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The Aesthetics of Curating: Exhibition-making after the Conceptual Turn

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Abstract

The thesis examines the evolving relations of the aesthetic and conceptual aspects in exhibition-making after the 'conceptual turn' that took place in the late-1960s and instigated key transformations in the aesthetic condition of art and contemporary curatorial practice. Drawing on a broadly construed and variously manifested conceptualism pervading the growing field of curating since 1990s, the thesis focuses on investigating the relation between the aesthetic and conceptual dimensions of three exhibitions that have had a significant impact on the postconceptual development of curating. In doing so, it aims to construct an alternative genealogy that reaffirms the significance of the aesthetic element, and so to reconstruct curatorial practice from the perspective of an Aesthetics of Curating.

This trajectory unfolds a non-unitary Curatorial Aesthetics that emerges and develops together with the conceptual shift offering a revisionist perspective to dominant practices and discourses today that tend to devalue or repress aesthetic modes of production. The driving force of the thesis is neither to affirm aestheticism nor simply reversing the received positions. Instead, the investigation of aesthetics – as the poetics of an exhibition and a philosophical understanding of the experience offered – provides a reading that contests the emphasis placed upon conceptualism in order to revise those relations and established assumptions, and enable us to understand contemporary aspects of curating that have been downgraded.

The thesis focuses on three case-studies, which mark important shifts in the conceptual development of curating from 1969 to 2007: *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, curated by Harald Szeemann, Kunsthalle Bern (1969); *Les Immatériaux*, co-curated by Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, Centre George Pompidou, Paris (1985); *Documenta 12*, under the artistic directorship of Roger Buergel and chief curatorship of Ruth Noack, Kassel (2007).

By exploring the different ways in which these exhibitions accommodate, engage with, and define aesthetic experience in relation to their conceptual modes, the study provides an alternative account of Curatorial Aesthetics that attains its transformative potential and political efficacy in the present through the invention of new sensations that incite new modes of thinking and acting.

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Fig. 5.32 Mary Kelly, *Love Songs*, 2005-2007, installation in five parts, dimensions variable. Exhibition view, *Documenta 12*, Neue Galerie, Kassel, 2007. <http://www.marykellyartist.com/love_songs.html> [accessed 27 June 2016]

Fig. 6.1 Installation view, *Documenta 12*, Museum Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel, 2007. Kerry James Marshall, *The Lost Boys*, 1993, acrylic and collage on canvas, under Karel van Mander III, *Persinna and Hydaspes Embracing*, oil painting, ca. 1650. Photo: Frank Schinski/documenta GmbH; © Kerry James Marshall, 1993. Michael Spens, 'Documenta 12: "Documenta as It Never Was"', *Studio International*, no. 27, 27 June 2007 <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/documenta-12-documenta-as-it-never-was> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.2 Exhibition view, *Documenta 12*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 2007. Atul Dodiya, *Antler Anthology I-XIII*, 2003. Photo: Ryszard Kasiewicz; © documenta Archiv. <http://d13.documenta.de/#archive/d12-2007/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.3 Installation view of works by Paul Klee, *Documenta 1*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1955. Photographer unknown; © documenta Archiv <http://d13.documenta.de/#/archive/d-1955/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.4 Installation view of works by Max Beckmann, *Documenta 1*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1955. Photo: Günther Becker; ©documenta Archiv. <http://d13.documenta.de/#/archive/d-1955/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.5 Installation view of works by Ernst-Ludwig Kirchner, *Documenta 1*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1955. Photo: Werner Lengemann; ©documenta Archiv. <http://www.documentaarchiv.de/aktuelles/rueckblick/2015/februar-2015.html> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.6 Installation view of works by Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà, *Documenta 1*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1955. Photo: Günther Becker; ©documenta Archiv. <http://archiv.documenta.de/index.php?id=d1_12&L=1> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.7 Installation view of works by Pablo Picasso, *Documenta 1*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1955. Photo: Günther Becker; ©documenta Archiv. <http://www.pathfinder.gr/stories/4231262/h-allh-symfwnia-athhnas-berolinoy-gia-to-2017/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.8 Exhibition view, *Documenta 1*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1955. Antoine Pevsner, *Construction*, 1938; Piet Mondrian, *Composition with White, Black, and Red*, 1936. Photo: Günther Becker. ©documenta Archiv. <http://www.mediencluster-documenta.de> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.9 Installation view, *Documenta 1*, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1955. Gustav H. Wolff, *Medusa*, 1929, and paintings by Giorgio Morandi. Photo: Günther Becker; © Documenta Archiv. <http://d13.documenta.de/#/archive/d-1955/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.10 Installation view, Kerry James Marshall, *Garden Party*, 2003-2007, *Documenta 12*, Neue Galerie, Kassel, 2007. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/architektur/614355627/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.11 Installation view, Peter Friedl, *The Zoo Story*, 2007, *Documenta 12*, documenta-Halle, Kassel, 2007.
<http://files.umwblogs.org/blogs.dir/125/files/2007/10/documenta.jpg> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.12 Installation view, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, *Phantom Truck*, 2007, *Documenta 12*, Documenta-Halle, Kassel, 2007. Photo: Katrin Schilling / documenta GmbH; © Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle. <http://artadia.org/artist/inigo-manglano-ovalle/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.13 Installation view, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, *The Radio*, 2007, *Documenta 12*, Documenta-Halle, Kassel, 2007.
<http://flickrhivemind.net/Tags/documenta,manglanoovalle/Interesting> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.14 Exhibition view, *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand*, Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2000. Photo: Werner Kaligofsky; © Generali Foundation.
<http://foundation.generali.at/en/info/archive/2000-1998/exhibitions/things-we-dont-understand.html> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.15 Installation view, Allan Sekula, *Shipwreck and Workers (Version 3 for Kassel)*, 2007, *Documenta 12*, Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel, 2007. Photo: Frank Schinski /Documenta Gmbh; © Allan Sekula.
Terry Smith, 'The World, from Europe: The Mega-Exhibition of Mid-2007', *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*, vol. 10, no 3 (Spring 2008), p. 10/12. <http://x-traonline.org/article/the-world-from-europe-the-mega-exhibition-of-mid-2007/10/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.16 Installation view, Allan Sekula, *Shipwreck and Workers (Version 3 for Kassel)*, 2007, *Documenta 12*, Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel, 2007.
<https://www.cgrimes.com/artists/allan-sekula/offsite_exhibitions/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.17 Installation view, Allan Sekula, *Shipwreck and Workers (Version 3 for Kassel)*, 2007, *Documenta 12*, Bergpark Wilhelmshöhe, Kassel, 2007.
<http://www.flickriver.com/photos/architektur/477246140/> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Fig. 6.18 Danica Dakić, *El Dorado*, 2007, media installation, *Documenta 12*, Schloss Wilhelmshöhe and Tapetenmuseum, Kassel, 2007.
<http://www.hkst.de/de/aktuelles-fruehling-2009/prospekt.html> [accessed 6 November 2016]

Introduction

I. Why Aesthetics of Curating?

This thesis takes a position in the rapidly growing field of curatorial and exhibition studies, a field that emerged in the 1990s when the artworld began to focus on the practices and discourses of curating. This shift gained momentum in a proliferation of symposia, graduate programmes, and publications along with an expansion and diversification in the modes of exhibition-making and curatorial production more generally. Integral to this shift was the now widely recognized 'conceptual turn' that took place in the late-1960s and instigated key transformations in artistic and exhibition practice. Taking its lead from these changing aesthetic conditions and the way they transformed conventional forms of exhibition-making and the traditional function of the curator, the thesis examines the evolving relations of the conceptual and aesthetic aspects in exhibition-making. Its aim is to explore and construct a genealogy of exhibitions that reaffirms the significance of the aesthetic or experiential element within what is now called the 'postconceptual' development of art and curating. In doing so, the thesis intends to reconstruct curatorial practice from the perspective of an 'Aesthetics of Curating' without thereby aiming of simply reversing the received positions and replacing a supposed overconceptualism with an outdated aestheticism.

The 'conceptual turn', in its broader sense, denotes the shift in the production, presentation, exhibition, communication and distribution of art that took place in the 1960s, most notably in North America and Western Europe. This wider shift quickly becomes highly differentiated into a range of movements such as Postminimalism, Conceptual art, Performance art, Installation art, and Institutional Critique, among others. Nonetheless, a shared anti-aesthetic thrust can be detected in the polymorphic Conceptualism of the 1960s, which reconsidered the established status of the artwork as aesthetic object and questioned the aesthetic categories and values inherited from Modernism, at least in its prevalent Greenbergian version. A range of postformalist and conceptual tendencies destabilized an understanding of art based on a visual essentialism in painting and sculpture, conventional object-making, the primacy of subjective expression and the sensation of experience, and pushed it towards more theoretical, linguistic-based, and critically-engaged practices.

Driven by this emphatically critical attitude and the embrace of new forms of mediation, distribution, and communication that accompanies it, art has long been untethered from modernist formalism's defining categories, exploring instead an expanded field of practice that interrogates both its own normative positions and its context of production. This transition to a broadly construed conceptualism was unmistakable by the 1980s, and in some ways postmodernism attempted to delimit and harden it into an anti-aesthetic orthodoxy, prefiguring in many respects the way 'contemporary art' makes conceptual engagement the indispensable condition of possibility for art practice today.[1] Otherwise put, conceptualism 'is the shifting terra infirma on which nearly all contemporary art exists.'[2]

These developments in artistic practice required a new framework for the production, mediation, and distribution of art. A curatorial shift occurs that is aligned with the new art practices and socio-cultural transformations of the time. As the traditional object of the exhibition is questioned, complicated, expanded, and potentially dissolved, the traditional role of the museum curator shifts to that of the exhibition-maker and organizing intermediary of art. Freed from the responsibilities of taking care of a collection, historical interpretation and organizing exhibitions in the museum framework, the curator's function by the early-1970s has shifted into a more proactive, creative, visible, and experimental practice. With the accelerating globalized art context and expanding art market of the late-1980s, a curatorial turn becomes ubiquitous. The widespread development of independent and semi-independent modes of curating in the early-1990s – nomadic curators functioning as internationally networked service providers unattached to an institutional post – reflected the proliferation of biennials worldwide, the diverse exhibition market, and the ever enhanced visibility of curating. Curator and artist Paul O'Neill called this 'the

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[1] See Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1998 [1983]). More recently, an account of contemporary art as 'postconceptual' in the sense of both a historical and ontological shift has been elaborated by philosopher Peter Osborne. Osborne provided an ontological characterization of contemporary art as constitutively postconceptual insisting that contemporary art's core characteristics include both 'art's necessary conceptuality' and 'art's ineliminable – but radically insufficient – aesthetic dimension', which critically necessitates an 'anti-aesthetic*ist* use of aesthetic materials.' Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 48. Italics in the original.

[2] Art critic Roberta Smith, in her *New York Times* review of the exhibition *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (1999), quoted in John Bird and Michael Newman, eds, 'Introduction', *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), p.3.

curatorial turn' of the 1990s, and argued it represents a marked shift from practice to discourse in the development of curating.[3]

Indeed, a broader epistemological shift in curatorial practice has taken place in the past two decades, which can be traced to two interrelated factors: on the one hand, the increased status of curating – both as exhibition-making and expanded extra-exhibitionary practice – has led to its greater relevance; and, on the other hand, this curatorial activity is itself a symptom of a heightened and diversified engagement with conceptual, theoretical, discursive processes and thematics. More specifically, curating in the 1990s shared a widespread practice of self-reflection in the arts, and thus began to re-examine its conceptual conditions and redefine its tasks, formats, and modes of production. Today this heterogeneous field of knowledge, practice, and discourse – still in formation – has entered the academy. Parallel to these developments was a departure from art historical approaches in favour of more concept-, theme-, discourse-based, essayistic, and subjectively-signed or authored exhibitions. Within this context, the foundation of the first graduate courses in curating and the emergence of new publications, which have burgeoned in recent years, attempted to delineate this new field of discourse and extended practice.[4]

This wide range of curatorial practices, which do not constitute a clearly-defined form and cannot be accommodated under a single definition, privilege discourse, critical inquiry and debate, intellectual analysis, educational programmes, research processes and knowledge production in their orientation, varying formats, aims, and modes of production. They often critically engage with current socio-political issues, the conditions and institutions of art production, and reflectively question their own mediating formats, limits, and structures. What is distinctive in contemporary practice is the insertion of discursivity and conceptual procedures into the very structures of presentation as integral parts of the exhibition and no longer as

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[3] Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', in Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick, eds, *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), pp. 13-28.
[4] In Europe, the pioneers were L'École du Magazin (Grenoble, 1987, the first postgraduage curatorial training programme in Europe), MA Curating Contemporary Art, Royal College of Art (London, 1992), and De Appel Curatorial Programme (Amsterdam, 1994). In the USA, curatorial education was marked with the reorganization of one of the paths of the Whitney Independent Study Program from Museum Studies to Curatorial Studies in 1987, and the foundation of the MA in the Center for Curatorial Studies in Bard College, 1994. On the contested issues of curatorial education, see Kitty Scott, ed., *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and its Discontents* (The Banff Centre: Koenig Books, 2011).

peripheral, auxiliary or complementary functions of secondary importance. Contemporary exhibition-making has a considerably extended scope and mode of address that incorporates symposia, workshops, lecture programmes, educational activities, conversational events, publications, talks, research and learning procedures – usually interdisciplinary, collaborative, process-oriented, and unfolding as work-in-progress over a long term – that in many cases even replace the production of the exhibition itself.

This tendency has gained currency particularly in perennial international exhibitions of which *Documenta X* (1997) and *Documenta 11* (2002) are now considered exemplary. Both paved the way for a more critically-engaged, intellectually-driven, self-reflective, and discursive exhibition practice that dominates the artworld in the following decade. Bruce Ferguson claims these 'discursive exhibitions' mark the arrival of a new genre, particularly in biennial culture, that tends towards 'exhibiting discursivity' and 'the engagement of the audience in listening, reading, studying, or participating rather than merely looking.'[5] Similarly, Paul O'Neill argues that since the 1990s curatorial practice has become 'a potential nexus for discussion, critique, and debate, where the evacuated role of the critic in parallel cultural discourse was usurped by the neo-critical space of curating', extending thereby the parameters of the exhibition form to incorporate intellectual and geopolitical discussion within the exhibition itself.[6] Mick Wilson sees this privileging of the productive powers of language as part of the assumptions of a wide range of experimental art practice and its attendant reception today. He writes of a 'Foucauldian moment in art' of the last two decades and 'the ubiquitous appeal of the term "discourse" as a word to conjure and perform power' to the point that 'discourse' replaces 'doing' within curatorial practice and 'the system of the *reputational* economy'.[7]

Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson consider discursive production not only 'pervasive' and 'central' to contemporary practice but also increasingly 'framed in

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[5] Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg, 'Talking and Thinking About Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity', in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds, *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 360-375 (361).

[6] O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', p. 13. For a discussion of the perceived 'crisis' in contemporary criticism, see Round Table, 'The Present Conditions of Art Criticism', *October*, vol. 100 (Spring 2002), pp. 200-228.

[7] Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns', in Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007), pp. 202-216 (202, 216). Italics in the original.

terms of education, research, knowledge production, and learning', and so as part of what they propose as a broader 'educational turn' in recent curatorial and artistic practice. Far from taking education merely as 'a theme', they state that 'Educational formats, methods, programmes, models, terms, processes and procedures have become pervasive in the praxes of both curating and the production of contemporary art and in their attendant critical frameworks.'[8] The widespread mobilization of the 'educational' is manifested in various curatorial strategies and critical art projects that diverge in terms of scale, purpose, *modus operandi*, value, and degree of actualization. Yet the propensity is to foreground collective action and collaborative discursive activity, their processual character, and a pronounced critical and self-reflective impulse undertaken by art academies and art institutions, most often levelled against the regulation, appropriation, and commodification of 'knowledge economies'. O'Neill and Wilson's assertion that curating 'increasingly operates as an expanded educational praxis' is deliberately differentiated from attempts to define such projects in terms of 'a relatively new medium' and 'a *form* of art making', as Kristina Lee Podesva proposed in 2007.[9] To them, the 'turn' takes on predominantly 'educational', or more narrowly, 'pedagogical' forms and purposes, which not only appear as a critique of formal educational processes but also suggest 'a kind of "curatorialization" of education whereby the educative process often becomes the object of curatorial production.'[10] This, they claim, demonstrates curating's contemporaneity.[11] O'Neill and Wilson's disputable proposal to capture such a

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[8] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds, *Curating and the Educational Turn* (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions and De Appel, 2010), p. 12. See also the Round Table, 'You Talkin' to me? Why Art is Turning to Education', *ICA NOUGHT TO SIXTY,* ICA London, 14 July 2008. The discussion was organized by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson and speakers included Dave Beech, Liam Gillick, Andrea Phillips, Sarah Pierce and Adrian Rifkin. <https://www.ica.org.uk/whats-on/salon-discussion-you-talkin-me-why-art-turning-education> [accessed 7 December 2016].

[9] O'Neill and Wilson, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, p. 12.
Drawing on research in Copenhagen Free University, Podesva identified ten shared concerns and characteristics across a spectrum of education-as-medium projects, as follows: 'A school structure that operates as a social medium'; 'A tendency on collaborative production'; 'A tendency toward process (versus object) based production'; 'An aleatory or open nature'; 'An ongoing and potentially endless termporality'; 'A free space for learning'; 'A post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants'; 'A preference for exploratory, experimental, and multi-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production'; 'An awareness of the instrumentalisation of the academy'; 'A virtual space for the communication and distribution of ideas.'
See Kristina Lee Podesva, 'A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art', *Fillip*, no. 6 (Summer 2007) <http://fillip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn> [accessed 7 December 2016].

[10] O'Neill and Wilson, Curating and the Educational Turn, p. 13.

[11] According to O'Neill and Wilson, 'Having moved, since the late 1960s, from an activity primarily involved with organizing exhibitions of discrete artworks to a practice with a considerably extended remit, contemporary curating may be distinguished from its precedents by an emphasis upon the

diverse and disparate range of artistic and curatorial practices under the trope of the 'educational turn' has raised scepticism towards the rhetoric of the 'turn' even among those implicated in such projects.[12] Being aware of the possible pitfalls, generalizations, decontextualizations, and all-too-easy co-opted commodifications that the hackneyed trope of 'turn' confronts, O'Neill and Wilson suggest its heuristic value to name an 'evolving process' of realignment rather than 'a fixed condition or stable state' of radical discontinuity.[13]

This thesis attempts to avoid the reductions, exclusions, conflation of underlying drives and ends into one more recognizable 'style' or fashionable 'rhetoric' that the recent burgeoning of 'turns' in contemporary culture often entails. It eschews the adoption of 'educational turn' and proposes, instead, what I view as a broader conceptualism pervading contemporary curatorial practice and its discourses – of which educational practices are a considerable part – ever since the 1960s. This inherited conceptualism has been reformulated and actualized under new historical and specifically curatorial conditions today. Whilst the multifaceted concern with conceptually-driven and concept-centred practices is positive as it opens new possibilities and reflects the diversity, critical significance and current developments in the field, it provokes scepticism inasmuch as it downgrades, devalues, or dismissively represses aesthetic modes of production. The conceptual turn in the late-1960s instigated the transition to a predominantly conceptual, at times post-aesthetic, poetics, which is now transferred into the rapidly growing terrain of curatorial practices. This shift – no matter how anti-orthodox or experimental – does not however effectively escape what Tom Holert sees, with regard to *Documenta 11*'s discursive programme, as the emergence of 'a new kind of essentialism' and the risk of art as knowledge production becoming 'an aestheticised epistemicism'.[14]

Within this context, the thesis does not deal with the issues of 'New Institutionalism', 'knowledge economies' and 'cognitive capitalism', most often associated with the contemporary artistic and curatorial shift to conceptualism. Nor

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framing and mediation of art and the circulation of ideas around art, rather than on its production and display.' Ibid., pp. 18-19.

[12] See, for instance, Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', *e-flux*, online journal, Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, and Anton Vidokle, eds, no. 0 (November 2008) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/> [accessed 6 December 2016], repr. in O'Neill and Wilson, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, pp. 32-46.

[13] Ibid., p. 15.

[14] Tom Holert & Mick Wilson, 'Latest Essentialisms: An E-mail Exchange on Art, Research and Education', in ibid., pp. 320-328 (322).

does it deal with the multiplicity of relational, participatory, community-based, collaborative, self-organized, socially-engaged and activist practices that have emerged in the last decades.[15] Nor is my aim to perform an oppositional critique of the conceptual turn in curatorial practice. The central focus of the thesis, instead, is to investigate the relation between the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of three exhibitions that have had a significant impact on the postconceptual development of curating in order to construct an alternative genealogy of Curatorial Aesthetics, one that maintains the important presence and power of the aesthetic. The reassessment of the aesthetic aspects of contemporary curating through the exploration of this alternative historical trajectory merits a study because it unfolds the way in which a non-unitary Curatorial Aesthetics emerges, exists, and develops as part of the conceptual shift in artistic and curatorial practice, offering a revisionist perspective to dominant practices and discourses today. Notably, my intention is neither to argue for an understanding of art and its exhibitions in terms of aestheticism nor to negate the postconceptual development. The driving force of the thesis is neither nostalgic nor reactive to conceptualism; it makes no claim for returning to a formalist aesthetics, and it does not wish to endorse the long-lasting aesthetic/anti-aesthetic opposition. The investigation of aesthetics in exhibition practice offers, instead, an alternative reading that contests the shift away from aesthetics in favour of the conceptual today, and aims to revise those relationships and assumptions that accord centrality to the concept. As such, it intends to critically reinsert the often repressed aesthetic or experiential element into the curatorial field as a significant and effective force beyond the limitations of traditional aestheticism and a de-politicized autonomy of art.

This underlying aim is evident in the deployment of the term 'aesthetics' in the context of the thesis. 'Aesthetics' is loosely defined as the construction or poetics of an exhibition that concerns its experiential elements. The Aesthetics of Curating is concerned with the way in which sensation is 'curated', that is, generated and activated by the poetics of curating – in its conception, organization, spatio-temporal arrangement and presentation, felt experience and spectatorship – in the wider socio-

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[15] On this subject, see *Art and the Social: Exhibitions of Contemporary Art in the 1990s*, symposium, Tate Britain, London, 30 April 2010. The symposium was organised by *Afterall* in conjunction with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Van Abbemuseum and was realised within the framework of the FORMER WEST project. Audio recordings available in <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/art-and-social-exhibitions-contemporary-art-1990s-audio-recordings> [accessed 15 May 2015].

cultural context of the exhibition. Aesthetic experience emerges as a disruptive, transformative force of existing conditions although this liberating potential is neither conceptually predetermined nor engaged in an explicitly political way as in most postconceptual discursivity and its ambitions of political engagement today. In this respect, the thesis takes up the challenge to investigate the political power of the aesthetic even in exhibition practices that have been widely deemed 'apolitical'.

The modern philosophical understanding of the encounter of sensation as an aesthetic question, and the understanding of the 'aesthetic' as the philosophical discourse on art is indebted to Kant's transcendental philosophy in the eighteenth-century.[16] This thesis does not claim to offer a philosophical interpretation of the Aesthetics of Curating, but it does seek to utilize a philosophical understanding of the aesthetic experience in discussing case-studies where aesthetics seems to have been a significant issue, despite their more recent reception. More specifically, the thesis is informed by Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Rancière's post-Kantian philosophical accounts, which have recently enjoyed sustained attention, and provide the resources enabling this study to go beyond the aesthetic/anti-aesthetic divide. Far from imposing a preconceived philosophical concept that would prescribe inquiry and would serve to explain the curatorship at stake from a position 'above' it, the thesis instead deploys a range of art historical, curatorial, artistic, art critical, and philosophical resources to create a fertile terrain of discussion.

In this regard, the driving questions of the thesis are as follows: What can be an alternative aesthetic genealogy that enables us to reread the relation between

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[16] In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), Kant examined the limits of knowledge – in terms of an immanent notion of transcendental critique – defining space and time as pure forms of intuition that provided the *a priori* conditions of possibility of objects and knowledge in general. In his *Critique of Judgment* (1790), he investigated the possible conditions for the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, occasioned in reflective aesthetic judgments of the beautiful and the sublime that nonetheless postulate a universal applicability of *sensus communis*. Kant's *Third Critique* extended the meaning of 'aesthetic' beyond the sensible (spatial and temporal) apprehension of the objects of intuition to include reference to the feelings accompanying reflective awareness of the unity of subjectivity itself, as the harmonious relations between the cognitive faculties. In Kantian transcendental philosophy, 'aesthetic' denotes both the philosophical inquiry of sensibility as the form of possible experience and the theory/philosophy of art as the encounter of sensation: the presentation of something through the particular aesthetic experience of pleasure or displeasure, which increases the subject's vitality and lays claim for a universally shared capacity of sharing feelings. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1781/1787]); Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1987 [1790]).

aesthetic and conceptual aspects in exhibition-making, contesting the emphasis placed upon conceptualism today? How do key exhibitions in the development of curating after the conceptual turn in the late-1960s accommodate, engage with, and define aesthetic experience and its radical potential in their conception, making, presentation, and reception? What is the aesthetic role of art and its experiences in postconceptual curatorial practice, and does this force us to rethink aesthetics' continuing presence, function, and significance today? How does the Aesthetics of Curating as a revisionary account of curatorial practice open up new perspectives in the field?

The thesis specifically focuses on three exhibitions, taken as case-studies, which mark important shifts in the conceptual development of curatorial practice from 1969 to 2007. These are:

- *When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Processes – Concepts – Situations – Information (Live in Your Head)*, curated by the director of Kunsthalle Bern, Harald Szeemann, Kunsthalle Bern, 22 March-27 April 1969.
- *Les Immatériaux* ('The Immaterials'), co-curated by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and the design historian Thierry Chaput, Centre George Pompidou, Paris, 28 May-15 July 1985.
- *Documenta 12*, under the artistic directorship of the exhibition organizer Roger Buergel and the chief curatorship of the art historian Ruth Noack, Kassel, 16 June-23 September 2007.

Whilst the experience of the aesthetic and its relation to conceptual modes is pursued, understood, and accommodated differently in each exhibition, they all maintain the importance of felt experience in the production, reception, and social intervention of art and its exhibition *in* and *after* the conceptual turn. As the study traverses these moments of rupture in exhibition history, which converge with certain shifts in the function of curating, art practices, and wider socio-cultural transformations, it reveals the affinities, differences, and tensions between aesthetic and conceptual processes that have significantly effected our notion of what an exhibition is and can be.

When Attitudes Become Form (1969) can be seen as the foundational moment of a genealogy of Curatorial Aesthetics because it marks the emergence of an exhibition practice that is an experimental, inclusive response to the diversity of the

new art tendencies taking place in the late-1960s, having reconfigured the role of the curator – as independent, creative exhibition-maker – as a result. I attempt to evade the mythical dimension that has posthumously surrounded Szeemann and the exhibition by focusing on how the show constructs the relation of its aesthetic, material, conceptual and immaterial elements to give an experience of the creative process itself.

Les Immatériaux (1985) is a pivotal show because it is an early response to the radical transformations brought about by new information technologies in art and culture. What is distinctive about the show is that it was the first curated by a philosopher, and so its driving aims are not restrictively artistic or curatorial – as in *Attitudes* – but more widely philosophical and, importantly, political. Lyotard as a philosopher approaches the aesthetic as a broader philosophical question – not merely one of poetics – and so brings into the curatorial realm new modes and perspectives. The show exemplifies the new function of the curator as the 'author' of the exhibition and can be seen as a predecessor of many of the research-based, essayistic, and discourse-driven exhibition practices of today. In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in *Les Immatériaux*, and it is widely recognized as a seminal show of new media art. However, what goes largely unnoticed is the tension between the aesthetic experience and conceptual processes that the exhibition embodies, the value assigned to the aesthetic experience of the sublime within a predominantly conceptually-structured exhibition, and how this explores the political possibilities of the aesthetic in its relation to non-art and contemporary life.

Documenta 12 (2007) brings us into the contemporary global context of the large-scale international exhibitions and transcultural curating, market-driven hegemonic forces of global capitalism, and the particular historical institution and cultural event of Documenta. It allows us to explore the transformative effect of the aesthetic experience of art in relation to its discursive mediation within the hegemony of postconceptualism and the establishing of curating as the discursive site of self-reflective, socio-political, critical inquiry and engagement. The show's affirmation of the value of the aesthetic experience, apart from its conceptual determinations, appears out of sync with other significant postconceptual exhibitions. This inconsistency, I argue, nevertheless has an emphatic discursive aspect and deploys the conceptual in a rather idiosyncratic way. The challenge is to show how an exhibition that prioritizes the aesthetic as a direct response to the over-conceptualism of

contemporary practices – and is deemed a 'failure' because of it – actually radicalizes the aesthetic beyond the conceptual/postconceptual frame and provides an aesthetic understanding of the political potential of art and its experience.

Through the selection of these exhibitions, the study delineates a genealogy of Curatorial Aesthetics that reads history, and so the present, in a way different to that prevalent in the field. Not only does it provide new readings of the seminal exhibitions it studies, but also offers something broader in its scope and implications: an alternative narrative that reaffirms the continuation and significant role of the aesthetic within contemporary curatorial practice. By exploring how aesthetic and conceptual aspects are engaged in exhibition practice, the thesis undermines established assumptions and offers useful insights in understanding contemporary aspects of curating that have been either repressed or devalued. In this respect, it offers a revised view of past and present curatorial practice, one that hopefully opens up future possibilities in the field.

The thesis, specifically, argues for an understanding of exhibition-making as a kind of aesthetic production that resists both an outdated aestheticism and contemporary over-conceptualism in which sensation dissolves into its determinant regulation by the concept or it is swallowed by politics. It puts forward and critically maintains the premise that the aesthetic dimension of art and its exhibition in the Aesthetics of Curating assumes a certain exteriority and otherness in order to attain its transformative potential on a subjective and collective level. This is an understanding of aesthetic experience based on difference, a difference which nonetheless is immanent rather than offering a pure and disinterested 'outside'. This alterity, which does not conform to our most recognizable criteria and shared values, enables the invention of new sensations, as yet unforeseeable and disruptive of the given, that incite new modes of thinking and acting. Herein lies the ethical dimension of the aesthetic experience; it calls us to be open to the unknown, to what exceeds our habitual modes of conceptual understanding, the certainties and hierarchies of knowledge, and so to discover new possibilities for reflection and new capacities to develop. The sensation of curating opens up the breadth of the things we can sense but not fully understand, extending thereby our awareness of new life possibilities. This indiscernibility of the aesthetic affect from ethics makes it a political factor of life, exposing an alterative understanding of aesthetic politics.

As such, the thesis makes a substantial contribution to current debates on the function of curatorial practice, the growing field of exhibition histories, and, in a certain respect, to aesthetic discourses by offering an alternative historical framework through which we can understand the Aesthetics of Curating. It provides a significant reconstruction of curatorial practice that maintains the crucial role of aesthetics by exploring the relation of the aesthetic and conceptual aspects in key exhibitions after the conceptual turn. The thesis, therefore, offers both a historical and corrective narrative, and it does so by moving in a positive rather than an oppositional fashion.

It is noteworthy that over the period of working on this thesis, since 2008, the field of curating has dramatically changed into a very fertile area of research. The study takes up and responds to the challenges of this evident shift and the rapid development of a field of knowledge still in formation. To a certain extent, the research material and progress of the thesis evolved in parallel with new publications, symposia, and remakings of the exhibitions under discussion. As a result, the thesis is highly timely in dealing with this knowledge production and research output currently underway. While this may appear as a limitation, it is instead a major strength because the thesis contributes to a very promising area of research as it is emerging. A wide range of primary and secondary sources is used such as exhibition catalogues and publicity material; curators and artists' statements, interviews, and texts; press and critical reviews; documentation material including exhibition plans, letters, diary notes, installation photographs, films, video and audio recordings; conference proceedings; online journals and resources coupled with archive visits (*Documenta Archiv*, Kassel), exhibition visits such as the remaking of Szeemann's historical show, *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern1969/Venice 2013* (2013) at the Fondazione Prada in Venice, and attendance to the recently burgeoning symposia on *Les Immatériaux*. In addition, the thesis deploys resources across art history, art theory, philosophy, exhibition histories, and curatorial studies. Although a more detailed review will be provided within the appropriate chapters, it is important to underline some key issues in terms of the existing literature.

II. Reflection upon the existing literature

Interrogating Contemporary Curating

From the late-1980s and throughout the 1990s, curating developed a heightened form of self-consciousness, with all of its main terms and definitions open to continuous questioning. In the wake of the increased professionalization of curating beyond the limits of the art institution, significant transformations in its function and conditions of practice within the globalized context, and its institutionalization within graduate programmes, an extensive curatorial interrogation began to take place. Curating re-examines its *raison d'être*, its legacies, and attempts to historicize itself as it evolves. The self-reflective interrogation of the identity, meaning, function, conditions of production, existing models and presentation forms, the exhibition itself – especially in relation to artistic practice and the institution – has given rise to a contested field of terms, methodologies, historiographies, and positions that continues to intensify up to today. In certain ways, the urgency of curatorial self-reflexivity in the early-1990s echoes Conceptual art's reflexive investigation of the concepts 'art' and 'artist' as if these debates had now been moved into the level of the exhibition.

This interrogatory thrust was in tune with the need to formulate a new language that would best represent the transformations taking place, at a time when even the most fundamental terms such as the 'curator', its most active derivative 'curating', and the recently coined verb 'to curate', let alone the adjective 'curatorial', were signifiers floating between various meanings. Curator Alex Farquharson points out that 'new words […] emerge from a linguistic community's persistent need to identify a point of discussion'; the recent appearance of the verb 'to curate' suggests not only the changing conception of the curator's activity, from a behind-the-scenes carer to one 'actively in the thick of' the processes of artistic production, but also the vitality and intensification of debate.[17] Intertwined with the requirement of a new vocabulary is a notable tendency to refuse to define curating and maintain, instead, a state of fluidity, uncertainty, or almost self-evident identifiability. The latter is demonstrated in the now ubiquitous 'curated by' in contemporary culture, a term attached to almost every activity that involves selection, compilation, and a form of public presentation.[18]

Within this context, a series of publications that tackled the redefinition of curatorial practice and the rise of a new generation of independent or semi-

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[17] Alex Farquharson, 'I curate, you curate, we curate…', *Art Monthly*, no. 269 (September 2003), pp. 7-10 (8).

[18] On this subject, see David Balzer, *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World – And Everything Else* (London: Pluto, 2015).

independent curators emerged. These were mainly compendiums of curators' statements and interviews concerning their own activities and views about the skills, tasks, and role of the curator. Curatorial anthologies usually generated from curatorial symposia putting forward a curator-led and curator-centred discourse about contemporary curating with a marked self-referentiality.[19] Curatorial self-reflexivity intended to formulate a new language for curating as an expanded, diverse, international field of practice, but it did so against a disciplinary arbitrariness without particular epistemological criteria or historical foundations.[20] Moreover, while the claim was to map out the new state of curating, to reshape art and its presentation by questioning curatorial and artistic orthodoxy in recent practice, it did not effectively avoid a reductive inquiry about the limits of the profession of the curator at the expense of a more theoretical or critical framework.[21] The art critic JJ Charlesworth perceptively stated that 'the constant navel-gazing on the part of curators … tends to produce more discussion about its undecidability and fluidity, rather than precipitating

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[19] Key curatorial anthologies in a chronological order include: Ute Meta Bauer, ed., *Meta 2: A New Spirit in Curating* (Stuttgart: Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 1992); Peter White, ed., *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future* (Banff: Banff Centre for the Arts, 1996); Mika Hannula, ed., *Stopping the Process? Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions* (Helsinki: Nordic Institute of Contemporary Art, NIFCA, 1998); Barnaby Drabble, Dorothee Richter, and Eva Schmidt, eds, *Curating Degree Zero: An International Curating Symposium* (Nuremberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 1999); Catherine Thomas, ed., *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice* (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2000); Gavin Wade, ed., *Curating in the 21st Century* (Walsall and Wolverhampton: The New Art Gallery, 2000); Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin, eds, *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation*, Series 1-5 (Gateshead: Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, 2000-02); Carin Kuoni, ed., *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art* (New York: Independent Curators International (ICI), 2001); Paula Marincola, ed., *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2001); Carolee Thea and Gregory Williams, eds, *Foci: Interviews with 10 International Curators* (New York: Apex Art Curatorial Program, 2001); Melanie Townsend, ed., *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices* (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2003); Christoph Tannert, Ute Tischler, and Künstlerhaus Bethanien, eds, *MIB-Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2004); Liam Gillick and Lind, Maria, eds, *Curating with Light Luggage* (Frankfurt: Revolver, Archiv für Aktuelle Kunst, 2005). Also, more recently: Carolee Thea and Thomas Micchelli, eds, *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators* (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2009); Zöe Gray et al., *Rotterdam Dialogues: The Critics, The Curators, The Artists* (Rotterdam: Witte de With Publishers, 2010); Carolee Thea, ed., *On Curating 2: Paradigm Shifts: Interviews with Fourteen International Curators* (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2016).

[20] According to the art critic Jennifer Allen, 'Curators tend to explain what they do either by referring to specific exhibitions they curated or by making rather abstract statements about art, publics and politics. Curating exists either as an example or as an abstraction; there seems to be no general theory about the practice.' Jennifer Allen, 'Care for Hire', in Margriet Schavemaker and Mischa Raskier, eds, *Right About Now: Art & Theory Since the 1990s* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2007), pp. 143-154 (153).

[21] Notable in these emergent discourses was also the tendency for analogy and metaphor in framing the figure of the curator, and the comparison between curatorial activity and other professions in various 'curator as …' constructions. Such curatorial hybrids implied the identity anxiety and uncertainty in the field. See Tom Morton, 'The Name of the Game: What is a Curator?', *Frieze*, no. 97 (March 2006), p. 21.

any serious theoretical crisis or professional rupture.[22] Writing along similar lines, Paul O'Neill argues that 'the prioritization of all things contemporary within recent curatorial projects' together with 'an individualization of the curatorial gesture' have created a discourse that is 'hermetic at times', 'self-referential, curator-centred and … in a constant state of flux: curatorial knowledge is now becoming a mode of discourse with unstable historical foundations.' For O'Neill, a major critical limitation of these emergent debates is that they affirmed the separation of artistic from curatorial practice, often at the level of 'an over-simplified antagonism', rather than recognizing their interdependence. 'If it is to continue', he warns, 'the gap between curatorial criticism and curator-led discourse will only widen further.'[23]

Later publications and new curatorial journals attempted to go beyond this self-reflexive anxiety and its resulting predilection for identity definitions by making a more nuanced interrogation of the function of curating. The focus on the relationship between 'artist' and 'curator' increasingly gives way to discussions of curating as a critical cultural practice, the relation of the exhibition to the public, and the investigation of the methodologies and histories through which critical practice can be analyzed.[24] Paul O'Neill and art historian Terry Smith's recent publications on the development and function of curating in contemporary culture represent a new departure. O'Neill focuses on the emergence and consolidation of curatorial discourse around independent curatorial practice and on the figure of the curator as an active,

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[22] He, accordingly, concludes: 'If curating is to be more than a narcissistic display of an uncertain "me, me, me", caught between wielding power over the presentation of art and the desire to produce it, a less self-reflexive discussion about institutional power, cultural freedom and artistic value is necessary.' JJ Charlesworth, 'Curating Doubt', *Art Monthly*, no. 294 (March 2006), pp. 1-4 (2, 4).

[23] O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn', p. 26.

[24] See, for instance, in chronological order: Paula Marincola, *Questions of Practice: What Makes a Great Exhibition? (*Philadelphia Center for Arts and Heritage: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative/Reaktion, 2006); Marianne Eigenheer, ed., *Curating Critique: ICE Reader 1* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2007); Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007); Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, eds, *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (New York: apexart, 2007); Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick, eds, *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007); Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mørland, eds, *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015); Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds, eds, *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?* (London and Cambridge, Mas.: LUMA Foundation & The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College and MIT Press, 2016).

English-language journals dedicated to the subject of curating include: *MJ-Manifesta Journal for Contemporary Curatorship* (since 2003) <http://www.manifestajournal.org/> [accessed 6 December 2016]; the online journal *OnCurating.org* (since 2008) <http://www.on-curating.org/> [accessed 6 December 2016]; *The Exhibitionist: Journal of Exhibition Making* (since 2009) <http://the-exhibitionist.com/> [accessed 6 December 2016]; *Journal on Curatorial Studies* (since 2012) <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Journal,id=205/> [accessed 6 December 2016].

creative agent, while Smith focuses on the notion of 'contemporary art' and 'contemporaneity' in relation to curatorial practice.[25]

Drawing on Raymond Williams's 'Dominant, Residual, and Emergent' in the formation of culture, O'Neill structures his study around three key moments in the history of exhibitions that are specific to the curator's role: the dissolution of the art object and the 'demystification' of the curatorial role in the late-1960s, and the emergence of the independent exhibition-maker; the primacy of the curator-as-author model and the convergence of the global and local in biennial culture and large-scale exhibitions in the late-1980s; and the consolidation of a curator-centred discourse and the convergence of artistic and curatorial practice in the 1990s. O'Neill maintains that the future of creative curatorship lies in further merging the activities of artist and curator towards more process-oriented and dialogical shows that challenge the traditional structures of art institutions and undermine individual authorship and hierarchies through 'durational' collaborations between producers and spectators.[26]

As the language around curating is still tentative, Smith set out to provide a shared history and language from which the field of contemporary curating can grow by posing the question 'What is *contemporary* curatorial thought?'.[27] He attempts to distinguish what is distinctive about curatorial thinking – curators think in and through the making of exhibitions – from art history, art criticism and art making. While this attempt to formulate the distinctiveness of curatorial thought is welcome, it is questionable whether Smith's argument that 'Curating *precedes* art-critical response, audience appreciation, and the eventual assessment of art-historical significance' does not fall into the schematic, reductive definitions that he wishes to avoid.[28] Nonetheless, Smith proclaims that the main task of the contemporary curator is 'exhibiting artistic meaning' '*in an exhibition setting*' or 'situated context'.[29] He, specifically, suggests that around 2000, 'three competing perspectives on the prevailing direction of contemporary art' were offered by the curators Kirk Varnedoe, Okwui Enwezor, and Nicolas Bourriaud: 'continuing modernism', 'postcolonial

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[25] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2012); Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, ICI Perspectives in Curating No. 1 (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012). See also Terry Smith's newest publication, *Talking Contemporary Curating*, ICI Perspectives in Curating No. 2 (New York: Independent Curators International, 2015).

[26] See the final chapter in O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, pp. 87-129 (129).

[27] Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, p. 17. Italics in the original.

[28] Ibid., pp. 41-42. Italics in the original.

[29] Ibid., p. 30. Italics in the original.

constellation', and 'relational aesthetics' respectively. Each of these tendencies required a distinct kind of exhibition-making: 'expand the white cube, decolonize the biennial, domesticate the gallery space.' Alongside these trajectories, was the 'ongoing evolution from institutional critique to critical institutionality'.[30] Smith sees the historical shift in the institution, the expansion of the 'exhibitionary complex', and the potential of 'infrastructural activism' that accompanies it as the major factor in the expansion of contemporary curating. Unlike O'Neill's insistence that the future of curating depends on bringing artistic and curatorial practice closer, Smith emphasizes the role of the artists and is particularly concerned with how digital culture and networks will affect institutions and exhibition-making in the future. [31]

Both O'Neill and Smith suggest, the former more explicitly, that the exhibition spectacle and the star curator are gradually giving way to collectively curated events and exhibitions that take place over a long time and offer sustained engagement with specific issues and communities. However, the collaborative, networked events and their attributes of mobility, flexibility, and multiplicity they suggest as a new mode of practice are not really new at all, as these terms have been proclaimed as attributes of new curatorial and artistic practices since the late-1960s.

Historicizing curatorial and exhibition histories

Curatorial practice and exhibitions obviously share a close relation, yet the question of art exhibition as such is infrequently addressed in recent publications that focus on the function of curating.[32] Exhibition history – the study of modern and contemporary art exhibitions – is a new field in comparison to art history, art criticism, and museum studies, and not yet academically entrenched. It was not until the mid-1990s that publications on twentieth-century and recent exhibition history began to appear at an

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[30] Ibid., pp. 31-32.
[31] Ibid., p. 34.
[32] A notable exception is the essay by the art historian and curator Elena Filipovic, 'What is an Exhibition?', in Jens Hoffmann, ed, *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2013), pp. 73-81. For a shift in the prevalent understanding of the exhibition as 'a medium' of contemporary art – or its being a medium for curators and artist-curators – to the potential they have to be 'discursive formations with multiple fields of possibility, activating critical exchanges about art that span the local and worldwide', see Lucy Steeds, ed., *Exhibition*, Documents of Contemporary Art, (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2014), particularly 'Introduction', 'Contemporary Exhibitions: Art at Large in the World', pp. 12-23 (19).

international level.[33] In the introduction to the early, seminal anthology *Thinking about Exhibitions* (1996), the editors highlight the contradiction that the recent explosion in the number and importance of exhibitions still waiting for its histories to be written:

> Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art […]. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions – especially, exhibitions of contemporary art – establish and administer the cultural meanings of art. Yet, despite the growing importance of exhibitions, their histories, their structures and their socio-political implications are only now beginning to be written about and theorized. What work has been done is partial, in both senses of the word, and surprisingly random.[34]

The editors proclaim 'exhibitions *per se*' as a subject 'worthy of study', and attempt to differentiate them from issues in 'museum culture', despite their overlap. They suggest various lines of inquiry – histories, sites, alternative spaces and architectural surroundings, formats and installation, the curatorship of biennial exhibitions, narratology and the construction of meaning – in an 'anthology' of different approaches, a format they consider analogous to the exhibition. Furthermore, they argue that 'writing about exhibitions rather than the works of art within them' marks 'a crisis' in art criticism, but also a 'tactic' that may 'either be a compensatory device, a politicised attempt to consider works of art as interrelated rather than as individual entities, or a textual response to changes in the art world itself.'[35]

The perception of exhibitions as a long repressed subject of study has become a recurring issue. Recent symposia emphasized the invisibility of exhibitions as a cultural phenomenon, and noted that 'exhibition studies' was an emerging field of inquiry and historical analysis.[36] To a certain extent, recent interest in the histories of

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[33] The most useful account of the history of exhibitions that reaches back to the mid-nineteenth century is Tony Bennett's, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), particularly chapter 2, 'The Exhibitionary Complex'.

[34] Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

[35] Ibid., pp. 2, 3. Italics in the original.

[36] See, for instance, *Landmark Exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows Since 1968*, conference, Tate Modern, London, 10-11October 2008, audio recordings available in

exhibitions is similar to the shift towards the social history of art in the mid-1970s, as both attempt to examine the social complexity of art and its public form. The main premise is that exhibitions provide a way of reading modern and contemporary art away from the traditional art historical focus on distinct artworks, individual artists, oeuvres, and the succession of epochs and styles, encouraging instead relational understandings of the ways in which art is made public. Marko Daniel and Antony Hudek, in their introduction to the symposium *Landmark Exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows Since 1968* (2008) highlighted the attempt to

> review a field of historical research that had gone heretofore largely unnoticed: the phenomenological, sociological, affective, economic and political contexts that condition art's presentation. The art object has for too long been considered in isolation, as a material artefact independent of the web of power relations in which it is produced, discussed, exchanged, stored and exhibited.[37]

Art historian Mary Anne Staniszewski, in her important publication *The Power of Display* (1998), introduced the term 'amnesia' with regard to 'installation design as an aesthetic medium and historical category', an aspect of modern art history which has been 'officially and collectively forgotten'. Her account aims to address both the repressed history of exhibition design and the implications this omission has for contemporary art and culture. For these 'ellipses … manifest historical limitations and demark the configurations of power and knowledge within a particular culture.'[38] Due to the 'ephemeral nature of exhibitions', but mostly because of a restricted notion of art history that foregrounds the 'histories of individual artworks', exhibition installations are still ignored despite their crucial role in the creation of meaning,

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/landmark-exhibitions-contemporary-art-shows-1968-day-1; <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/landmark-exhibitions-contemporary-art-shows-1968-day-2> [created 5-6 November 2009; accessed 15 May 2015]. Papers delivered at the conference appear in *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/issue-12> [accessed 15 May 2015]; *Invisible History of Exhibitions*, symposium, Budapest, 21-22 May 2009 <http://hu.tranzit.org/en/current/0/2009-05-21/invisible-historysymp> [accessed 15 May 2015].
[37] Marko Daniel and Antony Hudek, 'Landmark Exhibitions Issue: Introduction', *Tate Papers: Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009), p. 1of 3 <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/landmark-exhibitions-issue-introduction> [accessed 14 May 2015].
[38] Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001 [1998]), p. xxi.

different kinds of viewers or 'subjects', experiences, and art institutions. Acknowledging the significance of exhibition design, Staniszewski claims, is an 'effective strategy' for a renewed art history, which recognizes 'the vitality, historicity, and the time-and-site bound character of all aspects of culture.'[39] The study of installation designs reveals its 'conscious and unconscious' aspects, the latter understood as the 'often overlooked yet extremely powerful dimensions of art exhibitions', the representations of 'historical limitations and social codes.' Drawing on paradigmatic installations in MoMa, New York, during the so-called 'laboratory years', from its founding in 1929 until 1970, Staniszewski advances exhibition design as a 'medium in its own right' and a significant aspect of the twentieth-century avant-gardes.[40] By applying the terms 'amnesia' and 'memory' to the institution, she intends to raise questions about 'individual responsibility in creating institutional conventions and the historical and ideological processes of a museum.'[41] Furthermore, the often overlooked experimental exhibition design of the early twentieth-century international avant-gardes, reconfigured in the art of the 1960s and 1970s, forms the 'prehistory' of contemporary art practices, particularly in relation to viewer interactivity, site-specificity, multimedia, and the prevalence of installation art.[42]

The issue of the context of architecture, space, and institutional conditions was tendentiously raised in Brian O'Doherty's now classic *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of Gallery Space* (1986). O'Doherty showed how the institutionalization of the 'white cube' tended to erase earlier innovative exhibition forms and privileged a disembodied experience of art. He dismantled the myth of the neutral container, exposing the power structures inherent to it.[43] Ranging idiosyncratically across the last two centuries, Charlotte Klonk's *Spaces of Experience* (2009) shows how changing theories of perception and individuality informed debates about the presentation of art and modes of spectatorship in gallery space with socio-political effects. Emphasizing the Bauhaus-era designs for offering collective experience and interaction, Klonk is critical of how these were soon neutralized and co-opted within

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[39] Ibid., pp. xxii, xxi.
[40] Ibid., p. xxii.
[41] Ibid., p. xxiv.
[42] Ibid., p. 1. On the legacy of experimental exhibition designs of the early avant-garde on European curatorial practices in the 1990s, known as 'performative curating', with emphasis on interactivity, mobility, connectivity, and flexibility, see also Paul O'Neill, 'Curating U-Topics', *Art Monthly,* no. 272 (Dec.- Jan. 2003-2004), pp.7-10.
[43] Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of Gallery Space,* exp. edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999 [1986], orig. publ. in *Artforum* in 1976 as a series of three essays).

mid twentieth-century New York museums, which favoured individual contemplation and the notion of the spectator as 'consumer', formats that remain widely unchallenged up to today.[44]

Drawing on Staniszewski's work, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist has stressed the effects of 'amnesia' on our understanding of contemporary curatorial practice. Obrist notes the paradox of 'a missing literature of exhibitions', 'at a moment when there is so much talk about curating', an absence he attributes largely to the fact that exhibitions as temporary events are 'not collected'.[45] To amend the lack of curatorial literature, he calls for 'a protest against forgetting' – a phrase borrowed from Eric Hobsbawm – by which a collective memory of curating can take shape.[46] Since 1997, he has attempted to 'write an oral history of exhibitions' through an ongoing series of interviews with the 'curatorial pioneers', who laid the foundations of contemporary curating in the 1950-1960s.[47] Obrist aims to connect post-war and early twentieth-century experimental exhibition design and museology with current innovative curatorial practices, his own included. What is both interesting and controversial is Obrist's almost obsessive reliance on the interview format as his medium.[48] Alongside the post-war generation of Harald Szeemann, Walter Hopps, and Pontus Hultén, he champions modernist pioneers, especially Alexander Dorner, as points of origin for contemporary curating.[49]

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[44] Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009).

[45] Hans Ulrich Obrist, interviewed by Paul O'Neill, *Contemporary*: Special Issue on Curators, vol. 21, no. 77 (2005), pp. 94-97 (97).

[46] See Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'A Protest Against Forgetting: An Interview with Jean Leering', in Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007) pp. 148-158.

[47] Obrist, interviewed by Paul O'Neill, p. 97. See also Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP | Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2008).

[48] Paul O'Neill points out that Obrist's attempt against forgetting demonstrates 'an interest not only in establishing a curatorial history, but also a potential space for self-positioning. […] it also connects curatorial innovations from the past to his own curatorial practice, which is positioned as their logical successor.' O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, p. 41. See Hans Ulrich Obrist and April Lamm, eds, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating* But Were Afraid to Ask* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011), in which a number of artists interview Obrist about curating. Also, Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London: Penguin, 2015), in which Obrist discusses his own practice in relation to his major curatorial influences. For a discussion of the interview project, see Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Curiosity Is the Motor of the Entire Interview Project: Hans Ulrich Obrist in Conversation with Philip Ursprung', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 94, no. 1 (March 2012), pp. 42-49.

[49] Alexander Dorner as director of the Landesmuseum in Hanover in the 1920s commissioned avant-garde artists to create innovative installations. 'We have to start with Alexander Dorner in the 20s in Hannover, then Willem Sandberg in the 50s in Amsterdam.' Obrist, interviewed by Paul O'Neill, p. 97. In this respect, Obrist has been influential in bringing Dorner's ideas about a dynamic museum as 'laboratory' to the fore. See Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Battery, *Kraftwerk*, and Laboratory (Alexander Dorner Revisited)', in Carin Kuoni, ed., *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art* (New York: Independent Curators International (ICI), 2001), pp. 127-130.

It is noticeable that the recent attempt to counter amnesia through a process of historicization fluctuates between a history of exhibitions and a history of curating, but both share a quest for origins – the 1920s, the 1960s, the 1990s – and the privilege accorded to the agency of either the curators or the artists.[50] The role of exhibitions in the writing of late-nineteenth and twentieth century art history, and in the formation of our understanding of modern and contemporary art is now widely recognized, having been pioneered in the English-speaking world by art historian Bruce Altshuler in the mid-1990s. In his influential publication *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (1994) and the recent two-volume work *Salon to Biennial* (2008) and *Biennials and Beyond* (2013), both tellingly subtitled *Exhibitions that Made Art History*, Altshuler documents the most significant international group exhibitions, ranging from 1863 (*Salon des Réfusés*) to 2002 (*Documenta 11*).[51] In his recent work – a compendium of rich exhibition documentation with 'a minimum of interpretation' – Altshuler rather problematically suggests the broad notion of the 'salon' as a model for all exhibitions that present and advocate new art developments.[52] His major examples come from the historical avant-garde; a subtext to his survey, he notes, is the primary role played by artists in organising these exhibitions and inventing new forms of display, a phenomenon that diminishes after World War II 'as public institutions and nonartist exhibition organizers came to dominate the display of the new.'[53] Altshuler provides a narrative based on 'the increasing disempowerment of artists in directing the presentation of their work', which he links with 'the institutionalization of contemporary art' and 'the

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[50] Dorothea von Hantlemann argues that Duchamp marked what she calls 'the curatorial paradigm'. It was Duchamp's 'choice' that allowed the readymade to mark 'the transition of a product-oriented society to a selection-oriented society.' As such, 'Duchamp turned the act of choosing into a new paradigm of creativity.' Dorothea von Hantlemann, 'The Curatorial Paradigm', *The Exhibitionist*, no. 4 (June 2011), pp. 11-12.

[51] See Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994); Bruce Altshuler et al, eds, *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Volume 1: 1863-1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008); Bruce Altshuler et al, eds, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Volume II: 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013).

[52] According to Altshuler, the concept of the 'salon' should be 'understood broadly as a report on recent artistic production. Freed from its conservative use by the French Academy, the salon form has been employed throughout the history of advanced art to present and advocate for new developments, from the alternative Paris salons and great international exhibitions before World War I to the Documentas, biennials, and thematic museum surveys of the last third of the twentieth century.' Altshuler et al, *Salon to Biennial*, p. 18. Yet, Teresa Gleadowe rightly notes that the breadth of the notion makes 'little allowance for the more programmatic or essayistic approach to exhibition-making that has been a feature of the last two decades, exemplified perhaps pre-eminently in the last three Documenta exhibitions.' Teresa Gleadowe, 'Salon to Biennial', Book Review, *Art Monthly*, no. 327 (June 2009), p. 37.

[53] Altshuler, 'Introduction', *Salon to Biennial*, p. 18.

ascendancy of a new kind of curatorial power' in the 1960s typified by professional exhibition-makers like Harald Szeemann and Seth Siegelaub.[54] Altshuler's account of contemporary exhibition-making confirms the orthodoxy of the 'curatorial assumption of the artist's creative mantle',[55] despite recent developments such as Relational Aesthetics and discursive forms that merge artistic and curatorial practice, and the widespread phenomenon of the artist-curator.[56] In a book from 1972, art historian Ian Dunlop also emphasizes the agency of artists with specific focus on modern art that created scandal when first exhibited to the public by artists themselves.[57]

Afterall journal's *Exhibition Histories* series (ongoing since 2010) attempts to evade the primacy accorded to artistic or curatorial subjectivity by investigating 'exhibitions that have shaped the way contemporary art is experienced, made and discussed.' Through the scholarly study of selected exhibitions and the various factors that determined their production, *Exhibition Histories* aims to challenge the conventional focus on individual artists, single artefacts, and the relevant influences, arguing instead for an examination of art in the wider context of its public presentation in the form of exhibitions.[58]

This review of the burgeoning literature on exhibition practices and curatorship shows that the histories of exhibition remains a still nascent, if rapidly expanding field, whose writing tends to develop out of the writing of art history, even if it productively challenges the latter's most established assumptions.[59] It also raises

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[54] Ibid.; Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*, p. 238.

[55] Ibid., p. 237.

[56] Elena Filipovic has recently embarked on problematizing a history of the 'artist as curator', or artist-curated exhibitions, which still 'remains to come'. See Elena Filipovic, 'When Exhibitions Become Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator', in Lucy Steeds, ed., *Exhibition*, Documents of Contemporary Art, (London and Cambridge, Mass.: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2014), pp.156-168 [rev. edn of the first publ. as the introductory essay of *The Artist as Curator*, no. 0, *Mousse*, no. 41 (December 2013)].

[57] Ian Dunlop, *The Shock of the New: Seven Historic Exhibitions of Modern Art* (London: Weindenfeld and Nicholson, 1972). On this subject, see also Lewis Kachur, *Displaying the Marvelous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001). Kachur suggests the concept 'ideological exhibition' with regard to the historical avant-garde shows.

[58] *Afterall Books: Exhibition Histories* <https://www.afterall.org/books/exhibition.histories> [accessed 16 December 2016]. The ongoing (since 2010) *Exhibition Histories* series, under the commissioning editorship of Teresa Gleadowe, is a research project developed by the journal *Afterall* at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London, in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

[59] The writer and curator Simon Sheikh makes the provocative suggestion of writing a history of exhibitions based on Reinhart Koselleck's notion of 'conceptual history', in which history is seen through ideas and concepts rather than events, individuals, and specific objects. Simon Sheikh, 'A Conceptual History of Exhibition-Making', keynote presented at *Former West* Conference, BAK, Utrecht, 7 November 2009

a number of historiographical and methodological issues due to the ephemeral, mutable, and complex nature of the exhibition and the expansion today of exhibition forms, spaces, and institutions. The need to extend and complicate twentieth-century histories, and to build a body of work worthy of study while avoiding the production of a canon of legendary moments and a celebration of the heroic figure of the curator are recurring issues in recent debates on how to write the histories of exhibitions.[60] Teresa Gleadowe and Terry Smith suggest that the urgency and complexity of the task requires a new approach closer to curatorial and artistic practices, one that may lead to a 'different kind of historical recollection' to existing modes of art and cultural history.[61]

Within this context, there is a more recent and widespread tendency of remaking, restaging, and revisiting past exhibitions. These undertakings appear as an alternative form of exhibition history, turning curating-as-remaking into a self-reflective tool of historical analysis and investigation. The historical relation with the past and the extent to which they provide a new perspective or link to contemporary issues are among their most controversial aspects. Terry Smith claims that 'recuration' aims to endow earlier shows with a contemporary presence, and connects it to his claims for the distinctiveness of curatorial thinking in and through

<http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchCongresses/1stFormerWestCongress/Video/AConceptualHistory
OfExhibitionMaking> [accessed 16 December 2016].

[60] See, for instance, the contributions in *The Exhibitionist: Journal on Exhibition Making*, no. 4 (June 2011). On the issue of the canon, see 'The Canon of Curating', special issue, *Manifesta Journal*, no. 11 (2011); 'Rewriting or Reaffirming the Canon? Critical Readings of Exhibition History', special issue, *Stedelijk Studies*, no. 2 (2015). For an interesting account examining the teaching of historical approaches within a curatorial course (Master of Arts program, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College), the varying languages by which exhibition and curatorial histories are deemed significant, and the differentials of value inhering within the source materials and practices of study, see Jeannine Tang, 'On the Case of Curatorial History', in Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, and Lucy Steeds, eds, *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?* (London and Cambridge, Mas.: LUMA Foundation & The Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College and MIT Press, 2016), pp. 95-103.

[61] See Smith, 'Historicize Curating', in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, pp. 187-194 (194). According to Teresa Gleadowe, '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" […] An exhibition is always more than the relics that survive it […] [It] is also a series of phenomenological experiences – elusive and essentially irrevocable. 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.' Teresa Gleadowe, 'Inhabiting Exhibition History', *The Exhibitionist: Journal on Exhibition Making*, no. 4 (June 2011), pp. 29-34 (33-34).

exhibitions. In this respect, the phenomenon is seen as a consciously 'meta-critical' attempt at 'curating contemporaneity'.[62] Art historian Reesa Greenberg uses the term 'remembering exhibition' to designate 'a new exhibition genre' for telling and understanding exhibition histories. 'What' we remember relies on 'how' we remember it, Greenberg argues, therefore such shows offer different types of memory and history in relation to their historical reference points.[63] Within the wave of remaking activity, *When Attitudes Become Form*, *Les Immatériaux*, and the 50 editions of Documenta have been variously 'remembered', which I will discuss in the subsequent chapters. Critical questions concerning these re-exhibitions focus on whether they turn historical events into nostalgic fetishism, neo-formalism, or ultimately re-mythologize them in order to increase their market value.[64]

Exhibition-making, curating, the curatorial, and the paracuratorial

The expansion of contemporary curating and exhibition practice has raised various questions concerning the relationship of theory and practice. Recently, the concept of 'the curatorial', championed by the curator Maria Lind, has attempted to redefine contemporary curatorial practice as an entanglement of theory and practice that

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[62] Smith, 'Recuration', in *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, pp. 194-206 (203).

[63] Greenberg conceives 'remembering exhibitions' as 'the practice of spatialising memory'. We can remember exhibitions either 'as moments in time' (as landmarks, which implies a time path) or 'in an expanded field' (as multidimensional, topographic modalities). Accordingly, she identifies three types of re-enactment: replica; riff; virtual reprise. The 'replica' applies to anniversary exhibitions and/or the replication of content and form of the exhibition (reconstruction). The 'riff' implies a performative and self-reflective attitude with a more interrogative stance of representing the past in the present. The 'reprise', applied to the web, disrupts traditional notions of time. Greenberg stresses the potential of the web as a 'meta-site' and 'constant present' to radicalize the way exhibitions are created, archived, received, and reiterated in the transition from the progressive model of the history of exhibitions as landmark moments to a multidimensional, more flexible, decentred structure, what she calls 'from a typographic to a topographic representation of history'. Reesa Greenberg, 'Remembering Exhibitions: From Point to Line to Web', *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/remembering-exhibitions-point-line-web>
[accessed 11 August 2014]. See also Reesa Greenberg, 'Archival Remembering Exhibitions', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (June 2012), pp. 159-177. Here, Greenberg examines the variant of remembering exhibitions that uses a documentary approach and positions it in relation to the archive as it appears in contemporary art exhibition practices. For a discussion of various remaking forms and approaches, see also Alessandra Troncone, 'Il piacere di rifare', *Flash Art Italia*, no. 310 (May-June 2013), pp. 84-87 <http://www.flashartonline.it/article/remaking-exhibitions/> [accessed 16 December 2016].

[64] For a different perspective of the current engagement with remaking, connected with the so-called 'historiographic turn' in contemporary art as an indicator of nostalgia and lack of relation with the present in our 'post-historical' times, see Dieter Roelstraete, 'After the Historiographic Turn: Current Findings', *e-flux*, online journal, no. 6 (May 2009) <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/after-the-historiographic-turn-current-findings/> [accessed 11 August 2015].

exceeds presentation and offers a broader cultural, interdisciplinary, and more 'dematerialized' approach. 'The curatorial' is not located solely within curating since the practice of making exhibitions is now expanding to include all types of 'showing' and a wide-ranging set of roles. The interrogation of contemporary curating is here inseparable from an understanding of contemporary art as a fundamentally postconceptual field, that is, a field of knowledge production, interdisciplinary research and critical inquiry that has an interventionist role within the wider socio-political field. In this particular strand of literature and discourse, issues of display are of less importance. What counts is the critical potential and imperative of curatorial activity, and thus the development of new, critical methodologies in tune with the divergent and heterogeneous field of contemporary artistic practices. The exhibition in its most conventional sense as an object-based, visually-bound show is sidestepped in favour of the production of discursive events, educational activities, collaborative, activism-oriented and community-based 'projects' that often are outside or deliberately destabilize the art institution. The increasing use of the term 'project' in place of 'exhibition' is typical of this shift in artistic and curatorial practice towards modes of production that valorise mediation, flexibility, connectivity, creativity, innovation, self-organization, and the decentring of systematic structures.

In this respect, this emerging line of interrogation and the debate between curating-as-display-making (the exhibition) and curating-as-expanded-practice (the curatorial) can be traced back to Conceptual art, and, more specifically, Maria Lind has attempted to locate it as part of the genealogy of Institutional Critique. One gets a sense of this in the debate, tellingly entitled *To Show or Not to Show*, between Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind. Here Lind argues that, 'To say that curating equals exhibition making is like saying that art is the same as painting.'[65] Rather the exhibition is just one aspect of the potential of 'the curatorial', which in Lind's original formulation aims to question and critique the consensus. She defines 'the curatorial' 'as a multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education and fundraising'. That is, 'a loose methodology applied by different people in various capacities', and so implies 'curating as a way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in

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[65] Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind, 'To Show or Not to Show', *Mousse*, no. 31 (December 2011-January 2012), n.p. <http://moussemagazine.it/jens-hoffmann-maria-lind-2011/> [accessed 6 December 2016].

physical space like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions.'[66] Lind's formulation plausibly evokes the changing conditions of curatorial production today and how it has come to involve activities that have been to date considered subsidiary, educational, or publicity. She acknowledges that this approach owes much to 'site-specific practices', 'context-sensitive' art, and 'institutional critique', each allowing one 'to think from the artwork with it, but also away from it and against it. In this sense, the "curatorial" resembles what an editor should do, only with a broader set of materials and relationships.'[67]

'The curatorial' has achieved some currency among curators,[68] yet it has also raised criticism for implying an oppositional and hierarchical understanding between curating as tied to exhibition-production and discursive curatorial practices as well as between artists and curators. Jens Hoffmann coined the term 'paracuratorial' for the activities which are either outside of exhibition-making such as 'lectures, screenings' or are 'exhibitions without art, working with artists on projects without ever producing anything that could be exhibited.' The 'potential' of exhibitions 'as a format for the display of art has [not] been fully explored, and it certainly has not been exhausted', Hoffmann argues.[69] Rather than conforming to an oppositional logic of 'inside' and 'outside', O'Neill conceives the curatorial as 'a constellation of

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[66] Maria Lind, 'The Curatorial', in Brian Kuan Wood, ed., *Selected Maria Lind Writing* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), pp. 57-66 (63) [first publ. in *Artforum*, vol. 68, no. 2 (October 2009), p. 103].
[67] Ibid.
[68] Irit Rogoff provides a more deconstructive version of 'the curatorial' as 'critical thought … that does not rush to embody itself, … to concrete itself,' but allows us 'to stay with the questions' that are to be unravelled over time. Beatrice von Bismarck's understanding of the political potential of 'the curatorial' involves a 'continual process of negotiation' of the curatorial role, contributing to 'other processes of "becoming"', in which the positions taken appear in 'various constellations.' Emily Pethick proposes 'an unbounded framework that is speculative and responsive', allowing for things, ideas and outcomes to emerge in the process of being realized. See Irit Rogoff, 'Smuggling' – An Embodied Criticality', pp. 1-7 (3) <http://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf> [created August 2006; accessed 6 December 2016]; also Irit Rogoff, 'Smuggling' – A Curatorial Model', in Vanessa Joan Müller and Nicolaus Schafhausen, eds, *Under Construction: Perspectives on Institutional Practice* (Cologne: Walter König, 2006), pp. 132-135; Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Curatorial Criticality: On the Role of Freelance Curators in the Field of Contemporary Art', *OnCurating.org*, 'Curating Critique', no.9 (2011), pp. 19-23 (22)
<http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue9.pdf>
[accessed 6 December 2016]; Emily Pethick, 'The Dog that Barked at the Elephant in the Room', *The Exhibitionist*, no. 4 (June 2011), pp. 77-82 (81). On this subject, see also Jean-Paul Martinon, ed., *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).
[69] Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind, 'To Show or Not to Show', *Mousse*, no. 31 (December 2011-January 2012), n.p. <http://moussemagazine.it/jens-hoffmann-maria-lind-2011/> [accessed 6 December 2016]. The *para-* is derived from Gérard Genette's *paratext*, which are all the elements beyond the body text of a book (blurb, back matter, typography, etc.). *The Exhibitionist* journal formalized the term 'paracuratorial' in issue 4 (June 2011), and invited Vanessa Joan Müller, Lívia Páldi, and Emily Pethick to develop and elaborate on its implications for curatorial practice.

activities' in which 'discursive-led curatorial praxis does not exclude the exhibition as one of its many productive forms.'[70] Having acknowledged the paracuratorial work as part of an ever-expanding curatorial paradigm, O'Neill and Wilson more recently set out to explore the intersection between curating, 'the curatorial', and certain understandings of research as a means of moving beyond exhibitions as the main outcome of curatorial production.[71]

Within this context of burgeoning literature and debates on contemporary curatorial practice, directed either towards the writing of curatorial histories or an inquiry on curating as the site of knowledge production, discourse, and political engagement, what is distinctively missing is an investigation of the way exhibitions generate aesthetic issues that help us to understand better our condition in the present, our past, and through their liberating potential can also open up new futures. Through the construction of a genealogy of Curatorial Aesthetics over the past fifty years, this thesis explores the aesthetic dimension of curating and reaffirms its aesthetic power beyond the all too familiar curator-as-artist debate or unnecessary dualisms concerning the centrality of the exhibition format. Instead, the Aesthetics of Curating discussed here concerns an experiential, creative, ethical, political, and conceptual dimension that enables it to function as a transformative force of our habitual modes of thinking and acting in the world. It offers an alternative narrative that reconsiders the role of aesthetics in the history of curatorial practice, and provides a broader contemporary understanding of aesthetics in and after the conceptual turn.

III. Thesis structure

The thesis is structured in three main parts, each one devoted to each of the case-studies and including two chapters. Drawing on Szeemann's predicament of how to exhibit the non-exhibitable artistic gesture, which, from the outset, formed the tension between the material and immaterial aspects of *When Attitudes Become Form*, chapter 1 explores the relation between artistic 'attitudes' and 'forms' in artistic production

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[70] Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox', *The Exhibitionist*, no. 6 (June 2012), pp. 55-60 (57).
[71] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds, *Curating Research* (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions and De Appel, 2015).

that questions conventional object-making. It focuses on the new process-based, expressive materialism that the show affirmed and made visible in a radical aesthetics of 'structured chaos', which valorised contingency, indeterminacy, and the intensity of the creative process itself, taking individual 'attitudes' as its main compositional principle rather than a predetermined conceptual framework.

Considering, on the one hand, the value accorded to material processes of creation and, on the other, the inclusion of concepts and information in the expressive forms of artistic 'attitudes' as the extension of 'gesture', chapter 2 discusses the conceptualism at stake in *When Attitudes Become Form*. It explores Szeemann's own attitude towards conceptual practices along with the new, contested understanding of art as idea through a comparable analysis with the conceptualism of contemporaneous influential curator Seth Siegelaub and his affiliated artists in the show. Szeemann demonstrates a more inclusive and experiential approach that mixes material, performative, and conceptual processes, more intuitive rather than strictly conceptual modes of thinking, keeping both aesthetic and conceptual elements in play. The chapter also outlines Szeemann's practice in the aftermath of *Attitudes* in order to show how individual attitudes – as the organizing force and primary element of the aesthetic significance of the work – takes on different forms and names in its cohabitation with conceptual elements, nonetheless the experiential process of creation always remains vital.

Chapter 3 deals with the philosophical conception and artistic presentation of *Les Immatériaux* from the perspective of the tension between its conceptual and experiential aspects within the 'postmodern' context of the emerging forms of digital technologies, their 'immaterial materials', and dehumanizing effects. It analyzes the curatorial strategies and excessive means of communication the exhibition deployed for the presentation of a new immaterial sensibility, and argues for the disturbing incommensurability between sensibility and its understanding in thought it invoked. It also introduces Lyotard's reservations about the anti-aesthetic impact of the new technologies, and so his ambivalent position in relation to them, that nonetheless allows him to explore their liberating potential from within.

Chapter 4 argues that the technological excess and the chaotic presentation in *Les Immatériaux* were deliberately deployed to invoke the disquieting incommensurability of the sublime experience and the confrontation with the inhuman this entails. Through a range of theoretical sources from Lyotard's oeuvre, the chapter

claims – despite Lyotard's avoiding any direct connections of the exhibition with the sublime – that a sublime aesthetic emerges in *Les Immatériaux* not merely as a matter of poetics, but also as a certain politics and ethics that offers resistance to the instrumentalizing rational forms of contemporary capitalism through the invention of inhuman sensations and the increase of human possibilities it entails.

Chapter 5 discusses the primacy on aesthetic experience in *Documenta 12* (D12) through a poetics of 'formlessness' and the understanding of the exhibition as a medium itself for the creation of an aesthetic ethics of coexistence. The revisionist approach of D12, its deliberate withdrawal from the art market imperatives and prevailing frameworks of interpretation is discussed within the context of the historical development and contemporary challenges of Documenta itself; the proliferation of biennials in the changing conditions of globalization; and the shift to self-reflective, critical, discursive, more inclusive and politically-engaged curatorial modes since the 1990s, exemplified by *Documenta X* and *Documenta 11*. Contrary to charges for formalist aestheticism and lack of conceptualism, D12, I argue, continues and radicalizes these critical and discursive approaches both on a local and global level through a renewed interest in the aesthetic rather than prescribing explicitly political precepts and forcing a determining conceptual framework.

In contrast to the critical reception of D12 as being non-conceptual and a-political, chapter 6 argues that its insistence on the value of aesthetic experience does not efface the socio-political and the discursive. The politics of aesthetics of D12 deviates from what is usually understood as 'political' or 'critical' art and curating today, calling instead for the necessity of aesthetic autonomy (not the autonomy of the artwork) as a means to negotiate the relation of art and life. Through the production of an experiential space alongside social involvement and the emphasis on emancipated viewership, D12 suggests a politics of aesthetic indeterminacy whose potential liberating effect lies in maintaining a certain separateness from everyday life. Furthermore, this autonomy does not exclude conceptual and discursive processes but keeps them in productive play. In this sense, its alternative aesthetic proposal resonates with Jacques Rancière's 'politics of aesthetics' that redefines the relation of art and politics, art and life, concept and sensation in a paradoxical form of political efficacy that keeps art's autonomy and heteronomy in a constitutive tension and aesthetic indeterminacy that induces the new processes of subjectification.

Chapter 1

'But You Cannot Exhibit Gestures' or How 'to Make Things Possible'

The history of *Attitudes* is short but complex. After the opening in the summer of 1968 of the exhibition *12 Environments*, the people from Philip Morris and the PR firm Rudder and Finn came to Bern and asked me if I would like to do a show of my own. They offered me money and total freedom. I said yes, of course. Until then I had never had an opportunity like that. […] So getting this funding for *Attitudes* was very liberating for me.

After the opening of *12 Environments*, I was travelling with de Wilde through Switzerland and Holland to select works by younger Dutch and Swiss artists for two group shows devoted to each nationality that took place in both countries. I told him that with the Philip Morris money I intended to do a show with the light artists of Los Angeles. […] But Edy said, 'You can't do that. I've already reserved the project for myself!' […]

That same day we visited the studio of a Dutch painter, Reinier Lucassen, who said, 'I have an assistant. Would you be interested in looking at his work?' The assistant was Jan Dibbets, who greeted us from behind two tables – one with neon coming out of the surface, the other one with grass, which he watered. I was so impressed by this gesture that I said to Edy, 'Okay. I know what I'll do, an exhibition that focuses on behaviours and gestures like the one I just saw.' That was the starting point; then everything happened very quickly.[1]

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[1] Harald Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter: Hans Ulrich Obrist talks with Harald Szeemann', in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP|Ringier & Les Presses du Reel, 2008), pp. 80-101 (86-87) [first publ. in *Artforum*, vol. 35, no. 3 (November 1996), pp. 74-79, 111-112, 119, 125]. Szeemann refers to the exhibition *12 Environments: 50 Jahre Kunsthalle Bern* ['12 Environments: 50 Years Kunsthalle Bern'], Kunsthalle Bern, 20 July-29 September 1968, on the occasion of Kunsthalle's 50th anniversary. The exhibition famously included the first wrapped public building, *Wrapped Kunsthalle Bern* (1968) by Christo. He also mentions the collaborative project between the Kunsthalle Bern and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in the form of two exchange exhibitions: one presenting young artists from the Netherlands, selected by Harald Szeemann, director of the Kunsthalle Bern, the other presenting young artists from Switzerland, selected by Edy de Wilde, director of the Stedelijk Museum: *Junge Kunst aus Holland* ['Young Art from Holland'], Kunsthalle Bern, 2 November-1 December 1968; *22 Jonge Zwitsers* ['22 Young Swiss Artists'], Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 28 March-5 May 1969, then travelled to Bern, *22 junge Schweizer*, 7 June-6 July 1969). Jan Dibbets's *Grasstable + Neontable* (1968) was exhibited at the *Junge Kunst aus Holland* in Kunsthalle Bern.

This is how Harald Szeemann described in a 1996 interview to Hans Ulrich Obrist the genetic moment of what came to be seen as an iconic exhibition: *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, Kunsthalle Bern, 22 March-27 April 1969.[2]

I. A legendary show

The show is considered a landmark, almost mythical, exhibition both as a response to the radical shifts taking place in art at the time and for reconfiguring our understanding of contemporary curating. Art historian Teresa Gleadowe emphasizes

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[2] The exhibition was organized by Harald Szeemann, then director of the Kunsthalle Bern. From there, it travelled to the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, Germany, 10 May-15 June 1969, and then to the Institute of Contemporary Art, ICA, London, organized by Charles Harrison, 28 August-27 September 1969. Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)* exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), also available in UBUWEB <http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/text/Szeemann-Harald_Live-In-Your-Head_When-Attitudes-Become-Form_1969.pdf> [accessed 10 December 2016].
The exhibition was one of the first to be substantially funded by a private sponsor, the large American tobacco company Philip Morris, and so marked the increasing involvement of corporation into the art world. The company approached Szeemann through its collaborator PR Ruder & Finn, specifically the director of its Fine Art Department Nina Kaiden, offering him a budget of $15,000 for exhibition preparations and $10,000 for the catalogue. Szeemann was given full freedom in the selection of artists on the condition that the exhibition would travel since touring was important for the international focus of Philip Morris's promotional strategy. On this subject, see Claudia Di Lecce, 'Avant-garde Marketing: "When Attitudes Become Form" and Philip Morris's Sponsorship', in Christian Rattemeyer and others, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, *Afterall* Exhibition Histories series (London: Afterall, 2010), pp. 220-229.
In its ICA version, organized by Charles Harrison, then assistant editor of the *Studio International*, the show changed to expand British representation. Harrison was planning an exhibition of English artists – Barry Flanagan, Richard Long, Bruce McLean, and Roelof Louw – but the ICA lacked funding. He suggested the show after a US trip and wanted to present English artists that worked on a parallel line with the American avant-garde. Harrison was approached by Philip Morris, and agreed to bring *Attitudes* to the ICA by adding his own selection of British artists. The ICA accepted the show since it was funded, and Harrison undertook the organization as the only one knowledgeable about the new art. His ambition was to organize a cutting-edge avant-garde show. He expanded the prominence of British artists, adding also Victor Burgin's *Photopath*, which was not in Bern. Philip Morris offered a specific budget to support the travelling and accommodation cost of the artists. Due to transport cost, there were omissions and changes. British artists Gilbert & George appeared in the opening as 'Living Sculpture', although they were not invited to participate. Harrison later admitted that he did not install the works properly due to lack of instructions; he had only the Bern photos. The show had a rather indifferent public reception in comparison to the Swiss public. For more information on the ICA version and the controversial issue of the 'politics' of the selective process, see Sophie Richard, 'Conversation with Charles Harrison: Banbury, 19 May 20003', in Lynda Morris, ed., *Unconcealed: The International Network of Conceptual Artists 1967-77: Dealers, Exhibitions and Pubic Collections* (Ridinghouse in association with Norwich University College of the Arts: London, 2009), pp. 425-432. Also Charles Harrison, 'Interview with Teresa Gleadowe and Pablo Lafuente, October 2008', in Charles Harrison, *Looking Back: Charles Harrison* (London: Ridinghouse, 2010), pp. 93-151.

the increasingly common conception of the show as 'the cornerstone for an understanding of contemporary exhibition making'.[3] Similarly, curator Daniel Birnbaum argues that Szeemann 'practically defined the curator's role as we understand it today', and *Attitudes* 'marked an important methodological shift for exhibition practice.'[4] Curator and critic Germano Celant, who experienced the show himself, calls it a 'break' and 'historical rift', both artistic and curatorial, representing an important 'founding act' for a new way of making, showing, and thinking about art.[5] But, notably, Szeemann himself sustained this myth. He repeatedly referred to the show as a seminal curatorial moment for 'this was the birth of the curator as we understand the role today', and linked it to the transformations taking place in art in the late-1960s, what he called 'the second' and 'still the last revolution'.[6]

Over the last decade there is a resurgent interest in the show, and Szeemann's practice more generally,[7] with art historical studies and curatorial remakings that aim to reflect on its legacy today. Christian Rattemeyer provided a comprehensive art historical account of *Attitudes* in 2010, the first in *Afterall* Exhibition Histories series, as a comparative study with its co-current exhibition *Op Losse Schroeven*, curated by Wim Beeren at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.[8] He brings the two shows together

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[3] Teresa Gleadowe, 'Introduction: Exhibiting the New Art', in Christian Rattemeyer and others, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, *Afterall* Exhibition Histories series (London: Afterall, 2010), pp. 8-11 (9).

[4] Daniel Birnbaum, 'When Attitude Becomes Form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann', *Artforum*, vol. 43, no. 10 (Summer 2005), pp. 55, 58, 346 (55).

[5] Germano Celant, 'Why and How: A Conversation with Germano Celant', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), pp. 393-421 (404, 419).

[6] Beti Žerovc, 'A Conversation with Harald Szeemann: "Making Things Possible"', *MJ — Manifesta Journal*, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 28-37 (28); Harald Szeemann, '"When Attitudes Become Form" and Other Exhibitions', lecture at the Royal College of Art, London, 25 January 2001, quoted by Teresa Gleadowe, in Rattemeyer and others, p. 8.

[7] For English language publications on Harald Szeemann and his work, see Hans-Joachim Müller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2006); Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, eds, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite (Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957-2005)* (Zurich and New York: Edition Voldemeer and Springer, 2007); Florence Derieux, ed., *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zurich and Grenoble: JRP|Ringier and Le Magasin – Centre National d'Art Contemporain, 2007).

[8] The Dutch show *Op Losse Schroeven (Situations and Cryptostructures)*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 15 March-27 April 1969, was organized by the museum curator Wim Beeren. It opened just one week before *Attitudes*, and they run co-currently up to 27 April 1969. The shows shared a large number of artists (32), as Szeemann routed many of his artists via Amsterdam so that they were presented also in *Op Losse*; organizational resources; and, as it will be noted below, Szeemann's diary on organizing *Attitudes* was published in the exhibition catalogue of the Stedelijk show. Regarding the untranslatability of *Op Losse Schroeven*, Rattemeyer notes that the title is a Dutch idiomatic expression, literally meaning 'on loose screws', and indicates a state of instability and uncertainty. In his introduction to the catalogue, Edy de Wilde, director of Stedelijk, suggested the translation 'Square Pegs in Round Holes', which was not adopted. Rattemeyer suggests the alternative translation

under the telling title 'Exhibiting the New Art', to argue that although both Szeemann and Beeren set out to respond to the new art developments at the time, they followed distinct approaches: whereas Beeren followed a more analytical, art historical approach, Szeemann's was more intuitive and experimental.[9] According to Rattemeyer, the comparative analysis of the shows aims to provide a better understanding of their legacies today by taking a critical stance towards a 'historical disparity': the wide academic engagement with *Attitudes* over the limited historical recognition and scholarship on *Op Losse* to the point that Szeemann's show 'has assumed the role of the representative exhibition of that moment.' Instead, he argues, 'only in tandem with "Op Losse Schroeven" can "When Attitudes Become Form" be fully understood.'[10]

Within the recently widespread tendency of re-enactments as alternative self-reflective form of curatorial historization, *Attitudes* was remade following different approaches. In 2012, Jens Hoffmann presented a remaking of *Attitudes* as an innovative investigation – in the format of an exhibition – into the show's history and impact. The exhibition was conceived as a 'sequel' to Szeemann's historical show, presenting new works across the exhibition and the catalogue by more than eighty international artists who 'follow, in a number of ways, the legacy of Conceptual art.'[11] Considering *Attitudes* as a 'living past', it aimed at 'enlivening and re-imagining its legacy in the current moment' by presenting contemporary artworks alongside historical documentation and artefacts of Szeemann's original exhibition (Fig. 1.1).[12] Hoffmann describes the Wattis show as 'a restoration, a remake, a rejuvenation, a rebellion'– a range of terms appearing as its subtitle – to stress his updating intentions

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'Tentative Connections' as the one that best captures its metaphorical meaning and the ambiguities that the exhibition implies. Christian Rattemeyer and others, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, *Afterall* Exhibition Histories series (London: Afterall, 2010), p. 50.

[9] For Rattemeyer, the differences in approach are due to the different institutional framework – Beeren had to deal with the bureaucracy of a large-scale national museum, whereas the Kunsthalle allowed for a more flexible and swift development of the show – as well as the different training of their organizers – Beeren as traditional art historian asked for historical identifications, classifications, and analytical interpretations, whereas Szeemann's background in theatre, cabaret, and literature (though with a degree in Art History) allowed for a more experimental perspective. Ibid., p. 18.

[10] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[11] See Jens Hoffmann, ed., *Life in Your Head: When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes: A Restoration-A Remake-A Rejuvenation-A Rebellion*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: California College of the Arts Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2012). Also, *Life in Your Head: When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, 13 September – 01 December 2012 <http://www.wattis.org/exhibitions/when-attitudes-became-form-become-attitudes> [accessed 10 December 2016].

[12] Ibid.

and the aim to 'deconstruct the myth' of *Attitudes* and re-evaluate 'the hero worship and mythologizing' of Szeemann.[13]

In 2013, Germano Celant attempted more ambitiously the full re-enactment and faithful recreation of Szeemann's show with the original works and display at the Fondazione Prada in Venice (Fig. 1.2).[14] Celant presents the reconstruction as an 'archaeological object' and 'readymade'. By extracting Szeemann's historical show from its original context and introducing it as a 'readymade' into a different one, the aim, Celant argues, is to assign it new meaning and cognitive value through a re-examination of its relations and interaction with architecture rather than the conventional art history focus on the 'single artefact'.[15] Whereas Hoffmann focuses on the diversity of art practices in *Attitudes* and their impact on contemporary art, Celant emphasizes the role of visual relationships in the show for the construction of meaning, the projection of a certain curatorial vision, and the comprehension of its historical context based on direct experience. The attempt is made through a full-size scale replica into the space of a Venetian eighteenth-century Palazzo to 'recreate the feelings and emotions visitors experienced in 1969.'[16]

Both Hoffmann's 'sequel' and Celant's 'readymade', albeit their difference in approach, aim to critically negotiate the legendary dimension of *Attitudes* and its impact on contemporary art and curating. Explaining the *re-* prefixed terms in the subtitle of his show, Hoffmann describes 'rejuvenation' as 'bringing the thoughts and ideas of 1969 back to life', and Celant equally highlights the attempt to 'resurrect the event' in its poetic and historical dimension.[17] Despite good intentions and awareness of the risks at stake, questions are raised concerning the relation with the past, critical significance, and methodological efficacy of these undertakings; the extent to which they do not turn historical events into nostalgic fetishism, neo-formalism, ultimately

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[13] Hoffmann, 'Imaginative Expansion (or, the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull), in Hoffmann, ed., *Life in Your Head*, n.p.

[14] The exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013* was curated by Germano Celant 'in dialogue with' the artist Thomas Demand and architect Rem Koolhaas at Fondazione Prada, Ca' Corner Della Regina, Venice, 1 June-24 November 2013, during the 55th Venice Biennale. See Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013).

[15] Germano Celant, 'A Readymade: When Attitudes Become Form', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), pp. 389-392 (391-392).

[16] Miuccia Prada, President of the Fondazione Prada, 'Introduction', in Celant, *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, n.p.

[17] Hoffmann, 'Imaginative Expansion', in Hoffmann, ed., *Life in Your Head*, n.p.; Celant, 'A Readymade', in Celant, *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, p. 389.

re-mythologizing and increasing their market value.[18] In particular, Prada Foundation's attempt at 're-establishing the relationship – almost mysterious in its dynamics – between the works and the public' testifies to how limited, in the pursuit of verisimilitude, such a reproducibility of the original intensity of Szeemann's show inevitably is (Fig. 1.3).[19]

The predicament of how to exhibit artistic gestures

Within this context of burgeoning literature and curatorial remakings that both recognize the groundbreaking, legendary status of *Attitudes* and reflect on its legacy today – though not always efficiently escape the risk of re-mythologizing – what is not fully explored is the poetics of the show as a tension between its aesthetic and conceptual, material and immaterial processes and aspects. This experimental cohabitation was not only unparalleled at its time, but also had a decisive impact on the development of exhibition-making. *Attitudes* certainly played a pivotal role in the shift to the contemporary understanding of the curator as creative, semi-independent exhibition-maker. This transformation, however, is not the specific focus of my analysis although it will be discussed. What is at issue here is not the widely accepted conception of Szeemann as the progenitor of the contemporary figure and function of the curator; it is, instead, *Attitudes* as a foundational moment of a genealogy of curatorial aesthetics that sustains the significance of aesthetic experience and the aesthetic force of art in the development of contemporary curating after the conceptual turn. Szeemann paved this trajectory at the time when artists increasingly questioned and redefined almost all aspects of the established understanding of art by favouring more process-based, conceptual, dematerialized, post-studio, and not gallery-circumscribed approaches. Within the historically and culturally shifting relations between the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of the artwork in the late-1960s, the specific way in which Szeemann responded to contemporary shifts, and *Attitudes* accommodated them constitutes a radical artistic and curatorial gesture with

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[18] For a discussion on the historical, political, economic, and critical aspects of remakings with focus on the Venice reconstruction of Szeemann's show, see Celant's interview, 'Why and How: A Conversation with Germano Celant', to Thomas Demand, Rem Koolhass, and the Fondazione Prada Team, Journalists and Friends on questions raised during the process of the project. Ibid., pp. 393-421. The exhibition's catalogue takes 'reproduction' as one of its main themes with a range of scholarly contributions on the subject and the issues it raises.

[19] Miuccia Prada, 'Introduction', in Celant, *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, n.p.

significant impact on the conditions of artistic production and presentation as well as on the notion of exhibition and its making. To examine the relation of the aesthetic and conceptual aspects, which, in my view, is central to the aesthetics of *Attitudes*, I take momentum from Szeemann's aforementioned account of the genetic moment of the show. This was also succinctly described in his exhibition diary under the heading 'The Gesture'. In the 22nd July 1968 entry, Szeemann writes:

> *The Gesture.*
> The real story actually begins here.
>
> In the beginning was Dibbets's gesture to water a lawn on a table. But you cannot exhibit gestures. […] On the same day, I informed my colleague, Edy de Wilde, that, instead of the new experiments with light, my project would now be to present this 'New Art'.[20]

The entry encapsulates the tension between, on the one hand, Szeemann's aporia concerning the impossibility of exhibiting artistic gestures and, on the other, his determination to present them as a new kind of art (Fig. 1.4). The random encounter with what is not possible to (re-)present is speculatively tied to the 'new', giving rise to an exhibition that set out to present both that impossibility and that newness in the attempt at 'making things possible'.[21] Thus, from the outset, Szeemann's focus on the non-exhibitable, non-material artistic gesture – re-articulated as 'attitudes becoming form' – and the presentation of 'new art' – as characteristic of these attitudes and

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[20] Szeemann wrote a diary, which details the trips, studio visits, and installation process of the exhibition. It is striking that parts of the text (travelogue, preparations) were published in German in the catalogue of the co-current exhibition *Op Losse Schroeven (Situations and Cryptostructures)*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Szeemann submitted an introductory note followed by the diary entries from 9 December 1968 up to 20 February 1969. The complete text, which follows the Press coverage of the exhibition including quotes from articles, continues up to 13 June 1969 and was published as 'Wie Entsteht eine Ausstellung?', in Jean-Christophe Ammann and Harald Szeemann, eds, *Von Hodler zur Antiform: Geschichte der Kunsthalle Bern* (Bern: Benteli Verlag, 1970), pp. 142-162. The English translation of the complete 1970 text by Gerard Goodrow was first published in *Painting, Object, Film, Concept: Works from the Herbig Collection*, exh. cat. (New York: Christie's, 1998), pp. 39-49. In this thesis, reference is made to the full text: Harald Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, eds, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite (Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957-2005)* (Zurich and New York: Edition Voldemeer and Springer, 2007), pp. 244-261 (245). Italics in the original.
[21] This is the title of the interview of Harald Szeemann to Beti Žerovc (2003) after Szeemann's quote: 'I would rather make things possible than be rich. […] I'm better at making things possible for others than for myself.' Szeemann in Žerovc, p. 33.

gestures – introduces into the exhibition both conceptual-immaterial and visual-material elements as a kind of tension. This at once artistic and curatorial challenge activates a complexity of conceptual and aesthetic relations under the category of the 'new'. Artistic gesture appears as a third element between the visual-material form of the object and the conceptual-immaterial idea, questioning thereby established limits of what is possible – and representable or exhibitable – in art.

Drawing on Szeemann's predicament, my discussion shifts the perspective of focus on the materialism and conceptualism at stake in *Attitudes*, and how do these relate. If the 'new' in art was speculatively located by Szeemann in artistic practices-as-gestures, which nonetheless exceed – or at least challenge – the hand-crafted, material conditions of art production and its aesthetic presentation in formal objects, how does 'curating a gesture' recast the relation between the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of art, and what kind of art and exhibition-making does it put forward? Does it result in a mode of art making and presentation beyond or against aesthetics that denounces the heretofore privileged subjective aesthetic experience and the relevance of visual artistic form? Or does it keep the aesthetic elements by reformulating their relation to concept and idea?[22] These questions become more pertinent in light of Szeemann's statement in his short catalogue text, entitled 'About the Exhibition', that the artists presented in the show are 'in no way object-makers.'[23]

This chapter focuses on the materialism in/of the show, and explores the role of experience in the production of the work and its aesthetic presentation. It deals with the new forms of materialization in art and exhibition-making, which were critical of

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[22] I had already embarked on researching this problem, when Christian Rattemeyer, on the occasion of the Wattis remaking, published an essay about *Attitudes* along the lines of how to exhibit a gesture. However, he approaches the subject from an art historical perspective of the innovations of the show rather than seeing it as key in a genealogy of the aesthetics of curating, based on the examination of the aesthetic-conceptual relations in exhibition-making, which is the approach of this thesis. See Christian Rattemeyer, 'How to Exhibit a Gesture: The Innovations of *When Attitudes Become Form*', in Jens Hoffmann, ed., *Life in Your Head: When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes: A Restoration-A Remake-A Rejuvenation-A Rebellion*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: California College of the Arts Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2012), n.p.

[23] Harald Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', trans. unknown, in Charles Harrison, ed., *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, exh. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1969), repr. in Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, eds, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite (Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957-2005)* (Zurich/New York: Edition Voldemeer/Springer, 2007), pp. 225-226 (226) [Original text 'Über die Austellung', in Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n. p.].

established aesthetic forms, but nonetheless maintained the importance of the aesthetic on a modified material register. More specifically, the following section discusses the notion of 'new art' that *Attitudes* set out to present alongside the new exhibition mode it necessitates drawing on Szeemann's view that artistic 'attitudes' become 'forms' as extensions of 'gesture'. The next section examines the reconsideration of the conventional form of the object and the move towards a new status of the artwork as natural process and transformation of matter in contemporary American and European postformalist, Postminimalist practices. Particular focus is given on Robert Morris's 'anti-form' and Arte Povera in relation to the show. In the last two parts, I discuss Szeemann's understanding of the form of the exhibition as 'structured chaos', evident in the making and installation of *Attitudes*. The argument is made for a certain materialism and exhibition aesthetics that valorises contingency, indeterminacy, and the intensity of experience of the creative process itself, rooted in individual 'attitudes' as its compositional principle. This indeterminacy of creation has the potential to expand the aesthetic limits of possibility of art making and its presentation.

II. The complexity of 'new art': Exhibiting artistic 'attitudes' in their becoming 'forms'

After the encounter with Dibbets's gesture, Szeemann started collecting information about young artists working along the same lines.[24] With the Dutch artists Ger van Elk and Marinus Boezem, and the English Richard Long as first points of reference, but mostly with the key advisory role of the Swiss-Italian ex-artist and internationally networked Piero Gilardi,[25] he informed Philip Morris about his idea to present the

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[24] For a detailed account of the preparations prior to the exhibition and the curatorial process, see Rattemeyer and others, pp. 12-62.

[25] See Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 245, 247 (22 July, 20 November entries).

Piero Gilardi was initially involved with Arte Povera in Turin, known for his polyurethane *Tappei Natura* ('Nature Rugs') (1965 onwards), before abandoning art in the late-1960s to commit to the politics of art, which had gained urgency in the aftermath of 1968. In 1967, he rejected object-based art as a commodity-type, and being aware of the limitations that the art system imposed on artistic creativity, he decided to make art in the form of creating 'relationships' with other artists and exchanging ideas. As Szeemann writes in the exhibition diary, Gilardi 'decided to terminate his oeuvre and make the new artists his art … by providing information about them' (245). Combining the political commitment of an activist and the abilities of an entrepreneur, Gilardi travelled in Western Europe and the US to meetyoung artists who shared a new and politically revolutionary approach to art. His aim was to create a discursive network between them and further elaborate these new practices

work of a new generation of artists and submitted a working list for approval by the end of October 1968.[26] The exhibition idea was accepted, and American studio visits were planned for December. When Yaacov Agam's exhibition at the Kunsthalle – scheduled for March-April 1969 – was postponed, Szeemann immediately planned the new show for that period.[27] In the following two months, he travelled with unprecedented speed across the US and Europe to visit artist studios, exhibitions, and gallery owners. He, thus, initiated the research model of international travel after having identified an artist or community of artists of interest that has become the dominant curatorial practice since the 1990s. The exhibition catalogue includes the New York address list and artists' letters responding to his invitation to exhibit, and the exhibition diary provides a meticulous account of his contacts, travelling, and exhibition process (Fig. 1.5). During this hectic time, the number of participants was fixed and pressing questions regarding the exhibition title and the presentation were resolved. In the last days running up to the 22nd of March, the Kunsthalle was transformed into what Szeemann calls 'a construction site', 'a meeting place and

through his writings. He coined the term 'Microemotive art' to indicate a sensorial and psycho-physical interaction as opposed to mainstream object-based forms. He elaborated his ideas in the article 'Primary Energy and the "Microemotive Artists"', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 43, no. 1 (September-October 1968), pp. 48-51, also published in Stedelijk Museum's *Museumjournaal*, vol. 13, no. 4 (1968), pp. 198-202.

Gilardi criticized the mediation of private galleries and the commercialization of art in favour of self-organizational modes, which he intended to extend into the field of exhibitions for the ultimate integration of art and political life. From 1967 to 1969, he was an active organizer with Michelangelo Pistoletto, the gallerist Gian Enzo Sperone, and the support of the collector Marcello Levi of the Deposito D'Arte Presente (DDP) in Turin, an alternative public space run by a community of artists with performances and experimental exhibitions in a mode of display closer to a studio and warehouse. Considering art as a mixture of action and ideas, he conceives his role as 'animator' and 'organiser' within an artistic scene with the aim 'to catalyse this emergent movement' through his involvement in exhibition and performance activities, as well as his writings. Gilardi was actively involved in the initial stages of both *Attitudes* and *Op Losse*, having the role of advisor to Szeemann and Beeren. He suggested international young artists to them, affirmed the significance of their experimentations, and proposed a production model for a democratic exhibition structure consistent with his ambition for a new form of international art in a new society. In this respect, he had an influential role in the controversy that followed with Szeemann about the politics of *Attitudes*. See Piero Gilardi, 'Temporary Artistic Communities: Piero Gilardi in Conversation with Francesco Manacorda, 8 November 2008', trans. Amanda Coulson, in Rattemeyer and others, pp. 230-238 (233).

[26] According to Szeemann's diary, his initial exhibition proposal to Philip Morris in August 1968 was 'a confrontation' of the Cold Poetic Image artists (see the exhibition *Towards a Cold Poetic Image*, Galleria Schwarz, Milan, 13 June-30 September 1967 with works by Arakawa, Baruchello, Bauermeister, Brecht, Fahlström, Reuterswärd, and Simonetti), 'who had already hinted at the new problems in their works (Duchamp as father, then Fahlström, Andre, Pistoletto, Flavin), with the "new" artists.' After the installation of the exhibition *Junge Kunst aus Holland* in October, Szeemann renounced this historical perspective in favour of the presentation of new artists. The cancellation of this original idea is later confirmed in the 11th December diary entry, when Szeemann was in New York, because of the 'abundance' of new artists, the *Naturburschen* (Nature-Boys), as he calls them. Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 245-246, 248.

[27] Ibid., p. 246 (10 November entry).

forum'.[28] Instead of selecting artworks, though there were some exceptions, he invited the artists to make their work in the gallery space and beyond it, extending the exhibition out into the city. The energy of the artists' arrival, the feverish 'coming and going' is vividly described by Szeemann in his last diary entries.[29] The gallery space replaced the studio and a new exhibition mode emerged in tandem with a diversity of art practices that resisted the production of the work in any conventional sense (Fig. 1.6). Szeemann recalls this radical coexistence:

> Sixty-nine artists, Europeans and Americans, took over the institution. Robert Barry irradiated the roof; Richard Long did a walk in the mountains; Mario Merz made one of his first igloos; Michael Heizer opened the sidewalk; Walter de Maria produced his telephone piece; Richard Serra showed lead sculptures, the belt piece, and a splash piece; Weiner took a square meter out of the wall; Beuys made a grease sculpture. The Kunsthalle became a real laboratory and a new exhibition style was born – one of structured chaos.[30]

Szeemann attempts to encapsulate the diversity of experimentation, the multiplicity of materials, media, and practices – both within and beyond the institution – that the 'new art' entails. It includes what is now historically categorized as Postminimalism, Arte Povera, Process art, Conceptual art, Land art, and Performance art, a range of experimental practices presented in a similarly unconventional exhibition form as 'structured chaos', in which the boundaries between artistic production and presentation, art making and exhibition display were dissolved.

Szeemann presents the show as a revolutionary moment for both artistic production and exhibition-making. His commitment to present the current tendencies in art makes *Attitudes* a typical survey show of contemporary art, while the speculative link with the most radically 'new' in art practice puts it in the tradition of the historical avant-garde shows and their conception of 'newness' as the progress towards a better future and the emergence of new human possibilities.[31] Both the

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[28] Ibid., p. 256 (19 March, 20 March entries).
[29] Ibid.
[30] Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, pp. 87-88.
[31] Charles Esche, in his contribution to the Venice remaking exhibition catalogue, characterizes *Attitudes* as 'the iconic avant-garde curatorial gesture' since 'It was speculative yet it took a clear position, proclaiming this new art to be the art of the future as well as a discovery in the present.' Esche takes a critical position towards the Venice recreation, arguing that it can be seen as 'the final end of

'contemporaneity' and perceived 'avant-gardism' of the show need to be seen in relation to the artists' increased questioning and redefinition of all aspects of art, and the aim to break with art's established function and limits within the cultural context of the late-1960s. In his catalogue text, Szeemann locates the new art within the broader counter-culture of the time. As he writes, 'it was inevitable that Hippie philosophy, the Rockers, and the use of drugs' alongside 'Eastern influences' and 'many anti-social ideas' would affect a 'younger generation of artists', particularly in the American West Coast. Due to 'the lack of a real centre' in the artworld, analogous anti-social ideas affect young artists locally in Europe asking for new means of expression. The new art practices, Szeemann points out, demonstrates 'the desire to break down the "triangle in which art operates" – the studio, gallery, and museum.'[32]

Given the emphasis on new and experimental, *Attitudes* appears to exemplify what Bruce Altshuler has identified as the typical characteristic of the historical avant-garde shows that were initiated largely by the artists: exhibition form and the art on display coalesce so that exhibitions constitute works of the same genre they were showing. In his 1994 pioneering study on historical avant-garde shows, and *Attitudes* in particular, Altshuler sees 1969 as a 'watershed' in the course of experimental avant-garde exhibitions. He argues that both the institutionalization-qua-end of the oppositional avant-garde of the past and the broader counter-culture of the time marked a new development in which alternative exhibition forms proliferated but were now generated by exhibition organizers rather than the artists themselves. Figures like Harald Szeemann and Seth Siegelaub were creatively 'engaged in the same sort of critical enterprise as the artists, and their exhibitions became works on par with their components.'[33] *Attitudes* resonates with the avant-garde exhibitions and their commitment to the 'new' in its most experimental form, yet it is crucially different. There is neither an identifiable style or genre for the exhibition to illustrate

the end of Modernism and Modernity' in comparison to our time, 'in particular the loss of the "forward momentum" in art's forms and structures' that united the artists in 1969. He positions his argument within contemporary accounts of the failure of the present to fulfil the Modernist promises for a better future, and sees the Venice recreation as 'the symbolic moment to mark the end of an art rooted in the social rebellions of 1968' and the emergence of something new after the 1989 socio-political developments. Charles Esche, 'A Different Setting Changes Everything', in Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form*, pp. 469-476.

[32] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 225.

[33] See Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), especially chapter 13 'Dematerialization: The Voice of the Sixties: January 5-31, 1969, 44 East 52nd Street, New York / When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head), Kunsthalle, Bern, March 22-April 27, 1969', pp. 237-255 (237).

nor an artistic movement or manifesto to represent and postulate. Here, art and its exhibition were based neither on programmatic intentions nor on predefined categories and governing rules but were taking their form in the very process of their creation. 'New art' appears so diverse in its materials, media, forms, and outcome that defies stylistic classifications, conceptual identifications, and analytical art historical interpretations. The acknowledgment of this complexity informs Szeemann's approach from the outset.

Indeed, in the opening sentences of his catalogue text, Szeemann writes that the exhibition 'appears to lack unity, looks strangely complicated.'[34] He set out to present the complexity of new art, but refused to provide a name that would restrain it into a definitional category. The identity of new art paradoxically lies in its dis-identification, and any attempt to pin it down into a name captures only one aspect of its expanded heterogeneity. As Szeemann explains:

> So far no-one has given this complex phenomenon a satisfactory name and category, in the same way that Pop, Op, and Minimal art were quickly put into categories. Names so far suggested – Anti-Form, Micro-emotive Art, Possible Art, Impossible Art, Concept Art, Arte Povera, Earth art – each describe only one aspect of the style.[35]

The inadequacy of any suggested term to identify the most contemporary art is similarly addressed in the exhibition diary. 'A title has to be found. Until now', Szeemann writes, 'I only know what it shouldn't be: "Anti-Form" is too negative, "Micro-emotive" (Gilardi's expression) is incomprehensible".'[36] The exhibition title was finally given by Nina Kaiden, Director of Fine Arts for Ruder & Finn, the advertisement agency for Philip Morris, and the subtitle 'Live in Your Head' was suggested by the artist Keith Sonnier.[37] It is now one of the most iconic in exhibition history, although Szeemann cautions 'it is a sentence rather than a slogan.'[38] In its

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[34] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 225.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 248 (13 December 1968 entry). In the 18th December entry, he also refers to the artist Richard Artschwager's proposal 'Weak Interactions' as similarly unsatisfactory (252).
[37] Ibid., pp. 252, 256.
[38] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 226.
Suggestive of the mythical status of *Attitudes* is the fact that various shows have been named after paraphrasing its original title. See, for instance, British shows that explore developments in British art

unusual length, it reflects the difficulty to pinpoint the dynamics of contemporary art in Europe and North America and at the same time is open enough to encompass a range of practices and maintain an expansion that 'prevents the exhibition from propagating a new style.'[39]

The question arises of what sustains this heterogeneity, what is shared amongst those sixty-nine Europeans and Americans so that the complexity of contemporary art appears as 'structured chaos'. Participating artist Richard Serra, in hindsight, suggests: 'Most of the artists in those 1969 shows were in some sense involved with – I'm not saying is political but – the potential for a new way of thinking about what art can be.'[40] In a similar vein, art critic Scott Burton in his contribution to the catalogue, entitled 'Notes on the New', writes that the exhibition assembles a number of artists 'who have little in common, yet a great deal in common', and identifies 'urgency' as the unifying quality in the show in the sense that new art demonstrates 'the modern obsession with going as far as possible.'[41] Artists asked anew and extended what was possible in art through the various processes in which artistic attitudes were becoming forms, as the exhibition title foregrounds.

'*When Attitudes Become Form* – this was, of course, always the case, but the process was never exemplified so directly.'[42] This is how Szeemann introduces artistic attitudes as the central element that activates contemporary art as 'never before'.[43] Szeemann is keen to stress this 'never before' attribute so as to distinguish the new mode of art production from previous experiential practices such as geometric abstraction and action painting, which nonetheless maintained 'the finished product, the autonomous object.'[44] In contrast, at the epicentre of the new tendencies

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since the mid/late-1960s up to mid-1970s, particularly the growing dissemination and establishment of conceptual art practices: Hilary Gresty, ed., *1965 to 1972 – when attitudes became form*, exh. cat. (Cambridge and Edinburgh: Kettle's Yard Gallery and Fruitmarket Gallery, 1984); Clive Phillpot and Andrea Tarsia, eds, *Live in Your Head: Concept and Experiment in Britain, 1965-75*, exh. cat. (Whitechapel Gallery: London, 2000). Also Hou Hanru, Vasif Kortun, and Philippe Vergne, eds, *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2003).

[39] Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 252.

[40] 'Richard Serra in conversation with Lucy Steeds: 13 November 2009', in Rattemeyer and others, pp. 260-265 (265).

[41] Scott Burton, 'Notes on the New', in Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n.p., also available in UBUWEB <http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/text/Szeemann-Harald_Live-In-Your-Head_When-Attitudes-Become-Form_1969.pdf> [accessed 10 December 2016].

[42] Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 252.

[43] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 226.

[44] Ibid.

is artistic activity itself, how the inner attitude of the artist is variously turned into art in the most unprecedented direct way. For having been freed from the conventional task of object-making as the persisting end product in the form of painting and sculpture, new art gives primacy to the experience of the creative process itself. The focus on artistic creation is not anything new. 'New art' has certainly a transgressive effect – it exceeds existing categories, stifling preoccupations with the conventions of style, and a linear art historical canon – nonetheless is understood in relation to the past. This is evident in the short genealogy Szeemann suggests in his essay. He links the new generation of artists with precedents such as Marcel Duchamp's 'pre-experienced work process', Jackson Pollock's 'intensity of … gesture', and the 'unity of material, physical exertion and time' in the early-1960s Happenings, only to refuse interpreting them as part of a strict historical continuum and art history classifications.[45] The new artists, Szeemann states, create 'the new "alphabet of form and material"'.[46]

Accordingly, *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information* becomes the marker of an extended notion of contemporary art, which emphasizes artistic activity – as the experience of the creative process – over the production of an object as its end result. It highlights the inner attitude of the individual artist as the principle of a new mode of art production that finds its expression variously in 'works', 'processes', 'concepts', 'situations', and 'information', but not in 'objects'.[47] As such, it challenges the material and conceptual conditions of production and existence of the visual arts beyond the traditional commitment to objects as materially constituted entities. As the exhibition title shows, Szeemann, on a first level, translated the initial predicament of how to exhibit the non-exhibitable gesture into the far broader register of exhibiting artistic attitudes in their becoming forms, and suggested this process as the locus of radicalism in art. This shift in terms introduces a new relation between 'attitudes' and 'forms' and raises a number of questions concerning the nature and making of

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[45] Ibid., p.225.

[46] Ibid., p. 226. Szeemann, here, translates the title of Tommaso Trini's text 'Nuovo alfabeto per corpo e materia', first publ. in *Domus*, no. 470 (January 1969), and repr. in the *Attitudes* catalogue, n.p. The text was published in English as 'A New Alphabet for Body and Matter', in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, trans. Paul Blanchard (Milan: Electa, 1985 [rev. 1998]), pp. 109-113, repr. in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 200-201.

[47] Szeemann explicitly states: 'We consciously avoided the expressions object and experiment.' Ibid., p. 226.

contemporary art. That is, how do these two elements, 'attitudes' and 'form' – the one immaterial, invisible, non-verbal, and experiential; the other material, visible, perceptible, intelligible, and artistic – relate in art-making and its exhibition; What are their potential junctions and disjunctions? Does locating art's 'newness' in artistic attitudes, which nevertheless defy both conceptual identification and the materialism of the concrete object, result in the elimination of visual forms and the eradication of the aesthetic aspect in the work? Or does it result in a redefinition of matter, form, and the aesthetic in their encounter with the immaterial elements that were introduced as the new organizing forces in artistic production and its exhibition? It is precisely the extent to which *Attitudes* allows the tensions and relations between conceptual and aesthetic, material and immaterial aspects to take place that makes it such a pivotal exhibition as both a survey of the present art and a speculation of the future. It embodies the question of artistic creation from the standpoint of exhibiting artistic attitudes and gestures within the shifting conditions of the late-1960s.

III. Matter, form, anti-form: The decentring of the art object and the shift to a new, process-based materialism

Regarding the relation of attitudes, gestures, and form, Szeemann's understanding of 'form' makes compelling reading, particularly because 'the obvious opposition to form' is cited as one of new art's characteristic aspects:[48]

> Works, concepts, processes, situations, information […] are the 'forms' through which these artistic positions are expressed. They are 'forms' derived not from pre-formed pictorial opinions, but from the experience of the artistic process itself. This dictates both the choice of material and the form of work as the extension of gesture.[49]

Notably forms can be as diverse as artistic attitudes and creative processes are. They also attain a non-predetermined directness that challenges established hierarchical or oppositional relations to matter. Szeemann stresses the artists' aspiration to 'freedom from the object' as it is demonstrated in 'the absolute freedom in the use of materials,

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[48] Ibid., p. 225.
[49] Ibid., p. 226.

as well as the concern for the physical and chemical properties of the work itself.'[50] The proclamation of these ideas about an increasing shift to a salient materialism in art situates *Attitudes* within the counter-formalism of the time. The latter was part of the accelerated crisis of Modernist aesthetics – in its dominant Greenbergian version of a visual essentialism and ontological specificity of the medium – since the mid-1960s with the advent of Minimalism.[51] 'Nowadays the medium no longer seems important in the newest art', Szeemann writes. Instead, he emphasizes the liberating effects of the decentring of object-making in artistic production, and affirms the 'shift of interest away from the result towards the artistic process; the use of mundane materials; the interaction of work and material' as significant aspects of the new art practices.[52] These critical views and the focus on new art bring *Attitudes* close to more experimental contemporaneous shows, which functioned as surveys of current tendencies in art – usually in a messy display that deviated from conventional presentations in the museum context – and exerted an influence on Szeemann's approach. A significant influential source was the exhibition *Nine at Leo Castelli*, organized by the artist Robert Morris at the storage space of the Leo Castelli gallery, New York, 4-28 December 1968, commonly known as the 'Castelli Warehouse show'.[53] The exhibition presented the artists Giovanni Anselmo, Bill Bollinger, Eva

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[50] Ibid., p. 225.

[51] The crisis of Modernist aesthetics is the result of a complex conjunction of artistic, cultural, and socio-political developments taking place in 1960s. From an art historical perspective, it is notable that Charles Harrison, the organizer of the ICA presentation of *Attitudes*, specifies it with 'the period from the summer of 1967, when *Artforum* published its special issue, until the spring of 1969, when the exhibition "When Attitudes Become Form" opened at the Kunsthalle in Bern.' Charles Harrison, 'A Crisis of Modernism', in Gill Perry and Paul Wood, eds, *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, in association with the Open University, 2004), p. 58, quoted by Teresa Gleadowe, in Rattemeyer and others, p. 8. Harrison refers to the seminal *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967) issue, which was devoted to 'American sculpture' and included seminal texts by Minimalism-affiliated artists that pointed both to the crisis of Modernism and the opening of a new field of artistic practice beyond Minimalism. These were: Robert Smithson's 'Towards the Development of an Air Terminal Site', which announced the advent of what was to be called 'Earthworks'; Sol LeWitt's 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', which stressed the serial nature of art in relation to language and dematerialized conception; Robert Morris's 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 3', which pointed out his interest in a gestalt theory of perception that assumes a whole body in its encounter with the work, and so the durational experience of the spectator, rather than a purely visual perception; and art critic Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood', a polemic essay against Minimalism.

[52] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 225.

[53] The influential role of the *Nine at Leo Castelli* show on Szeemann's exhibition is recognized by art historians such as Alison M. Green, 'When Attitudes Become Form and the Contest over Conceptual Art's History', in Michael Corris, ed., *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 123-143 (136-137); Christian Rattemeyer, in Rattemeyer and others, pp. 43-46. The show is also cited in the 'Bibliography General' in the *Attitudes* catalogue, n.p. In addition, contemporaneous exhibitions such as *Prospekt*, founded by the dealer Konrad Fischer in Düsseldorf, 1968, as a commercial art fair, Rudolf Zwirner's commercial art fair *Cologne Kunstmarkt*, and Edo Sperone's Deposito D'Arte Presente (DDP) in Turin informed Szeemann's practice.

Hesse, Stephen Kaltenbach, Bruce Nauman, Alan Saret, Richard Serra, Keith Sonnier, and Gilberto Zorio in a messy installation that looked more like an artist's studio (Fig. 1.7).[54]

According to the exhibition diary, Szeemann visited the show on 11 December 1968, and invited Robert Morris and all the participating artists to Bern; he even selected particular works.[55] The Castelli show, which was mainly a presentation of the New York Postminimalist practices, demonstrated the shift from object-based art, an expansive use of materials, and the reconsideration of form as process in relation to matter that was further reflected on its informal display. It is closely related to Morris's recent influential essay 'Anti Form' (April 1968), conceived as a critique of Minimalism and object-based art in favour of process-oriented art practices although it does not function as a mere illustration.[56] Notably, the show included two Italian artists (Anselmo and Zorio) associated with Arte Povera, implying a similarity with the New York 'anti-form' tendencies. Szeemann was already informed about them by Gilardi and Dibbets. However, their inclusion in the Castelli show stood for the internationalism of the movement, which in part explains the whole embracement of the show and the place of Arte Povera in Bern. Aside from shared works and artists, certain features of the Castelli show as well as Morris's critique of formalism in

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[54] A reproduction of the *Nine at Leo Castelli* was made by the artist Mario Garcia Torres for the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, in 2009. The artist remade all the original works in the show, adding Morris, Joseph Beuys (who was invited in the 1969 show but refused the invitation), and Rafael Ferrer (he had presented an intervention installation beyond the exhibition space), and so featured11 artists instead of 9. Torres 'stages' the remaking in a process-oriented installation as a kind of 'a month long theatre piece' that highlights the materials in use. A book, in lieu of the non-existent catalogue of the original show, was published before the remaking as a gesture of reversing the conventionally corresponding relationship between exhibition and catalogue. See Jens Hoffmann, ed., *Mario Garcia Torres*: *9 at Leo Castelli*, exh. cat. (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 2009) <http://hundredyearsof.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/9atleocastelliinterior.pdf> [accessed 28 November 2016]. For a conversation with Jens Hoffmann about the Castelli reproduction, see Mario Garcia Torres, *The Exhibition Formerly Known as Passengers*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco, 7 July-1 August 2009 <http://www.wattis.org/exhibitions/exhibition-formerly-known-passengers-211-mario-garcia-torres> [accessed 28 November 2016].

[55] Szeemann also invited the artist Rafael Ferrer, who was not presented in the show but had organized an intervention installation during the opening day by spreading dry leaves in three sites: the stairwell of the Castelli Warehouse, the foyer of the Leo Castelli Gallery, and the elevator of Dwan, Tibor de Nagy and Fischbach Galleries. The following works were in both exhibitions: Eva Hesse's, *Aucht* and *Augment* (1968); Keith Sonnier's, *Neon with Cloth* (1968) and *Flocked Wall* (1968); Richard Serra's, *Splash Piece* (1968). See Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 248, 252, 248-249 (December 11, 17, 14, and 15 entries respectively).

[56] Robert Morris, 'Anti Form', in Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 41-49 [first publ. in *Artforum*, vol. 6, no. 8 (April 1968), pp. 33-35]. The essay is cited in the 'Bibliography General' in the *Attitudes* catalogue, n.p.

favour of the processual nature of artwork-as-matter as significant quality of the new art tendencies can be traced in Szeemann's postformalist stance.

In his concise essay, Morris argues that Minimalism's 'well-built thing' of rigid industrial materials within 'progressive, symmetrical organizations' as critical response to the relational composition of late modernist painting and its *a priori* principles did not fully succeed. It 'remains problematic' inasmuch as it is driven by the 'reasonableness' of the material and the fixed order of the units, preventing thereby an 'inherent relation' to the physicality of matter.[57] The repetitive regularity of organization establishes dualistic relations with matter as just 'another order of facts', imposing an *a priori* form-as-order to it. As a result, matter and means are separate from prescribed ends – the 'well-built form of objects' dictates the materials and means – which makes Minimalism a residually formalist modernist practice. In contrast, Morris sees in Jackson Pollock's dripping and Morris Louis's pouring paintings the most recent attempts to foreground the process of making itself alongside the direct investigation of tools and materials in response to the physical properties of matter. In their case, the 'optical' forms are not *a priori* to the means, but rather means and ends come together in a process that opens matter directly onto its physical properties.[58]

Nonetheless, Morris contends, Abstract Expressionism's affirmation and visibility of process in the end form of the work – no less than Minimalism's rationalism – did not succeed in effectively challenging assumptions that still dominated the 'European tradition of aestheticizing general forms.' They only established a dualism that opposes 'action' to 'conceptualization' without managing to break with the 'preservation of separable idealized ends'.[59] Against these limitations, Morris proposes an art as immediate material process that advances Pollock and Louis as precedents and acknowledges Claes Oldenburg's pioneering investigation of soft materials. The latter allows the physical properties of matter such as gravity to manifest themselves in defiance of form. The 'perpetuation of form is functioning idealism', a 'conservative enterprise', Morris states. Instead,

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[57] Ibid., p. 41.
[58] Ibid., pp. 43, 44.
[59] Ibid., p. 43.

Random piling, loose stacking, hanging, give passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy is implied since replacing will result in another configuration. Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and orders for things is a positive assertion. It is part of the work's refusal to continue aestheticizing form by dealing with it as a prescribed end.[60]

The emphasis on the natural qualities and processual operations of matter opens the Postminimalist embrace of various low-grade, non-art materials alongside the redefinition of form and aesthetic materiality. Matter is itself mutable, subject to the physical forces of gravity, fluidity, and entropy, in contrast to the pure permanence of visual forms and the aesthetic resolution in the stability of the object. Instead of the traditional preconceived relations that hierarchically oppose matter to form as separate entities, relations are now shifting, indeterminate, and more complex as they incorporate chance, randomness, and site-responsiveness. The direct engagement with the dynamics of matter generates temporary forms of material vulnerability.[61] Any material modification provides a new composition, a variable configuration in an aesthetics of continual transformation. This is particularly evident in Morris's *Specification for a Piece with Combustible Materials* (1969), which was presented in the school opposite the Kunsthalle. Following the work's specification, every day during the show a different kind of combustible material was added to a messy pile of matter, which was finally burned in the city on the last day of the exhibition (Fig. 1.8).[62] The defiance of the irreversible process towards a finite static object marks the work's independence from the conventional space-time parameters and enables its

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[60] Ibid., p. 46.

[61] 'It is not that we are irritated by a disdain for permanence', Max Kozloff writes in his review of the Castelli show, 'but we are touched by the knowledge that these works cannot even be moved without suffering a basic and perhaps irremediable shift in the way they look. The life and salience they have as objects, rather than the intactness of their medium, is, therefore, of a pathetic transience.' He further remarks, 'In this warehouse […] the object, especially the artificial, man-made object, returns to nature, obeys physics.' Max Kozloff, '9 in a Warehouse: An "Attack on the Status of the Object"', *Artforum*, vol. 17, no. 6 (February 1969), pp. 38-42 (38, 39).

[62] The specification of the work reads: Feb 24, 1969. Proposal: I. Collect as many different kinds of combustible materials as are available in Bern – coal, oil, fireplace logs, grass, peat, coke, twigs, magnesium, etc. Assign a curator to think of more than I have listed. 2. Divide the number of exhibition days, less one, by the number of materials. 3. Begin with one material and place it in the allotted place (inside or outside). At each interval obtained by step 2 add another material. Each material must be placed freely in the place – that is, not in containers. If necessary, protect the floor inside with plastic from the beginning. 4. On the last day of the exhibition, remove the entire mass (if set up inside) to a designated safe place outside the museum and ignite. – R. Morris.
Robert Morris, cited in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 236.

existence at any time and place in a different form, unlike Minimalism's repetitive order *ad infinitum*. The making process and the work itself are brought onto the same material plane, putting forward an expansive notion of art and its perception in terms of energy.[63] As Morris explains, the move away from Minimalism is primarily a 'restructuring of what is relevant', therefore what is 'under attack is the rationalistic notion that art is a form of work that results in a finished product' with respect to 'either time or space'.[64]

The new status of the artwork and its anti-rationalistic force gives it a new 'ontological instability', Scott Burton perceptibly notes in his contribution to the *Attitudes* catalogue. Burton cites Bill Bollinger's *Rope Piece* (1969) in the show to point out that the work raises the aesthetic question anew as a matter of sheer consciousness, namely the beholder's awareness of the existence of the work as a work of art. He, thus, asks: 'What happens when it is disassembled? Does it still exist? If so, does it exist as a rope, as potential art, or as art?' Unlike painting or sculpture, 'its installation is very synonymous with its existence.' Burton emphasizes temporality as an important aspect of the new practices.[65] The work no longer denies or defeats its existence and reception in time. Rather than expelled in a timeless condition of 'instant presentness' and removal from life, temporality becomes part of the work's making process and visibility.[66] Szeemann is explicit: The artists presented in the show 'want the artistic process itself to remain visible in the end product and in the "exhibition"'. Emphasis shifts from 'the articulation of space' to 'the activity of the artist', and 'the power of human movement' plays significant role in the production, presentation, and installation of art as lived experience rather than as visual contemplation.[67]

The embrace of the post-object shift in art and its materialist anti-form effect are plainly demonstrated in Szeemann's above use of quotation marks in the term

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[63] According to Morris, 'The detachment of art's energy from the craft of tedious object production has further implications. This reclamation of process refocuses art as an energy driving to change perception'. See Robert Morris, 'Notes on Sculpture, Part 4: Beyond Objects', in Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 51-70 (68) [first published in *Artforum*, vol. 7, no. 8 (April 1969), pp. 50-54].

[64] Ibid., pp. 64, 68.

[65] Burton, 'Notes on the New', in *When Attitudes Become Form*, exh. cat., n.p.

[66] For the most influential account of Modernist art's defence of time, see Michael Fried's seminal essay 'Art and Objecthood': a polemic response to the introduction of the temporal or 'theatrical' dimension in art by Minimalism, which he renames as 'literalist art'. Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148-172 [first publ. in *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967), pp. 12-23].

[67] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 226, 225-226.

'exhibition' to indicate the inadequacy of its traditional understanding as merely a show. Richard Serra's *Splash Piece* (1968/69), made of hot splashed lead, at the entrance of the Kunsthalle exemplifies the new material processes. Szeemann was impressed by the *Splash*, first made at the Castelli warehouse, and decided to invite Serra to make it *in situ* assigning him a key position in the exhibition. The work was presented below Serra's *Belt Piece* (1967), a nine-part rubber belt compound with neon, and next to three of his lead *Prop Pieces* (1969) (Fig. 1.9-1.10).[68] The two linked small galleries of the Kunsthalle provided a genealogy and introduction to 'new art'. Claes Oldenburg and Joseph Beuys were presented in the same room as predecessors for the new artists, Szeemann notes, because of their early experimentations with everyday, soft materials and process-driven way of working:[69] Beuys's *Fond* (1969), a stack of thick felt layers, and *Fat Corner* (1969), fat spread into the corner and edges of the floor, alongside the audio work *Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee* (1969), a tape recorder endlessly repeating its title, were displayed together with some of Oldenburg's earlier soft sculptures (Fig. 1.11-1.12).[70] Morris kept a key place at the other end of the adjoining gallery with the *Felt Piece No. 4* (1968), part of his *Felt Pieces* (since 1967), in which sheets of industrial felt cut into or sliced up in variable dimensions let the material itself and gravity determine their own shape. Morris's piece was connected with Beuys's felt work by Barry Flanagan's *Two Space Rope Sculpture* (1967), a meandering thick rope piece on the floor. Between the two galleries, Edward Kienholz's *Concept Tableau –The American Trip* (1966) served as an additional reference to the old generation of artists.[71] In the same room with Morris were Bruce Nauman's works – measurements of the artist's body as

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[68] After a visit to Richard Serra's studio, Szeemann writes in the exhibition diary (15 December 1968): 'There are always those situations, when, upon entering a studio, one actually smells a good artist. With his *Floor*, *Splash* and *Lead Pieces*, Serra had, already at Castelli's, impressed me the most. He wants to know everything about the exhibition, and with his direct punch, he casts new light on many aspects. I will try to get a ticket for him, so that he can make new works right on site in Bern, especially the *Splash Piece* (210 kg hot lead). From Cologne I will get the large *Belt Piece* as a key work for the exhibition.' Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 249.

[69] Ibid., p. 253.

[70] Oldenburg's works were the following: *Soft Washstand* (1965); *Model (Ghost) Medicine Cabinet* (1966); *Street Head II* (1960), and *Pants Pocket with Pocket Objects* (1963). For a detailed description of the *Attitudes* installation, see Rattemeyer and others, pp. 34-40.

[71] Kienholz also loaned for the exhibition a work by Yves Klein, which is listed in the catalogue as an immaterial work. The work itself is Kienholz's account of the immaterial sensibility zone that he had been given by Klein, and it was written in the catalogue. See Edward Kienholz in *When Attitudes Become Form,* exh. cat., n.p.; also Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 253 (23 December entry).

a new art material – [72] alongside the Italian Mario Merz's *Sit in* (1968), *Leaning* (1969) and Alighiero e Boetti's *Me Sunbathing in Turin on 24 February 1969* (1969) – a floor sculpture of his body made with hand-size cement balls functioning as a kind of prelude to the post-object practices that followed (Fig. 1.13-1.14).

The materialist shift in art is conspicuous with the presentation of the young generation of artists in the large gallery of the Kunsthalle. With the exception of the Europeans Reiner Ruthenbeck and Markus Raetz, the North Americans including Bill Bollinger, Eva Hesse, Gary Kuehn, Walter de Maria, Alan Saret, Keith Sonnier, and Richard Tuttle dominated the grand hall. As the photographs by Harry Shunk and the short film by the journalist Marlène Bélilos for the Franco-Swiss Télévision Suisse Romande – both invited by Szeemann – document, most of the works were produced on site evincing the activity of the creative process itself as it gives form to the work.[73] Keith Sonnier, for instance, is filmed creating his *Flocked Wall* and *Flock Pulled from Wall with String* (both 1968) by applying fibre to large sheets of cloth attached to the wall or pulled from it with strings, while his *Neon with Cloth* (1968) is attached to the wall (Fig. 1.15).[74] The main gallery celebrated the experimental use of a wide range of materials – fibre, cloth, wire mesh, latex, rope, steel tubes, iron, neon – in an erratic and densely sprawling installation without defined allotments in-between the works, most of which were placed on the floor, as if they were stored rather than exhibited (Fig. 1.16). Although it was dominated by the Castelli show artists and their Postminimalist tendencies, a room on the same floor featured works by artists associated with Minimalism such as Carl Andre, Robert Ryman, Fred Sandback, and Sol LeWitt demonstrating the expansiveness of the show.[75]

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[72] On the floor, next to Flanagan's rope were Bruce Nauman's *Collection of Various Flexible Materials Separated by Layers of Grease with Holes the Size of My Waist and Wrists* (1968); against the wall, *Neon Templates of the Left Half of My Body Taken at Ten Inch Intervals* (1966), and *Untitled* (1965) in fibreglass.

[73] Marlène Bélilos (journalist and producer) and André Gazut (director), *Quand les attitudes deviennent formes*, Geneva: Télévision Suisse Romande, 28:12 min., in French and English with French voice over, broadcast 6 April 1969 <http://www.rts.ch/archives/tv/culture/en-marge/3436012-l-attitude-de-l-artiste.html> [accessed 28 November 2016].

[74] Szeemann had seen Sonnier's both works in the 'Castelli Warehouse show', and decided that 'his presence in Bern is unavoidable' because 'together with Serra, he formulates the new tendencies most succinctly.' Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 249.

[75] In the 18th December entry in the exhibition diary, Szeemann asks whether artists associated with Minimalist art exhibitions such as Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt should be included in the show, and whether 'the "attitudes" only lead to soft forms'. According to Szeemann, insofar as the show does not restrain itself to a particular style but underscores 'the constant differentiation between organic and geometric', LeWitt's *Wall Markings* (1968) and Andre's floor steel pieces evoke the experiential process of attitudes becoming form. Ibid., p. 252.

The concern with everyday materials and the transformation of matter continues in the downstairs galleries with the presentation of Italian artists associated largely with Arte Povera, including Gilberto Zorio, Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero e Boetti, and Mario Merz. Related works by the Turkish-born Sarkis and the American Neil Jenney, both experimenting with neon and fluorescent light, broke what appeared as a national predominance. The term 'Arte Povera' was recently coined by the art critic and curator Germano Celant to provide a theoretical framework for understanding as a movement the shared revolutionary quality he had recognized in diverse works by Italian artists, whom he brought together in the exhibition *Arte Povera – Im Spazio* (1967).[76] In his catalogue essay, Celant argued that the 'commonplace' and the 'insignificant' have now entered the realm of art; they impose the 'pure presence' of things over 'every conceptual school' in order to attain a new kind of art that would be called 'poor'. 'Poorness' does not refer exclusively to the use of 'poor' materials but, importantly, to the reduction to a basic formal language that returns to origins. 'Gestural language replaces the written script', Celant writes, and the linguistic process now consists in 'downgrading things to a minimum, impoverishing signs to reduce them to their archetypes.'[77] This shift to apprehend 'things in themselves' proclaims the 'inseparability of experience and knowledge' and the artist's 'own personal experience' in the openness to all aspects of life. 'Making art is life', Celant claims, not as a representation of life but as a condition in which 'art, life, and politics are not apparent or theoretical' and do 'not exist as a distinct and finite entity.' Rather the tendency is towards 'deculturalization', in the sense that the work merely presents the self-determinism of life, precluding 'the analysis or criticism of and in the system.'[78]

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[76] *Arte Povera − Im Spazio*, organized by Germano Celant, Galleria La Bertesca, Genoa, 27 September-20 October 1967. The exhibition was divided into two sections and presented wide-ranging works, although as a whole reflected a certain interest in works that explored notions of space. *Arte Povera* presented the artists Alighiero e Boetti, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Giulio Paolini, Pino Pascali, and Emilio Prini, and *Im Spazio* featured Umberto Bignardi, Mario Ceroli, Paolo Icaro, Renato Mambor, Eliseo Mattiacci, and Cesare Tacchi.

[77] Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera', in *Arte Povera − Im Spazio*, exh. cat. (Gènova: La Bertesca/Masnata/Trentalance, 1967), publ. in English in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, trans. Paul Blanchard (Milan: Electa, 1985), rev. 1998, pp. 31-33, repr. in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 220-221 (221).

[78] Germano Celant, *Arte Povera* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzota; New York: Praeger; Tubingen: Wasmuth; London: Studio Vista, 1969), publ. in English in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, trans. Paul Blanchard (Milan: Electa, 1985), rev. 1998, pp. 119-123, repr. in Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Arte Povera*, pp. 198-200 (199). Szeemann refers to this edition in the exhibition diary (9 January 1969 entry) during his visit to the publisher Mazzota in Milan. He writes: 'The title of the book is a problem. They want to

In the week prior to the show, the Kunsthalle's downstairs galleries were transformed into a construction site. The Italian artists used various mundane industrial and organic materials such as chemicals, electricity, water, fire, chalk, wax, bamboo sticks to explore and make visible the changing processes of matter as energy in a non-mediated language of real experience that brings art close to the vitality of life and natural forces. The dissolved art forms demonstrated not only a new sense of immediacy of the artistic action, the will for free self-development in search of new means of expression, but also the disillusion with technological-economic progress as the main driving force in postwar societies. As Szeemann writes, echoing Celant's texts, the young artists have replaced 'the belief in technology' with 'the belief in the artistic process' and their own subjective gesture that elevates 'the human activity' into 'the dominant theme and content' of art.[79] Although Arte Povera artists rarely referred directly to political action in their works, the counter-culture, anti-capitalist thrust of the time, and a strong sense of liberation of life pertain their work. To a certain extent, they are closer to the romantically anarchistic thrust embodied in the recent Parisian May 1968 student revolts – whose Italian counter-part was in the working class – and the longing for free, individual self-creation that resisted predefined systems and action than the more constrained political language of the American Postminimalists.

In the opening sentence of his seminal article 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War' (1967), Celant states: 'First came man, then the system.' He calls for an autonomous and nomadic revolution that would destabilize existing structures to achieve 'identification between man and nature' as 'a pragmatic intent of liberation'. Within a context dominated by technological innovation and the swift assimilation of any action against consumer society by the system itself, the opposed alternative, Celant argues, is 'the free self-projection of human activity.' The artist is no longer a producer than an independent 'guerrilla warrior' making 'surprise attacks' in the world. Celant calls for an 'asystematic way of existence', and so a kind of art that

perhaps use mine; Quanto attitudini diventano forma (opera, concetti, processi, situazioni, informazione).' Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 255.

[79] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p.225.

departs from categorical positions to 'focus on gestures … that do not oppose themselves to life as art', but 'exist as social gestures in and of themselves.'[80]

The existential and political connotations of the nomadic conception of artistic production along with the relation of art and nature are evoked in Mario Merz's centrally positioned in the downstairs galleries *Igloo with Tree* (1969). The political point is succinctly invoked in *Sit in* (1968), in the same room with Morris's anti-form felt piece. This was an iron structure filled with congealed wax and covered with wire mesh. The phrase 'Sit in' inscribed in neon tubing was sinking into the wax, which softened as it was gradually warmed by the neon. Here, the transformative processes of matter poetically invoke the new strategies of labour resistance that Celant advocated, and, as Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev notes, they function as 'a metaphor for non-violent political action' (Fig. 1.17-1.18).[81] During his visit to Turin, Szeemann was struck by the artistic scene there. Despite a restrained regionalism, 'the situation in Turin is extraordinary positive', he writes, 'because these artists create a climate, and … have the courage to create complicated works which lack the legendary Italian lightness.' Szeemann cites Merz, who 'impressed [him] the most' because his '"Gestures" are the "most natural" and give testimony to an obsession with his need to express himself, which is lacking with the others.'[82] Arte Povera had a central place in *Attitudes* and certain affinities can be traced between Szeemann's approach and the 'gestures' of these artists – their intuitive and political attitude of the free self-development of human activity.[83]

IV. Exhibition as 'laboratory' and stage of artistic activity

[80] Germano Celant, 'Arte Povera: Appunti per una guerriglia', *Flash Art*, no. 5 (November-December 1967), p. 3, publ. in English as 'Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War', in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, trans. Paul Blanchard (Milan: Electa, 1985), rev. 1998, pp. 35-37, repr. in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 194-196 (194).

[81] Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Arte Povera,* p. 33. Though not explicitly political, many Arte Povera works bear political connotations related to the socio-political instability in Italy, especially in Turin, in the late-1960s. The postwar collapse of Turin as a powerful industrial centre led to demonstrations of the working class in September 1969, known as the *operaismo* (autonomism/workerism) movement. Christov-Bakargiev's political reading of Merz's work draws on the non-violent demonstrations of the workers – known as 'sits ins'– which, for *operaismo*, may have a transformative effect.

[82] Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?' (11 January 1969 entry), in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 255.

[83] It is noticeable that Germano Celant gave the opening speech at *Attitudes* and the critic Tommaso Trini's text *Nuovo alfabeto per corpo e material* ('A New Alphabet for Body and Matter'), first publ. in *Domus*, vol. 470 (January 1969), pp. 46-48, was reprinted in Italian in the *Attitudes* catalogue.

Noticeably, the installation and dispersed form of the exhibition foreground heterogeneity and indeterminacy in accordance with Szeemann's commitment to avoid framing 'new art' into a neat art historical narrative or strict national movements. Nonetheless there is an organizational logic, and loose art groupings with shared affinities but not defined relations tended to underwrite the pursuit of certain artists by Szeemann. The presentation of the young Americans, particularly the Castelli show artists, in the main gallery, the emphasis on material processes over established compositional principles and prescribed ends, as well as the restructuring of perception in radically phenomenological conditions tend to bring *Attitudes* along the lines of Morris's anti-form.[84] Notwithstanding the international perspective of the show and Szeemann's proclamation of 'lack of a real centre', it is controversial of whether *Attitudes* was underwritten by a continental division in favour of American Postminimalism. The show, in hindsight, is criticized for certain artistic exclusions; the presentation of only three women (Hanne Darboven, Eva Hesse, and Jo Ann Kaplan); cultural omissions; the failure to address a world changed by new technologies and socio-political critique; and, most notably, the coexistence of the radicalism of contemporary art practices with corporate sponsorship.[85] *Attitudes'* sponsorship by the US tobacco corporation Philip Morris stands out as an early example of what would increasingly become a common practice in the following years: the new relationship between corporate marketing strategies and support funding for contemporary art and exhibitions.[86] Hans Haacke admits that 'the

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[84] Christian Rattemeyer argues that Morris's concept of 'anti-form' is 'key for understanding the Bern exhibition since it casts in material terms an attitude that Szeemann had detected as gesture in Dibbets. Morris provides a philosophy of process, chance, random order, indeterminacy and impermanence that coincides with several main principles of other artists at the time, but renders the origins, procedures and effects of these "attitudes" in a decidedly physical language.' Christian Rattemeyer, in Rattemeyer and others, p. 46.

[85] For a critique of the exhibition, especially in terms of Szeemann's selection criteria, that contradicts its 'mythical status, comparable to a historical event', see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'The Thresholds of 1969', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), pp. 495-504 (495). Also Jens Hoffmann, 'Attitude Problems', ibid., pp. 491-494.

[86] Claudia Di Lecce in her compelling essay on the subject uses the term 'art-based marketing'. Claudia Di Lecce, 'Avant-garde Marketing: "When Attitudes Become Form" and Philip Morris's Sponsorship', in Rattemeyer and others, pp. 220-229.
Nina Kaiden had persuaded the company to take the risk to be associated with young unknown 'avant-garde' artists, and relate the company's profile with 'innovation' in art. John A. Murphy, the President of Philip Morris, states in the exhibition catalogue: 'The works assembled for this exhibit have been grouped by many observers of the art scene under the heading "new art". We at Philip Morris feel it is appropriate that we participate in bringing these works to the attention of the public, for there is a key element in this "new art" which has its counterpart in the business world. That element is innovation […] Our constant search for a new and better way in which to perform and produce is akin to the

implication of corporate sponsorship on culture was not yet recognized as an issue' by the artists in 1969.[87] However, the fiercest critique at the time was levelled by Piero Gilardi. He accused Szeemann of having succumbed to pressure from Philip Morris and of alignment with the institutional power of the dealer Leo Castelli against the initial concept of a self-organizational exhibition as discussion forum. This would ensure the central role of the invited artists to 'decide collectively' the structure and content of the exhibition and work *in situ*.[88]

Regarding the issue of continental divide and the politics of representation, artistic views vary although the show did not develop as a cultural platform for groups as they have now been recognized in art history.[89] Richard Serra's emphasis on a shared materialist sensibility, irrespective of national divisions, is worth quoting at length:

> I don't think there was a continental divide. We all shared a common language and sensibility. […] Whether it was a shared interest in time or process, or new materials or materials that would disintegrate, there seemed to be a new common understanding that matter itself was imposing its own form on form. That led to a different kind of exhibition – it led to exhibitions that weren't pre-conceptualized in terms of being scripted and programmed beforehand.[90]

Attitudes, itself a work of material process enacted by the artists rather than a thoroughly pre-conceptualized and imposed layout – despite some key signposts decided by Szeemann prior to the show – is in tune with the urgency of a new

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questionings of the artists whose works are represented here.' John A. Murphy, 'Foreword', in Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n.p., also available in UBUWEB <http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/text/Szeemann-Harald_Live-In-Your-Head_When-Attitudes-Become-Form_1969.pdf> [accessed 10 December 2016].

[87] Hans Haacke quoted in Di Lecce, p. 220. Haacke was presented in the exhibition catalogue but his proposal for an outdoor installation was not realized.

[88] Gilardi, 'Temporary Artistic Communities', in Rattemeyer and others, pp. 230-238 (235). According to the exhibition diary, when Szeemann presented 'the proposal of the Philip Morris exhibition' to the Kunsthalle committee, it was met with 'reservations, especially on the part of the artist members, on the grounds that the Kunsthalle is selling itself out to an American corporation.' They agreed, however, when he ensured them that 'the curator is solely responsible for the organization of the exhibition.' Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 247 (5 December entry).

[89] On this subject and from today's perspective, see the interviews of participating artists in Rattemeyer and others, pp. 240-265.

[90] 'Richard Serra in conversation with Lucy Steeds, 13 November 2009', in Rattemeyer and others, p. 261.

materialism in art, a way of making in direct experimentation with the dynamics of matter. The treatment of Kunsthalle as 'laboratory' responded to that urgency and the shared artistic concern for creative freedom. In response to Gilardi's explicitly political initial proposal, Szeemann writes in the exhibition diary:

> Giraldi wanted to see the whole thing as an assembly of artists, from which the exhibition would then naturally emerge: no shipping of works, no art dealers, but rather the results of discussions among artists and the self-criticism of the museum. […] For my part, I was able to assure them that each artist would be represented in the way he feels appropriate, and only when an artist wants me to select him will I do this. The exhibition really shouldn't simply reinforce the idea of the museum as a temple, but rather bear witness to the fact that, done in the same spirit, different things can develop.[91]

Attitudes develops as a postformalist exhibition whose critical significance lies in moving from the 'temple' of art to the 'laboratory' and stage of art activity; that is, to an institution 'overtaken' by the artists in order to present the current state of art and question the boundaries between art and life. What is on display is less the finished, static art object than the natural processes of art and artistic activity. Nonetheless, *Attitudes'* newness and form of criticality differs from the avant-garde manifesto exhibitions as it refuses to postulate another artistic movement, and so to narrow the diversity of new art into an identifiable group of artists. Rather than an avant-garde gesture of opposition, *Attitudes* should be seen as a gesture of affirmation of the expansion of heterogeneous art practices to the vitality of life from within the institution.

This view appears to contradict Szeemann's writing in his catalogue essay that artists 'work against all the ideas and principles of the society in which they found themselves.'[92] Besides, the inclusion of eleven Arte Povera artists in the show and the echoes of Celant's ideas in Szeemann's text imply an alliance to the politically inflected spirit of Arte Povera. However, unlike Celant's open call for a guerrilla war and romantic anti-capitalism, Szeemann did not make any explicit references to the

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[91] Szeemann writes about his meeting with Gilardi, Dibbets, Boezem, and van Elk in Arnhem (19 November 1968), during the initial stages of the show. Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 247.
[92] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 225.

political climate at the time or the politics of the presented artists. Instead, he brought together a constellation of heterogeneous art practices and individual approaches under a common, if loosely defined, set of goals that emphasized the freedom from the object form and the vitality of process. Thus, while none of the works were explicitly political and the exhibition was not about political statements, it managed – albeit its corporate funding – to create a post-1968 palpable sense of a world in change. 'The aim', Szeemann pointed out, 'was to bring the intensity of the experience with the artists into the framework of the museum without a loss of energy.'[93] This demand for freedom, embodied in contemporary art that prioritized the intensity of experience and the artistic attitudes in search of new forms of expression, was hardly different from the political energy throughout Europe and the US at the time.

In 2003, in response to the view that he attempted to open somehow the boundaries of the artworld but aimed at 'calming things down' and 'keeping the broader hierarchy stable' in the late-1960s, Szeemann advocates a distinct level of criticality among the artists in the exhibition. He stresses the 'working against' drive as the attempt 'to break up the power triangle of studio-gallery-museum, to free the creative process to create an attitude', and makes clear that 'Art=Life=art was always a very strong motivation for what [he] did and how [he] did it.' Against Gilardi's accusations for having de-politicized the exhibition, Szeemann presents *Attitudes* as 'an anarchic event supported with money from Philip Morris', adding that 'The question was never about being against something, but about being one hundred percent behind what you show. To live it…' For Szeemann, the power and long-standing legacy of *Attitudes* lies precisely in its intensity. As such, he differentiates oppositional critique and overt negation – a polemical approach of political activism – from the personal engagement and commitment that the intensity of experience offers. 'I never felt like a critical person; I only show what I love', he explains, '… but acting as I do, it meant that I refused to criticize. Lyotard said once: non-judgment as a way of being.'[94]

In this respect, Szeemann's postformalist attitude and approach is much broader in its scope and aims than Morris's anti-form, despite his indebtedness to ideas, artists, and the display. Szeemann, as noted above, rejected 'anti-form' as the

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[93] Szeemann quoted in Müller, p. 18.
[94] Szeemann in Žerovc, pp. 29, 31-32, 28.

unifying term for the art on display for its negativity and restrictive focus on one aspect of new art: 'the obvious opposition to form'. His scepticism parallels the criticism 'anti-form' had raised amongst artists at the time, most notably Allan Kaprow's. In an *Artforum* essay (1968), Kaprow set out to clarify that there is nothing ideological 'against' form in the use of the term, and suggested the alternative meaning of 'nonform' since 'literal nonform, like chaos, is impossible', even 'inconceivable'.[95] Insofar as works are made, shown, and reproduced in rectangular framing spaces – studios, galleries, magazines, and photographs – they always function in relation to them, even in contrast, and it is almost impossible to escape patterned mental responses, Kaprow maintains. Formal relationships are always there, and what mostly matters is less the obvious rejection of form than the 'absence of strict hierarchies' in the composition process and the 'amplification of different possibilities'. From this perspective, Kaprow argues, 'antiform' means merely 'antigeometry'. He sees Morris's works within a long tradition of formlessness, even suggests certain affinities with the New York Environments and Happenings in mid-1950s to early-1960s. To advance this tradition, more radical practices are needed that would bring art beyond the conventional dualisms of the gallery into the open space.[96]

V. Exhibition aesthetics of 'structured chaos': Expressing, materializing, and making visible the invisible processes of creation

Szeemann included in his catalogue text the early-1960s Happenings amongst the precedents of the 'new art', and the *Attitudes* installation, to a certain extent, evinces an interest in form in the sense of Kaprow's 'amplification' of new formal possibilities. The description of the exhibition as 'structured chaos' means that form is still there, albeit redefined as chaotic order. Resistance to form should not be conflated with the abolition of form altogether, but rather understood as the experimental restructuring of the conventional exhibition structure. 'Structured

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[95] Allan Kaprow, 'The Shape of the Art Environment', in Jeff Kelley, ed., *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, exp. edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 90-94 (90) [first publ. in *Artforum*, vol. 6, no. 10 (Summer 1968), pp. 32-33].

[96] Ibid., pp. 92-93. It is worth mentioning that Morris himself in a 1970 interview stated that anti-form 'isn't possible', and that the term was not his but Philip Leider's, the editor of *Artforum*. He further dismissed Conceptual art's 'mind over matter' because aesthetic indifference to the final form of the object does not necessarily amount to the primacy of the concept and immateriality. E. C. Goossen, 'The Artist Speaks: Robert Morris', *Art in America*, vol. 58, no. 3 (May-June 1970), pp. 104-111 (105).

chaos', I argue, refers to a twofold, intertwined process: one that breaks with the traditional hierarchically organized exhibition according to certain formal, stylistic, and conceptual categories – all-too-easy recognizable and communicated – and at the same time opens itself to order's 'outside' – order's messiness and randomness. As such, it creates the conditions for the emergence of something new from within, even at the frustration and possible confusion of the habitual modes of the beholder. This is evidenced in Szeemann's refusal to take an overtly polemical stance that would strictly oppose 'inside' to 'outside' and to present, instead, *Attitudes* as the birth of 'a new exhibition style'.[97]

This newness of 'style' is not merely a matter of formal innovation insofar as a chaotic approach was shared across experimental exhibition-organizers at the time. It is rather inseparable from a new understanding of the nature of art that frees itself from the authoritative status of the object and associated assumptions about its modes of production and display. The genetic dimension refers to the emergence of a particular aesthetic condition that simultaneously expresses, actualizes, and makes visible the invisible process of creation, which is rooted in the level of experience, the attitudes and subjective gestures of artists in their heterogeneous relation to the processes of life. Szeemann conceives 'the form of work as the extension of gesture'; the latter, he explains, 'can be private, intimate, or public and expansive. But the process itself always remains vital.' In the conclusion of his essay, he succinctly expresses the attributes of new art, as follows:

> Thus the meaning of this art lies in the fact that an entire generation of artists has undertaken to give 'form' to the 'nature of art and artists' in terms of a natural process.[98]

Szeemann deliberately deployed the chaotic element in relation to a broader understanding of creation, which is not strictly artistic, but also includes the exhibition-organizer and, mostly, the experience of poetics itself. The aesthetics of structured chaos recasts both art and its exhibition in new materialist terms; that is, a condition of expressive materialism and materialist thinking in aesthetic processes

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[97] See above note 30.
[98] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p.226.

that evade rational understanding, formal interpretation, and resist subjection into identifiable concepts.

Reviews of the show emphasize the lack of a certain formal style and art's entrenchment into the wider field of culture. This increased at once the bafflement, helplessness of the spectators and their active power within the redefined phenomenological conditions of perception-as-situation and a promising egalitarianism in art (Fig. 1.19-1.20).[99] In this regard, the review (May 1969) by the Swiss curator Jean-Christophe Ammann is instructive. Ammann envisages the show's 'tremendous' impact, which cannot as yet be fully estimated as *Attitudes* 'is not an easy exhibition, because everything in it essentially aims to document creative thought.' The show, Ammann explains, focuses on 'the visualization and mapping of thought processes, which implies a strong relativization of the objects.' In particular, it demonstrates the shift from 'vertical' to 'lateral thinking', from the ordinary linearly-developed thinking according to rational relations of causality to a more expansive thinking process due to the range of possibilities and unpredictable combinations opened up within. What we encounter in *Attitudes* is 'a kind of structuralism' that emphasizes the significance of 'relationships' over the 'single object', specifically 'the nature of the relationships' that refer to 'the thought or intention of the artist.' No matter the diversity and randomness in the use of materials, the purpose, Ammann maintains, is always 'the materialization of a thinking process occurring in the material and visualized through the confrontation with material.' He cites, among others, Beuys's combination of fat pieces and tape recording as a prime example.[100]

Ammann's emphasis on the nature of relationships demonstrates that what counts are less the discrete objects than 'that which – through these, with these – is created and made possible.'[101] This is an understanding of the exhibition that has largely informed its contemporary remakings, which focus on the construction of meaning but, nonetheless, fail for that reason to capture the aesthetic processes in

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[99] See, for instance, the Press review of *Volksrecht*, Zürich, included in Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 259-260.

[100] Jean-Christophe Ammann, 'Sweizer Brief' ('Swiss Letter'), *Art International*, vol. 13, no. 5 (20 May 1969), pp. 47-50, repr. in Bruce Altshuler et al., eds, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Volume II: 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013), pp. 109-110. Notably, Ammann is not dismissive of contextual factors; 'spheres of influence, such as protest and provocative models of behaviour, should not be overlooked', he writes.

[101] From the Press clippings and reviews included in Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 261.

which the experience of creation and thinking occur. For artistic 'attitude', to which Szeemann assigns a central role, is not a given conceptual power, separable from and determining the work; it is rather expressed in a non-conceptually defined way, in processes of aesthetic thinking that take place on the same material plane of immanence with the production process and the work itself. Artistic thinking is here associated with more primary processes that defy coded languages of representation and established conceptual categories to freely develop what the critic Tomasso Trini identified as the shared feature of the new art experiences: 'a practical way of realizing a new thought' and developing 'the new "alphabet of form and material"', as Szeemann translated and cited the title of Trini's text in his own catalogue essay.[102] The exhibition equally becomes a creative process in its own right, a situation – rather than merely a show – that manifests a thinking attitude in its making, instead of a representation strictly conceptualized in advance. The exhibition diary along with the invitation of photographers and the Swiss television to document the installation demonstrate Szeemann's intention to de-emphasize the finished, static exhibition in favour of the intensity of the experience of making.[103]

In conclusion, *Attitudes* postulates the heterogeneity of new art practices in the late-1960s emphasizing a sensibility that accords unprecedented value to inner attitudes and the experience of creation – form as the extension of gesture – over the finished art product. However, if 'new art' aspires to move beyond conventional object-making and demonstrate a mode of thinking that radicalizes the relation of individual 'attitudes' and artistic 'forms', the issue is this 'beyond': it points to both the limits and the breadth of materiality at stake, how far these limits can be extended

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[102] Tommaso Trini, 'Nuovo alfabeto per corpo e materia', first publ. in *Domus*, no. 470 (January 1969), and repr. in Szeemann, ed. *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n.p. The text was published in English as 'A New Alphabet for Body and Matter', in Germano Celant, *Arte Povera Art Povera*, trans. Paul Blanchard (Milan: Electa, 1985 [rev. 1998]), pp. 109-113, repr. in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed., *Arte Povera* (London: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 200-201. See also Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p.226.

[103] Christian Rattemeyer has recently argued that the emphasis Szeemann put on the representation of the show in its installation process as a new model of exhibition-making was actually a newly marketed idea, and so the immediacy of the process of creation was somehow a constructed narrative. He refers not only to the selection of certain works by Szeemann prior to the show, but also to fictive cases of immediate creation for the sake of documentation such as the iconic image of Lawrence Weiner scraping away at the site of his already-finished removal of one square meter of plaster from the Kunsthalle wall. Christian Rattemeyer, 'How to Exhibit a Gesture: The Innovations of *When Attitudes Become Form*', in Jens Hoffmann, ed., *Life in Your Head: When Attitudes Became Form Become Attitudes: A Restoration-A Remake-A Rejuvenation-A Rebellion*, exh. cat. (San Francisco: California College of the Arts Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2012), n.p.

and overcome. 'New art' poses again the question of the conditions of possibility of art in order not to define them in a Greenbergian ontological entrenchment in the specificity of medium and the essentialism of the visual, but to leave them open so as to 'make more things possible', in Szeemann's words, and create the new areas of freedom. The exhibition subtitle includes 'concepts' and 'information' in the various manifestations of artistic attitudes, implying that these can be artistic forms no less than material-based and process-oriented art. In fact, conceptual forms posit Szeemann's initial predicament of how to exhibit the unpresentable gesture more directly, and the question of the relation of artistic attitudes and form is now raised on a different register. The discussion has shown that, for Szeemann, the physical materialization of the immediacy of aesthetic experience remains important. This emphasis on materiality appears to undermine Szeemann's initial commitment to focus on works-qua-gestures like that of Dibbets's. For neither American Postminimalists nor European Arte Povera artists renounced the visual, material form and its spatio-temporal experience in their post-object critical endeavours. On the other hand, the inclusion of concepts in the expressive forms of artistic attitudes points to an expanded understanding of art, one that engages experimentally with the material without abolishing the conceptual.

The key question, then, concerns the conceptual dimension of the new art tendencies, its relation to art's material conditions of production, presentation, and exhibition, and the extent to which it resolves the curatorial, artistic, ultimately aesthetic aporia of exhibiting art-as-gesture. The relation of concepts to artistic attitudes, which remain the organizing force and primary element of the aesthetic significance of the work, becomes more intriguing in terms of Szeemann's own curatorial conceptualism. These issues are tackled in the following chapter and become particularly pertinent in light of the so-called 'dematerialization of art' that was taking currency at the time.

Chapter 2

Art as Idea and Information or 'The Freedom to Exist Materially or Not'

The growing questioning of established art categories and the traditional aesthetic attributes of the artwork points to a changing aesthetic condition in the conception, production, and experience of art that challenges its status and value as concrete, material object. Szeemann proclaimed that the artists in *Attitudes* are no 'object-makers', and valorised a new understanding of art in terms of a natural experiential process that gives it an ontological instability beyond the status of object as prescribed end. Scott Burton, in his contribution to the catalogue, stressed the increasing tendency to eradicate inherited modernist categories, to blur established distinctions between art and ideas, artists and intellectuals, art and life, pushing art's limits as far as possible. 'The only large esthetic condition remaining is that between art and life; this exhibition reveals how that distinction is fading', he writes. On this basis, he cites the infamous Duchampian question, 'Can one make works which are not works of "art"?', and remarks in regard to the perceived shift in art: 'It is compelling to see, at least, the continuing dilation of art's limits, to watch the quotation marks get further and further apart.'[1]

Conceptual art practices, most notably, posed the question of the aesthetic status of art and the role of the artist anew, pushing in cases the quotation marks indeed far apart by identifying art with concept and idea. The artwork is less concerned with the material sensation of experience, thereby extends the Postminimalist investigations into various aesthetic forms of expressive materiality to a level of increased conceptualism. The inclusion of 'concepts' and 'information' into the various forms of artistic 'attitudes' in the exhibition subtitle, which Szeemann proclaimed as the primary force of the aesthetic significance of the most recent tendencies in art, complicates the affinities of *Attitudes* with conceptual art and raises questions about Szeemann's own adherence to conceptualism in the making of the show. The affirmation of artistic attitudes becoming form – in this case, conceptual forms – creates also the problem of the presentation or exhibition of such 'forms',

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[1] Scott Burton, 'Notes on the New', in Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n. p., also available in UBUWEB <http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/text/Szeemann-Harald_Live-In-Your-Head_When-Attitudes-Become-Form_1969.pdf> [accessed 10 December 2016].

which necessarily leads us back to Szeemann's initial predicament of the non-exhibitability of artistic gestures.

This chapter discusses the response of *Attitudes* to the conceptual shift in the aesthetic status of art and the role of the artist at the time. The conceptual turn in art is highly differentiated and contested, and the show included a range of post-object and site-specific practices. While these will be outlined, particular focus is given on the New York art dealer and exhibition-organizer Seth Siegelaub and the contributions of his associated artists in *Attitudes* for a number of reasons. First, Siegelaub had already established increased recognition as an advocate of Conceptual art in New York with the invention of innovative exhibition and distribution practices through the strategic use of the newly emerging global networks and in response to the 'idea art' of his affiliated artists. Second, he played an influential role on Szeemann's treatment of the *Attitudes* catalogue as a dynamic exhibition space to the point that the latter was largely modelled after Siegelaub's innovative catalogue-show *The Xerox Book* (1968). Finally, the diverse approaches of Siegelaub's group of artists to what was then called 'dematerialized art' and their various degrees of conceptualism represent – though not exhaustively – conceptual artists' contested responses to what appeared as a common, unifying condition: the crisis of formalist modernism and the corollary claim for the expansion of art into non-art and life linked with certain socio-political goals.

The participation of conceptual artists in *Attitudes* indicates that both Szeemann and Siegelaub as exhibition organizers responded to the challenges of 'dematerialized art' and to the problem of how to present the immaterial aspect of art, though with different motivations, aims, methods, and modes of practice. Outlining these differences offers insights into Szeemann's more inclusive conceptualism and the way in which *Attitudes* accommodates and deals with the tension between its material and immaterial, experiential and conceptual aspects; it also suggests a way of resolving the issue of the non-exhibitability of 'gesture' raised in the previous chapter. It shows how the radical breadth and inclusive approach of *Attitudes* opens up a trajectory of exhibition aesthetics that reclaims the value of expressivity, creative processes, and felt experience in art without overlooking the ideational component. To fully appreciate the aesthetic significance of the show, the last part of the chapter outlines how the curatorial experience of *Attitudes* is variously re-articulated and further radicalized in Szeemann's later practice within the postconcpetual development of art and curating.

I. The catalogue as exhibition space: *When Attitudes Become Form* and *The Xerox Book*

The art critics Lucy Lippard and John Chandler coined the term 'dematerialization' in their 1968 influential essay to express their position about a perceived tendency towards a fully conceptual art production that would make the object dispensable. According to the writers, the term is expressive of an emerging tendency, in the aftermath of Minimalism, towards an 'ultra conceptual art that emphasizes the thinking process almost exclusively' and supersedes the 'anti-intellectual, emotional/intuitive processes of art-making' prevalent in the last two decades. 'The studio is again becoming a study', Lippard and Chandler diagnose. 'Dematerialized art is post-aesthetic in its increasingly non-visual emphases', they point out, and if the separation between the conception of the work and its handcrafted making continues, they warn that the object may become 'wholly obsolete' and art would turn into an entirely conceptual mode of production.[2]

If in 1968 the perceived 'dematerialization of art' points to the profound aesthetic implications for the ontological, formal, and functional parameters of art, let alone its exhibiting conditions, one year later Szeemann explains in his catalogue text: 'A large group of artists, like the "Earth Artists", are not represented by works, but with information; and the "Conceptual Artists" are represented by working plans, which no longer require further realisation.'[3] Indeed, forty artists out of the sixty-nine participants in the show exhibited tangible works. The rest contributed different forms of documentation – photographs, maps, diagrams, texts, letters, and statements – either in the gallery space, alluding to works beyond it, or in the catalogue alone, listed as participating with 'Information', namely works of no material form.[4] The

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[2] Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', *Art International*, vol. 12, no. 2 (February 1968), pp. 31-36, excerpts repr. in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 46-50 (46).

[3] Harald Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', trans. unknown, in Charles Harrison, ed., *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, exh. cat. (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1969), repr. in Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, eds, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite (Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957-2005)* (Zurich/New York: Edition Voldemeer/Springer, 2007), pp. 225-226 (226) [Original text 'Über die Ausstellung', in Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head)*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n.p.].

[4] Thirteen artists appear only in the catalogue, listed in the 'Information' section: Jared Bark, Ted Glass, Hans Haacke, Paolo Icaro, Jo Ann Kaplan, Bernd Lohaus, Roelof Louw, Bruce McLean, David Medalla, Dennis Oppenheim, Paul Pechter, Michelangelo Pistoletto, and William Wegman. See Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information*

inclusion in the show of works as 'information' and works that exist without requiring physical materialization reveals the various degrees of conceptualism in *Attitudes*. Szeemann integrated in the show the material and immaterial responses of various practices that came to be designated as 'Conceptual art' in their critical interrogation of the established Greenbergian modernist aesthetics: the definition of the artwork as materially constituted, visually privileged, skilfully made, having an inherently aesthetic quality as the expression of sensation, and teleologically moving towards its constitutive essence through the transcendence of life, allowing for disinterested contemplation.[5]

The role of the catalogue as expansion of the exhibition space exemplifies the changes in the conventions of presenting and communicating art, and the extended exhibition possibilities that the conceptual shift in the state of art opened up. In a 1996 interview, Szeemann recalls the distinctiveness of *Attitudes* and stresses the key role of the catalogue in documenting a revolutionary moment of freedom in art, when the work could either be made and take material form or assume an idea form and remain immaterial:

> It [*Attitudes*] was an adventure from beginning to end, and the catalogue, discussing how the works could either assume material form or remain immaterial, documents this revolution in the visual arts. It was a moment of great intensity and freedom, when you could either produce a work or just imagine it.[6]

Due to the discrepancy between the entire artistic entries in the catalogue and the works on display in the gallery, the *Attitudes* catalogue creates a dynamic exhibition space, reinforced with the diversity of contributions – chosen by the artists themselves – in the artistic section. This is organized alphabetically with tabbed dividers,

(Live in Your Head), exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), also available in UBUWEB <http://ubumexico.centro.org.mx/text/Szeemann-Harald_Live-In-Your-Head_When-Attitudes-Become-Form_1969.pdf> [accessed 10 December 2016].
[5] See Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), in John O'Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, *Volume 4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 85-93 [orig. in *Forum Lectures* (in *Voice in America*), Washington, 1960; repr. with slight revisions in *Art & Literature*, 4 (Spring 1965), pp. 193-201].
[6] Szeemann quoted in 'Mind over Matter: Hans Ulrich Obrist talks with Harald Szeemann', in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP|Ringier & Les Presses du Reel, 2008), pp. 80-101 (87) [first publ. in *Artforum*, vol. 35, no. 3 (November 1996), pp. 74-79, 111-112, 119, 125].

ostensibly in contrast to the diversity of its content. The distinctive feature of the catalogue is that it 'exhibits' immaterial works without a corresponding physical presence in the gallery such as Ed Kienholz's account of the immaterial sensibility zone he had been given by Yves Klein, or David Medalla's letter of response to Szeemann's invitation informing him that he was unable to participate, as his actual contribution to the show.[7] A number of artists – those designated by Szeemann as 'Earth artists' and those participating with outdoor, site-specific works – used extensively linguistic, photographic, and cartographic information, reproduced in the catalogue, to present works that did not appear physically in the gallery. Robert Smithson, for instance, presented *Bern Earth – Mirror Displacement* (1969) in the gallery, a photograph of a mirror displacement at a site in Bern; Richard Long displayed a poster on the gallery wall listing his name, the date March 18-22, 1969, and the title of his work, *A Walking Tour in the Berner Oberland* (1969), merely to state his walk in the Swiss mountains and cutting a path through nature during this time. Stephen Kaltenbach's *Graffiti Stamp: Lips of Artist* (1968), the rubber-stamped imprint of his lips, was dispersed on various surfaces throughout the city and was presented only in the catalogue.

In some cases, site-specific works took the form of more crude space interventions and destructive gestures as a kind of earlier Institutional Critique: Jan Dibbets, for *Museum Pedestal with four Angles of 90°* (1969), excavated the four corners of the Kunsthalle and presented photographs of them on an architectural floor plan within the gallery; Ger van Elk in his *Replacement Piece* (1969) removed one square meter of asphalt from the pavement outside the Kunsthalle to insert a photographic reproduction of the original in its place; and Michael Heizer in *Bern Depression* (1969) organized, prior to the show, the demolition with a wrecking ball of the pavement in front of the Kunsthalle, making a crated hole (Fig. 2.1). The work was complemented with the *Cement Slot* (1969), a long concrete incision into the garden behind the Kunsthalle, listed merely as 'Incision' in the catalogue. These works dispersed the exhibition outside the gallery, integrated art with the city environment and beyond it, so that one was not even aware of their existence as they merged with the everyday fabric. They also represent more explicitly Szeemann's

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[7] Ed Kienholz had loaned for the show an immaterial work by Yves Klein, which is listed in the catalogue as 'Information'. David Medalla was travelling at the time, and so contributed in the show his letter of response to Szeemann's invitation, which was reproduced in the catalogue together with his bibliographical information.

statement about the aspiration of young artists to 'break down' the operational system of art and 'work against' society.[8] Not unsurprisingly, especially these works caused the outrage of the local Press and enforced the controversy of the exhibition among the Bern City Council (Fig. 2.2).[9]

The *Attitudes* catalogue, in its diverse material, reflects the lack of unity in the gallery space proper and, importantly, destabilizes the traditional relationship between exhibition and catalogue. Whereas the catalogue typically has an auxiliary role to the physical exhibition, here it constitutes the most comprehensive exhibition demonstrating that the new art tendencies tend to integrate their means and context of communication. The use of the catalogue as exhibition space is, however, not completely unprecedented. Printed material and various publications were increasingly used for artistic, exhibition, and distribution purposes in the late-1960s.[10] Seth Siegelaub pioneered the catalogue-exhibitions for a Douglas Huebler show (November 1968),[11] and more ambitiously with the commonly known as *The Xerox*

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[8] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 225.

[9] Szeemann's diary includes a selection of titles and extracts from the Press coverage of the exhibition from 22 March to 13 June 1969. Among others, the following titles are characteristic of the reception of the show: 'Art Rubbish in Bern' (March 24, *Die Tatt*); 'What do These People Still Have in Common with Well-fortified Switzerland?' (March 25, *Bischofszeller Zeitung*); 'Asphalt Damaged in the Name of Art' (April 9, *Der Sweizer Bauer*); 'Sabotage in the Temple of Art' (April 15, *Tages-Anzeiger, Zürich*); 'Rebellion Against the Museum Culture' (Arpil 25, *Stuttgarder Nachrichten*). The French artist Daniel Buren, whom Szeemann had visited prior to the show but was not officially included in it, in the night before the opening of *Attitudes* posted without permission from the city authorities his signature vertical stripes in white-and-pink colour scheme (*Wild Posters*, 1969) in several billboards over existing signage and advertisements throughout the city. Buren was arrested by the local authorities and his stripped posters were removed thereafter. See Harald Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', trans. Gerard Goodrow, repr. in Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, eds, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite (Catalogue of all Exhibitions 1957-2005)* (Zurich and New York: Edition Voldemeer and Springer, 2007), pp. 244-261 (256-261). [The original complete text 'Wie Entsteht eine Ausstellung?', in Jean-Christophe Ammann and Harald Szeemann, eds, *Von Hodler zur Antiform: Geschichte der Kunsthalle Bern* (Bern: Benteli Verlag, 1970), pp. 142-162, was first translated in English by Gerard Goodrow and published in *Painting, Object, Film, Concept: Works from the Herbig Collection*, exh. cat. (New York: Christie's, 1998), pp. 39-49]. For a detailed account of the controversial reception of the exhibition in the Swiss and Dutch Press, see Steven ten Thije, '"Op Losse Schroeven" and "When Attitudes Become Form": Public Reception in the Netherlands and Switzerland', in Christian Rattemeyer and others, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, *Afterall* Exhibition Histories series (London: Afterall, 2010), pp. 212-219.

[10] On this subject, see Anne Rorimer, 'Siting the Page: Exhibiting Works in Publications – Some Examples of Conceptual art in the USA', in John Bird and Michael Newman, eds, *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 11-26; also, Gwen L. Allen, 'The Catalogue as an Exhibition Space in the 1960s and 1970s', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), pp. 505-510.

[11] In *Douglas Huebler: November 1968* (1968), Huebler's works – typewritten statements, maps, and photographs – appeared in catalogue form alone. The catalogue-show is characteristic of the interrelation between the informational nature of the work, its emphasis on documentation, and the strategies Siegelaub used to exhibit and promote it. The notice announcing the show, in *Artforum*, vol. 7, no. 3 (November 1968), p. 8, reads: 'This ¼ page advertisement (4½″ x 4¾″), appearing in the

Book, Siegelaub's first group show in publication format (December 1968). Here each of the seven invited artists – Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Lawrence Weiner – were asked by Siegelaub to contribute a twenty-five page piece on standard 8½ x 11-inch paper, to be reproduced seriographically (Fig. 2.3).[12] In fact, *The Xerox Book* was intended less as a proper publication than a photocopied compendium of artistic projects, based on standard requirements, to be reproduced in 1000 copies.[13] The embrace of reproduction technologies and non-art procedures testifies to the anti-aesthetic thrust of *The Xerox Book* as it deprivileges more traditional art attributes associated with uniqueness, self-expression, skilfulness, formal qualities, and visual display.[14] Unlike

November 1968 issue of Artforum magazine, on page 8, in the lower left corner, is one form of documentation for the November 1968 exhibition of DOUGLAS HUEBLER. (Seth Siegelaub, 1100 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10028).'

Alexander Alberro, in his seminal study of Siegelaub's communication practice and strategic use of the new means of marketing and publicity in Conceptual art in the late-1960s, argues that the announcement of the advertisement as 'one form of documentation' of the exhibition demonstrates the new alignment of the artwork with the marketing strategies of publicity in contrast to modernism's distance from mass and commercial culture. This, in turn, raises the crucial question: 'To what extent can artistic practices parallel (and even appropriate) advertising strategies without fully becoming advertisements themselves?' in the sense that the artwork abolishes its aesthetic value and becomes 'an object whose use value is located in its publicity and sign value.' Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 130-133.

[12] Seth Siegelaub, ed., *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner*, exh. cat. (New York: Seth Siegelaub & John W. Wendler, 1968).

[13] Siegelaub, in various interviews, contends that *The Xerox Book* should not be misunderstood as having any relation with Xerox. In 2000, he stated that he 'now would prefer to call it the "photocopy book"', and in 2006 favoured the term 'project' over 'book' for its openness and versatile possibilities. He, thus, ensures: 'The "Xeroxed" exhibition, in fact, was never published as a "xeroxed" book, it was printed in offset. I have never liked the term "Xeroxed" as it gives the misleading impression that the Xerox Company had something to do with it, which is not the case. … in the 1960s the word "xerox" was then virtually synonymous with "photocopy".' See Seth Siegelaub, interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Amsterdam 2000, in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP|Ringier & Les Presses du Reel, 2008), pp. 116-130 (122); Seth Siegelaub, interviewed by Paul O'Neill, 'Action Man: Paul O'Neill interviews Seth Siegelaub', *The Internationaler*, no. 1, June 2006, pp. 5-7, republ. by Curatorial Network with permission, November 2007 <http://www.curatorial.net/go/data/en/files/ActionMan%28SethSiegelaub%29.pdf> [accessed 3 September 2014], pp. 1-19 (12, 11). Alexander Alberro accounts that Siegelaub contacted the Xerox Corporation in New York to cover the printing cost of the book in a xerox process. After their refusal, he turned to the businessman Jack Wendler. Due to the high cost of producing the book entirely in a photocopy machine, they decided to print it in offset. However, despite the shift in production, the name 'Xerox' continued to be associated with Siegelaub's project because of the trademark's multiple 'sign value' at the time. See Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, pp. 135-136, 148.

[14] The use of reproduction technologies in *The Xerox Book* actually draws on the exhibition *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper not Necessarily Meant to be Viewed as Art*, organized by the artist Mel Bochner at the Visual Arts Gallery, The School of Visual Arts, New York, 2-23 December 1966. Bochner collected a hundred working drawings by a number of artists – in today's terms, Minimalists, Postminimalists, and the emerging Conceptualists – ranging from studio notes, diagrams, working sketches to invoices, receipts, even a score by John Cage, and used the then new Xerox technology to photocopy them standard size, four times. The drawings also included the gallery's floor plan and a diagram of the photocopy machine itself. Bochner displayed the collated copies in four loose-leaf notebooks, which were placed on four sculpture pedestals in the centre of the

the *Attitudes* catalogue which merely extends the physical exhibition space, *The Xerox Book* displaces the gallery entirely and reverses the conventional relation by giving the catalogue unprecedented primacy as information. The conceptual approach and status of *The Xerox Book* as information importantly opens up a new realm of artistic production by which Szeemann was fascinated.

     The Xerox Book had been recently published when Szeemann arrived in New York, in December 1968. Szeemann met with Kosuth the editors Siegelaub and John Wendler, and *The Xerox Book* not only was influential for his catalogue, but also triggered his interest in the kind of conceptual art represented by Siegelaub.[15] The classification system and prosaic bureaucratic form of a loose-leaf office binder of cardboard covers in the *Attitudes* catalogue emulates the logic of 'pure administration' of the spiral-bound *Xerox Book*.[16] The multi-lingual reading of the exhibition title in the front cover indicates the international reception Szeemann was assuming for new art and his show, as Siegelaub himself intended for his exhibition-publications (Fig. 2.4-2.5).[17] Both catalogues reproduce textual material submitted by the artists themselves – though in *Attitudes* this is not conditioned on pre-given layout instructions – and organized alphabetically in accord with Siegelaub's concern to level artistic hierarchy and Szeemann's emphasis on individual practice. The use of supportive texts, however, makes a considerable difference. *The Xerox Book* does not include any interpretative texts at all in line with Siegelaub's aim to present the work of his artists in the most direct and disinterested way without the mediating effects of explicatory curatorial statements, critical essays, and subjectively elaborated titles as in Szeemann's show.

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gallery. Unlike Bochner's more artistic installation, Siegelaub's *The Xerox Book* was intended to be communicated and distributed solely as information.

[15] Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 248 (13 December entry). *The Xerox Book* is included in the Bibliography for the exhibition (Books section) in the *Attitudes* catalogue.

[16] See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'The Thresholds of 1969', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), pp. 495-504 (499).

[17] 'My books are printed in three languages to further global communication, rather than limited and limiting local distribution.' Seth Siegelaub, interviewed by Ursula Meyer (New York: November 1969), excerpts publ. in Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972: a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia, arranged chronologically and focused on so-called conceptual or information or idea art with mentions of such vaguely designated areas as minimal, anti-form, systems, earth, or process art, occurring now in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia, and Asia (with occasional political overtones), edited and annotated by Lucy R. Lippard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997 [prev. publ. by New York: Praeger, 1973]), pp. 124-126 (126).

After having met Siegelaub, Szeemann notes in his diary that on Siegelaub's group of artists 'one can only provide information', and further comments on the documentary, linguistic, and dematerialized forms of their work.[18] The presence of Siegelaub at the opening of *Attitudes* and the wholesome participation of his artists demonstrates that Szeemann embraced Conceptual art and the new possibilities it offers. In a 2003 interview, he characterizes Conceptual art as 'a fantastic liberator' because 'the work could be done or not', and non-materialization 'became a real trip of the imagination.'[19] Nonetheless, his adherence to Conceptual art and approach to the artwork as 'idea' and 'information' differs from Siegelaub's in the way he engages with both the visual and conceptual, material and immaterial aspects of the work.

II. 'Primary' and 'secondary' information: 'You don't need a gallery to show ideas'

In an often cited 1969 interview to Charles Harrison, Siegelaub reflects on the new art practices and formulates the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' information:

> … when art concerns itself with things not germane to physical presence its intrinsic (communicative) value is not altered by its presentation in printed media. The use of catalogues and books to communicate (and disseminate) art is the most neutral means to present the new art. The catalogue can now act as primary information for the exhibition, as opposed to secondary information *about* art in magazines, catalogues, etc., and in some cases the 'exhibition' can be the 'catalogue'.[20]

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[18] Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 248-249 (14 December entry).

[19] Szeemann is also critical of Conceptual art becoming 'academic' in the 1970s, saying that he was 'deploring the lost dimension of freedom.' Harald Szeemann in Beti Žerovc, 'A Conversation with Harald Szeemann: "Making Things Possible"', *MJ ─ Manifesta Journal*, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003), pp. 28-37 (36).

[20] Seth Siegelaub, 'On Exhibitions and the World at Large: Seth Siegelaub in Conversation with Charles Harrison', *Studio International*, vol. 178, no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 202-203, repr. in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), pp. 198-203 (199). Italics in the original.

The quotation shows that the innovative transformation of the catalogue from an accompanying document about art into the exhibition itself accorded with conceptual art's concern about ideas and their effective communication than the material presence and visual contemplation of art objects in space. As Siegelaub explains, new art creates a situation in which it is now possible to split the artwork into 'primary' and 'secondary' information since the conditions of making and presenting art are no longer identical:

> Until 1967, the problems of exhibition of art were quite clear, because at that time the 'art' of art and the 'presentation' of art were coincident. […] But gradually there developed an 'art' … wherein the problem of presentation … [was] *to make someone else aware that an artist had done anything at all*. Because the work was not visual in nature, it did not require the traditional means of exhibition, but a means that would present the intrinsic ideas of the art.[21]

According to Siegelaub, the radical separation between the art itself and its presentation legitimates the distinction between 'primary information' ('the essence of the piece', its ideational part, the concept) and 'secondary information' (the material information by which one becomes aware of the piece, its 'form of presentation', the documentation).[22] Since new art primarily lies in ideas, materialization is now secondary and the conventional need for representational or explicatory information about it can be evaded. For, Siegelaub contends, all the intrinsic information, necessary for the presentation of the work itself and its awareness of existence, can be now communicated with printed media such as catalogues that function as '"containers" of information … unresponsive to the environment.'[23] Likewise, the actual need to experience an art object is undermined since all the essential art information is in front of the viewer as real printed matter.[24]

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[21] Ibid. Italics in the original.
[22] See Seth Siegelaub, in an interview to Elayne Varian, June 1969, cited in Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, p. 56.
[23] Siegelaub, interviewed by Ursula Meyer (New York: November 1969), in Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 126.
[24] Seth Siegelaub, interviewed by Catherine Moseley (Amsterdam: April 2000), in Catherine Moseley, ed., *Conception: Conceptual Documents 1968 to 1972*, exh. publication (Norwich: Norwich Gallery/Norwich School of Art and Design, 2001), pp. 145-150 (147).

New art by its nature necessitated an unprecedented immediacy in the processes of signification and communication. Noticeably, Siegelaub identifies content with the 'intrinsic ideas' of art itself as if they exist in an *a priori* condition to their form of presentation. It is precisely the ideational condition of new art that links it to the actual problem of how to present it and how to make the audience aware that a work has been done at all, hence the need to invent new means of communicating these work-ideas. Siegelaub characterizes his practice as 'problem solving' in response to the specific problems posed by art itself.[25] In a 1969 interview to Patricia Norvell, he explicitly aligns himself with the kind of art that deals with 'ideas', explaining that 'because ideas don't have any weight […] there's no condition for space at all' or at least the work 'exists in space on a different level.'[26] He describes his practice not in exhibition-making terms but as making available 'certain conditions' and implementing 'situations' that responded to the conceptual nature of new art, specifically the work being produced by 'a few men' – Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner – 'functioning as an intermediary' between them and reaching their work out to the community.[27] It is striking that Siegelaub refers to 'situations' rather than shows and explains his role as working closely with artists to devise those conditions to present their work that best reflect its nature and function. These 'situations', he claims, not only responded to the physically 'dematerialized' condition of the works, but also dealt with their ability 'to

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[25] Ibid., p. 150.

[26] Seth Siegelaub, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, 17 April 1969, in Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell, eds, *Recording Conceptual Art: Early Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kaltenbach, LeWitt, Morris, Oppenheim, Siegelaub, Smithson, Weiner by Patricia Norvell* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 31-55 (32).
On this subject, see the symposium 'Art Without Space', moderated by Seth Siegelaub with the participation of his associated artists, Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, and Joseph Kosuth, 2 November 1969, WBAI-FM, New York. The programme was initiated by Jeanne Siegel, Art Programs Director of WBAI. Indicative of the contested approaches is the way in which Siegelaub announces the symposium and introduces his artists as having a conception of space close to Joseph Kosuth's. This was followed by Lawrence Weiner's disagreement with whom Douglas Huebler and Robert Barry largely align:
SS: What we will hopefully be concerning ourselves with is the nature of the art whose primary existence in the world does not relate to space, not to its exhibition in space, not to its imposing things on the walls. These men are not primarily concerned with the nature of making objects, perhaps, nor are they involved with the nature of performing with things. … Larry?
LW: I disagree wholeheartedly that there could ever be an art without space per se. It's just another catchall. Anything that exists has a certain space around it; even an idea exists within a certain space.
'Art Without Space' symposium, 2 November 1969, WBAI-FM, New York, excerpts in Lippard, *Six Years*, pp. 127-133 (127).

[27] Siegelaub, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, in Alberro and Norvell, pp. 31-32.

question their status as commodities, saleable objects or permanent collectible objects.'[28]

Explaining his own engagement with the presentation problem, Siegelaub is explicit: 'If a man is principally involved with ideas, well, you don't need a gallery to show ideas.' Having denounced the gallery as meaningless for this kind of art, Siegelaub declared 'the world' as his gallery.[29] The new art sensibility required a broader framework, which made the presentation problem more dynamic: 'a wall label, a post office box, a street sign, writing on a wall, an advertisement in a magazine, etc. All these kinds of new, unexpected spaces', Siegelaub explains, 'made it possible for one to look at art and think about it in an entirely different way.'[30] Yet, he cautiously addresses that 'all this is a record of the work of art … It's not the work of art.'[31] Siegelaub's commitment to the expansion of art into non-art spaces and its opening into the world is linked to the attempt to practically deal with the presentation problem of 'dematerialized art', and escape a certain exhibition logic that the gallery itself imposes.[32] More importantly, demonstrates his communication practice and strategic use of the new means of publicity in response to Conceptual art's embrace of new 'materials' such as information, language, and the mass media within the new markets of the growing value of immaterial labour. Publications, Siegelaub claims, appear as 'the logical means' to present and communicate this kind of art.[33] If the issue is not just to present an art that eliminated material presence, but also to make someone aware of it – admittedly, 'information goes from mind to mind as directly as possible' –[34] printed material is the most appropriate medium in many respects: it downgrades the visual experience of art, it diminishes the role of the critic, it is cheap and quick in communication, and, significantly, serves Siegelaub's goal to make the work of his artists easily and widely accessible to a large, diverse public. He put it

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[28] Siegelaub, interviewed by Paul O'Neill, 'Action Man', p. 4.
[29] 'My gallery is the world now.' Siegelaub, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, in Alberro and Norvell, p. 38. Before shifting direction in his practice, Siegelaub run his own gallery 'Seth Siegelaub Contemporary Art' in New York, from 23 June 1964 to the end of April 1966.
[30] Siegelaub, interviewed by Catherine Moseley, in Moseley, ed., *Conception*, pp. 146-147.
[31] Siegelaub, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, in Alberro and Norvell, p. 34.
[32] As he characteristically says: 'At the beginning one runs a gallery but after a while the gallery is running you.' Siegelaub, interviewed by Catherine Moseley, in Moseley, ed., *Conception,* p. 146. On the limitations of running a gallery, see also Siegelaub, interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, p. 120.
[33] Siegelaub, interviewed by Catherine Moseley, in Moseley, ed., *Conception,* p. 147.
[34] Siegelaub, 'On Exhibitions and the World at Large', repr. in Alberro and Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art*, p. 202.

plainly, when he connected the advantages of swift communication and cheap distribution with a new notion of 'power' on global level:

> My idea of power has to do with reaching a lot of people quickly, not just a circumspect small art audience. […] The idea of getting information to people quickly is a much different idea from getting a painting quickly – to say nothing about the logistics of sending a painting as opposed to sending a Barry or a Weiner. My interest in art transcends the present establishment's limited art-collector scope of communications.[35]

Siegelaub also considers publications as the most neutral means to present the new idea-art. He argues that exhibitions, in whatever form, need to be standardized and provide every artist with the same conditions for production, so that 'the resulting differences' within them would be each artist's work as in *The Xerox Book*.[36] Here artists were given the same production parameters – paper size, number of pages – within which they could make their own choices. Siegelaub is aware of charges of authoritarianism and artistic restriction, nonetheless he maintains that even within standardized conditions for making there are still artistic differences, 'great artists and lesser artists'.[37] Prevalent among the participants in *The Xerox Book* was a concern with reproduction and repetition; however, Siegelaub contends, 'there are seven different aspects of repetition' (Fig. 2.6-2.8).[38] Standardization, he argues, shifts focus on the role of the context and allows the exhibition to presume a neutral condition of presentation as it eliminates certain factors – themes, descriptive titles, preferences for certain artists in terms of allocated places and number of works, art criticism – which predetermine the conditions under which art is made, shown, and experienced, and thus obscure 'the intrinsic value of each work of art.'[39] *The Xerox Book*, he claims, sought to create a uniform 'level playing field' that allowed for a better understanding

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[35] Siegelaub, interviewed by Ursula Meyer, in Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 126.

[36] Siegelaub, interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, p. 122.

[37] Siegelaub, 'On Exhibitions and the World at Large', repr. in Alberro and Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art,* p. 198. On the subject of authoritarianism, see Siegelaub, interviewed by Catherine Moseley, in Moseley, ed., *Conception,* p. 150.

[38] Siegelaub, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, in Alberro and Norvell, p. 39. For an analytic description of the seven contributing projects, see Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, pp. 136-148.

[39] Siegelaub, 'On Exhibitions and the World at Large', repr. in Alberro and Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art*, p. 198. Siegelaub expresses this position laconically: 'The less standard the exhibition situation becomes, the more difficult to "see" the individual work of art.'

of the context in which art was made.[40] Siegelaub uses the term 'de-mystification' to describe the new function of art and exhibition-making as the attempt to show the hidden structures and values that predetermine the context of art experience, and reflect on one's own role and responsibility.[41]

However, the 'de-mystification' process and its critical potential as the new salient characteristic of exhibition-making at the time tends to be overestimated insofar as this practice by declaring its own formats to be 'neutral' or objective, actually refuses to examine its own conditions of production. This issue was first raised when Charles Harrison pointedly addressed to Siegelaub that the organizer's choices in art-idea still remain primary to the extent that there is no other information available, and any choices of how to make the audience aware of an artist's work cannot be ignored. In response, Siegelaub set the limits of responsibility as follows:

> … this new body of work *explicitly* denies any responsibility for presentation. […] The question of what environment you see the work in has nothing to do with what has been done. […] If an audience … knows that *how* he is made aware is not within the artist's control or concern, then its specific presentation can be taken for granted. […] The standardizing of the exhibition situation begins to make the specific intentions of the artists clearer.[42]

Neutralization, therefore, involves two interrelated processes: on the one hand, it frames artistic production within the conditions provided, relinquishes artistic control over its modes of presentation and reception, and prioritizes artistic intention; on the other hand, it deframes and expands art into a whatever and wherever condition in the sense that art can be anything and can be found anywhere at all. The Duchampian echoes are evident here. As we see below, it lies on artistic intention to turn any object into 'art', and it is this mental decision that deskills and democratizes art so that anyone is capable of making it and it is the beholder who decides whether a piece is

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[40] Siegelaub, interviewed by Catherine Moseley, in Moseley, ed., *Conception,* p. 150.
[41] Siegelaub, interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, in Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, p. 130.
[42] Siegelaub, 'On Exhibitions and the World at Large', repr. in Alberro and Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art*, p. 200. Italics in the original.

'art' or not. In his interview to Harrison, Siegelaub drew attention to this shift in art as an underlying tendency 'towards generality'.[43]

The Xerox Book exemplifies this shift from the specific to an expanded field of art in many ways. It rejects the status of art as unique material aesthetic object in favour of art as idea and information; it depersonalizes and deskills art-making through mechanized (re)production; it integrates the conceptualization of the medium itself – the photocopy machine – in art production and reception; and it transforms aesthetic experience into the reproducibility of textual information.[44] Art expands into the banality of everyday life and the emerging information culture, appropriating their non-aesthetic materials and production methods. The anti-aesthetic drive of these strategies alongside their embrace of the new possibilities offered by the mass media and communication culture were prominent in the seminal *January 5-31, 1969* (1969) show that immediately followed *The Xerox Book*.[45] In this show, which has been characterized as 'the first exclusively Conceptual Art exhibition', Siegelaub more programmatically presented the work of his artists as a new art concerned primarily with ideas and famously declared: 'The exhibition consists of (the ideas communicated in) the catalogue; the physical presence (of the work) is supplementary to the catalogue.'[46] Two months later, the four *January Show* participants presented those conceptual works, slightly modified, in Bern.

III. Different degrees and contested forms of conceptualism

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[43] Ibid., p. 202. Interestingly, Siegelaub refers to *Attitudes* as an example of how the tendency towards generality works in exhibitions in which 'the general conditions are proposed to the artists and the decisions about specifics are left entirely to them.' As a result, 'The general feeling one got from Harald Szeemann's show "When Attitudes become Form" … did much to enhance the viewing situation for individual works.'

[44] In 1969, Siegelaub explained his intentions about the production of *The Xerox Book* as follows: 'I chose Xerox as opposed to offset or any other process because it's such a bland, shitty reproduction, really just for the exchange of information. That's all a Xerox is about. I mean, it's not even, you know, defined.' Siegelaub, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, in Alberro and Norvell, p. 39.

[45] Seth Siegelaub, ed., *January 5-31, 1969*, exh. cat. (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969). The show is laconically named after the dates of its duration and is commonly known as the *January Show*. In order to totally circumvent conventional institutional structures, Siegelaub rented for the show an office space in the vacant McClendon Building at 44 East 52nd Street, New York. For a more detailed account of the show together with Szeemann's *Attitudes*, see Bruce Altshuler, 'Dematerialization: The Voice of the Sixties: January 5-31, 1969, 44 East 52nd Street, New York / When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head), Kunsthalle, Bern, March 22-April 27, 1969', in Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), pp. 236-255 (esp. 237-243).

[46] Ursula Meyer, 'Introduction', in Ursula Meyer, ed., *Conceptual Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), pp. vii-xx (xiv); Seth Siegelaub, cited in Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 71.

In *Attitudes*, Joseph Kosuth contributed *I. Space (Art as Idea as Idea)* (1968), linguistic statements for the category 'space' as advertisements in four local newspapers, which were presented as photographs in the catalogue (Fig. 2.9).[47] The work belongs to the *Second Investigation* series in which Kosuth published anonymously excerpts from the 'Synopsis of Categories' in *Roget's Thesaurus* in the advertising spaces of public media. The photograph in the catalogue is accompanied by the artist's statement that delineates his more decisive shift to 'the immateriality of the work' through changes in 'its form of presentation' in a non-art context. As he explains, with this work he departs from *First Investigations* (1967-1968) – mounted, enlarged negative photostats of dictionary definitions – to radicalize further his practice in dealing with 'abstraction' and interrogating the nature of art.[48] The presentation of appropriated entries from a linguistic system into the non-art space of newspapers as a kind of readymade linguistic 'objects' and in a way that simulates the banality of advertisements served Kosuth's objective to totally disassociate with painting's composition form; even 'remove the experience from the work of art',[49] and achieve the immateriality of the work. Art is separated from its form of presentation since the advertising printings, often dispersed within the same publication, function merely as the documentation of the work, which itself does not

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[47] Kosuth presented his work *I. Space (Art as Idea as Idea)*, (1968) as a series of advertisements ('A. Abstrakter Raum'; 'B. Spezifischer Raum'; 'C. Relativer Raum'; 'D. Existenz im Raum') in the following Swiss newspapers: *Berner Tagwacht*, March 8/9, 1969; *Neue Berner Zeitung Sonntags Illustrierte*, March 8/9, 1969; *Berner Tagblatt*, March 8/9, 1969, and *Der Bund Sonntagsausben*, March 9, 1969.

[48] An excerpt from Kosuth's statement reads: 'J. K. My current work, which consists of categories from the thesaurus, deals with the multiple aspects of an idea of something. And, like the other work, it's an attempt to deal with abstraction. The largest change has been in its form of presentation – going from the mounted photostat, to the purchasing of spaces in newspapers and periodicals (with one "work" sometimes taking up as many as five or six spaces in that many publications – depending on how many divisions exist in the category.) This way the immateriality of the work is stressed and any possible connections to painting are severed.' Joseph Kosuth, in Harald Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form*, exh. cat. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern, 1969), n.p.
The statement was first published in Seth Siegelaub, ed., *January 5-31, 1969*, exh. cat. (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969), n.p. For the *January Show*, Kosuth purchased advertising space in various newspapers and periodicals, in which he published entries from *Roget's Thesaurus* for the categories *existence*, *time*, *order*, and *number* in the format of advertisements. The *Thesaurus* entries for these terms were listed in the catalogue as the works proper along with the reproduction of a photostat from the 1967 *Titled (Art as Idea as Idea)* series with the dictionary definition for 'painting'. In *January Show*, Kosuth functioned also as a critic with the pseudonym Arthur R. Rose. He interviewed the four participating artists, himself included, for *Arts Magazine*. His self-interview quotes the statement he had printed in the catalogue, which was later reproduced in the *Attitudes* catalogue. See Joseph Kosuth, in Arthur R. Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews with Barry, Huebler, Kosuth, Weiner', *Arts Magazine*, vol. 43, no. 4 (February 1969), repr. in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Idea Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973), pp. 140-149 (144-148).

[49] Kosuth, in Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews', p. 145.

exist as a material object at all. The immaterial condition of art is stressed by the collective subtitle (Art as Idea as Idea) to the works, which itself constitutes a certain proposition about the nature of art as idea.[50]

Kosuth's main premises on the shift of art towards a conceptual-philosophical understanding of itself, and so a new concept and function of the artist, were outlined on the occasion of the *January Show* but were formulated more programmatically in his seminal three-part essay 'Art after Philosophy' (1969). Here he stipulates that art no longer requires the making of objects since it is conceived philosophically as a propositional affair, that is, 'a work of art is a kind of *proposition* presented within the context of art as a comment on art.'[51] To consolidate his positions, he appealed to a range of artistic and philosophical references, particularly Marcel Duchamp and A. J. Ayer's analytical philosophy of language following the 'linguistic turn' of this kind in postwar Anglo-American thinking.[52] Kosuth repeats his well-known plea, on the occasion of the *January Show*, that the major function of the artist now is 'to question the nature of art', and specifies that this is a concern with the validity of a general concept of 'art' rather than a '*kind* of art' as painting or sculpture. He, accordingly, rejects formalist art and criticism, particularly Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried, on the basis of its morphology and the embodiment of 'an implied *a priori* concept of art's possibilities', which precludes inquiry into the nature of art.[53]

From this standpoint, Kosuth questions established narratives of the history of modern art and advances an alternate canon based on his conception of Duchamp's legacy on Conceptual art. He proclaims Duchamp's 'first unassisted readymade' a radical event, which shifted the focus about the nature of art 'from a question of

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[50] Kosuth clarified the subtitle 'Art as Idea as Idea', which accompanied his works since the *First Investigations*, in his WBAI interview to Jeanne Siegel (1970). He presented it as a reference to the artist Ad Reinhardt with the double use of 'idea' intended to avoid the 'reification' of the idea as an art object and to change the definition of art itself: 'The addition of the second part – "Art as Idea *as Idea*" – intended to suggest that the real creative process, and the radical shift, was in changing the idea of art itself.' Kosuth quoted in 'Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea', interview to Jeanne Siegel (broadcast on WBAI-FM New York Radio, 7 April 1970), in Jeanne Siegel, ed., *Artwords: Discourse on the 60s and 70s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), pp. 220-231 (221). Italics in the original.

[51] Joseph Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy', in Gabriele Guercio, ed., *Joseph Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and after: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 13-32 (19-20) [first publ. in *Studio International*, vol. 178, no. 915 (October 1969), pp. 134-137; *Studio International*, no. 916 (November 1969), pp. 160-161; *Studio International*, no. 917 (December 1969), pp. 212-213]. Italics in the original.

[52] For a critical account of Kosuth's strategic use of his range of references (Duchamp, LeWitt, Reinhardt, and Ayer) and the investment of analytical conceptual art in philosophy, see Peter Osborne, 'Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy', in John Bird and Michael Newman, eds, *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), pp. 47-65.

[53] Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy', p. 18. Italics in the original.

morphology to a question of function', and so marked 'the beginning of "modern" art and the beginning of "conceptual" art'. According to Kosuth, 'All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually.'[54] This renowned statement suggests a new genealogy and ontology for modern and contemporary art as conceptual art on the grounds of the rupturing effect of Duchamp's readymades. It rejects inherited Modernism and advances new art criteria, namely the presentation of 'new propositions as to art's nature'.[55] Aesthetic considerations are '*always* extraneous to an object's function or "reason to be"', Kosuth maintains, thereby he denounces formalist criticism for its historicist, morphological analysis and derides Greenberg as 'the critic of taste'.[56]

Kosuth's anti-aesthetic thrust could not find better endorsement than in the 'visual indifference', 'total absence of good or bad taste' that dictated the epistemological conditions of Duchamp's readymades.[57] Readymades turned the definition of art into a conceptual decision or act of 'nomination' – the intentional declaration 'this is, or is not, art' – establishing aesthetic indifference and the subjective power of signification as art's new conditions of possibility. They also exposed the functional and contextual structure of art as social institution that determines this nomination to be 'true'. Kosuth, nonetheless, prioritized artistic intention over contextualization.[58] This understanding inevitably raises the issue of

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[54] Ibid.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., p. 17. Italics in the original.

[57] In 1961, Duchamp famously clarified that 'the choice of these "readymades" was never dictated by aesthetic delectation' but 'was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste… In fact a complete anaesthesia.' In addition, 'the short sentence', occasionally inscribed on the readymade, 'instead of describing the object like a title, was meant to carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions more verbal.' Marcel Duchamp, 'Apropos of "Readymades"', talk in the 'Art of Assemblage' symposium, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 19 October 1961, in *Art & Artists*, vol. 1, no. 4 (July 1966), p. 47, repr. in Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, eds, *Salt Seller: The Writings of Marcel Duchamp (Marchand du Sel)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 141-142 (141).

[58] For an overview of the debates about the reception of Marcel Duchamp by Conceptual art, see the Round Table with Alexander Alberro, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Martha Buskirk, Thierry de Duve, and Rosalind Krauss, 'Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp', *October*, vol. 70 (Fall 1994), pp. 126-146, repr. in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon, eds, *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Round Table* (Cambridge, Mas.: MIT Press,1996), pp. 205-224. For a critique of Kosuth's one-sided nominalist reception of Duchamp's readymades at the expense of other aspects for the purposes of his analytical proposition model, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, vol. 55 (Winter 1990), pp. 105-143 (124-130) [first publ. in Claude Gintz, Juliette Laffon, and Angeline Scherf, eds, *L'Art Conceptuel: Une Perspective*, exh. cat. (Paris: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1989), pp. 41-53]. For a reading of Duchamp's reception in Conceptual art that marked the transformation of art into its contemporary and 'generic' condition, see Thierry De Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

referentiality. Kosuth turns to the logical positivism of analytic philosophy of language and introduces A. J. Ayer's reading of the Kantian distinction between synthetic and analytic propositions into art in order to claim for the analogy between the status of the artwork – the 'art' condition of whatever object is presented in the context of art – and that of the analytic proposition. That is, works of art are not verifiable empirically – they provide no information about facts of experience – but entirely within the context of art as definitions of art.[59] This analogy allows Kosuth to make art referable only to art and apply analytic philosophy's rejection of the empirical and the metaphysical from a function of philosophy to a function of art. As such, he claims:

> A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art *is* art, which means, is a *definition* of art. Thus, that it is art is true *a priori*.[60]

Drawing on the nominalism and visual indifference of Duchamp's readymades as well as the tautology of Ayer's analytical propositions, Kosuth shifts the definition of art away from the visual, empirical, experiential, and aesthetic towards art's analytical understanding of itself so as to reach both the 'generic' and autonomously conceptual in art, as it is formulated in the 'Art as Idea as Idea' subtitle. This designates the tautological relation of the definition of the artwork (as idea) to art in general (the concept/Idea of art) as a function of interrogation into art's own conditions of existence within an entirely conceptual state of reference. Kosuth parallels art to the analytic method in language and assigns the artist the role of the 'analyst', whose propositions followed conceptual art's 'growth'. Art is 'a purely logical enquiry' that gives the logical conditions by which a statement that an object whatsoever is 'art' can be nominated true or false.[61] Kosuth's idiosyncratic conjunction of pure

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[59] See Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971 [1936; 1946]). Kosuth here paraphrases Ayer: 'A proposition is analytic when its validity depends solely on the definitions of the symbols it contains, and synthetic when its validity is determined by the facts of experience.' Accordingly, 'Works of art are analytic propositions. That is, if viewed within their context – as art – they provide no information whatsoever about any matter of fact.' Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy', p. 20.

[60] Ibid. Italics in the original.

[61] Kosuth paraphrases Ayer: 'For the artist, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. He is concerned only with the way (1) in which art is capable of conceptual growth and (2) how his propositions are capable of logically following that growth. In other words, the

conceptualism and intentional designation affirms that art is by nature prior to its materialization – an *a priori* idea – and what shares with science and logic is their positivistic method,[62] yet its truth paradoxically relies on its nomination as such by the artist.

These contradictions and ambiguities have significant implications for art. The identification of the artwork with linguistic 'art-propositions', meaningful as such, amounts to the pure abstraction of art from any material, perceptual, and contextual reference. To depart entirely from any residues of modernist morphology and establish conceptual art's immateriality, Kosuth makes the strict distinction between a discredited 'stylistic' conceptualism, discernible in much work of his contemporaries – including the artists associated with him in Siegelaub's group – and a 'purer' one, 'clearly conceptual in intent.'[63] The proposition for a purely conceptual ontology of art, nonetheless, suffers from the contradiction between the status of the artwork as a self-contained linguistic tautology, completely independent from context for its meaningfulness and validity, and the assertion that the work attains such a status only when presented in the context of art. Kosuth, however, neutralizes the context to achieve its purity and prioritizes the new ontological task of the artist to produce works-as-tautologies, legitimizing thereby the artistic authority in meaning-making and assigning artistic status.[64]

The emphasis on the conceptual intention of the artist affects the relation of art to critical discourse. Since art is primarily an inquiry into what art is, works of art as analytic propositions replace analytic philosophy and integrate the function of art criticism. Kosuth specified that his 'idea of art' includes not only his analytic propositions-qua-artworks, but also his 'activities in the production of any meaning in relation to art' such as articles, lectures, teaching, interviews, symposia, panel discussions, and statements. Art becomes the product of the artist's 'total signifying

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propositions of art are not factual, but linguistic in *character* […] they express definitions of art, or the formal consequences of definitions of art.' Ibid., pp. 20-21. Italics in the original.

[62] Kosuth writes: 'To repeat, what art has in common with logic and mathematics is that it is a tautology, i.e., the "art idea" (or "work") and art are the same and can be appreciated as art without going outside the context of art for verification.' Ibid., p. 21.

[63] See the second part of 'Art after Philosophy', entitled '"Conceptual Art" and Recent Art', pp. 25-30 (esp. 25-26). The dismissive conceptualism includes the artists associated with Kosuth in Siegelaub's *January Show*, while its 'pure' form includes himself, early Art & Language (Terry Atkinson and Michael Baldwin), On Kawara, and Christine Kozlov, among others.

[64] Kosuth's remark in his interview to Siegel is revealing: 'But even if you can't invent new forms you can invent new meanings. I think that's really what an artist does.' Kosuth, 'Joseph Kosuth: Art as Idea as Idea', in Siegel, p. 222.

activity'.[65] A new concept and image of the artist as theorist and intellectual thinker emerges, which continues up to today. In a parallel shift, Siegelaub eliminated external explicatory and critical discourse to turn the catalogue-exhibition into a container of art as 'primary information'.[66]

As early as 1969, Kosuth envisages art's future as 'a kind of philosophy by analogy' on the condition that art 'concerns itself only with art problems', so that 'its intellectual rigor … is equal in quality to the intensity of the best thinking of the past.'[67] Kosuth set out in his conceptual programme to negate the reductions of formalist modernism and ended up using its own methods to reach ultimately a conceptual formalism. His turn to logical positivism, as the immanent investigation of the logical operations of language itself, in order to achieve the self-sufficient abstraction of art suggests methodological affinities with Greenberg's Modernism as an immanent Kantian self-criticism.[68] Kosuth himself later acknowledged that his proposal for art as tautology was 'quintessentially modern'.[69] In this respect, the purported radicalism of 'Art as Idea as Idea' appears to continue as another version Greenberg's transcendental modernist project inasmuch as Kosuth also seeks for the *a priori* conditions of art, only to find them in the conceptual intention of the artist rather than in aesthetic feeling. This time the logic of modernist purification is pushed to its linguistic extreme that ultimately equalized art with philosophy.[70]

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[65] Ibid., p. 228. The effacement of the difference between art and theoretical discourse is pronounced by the British group Art & Language, proponents of analytical conceptualism and declarative nominalism like Kosuth, when they asked in the editorial introduction to the first issue of their journal *Art-Language* (May 1969): 'Can this editorial, in itself an attempt to evince some outlines as to what "conceptual art" is, come up for the count as a work of conceptual art?' 'Introduction', *Art-Language*, vol. 1, no. 1 (May 1969), pp. 1-10, repr. in Alberro and Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art*, pp. 98-104 (100).

[66] Gregory Battcock, in his review of the *January Show*, wrote: 'The works in the show are ideas that are not intended to be any more than ideas. […] Another thing about this show is that perhaps it isn't art and maybe it's art criticism … the painter and sculptor have been moving further and further away from art and in the end perhaps all that would remain is art criticism.' Gregory Battcock, 'Painting is Obsolete', *New York Free Press*, 23 January 1969, p. 7, quoted from extracts rerp. ibid., pp. 88-89 (89).

[67] Kosuth, in Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews' p. 147.

[68] Benjamin Buchloh criticized Kosuth that his 1969 conceptual programme continued and expanded modernism's positivist legacy with what he thought to be 'the most radical and advanced tools of that tradition: Wittgenstein's logical positivism and language philosophy.' He subjected the Wittgensteinian model of the language game and the Duchampian model of the readymade to the restrictions of a model of meaning centred on artistic intention and self-reflexivity, now recast in discursive, epistemological terms. Kosuth, Buchloh argues, contrary to his claim 'to displace the formalism of Greenberg and Fried, in fact updated modernism's project of self-reflexiveness', following the modernist tradition of '"empirico-transcendental" thought.' Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969', p. 124.

[69] Joseph Kosuth, 'Within the Context: Modernism and Critical Practice' (Ghent: Coupoure, 1977), repr. in Guercio, *Joseph Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and after*, pp. 153-167 (153).

[70] Kosuth famously proclaimed 'the end of philosophy and the beginning of art.' Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy', in Guercio, p. 14.

The resolutely anti-aesthetic programme of Kosuth raises questions about its validity and consistency, and more recently was used by Peter Osborne to claim that contemporary art is necessarily postconceptual and utilizes a post-aesthetic poetics.[71] However, Kosuth's attempt to replace the aesthetic existence of art with the immaterial concept and his deployment of information as art has significant implications as it is linked to certain socio-political drives. Consistent with the priority to the conceptual intention of the artist and the self-interrogating function of art, Kosuth disavows involvement to any further use of the work either as ephemera or collectible as irrelevant to art. In his statement to the *Attitudes* catalogue, he maintains:

> The new work is not connected with a precious object – it's accessible to as many people as are interested; it's non-decorative … it can be brought into the home or museum, but wasn't made with either in mind; it can be dealt with by being torn out of its publication and inserted into a notebook or stapled to the wall – or not torn out at all – but any such decision is unrelated to the art. My role as an artist ends with the work's publication.[72]

The statement implies the broader social implications of the functional value of art. The use of everyday, inexpensive materials, the fragmentation of the work, its insertion and reproducibility into non-art, mass-media formats intended to remove the aesthetic conventions that determined art's commodity value, and put art out of the control of the art institution in order to democratize it as a free activity, available to anyone.[73] Szeemann expresses succinctly this aspiration when he writes about

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[71] Peter Osborne argues that it is precisely the 'failure' of an absolute anti-aesthetic programme of the analytical, 'purely' Conceptual art, advocated by Kosuth (and Art & Language in Britain) in the period 1968-72, that demonstrated 'the ineliminability of the aesthetic as a *necessary*, though *radically insufficient*, component of the artwork.' The failure of the attempt to eliminate the aesthetic was actually a 'perverse artistic success' for it meant 'the victory of the "aesthetic remainder"' over strong conceptualism; that is, the recognition that all art requires some form of materialization/presentation, thereof conceptual art's 'own inevitable pictorialism'. He adds, however, this was ultimately a 'Pyrrhic victory', which marks the transition to a postconceptual art and accounts for the necessary conceptuality of the artwork, the 'strategic aesthetic use of aesthetic materials', and the privileged status of photography in contemporary art. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 49-50. Italics in the original.

[72] Kosuth, in Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form*, exh. cat., n.p.

[73] Later, in his response to the critique of Benjamin Buchloh, Kosuth explained: 'One goal of a work such as *The Second Investigation*, 1968, was to question the institutional forms of art. If the work that preceded this confronted the institutionalized form of authority of traditional art, this work pressed the point *out* of the gallery and museum and into the world using public media.' Joseph Kosuth,

Kosuth's contribution in the show: 'Everyone in Bern has a Kosuth without even knowing it. "Art works for everybody in local newspapers".'[74] The attempt to democratize art by escaping its aesthetic and institutional conditions and place it directly into life so as to justify its political stakes, nonetheless raises crucial questions of whether art itself actually reproduces, and becomes assimilated by, those capitalist mechanisms of the new information economies it sought to resist. In this sense, Kosuth's conceptual project has significant consequences for contemporary art's relation to theory and mass-media networks.

The egalitarian aspirations associated with the linguistic forms in art are evident also in Lawrence Weiner's work. In *Attitudes*, Weiner contributed *A 36" x 36" Removal to the Lathing or Support Wall of Plaster or Wallboard from a Wall* (1968), *(Statement 021, 1968)*. He visited Bern to implement the removal of the plaster in the stairway leading to the lower galleries, however it could have been made by anyone or not made at all since the work is located primarily in the idea, formulated as a linguistic statement (Fig. 2.10).[75] Weiner defined the operations of his practice in his famous 'Statement of Intent' (1968), which accompanies his works ever since its first publication in the *January Show*.[76] The statement – published in the *Attitudes* catalogue too – advances a kind of conceptualism in which art is equally valid, whether physically materialized or not; the materialization is an option left open equally to the artist and the beholder or 'receiver'. The acknowledgment of the artist or anyone else as equal parts in artistic production, the unprecedented activation of the

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'Intention(s)', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 78, no. 3 (September 1996), pp. 407-412, repr. in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, pp. 460-468 (note 3, 467). Italics in the original.

[74] Szeemann, 'How Does an Exhibition Come into Being?', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 248.
In 1969, Siegelaub made a similar comment in relation to his intention to change 'the idea of individual ownership of works of art', which becomes now 'a very passé', even 'impossible condition'. He claimed that 'Anybody can have four tear sheets of Joseph Kosuth's piece by just spending twenty cents on a newspaper.' Siegelaub, interviewed by Patricia Norvell, in Alberro and Norvell, p. 39.

[75] Weiner insists that his work is strictly about 'materials'. Nonetheless, he could not call himself 'a materialist' because he is 'primarily concerned with art', and the work's 'reason to be' goes beyond materials to something more general and conceptual in state, 'that something else being art.' Weiner, in Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews', p. 149.

[76] '1. The artist may construct the piece.
2. The piece may be fabricated.
3. The piece need not be built.
Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist, the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.'
Lawrence Weiner, in Seth Siegelaub, ed., *January 5-31, 1969*, exh. cat. (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969), n.p.
In 1970, Weiner somehow amplified his 'Statement of Intent': 'As to construction, please remember that as stated above there is no correct way to construct the piece as there is no incorrect way to construct it. If the piece is built it constitutes not how the piece looks but only how it could look.' Weiner, quoted in Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 74.

receiver by delegating to them the decision to materialize the work-qua-linguistic statement (usually in instruction form) anywhere, whenever, and in various forms sought to democratize the conditions of art by disclaiming artistic competence, subjective expressivity, and artistic authority. Importantly, insofar as the artwork – whose material is primarily linguistic – can be potentially dispersed in endless physical forms or not at all, and is equally valid whether performed, materially documented or communicated as a title, the aspiration is to remove the commodity value of its object quality and make art, Weiner claims, 'all freehold'. However, as egalitarian the idea of 'public freehold' may appeared, the work actually maintained an exclusive, exchange value through Weiner's distinction between 'public freehold' and 'private freehold', and the invention of a strategy to verify authenticity and prove ownership with the use of certificates. People who were interested in buying conceptual art could own and collect works with no material existence, despite the attempt to disengage art from its capitalist market operations.[77] The execution of the *Removal* in *Attitudes* makes one more aspect evident. Its installation into the gallery as a gesture of creative destruction draws attention to the relation of art to its institutional support system, and resonates with Szeemann's statement on the aspiration of new artists to collapse the operational framework of art.

Douglas Huebler deals with the work as a process of conceptual production completed through forms of documentation or 'secondary information' with the aim to eliminate artistic subjectivity and achieve more democratized forms of art communication and accessibility. His work exemplifies Szeemann's remark that 'conceptual art readily makes use of existing systems … to create its "works", and these eventually lead to new systems, which prevent all discussion of their starting-

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[77] Weiner explains the operation of his work in three possible conditions-choices, which are all equal to him, as follows: 'I want the art to be accessible. … the price becomes almost unimportant. […] So the pieces are published, the information is public, anybody that really is excited can make a reproduction. So in fact, the art is all freehold.' Nonetheless, he adds about the conditions of ownership: 'But for the people who really like to own something, once a month I build a piece that's freehold. I make a proper notification, and for the period that the piece is exhibited, anybody who wants it asks for it and is given a piece of typed paper like anybody else, and their names get listed in the records – if they choose it.' He also calls his contribution (twenty-five sheets of the same exact piece) in *The Xerox Book* 'a public freehold piece', but he crucially adds that 'then there's private freehold, which is where the only people that can own the piece are the people who ask for it when it's freehold.' Lawrence Weiner, interview to Patricia Norvell (June 3, 1969), in Alberro and Norvell, pp. 101-111 (104, 105). For a critical account of the relation of Conceptual art with the corporate world and the new breed of corporate collectors in the expanding information and new media market in the 1960s, see Alberro, 'Art, advertising, sign value', in *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, pp. 6-25.

points.'[78] Huebler contributed to *Attitudes* the *Duration Piece # 9* (1969), a work that involves time and space in its production and foregrounds the complementary role of documentation systems in art. Within a predetermined period of six weeks, a parcel that was sent to successive false addresses traced the line of approximately 10,000 miles across America from Berkeley, California to Hull, Massachusetts through the agency of the US Postal Service. Each time the parcel was returned as undeliverable, Heubler repackaged it in a slightly larger container and posted it on. In the catalogue, he submitted a description of the piece, accompanied by a signed, typewritten statement in which he explains that the statement together with the final container, all mail receipts, and a map with all the cities marked 'form the system of documentation that completes this work', and what was shown in the gallery was merely the documentation.[79]

What is striking in Huebler's practice is that an existing non-art system is used to document a process and so produce the work, which nonetheless exists separately from it. There is a split between 'primary' and 'secondary' information; however, Huebler explains, the idea that regulates the work requires the forms of documentation for the piece to be 'brought into its complete existence … in present time and space.'[80] The work itself consists of the idea of relationship, and the role of

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[78] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 226.
[79] Huebler describes *Duration Piece #*9 (1969), size: 10´045 miles (approximate), time: 42 days, location: Berkeley, Cal./Riverton, Utah/Ellsworth Nebraska/Alpha, Iowa/Tuscola, Michigan/Hull, Mass., as follows:
Site Sculpture Project
Duration Piece #9
Berkeley, California - Hull, Massachusetts

On January 9, 1969 a clear plastic box measuring 1´´ x 1´´ x 3/4´´ was enclosed within a slightly larger cardboard 4´´ container that was sent by registered mail to an address in Berkeley, California. Upon being returned as 'undeliverable' it was left altogether intact and enclosed within another slightly larger container and sent again as registered mail to Riverton, Utah - and once more returned to the sender as undeliverable. Similarly another container enclosing all previous containers was sent to Ellsworth, Nebraska; similarly to Alpha, Iowa; similarly to Tuscola, Michigan; similarly and finally to Hull, Massachusetts which accomplished the 'marking' of a line joining the two coasts of the United States during a period of six weeks of time.
That final container, all registered mail receipts, and a map join with this statement to form the system of documentation that completes this work.
January 1969
Douglas Huebler, in Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form*, exh. cat., n.p.
[80] Huebler's typewritten statement in the *Attitudes* catalogue reads:
'A system existing in the world disinterested in the purposes of art may be "plugged into" in such a way as to produce a work that possesses a separate existence and that neither changes nor comments on the system so used.
Duration Piece # 9 used an aspect of the United States Portal Service for six weeks to describe over 10,000 miles of space and was brought into its complete existence through forms of documentation that in fact "contain" sequential time and linear space in present time and space.

documentation is merely functional; it simply provides factual information for the awareness of the artwork, whose relations in time and place exceed immediate perceptual experience. The documents are 'not intended to be necessarily interesting ... *they* are not "art"' but serve to 'create a condition of absolute coexistence between "image" and "language"', Huebler maintains.[81] With the *Duration Piece*, Huebler rejects a fully present material object in favour of the temporality of process. He states, however, that although these works cannot be experienced as physical presence, they 'possess material substance' and can be 'totally experienced' through their documentation.[82] Moreover, the deployment of a predetermined system neutralizes the production process and allows art to develop as a self-generating structure independently from the artist's choices. As Heubler puts it: 'I like the idea that as I eat, sleep or play the work is moving towards its completion.'[83]

Robert Barry's practice provides the most literary example of the 'dematerialization' of art and the problem of making the audience aware of the existence of a piece that is not even perceptible and does not appear in the gallery. Following his series of *Carrier Wave*, *Radiation*, and *Inert Gas* pieces (1966-1969), Barry released a radioisotope, *Uranyl Nitrate (UO2 (NO3)2)* (1966-69), from the roof of the Kunsthalle (Fig. 2.11). The piece is typical of Barry's works, 'made of various kinds of energy', nonetheless he proclaims their materiality and particular form.[84] He even calls himself 'a materialist' in the sense that he does not impose a process onto his chosen material.[85] With the energy pieces, Barry provides a more nuanced understanding of 'dematerialization' than the strict opposition between objecthood and invisibility. He claims that his concern is to question the 'actual nature' of human perception and explore possibilities that open up new aspects of reality and expand the range of materiality.[86] He does not intend to obliterate the object, but rather

An inevitable destiny is set in motion by the specific process selected to form such a work freeing it from further decisions on my part.

I like the idea that as I eat, sleep or play the work is moving towards its completion.' Ibid.

[81] Douglas Huebler, in Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews', p. 143. Italics in the original.

[82] 'The material of a duration piece does disappear during the period of time that it is made. Nonetheless, it actually exists in present time through its documentation.' Ibid.

[83] Huebler, in Szeemann, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form*, exh. cat., n.p.

[84] Robert Barry, in Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews', p. 141.

[85] Robert Barry, 'Interview with Patricia Norvell', 30 May 1969, in Alberro and Norvell, pp. 86-100 (99).

[86] Barry, in Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews', pp. 141-142.

'producing a different kind of object … just expanding the definition.'[87] Yet invisibility raises 'fundamental problems' regarding the existence of an artwork, 'how much has to be known about a work of art, before it does exist', creating in turn the presentation and documentation issue.[88] Barry differentiates '*making*' from '*presenting*', and explains that his intention is to start with 'the idea of *no* presentation' and then move to 'the *least* amount of presentation' such as a sticker in the gallery wall with a brief descriptive title that makes the presentation 'as impersonal as possible.'[89] Despite the primacy in making and the intention to circumvent presentation altogether, Barry is aware that if the existence of the work has to be made known as art, it relies on the art context, no matter how minimal and neutral the means of presentation.[90] Rather, the imperceptible nature of the work emphasizes its dependence on the art context and the role of secondary information in making its presence known to the viewer, either in exhibition wall labels or in the catalogue alone. The latter was the case in *Attitudes*, where the act of emitting gas was not indicated anywhere in the gallery, only in the catalogue.

Conceptual art evidently appears as a field of divergent tendencies. The shared aspiration to discard the art object amounts to varying degrees of conceptualism and relations between art and its form of presentation, even in Siegelaub's small but influential group. Either the concept of art as such is exclusively and philosophically prioritized, claiming the eradication of the material object and its replacing with the 'pure' idea (Kosuth) or the primacy accorded to idea is not necessarily conflated with the abolition of physical existence, even when the work is invisible or dispenses with the need of fabrication; instead, it allows for the expansion of materials and making processes of art into an anything at all condition, which nonetheless maintains the importance of 'secondary information' as documentation (Huebler and Weiner; Barry inhabits an in-between space).[91]

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[87] Robert Barry, 'Interview with Ursula Meyer', in Ursula Meyer, ed., *Conceptual Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), pp. 35-41 (36).
[88] Barry, 'Interview with Patricia Norvell', in Alberro and Norvell, p. 86.
[89] Ibid., pp. 87, 90. Italics in the original.
[90] He explains it succinctly to Arthur R. Rose with regard to his participation to the *January Show*: 'By just being in this show, I'm making known the existence of the work. I'm presenting these things in an artistic situation using the space and the catalogue.' Barry, in Rose [pseud.], 'Four Interviews', p. 142.
[91] Kosuth is dismissive of the conceptual work of Huebler, Barry, and Weiner for their adherence to materialism unlike a purer version of Conceptual art. He claims that Huebler only superficially relates to 'Conceptual art' since the existence of his work relies on its documentation. The work of Barry and Weiner has taken on 'a "Conceptual Art" association almost by accident' because for them 'the "path" to conceptual art came via decisions related to choices of materials and processes.' In particular,

The various levels of conceptualism in *Attitudes* are further attested with the inclusion in the galleries left to the entrance hall of conceptual works that followed a Postminimalist, serial approach. Among others, Hanne Darboven's numerical *Six Books on 1968* (1968) were displayed in vitrines, and Mel Bochner's *Thirteen Sheets of 8 ½´´ Graph Paper* (1969) were pinned to the wall. Bochner had merely submitted a typed letter to Szeemann with instructions and a diagram – both in the catalogue alone – for thirteen sheets of unmarked typing paper to be stapled or pinned to the wall by the curator. The adjacent room included Carl Andre's *Steel Piece* (1968) on the floor and ephemeral, wall-mounted works such as a string installation by Fred Sandback, Robert Ryman's paper sheets, and Sol LeWitt's *Wall Drawings* (1969); the latter was drawn on the wall by the artist Markus Raetz according to an annotated drawing sent by LeWitt and reproduced in the catalogue (Fig. 2.12-2.13). As noted in the previous chapter, Szeemann was sceptical about the inclusion of Andre and LeWitt due to their minimalist affinities. He considered however their participation as important for demonstrating the inclusivity of the show and the primacy of process in art-making. LeWitt's presence is particularly significant because he represents a kind of 'proto-Conceptualist Minimalism',[92] which stresses a conceptual structure of numerical and linguistic operations through which the material work is produced.

In 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' (1967), LeWitt characterized his own work as 'conceptual art', while the opening sentences of the text provided a kind of defining statement for Conceptual art upon which Lippard and Chandler's account of dematerialization was largely based. 'In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work', LeWitt claims, meaning that 'all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.'[93] Although LeWitt prioritizes the ideational aspect of artistic production, he cautiously disconnects Conceptual art from strong intellectualism, the illustration of theories and systems of philosophy, declaring

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Barry's work 'seems to exist conceptually only because the material is invisible', however his art 'does have a physical state' in contrast to work which 'only exists conceptually', and Weiner is concerned with 'specific materials and processes', although he proclaimed that fabrication is not necessary. Kosuth, 'Art after Philosophy', in Guercio, pp.26-27.

[92] The term is used by Peter Osborne to characterize the transitional role of LeWitt in comparison to later, more exclusively logico-linguistic forms of conceptualism. Osborne, 'Conceptual Art and/as Philosophy', p. 54.

[93] Sol LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art', *Artforum*, vol. 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967), pp. 79-84, repr. in Alberro and Stimson, *Conceptual Art*, pp. 12-16 (12).

instead its 'intuitive' character.[94] In contrast to Kosuth's logico-analytical process, LeWitt maintains that ideas are 'discovered by intuition' and 'need not be complex', but only 'interesting'.[95] While the idea of the work is valorized over its formal appearance, which is of little importance, LeWitt insists on 'the process of conception and realization', the materialization of the work as significant condition of its existence.[96] He acclaims the significance of 'the thought process of the artist' so that 'all the intervening steps' that show it are 'sometimes more interesting than the final product.'[97]

In this mode of conceptual practice, the idea provides the perfunctory structure for the materialization of the work, yet conception and execution are separated as LeWitt's contribution in *Attitudes* makes evident. The work operates according to an initially framed idea by the artist following a quasi-scientific structure of permutations of individual units or written instructions. As such, the artist is detached from the work, which merely actualizes a conceptual process. For all his apparent formalism, LeWitt insists on the anti-rationalistic, even 'mystical' character of Conceptual art.[98] By retaining the material object and positing the conceptual framework as the mechanism through which the work is produced and attains its meaning, LeWitt exerted great influence on many contemporary artistic and curatorial practices.

IV. Szeemann's expansive materialism and inclusive conceptualism

'I had no concept, I had only my intuition'

The conceptual shift in art appears, therefore, diverse and contested regarding the role of idea and the elimination of physical form. The divergent tendencies reveal the ambiguity of the term 'dematerialization' and its contested relations to materiality.

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[94] Ibid., pp. 12, 14.
[95] Ibid., p. 13.
[96] 'What the work of art looks like isn't too important. It has to look like something if it has physical form. No matter what form it may finally have it must begin with an idea. It is the process of conception and realization with which the artist is concerned.' Ibid.
[97] Ibid. p. 14.
[98] '1– Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.
2 – Rational judgements repeat rational judgements.
3 – Illogical judgements lead to new experience.'
Sol LeWitt, 'Sentences on Conceptual Art', *0-9*, no. 5 (January 1969), pp. 3-5, repr. in Alberro and Stimson, eds, *Conceptual Art*, pp. 106-108 (106).

For all his emphasis that the artists presented in *Attitudes* are no object-makers and the echoes of Lippard and Chandler's essay in his catalogue text, Szeemann did not endorse the possibility of the withdrawal of the object spelled out by the writers. As the exhibition and the catalogue attest, 'dematerialization' did not result in the obsolescence of the material object and the elimination of physical existence, but produced instead various forms of documentation that served as the record of an art of ideas. In fact, 'dematerialization' dispensed with the wholeness and unity of the aesthetic object. It shifted from fully-present, autonomous, and materially-cohesive means of representation to the presentation of material residues and the documentation of an idea-driven art, whose dispersed relations of production, distribution, and reception need not to be necessarily substantiated in fixed time-space conditions to constitute the totality of the work. In a broader sense, 'dematerialization' refers to the redefinition of the role of the object in questioning the conditions of art-making, distribution, and perception as a strategy that best served the expansive openness of art into the world with further socio-political implications.[99] In this regard, literal 'dematerialization' of the art object is not possible, even in such cases as Barry's invisible work. The term had already raised criticism among artists,[100] and, as Lippard herself in hindsight admitted, is an 'inaccurate term' that needs to be understood as the 'deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness)'; she, accordingly, recognized the aesthetic contribution and critical significance of an idea art, which 'parallels (rather than replaces or is succeeded by) the decorative object.'[101]

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[99] For an understanding of 'dematerialization', beyond a restricted formalist reading, as a strategic move that made art-making 'more adaptable to the interests of merging art and daily life' as well as serving certain political aims, see 'Foreword', Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver, and Rachel Weiss, eds, *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*, exh. cat. (Queens Museum of Art, New York: 1999), p. viii.

[100] Among the first who criticized the term was Terry Atkinson of the English group Art & Language. In a letter-essay (23 March 1968), written in response to Lippard and Chandler's essay, Atkinson pointed out the crucial distinction between dematerializing the art object and dealing entirely with ideas, not even applicable to the need to record the idea. He contended that, with few exceptions, the 'art-works (ideas)' referred to in the article are 'art-objects. They may not be an art-object as we know it in its traditional matter-state, but they are nevertheless matter in one of its forms, either solid-state, gas-state, liquid-state.' Terry Atkinson, 'Concerning the Article "The Dematerialization of art"' (23 March 1968), excerpts publ. in Lippard, *Six Years*, pp. 43-44 (43).

[101] In 1973, Lippard writes in the 'Preface' of her edition about 'the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972': '… since I first wrote on the subject in 1967, it has often been pointed out to me that dematerialization is an inaccurate term, that a piece of paper or a photograph is as much an object, or as 'material', as a ton of lead. … But for lack of a better term, I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a deemphasis on material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative attractiveness).' In the 'Postface' of the same edition, she reflects on the contribution of conceptual art:

Despite the currency of the term in providing a common language through which a range of loosely defined practices, critical of Modernist aesthetics, would be understood at the time, Szeemann did not put the show under the rubric of 'dematerialization' to avoid its restrictions, aesthetic reductions, and implied negativity. Instead, he heralds the 'freedom from the object' as a means to 'deepen' the levels of its meaning and 'reveal the meaning of those levels beyond the object.'[102] The depth and breadth of objecthood Szeemann points to, linked with the presentation of 'no object-making', reveals an approach of expansive materiality and inclusive conceptualism that avoids strict divisions regarding material presence. Rather the radicalism of new art tendencies lies in making available the possibility to 'produce a work or just imagine it' without opposing one condition to the other in the show.[103] The issue, for Szeemann, is not how to eliminate the aesthetic dimension of the work, but how to effectively deal with and reimagine the play between its aesthetic and conceptual aspects. In this regard, Szeemann was actually close to many Conceptual artists exposing his interest in the impact of conceptual processes on material practices and their intersection into a new kind of work, which was addressed to thought processes but nonetheless utilized objects and various materials to actualize them. Unlike Siegelaub's more exclusive and polemic approach, Szeemann does not champion Conceptual art over other art practices, and accommodates both the 'information' in the catalogue and the materiality of the art object or its material residues in the gallery without entirely substituting the visual display and its experience in space with the objectless catalogue of 'primary information'. In this respect, *Attitudes* is not 'an exhibition *about* Conceptual art' as it is often, in retrospect, restrictively presented.[104] The integration of conceptual forms of art with the diversity of practices which de-emphasized the role of the object and expanded the possibilities of art suggests that the radicalism of 'conceptual art' in *Attitudes* needs to

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'An informational, documentary idiom has provided a vehicle for art ideas that were encumbered and obscured by formal considerations. It has become obvious that there is a place for an art which parallels (rather than replaces or is succeeded by) the decorative object, or perhaps still more important, sets up new critical criteria by which to view and vitalize itself.' Lippard,, *Six Years*, pp. 5, 263.

[102] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 226.

[103] See above note 6.

[104] See Alison M. Green, 'When Attitudes Become Form and the Contest over Conceptual Art's History', in Michael Corris, ed., *Conceptual Art: Theory, Myth, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 123-143 (127). Italics in the original. In her account, Green argues that *Attitudes* offers an inclusive interpretation of the late-1960s art that significantly differs from contemporary accounts of many art historians and theorists on the history and radicalism of Conceptual art.

be seen within the broader notion of an attitudinal or gestural conceptualism with materialist adherence rather than the restrictive notion of 'dematerialization'.[105]

It is from this viewpoint that the predicament of the non-exhibitable gesture that formed Szeemann's idea for the show in a first place should be seen. The gesture is a third element that resides in the area between the visual object and the idea, neither fully visual and material nor fully conceptual and immaterial, neither entirely aesthetic nor utterly anti-aesthetic. It is rather linked to an indeterminate territory of expressive attitudes and can only be experienced as the immediate process of its actualization, of which only material traces and residues are exhibited such as Dibbets's table, Serra's lead on the wall, the holes in the pavement after Heizer's demolition, or whatever form the gesture is extended to. It resides in both the immaterial and material components of artistic production to the extent that actualizes an unbounded territory of the 'possible' – those non-visible and non-verbal levels beyond the object's visual form, Szeemann refers to – and thus keeps the physical, material, aesthetic, and ideational elements in art-making and its exhibition in play. In his catalogue text, Szeemann links the gesture to the indispensable vitality of process, and identifies the significance of the new art tendencies with the task of giving 'form' to 'the "nature of art and artists" in terms of a natural process.'[106] This means that, for Szeemann, the experience of natural processes as the manifestation of inner attitudes and gestures is far more important, and no less radical, for the state of art than Siegelaub's assertion of art as 'primary information'. Szeemann exposes a more curatorial understanding of 'information' that remains tied to the documentary mediation of the work than to the nature of art as such. This is evident in the way he explains his practice during the Kunsthalle years as the combination of two approaches: the focus on the quality of the object and the value of its experience but also on ideas and information – taken from curators Georg Schmidt and William Sandberg respectively – to achieve what he calls a 'selective information and/or informative selection'. As he states, 'I took both connoisseurship and the

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[105] For the distinction between Conceptual art and conceptualism, see the definitions offered by the curators of the exhibition *Global Conceptualism* (1999) that in a sense echoes the inclusive approach in *Attitudes*: '*conceptual art* as a term used to denote an essentially formalist practice developed in the wake of minimalism', whereas '*conceptualism* was a broader attitudinal expression that summarized a wide array of works and practices which, in radically reducing the role of the art object, reimagined the possibilities of art vis-à-vis the social, political and economic realities within which it was being made.' Camnitzer, Farver, and Weiss, 'Foreword', *Global Conceptualism*, p. viii. Italics in the original.
[106] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 226.

dissemination of pure information into account and transformed both. That's the foundation of my work.'[107]

The statement is itself telling. Szeemann certainly draws on idea and information, yet not to the point of disregarding the experience of the aesthetic object. His reliance on the object, despite the post-object direction of the show, is criticized by Piero Gilardi for ideological reasons:

> Szeemann's vision was *not* that of cancelling out the object – of transforming nature – but the condensation of ideology into an aesthetic icon, and he was still interested in showing the whole supporting process of the artwork's creation and its maintenance. That's because he, as a museum man, needed a final object.[108]

According to Gilardi, Szeemann's purported radicalism did not go as far as to reject the materiality of the object and the support of the institutional frame in favour of the conceptual transformation of art. When Szeemann was later asked about 'the concept behind' the show and the controversy with Gilardi, he replied:

> My task was to make an exhibition – it's my medium of expression – and through it offer a new type of exhibition – a laboratory of attitudes, concepts, information, processes, and works. It was not about a difference in concepts. I had no concept, I had only my intuition.

On this basis, he states that he is 'not so interested in academic differences', and calls himself 'a naïve guy who wants … to give things the breadth they need.'[109]

Szeemann evidently advocates an intuitive, materialist approach dismissive of strong intellectualism and academicism. His breadth of approach, the emphasis on an intuitive idea as the mechanism through which the work is actualized, and the maintenance of material form that encompasses the stages of the thinking and making process appear close to LeWitt's anti-rationalist processual conceptualism. Some

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[107] Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, p. 84.

[108] Piero Gilardi, 'Temporary Artistic Communities: Piero Gilardi in Conversation with Francesco Manacorda', 8 November 2008, trans. Amanda Coulson, in Christian Rattemeyer and others, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, *Afterall* Exhibition Histories series (London: Afterall, 2010), pp. 230-238 (237). Italics in the original.

[109] Szeemann in Žerovc, pp. 31-32.

initial conditions are set by the artist or the curator's idea, but at the same time a process emerges that allows the work to generate on its own. As the above quotation shows, Szeemann's approach crucially differs from conceptual attempts to neutralize artistic subjectivity, particularly Siegelaub's commitment to standardize the production of art and neutralize the presentation in the name of the intrinsic art idea. Szeemann maintains a strong interest in subjective expression in the name of attitudes, primary experiences and natural processes. While both Szeemann and Siegelaub engage with the problem of how to present the immaterial aspect of art, their approach differs. Whereas Siegelaub separates the idea-art from its form of presentation assigning the exhibit the role of 'secondary information', Szeemann's emphasis on the vitality and visibility of the experiential process seeks to reduce, but not to efface, the gap between the immaterial idea and the material form, and so neither fully endorses conventional object-making nor an exclusively conceptual practice. What gives *Attitudes* its unique 'exhibition style' and differentiates it from contemporaneous shows of the new art practices is the way in which it brings together material-based, process-based, and conceptual forms through a poetics of 'structured chaos' that does not efface differences to subject them under the regulation of a concept or formal style but keeps them indeterminate, that is, free in play.

'The ideal mixture of action and thought'

Even Lippard and Chandler, who warned about the aesthetic ramifications of the tendency towards an 'ultra-conceptual art', also pointed to another possibility of performative art practices. 'The visual arts at the moment seem to hover at a crossroad that may well turn out to be two roads to one place', they remark, 'though they appear to have come from two sources: art as idea and art as action. […] in the second case, matter has been transformed into energy and time-motion.'[110] In my view, by encompassing art-as-energetic matter, material process, and art-as-idea, *Attitudes* demonstrates the convergence of these 'two roads to one place'. Szeemann's emphasis on attitudes, gestures, and processes as the new compositional elements in art reveals an interest in the poetics of materialist thinking and a performative mode of production that allows for a new figure of the artist and the exhibition-maker to

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[110] Lippard and Chandler, 'The Dematerialization of Art', in Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 43.

emerge: neither merely an object-maker nor an analyst or intellectualist, but what he calls a 'full-blooded' artist as 'the ideal mixture of action and thought' of which he considers Richard Serra as exemplary. It is striking that in the question of whether 'there are also full-blooded curators', Szeemann explicitly states: '… in my case, I would say yes.'[111] Szeemann aligns his own attitude to the artistic ones and puts the exhibition on the same expressive-experiential level with art-making. He, admittedly, sees himself 'functioning more as an artist, without being an artist – one who has chosen the exhibition as his medium of expression', and specifies that this is 'a different way of thinking'.[112]

In this respect, the initial challenge of how to exhibit gestures indeed found its resolution into 'a mixture of action and thought': a kind of presentation that confounds established viewing conditions and keeps its various components – 'works' in the gallery; 'concepts' and 'information' in the catalogue; 'processes' and 'situations' in the making of art, the installation of the exhibition, happenings and performances in the gallery – in tension.[113] From its inception to display and co-ordinated documentation, the exhibition evolves with a marked element of performativity that, in certain ways, reflects Szeemann's background in theatre.[114] Szeemann 'exhibits' the exhibition itself as a major gesture, activated by individual attitudes as the central organizing force in artistic production. Inasmuch as attitudes reside in the process of making and characterize a performative-based art that can be material-based and/or conceptual, the exhibition takes on a wide scope which gives it its vitality and significance as both an unconventional survey of the art of the time and a premonition of the future. It accommodates practices that are continuous with the more traditional aesthetic aspects of expression, materiality, spatial and perceptual experience and includes the more progressive elements of historical modernism such as action, gesture, process, anti-rationalism along with the new practices that emerged from the critical reaction to it – anti-form, conceptualism, dispersion of unity, bodily

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[111] Szeemann in Žerovc, pp. 36, 37.

[112] Ibid., p. 32.

[113] Among the performances were Gilberto Zorio's, *Trasciniamo un po' di…* ['Let's drag a little'], 1969; Franz Erhard Walther's, *Werksatz* ['Work Sentence'], 1963–1968 with the participation of Seth Siegelaub, among others; and James Lee Byars's, *Two in a Hat (Fictions Doctor Degree)*, 1969, performed by Anny De Decker and Kasper König.

[114] Szeemann, during his studies in Art History, had invented and run a 'one-man theater' in Bern and Paris in the 1950s. He was doing everything by himself – acting, music, costumes, set design – following his ambition 'to realize a Gesamtkunstwerk'. Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, p. 81.

movement, interaction, temporality, installation, site-specificity, the increased use of language, photography and documentation, the insertion of art into the mass-media networks – arriving thereby at the most intensive accounts of the art of the time. This 'style' of inclusiveness and the intensity of experience it offers is what marks the radicalism and 'modern-contemporaneity' of *Attitudes*.[115]

V. Attitudes - Individual mythologies – Obsessions - Intensive intentions

It is precisely the energy of action and the intensity of experience that contemporary remakings of the show, as discussed in the previous chapter, lack turning Szeemann's 'laboratory' into a static, at times nostalgic, 'readymade' and analytical tool of interpretation. According to Miuccia Prada, the drive behind the Fondazione Prada reconstruction was the desire to

> recreate the emotion and passion which one perceives in the original photos from 1969 [...] to understand whether what used to be political art still is, and to reflect on whether and how art can be political and disruptive today.[116]

Remaking attempts tend to be more information, more commentary and meaning-construction than experience, missing most notably the 'Live in Your Head' directive of the second subtitle of the show, which in a way encapsulates its more visionary dimension: the belief in the power of imagination, mental processes and speculative ideas, the defiance of rational limits and classifications, overall the immaterial aspect of creation as it is linked to the claim for liberated life and artistic self-proclamation (Fig. 2.14).[117] These elements, rooted in *Attitudes*, constitute Szeemann's practice

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[115] Szeemann repeatedly emphasizes 'intensity' as the key element in the show's lasting legacy, and was aware of his role in exhibition history: 'And why is it, actually, that you are still talking about *Attitudes*? Because it was intense, and only what is intense remains in the memory.' […] 'I'm for a society without classes: but I have to admit at least two: the ones who saw my shows, and the ones who didn't. And now there is a third class: the ones who didn't see my shows but still talk about them.' Szeemann, in Žerovc, pp. 32, 37.

[116] Miuccia Prada, President of the Fondazione Prada, 'Introduction', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), n.p.

[117] On this subject, see the critical reviews of the Fondazione Prada reconstruction by Thomas Crow, 'Head Trip: Thomas Crow on "When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013"', *Artforum*, vol. 52, no. 1 (September 2013), pp. 320-325, 432. Also Charles Esche, 'A Different Setting Changes Everything', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), pp. 469-482.

hereafter and open up a trajectory in exhibition-making that privileges expression and the intensity of experience of the creative process without overlooking the ideational aspect. Unlike the restrictively exclusive New York Conceptual art and its questionable attempt to escape the reification of art as commodity and collectible material object through the elimination of sensation and the exodus from art's institutional support, Szeemann suggests a broader conceptualism that historically goes through Fluxus, Happenings, Arte Povera, even the Viennese Actionists.

This is most apparent in Szeemann's attempt to continue and further radicalize the *Attitudes* experience after his resignation of the Kunsthalle Bern directorship – due to the dispute over the show – and the foundation of his *Agency for Spiritual Guestwork* (October 1969) so as to work independently in a 'Live in Your Head' spirit.[118] Szeemann invented the contemporary understanding of the freelance, nomadic curator who works on demand organizing 'signed' exhibitions in hosting institutions and venues, and identified his role as 'exhibition-maker' (*Ausstellungsmacher*). As he explains in a 1972 interview, his aim was to pursue exhibition-making 'in the purest possible way' by eschewing traditional museum tasks and to 'attack the spirit of ownership', tied to the notion of art as object and end result, with 'free action' by participating in 'a kind of art that depended entirely on the moment of the experience.'[119] Accordingly, his following exhibition *Happening & Fluxus*, at Cologne Kunstverein, 6 November 1970 – 6 January 1971, traced the

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[118] Szeemann broke away from the Kunsthalle in the summer of 1969, after the scandal *Attitudes* had caused in Bern. The city government was involved in it and the decision was made that hereafter the exhibition committee, which was comprised mainly by the local artists, would dictate Kunsthalle's exhibiting programme. After the rejection of the planned solo shows of Edward Kienholz and Joseph Beuys, Szeemann founded the *Agentur für geistige Gastarbeit* (Agency for Spiritual/Intellectual Guestwork) on 1st October 1969. By conceiving the curator as 'Gastarbeiter', in the double meaning of the term in German as temporary guest and foreign worker, Szeemann expressed his political solidarity to immigrant workers in Switzerland that at the time were seen with growing hostility – Szeemann himself was subject to it because of his Hungarian name – and at the same time invented the new role of independent curator as 'service provider'. See Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, p. 88.

[119] Szeemann quoted from an interview to Yann Pavie, *Opus International*, no. 36 (June 1972), p. 39, in Florence Derieux, ed., *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zurich and Grenoble: JRP|Ringier and Le Magasin – Centre National d'Art Contemporain, 2007), p. 65.

In founding the Agency, Szeemann has repeatedly expressed an affinity with the 1968 spirit and neo-avant-garde practices such as Happenings and Fluxus. The ideological motives behind the Agency are evident in its initial slogan 'Replace ownership with free actions', and the idea of creating an anonymous collective for its operations. However, by the end of 1970, this motto was modified to the more pragmatic 'From vision to nail' since, Szeemann explains, the public required 'signed' exhibitions identifiable with 'the individual profile of the exhibition maker.' Hereafter, he clearly describes his job as *Ausstellungsmacher* ('exhibition maker'), extending his tasks from conceptualization to installation, and the Agency develops as a 'one-man enterprise', a kind of self-institutionalization for the production of subjectively signed exhibitions. See Urs and Rös Graf, 'The Agency for Intellectual Guest Labour: Interview with Harald Szeemann, December 28, 1970 (first version)', in Derieux, pp. 83-90 (83). Also Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, p. 88.

history of process-oriented and non-object art forms with the presentation of the predecessors of the art presented in *Attitudes* up to current practices such as the Vienna Actionists. The show developed in a 'three-part structure' of documentation, personal presentations, and a three-day Event of actions, happenings and performances.[120] Following the *Attitudes* approach, Szeemann avoided strict demarcations, and presented process and event art as 'a "third force" relative both to traditional art, which continued on its usual way, and objectal art, which had expanded enormously during the 1960s.'[121]

The experience of *Attitudes* is more ambitiously pursued in the context of an international exhibition after Szeemann's appointment in early 1970 as General Secretary of the fifth Documenta (D5, 1972) in Kassel due to his reputation for experimental activity in Bern and the recognition of *Attitudes* as a progressive presentation of international contemporary art.[122] A detailed presentation of the watershed character of D5 exceeds the scope of this chapter. It suffices to stress the radical introduction of process-oriented forms of art and art-as-individual expression into a large-scale exhibition devoted to the survey of contemporary art, all the more within an artworld preoccupied with questions about the social function of art and the critical role of the artist in the aftermath of the 1960s. Having distanced himself from academic conceptualism, Szeemann recalls: 'After the summer of 1968, theorizing in the art world was the order of the day, and it shocked people when I put a stop to all

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[120] The show was organized in a controversial collaboration with the Happenings artist Wolf Vostell and the support of the collector Hans Sohm; the latter had provided the archival printed material for the long 'Documentation Path' in the large hall that traced the history of Happenings and Fluxus since 1959. Vostell was interested in consolidating the Actionist art by associating the tradition of Happenings with the political protests in the second half of 1960s, and favoured artists whose actions were more socially relevant. Szeemann, on the other hand, was more interested in the free artistic self-projection that made 'All kinds of gestures … possible' in the show. He, thus, invited the Viennese Actionists against Vostell's will in order to 'add some spice to what was in danger of becoming a reunion of veterans. It was the first public appearance of the Viennese and they took full advantage of the opportunity.' Ibid. pp. 89-90.

[121] Szeemann in interview to Urs and Rös Graf, in Derieux, p. 88.

[122] *documenta 5: Befragung des Realität, Bildwelten Heute* (*Questioning Reality-Image Worlds Today*), Museum Fridericianum and Neue Galerie, Kassel, Germany, 30 June – 8 October 1972. The appointment of Szeemann as General Secretary constitutes a significant structural change in the history of Documenta. Up to D4, the exhibition was run by Arnold Bode and a twenty-four member Documenta Council. With a single delegation to an artistic director for the first time, Szeemann gained autonomy from the board allowing him to express his own vision and work with a curatorial team of advisors in the conceptual formation of the show, while delegating the curatorship of the various sections of D5 to invited collaborators. This administrative change was retained for future Documenta with the title position changing into 'Artistic Director'. Szeemann had variously connected his title as General Secretary with that of 'the head of the communist party or the United Nations' (Szeemann in Žerovc, p. 37), or the ultimately failed attempt to 'include the East, the realism from the Soviet Union and China', and so to extend the political relevance of the Realist section beyond the American Photorealists. Szeemann quoted in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 322.

the Hegelian and Marxist discussions.'[123] He conceived Documenta as a radical '100 Day Event', unlike the prevalent '100 Day Museum', with the aim to present the process-oriented art that was excluded from the previous *Documenta 4* (1968). The latter's failing to present the most recent art developments had informed Szeemann's inclusive approach in *Attitudes*.[124] In his initial proposal for D5, Szeemann envisioned a themed show as an activity centre and interactive space, a process of programmed events that incorporates its audience and transforms the city into a real studio rather than 'a place for a static accumulation of objects' associated with object acquisition and material property.[125] However, due to the failure of the controversial *Happening & Fluxus* and budget concerns, Szeemann admitted that a purely event show 'involved too great a risk of total fiasco', and he shifted from the event-structured to the thematic exhibition.[126]

Documenta was modified as a conceptually-structured show on the theme *Questioning Reality-Image Worlds Today*, co-authored by the curator Jean-Christophe Ammann and the philosopher Bazon Brock. It investigated the relations between reality and mediated reality (representation) within the contemporary context of a larger inquiry about the socio-political relevance of critical art and the current trend to

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[123] Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, p. 91.

[124] *Documenta 4* (1968), curated by the Dutch architect Jean Leering, deviated from the domination of abstract art in Documenta since its inception in 1955. It exhibited Minimal art, Environmental Art, Color Field Painting, and Pop art as the current trends in art. There was criticism by Wolf Vostell and protests at the opening of the show for the exclusion of Happenings and Fluxus artists, whose ephemeral, non-object forms of art were more in line with the recent tendency to exceed the commodification of art. The presentation of such recent developments caused discord within the Documenta Council, in which Bode advocated the contemporary openness of Documenta and supported the invitation of Szeemann for D5. In various interviews, Szeemann explicitly states that he had taken the failures of the previous year D4 as a reference point for *Attitudes*. See Szeemann in Žerovc, p. 37; Harald Szeemann, interviewed by Carolee Thea, 'Here Time Becomes Space: A Conversation with Harald Szeemann', *Sculpture Magazine*, vol. 20, no. 5 (June 2001), n.p. <http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag01/june01/bien/bien.shtml> [accessed 30 January 2015].

[125] The proposal was submitted in May 1970 and included the investigation of thematic presentations on recent tendencies in visual arts, new media and new technologies, the artist's social role, art's social space outside the usual circuit of studio/gallery/museum/collection, and the mediation of art. The commitment to the event-structure of the exhibition and the association of art with the cultural movements in the late-1960s are reflected in the inclusion of the theme of 'the street' as 'site of encounters, as space of action and demonstration, as an aesthetic situation' in Kassel's Auepark. See Harald Szeemann, 'Initial Concept for documenta 5', repr. in Derieux, pp. 93-94 [first publ. as Harald Szeemann, '1. Konzept zur documenta 5, Mai 1970', *Informationen*, no. 9 (May-June 1970)].

[126] *Happening & Fluxus* had caused a scandal and public debates particularly against the exhibits and actions by Otto Mühl and Hermann Nitsch, which were considered as anti-social and offensive, and the Cologne Kunstverein removed their displays. Also, when the Veterinary Institute of Cologne did not allow Vostell to let a cow give birth in the Kustverein for a Happening, he threatened to boycott the opening of the show, and asked for solidarity among the participants. See Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, p. 90; Szeemann in interview to Urs and Rös Graf, in Derieux, p. 88.

semiotics.[127] The show traced the relationship of visual forms of expression (artistic and non-artistic) to the various concepts of reality that formulated them through its division into merging thematic sections, organized by different curators. As such, it allowed for a broad overview of representational strategies in current art tendencies and everyday life. D5 provided an encyclopaedic approach to visual culture mixing art and non-art forms from a range of categories such as advertisements, political propaganda, kitsch culture, science fiction, mass media, outsider art alongside current art tendencies such as Conceptual art, Performance, Body art (Viennese Actionists), film, video, photography, installations like the 'Museums by the Artists', and the latest Photorealism.[128]

It is noteworthy that within an exhibition of international contemporary art, which was based on a complex theoretical structure, addressed the international recognition of Conceptual art, and dealt with art's social function, Szeemann introduced his 'individual mythologies'. He did so, in order to break the dualisms dominating the history of modern art and Documenta itself – in its fifth edition, the opposition was between Conceptual art and the emerging Photorealism – and to foreground the claim for personal expression. In this regard, 'individual mythologies' appears as another name for 'attitudes' in the now established conceptualism of art. It was offered, Szeemann specifies, as 'a question of attitude not style' to defend free artistic self-projection.[129] As he recalls,

> All the former Documentas followed the old-hat, thesis/antithesis dialectic: Constructivism/Surrealism, Pop/Minimalism, Realism/Concept. That's why I invented the term, 'individual mythologies'— not a style, but a human right.

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[127] According to the second proposal (submitted in March 1971), 'An attempt to formulate the theme of *d5* can be derived thus from the phenomena of contemporary social life and contemporary art: *Questioning Reality-Image Worlds Today*.' The show explored mimetic relations in a dialectical structure of three core concepts, divided into subcategories, taken from Hegel's discussion about the reality of the image and the reality of the imaged: 1. Reality of the image; 2. Reality of 'what is portrayed'; 3. Identity/non Identity of the image and of 'what is portrayed'. Szeemann left the theoretical presentation of the subject in the catalogue to the leftist philosophers Hans-Heinz Holz ('Introduction') and Bazon Brock, and he submitted only a brief preface. See Harald Szeemann, Jean-Christophe Ammann, Bazon Brock, 'Draft Program for documenta 5 as a Thematic Exhibition', *Informationen*, no. 3 (March 1971), repr. in Derieux, pp. 95-103.

[128] For an analytical list of the sections, co-curators, artists and the layout of the show, see ibid., pp. 106-118.

[129] Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, p. 91.

An artist could be a geometric painter or a gestural artist; each can live his or her own mythology.[130]

With clear resonances to *Attitudes*, Szeemann associated 'individual mythology' with the need to 'find something in which the artist's intensity of intention would dictate the nature of the medium to be used.'[131] Szeemann himself recognized the apparent contradiction between the 'inherent egocentricity' of the concept and the claim to the validity of 'a universal language' shared by many, even though it 'has no form.'[132] Yet, he stresses, 'individual mythologies' require a shift in the viewing and critical criteria as they are comprehensible within 'a history of intensity in art', less concerned with formal criteria than with 'the perceivable identity of intention and expression.' They form an open-ended realm of not clearly defined and easily recognizable demarcations, critics nonetheless insist on tracing a dominant style, and so bypass the 'irrational d5 section'.[133]

Within D5's theoretical preoccupations with concepts of reality, Szeemann suggests the subjective universe of every artist and the intensity of inner experience as access to different attitudes and levels of reality. The *Individual Mythologies* section included a heterogeneous group of more than one hundred artists in a sprawling setting that evoked the structured chaos and inclusiveness of *Attitudes*, extending between the *Idea* and *Realism* sections.[134] If *Attitudes* constituted 'a compendium of

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[130] Szeemann, interviewed by Thea, 'Here Time Becomes Space', n.p.

[131] Szeemann interviewed by Jean François Chougnet, Thierry Prat, and Thierry Raspail (Lyon, 1997), repr. in Derieux, pp. 173-180 (177). Szeemann first used the notion 'Individual Mythologies' in Etienne Martin's exhibition, Kunsthalle Bern, 2 November – 1 December 1963, to characterize Martin's sculptural works as the creation of a rich personal mythology, 'a world of its own', which is built upon a unique, complex mode of thinking in signs and symbols drawn from the artist's own experience. See Harald Szeemann's text in the catalogue of the *Etienne-Martin* exhibition, repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 93-94. Also, Szeemann, 'Mind over Matter', in Obrist, pp. 91-92.

[132] Harald Szeemann, 'Individual Mythologies', in Harald Szeemann, *Museum der Obsessionen: von / über / zu / mit* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1981), pp. 87-92, excerpts trans. and repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 318 [first publ. in *Kunstnachrichten*, no. 3, November 1972].

[133] Ibid. Szeemann challenges his readers: 'So why not turn the tables and look among the Conceptual artists, the Structuralists and Realists for individual mythology-builders, because every true artist is one.'

[134] Forty-two of the sixty-nine artists in *Attitudes* were presented in D5; twenty-two of them were in the 'Individual Mythologies'. The section was introduced in the exhibition catalogue by the co-curator Johannes Cladders without a rigorous presentation of the notion. Szeemann himself made a short reference to it in his brief Catalogue Preface, stressing that the parallel pictorial methods featured in the show provide access to the creation and development of different levels of reality. 'Conceptual art and Hyper-Realism … provide access to trends based on a formal perspective; individual mythologies provide access to the subjective creation of myths, sustaining a claim for overall validity via pictorial formulation.' Harald Szeemann, 'Preface', *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität – Bildwelten Heute*, exh. cat. (Munich: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1972), repr. in Derieux, pp. 104-105 (105).

stories told in the first person singular',[135] *Individual Mythologies* was similarly 'made up of personal statements'.[136] In the cultural context of the early-1970s, Szeemann presents diverse individual positions rather than a dominant opposing style, and foregrounds the value of the artwork while mixing it with non-art visual forms and everyday items. In his short catalogue text, he privileges the artwork itself over 'the phoney freedom of a "museum in the street"', stating explicitly that the 'innovative boom years, during which new pictorial ideas and materials were placed on an equal footing and were promoted as new adventures, seem to be over.'[137] These are highly controversial claims during a period of intensified interrogation of the social relevance and critical force of art. Szeemann was criticized, especially by the artists with whom he had collaborated in *Attitudes*, for having reinforced the museum model by recuperating the anti-art, anti-institutional trajectory of the 1960s art, and having subsumed art to predetermined thematic classifications in a new exhibition form and power of the curator (Fig. 2.15).[138] In a harsh critique, published in the exhibition catalogue, Daniel Buren dismissed the authorial effects of Szeemann's thematic approach, arguing: 'More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art.'[139]

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[135] Szeemann, 'About the Exhibition', repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, p. 225.

[136] Szeemann, interview to John Anthony Thwaites (1972), in Derieux, pp. 132-133 (133).

[137] Szeemann, 'Preface', *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität – Bildwelten Heute*, exh. cat. (Munich: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1972), repr. in Derieux, p. 104. The shift from a 'free action art' to its institutionalized accommodation is also made evident in Szeemann's following statement: 'An artist's relationship to museums once again goes without saying, and there are signs suggesting that as soon as we manage to free museums from their dreadful reputation as places of consecration, they will become what they once were, thanks to the artworks themselves.' Ibid. p. 105.

[138] A petition was signed by a group of North American artists (Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Barry Le Va, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson) in May 1972, to protest against art being exhibited in thematic classifications without their permission. All of the signatories took part in the end, except of Andre, Judd, Morris, and Sandback. Robert Morris sent a letter (6 May 1972) to Szeemann denying authorization to show his work, and Robert Smithson wrote a polemical essay, entitled 'Cultural Confinement' (1972), critical of the restrictions imposed to art by museum spaces and curators. After Smithson's decision to withdraw his participation, the text was published in German translation in the exhibition catalogue as Smithson's contribution to D5 and was subsequently published in English, in *Artforum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October 1972), p. 32. Interestingly, the D5 catalogue contained and promoted awareness of *The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement* (April 1971), in English, German, and French. This was a contract-document commissioned by Seth Siegelaub and authored by New York lawyer Robert Projansky, which allowed artists to have more control over their artwork, when it is sold or exhibited, and protected the artists' ongoing intellectual and financial rights of their production. Seth Siegelaub and Robert Projansky, 'The Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement', *Leonardo*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1 October 1973), pp. 347-350 [orig. in *Studio International*, April 1971].

[139] Daniel Buren, 'Exposition d'une exposition' ['Exhibition of an Exhibition'], in Harald Szeemann, ed., *documenta 5: Befragung der Realität – Bildwelten Heute*, exh. cat. (Munich: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1972), section 17, p. 29, repr. in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds, *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 210-211

Szeemann had embraced the 1960s aspiration for bringing art into life. Yet, by 1972, within the context of increased intellectualism in art and cultural critique, he appears to maintain that art contributes to a liberated life inasmuch as in its shift to an expanded condition still remains something that differs from life. In the question of whether D5 meant 'a victory of the intellectual over the artist', he replied: 'No, that's quite impossible. The work of art is autonomous. But it can be experienced in various ways: as information, for its connections, or as the way to a more concentrated statement.'[140] According to Hans-Joachim Müller, in the aftermath of the 1960s Szeemann did not link the emergence of a new future with the 'pedagogical aestheticization of the conditions of life', but instead affirmed the relation of art and life through 'the symbolic difference of art'.[141] Szeemann's insistence on an art of 'attitudes' and 'individual mythologies' shows that there is always an aspect in art, which cannot be clearly defined, analyzed or culturally instrumentalized, and this can be found in the 'intensive intentions' and experience of creation. Even when art evades its object status, still retains its form of existence as an object of experience in a realm of natural processes that is constantly recreated. This position deviates from accounts of the critical project of Conceptual art in the 1960s, notably Benjamin Buchloh's. According to Buchloh, early Conceptual art's negation of the aesthetic conventions achieved to 'subject the last residues of artistic aspiration towards transcendence … to the rigorous and relentless order of the vernacular of administration.' Conceptual art production ultimately 'mimed the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality' with the aim of 'liquidating even the last remnants of traditional aesthetic experience.'[142]

Szeemann's continued belief in the visual and visionary qualities of art – the existence of an element in art akin to the vital fluidity of energy – is further radicalized with the so-called 'Museum of Obsessions' in the aftermath of D5. 'The Museum of Obsessions is not an institution', Szeemann explains, it 'exists in my

(211). In 2004, Buren updated his argument in 'Where Are the Artists?', in Jens Hoffmann, ed., *The Next Documenta Should be Curated by an Artist* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2004), pp. 26-31, a curatorial project-qua-publication, which invited artists to respond to a discussion about the effectiveness of an artist-led curatorial model. Hoffmann intended to delegate to artists the critical and curatorial voice, however, as Mark Peterson states in his contribution, he 'ultimately uses a similar curatorial strategy as the one he is criticizing, namely to invite artists to illustrate his thesis.' See Mark Peterson, 'Open Forum', in Hoffmann, *The Next Documenta Should be Curated by an Artist*, p. 80.

[140] Szeemann in interview to John Anthony Thwaites (1972), in Derieux, p. 132.

[141] Hans-Joachim Müller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2006), p. 40.

[142] Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969', pp. 142, 143.

head' as a place in mind in which 'a constantly changing sum of speculations …
struggles for visualisation.' While in D5, individual mythologies were 'still sign
language', obsessions are henceforth 'the energies that work behind these languages,
driving and ripening.'[143] With clear allusions to the 'Live in your Head' element in
Attitudes, the Museum of Obsessions is an imaginary entity, a kind of utopian sphere
that links the ideational realm of individual mythology with the primary source of
energy behind it; the latter, Szeemann writes, 'couldn't give a damn whether it is
expressed or used by society' in any kind of way. With the Museum of Obsessions, he
keeps the possibility to materialize a work or not still open, although he admits that in
his case as exhibition-organizer this primal unit of energy tends towards
'visualisation', and speculation is directed to 'a temporarily visualised form'. [144]

Accordingly, Szeemann revived the Agency, as *The Agency for Intellectual
Guest Labour in the Service of a Possible Vision of the Museum of Obsessions*, with
the aim to project his own speculative ideas and 'make even more things possible' as
a 'service-provider'.[145] The new form of organization extends 'intellectual labour'
into a potentially boundless field of what is thinkable and exhibitable. Since the
impulse to speculation tends to visualisation, the realm of applications extends into
life and the world, and Szeemann now asserts that the Museum of Obsessions is
'everything'.[146] By declaring the world a museum – unlike Siegelaub's pronouncing
the world his gallery – Szeemann sought not to provide an alterative to the official
cultural context. Instead, he aimed to enable the implementation of new,
unconceivable ideas in traditional museum-bound exhibitions by giving 'precedence
to obsession over traditional values, the art history of intensive intentions over the art
history of the great masterpieces', and to 'resolve all dialectics in the intention and its
intensity.'[147] This shift from formal style to the energy of creation opens art
operations to the vitality of the world and legitimates the condition of the 'obsessed'
as a new kind of 'power' and political potential. The Museum of Obsessions,
Szeemann contends, is often more efficient 'when it does not act', and in a society

[143] Harald Szeemann, 'Museum der Obsessionen' [1975], in Harald Szeemann, *Museum der Obsessionen: von / über / zu / mit* (Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1981), pp. 125-136, trans. and repr. in Bezzola and Kurzmeyer, pp. 370-379 (370, 374).
[144] Ibid., pp. 370, 371.
[145] Ibid., pp. 371-372. Szeemann cites among the models of organization that inspired him for the Agency-Museum of Obsessions pair the solitary existence of Simeon the Stylite in the service of others and two independent republics, Robinson Crusoe's island and Castro's Cuba.
[146] Ibid., p. 373.
[147] Ibid., pp. 373, 379.

preoccupied with instrumentalized end results this is 'eminently political, the non-instance of energy management.'[148]

'Attitudes', 'processes', 'individual mythologies', 'obsessions', 'intensive intentions', all rooted in *When Attitudes Become Form*, are different names and changing registers of a substantially experiential mode of artistic production and exhibition-making. They constitute the realm of immateriality that Szeemann introduced into art and subjectivity (artistic and curatorial), which differs from the anti-aesthetic immateriality of the linguistic and information conceptualism inasmuch as it combines an art extended into life with intensely motivated forms of subjective expression and felt experience. The rupture with traditional art history and museum classifications, already evident in *Attitudes*, now allows everything to become exhibitable in a practice that mixes art and non-art, aiming neither to repress the aesthetic dimension of art nor to evaporate art into the banality of everyday. The exhibition, Szeemann explains, becomes a force-field that seeks to maintain the value of the singular artwork through an intensive 'poetics of free association'.[149] Intensity, love, and obsession are the key curatorial criteria and, from the mid-1970s onwards, Szeemann describes his practice as participating in 'the creation of a little poem or a drama, or even an apparent chaos' with the aim to set energies free for reception and reveal new, non-verbal levels of signification.[150] In the 1980s, in the midst of the commercial success of Conceptual art and laments about the late-1960s critical impulse, Szeemann still adheres to utopian thinking, and attempts to make the 'immaterial aspect of creation' – 'the part that can never be a property' – 'visible and experiential'.[151] Exhibition-making becomes 'an adventurous balancing act' between visualizing an idea and preserving the autonomy of the artwork in the shift to so-called 'ahistorical' or 'postmodern' exhibitions.[152]

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[148] Ibid., p. 374.

[149] Szeemann in Žerovc, p. 37.

[150] Harald Szeemann, 'Does Art Need Directors?, in Carin Kuoni, ed., *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art* (New York: Independent Curators International, ICI, 2001), pp. 167-169 (167, 169). Szeemann famously concludes, 'To make exhibitions is to love.'

[151] Szeemann, in Žerovc, p. 37; Szeemann, 'Does Art Need Directors?, in Kuoni, p. 168.

[152] Ibid. For a critique of the shift to 'ahistorical' shows within the postmodern context of art, see Debora J. Meijers, 'The Museum and the "Ahistorical" Exhibition: The Latest Gimmick by the Arbiters of Taste, or an Important Cultural Phenomenon?', in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 7-20. Meijers criticizes, in particular, Szeemann's exhibition *A-Historische Klanken* ['Ahistorical Sounds'], Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1988, for reasserting the romantic quest for the essence of art and the creation of a new unity, predicated upon 'affinity', 'correspondence', 'resonance', and artistic

In conclusion, *When Attitudes Become Form* constitutes a seminal exhibition within the context of the conceptual shift towards an extended notion of art that reconsiders its material status as aesthetic object and its inherited aesthetic conditions, opening new possibilities for its production, reception, distribution, and communication with socio-political implications. Szeemann responds to these shifts with an inclusive approach, nonetheless he emphasizes attitudinal expression and the experience of the creative process as the primary forces of the aesthetic significance of art and exhibition-making. The exhibition aesthetics of an 'Attitudes art' attests to the concern of how to make the immaterial aspect of creation visible in its various forms as the mixing of materially-based and conceptual processes rather than exclusively addressing the conceptual nature of art as idea and primary information, advocated notably by Siegelaub. By reclaiming the significance of aesthetic experience in *Attitudes* and understanding art in terms of natural processes of creation, as well as embracing the openness of art into the realms of non-art and life, Szeemann responded to the aesthetic (and political) question of how to insert art into life without assimilating it to contemporary life's instrumental operations. *Attitudes* extended the limits of art and what is exhibitable into life and non-art through a poetics grounded on the value of experience and aesthetic processes for both art and thinking.

The issues concerning immateriality and new forms of materialism, the aesthetic role of art and its political potential, the shift to more creative forms of exhibition-making, overall interrogating what art and its exhibition is and can be that were addressed in the late-1960s, alongside the transition from modernism to an expanded 'postmodern' field, will be more dramatically raised in the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* (1985) within the contemporary shift to new media and technoscientific culture. The challenge now is how to comprehend and present the new 'immaterial materials' and their impact on human identity and culture in a new immaterial, 'postmodern' sensibility. *Les Immatériaux* is conceived as a philosophical show but it is presented as an artwork, therefore it raises questions and provides aesthetic views about the nature and role of aesthetic experience that exceed the more limited artistic understanding of Szeemann's curatorship in *Attitudes.*

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mythology (14). For Meijers, this kind of exhibition practice, despite its correlations with postmodern eclecticism, returns to an eighteenth-century style of the Academic exhibition.

Chapter 3

Les Immatériaux: **A Philosophical Interrogation and an Artistic Presentation**

In 1985, the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard co-curated the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* with the design theorist and historian Thierry Chaput at the Centre Georges Georges Pompidou in Paris.[1] The exhibition concerns the implications of so-called 'immaterials' for culture and human identity, those new materials mostly associated with developments in science and information technology. A particularly striking aspect of the show is that it is philosophical in its conception but is presented as an artwork, invoking an 'immaterial' sensation of the contemporary shift from modernism to postmodernism, and its related technoscientific developments. It is precisely the way in which philosophical and artistic concerns, conceptual and aesthetic issues meet in this exhibition to investigate and present the changes brought about by the new technologies, and to recast the very notion of aesthetics that is my specific concern here. This is a reading of *Les Immatériaux* that significantly departs from its widespread reception as an early investigation of art and new technology, although the role of technology in the exhibition remains central to my account (Fig. 3.1).

I. Why *Les Immatériaux?*

At first sight, it seems peculiar to locate *Les Immatériaux*, a show with pronounced philosophical intentions and a conceptual framework, within a genealogy of curatorial aesthetics in which aesthetic experience plays a significant role. However, the play between the conceptual and the aesthetic; the adherence to materialism beyond conventional object-making and forms; the accommodation of conceptual practices; the extension of art into non-art; and the primacy of unmediated experience, all prescient in Harald Szeemann's *Attitudes*, are also dramatically present in *Les Immatériaux*, this time from the perspective of a show in which philosophy meets art

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[1] *Les Immatériaux* was initiated and supported by the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI) for the Centre National d'art et de culture George Pompidou in Paris. It was held in the Main Gallery in the fifth floor from 28 March to 15 July 1985. See Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, eds, *Les Immatériaux*: *Album et Inventaire* (vol. 1); *Les Immatériaux*: *Épreuves d'écriture* (vol. 2), exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985).

and the wider culture in the midst of changing contemporary conditions. It provides, therefore, a more nuanced and rigorous understanding of the pertinent issues of materiality and form, the aesthetic experience, the status and function of the artwork wihtin the context of the shift to contemporary electronic culture.

The latter is an important aspect given that the encounter of art and exhibition-making with technology was explicitly absent from Szeemann's show, despite the emergence of information culture in the late-1960s and its embrace by Conceptual art.[2] The question of the nature of art and its experience is now raised within the context of Conceptual art's institutionalization and the advent of the digital age in a show which, unlike Szeemann's, does not aim to present new art, but instead to interrogate the impact of the emerging forms of digital technology and its 'immaterial materiality', as Lyotard calls it. The curatorial challenge is not how to present the unpresentable artistic gesture, or how individual artistic attitudes are extended into various material-based and conceptual artistic forms, but rather how to interrogate and present what is changing in a new immaterial sensibility through diverse non-art and art exhibits. With *Les Immatériaux* we move onto the wider philosophical and cultural register of the philosopher-curator offering aesthetic views and perspectives that exceed Szeemann's more specific artistic understanding of exhibition-making.

In an explanatory curatorial statement from 1985, Lyotard describes the show as an attempt to examine certain aspects of the contemporary condition associated with 'the new technological revolution'. He asserts that 'the conception of the exhibition will be philosophical' and intended primarily to 'ask questions and incite others to ask questions, not only about what the material is, but also about what is associated with it.'[3] More specifically, the show asks 'how far' the existence of 'new materials' or 'immaterials' has changed the relationship of human beings to material. It is an ambitious interrogation of the way in which these 'immaterials' interfere with 'the identity of "Man", understood as mind and will', and so can have dehumanizing

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[2] On this subject, see Benjamin Buchloh's critique of the failings of *Attitudes*. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'The Thresholds of 1969', in Germano Celant, ed., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exh. cat. (Fondazione Prada, Milan: Progretto Prada Arte, 2013), pp. 495-504.

[3] The statement was originally published in *Art & Text*, no. 17 (April 1985), pp. 47-57. It was the second explicatory statement by Lyotard about the exhibition, following a preliminary document in December 1983. See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 159-173 (165, 160) [first publ. in *Art & Text*, trans. Paul Smith, no. 17 (April 1985), pp. 47-57]. Terms associated with the 'immaterial', including *immature*, *increate*, *immediate*, *unmasterable*, *immanent*, *unsexed*, and *immortal* are also listed in the curatorial statement to indicate its thematic range (166-167).

effects. As Lyotard explains, 'The word "human" … designates an ancient domain of knowledge and intervention which the technosciences now cut across and share', thus a far-reaching, significant aspect of the 'immaterials' is that they imply 'a loss of identity'.[4]

In an important 1985 interview to Bernard Blistène, curator of the Musée National d'Art Moderne and largely responsible for the selection of the artworks in *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard states that he is 'particularly concerned with turning the exhibition itself into *a work of art*.'[5] This artistic aspect is also stressed in the Press release, which presents the exhibition as a 'dramaturgy' of emerging postmodernity that aims to arouse sensitivity to its changing effects. This makes *Les Immatériaux* both 'a philosophical and artistic project':

> … the CCI seeks to stage what changes. […] 'Les Immatériaux' is a kind of dramaturgy placed between the completion of a period and the anxiety for an emerging era at the dawn of postmodernity, and in this sense, is part of a philosophical and artistic project. It seeks to awaken a sensitivity which is already there, to feel the uncanny in the familiar, and how difficult it is to get an idea of what is changing.[6]

In this respect, *Les Immatériaux* attempts to investigate two major themes, indeed two neologisms: 'immaterials' and 'postmodernism', and their interface with the 'human'. It does so by staging in a specific spatio-temporal presentation what Lyotard saw as the contemporary feeling of anxiety, and the predicament to grasp or define the shifts taking place. The curatorial challenge is how to make this problematic sensible while maintaining an experience that eludes definition. As such, *Les Immatériaux* demonstrates a relation of philosophy and art, a certain play between the conceptual

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[4] Ibid., p. 162.
[5] Bernard Blistène, 'A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard', *Flash Art*, no. 121 (March 1985), pp. 32-35 (35). Italics in the original.
[6] *Les Immatériaux* Press release, 1985
<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/ressource.action?param.id=FR_R-c0fe776adc5cc43493966a229476bc25&param.idSource=FR_E-ec23b17dc48b72fc9a696a1db2beb4c>
[accessed 31 May 2015]; excerpt trans. in Mariabruna Fabrizi and Fosco Lucarelli, eds, 'Les Immatériaux (an exhibition by Jean-François Lyotard at the Centre Pompidou, 1985)', *socks-studio*
<http://socks-studio.com/2014/07/16/les-immateriaux-an-exhibition-of-jean-francois-lyotard-at-the-centre-pompidou-1985/> [created 16 July 2014; accessed 31 May 2015].

and the aesthetic experience that makes it a pivotal show for the purposes of this study and the broader field of contemporary art and curating.

The philosopher-curator: 'Thought' and research exhibitions

Given its philosophical impetus and interrogatory thrust, *Les Immatériaux* is a discourse-driven and conceptually-structured work that extends many aspects of Conceptual art, while anticipating the discursive practices and new forms of practice-led research that emerged in art and curating in the 1990s. From this viewpoint, Lyotard is widely advanced as the 'philosopher-curator' who paved the way for other philosophers to curate a show,[7] and *Les Immatériaux* stands out as the precursor of what can be seen as a new exhibition 'genre' in contemporary curating: the research-exhibition or exhibition-as-discourse.[8] French philosopher and sociologist of science Bruno Latour coined the term 'thought exhibition' (*Gedanken-Ausstellung*) akin to a 'thought experiment' (*Gedanken-Experiment*) to designate the two major 'intellectual shows' he co-curated with Bruno Weibel in 2002 and 2005 at the Centre for Art and Media/ZKM in Karlshruhe.[9] Latour and Weibel proclaim the exhibition 'a medium

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[7] See Daniel Birnbaum, 'Il Filosofo Curatore/The Philosopher Curator', *Domus*, no. 905 (July-August 2007), pp. 140-141; Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, 'Thinking Philosophy Spatially: Jean-François Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux* and the Philosophy of the Exhibition', in Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, eds, *Thinking Worlds: The Moscow Conference on Philosophy, Politics and Art* (New York: Sternberg Press, 2008), pp. 123-145; Antonia Wunderlich, *Der Philosoph im Museum: Die Ausstellung 'Les Immatériaux' von Jean-François Lyotard* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008); John Rajchman, '*Les Immatériaux* or How to Construct the History of Exhibitions', *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/les-immateriaux-or-how-construct-history-exhibitions> [created 1 October 2009; accessed 31 May 2015].

[8] On new forms of exhibition as a 'research output', see the symposium *Beyond the Academy: Research as Exhibition*, Tate Britain, London, 14 May 2010, audio recordings available in <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/beyond-academy-research-exhibition-symposium-audio-recordings> [created 14 May 2010; accessed 31 May 2015]. For different notions of 'research' in exhibition practice, see Simon Sheikh, 'Towards the Exhibition as Research', in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds, *Curating Research* (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions and De Appel, 2015), pp. 32-46.

[9] Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, exh. cat. (Karlshruhe and Cambridge, Mass.: ZKM | Centre for Art and Media and MIT Press, 2002); Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, exh. cat. (Karlshruhe: ZKM | Centre for Art and Media, and Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005). The shows complement each other in engaging with the issue of representation and its various crises. Whereas the former explores conflicting modes of representation in science, religion, and art, the latter sets out to rethink the notion of political representation. See also <http://www.iconoclash.de/>; <http://makingthingspublic.zkm.de> [accessed 31 May 2015]. For an explanation of the terms *Gedanken-Ausstellung* and *Gedanken-Experiment* with regard to *Making Things Public* exhibition, see Bruno Latour, *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, video (90 sec) <http://container.zkm.de/streaming/streams2005/mtp_latour_mov.html> [accessed 2 July 2015]; Bruno

for experimentation' and explain that such 'exhibition experiments' do not aim to present new art; they are, instead, assemblages of disparate elements which set out to present a problem, raise and testify a question as right or wrong. In this sense, they replace the philosophical seminar and publication, which by nature have limited means of representation, with the performative conditions of mainly interdisciplinary projects. Such 'exhibition experiments' aspire to renew what is an art show and to create new forms of collaboration between academy, art, and science for the production of new kinds of knowledge and experience (Fig. 3.2).[10]

In 1985, Blistène had questioned Lyotard about 'the philosopher who decides that his job is to give us something to look at.' Implying a critical attitude to linguistic structuralism, Lyotard referred to the crisis of the book as an instrument for the dissemination of ideas, and the necessity for a contemporary thinker to experiment with new formats beyond the constraints of available modes of writing and recording – what he calls 'inscription' – in order to investigate the new and different issues at stake. These concern the completion of modernity and the emergence of postmodernity, and necessitate moving from the aesthetic of the beautiful and the Romantic aesthetic of genius and the sublime to more fundamental questions of 'what's now at stake in art'.[11] The exhibition, therefore, allows Lyotard to engage with his most pressing philosophical concerns in a realm that offers extra-textual possibilities. In this regard, John Rajchman claims that *Les Immatériaux* marks 'an important part of Lyotard's oeuvre, along with his many books.'[12] In a similar vein, Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein see *Les Immatériaux* as a necessary move in Lyotard's work from his critique of structural linguistics and phenomenology in *Discours, figure* (1971) to 'philosophy as exhibition' or a spatial practice of philosophy. They argue that an exhibition can be 'the manifestation of a philosophy' and 'a productive medium for thinking' without succumbing to the pedagogical

Latour and Tomás Sánchez-Criado, interview, 'Making the "Res Public"', *ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2007), pp. 364-371 (p. 370) <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/7-2latour-sanchez-criado.pdf> [accessed 31 May 2015].
[10] For a discussion of the 'exhibition experiments' at ZKM, see Peter Weibel and Bruno Latour, 'Experimenting with Representation: *Iconoclash* and *Making Things Public*', in Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu, eds, *Exhibition Experiments* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 94-108.
[11] Blistène, p. 32.
[12] John Rajchman, 'Jean-François Lyotard's Underground Aesthetics', *October*, no. 86 (Fall 1998), pp. 3-18 (15).

illustration of pre-existing ideas, and they pronounce Lyotard 'the philosopher of the exhibition' having originated '[t]his "curatorial turn" of radical thought'.[13]

The curator-auteur: Exhibition-as-artwork

These accounts show how *Les Immatériaux* is linked to an understanding of the exhibition as a medium for experimental thinking. However, the pronouncement of the presentation of the show as itself an artwork complicates these positions. It puts Lyotard-the-philosopher in the legacy of the curator-artist, a controversial development which has instigated ongoing debates about the limits of the curator's activity in relation to artists ever since the early-1970s.[14] Lyotard was aware of the well-known critique the artist Daniel Buren, among the participants in *Les Immatériaux*, levelled at Harald Szeemann for his curatorship of *Documenta 5* (1972). As he admits to Blistène, this 'may cause some discomfort for Daniel Buren' but what *Les Immatériaux* is 'exhibiting isn't the works of art, but the exhibition itself' – Lyotard quotes Buren. He adds, however, that he is less concerned about whether he should declare himself an 'artist' than with pursuing the possibilities offered 'at the level of the physical articulation of the exhibition' and cautions that 'any art objects' included in the show 'have to be compatible' with the other exhibits.[15]

    Les Immatériaux exemplifies two significant curatorial developments that were ostensibly in tension: on the one hand, the expansion of the curatorial role beyond art specialists and the ensuing transformation of the exhibition into a discursive event and, on the other, the elevation of the exhibition itself into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Both emerged in tandem with the increased visibility of curators in the 1980s and have been criticized for functioning at the expense of the artworks on display. These correlated shifts are discussed in a seminal 1989 text by the sociologists Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak as symptomatic, particularly in the

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[13] Birnbaum and Wallenstein, 'Thinking Philosophy Spatially', pp. 143, 144.
[14] The question of whether curatorship is a creative act at the expense of the artworks on display dominated curatorial discourse and self-reflexive inquiry in the 1990s. Among the most recent and polemical critiques is that by the artist and editor of *e-flux* journal Anton Vidokle which stimulated a number of responses particularly from curators. See Anton Vidokle, 'Art without Artists?', *e-flux journal*, no. 16 (May 2010), n.p. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/136> [accessed 2 July 2015]; Maria Rus Bojan and others, 'Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's "Art Without Artists?"', *e-flux journal*, no. 18 (September 2010), n.p. <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/172> [accessed 2 July 2015].
[15] Blistène, p. 35.

French cultural context, of a 'de-professionalization' process: namely an 'antithetical' move from a well-defined institutional post (museum *conservateurs*) to an autonomous function (exhibition curators/*commissaries d'exposition*), which authorizes a more independent and personalized position (exhibition authors/*auteurs*). This evolution, according to the writers, is comparable to the emergence of the 'auteur' in cinema.[16] In hindsight, Heinich claims that *Les Immatériaux* provided, among its many innovations, a 'dramatic illustration' of the transition to the new curator-auteur phenomenon in the 1980s.[17]

These curatorial developments can largely be traced back to the shifts taking place in art and exhibition practice in the late-1960s. Within the French cultural context, however, *Les Immatériaux* and the shifts it represents cannot be considered independently from the museological innovations of the Centre Georges Pompidou. The Pompidou Centre, also known as the 'Beaubourg', opened in 1977 as a multi-purpose, pluralistic cultural institution, open to the broad field of contemporary art and a wide spectrum of non-art disciplines with the ambition to de-sacralize the museum, democratize culture, and make it accessible to a wider public.[18] *Les Immatériaux* culminated Pompidou's exhibition programme since 'Paris-New York' (1977), the first in the series of pioneering large-scale, interdisciplinary shows of its founding director Pontus Hultén, which developed as collaborative projects across the various departments of the institution and served Hultén's vision for an elastic, open

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[16] Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, 'From Museum Curator to Exhibition *Auteur*: Inventing a Singular Position', trans. Robert McGee, in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 231-250 [first publ. in *Sociologie du Travail*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1989), pp. 29-49].
The notion of *auteur* in cinema is a product of French criticism in the 1950s and of the attempt to elevate the hitherto underestimated role of director to that of an artist. The *auteur* theory was introduced by François Truffaut's seminal text, 'A certain Tendency of the French Cinema' (1954), as a response to traditional forms of filmmaking in France and the Hollywood studio cinema, and is closely linked to the French *Nouvelle Vague*. It contributed to the validation of director as creator with primary control and responsibility for the final product, and so the development of his/her own cinematic style. For an affirmative account of the shift to the curator-auteur in contemporary exhibition-making, see Jens Hoffmann, 'A Certain Tendency in Curating', in Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007), pp. 137-142.
[17] Nathalie Heinich, '*Les Immatériaux* Revisited: Innovation in Innovations', *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/les-immateriaux-revisited-innovation-innovations> [created 1 October 2009; accessed 14 May 2015], p. 2 of 4.
[18] On this subject, see Nathalie Heinich, 'The Pompidou Centre and its Public: The Limits of a Utopian Site', trans. Chris Turner, in Robert Lumley, ed., *The Museum Time-Machine*: *Putting Cultures on Display* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 199-212.

museum (Fig. 3.3).[19] Heinich characterizes these shows as 'documentary exhibitions' within a broad cultural frame marking a paradigm shift in their conception as a kind of discourse and their public reception as a kind of 'essay'.[20]

Jean Maheu, President of the Centre Georges Pompidou, in his catalogue text, pronounced *Les Immatériaux* a radical event in accord with the innovative character, contemporary cultural concerns, and commitment to interdisciplinarity of the Pompidou itself. He stresses, however, that this is a 'different exhibition' from those presented thus far both 'in form and intentions'. *Les Immatériaux* is presented as an 'essay' without authority pretensions or 'demagogical concessions', but also as a 'dramaturgy' that intends to 'make manifest – visually and audibly – the opposition between the project of modernity ... and the investigations of emerging postmodernity' and immaterial culture. *Les Immatériaux* is a multi-innovation, Maheu claims, that makes the collaborative conjunction of philosophy and culture 'a milestone'.[21] Indeed, *Les Immatériaux* developed out of a project on new materials and creation, initiated by Thierry Chaput and the team of the *Centre de Création Industrielle* (CCI) in 1982. When Lyotard was invited to join the project in 1983 as chief curator (*commissaire général*), many of the already chosen exhibits, existing plans, innovative features, consultants and collaborators were integrated into the new version. Lyotard's role was crucial in the philosophical conception and linguistic presentation of the exhibition as well as the participation of prominent intellectuals. Nonetheless the exhibition was a collaborative undertaking that brought together more than fifty participants and incorporated projects running across Pompidou's departments.[22] It was accompanied by music performances, a film programme (*Ciné-*

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[19] The Pompidou Centre opened in 1977 with a retrospective of Marcel Duchamp, curated by Jean Clair. Pontus Hultén moved from Stockholm's Moderna Museet to the Centre Pompidou as appointed director in 1973, organizing, among others, a series of pioneering interdisciplinary shows, which investigated Paris's cultural relationship to other art centres: *Paris-New York* (1977), *Paris-Berlin* (1978), *Paris-Moscou* (1979), and *Paris-Paris* (1981). For Hultén's innovative curatorial practice and views on the role of museums, see Pontus Hultén, interview to Hans Ulrich Obrist, in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP|Ringier & Les Presses du Reel, 2008), pp. 32-50 [first publ. in *Artforum*, no. 4 (April 1997) under the title 'The Hang of It-Museum Director Pontus Hultén'].

[20] Heinich, '*Les Immatériaux* Revisited', p. 2 of 4.

[21]Jean Maheu, 'Immatériaux', in Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, eds, *Les Immatériaux*: *Album et Inventaire* (vol. 2), exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), p. 3, trans. in Bruce Altshuler et al., eds, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Volume II: 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013), p. 224.

[22] The Centre Pompidou consisted of four departments in addition to various spaces devoted to a range of cultural activities: the National Museum of Modern Art, Musée national d'art moderne (MNAM) with a large public reference library, Bibliothèque publique d'information (BPI); a Centre for Design and Architecture, Centre de création industrielle (CCI); and an Institute for Music and Acoustic

Immatériaux), a three-day colloquium on architecture, science, and philosophy, and three related publications in addition to the catalogue, and was Pompidou's most expensive exhibition to that date.[23] As the CCI closed in 1992, when it was integrated into the Musée National d'Art Moderne, *Les Immatériaux* was the CCI's last large-scale exhibition; a 'hinge' in the Pompidou's history representing both the accomplishment of its vision of an interdisciplinary postmodern museum and a more conservative transition (Fig. 3.4).[24]

Les Immatériaux: An aesthetic experiment

For all the above reasons, *Les Immatériaux* is widely considered a 'landmark' in exhibition culture and the growing research into exhibition histories.[25] The show has recently been the subject of various conferences, symposia, publications[26] as well as

Research, Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM). Alongside the CCI's project, *Les Immatériaux* integrated projects initiated and organized by the BPI, MNAM, and IRCAM. For a detailed account of the development of the exhibition project before Lyotard's key involvement at a point when 'the project was supposed to be abandoned' due to the lack of a guiding idea that would frame its already explored thematic field, see Jean-Louis Boissier in Conversation with Andreas Broeckmann, 'The Production of *Les Immatériaux*, in Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann, eds, *30 Years after Les Immatériaux: Art, Science, and Theory* (Leuphana University of Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2015), pp. 93-107 (95-96).

[23] For the events programme of the exhibition, see
<https://www.centrepompidou.fr/cpv/resource/cRyd8q/r6rM4jx> [accessed 1 June 2015].
The additional publications were Élie Théofilakis, ed., *Modernes et Après? Les Immatériaux* (Paris: Édition Autrement, 1985); *Petit Journal*, 28 March-15 July 1985 (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985); a special issue of CCI's journal *Traverses*, no. 35 (September 1985).

[24] Antony Hudek,, 'From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of Les Immatériaux', *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009)
<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/over-sub-exposure-anamnesis-les-immateriaux> [created 1 October 2009; accessed 7 June 2015], p. 2 of 14.

[25] See, for instance, the conference *Landmark Exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows Since 1968*, Tate Modern, London, 10-11October 2008, audio recordings available in
<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/landmark-exhibitions-contemporary-art-shows-1968-day-1; <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/audio/landmark-exhibitions-contemporary-art-shows-1968-day-2> [created 5-6 November 2009; accessed 15 May 2015]. Papers delivered at the conference are available in *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009)
<http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/issue-12> [accessed 15 May 2015].
For a compelling contextualization of *Les Immatériaux* within the politics of the Centre Georges Pompidou and the role of the Pompidou itself in the development of the culture industry in France, see Robin Mackay, 'Immaterials, Exhibition, Acceleration', in Hui and Broeckmann, pp. 215-242, especially 222-226.

[26] In addition to the Tate Modern conference (2008) and the related issue of *Tate Papers* (no. 12, Autumn 2009), the resurgent interest in *Les Immatériaux* is evident in conferences and events at the Pompidou Centre and the University of Paris VIII in 2005 on the occasion of its twentieth anniversary. More recently, the thirtieth anniversary of the exhibition was marked by the symposium *30 Years after Les Immatériaux: Art, Science & Theory*, Centre for Digital Cultures, Leuphana University of Lüneburg, 21-22 May 2014 <http://cdc.leuphana.com/news/news/blog-article/30-years-after-les-immateriaux-science-art-and-theory/> [accessed 1 June 2015] and the ensuing publication, Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann, eds, *30 Years after Les Immatériaux: Art, Science, and Theory*, (Leuphana

re-enactments and forthcoming sequels to it (Fig. 3.5).[27] While the existing literature addresses the curatorial innovations of the show, what has gone largely unnoticed is the play between the conceptual and the aesthetic it embodies. Either the innovative presentation of the show takes precedence over a more sustained philosophical inquiry or the focus of interest is on the role of technology, particularly because *Les Immatériaux* is considered one of the first major exhibitions of new media art.[28] From this standpoint, it can be seen within a curatorial genealogy that goes back to seminal shows of Conceptual art that explored the turn to information culture and new media in the intersection of art with socio-political and technological systems such as Kynaston McShine's *Information* and Jack Burnham's *Software: Information, Technology: Its New Meaning for Art* (both in 1970). It is also a precursor of Hans Ulrich Obrist's co-curated interdisciplinary and discursive shows that deal with the relation of art and science such as *Laboratorium* (1999) and *Bridge the Gap* (2001),

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University of Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2015); the symposium *Les Immatériaux: Towards the Virtual with Jean-François Lyotard*, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 27-28 March 2015 <https://www.courtauld.ac.uk/researchforum/events/2015/spring/LesImmateriaux.shtml> [accessed 1 June 2015].

[27] The exhibition *Zum Beispiel 'Les Immatériaux'* [*'Les Immatériaux' for Instance*], co-curated by Hans-Jürgen Hafner and Christian Kobald, Kunstverein Düsseldorf, 5 April-10 August 2014, was presented as an experimental combination of elements of a 'study exhibition' including archival material, a selection of original exhibits, and the 'presentation of current artistic works'. See <http://www.kunstverein-duesseldorf.de/en/exhibitions/archive/from-2012.html> [accessed 2 July 2015]. In contrast to the recent and debated trend of exhibition reconstructions, especially Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) at the Fondazione Prada in 2013, Hans-Jürgen Hafner presents *'Les Immatériaux' for Instance* as an exhibition in which the critical issue is 'presentability' itself and the ambivalences of restaging exhibitions in the very format of a show. Given the impossibility of the task to reconstruct *Les Immatériaux*, the aim was how to recall 'the presenting moment' without interpretation, and emphasize instead the distance from today in the construction of the experience. This is apparent in the clarity, austerity, whiteness, and geometry of the Düsseldorf presentation, which departs from the confusing greyness of the original. Hans-Jürgen Hafner, *'Les Immatériaux' for Instance*, *2014*, unpublished presentation in the symposium *Les Immatériaux: Towards the Virtual with Jean-François Lyotard*, The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, 28 March 2015 (notes kept by the author).
More recently, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein announced that together with the French artist Philippe Parreno intend to co-curate an exhibition, entitled 'Resistance', as a sequel to *Les Immatériaux* with the aim to extend Lyotard's ideas on the subject into the present. The project draws on Parreno's recollections, according to which Lyotard intended a homonymous, unrealized exhibition as a sequence to *Les Immatériaux*. See Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, 'From Immaterials to Resistance: The Other Side of *Les Immatériaux*', in Hui and Broeckmann, pp. 245-267. Also Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, 'Spatial Thought', *e-flux architecture*, n.p. <http://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/66879/spatial-thought/> [created 7 November 2016; accessed 9 November 2016].

[28] See Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, eds, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010); Sarah Cook, 'Immateriality and its Discontents: An Overview of Main Models and Issues of Curating New Media', in Christiane Paul, ed., *Curatorial Models for Digital Art: New Media in the White Cube and Beyond* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), pp. 26-49.

and points ahead to the burgeoning field of curating new media and net-art in the contemporary art world.[29]

But by pronouncing the exhibition as philosophical in conception and artistic in presentation, Lyotard announces a concern with the relation between thinking and art, concept and sensation within the contemporary or postmodern 'work'. This means that one of the most extraordinary features of *Les Immatériaux* is that it poses the question of the aesthetic aspects of exhibition-making from the perspective of the philosopher-curator. The question is whether Lyotard insists on the traditional distinction of concept and sensation as the separate realms of philosophy and art, or does he recast the relation, and if so in which terms? Do philosophy and art retain their separate entities, namely philosophy providing the conception of the show and art exhibiting it, or do they merge in certain ways? In this respect, the focal question concerns the kind of thinking and the kind of experience – and their relation – involved in the production of the 'work' *Les Immatériaux*. That the show's mode of exhibiting/presenting was said to be a 'dramaturgy' demonstrates the contemporary interchangeability of exhibition-making and art-making, this time within a philosophical framework which necessarily poses the aesthetic question both artistically and philosophically.

This perspective brings to the fore the methodological problem underlying *Les Immatériaux*. Despite its uncontested curatorial novelties within the innovative context of the Pompidou Centre, *Les Immatériaux* should be discussed as an act of experimentation rather than merely an attempt at innovation, in which the 'new' is often reductively linked to functionality and instrumentalized production. Experimentation as the constant investigation of established conventions that embraces the risk of failure in its attempt to discover something 'new' from 'within' is closer to Lyotard's own philosophical approach. The curatorial aim was not to predict the new, and Lyotard entered curating *ad hoc* not with the intention of innovating the exhibition form and its institutional conditions, but wanting to use the

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[29] See Kynaston L. McShine, ed., *Information*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1970); Jack Burnham, ed., *Software, Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Jewish Museum, 1970); Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden, eds, *Laboratorium*, exh. cat. (Antwerp: Provisional Museum of Photography, 1999); *Bridge the Gap: A Conference, Exhibition, and Gathering*, co-curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Akiko Miyake, Center for Contemporary Art, Kitakyushu, 24–27 July 2001. *Les Immatériaux* is a recurring reference in Obrist's writings and interviews. See, for instance, Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'After the Moderns, the Immaterials', *The Exhibitionist*, no. 5 (January 2012), pp. 12-15.

exhibition to interrogate the contemporary shift or 'crisis' in aesthetics. Indeed, in his interview to Blistène, he contends that philosophical thought is constantly interrogatory and invents its own rules – without being able to define them – often in interaction with what is considered as outside or non-philosophical. After the end of metaphysics, what is at stake in art, Lyotard explains, is 'a question of limits', pertinent also to sciences, as a new 'relationship to time and space and sensibility' – although he does not like 'to make use of that word [sensibility]' and, instead, draws attention to the 'existence' of artworks 'as events'.[30]

Accordingly, my inquiry is not concerned with the boundaries between art and curating, which nonetheless have continued to be blurred since the late-1960s, as *Les Immatériaux* so evidently exemplifies. My focus is, instead, on the new perspectives Lyotard's curatorship offers in regard to aesthetic experience, both on the more specific curatorial-artistic level and on the broader philosophical level of the shifting conditions of postmodern immaterial culture; namely the exhibition and philosophical aesthetics of *Les Immatériaux* as a philosophical, artistic, and curatorial compound. For although *Les Immatériaux* may not be primarily an art show, aesthetic concerns and the question of art are at its core. It is my contention that *Les Immatériaux* constitutes an ambitious aesthetic experiment embodying a certain aesthetic proposal – in this sense, it is different from Latour's intellectual exhibitions as 'thought experiments' – which within the resurgent interest in the show still awaits a more sustained critical inquiry. The investigation of *Les Immatériaux* from this viewpoint also allows for the construction of a genealogy of curatorial aesthetics that is not restricted to the curator-artist debate, and opens up a realm to discuss exhibition practices in their intersection with aesthetic issues, something distinctively missing in the growing discourse on curating today.

Les Immatériaux, therefore, takes up the methodological challenge to investigate new modalities of philosophical thinking and experience in search of a new 'sensibility' pertaining to the state of 'immaterial matter'. It confronts the complex question of how one can exhibit this kind of immaterial presence and sensation, which in turn challenges the modernist aesthetics of visual pleasure and calls for rethinking the notion of 'aesthetic' itself. In this regard, it is necessary to discuss the exhibition within the framework of Lyotard's philosophical work and

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[30] Blistène, pp. 32, 33.

aesthetic concerns of the time, and specifically his ongoing preoccupation with the 'postmodern' question and his turn to Kant in articulating a postmodern sublime. Lyotard, as I discuss at a later point, does not relate *Les Immatériaux* directly to the aesthetic of the sublime, emphasizing instead an interest in the impact of new technologies. Nonetheless, his philosophical work of the time sought to explore art's transcendental conditions of possibility in an aesthetic of the sublime, and in this respect his understanding of the conjunction of the sensible and what lies beyond it in the 'immaterial material' of contemporary sensation pertains directly to the philosophical and artistic dimensions of *Les Immatériaux*.

This chapter deals primarily with the philosophical conception and artistic presentation of *Les Immatériaux* from the perspective of the tension between its conceptual and experiential levels. Having already introduced the methodological issues and relations specific to the exhibition, the next section engages with the philosophical and conceptual aspects of *Les Immatériaux*. Specifically, it discusses the exhibition's underlying questions about the 'postmodern' and its 'immaterial materials', and their dehumanizing effects. The third section analyses the staging of the exhibition as a 'dramaturgy of postmodernity' including its 'postmodern' spatio-temporal presentation, heterogeneous array of exhibits and openness to non-art, excessive means and disquieting effect of communication, its mode of spectatorship and controversial reception with particular emphasis on *Les Immatériaux*'s performative dimension and the disturbing incommensurability between sensibility and its understanding in thought it invoked. Given Lyotard's interest in destabilizing the hegemony of conceptual understanding, the established reception of *Les Immatériaux* as a philosophical and conceptual exhibition becomes more complicated. The reservations Lyotard expresses about the anti-aesthetic impact of technoscientific rationality on the production, mediation, and reception of art, despite the profusion of technoscientific exhibits in *Les Immatériaux*, also complicate the role of technology in the show and the experience offered. The last part tackles Lyotard's concern with the possibility of aesthetic feeling in the age of communication-information technologies, and so his ambivalent position to them, which in turn raises the fundamental question of 'presence' in the postmodern condition, and the necessity to be open to the aesthetic feeling of the sublime.

II. *Les Immatériaux* as a philosophical exhibition

The 'postmodern condition' and technoscience

The conception of the exhibition along the lines of 'immaterials' and the 'postmodern' is part of Lyotard's ongoing concern with the 'postmodern' after the seminal publication *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).[31] The book, commissioned by the government of Quebec as a report on the state of knowledge in advanced Western society, established Lyotard's reputation as a 'postmodernist theorist' and imposed the term 'postmodernism' on the debates that dominated the 1980s. Yet, for Lyotard, 'postmodernism' is not a theory, but a certain cultural attitude towards modernity and the modern as a humanist project. He famously distinguished 'modern' and 'postmodern' on the basis of their respective attitude towards what he calls 'metanarratives' or 'grand narratives': the overarching theories of the past which provided society with the foundations for its totalizing discourses, and the legitimate guarantors of 'truth' in science, knowledge, and culture. Whereas the 'modern' defines any science that legitimates itself by appealing to grand narratives such as 'the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth', the 'postmodern' marks an 'incredulity towards metanarratives', largely as an effect of the technological transformations of the last decades.[32]

According to Lyotard, the 'leading' developments in science and technology since the end of the 1950s have to do with language, communication and information.[33] He accordingly defines the field of his study as 'knowledge in computerized societies', and makes the point that with the rapid development of communication technologies the role of knowledge and the processes by which it is legitimated have entered into a crisis.[34] The decline of the traditional 'grand

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[31] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 [1979]).

[32] Ibid., pp. xxiii-xxiv.

[33] 'And it is fair to say that for the last forty years the "leading" sciences and technologies have had to do with language: phonology and theories of linguistics, problems of communication and cybernetics, modern theories of algebra and informatics, computers and their languages, problems of translation and the search for areas of compatibility among computer languages, problems of information storage and data banks, telematics and the perfection of intelligent terminals, paradoxology.' Ibid. pp. 3-4.

[34] 'The Field: Knowledge in Computerized Societies' is the title of the first chapter of the book. Ibid., pp. 3-6.

narratives' legitimating knowledge since the European Enlightenment raises the question of 'Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?'[35] In postindustrial societies, Lyotard argues, science and technology have become intertwined as 'technoscience', closely bound to capitalist operations for which what primarily counts is the 'criterion of performativity' – the logic of maximizing the system's efficiency – so that emphasis has shifted 'from the ends of action to its means.'[36] Consequently, the modernist grand narratives that legitimated the progressive movement of the human towards an objective end, defined as either universal emancipation – in Marxism's political programme – or the establishment of mind and knowledge – in Hegel's speculative philosophy – are no longer pertinent; they are increasingly replaced by 'performativity' as the new means for legitimizing knowledge and socio-cultural development.[37] 'Postmodern', therefore, designates a socio-cultural condition marked by a 'legitimation crisis', which is ultimately a crisis in knowledge produced by its increasing alliance with economic and political power as 'an informational commodity'.[38]

Lyotard neither advocates nor laments the 'postmodern condition'. He rather describes it as a state of affairs, nonetheless pointing to kinds of knowledge that open up possibilities for thinking and expression not susceptible to the technological criterion of performativity. 'Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable', he writes.[39] In a poststructuralist move, Lyotard points to those differences, particularities, and events which are excluded from the totalizing structures of metanarratives in the name of unity, or are threatened with reductive translatability into the codes of computer languages in the name of informational distribution and operational communication.[40] As such, he argues for the heterogeneity of Wittgenstein's 'language games' over Jürgen Habermas's

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[35] Ibid., pp. xxiv-xxv.

[36] Ibid., pp. xxiv, 37.

[37] Lyotard defines 'delegitimation' as follows: 'In contemporary society and culture – postindustrial society, postmodern culture – the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation.' Ibid.

[38] Ibid., p. 5.

[39] Ibid., p. xxv.

[40] 'It [knowledge] can fit into the new channels and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer languages.' Ibid., p. 4.

communicational consensus.[41] The 'postmodern condition' is presented as both a historical moment and a narrative mode; the latter is recognized as defining the rules to be discovered and put into use in the conduct of various 'language games' that bring to the fore the qualities of heterogeneous invention and dissensus, that is, a kind of 'legitimation' no longer based on operational efficiency.

The presentation of postmodernism in diagnostic rather than ideological terms makes it an open question instead of an attempt at systematic theorization, which would risk turning it into just another 'grand narrative'. In this sense, the question of 'immaterials', which provided the title and philosophical framework of the show, develops certain issues from Lyotard's earlier 'report' on the domination of technoscientific rationality in the 'postmodern condition'. For at issue in contemporary technoscience is not the Enlightenment values it may represent, but its new place in society and its implications in a culture that no longer posits the human subject at its centre. As Lyotard expresses it to Blistène:

> these technologies are interesting, and at the same time so troubling, to the extent that they force us to reconsider the position of the human being in relationship to the Universe, in relationship to himself, in relationship to his traditional purposes, his recognised abilities, his *identity*.[42]

By linking technoscientific postmodernism to the fundamental question of human identity, Lyotard calls for reflection on the disarray invoked by the displacement of modernism's certainties. The show intends to be a manifestation of the disturbing effect of this change. However, instead of providing definite replies and evaluations, and so giving an idea of the future, the stated aim is to 'intensify' the interrogation and 'the question be left open for the visitor.'[43] The philosophical stakes of the exhibition find their way into a dramaturgy of the changing contemporary condition, with the aim of avoiding didacticism and sustaining 'a feeling of incertitude' about the outcome of these developments. 'What sort of legitimacy can be seen in this mode of development?', Lyotard asks.[44] As such, the curatorial intention is to address this question through the show, at least in its dramaturgy, as a sense of 'anxiety' and

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[41] Ibid., pp. xxv, 9-11.
[42] Blistène, p.33. Italics in the original.
[43] Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, pp. 160, 162.
[44] Blistène, pp. 34, 33.

uncertainty that incites reflection on Man's identity and the objects surrounding us.[45] The exhibition, Lyotard explains, 'tries to give legitimacy' to the theme of 'immaterials', this 'monstrous neologism', considering that 'the progress that has been accomplished in the sciences and probably in the arts … is strictly connected to an ever closer knowledge of what we generally call objects.'[46]

'Immaterials': New forms of materiality and their implications

The development of new sciences and technologies, however, marked the crisis of the understanding of 'object' as a solid material entity, and of the subject-object relationship associated with it. As Lyotard explains, the term 'immaterials' does not merely – and somewhat contradictorily – denote new materials, but in a broad sense denotes a material which is 'no longer matter … for a project', implying for Man 'a dissolution which is comparable to his own.'[47] In this respect, what is new is primarily the kind of dissolution these forms of materiality imply, and their effect on long-lasting presuppositions of what it is to be human. The modernist notion of Man as master of nature, which is based on the fixed relationship between an active, powerful subject and a passive, compliant material, destined for and subservient to human will and aims, is no longer applicable.[48] As Lyotard explains:

> It [the new technology] shows that the mind of Man is also part of the 'matter' it intends to master; and that when suitably processed, matter can be organized in machines which in comparison may have the edge on mind. The relationship between mind and matter is no longer one between an intelligent subject with a will of his own and an inert object. They are now cousins in the family of 'immaterials'.[49]

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[45] Ibid., p. 33; Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 165.
[46] Blistène, p. 33.
[47] Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, pp. 159, 162.
[48] Ibid., p. 159.
[49] Ibid., p. 165. Lyotard refers to the replacement of the functions of the mind by computer technologies and to the treatment, according to the development of neuroscience, of the neural part of the brain as itself a complex of coded, structured matter in interface with other compounds: 'The human cortex is "read" just like an electronic field; through the neurovegetative system human affectivity is "acted" on like a complex chemical organization composed of information transmitted by media and according to diverse codes connected by interfaces where "translations" take place.' Ibid., pp. 162-163.

The destabilization of the subject-object distinction and Man's power over objects consequently affects established dualist co-ordinates such as 'mind versus matter', 'matter versus form', 'matter versus energy', 'hardware versus software'; the 'whole network of associations' is destabilized and forces us to reconsider Man's identity as maker, and indeed the notion of creativity itself.[50] Matter is no longer conceived as an obedient substance, opposed to a shaping subject. This shift undermines the idea of creation as a teleological endeavour implying an author (origin) and a material product (end result), centered on Man's expressive self and power. Lyotard was concerned with the theological connotations of 'creation' and replaced the previously suggested title of the exhibition *Nouveaux Matériaux et Creation* ['New Materials and Creativity'] with that of 'Immaterials'. He explains his choice on the basis that 'all of these words have undergone considerable shifts in meaning', therefore a different perspective is required.[51]

According to Lyotard, scientific developments, especially in particle physics, show that on their structural level objects are 'complex agglomerates of tiny packets of energy' or 'particles' not perceived as such, and so, he infers, 'the only thing that exists is energy.'[52] These remarks suggest a considerable shift in our conception of matter in forms that exceed the reach of ordinary human perception and, more significantly, dissolve the mind/matter division that had defined the Cartesian course of modern thought. In his paper 'Complexity and the Sublime' – presented in a conference on the philosophical issues of postmodernism at London ICA, in May 1985 on the occasion of the recent English translation of *The Postmodern Condition* and the Pompidou exhibition –[53] Lyotard drew attention to how electronic machines

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[50] Ibid., pp. 160-161.

[51] 'The idea of "immaterials" or "non-materials" was a little bit different at first, since I'd been asked to do this exhibition under a different title. It was supposed to be called "Nouveaux Matériaux et Creation"—New Materials and Creativity. But then I slightly shifted the subject by trying to give it a somewhat different range; I said to myself, "Creativity? What is that supposed to mean?" And again, "What is 'new' supposed to mean?" Thinking about "materials" today, I thought, "But what does that imply for an architect, or for an industrialist?" I came to the conclusion that all of these words have undergone considerable shifts in meaning, and I thought that the question had to be approached from a different point of view.' Lyotard in Blistène, p. 32.

For Lyotard's concerns with the theological meaning of 'creation', and thus the association of the term *incréer* ['increate'] with the 'immaterials', see Jean-François Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work …', [curatorial talk delivered in Spring 1984], trans. Robin Mackay, in Hui and Broeckmann, pp. 29-66 (35-37).

[52] Ibid., p. 33.

[53] A two-day conference, entitled 'A Question of Postmodernity: The Philosophical Dimension of the Postmodern Debate', was held at the ICA, in May 1985. In 'Introduction: The Question of Postmodernism', Geoff Bennington explains that the insistence on Lyotard as the starting and recurring reference point for the debate (Lyotard replied to the other contributors) is due to the recent publication

do not substitute for 'mechanical operations', but 'certain mental and/or linguistic operations'. He also identified a philosophical return to Leibniz as symptomatic of an ongoing collapse of the Cartesian conception of matter and the image of the world as divided between matter and soul or mind.[54] Lyotard's account is important in many respects: it points to the counter-Cartesian trajectory of an idea of complexity as well as to a contemporary materialist position and, significantly, connects *Les Immatériaux* with them.

> The overlapping of mind and matter in contemporary techno-science is the aspect we were particularly concerned to emphasize in the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*. We were trying to exhibit, not the unpresentable, and to that extent it is not a sublime exhibition, but the retreat of the traditional division between mind and matter; what is important now is this sort of continuity between mind and matter. […] Maybe our task is just that of complexifying the complexity we are in charge of. Perhaps this is a materialist point of view, but only if we see matter not as a substance, but as a series of invisible and ungraspable elements organized by abstract structures. So we can be materialists today and in a sense maybe we must be.[55]

Lyotard warns us that we should not look to the exhibition for an illustration of sublimity, either on the technological or art historical level, but see it as an investigation into the effects of complexification and the shift to a new immaterial materiality. The exhibition reflects on the profound transformations in man's relationship to nature and the world in the wake of the new materialism of technoscience. Lyotard spelled out his ideas on the contemporary conception of matter and its impact on philosophy in the seminar 'Matter and the Immaterials', held at the Centre Pompidou during the show. Drawing on contemporary developments in

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in English of his influential book *The Postmodern Condition.* This book, Bennington continued, was 'an important impulse behind the ICA conference' as it has given rise to various debates surrounding the term 'postmodern' in the English-speaking world. He also refers to Lyotard's concept of the sublime in the Appendix to the English edition, the essay 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', as well as the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* still running at the Pompidou, which was another drive for the conference. See Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989 [first publ. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986]), pp. 3-6.

[54] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Complexity and the Sublime' [1985], ICA Documents 4, in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989 [first publ. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986], pp. 19-26 (19-20).

[55] Ibid., p. 20.

physics, he disclaims the Cartesian concept of matter as independent and conceptually determined substance, and suggests instead a philosophical shift to what he calls an 'immaterialist materialism' understood in terms of energy and vibrations.[56] This conception of matter-as-energy entails the immaterialization of what is perceived as a solid entity, and so a new conception of reality to which the exhibition sought to testify. According to the Press release, immaterialization makes reality more intangible and abstract, infinitely malleable, and highly complex.

> It is as if a filter has been placed between us and the things, a screen of numbers. […] A colour, a sound, a substance, a pain, or a star return to us as digits in schemes of utmost precision. With the encoding and decoding-systems we learn that there are realities that are in a new way intangible. […] Reality consists of elements, organised by structural rules (matrixes) in no longer human measures of space and time.[57]

Not only is our conception and perception of matter as solid objects destabilized, but also our relation to reality is mediated by ever more complex technological devices and digitalisation that transform material entities into dissolved bits of information.

The operational communication structure

It is clear that the immaterials testify to an increased complexification in postmodern electronic culture that destabilizes the very notion of the 'human', implying processes of dispersion in all levels of human activity. Nonetheless they are states of matter and should not be confused with a limited understanding of 'dematerialization' as the invisibility and potential obsolescence of the object associated with Conceptual art, and to which, as previously discussed, many objections were raised. To reflect on

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[56] The seminar 'Matter and the Immaterials' was held in April 1985 in the Seminar Space of the Centre Georges Pompidou on the initiative of its director Christian Descamps. See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Matter and Time' [1985], in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 36-46 (45).

[57] 'Les Immatériaux', Press release, Dossier de Presse, Press Conference 8 January 1985, Centre Georges Pompidou <https://www.centrepompidou.fr/media/imgcoll/Collection/DOC/M5050/M5050_A/M5050_ARCV01_DP-2007011.pdf>, p. 3 of 13; trans. in Eric Kluitenberg, 'Transfiguration of the Avant-Garde: The Negative Dialectics of the Net' (Amsterdam: 21 December 2001), n.p. <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0201/msg00104.html> [created 23 January 2002; accessed 2 July 2015].

these changes and due to the breadth of immaterials – apparent in one of the working exhibition titles *La Matière dans tous ses états* ['Matter in all of its states'] – the exhibition was organized along a structure taken from communication theory and linguistic pragmatics. According to it, any object or phenomenon is a message, or a set of signs, in a schema of interactions. In his curatorial statement, Lyotard cites communication theorists Harold Lasswell, Norbert Wiener, and Roman Jacobson as points of reference. The statement includes a diagram of the communication model comprised of two sets of poles in two intersecting axes: the horizontal one, along which a *message* is disseminated from a *sender* to a *receiver* pole, and a vertical one moving from the *code* of the message – the distribution of the differential variations of the elements out of which the message is composed – to the *referent* of the message pole (what it refers to) via the *support* or *material* of the message, namely its material instantiation, its physical embodiment. The general principle of this model is that of 'interaction', meaning that each pole is relevant only in its relation to the other ones and any change in the function of one axis or point causes a change in the whole, and thus a modification of the message.[58]

While Lyotard employed this structuralist model of the communication process, he does not adhere to it as a totalizing system of communication. For what is at issue in electronic culture, he points out, is the dissolution of the message, or the immateriality of matter, through the inscription of the code into the material support. Since the support is no longer a solid substance but distributed states of energy, the change in the support's dimension affects the whole network as an 'unstable ensemble of interactions'. Matter as an independent entity dissolves through its codification in information and communication technologies, and 'the model of language', Lyotard asserts, 'replaces the model of matter' at a no longer human scale.[59] It is noteworthy that Lyotard is less concerned to provide an epistemological analysis of the communication model than to adapt it for the purposes of the exhibition and the construction of a linguistic structure on the theoretical and poetic level.

As such, he selected five French terms deriving from the Sanskrit root *mât-* ('to make by hand; to measure; to build') and, as a second diagram shows, he maps these *mât-* words onto the communication schema, creating the following

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[58] Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 163.
[59] Ibid., pp. 163-164. Lyotard writes: 'The scale on which the structure is operational in contemporary technoscience and artistic experimentation is no longer a human one. Humans are overwhelmed by the very small, which is also the only means of information about the very large (astrophysics)', (164).

correspondences: *Matériau/Material*: the medium support of the message; *Matériel/Material*: the hardware, the receiver, what handles its acquisition, transfer and collection; *Maternité/Maternity*: the sender of the message; *Matiére/Matter*: the referent of the message (what it is about); and *Matrice/Matrix*: the code of the message (Fig. 3.6-3.7).[60] The overarching linguistic structure apparently puts the exhibition within the realm of the study of telecommunication and information technologies since the 1979 report, and reflects Lyotard's position that language imposes its immaterial model on postmodern electronic culture. However, the conflation of communications theory with the etymological group of *mat-* terms does not substantiate a rigorous linguistic approach, not least because Lyotard himself acknowledges that the root *mât-* as an 'old Indo-European' is 'fiction'.[61] These linguistic categories function less as a hermeneutics of meaning than as an organizing tool, what Lyotard calls 'the operator', which structures the conceptual field and the exhibition's main lines of investigation. They also provide a selection mechanism for the wide range of exhibits, which should 'evoke passages, overlaps and slippages from one semantic zone to another', demonstrating a state of instability.[62]

III. A postmodern space-time: Exhibition as 'manifestation' and 'overexposition'

This two-fold linguistic structure became the basis of the exhibition layout and its framework of inquiry. The fifth floor of the Beaubourg, a space of 4,000 square metres, was divided into five major paths, one for each of the *mat-* terms. The paths were in turn divided into thirty-one 'zones' and each 'zone' grouped a number of 'sites' – constellations of heterogeneous exhibits named after a theme relevant to the *mat-* term they represented. Between the zones were neutral sections, called 'desert' regions.[63] The exhibition space was transformed into a huge labyrinth, designed by the architect and scenographer Philippe Délis, which still eludes thorough

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[60] Ibid., pp. 161, 164-165. Unlike in English, the uses of 'material' in French are distinguished as *Matériau* (material; the media support of the message) and *Matériel* (the recipient).

[61] Blistène, p. 35. On the lack of epistemological rigour in the linguistic operator of the exhibition, see John Rajchman, 'The Postmodern Museum', *Art in America*, vol. 73, no. 10 (October 1985), pp. 110-117, 171 (114); also Hudek, 'From Over- to Sub-Exposure', note 16, p. 11 of 14.

[62] Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, pp. 163, 161.

[63] Ibid., p. 169.

documentation (Fig. 3.8).[64] The confusing effect was intensified by the division of space with grey metal web hanging from the ceiling – echoing the mediated relation to reality referred to in the Press release – the contrast of light and dark areas that made the webbing more or less opaque, and the profusion of mirrors and screens (Fig. 3.9-3.11). Thierry Chaput describes the exposition of the 'immaterials' as a fluid multi-sensory environment that defies the familiarities of perception:

> Hung with difficult greys, lit by improbable lights, floating unpredictable ideas, at this hour, on this day of this year, suspended, ordered with rigour and without a system, 'Les Immatériaux' expose themselves between seeing, sensing, and hearing.[65]

Sound was a key element in the show. Upon their entrance, visitors were equipped with radio-controlled headphones through which they could hear various localized broadcasts for each zone and the *mat-* question at stake. Broadcasts comprised a melange of literary and philosophical texts, accompanied by music and other sound effects, even advertising jingles. The soundtracks did not offer any guide to the exhibits or a coherent narrative. The unidentified voices changed as the visitors moved throughout the show signaling their passage from one semantic zone to another (Fig. 3.12-3.13).[66]

After their encounter in the entrance of the show with an ancient Egyptian bas-relief depicting a goddess offering the sign of life to Nectanebo II, and accompanied by the sound of human breathing, visitors moved through a dark corridor to a

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[64] For the most comprehensive account that puts together a 'phenomenological visit' of the exhibition in a site-by-site description, see Antonia Wunderlich, *Der Philosoph im Museum: Die Ausstellung 'Les Immatériaux' von Jean-François Lyotard* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008).

[65] Thierry Chaput, 'Entrée en Matière', in Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, eds, *Les Immatériaux*: *Album* (vol. 1), exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), p. 6, trans. in Altshuler et al., eds, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Volume II: 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013), p. 224.

[66] The soundtrack included excerpts of texts by, among others, Maurice Blanchot, Samuel Beckett, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, Paul Virilio, Yves Klein, Hans Christian Andersen, Lewis Carroll, Antonin Artaud, Stéphane Mallarmé, Marcel Proust, François Rabelais, Émile Zola, Heinrich von Kleist, and Jorge Luis Borges. See *Immaterials, Route: Zones & Sites*, English Version of the French Sound-track (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985). The English version describes 26 zones in the exhibition. French sociologist Nathalie Heinich, who was in charge of a survey of the visitors' reactions to the exhibition, refers to complaints about the required fee for the headsets, about them often malfunctioning, and misunderstandings among visitors who did not realize the connection between the switch of voices and their own movement through the exhibition, and thought they did not work. Heinich, '*Les Immatériaux* Revisited', p. 3 of 4.

mirrored vestibule which opened onto the introductory site, entitled *Théâtre du non-corps* ['Theatre of the Non-Body']. The Egyptian low-relief was also on display in the very last vestibule of the show, this time as a blurred photographic reproduction projected onto a screen as if to suggest the transformation of the founding gesture of life and Man's mastery on Nature in the postmodern condition (Fig. 3.14-3.15). With an excerpt from Beckett's *The Unnameable* on the headphones, visitors confronted in the first site five dioramas displaying miniature stage sets from Beckett's plays, put together by his set designer Jean-Claude Fall and scenographer Gérard Didier (Fig. 3.16). These tableaux, one per *mat-* word, served as points of entry to the five meandering paths making up the show, and it was the visitor's choice which one to follow.

The *mat-* paths converged at the other end of the exhibition in the site called *Labyrinthe du Language* ['The Labyrinth of Language'].[67] This was a space filled with computer consoles and electronic devices demonstrating the undertaking of linguistic, mental, and creative operations by the new technologies (Fig. 3.17). It included programmes of Maths games, problem-solving, videos of spectrographic analyses of voice and text, computer-generated artistic images, various ways of manipulating language – storing, analyzing, (re-)composing data – even a programme that allowed visitors to make their own interactive story and compose literature, devised by the experimental literature group ALAMO in the *Tous les auteurs* ['All the authors'] site (Fig. 3.18). The most ambitious element here was the project *Épreuves d'écriture* ['Writing Tests']. Visitors had access via computer terminals to the conversations between twenty-six invited French intellectuals on fifty terms, selected by Lyotard as key to the exhibition. The discussions between the participants, including among others Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Isabelle Stengers, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, François Châtelet, and Daniel Buren were conducted over two months via an interactive software installed on networked computers on France's communication system Minitel. It was a collaborative electronic writing experiment that undermined the notion of 'author' and functioned as a kind of proto-

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[67] John Rajchman, in his review of the show, makes the point that 'In the world of "*Les Immatériaux*", everything starts in the body and ends in language.' Rajchman, 'The Postmodern Museum', p. 114.

e-mail and academic Internet network (Fig. 3.19).[68] The transcripts were also published as the second volume of the exhibition catalogue.

The sites exhibited a remarkably heterogeneous array of everyday objects, commodities, technical artefacts and scientific documentation such as computers, robots, electro-microscopes, telecommunications, Silicon Valley displays, photocopiers, a Japanese Sleeping Cell, and biogenetic manipulations (Fig. 3.20-3.21). Within this vast assemblage, various artworks were presented without historical, stylistic, or medium-specific classifications. Alongside experimental forms of writing and text, there were computer and video music, videos, a holographic film, spectrographs, manipulated images, videodiscs of images, interactive installations such as *Son=Espace* ['Sound=Space'], a sound environment in which the visitors' movements were detected by a system of sensors and turned into various sounds by means of software, designed by the artist Rolf Gehlhaar (Fig. 3.22).[69] An iconic work of new media art was the interactive videodisc-installation *The Bus* (1984-1985) in the site *Visites simulées* ['Simulated Visits'], offering visitors simulated rides to Paris on public transport (Fig. 3.23-3.24).[70] The installation was produced by the artist Jean-Luis Boissier and the department of digital images, University of Paris VIII. In retrospect, Boissier makes the interesting point that at the time *Les Immatériaux* was not considered an exhibition of 'electronic and digital art', despite its affinities with

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[68] Participants in *Epreuves d'écriture* were working at home over the course of two months with an Olivetti M20, which was connected to the central network based at the Centre Pompidou, and were asked to respond to the terms 'Artificial', 'Author', 'Code', 'Desire', 'Interface', 'Modernity', 'Nature', 'Language', 'Meaning', 'Simulation', 'Speed', 'Time', 'Voice', among others. They wrote brief commentaries for each keyword and commented upon the entries of others. The responses were collated and made available to exhibition visitors on Olivetti M24 workstations at the exhibition space. Nathalie Heinich refers to the complaints, recorded also in the transcript, of most of the contributors about the difficulties and technical failures they encountered in using the software. Heinich, '*Les Immatériaux* Revisited', p. 3 of 4.

[69] *Son=Espace* was created *in situ* by the artist. Minitels were the main computer devices in the exhibition, and some projects, Gehlhaar's included, malfunctioned because of the difficulty the team had in providing a sufficiently powerful server. Gehlhaar continues to work on this project up to today, developing variations of the prototype exhibited in *Les Immatériaux*. For a description of *Sound=Space* and an account of the practical difficulties the artist encountered in installing it at the Pompidou Centre, see Rolf Gehlhaar, 'SOUND=SPACE in *Les Immateriaux* at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, March 5 - May 27, 1985' <http://www.gehlhaar.org/x/pages/words.htm> [accessed 25 June 2015].

[70] Visitors sitting in a replica of a bus could view what we normally see from the window of a bus *en route* – a landscape film was projected in the screens behind the bus windows alternating with a large set of photographic portraits – and one could press the button to request a stop. For a detailed account of the project, see Jean-Louis Boissier, *1985 Le Bus* <http://jlggb.net/jlb/?page_id=94> [accessed 25 June 2015]; also Jean-Louis Boissier, 'The Bus of *Les Immatériaux*', in Hui and Broeckmann, pp. 109-117.

the recent exhibition *Electra* (1983).[71] Some forms of what we now call 'digital art' were then emerging, but works made by new technologies such as *The Bus* were not established in the public conception as art. Besides, Boissier remarks, the strict distinction between art and non-art exhibits was not an issue in *Les Immatériaux*, in which 'there were not really "works" … but "sites"'.[72]

The selection of the artworks was collaborative and not solely Lyotard's decision. The exhibition included architectural models and drawings by, among others, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, Peter Eisenman, Kazimir Malevich, Piet Zwart, Zaha Hadid; paintings and sculpture by 'canonical' European avant-garde artists such as Marchel Duchamp, Georges Seurat, Giacomo Balla, Robert and Sonia Delaunay, Nathalie Gontcharova, Jean-Simeon Chardin, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Raoul Hausmann along with works by Lucio Fontana, Dan Flavin, François Morellet, Andy Warhol; Conceptual art by Joseph Kosuth, Dan Graham, Robert Barry, Robert Ryman, Yves Klein; Arte Povera by Giovanni Anselmo, Jannis Kounellis, and Piero Manzoni; Kinetic art by Takis; hyperrealist paintings by Jacques Monory; manipulated photographs by Annegret Soltau, Philippe Thomas, Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, among others (Fig. 3.25-3.27). The artworks were not presented as individual art exhibits but as part of the overall conceptual framework, demonstrating the breadth of immaterials and their overwhelming effect (Fig. 3.28).

Such a heterogeneous range of exhibits attests to what John Rajchman aptly calls 'a universe of museological nominalism' no longer following the classifications, aesthetic and cultural divisions of a fixed structural order.[73] Instead, *Les Immatériaux* foregrounds that in today's world saturated by the fluidity of immaterial messages, to which we are overexposed, our conception and relation to reality is transformed as it goes beyond the established 'code'. The imposition of the immaterial 'order' of

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[71] The exhibition *Electra: L'électricité et l'électronique dans l'art au XXe siècle*, curated by Frank Popper and Marie-Odile Briot, Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris, 10 December 1983 - 5 February 1984, dealt with the effects of electricity and electronics in twentieth-century art and, to a certain extent, explored issues further developed in *Les Immatériaux*. A number of twentieth-century artists presented in *Electra* were also part of the Pompidou exhibition. On this basis, art historian Andreas Broeckmann in his conversation with Jean-Luis Boissier (2014) claims that the artistic programme of *Les Immatériaux* is largely inscribed into the artistic practice in Paris in those years. See Jean-Louis Boissier in conversation with Andreas Broeckmann, 'The Production of *Les Immatériaux*', in Hui and Broeckmann, pp. 93-107 (104-105).

[72] Ibid. p. 102. Seen from today's perspective, Boissier points out, the checklist of artworks in *Les Immatériaux* should be reconsidered since many of the exhibited items would now be considered as artworks.

[73] Rajchman, 'The Postmodern Museum', p. 113. In this sense, he calls *Les Immatériaux* 'the first postmodern museum.' Ibid.

dispersions, interactions, and invisible interfaces puts the fixed 'identity' attributed to an origin (maternity) into question.[74] The show strongly evoked the sense that the distinctions between natural or original and artificial, reality and representation are increasingly blurred. Was *Les Immatériaux* a demonstration of the advent of a culture of simulacra, the 'precession' of empty signifiers without referent, prophesized by French sociologist Jean Baudrillard whose voice was heard in the soundtrack?[75] In his scathing essay 'The Beaubourg Effect', Baudrillard presents the Pompidou as paradigmatic of a postmodern culture of simulation, 'a carcass of flux and signs', suggesting ironically that if anything had to be placed in it, it should be 'a labyrinth, a combinatory, infinite library … in short, the universe of Borges' to verify the processes of cultural implosion and deterrence taking place.[76] John Rajchman describes *Les Immatériaux* as a 'phenomenologist's nightmare' because of its overwhelming sense of a world of simulation, in which the activities of the lived body are replaced by artificial processes and the subject's physical being in the world is disorientated (Fig. 3.29).[77] For example, in the 'matériau' strand, the site *Nu Vain* ['Vain Nakedness'] juxtaposed photographs by Eadweard Muybridge's 1887 experiment *Animal Locomotion*, featuring 'twelve asexual mannequins', with the projection of a clip from Joseph Losey's film *Monsieur Klein* (1976) alternating with a photograph of body dissection in Nazi concentration camps.[78] In the site *L' Ange* ['The Angel'] manipulated photographs displayed the body as subject to gender change and hermaphroditism, while the site *Deuxième peau* ['Second Skin'] showed images of artificial and cultivated skin (Fig. 3.30). In addition to the simulated *Bus* visits, Jean-Luis Boissier presented with Liliane Terrier an installation in the site *Toutes les copies* ['All the Copies'], where visitors could photocopy household objects or body parts with the assistance of a technician.

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[74] In his explication of the communication model informing the show, Lyotard writes: 'With "immaterials", the attribution of an identity (thing, man, mind, etc.) to one of the poles of the structure appears as an error. A "same" identity may occupy various poles of the structure.' Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 164.

[75] See Jean Baudrillard, 'The Precession of Simulacra', in Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981]), pp. 1-48. Excerpt of the text was heard in the site *Images Calculées* ['Calculated Images'].

[76] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Beaubourg Effect: Implosion and Deterrence', in Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981]), pp. 61-73 (61, 63). Jorge Luis Borges was a major reference in the exhibition. Extracts from his 'Babel's Library' were broadcasted in 'The Labyrinth of the Language' site.

[77] He writes, 'One entered a world of simulation of the body.' Rajchman, 'The Postmodern Museum', p. 116.

[78] See 'Nu Vain', in Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, eds, *Les Immatériaux*: *Inventaire* (vol. 1), exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), n.p.

Jean-Luis Déotte, philosopher at the University of Paris VIII, argues that the experimental installations, contemporary artworks, and the emphatic role of technology in the exhibition demonstrate Lyotard's 'enthusiasm' for the possibilities of art based on new technologies, a 'passion' for contemporary art that enforced a shift from his aesthetic concerns with the more traditional category of painting to which Lyotard returns in the *Que peindre?* ['What to Paint?'] (1987).[79] This claim of Lyotard's enthusiastic endorsement of art using new technology is rather overstated, as we will see. Despite the profusion of technoscientific exhibits, the transformation of our lived sense of being in the world, and the embrace of the artistic possibilities of new technology, *Les Immatériaux* presented neither a technological utopia nor dystopia. Lyotard forcefully distinguished himself from Baudrillard's nostalgia for a lost referent, and the aim of the show is not ideological critique or reaction to the supposed alienation of an original nature. Moreover, *Les Immatériaux* was not primarily intended as an exhibition of the latest technoscientific developments or cultural artefacts. It recalls the nineteenth-century world fairs and the early modernist design and architecture exhibitions, which aimed to project an image of the new by bringing together advanced art and technology in the name of a progressive humanist programme, however it remains essentially different from these in its intentions and driving aims. *Les Immatériaux* is not a 'universal exhibition' that celebrates the 'new' as innovation and progress. Rather, as Thierry Chaput explains, 'The unavoidable technoscience is present, without holding center stage. Expurgated of its bewitching content, of its magic, one senses it behind the scenes.'[80]

And yet, for contemporary critics such as Kate Linker in *Artforum*, technology, against curatorial intentions, 'occupied center stage' in *Les Immatériaux*. The show, she writes, paid 'homage to the machine's effects', 'valorized, and thereby mystified' contemporary technology, ultimately 'repeating the ideology of progress.' Its most problematic aspect, Linker explains, is that it 'unpersuasively presented' and 'banalized its central themes' such as simulation and artificiality while the conspicuous employment of conceptual art – 'a '60s, McLuhanesque air ran throughout the show'– functioned as mere illustration of the show's ideas. These failings, she concludes, raise the focal question of whether *Les Immatériaux* 'looks

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[79] Jean-Louis Déotte, '*Les Immatériaux* de Lyotard (1985): un programme figural', *Appareil*, online journal, 10 (2012) <http://appareil.revues.org/797> [created 20 December 2012; accessed 20 March 2015].

[80] Chaput, 'Entrée en Matière', in Lyotard and Chaput, eds, *Les Immatériaux*: *Album,* p. 6.

better on paper and reads better in its accompanying literature than it did in its physical form' or else 'whether profound shifts of a philosophical nature can be represented through objects – whether the immaterial can be … materialized.'[81]

While Linker focuses on the conceptual shortcomings of the show, raising questions pertinent to many theory-based contemporary exhibitions coming after *Les Immatériaux*, Michel Cournot in a particularly scathing critique in *Le Monde* draws attention to its technological failures. He describes it as a 'naïve curiosity shop', 'rather empty, rather dark, and rather macabre', actually 'a festival of the déjà vu' that leaves the visitor with 'the impression of not having seen anything new.'[82] In his response, Lyotard spells out the concerns of the show and provides a Duchampian understanding in place of Cournot's pejorative use of the 'déjà vu'.

> Mr Cournot wanted to revel in the jubilation offered by the new mastery promised by the 'technologists', by the prophets of a 'postmodern' break? The exhibition denies it, and this is precisely its gambit, to not offer any reassurance, especially and above all by prophesising a new dawn. To make us look at what is 'déjà vu', as Duchamp did with the ready-mades, and to make us unlearn what is 'familiar' to us: these are instead the exhibition's concerns.[83]

In contrast to habitual understandings of the 'new' as the promise of another narrative of universal progress, Lyotard defends an experimental approach over didacticism with the aim to awaken the visitors' sensitivity as a new sensibility arises in the present. He is concerned to bring visitors into a 'dramaturgy of postmodernity', and so to exhibit/present the postmodern experience and explore it in an artistic fashion rather than illustrating a theoretical thesis that legitimizes a new metanarrative.

Accordingly, Lyotard emphasizes the need to experiment with a new organization of space-time that invokes an immaterial sensibility and responds to the shifting aesthetic concerns of the day, although he mistrusts the term 'sensibility', as

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[81] Kate Linker, 'A Reflection on Post-modernism', *Artforum*, vol. 24, no. 1 (September 1985), pp. 104-105 (105).

[82] Michel Cournot, '*Les Immatériaux* au Centre Georges Pompidou : Un "Magasin de curiosités", naïf et macabre', *Le Monde*, 12 April 1985, p. 21, extracts trans. and cited in Altshuler et al., eds, *Biennials and Beyond*, p. 226.

[83] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Qui a peur des "Immatériaux"?', *Le Monde*, 3 May 1985, pp. 3, 5, trans. and cited in Hudek, 'From Over- to Sub-Exposure', pp. 4-5 of 14.

noted above. He explicates *Les Immatériaux* as a 'setting in space-time' ('mise en espace-temps') in sharp distinction with the traditional painting exhibitions, indebted to eighteenth-century modernist salons and galleries.[84] According to Lyotard, these institutions played a crucial role in the self-identification and formation of the modernist subject. The governing rule of both the artwork and the gallery space and, by extension, the formation of the subject is the visual rule of representation. The 'visitor is an eye' within a space legitimately constructed, following the geometric rules of perspectival perception dominant since the Renaissance, and experience is given through the visual identification of certain views ('vedute') as subject matters and modes of representation. The subject is 'formed by one sense alone, his sight', Lyotard encapsulates. Furthermore, movement is regulated by an obligatory itinerary within the gallery space so that the viewer is 'a body in movement' on a formative journey akin to eighteenth-nineteenth centuries 'character-forming novels'. In this regard, the modernist gallery becomes the unified space of the visual order of representation, a cultural institution that creates communal sense on the basis of commonly recognizable subject matters and the 'assimilation of heterogeneous data in the unity of an experience which constitutes a subject.'[85]

Lyotard is explicit: 'It is consequently impossible to present *Les Immatériaux* in a space-time of this nature. It is necessary to seek a "postmodern" space-time.' He maintains that 'the eye will be deprived of the exclusive privilege' granted to it in the modern galley,[86] and be replaced with a multi-sensory experience – sonorous, haptic, olfactory, and visual – with a disrupting rather than unifying effect. Instead of imposing a single itinerary within an ordered totality, space is dispersed into zones-as-constellations in a horizontal, rhizome-like structure. Visitors move without a map into a 'structured chaos', to use Szeemann's apt term, on a journey which is experiential rather than formative or instructive. Having denounced the traditional exhibition model, Lyotard cites the scriptural modes of Denis Diderot's reports on *Salons*, particularly that of 1767, and the city models of urban sociologists Paul Virilio and Giairo Daghini as sources of inspiration. He finds in Diderot's narrative a multi-vocal, heterogeneous format permutating between 'fiction and reality', 'creation and nature', overall the 'embryo' of an experimental 'postmodern aesthetics' beyond

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[84] Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 167. For a detailed account of the spatial layout of the exhibition, see Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work…', especially pp. 45-66.
[85] Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 167.
[86] Ibid., p. 168.

the sequential representation, common referent, and didacticism of a single authorial voice.[87] Similarly, he finds in the 'megalopolis' models a space of fluidity in contrast to the entirely programmed, rationally organized and dominated plan of Descartes's imagined city in *Discourse on Method*.[88] The issue, Lyotard argues, is no longer the presentation of 'an exhibition (*exposition*) but rather an "overexposition"' in Virilio's sense of the 'overexposed city'. The experience sought in *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard explains, is akin to that of travelling by car across California in a 'zone of conurbation', from San Diego to Santa Barbara, with only the car radio to mark the passage from one place to the next as one moves through different broadcasting zones. He describes it as a 'nebula', where maps and conventional oppositional structures are no longer useful because all material entities turn into 'metastable states of energy' and information flows moving through 'invisible interfaces'.[89]

Les Immatériaux, therefore, provides a dispersed, fluid and immaterial space-time organization, appropriate less to an exhibition than to a 'manifestation', as Lyotard called it, with the aim to 'render manifest' rather than to 'show something'.[90] The term suggests a performative process of presenting through experience immaterial forces and invisible interfaces that disrupt the canonical perception in fixed space-time conditions. Notably, the 'manifestation' of immateriality is occasioned within the materialist field of the exhibition and while material and immaterial, sensible and insensible coexist, they are not reducible to a harmonious union. Lyotard's 'overexposition' testified to a new sensibility, invoking tensions, gaps, incommensurabilities, and delays intensified by sound – 'which belongs to the art of the time' –[91] in short, an uneasy reflection rather than an all-too-easy identification. It is precisely this immanent tension that fundamentally constitutes the performative experience rather than the more obvious means by which it is demonstrated: namely the deliberate disruption of ocularcentrism; the overwhelming of the senses; the invitation of the viewers to engage with interactive installations and electronic devices; and, importantly, to become themselves investigators and experimenters finding their own way within a space that offers 'many exhibitions in

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[87] See Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work…', pp. 49-53. Lyotard borrows the term 'sites' from Diderot's presentation of Horace Vernet's landscape paintings as if they were 'real sites in which he was walking' (49).
[88] Ibid., pp. 34-35.
[89] Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 168.
[90] Ibid., p. 167; Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work…', p. 59.
[91] Ibid. p. 61.

one'.[92] In this respect, Kiff Bamford argues that for all the demonstration of the artificiality of the body, the visitor in *Les Immatériaux* is still 'a body in movement', and suggests that the aim of the deliberately sprawling and confusing movement was to register the visitor as 'performer' and 'participant in the performance of the exhibition' (Fig. 3.31).[93]

'Liberated from the hegemony of understanding'

Given the prevalence of language, both written and spoken, in *Les Immatériaux*, the participatory mode of spectatorship associated as it is with the aversion of authorship and didacticism evokes Roland Barthes's announcement of the 'death of the author' and the 'birth of the reader' as the maker of meaning and creator of the 'work' itself.[94] Lyotard acknowledged that 'the textual element' in the exhibition was intended to be 'a considerably more forceful presence than it usually is', and asserted the role of the visitor as oscillating between that of 'involuntary author' and the 'receiver'.[95] The excessive deployment of the textual, in whatever form, sought to question rather than to facilitate the understanding of the exhibition as referent (content) in a meaningful way. This is particularly evident in the disorientating effect of the sound system. As Lyotard explains, the broadcasts 'cover several *sites* at once' with the aim to 'create a soundtrack of *commentaries* that won't even really be commentaries at all.'[96]

Even the catalogue broke with the conventional explanatory account, consisting instead of two publications that reflected the exhibition as a process and open question. The first volume consists of two parts: *L'Inventaire* ['Inventory'], a bundle of loose cards presenting the works, artefacts, and installation in each of the 'sites'; and *Album*, a kind of documentation of the exhibition's making process

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[92] Ibid., p. 65. Given the variety of route choices the huge maze offered, it was unlikely that any individual trajectories through *Les Immatériaux* may be the same. The initial curatorial plan was each visitor to be given a magnetic memory card that would record their own itinerary throughout the exhibition space and printed it out upon their leaving the show. See Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 169.

[93] Kiff Bamford, *Lyotard and the figural in Performance, Art and Writing* (London: Continuum, 2012), p. 78. Bamford cites avant-garde theatre, Kaprow's Happenings, and especially Vito Acconci's performances as historical examples that best anticipate the 'visitor as performer' in *Les Immatériaux*. I would suggest that Szeemann's *Attitudes* as 'structured chaos' should also be considered within this trajectory, although it lacks the immersive dimension of *Les Immatériaux*.

[94] See Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977 [1967]), pp. 142-148. Quotations from this text and 'From Work to Text' in the same publication were heard in the soundtrack at the site 'All the Authors'.

[95] Blistène, p. 35; Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work…', p. 65.

[96] Blistène, p. 35. Italics in the original.

including statements, meeting minutes, notes, and layout sketches, echoing Szeemann's exhibition diary and early Conceptual art exhibitions of documentation (Fig. 3.32). The *Inventaire*, which actually presents the 'contents' of the show, allows the reader to put the unbound sheets into any order – as the visit of the sites themselves appeared – reflecting the dispersed effect of the information culture and Lyotard's critical engagement with totalizing forms of signification.[97] The second volume of the catalogue *Épreuves d'écriture* ['Writing Tests'] includes the transcript of the computer-mediated discourse among the French theorists.

Nonetheless, none of the textual materials was legible as a handy guide and aid to clarification. Thierry Chaput warns:

> When the true becomes uncertain, when existence loses its Manichaeism and is but a state of density of a probable presence, then the 'grasping' becomes blurred. Liberated from the hegemony of understanding (vain vanity?), 'Les Immatériaux' then calls upon a secret sensibility.[98]

It is precisely this curatorial call to be willing to leave behind one's rational convictions and enter a state of uncertainty in which any attempt to grasp 'a secret sensibility' is no longer plausible that split the audience responses at the time. In a softer tone than Cournot's critique, yet similarly ironic about the 'unfathomable' in the exhibition, which succeeds in making 'all equal' before it, Daniel Schneidermann writes in *Le Monde*:

> France is thus cut in two. There are those whose 'secret sensibility' has answered the roll call. And the others, shipwrecked, bogged down in the 'hegemony of understanding', with no other option than to cling to the life belt

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[97] *L'Inventaire* allows the visitor to become a reader who creates the work itself at the time of its reading. It reflects the necessity Lyotard had addressed in *Discours, figure* [1971] to exceed the structure of the book that imposes an immutable order and sense of progression, and be instead a book of fragmentation that disrupts the time of the reader: 'A good book, in order to give free rein to truth in its aberration, would be a book where linguistic time (the time in which signification evolves, the time of reading) would itself be deconstructed – a book the reader could dip into anywhere, in any order: a book to be grazed.' This is why Lyotard himself finally characterized *Discours, figure* as not a 'good book', 'for it still stakes out a position in signification; not being an artist's book, deconstruction here does not operate directly, but is *signified*. It is thus, still, a book of philosophy.' Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Mary Lydon and Antony Hudek (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011 [1971]), p. 13. Italics in the original.

[98] Chaput, 'Entrée en Matière', in Lyotard and Chaput, eds, *Les Immatériaux*: *Album*, p. 6.

of their Cartesianism, looking desperately from one room to the next for a common thread.[99]

The writer cites some of the visitors' responses sharing a common state of perplexity and difficulty in understanding, although, as a visitor remarks, 'there is nothing to be understood. If they'd wanted to explain it to us, they'd have put some labels…'[100]

Indeed, *Les Immatériaux* is an exhibition intended to be felt rather than understood. It brought together a range of visual, auditory, haptic, olfactory, and textual effects, creating an amalgam almost impossible to describe, comprehend, and define. The critics and much of the audience hardly assented to such an incomprehensible environment that violates the senses and destabilizes the rational powers of the subject. It is remarkable how French artists, later associated with Relational Aesthetics in the 1990s and using largely the exhibition as their medium, recall their own experience of *Les Immatériaux*. Their enthusiasm is fused with the inability to describe how the exhibition really was and to provide evidence of having witnessed the experience. Philippe Parreno recalls:

> There was no text, and yet you moved through a narrative written implicitly. It was a wonderful reading experience. But if you haven't seen the exhibition, it's difficult to describe it. If I tell how it was, it will sound like a dream.[101]

In a similarly enthusiastic tone, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster stresses the effect of light and sound and the consideration of the viewer's movement in the creation of the experience.[102]

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[99] Daniel Schneidermann, 'Candide at "Les Immatériaux"', *Le Monde*, 2 April 1985, trans. and cited in Altshuler et al., eds, *Biennials and Beyond* , p. 225.

[100] Ibid. Lyotard is aware that the 'disquiet' evoked in the show 'risks ending up in failure', nonetheless the curatorial team is determined to take the risk. Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work…', p. 60. Nathalie Heinich conducted a survey during the show of the visitors' reactions to it, testing new, non-statistical methodologies. [Nathalie Heinich, 'Un Évenement culturel à Beaubourg', in Christian Carrier, ed., *Les Immatériaux (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985): Étude de l'évènement exposition et de son public* (Paris: 1986)]. For the methodology and a summary of the findings, specifically the striking variety and instability of reactions as an effect of both the exhibition and institutional 'innovation' in contrast to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, see Heinich, '*Les Immatériaux* Revisited', pp. 3-4 of 4.

[101] Philippe Parreno, interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Gasthof* (Frankfurt: Städelschule, 2002), pp. 98-107 (98) <http://www.staedelschule.de/fileadmin/html/projects/Gasthof/Gasthof.pdf> [accessed 28 June 2015].

What is notable in contemporary accounts and recollections of *Les Immatériaux*, ranging from enthusiasm to frustration and disdain, is a strong sense of uncertainty; a perceived gap between the experience of the exhibition and its comprehension in thought, thereby its putting into knowledge by matching it to a certain meaning or concept. Lyotard maintained that 'the entirety of the exhibition could be thought of as a sign that refers to a missing signified.'[103] Meaning is withdrawn within the sensation of an immersive environment, disruptive of the visitors' consciousness and senses, and is raised, instead, as a question mark that suspends knowledge in the stabilization of a referent that would bring it to a resolution. Nonetheless, they all stress the value of having witnessed it, no matter how uneasy, unfamiliar, overwhelming, or violent the experience was. It is precisely the encounter with the limits of conceptual grasping and the representation of a referent that forces reflection upon this state of inadequacy and sense of limit experience. Reflection takes place at the edge of thinking with a delay or 'déjà vu', in Lyotard's words, as openness to often conflicting experiences and affective intensities. The latter can only be felt as they occur, without the mediation of a pre-text, irreducible to definition according to established categories of knowledge. In this respect, albeit its philosophical impetus, *Les Immatériaux* is not a strictly conceptual show providing an intellectual experience at the expense of sensation. Philosophical thinking is there neither to dictate nor to reject the singularity of experience by applying prefabricated concepts or a set of rules, but rather to activate – through its own practice and reinvention – tensions, indeterminacies, disruptions, and ambivalences from within. Rajchman formulates the role of 'theory' in *Les Immatériaux* as follows:

> …while there was lots of 'theory' in the show, it was part of the jumble. It occurred alongside or among the objects shown rather than 'above' them, as if no longer able to oversee their spread or supply an Ariadne's thread to get out from it. Theory, too, had become part of the 'condition'.[104]

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[102] Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist, in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Conversation Series 12* (Cologne: Walter König, 2008), p. 35, cited in Obrist, 'After the Moderns, the Immaterials', p. 13.

[103] Blistène, p. 35.

[104] Rajchman, 'Jean-François Lyotard's Underground Aesthetics', p. 15.

Rather than a meta-discipline that provides the exhibition and visitors predetermined concepts – the 'Ariadne's thread'– for the critical analysis and formal evaluation of what is already known, theory coexists with the range of immaterials as if itself in a process of immaterialization, no longer so powerful as to take precedence over sensation by imposing a certain meaning. Rather it is itself part of the horizontal network of interactions and the performance of the experience, inducing liquefied 'messages' as experiential intensities which cannot be signified as such and remain indeterminate. Philippe Parreno's remarks are a case in point:

> *Les Immatériaux* was an exhibition and therefore a way of organizing meaning, in specific time and space. But it's different from … the work consisting in bringing out a concept in philosophy. And this was precisely what was beautiful in the show: despite it was organized by a philosopher, it wasn't a conceptual exhibition. It was much more experimental, and in a certain way 'liquid'. […] There were many ideas but no concepts.[105]

Parreno's observations aptly encapsulate the meeting of philosophy and the art of exhibiting in *Les Immatériaux* on the shared ground of experimentation, though inhabiting it in different ways. The show demonstrates that even within a philosophical framework of interrogation, aesthetic experience remains significant as a singular, inexpressible, disruptive feeling that resists signification according to predetermined conceptual categories, nonetheless it takes place as an indeterminate difference within the exhibition-qua-artwork. For Lyotard, as I will discuss in the following chapter, philosophical thinking and art may inhabit different domains, yet both proceed in an experimental fashion in search of the rules that guide them as these rules result from the process itself. Moreover, it is due to the incommensurable in our experience and the incommunicable according to a shared set of rules, meaning, and content governing the unity of experience that 'communication' happens in a transformative way, beyond existing systems of discourse and habitual modes of thinking.

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[105] Parreno, interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Gasthof*, p. 98.

IV. Aesthetic experience as 'passibility': Lyotard's ambivalent position towards art using new technologies

Les Immatériaux, though philosophically conceived, exhibits a concern with the maintenance of the gap between knowledge and experience that allows experience to take place in an in-between register, which is not conceptually predetermined and *as such* defined. Lyotard's concern with aesthetic experience in the age of communication and information technologies is most directly and dramatically raised in the essay 'Something like: "Communication … without Communication"', presented as a lecture shortly after the exhibition, in October 1985.[106] Here, he reflects on the anti-aesthetic impact of technoscientific rationality on the production and reception of art, particularly the possibility of undermining the aesthetic feeling that constitutes the basis of art. Lyotard takes his cue from Kant's analysis of the beautiful, which presupposes the immediate communicability – without being determined by a concept – of the singular aesthetic feeling of pleasure giving rise to judgments of taste. For Kant, aesthetic judgments, albeit singular and subjective, presume universal communicability – the *a priori* demand for assenting from all subjects – in forming a transcendental *sensus communis*. Drawing on Kant, Lyotard interrogates the very possibility of aesthetic experience 'at a time when, precisely, the "products" of technologies applied to art cannot occur without the massive and hegemonic intervention of the concept.'[107] Accordingly, he claims that a particular kind of 'communication without communication' in the aesthetic feeling, and a particular kind of aesthetic community deriving from it – an immediate co-belonging which remains always potential and promised – are involved in the reception of

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[106] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Something Like: "Communication … without Communication"' [1985], in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 108-118. Originally given as a lecture at the 'Art and Communication' conference, organized by Robert Allezaud at the Sorbonne, in October 1985, and published under his editorship in 1986.

[107] Ibid., p. 109. Lyotard emphasizes the transcendental conditions Kant postulates in aesthetic judgments in contrast to an empiricist kind of communication operating *in fact* and knowledge as constitutive of the existence of art. He writes: 'This communicability, as a demand and not as a fact, precisely because it is assumed to be originary, *ontological*, eludes communicational activity, which is not a receptiveness but something which is managed, which is done. […] So if we keep to a psychological or social or pragmatic or generally anthropological kind of description, we give up on according to art a specific status as to its reception, and basically, we grant that there is no art. If we abandon this transitivity – potential, immediate, capable of being demanded in the judgement of taste and, simultaneously, demanded in order for there to be art – by the same token we abandon the idea of a community deriving from what Kant calls *sensus communis*, which is to say from an immediately communicable *sentimentality*.' (109-110). Italics in the original.

artworks. This communicability is 'anterior' to communicative pragmatics and 'irreducible to theories of communication.'[108] We have seen that the irreducibility of communication to theory was already testified in *Les Immatériaux*, where the communicative function of the communication theory model deployed was deliberately undermined from within. For, according to Lyotard, what is central in our 'problematic of "new technologies and art", or put differently, "art and postmodernity"' are communicative processes that rationally predetermine the conditions of reception, raising the focal question of 'What happens to aesthetic feeling when *calculated* situations are put forward as aesthetic?'[109]

Lyotard's reservations concern specifically the conceptual determination of works made by the 'new *techne*'. Predetermined aspects in their production, presentation, mediation, and distribution undermine the possibility of immediately experiencing what he calls 'passibility'. 'In a state of passibility', Lyotard explains, 'something is happening to us', an unforeseeable occurrence that 'seize[s] us', in which the feeling is – Lyotard echoes Heidegger – the 'immediate *welcoming* of what is given' without knowing what it is. Passibility presupposes a 'donation' as 'something fundamental' that eludes our mastery, control, and initial cognition; it is an openness to the occurrence of unanticipated events, a receptivity to being affected in ways which are not 'first controlled, programmed, grasped by a concept' or 'plotted conceptually' as in arts deploying new technologies.[110] It implies a sense of passivity, yet Lyotard reclaims the passible from the passive and the reductions of the passive/active opposition, for what matters is that the increasing demand for 'activity or "interactivity"' made by works based on new technologies undermines passibility itself.[111] The receiver is invited to take an active role, usually set in advance, and what is valorized is more intervention over mere contemplation. However, inasmuch as we are judged today by means of demonstrating a capacity and 'will to action' rather than a capacity to be affected, we are 'still' within the Cartesian model of mastery and control and what retreats in this process of interactivity, Lyotard maintains, is precisely our capacity for passibility (Fig. 3.33).[112]

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108 Ibid., p. 110.
109 Ibid., pp. 109, 110. Italics in the original.
110 Ibid., p. 111. Italics in the original.
111 Ibid., p. 116.
112 Ibid., p. 117. Italics in the original.

Lyotard denounces the contemporary preoccupation with masterful intervention as 'interactional ideology' in order to stress that what is at issue in communications culture is 'a problem of the modality of presence' – which is misunderstood as intervention – rather than 'a problem of content or simple form'.[113] With resource to Kant, he reflects on the implications of new immaterial technologies for the possibility of intuiting the world through aesthetic feeling. For Kant, space and time are *a priori* forms of intuition, immediately given by means of sensibility. Whereas the First Critique deals with the question of the 'synthesis' of the sensible through which reality is knowable by the application of the concept, the Third Critique deals with the question of reception, how 'here' and 'now', as forms of intuition, make feeling possible in a way that the freely floating forms in space and time are received affectively without the mediation of a concept.[114] Aesthetic feeling requires a sensible presentation of the form in space and time as the conditions in which something happens to us here-and-now, prior to and free from its ensuing representation by a concept of understanding. Drawing on the distinction between 'presentation' and '*re*-presentation', Lyotard not only suggests what is fundamentally at stake in the culture of immaterials, but also infers that presence as the immediate transitivity of feeling is necessarily 'implied, and forgotten' in the arts of representation (exhibitions included); presentation is always presupposed, but nonetheless eludes them. For Lyotard, the arising question concerning the works based on communication technologies is how can 'an *aesthetic* feeling' be issued from 'calculated *re*-presentation'? How can the conceptually determined forms allow for the free play of forms and concepts – the harmonic union between sensibility (imagination) and understanding – in reflective aesthetic judgments, and how can the potential communicability – constitutive of this pleasure – not be excluded in the products of instrumental rationality in new technologies?[115]

Lyotard links the perceived anti-aesthetic impact of the technological works with the 'crisis of foundations', namely the crisis of space and time as the fundamental conditions of what is given to us intuitively.[116] While the transformation of our habitual sense of space-time is shared between modernity and postmodernity, it is intensified in the latter with the saturation of new communication technologies that

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[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid., pp. 112-113.
[115] Ibid., pp. 111-112. Italics in the original.
[116] Ibid., p. 112.

replace our perceptions of objects in a here-and-now with more abstract and conceptual calculations.[117] As previously shown, the foundational crisis of sensory space and time in postmodernity was central to the conception and presentation of *Les Immatériaux*. In this essay, Lyotard avoids a definitive conclusion and poses instead a series of questions about the issue of presence and the possibility of aesthetic experience in art using new technologies:

> The question raised by the new technologies in connection with their relation to art is that of the here-and-now. […] Does not the 'tele-' element necessarily destroy presence, the 'here-and-now' of the forms and their 'carnal' reception? What is a place, a moment, not anchored in the immediate 'passion' of what happens? Is a computer in any way here and now? Can anything *happen* with it? Can anything happen *to* it?[118]

These views, echoing Heidegger's 'Gestell' [ˈenframingʹ] of advanced technology, have been variously received and criticized for a limited understanding of the emergence of digital culture. Not only do they imply the refusal of the possibility of aesthetic experience in art based on new technologies but also its status of art as such.[119] At the same time, they seem to suggest a more decisive return to a

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[117] Lyotard distinguishes the 'two expressions' of the crisis of space and time: 'modern – there no longer remains anything but space and time; and postmodern – we no longer *even* have space and time left.' Ibid., p. 116. Italics in the original.

[118] Ibid., p. 118. Italics in the original.

[119] On this subject, see Eric Kluitenberg, 'Transfiguration of the Avant-Garde: The Negative Dialectics of the Net' (Amsterdam, 21 December 2001), n.p. <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0201/msg00104.html> [created 23 January 2002; accessed 02 July 2015]. Also Charlie Gere, in his account of *Les Immatériaux*, argues that 'Lyotard did not think art made using new technologies was capable of invoking this sublime feeling', hence his investment in canonical avant-garde works in the show. Charlie Gere, 'Is it Happening ?', in Gere, *Art, Time and Technology* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), pp. 139-157 (149). For a critical opposition to these views, and Lyotard's maintenance of both the possibility of the aesthetic experience of the sublime and the status of the artwork to art deploying new technologies, see Ashley Woodward, 'Aesthēsis and Technē: New Technologies and Lyotard's Aesthetics', in Woodward, *Lyotard and the Inhuman Condition: Reflections on Nihilism, Information and Art* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 134-150. In an important interview to Richard Beardsworth (1999), Lyotard acknowledged that 'There are works of art, that … pass through informational multimedia, indeed circulate in virtual memory...' He specified, however, that these operations are 'second in relation to the appearance of the work of art', and he reserves for them the name of 'culture'. According to Lyotard, 'culture is not art' since they do not operate in 'the same temporality.' Nonetheless, 'this does not mean … in the least that with the new informational, digital machines one cannot create works of art. … Artists have always used every possible kind of support, every possible kind of material, every possible kind of tool. There is no opposition here, but a question of stress.' Richard Beardsworth, 'Freud, Energy, and Chance: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard', *Teknema*, trans. Richard Beardsworth, no. 5 (Fall 1999) <http://tekhnema.free.fr/5Beardsworth.html> [accessed 2 July 2015].

phenomenology of perception and of the body, which Jean-Louis Déotte identified in Lyotard's later work, based on an aesthetics that ostensibly advocates the material state of the artwork in a way that the exhibition itself had pronounced problematic.

A 'passibility to lack': The inhuman

Contemporary debates on the digitalization of culture and new media art exceed the scope of this study, however it should be noted that despite the apparently bleak perspective of the essay, Lyotard implies a positive view. He asks whether in the contemporary crisis of foundations and immaterial condition 'there is simply the loss of something (donation or presentation) without there being some gain? […] Can the uprooting which is linked to the new technology promise us an emancipation?'[120] These are important questions inasmuch as they leave the possibility open for a new media art and maintaining of the immediacy of the aesthetic feeling and its appeal to a community. Lyotard does so by suggesting a line of thinking that opens the postmodern and art onto an aesthetic of the sublime taken from Kant. It is notable, however, that the defense of the aesthetic experience offered here primarily draws on the aesthetic of the beautiful rather than on the sublime, which would be more compatible with Lyotard's research and writings at the time. This is not a cue that Lyotard's work should be understood as 'closer to an aesthetics of beauty' than its postmodern reception puts it, as Diarmuid Costello argues,[121] because the aesthetic of the sublime emerges as a kind of philosophical alternative and resistance at the point that the aesthetic of the beautiful appears insufficiently problematic. According to Lyotard, 'In Kant, passibility does not disappear with the sublime but becomes a passibility *to lack*' since it is the free forms of the beautiful, destined to be presented in sensory space-time, which are lacking. This fundamental crisis, this 'nothing happens' and 'loss of destiny', becomes the condition for an aesthetic of the sublime, which involves an 'ontological melancholy' and feeling of pain.[122] Yet, Lyotard importantly claims, the avant-gardes have always been 'inflexible witnesses' to the

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[120] Lyotard, 'Something Like', p. 116.
[121] Diarmuid Costello, 'Lyotard's Modernism', *Parallax*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2000), pp. 76-87 (81).
[122] Lyotard, 'Something Like', pp. 118, 114. Italics in the original. Lyotard relates, in less specifically Kantian terms, the failing of space and time – this 'almost nothing' – to Heidegger's notion of the retreat of Being or the retreat of donation, which nonetheless is registered within experience (113).

foundational crisis of space and time, which makes it possible to relocate their role and issue today.[123]

Lyotard's discussion reveals an ambivalent position towards new technologies, which also underlies *Les Immatériaux* despite the profusion of technoscientific exhibits. His reservations concern the reduction of artistic practice to mere 'technical' construction, a programmed and conceptually determined process at the expense of aesthetic feeling. He suggests, however, that if the retreat of 'presence' entails in certain respects a loss of experience, it can also be an opening to other dimensions of sensibility and experience associated with the aesthetic of the sublime. Lyotard's aim is not to provide a direction out of the 'postmodern condition', but rather to sustain and complicate the incommensurability of difference from within by defending an experimental process of invention for both art and philosophy. This is, as I have argued here, what the exhibition sought to actualize and make manifest in its philosophical interrogation and artistic presentation: a new direction in thinking and a mode of experience which claims that art is less an object of knowledge and unity of meaning than an experimental machine pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced. Writing a year before the exhibition, Lyotard cites Szeemann's D5 as paradigmatic for the experimental diversity of contemporary art: 'The powers of sensing and phrasing are being probed on the limits of what is possible', and the postmodern vocation is to explore and extend these limits. 'Today's art', Lyotard maintains, 'consists of exploring things unsayable and things invisible. Strange machines are assembled, where what we didn't have the idea of saying or the matter to feel can make itself heard and experienced.'[124] This potentiality gives art an ethical imperative insofar as it involves the moving beyond the familiarity of what is human. That is, the capacity to the affect of passibility and opening ourselves to what exceeds our habitual, all too 'human' sensibility and understanding.

This embrace of transformation was perceptively addressed by Pierre Restany in his review of *Les Immatériaux*. Restany highlighted the necessity for Man to 'invent the rules of the game' anew in light of the change of our sensibility brought about by technoscience. He draws attention to the sensory breadth of the exhibition and its transformative potential, describing it as 'a school of sensibility and an alarm

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[123] Ibid., p. 115.
[124] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Philosophy and Painting in the Age of Their Experimentation: Contribution to an Idea of Postmodernity' [1984]), trans. Mária Minich Breuer and Daniel Breuer, in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 181-195 (190).

signal'. 'We emerge from it a little more conscious of ourselves and of the imminent mutation of our kind', Restany argues. He uses the term 'revelation' to characterize what matters in the show and what is Lyotard's proposal for reinventing the rules of the game in Man's future state of humanity.[125] Contrary to bleak reviews, Restany finds within a highly incomprehensible environment the sensory stimuli that activate and extend a sense of awareness of that which is not yet fully defined and exceeds our grasping in consciousness, but can nonetheless be reflected through this uneasy encounter with the unknown.

Indeed in the introduction to his essay collection *The Inhuman* (1988), Lyotard asserted that there are two types of the 'inhuman', which must be disassociated. On the one hand, there is the inhumanity of the 'system', which is concerned with speed and acceleration so as to 'retain only the information that is useful.' For 'the system', Lyotard writes, causes 'the forgetting of what escapes it.'[126] The inhumanity of the system involves a non-human level of complexification as the effect of contemporary technoscientific and capitalist development, and this was at the core of the philosophical interrogation of the exhibition. The other kind of the inhuman is associated with the slow movement in searching 'the unknown thing "within"'.[127] It indicates, for Lyotard, a mode of resistance, which is 'what remains as "politics"',[128] and can be evinced in aesthetic experience as the disruption of systems of instrumental rational thinking and universal consensus. This other inhumanity that entails the openness or 'passibility' of an inhuman experience is discovered in the aesthetic of the sublime and points to an ontological commitment to difference itself.

Lyotard's reservations about new technology concern its calculated, cognitive process forcing determinative concepts upon aesthetic experience. In the case of *Les Immatériaux*, however, it is plausible to argue that new technologies can escape conceptual determination and have a transformative effect precisely through the embrace of their dehumanizing forces. It is striking that Lyotard sees this potential liberation through the aesthetic of the sublime and its excess rather than the aesthetic of the beautiful, which, as we will see in the following chapter, he associates with the

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[125] Pierre Restany, 'Immatériax: Let us be Leavened with Lyotard', *Domus*, no. 662 (June 1985), pp. 60-61.

[126] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Introduction: About the Human', in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 1-7 (2-3).

[127] Ibid., p. 3.

[128] Ibid., p.7.

values of commodity culture and the instrumental operations of capitalist technoscience.

In conclusion, the curatorial announcement of *Les Immatériaux* as philosophical in conception and artistic in presentation on the basis of interrogating the entwined themes of 'postmodernity' and the 'immaterials', and so the fundamental issue of the 'human', marked key developments in the conceptual-discursive turn in exhibition-making. Despite its highly conceptual orientation, it nonetheless demonstrates that philosophical thinking was not incompatible with aesthetic experience in the postconceptual, postmodern 'work' rather than a conceptual practice being against or determining the latter. Actually, the exhibition maintains an indeterminacy between sensibility and its cognitive comprehension. Conceptual understanding is withdrawn into the 'overexposure' of *Les Immatériaux* through the disrupting experience of its excessive immaterial flows and the new technologies that produce them, along with the deliberately deployed chaotic mise-en-scène in accordance with a 'postmodern' spatio-temporal organization. Lyotard called the exhibition a 'non-exhibition' to stress that its artistic presentation was intended to manifest and render visible, rather than simply represent or show, the new immaterial sensibility as a certain presence/absence, materiality/immateriality that best responds to the contemporary concerns of aesthetics.

Having discussed here the curatorial strategies and the deliberate excess of the communicative means themselves for invoking a disruptive, uneasy, and incommunicable experience according to our habitual cognitive mechanisms, the key question concerns the stakes of the production of an experience with a distinctly sublime quality. The ambivalence of the exhibition itself towards technological change and Lyotard's commitment to provide visitors an experiential space for reflection, free from prescribed positions and didactic resolutions, implies that *Les Immatériaux* not only reflects the socio-cultural effects of the latest technological developments but also uses their inhuman processes to explore forms of resistance and liberating possibilities from within. In this regard, the aesthetic experience of *Les Immatériaux* is not merely a significant curatorial innovation or representation of the technological excess, as it is often construed. It is inscribed into Lyotard's critical attempt to explore the new conditions of life, emerging at the time, and so to extend the role of aesthetics beyond its traditional stakes. This expansion, for Lyotard, is

grounded on difference and the opening to the ethical horizon of the inhuman experienced in the sublime affect.

Chapter 4

The Sublime Aesthetic of *Les Immatériaux*

Les Immatériaux was an experiment with the new conditions and effects of recent technological developments that explored the tension between its conceptual and aesthetic dimensions through the incommensurable in the experience offered. It invoked a disruptive experience of an emerging state of disarray through the excessive immaterial flows and the new communication technologies that produce them within a disorientating *mise-en-scène*. The new realms of techno-experience exceed the organic limits of human perception, are incapable of being entirely grasped in thought, and remain incommunicable by our habitual discursive modes. Despite the profusion of technoscientific exhibits and the deployment of the new communication technologies, *Les Immatériaux* appears ambivalent to the technological changes and refuses to clearly offer a technological utopia or dystopia. Lyotard denied *Les Immatériaux* celebrates new technologies, and maintains an ambivalent position in relation to them. He is particularly concerned about the dehumanising and instrumental processes of contemporary technoscientific capitalism and the anti-aesthetic impact of new technologies. He does suggest, however, they can enable aesthetic experience to escape conceptual determination and calculated processes through the production of a sublime aesthetic and through the openness of an inhuman experience this entails. Lyotard, in *Les Immatériaux*, sought to provide a space for reflection free from prescribed positions, and so reveals and constructs an experience of the new immaterial sensibility that not only exemplifies the forms of technoscientific domination it deploys, but also explores its potential to function as a form of resistance.

This chapter deals with the question of the aesthetic sublimity of *Les Immatériaux* in relation to the contemporary technoscientific shift it employed. It places the critical stakes of the exhibition within a wider context in order to argue that the aesthetic experience of *Les Immatériaux* situates it directly within the new conditions of life emerging at the time, and so extends the function of art beyond those found in traditional aesthetics. That is, *Les Immatériaux* reflects on the socio-cultural effects of the latest technological developments, but at the same time explores their transformative, liberating possibilities from within. In this sense, the exhibition

participates in a more widespread move away from the stakes of traditional aesthetics – whether mimetic representation, beauty, or Romantic expression – even current forms of 'postmodernism' associated with commodity culture towards a new understanding of the nature and function of art, but it does so *through* rather than *against* aesthetics. In this respect, the aesthetic is placed at the centre of contemporary politics and social life, and the sublime emerges in *Les Immatériaux* not merely as a poetics on the curatorial level, but also as an ethics-qua-politics that explores new and liberating possibilities for both feeling and thought.

The importance of this approach is that it offers an alternative to the more usually negative accounts of the exhibition experience, which focus on its undeniably unsettling and disabling effect. As well, my account attempts to provide a corrective to the prevalent reading of *Les Immatériaux* as distinctively apolitical and merely illustrative of recent technoscientific developments. Instead, I argue that Lyotard aims in *Les Immatériaux* to explore the critical possibility of the aesthetic through the excessive experience of the sublime as this emerges within the most contemporary technological developments. *Les Immatériaux,* in my view, provides a contemporary experimental testing ground for the relevance and efficacy of the sublime as a possible aesthetic for art, and as a wider mechanism of ethical and political resistance to capitalism and the damaging advances of technoscience.

The first problem we encounter with this argument is that Lyotard himself did not relate the exhibition directly to the aesthetic of the sublime, although he was critical of the aesthetic of the beautiful. Despite the significance of the sublime in his theoretical work of the time and the connections that can be drawn between it and the thematic of the exhibition, Lyotard in his interviews and curatorial statements avoids such references. He emphasized instead the retreat of the traditional mind/matter division in the wake of technoscientific advances,[1] implying that a mere documentation of the technological or art historical sublime is not his intention. Furthermore, Lyotard builds his account of the sublime upon a transcendental framework indebted to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), and sees the artwork as an event that bears witness to the unpresentable and takes place at the limits of human sensibility. In this respect, his concept of the sublime points to a radical meta-

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[1] See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Complexity and the Sublime' [1985], ICA Documents 4, in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), pp. 19-26 (19-20), [first publ. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), 1986].

aesthetic condition, but nonetheless one that pertains to the contemporary critique of capitalism and its technological forms of instrumentalization. The sublime is introduced in *Les Immatériaux* as neither a theory to be applied nor as an art historical category, let alone a thematic directive or illustration of the technoscientific condition. It is activated on the experiential level of the exhibition as a whole in order to reveal the wider ontological and critical stakes of the aesthetic.

My discussion draws on the so-called 'Kantian turn' in Lyotard's oeuvre in the 1980s, the shift from the earlier libidinal philosophy to a philosophy of the 'différend' and the sublime that sets up the ethical stakes of reflective judgment and the incommensurability at the heart of the sublime experience. At the time of the exhibition Lyotard was giving lectures on the sublime at the University of Paris VIII, which were later published in *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime* (1991).[2] However, his ideas on modern and a specifically postmodern sublime had already appeared in two essays published in *Artforum* in 1982 and 1984, later revised and included in the collection *The Inhuman* (1988). Additionally, the essay 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?', was added to the 1984 English translation of the *Postmodern Condition* (1979), in which the postmodern question was discussed in specifically sublime aesthetic terms. However, the first connection made between the sublime and contemporary art was in a highly critical 1981 essay on Jacques Monory's hyper-realist postmodern paintings.[3] The *Artforum* essays, in particular,

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[2] Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994 [1991]).

[3] Lyotard's first essay on the sublime in the English-speaking world, 'Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime', trans. Lisa Liebmann, was published in *Artforum*, vol. 20, no. 8, (April 1982), pp. 64-69 at the request of the editor Ingrid Sischy. The title, however, was not Lyotard's and it was modified along with slight revisions, when the essay was published in French in the 1988 collection of essays *L'Inhumain* as 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable'. See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable', in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 119-128. The second sublime-related essay in *Artforum* was 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', trans. Lisa Liebmann, *Artforum*, vol. 22, no. 8 (April 1984), pp. 36-43, published in a modified version in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 89-107. Unless otherwise indicated, references here are made to the revised texts collected in *The Inhuman*. See also Jean-François Lyotard, 'Appendix', 'Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?', trans. Régis Durand, in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984 [1979]), pp. 71-82 [orig. publ. in French under the title *Réponse à la question: qu'est-ce que le postmoderne?*, *Critique*, 419 (April 1982)]. The text *Esthétique sublime du tueur à gages* (*Sublime Aesthetic of the Contract Killer*) was completed in December 1981 and is included together with the essay *Économie libidinale du dandy* (*Libidinal Economy of the Dandy*), December 1972, in Lyotard's book on Jacques Monory *L'assassinat de l'expérience par la peinture – Monory*, published in 1984, one year before *Les*

provocatively championed the modern avant-garde as 'presenting the unpresentable', which contributed in part to the misconception that Lyotard's theory of the sublime was simply an endorsement of 'high modernist' painting, often at the expense of contemporary practice. However, as Kiff Bamford usefully notes, we need to take into consideration the different contexts and debates in France and the USA at the time. Lyotard's work was part of a revival of interest in the Kantian sublime in France, where aesthetic debates were free of the high modernist connotations that Kant represented in the USA through their association with Clement Greenberg's aesthetic formalism. Nonetheless, these essays are not a response to the debates about the end of abstract painting and the neo-avant garde turn that dominated the American context.[4]

Lyotard's writings on the sublime from this period focus on its indeterminacy or 'différend', both in feeling and matter, in a way that connects it with his ongoing preoccupation with the postmodern question and his critique of the rationality and dehumanization effected by technoscientific and capitalist development. These conceptual interrogations, also at the core of *Les Immatériaux*, demonstrate Lyotard's attempt to recast the postmodern embrace of difference into a new immaterial materiality of art and a highly critical aesthetic experience. As such, the aesthetic sublimity of *Les Immatériaux* should be seen as the convergence of various critical trajectories in Lyotard's work, which I will attempt to delineate here. The exhibition addresses the limitations of *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) as a diagnostic report; it builds upon and activates the incommensurability of *The Différend* (1983); it extends the relevance of the sublime attributed to the modern avant-garde in the *Artforum* essays (1982, 1984); it recasts the 'postmodern' in the sublime terms of an immanent experimental materialism in aesthetic production of the Appendix essay (1984), and appears to be grounded on an affirmation of art's fundamentally incommensurable difference.

More importantly, against the melancholic reading of the prospects for humanity in light of the retreat of 'presence', expressed most pointedly in *The Inhuman* (1988), as analyzed in the previous chapter, the ambivalence to new technologies in *Les Immatériaux* leaves open the possibility that they have a liberating

function. This shift in approach suggests a significant link to Lyotard's previous work on Duchamp (1977) as well as the *Libidinal Economy* (1974).[5] Here, as we will see, Lyotard affirms the dehumanizing force of technology on workers, claiming that they embrace this force as a kind of nihilistic, even sublime, joy for its potential of transformation. *Les Immatériaux*, due to its ambivalence, continues this earlier position in the sense that, despite Lyotard's reservations about new technologies which will be expressed more explicitly in relation to contemporary postmodern artistic forms and oppressive capitalist sublimity as in Monory's work, they can have a transformative effect through the embrace of their dehumanizing forces and the development of new strategies of incommensurability with political power. This perspective provides a new reading of *Les Immatériaux* and locates it in a line of thinking that explores the transformative power of the sublime experience *within* and *against* the instrumental operations of capitalist technoscience that goes back to Lyotard's book on Duchamp. The latter signaled the transition from Lyotard's work on capitalism in *Libidinal Economy* to the 'différend' found in the experience of the sublime, and so its liberating potential through the confrontation with the inhuman it entails.

I. The incommensurable of the 'différend'

Lyotard's shift to a philosophy of the 'différend' in his homonymous 1983 book – translated in English as 'differend' – focuses on the particular affect given by an irresolvable conflict between heterogeneous genres of discourse.[6] The 'differend' is, therefore, the difference arising from the lack of an applicable common rule allowing for a judgment and resolution of such a conflict. Accordingly, Lyotard argues, judgment should be indeterminate in these cases, to testify to the incommensurability that is at stake.[7] Lyotard understands linguistic units in terms of 'phrase regimens' and demonstrates that any form of communication bears inherent norms, presuppositions and generic conventions, which impose the agreed rules of linkage

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[5] Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod (Venice CA: Lapis Press, 1990 [1977]); Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Continuum, 2004, first publ. by Athlone Press, 1993 [1974]).

[6] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1988 [1983]).

[7] 'As distinguished from a litigation, a differend [*différend*] would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments.' Ibid., p. xi.

for a set of possible phrases in a genre, excluding that which does not fit, cannot be phrased, understood, or is silenced by the conditions of established systems of discourse. But because the meaning of a phrase is determined by the next phrase it is linked onto, the direction and destiny of the phrase remains contingent.[8] As a result, the problem is that of the legitimation of the judgment that determines the path – that is, the genre – of discourse. This problem is complicated because there is no universal genre, meaning any judgment necessarily does an injustice to the regimens or genres whose phrases remain unactualised. As such, every phrase is the site of a differend, and every link between phrases necessarily involves a question of justice. Lyotard affirms the existence of heterogeneous genres that supply different – conflicting and equally right – sets of links, which must remain unresolved to do justice to the differend and 'save the honor of thinking.'[9]

The differend, Lyotard explains, indicates the 'unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be.' It is signaled by what we call a 'feeling', disclosing something which cannot be expressed in the existing conditions of possibility, but which nonetheless 'calls upon phrases which are in principle possible.'[10] In this sense, the differend is an instant that suspends linking and leaves the question '*Is it happening?* [*Arrive-t-il?*]' open, calling for a non-predetermined response and reflection that pays attention to new occurrences rather than the already known.[11] The accompanying feeling, Lyotard claims, is 'anxiety or surprise: [that] there is something rather than nothing', but this minimal occurrence does 'not present' or signify anything.[12] That is, the singular event of 'it happens' is 'not tautological' with 'what happens', which is the signification of the event that always comes after it.[13] The differend leaves us in the indeterminate state of the inarticulate event, which nonetheless demands phrasing or response, and takes place 'now', in the gap when the link to the next phrase has not

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[8] 'A phrase "happens"', Lyotard asserts, and 'linkage must happen "now"'. That is, a phrase occurs and while several linkages are possible, only one 'can happen (be "actualised") at a time', and selecting one is to suppress the others which remain 'neglected, forgotten, or repressed possibilities.' Ibid., pp. xii, 29, 136.

[9] Ibid., p. xii. 'Thinking' is, here, understood in a Kantian sense as 'judgment'.

[10] Ibid., p. 13. See also 'Feelings as a phrase for what cannot now be phrased.' Ibid., p. 70.

[11] Ibid., p. xv. Italics in the original.

[12] Ibid., p. 75. Lyotard describes it rather lyrically in this passage: '… the feeling that the impossible is possible. That the necessary is contingent. That linkage must be made, but that there won't be anything upon which to link. The "and" with nothing to grab onto. Hence, not just the contingency of the how of linking, but the vertigo of the last phrase. Absurd, of course. But the lighting flash takes place – it flashes and bursts out in the nothingness of the night, of clouds, or of the clear blue sky.'

[13] Ibid., p. 79.

yet been determined. The differend-event is, therefore, marked by its radical singularity. It is a temporal oscillation, which cannot be anticipated – it remains a potentiality to be activated – and cannot be understood at the time it happens, because its sheer contingency exceeds the referential structure that attempts to encompass it.

The temporality of the event will be crucial to Lyotard's concept of the sublime, and will play a large part in its political efficacy. Lyotard introduces the *Is it happening?*, whose occurrence as such cannot be predicated and known, as 'resistance' to the (ac)-countable use of time in the hegemony of capitalist exchange in the economic genre.[14] Resistance lies in evoking a temporality incommensurable with the capitalist logic of acceleration and rationalization. The differend incites sensitivity to what is silenced, what cannot or is not allowed to be phrased according to the governing rules, and calls philosophy and even the arts as politics in this context. Both, Lyotard claims, 'bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them.'[15] According to Lyotard, philosophy sets itself the paradoxical task to 'give the differend its due' and search to find the idiom 'for the wrong to find an expression', but without seeking a determinate judgment to resolve it, but rather to keep it open.[16] What is at stake, Lyotard contends, is a 'philosophical politics apart from the politics of "intellectuals" and of politicians',[17] a space for reflection free from self-interest, desire for power, determinate purposes and criteria. Unlike conventional politics that advocates only within one genre, the responsibility of philosophy is to insist on the competing heterogeneity of genres, to bear witness to the differends, and search for as yet unknown idioms to phrase them.

In this sense, for Lyotard, politics is 'not a genre'. It is instead 'the multiplicity of genres, the diversity of ends, and par excellence the question of linkage', in that the political 'bears witness to the nothingness which opens up with each occurring phrase and on the occasion of which the differend between genres of discourse is born.'[18] The philosophical politics of the differend exceeds the normal understanding of political activity, especially the aspirations to consensus and redemption that drives 'deliberative politics', and is more akin to ethics.[19] Contrary to attempts at agreement

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[14] Ibid., p. xvi.
[15] Ibid., p. 13.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. xiii.
[18] Ibid., pp. 138, 141.

[19] Ibid., p. 147.

and aspirations for unification, politics, Lyotard contends, 'lets the abysses' that separate genres of discourse and phrase regimens from each other, 'the abysses that threaten "the social bond"', be perceived and emerge to the surface.[20]

This shift from politics in its most usual sense to the ethics of bearing witness to the differend will be crucial for a sublime aesthetic politics. For Lyotard, the event that remains a critical case for a philosophical politics is Auschwitz, and the extermination of the Jews during the Second World War. Auschwitz invokes 'an impossible phrase', a 'feeling' which cannot become the object of knowledge, cognition, and the referent of a representation without betraying it.[21] Instead of imposing the 'silence of forgetting', Lyotard contends, this event imposes 'a feeling' of respect which forces us to remember and find 'unknown phrases to link onto the name of Auschwitz.' For Auschwitz is not a 'fact' but a 'sign' in history of something incommensurate, which cannot conform to the demand for cognition and representation without doing injustice to the feeling elicited in the silence of victims.[22] In dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas, Lyotard addresses the 'obligation' of opening oneself to 'the unpresentable that calls out', and so do justice to what is silenced and fails presentation.[23] It is, thus, not accidental that *Les Immatériaux*, as noted in the previous chapter, included in the site *Nu Vain* ['Vain Nakedness'] a screening of a clip from Joseph Losey's film *Monsieur Klein* (1976), set in occupied Paris, alternating with a photograph of body dissection in Nazi concentration camps.

The engagement of *Les Immatériaux* with communication in the cultural shift to immaterial information technologies builds upon and explores Lyotard's philosophical investigations in *The Differend*. As shown in the previous chapter, the exhibition structure, taken from communication theory, emphasized the domination of language in information culture, while simultaneously seeking and attempting to sustain the incommensurable occurring within the communicational system. This can be seen in the intensification of indeterminacy and the lack of a totalizing meta-language that would settle the differends and articulate the heterogeneous genres in

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[20] Ibid., p. 150.

[21] Ibid., pp. 88, 104.

[22] Ibid., pp. 56-57. In addition to *The Differend*, Lyotard rails against the Holocaust deniers most notably in *Heidegger and "the jews"*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990 [1988]). He criticizes what he calls 'a politics of forgetting' by such exponents as Martin Heidegger, who in the aftermath of World War II maintains 'a laden silence' (3, 52).

[23] Ibid., p. 116.

Les Immatériaux as a whole. Following its postmodern drive, the exhibition rejected any dominating genre that would legislate a consensual ground of communication, and so raises the political question of which community is addressed or anticipated in the shift to immaterial culture. Indeed, Lyotard specified that 'the linkage or the sequencing of zones to each other will … always leave open the question "… what is happening?" and thus the feeling of a kind of contingency and encounter.'[24] In my view, Lyotard's concern was to create a space of reflection that would enable the visitors to bear witness to *Les Immatériaux* as itself being in a state of differend – the incommensurable between its philosophical conception and artistic presentation – but also to the multiplicity of differends happening within it in its unstable communication of contingencies, intensities, and temporal delays.

In this sense, the 'differend' was certainly active in *Les Immatériaux*; yet the wider aesthetic and political stakes of the exhibition cannot be seen merely as the application of the philosophy of that book. While *The Differend* elaborates many of the issues raised in *The Postmodern Condition*, it makes no reference to the 'postmodern' – which remains an ambiguous presence – or to art.[25] It does, however, attest to the increasing significance of Kant's 'Third Critique' in Lyotard's work, along with the extension of the 'postmodern' as a critical practice to various fields – technoscience, visual arts, literature, philosophy, and politics. The new aesthetic orientation of the postmodern and its critical potential is most notably articulated in the Appendix essay, in which Lyotard poses the postmodern question directly in relation to art and aesthetic concerns bound up with Kant's aesthetic of the sublime. The essay accentuates the sense, already evident in *The Differend* and later reinforced in *The Inhuman*, that the postmodern affirmation of difference should not be seen merely as a chronological (the end of modernity) or sociological (the changing status of knowledge) development, but as grounded on a sublime feeling with broader implications for what is fundamentally at stake in art and its political potential.

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[24] Jean-François Lyotard, 'After Six Months of Work …', [Spring 1984], trans. Robin Mackay, in Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann, eds, *30 Years after Les Immatériaux: Art, Science, and Theory* (Leuphana University of Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2015), pp. 29-66 (62).
[25] According to Niels Brügger, the concept of the postmodern in *The Differend* is equivocal; it assumes 'a double position of simultaneous presence and absence.' Present in the sense that *The Differend* is inscribed in the epochal context referred to as 'postmodern' in the previous *Postmodern Condition*, and absent in that the postmodern is not elaborated as an independent concept and 'narratives' do not constitute the main analytical point. Niels Brügger, 'What about the Postmodern? The Concept of the Postmodern in the Work of Lyotard', in Robert Harvey and Lawrence R. Schehr, eds, *Jean-François Lyotard: Time and Judgment* (New Haven; Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 77-92 (89).

II. Lyotard's account of the sublime in art

Rereading Kant

Lyotard finds in Kant's analysis of the sublime a principal example of the differend and its affect: the irresolvable conflict between the faculties of the understanding and the imagination, and consequently between what can be conceived by reason but cannot be presented by imagination and this is – despite Kant's ambiguity on this point – what is presented in the artwork. Lyotard claims that the stakes of his engagement with the Kantian sublime is the analysis of 'a differend of feeling', which is also the analysis of 'a feeling of differend', and the attempt to 'connect this feeling with the transport that leads all thought (critical thought included) to its limits.'[26] It is precisely Lyotard's insistence that the sublime feeling emerges from the differend between the representational powers of the subject and the intuition that lies beyond their limits of thought – rather than being resolved, as they are in Kant, through the Ideas of reason – that makes Lyotard's appropriation of the Kantian sublime a provocative rereading. Lyotard not only discovers in the sublime experience a differend that demonstrates the impossibility of a totalizing philosophy, but he importantly makes this differend constitutive of the artwork itself.

For Kant, the sublime is the overwhelming experience of natural phenomena so immense and infinite (the 'mathematically' sublime) or forces so overpowering (the 'dynamically' sublime) that it dismantles our rational power of understanding and sends representation to its limit.[27] The sublime experience thus confronts the limitations of human sensibility to directly present what is infinite or formless. In Kant's aesthetics of the beautiful a particular object given by intuition – free of interest, charm, and conceptual determination – gives rise to a reflective judgment of taste, which invokes a feeling of pleasure. This is due to the harmony or 'free play' between the faculties of imagination and understanding, and so, while it is subjective, the judgment of taste makes the demand – even in principle – for its universal sharing and consensus among all judging subjects. In the experience of the sublime, however,

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[26] Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, p. x.
[27] Kant's account of the sublime is offered in the Book II, Analytic of the Sublime, §23-§29, in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1987 [1790]), pp. 97-140.

we encounter the absolutely great, which is not comprehensible according to the categories of the understanding, and so the imagination strives but fails to synthesize a discrete form, at a certain distance. The incapacity of imagination and understanding to grasp and present an object produces a feeling of pain. But, in Kant's account, the confrontation of imagination with the limits of understanding forces us to turn to reason, and the excess of the sublime experience is grasped by an Idea of 'infinity' or 'totality'. Thus, our pain is accompanied by a feeling of pleasure as imagination discovers its transcendental ground in an Idea of infinity, and we become all the more aware of this 'supersensible power' within us.[28] This, in turn, makes the sublime a sign of a transcendence proper to the moral law of freedom, because Ideas of reason are free of any causal determination. In this respect, the Kantian sublime reveals the transcendental, and yet immanent, excess of experience in relation to its human conditions of possibility, and this excess itself reveals the transcendental Ideas that recompose the subject around a sublime and yet constitutive 'beyond'.

Lyotard modifies and extends the Kantian sublime to art by emphasizing the absolute difference between the faculties of reason and sensibility, and connecting these to his own concept of the differend. The superiority Kant accords to reason and the supersensible world is actually reversed, and the painful impossibility of ever being able to present an Idea within reality takes precedence over Kantian pleasure.[29] Insofar as Lyotard stresses the irresolvable differend of the faculties in the sublime experience, he rejects Kant's ambitious attempt to bridge the faculties of reason and sensibility in the *Critique of Judgment*; rather, he claims, such attempts at totalization haunted modern history.[30] Since the sublime, for Lyotard, is 'subjectively felt by thought as differend', the differend must remain irresolvable in order to do justice to the limits of thought. The contingency of the sublime feeling resists any resolution in terms of either moral feeling or dialectical synthesis, let alone an aesthetic of the beautiful.[31] What counts in Lyotard's sublime is the differend on which 'the fate of thought depends and will depend', and the only demand that can be made is that we

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[28] Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, § 25, p. 106.
[29] 'The despair of never being able to present something within reality on the scale of the Idea then overrides the joy of being nonetheless called upon to do so. We are more depressed by the abyss that separates heterogeneous genres of discourse than excited by the indication of a possible passage from one to the other. –Would a vigorously melancholic humanity be sufficient to supply a proof that is "progressing toward the better"?' Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 179.
[30] Ibid., pp. 179-180; also Lyotard, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 81.
[31] Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, pp. 131, 127.

testify to it.[32] The sublime constitutes a profoundly disrupting limit of a differend that demands the imagination presents the unpresentable. Accordingly, Lyotard claims the most urgent critical task is to 'activate the differences' and 'be witnesses to the unpresentable' with art and aesthetics being central to this anti-totalitarian appeal.[33]

The question of the unpresentable: Modern 'melancholia' and postmodern 'novatio'

Lyotard not only departs from the modern aesthetic of the beautiful but also introduces another notion of the 'modern' based on the sublime. He defines modern art as that which 'devotes its "little technical expertise" … to present the fact that the unpresentable exists', to make visible something that can be conceived but cannot be seen. The 'indexes' for this unpresentable is either 'formlessness' or 'abstraction', an absence of content operating as a 'negative presentation' of the infinite.[34] In this way, Lyotard extends the status of the sublime to painting, despite Kant's denying it was art. Unpresentable Ideas cannot be represented but, in Lyotard's reformulation, their unpresentability can be negatively alluded to or evoked by means of visible presentations as, for example, in the white paintings of Kazimir Malevich. Modern painting, Lyotard argues, 'enable[s] us to see only by making it impossible to see' and 'please[s] only by causing pain'; in these outlines the artistic avant-gardes have found their impetus and 'axioms' in the sublime.[35] This position is more directly expressed in the essay 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable', a modified version of his first 1982 *Artforum* essay on the sublime: 'The current of "abstract painting" has its source … in this requirement for indirect and all but ungraspable allusion to the invisible in the visible', Lyotard writes. 'The sublime, and not the beautiful, is the sentiment called forth by these works.'[36] The artistic avant-gardes, in their commitment to present the unpresentable, constantly interrogate the techniques and means of visible presentation to produce new ways of seeing and feeling that no

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[32] Lyotard, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 80.

[33] Ibid., p. 82.

[34] Ibid., p. 78. Kant's citation of the biblical commandment 'Thou shalt not make graven images', which forbids any presentation of the Absolute as 'the most sublime' example, offers Lyotard the source for an 'aesthetic of sublime paintings'.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Lyotard, 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable', p. 126.

longer 'subordinate thought to the gaze', raising in effect the question of what is painting anew.[37]

In the modern aesthetic of the sublime, however, the unpresentable appears only as 'missing contents', still implying a 'nostalgia' for the lost unity with its agreed system of rules and conventions. Whence, the reliance on the consistency of 'good form', even if abstract, for the 'solace and pleasure' it offers. Yet, the nostalgic mode contradicts 'the real sublime sentiment, which', Lyotard maintains, 'is in an intrinsic combination of pleasure and pain: the pleasure that reason should exceed all presentation, the pain that imagination or sensibility should not be equal to the concept.' In contrast, the postmodern sublime evinces 'a stronger sense of the unpresentable' due to its very disruptive and inventive nature. It attests to the irreconcilable conflict at the heart of the sublime feeling and 'puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself', resisting the solace of recognizable forms and the shared pleasure of good taste as it breaks with established rules and seeks new possibilities beyond the existing conventions of presentation.[38] This is Lyotard's critical distinction between a modern 'melancholia' and a postmodern '*novatio*'. In the latter, the pleasurable aspect of the sublime is located in the invention of new forms and rules of the game, as this keeps the gap between what is presentable and what is conceivable open, without resorting to *a priori* determinate criteria for its resolution such as the concepts of the understanding that condition representation.[39]

The postmodern 'work'-as-event: An immanent materialism of experimentation

Lyotard's affirmation of *novatio* allows him to defend the vocation of the avant-garde as a postmodern and experimental sublime. As such, he claims that the postmodern is actually 'a part of the modern', a radicalization of the modernist unpresentable, rather

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[37] Lyotard, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 79.

[38] Ibid., p. 81.

[39] Lyotard clarifies that the difference is subtle, as at times the two tendencies coexist even in the same work, they nonetheless testify to the basic differend in thought 'between regret and assay.' In a schematically, as he admits, rather than specific art historical approach to the avant-garde, Lyotard sees melancholic sublimity in the German Expressionists, Malevich, and de Chirico, whereas *novatio* is exemplified by Cézanne, Braque and Picasso, Lissitzky, Duchamp, and Daniel Buren. Regarding literature, he claims that both Proust and Joyce allude to the 'unpresentable', however in Joyce's postmodern work the unpresentable becomes perceptible in the very operations of writing without concern for the good form and the unity of the whole. What unites these disparate artists is a certain experimental manner that proceeds without the certainty of knowing the rules of the game; these are constantly invented in order to allow that rules remain indeterminate, having a disruptive effect on what is presumed as recognizable, expected, and permissible. Ibid., pp. 79-80.

than its overcoming. Postmodern artists set out to question the presuppositions of the past and as they experiment with the inherited rules of representation, they present art as a possibility of infinite development. In this sense, postmodernism, Lyotard argues, 'is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.'[40] Accordingly, the 'post' of 'postmodern' is disassociated from the simple chronological succession of the modern, and suggests instead that the postmodern difference is not to be seen in a periodizing sense but as the time of the event and the indeterminacy of a sublime reflective judgment. In a key passage, worth quoting at length, Lyotard claims:

> A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories... Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event*; …they always come too late for their author, or … their being put into work … always begin[s] too soon. *Post modern* would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).[41]

Lyotard's emphasis on the value of experimentation in postmodern art – and philosophy – bound up with the sublime has significant aesthetic implications. The postmodern 'work' – whether art object, text, or exhibition – operates in search of its own rules, which are as yet unknown. In this sense, the 'future anterior' in which Lyotard places postmodern art suggests that art is future-orientated, always in a 'nascent state', which cannot be anticipated and determined as an identifiable category of knowledge. Art is less a matter of knowledge or concepts than experiments yet to be performed and rules to be invented. As such, Lyotard explains, the work is an 'event' that occurs 'too soon' to stabilize it with a recognizable meaning and 'too late' to be recovered, but nonetheless presents itself as a demand for linkage. It is an ungraspable oscillation between the 'too early' and the 'too late',

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[40] Ibid., p. 79.
[41] Ibid., p. 81. Italics in the original.

leaving us without definite criteria and requiring a non-determinative judgment based on feeling.

If the postmodern 'work' is a critical activity in search of its own rules, the question arises of how is it to be distinguished from other fields such as philosophy? David Caroll perceptively formulates the contradiction: while the knowledge of rules is necessary to distinguish art and knowledge, this knowledge undermines the Lyotardian claim of art's indeterminacy. Moreover, insofar as any critical activity at the limits of knowledge necessarily entails a certain kind of knowledge (of the limits), then how do we develop a critical approach to art that maintains art's indeterminacy? Here, Caroll points out, lies the significance of Lyotard's insistence on the differend. Lyotard's critical project lies in 'keeping knowledge and the aesthetic as distinct categories that can be linked to each other only across the irreducible gap which separates them.'[42]

This is precisely what *Les Immatériaux* embodies as a postmodern philosophical and artistic 'work': an incommensurable linking of philosophy and art, activated by the indeterminacy of the experimental method itself. By ensuring the indeterminacy of its critical strategy, *Les Immatériaux* raises the question of art's specificity without in the same process defining the rules governing it. Art – the event of art – maintains a certain alterity and excess in relation to philosophy, history and the socio-political realm within which it nonetheless takes place. In this sense, the critical potential of art depends on its otherness, thereby the Lyotardian sublime becomes the critical force for an alternative aesthetic understanding of art based on the experience of a transcendental, yet immanent, difference.

An a-temporal experience of the 'now'

In his second *Artforum* essay 'The Sublime and the Avant-garde' (April 1984), Lyotard re-inscribes the sublime experience in terms of the question of the event to connect the experience of the avant-garde mode of production with the aesthetic of the sublime, and to present Barnett Newman's abstract paintings as exemplary of the sublime sensation and the work-as-event. He discusses Newman's abstract paintings in terms of the temporality of the sublime with the aim of providing a wider aesthetic

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[42] David Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 156-157.

understanding of the event of *It happens* 'now', and to associate this temporality with the critical force of the 'new'.[43] 'The avant-gardist attempt', Lyotard argues, 'inscribes the occurrence of a sensory now as what cannot be presented and which remains to be presented' in excess of representation, making the question 'Does it happen?' the work of art itself. It is in this sense that the avant-garde 'still belongs to the aesthetics of the sublime.' As such, Lyotard connects the ongoing relevance of the avant-garde with the fundamental task of 'bear[ing] witness to the indeterminate', invoking the sublime experience as a moment of suspense that involves the privation of what is foreseeable, identifiable, and known.[44]

The example of Newman allows Lyotard to develop the connection between avant-gardism and the aesthetic of the sublime in a way that resists a merely formalist reading of abstraction, and instead makes the artwork the locus of its own generative occurrence. In his essay 'Newman: The Instant' (1985), Lyotard explains that the only purpose of the work is 'to be a visual event in itself', invoking an a-temporal experience of the 'now'.[45] According to Lyotard, Newman's paintings disrupt communication in an essentially temporal rather than spatial manner.[46] The work refuses to communicate any information, it is not a message about an occurrence and its time is not of consumption, Lyotard maintains; 'it is, that is, presence.' In our confrontation with a Newman painting, conventional commentary is no longer adequate. 'If, then, there is any "subject-matter"', Lyotard contends, 'it is immediacy', leaving only the sheer presence of the painting: 'It happens here and

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[43] Lyotard opens his essay with a discussion of Barnett Newman's essay 'The Sublime is Now' (publ. in *Tiger's Eye*, December 1948), in which Newman interprets his works as sublime of a certain temporality. Newman criticizes the confusion of beauty with sublimity in classical and romantic aesthetics contrary to contemporary avant-garde experimental painting in New York. The essay prefigured the 1950-1951 canvas *Vir Heroicus Sublimus*. Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 89-107 [first publ. in *Artforum*, trans. Lisa Liebmann, vol. 22, no. 8 (April 1984), pp. 36-43].

[44] Ibid., p. 103.

[45] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Newman: The Instant' [1985], trans. David Macey, in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *The Lyotard Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 241-249 (244). The essay was first published in the catalogue of the exhibition *Le temps: regards sur la quatrième dimension* ['*Time: Looking at the fourth dimension*'], organized by Michel Baudon at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, repr. in *Po&Sie*, 34 (1985). From the artists being included in the exhibition, Lyotard focuses on Newman and Marcel Duchamp.

[46] Lyotard presents the temporality of Newman's works as distinct to that of Duchamp's. While Duchamp's works, however disruptive of the senses, are inscribed in the temporal hinge between the 'too early' and the 'too late', a painting by Newman is the occurrence itself, 'the moment which has arrived', even though it 'announces nothing; it is in itself an annunciation.' Ibid., pp. 242, 241.

now. What [*quid*] happens comes later.'[47] The instant of the 'it happens' is the unpresentable presence of the painting-event, which nonetheless is immanent to the sensible since it embodies the irreducible differend between sensibility (the *aestheton*) and its comprehension in thought. This transcendental, and yet immanent, difference has a genetic, creative potential.[48]

The unpresentable presence of the work-event and the ethical necessity of art

Lyotard's reworking of the sublime experience as the time of the event has wider aesthetic implications. In bearing witness to the event of annunciation that presents nothing and does not appeal to the mind, art – exemplified here by Newman's work – is 'much closer to an ethics than to any aesthetics or poetics', Lyotard claims.[49] Disassociated from discourse and comprehension, there is an ethical calling to the 'presence' of painting itself that creates an obligation to be attentive to 'the most minimal occurrence' taking place 'despite everything, within this threatening void.'[50] In this respect, the temporality of the sublime gives rise to the ethical in art since it presents an excess of representation, the inexpressible differend that nonetheless remains to be listened to and must be given its due by bearing witness to it. The sublime gives rise to a singular sensation that exceeds human comprehension, thereby forces us to open and surrender ourselves to the touch of the Other, prior to representation, concept, and the Law, disengaged from any personal interests in that 'ataraxic' state of 'apathetic pathos' that accompanies obligation, as Lyotard puts it.[51] In the case of Newman, Lyotard explains, the work impels the ethical imperative '*Listen to me*' rather than merely '*Look at me*', because 'obligation is a modality of

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[47] Ibid., pp. 242, 243. Italics in the original.
[48] Lyotard deploys a range of references – Edmund Burke, Kant, Duchamp, and Thomas B. Hess's reading of Newman's work from a Jewish perspective – to give an account of the instantaneous occurrence as the performative time of the work-event before it becomes signification, commentary, communication, and culture 'in the network of what has happened.' Based on Hess's views of the subject matter of Newman's work as the '"artistic creation" itself, Lyotard links the creative power of the sublime occurrence to the paradox of the 'beginning', the instant as a generative difference: 'It takes place in the world as its initial difference', and yet 'It does not belong to this world because it begets it, it falls from a prehistory, or from an a-history.' The artwork is a singular actualization of its material elements that arrives unexpectedly 'in the midst of the indeterminate', irreducible to the *what happens* that follows and distinguishable from the romantic 'beyond'. Ibid., p. 243.
[49] Ibid., p. 242.
[50] Ibid., p. 245.
[51] See Lyotard, *The Differend*, p. 166; Jean-François Lyotard, 'Anamnesis of the Visible' [1995], trans. Couze Venn and Roy Boyne, in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 21, no. 1 (February 2004), pp.107-119 (111).

time rather than of space and its organ is the ear rather than the eye.'[52] We can easily recognize here Lyotard's aversion to occularcentrism in favour of the affective intensities of sound in the presentation of *Les Immatériaux*. However, the obligation to listen and open ourselves to the trace and voice of the unpresentable is more than that. It is an ethics of the Other, driven by the aesthetic understanding of the artwork as the differend-event, a radical presence *and* absence.

The artwork, then, testifies to the singularity of 'presence' and the emergence of sensation as a pure sensory event in the 'absence' of the human. This is closely bound to what Lyotard, in *The Inhuman* and his later writings on painting, calls the presence of 'the Thing' itself: a pure indeterminacy, withdrawn from all relation to feeling and the mind, 'encrypted in the unconscious … of the painting and the writing.'[53] Lyotard advocates dissociating the secondary repression that causes 'formations' from what Lacan called the 'Thing' and Freud the 'unconscious affect', which escape all presentation. In this respect, 'primary repression, tightly connected with this Thing, would … be to secondary repression what the sublime is to the beautiful.'[54] The Thing is the absolute Other as an unpresentable presence, beyond any possible representation and cognition, that may command the work but itself makes no demand. The ethical demand is rather issued by the almost inaudible Voice of the Other that places the subject under the obligation to respond, for 'you must be answerable to the Law and you must be unable to answer.'[55] It is noticeable that Lyotard sees in the sublime experience the Kantian imperative of the moral Law and the accompanying state of disinterestedness as well as the subject as divided by the moral law, and thus 'exiled from the ownership of yourself',[56] always already in a constitutive indebtedness to the Other, echoing Emmanuel Lévinas's ethical call to obligation. In presenting the sublime sensation in art as the experience of an otherness linked to lack and debt, Lyotard connects the a-temporality of the sublime event both with the radical presence of the Other as pure difference – pure *aistheton* – and the call of the Other to which we are forced to be just and bear witness.

The privileging, in the *Artforum* essays, of abstract painting and of the avant-garde for constantly examining their inherited rules have given rise to the belief that

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[52] Lyotard, 'Newman: The Instant', p. 242.
[53] Lyotard, 'Anamnesis of the Visible', p. 110.
[54] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Rewriting Modernity', in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp.24-35 (33).
[55] Lyotard, 'Anamnesis of the Visible', p. 111.
[56] Ibid., p. 113.

Lyotard's concern with the postmodern sublime is actually an affirmation of Greenberg's formalist modernism.[57] Certainly, there are affinities with Greenberg's understanding of modernist art as a dynamic form of Kantian critique, reinforced by Lyotard's claim that the postmodern is part of the modern. Yet, as contemporary commentators have shown, the link to Greenberg is problematic. Kiff Bamford notes that Lyotard's affirmation of the 'avant-gardist act of disruption in and of itself' contrasts with Greenberg's definition of modernist art as a continuity of tradition. Similarly, David Cunningham draws attention to the well-known impasse that the Greenbergian project reached with Minimalism, and how it forced him to return to a formalist understanding of good taste, which Lyotard clearly resists.[58] I would add that Lyotard's turn to Kant, unlike Greenberg's, finds art's transcendental conditions of possibility in the ethical figure of the sublime. As a result, Lyotard advocates an aesthetic understanding of the 'sublime' and the 'avant-garde', which do not adhere to established distinctions between painting and contemporary art practices or to art historical definitions of 'modern' and 'postmodern'. They appeal, instead, to an a-temporal 'ontology' that traverses a range of art practices and keeps the critical tension between tradition and the production of the new open. As the conclusion to the essay on Newman puts it: 'it [art] accomplishes an ontological task, that is, a "chronological task" … without completing it. It must constantly begin to testify anew to the occurrence by letting the occurrence be.'[59]

Importantly, this has a significant political dimension as well. For the threat to the avant-garde artwork-event, Lyotard points out, is no longer direct political oppression, but is now contemporary capitalism, the art market, and various artistic currents misleadingly called 'postmodern art'.[60] These political stakes are certainly examined in *Les Immatériaux*. As shown in the previous chapter, existing approaches tend to frame it as either an embrace of modernist avant-garde painting, particularly in

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[57] See, for instance, Diarmuid Costello, 'Lyotard's Modernism', *Parallax*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2000), pp. 76-87. Costello identifies in Lyotard's postmodern reworking of the Kantian sublime a modernist understanding of art and philosophy as Kantian self-criticism and a 'historically circumscribed' avant-garde rhetoric that derives from Greenberg. He, thus, construes Lyotard's work as 'the last gasp of artistic modernism itself' contrary to its wide reception as 'postmodern' (80, 81).

[58] See Bamford, note 52, p. 194; David Cunningham, 'How the Sublime Became "Now": Time, Modernity, and Aesthetics in Lyotard's Rewriting of Kant', *Symposium: Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2004), pp. 549-571 (558-559) <http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/3683/1/Cunningham_2004_final.pdf> [accessed 25 November 2015].

[59] Lyotard, 'Newman: The Instant', pp. 248-249.

[60] Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', pp. 104-105.

light of Lyotard's skepticism about the new media art, or conversely as the enthusiastic embrace of the new technologies. The aesthetic sublimity of *Les Immatériaux*, instead, critiques contemporary forms of postmodern art, and attempts to delineate the postmodern as the continued critical activity of the modern.

III. Sublime politics and the inhuman: The aesthetic of the sublime as a form of resistance

Criticizing contemporary forms of 'postmodern art', commodity culture, and the operational rationality of contemporary capitalism

Both in the Appendix and the *Artforum* essays Lyotard is highly critical of current trends mistakenly referred to as 'postmodern'. His criticism is also explicitly expressed in his opening paper, entitled 'Defining the Postmodern', at the ICA conference (May 1985), given while *Les Immatériaux* was still running and at the height of the 'postmodern' debate in the Anglophone world. Lyotard emphasizes that the aim of his paper is to point to – and not resolve – certain confusions and ambiguities surrounding the term 'postmodern', and particularly its suggestion of an opposition to modernism.[61] The misconception of *post-* as mere chronological succession and as a 'break' with tradition is, according to Lyotard, a modernist way of 'forgetting or repressing the past' in a Freudian sense, destined to its repetition rather than its overcoming.[62] This was evident in contemporary architectural styles such as Charles Jencks's postmodern architecture, and in the contemporary painting movements of Italian Transavantgarde and German or American Neo-expressionism.[63]

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[61] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Defining the Postmodern' [1985], ICA Documents 4, in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989 [first publ. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1986]), pp. 7-10 (7). The paper, slightly modified, will be published under the title 'Note on the Meaning of "post-"', in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*, trans. and ed. Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas (London: Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1992), pp. 89-93. Unless otherwise stated, references are made to the ICA conference paper due to its contemporaneity with *Les Immatériaux*.

[62] Lyotard suggests that the process of avant-garde art is comparable to Freudian 'anamnesis', namely a 'working through' (*Durcharbeitung*) 'operated by modernity on itself' (Ibid., p. 10). On this basis, he explains, 'the "post-" of "postmodern" does not signify a movement of *comeback*, *flashback* or *feedback*, that is, not a movement of repetition but a procedure in "*ana-*": a procedure of analysis, anamnesis, anagogy and anamorphosis which elaborates an "initial forgetting".' Lyotard, 'Note on the Meaning of "post-"', p. 93. Italics in the original.

[63] Ibid., pp.7-8. Charles Jencks's book *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1977) was the first to define 'postmodernism' in architecture. Jencks attacked the

Lyotard's aversion to these contemporary forms of 'postmodern painting' is clearly demonstrated by his decision to exclude them from *Les Immatériaux*. In his interview to Blistène, he explicitly distances himself from these tendencies and emphasizes his intention to 'be "strict"' in 'detect[ing] the existence of a postmodern sensibility.' He claims Neo-expressionism and transavantgardism return to the viewer's enjoyment, and so forget the achievements of painters such as Cézanne, Duchamp, and Klee for whom the primary artistic task was to interrogate the nature of their own activity. In a more dismissive tone, Lyotard states, 'they've lost all sense of what's fundamentally at stake in painting.'[64] In this way, he differentiates the real vocation of the artist from what is pleasing, easily communicable, and suggests a consensus of taste from the aesthetic of the sublime.[65]

Paul Crowther, in his discussion of *Les Immatériaux*, is critical of Lyotard's exclusion of neo-expressionist paintings. He contends that 'neo-expressionist' works by Malcolm Morley, George Baselitz, and Anselm Kiefer are 'genuinely' sublime and exemplary of the 'postmodern' since they have succeeded, through playful experimentations, in questioning 'convenient categories' and a 'well-defined' notion of art.[66] In his view, Lyotard's position in *Les Immatériaux* conflates two not entirely compatible approaches: on the one hand, an 'empirical theory' about the change in

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'International Style' on the basis that modernism had turned into a style as rule-constrained for its practitioners as the traditional styles it had rejected. Lyotard is often critical of Jencks's eclectic postmodern architecture in his writings of the period. See, for instance, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 76; 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable', p. 127. The opening of the essay 'What is Postmodernism? essay is characteristic: 'I have read that under the name of postmodernism, architects are getting rid of the Bauhaus project, throwing out the baby of experimentation with the bathwater of functionalism' (71).

Transavantgarde was an art movement championed by the Italian critic Achille Bonito Oliva in the late-1970s that claimed the death of the Modernist avant-garde and the failure of Conceptual art. He promoted, instead, the revival of expressiveness in image-painting, which eclectically used materials from different historical periods, styles, and geographical locations, often linked to the affirmation of a kind of national identity.

[64] Lyotard in Blistène, p. 35.

[65] Lyotard's defence of the avant-garde task should be seen within the context of the return to painting in the boom of the art market in the 1980s, most notably in such popular exhibitions as *A New Spirit in Painting*, curated by Christos M. Joachimides, Norman Rosenthall, and Nicholas Serota, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 15 Januray-18 March 1981, and *Zeitgeist*, curated by Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthall, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin, 16 October 1982-16 January 1983. Following a decade dominated by photography, video, and performance, these shows proclaimed the current vitality of painting and the expression of the subjective vision of the artist with the renewal of figuration and identifiable imagery. The neo-expressionist tendencies were presented within a twentieth-century avant-garde tradition, using elements of earlier avant-garde styles in usually big-size canvases and in a more readable and communicable form. They also attempted to place the European Expressionist painting at the forefront of the international contemporary art scene.

[66] Paul Crowther, '*Les Immatériaux* and the Postmodern Sublime', in Andrew Benjamin, ed., *Judging Lyotard* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 192-205 (197-198).

our sensibility brought about by technoscientific development and, on the other, the idea of the avant-garde as 'authentic painting', which is precisely the kind of emancipatory meta-narrative Lyotard was critical of. Lyotard mistakenly runs them together, Crowther maintains, for 'whilst the technoscientific culture of *Les Immatériaux* is indeed sublimicist', 'the avante-garde works favoured by Lyotard are not.'[67]

However, a reading that seeks the sublime merely in specific artworks in the exhibition is not only misleading but also unproductive. For instance, Newman's abstract paintings were a conspicuous absence from the exhibition, while the 'sublime' hyper-realist paintings by Jacques Monory – as Lyotard had called them – were exhibited as were works by Marcel Duchamp that Lyotard repeatedly stresses were not sublime.[68] I will come back in detail to these artists and Lyotard's earlier writings on them, as they usefully prefigure the underlying ambivalence in *Les Immatériaux* regarding the ability of new technologies to escape conceptual determination and provide a liberating experience of the sublime. These ambiguous 'inclusions' and 'exclusions' simply reveal that the formulation of the sublime in the *Artforum* essays should only be broadly applied to *Les Immatériaux* as outlining a function of art and its radical potential, rather than as the endorsement of a certain 'turn' to painting.

Crowther himself suggests this, when he mentions another problematic exclusion: the lack of a 'politico-historical' dimension and the '*unquestioned*' embrace of technological change that turns *Les Immatériaux* into a 'self-justifying spectacle'. Crowther highlights a recurring issue in the critical reception of the exhibition and could not put it more bluntly: '*Les Immatériaux* itself attempts only the neutral task of evoking an already existent sensibility, rather than the prescriptive task of criticizing it' as if its declared artistic status is 'in conflict with explicitly raising political questions.' These failings become more conspicuous, he adds, in the face of socio-political movements critical of established forms of power, and the arousal of new modes of political sensibility in contemporary life.[69] Aside from the exclusion of current 'postmodern' art and the lack of critical reflection on technoscientific advances, Crowther returns to another problematic issue: Lyotard's reworking of the

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[67] Ibid., p. 197.

[68] In his interview to Blistène, prior to the show, Lyotard referred to Duchamp as the man whose 'aesthetic has nothing to do with the sublime, that it leaves the sublime behind.' Blistène, p. 32.

[69] Crowther, '*Les Immatériaux* and the Postmodern Sublime', pp. 198-199. Italics in the original.

Kantian sublime that stresses the negative side of the sublime experience, hence the emphasis on the '*alienating*' effect of technoscientific immaterialization at the expense of any pleasure found in its infinite complexity.[70] The role of technology in the exhibition and its critical reception was discussed in the preceding chapter, however Crowther's account is useful insofar as it raises the political potential of *Les Immatériaux* explicitly. Crowther sees the incomprehensible, overwhelming excess of the immaterials '*as* a surface sustained by infinite complexity', and so as the 'vivification and affirmation of our rationality' which can overcome alienation.[71] The sublime sensibility of *Les Immatériaux*, he argues, attains 'an emancipatory effect through its affirmation of reason', and can also contribute to the 'reintegrative task' by developing 'deeper political awareness' of the aesthetic ground of sublime pleasure. Crowther advocates a sublime aesthetic that would involve the 'deconstructive interrogation' of socio-political reality producing 'critical tolerance', instead of a limited sublime aestheticization of technoscience.[72]

Crowther's account emphasizes Lyotard's intention to show how new technology functions aesthetically with both repressive and liberating effects. Nevertheless, his interpretation insists on the re-affirmation of reason in the sublime, while Lyotard argues for the political efficacy and radicality of the incommensurable differend between sensibility and reason. Contrary to Crowther's claims, the excessive experience of *Les Immatériaux* not only reflected the changing conditions of contemporary life but also extended art into an aesthetic politics based on an indeterminable – that is, free – feeling it produced, rather than the development of a 'sharpened political consciousness' or a re-affirmed rationality.[73] This creation of a new sensibility is an aesthetic politics grounded on ethics as the opening to otherness and the inhuman. The avant-garde remains central to affirming art's potential of productive resistance because it is committed to the incommensurability of art with the socio-political and technical systems in which it is produced. Avant-garde art is, therefore, an immanent critical interrogation of the challenges posed by the complexity of contemporary life and its mechanisms of oppressive power.

According to Lyotard, the avant-garde sublime is 'doubly threatened' by 'cultural policy' on the one hand, and the art market's appeal to the imperative for

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[70] Ibid., p. 200. Italics in the original.
[71] Ibid., p. 202. Italics in the original.
[72] Ibid., p. 204.
[73] Ibid.

profit in capitalist economies, on the other.[74] In particular, Neo-expressionism and the Transavantgarde mix the motifs of earlier artistic styles, and so establish 'the eclecticism of consumption' as 'a new "taste"', which, Lyotard claims, is 'no taste' at all since in the absence of aesthetic criteria everything becomes 'equivalent': a homogeneous experience expressing 'the spirit of the supermarket shopper.'[75] Lyotard addresses the objectives, artistic implications, and confusions that underlie these attempts within the context of neoliberal capitalism. The postmodern eclecticism, advanced by art critics, art collectors, museum and gallery directors, implies a need for unity and popularity over the more fragmentary character of avant-garde experiments. Previously successful artistic modes are recycled to create 'amalgamations, quotations, ornamentations, pastiche', which are passed off as innovative.[76] What drives this process, Lyotard argues, is a 'cynical eclecticism' that works to 'suppress' the avant-garde vocation by 'deresponsibilizing the artists' and making artistic research conform to 'a *de facto* state of "culture"',[77] namely what is easily recognizable, massively communicable, and often flattering to the public. In this sense, 'the realism of the "anything goes"' is connected to capitalist profitability, and is more effective in 'slackening' culture than any reactionary anti-modernism of the past.[78]

Lyotard dismisses postmodern eclecticism because he sees it as part of the functionalism and the demand for infinite profit central to contemporary capitalism. Similarly, he claims, the art market operates according to the law of innovation – the 'new' is misconstrued as a commodity and commercial success – and this kind of temporality tends to obscure the 'now' of the artwork as singular event. Hence, the confusion of 'expressing the spirit of the times' with 'merely reflecting the spirit of the market.'[79] Within this context, Lyotard contrasts the experience of the sublime and the political role of the 'now' with the technical manipulation of time and the

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[74] Lyotard, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 76.

[75] Lyotard, 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable', p. 127.

[76] Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', p. 106.

[77] Lyotard, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 73; Lyotard, 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable', p.127.

[78] Lyotard, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 76. Lyotard writes: 'When power is that of capital and not that of a party, the "transavantgardist" or "postmodern" (in Jencks's sense) solution proves to be better adapted than the antimodern solution. Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture.'

[79] Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', p. 106.

information economy of contemporary capitalism.[80] In this respect, he prefigures the key distinction in *The Inhuman* between the inhumanity of the system's acceleration, speed, optimization and efficiency, and the inhuman event of the 'now'. For the openness to the disruptive occurrence of the event and the encounter with the terror of nothingness, Lyotard maintains, has nothing to do with the 'profitable pathos' of the 'cynicism of innovation'. The demand for the constantly 'new' in the production and consumption of experience is capitalism's response to the terror that nothing further happens, and reaffirms the 'hegemony' of will, now subsumed in 'a technology of time'. Lyotard, however, is explicit: 'The innovation "works". The question mark of the *Is it happening?* stops.'[81]

Lyotard finds a certain sublimity in capitalist economy in that it is regulated by the Idea of infinite wealth, which it actualizes in the constant demand for ever new commodities, information, and experiences that, in turn, makes reality ever more ungraspable. It is noteworthy that whilst Lyotard clearly differentiates between avant-garde experimentation and capitalist innovation, he also identifies 'a kind of collusion between capital and the avant-garde', and their 'ambiguous, even perverse' correlation.[82] Artists are impelled to challenge established rules, and affirm art as the possibility of an infinite development beyond the rules of innovation and realism driving the market. In this sense, Lyotard claims, 'it is possible to ascribe the dialectics of the avant-gardes to the challenge posed by the realisms of industry and mass communication to painting and the narrative arts.'[83] The function of the avant-gardes and what keeps them moving is, according to Lyotard, questioning 'the "technical" presuppositions' of the visible, to 'show that there is invisibility in the visual', and thereby maintaining art's incommensurability with itself and the systems that produce it. This is an important claim insofar as it introduces the political function of the modern sublime as breaking with the givens of 'legitimate construction' and codes of social communication. Painting, in particular, resists a consensual aesthetics of the beautiful and its established systems of perception and thought. As such, it critically opens up the possibility for a transformed vision but it

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[80] 'Between two pieces of information, "nothing happens", by definition', Lyotard writes. A confusion thereby becomes possible, between what is of interest to information and the director, and what is the question of the avant-gardes, between what happens – the new – and the *Is it happening?*, the *now*.' Ibid. pp. 105-106. Italics in the original.

[81] Ibid., pp. 106-107. Italics in the original.

[82] Ibid., p. 105.

[83] Lyotad, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 75.

does so, Lyotard points out, 'in accord with the contemporary world of industrial techno-sciences at the same time as it disavows it.'[84]

In 'Representation, Presentation, Unpresentable', Lyotard links the shift of painting away from representation with the development of photography. With the integration of postindustrial, technoscientific procedures in the fabrication and dissemination of images, photography took over the task of representation from painting and rapidly became a popular mode of visual pleasure, easy communication and accessibility.[85] The result of photography's expansion and use of meticulously programmed procedures, Lyotard claims, is the 'loss of *aura*', the limitation of the indeterminate, and the commodification of the visual through the production of beautiful images that appeal to the 'beauty of understanding' and no longer address a subject free to invent 'a community of taste to come'. In this sense, industrial photography dissolves experience into the finite products of capitalist technoscience, and so taste is 'profoundly modified' as the accord between capitalist sensibility and its rational understanding that produces the disinterested pleasure given by the image.[86]

Lyotard not only criticizes current forms of 'postmodern' painting but also art using new technologies, such as photography, for conforming to the consensual beauty of contemporary capitalism. What is at issue is not merely that photography has taken over painting's task of representation, but that this role includes the codification of linguistic structures in ever more stored data. Kiff Bamford for one, sees photography as having an ambivalent position in this essay. On the one hand, the development of photography is placed within a long history of the technology of the visual, in which the increasing connection with technoscience is criticized for defining a popular aesthetics of the beautiful; on the other, it indicates the radical potential of photography to render visible the previously invisible, as the illustrations in the 1982 earlier *Artforum* version show. Photography, Bamford argues, is here offered as an alternative means of engaging with the unpresentable, an ambiguity anticipating that of *Les Immatériaux*.[87] However, as he rightly notes, this ambivalence is far from an alignment with the championing of a 'postmodern' photography of

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[84] Ibid., p. 127.
[85] Ibid., pp. 119, 121.
[86] Ibid., p. 122. Italics in the original.
[87] See Bamford, p. 115. Bamford refers, for instance, to the site *Nu Vain* in which the exhibits – including Muybridge's experimentations and documentation of the occupied Paris – position the role of photography as both 'the recorder and interrogator of modernity.'

appropriation, particularly in the new journal *October*, as critical alternative to neo-expressionist painting.[88]

Lyotard's criticism of postmodern beauty as part of commodity culture already appeared in his earlier discussion of the hyper-realist paintings by Jacques Monory, also included in *Les Immatériaux*. His 1981 essay on Monory, *Sublime Aesthetic of the Contract Killer*, was the first in which Lyotard related the concept of the sublime to contemporary art. The connection was made on the basis of the painter's use of mass media images as a primary source and of technical reproduction procedures.[89] *Explosion* (1973), which was displayed in the site *Peintre sans corps* ['Painter without Body'], is a large four-panel work consisting of one painted and three photographic print canvases in which images are copied and projected onto light-sensitized canvas. Each panel depicts the explosion of an aeroplane with the image fading progressively to end up barely discernible in an almost white monochrome in the last canvas (Fig. 4.1). The essay was written for the series of paintings 'Skies, Nebulae and Galaxies' (1978-1981), in which Monory reproduces images of the starry sky based on data taken by radio-telescopes, analysed by computers, and stored in memory-machines.[90] Lyotard focuses on the 'dispositif' or apparatus of projection and image-making in hyper-realist paintings along with the kind of sensibility and community they appeal to. Despite their friendship, he is highly critical of Monory's 'realism', claiming that his images suggest 'exchangeability, repetition … the loss of *aura*, the techno-science of capital.' As such, they reflect the 'anonymous spectator' and appeal to the tasteless realism of 'an apathetic mass'. Rather than invoking a community to come, they attest to a population 'already dead as a community, existing only as an image-market.'[91]

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[88] Ibid., pp. 116-117.

[89] The essay *Esthétique sublime du tueur à gages* (*Sublime Aesthetic of the Contract Killer*) was completed in December 1981 and is included together with the essay *Économie libidinale du dandy* (*Libidinal Economy of the Dandy*), December 1972, in Lyotard's book *L'assassinat de l'expérience par la peinture – Monory*, published in 1984. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Assassination of Experience by Painting – Monory*, Sarah Wilson, ed., trans. Rachel Bowlby (London: Black Dog, 1998 [1984]), pp. 191-231.

[90] Lyotard, 'Sublime Aesthetic of the Contract Killer', p. 194.

[91] Ibid., pp. 218-219. For a study of the mutual engagement of Lyotard and Monory, the senior painter of the 'Narrative Figuration' movement in France in the 1970s, during a period Lyotard was also writing on Duchamp, see Sarah Wilson, *The Visual World of French Theory: Figurations* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), esp. chapter 5, pp. 156-183. According to Wilson, the relationship with Monory marked Lyotard's shift from an engagement with the art of the past into 'the contemporary and a specific style of writing'; Monory was, for Lyotard, the 'contemporary "painter of modern life"' (156-157). Wilson stresses the role of the experience of the Californian landscape for both in 1970-1977, as it marked Monory's shift to the starlight paintings and Lyotard's move from

Lyotard identifies in Monory's images an aesthetic of the beautiful, but one in which the free harmony of imagination and understanding is replaced by an 'adjustment' determined and constrained by the technoscientific and commercial laws governing the (re-)production and consumption of images. Painting presents a '*matter-of-fact* theme in a *ready-made* style', which, Lyotard explains, is '*too beautiful*' in the sense that it 'does not solicit a taste' in the Kantian notion of free judgment and *sensus communis* but 'demands only the knowledge' of the external 'techno-scientific and media codes' and appeals to 'a receptiveness to the connotations.'[92] Nonetheless, he argues, Monory's paintings are postmodern because they relate to the aesthetic of the sublime as an *après-dandyisme*, beyond romanticism's quest for a lost absolute, and having achieved – precisely through '*too much beauty*' – 'the synthesis' of the infinite (sublime) and finite (beautiful) in experimentation.[93] Inasmuch as experimentation results from capitalist technoscience, it does not attest to experience itself but to the 'know-how' of the new machines, which operate according to logical 'axiomatics'. In this sense, Lyotard points out, the division between infinity and the finite collapses, because infinity is that of 'competences and performances' introduced into the 'finite of an axiomaticised and operational set-up'. The sky in Monory's paintings is not the infinity that escapes our limited human experience, but instead 'the finite product of certain transformational set-ups … in an infinite ensemble of possible transformers.'[94] Within this condition of technological and knowledge infinitudes, the role accorded to the subject, Lyotard concludes, is to 'serve these set-ups. It is in this respect that "we" are either survivors … or experimenters', and that 'The sublime of immanence replaces the sublime of transcendence.'[95]

The 'realism' of Monory, therefore, exposes the underlying sublimity of the contemporary world of technological rationality it paints. A sublimity that, according to Lyotard, destroys the incommensurable of experience through 'ideas realized in axiomatics and operational set-ups'.[96] By criticizing the 'realism' of 'postmodern' art for deploying mass-media imagery, technical procedures and information

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'dandyism and an American Duchampianism towards the technological and electronic infinitudes of *The Postmodern Condition* and a new aesthetic of the sublime' (177).

[92] Lyotard, 'Sublime Aesthetic of the Contract Killer', pp. 222-223. Italics in the original.
[93] Ibid., p. 225. Italics in the original.
[94] Ibid., p. 227.
[95] Ibid., pp. 228, 229.
[96] Ibid., p.229.

technologies to make art conform to an operational rationality, the essay on Monory anticipates the 1982 *Artforum* essay and 'Something Like Communication' from 1985, let alone the ambivalence towards new technologies in the exposure of contemporary technological sublimity in *Les Immatériaux*. But it also intends to show that, in the wake of new developments in the fabrication and consumption of images, painting is engaged in a 'sublime of immanence' by which it exposes a new kind of technoscientific sublimity, one that is repressive.[97] In his later essays, Lyotard affirms the *novatio* of the postmodern sublime as a mode of avant-garde resistance to this 'sublime' embodiment of the aesthetics of capitalism in technoscience. It is noteworthy, however, that Lyotard had discovered this strategic engagement within and against the consensual aesthetics and nihilistic aspects of capitalist technoscience – and thus the liberating potential of the incommensumerable in art – in the inhuman logic of Duchamp's transformative machines, which refers back to his earlier work on capitalism in *Libidinal Economy*. This is a key link in our discussion to fully understand the role of the excessive experience offered in *Les Immatériaux*.

Aesthetics and politics of the incommensumerable: The inhuman logic of Duchamp's machines

Lyotard advances an approach to Duchamp that differs from the established American view of the critique of painting and the visual in favour of pure conceptualism. In *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* (1977), he provides a philosophical reading of what is at stake in Duchamp's works, emphasizing their transformative impetus and disruptive function as 'a battery of metamorphosis machines'.[98] By focusing on Duchamp's

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[97] Ibid., pp. 229-230. 'Neo-technological reality will, by its very constitution, dismiss all testimony other than that of the procedures for establishing this reality. Like the murder of the contract killer, it has no other witness than the infinite capacity of ideas. Monory's paintbrush *is* that other witness…' Italics in the original.

[98] Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, trans. Ian McLeod (Venice CA: Lapis Press, 1990 [1977]), p. 36. The book is a collection of lectures and essays, delivered between 1974 and 1977, in a fragmentary style of presentation. It was published in 1977, in the midst of Duchamp's rediscovery in France, which was accentuated with Duchamp's first major retrospective (February 1977). The exhibition, curated by Jean Clair, Pontus Hultén, and Ulf Linde, inaugurated the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, and Lyotard contributed to the catalogue. See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Etant Donnés: inventaire du dernier nu', in Jean Clair, ed., *Abécédaire: Approches critiques*, *L'Œuvre de Marcel Duchamp*, vol.3 (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977). Up until the 1970s, Duchamp was not well-known to the French public, and for the artists was mainly associated with Dada and Surrealism while the contemporary 'Narrative Figuration' movement criticized him fiercely for his apolitical position and American conceptualism. Lyotard, on the contrary, reads Duchamp's work for its political potential, and suggested at a conference on performance (Milwaukee, 1976) to 'replace

'transformative apparatuses (for channelling or redistributing energy)', Lyotard claims it is futile to attempt to comprehend, interpret or offer traditional commentary on them, and searches instead for 'materials, tools, and weapons for a politics of incommensurables.'[99] Lyotard deals specifically with Duchamp's two major works, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*, (1912, Paris; 1915-1923, New York) and *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* (1946-1966, New York), claiming that there is always 'something uncommentable', though 'nothing mystical' in them, an 'inconsistency' that is not an 'insignificance'. It is rather 'the incommensurable brought back into commentary', hence Lyotard calls to 'let the inconsistency of the commentary and its object be felt' and affirms 'non-sense as the most precious treasure.'[100] As a result, 'You begin to live and think according to non-sense, to practice and commemorate it' in order to 'resist' 'tastes', 'reasons', and 'continuities'. This is done 'By the use of mechanical techniques' based on an 'inhuman' logic, 'coldly carried out, and distant'.[101]

Lyotard connects the mechanics of Duchamp with the provocative assertions in his earlier *Libidinal Economy* (1974) that the nineteenth-century English proletariat was not only able to adjust their body to the most extreme physical working conditions in industrialization, but also found a most perverse pleasure (*jouissance*) in the repression and destruction imposed on them. It was not a question of 'that or die', Lyotard contends, but 'that and die' since death is part of and attests to the *jouissance* invested in conditions of power as constraint or domination.[102] Writing on Duchamp, Lyotard claims that in the hardest industrial labor there is an 'impressive contribution' by workers to 'the demeasurement of what was held to be the human, to the toleration of situations that were thought to be intolerable.' This means, Lyotard clarifies, and

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performer by *transformer*'. As such, he shifts emphasis from the individual agency in performance on its operation modes and effects as a system of projection. Ibid., p. 31. Italics in the original.

[99] Ibid., pp. 31-32, 12, 28.

[100] Ibid., pp. 11, 12.

[101] Ibid., p. 13, 22.

[102] It is worth quoting the key passage at some length: '… look at the English proletariat, at what capital, that is to say *their labour*, has done to their body. You will tell me, however, that it was that or die. *But it is always that or die* […] Death is not an alternative to it, it is part of it, it attests to the fact that there is *jouissance* in it, the English unemployed did not become workers to survive, they … *enjoyed* … the hysterical, masochistic, whatever exhaustion it was *hanging on* in the mines, in the foundries, in the factories in hell, they enjoyed it, enjoyed the mass destruction of their organic body, which was indeed imposed upon them, they enjoyed the decomposition of their personal identity, the identity that the peasant tradition had constructed for them, enjoyed the dissolution of their families and villages, and enjoyed the new monstrous *anonymity* of the suburbs and the pubs in the morning and evening.' Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London: Continuum, 2004, first publ. by Athlone Press, 1993 [1974]), pp.109-110. Italics in the original.

here the traced links to *Les Immatériaux* are most evident, that they demanded 'another body, in a different space' to put up with an unprecedented 'experience of quantity', the intensity of a new sensibility that the 'old' organic body was forced to bear in capitalist production.[103] Lyotard's argument therefore concerns the invention of a new body as the site of libidinal forces that continue to flow even where Marxist accounts see only 'alienation', 'exploitation', and the workers as 'victims'. Breaking with his Marxist past and echoing his subsequent engagement with the sublime, Lyotard claims that rational discourses, which oppose intensities of desire, 'miss the energy that later spread through the arts and sciences, the jubilation and the pain of discovering that you can hold out (live, work, think, be affected) in a place' where it was considered 'senseless' to do so. The new inhuman condition and its transformed body demonstrates a kind of 'mechanical asceticism', which is, Lyotard argues, the proletariat's contribution to modernity.[104]

Lyotard's point is neither to defend capitalism nor to sidestep its oppressive power, but rather to stress how it also created new affective intensities – irrational libidinal energetics – in industrial production that made it possible for humanity to escape its conditions and embrace the unknown. At the end of his apology, Lyotard argues:

> The metamorphosis of bodies and minds happens in excitement, violence, a kind of madness […] when there is no common measure between what you're coming from (the old body) and where you're going. Always incommensurability, here in the projection of the human figure, starting from a familiar space, on to another space, an unknown one. To accept that is to extend your power. This is the hardness of which Duchamp takes a reading, in his way, in his corner.[105]

According to Lyotard, Duchamp's mechanistic descriptions, diagrams and meticulous studies of desire in *The Large Glass* and the laying out of the naked woman in the diorama of *Given* demonstrate bizarre, arbitrary, and humorous constraints of the

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[103] Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, pp. 14-15. Lyotard cites here the example offered in *Libidinal Economy* (10) of an audiogram study, which revealed that a worker was hardly affected by the noise of a machine next to him, functioning at 20,000 Hz frequency, because his auditory spectrum had 'neutralized' the noise, made it '*mute*'. Italics in the original.
[104] Ibid., pp. 16-17.
[105] Ibid., p. 19.

human body, in space and time, following 'a method of dissimilation'; 'let it exceed its givens; let it invent its possibilities', this is Duchamp's appeal.[106] Accordingly, Lyotard discovers in Duchamp a 'model of political thought' and claims that his works are 'contributions not only to an aesthetics but to a topological politics.'[107]

In particular, Lyotard finds in Duchamp's two major works the invention of 'a topological justice', which renders Euclidean geometry and the notion of democratic equality 'totally invalid' through the introduction of incommensurabilities and other types of projections in the pictorial space. These complex mechanisms disrupt the axioms of spatial representation, along with the conventional understanding of the political space as 'commensurable', 'homogeneous and isomorphic'.[108] For instance, the two halves of *The Large Glass* operate according to different principles and are joined like mirrors by a 'hinge' in 'a relation of incongruences' that makes the figures occupy 'similar and non-superimposable spaces'.[109] The disruption of perspectival common-sense through the incommensurable projective machinary of the work has uncontrolled effects that not only undermine the coherency of the subject, but also give the work another sense of time (Fig. 4.2).

This is because Duchamp's mechanics operate according to a dissimulating rather than a representational logic. In a key passage, Lyotard explains the particularities of the Duchampian machines:

> Duchamp likes machines because they have no taste and no feelings. He likes them for their anonymity, which keeps nothing and capitalizes on nothing of the forces that they articulate and transform, and suppresses the question of the author and of authority; and he likes them because they do not repeat themselves, an even stranger thing for minds penetrated by the equation: mechanics=replication. No assimilation in the causes and none in the effects.[110]

Duchamp creates different kinds of dissimulative, 'celibate', 'cunning' machines, which do 'not belong to the things of power, to politicians, to technicians'. Their

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[106] Ibid., p. 22.
[107] Ibid., pp. 25, 26.
[108] Ibid., pp. 28, 27.
[109] Ibid., pp. 34-35.
[110] Ibid., p. 68.

effects are not predictable, recognizable and thus consumable, but are instead 'singular, misrecognizable inventions'. Lyotard privileges Duchampian machines precisely for their sheer 'pointlessness', for being 'spontaneous-affirmative' and knowing 'no consequence', echoing the inexplicability of intensities in the libidinal economy.[111]

In the modified version of a text originally published in the catalogue of the exhibition *The Bachelor Machines*, organized by Harald Szeemann in 1975, Lyotard importantly moves from mechanics to the realm of machinations, favouring the 'Bachelor machines' as opposed to 'industrial mechanics'.[112] Machination, Lyotard explains, is less a 'weapon' than an 'artifice' that transforms the direction and effect of relations of forces.[113] Likewise Duchamp's 'sophistic' machines strategically deploy cunning apparatuses both in the commentary on and projection of geometry in n-dimensions, aiming to disorganize and prevent 'any totalising and unifying machine, whether in the area of technology … language or of politics.'[114] The bachelor machines function as transformers that redistribute energy to multiple set-ups with uncontrollable effects, they are peculiarly productive in artistic terms and resist power. 'The trick is', Lyotard contends, 'to use the specular and the reproductive, those mechanisms of assimilatory tenor, to engender something dissimilar, to invent singularities.'[115] This is a strategic deployment of the existing mechanisms in the sense that singularities, while they are produced by the machine,

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[111] Ibid., pp. 69, 70.

[112] Ibid., p. 49. The first version of Lyotard's text 'Partitions', entitled 'Considerations on Certain Partition-Walls as the Potentially Bachelor Elements of a Few Simple Machines' (pp. 98-108) was published in the catalogue of the touring exhibition *The Bachelor Machines*, organized by Harald Szeemann's *Agentur für geistige Gastarbeiter* (1975). The catalogue, entitled *Junggesellen Maschinen/Les Machines Célibataires* was first published in a bilingual German-French version, followed by one in English and Italian, edited by Jean Clair and Harald Szeemann: *Le Macchine Celibri/The Bachelor Machines*, exh. cat. (Venice: Alfieri Edizioni and H. Szeemann, 1975).

[113] Ibid., p. 42. Lyotard's concept of 'machination' is based on Franz Reuleaux's definition (1875) of the machine as 'a combination of resisting bodies, assembled in such a way that, by means of them and certain determinant motions, the mechanical forces of nature are obliged to do the work.' But Reuleaux suggests that the machine is also 'a *trap* set for the forces of nature' insofar as it is 'an apparatus that lets us overturn relations of force.' Machination, Lyotard claims, is 'an artifice, which is and which is not coupled with nature.' It works by 'capturing and exploiting natural forces', but it plays '*a trick*' on them, for although it is itself less strong than they are, it can dominate them, and so actualizes the logical 'monstrosity: that the less strong should be stronger than what is stronger.' According to Lyotard, the Bachelor machines in the *Large Glass* join this 'unconscious of cunning implied in the invention of mechanisms' that modern technical thinking has silenced in its drive for dominating nature (41-42). Lyotard extends the cunning machinations to the discursive strategies of Duchamp, whose correlative can be found in the dissimulating logic of the duplicitous speeches (*dissoi logoi*) of ancient Greek sophistry (47). Italics in the original.

[114] Ibid., pp. 49-50.

[115] Ibid., p. 62.

resist its logic of rational reproduction. Their dissimulation is a paradoxical affirmative negation, an affirmation, Lyotard explains, which does not exclude negation and separation as its opposites, but includes them as 'potencies'. This is what Duchamp himself called an 'ironism of affirmation', and as Lyotard aptly summarizes: 'It's a question of dissimilating the givens.'[116]

As such, the Duchampian machinery introduces playful visual and temporal incommensurabilities that have unpredictable, disruptive effects, which are not consumable within the circulations of capitalist society. According to Lyotard, Duchamp's mechanisms rail against the phenomenological horizon of 'retinal', 'perceptual' painting – 'as stupid as a painter' – and resist the need of the eye 'to think, to unify, to be intelligent'. Instead, they favour an 'eye without memory', 'a certain inopticity', as Duchamp puts it, such as the molecularization of each colour.[117] Rather than seeking to restore any deformities and decompositions within a comprehensible organic unity or to denounce opticality in favour of the purely conceptual, a 'painting of blindness' invents ironic machinations that intervene to outwit the logic of the gaze by bringing into play 'moments of delay' and discontinuities that pre-empt the consolidation of the conceptual and pronounce the 'great stupidity of non-power'.[118] *The Large Glass* and the *Given* both exercise a disruptive logic that brings into play mutually exclusive dimensions of temporality. They can be inscribed, Lyotard suggests, in the temporal hinge of an event that happens at once 'too late' and 'too soon'. 'Now' is the temporal present of a fundamental incongruence that disrupts the order of consciousness and postpones the intervention of the mind.[119]

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[116] Ibid., pp. 68, 76.

[117] Ibid., pp. 76, 75, 138, 74.

[118] Ibid., pp. 77, 101. Hence, the Duchampian distinction between the *appearance* of an object ('the ensemble of usual sensory data permitting us to have an ordinary perception of this object') and its *apparition* [the '(formal) mold' of the appearance that turns against visual habits], namely the passage from the visible to the invisible or the visual, unconsumable and unintelligible by ordinary human perception. Ibid., pp. 169-170.

[119] Ibid., pp. 198-199. Lyotard writes of the 'delay' introduced in *The Large Glass* to interrupt and hold out the advent of vision in immediacy: the bachelors, separated by the bride, are caught in a state of perpetual unfulfilment, while the bride is fixed in the temporality of the 'not yet'. In the peep show of *Given*, where the unveiling of the body has already been occurred, the temporal dimension is that of 'too late'. Thus, 'two "solutions"', Lyotard concludes: 'That of the *Glass*, where the gaze comes always too soon, because the event is "late", the *corpus* remaining to be stripped without end. With that of *Given*, it's the gaze that arrives too late, the laying bare is finished, there remains the nudity. Now makes a hinge between not yet and no longer. That goes without saying for any event, erotic, artistic, political. And does not give place to mysticism.'

We can recognize in Lyotard's exploration of the playful temporal and logical incongruences in Duchamp's works his later elaborations of the artwork-as-event, the temporal modality of the postmodern operating according to the paradox of the future-anterior, as well as the unpresentable and the differend central to the sublime. Lyotard's reading reclaims Duchamp and the avant-garde from mere negation and the so-called 'end' of painting for the sake of the conceptual. Duchamp introduces the incommensurable logic of the hinge or the differend between art's conceptual and material production, between sensibility and its rational comprehension, constantly transforming its own limits and conditions.[120] Lyotard turns this logic into a precarious ontological aesthetic condition of a world producing difference, a metamorphosis machine in which there are 'only transformations and redistributions of energy'.[121] We shift, therefore, into a realm of aesthetic uncertainty and ambiguity in relation to the (re-)production of the given, an ironism of affirmation that is not transgressive and reactive but rather involves the *jouissance* of transformation of the established conditions through the production of an indeterminate, singular experience. The radicalism of Duchamp's machinery is that its logic is not limited to artistic production but extends into the socio-political, pointing to the political possibilities of the aesthetic.

Les Immatériaux: Aesthetics and politics of the inhuman

What is important for our discussion is that Duchamp's machines call into question the totalizing, expansive machine of contemporary technoscientific capitalism, but they also show that technology can be deployed to produce free singular intensities and affects in the confrontation with the inhuman within experience. Technoscientific capitalism thereby produces its own resistance when it produces the breakdown of existing human competencies, and invents new libidinal bodies and minds, as in *Les Immatériaux*. There is, therefore, a continuity between Lyotard's earlier commitment to libidinal production and proletarian *jouissance* and the productive inhumanity of the Duchampian machines, and furthermore with the technological excesses of *Les*

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[120] According to Lyotard, 'Duchamp's "ready-made" does nothing but actively and parodistically signify this constant process of disposition of the craft of painting or even of being an artist.' Lyotard, 'What is Postmodernism?', p. 75.

[121] Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers*, p. 36.

Immatériaux. It is in this sense that the incommensurabilities of the sublime staged in *Les Immatériaux* is not merely a matter of poetics but also of politics.

Contemporary accounts address Duchamp's significant presence in *Les Immatériaux*, one site of which was named *Infra-Mince* ['Infra-thin'] (Fig. 4.3).[122] Nonetheless, these tend to focus on the more obvious affinities such as the exhibition catalogue format that echoes Duchamp's *Boîte en valise* (1935-41), and the 'overexposition' of sounds, smells, contrasts of light and dark reminiscent of Duchamp's immersive, multi-sensory environment in the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris. Less discussed are the connections between Duchamp's aesthetics and politics of incommensurability and Lyotard's claims in *Libidinal Economy*, and how *Les Immatériaux* relates to Duchamp beyond the above formal affinities.[123] *Les Immatériaux* captures the excess of the technological sublime, showing that the new technology works aesthetically *and* politically through the production of an excessive and intensive aesthetic experience, one hard to endure, comprehend and explicate, as the visitors' responses demonstrated. Lyotard's aim is neither to be reactive in an explicitly political way nor transgressive, but to explore a poetics and politics of the indeterminate, and so extend the aesthetics of the sublime beyond the museum and into the stakes of contemporary life.

Lyotard's argument about the aesthetics of the sublime, especially in the *Artforum* essays, necessarily poses the political problem of what is a human community in the absence of the demand of a *sensus communis*. Lyotard also addressed this problem in his ICA presentation in relation to the complexification of

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[122] The site 'Infra-Mince' featured handwritten notes and sketches by Duchamp on his concept of 'infra-thin' among works by Yves Klein, Giovanni Anselmo, and Thierry Kuntzel. On the catalogue sheet Lyotard writes: 'The visual work bears witness to the invisible in the visible.' Also the site entitled *Odeur Peinte* ['Painted Odour'] included two works by Duchamp, *Torture-Morte* (1959) and *Belle haleine, Eau de voilette* (1921), and the site *Négoce Peint* ['Painted Trade'] featured Duchamp's *Obligation pour la roulette de Monte-Carlo* (1924). See Jean-François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, eds, *Les Immatériaux*: *Inventaire* (vol. 1), exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), n.p. Antony Hudek emphasizes the presence of Duchamp in the exhibition, and cites John Rajchman from an early unpaginated draft of his 1985 review 'The Postmodern Museum' (in the Centre Pompidou archives) that *Les Immatériaux* 'may be the first Duchampian museum'. Antony Hudek, 'From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of Les Immatériaux', *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009), note 27, p. 12 of 14 <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/over-sub-exposure-anamnesis-les-immateriaux> [created 1 October 2009; accessed 7 June 2015].

[123] Notable exceptions are the accounts of Kiff Bamford and Stephen Zepke to whom I am indebted. They recognize in *Les Immatériaux* not merely the reminiscent of Duchamp's works and exhibitions but, importantly, the connection between the exhibition, Lyotard's book on Duchamp, and his controversial argument in *Libidinal Economy*. See Bamford, pp. 89-91; Stephen Zepke, *Sublime Art: Towards an Aesthetics of the Future* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming August 2017).

contemporary life and the connotation of the 'postmodern' with the failure of the modernist project of human emancipation, a connotation for which, he concedes, is 'at least partly responsible'.[124] The sublime is an undetermined *sensus* that emerges through a confrontation with the formless, involves both terror and the 'imminence of death', and is not therefore a *communis*. Because Lyotard sees the sublime as a necessarily unfulfilled search for Ideas – in favour of the differend itself – he draws attention to 'the danger of practicing a politics of sublime' and 'trying to present in political practice an Idea of Reason' such as a 'we' as the 'incarnation of free humanity' or the 'incarnation of the proletariat'. The same, he suggests, applies to every 'revolutionary' struggle, and thus he rejects any attempt at presenting in experience something that corresponds to the scale of these Ideas.[125] Contrary to the modern belief in the emancipation of mankind and technological progress, Lyotard is explicit: 'Neither economic nor political liberalism, nor the various Marxisms, emerge from the sanguinary last centuries free from the suspicion of crimes against mankind', the bloodiest of which is 'Auschwitz'. For Lyotard, 'there is a sort of sorrow in the *Zeitgeist*', which 'can express itself by reactive or reactionary attitudes or by utopias, but never by a positive orientation offering a new perspective.'[126]

This bleak perspective is exacerbated by the 'autonomous force' of contemporary technoscientific development and the accelerating process towards 'complexification' at every level of human life.[127] It is in this sense that the postmodern change – to which *Les Immatériaux* attests and Lyotard works to dissociate from 'the market of contemporary ideologies' – actually inscribes itself into the failures of modernity and bears witness to them rather than announcing a new historical paradigm or promising a new utopia of progress.[128] *Les Immatériaux* refuses to moralize about this increased complexity, calling instead for an ethical response that bears witness to the differend the new technologies demonstrate, and to use this to invent new idioms and new materializations of immateriality as a resistance to the contemporary rationalization of the human. *Les Immatériaux* makes manifest the disabling, inhuman effect of new technologies, calling for the testimony to the lack of validity of Ideas of reason such as the emancipation of the human, but at the same

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[124] Lyotard, 'Defining the Postmodern', p. 8.
[125] Ibid., pp. 22, 24, 26. Italics in the original.
[126] Ibid., p. 9. Italics in the original.
[127] Ibid.
[128] See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Rewriting Modernity', in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp.24-35 (34).

time entails a positive and life-affirmative potential precisely by creating a new inhuman sensibility. It incorporated the immaterial aspects of new technologies in a way that signaled the contradictory feeling of the sublime and also indicated the ability of the human to engage with and adapt to their effects through a 'radical mutation of our sensibilities', as Pierre Restany argued in his review.[129] This ability of the human to mutate through the excessive intensity of experience in the confrontation with the destructive and disabling aspects of technological development, already highlighted in *Libidinal Economy*, is expressed in what Lyotard later calls the 'affect phrase',[130] namely unarticulated, immaterial signs of a materiality that we cannot conceptually determine, represent, and provide evidence of, but nevertheless seizes us in an unforgettable way. 'The visitor will not quickly forget the sound blood in the entrance hall. Artaud's cry to the equivalent derm, or the voice of Yves Klein talking about the architecture of air', Restany writes.[131] Just like the breathing sound at the beginning of the show, these sonorous affects or singularities are marked by a free affective energy that flows within and through the immaterial complex of new technologies, and while we cannot comprehend them, they seize our body and mind giving rise to occurrences that leave their traces upon consciousness. Thereby, we feel 'a bit stronger' and are able to see 'a little further ahead', as Restany claims.[132]

Lyotard sought in *Les Immatériaux* to create an inhuman *sensus* within the dominant rational structures of contemporary life rather than attempting to define a new community according to programmatic goals, promised outcomes or universal *a prioris*. Hence, while resistance takes place in the name of an impossibility, it nonetheless has a liberating, transformative potential because it is an immanent, and not transcendent, outside. Lyotard's ethico-political claim to give justice to the differend constantly activates the given to generate a multiplicity of new possibilities and produce something as yet unknown. This is how we can understand Lyotard's

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[129] Pierre Restany, 'Immatériax: Let us be Leavened with Lyotard', *Domus*, no. 662 (June 1985), pp. 60-61 (61).

[130] In response to his previous designation of the differend as signaling a state in language of what we usually call a feeling ('One cannot find the words'), Lyotard writes: 'Feeling is a phrase. I call it the affect-phrase. It is distinct in that it is *unarticulated*.' Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Affect-Phrase (from a supplement to *The Differend*)', trans. Keith Crome, in Keith Crome and James Williams, eds, *The Lyotard Reader and Guide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006 [1990]), pp. 104-110 (104). Italics in the original.

[131] Restany, 'Immatériax, pp. 60-61.

[132] Restany, 'Immatériax', p. 61.

affirmation of the sublime as a response to contemporary forms of inhumanity and the need for a philosophy of immanence, which neither is 'a question of aesthetics' in the traditional Kantian sense nor offers a new 'theory', as he explained to Blistène.[133]

IV. 'Immaterial matter': An aesthetic of material presence and difference itself

Lyotard returns to the sublime in an important essay, entitled 'After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics' (1987), in which he repeats his connection of the avant-garde with the sublime and his affirmation of the materiality of the artwork in light of the formlessness that the sublime entails. Lyotard asks what happens to matter if it is deprived of its means of presentation by the sublime 'disaster suffered' by the imagination.[134] How can matter be articulated when presentation itself is no longer possible, especially because the relation of matter to form is indispensable for our understanding of art? Lyotard argues that the specific aim of the arts, particularly painting and music, is 'approaching matter'; that is, 'approaching presence without recourse to the means of presentation', and so approaching the 'immaterial' matter of art.[135] Matter in this sense is defined by its pure intensity without form, its 'nuances' and 'timbre' in colour and sound. These 'scarcely perceptible differences' are unspecifiable in themselves and cannot be conceptualized through chromatic systems or musical notation. Their singularity '*differ[s]*' and '*defer[s]*' any identification and formation, escaping the sets of differences and exact divisions that govern the structure of colour and tone.[136]

In a paper presented to the conference 'Museum/Memorial' at the Georges Pompidou Centre (1986), Lyotard pointed out how colour as matter in painting affects us by abstracting itself from its historical and cultural context, from any plot, or conceptual frame. Rather colour is pure difference, and the aim of painting is 'to render [this] presence, to demand the disarming of the mind'; it is 'material' that

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[133] Lyotard in Blistène, p. 34.
[134] Jean-François Lyotard, 'After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics' [1987], in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 135-143 (136).
[135] Ibid., pp. 139, 140.
[136] Ibid., p. 140. Italics in the original. Lyotard refers to both Kant's primacy of aesthetic form and Aristotle's hylomorphic model to draw attention to a historical trajectory towards a matter-form relation that seeks to destabilize hierarchical models based on determining oppositions. The Kantian sublime stands out in this direction due to the paradox of the presence of matter it creates in regard to the formlessness of the object at stake. Ibid., p. 139.

'gives rise to an aesthetic "before" forms. An aesthetic of material presence which is imponderable.'[137] In this sense, Lyotard's question of 'what to paint?',[138] made after the engagement with new technologies in *Les Immatériaux*, is not a conservative return to more traditional forms of artistic activity, but the continuation of his commitment to the aesthetic of the sublime and a new immaterial materiality in art as alternative to an aesthetic of the beautiful. With 'immaterial matter' Lyotard recasts the 'aesthetic' after the *aestheton*, beyond and against the beautiful form, and points to the nature of sensibility at its human limits, to the event of sensation itself. In this regard, the question of matter in sublime art, although raised mainly in the domain of painting and music, continues the explorations of *Les Immatériaux*.

Immaterial matter, for Lyotard, is akin to pure energy that comes-into-presence only in the absence of the active capacities of the mind, '*the Thing*' itself, which 'does not call on the mind' and 'withdraws from every relationship.' Understood as pure indeterminacy without concept, 'presence as unpresentable to the mind',[139] it involves a withdrawal from oneself. Lyotard presents the material event as unsettling, as unforgettable and immediately forgotten, the passibility of a nuance or timbre, the grain of a skin or a piece of wood, the fragrance of an aroma, suggesting a fluid and infra-sensible kind of matter, of which the mind 'conserves only the feeling – anguish and jubilation – of an obscure debt.'[140] This new immaterial materialism requires both the artist and the addressee to become 'blind' and without mastery. Lyotard describes this condition with reference to the ancient Egyptian bas-relief at the entrance of *Les Immatériaux*: 'To be passible to this silence is to see. All that is necessary is to be blind of a certain kind of blindness, to become unintelligent to the intrigues – all 2,500 years of them.'[141] The eye turns away from commentaries and intrigues and listens to the silence issued by the work itself, to the inaudible Other that remains to be heard. From this perspective, Lyotard points out, matter is indeed immaterial, that is, 'anobjectable' 'if it is envisaged under the regime of receptivity or

[137] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Conservation and Colour' [1986], in Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 [1988]), pp. 144-152 (151, 150). The paper was given to the conference 'Museum/Memorial', organized by Jean-Louis Déotte, Georges Pompidou Centre, Paris, October 1986.
[138] See Jean-François Lyotard, *Que Peindre? Adami, Arakawa, Buren/ What to Paint? Adami, Arakawa, Buren*, Herman Parret, ed., (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012 [1987]. This is a collection of essays written between 1978 and 1985.
[139] Lyotard, 'After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics', p. 142.
[140] Ibid., p. 141.
[141] Lyotard, *What to Paint?*, p. 121.

intelligence.'[142] But the Lyotardian approach to artistic matter should not be confused with a privileging of the concept or idea in Conceptual art.[143] It is, instead, sensation as/of matter itself, 'an apparition' that takes place in the instant of suspension of conceptual thought, namely 'an appearance, but bound to its disappearance', as Lyotard puts it.[144]

In this way, matter-as-presence resists our habitual reception of sensations through recognizable concepts and objects and allows us to access a heightened and more refined level of sensation that enriches a life-affirmative feeling. To do so, Lyotard calls for an 'ascesis', the suspension of all interests, expectations, and anticipation of meaning.[145] Sensation is liberated from its submission to the demand of knowledge, and the subject experiences what Lyotard calls in *The Inhuman* their 'debt to childhood', a state that precedes the division between subject and object.[146] Lyotard invites the subject into a process, through the matter inside us, that leads towards pure sensation and the ethical surrender of oneself to the sensible presence of the event.[147]

Despite the emphasis on the withdrawal of thought, Lyotard's aesthetics of immaterial matter, as I have shown, should not be conceived negatively.[148] In his

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[142] Lyotard, 'After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics', p. 140.

[143] Lyotard's understanding of Joseph Kosuth's conceptualism is characteristic. He sees Kosuth's works on language such as *One and Three Shadows* (1965), which was exhibited in *Les Immatériaux*, as signs of silence, oblique remainders of gestures that manifest an absent 'presence', the visual in excess of the visible. Jean-François Lyotard, 'Foreword: After the Words', in Gabriele Guercio, ed., *Joseph Kosuth, Art after Philosophy and after: Collected Writings, 1966-1990* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), pp. xv-xviii.

144 Lyotard, 'Anamnesis of the Visible', p. 115.

[145] Lyotard writes that the openness to the 'It happens that' 'requires at the very least a high degree of refinement in the perception of small differences … you have to impoverish your mind, clean it out as much as possible, so that you make it incapable of anticipating the meaning, the "What" of the "It happens…" The secret of such ascesis lies in the power to be able to endure occurrences as "directly" as possible without the mediation of a "pre-text".' Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 18.

[146] Lyotard, 'Introduction: About the Human', in *The Inhuman*, p. 7.

[147] 'The sublime', Lyotard writes, 'is none other than the sacrificial announcement of the ethical in the aesthetic field. Sacrificial in that it requires that imaginative nature … must be sacrificed in the interests of practical reason […]. This heralds the end of an aesthetics, that of the beautiful, in the name of the final destination of the mind, which is freedom.' Lyotard, 'After the Sublime, the State of Aesthetics', p. 137.

[148] It is worth noting that Lyotard will be criticized by Jacques Rancière for making the autonomy-qua-disappearance of the aesthetic the condition of possibility of the experience of pure materiality. Rancière objects Lyotard's giving ontological primacy to otherness both by inverting the logic of the Kantian sublime and assigning to art the memorial task of testifying to the subordination of thought to the *aestheton* (the presence of the Thing), in order to show our assent to 'the law of alterity'. This makes sensible experience the experience of a debt, an ethical subservience, without escape, to the law of the Other. As such, Rancière objects, 'Art no longer carries any promise. It is still seen as a form of "resistance"', but 'Resistance becomes nothing other than the anamnesis of the "Thing"', turning

insistence on the affect of the immateriality of matter, Lyotard calls us to become sensitive to the minimum at the edges of perception, to those qualities that appear as almost-nothings and are devalued in the conformity of our normal experience. Works of art and exhibitions such as *Les Immatériaux* open up a more nuanced field of differences that awaken in us a heightened sensibility – the breadth of the things we can sense rather than understand – if we are sensitive enough. It is in this sense that Lyotard's repeated appeal to 'a secret sensibility' and the 'attentive observer' in *Les Immatériaux* should be understood. It is in this sense that the inhumanity of art resists the inhumanity of contemporary capitalism, as Lyotard quotes Guillaume Apollinaire (1913): 'More than anything, artists are men who want to be become inhuman.'[149]

In conclusion, *Les Immatériaux* is important for privileging the singularity and indeterminacy of the aesthetic experience, precisely the inhumanity of experience, within the dehumanizing context of contemporary technological and capitalist development. Rather than celebrating technology or exorcizing its instrumental moves towards increased complexity in its alignment to contemporary capitalism, Lyotard shows that technology works both aesthetically and politically. He advocates an aesthetics and politics of the incommensurable, a new inhuman logic whose liberating potential is an ability to invent singular intensities and events within the conditions of dehumanization effected by the systems of contemporary development. In *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard explores and asserts this inhuman power of art through an ontological commitment to difference itself. This differend is the mechanism by which the given produces something new and as yet unknown, and so attains a transformative potential. In this respect, *Les Immatériaux* is a 'cunning machine' in the Duchampian sense of affirmative negation; it transforms – through the poetics of new technology and the production of incommensurables – powerlessness into the

'every will to emancipation … into the illusion of a will to mastery.' By dissociating modern art from the grand narrative of the emancipation of the proletarians and linking it to the extermination of the Jews, the avant-garde no longer attests to the contradiction of art and capitalism's commercial culture, but, instead, mourns the absence of the Thing (or the Holocaust) from the sensible, forcing the subject into a double bind: 'either submission to the *aistheton* which does violence to us, or an absence of the *aistheton*, in other words either "servitude or death"'. In the name of the law of ethics, Rancière claims, Lyotard accomplishes 'a joint suppression of both aesthetics and politics', in which the singularity of experience merely 'testif[ies] to an alienation that cannot be eased', and effaces emancipation into a 'sign of dependency'. Lyotard imposes 'a one way detour leading from aesthetics to ethics' that blocks 'the originary path from aesthetics to politics.' See Jacques Rancière, 'Lyotard and the Aesthetics of the Sublime: A Counter-reading of Kant', in Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009 [2004]), pp. 88-105. Also Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy', *New Left Review*, no. 14 (March-April 2002), pp. 133-151 (149).

[149] Lyotard, 'Introduction: About the Inhuman', in *The Inhuman*, p. 2.

power of non-sense, making the aesthetic affect the most political mechanism of art. The advocacy of the heterogeneous sensible is indiscernible from a certain kind of politics-as ethics.

In this way, as I have argued, Lyotard's appeal to the sublime escapes the danger of a navel-gazing philosophical understanding of the aesthetic experience, withdrawn from contemporary stakes. Nonetheless, from a contemporary viewpoint the risk remains. Within the current interest in philosophical accounts of art and the engagement with the aesthetic tradition, the problem of a potential gulf between the aesthetic concerns of philosophy and what is actually at stake in contemporary art forms and practices has been even more challenging. But while Lyotard's account of the sublime may appear problematic in relation to the postconceptual practices that mark our present, it nonetheless retains a critical potential because it provides an immanent ontological framework to the aesthetic that gives it political efficacy within and against contemporary forms of power. Lyotard shows that art and its experience must remain indeterminable resisting any form of categorization, first and foremost that of 'postmodernism'.[150] *Les Immatériaux* as a philosophical exhibition presented artistically within the contemporary shift to information culture demonstrates that conceptually-driven practices maintain an indeterminate relation to aesthetic elements and forces, whose transformative role and critical function is not to be underestimated. *Les Immatériaux* invites us to reconsider the conceptual-aesthetic relation and draw attention to the political possibilities of the aesthetic experience, which is often repressed within the postconceptual context of contemporary art. These remarks become more pertinent in relation to the large-scale, international exhibition of *Documenta 12* (2007). D12 controversially brings to the fore the role of the aesthetic through an insistence on the primacy of the aesthetic experience, the formlessness of the exhibition, and the attempt to elevate the exhibition itself into an ontological laboratory of an aesthetic politics and ethics of coexistence.

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[150] From this viewpoint, Lyotard's answer to Blistène's question, 'What, finally, is postmodernism?', is instructive and somewhat prophetic: 'My work, in fact, is directed to finding out what it is, but I still don't know. […] The discussion will be abandoned before it ever reaches its conclusion.' Blistène, p. 35.

Chapter 5

The Curatorial Aesthetics of *Documenta 12*

The *Documenta 12* (16 June – 23 September 2007, Kassel), under the artistic directorship of the exhibition-organizer Roger Buergel and the chief curatorship of the art historian Ruth Noack, proclaimed the significance of the aesthetic experience in exhibition-making and within the particular conditions of a large-scale international exhibition committed to contemporary art.[1] The organizers refused to provide a programmatic statement or a discourse that would conceptually frame the exhibition; instead, they asserted the exhibition as a medium itself with an aesthetic potential activated by a poetics of 'formlessness' and affiliations for an ethical openness to the 'other' that escapes rational grasping. D12 sought an experience of complexity and ambiguity that evades the recognizable knowledge and 'good taste' it implies in the current state of contemporary art. It set out to provide an alternative to art as representation of knowledge, the directives of the art market, and wilfully departed from the commonly recognizable criteria of what counts as 'new' and 'successful' with a shift of focus on the role of display and the purpose of exhibition as aesthetic and critical experience. Over the 1990s, there have been critical reconsiderations of the curatorial practice, not least in Documenta itself, in response to radical shifts taking place in the global context of contemporary art. What makes D12 both challenging and controversial is that it attempted a revisionist stance not so much through the ever increased resorting into intellectual conceptualization and the recent emphasis on discursivity, but through the refocused emphasis on the value of the aesthetic experience. Exhibition-making here is less concerned with questions of identity, representation and knowledge production than with the 'how' and the effect of the aesthetic experience in a particular state of relationality and compositional process.

This chapter discusses the aesthetics of D12 with emphasis on the curatorial aims, intents, methodology, and modes of production. Drawing on the primacy the

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[1] Documenta is usually numbered according to Roman numerals – the last was Documenta X in 1997. However, there is a lack of consistency both in the numerical system and the lower-case or upper-case letter 'D' used in the existing literature and the catalogues material, so these details are not always accurately determined. Throughout this study, I have, as a matter of practicality and consistency, opted to refer to each Documenta in the abbreviated form of a capital D followed by the Arabic number of the respective edition. The only exception regards Documenta X (referred to as dX) for the conceptual position implied in the curatorial decision to use a controversial logo in which the small *d* is crossed out by a large Roman numeral *X*.

organizers assign to the aesthetic experience, my central concern is the way in which the aesthetic element is activated on the level of the exhibition, its relation to the conceptual, and how the emphasis on the transformative effect of the aesthetic experience is linked to a certain understanding of the exhibition that problematizes its function and what is at stake in contemporary art and curating. The curatorial necessity to conceive new modalities of encounter, and put into practice different formats and modes of presentation, compatible with the new directions of contemporary art, is not without critical precedents in large-scale exhibitions, particularly in the context of Documenta. However, the sustained focus on the value of the aesthetic and the introduction of the so-called 'migration of form' at the expense of a weighty concept or identifiable intellectual framework raised competing views about the curatorial intent and its outcome. To assess the potential and merits of D12, it is thus necessary to contextualize it within the Documenta heritage and the globalized conditions of contemporary art. We need to consider the distinguishing particularities of Documenta itself as exhibition, institution, and cultural event and το delineate the critical configuration in its function and format that has taken an emphatically conceptual, discursive, and political orientation over the last two decades.

I. A 'formless' exhibition

A good exhibition is supposed to cause a crisis. A good exhibition is supposed to respond to a crisis. And while a good exhibition, by definition, will fail to turn the crisis into a theme, it will be affected by the very form of the crisis. […] a state of oscillation – between a sense of being disconnected and a sense of being reconnected. ... A good exhibition doesn't take sides. But it manages to extend its audience away from itself, connecting people to a realm of being they cannot contain. 'Good', by the way, means nothing less than 'worth paying attention to'.[2]

In this post-D12 statement worth quoting at length, Buergel relates the notion of the exhibition to a certain attitude towards a condition of crisis – the confrontation with a

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[2] Roger M. Buergel, 'Notes on Display, and a Work by Alejandra Riera', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, vol. 9, no. 2 (December 2010), pp. 103–122 (103).

state of oscillation, ambiguity, and undefined tension. Interestingly, the exhibition proper task is not to pin this crisis down into a reductive illustration, but rather to sustain it through the evocation of an aesthetic experience that exceeds recognizable rational boundaries and evades fixed identities. 'A good exhibition', Buergel points out, 'is an ontological laboratory where the formal principle of non-identitarian associations reigns.'[3]

Buergel's views – sounding like a curatorial manifesto – pertain all the more to D12. In the section, entitled 'The Migration of Form', available in the D12 website, he explains that in the current context of globalized capitalism, crisis' various forms – socio-economical crisis affecting mostly the middle classes, the majority of Documenta's audience, as well as institutional crisis concerning the financing, site, and increasingly entertaining aspect of Documenta – are 'already part of the very substance of the exhibition, a token and a pledge of the aesthetic experience'. Buergel stresses the 'crisis of form' as the one that 'makes up the heart of the exhibition', thereby the crucial question is 'whether and how one faces an experience of crisis.'[4] The issue is how to respond to a multi-faceted crisis that traverses the social and artistic field without turning it into a mere object of analytical discourse, academic knowledge, and thematic representation, let alone a lamenting or reactionary position. Contrary to prevalent today diagnostic analytical approaches, Buergel opts for aesthetically evoking 'the experience of crisis' through the 'formlessness' of the exhibition and the 'migration of form' as D12's main organisational principle.

'The big exhibition has no form', we read in the opening sentence of what counts as Buergel and Noack's curatorial statement, a brief Preface in the exhibition catalogue.[5] This bold statement that brings to the fore the question of form in the contemporary art context as the manifestation of a condition of crisis in large-scale exhibitions is consistent with the curatorial affirmation of the precariousness of the aesthetic experience that nonetheless makes it all the more productive. 'Aesthetic experiences', Buergel explains in his 'Migration of Form' credo, 'do not suggest a false sense of solid ground, but teach us to tolerate tensions and complexity.' They teach us, Buergel continues, to fully enjoy the pleasure that emerges in realizing that

[3] Ibid., p. 122.
[4] Roger M. Buergel, 'The Migration of Form', in *Documenta Kassel 16/ 06 – 23/ 09 2007* <http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=1039&L=1> [accessed 8 December 2015].
[5] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, 'Preface', in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007 Katalog/Catalogue*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 11-12 (11).

'against all expectations, this bottomless ground of aesthetic experience is actually fertile and productive.'[6] In this respect, the assertion of the 'inherent formlessness' of Documenta – departing from more conventional thematic, stylistic, and chronological exhibition approaches –[7] is coupled with the assertion of the instability of aesthetic experience towards a fixed, more recognizable point. In the case of Documenta, this appeal to formlessness entails various contradictory stakes. According to the curators, Documenta as an international show of contemporary art raises high expectations in many respects, yet 'people are not really well equipped to deal with radical formlessness' as they tend to seek for identity.[8]

This discrepancy between, on the one hand, the curatorial decision to engage with formlessness as the inherent nature and contemporary challenge of Documenta and, on the other hand, the perceived inadequacy, if unwillingness, of its audience to confront it, creates from the outset a tension. Considering, Buergel points out, that the majority of Documenta's audience is 'ignorant' of the conditions of production of works from all over the world, and the price is often 'ethnocentric mystification' in the sense that 'art from Africa has to look "African", art from the Arab world "Arabic"', the methodological question arises of how to 'keep the balance between identification and fixation.'[9] Instead of resorting to impotent, over-determining universal categories or turning the exhibition into a cognitive tool for local knowledge, the organizers suggest an alternative 'middle course', the aesthetic mobilization and communication of forms, as a means to avoid didacticism and create the conditions for a process of 'self-knowledge' and 'self-transformation'.[10] Buergel and Noack sought for an aesthetic alternative to the perceived form of large-scale exhibitions, emphasizing the idea of 'formlessness' and aesthetic experience undetermined by the norms of the given. D12, from the outset, is suggested as an 'experiment' open to failure and the unknown for even the curators themselves had to find out 'if this middle course is actually a practicable path.'[11]

II. Documenta: Between exhibition, institution, and cultural event

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[6] Buergel, 'The Migration of Form', n.p.
[7] Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 11.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Buergel, 'The Migration of Form', n.p.; Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 11.
[10] Buergel, 'The Migration of Form', n.p.
[11] Ibid.

In order to fully understand the curatorial problematic and the methodological issues it raises, we need to take into account the particular exhibition status of Documenta alongside the socio-cultural and historical context within which it was constituted. In their short Preface, Buergel and Noack emphasize the historical reconciliation role of the first Documenta as paradigmatic of 'an aesthetic effort with a vengeance', which evolved into 'a cipher of contemporary art' and a site of experimental approaches.[12] Indeed, since its inception in 1955 by the painter, designer, and art educator Arnold Bode in the German city of Kassel, Documenta developed into one of the most prominent international exhibitions of contemporary art attracting an ever-increased audience and cultural attention. It takes place every five years in Kassel under changing directorship with the aim both to exhibit the present-day developments in art worldwide and to critically reflect on them, pointing to future directions (Fig. 5.1).[13] This dynamic tension between 'exhibition' and critical 'reflection', characteristic of Documenta, is denoted by the term itself.[14]

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[12] Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 11.

[13] For a more recent account of the historical development of Documenta, see the two-volume publication which accompanied the 2005 touring exhibition, *50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955–2005*, curated by Michael Glasmeier on the occasion of Documenta's fiftieth anniversary, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, 1 September - 20 November 2005.. This jubilee exhibition, of the kind of exhibitions historicizing curating, is important for combining a flexible approach to the diverse material from the Documenta archive in Kassel with contemporary responses by young artists and authors to it. Being aware of the impossibility of undertaking a replication of the eleven Documenta installations, and so the risk of canonizing the Documenta memory, Glasmeier suggested an exhibition structured into 'five interacting and complementary chapters': an archival, an art historical, a site-specific, a cinematic, and a scientific chapter. A pair of different, yet inseparable and simultaneous, exhibitions employed the art historical and the archival modalities to activate the Documenta memory to the present. The Documenta Archive material forms the basis of the exhibition *Archive in Motion*. The eleven Documenta exhibitions were treated as individuals, so each one was presented in its own chamber, where documentary material was displayed in image panels seeking to convey each exhibition's unique atmosphere. Each chamber also contained the new works made by contemporary artists in response to the material and the ambience of each specific Documenta. The *Discreet Energies* part of the exhibition consisted of over two hundred artworks from the past eleven Documenta. The artworks were treated as units of discreet energies, and so they were not presented in a linear chronological order by Documenta or date nor were they accompanied by further interpretation and commentary. As Michael Glasmeier and Barbara Heinich explain (*50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955–2005: Discreet Energies*, p. 11), the exhibition is presented as a risky 'poetic experiment, which seeks to exploit the possibilities of an art defying standardization; for first and foremost art is visibility and presence.' See Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel, eds, *50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955–2005*: *Archive in Motion* (vol. 1) (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005); Michael Glasmeier, *50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955–2005: Discreet Energies* (vol. 2), Documenta GmbH, ed., exh. cat. (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005).

[14] The invented term 'Documenta' is the plural of the Latin word *documentum*: lesson, example; in Medieval Latin, instruction, official paper. The etymological origin of *documentum* – it comes from *docere* (Latin for teach, instruct, inform, show) and *mens* (Latin for intellect, the mind, understanding, also the soul or spirit of something) – denotes the twofold aim of the exhibition, which exceeds the mere documentation of modern art that was banned during the Nazis regime. Christoph Lange cites Arnold Bode and Ernst Schuh, Bode's assistant at D1, to explain the meaning of *docere mentis*. According to Schuh, 'the chief aim of the venture was to instruct people's minds', and it was Bode's premise that the designer's task is 'to evolve an artistic form from the overall spirit of the age.'

Documenta was initiated as a response to the particular socio-political and cultural context of restoration in post-war Germany. It was presented as part of the major German Federal Garden Show, which was held that year in Kassel in order to boost the local economy and to function as a symbolic gesture of the city's post-war reconstruction. Kassel, the former royal capital, had been heavily bombarded during the World War II, partly because of its munitions industry. With large parts of the city still in ruins and the modernization process behind due to its provincial proximity to the post-war borders with East Germany, the selection of Kassel as the host city for the National Garden Show was exemplary in demonstrating the West German post-war reconstruction process. Within this context, Bode initiated an international exhibition of modern and contemporary art with the aim to bring the German public in contact with the modern avant-garde art after its denunciation by the National Socialist regime in the exhibition *Degenerate "Art"* (1937).[15] The reconciliation with modernism, represented by Documenta, intended to reconnect post-war Germany with its banned modernist lineage and to reintegrate the German modernists, especially abstractionists, into the international currents of modern art, namely to show and instruct people the *Zeitgeist* of art. Documenta, in its inception, was advanced as a historical act of a double cultural rehabilitation: of the German modernist tradition from its 'degeneracy' and of the German public from its recent traumatic past, both in a distinctive openness to the Western world.[16]

Documenta, Lange points out, aimed in an avant-garde spirit, on the one hand, 'to show (*docere*) how "an artistic form" emerged "from the overall spirit of the age" and, on the other hand, to teach and instruct (*docere*) the spirit or mind (*mens*) of the age. Christoph Lange, 'The Spirit of *Documenta*: Art-Philosophical Reflections', in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel, eds, *50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955–2005*: *Archive in Motion*, exh. cat. (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), pp. 14-25 (14).

[15] Walter Grasskamp notices an indirect connection between D1 and the Nazis' exhibition. D1 was a 'counterexhibition', though an incomplete and inadequate answer, to the 1937 *Degenerate "Art"* show, a perspective, he points out, that is usually left out in the literature on the history of Documenta. See Walter Grasskamp, '"Degenerate Art" and Documenta I: Modernism Ostracized and Disarmed', in Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff, eds, *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 163-194 (165) [orig. publ. without the introduction, in Walter Grasskamp, *Die unbewältigte Moderne: Kunst und Öffentlichkeit* (München: Beck, 1989), pp. 77-119].

[16] On the aims and the historical role of *Documenta 1*, see Ian Wallace, 'The First Documenta, 1955', in documenta and Museum Fridericianum-GmbH, eds, *100 Notes – 100 Thoughts*, Documenta 13, no. 002 (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), pp. 2-17 [orig. presented as a lecture at the symposium 'The Triumph of Pessimism', University of British Columbia, Department of Fine Arts, 26 September 1987]. For the central role of Documenta in the production of post-war art history, see Walter Grasskamp, 'For Example, *Documenta*, or, How is Art History Produced?', in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 67–78; Walter Grasskamp, 'To Be Continued: Periodic Exhibitions (*documenta*, for Example)', *Tate Papers*: *Tate's Online Research Journal*, no. 12 (Autumn 2009) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/to-be-continued-periodic-exhibitions-documenta-for-example> [created 1 October 2009; accessed 20 May 2016].

To serve this double aim, Documenta was driven by the question to 'reflect where art stands today',[17] presenting a dynamic historical role in the tension between past and future. According to Bode's programmatic statement, the main objective of the show was not to present a survey of art as its subtitle *Kunst des XX. Jahrhunderts* (Art of the Twentieth Century) denotes, but to 'make visible the roots of contemporary artistic production in all major fields' and highlight 'which works and which artistic positions formed the point of departure for what we now call contemporary art' (Fig. 5.2).[18] For this task, and so the legitimization of the selections, Bode relied on the academic credibility of the renowned art historian Werner Haftmann, who had an influential role in the post-war German heated debates on Modernism as an advocate of continuity in the development of abstract art.[19] In the wake of the Cold War and the polarization of ideological positions between capitalism and socialism, the focal point of the aesthetic debates was the legitimacy of abstract art and expressionist tradition over figuration and social realism.[20]

Within this debated context, the emphasis on 'roots' was meant as a genealogy of the contemporary that would allow at once a retrospective view of the key transformations of modernism and a direction towards contemporary art. This conception of 'contemporaneity' was reflected in the staging of the exhibition, which was Bode's responsibility altogether. It was particularly manifested in the exhibition foyer with a series of photographs featuring examples of ancient, primitive, and early

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[17] Wallace, p. 9.

[18] Arnold Bode quoted in Roger M. Buergel, 'Der Ursprung/The Origins', in *Documenta 12 Magazine*: *Modernity?*, vol. 1 (3) (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 25-39 (28) [orig. publ. in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel, eds, *50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955–2005*: *Archive in Motion*, exh. cat. (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), pp. 173-180].

[19] Werner Haftmann was instrumental in the promotion of modernism and abstract art, and he had a great influence on the conception of Documenta. As the theoretical brain of Documenta, he was responsible for the selection of works and wrote the catalogue essay for the first three Documenta exhibitions. He established an art historical paradigm for the 1950s-1960s that championed the continuity and historical development to abstraction as the art of a free word. His book *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Entwicklungsgeschichte*, 2 vols, (Munich: Prestel, 1954) was published one year before the inception of Documenta and established him as the foremost German historian of modern art. The subtitle of the first Documenta, 'Art of the Twentieth Century', echoes the title of his book. After the inclusion of American abstraction in D2, subtitled 'Art since 1945', in line with Haftmann's thesis of 'abstraction as world language', the book was translated in English in 1960 and was established as a seminal text in the consolidation of modernist art. In the wake of Documenta's interest in Pop art and photo-realism, Haftmann withdrew from the Documenta working committee after D3 (1964). See Werner Haftmann, *Painting in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960).

[20] For an eloquent account of the ideological role of Documenta and the aesthetic debates between the German anti-modernists, represented by the art critic Hans Seldmayr, and the modernists, represented by the abstractionist Willi Baumeister, and Theodor Adorno's defence of the autonomy of modern art within the political context of early post-war Germany, see Wallace's text as referenced above.

Christian art as precursors of European modern art confronted with photographic portraits of avant-garde artists. Documenta presented art as an anthropological constant – offering a historical, and yet timeless foundation of modern art – and at the same time affirmed the avant-garde art, especially abstraction, by highlighting the individuals' achievements (Fig. 5.3-5.4). Indeed, under the programme of modernism's rehabilitation, Documenta became instrumental in the consolidation and dissemination of abstract art as the dominant trend and legitimate future of the modernist tradition. The organizers' championing of the redemptive power of abstraction and its promotion as a common language of freedom for the future regeneration of German culture served a strategic cultural role in the Cold War context.[21] It affirmed West Germany's integration and ideological alignment to Western Europe and simultaneously promoted the idea of 'a common European form of art' as part of the political vision of a united Europe (Fig. 5.5).[22] Haftmann's modernism was underwritten by a Eurocentric vision of art; it presented the 'degenerate artists' and the main currents of the avant-garde but overlooked the figurative art and social realism, the German New Objectivity, the Russian Constructivism, the Berlin Dada, Surrealism, the Bauhaus experiments, and nearly all the politically engaged art of the Weimar Republic (Fig. 5.6-5.7).[23] This Western-centred perspective will dominate Documenta up until the end of the Cold War when the focus on global art and a reinterpretation of its underlying Occidentalism became more distinct.

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[21] Haftmann's views of the development of modern art owed much to Alfred Barr. In the catalogue for D2 (1959), Haftmann famously declared that 'quality in art is only possible when it develops in total freedom, uninhibited by non-artistic demands'. Owing to its freedom from restrictions, political or representational, 'art has become abstract'. Werner Haftmann, 'Einführung', in *documenta 2*, vol. i: *Malerei*, exh. cat., Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, 1959, pp. 15, 17, cited in Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 176. On the ideological promotion and cultural role of abstraction as the contemporary American art during the Cold War, see the seminal study by Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).

[22] After 1945, the centre-right, led by the chancellor Conrad Adenauer, were strong advocates of the Western European integration, whereas the Social Democrats, under Kurt Schumacher, appealed to nationalist sentiment in campaigning for German reunification. Bode himself in an early manuscript note from 1954, entitled 'Bode-Plan', argues for the importance of 'promoting … the idea of a common European form of art as part of the Europe movement', and identifies Kassel as 'an exemplary deed to manifest the idea of Europe in an art exhibition thirty kilometres from the East German border.' Bode cited in Klonk, p. 174. The fact that Documenta did not highlight the artists' national origins and the idea of nation-states, unlike the Venice Biennale, reinforced this direction.

[23] For an account of the statistics of the artistic representations in D1 as revealing of the scope of the exhibition – 670 works, 148 artists mostly from Germany, Italy, and France with the surprising presentation of only three Americans that was to be compensated in D2 (1959) with the domination of the New York school, particularly Jackson Pollock – see Wallace, p. 10.

Documenta was initially intended as one-off exhibition but its great public success, attracting 130,000 visitors, launched it as a perennial event (Fig. 5.8). Documenta's commitment to contemporary artistic development and its future direction distinguished it, from the outset, from the museum model and its reliance on the historical categories of permanent collection – opting instead the temporary form of the '100-day museum' – and from other periodic international exhibitions of contemporary art such as the Venice Biennial, modeled on nineteenth-century World Fairs and competitive nation-state representations.[24] The atypical institutional status of Documenta – between the periodic large-scale exhibition, the museum, and a cultural event with international reach and increasingly spectacular aspect – allowed not only for more flexibility in the exhibiting modes but also for institutional self-reflection and critical perspectives on the conditions of artistic practice and communication. After Szeemann's organizational reformations in D5 (1972), the reflective focus on the contemporary was no longer based on a legitimate art historical concept, as in the early editions, but on the production of a concept and thematic framework. Documenta marked a new critical attention to the organizers' achievements and a moment of critical reflection that instigates extended debates about the state of contemporary art. While each Documenta constitutes a singularity, the event's periodicity establishes a kind of dynamic (dis-)continuity and the tendency is each edition to be perceived and reviewed in relation to its predecessors.

III. Large-scale international exhibitions and biennial culture: The self-critical, discursive shift in the 1990s

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[24] Arnold Bode coined the phrase '100-day museum' in the Foreword to the first volume of the catalogue for D3 (1964) to express his uneasiness about the museum's archiving, preserving, and classifying art historically in permanent collections. Arnlod Bode, 'Einführung' ('Foreword'), in *documenta III*, vol. i: *Malerei, Skulptur*, exh. cat. (Cologne: DuMont, 1964), pp. i-xix (xix).
Documenta also set out to overcome the idea of the competing nation-states in favour of a universalistic understanding of modern art. In his opening speech at D2 (1959), Werner Haftmann wrote: 'The freedom to realize ourselves and to determine our specific existence in the world, which modern art brings, has created unexpected congruencies in the human race today. In a world divided by hate, it has initiated the potentiality of a new and larger fraternal community.' Werner Haftmann, 'Sittliche Grundimpulse der modernen Kunst', *Werk und Zeit*, 8, 7 (1959), 1, cited in Lange, 'The Spirit of Documenta', p. 15.
For a seminal account of the origins and development of the Venice Biennial from its inception in 1895 through to 1968, see Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895-1968: From Salon to Goldfish Bowl* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969).

In the last two decades, the two aspects of Documenta – the exhibition of international contemporary art and the critical reflection not only on the structures and conditions of current artistic production but also upon its own format, institutional status, and cultural function – are increasingly intertwined. Premised upon a multidisciplinary inquiry into the ethical requirements of curating and the institutionalizing effect of the exhibitions, Documenta appears to becoming a new model of the art institution, which incorporates discursive reflection on its own limits and tasks at the heart of the exhibition, expanding thereby the exhibition's traditional spectrum beyond the bounds of art. In the 1990s, significant socio-political, economic, and cultural transformations worldwide – the end of the Cold War, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the fall of Apartheid in South Africa, and the globalization of the market – urged more inclusive and critically inflected forms of curating intended to address the ethics of difference and multiplicity, and take a stand against the power of the art market since the 1980s. The attendant and corollary phenomenon of the proliferation of new biennials – to which Documenta can be included though not properly-speaking biannual – in the so-called 'periphery' cities worldwide[25] played a significant role in

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[25] 'Biennial' is a generic term, which has come to signify the large-scale perennial exhibition of contemporary art that recurs at regular intervals, including triennials and quinquennials, and not merely those that recur biannually as the etymology of the term suggests. Due to their international vision, sheer number of exhibits from all over the world, and the vast scale of their attendant audiences, they are also called 'mega-exhibitions', 'large-scale international' or 'transcultural exhibitions'. Global aspirations – emphasizing the international nature of artistic and cultural production and often taking globalization as their theme of inquiry – is biennials' main characteristic, nonetheless global ambitions are interconnected with the specificities and requirements of the local context of origin. The first was the Venice Biennial (1895), followed by the São Paulo Biennial (1951), Documenta (1955), Sydney Biennial (1973), and the Bienal de la Habana (1984) with aims, founding histories, modes of organization, visibility, local priorities, cultural, financial, and geopolitical aspects varying in each case. The number of new biennials during the proliferation period – occurring largely since the late-1980s – is open to debate. Due to the generic use of the term and the radically diverse forms biennials take on, including also art projects of primarily discursive and event form, there is no consensus in the existing literature about their exact number. Most recently, the editors of the significant anthology *The Biennial Reader*, which resulted from the Bergen Biennial conference (a biennial in the form of a conference, Bergen Kunsthalle, 17-20 September 2009), note that 'currently [biennials] thought to be somewhere between one hundred and two hundred around the world.' Rafal Niemojewski estimated that 'around fifty new instances' of the contemporary biennial, in the specific format of the large-scale perennial international exhibition, 'were introduced from 1984 to 2009'. See Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, 'Biennialogy', in idem, eds, *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), p. 13; Rafal Niemojewski, 'Venice or Havana: A Polemic on the Genesis of the Contemporary Biennial', in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 88-103 (note 7, 101).
Regarding Documenta, it was held every four years until its fifth edition (1972) with the exception of the five-year interval between its second (1959) and third editions (1964). From 1972 onwards, it took its current quinquennial format, recurring once every five years. The majority of contributors in the Bergen Biennial Conference emphasized that Documenta should not be discussed separately from other perennial exhibitions, despite its running on a five-year schedule.

the emergence of curatorial self-reflection, although the implications and critical currency of this global expansion were profoundly contested.[26]

The 'Biennial boom', on the one hand, demonstrated the openness of the artworld beyond the established structures and legitimizing systems of a limited Western-centred perspective, enabling greater artistic diversity and global exchange. Biennials were advocated as an alternative to the museum, offering a critical site of experimentation in artistic and curatorial practice.[27] Comparatively less impeded by institutional inertias, bureaucratic structures, expensive infrastructures, and unburdened by regular programming and collecting, they were seen as more flexible to respond to contemporary art developments, providing the platform for the latest trends, inventive curatorial forms, alternative approaches for knowledge production and intellectual debate, and addressing the most politically charged issues of the period. As such, they became distinct sites for the production, distribution, and

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[26] The histories and critical debates about Biennials and large-scale contemporary international exhibitions more generally is a growing field of interest over the last two decades, though a sustained scholarly literature is still limited. In addition to Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds, *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), see among others: Michael Brenson, 'The Curator's Moment: Trends in the Field of International Contemporary Art Exhibitions', *Art Journal*, vol. 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998), pp. 16-27; Tim Griffin and others, 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', *Artforum*, vol. 42, no. 3 (November 2003), pp.152-163, 206, 212; Francesco Bonami and Charles Esche, 'Debate: Biennials', *Frieze*, no. 92 (June-July-August, 2005), pp. 104-105; Marieke van Hal, Viktor Misiano, and Igor Zabel, eds, 'Biennials', special issue, *MJ–Manifesta Journal*, no. 2 (Winter 2003-Spring 2004); Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, eds, *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Brussels and Cambridge, Mass.: Roomade and MIT Press, 2005); Jorinde Seijdel and Liesbeth Melis, eds, 'The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon: Strategies in Neo-Political Times', special issue, *Open*, no. 16 (March 2009). From the most recent publications, see Sabine B. Vogel's, *Biennials: Art on a Global Scale* (Vienna: Springer, 2010); Charlotte Bydler provided an in-depth study that critically contextualizes the development of biennials as a specific case in relation to globalization and the shifts in power it prompted, in her published PhD thesis, *The Global Art Wold, Incl.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2004), of which an abridged version is included in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 378-405. For a historical survey of contemporary art and globalization through the analysis of the biennials of international art, see Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016).

[27] On this subject, see Carlos Basualdo's seminal text, 'The Unstable Institution', in Paula Marincola, ed., *Questions of Practice: What Makes a Great Exhibition? (*Philadelphia Center for Arts and Heritage: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative and Reaction, 2006), pp. 52-61 [orig. publ. in *MJ-Manifesta Journal*, no. 2, special issue 'Biennials' (Winter 2003-Spring 2004), pp. 50-61]. Basualdo argues for the 'unstable nature' (56) of the large-scale international exhibitions, which 'never completely belong to the system of art institutions in which they are supposedly inscribed', and thus 'the range of practical and theoretical possibilities to which they give rise often turns out to be subversive.' His rather optimistic position that 'the global expansion of large-scale exhibitions performs an insistent de-centering of both the canon and artistic modernity' is based on a binary logic that 'museums are, first and foremost, Western institutions' (60), and overlooks that biennials have also become a form of institution themselves. For a further discussion on the institutional aspect of biennials, see Maria Hlavajova, 'How to Biennial? The Biennial in Relation to the Art Institution', in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 292-305.

reconfiguration of a notion of the 'contemporary' and its discourses closely bound up with a 'curating the new' attitude. They also enhanced the visibility and competitiveness of the host cities in the new geographies of art, contributing in many cases to urban regeneration and boosting the local economy.

The biennial excess, both a symptom and condition of our globally networked world, was not without problems as it was interlinked to the global art market – its expansions, network of forces and agents. The promising radicalization was thus increasingly coupled with bemoaning the Biennial homogenizing effect. Despite their catalysing role in engendering transcultural debates, encounters, and audiences, they were also instrumental in the consolidation of the Western hegemony of art and capitalism's power worldwide.[28] They functioned as a kind of commodities within a global tourist economy, city branding and marketing, and the production of art as entertaining spectacle. Significantly, the rise of new biennials went in tandem with the rise of a new breed of itinerant curators in search of the 'new' – and marketable – worldwide and the associated figure of the 'peripatetic' artist working *in situ* and in socially-engaged art practices. However, local engagement and context-specificity were often misused with the import of Western cultural interventions, superficial and insensitive to the specifics of local contexts and communities.[29] For the dissenting voices, biennials function as the means through which much art is validated on the international art circuit and certain forms of artistic and curatorial practice are legitimized. Contrary to celebrated diversity, they tend to support an elite network of well-travelled professionals, showcasing standard and predictable inclusions by

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[28] For a more detailed critical account of this contradictory terrain, though keeping a positive view on the potential of biennials to be an agent of transformation and transcultural encounters, see Okwui Enwezor, 'Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form', in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 426-445 [repr. from *Documents*, vol. 23 (Spring 2004), pp. 2-19 with an earlier, slightly different version publ. in *MJ–Manifesta Journal*, special issue 'Biennials', no. 2 (Winter 2003-Spring 2004), pp.6-31].

[29] For an analysis of the relation between location and biennial exhibitions, based on committed artistic and curatorial engagements with place, understood as 'an intersection of social, economic and political relations, rather than a bounded geographic location', see Claire Doherty, 'Curating Wrong Places … or Where Have All the Penguins Gone?' in Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions and De Appel, 2007), pp. 100-108 (103); also Claire Doherty, 'Location, Location', *Art Monthly*, no. 281 (November 2004), pp. 7-10. For a further examination of biennials as the production of new localities in their host cities on the dynamic nexus of global-local, see Hou Hanru, 'Towards a New Locality: Biennials and "Global Art"', in Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, eds, *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Brussels and Cambridge, Mass.: Roomade and MIT Press, 2005), pp. 57-62.

invited well-known curators in the international art circuit, who often represent dominant museum, collectors, and market interests.[30]

Hence, the proliferation of biennials happening in the 1990s in tune with the global expansion of the markets, the dramatic increase of contemporary art activities and demands, and the ever expanded field of curating had contradictory implications. While biennials were seen as an alternative field of critical resistance, especially to Western art and its canons, they were also called into question for their homogeneity and standardizing processes. They came largely to signify an institution, whose global expansionism invaded the 'periphery' with art events designed to support an ever-expanding cultural industry and voracious art market replicating Western dominant models often under the guise of a genuine process of de-Occidentalization.[31] It is within this context of increased economic and cultural globalization, imbued with the tension between homogenizing and anti-homogenizing forces, alongside the expansion of contemporary artistic practices and wider developments in curatorial and institutional conventions that Documenta as an exhibition at the forefront of international contemporary art had to confront new challenges. In particular, dX, directed by Catherine David in 1997, and D11, under the artistic directorship of Okwui Enwezor and a team curatorship in 2002,[32] marked a shift in Documenta's heritage and the curating of large-scale international exhibitions with an unprecedented institutional self-reflection and the emphasis on intellectually critical and politicised positions, taking the new conditions of art in a globalized, postcolonial world as their focus of investigation. Driven by the ethico-political imperative to exceed canonizing approaches to art based on universalised, Western-centred, and aestheticized curatorial models, David and Enwezor incorporated discursivity into the

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[30] For a compelling critical account of the role of biennials in the globalization of the art market and their putative inclusivity, contrary to Basualdo's belief in their potential for cultural and social subversion because they stand outside the commercial circuit, see Marcus Verhangen, 'Biennale Inc.', *Art Monthly*, no. 287 (June 2005), pp. 1-4.

[31] On this subject, see George Baker's oppositional response to Enwezor's more positive claims, 'The Globalization of the False: A Response to Okwui Enwezor', in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 446-453 [repr. from *Documents*, vol. 23 (Spring 2004), pp. 20-25].

[32] dX (Kassel, 21 June – 28 September 1997) was the last Documenta of the twentieth century and the first to be directed by a woman, the French curator Catherine David. The Nigerian-American critic and curator Okwui Enwezor was the first non-European artistic director of Documenta. For D11 (Kassel, Platform 5: Exhibition, 8 June – 15 September 2002), he worked with a six-member team of international curators from six different countries: Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya. In terms of its content, time-scale and geographical dimensions, D11 was broader in scope than any of the previous editions had been.

structures of presentation as integral parts of the exhibition's expanded mode of address and no longer as supplementary functions.

Certainly, the discursive exhibition form and the legitimization of the exhibition as a medium of cultural critique is not new as such. The 'discursive turn' in curating in the 1990s – especially, in the biennial format – actually reformulates the conceptual art practices of the late-1960s and early-1970s as a kind of increased 'dematerialization' of the exhibition form;[33] it also relocates the practices of Institutional Critique in the late-1970s within, and no longer outside, the institution, what came to be called 'New Institutionalism', a phenomenon that in the 1990s went in tandem with the artistic and curatorial tendency of Relational Aesthetics;[34] it even reconfigures a postmodern (anti-)aesthetic discourse on the value of plurality and heterogeneity in the art context, underwritten with a language of 'rupture', on the now global level of a 'new world order' and shift to postcolonialism. Although the discursive practices are variously manifested and do not constitute a unified tendency and clearly-defined form, dX and D11 are now widely acknowledged as curatorial landmarks for breaking with the prevailing logic of the exhibition in Kassel and paving the way for an intellectual and discursive exhibition practice that will dominate the artworld from the 1990s onwards. They emphasized art's political context and advanced the exhibition as a medium of expansive cultural inquiry and knowledge production to an unprecedented degree. It is this critical tenet and heightened discursive orientation, which demonstrates, among others, a certain

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[33] For the implications and critical potential of the increased introduction of discursive exhibitions into the biennial field over the last decade, see Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg, 'Talking and Thinking About Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity', in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 360-375.

[34] A term borrowed from sociology and economics, 'New Institutionalism' refers to the transformation of art institutions in the 1990s after the initiative of previously independent curators, particularly in small-scale institutions in the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands. Contrary to earlier waves of Institutional Critique in art, it was about the organization and curatorial takeover of the institution itself with the aim to create a space for reflection and make experimental formats possible that questioned institutional hierarchies and the conditions of institutional production. On the subject, among others, see: Jonas Ekeberg, ed., 'New Institutionalism', *Verksted*, 1 (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003); Claire Doherty, 'The Institution is Dead! Long Live the Institution! Contemporary Art and New Institutionalism', in 'Art of Encounter', *Engage*, no. 15 (Summer 2004), pp. 1-9 <http://www.engage.org/readmore/..%5Cdownloads%5C152E25D29_15.%20Claire%20Doherty.pdf> [accessed 6 December 2016]; Jens Hoffmann, 'Curatorialization of Institutional Critique', in John C. Welchman, ed., *Institutional Critique and After*, SoCCAS Symposium vol. II, (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2006), pp. 323-335; Nina Möntmann, ed., *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006); 'Institution as Medium. Curating as Institutional Critique?', *onCurating.org*, no. 8 (2011) <http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue8.pdf> [accessed 6 December 2016].

postconceptual understanding of contemporary art and its exhibition in the global context that is of my interest here. For while D12 undeniably does not lack a revisionist self-reflection and deliberately directs itself against the given rules of contemporary art and its dysfunctions, it does so by positively emphasizing the aesthetic, experiential aspect of art and its transformative potential through the operation of a methodological formlessness. In this regard, to appreciate D12's aesthetic and critical proposal, it is worth outlining the critical and curatorial precepts that informed dX and D11's methodological shift to the discursive, not least because the criticism levelled to it was largely based on the comparison with its last two predecessors.

documenta X: A 'manifestation culturelle' – 'Seeking out the current manifestations and underlying conditions of a critical art'

Catherine David explicitly positioned dX within the questioning of the large-scale exhibitions and contemporary culture in a globalized world. In the opening lines of her Introduction in the Short Guide to dX, she interrogates 'the meaning and purpose' of Documenta at a time when such large-scale exhibitions are legitimately called into question. 'It may seem paradoxical', David writes, 'to envision a critical confrontation with the present in the framework of an institution that over the past twenty years has become a mecca for tourism and cultural consumption.' However, in view of 'the pressing issues of today', it would be 'presumptuous to abandon all ethical and political demands.'[35] Contrary to lamenting or nihilistic positions about the critical function of art, David claims that contemporary art is 'a vital source' of representations with an aesthetic and political power, irreducible to the dominant laws of the market. She, accordingly, assigned dX a deliberately critical and intellectual function for what is the issue is 'seeking out the current manifestations and underlying conditions of a critical art.' The stakes of this task, David maintains, 'are no less political than aesthetic.'[36]

Starting from the consideration that aesthetic production should engage its political context in the broadest sense of 'the "new world disorder"', David defined

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[35] Catherine David, 'Introduction / Vorwort', in documenta and Museum Fridericianum-GmbH, ed., *documenta X: Short Guide* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), pp. 6-13 (7).
[36] Ibid.

dX as a 'manifestation culturelle', which nonetheless cannot ignore the ideological thrust and changes into Documenta's institutional condition since its inception nor the recent developments in aesthetic forms and practices.[37] The directive of dX, as the last Documenta of the millennium, was thus premised upon the ethical-political demand to confront the present in its most urgent socio-political, economic, and cultural issues and historical foundations, while putting Documenta itself under scrutiny by inscribing 'a political and aesthetic inquiry into the very structures of documenta X.'[38]

This inquiring approach was based on the central idea of 'looking back into the future' – David's term 'retroperspectives', which was also used in the exhibition design.[39] The task was not merely to look back, but also 'reconsidering' the major artistic tendencies that emerged in the post-war period, especially in the 1960s, from a critical contemporary, 'even programmatic' perspective so as to gain insight into the present and instigate discussion about future orientation. The 'retroperspectives' included works by Marcel Broodthaers, Öyvind Fahlström, Gordon Matta-Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Dan Graham, Gerhard Richter, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Richard Hamilton, Aldo van Eyck, even documentary photographers from the 1930s, in an organic display with contemporary works. What these figures shared, David notes, is 'a radical questioning of the categories of the "fine arts" and of the anthropological foundations of Western culture through a subversion of the traditional hierarchies and divisions of knowledge.'[40] This makes their practices relevant today, in the sense that they constitute a significant basis for understanding contemporary art and viewing anew the aesthetic, political and cultural function of art. Hence, alongside the historical works, certain lines of development were traced into the present in the works by, among others, Peter Friedl, Lois Weinberger, Chistine Hill, Jeff Wall, James Colleman with particular emphasis on the use of video, photography, new media and Internet-based art.[41]

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[37] Ibid., p. 8; *Documenta Retrospective: dX*
<http://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_x#> [accessed 4 May 2016].
[38] David, 'Introduction / Vorwort', p. 8. According to David, '… the last documenta of this century can hardly evade the task of elaborating a historical and critical gaze on its own history, on the recent past of the post-war period, and on everything from this now-vanished age that remains in ferment within contemporary art and culture' (9).
[39] *Documenta Retrospective: dX* <http://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_x#>
[accessed 4 May 2016].
[40] David, 'Introduction / Vorwort', p. 9.
[41] David embraced digital technology and the Internet as the new medium that not only offers the widest range of communication, but also calls into question the conventional category of 'fine arts' and hierarchies of power. In addition, new media allowed her to exceed Documenta as merely an exhibition

David's 'retroperspecitves' admittedly privileged the critical approaches that evolved in the late-1960s and early-1970s, nonetheless she wished to go beyond the development of Institutional Critique in the 1980s and bring the art practice into social life. Any strategies, David contends, that, in view of the growing assimilation today of museums and the public space into 'the society of the spectacle', seek to 'contrast institutional space with an "outside" appear naïve', as do '"in situ" interventions' that do not recognize the crucial role that the 'city and urban space' can play in contemporary experience and aesthetics.[42] In this regard, she sought to expand the exhibition's traditional spectrum beyond the mere presentation of artworks in the museum framework. Not only did she adopt an urbanist approach, taking Kassel as 'exemplary' site for its history and local repercussions of globalization, but she also integrated discourse and a body of cultural activities into the structure of dX. The exhibition venues were on a par with the current context of Kassel through the creation of a 'parcours' or itinerary, attentive to history as it is embodied in the city, beyond the effect of the 'exhibition-promenade' model. Along this itinerary, a range of cultural and globalization issues were addressed and confronted; artworks were inserted into the city fabric – as video screens, poster walls, advertisement spaces, window displays, and sound installations – intended to intervene into the public space as representations and analysis of reality with specific questions rather than as urban events.[43]

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of showing art and to present it as a cultural event. The *Documenta X website*: *21. Juni - 28. September 1997* <http://www.documenta12.de/archiv/dx/english/frm_home.htm> [accessed 26 May 2016] – the first ever in Documenta's history – was curated by Simon Lamunière of SGG (Saint-Gervais Genève foundation) and featured a lively mix of information, a newsletter, a guide to the various exhibition locations around Kassel and to the main exhibition venues, a 'guestbook', discussion groups, on-demand video archive of the daily lectures programme, links to specialized sites, and various art projects. The dX website hosted about 30 online projects by individual artists and groups, anticipating the growing use of Internet art projects. A critical component of dX was the *Hybrid WorkSpace*; an open multimedia studio was installed in the Orangerie for artists to work on Information links to socio-political and cultural questions while in a program, entitled 'documenta meets radio/radio meets documenta', the Hessischer Rundfunk broadcasted the works of six artists.

[42] David, 'Introduction / Vorwort', pp. 10, 11.

[43] Ibid., pp. 10-11. The parcours went from the Kulturbahnhof – a part of the local railway station converted into a cultural centre that was used in dX – to Karlsaue Park. As David explains, it is also 'a real and symbolic itinerary … in relation to its possible "elsewheres", the cultural and urban realities of a "Whole-World" (Edouard Glissant) that Documenta cannot claim to convoke or even to "represent" in Kassel' (10). Its symbolic beginning was marked by Lois Weinberger's *Das über die Planzen/ist eins mit Ihnen* ['That Which is Over the Plants is One with Them'], 1997; a misused railway track at the Kulturbahnhof was planted with neophytes from southern and south-eastern Europe as a metaphor for the migration processes of today. Of the works installed along the urban itinerary, Christine Hill's *Volksboutique* ['People's Boutique'], 1996, stands in the tradition of the 1960s precursors and is paradigmatic of Relational Aesthetics. Hill set up a real thrift shop, called *Volksboutique*, in a

David's critical vision is informed by the attempt to exceed the limits and limitations of conventional models of presenting art as they cannot do justice to the sheer 'heterogeneity' of contemporary artistic production, the variety of exhibition spaces today and the diversity of experiences they offer. She stresses the problematic role of the 'white cube' as 'the supposedly universal model of aesthetic experience' – of which Documenta is an 'offshoot' – and draws attention to its 'spatial and temporal but also ideological limits' with respect to the presentation of contemporary art practices, which exceed 'the object for which the white cube was constructed', and the 'local fulfillments of a complex and now "globalized" modernity'. The reliance on traditional exhibition formats is questionable for the additional reason that the cultural articulations of several non-Western cultures have mostly evolved in areas outside the exhibitable object of the visual arts.[44] The inability of the universalist exhibition framework to accommodate and serve equally the most experimental contemporary cultural production determined David's objective to integrate the programme '100 Days-100 Guests' – a series of daily public lectures alongside film screenings, theatre performances, poetry readings, and other events. The aim, David explains, is to provide 'a multiplicity of spaces and a broadened platform of discussion and debate, in and outside Kassel, for highly diverse cultural expressions and publics.'[45] In allusion to Bode's 'Museum of 100 Days', David invited for the 100-day duration of the show individuals from a wide range of disciplines and all over the world to discuss, in an auditorium at the Documenta-Halle, the urgent socio-political, economic, and cultural issues at the close of the twentieth-century (Fig. 5.9).[46] The

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pedestrian subway storefront in which second-hand clothing, all donated by residents of Kassel, was for sale.

[44] Ibid., pp. 11-12. As David explained: 'For reasons which have partially to do with interrupted or violently destroyed traditions, as well as the diversity of the cultural formations that have sprung from colonization and decolonization and the indirect and unequal access these formations have been given to Western modernity, it seems that the pertinence, excellence, and radicality of contemporary non-Western expressions often finds its privileged avenues in music, oral and written language (literature, theatre), and cinema – forms which have traditionally contributed to strategies of emancipation.'

[45] Ibid., p. 12.

[46] Ibid. The Documenta-Halle, which was built in 1992 as a multifunctional venue, was now transformed into a lively debate forum. The auditorium was designed by the artists Franz West (chairs with upholstery) and Heimo Zobering (the stage, a recording and broadcasting booth). The artist Peter Friedl, in an ironic allusion to the inscription in the neighbouring Staatstheater, affixed the word "KINO" (CINEMA in German) in large red letters above the entrance to Documenta-Halle, undermining the function of representation.

The *100 Tage-100 Gäste* ['100 Days-100 Guests'] programme presented artists, scientists, writers, poets, stage and film directors, musicians, architects, urbanists, economists, sociologists, and philosophers. It began with Edward Said and included, among others, Rem Koolhaas, Etienne Balibar, Andreas Huyssen, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Saskia Sassen, Wole Soyinka, Okwui Enwezor, Suely

emphatically discursive orientation is also apparent in a series of journals, the *documenta X documents*. These were published prior to the exhibition as a kind of preparatory work that reflected the philosophy of dX and demonstrated its evolving process. As David explains in the Editorial of *document 1*, the working method of Documenta is based on the film 'process of montage'. Following the logic of 'a "work in progress"', the *documents* are intended to be 'a site of debate, of controversy, and possibly of contradiction.' They include interviews, statements, existing theoretical texts, working notes, and artistic contributions giving insight into the approach of dX and its process of creation.[47]

The multidisciplinary approach of dX was predominant in its accompanying publication, called *Politics-Poetics: documenta X – The Book*, a massive 830-page volume which rejected the traditional exhibition catalogue format. *The Book* was intended neither to reproduce the exhibits nor the events programme. According to Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier who conceived it, the *Book* 'seeks to indicate a political context for the interpretation of artistic activities at the close of the twentieth century'. Rather than providing an encyclopaedic survey of the post-war period to the present, it is organized chronologically in reference to four key dates (1945, 1967, 1978, 1989) as markers for wide-reaching social and cultural transformations along which the links between aesthetic practices and politico-economic events could be traced. It is presented as 'a polemical attempt' to articulate the historical and cultural interrelationships, which shaped the post-war artistic productions and can be taken as analytical references in the contemporary debate on the processes of globalization.[48] In order to evoke the complexity of relations, to destabilize the 'strict divisions between work, document, and commentary', and so to create 'a multifaceted, polyphonic structure', *The Book* kept with the 'montage technique' and assembled a transdisciplinary range of texts in various formats –

Rolnik, and Jeff Wall. The daily lectures-events were recorded and broadcasted live on the Radio and the Internet by Bundmedia. They were also digitally archived and could be consulted as a video on demand in the dX website or on computer terminals in Documenta-Halle during the exhibition. For the programme, see <http://www.documenta12.de/archiv/dx/english/frm_news.htm> [accessed 26 May 2016]. Videos can now be viewed at <http://www.mediencluster-documenta.de/R/79XS2VXJVJNFR6J3712D2DILS7NAIA4EEJXXGE64LD4Q21YNQV-08321?func=collections-result&collection_id=1653> [accessed 26 May 2016].

[47] Catherine David, 'Editorial', in documenta GmbH, ed., *documenta X documents 1* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1996), p. 1.

[48] *Politics-Poetics: documenta X – The Book*, documenta and Museum Fridericianum-GmbH, eds, (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), p. 24.

mostly in excerpt form – mixed with images of dX artworks and documentary photographs.[49]

It is clear that central to the conception of dX is the underlying premise of a crisis pertaining the presentation of art today, which is linked to the inadequacy of existing exhibiting models to correspond to the diversity of artistic practices, particularly the move beyond the visual object, and to the expansion of culture in the changing context of globalization. This crisis is also evident in the growing spectacle of mega-exhibitions such as Documenta and the domination of the market values, which necessitates attempts of resistance that foreground the intersection of art and politics. However, rather than advocating an art of direct political intervention and action, in accordance with one of the major directions taken by contemporary art, David significantly denounces the 'contemporary art' tag for its instrumentalization and valorises, instead, a notion of art and its exhibition premised on a reflective mandate on the changing conditions of aesthetic experience today. To the extent, she argues, that visual art is no longer of 'crucial importance' to contemporary culture, 'what is more interesting than the works themselves is the emergence of numerous disruptive attitudes and practices as opposed to traditional production strategies.' To make them possible, 'genealogies must be reconstituted and perspectives traced.'[50] Similarly, in an informative interview to Robert Storr prior to dX, David explicitly avoids a limited understanding of 'political art' in favour of the broader category of the 'critical'. She explains that the latter 'isn't necessarily the completely instrumentalized category it has become' – 'a certain development of late '70s art: so-called political art' having been turned into 'a commercial and journalistic label'.[51] Instead, she locates the critical power of art in various practices involved in 'the radical critique of culture's anthropological foundations' that echo the revolutionary approaches of the 1960s art, such as Jeff Wall and Lois Weinberger's work. Having stretched the critical dimension of art into the broader space of the cultural, David is

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[49] Ibid., p. 25. *The Book* contains no art criticism as such or aesthetic theory. It serves more as a political, intellectual, cultural, and historical compendium of texts and images about contemporary history across four periods (1945-1967, 1967-1978, 1978-1989, 1989-1997). The publication's only exception is a two-part interview with Benjamin Buchloh conducted by Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier, entitled 'The Political Potential of Art', in which dX's anti-formalist, critical position was deliberated.

[50] See Jean-Christophe Royoux, 'Documenta X: Director Catherine David Discusses Art at the End of the Millennium', *Flash Art*, no. 193 (March-April 1997), pp. 86-88 (88, 87).

[51] Robert Storr, 'Kassel Rock: Robert Storr Talks With Documenta's Catherine David', *Artforum*, vol. 35, no. 9 (May 1997), pp. 77-80, 129, 131, 142 (79-80,142).

concerned to avoid an 'anything goes attitude' and encapsulates the driving stakes of her project as follows: 'What are the conditions of possibility for critical aesthetic practices today? Where are the homogenizing forces and where are the areas of resistance – formally, culturally, intellectually, and politically?'[52]

From this perspective, David attempted to transform Documenta from a spectacular visual arts exhibition into a multidisciplinary site for a diversity of media and cultures, political analysis and critical reflection giving in turn rise to charges for being too intellectual and theory-driven, too ideological and political, and thus non-sensuous and aesthetically deprived. For critics, David's 'post-retinal' Documenta was marked by the '"suppression" of visual gratification' disdaining art that prioritizes aesthetic experience in favour of 'art as a form of social criticism'. In the attempt to exceed the limits of merely an art exhibition, she was charged for having 'orchestrated a three-month ideological consciousness-raising session.'[53] David's postconceptual vision was actually underwritten by the concern of 'staging an event around political and cultural issues', which, she remarks, does not mean that artists were expected to become 'illustrators or activists. The aesthetic act cannot stand or fall on what is urgent or immediate.'[54] The event-oriented focus, however, did not go thus far as turning Documenta into a '100-Day event', as Szeemann conceived it in his first, unrealized D5 proposal. Instead, she used the conceptual and discursive structures of dX to activate the intensification of discourse and political conceptualism, which would dominate the following years the curatorial and New-institutional practice, in search of the conditions of possibility for a critical contemporary aesthetics.[55] For David, this was not merely a political task, and dX

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[52] Ibid., pp. 80, 79, 142. David crucially adds: 'I do not think, as I read in a French magazine, that art is there to heal the social rift.'

[53] See Ken Johnson, 'A Post-Retinal Documenta', *Art in America*, vol. 85 (October 1997), pp. 80-89 (81, 82).

[54] David in interview to Jean-Christophe Royoux, p. 88.

[55] In a 2002 inquiry about the relationship between 'Documenta' and the 'museum' models, David underlined the influence that dX exercised in the growing embrace of the discursive and cultural element by new institutions and curators in the sense that dX became the model of a new kind of art institution. 'It seems to me', David states, 'that many institutions have taken up certain aspects of "documenta", including being more attentive to, and favoring, the discursive element; in many contemporary art projects the object is secondary, even non-existent. […] Hence, in order to convey to the public projects that are using words or texts more than the object, it is necessary to find different formats or modes of presentation that are compatible with the art projects. … "documenta X" offered certain possibilities that were reworked by certain young curators in the years that followed.' She continues to denounce museums as 'spaces for cultural consumerism', advocating instead experimental 'art centers' that invent new formats and modalities of encounter aimed at specific 'public groups'. 'Without shared or at least discussed experiences', David points out, 'one immediately passes into the

intended to show that the political is inextricably bound up with the poetic (Fig. 5.10).[56]

Documenta 11: Art and exhibition-making as critical reflection and transdisciplinary knowledge production in postcolonial globalization

The eleventh edition of Documenta was an advancement of David's curatorial approach in many respects, and it is now considered a seminal reinvention of the large-scale exhibition format. Starting from an essentially interrogative stance, Okwui Enwezor proclaimed his goal to construct a fully inclusive discourse for art in the contemporary postcolonial globalization, and so to challenge the limits of Western art historiography, specifically the Western conception of avant-garde, which, in his view, is institutionalized in mega-exhibitions such as Documenta and has marked the horizon of artistic discourse today. This goal is central to the organizational framework of D11 and is further demonstrated in Enwezor's selections with an unprecedented presence of artists from outside Europe and North America. Enwezor's interrogation of the scope, function, and format of the exhibition, which is my focus here, was underpinned by certain critical and curatorial premises that determined D11's expansive shift to the discursive and established it as a landmark of that case. Enwezor's essay 'The Black Box' in the catalogue-cum-encyclopaedia provides an analytical programmatic conception of the ethical, political, and cultural goals pursued by D11. Here, the most fundamental methodological question of how 'to construct an exhibition' is explicitly predicated on a critical vocabulary taken from postcolonial critique and globalization.[57] For Enwezor, the present conditions of the new world order that emerged after World War II generate new ethical demands with

register of aestheticization.' Catherine David, in Ursula Sinnreich, Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, and Ali Subotnick, 'Inquiry: Learning from "documenta"', *Parkett*, no. 64 (2002), pp. 187-208 (190-191).

[56] This link is demonstrated in the typographical play that gives dX's main publication its title. On the cover of *The Book*, behind the 'li' of the word *Politics* stands out a red, italic 'e' that makes for the *Politics/Poetics* intersection. Commenting on the inseparability of the political and the poetic in dX, Bettina Steinbrügge recognizes key references to Marcel Broodthaers's practice and argues that: 'At *documenta 10*, the aim seemed to be the restoration of depth to the aesthetic, but beyond the visual. Perhaps, on the contrary, the aim was to take a gaze that today is trained by the media and confront it with unusual pictorial experiences, whose decoding poses a challenge. That is not a question of quality or sensuousness, but a question of habits of seeing and of the search for the possibilities of a critical aesthetics of the pictorial.' Bettina Steinbrügge, 'Documenta X: An Ontology of the Present', in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel, eds, *50 Jahre/Years Documenta 1955–2005: Archive in Motion*, exh. cat. (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), pp. 353-364 (362).

[57] Okwui Enwezor, 'The Black Box', in documenta and Museum Fridericianum-GmbH, eds, *Documenta 11_ Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), pp. 42-55 (42).

regard to the marginalization and displacement of non-Western entities, and thus the opening up of a space for the production of diverse narratives on the conditions of historical interpretation and the articulation of counter-hegemonic voices. 'The postcolonial space', Enwezor argues, 'is the site where experimental cultures emerge to articulate modalities that define the new meaning- and memory-making systems of late modernity' beyond 'existing epistemological structures' and the narrowness of a Western global perspective.[58]

Enwezor defines 'postcolonialism' not merely as the political order of societies that emerged from the liberatory processes of decolonization but mainly as a spatial and temporal reordering, which creates 'a world of proximities …, not of elsewhere'. Postcolonialism is a 'double move' generating ruptures and displacements that destabilize the centre-margin dichotomy of the former colonized world to 'lay claim to … the world of empire by making empire's former "other" visible and present', though not in the sense of postmodernism's claim to cultural pluralism, otherness, and corollary historical relativism.[59] It involves, instead, cultural forms and forms of subjectivity that shift from the centre-margin geopolitics of the imperial state to the dynamics of new differential relations and restructuring, no longer underwritten by the narrative and teleology of development. In this respect, the displacement of the formal organization of Documenta is inscribed into the ethical demand to counter totalizing narratives, the history of avant-gardism included, and to invent new modalities of articulation and historical interpretation for the former 'other' within the transformations taking place in the globalization of postcoloniality. Accordingly, Enwezor disavows a formalist exhibition approach that intends to construct a 'tautological system' of the artwork's 'self-referentiality' and advocates the kind of exhibition which, in response to the rapid changes and complexity of the contemporary global condition, allows the larger encounter with the systems that determined the limits of global discourse today and subjects the contexts of artistic

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[58] Ibid., p. 44. Enwezor defines 'experimental cultures' as 'a set of practices whereby cultures evolving out of imperialism and colonialism, slavery and indenture, compose a collage of reality from the fragments of collapsing space' (45).

[59] Ibid., pp. 44, 45. Enwezor explicitly distinguishes the double move of postcoloniality from the prevalence of postmodernism two decades ago. He writes: 'While postmodernism was preoccupied with relativizing historical transformations and contesting the lapses and prejudices of epistemological grand narratives, postcoloniality does the obverse, seeking instead to sublate and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation.' 'In this regard', he continues, 'it could be said that the history of the avant-garde falls within the epistemological scheme of grand narratives. What, then, is the fate of the avant-garde in this climate of incessant assault upon its former conclusions?' (45).

production into a range of interrogations.[60] Central to this goal is Enwezor's motif of 'extraterritoriality':

> As an exhibition project, Documenta 11 begins from the sheer side of extraterritoriality: firstly, by displacing its historical context in Kassel; secondly, by moving outside of the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive; and thirdly, by expanding the locus of the disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and cultural interest.[61]

As such, D11 was composed of a series of five 'Platforms' intended to expand and deterritorialize Documenta's geographical, spatial, temporal, and intellectual constitution and to transform it into a transnational, transdisciplinary project. The first four Platforms took the form of public discussions and themed conferences – including a workshop and film screenings – with leading intellectuals debating on critical issues of the globalized world, each one resulting in a major publication. They were held in certain cities across four continents over the course of eighteen months, followed by the last, fifth Platform, the exhibition proper in Kassel.[62] The intercontinental format was not only a radical dislocation of the historically single site of Documenta in Kassel; it provided the opportunity to engender a global discourse within the global public sphere of contemporary culture, placing research and critical reflection at the heart of the exhibition.[63] Although the worldwide theoretical

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[60] Ibid., p. 42.

[61] Ibid.

[62] The platforms took place between March 2001 and September 2002. The first, two-part platform, entitled 'Democracy Unrealized', took place in Vienna (15 March–20 April 2001) and continued in Berlin (9–30 October 2001); Platform 2, 'Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation', was held in New Delhi (7–21 May 2001) and examined issues of truth, justice, and reconciliation in States that have just emerged from genocide or civil war. Alongside public panel discussions and lectures, it included a video programme of films and documentaries; Platform 3 was a workshop of fifteen writers in St Lucia (13–15 January 2002) on the subject of 'Créolité and Creolization'; Platform 4, 'Under Siege: Four African Cities Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos' was held in Lagos (16–20 March 2002) to discuss in public symposia and a workshop the urban systems and state of affairs of African mega-cities; Platform 5, 'Exhibition' took its place in Kassel (8 June–15 September 2002), its participating artists engaged in a parallel critical project of investigating key themes and issues of global concern. The proceedings, published in four homonymous volumes by Hatje Cantz, were available only after the end of the exhibition, in 2002 and 2003. For a thorough, compelling analysis of the Platforms, see Stewart Martin, 'A New World Art? Documenting Documenta 11', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 122 (November-December 2003), pp. 7-19.

[63] According to Enwezor, 'The five Platforms define a constellation of disciplinary models that seek to explain and interrogate ongoing historical processes and radical change, spatial and temporal dynamics,

Platforms were hardly attended by visitors, they were integral to the form of D11 and, while not a literal rehearsal of the exhibition Platform, they mapped out its underlying critical concerns and generated an intellectual framework that inflected the visitors' experience of the show.[64]

By placing the exhibition alongside these discursive events as an equivalent component of the whole, Enwezor sought to reverse the logic of the 'centrality' of exhibition in the production of meaning and extend the entire scope of D11's intellectual and artistic possibilities. The necessity of 'enlargement' is presented as a 'redefinition' of the formal organization and overall function of the mega-exhibition, which, Enwezor maintains, should not be understood as 'a terminus' of the preceding Platforms.[65] The main task of D11 was not to offer 'overarching conclusions', any 'forms of closure' or 'prognosis'; in doing so, Enwezor claims, differentiates itself from previous Documenta and institutional forms of exhibition practice that worked to form a narrative and posit the 'completeness of their vision': either a formalist 'unified vision of art' that maintains art's autonomy through its institutionalized forms or the avant-garde transgression of the institution and, ultimately, suppression of any separation from society in the name of innovation. Having denounced past attempts 'to forge one common, universal conception and interpretation of artistic and cultural modernity' for their exclusions and limits in being truly international, Enwezor ambitiously pronounced 'Documenta 11's "spectacular difference"'.[66]

What distinguished D11 was not so much the wide selection of artists from all over the world – the issue of inclusivity had been a commonplace in the artworld over the last decade – but primarily the ambition to stage a truly globalized Documenta as a critical project of reflection on the global scale of contemporary cultural

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as well as fields of actions and ideas, and systems of interpretation and production; all of which significantly enlarge the exhibition format of Documenta 11.' Enwezor, 'The Black Box', p. 49.

[64] Axel Lapp, in his review of the exhibition Platform, emphasizes the inaccessibility of the foregoing theoretical Platforms and dismisses them as superfluous and irrelevant to it. He writes: 'The four previous Platforms … set the agenda for the exhibition, forming a theoretical framework for its visual investigation of the world's societies. However, since they could not normally be attended by visitors to the exhibition … and since the publication of their proceedings will not be completed before the end of the show, this contextualisation will only be virtual and will only happen in hindsight. This later aggrandisement of the exhibition through theoretical discourse seems quite unnecessary. "Platform5" could well stand on its own.' Axel Lapp, 'Documenta 11/2', *Art Monthly*, no. 258 (July-August 2002), pp. 7-10 (8).

[65] Enwezor, 'The Black Box', pp. 42, 53, 42.

[66] Ibid., pp. 42, 43.

transformation in a public terrain.[67] As Enwezor stated, the claim for D11's 'spectacular difference' lies in the fact that 'its critical spaces are not places for the normalization or uniformization of all artistic visions on their way to institutional beatification.' Rather, they are 'forums of committed ethical and intellectual reflection on the possibilities of rethinking the historical procedures that are part of its contradictory heritage of grand conclusions.'[68] The thrust of Enwezor's attempt, not unlike David's, was to reflect on the way hegemonic and homogenizing systems operate, to expose the historical omissions and cultural injustices of the Western art historical canon – to which Documenta had played an ideological role – and make a meaningful case for contemporary art through the redefining prism of postcolonial globalization, or what he called the 'postcolonial constellation'.[69] Within this perspective, the question of curating contemporary art – specifically, the ethics and politics of transcultural curating – appears pressing, if one wishes to avoid a hierarchical, integrating framework on the grounds of Western value systems and canon, that is, Enwezor quoting the curator Gerardo Mosquera, an asymmetrical relationship between 'curating cultures' and 'curated cultures'.[70] For Enwezor, the new postcolonial order reveals – counter to the general belief – the Western avant-garde's 'conservative' understanding of modernity alongside the narrowness of its political and historical vision. In this respect, Documenta's historical alignment to

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[67] Enwezor claims: 'Traversing continents and cities, locations and disciplines, practices and institutions, formats and publics, Documenta 11's proposition to open up new spaces for critical reflection on contemporary artistic and cultural situations, creates for us – in dialectical interaction with heterogeneous, transnational audiences – a public sphere through which to think and analyze seriously the complex network of global knowledge circuits on which interpretations of all cultural processes and research today depend.' Ibid., p. 53.

[68] Ibid., p. 43.

[69] In a key essay from 2003, Enwezor suggests the concept of 'postcolonial constellation', which 'echoes itself in a series of structural, political and cultural entanglements' rather than dichotomies after the World War II, in order to illuminate the understanding of the historical context from which the discourses of modernism and contemporary art emerged (77). For Enwezor, contemporary art exists in a state of permanent transition and 'impermanence' in the sense of having a more 'transversal' relationship to history, without thereby abandoning specificity (69). The 'postcolonial constellation' provides an understanding of 'a particular historical order that configures the relationship between political, social, and cultural realities, artistic spaces and epistemological histories not in contest but always in continuous redefinitions' (77). In response, the curator of contemporary art has a reflective, intellectual agency as 'a producer of certain kinds of thought about art, artists, exhibitions, and ideas and their place among a field of other possible forms of thought that govern the transmission and reception of artistic production', in short, a kind of curatorial practice that leads to 'particular ways of aligning thought and vision' (76). Okwui Enwezor, 'The Postcolonial Constellation: Contemporary Art in a State of Permanent Transition', *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 34, no. 4 (Winter 2003), pp. 57-82.

[70] Ibid., p. 46. Enwezor cites Gerardo Mosquera's, director of the first two Havana Biennials, 'Some Problems in Transcultural Curating', in Jean Fisher, ed., *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (London: Kala Press, 1994), pp. 133-139.

modernism demonstrates how 'it is caught in a double bind in its attempt to negotiate both its radicality and normativity.'[71]

This kind of 'double bind', in which Documenta inescapably finds itself, raises a central methodological issue inherent to it. This was also addressed previously by David and later by Buergel as an aspect of Documenta's always already 'crisis' and contradictory stakes: namely how to avoid the production of a multicultural spectacle, given Documenta's institutional context and place within a global art network of biennials and other institutional forms, generous funding, and attendance expectations that ensure its public success. Anthony Downey aptly explains the stakes of this 'double-edged remit'; the issue is 'how do you cultivate … a radical Documenta that acts as a critique of its own institutionalising agenda and tendency towards spectacle without eviscerating its very function as an institution?'[72] For having denounced institutional critique as Occidentalist and disavowed the attempt of past exhibitions to assert the ontological distinctiveness of art by developing an institutional space for the canonical legitimization of the autonomous art object, Enwezor confronts the following twofold challenge: how to make a convincing articulation of the radical, political possibilities of contemporary art and simultaneously question Documenta's institutional function, without thereby adopting the avant-garde breaking with the institution. This problematic becomes more pertinent since, in Enwezor's view, institutional structures such as museums, biennials and large-scale international exhibitions, despite their proliferation, cannot themselves 'define the legitimacy of contemporary art.' Rather, they need to reshape their own legitimacy as a result of their 'delayed recognition of the complex topos of the new global community.'[73]

It is along these lines – caught up in the awareness of a number of perpetuating inadequacies, constraints, limits, and deficiencies with respect to claims for inclusivity and radicality made by previous and existing institutional and exhibitionary models – that Enwezor proposes as alternative the paradigmatic reshaping of Documenta. D11 is conceived as a meta-exhibition; 'a constellation of public spheres' – rather than merely an exhibition of artworks – which underlines the ability of art practices and processes to 'enact the multidisciplinary direction […] in

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[71] Ibid., pp. 46, 47.
[72] Anthony Downey, 'The Spectacular Difference of Documenta XI', *Third Text*, vol. 17, no. 1 (March 2003), pp. 85-92 (89).
[73] Enwezor, 'The Black Box', p. 54.

those circuits of knowledge produced outside the predetermined institutional domain of Westernism, or those situated solely in the sphere of artistic canons.' The exhibition gesture, Enwezor claims, is 'rearticulated here as a new understanding in the domain of the discursive' that affirms various forms of knowledge production in their intersecting heterogeneity, and so enables transdisciplinary reflection on the effects of postcolonial globalization and the production of new modes of subjectivity.[74] In this respect, the exhibition functions as a 'diagnostic toolbox' that 'counterpoises the supposed purity and autonomy of the art object against a rethinking of modernity based on ideas of transculturality and extraterritoriality'. Seen this way, Enwezor argues, the exhibition Platform is 'less a receptacle of commodity-objects than a container of a plurality of voices, a material reflection on a series of disparate and interconnected actions and processes.'[75]

It is apparent that, by problematizing more conventional, teleological exhibition models, D11 sought for new counter-models of transdisciplinary action, which would enable the confrontation with the sheer complexity, instability, and entanglements of the current processes of global postcolonialism. In fact, Enwezor calls for the emergence of art as the heterogeneous production of knowledge and critical reflection in lieu of its autonomous, separate status. As such, he attempts to develop an open, non-totalizing space of representation within the contemporary global public spheres in accord with postcolonialism, and so to re-enact the socio-political agency of art beyond the supposedly limited heritage of the historical avant-gardism. The strong emphasis on the globalization of postcolonialism is here coupled with the diagnosis of the emergence of a new form of global capitalism in the post-Cold War era as the new overpowering form of imperialism. According to Enwezor, 'Empire's' global sovereignty repels any kind of autonomy previously claimed by avant-garde art and necessitates a new form of radical art, a global political counter-power to Empire's regulatory, homogenizing force.[76] A detailed discussion of

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., p. 55.

[76] Ibid., p. 45. Enwezor borrows Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's concept of 'Empire' to show that in the wake of the homogenizing effects of globalization and the emergence of new forms of regulation in all aspects of human life and cultural exchange 'strong, critical responses to this materialization are contemporary art's weakest point' (Ibid). According to Hardt and Negri, over the past decades there is 'an irresistible and irreversible globalization of economic and cultural exchanges', which is 'materializing' as a new form of sovereignty, the 'Empire'. 'Empire' regulates all forms of economic and cultural exchanges, mostly 'social life in its entirety' through 'a new logic and structure of rule.' 'In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed

Enwezor's political proposal exceeds the focus of this chapter,[77] not least because the sweeping dismissal of the historical avant-gardes and Modernism for their limited 'Westernism', perceived lack of radicality, and 'domesticated' implication in a neo-imperial scheme of Empire tends to be generalizing.[78] Besides, as critical voices stress, it is questionable whether D11 actually escapes the avant-garde tradition and offers a model of resistance that makes for an effective 'counterbalance' to the overwhelming hegemony of capital and Western power today.[79] In this sense,

boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentred* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers.' Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Preface', *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. xi-xvii. Italics in the original.

[77] Enwezor draws on Hardt and Negri's notion of the 'multitude' as an alternative political organization, a resistance force to counter-act Empire's attempt at totalization from within, and so to argue for a politics of postcoloniality. For Hardt and Negri, 'The creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire are also capable of autonomously constructing a counter-Empire, an alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges.' (Ibid., p. xv.) For a detailed discussion of the 'multitude' as 'posse' that starts appearing as a 'biopolitical self-organization', a creative network always open and continually in movement that produces forms of common resistance to the hegemonic power of Empire, see especially chapters 1.3 and 4.3, in *Empire*; also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *The Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Group, 2004).

[78] Enwezor, 'The Black Box', p. 45. Enwezor attempts to forward in D11 a kind of 'multitude' of global intersections and constellation of public spheres in order to deterritorialize and counter what he perceives as Modernism's totalizing strategy of canonical integration. For Stewart Martin, Enwezor draws on Hardt and Negri's analysis of 'Empire' 'in order to generalize the condition of postcoloniality by analogy with their characterization of the multitude – as a global political counter-power, emerging immanently from the globalization of transnational capital – while overdetermining this notoriously indeterminate category as a politics of postcoloniality.' As such, 'The political act that Documenta 11 itself is intended to perform', Martin argues, is 'the irruption of a central location of the art world by an alternative world art, the full emergence of the margin to the centre.' Martin, 'A New World Art?', p. 9. In this respect, Enwezor aligns the postcoloniality of D11 with recent anti-capitalist movements, and suggests the re-function of the name 'Ground Zero' as the '*tabula rasa*' that defines global politics, that is, a symbol of 'the clear ground from which the margin has moved to the center in order to reconceptualize the key ideological differences of the present global transition.' Enwezor, 'The Black Box', pp. 47, 48. Italics in the original.

[79] See Downey, p. 90. For an acute reading of Enwezor's 'equation of avant-gardism and Westernism', from which he derives the programme of D11 as a 'rupture of this culture' and the 'institution of an alternative artistic culture of postcolonialism', see Martin, 'A New World Art?', especially pp. 8-10, 17-18. For Martin, Enwezor appears to have 'reduced' the avant-garde to a Greenbergian account of modernism, and D11, despite its political rhetoric, 'remains caught in the predicament of a neo-avant-garde', not least because it is funded by national institutions and corporate sponsors. Given the historical transformations and new global forms of imperialism today, D11, Martin argues, is conceived as a critical 'rearticulation' of the avant-garde discourse for a total revolution of social life through the claim for postcoloniality's immanence. Albeit its political potential, Martin concludes, there is a sense in which D11 'proposes a radical transformation of avant-garde art, while remaining deeply entwined within its traditional problems.'

On this subject, curator Yuko Hasegawa notes that Enwezor 'essentially places himself within the context of Western discourse, and from this position constructs an exacting theory.' Yuko Hasegawa, 'Struggling for Utopia', *Flash Art*, vol. 33, no. 225 (July-September 2002), p. 105. More pointedly, Rasheed Araeen criticizes Enwezor's anti avant-garde impulse for being limited to a rhetoric and thematic framework that does not provide an efficacious opposition to the hegemonic strategies of Westernism: 'Enwezor claims to be contesting the language of Modernism and the Avant Garde, which he thinks represents a continuation of Western hegemony. […] Can mere subject matter – here he invokes the struggle of the oppressed – confront and change the language in which it is inserted

Enwezor's proclamation of the 'spectacular difference' of D11 with regard to what preceded it was met with scepticism. If the political task of responding to contemporary postcolonialism demands a new radical art and a revision of curating, then it was unclear how exactly did D11's articulation of a politics of postcolonialism 'open up a radically new knowledge system or paradigm within which to discuss contemporary art practice?'[80]

The introduction of certain political premises and concepts in the curatorial statement and the attendant discourses in the theoretical Platforms affected the exhibition in significant ways. Not only did they shape the driving aims and thematics of the exhibition with undertones of ethical necessity but, as Downey remarks, they were also advanced as a 'predicative model for the content and form of the art chosen to be included in the exhibition.'[81] Indeed, many of the artists took war, violence, injustice, oppression, genocide, dislocated populations and issues of borders, poverty, global capitalism, worldwide terror, overall political and personal traumas in a condition of global conflict and fragmentation as their themes with conspicuous preference to installations, photography, digital media, film and video projections, mostly documentary in nature and invoking the news media (Fig. 5.11).[82] D11 sought

adequately and still produce something significantly new and different in terms of art? If the language remains the same as that in what is denounced as part of "the scheme of Empire", how is Enwezor carrying out his ambition of "displacing its historical context" in Kassel?' Rasheed Araeen, 'In the Heart of the Black Box', *Art Monthly*, no. 259 (September 2002), p.17.

[80] Downey, p. 89. Downey cites Thomas McEvilley's remark that many of the issues that D11 investigated were hardly new in the relevant discourses of postcolonial criticism and politics. 'In a sense the agenda proclaimed by these curators', McEvilley writes, 'gave one a sense of déjà vu; or rather, it seemed not exactly to usher in a new era but to seal on an era first announced long ago.' Thomas McEvilley, 'Documenta XI', *Frieze*, no. 69 (September 2002), p. 81, cited in Downey, note 10, p. 89.

[81] Ibid. Downey makes an interesting point with regard to the large amount of commissioned works (seventy per cent) in D11. Although the commissioning of works was meant to ensure a heterogeneous approach in line with the formal organization of the entire project, paradoxically 'it elicited a certain response to what was a very clear, and perhaps over-prescriptive curatorial mandate' that may explain 'a certain evenness of output' in terms of the art content (90).

[82] It is noticeable that the first 30 pages of the exhibition catalogue record a series of media images of recent global violence, demonstrations, and conflict events as if to demonstrate that disorder is the 'new world order' in postcolonial globalizaiton, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 attack. On Enwezor's 'diagnostic' mode of presenting globalization and its discontents, see Kim Levin, 'The CNN Documenta: Art in an International State of Emergency', *Village Voice*, 2 July 2002, p. 57, also available in <http://www.villagevoice.com/arts/the-cnn-documenta-7142208> [accessed 2 June 2016]. Eleanor Heartney addressed the preponderance of time-based media and material in D11 – total duration of film and video projections was estimated at six hundred hours – which made it an almost impossible show to see in its entirety, or at least provided visitors with an exhausting, physically and intellectually, experience. See Eleanor Heartney, 'A 600-Hour Documenta', *Art in America*, vol. 90, no. 9 (September 2002), pp. 86-95. This resistance to art as object-making was conspicuous in the prevalence in the Fridericianum of conceptual art installations by Hanne Darboven and On Kawara, as if setting the tone for the systematized vision and taxonomy that tends to dominate the show.

to radically recontextualize its function in terms of an ethically, socio-politically, and intellectually posited art practice in a non-totalizing representational space, albeit it did not avoid the risks of homogenization and imposition of order. For several commentators, D11 demonstrated its own fundamental contradiction. While it laudably set out to evade totalizing narratives and structures in favour of process-oriented counter-models that would present the complexity, diversity, and instability that informs the world art today, it fell short of actualizing these models in the primary exhibition sites, and so to escape a homogenizing effect, partly because of the programmatic curatorial intent that pervades the entire project. It was thus criticised for its didactic, often one-sided, and literal documentation of art in a surprisingly traditional, orderly, almost 'clinical' aesthetic of display, which contradicted the disturbing content of the works and the radical agenda of its overall conception (Fig. 5.12).[83] From this perspective, although the displaced Platforms constitute an

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[83] For Jens Hoffmann, the Exhibition Platform is 'almost perfect, at least in terms of what a traditional art exhibition can be.' Jens Hoffmann, 'Reentering Art, Reentering Politics', *Flash Art*, vol. 33, no. 225 (July-September 2002), p. 106. Peter Schjeldahl described it as a 'global salon' of 'elegantly proportioned' and 'restrained' spaces. 'Aesthetically starved but overflowing with information, the show feels at once energetic and joyless.' Peter Schjeldahl, 'The Global Salon: European Extravaganzas', *The New Yorker*, 78, no. 17 (1 July 2002), p. 94, also available in <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/07/01/the-global-salon> [accessed 2 June 2016]. Curator Massimiliano Gioni addressed the disjunction between the aesthetic of display and the artworks' content: 'Everything is presented in an almost clinical manner, verging on seamless slickness. Disorder is at the core of the exhibition, but the show itself speaks in a very clear, at times didactic tone.' Massimiliano Gioni, 'Finding the Center', *Flash Art*, vol. 33, no. 225 (July-September 2002), pp. 106-107 (106). In a more polemical tone, Jean-Paul Martinon claims: 'The exhibition is curatorially safe. Documenta 11 does not in any way problematize traditional exhibition models […] It might pretend to present counter-models that allow us to see the sheer complexity of what we grapple with when we talk about globalization, but it never actualizes on site these counter-models.' It presents art 'in a curatorially dead safe museum realm.' […] 'The meaningless that comes when facing the absolute inarticulateness of the present is precisely what is missing from this show.' Jean-Paul Martinon, 'Capturing the Present?', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2002), pp. 374-377.
Elena Filipovic, in a compelling account from 2005, criticizes biennials, dX and D11 included, for a marked discrepancy: although these exhibitions explicitly present themselves as critical alternatives to the museum and the white cube, seeking to undermine their historiographies, epistemological and institutional presumptions, they still adopt the white cube format in museum spaces having configured what she calls the new 'global white cube'. Concerning D11, Filipovic argues that 'the fifth Platform appeared to be a decided *return to order*. […] one encountered a display even more museal, conservative, and rarefied than in previous editions.' The adoption of the white cube aesthetic, Filipovic claims, undermined particularly the project's attempt to challenge continued Occidental paradigms: 'Why, one might ask, expand Documenta into different parts of the world through the four discussion platforms only to encase most of the over four hundred works from five continents in Kassel within the West's least questioned framing devices? A hasty response might be that bringing together works of art from vastly different cultures requires using a uniformly prestigious or valid frame through which they can be experienced – the necessary fiction sustaining this being that the white cube is a neutral, legitimate frame.' Elena Filipovic, 'The Global White Cube', in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 322-345 (337, 338) [first publ. in Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, eds, *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Brussels and Cambridge, Mass.: Roomade and MIT Press, 2005), pp. 63-84]. Italics in the original.

organizational radicality towards the decentralization of the exhibition – yet not entirely unprecedented, if we consider Siegelaub's pioneering geographically and temporally dispersed projects in a smaller, Western scale – the exhibition, despite its notable breadth of representation, provides less evidence of radicality and challenging sustained Occidental paradigms as it opted for safer modes of presentation.

Actually, a historical thread can be detected between the D11 Platforms and the conceptual shift in art and exhibition-making in the late-1960s. The Platforms, on the legacy of conceptual art, redefine structure as a decentred form of widely discursive procedures, constituting a further move towards the 'dematerialization' of aesthetics and the exhibition.[84] They extended the discursivity and intellectualism that David incorporated in the constitution of dX in a more fundamental way. Thus, while D11 did not represent the first intersection of art with theory, scholarship, various disciplines of knowledge and discourse – *Les Immatériaux* is certainly a case at point, though with a strong aesthetic position – it was such the scale, ambition, and ideological emphasis on discourse that overshadowed any previous discourse-oriented events. D11 foregrounded the visual arts as a field of knowledge production that methodologically proceeds through a transdisciplinary fashion and towards a range of social concerns for the formation of a transcultural public sphere, and so established the exhibition as a cognitive tool for political analysis and cultural critique on a global context. It was a significant attempt – though its self-proclaimed 'paradigm' shift and 'spectacular difference' were overestimated – to forward a radical position for a new global art and curating as a counterpoint not only to the exuberance of the art market and the spectacle but also to the historical Modernist understanding of art. In the following years, large-scale exhibitions and biennials will become almost

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For Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, '… in spite of its radical attempts to rethink the discourse of contemporary art, Documenta 11 did not succeed in disrupting the West's drive for global hegemony. Its interrogation of the possibility of avant-garde action was criticized as a very conservative and institutional interpretation of contemporary culture, one that emphasized precisely the occidental paradigms that Documenta 11 targeted in its counternarrative. Although the artworks represented a global perspective on contemporary art and visual culture, the overriding structural perspective was still that of the Western world. The scopic regime of the panopticon was fully at work in the meticulous ordering of chaotic events, which spoke to a peculiar occidental tendency to objectify and fix reality. […] The exhibition thus represented the latest attempt to order the universe in line with the unequal relationship between the West and the rest of the world.' Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, 'Ordering the Universe: Documenta 11 and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze', *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 81-89 (86).

[84] The term 'Platform' is defined as follows: 'an open encyclopedia for the analysis of late modernity; a network of relationships; an open form for organizing knowledge; a non-hierarchical model of representation; a compendium of voices, cultural, artistic, and knowledge circuits. Enwezor, 'The Black Box', p. 49.

entirely interwoven with the mainstream international system and the interests of the market. Curatorial attempts to reinvent the exhibition format marked an ever-increased tendency to self-reflective discursivity, to the point of eschewing the display of art. Bruce Ferguson pointedly asks whether the recent shift to discursive exhibition forms, especially in biennials, is symptomatic of a 'crisis' in the field – indicating an 'exhaustion or "saturation"' of the biennial model to produce genuine, critical alternatives to the spectacular, no longer based on 'either market values or a surplus of the theory' – or, instead, a promising interest in the potential of exhibitions 'in/towards the production of knowledge' for contemporary art.[85]

IV. The poetics of *Documenta 12*: Discovery and production over representation

Within this context of increased signs of 'exhaustion' and possible counter-positions, Buergel – being acutely aware of the inherent constraints of Documenta itself – confronts, just like his predecessors, the curatorial challenge of how to present art from diverse cultural contexts and simultaneously distance from the spectacle and the instrumentalizing forces of the market. Instead of turning into the domain of the discursive and formulating certain precepts that would underwrite the ethico-political urgency of his project, Buergel set out to search for a critical alternative to the canonical and the directives of the market with a renewed interest in the exhibition itself and its aesthetics. He attempts a critical position, which foregrounds the mediality of the exhibition and its experiential force using the 'migration of form', a term charged with modernist undertones, as the exhibition's operating mechanism. The bold pronouncement of D12 as 'an exhibition without form' accords with the stated aim to provide 'aesthetic experience in its true sense', namely 'to dispense with preordained categories and arrive at a plateau where art communicates itself and on its own terms.'[86] What is at stake, then, in the affirmation of formlessness is a certain notion and function of the exhibition, and so a certain poetics, which valorises the aesthetic experience and allows art to express itself unconstrained from determinate concepts and prescriptive discourses. On a first level, we are presented here with a 'non-hylomorphic' kind of curating in the sense that theory is not there to apply its

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[85] Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg, 'Talking and Thinking About Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity', in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 360-375 (372-373, 365).
[86] Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', pp. 11, 12.

'form' to the 'matter' of art, and in this respect D12 takes its place into a curatorial genealogy of 'formlessness' that, in its multiple manifestations, can be traced back to Szeemann's *Attitudes*.

Buergel and Noack are explicit: '…we are doing an exhibition in order to discover, rather than illustrate, something; it's not about representation, it's about production.'[87] This sharp contrast between representation and discovery reveals a kind of poetics that dismisses any regulated order that would threaten to reduce art to mere illustration or explication, and advances instead the conception of the exhibition as 'a medium in its own right' with its own productive potential.[88] Accordingly, the intention is neither to provide the usual survey by 'simply lining up "best artists of the world"' nor to embrace 'all-encompassing concepts' or to 'favour geopolitical identity (à la "art from India").'[89] Contrary to such habitual exhibition practices that tend to impose a predefined framework of interpretation or to succumb to the art market hierarchies, the understanding of the exhibition as itself a medium allows for the 'production of an experiential space'.[90] Unlike D11's almost literal reflection of life, the organizers claim that 'art is experienced in particular situations', away from the 'all-encompassing immediacy' of our everyday context, therefore can help us to critically 'negotiate the relationship between art and life' and induce new forms of thinking our condition in the present.[91] It is not accidental that Buergel uses the metaphor of 'laboratory' – familiar to us from Szeemann's process-based attitude and Lyotard's performative perspective – to stress the experimental and productive function of the exhibition. From this viewpoint, 'mediality', as we will see, takes on a far expanded aesthetic dimension – creative, ethical, political, and ontological – than the restrictive understanding as 'artistic medium' and the ongoing debates on the creative role of the 'curator-qua-artist' that dominated the curatorial field ever since Szeemann's creative paradigm.

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[87] Clare Carolin, 'It's Not About Representation, it's About Production: Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack in Conversation with Clare Carolin', *Untitled*, no. 43 (Autumn 2007), pp. 4-11 (6).

[88] Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 12. See also Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel, 'General Information: About the Exhibition', in *Documenta 12 Press Kit*: *Press Conference on 13 June 2007 in Kassel*, pp. 1-42 <http://www.metabol.net/d12/Press_engl.pdf> [accessed 10 February 2015]: 'But what about the poetics of the show? We think of the exhibition as a medium, a move away from representation towards production' (p. 3).

[89] Ibid.; Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 11.

[90] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, 'Documenta 12 - 100 Days of Art in Kassel' <http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=aussttelung&L=1> [accessed 10 February 2016].

[91] Noack and Buergel, *Documenta 12 Press Kit*, p. 3.

'The documenta 12 knows no programmatic statement', Buergel proclaimed in the Press Conference.[92] Instead, he introduced three 'leitmotifs', which 'emerged directly from looking at art', as open questions for art and the audience to 'correspond with' rather than to illustrate: *Is modernity our antiquity? What is bare life? What is to be done?*[93] The first regards the legacy and fate of modernity today, whether it is 'dead or alive'. According to Buergel, the condition of modernity, as distinguished from modernism, 'seems to be in ruins', particularly its Enlightenment and colonialist aspects. Nonetheless, it 'still' exerts an influence on contemporary artists and we still apply modern categories, such as 'identity' and 'subject', or we perceive the world by appealing to modernity's universal visions and forms. This ambiguity and tension – itself a kind of crisis – suggests, in Buergel's view, that today 'we are both outside and inside modernity.'[94] A long now compelling question of how art relates to modern life, in D12, coupled with antiquity, seems to point to both directions: the melancholy modernism that locates us in modernity's ruins and a past worthy of reclaiming.[95] As Buergel claims, we are both 'repelled' by the decline of the

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[92] See 'An Overview of Documenta 12', *Documenta 12 Press Kit*, p. 5.

[93] Buergel in interview to Carolin, 'It's Not About Representation', p. 10. For a presentation of the three leitmotifs in D12's website, see Roger M. Buergel, 'Leitmotifs' (December 2005) <http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=leitmotive&L=1> [accessed 12 May 2016].

[94] Buergel, 'Leitmotifs', n.p. See also Sylvia Liska, 'Roger M. Buergel, Rob Storr with Sylvia Liska' (April 2006), in Sylvia Liska, ed., *The Secession Talks: Exhibitions in Conversation 1998-2010* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, n.d.), pp. 442-457 (448). Here Buergel stresses his interest in 'modernity' as a condition of complexity difficult to pin down, following T. J. Clark's suggestion, in his *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (1999), of 'modernism, as one possible answer to this condition' in the sense that modernism is our antiquity.

[95] For a compelling charting of a historiography of the question of the relation of art to modern life – first raised by Charles Baudelaire in 1863 and having been asked in different ways by thinkers such as Walter Benjamin and T.J. Clark – and a discussion of how the coupling of modernity with the idea of antiquity underlines 'the very complicated co-dependent and simultaneously antagonistic relationship between the two', see Mark Lewis, 'Is Modernity our Antiquity?', *Afterall* , no. 14 (Autumn/Winter, 2006), pp. 109-117 (117), published as contribution to Georg Schöllhammer, ed., *Documenta Magazine No 1-3, 2007 Reader* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 40-65.
The question of modernity's antiquity was modestly addressed in the curatorial gesture of discreetly hanging on the stairwell of the Fridericianum a copy of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (oil transfer, 1920), which Walter Benjamin bought in 1921 and bequeathed to the religious historian Gershom Scholem. Benjamin famously interpreted it as representing the 'Angel of History': facing the past, the angel looks in horror at the detritus of a catastrophe (a symbolism of the destruction that history was depositing before him), but is driven by the storm of progress towards the future, which lies behind him. Easily missed, in a display case in the basement of the Neue Galerie, was a postcard reproduction of Edouard Manet's painting *L' Exposition Universelle* (1867), made by Buergel himself. The postcard of Manet's painting, which according to T.J. Clark marks the emergence of spectacle in mid nineteenth-century Paris, was exhibited in a kind of tension next to a postcard of Johann Heinrich Tischbein's 1783 painting of the Fridericianum, the first public museum of Europe.

modernist ideals and 'seduced' by a yearning for a utopian vision that there might be 'a common planetary horizon for all'.[96]

The question of 'bare life' is borrowed from the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's critical concept of the Western political tradition. Agamben addresses an increasingly condition of capture and subjugation of life to sovereign power, taking the figure of *Homo Sacer* as representative of the state of sovereign exception that determines bare life, particularly its recent applications to political statelessness. 'Bare life' is a life excluded from its form of life, and so reduced to the status of mere physical existence (*zoē*). Agamben calls, in response, for the possibility of a 'form-of-life' in which no divisive apparatuses are possible that work to produce a state of exception within life and politics.[97] Drawing on artistic practices rather than Agamben's philosophical deliberations, Buergel addresses 'bare life' more generally as both the existential and political aspect of 'the sheer vulnerability and complete exposure of being'. Critical art today, Buergel claims, most often presents an 'apocalyptic' condition of the human subject totally determined by the system. However, there is also 'a lyrical or even ecstatic dimension to it', in the sense of 'a freedom for new and unexpected possibilities' in relation to the world we live in; 'the capacity of people to create out of nothing.' In this regard, Buergel suggests, contemporary art – especially dance and performance – plays a key role in dissolving 'the radical separation between painful subjection and joyous liberation' or, at least, showing 'the precarious dialectics between subjection and emancipation' (Fig. 5.13).[98]

The last weighty question made famously by Lenin (*chto delat*, 1921), though differently, refers here to 'education' in a twofold meaning: as the 'mediation' of art and the additional meaning that the German word 'Bildung' for education takes as

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[96] Buergel, 'Leitmotifs', n.p.

[97] Agamben outlines a philosophical history of Western politics as the production of the excluded, following the manifestations of *Homo sacer* from Roman exiles to medieval outlaws, modernity's concentration camps – as paradigmatic of the way a state of exception is territorialized – to stateless persons and refugees of our times, particularly the prisoners in Guantánamo. Following Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt, he argues that life is progressively captured in biopolitical sovereign power. Yet, his critique does not suggest a 'return' to an origin or an idea of *zoē*, but calls, in response, for the rather abstract possibility of a *form-of-life*: a life without any presupposed qualities, which cannot be separated and excluded from its form and in which it is no longer possible to produce a space for bare life. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998 [1995]); Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000 [1996]).

[98] See Buergel, 'Leitmotifs', n.p.; Buergel in interview to Sylvia Liska, pp. 451-452.

'generation' or 'constitution'. It is noteworthy that, for Buergel, education or mediation are 'integral' to the exhibition's 'composition' rather than 'external' to it,[99] taking therefore a broader meaning than the auxiliary educational programmes and tour guides that usually complement exhibitions, let alone academicism or the growing discursive events in art fairs. The audience, Buergel explains, educate themselves by 'experiencing things aesthetically', hence the challenge for Documenta is how to mediate artistic forms and content 'without sacrificing their particularity'; on the other hand, the global condition of art provides the stage for 'a potentially all-inclusive public debate' and the generation or constitution ('Bildung') of a transcultural public sphere. Within this context, he is concerned to avoid both 'the devil (didacticism, academia) and the deep blue sea (commodity fetishism)' suggesting aesthetic education as a 'viable alternative' to them.[100]

The questions of modernity, bare life, and education constitute steering investigations for the construction of the exhibition rather than sheer themes or structuring principles. Consistent with their model of production and discovery, Buergel and Noack claim that the questions were not 'devised'; rather, they 'suggested themselves in the process of coming to terms with contemporary art', serving as their 'enabling fantasies' prior to the show.[101] The musical terminology is thus not accidental. According to Buergel, these motifs are both specific and open enough so that they may 'correspond, overlap or disintegrate – like a musical score.'[102] And while they are part of D12, the exhibition does not explicitly reflect them and the artworks on display are not deployed to illustrate them. Buergel speaks of them as 'ampli-signifiers; they create a horizon of possibility, but are simultaneously vague enough not to imprison anyone.' For new things emerge and coalesce in the process, which may not be strictly connected to the leitmotifs, nonetheless are significant since 'an exhibition must perform its own undoing.'[103] The leitmotifs functioned as a productive means to foster debate and generate a range of responses, at times contradictory and competing, in anticipation of the show. More importantly, the aim was to originate discourse from within the interests, preoccupations, and knowledge of local contexts, first and foremost the city of Kassel

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[99] Buergel in interview to Sylvia Liska, p. 453.
[100] Buergel, 'Leitmotifs', n.p.
[101] Noack and Buergel, *Documenta 12 Press Kit*, pp. 15, 3.
[102] Buergel, 'Leitmotifs', n.p. See also Marco Scotini, 'Documenta 12: Interview with Roger Buergel', *Flash Art*, vol. 40, no. 254 (May-June 2007), p. 94.
[103] Buergel in interview to Carolin, 'It's Not About Representation', p. 10.

with the constitution of the 'documenta 12 Advisory Board' (the *Beirat*) in advance of the exhibition.[104] The Advisory Board reveals how local knowledge and social issues become an integral part of D12's compositional process with a long-lasting engagement, avoiding either an urbanist approach of the kind of dX or community-based art of the kind of Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* (2002) in D11.[105] This discursive, communicative process was extended to a translocal space with D12's Magazine project, in which responses to the leitmotifs originated from diverse localities inflected by specific histories and contexts.

The Magazine project

The 'documenta 12 magazines', or else the Magazine project, is an international network of 94 print and online publications of varied direction and focus – art, culture, and theory – from more than fifty countries, which were invited prior to the show to respond to the leitmotifs in their chosen format and individual contributors. The initiative, under the co-ordination of Georg Schöllhammer, editor of the Austrian art magazine *Springerin*, arose from the curators' concern to find a productive format that would allow Documenta to access 'local' knowledge in the world and

[104] For two years prior to the show, the attempt was made to discuss and consider the social and political significance of the three leitmotifs in relation to the city of Kassel through the constitution of the 'Documenta 12 Advisory Board'. For the first time in Documenta history, the Advisory Board consisted of about forty local 'experts', who brought their own experience, knowledge, and viewpoints in various areas, linking the leitmotifs to contexts and topics of specific, local relevance such as Kassel's history as an industrial city, its post-war reconstruction, current educational situation, problems related to unemployment, migration, and exclusion. The work of the Advisory Board was not limited to aspects of conceptual development, communication, and collaboration with artists. It 'continues in the city' with the development, independently of the exhibition, of local activities that put the leitmotifs into practice in diverse contexts, especially with education programmes and initiatives for children and youth or unemployed workers, encouraging the public to relate the D12 questions and art to their own lives. The Board also directed the programme of free-lunch lectures that took place at the Documenta-Halle every day during the show. See Noack and Buergel, 'documenta 12 Advisory Board', in *Documenta 12 Press Kit*, p. 22. For an interview of Ayse Gülec, director of the Kulturzentrum Schlachthof in Kassel and spokesperson of the Documenta 12 Advisory Board, see <http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=1388&L=1> [accessed 12 May 2016].

[105] In an interview to Jennifer Allen, prior to the opening of the exhibition, the organizers stressed the idea that the leitmotifs should relate practically to the life of people in Kassel, which necessarily affects our understanding of the 'exhibition space'. 'It's important', Buergel claims, 'not to invent something in the style of a Hirschhorn monument – not to have our own little political theater. That's why we worked with the Schlachthof, a cultural center … in Kassel. […] We have to be able to create a language in which to discuss topics beyond belief systems or established sets of values […] to use the exhibition space as a forum for something like unconditional discourse.' Regarding the Advisory Board initiative, Ruth Noack emphasizes: 'The idea isn't to bring social work into the exhibition, to perform social work; you can't just take something out of the city and put into Documenta.' Jennifer Allen, 'What is to Be Done?: Jennifer Allen Talks with the Curators of Documenta 12', *Artforum*, vol. 45, no. 9 (May 2007), pp. 173-174, 177, 392 (174).

communicate it in a 'trans-local' space and public, while escaping the usual ramifications of international exhibitions: the travelling-curator model in search of the new and the 'other' worldwide, coextensively the subsumption to the mainstream of international art market or the presentation of geopolitical identities and positions of exoticism.[106]

The Magazine project aspires to a worldwide cultural collaboration in inquiry processes and knowledge formation on the basis of the common relevance of the leitmotifs as a means to generate heterogeneous responses from within diverse local contexts. So while the questions were discussed in worldwide editorial groups and reflected the specificities and priorities of the local contexts of the participants, the intention was to exceed regionalism and create a space for 'exchange, debate, controversy, and translation – a many-layered communication process' that, as Buergel points out, would reveal as yet unforeseen issues, 'things we can use for the exhibition.'[107] The process leading to the exhibition, being complemented with a series of far-flung workshops and online meetings, generated a wide range of material – 650 articles, theoretical or illustrated essays, interviews, commentaries, artists' inserts – which in its entirety was published on the intranet platform of D12 magazines and was then made accessible to the public in the online journal of D12 (www. documenta.de) during the show. A selection of this material was published in anticipation of the show in the form of three issues – one for each of the respective questions – entitled *Modernity? Life! Education:* as a Reader intended to function as 'a navigation aid for readers and visitors'.[108] The process of communication continued during the exhibition with the presentation of participating magazines in the Documenta-Halle and their inclusion in the programme of the daily Lunch Lectures with the public (Fig. 5.14).

It is notable that the invited magazines were in large independent publications with small budget and circulation – artists' projects, newspaper supplements, university journals, online platforms, political fanzines – rather than the leading trade journals and art magazines in the mainstream cultural circuit.[109] Explaining the selection criteria and driving aims of the project, Georg Schöllhammer maintains that

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[106] See 'Documenta 12 Magazines', *Documenta 12 Press Kit*, p. 18.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid. See Georg Schöllhammer, ed., *Documenta Magazine No 1-3, 2007 Reader* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007).
[109] For a self-presentation of all the participating magazines, see ibid., pp. 640-651.

they were cautious to avoid magazines that 'work in the direction of the strong forces of the market and lifestyle industries' as well as academic journals for their propensity to 'conclude arguments'. He rather refers to magazines as 'forums' and calls their editorial groups 'small academies' precisely to address a mediating process that constantly re-examines the structural relation between art, theory, and its audiences.[110] In this sense, the project intended to sidestep both the market tenets and academicism, favouring instead a more inclusive and democratic structure so as to create an alternative space for debate and contribute to the development of an intellectual network on international level with a long-term collaboration.[111]

The Magazine project appears ambitious in its aims and, in many respects, in continuity with dX and D11's commitment to transdisciplinary discourse and self-institutional reflection. According to Schöllhammer, D12 draws on the discursive formats of its last two predecessors, especially Enwezor's 'deterritorialization' of Documenta with the intercontinental Platforms, which demonstrate that the world can no longer be interpreted in strict centre-periphery logic. Yet, D12 took a different approach to decentralization. It intended to avoid the formation and presentation of knowledge in the classic academic symposium-publication format, and work instead 'in truly decentralized fashion' with the production of discourse in very diverse forms in the editorial 'little academies' worldwide. This is, Schöllhammer claims, the distinctive characteristic of the Magazine project: it enables different forms of interpretations of the history of contemporary art to arise, no longer reliant on the marginal-centre distinction. For what is conventionally seen as 'marginal' is not, 'when it's being looked at from the perspective of the respective centres in which the "marginal" lives.'[112] Accordingly, the editorial teams were called to make the exhibition's guiding questions 'their own'[113] within a self-organized, independent format with the potential to develop a sustained network of cultural collaboration worldwide. If we add to these points, the curatorial decision to circumvent the

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[110] Georg Schöllhammer, 'Editorial', in ibid., n.p.; Georg Schöllhammer interviewed by Elena Zanichelli, 'Documenta 12 Magazines', n.p. <http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=1389&L=1> [accessed 12 February 2016].
[111] According to Schöllhammer, 'The documenta 12 magazines was an editing project where forums for publicity were created which, even if they are very specific, open up from within the working space, spaces which appear to remain open even after the end of the documenta.' Ibid.
[112] Ibid. Schöllhammer points out: 'Part of the criticism the exhibition has sparked is that it puts the marginal into the centre – what great criticism! It's not marginal when it's being looked at from the perspective of the respective centres in which the "marginal" lives.'
[113] Schöllhammer, 'Editorial', n.p. See also *Documenta 12 Press Kit*, p. 18.

international academic star system, which largely informed the invited theorists and intellectuals in the two previous Documenta, then the Magazine project appears not merely as their continuation but as their advanced radicalization.

The 'migration of form' methodology and organizing principle

The leitmotifs were, therefore, a productive tool for the opening of discourse and multiplicity of debate prior to the show, serving as points of reference rather than entering the exhibition in an intellectual form as precepts through which it would theoretically and coherently develop, as it happened in D11. Since the exhibition is conceived as a medium, the diversity of works, Buergel and Noack proclaimed, are 'organized aesthetically in relation to one another, so that a productive exchange between work, space and audience emerges.'[114] The leitmotifs serve to initiate this exchange as they intertwine in and out of the exhibition, and the visitors are invited to fend for themselves and take up any possible answers in what is to be seen *in situ*. For the organizing principle of the exhibition, the curators contend, is not the leitmotifs themselves but the curatorial premise of the 'migration of form'. They succinctly explain it in the Press Kit as the traceable movement of forms across different places, eras and media that allows for the creation of 'speculative relationships' between and among works of art. The aim was to avoid a privileged narrative of interpretation and liberate the individual works from 'over-determined and over-determining, stale, identity-based perceptions', so as to encourage the direct confrontation with the artwork proper.[115]

Given the centrality of the 'migration of form' in the production of the exhibition alongside its residual ambiguity, Buergel and Noack discussed its meaning and function in a 2008, post-D12 text to compensate for missing explications in the exhibition catalogue. They warn, however, that the deployment of an organizing principle does not mean that D12 is structured on the grounds of a 'coherent rule or strict concept' that could be elevated to a 'universal law' or overarching category independently of the works on display and the 'specific encounters' between them and the audience. Rather the migration of form entails the creation of an 'expansive layering of correlations' that work 'thematically' and 'aesthetically on changing

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[114] Ibid., p. 5.
[115] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

levels of complexity' in the presentation of art.[116] It is an alternative methodology that emphasizes curatorial speculation and ambivalence and, by necessity, involves a viewer 'willing' to make sense of what is there presented – 'viewing as an act of interpretation'. The exhibition display generates meaning as a 'form of engagement' between the viewer and the artwork in specific conditions of experience,[117] rather than relying on a prevailing framework of interpretation for the purpose of a coherent narrative. Instead, any kind of coherence is here based on the recognition of the dynamism of forms. The movement of forms, the curators maintain, is historically confirmed as they traverse various geographical, historical, cultural contexts, and media such that most of them 'come with rather a long history' and may 'extend well into the future.'[118]

This means that the notion of 'contemporaneity' in art is deliberately undefined; neither fixed to a concept such as 'postcolonialism' in D11 nor attached to certain periodizations and chronological timelines for a recentralized view of art history as in dX's combining a survey of current artistic production with 'retroperspecives' of particular historical practices from 1945 onwards; not even limited to Szeemann's commitment to the 'present' in D5. 'Contemporary does not mean that the works originated yesterday', Buergel and Noack pointed out. 'They must be meaningful for people today. documenta 12 is concerned with both historical lines of development in art and unexpected concurrences.'[119] Accordingly, relationships were to be traced between diverse works of art that bring forth similar patterns and formal resonances occurring, or 'migrating', across temporal and cultural boundaries. Form appears here as a vital force that emerges within historical specificities and certain contexts, but also traverses them and produces their difference. There is a legacy to this approach to history that evokes particularly the mobile methodology of Aby Warburg's legendary *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929).[120]

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[116] Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts on the Migration of Form', *Afterall*, no. 18 (Summer 2008), pp. 5-15 (5).

[117] Ibid.

[118] Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 12.

[119] Buergel and Noack quoted in *Documenta Retrospective: d12* <http://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_12#> [accessed 9 May 2016].

[120] The art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929) conceived the *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929), now at the Warburg Institute in London, towards the end of his life and it was left unfinished. At the time of his death, it was comprised of more than sixty panels covered with black fabric, on which were displayed nearly two thousand images of a wide range of subjects, mostly of European and Middle-Eastern origin. In addition to drawings, paintings, and sculptures, the heterogeneous material included photographs of textiles, images of artefacts from different cultures and epochs, astrological charts,

Drawing on the historical mobility of forms, Buergel and Noack presented a mix of artworks across diverse timelines and from different geographical and cultural contexts. Rather than merely sourcing the new and reflecting the present, as is usually the case in international exhibitions, the range of exhibits reveals the curatorial propensity to 'move deeply into the past' and trace its relations to the present in a way that upholds certain values and radical tenets.[121] The mobility of forms, or formlessness of the exhibition, attests to an aversion to received narratives and their established values as well as the resistance to what counts as novel, fashionable, and familiar in the present. By looking back, the curatorial aim is to escape the habitual survey show of contemporary art, intended to identify and so establish recent paradigmatic trends and practices worldwide. Rather D12, Buergel ambitiously pronounced, 'breaks with the dogma of innovation.'[122]

Hence, the selection turns toward lesser-known, overlooked, marginalized artists with a notable tendency to non-spectacular, modest works eschewing the art world 'stars' choices. The presented artworks, dated from the post-war period to the present, prioritized non-canonical art from Eastern Europe, Africa, South America, and India, highlighting different historical moments from those informing the Western modernist lineages. The exhibition is also credited for a remarkable proportion of female artists (roughly fifty percent) and an emphasis on feminist conceptual art from 1960s-1970s, rarely seen in this range in such international exhibitions. Most notably, the artworks were presented alongside an assortment of non-Western historical artefacts such as Persian calligraphy from the sixteenth-century, a Chinese lacquer

scientific diagrams, maps, manuscripts, stamps, postcards as well as newspaper clippings and popular imagery of his time. Warburg attempted to construct a collective historical memory that demonstrates the 'afterlife' of antiquity up to the present through the tracing of hidden 'elective affinities' and 'pathos formulas' – recurring motifs of gesture and bodily expressions – in a materialist project of the life experience in continuity. It envisioned a way of looking and thinking based on juxtapositions and associations among disparate objects that challenged the disciplinary boundaries and rigorous methods of art history. The *Atlas* anticipated the subsequent decontextualized approach of André Malraux's 'Museum Without Walls' (1947). For several commentators, particularly in the German Press, Buergel's methodology of the migration of form is indebted to Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*. See Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, 'documenta 12', *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, vol. 6, no. 3 (September 2007), pp. 33-47 (40-41).

[121] Buergel and Noack quoted in *Documenta Retrospective: d12* <http://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_12#> [accessed 9 May 2016].

[122] 'Documenta 12 will be the first documenta which reaches back uninhibitedly into the past. It breaks with the dogma of innovation, chooses not to be merely an exhibition that reflects only the present. Why should it matter when a piece of art is created? It's only important that it feels current to us.' Roger M. Buergel quoted in Hanno Rauterberg, 'Revolte in Kassel', *Die Zeit*, 12 April 2007, cited in Anthony Spira, 'Infancy, History and Rehabilitation at documenta 12', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (August 2008), pp. 228-239 (230).

work panel and Indian miniatures from the late seventeenth-century, an eighteenth-century Mogul album from northern India, an Iranian carpet from 1800, nineteenth-century Japanese woodcuts, and bridal veils from Tajikistan (Fig. 5.15). The oldest exhibit, a Persian drawing of a landscape dating from the fourteenth or fifteenth-century was presented as exemplary of the movement of forms across broad timeframes with obvious appropriations among Iran, China and Mongolia. This wide array of exhibits, which defies a cohesive, rationalized model in favour of a more fragmented exhibition structure, was spread across D12's six main venues: the Museum Fridericianum and Documenta-Halle – Documenta's traditional venues – Kassel's Neue Galerie, the Kulturzentrum Schlachthof, the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, which houses an exquisite collection of Old Masters and was used in Documenta for first time, and the especially constructed, temporary Aue-Pavillon (Fig. 5.16).[123]

It is noteworthy that placing historical artefacts or non-art alongside contemporary art is not unprecedented in the history of Documenta. Harald Szeemann's 'Individual Mythologies' in D5 stands out as a seminal example of this approach, which was controversially advanced in his 1980s exhibitions as a poetics of compositional associations through a thematic and more subjective perspective. Moreover, the interest in the presentation of non-Western cultural practices within Western institutional frameworks and the corollary debates about its pitfalls have been increased ever since the seminal *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition (1989),

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[123] With the inclusion of the Kulturforum Schlachthof [Cultural Centre] and the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, where Documenta artworks were integrated into the Old Masters collection, D12 expanded far beyond the city limits of Kassel. The D12 venues also include the restaurant elBulli in Roses, Spain. The Catalan chef Ferran Adrià, famous for his inventive molecular cooking, was invited as a participating artist in Documenta. His contribution consisted, instead, of declaring elBulli a distant venue of D12, the so-called 'G pavilion'. Every day, during the100-day course of the exhibition, Roger Buergel selected two visitors at random, who were invited to eat at elBulli. See 'Documenting Documenta: Ferran Adrià', film, 4.37 min, directed by David Pujol <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9uByt57Cz4> [accessed 15 May 2016].
The Aue-Pavillon is a temporary construction, a huge 9,500-square-metre plastic structure, based on greenhouse architecture. It was built in Karlsaue park, in front of the Orangerie, interrelating with and cutting the axes of the garden layout. The Aue-Pavillon evoked Bode's initial plan to construct a temporary building on this site for D1, and it was originally referred to by Buergel as the 'Crystal Palace' – the eponymous complex of glasshouses with its utopian modern transparency, created by Joseph Paxton as the venue of the first World Exhibition (1851). In terms of the other venues, it signals the 'contemporary'; it was intended as a decisive move away from the white cube as well as made critical allusions to today's commercial art fairs. The French architects Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal were invited to design it. However, the pavilion proved quite problematic for the display of art because of the heat, the humidity, the yellowish, lit light and it had to be modified with reflective curtains and grey polyester canopies. In the end, Lacaton & Vassal were highly critical of the various compromises that had to be made to meet the needs of display of particular artworks.

curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.[124] *Magiciens* was positioned as direct response to the heavily criticized for its decontextualized approach to tribal artefacts and retaining the perspective of the dominant Western modernism *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, MoMa, New York, 1984.[125] Contrary to the ethnocentric, colonialist attitude of *'Primitivism'*, *Magiciens* claimed to be the first worldwide exhibition of contemporary art by presenting on an even footing contemporary artists from Western centres of artistic production with ritual objects, artefacts, and performances by living artists from outside Europe and North America. It was an ideologically charged exhibition, which highlighted the issue of equality between Western and non-Western cultures alongside a humanist, spiritual notion of artistic creation and an intuitive

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[124] The *Magiciens de la Terre* ['The Magicians of the Earth'] was held at the fifth floor of the Centre Georges Pompidou (Musée national d'art moderne) and the Grande Halle of the Parc de La Villete in Paris,18 May - 14 August 1989. The exhibition was curated by a team, including Mark Francis, Aline Luque, and André Magnin, led by Jean-Hubert Martin, then director of the Musée national d'art moderne. It was originally intended as a replacement of the traditional biennial format when Martin was appointed director of the Paris Biennale in 1985. Instead of contributions being selected by cultural representatives from each participating country, as it was traditionally the case, Martin proposed an exhibition that would explore and present the practices of non-Western living artists alongside contemporary artists from the United States and Western Europe on equal terms. He assembled a team of curators, anthropologists, and regional specialists, who travelled throughout the world in an exploratory research to select the non-Western participants, most of whom were invited to develop their work on the exhibition site in order to facilitate artistic interaction. See Jean-Hubert Martin, ed., *Magiciens de la Terre*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989). For a recent, comprehensive study of the show, see Lucy Steeds and other authors, *Making Art Global (Part 2): 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989*, *Afterall* Exhibition Histories series (London: Afterall, 2013).

[125] *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* was curated by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe at the MoMa, New York, 27 September 1984 - 15 January1985. The exhibition presented non-Western cultural objects such as masks and totems in juxtaposition with painting and sculpture of modern and contemporary Western artists. While the aim was to juxtapose the traditions of modern and tribal art, it reconfirmed the old perspective of the inspirational discovery of 'primitive' art by the modern artists since the early twentieth-century. Through the notion of 'affinity', defined as shared formal characteristics and concerns, the exhibition was criticized for erasing all differences and proposing a universalistic conception of artistic creation, written from a hegemonic Western modern perspective. The non-Western objects were extracted from their specific cultural contexts and functions, and they were aestheticized on the basis of their formal qualities – without any informational texts – as subordinate referents to modern and contemporary Western artworks. *'Primitivism'* gave rise to heated debates about issues such as the over-aestheticization of objects and decontextualization, the representation of the ethnographic 'other' and cultural differences, and the neo-colonial attitude in reinforcing modernist aesthetics by means of 'primitive' art and a formalist agenda. See William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe, eds, *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984).
For the debates that the exhibition prompted, see Thomas McEvilley, 'Doctor Lawyer Indian Chief: "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art" at the Museum of Modern Art in 1984', *Artforum*, vol. 23, no. 3 (November 1984), pp. 54-60, followed by an exchange of polemical letters with Rubin and Varnedoe in subsequent issues (February 1985 and May 1985), all repr. in Bill Beckley and David Shapiro, eds, *Uncontrollable Beauty: Toward a New Aesthetics* (New York: Allworth Press, 1998), pp. 149-239; also James Clifford, 'Histories of the Tribal and the Modern', *Art in America*, vol. 73, no. 4 (April 1985), pp. 164-215 with a response by Kirk Varnedoe in the following issue, 'On the Claims and Critics of the "Primitivism" Show', *Art in America*, vol. 73, no. 5 (May 1985), pp. 11-13; Hall Foster, 'The "Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art', *October*, vol. 34 (Autumn 1985), pp. 45-70.

aesthetic, replacing the term 'artist' with that of the 'magician' to escape a paternalistic attitude towards tribal art. Despite its equality claims, *Magiciens* was criticized for removing artists from their socio-cultural context and effacing their cultural specificity through a Western aesthetic gaze; coextensively, for exoticizing their practices and imposing a neo-colonialist attitude that allowed the contemporary art system to co-opt what was seen as 'other' (Fig.5.17).[126]

Magiciens, however flawed, is widely acknowledged as the large-scale exhibition that signalled the beginning of the global perspective of the contemporary art world that will mark the 1990s. It raised the issue of the inclusion of contemporary art and artists from non-Western centres of production and incited, in the light of its critique, subsequent discussions about globalization and large-scale exhibitions, difference and representation of 'otherness' in the so-called 'identity exhibitions', and the role of display in interpretations and encounters with the 'other'. Thirteen years later, following David's shift of perspective, Enwezor attempted more pointedly, though not without shortcomings, to critically respond to Martin's transcultural ethnographic approach by denouncing the exoticizing gaze of the 'other' and the 'elsewhere' through the political focus on 'postcolonial constellation' in contemporary culture.[127] Within this context of increased consideration of the politics of representation on the level of structural presentation, D12's methodological approach instigated extended debate, as we will see, for echoing the decontextualized

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[126] See, for instance, Jean Fisher, 'Fictional Histories: "Magiciens de la Terre" – The Invisible Labyrinth', *Artforum*, vol. 28, no. 1 (September 1989), pp. 158-162, repr. in Steeds and other authors, pp. 248-258. For an important discussion about the failings of the exhibition's approach with regard to its potential 'neo-colonialist subtext', see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'The Whole Earth Show: An Interview with Jean-Hubert Martin by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh', *Art in America,* vol. 77, no. 5 (May 1989), pp. 150-159, 213. For a broad range of responses to the exhibition, see *Third Text* (special issue dedicated to 'Magiciens de la Terre'), Rasheed Araeen, ed., no. 6 (Spring 1989), trans. from *Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne*, Yves Michaud, ed., no. 28 (Spring 1989). The issue contains all the texts published in *Les Cahiers* with the exception of Lucy Lippard's text 'Esprits captifs' and the addition of a Foreword by Rasheed Araeen, 'Our Bauhaus Others' Mudhouse', pp. 3-17, repr. in Steeds and other authors, pp. 238-247.

[127] On the critical issues surrounding transcultural curating with specific focus on the evolution from 'Primitivism' to *Magiciens*, to D11, see Johanne Lamoureux, 'From Form to Platform: The Politics of Representation and the Representation of Politics', *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 64-73. According to Lamoureux, Martin's exhibition is laudable for calling attention to the issues tied to 'politics of representation in Western art institutions – but it attempted to do so without politics, and it failed to address what representation and presentation structurally entail.' D11, in contrast, 'had a reflexivity that allowed its politics of representation to flip, double, and articulate a representation of politics, one that obviously informed and motivated both selection and presentation and made it possible to engage the global in a tone less condescending than that of the explorer' (73). See also in the same issue, Norman L. Kleeblatt, 'Identity Roller Coaster', *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 61-63; Reesa Greenberg, 'Identity Exhibitions: From *Magiciens de la terre* to Documenta 11', *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 90-94.

move of *Magiciens*, if not of *'Primitivism'*. What was particularly controversial was the curators' decision to remove contextual information so as to divert attention from the artists' names to the works on display and the appreciation of their aesthetic aspects through the tracing of formal correspondences.

Indeed, in an online interview on the occasion of the exhibition, the curators dismiss the information saturation, characteristic of contemporary art, as ideologically infused and prioritize active 'looking', slow contemplation, and speculation over 'reading', explication, and national identities to permit the works to 'speak' in themselves and create the conditions for the self-knowledge of the viewer. 'All this language-based discourse', Noack points out, 'has the problem of somehow cutting off potential from artworks. […] The written information, the text becomes *ersatz* for really looking and trying to teach yourself, and deciphering the formal languages of art.' Buergel, in turn, emphasizes that 'every individual should be able to walk freely without a passport' and he raises the question of the 'legitimacy of information':

> I don't think that information is neutral or value-free, and the same holds true of all kinds of display systems. […] Our world does not suffer from a lack of information. […] What is more important probably is to teach people how to deal with information.[128]

They, accordingly, diminished textual information in the exhibition space with the wall labels either totally missing or including no information about the artists' national identity, country of residency, and age as irrelevant to the cultural context. Analogous approach applies to the exhibition publications. Both the exhibition catalogue, which is ordered chronologically according to the date each work was created rather than alphabetically by the artists' names, and the so-called 'Picture book' – presenting merely photographs from the installation process in the various venues – without any text whatsoever attest to the value credited to 'looking' and the disregard of national geographies.[129] Following Buergel's call for 'walking freely without a passport', none of these publications serves as a guidebook or proper

[128] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, *Labels: Interview at Documenta 12 Kassel, Germany, 2007* (August 2007) <http://www.dmovies.net/documenta12/index.html> [accessed 2 March 2016] .
[129] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Bilderbuch*: *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007* (Cologne: Taschen, 2007).

navigational tool through the exhibition, and it is the collectively written Reader of the Magazine project that provides the 'theory catalogue' of Documenta.

What is at issue, then, is the responsibility of the viewers to discover alternative narratives by themselves, no longer in need of mediating discourses and instructive (con-)textual references. The elimination of mediating information aims to experiential immediacy, a kind of spectatorship that, as Buergel puts it, allows people to become themselves 'mediators'.[130] Yet, at the same time it problematically recalls the modernist affirmation of the aesthetic as a visual language in its own, as if any conceptual or textual information would encumber the expressive visibility of art that can only be directly experienced. Abstracted from a recognizable order or specific historical context, the works functioned primarily through their formal qualities and underlying relations so as to create anew the spatio-temporal conditions that would bring the diversity of exhibits together into aesthetic layers of potential correlations.[131] This characteristic way of bringing the past into the present seems, at first place, as random curatorial eclecticism, however it is informed by certain criteria. To elucidate their practice and resolve any ambiguities, Buergel and Noack provide in the aforementioned post-D12 text certain examples of constellations between and among the works that offer instructive points on how the migration of form, as the strategic tool of curatorial poetics, functions, for whom, and for what reason.

Constellations between and among works: Creating a 'situation' of the exhibition's 'compositional unfolding'

For instance, in a small room in the Fridericianum Museum were on display the Persian drawing (fourteenth or fifteenth-century) with evident appropriated Chinese forms; the porcelain *Prototype for the Wave* by the Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (2004); and the *Droguinhas* (1966) by Mira Schendel so as to create, we read, 'a force field or

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[130] Buergel, in 'Labels' <http://www.dmovies.net/documenta12/index.html> [accessed 2 March 2016].

[131] The curator Anthony Spira suggests the Berlin Saray Albums (*Diez Albums*), 14-16th centuries, displayed in the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, as the key work that 'provided a succinct motif for the entire exhibition.' Anthony Spira, 'Infancy, History and Rehabilitation at documenta 12', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (August 2008), pp. 228-239 (229-230). According to the catalogue entry, the eighteenth-century album was compiled by a Prussian ambassador. '… a loose collection of drawings and paintings […] of Persian, Chinese, Ottoman, and European origins, were taken out of their original historical and textual contexts and compiled into albums. […] Torn from their imperial and adventurous histories, the paintings are thrown back entirely to their visual expressivity.' Inka Gressel, '14-16 c.', in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007 Katalog/Catalogue*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), p. 16, cited in Spira, p. 230.

space of transition'.[132] Having studied the historical conditions that made the particular formal styles and techniques to move, the curators sidestep the context of their production and draw, instead, attention to the striking thematic, formal, and material similarities, especially the shared rendering of 'movement or flow' (Fig. 5.18-5.20).[133] Significantly, through the focus on formal correspondences among such disparate works, they are concerned to show that forms exceed the level of the object as supposedly essential qualities and relate to forms of being, or subjectivity.[134] In many occasions, Buergel and Noack resource to visual theorists Kaja Silverman and Leo Bersani as influential points of reference to claim that what they attempt with the 'migration of form' is to combine artistic formalism with a psychoanalytical formation of the subject – a subject of desire and active attention, in a state of constant revision and relationality with others and the world.[135] The *Droguinhas*, meaning 'Little nothings' in Portuguese, is a notable example of the 'interdependence between artistic form and forms of being.'[136] As the curators go on to explain, their fragile materiality, constant reinvention of form, and resistance to completion transmit such a remarkable sense of transience and 'flow of energy' – linked to Schendel's own experience of migration and exile – that the piece requires almost no contextual knowledge or 'institutional framing' for its reception; 'simply the act of care by an individual.'[137]

The interconnection between artistic forms and forms of subjectivity that eludes rigid comprehension is also made apparent in a constellation of works from the Aue-Pavillon. David Goldblatt's *The Transported of KwaNdebele* (1983), a photo series documenting the hard daily journey to work of black South Africans during Apartheid, is placed alongside the *Rubands*, bridal face veils from the nineteenth-century Tajikistan, and John McCracken's mandala painting *Kapai* (1970) (Fig. 5.21-5.23). Alongside formal similarities in colour and abstract patterns, the curators call

[132] Noack and Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts', p. 6.
[133] Ibid., p. 8.
[134] Ibid., p. 13.
[135] See Kaja Silverman, *World Spectators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Forms of Being: Cinema, Aesthetics, Subjectivity* (London: British Film Institute, 2004).
[136] Noack and Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts', p. 8.
[137] Ibid. The *Droguinhas* are objects in various shapes, made from rice paper that have been twisted into a rope and then woven into knots, which form nets and plaits. They change appearance, according to how they are handled or hung. The Swiss-born Jew artist Mira Schendel migrated to Brazil in 1941 to escape Nazism, taking part in the non-institutionalized artistic scene there in the 1950s-1960s. The fleetingness of time as well as trauma and its redemption are traced questions into her work. See Suely Rolnik, 'Mira Schendel', in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007 Katalog/Catalogue*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), p. 74.

the viewer to recognize the human subject in a condition of subservience, invisibility and power relations, the body itself 'a cipher of bare life'. Yet, they contend, McCracken's 'mediated' mandala painting complicates this condition with the kind of freedom and 'inner vision' it suggests. Drawing on the esoteric streak and holistic view in McCracken's abstraction, Buergel and Noack construe his practice as a response to the 'disenchantment' of the world brought in by capitalism's rationality. Here, we read, 'anti-capitalism, the esoteric and abstraction' are interconnected.[138]

To exhibit the movement of forms in a more challenging way, the curators sought to create relations of continuities and discontinuities through the dispersion of works by the same artist across the exhibition venues. Here, they explain, the migration of form parallels the viewers' own movement through space and appeals to their ability to recollect, connect, and discover unexpected relations based on their own resources. This is a means for the 'lay audience' to 'educate' themselves aesthetically and realize the role of display and exhibition space in the production of a work's meaning.[139] A key example of the spatially discontinuous grouping of an artist's works is Louise Lawler. In the Fridericianum Museum, Lawler's photograph *Paris, New York, Rome, Tokyo* (1985) is connected to those by Sanja Iveković, Ion Griġorescu, Anatoly Osmolovski, and reproductions of the overtly political Tucumán Arde archive in 'a room', we read, 'devoted to works of lyrical performance and poetic subversion' (Fig. 5.24-5.25). A highly controversial presentation is provided in the Neue Gallerie. In a small pink-painted cabinet Lawler's *Untitled (1950-51)* from 1987, depicting the reflection of a Juan Miro painting onto the polished bench and gallery floor in a typical white cube setting, is juxtaposed with Chile-born Juan Davila's painting *La Perla der Mercader* (1966) with obvious nineteenth-century Orientalist references and issues of colonialism. Arguing for their choice of this coupling, the curators address the shared use of different pictorial devices that shift the focus of the viewer's gaze. In Lawler's case, the focus on the banality of an object – the bench within the white cube – is to be seen not merely as an 'ironic critique of the art system' but also as a transformative act of the artist's 'loving gaze' that turns the everyday into the 'sublime' (Fig. 5.26-5.27).[140]

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[138] Noack and Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts', pp. 8-9. See also Buergel's entry on John McCracken, in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007 Katalog/Catalogue*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), p. 88.

[139] Noack and Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts', p. 9. See also *Documenta 12 Press Kit*, p. 16.

[140] Noack and Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts', pp. 12-13.

These are controversial remarks, particularly for an artist largely associated with the Institutional Critique (Fig. 5.28). Driven by their commitment to escape the white cube conventions, Buergel and Noack insist that hung in 'the pink boudoir' and clashed with Davila's rather kitsch-framed painting, Lawler's photograph was relegated to but effectively survived 'the realm it seeks to criticize. What might have been the other in New York becomes mainstream when looked at from Santiago de Chile.'[141] The unconventional Lawler presentations continue in the Aue-Pavillon, where her monumental photograph *HVAC* (1966) was displayed on a single wall next to a mandala diptych by Béla Kolarova (1971) and close to Charlotte Posenenske's *Vierkantrohre Serie D* (1967), sculptures of industrial material lying on the floor. Here, the correspondences between Lawler and Posenenske's works do not merely regard formal and thematic references to industrial spaces and 'concrete objects', but they also integrate the architectonic setting of the Aue-Pavillon (Fig. 5.29-5.30). The example is characteristic of the importance the curators grant to the exhibition space; specifically, their determination to abandon the white cube and its regulated taxonomies, still ubiquitous in biennials, in favour of creating through possible correlations and moments of correspondence 'an atmosphere or a situation in which the exhibition involves the viewer in its compositional unfolding.'[142] As such, not only did they audaciously introduced auratic light and colour into the installation, but they playfully integrated different historical spatial displays into the exhibition with each venue alluding to a different century and understanding of the public (Fig. 5.31-5.32).[143]

The singular within the compositional: Thinking 'beyond the frame'

The examples show that the 'migration of form' is suggested as both a historical approach that claims for an aesthetic and formal movement across different eras and cultural contexts and as the main methodological principle of the curatorial composition with further aesthetic, artistic, and exhibition implications. As the central motif of the exhibition poetics, it operates to create layers of associations between and among the works, and in interaction with the exhibition space. By decontextualizing

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[141] Ibid., p. 12.

[142] Buergel in interview to Carolin, 'It's Not About Representation', p. 10.

[143] For a discussion of the exhibition architecture with Noack and Buergel, see Allen, 'What is to Be Done?', p. 392; Carolin, 'It's Not About Representation', p. 10.

disparate works and distributing individual works of the same artist across different sites and venues – to Louise Lawler can be added John McCracken, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Charlotte Posenenske, Kerry James Marshall, and Lili Dujourie, among others – the curatorial aim is to create a flexible composition that prioritizes the aesthetic expressivity of the singular artwork over the integrity of an artist's oeuvre and the individualized form of engagement between the viewer and the artwork over an all-encompassing interpretative framework. The regular appearance of works by certain artists, such as John McCranken and Juan Davila, sought a kind of rhythmical effect within the heterogeneity of exhibits, but at the same time deliberately destabilized any sense of congruity in experience. This compositional approach that disrupted familiar readings and confounded recognizable orders so as to sustain a level of complexity and connectedness allows, for Buergel, 'the singular artwork [to] show itself in more depth.'[144] The curatorial position is that compositional relations, no matter how incohesive, irrational, and absurd may first appear, are primary and work effectively only when they meet certain aesthetic criteria. These include, Buergel and Noack explain, the individuality of the artworks – 'whether particular combinations infuse the individual work with resonances and make it shine' – alongside the audience's relational abilities – whether the exhibition succeeds 'to transform people from passive, appropriating subjects into active collaborators.'[145]

It is clear that the poetics of the migration of form that underpins the entire exhibition as the interconnection of the artworks, the viewers, and the surrounding exhibition space activates complex relations – aesthetic, thematic, historical, on the level of subjectivity – yet not at the expense of individuality. Buergel's dynamics of form is intended to escape a regulatory, linear structural frame and to experiment with an open-ended, processual exhibition model that favours the singular within the relational on the level of discovery. As such, he brings back into the contemporary curatorial agenda the importance of display and exhibition form shifting the focus from intellectual and political debates – that usually provide the organizational framework to large-scale exhibitions and are prone to rhetorical demonstrations of geopolitical identities – on the specific effect of the aesthetic experience. Unlike the recently widespread rhetoric of curatorial innovation in the biennial format, what is

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[144] Buergel in interview to Carolin, 'It's Not About Representation', p. 10.
[145] Noack and Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts', p. 5.

the issue here is that we can understand how an exhibition works, both aesthetically and politically, through its exhibiting form, display, and structure; how the relationships between artworks, their presentation frames, and the viewers actualize modes of experience and articulate positions which can also exceed those frames and destabilize their categories. This means that the migration of form goes beyond the literal level of 'a rewarding exercise' in tracing unexpected relations in the historical mobility of forms, and becomes, Buergel and Noack argue, a risky enterprise that affirms 'the anti-rational streak in aesthetic experience'. It invites both curators and viewers to 'think beyond the frame' and be prepared to enter an aesthetic realm of unstable, tricky, at times illegible correlations. For the stake, the curators insist, is how the exhibition 'free[s]' the individual work from the restrictions of conventional meaning and the categories of knowledge, allowing unforeseen aspects of it 'to surface'.[146]

The migration of form operates as an open call for the viewers to be willing to encounter and be open to things that may not make sense on a first level or they rupture our familiar understandings and tendency to identify and fix them as recognizable knowledge. In this respect, there is a certain ethics (and politics) in the aesthetics of D12 in terms of both its poetics and reception. The curators, on the one hand, are committed to provide a non-regulatory space for the coexistence of diverse works and to show artistic forms as forms of being in constant revision; the spectators, on the other, are challenged to look actively at what is there to be seen, unconstrained by the norms of expected orders. The key tenet is 'beyond the frame', which unlike Enwezor's notion of the aesthetic experience as an intellectual activity reliant on the ability to decipher what is presented in a nonetheless orderly, didactic display, here another kind of communication is attempted that seeks to overcome knowledge and information as our basic resource in approaching art. Mediation regards the invention of new sensations and aesthetic knowledge as a means of reconsidering our relation to life. This kind of knowledge paradoxically passes through the mechanisms of 'ignorance' and non-identification rather than through political representation and identity struggles about 'inclusions' and 'exclusions'.

In this sense, the migratory form was deployed to create an experiential space and activate a meta-structural condition of formlessness – a fragmentary, more

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[146] Ibid., p. 6.

complex and fluid structure – that allows for aleatory drifts in meaning and coherence. Instead of following a thorough conceptual mapping, as in dX and D11, the audience produces meaning as part of the exhibition and its own dynamics. Hence, while there is a shared critical interest with dX and D11 in processual approaches with the aim to exceed the exhibition as merely a show and correspond to the fragmentary nature of art and its experience today, here the pursuit of formlessness is fully activated in the exhibition site and in consistency with the conception of the exhibition itself as medium. The latter allows eschewing the conventions of a clinical museal order – still apparent in dX and D11, despite their critical appeal to the opposite – and creating a 'situation' that aspires to 'involve its audience in its compositional moves.'[147] We enter a realm of dynamic interrelations in which the display mode is not merely a tool for the materialization of the exhibition but becomes itself the mediation process – an act of 'dramatization' of the poetics on the legacy of Szeemann and Lyotard's curatorial approaches, which exhibit their own declassification, chaotic disorder, and making processes within an experiential space, though in different manners. In an essay, entitled 'Canons and Publics' (2009), Noack highlighted that 'the exhibition apparatus' was not external to the making of D12 but it was itself 'exhibited alongside the works themselves.'[148] The remark makes notable the curatorial penchant to dissolve the distinction between means and ends in favour of a performative – if not immanent, at least not entirely predetermined – mode of exhibition-making that is far from an essentialist, polarizing understanding of form. This is evident in the curatorial statement that the intention was not merely to approach 'the internal dynamic destinies of form' theoretically, but 'to actually show them, turning them into documenta 12.'[149]

Migration of form and its political connotations: Revising the canon

While the term 'migration', in the first place, is key for showing the historical dynamics of form, even the organizers themselves admit that it seems somehow 'out of place' in a curatorial practice that is 'focused – not exclusively, but primarily – on

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[147] Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 12.

[148] Ruth Noack, 'Canons and Publics', in Margriet Schavemaker and others, eds, *Now is the Time: Art and Theory in the 21st Century* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2009), pp. 100-106 (105).

[149] Buergel and Noack, 'Preface', p. 12. See also Noack, 'Canons and Publics', p. 105: 'Form need not be thought of as an essential attribute of an object; an observer can also relate to a work of art either contextually *or* phantasmatically.' Italics in the original.

aesthetics.' The introduction of the term into Documenta, an exhibition with such international reach and, as they point out, 'some hegemonic force', is not accidental. It is deliberately used for its semantic ambivalence and political connotations since, Buergel and Noack maintain, there is 'no neutral, free movement'. On the contrary, the 'irrational fear of migrants' in Europe in conjunction with a notable 'lack of knowledge about globalisation' made it necessary to show that globalization has a 'long history' in which 'Europe seems to be almost an afterthought.'[150] As such, the methodological trope of the migration of form attains further political significance within the context of the shift to a more inclusive, global perspective in the history of contemporary art and the attempt of international exhibitions, such as dX and D11, to question a canonizing modernist history and its Occidental gaze of the 'other'.

What distinguishes D12 from these attempts is that the revision of Western canons in favour of a globalized conception of art is sought without resource to the politics that underwrite postcolonial criticism and theory or an ever expansive turn into cultural topics. David was explicit about her concern with 'cosigning the aesthetic experience back into the more general space of cultural issues', and Enwezor maintained his commitment 'to work outside of the canon and to do it within culture.'[151] Buegel and Noack, on the other hand, insist on the specific effectivity of the aesthetic and they explain that their concern was for an alternative 'middle course' that would allow them to evade equally the appeal to an 'assumed universality' and a 'predefined … national or cultural identity'.[152] Being aware of the underlying risks of homogenization and retaining an oppositional logic of dichotomy, they addressed the need for ways of communication that do not take 'a global or local given' as their point of departure, nor an existing canon or community, but work instead and may be engaged in 'canon-building'. This entails, according to Noack, 'the formation of provisional consensus in a way that leaves room for conflict and dissent', and she suggests as the possible basis for this 'negotiation' process one that 'integrates the desire, interest and necessity of personal change for the purpose of coming together.' Noack's claim is closely bound up with the transformative effect of art and the exhibition in a curatorial approach that 'combin[es] the political with the personal by

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[150] Noack and Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts', pp. 5, 6.
[151] David in interview to Jean-Christophe Royoux, p. 88; Okwui Enwezor quoted in 'Curating Beyond the Canon: Okwui Enwezor Interviewed by Paul O'Neill' (04.02.2005), in Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007), pp. 109-122 (120).
[152] See Buergel, 'The Migration of Form', n.p.; Noack, 'Canons and Publics', p. 101.

means of the aesthetic' –[153] namely, by means of experimental encounters with the 'other' on a level of increased complexity and ambiguity.

The curatorial attempt was 'to shift the gaze away from Western centricity and to revise the canon of contemporary art', but this was sought, Noack argues, through a kind of coherence that is not owed to 'a system of star players or key themes'.[154] Since the aim was to depart from the marketable representation of the world's renowned artists and prevailing frameworks of interpretation, they opted for a poetics of unstable associations that obfuscate meaning and centralize the role of the viewers in its production. Significantly, this revisionist position was more than a matter of the range of works included or re-centring the marginalized non-Western practices and discourses. Moving the marginal into the centre to empower it is often another way to confirm the 'centre-periphery' binary and to feed capitalism's persistent need for new commodities by creating the new conditions of appropriating the 'other'. Even Enwezor's insistence on a politics of empowering the marginalized without making it part of the centre through the strategic displacement of the centre as the site of Western power did not avoid, as we saw, a totalizing, homogenizing effect. The kind of revision D12 attempted, Noack points out, required a relentlessly critical examination of the organizing principles of an exhibition up to the display strategy and installation design for the creation of an experience whose outcome even the curators were 'unable to control'.[155] On this basis, Noack makes the provocative plea to 'bring the canon back into the sphere of the aesthetic' in the sense that curators and institutions need to find ways of providing form to 'a canon created by the public' within the exhibition itself, and so to address the viewer's view of what it means to 'occupy and define a common space.'[156]

It is made apparent that while D12 shares concerns with the postcolonial exhibitions of contemporary art and the critical debates they fostered, its response is less overtly activated by an ideological argument or theoretical position. The curators used the methodology of the migration of form and its attendant ideas of self-change and coming-togetherness to counter what they see as a growing Eurocentrism and preoccupation with issues of geopolitical identity today. In the attempt to evade both the pitfalls of 'identity exhibitions' and the didacticism of exhibitions-qua-argument,

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[153] Ibid., pp. 101-102.
[154] Ibid., p. 102.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., p. 106.

they worked on the interface of a historical, transgeographical, translocal, and formalist approach to open up new interpretative and affective spaces in which the artworks can resonate in radically new ways. This is, Buergel expains,

> how the documenta resolves its most immanent crisis. […] by using the exhibition to create a new, radically artificial context… The decisive questions in this endeavour are: will the migration of form allow non-Western cultures to achieve the resonance and historicity denied to them by exhibitions that work with fixed identities? And: will it be possible to take the art of our inherited Euro-American cultural arena, which we experience as so excessively familiar, and make it seem utterly alien and idiosyncratic, even unidentifiable, but for that very reason all the fresher and more radiant?[157]

Buergel's remarks encapsulate the risks and stakes of D12's experimental undertaking and understanding of a globalized perspective of art. The radical potential of its proposal is predicated on the ethico-aesthetic value of the destabilization of the familiar, and thus the openness to 'otherness' and the unknown in the complexity of presentation and ambivalence of perception.

In conclusion, D12 attempted a different approach, actually the invention of a form of communication, through its insistence on the power of the aesthetic and the ability of art to communicate in itself. Driven by a self-reflective criticality, it asserts a curatorial model of discovery than of representation, which deliberately departs from the art market imperatives, the didacticism and political over-conceptualism that dominated curating over the previous decade, thereby rejecting to confirm the shared principles of 'good taste', 'critical art', prevailing forms of interpretation, and the sense of community they establish. As such, it will be highly criticized as a conservative withdrawal from the conceptually and politically invested practices advanced by its two immediate predecessors in Documenta's heritage, back into the aesthetic and a formalist understanding of art's autonomy. Yet, despite the primacy to the immediacy of aesthetic experience and the modernist echoes of the migration of form, D12's poetics does not efface the socio-political or the discursive as if in opposition to the aesthetic. On the contrary, it provides a different understanding of

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[157] Buergel, 'The Migration of Form', n.p.

the political to the one that informed the ethics of postcolonial globalization of dX and D11. However upsetting and certainly not without shortcomings in its application, D12, as we will see in the following chapter, set out to show that aesthetics can relate to the political in the context of contemporary art not only in terms of political representation or the production of knowledge and discourse, but also of its specific, liberating effect in a space of experience that allows for new sensations and incites new modes of thinking. It is within the interface, or tension point, between the aesthetic and the political, the visual and the conceptual, the sensible and the discursive that D12's curatorial aesthetics attains its full potential.

Chapter 6

The Politics of Aesthetics of *Documenta 12*

Following the previous discussion of the poetics of D12 and the primacy it gives aesthetic experience, the aim of this chapter is to provide a political reading of D12 that deviates from its widespread reception as being non-conceptual and apolitical. Against such prevalent misunderstandings, my contention is that D12's emphasis on the value of the aesthetic experience does not efface the socio-political or the discursive as if these opposed the aesthetic. On the contrary, it provides an alternative understanding of the political and its function – the political effect of the specificity of aesthetic experience – that does not accord with what is usually understood as 'political art' today, or with attempts to 'politicize' art and connect it to a critical position in the present, as happened in the previous two Documenta. Specifically, it asserts the necessity of aesthetic autonomy – as opposed to the autonomy of the art work – understood as the potentially liberating effect occasioned by the heterogeneity of aesthetic experience with regard to existing conditions and their underlying structures. The egalitarian political potential of the aesthetic paradoxically lies in maintaining a certain separateness from everyday life and its conditions that nonetheless does not exclude the conceptual or discursive elements but keeps them in play, and so does not withdraw art from social intervention. The issue, for D12, is to renegotiate the relationship between art and life beyond the ethical immediacy of political representation or over-conceptualism. Political aesthetics escapes the cause-effect determinations of the representational and critical schemas and their underlying knowledge and social hierarchies. The production of an experiential space allows for the invention of indeterminate – albeit specific – sensations, aesthetic processes of thinking and forms of enunciation that, in turn, urge reflection and modes of acting in the world that may have a transformative effect on individual and collective life. The exhibition generates experiential effects that turn it into an aesthetic intervention, rather than merely a show, opening up a liberating space of otherness, dis-identification and indetermination in which new forms of political subjectification can be elaborated.

To substantiate my argument, I follow various threads of interrogation informed by a range of resources – curatorial, historical, and theoretical – that often go unnoticed in the reception of D12. This diverse material is structured into four

parts. The first part deals with the critical reception of D12. Although it was widely recognized that it attempted a different approach to the established ones, the curatorial methodology and primacy accorded to the aesthetic was vehemently criticized as a withdrawal into a formalist, autonomous aestheticism and, coextensively, as a reversal of the more radical conceptual and political strategies of its two immediate predecessors. The second part concerns the notion of aesthetic autonomy and of its political effects that informed Buergel's curatorial approach. Central to this part is Buergel's revisionist, political reading of the first Documenta along with the exhibition *Things We don't Understand* (2000), co-curated with Ruth Noack. This show explored the liberating effect of aesthetic autonomy and the political potential of the suspension of understanding as an indispensable part of the aesthetic experience and its expression. Both resources – barely considered in relation to D12 – shed light on the methodologies adopted in D12 and their politics.

In all these points D12 resonates with the philosopher Jacques Rancière's recent and influential account of reinventing the aesthetic in political terms, specifically as an egalitarian, dissensual, and contingent politics of aesthetic indetermination and the new processes of subjectification this induces. Although Buergel and Noack do not directly refer to Rancière's aesthetic account of art as a source for D12, the affiliations are both striking and revealing. The third part deals with the complexities of Rancière's understanding of the political as primarily an aesthetic question, followed by a discussion of what he calls the 'politics of aesthetics' or 'aesthetic metapolitics', which redefines the relation of art and politics, or art and life, in a paradoxical form of political efficacy that keeps art's autonomy and heteronomy in a constitutive tension and exchange. Rancière's account of the political power of the aesthetic is not used here as an overarching philosophical explanation of D12. Rather it is seen as a platform that allows new relations and subtle differences to emerge offering valuable insights not only into the politics of aesthetics of D12, but also into the context of contemporary art, its defining categories, and the impasses of many of its political forms. Rancière provides a radicalization of the aesthetic beyond the modern/postmodern split, and so the conceptual/postconceptual frame within which contemporary art is currently understood. The last part outlines the implications of Rancière's account of the egalitarian and emancipatory potential of art beyond the necessity of political 'content', 'critique', issues of failure, and didacticism.

I. Criticism and reactions

D12 was highly controversial, with responses ranging from the most derisive and disdainful – in fact, the majority – to more sympathetic and some, in hindsight, even affirmative of the exhibition's merit in relation to the future of contemporary curating. This range of responses and tones is symptomatic of D12's contradictory character as at once original, challenging, and upsetting. The initial reactions to a 'disaster' and 'ineptitude' were followed by most ambivalent positions.[1] The opening sentence of Daniel Birnbaum's review claiming 'Documenta 12 is a weird thing' is typical of the sense of puzzlement that D12 caused in the artworld.[2] Claire Bishop also stresses her inability of delivering 'a clear verdict' about D12, although she concludes that its 'failures ultimately outweighed its successes.'[3] In a similar vein, Birnbaum credits the organizers for 'attempting to do something different' inasmuch as D12 'steers clear of the most predictable curatorial choices and abjures the tiresome hierarchies dictated by the art market.' Yet, insofar as the alternative offered appears to be based solely on 'personal … preferences and arbitrary connections', D12, he concludes, becomes 'a missed opportunity'.[4]

While it is recognized that D12 attempted an alternative approach, what raised indignation was the practice of formal correspondences alongside the curators' reluctance to overtly theorize the exhibition and let, instead, art communicate itself. A controversial point was whether, in the name of radical formlessness, they liberated the individual artwork from the art market mandates and the encumbrance of over-theorization or they merely removed it from its socio-political context to posit it in a formalist history of art's autonomy. Buergel, as we have seen, asserted that the aim of removal was actually to create a new context in which the works would relate and resonate in radically new ways, thus reassigning and creating new meanings. No matter how ambitious, reflective, even revealing, this approach was vehemently criticized for offering 'superficial visual rhymes' and 'morphological exercises' that

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[1] Adrian Searle, '100 Days of Ineptitude', *The Guardian* (Tuesday 19 June 2007), n.p. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/jun/19/art> [accessed 2 March 2016].

[2] Daniel Birnbaum, 'String Theory', *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 1 (September 2007), pp. 407- 414 (407).

[3] Bishop cites the curator and critic Lars Bang Larsen's succinct report on D12 – 'Idiosyncratic, flippant, pedagogical, opaque, arrogant AND political' – as the one that encapsulates the contradictory tone of reactions. Claire Bishop, 'Vienna Inc.: The Analytic Documenta', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (August 2008), pp. 206-214 (206).

[4] Birnbaum, 'String Theory', pp. 407, 414.

ultimately turned the curatorial intentions of experimentation into 'dilettantism'.[5] The migration of form, for its critics, fell short of sustaining D12 as a coherent, meaningful edifice. Any sense of coherence, Birnbaum scathingly notes, is achieved only on the literal level of recurring references to strings, threads, and knots that were abundant in the show.[6]

For its commentators, the most problematic aspect of D12 was the lack of a concept that would ground the disparate array of works into a kind of cohesive or rationalized argument.[7] The curatorial belief that art itself and the exhibition as medium could create new relations and so new meanings rendered any kind of critical analysis or contextual framing of the works superfluous. The migration of form was at times prone to misreadings, overlooking the nuances of individual artistic practices. The most unfortunate example, and one that raised furious reactions, appeared in a gallery at the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe. Here, the portraits of disaffected African youths from the series *The Lost Boys* (1993) by the American artist Kerry James Marshall was coupled with a seventeenth-century painting by the Dutch master Karel van Mander III, which features the myth of the dark-hued royal couple Hydaspes and Persinna – a juxtaposition apparently on the level of mere formal correspondences (Fig. 6.1). Numerous juxtapositions throughout the exhibition were perceived by the critics as meaningless encounters of a 'curatorial whimsy'.[8] According to Bishop, the relations between the works were at times 'so elliptical and opaque that the particularity of each piece was evacuated in favour of a formalist stream of consciousness.' The migration of form, despite the plea for the self-education of viewers, established 'a private conversation' between the curators, almost 'incommunicable' to others.[9]

Certainly, the relations of forms were not only historically or culturally determined but also decided by the curators. However, what is perceived as 'curatorial whimsy', lack of content, and mere formalism is, in many cases, a different

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[5] Ibid., pp. 407, 410; Jörg Heiser, 'Mixed Messages', *Frieze*, no. 109 (September 2011), n.p. <http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/mixed_messages/> [accessed 2 March 2016].

[6] Birnbaum, 'String Theory', p. 410.

[7] According to Claire Bishop, 'Although the exhibition invited intense looking and thinking, the more one looked and thought, the more one uncovered an empty centre – both on the thematic level of the *leitmotifs* and on the meta-level of references to the "exhibition as medium".' Bishop, 'The Analytic Documenta', p. 209. Italics in the original.

[8] See Tom Holert, 'Failure of Will', *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 1 (September 2007), pp. 408, 410, 412, 414 (408); Bishop, 'The Analytic Documenta', p. 210.

[9] Ibid., pp. 209-210.

way of meaning production, all the more consistent with the nuances of individual practices. The controversial installations of Louise Lawler's works in the Neue Galerie, presented in the previous chapter, is a good example of how the curatorial approach, from a certain viewpoint, is actually in accord with the artist's postmodern 'play' of meaning. Birnbaum laments the installation of Lawler's works – the artist who 'wittily and witheringly critiqued the contexts in which artworks are displayed' – next to Juan Davila's paintings.[10] Yet, inasmuch as Lawler deliberately locates her practice within a representational system with the aim to open it out through a 'play' of meaning, achieved with strategies of irony and appropriation, the play of juxtapositions suggested here exceeds the level of purely a play of form.

Nonetheless, the migration of forms combined with the elimination of mediating information and the wish for unconstrained looking was seen as revising a late-modernist language of the expressive visibility of art on its own. This was reinforced by the *mise-en-scène* – richly coloured walls, flimsy partitions and curtains, dim spotlights – particularly in the Fridericianum and the Neue Galerie, invoking a sense of art's universality as if the tracing of forms takes place in a 'phenomenological bracketing of objective reality' (Fig. 6.2).[11] As a result, while for some critics the open-endedness and compositional unfolding of the exhibition was 'a bold exercise in curatorial erasure', for others the concern with the *mise-en-scène* amounted to the creation of a dominating environment over the individual artworks, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* akin to the curator-as-artist.[12] The shortcomings of the curatorial methodology were made plain in the conclusion to curator Lynne Cooke's review. The pronounced radical formlessness of D12, Cooke writes, was ultimately 'eerily reminiscent of outmoded curatorial models in which the personal tastes and sensibilities of the organisers become primary determinants in both the selection and the display of the exhibits.' Besides, 'by divesting the exhibition of a conceptual framework, they relegate to its aphotic depths that trio of tenets on which they based their original proposal.'[13]

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[10] Birnbaum, 'String Theory', p. 413.

[11] Ibid., p. 409.

[12] On the former, see Anthony Spira, 'Infancy, History and Rehabilitation at documenta 12', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (August 2008), pp. 228-239 (note 9, 237-238); on the latter, Birnbaum, 'String Theory', p. 413; Holert, p. 410.

[13] Lynne Cooke, 'Documenta 12', *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 149, no. 160 (October 2007), pp. 726-728 (728).

The criticism directed at D12, therefore, concerns primarily the 'migration of form' methodology and the corollary issue of its relation to theory, critical discourse, and conceptualism. The exhibition's lack of intellectual grounding and the suppression of (con-)textual references so as to leave the potential of the artwork and its experience open appear provocative, if not reactionary, in terms of the recent emphasis on discursivity. D12, however, did not lack discourse and was not opposed to it. It alternatively deployed it in the form of the three steering questions debated by the Documenta Advisory Council of Kassel citizens and the international Magazines network prior to the show. Most importantly, the curatorial approach can be seen as a direct response to the hyper-intellectualism of dX and D11, and the Magazine project was intended as an ambitious radicalization of the discursive practices and self-institutional reflection proposed by David and Enwezor. Nonetheless, the project raised fierce criticism both within and beyond its participants. Critique ranged from scepticism about the leitmotifs – their critical urgency, relevance, effectiveness, clarity, and undetermined openness – to more practical shortcomings and organizational failings. The response of the French philosophical journal *Multitudes* to the organizers' invitation is a case at point. The editors reformulated the leitmotifs as counter-questions and then addressed them to more than 250 artists in order to make an online intervention as a critical 'counter project'.[14] For Schöllhammer, the *Multitudes*' response exemplifies the chief aim of the project 'not to homogenize the

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[14] As the editors Éric Alliez and Giovanna Zapperi note in their website *Multitudes-Icônes*, launched in 2007 and entitled 'Critical and Clinical Documentation', 'the three questions were reformulated (that is, appropriated and détourned) and addressed to artists in a provocative way. Artists were asked to situate their work in relation to Documenta 12's themes but also in relation to their participation or non-participation in the exhibition.' The range of responses in various formats constituted 'alternative, multiple, and ironic points of view, or "critical and clinical" perspectives, regarding the exhibition's themes and Documenta itself.' In this regard, the editors argue, the organization of the website with the artists' responses 'provides an open framework, allowing users to articulate relations between replies, creating hybrid interventions, and transforming each user into a curator-artist of another virtual-real Documenta.' The leitmotifs were reformulated as follows: 'Is modernity (y)our aftermath? Is bare life your apocalyptic political dimension? What is to be done after the D12 *Bildung* programme?' and were elaborated with comments and further questions. Éric Alliez and Giovanna Zapperi, 'New website "Multitudes-Icônes", presentation', *Multitudes* <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Projet-de-site-2-Multitudes-Icones> [created 23 March 2007, accessed 7 July 2012]. For the editors' reformulation of the leitmotifs, followed by a selection of artistic responses, see also Éric Alliez and Giovanna Zapperi, 'Multitudes Icônes *versus* Documenta Magazine', pp. 129-132, in 'Icônes in : Documenta 12', *Multitudes*, vol. 3, no. 30 (2007), pp. 129-166 <https://www.cairn.info/revue-multitudes-2007-3.htm> [accessed 21 October 2016].
Claire Bishop, in her review of the Magazine Project, acknowledges the interventionist intention of the *Multitudes* project, yet she is critical of the chosen Q&A format. She sees it as 'symptomatic of the art world's empty overproduction', and suggests that the intervention should have taken 'more complex forms of interrogation to do battle with the values and flaws of Documenta 12.' Claire Bishop, 'Writers' Bloc', *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 1 (September 2007), p. 415.

discourse but to create a field of open conflict and controversy.' The 'against/(but also) involved in' kind of criticism delivered by *Multitudes*, Schöllhammer remarks, is a format that actually fits with D12's intention to integrate and compel dissensus. In this sense, the leitmotifs, from the outset, 'turned against themselves' as they were addressed in the specific context of the participating publications worldwide.[15]

The relation of the leitmotifs to the exhibited works was an additional focal point of criticism. Their role in a curatorial model directed to production rather than representation along with their distant proximity, which obscured the usual cause-effect reconciliation between exhibition and discourse, was discussed in the previous chapter. For several commentators, however, the problem was that the works on display were only loosely, or not at all, connected to them. Consequently, the questions of modernity, bare life, and education were either deprived of their intellectual depth or they went largely unanswered in the exhibition.[16] David Cunningham and Stewart Martin, among the contributors of the participating UK journal *Radical Philosophy*, in a derisive article about the failed promises of the Magazine project, underlined 'a remarkable dislocation' between the theoretical texts provided by the Magazines and the exhibited artworks. This discrepancy, they argue, had the contradictory effect of 'both separating the artworks from the theory, while making the artworks more directly reliant on the theory in the absence of any mediating discourse.'[17]

The function of the Magazine project, Buergel stated prior to the show, 'is not to hold art at bay but to prepare the ground for its reception.' Contrary to diverging art and theory, he stressed their interrelation:

> We want to overcome the tiring juxtaposition of theoretical work and aesthetic experience. The two are intertwined […] Academia has become, in the last 10 or 15 years, the main problem solver, but it was a big projection. In my view, discourse … cannot be limited to academia.[18]

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[15] Georg Schöllhammer, interviewed by Elena Zanichelli, 'Documenta 12 Magazines' <http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=1389&L=1> [accessed 12 February 2016].

[16] See, for instance, Bishop, 'The Analytic Documenta', p. 209.

[17] David Cunningham and Stewart Martin, 'The Death of a Project', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (August 2008), pp. 214-218 (217).

[18] See Sylvia Liska, 'Roger M. Buergel, Rob Storr with Sylvia Liska' (April 2006), in Sylvia Liska, ed., *The Secession Talks: Exhibitions in Conversation 1998-2010* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, n.d.), pp. 442-457 (450).

Buergel's allegedly 'anti-theoretical' stance, therefore, regards a certain understanding of 'theory' as academic knowledge and explication that threatens to reduce the experience of art to mere illustration of predetermined knowledge-based issues. The organizers are not against intellectualism but what it mistakenly came to signify and serve in the postconceptual artworld. Specifically, they are against this misunderstanding of theory, which Buergel, in a 2006 Round Table, pointedly characterized as 'part of the whole drama of the so-called postmodernism.'[19] Buergel's dismissal implies the excessive resort to and overarching application of theory in postmodern art and criticism as a means of a critical politics of representation, not least the critical legitimacy, symbolic quality, and intellectual authority lent by the employment of iconic philosophical names. The 'theoretical turn', marked by postmodernism in the 1980s, created various misunderstandings about the function of theory and its relation to art, which in different ways continues up to today with the ubiquity of discursive practices. Contrary to an academic notion of theory that provides readymade conceptual tools to represent and interpret art, Buergel asserted his intention to deal with theory in its proper, at least etymologically, meaning: namely, as 'looking', a way of seeing and acting in the world.[20] D12, from a contemporary perspective, may appear under-theorized, yet it is too much to characterize it as a non-theoretical exhibition. It generated discourse both on a local and global level, and the Migration of form approach accommodated both formal and conceptual elements in the playful creation of meaning and non-didactic content. In a certain respect, it is a direct 'theoretical' response to its last two predecessors and the artworld's prevalent systems of interpretation. The difference is that this response was predominantly aesthetic, rather than discursive, in orientation.

Nonetheless, its approach to theory, particularly after the central place accorded to it in dX and D11, was a highly contested point. Cultural theorist Oliver Marchart, in an essay from 2011 comparing the deployment of theory in these Documenta, rails against D12's 'anti-intellectualism'. According to Marchart, while the Magazine project appears ambitious in its aims and scope and suggests a continuation of dX and D11's theory projects, it proved to be a means for

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[19] Buergel quoted in Nina Möntmann, ed., *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006), p. 257.

[20] See Jennifer Allen, 'What is to Be Done?: Jennifer Allen Talks with the Curators of Documenta 12', *Artforum*, vol. 45, no. 9 (May 2007), pp. 173-174, 177, 392 (392).

'legitimizing the wholesale "outsourcing" of theory' to intellectuals-qua-'sub-contractors' worldwide, attempting to 'compensate for the lack of intelligence at the site of the exhibition.' Marchart laments the conservative withdrawal from the radicalism brought in by David and Enwezor; specifically, the attempt of reversal in a progressive series of transformations through Buergel's 'strategies of decontextualization, formalization and aestheticization' – coupled with 'a spiritualist and esoteric irrationality' – 'all dipped in a regressive discussion about the "beautiful"' for an overall 'project of curatorial anti-enlightenment.'[21] In a previous 2010 essay, Marchart provides a political reading of these Documenta editions arguing that D12 exemplifies a 'transformist strategy' in the art field. While dX and D11 radicalized exhibition-making through their increased politicization, theorization, decentring the West, and mediating work, thereby producing a progressive canon shift at the 'centre' of the art field, D12 strategically reversed these transformations with its 'depoliticized aestheticism'. It reveals, Marchart claims, how the institutional means that were previously appropriated for the canon shift in the art field were also employed by the dominant culture to neutralize any anti-hegemonic breaks.[22] In a similar vein, Peter Osborne, from *Radical Philosophy*, in a polemical editorial against the Magazine project's '"cutting edge" pretensions' of transnational cultural collaboration and political radicalism underlines the 'Faustian nature of the pact' through the legitimation of 'intellectual outsourcing'.[23] The project, he argues, evokes neoliberal models of instrumentalization transferred to the level of the art institution, demonstrating recent strategies within the cultural industry and dominant culture to

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[21] Oliver Marchart, 'Curating Theory (Away): The Case of the Last Three Documenta Shows', *onCurating.org*, 'Institution as Medium: Curating as Institutional Critique? Part 1', Dorothee Richter and Rein Wolfs, eds, no. 8 (August 2011), pp. 4-8 (7, 8)
<http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue8.pdf> [accessed 23 February 2016].

[22] Marchart's political analysis is based on the 'hegemony-theory', which has been developed by Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. A 'transformist strategy', he explains, is an ironic political strategy that does not seek to reject certain anti-hegemonic shifts altogether, but instead transforms them so that they no longer stand in the way of a hegemonic consensus and cultural reproduction. Oliver Marchart, 'Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization: The Case of Documenta', in Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds, *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen and Ostfildern: Bergen Kunsthalle and Hatje Cantz, 2010), pp. 466-490 (471) [abridged and translated version of the book, Oliver Marchart, *Hegemonie im Kunstfeld: Die Documenta-Ausstellungen dX, D11, d12 und die Politik der Biennalisierung* (Cologne: 2008)].

[23] Peter Osborne, 'Dossier', 'Documenta 12 Magazines Project: Debacle', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (November/December 2007), p. 39.

appropriate forms of 'independence' by merely producing their emergence as commodities on a transnational terrain.[24]

Reviews of the Magazine project, from this standpoint, rehearse issues about the efficacy of the art networks within a global economy of 'symbolic capital' and the extent to which critical attempts undertaken by the institutions and intended to give voice to non-visible local positions paradoxically risk being assimilated by them.[25] For several critical contributors, the 'failure' of the project to fulfill its promising radicalism is the outcome of a cultural process of the pre-emption of criticality by the art institution at the same time it creates the critical conditions within – and no longer outside – itself.[26] Within this perspective, evocative of recent debates about 'New Institutionalism', Cunningham and Martin scathingly characterize the Magazine project as an 'extravagant' curatorial device, deployed to conceal Buergel's 'neo-formalism' and the exhibition's assimilation of critique into its conservative project. They see D12 ironically as a 'landmark' in the 'reinvention' of the art institution as a 'fundamentally *post-critical* form'.[27]

Thus, for the critics of cultural industry, D12's perceived anti-intellectualism is associated with the neoliberal processes of outsourcing and the production of homogeneity through the institutional recuperation of critique. Osborne, a committed opponent of international exhibitions, posits them as the new transnational cultural spaces – 'a primary marker of its [art's] contemporaneity' – which articulate a distinctively new 'capitalist constructivism of the exhibition-form'. Coextensively, 'art appears *within* the culture industry', now transformed into an expansive 'transnational *art industry*'.[28] Unlike Marchart's belief in the strategic appropriation of the institutional apparatus for an anti-hegemonic shift in the 'centre' of the art field

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[24] Peter Osborne, 'Dossier', 'Documenta 12 Magazines Project: What is to be Done? (Education)', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 141 (January/February 2007), p. 33.

[25] On the subject, see the critique of the Magazine project by The Radical Culture Research Collective (RCRC) from the standpoint of the observer rather than the involved contributor. Radical Culture Research Collective, 'The Sublime Whiff of Criticality', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (November/December 2007), pp. 40-42 (41).

[26] See, for instance, Patricia Canetti and Paula de Leandro (*Canal Contemporâneo*), 'Magazines Field, or, the Next Documenta Should be Curated by Magazines', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (November/December 2007), pp. 43-45; Dario Corbeira and Irene Montero (*Brumaria*), 'The Big Lie', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 146 (November/December 2007), pp. 45-46; *Ctrl+P: Journal of Contemporary Art* (http://www.ctrlp-artjournal.org/): A Special Post-documenta 12 issue, no. 9 (December 2007), pp. 1-39 <http://www.ctrlp-artjournal.org/pdfs/CtrlP_Issue9.pdf> [accessed 6 July 2012].

[27] Cunningham and Martin, 'The Death of a Project', p. 218. Italics in the original.

[28] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), pp. 163, 161, 165. Italics in the original.

– exemplified by dX and D11 – Osborne notes that 'by virtue of their power of assembly, international biennials are manifestations of the cultural-economic power of the "centre", *wherever* they crop up and *whatever* they show.' In short, they are 'emblems of capital's capacity to cross borders, and to accommodate and appropriate cultural differences.' As such, he suggests, currently 'it is *only* capital that immanently projects the utopian horizon of global social interconnectedness, in the ultimately dystopian form of the market.'[29] Osborne's diagnosis of the new transnational art spaces and projects – like the Magazine project – as a contemporary cultural form serving 'capitalist constructivism', despite its perceptiveness, points to a bleak perspective in which art cannot escape capitalism's need for global interconnectedness. This is a dystopian view compared to Buergel's more affirmative belief in a potentially 'common planetary horizon for all', not least because, as Noack points out, 'actual experience is much more fragmentary' than its ideological formations.[30] D12 leaves the possibility open for another perspective in which contemporary exhibitions can activate modes of experience and articulations of cultural connectivity with the potential to form an aesthetic and discursive community disruptive of capitalist relationality. Buergel put it clearly in his conclusion to a 2004 talk:

> After all, there should be a difference between a museum and a museum shop, between aesthetic relationality and capitalist relationality. A difference that has to be established, or at least maintained, by curatorial work.[31]

Nonetheless, for those arguing from the standpoint of institutional and cultural critique, D12 is a reversal of the radical practices advanced by its two immediate predecessors. However, following the discussion in the previous chapter, this is an overstated point that tends to ignore the shortcomings of dX and D11. Both constitute key critical moments in the shift to a globalized perspective of art and curating,

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[29] Ibid., pp. 164-165. Italics in the original.

[30] *Documenta 12 Press Kit: Press Conference on 13 June 2007 in Kassel*, pp. 1-42 (15) <http://www.metabol.net/d12/Press_engl.pdf> [accessed 10 February 2015]; Noack quoted in Silvestre Manoel Friques and Renan G. Laru-an, 'Curators Must Stay Different: Interview with Ruth Noack', (December 3, 2015), *open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain*, pp. 1-10 (7) <http://www.onlineopen.org/curators-must-stay-different> [accessed 8 July 2016].

[31] Roger M. Buergel, 'An Invitation to Think About Curatorial Methods', in Jonas Ekeberg, ed., 'How to Look at Art-Talk: How to Look at Aesthetics, How to Look at Capitalism', *Verksted*, no. 2/3 (Oslo: Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2004), pp. 57-62 (62).

however they did not evade the white cube conventions of display, the Western determination of hegemony, a totalizing representation of art within the new discourses of political globalization, not to mention the institutional constraints of Documenta itself contrary to their programmatic aims and their reception as paradigmatic anti-hegemonic shifts by the likes of Marchart. Based on the historical foundation and institutional specificities of Documenta, which situate it in 'the grey zone between museum and exhibition', Buergel draws attention to this inherent tension that allows curators and audience each time to test the limits of either direction. Rather than articulating an argument directly taken from ideological discourse, Buergel took a position within this zone of tension. On the one hand, he claims, 'Documenta 12 worked against Documenta' by denouncing an authoritative institutional stance through the primacy given to local and translocal collaborative projects and an expanded notion of the exhibition-as-medium. On the other hand, D12 as exhibition 'performed the fate of the Western museum': a 'fundamental lack of categories' as the 'defining moment of contemporary art' that reveals the fragmentation of experience today. The aim of D12, Buergel maintains, was to confront and expose 'the crisis' of the universe of Western modernity and the Eurocentric paradigm of art historical categories in order to make this crisis 'fruitful'.[32] The attempt at confronting the crisis of the modern concept of the art object and a Eurocentric view of art was equally shared with dX and D11, only they used different approaches and significantly, as we will see, were based on a different understanding of 'autonomy'.

Within this context of fierce criticism for having reversed a process of radical transformation in the artworld and Documenta's heritage, one of the most perceptive and sympathetic reviews of D12 is surprisingly delivered by Okwui Enwezor. Taking his cue from the hostility of responses to D12, the Venice Biennale, and the Sculptur Projekte Münster – three periodic large-scale shows happening once a decade synchronically – alongside the commercial success of the Art Basel art fair of the same year, Enwezor asks whether this is a sign that 'spell(s) the end' for the

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[32] Roger M. Buergel, 'Associative Control with Reference to documenta 12, 2007', lecture delivered in the *d documenta: A conference Towards Documenta (13)*, 18-19 September 2009, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin <http://d13.documenta.de/research/assets/Uploads/pieghevoleWebENG.pdf>, broadcast available in <http://d13.documenta.de/#/research/research/view/associative-control-with-reference-to-documenta-12-2007> [created 26 July 2011; accessed 7 November 2016].

intellectually, critically inflected, and oppositional curatorial endeavours that marked the global turn of the artworld in the 1990s. The proliferation and development of art fairs into a 'new arbiter of curatorial judgment' and 'intellectual leader', Enwezor points out, indicates the current 'crisis in non-market-based exhibition making'. Within the 'money-drenched condition of contemporary art', he credits D12 for its anti-market tenet and 'radically revisionist stance'.[33] Thus, while at first glance his own curatorial position and that of Buergel and Noack seem 'radically opposed', there is a 'paradoxical contiguity' with dX and D11 since D12 does not so much depart from these critical curatorial paths as 'recontextualize[s]' them.[34]

For having grasped, Enwezor claims, 'the crisis of legitimation' that currently pertains to critical practice, the organizers were aware that, 'in order to set themselves apart', they had to 'invent a rather strange grammar'. They challenged established dichotomies and hierarchies in international shows of contemporary art and their 'laconic attitude' seems to disdain 'the "bourgeois" art world that trades in commodity objects.' D12, Enwezor contends, is 'the first exhibition in a long time to successfully articulate a contrarian position regarding the question of the display of contemporary art.' Unlike the majority of reviews, Enwezor sees in D12's 'willful remove' its productive strength, yet he rightly notes that at times this leads into 'unproductive culs-de-sac', particularly when the organizers follow 'their own gambit to the letter' and 'arrive at a series of mannerisms'.[35] Against any pitfalls, initial reservations, and the mordant responses of the artworld, D12, Enwezor concludes, is placed among the most critical editions of Documenta as it has something 'worth retaining'. Buergel and Noack are commended for their daring, unique approach – 'they threw a grenade into the arena' and took 'a road less travelled' – which may not have been fully accomplished, yet it is significant for the current state of contemporary art and the future of large-scale exhibitions.[36]

Writing in a similar tone in 2010, Chus Martinez, Head of Department of D13, credits D12 for its political merit and 'ambition to reset the machine'.[37] According to Martinez, 'Versus a consensual choreography of practices, objects, and ideas aimed to

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[33] Okwui Enwezor, 'History Lessons', *Artforum*, vol. 46, no. 1 (September 2007), pp. 382-385 (382, 383, 382, 384).
[34] Ibid., pp. 384, 385.
[35] Ibid., p. 384.
[36] Ibid., p. 385.
[37] Chus Martinez, 'Documenta 12 and the Future of Thinking', *The Exhibitionist*, no. 1 (January 2010), pp. 7-9 (9).

stress a certain notion of the political', D12 drew attention to 'the necessity of a new form of empiricism'; one that would impel us 'to forget what we already know about good politics and agency in order to create a temporary regime that would escape the show as a communication or information machine.'[38] Despite the fact, she notes, that the curators problematically used some 'defunct modes of thought' to make their position, what is notable is the affirmation of 'an ethos of permanent becoming'. D12 instigated a 'chaotic thinking motion' with the potential to 'enable new forms of affiliation not based in our old "loves".' No matter the result, what primarily counts is that D12 was 'different', that it 'chose not to be synchronized with the "concerns" of our time' so as to avoid didacticism. In contrast to prevalent notions of knowledge formation, D12 suggests an approach requiring that 'concepts be set aside (for a while) and replaced with a focus on the singular': namely, 'a critical experience of the here and now', which is already future-oriented. Notwithstanding the effectiveness of the curatorial means, Martinez maintains, D12 merits our critical attention precisely for the ambitious attempt to advance a new mode of thinking and the political that appeals to the specificity of experience and its potentially transformative power of the given.[39]

In my view, the criticism of D12 is symptomatic of the current state of contemporary art and exhibition-making, what both Buergel and Enwezor call a state of 'crisis'. D12 was annoying and disquieting because it deliberately chose not to conform to the accepted rules and shared values in the artworld, those established by the market, and so distanced itself from the recognizable knowledge of contemporary art. The organizers' attempt to evade recognition from the perspective of the market through, among other strategies, selections that did not accord prominence to artistic brand names and the spectacular was a means to reveal that 'the curatorial model that exists today is a covert neoliberal model', as Buergel puts it.[40] The 'Migration of form' experiment that informed the transcultural poetics of D12 appeared weird, at times frustrating expectations, and even reductively idiosyncratic. However, what

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[38] Ibid., pp. 8-9.

[39] Ibid., p. 9. Martinez sees in D12 resonances with Gilles Deleuze's thinking-as-movement and the idea of the transformative potential of 'minoritarian becomings'. The latter, she remarks, does not imply a refusal of democratic politics since those excluded from the majority – defined by a set of axioms – let alone those included within it are the source of minoritarian becomings that carry the potential for the transformation of that given set of axioms and the invention of new people.

[40] Buergel cited in Richard Rhodes, 'Our New Antiquity: Documenta 12's Leading Question', *Canadian Art (Toronto, ON),* 30. 06. 2007, p. 18.

caused such discomfort to most commentators was that Buergel and Noack exposed the market-dominated state and increased academicism of contemporary art through a form of communication that did not confirm the common frame of the 'critical', the 'political', the 'new', and the 'known', and thus the sense of 'community' they establish. This exposure, importantly, was not driven by a deconstructive tenet or an overtly critical and polemical language. Rather the organizers addressed the need to create 'a language' – both aesthetic and discursive – 'in which to discuss topics beyond belief systems or established sets of values.'[41]

By willfully setting themselves apart from the recognizable criteria of good politics and critique, Buergel and Noack actually made failure a constituent part of their project and, I would say, paradoxically of its success. It is as if, by taking an alternative path, D12 set out to perform its own 'failure' and the reactions it raised were, in a certain sense, the sign of its success. In a recent 2015 interview, Noack makes an interesting point about the radicality of curatorial insufficiency:

> Very few people have perfected insufficiency or failure as a true method. […] It is important to make a form that allows this insufficiency to appear. It is not just rhetoric. It is not just deconstruction. It is really creating something that is at the same time opening up for this reflection and/or this understanding of fallibility, but still holding together at the seams well enough so that you can actually have meanings.[42]

Within this perspective, Noack appears critical not necessarily of intellectual practice but of the widely used practice of criticality, which often ends up in mere rhetoric. Most often, she argues, 'people hide behind the gesture of criticality, because they are afraid of articulating something that will be deemed wrong or naïve or out of fashion.' However, 'for any political action to take place, people need to voice a position. This might be derived from criticism, but it cannot stop there', Noack contends, asserting her belief in the still open horizon of 'utopia'.[43] Noack's position is telling of the way in which D12 attempted to articulate a dissensual voice within the existing conditions. Very few commentators understood the importance of attempting an alternative

[41] Buergel quoted in Allen, 'What is to Be Done?', p. 174.
[42] Noack in interview to Friques and Laru-an, 'Curators Must Stay Different', p. 5/10.
[43] Ibid.

curatorial approach that poses again questions of form, methodology, and presentation and integrates the risk of failing into its own form in order to open something new from within the given: namely, an experiential exhibition space that creates new relations and unforeseeable possibilities for art and its audience, and so bears within the germ of a future. Buergel and Noack refused to turn the exhibition into a critical essay, a cognitive tool or a political weapon, opting instead to 'use the exhibition space as a forum for something like unconditional discourse.'[44] This means that discourse is generated processually rather than predetermining the meaning of art on display. There is, then, a certain politics and ethics in D12's curatorial aesthetics that complicates any easy conclusions about its perceived lack of radicalism.

II. Aesthetic autonomy and its political potential

The 'Origins': The broader political capacity of the exhibition-as-medium; an aesthetic ethics of coexistence

The extended function of the exhibition beyond the level of the show and the broader ethico-political potential of the aesthetic experience are spelled out in a key text by Buergel about the first Documenta that often goes unnoticed in the critical reception of D12. The essay, entitled 'The Origins', was first published in 2005 on the occasion of the exhibition held for the 50th anniversary of Documenta, and was reprinted as the opening essay in the D12 Magazine Reader on Modernity. The significance of the text does not lie merely in its eloquent historical account of the beginnings of Documenta; it constitutes a comprehensive argument that offers insights into the aesthetic stakes that informed D12 and, in a certain respect, can be seen as Buergel's pre-opening curatorial statement. Taking his lead from Arnold Bode's aim to trace the roots of modernism in the exhibition design, Buergel provides a revisionist reading of the aesthetics of D1 in a way that resonates with D12's configuration. He emphasizes that the inception of Documenta was a response to a particular historical condition, 'that peculiar, very German mix of postwar trauma and restorative rebuilding.' Buergel is fully aware of the ideological thrust of Documenta and the danger of idealization in

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[44] Buergel quoted in Allen, 'What is to Be Done?', p. 174.

his generally laudatory text.[45] The Western ideological affiliations and major artistic exclusions of the first Documenta cannot be ignored, Buergel claims, nonetheless they are 'less important' in comparison to what he retrospectively sees as its main achievement: a broader political power that exceeds the function of a show and makes the exhibition a medium through which a 'damaged' community 'learns to see, understand, and develop itself as a community.' Despite its striking omissions, Buergel argues, 'documenta was (and is) … an ontological laboratory in which to create, display, and emphasize an ethics of coexistence.'[46] In this principal creative function Bode's exhibition design played a key role.

Bode suggested the war-damaged Fridericianum museum to house the exhibition. The provisionally restored building, the first public museum in Europe (1779), served as a radical symbol of both the recovery of German society and the Enlightenment's failure. In accord with a genealogical approach to contemporary art, Bode did not stage the exhibition as a 'showcase' but as 'a form of organization' based on the 'interplay' between the artworks, the design of the space, and the audience.[47] This allowed him to achieve a 'harmony' less in the sense of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* than by virtue of employing 'fragmented, genuinely traumatized existences in a compositional activity'. By creating a balance out of a shared experience of 'nakedness' and fragility, the exhibition was more than just a show of modern art; it became, Buergel argues, a medium for the constitution of a public space in post-Nazi Germany. For what brought that audience together, what created it as a public in the context of Documenta was not any sense of identity, representation or belief systems – political, religious, or national. Rather 'the public constituted itself on the groundless basis of aesthetic experience – the experience of objects whose identity could not be identified.' This dis-identifying experience had the potential to exceed the singular and to facilitate new relations since, Buergel maintains, 'Here there was nothing to understand, in the true sense, no preconceptions, which is precisely why it was possible and essential to talk about everything, to communicate about everything.' In this respect, the exhibition was 'an act of civilization'.[48]

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[45] Roger M. Buergel, 'Der Ursprung/The Origins', in *Documenta 12 Magazine*: *Modernity?*, vol. 1 (3) (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 25-39 (31), [orig. publ. in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel, eds, *50 Jahre/Years documenta 1955-2005: Archive in Motion*, vol. 1, exh. cat. (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005), pp. 173-180].
[46] Ibid., p. 32.
[47] Ibid., pp. 32, 35.
[48] Ibid., p. 31.

Buergel's reading is telling in both its dismissal of identity exhibitions and the ethnocentric community they appeal to and its affirmation of the indeterminacy of aesthetic experience, both approaches informing his approach to D12. He particularly emphasizes the role of display in the creation of experience and the sense of community it invokes. Buergel underlines how Bode developed with very little resources an *Inszenierung* [*mise-en-scène*] that invoked an 'experience of pure contingency' that potentially created new relations characteristic of modernist experience.[49] In the partially restored Fridericianum, Bode put into play a range of tensions and interrelations. The inner walls were kept bare, merely whitewashed; the rooms were divided with long sheets of black and white Göppinger plastic and wall drapes, which filtered the daylight and provided a smooth background for the works' display (Fig. 6.3-6.4). The overall sense of fluidity was reinforced by the hanging system. Paintings were not displayed directly on the wall but, instead, on lightweight construction panels, hung and hovering in long strips, or on free-standing metal frames as if floating in front of the wall, or standing alone in the space (Fig. 6.5-6.6). The makeshift use of construction materials was not unusual in post-war exhibition design; what was distinctive here was their experimental and autonomous use in creating a floating effect. Bode also undertook experimental displays of renowned modernist paintings through various interplays of textures, surfaces, and colours (Fig. 6.7-6.8). These tensions, according to Buergel, released the 'associative potential' of the works and at the same time allowed their own individuality and freedom to 'shine', especially when standing alone (Fig. 6.9). Artworks and viewers 'shared a single world' of 'ontological affinities' within a flowing environment that resisted any fixed points of reference and identification.[50]

This was, according to Buergel, the most striking aspect of Bode's *mise-en-scène* and, in retrospect, the major 'ethical and aesthetic lesson successfully communicated by documenta.'[51] Bode created an experiential space, a laboratory of 'an aesthetic ethics of coexistence' deprived of any fixed identity, therefore open and able to activate new relations, especially on the level of perception.[52] Buergel describes the aesthetic experience in a vocabulary with strong modernist undertones, as the abolition of the separation between the work and the subject, a 'threshold' to be

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[49] Ibid., p. 30.
[50] Ibid., p. 38.
[51] Ibid., p. 30.
[52] Ibid., p. 39.

crossed through 'the leap of affective engagement' that 'leads visitors out of themselves and connects them with a reality they are unable to grasp.'[53] Viewers enter a condition of suspension, yet they have to be receptive to what is happening in their encounter with art, no matter how unintelligible in the first place. On the contrary, Buergel maintains, the 'possibility of not understanding', even the 'failure' to connect, should be affirmed as a means to enable 'other ways of understanding' and relating that incite self-reflection with a potentially transformative effect. Aesthetic experience becomes an experience of emancipated viewership on the condition that viewers are willing to temporarily 'relinquish the integrity of their own self'. They are called, Buergel claims, to 'possess the gift of an unpreconceived gaze'. As such, the exhibition exceeds mere representation and becomes a medium on its own with the potential to simultaneously communicate 'two dimensions of being'; it oscillates between 'a physical, individualized form of existence and a mode of being in the form of a dispersed connectedness within the universe.'[54]

In privileging the exhibition with a creative potential that moves from the singular experience to the universal so as to enable the formation of a shared common ground that has, in turn, a transformative effect in the present, Buergel affirms the power of the exhibition as a process capable of producing new subjectivities. Notably, this productive, transformative process goes through the mechanisms of intelligibility, ignorance, and the dissolution of identities rather than the all too familiar mechanisms of representation and identification. For some commentators, then, Buergel's wish for the 'unpreconceived gaze' upholds 'the retrograde notion of mystical union with the work of art'. His affirmative reading of the modernist origins of Documenta was criticized for appropriating Bode and Haftmann's notion of art as a universal language and existential common ground alongside the exhibition's capacity 'to forge a new subjectivity open to Otherness' in order to pursue 'a certain metaphysical turn' in the shifting conditions of today.[55] Buergel, certainly, emphasizes an aesthetic ethics of coexistence leading to the self-formation of a public space, yet he is careful to avoid nostalgia and does not present D12 as a replication of the first Documenta, not even on the level of staging where affiliations are most obvious. Instead, he acknowledges his indebtedness to Lina Bo Bardi's 1950s dynamic exhibition space, taking from

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[53] Ibid., pp. 38-39, 36.
[54] Ibid., p. 39.
[55] Holert, 'Failure of Will', pp. 408, 412.

Bode's aesthetics of display a sense of 'bareness or crudeness' that allows an 'undefined relationship' between the work and the viewer to emerge, and that may be useful in 'defamiliarizing contemporary art' particularly in its mainstream manifestations. The challenge that D12 confronts today is, Buergel contends, whether an exhibition can 'succeed in overcoming a sense of fragmentation in a given society without creating a false sense of community, as in the case of the identitarian shows'; namely, whether it can extend the notion of public and viewership into 'a potentially global audience'.[56]

Buergel evokes the possibility of calling forth an audience that shares, inhabits, and defines a common space free from the over-determining criteria of geopolitical identity, representational politics, conceptual determination, and mainstream dictates. This appeal to invoke and produce a public, accentuated as it is with aesthetic education, echoes the modernist mission of an ideal global community. Buergel appears to evoke the past by calling his search for origins 'Romantic',[57] but he also calls for alternatives to create a better future as a modernist beyond critical postmodernism. The belief in the continuing value of certain aspects of modernism, not limited to Greenberg's position, is demonstrated in various ways. Two years prior to D12, Buergel stated:

> There is no need to make Documenta on a planetary scale. It has a modernist legacy, dreaming of art as a kind of universalist language. I know that this myth is deconstructed, but I can't think of any viable alternative to it. […] It is true that the modernists somehow got the premises of the utopian investment of modernity wrong, so that it is not possible to claim modernity any longer with an innocent eye. But still, we have to work on something like a planetary horizon for humankind.[58]

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[56] Buergel in Clare Carolin, 'It's Not About Representation, It's About Production: Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack in Conversation with Clare Carolin', *Untitled*, no. 43 (Autumn 2007), pp. 4-11 (6).

[57] See Roger M. Buergel, 'Ja, Ich bin Romantiker', interview to Hanno Rauterberg, *Die Zeit*, 11.12.2003, print version, n.p. <http://www.zeit.de/2003/51/B_9frgel_2fdocumenta> [accessed 23 October 2016].

[58] Roger M. Buergel, [not authorized transcription of a talk] 'Discourse on the (Curatorial) Method', in CIMAM 2005 Annual Conference *Museums: Intersections in a Global Scene* (Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo, Brazil: 21-22 November 2005), pp. 48-55 (48-49), proceedings available in <http://cimam.org/wp-content/uploads/CIMAM-2005-Annual-Conference-Museums-Intersections-in-a-Global-Scene.pdf> [accessed 23 October 2016].

Buergel is aware of the risks in claiming today a common horizon for all, therefore the work of cultural translation and the connection to specific kinds of local knowledge is important. The challenge for D12 was how to show works from different modernities in a single exhibition without missing locality and contextual specificity. On the legacy of D1, the migration of form was controversially deployed to create a situation in which works and subjects could relate to each other within the precarious aesthetics of an ethics of coexistence. As the curators explained after the show, 'The investment of documenta 12 was in the interface … in a twilight zone of ethics and aesthetics that is not yet properly understood', however it 'offers an alternative to the feudal structure of the better part of today's art world.'[59]

The political is not in the piece itself

While the modernist emphasis of D12 is evident and not without risks and possible objections, what goes largely unnoticed in its critical reception is that its concern with the aesthetic does not efface the socio-political. On the contrary, D12's aesthetic proposal extends into the political realm and so avoids a restrictive modernist aestheticism; the postmodern critical approaches to art; and the contemporary prominence of political over-conceptualism or overt politicization. Buergel affirms the political power of aesthetic autonomy. 'Art needs autonomy, not as a characteristic, but as an effect. However, it must be able to expound alternative social projects', he stated in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2003, showing that aesthetic autonomy and social engagement can be connected.[60] From this viewpoint, the organizers' online interview during D12, entitled 'Politics', offers useful insights. According to Buergel,

> Political … is not in the piece itself. The political effectiveness is precisely in the effects an exhibition has … on a deeper level, a collective level. But what is important for the exhibition is … to create a space for exteriority and

[59] Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel, 'Some Afterthoughts on the Migration of Form', *Afterall*, no. 18 (Summer 2008), pp. 5-15 (13).

[60] Roger M. Buergel, 'More Art into Politics!', interview to Holger Liebs, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 December 2003, print version, n.p., from Documenta Archiv, Mappe 45, Dezember 2003-April 2007.

exterior world, where art is no longer an integrated part of everyday life or part of the mainstream, but something else to which people have to react.[61]

Buergel makes two key, interconnected points. First, the political is a matter of effect rather than of the work's content as such and, second, art paradoxically needs autonomy, a certain separateness from everyday conditions in order to be politically effective. In this regard, the political dimension of D12 is not to be found in what are conventionally deemed 'political works', which the exhibition nonetheless did not lack. Claire Bishop, who was critical of the conceptual 'groundlessness' of the exhibition, claims that if one considered the works exhibited, 'it was hard to argue for a repression of the socio-political.'[62] Indeed, a significant number of works engaged with issues of feminism (Jo Spence, Mary Kelly); the political economy of labour (Martha Rosler, David Goldblatt, Allan Sekula, Zoe Leonard); disruptive public performances and the invention of new aesthetic forms under repressive political regimes in Latin America and Eastern Europe of the 1960-1970s (Sanja Ivekovic, Jiri Kovanda, Ion Grigorescu, Lotty Rosenfeld, reproduction of archival material documenting the work of Graciela Carnevale and the activist collective Grupo de Artistas de Vanguardia in Rosario, Argentina); contemporary politics and terror war such as in Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *Phantom Truck, The Radio* (2007). These pieces, and many others, make apparent that D12 did deploy works with political content and perceptive critical positions alongside the more abstract forms of John McCracken, Agnes Martin, Gerwald Rocknenschaub, Mira Schendel, among others, and the ensuing tension was at times revealing.

What raised criticism was that D12, by means of its overall conception and exhibition display, managed to 'neutralize' and 'depoliticize' even the most political works (Fig. 6.10).[63] Juxtapositions may not always be successful, however what is significant in D12 is the attempt to avoid canonizing the political into an exhibition genre or style – a frequent risk in exhibitions even with the most radical intentions and political contexts. 'The relation between art and politics is a complicated one', Noack argues, so that it cannot be actualized 'solely by putting political context into art.' For 'the political … happens in real life', and so 'the quality does not lie only

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[61] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, *Politics*: *Interview at Documenta 12 Kassel, Germany, 2007* (August 2007) <http://www.dmovies.net/documenta12/index.html> [accessed 11 March 2016].
[62] Bishop, 'The Analytic Documenta', p. 208.
[63] Marchart, 'Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization', p. 476.

within the artwork or outside [it] but somewhere in the relationship between.' In this respect, Noack explains, often a feminist work of art is not 'feminist' when it is read in a different register and, conversely, 'a work that is not feminist at all can be political in a show with [a] feminist perspective.' This means that 'art can only be political in a situation where it is made political',[64] therefore the boundaries between what is usually labelled 'political art' and what is called 'aesthetic' are not fixed but contingent.

By not strictly locating the political in content and what are considered as politically-committed practices, but in the aesthetic effect, Buergel and Noack responded to prevalent forms of politicizing art and its exhibition over the last decades, especially the exhibition-qua-political analysis. For the D12 organizers, it is not possible to experience art beyond concept, discourse, context, and social relation. What they contend however, is the conceptual and political determination that threatens to frame art into certain didactic, utilitarian and ideological constraints. They alternatively suggest the exhibition as a medium for the creation of an experiential space, or else a non-didactic context, in which art does not represent, identify, explain, or illustrate anything in advance but opens the possibility for unforeseeable meanings to emerge that disrupt the regulations of the existing semantic systems and expand our awareness of reality. Driven by the similar tenet of questioning existing structures and their established hierarchies, David and Enwezor directed Documenta towards a global documentation project, they renounced past aestheticized models, the cultural spectacle and commodification of art with the aim of reasserting the critical agency of art, its relation to social life and political reality. Nonetheless, as we have already seen, they did not effectively avoid a didactic essay-like approach and the prescription of a conceptual-discursive framework that largely shaped the content and form of the exhibited art.[65]

Enwezor explicitly criticized the deficiencies of Modernism and avant-garde practices for representing the continuation of Western hegemony and the institutional

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[64] Noack in interview to Friques and Laru-an, 'Curators Must Stay Different', p. 7/10.

[65] Yuko Hasegawa, in her review of D11, writes: '… although there is nothing particularly new about the theme and content of the exhibition itself, the actual experience of being at the exhibition was akin to reading a profound book […] Documenta 11 overlapped with the previous Documenta, which critics had described as being akin to editing a book, in the selection of artists and the structure of the exhibition.' She concludes: 'There was a strong educational tone to this exhibition that made me cringe a little, like being forced to listen closely to a cultural studies lecture at an American or English University.' Yuko Hasegawa, 'Struggling for Utopia', *Flash Art*, vol. 33, no. 225 (July-September 2002), p. 105.

legitimization of the discrete, autonomous art object. To contest past attempts that asserted the autonomous distinctiveness of art and to go beyond a narrow Western global perspective, he rearticulated the exhibition and artistic practice into the wider socio-political, cultural, and discursive realm and, most notably, he made the representation of the struggles of the oppressed and the disorder of globalization his main focus. Content appears to be the predicative force behind much of the work selected for D11. An overly aesthetic representation of global disorder, intended as a more politicized art with works that highlighted oppression, injustice, poverty, inequities, political constraint, immigration, generally the troubles afflicting the contemporary world – in the preferably used lens-based documentary form – generated questions about what is critical art today and to what extent it is different from photojournalism and other documentary forms. Inasmuch as Enwezor intended to accommodate and fully pursue a politicized contemporary form of art, at issue is the difference of this art from politics and the everyday exigencies of life – those that one can directly encounter in the media – along with its efficacy.[66]

Reviews of D11 repeatedly address the implications of the documentary approach as a critical antidote to the perceived inadequacies of avant-garde art. Most works were committed to witnessing or documenting aspects of social reality, providing a 'very literal reflection of life'.[67] However informative, ethical, and socially-engaged, they did not avoid a didactic, polemical, and often one-sided tone. Massimiliano Gioni, who criticized the disjunction between the disturbing content of documentary work and the orderly visual display in the exhibition site, writes about the 'dictatorship of subject matter' and suggests that 'being literal might have become a new dogma, as oppressive as being abstract or modern'. D11, Gioni astutely claims, is grounded on a 'strong theoretical system' that does not allow for much flexibility. As a result, 'in the very moment it celebrates heterogeneity, Documenta actually proclaims the coming of a new variety of homogeneity. … as though pluralism had

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[66] In his review of D11, Anthony Downey asks: 'is it adequate, or critically efficacious, to present an overview of contemporary art practices, if not in terms of spectacle, then in terms of the extent to which they reflect issues readily accessible in the media and newspaper images we are confronted with every day?' Anthony Downey, 'The Spectacular Difference of Documenta XI', *Third Text*, vol. 17, no. 1 (March 2003), pp. 85-92 (91).

[67] 'Much of what is shown in this exhibition is a very literal reflection of life; it is in fact documentary and the name Documenta thus assumes a totally new meaning.' Axel Lapp, 'Documenta 11/2', *Art Monthly*, no. 258 (July-August 2002), pp. 7-10 (8).

been imposed as a new form of fundamentalism.'[68] In a similarly critical tone, Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie argues that this literalism is often based on the 'fallacy' that it is enough 'to be present, to document events' and that the presentation of an object within 'a discursively circumscribed spatial and temporal arena' such as a museum can 'elevate it to the status of art.' Literalism appears as 'a cultural dictum that advocates difference through conformity and yields homogeneous artworks.'[69]

The crucial question is how critically efficacious this kind of politicized work is, especially in relation to the conflict and struggles of life it documents, and, importantly, to what extent it reserves that sense of ambiguity and sensibility we associate with art. Certainly, there were instances of documentation in D11 that blurred the boundaries between reality and fiction and opened new modes of perception. The majority of works, however, were prone to literalism. In this respect, Anthony Downey rightly asks,

> whether it is actually more radical to take the apparently 'conservative' position and contend that there is such a distinct practice as 'art' that is, if not independent from a politics then at least an alternative to it.[70]

Within this framework of inquiry, Gioni brings attention to an additional key point: the role and reaction of the spectators. 'When faced with images coming from the Rwanda massacres or from the occupied territory', as in D11, 'how are we supposed to react?', Gioni asks. 'Does our reaction belong to the domain of ethics or to that of aesthetics? Are we spectators or are we meant to turn to political action?' While the tendency here is to distinguish ethics from aesthetics, the supposed passivity of spectatorship from the activity of political praxis, the questions imply an enforced ethical reaction – taking a prescribed moral position – that turns those encountering these images into guilty spectators or voyeurs without leading to meaningful political analysis or action. The problem with D11, Gioni concludes, is that it 'renovates'

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[68] Massimiliano Gioni, 'Finding the Center', *Flash Art*, vol. 33, no. 225 (July-September 2002), pp. 106-107.
[69] Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, 'Ordering the Universe: Documenta 11 and the Apotheosis of the Occidental Gaze', *Art Journal*, vol. 64, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 81-89 (86).
[70] Downey, p. 91.

artistic themes and languages, but 'it does not readdress the format of the exhibition or truly question our role as spectators.'[71]

Enwezor's intention to reactivate the relationship between art practice and the socio-political sphere beyond autonomous aestheticism and what he perceived as the ultimate failure of the modernist avant-garde brought to the fore various debates about art, autonomy, and politics or art's relation to life. Buergel and Noack, without presenting D12 as a harbinger for 'spectacular difference', took another tack on these issues foregrounding presentation and the need for art to stay autonomous, if it is to have an effect on collective life. D11, despite the proclamation of its 'spectacular difference', ended up representing its all-encompassing claims, political concepts, and ethical drives in a totalizing politics of representation. In response to this danger, Buergel and Noack stress the need to negotiate the relation of art and life beyond ethical and representational immediacy and for the exhibition to create a liberating space of unconstrained perception that, in turn, invokes new perspectives of reflection and action:

> … every good exhibition deals with a free imagining of the relation between subjectivity and the world. […] If you show a work that deals with the border of the West Bank and Israel, then this won't directly change what is happening in political terms, but … if you give a space in which people can reflect upon the world in a different mode from that offered by media then that's good. […] A lot of art works through these problems, not by mirroring them … but by finding ways to formulate the problems in a way that gives you breathing space.[72]

Buergel chooses a different trajectory in which critical efficacy lies less in mirroring the dysfunctions of life in the present than in providing an aesthetic space that allows for a distance from the everyday immediacy of things and the way in which socio-political issues are presented in the media. Peter Friedl's *The Zoo Story* (2007) breaks with the stereotypical impotency of most media images of the political conflict in the West Bank. The installation of a taxidermised giraffe – a giraffe from the zoo in

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[71] Gioni, 'Finding the Center', p. 107.
[72] Buergel quoted in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, 'We're not Prophets!', interview, *Art Review*, no. 10 (April 2007), pp. 82-85 (85).

Qalqiliyah, a city in the West Bank before it was enclosed by the Israeli 'security wall', died during the Israeli military occupation in 2003 and was stuffed by the zoo veterinarian in an amateur manner – functions as an 'image' that may activate new narratives distinct from the critical pretensions of documentary images (Fig. 6.11). If the encounter with art is more than meaning consumption, then the political is not a matter of didacticism and literal message. Buergel repeatedly objects to the widespread misconception that we 'have to understand art.'[73] Art can be liberating not so much by inviting viewers to understand it but by inventing an experience of ambiguity that forces them to attentively reflect and make things meaningful themselves. As such, new modes of thinking are invoked and new capacities can be discovered, leading to a broader awareness of reality that potentially reconfigures the relation to ourselves and society.

The aforementioned *Phantom Truck, The Radio* (2007) by Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle is a case in point of how art can be political without losing its powerful presence and sense of strangeness that keeps it from being swallowed by political representation. The installation is a full-scale reproduction of what is allegedly a mobile biological weapons lab, as described by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell when addressing the U.N. Security Council in 2003, prior to the invasion of Iraq. The work is collated from renderings used by Powell and photographs of actual trailers found in Iraq after the invasion, which proved not to be capable of weapons' production. The artist built this 'phantom truck' playing upon its non-existence and the processes of representation, perception, and reception of information in the contemporary world. Installed in a darkened space, barely perceptible, the truck reflects its own status as a fiction. Perception is more perplexed in an adjacent room suffused with red light issuing through windows. The occasional sound of a radio interrupts the transformed perception of the surroundings outside (Fig. 6.12-6.13). Manglano-Ovalle researches the political, cultural, and technological systems and processes in which the truck is involved, yet he avoids any explication, political conceptualism and documentation, and translates the conceptual process of production into an experiential space of aesthetic indeterminacy. 'The resulting work', we read in the D12 catalogue, 'translated into an aesthetic context, is always highly formal and refined', yet the artist 'strategically disrupts any sense of modernist

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[73] Ibid.

autonomy'. Spectators are drawn into 'a poetic awareness of the invisible forces that shape the contemporary world'[74] rather than being constrained by a didactic representation intended to raise their consciousness about the mechanisms through which information is constructed today for political purposes.

D12 deliberately provided a formless system that exposed ambiguity and complexity inciting the uneasiness, even frustration, of not understanding, which disrupts conventional perceptions and established forms of acting. In this respect, it provided a more permeable structure – really open to transformation, criticism, and failure – than Enwezor's solid theoretical system. Besides, it is predicated upon the necessity of assuming a certain exteriority for art and its exhibition, if it is to have a liberating effect on existing conditions. Buergel and Noack were explicit about the political and aesthetic aims of D12:

> We need to find the means to step out of this all-encompassing immediacy, if we are to negotiate the relationship between art and life. Aesthetic experience starts where conventional meaning ceases. It challenges immediacy, and enables us to rethink the terms, which guide us through the present.[75]

As a result, D12's curatorial commitment to the political potential of aesthetic autonomy departs from the more conservative understanding of autonomy in terms of the work's existence in an absolute state of social disinterestedness and deficiency in generating social responsibility.

Aesthetic autonomy, not autonomous art: 'Things We Don't Understand'

Indeed, the notion of autonomy advanced by Buergel and Noack does not exclude social relevance. The aesthetic autonomy and its liberating effect was the subject of a little examined exhibition called *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen//Things We Don't Understand*, curated by Buergel and Noack in 2000, at the Generali Foundation in

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[74] Russel Storer, 'Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Phantom Truck, The Radio, 2007', in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007 Katalog/Catalogue*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 280-281 (280).
[75] Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel, 'About the Exhibition', in *Documenta 12 Press Kit: Press Conference on 13 June 2007 in Kassel*, pp. 1-42 (3) <http://www.metabol.net/d12/Press_engl.pdf> [accessed 10 February 2015].

Vienna.[76] The exhibition is important for our discussion because it elucidates the concept of 'autonomy', which informed the emphasis on the value of the aesthetic experience in D12, while it exposes several misconceptions upon which the criticism of D12 was based. In their short catalogue text the curators highlight that 'works of art cannot be autonomous', and so they differentiate themselves from the 'autonomous art' that is an essential part of the history of the bourgeois public and its ideology. Instead, they see 'aesthetic autonomy as an *effect* – a liberating effect in relation to the existing conditions'; as something that may happen since 'the possibility of aesthetic autonomy depends upon the existence of a situation' in which the encounter of art and the public takes place.[77] The exhibition explores the conditions of possibility by which aesthetic autonomy might have an effect, and it is this speculative, rather than diagnostic or repairing of the social fabric, dimension which is akin to the approach of D12. According to Buergel and Noack,

> an aesthetic experience may lead to effects of autonomy if our attempts to understand a work of art, or to attach significance to it, are frustrated by the work itself, and if this failure of understanding simultaneously opens up a view of the other of meaning.[78]

Understood this way, aesthetic autonomy is a matter of experience in which conceptual processes take place on a different level than the determinant domination of understanding. The 'things we don't understand', the curators claim, are the means for a 'liberation in relation to the existing order of society'.[79] Far from being disempowering, they can be used as a mechanism of thinking and communicating beyond the conventions of powerful social relations and the hierarchies of knowledge, forging new forms and spaces for acting in the world. Aesthetic autonomy is an

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[76] See Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2000). The exhibition, 27 January-16 April 2000, presented works by the invited artists Eleanor Antin, Ines Doujak, Harun Farocki, Peter Friedl, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, Nina Menkes, Alice Ohneland, and Alejandra Riera. Through the deployment of diverse forms, materials, and content, the artists, we read in the catalogue, explore 'how social engagement and aesthetic autonomy can be connected' on the basis of 'the effects of irritation' in everyday life experience (n.p.).

[77] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, 'Things We Don't Understand', trans. Tom Appleton, in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2000), pp. 87-94 (87). Italics in the original.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

aesthetic strategy that intervenes in the existing social order and carries the potential to change the world without 'either succumbing to the draw of popular culture (and becoming part of the entertainment industry) or repairing social outrages (and dissolving into social work).'[80] 'Art has the social function of representing this Other to society', we read in the exhibition website. For a 'bourgeois' understanding of art, Otherness is the absolute 'freedom' from social life; for art as 'critical practice', the Other is a means for 'rendering visible the excluded, repressed, or unthinkable.' The curators counter both conceptions since art is neither free nor critical in itself. Rather its meaning is contingent upon the 'specific situation' of the aesthetic encounter.[81]

Accordingly, the '*shape*' of the exhibition itself or the 'physical and narrative context' within which the works appear in corresponding or contradictory relations – the approach that also informed D12 – plays a significant role in the production of meaning.[82] The curators sidestep the perennial debate of 'institutional critique' and focus on how to place art in a context so it avoids the pitfalls of established contextualizing forms. Historical or contemporaneous contextualization may be intended against the 'normative myths of autonomy', they point out, but it does not necessarily lead to liberation from existing conditions as it tends to confuse 'the analysis of a problem with its solution.'[83] This is a key remark implicitly directed at both the vacuous rhetoric of discursive practices that do not address the underlying structural conditions of discourse and more academic approaches. 'The power of norms and images', Buergel and Noack argue, 'is based on the systemic character of the visual, which regulates both the production and the readability of images' and further 'shapes the visions one has of the world and of the self.' The challenge is not a matter of merely 'developing other visions' but also of 'creating new kinds of imagination, not just in order to produce different images, but also to keep working on their underlying basic structures.'[84] This double focus on the disruption of the underlying structural conditions and the way they affect artistic production and aesthetic experience through the invention of new forms of imagination and narration

[80] Buergel and Noack, eds, *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand*, exh. cat., n.p.
[81] *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand* exhibition, curated by Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, Generali Foundation, Vienna, (27 January-16 April 2000) <http://foundation.generali.at/en/info/archive/2000-1998/exhibitions/things-we-dont-understand.html> [accessed 25 October 2016].
[82] Buergel and Noack, 'Things We Don't Understand', p. 88. Italics in the original.
[83] Ibid., p. 89.
[84] Ibid.

was also central in the configuration and experience of D12. In the Generali Foundation exhibition it was reflected both in the production of diverse works that shared a concern with the transformation of the conventional meaning of everyday experiences through the disruption of 'irritation' and the non-conventional framing of the works in a kind of '*narrative image*' (Fig. 6.14).[85]

The works on display were not, however, directly recognizable as 'political' in message or content. Instead, they explored the potential transformative effect of the uneasiness of not understanding as an artistic strategy at the point where aesthetic experiences and the experiences of everyday life meet without being equated. In this sense, art can intervene in the way in which things are normatively perceived, thought, and communicated forging different perspectives and modes of action beyond the constraints of the given. The 'things we don't understand' become a source of investigation that, far from the myth of the absolute detachment of art from social interaction, aims to renew the always socio-political involvement of art and simultaneously preserve it as art.

For, the curators maintain, the 'other side' of meaning towards which artistic practice is directed is 'a moment of transcendence, of translucence, which is never the artwork itself, but something that may be recognized in its effects, in its capacity to liberate.'[86] This Otherness, therefore, should be better understood as the blurring of limits rather than as the ontological difference of art-as-sensation qua non-conscious experience. The organizers emphasize that they attempt to create a situation in which 'understanding itself is transformed', that the effects of irritation 'do not frustrate the mind but rather transform it', opening our consciousness to inter-subjective dimensions of the experience.[87] Herein lies the political and ethical value of the aesthetic experience. Our uneasiness when confronted with situations that disrupt entrenched modes of understanding can simultaneously have a liberating effect insofar as we are able to 'convert the crisis of insecurity into the fertile potential of

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[85] *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand*
<http://foundation.generali.at/en/info/archive/2000-1998/exhibitions/things-we-dont-understand.html>
[accessed 25 October 2016]; Buergel and Noack, 'Things We Don't Understand', p. 88. Italics in the original.

[86] Ibid., p. 94. The remark is made with reference to Harun Farocki's exhibited video installation *Ich Glaubte Gefangene zu Sehen* ['I Believed I Saw Prisoners'], 2000, in which the material is split into a double projection providing a senseless scenario. The division, Buergel and Noack explain, opens up an in-between space which is entirely 'outside of representation', but nonetheless 'enable(s)' it.

[87] *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand*
<http://foundation.generali.at/en/info/archive/2000-1998/exhibitions/things-we-dont-understand.html>
[accessed 25 October 2016].

change.'[88] In contrast to the analytical force and ethical drives of D11, the encounter with the incomprehensible requires neither excessive information nor concepts, and does not disempower the understanding in an excess of sublime feeling in order to assert its heterogeneity.

The things we cannot understand activate unconstrained modes of experience and urge a reflective recourse with a potentially modifying effect on an individual and collective level. For Buergel and Noack, aesthetic experience involves the willingness and responsibility of people to educate themselves about things they don't understand. Considering the middle class public of Documenta, Buergel stressed D12's indispensable educative role, which, unlike didacticism, is

> the attempt to draw people into a realm they cannot contain. Here they have to work on themselves and on each other but not on a common ground. What people have in common is this highly volatile essence of aesthetic experience.[89]

D12 refused to be recognizable in an easy manner and set out to explore what happens if one does not have all the information at one's disposal. It is this liberation of understanding and imagination from instrumental conceptual reason as well as the urge for aesthetic reflection, where one can no longer fall back on knowledge, familiar representations, and mainstream values but is invited to think through aesthetic processes that carries an emancipatory, political potential. For its critics, D12 is a 'completely apolitical exhibition', after two 'explicitly political' Documenta, offering 'less theory, less politics, less critique, and more beauty.'[90] However, as the revisionist reading of the first Documenta, *Things We don't Understand*, and D12 itself make clear, Buergel's curatorial approach contests what is normally understood as 'political art' today as well as attempts to 'politicize' art and reduce it to a critical position in the present. As if anticipating the charges for pursuing a revival or reactionary retreat into a self-referential aesthetics of the beautiful and a de-politicized autonomy of art, Buergel stated prior to the opening of D12:

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[88] Dietrich Karner, President of the Generali Foundation, 'Foreword', in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Dinge, Die Wir Nicht Verstehen/Things We Don't Understand*, exh. cat. (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2000), p. 9.

[89] Buergel quoted in Sylvia Liska, ed., *The Secession Talks*, p. 446.

[90] Marchart, 'Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennialization', p. 476.

Politics in a 'beautiful' exhibition is not a contradiction. For me, politics is not showing starving children in Africa, but hauling people out of their ossification and getting them to take responsibility for the world … and for themselves.[91]

III. The politics of aesthetics: *Documenta 12* and Jacques Rancière

D12 raises the question of the political function of contemporary art in a way that complicates established relations between aesthetics and politics, autonomy and social-engagement, modernism and anti-modernism, perception and thought, form and content. There is a commitment to autonomy understood as a specific form of the aesthetic experience and its potentially liberating effect that expands D12's aesthetic (and conceptual) proposal into the socio-political realm, without succumbing to either an autonomous aestheticism, for which it was mistakenly criticized, or to art as a representational and/or discursive political critique. By insisting on the relation between aesthetic autonomy and egalitarian emancipation through the maintenance of a certain exteriority of art from everyday life, D12 further complicates the aesthetic and anti-aesthetic opposition that largely underwrites an anti-modernist understanding of contemporary art.

From this viewpoint, D12 resonates strongly with philosopher Jacques Rancière's recent account of contemporary art. Rancière attempts to redefine the relation between aesthetics and politics in a way that asserts the political capacity of art without conflating it with politics as this is normally understood. Artistic practice and political activity are both forms of dissensus in relation to what Rancière calls the given 'distribution of the sensible', but each retains the specificity of their act and existence. Rancière's reconceptualization of the emancipatory promise of art attempts at 'reestablishing an element of indeterminacy in the relationship between artistic production and political subjectivization.'[92] Rancière does so not through a postconceptual discursivity and its ambitions of political engagement, of which he is

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[91] Buergel cited in Domeniek Ruyters, 'Passionate Crises: Documenta 12 Manual', *Metropolis M*, no. 3 (June-July 2007), n.p. <http://www.metropolism.com/magazine/2007-no3/lustvolle-crises/english> [accessed 15 July 2016].

[92] Jacques Rancière, 'Art of the Possible: Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in Conversation with Jacques Rancière', *Artforum*, vol. 65, no. 7 (March 2007), pp. 256-259, 262-264, 266-267, 269 (257).

critical, but by exploring the paradoxical identity of art as a separate sphere of experience at the very time that the boundaries between what is art and what is not art are being erased.

Buergel and Noack do not name Rancière as an influence, but an interview with him about the contemporary understanding of the 'political' opens the D12 Magazine Reader on Education.[93] Their shared positions are obvious, and include the political agency of the aesthetic; the political necessity of aesthetic creation as a democratic power; the rejection of contemporary forms of political art and exhibition practice; the dissensual invention of particular aesthetic experiences and the creation of spaces for the production of new subjectivities; the renouncement of didacticism in favour of self-education, active looking, and emancipated spectatorship; and, importantly, a political and aesthetic understanding of contemporary art that affirms the continuing existence of modernist elements along with the productive cohabitation of its aesthetic and conceptual aspects. It is, thus, of great value to discuss these affinities not in order to put D12 under a philosophical umbrella – this kind of framing would counter both D12 and Rancière's non-representational methodologies – but to offer by virtue of this productive encounter further insights on the aesthetic-conceptual-political proposal of D12 and, by extension, another possible understanding of the curatorial aesthetics of contemporary art.

The aesthetics of politics: Politics is a question of aesthetics and of processes of subjectification

Rancière's political understanding of aesthetics begins from what he calls the 'distribution of the sensible' ('*partage de sensible*'), or 'the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it.'[94] This 'distribution' structures the sensible, defining the limits and modes of what is visible and sayable; it determines forms of participation and exclusion, and the assignment of parts and shares in our common world. Rather than 'the exercise of power or the struggle for power', politics is therefore an 'aesthetic affair' in the sense

[93] Jacques Rancière and Christian Höller, 'The Abandonment of Democracy', in Georg Schöllhammer, ed., *Documenta Magazine No 1-3, 2007 Reader*, (*Education:*), (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 449-465.
[94] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004 [2000]), p. 12.

that it is 'the configuration of a specific world, a specific form of experience in which some things appear to be political objects, some questions political issues or argumentations and some agents political subjects.'[95] Rancière's aesthetic redefinition of politics evokes Foucault's reading of Kant inasmuch as he understands it as 'the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience.' It is the 'delimitation' of what is visible and invisible, discursive and non-discursive at any given historical moment that 'simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience', so that only what possesses visibility and speech is assigned a part.[96]

Social-political organization, the institutions and other systems of distribution and legitimization of power are what Rancière calls 'the police'.[97] Policing is 'a systematic production of the given', while 'politics' is 'whatever' contravenes the police order and 'by definition, has no place' in it – what Rancière calls 'the part of those who have no part'.[98] Politics 'disturbs' the police configuration by 'supplementing it' with a part that remains apart.[99] The claims of this invisible part to become visible, heard, and understood challenges the distribution of the sensible, and signals the emergence of politics as an activity of disagreement that potentially transforms the conditions of existence.

In this sense, the dispute between counted in and out of society paradoxically 'brings the community and the non-community together' in 'the assertion of a common world'.[100] Accordingly, for Rancière, the community exists through and in conflict, and, importantly for our discussion, disagreement is the aesthetic condition of politics.[101] Politics-qua-disagreement consists in reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible, 'the opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted', a

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[95] Jacques Rancière, 'The Thinking of Dissensus: Politics and Aesthetics', in Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, eds, *Reading Ranciére* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 1-17 (7). 'I attempted to redefine this "aesthetic" nature of politics', Rancière continues, 'by setting politics not as a specific single world but as a conflictive world: not a world of competing interests or values but a world of competing worlds.' Ibid.

[96] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 13.

[97] See Jacques Rancière, *Dis-agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1999 [1995]), p. 28.

[98] Rancière, 'Art of the Possible', p. 264; Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, pp. 29-30.

[99] Jacques Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', in Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 27-44 (36) [first publ. in *Theory and Event*, trans. Rachel Bowlby and Davide Panagia, vol. 5, no. 3, 2001)].

[100] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, p. 55.

[101] '… there is politics when there is a disagreement about what is politics […] Politics is a way of re-partitioning the political from the non-political. This is why it generally occurs "out of place", in a place which was not supposed to be political.' Rancière, 'The Thinking of Dissensus', p. 4.

space in which those who were not entitled to be counted as speaking beings, 'those of no account are counted', manifesting themselves in both dimensions of the *logos*.[102] 'Politics', Rancière states, 'is aesthetic in principle.'[103] The issue, at least for us, is whether the 'aesthetics of politics' is distinct from the aesthetics of art, a question that leads us back to the question of how politics is specifically implemented.

Politics, for Rancière, is aesthetic because 'its logic of *demonstration* is indissolubly an aesthetic of *expression*': namely, the expression of a part that contests its exclusion from the given *logos* and, coextensively, the 'poetics' by which equality appears within and changes the ordering of *aisthêsis* sustained by the police.[104] This allows Rancière to locate any principles, equality included, outside politics and to assert politics as aesthetic in principle. The question of the 'aesthetics of politics', accordingly, returns to the issue of the exceptionality and specificity of the political act. Politics is 'a matter of appearances', but also 'a matter of subjects or, rather, modes of subjectification.'[105] Specifically, politics occurs through specific mechanisms of subjectification in the processing of a wrong. The conflict between egalitarianism and the police over the articulation of a wrong 'transform[s] egalitarian logic into political logic.' This is what Rancière calls the 'constitutive function of wrong', the 'essential nexus of logos and wrong.'[106] Political subjectification modifies the identity ascribed to bodies by the police order, and so produces new subjects that

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[102] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, p. 36.
Rancière's understanding of politics is based on the Aristotelian distinction between speech and voice. He re-examines Aristotle's definition of the human as a political animal because it possesses speech, and of the political capacity as the debate over what is useful, harmful, just and unjust in relation to the common, defining who belongs and does not in the political community. Aristotle deduced from the human *aisthêsis* (as both feeling and understanding) the opposition between speech (*logos*), which is the manifestation of the human political capacity, and voice (*phôné*), which expresses mere animal sensations, feelings of pleasure and pain, and belongs to all. The issue, for Rancière, is to know who possesses speech and who possesses voice, hence political disagreement primarily concerns 'who speaks', whose voice counts, is recognized and understood as argument since *logos* is not just the sonorous emission itself as speech, but also 'the *account* that is made of this speech.' The voice appropriate only for expressing mere sensations is the voice of the people (*demos*): those who have no share and part as unqualified; no right to be counted as speaking beings. Politics is the process through which the voice of sensation is recognized as an articulate claim into the given order that contests the distributions of its exclusion and transforms them with the introduction of new subjects and objects. See Rancière, 'Ten Theses on Politics', pp. 37-38; Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, pp. 22-23. Italics in the original.
[103] Ibid., p. 58.
[104] Ibid., p. 57. Italics in the original. According to Rancière, 'Equality has no vocabulary or grammar of its own, only a poetics.' Ranciére, 'The Thinking of Dissensus', p. 6.
[105] Rancière, *Dis-agreement*, pp. 74, 35.
[106] Ibid., p. 35.

transform existing configurations 'into instances of experience of a dispute'.[107] Declaring a wrong becomes a collective manifestation that dissensually institutes the community as it produces 'another community that only exists through and for the conflict over the very existence of something in common between those who have a part and those who have none.'[108]

'What remains', then, 'are spaces of possible subjectivation… This is', Rancière claims, 'the space of a micropolitics that neither complements nor substitutes for the politics of collectives: it is the element of their transformation.'[109] In his interview in the D12 Reader he contends that politics is not about social protest or 'integrating' excluded social groups in the public sphere; it is about 'restaging' and rephrasing issues of exclusion as matters of dissensus that bring out the existence of the non-existent. The political people, he specifies, 'is missing as a social body, but it exists in the present through the construction of its own space. It is not the people of a democracy to come.'[110] In this sense, Rancière thinks politics, as he says, 'in terms of poetics'.[111] Rancière's politics-qua-poetics gives the political space and its presupposition of equality the specificity of its here-and-now. The issue, then, is not to determine political programs and envision egalitarian goals to achieve, but rather to propose 'tools and gauges that enable us to judge the current state of things and reframe the stage of the possible' on which we think and act. 'We must think of the future', Rancière insists, 'as the outcome of the possibilities created and the capacities enhanced in the present rather than put it as the goal determining what has to be done in the present.'[112]

We can recognize in this call D12's understanding of the political as a fundamentally aesthetic intervention into the given conditions of possibility through the creation of a space in which new relations and forms of subjectification can emerge. The curatorial position that nothing is political in itself, but everything becomes political when it disturbs what is sensible and the 'community' it establishes, accords with Rancière's attempt to free politics from ontological, representational,

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[107] Ibid., p. 36.
[108] Ibid., p. 35.
[109] Jacques Rancière, 'A Politics of Aesthetic Indetermination: An Interview with Frank Juda & Jan Voelker', in Jason E. Smith & Annette Weisser, eds, *Everything Is In Everything: Jacques Rancière Between Intellectual Emancipation and Aesthetic Education* (Zurich: JRP | Ringier 2011), pp. 10-33 (26).
[110] Rancière and Höller, 'The Abandonment of Democracy', pp. 459, 462-463.
[111] Ranciére, 'The Thinking of Dissensus', p. 14.
[112] Rancière and Höller, 'The Abandonment of Democracy', pp. 459, 458.

ideological, utilitarian, and contemporary ethical constraints in favour of a poetic life process. 'The political', Noack remarked, 'is something that happens in real life.'[113] It is a possibility occasioned here-and-now, which is already future-oriented. Buergel and Noack do not attempt to politicize art because, as we will see, art is always political, even if the link between art and politics is not immediate and straightforward.

Buergel's insistence on the exhibition as a laboratory for the creation of new modes of subjectivity allows for the formation of a community that exists merely through the construction and inhabiting of their own space. This kind of emancipatory formation of a public, which underwrote Buergel's political reading of D1 and the appeal to a global community for D12, is an attempt to restage the scene of the common by opening a space of experience and its enunciation where anyone can be counted. D12, through the 'Migration of form' poetic process and the emphasis on aesthetic experience, provided a specific stage for the enactment of the egalitarian principle of equality, wherein the part of those who have no part – the so-called 'lay audience', the 'unqualified' to speak about art – can make their own *account* and voice heard. Politics is an aesthetic matter for D12, but this does not take place in a purely aesthetic register and does not preclude discursivity. Instead, it negotiates the gap between the two dimensions of *logos* – the collective capacity for feeling that belongs to all and its making of some *account*; its interpretation and communication in the existing language. D12 worked to open up new possibilities for enunciation, a new space for the activation of collective aesthetic capacities, new forms of organization for the demonstration of dissensus – the growing of Documenta into the urban space of Kassel with the local Advisory Board and the international Magazine Project are only two examples of a poetic invention of the political and the creation of a common space that evades the determinations of identity and politically-driven agenda of many shows. In this regard, its politics-qua-poetics is distinguishable from David's stated attempt to define the conditions of possibility for a critical art in the present through her *retroperspectives*; it also differs from Enwezor's ethical commitment to reactivate the political and critical function of art as resistance to the totalizing forces of globalization through a programmatic politics of postcoloniality. David and Enwezor intended to politicize art and enhance its critical agency through

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[113] Noack in interview to Friques and Laru-an, 'Curators Must Stay Different', p. 7/10.

strategies of representation, discursive analysis, and consciousness-raising in the present, thereby predetermining what was to be done and the outcome of its effects. In doing so, they did not effectively avoid the danger of totalization to which they were opposed.

The politics of aesthetics

Rancière argues that 'art has its own politics, which does not dovetail with attempts at politicizing it.'[114] Art is an activity of political dissensus inasmuch as 'the practices and forms of visibility of art themselves intervene in the distribution of the sensible and its reconfiguration.' This means that 'the relationship between aesthetics and politics', Rancière explains, 'consists in the relationship between this aesthetics of politics and the "politics of aesthetics"', the way in which art effects an intervention in the political redistribution of the sensible. Insofar as art and politics are not 'two permanent, separate realities' but 'two forms of distribution of the sensible, both of which are dependent on a specific regime of identification', the key issue in the politics of aesthetics regards the specificity of the aesthetic.[115] Like the heterogeneous constitution of politics and its significance within the heteronomous stage of the police order, the political function and efficacy of art is predicated upon the condition of maintaining a heterogeneous connection between art's autonomy *and* heteronomy. There is no need to politicize art, Rancière states, because

> art produces political effects out of the very separation of the aesthetic sphere – which is not tantamount to the autonomy of the artwork – since this separation of a sphere of experience goes along with the loss of any determined criterion of difference between what belongs to art and what belongs to nonartistic life.[116]

This understanding of autonomy is pivotal for our discussion. The politics of aesthetics regards the emergence and identification of art as an autonomous, specific

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[114] Rancière and Höller, 'The Abandonment of Democracy', p. 464.
[115] Jacques Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', in Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009 [2004]), pp. 19-44 (25-26).
[116] Rancière and Höller, 'The Abandonment of Democracy', p. 464.

sphere of experience, which nonetheless does not separate art from other spheres of life.

Rancière identifies three regimes of art, which are not strictly temporal periods restricted to certain art historical styles, movements, or a teleology of art, but the historical formation of a specific system of *a priori* relations that structures the field of possible experience – what is visible, sayable, and thinkable – at a given historical moment.[117] There is the ethical regime, characteristic of Platonism; a representative regime, that of 'classical poetics', where works of art belong to the sphere of *mimēsis* (imitation) as ways of imposing a form on matter; and there is the aesthetic regime of art, which emerges with the Enlightenment, and continues up to today. Here art is defined as such, understood as 'an *autonomous form of life*'.[118] It assumes a form of equality in the production and reception of art and has the potential to reconfigure life. Equality manifests itself, first, as aesthetic 'indifference' to the hierarchical imperative of propriety with respect to art subjects, genres, and materials.[119] Inasmuch as there is no longer any meaningful distinction between ways of making associated with art and other ways of making and doing, everything is a possible subject of art and everyone is potentially both an art maker and spectator. By undoing the strict knot between a way of making and its horizon of affect, art is liberated from representation and the social divisions it orders.

As such, 'aesthetics', in its strict sense, does not refer to a theory of art, taste, or sensibility but to 'a specific regime for identifying and reflecting on the arts',

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[117] Rancière has noted the affinities of his historical methodology of 'regimes' with Foucault's archaeology of 'epistemes' along their respective differences. Both aim to analyze the specific conditions of possibility that must exist for a discourse to be recognized as such and to describe the system of rules determining the field of possible experience and expression within a given historical time. However, the regimes lack the historical rigidity and strict boundaries of *epistemes*; they are looser historical categories, not mutually exclusive, allowing for a more fluid historical transition: 'I differ from Foucault insofar as his archaeology seems to me to follow a schema of historical necessity according to which, beyond a certain chasm, something is no longer thinkable […] I thus try at one and the same to historicize the transcendental and to de-historicize these systems of conditions of possibility. […] the aesthetic regime of art, for example, is a system of possibilities that is historically constructed but that does not abolish the representative regime, which was previously dominant. At a given point in time, several regimes coexist and intermingle in the works themselves.' Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 50. Elsewhere, he explains that his attempt is 'to describe a world open to the possibilities and capacities of all: something like an archaeology more open to the event than Foucault's, but without any Benjaminian messianism.' Jacques Rancière, 'Jacques Rancière and Indisciplinarity', interview to Marie-Aude Baronian and Mireille Rosello, trans. Gregory Elliott, *ART & RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 2008), n.p. <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/jrinterview.html> [accessed 10 November 2016].
[118] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 26. Italics in the original. For a discussion of the artistic regimes, see ibid., pp. 20-23.
[119] Jacques Rancière, 'A Few Remarks on the Method of Jacques Rancière', *parallax*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2009, pp. 114-123 (120).

which 'presupposes a certain idea of thought's effectivity.'[120] The aesthetic identification of art signals the emergence of a new 'sensible mode of being', specific to art products – 'whatever falls within the domain of art'. Inasmuch as the property of being art is no longer based on a distinction between ways of doing, but instead on modes of being, 'the aesthetic regime asserts the absolute singularity of art and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity. It simultaneously', Rancière maintains, 'establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its forms with the forms that life uses to shape itself.'[121] Importantly for contemporary debates Rancière reinvents 'aesthetics' so that it denotes a specific form of sensory experience and its interpretation, including the linguistic and theoretical domain in which thinking about art takes place.

The politics of aesthetic indeterminacy departs from more established understandings of political art associated with content, message, critique, negation, the struggles of the oppressed, and raised consciousness. These mechanisms, as Buergel also pointed out, merely mirror the existing structures and confirm the hierarchical divisions of knowledge and social life they are meant to criticize. Political art, for Rancière as well as for the D12 curators, is not a concept of representation. Rancière is firm at this point:

> Art is not, in the first instance, political because of the messages and sentiments it conveys concerning the state of the world. Neither is it political because of the manner in which it might choose to represent society's structures, or social groups, their conflicts or identities. It is political because of the very distance it takes with respect to these functions, because of the type of space and time that it institutes, and the manner in which it frames this time and peoples this space.[122]

The creation of new political possibilities is, therefore, primarily an aesthetic question that concerns the creation of a particular form of experience, which, in turn, is translated into discourse in order to be able to create a new egalitarian social whole.

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[120] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 10.
[121] Ibid., p. 23.
[122] Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', p. 23.

Rancière, like Buergel and Noack, repeatedly stresses that aesthetic autonomy is 'the autonomy of the experience, not of the work of art.' Otherwise put, 'the artwork participates in the sensorium of autonomy inasmuch as it is not a work of art.'[123] As Rancière explains, 'not being a work of art', far from being an anti-art negation, means that the object of this experience is aesthetic insofar as it is the appearance of a form of life that does not experience art as a separate sphere of life. Accordingly, and here Buergel and Noack clearly resonate with Rancière: 'What is at stake is the shift in the idea of autonomy, as it is linked to that of heteronomy.'[124] This understanding of autonomy has certain repercussions for art's identity and political potential. According to Rancière, it is only by a 'strangeness' and 'radical unavailability' that the work carries 'the promise of a humanity to come', or else 'the "autonomy of art" and the "promise of politics" are not counterposed.'[125] Due to its difference from everyday sense, 'free appearance' opens up an 'aesthetic state' where power is withdrawn, and sensation is liberated from reason's instrumental domination. The work here bears the promise of a free community because 'it is not art'; it is the expression of a mode of life, whose experience has no specific separations between art, politics, and the everyday, and 'all that it expresses is a way of inhabiting a common space.'[126]

Hence, the issue is of 'restoring the "separation", restoring the otherness of aesthetic experience that alone carries the promise of a new sensuous world.' At stake is not autonomy itself, but 'the link between the promise of emancipation and the assessment of a difference in sensory experience', the experience of a heterogeneity 'cancelling of the power of active form over passive matter … that epitomizes the order of domination.'[127] Contrary to current positions that separate aesthetic autonomy from emancipation, Noack claims that 'the curatorial work is to struggle to bring these two together […] to create a situation in which they can relate with each other, though not necessarily in harmonious way.'[128]

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[123] Jacques Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes: Emplotments of Autonomy and Heteronomy', *New Left Review*, no. 14 (March-April 2002), pp. 133-151 (136).
[124] Ibid.
[125] Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', p. 34; Ibid.
[126] Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', p. 35.
[127] Jacques Rancière, 'The Sublime from Lyotard to Schiller: Two Readings of Kant and their Political Significance', trans. Max Blechman, *Radical Philosophy*, no. 126 (July/August 2004), pp. 8-15 (14).
[128] Noack in interview to Friques and Laru-an, 'Curators Must Stay Different', p. 7/10.

For Rancière, 'aesthetic separation' creates a community of sense as a 'dissensual community … structured by disconnection.'[129] Aesthetic separation attests to a twofold, interlinked separation: the artworks are, first, separated from their 'original destination', their intended meaning and predicted effect since there is no longer any determinate relationship between making and its *aesthesis*; coextensively, they are separated from their institutional destinations, the distribution of social places, functions, and (in-)capacities attributed to the bodies located in those places. The otherness of the aesthetic experience is the *neither… nor…* play that refutes the everyday hierarchical distributions of the sensible – the distribution of the active and the passive – and the way in which bodies fit their presupposed functions and destinations. For Rancière, 'Social emancipation was an aesthetic matter.'[130]

Accordingly, when Buergel stresses the 'gift of an unpreconceived gaze', the value of the suspension of understanding or the unavailability of the work to our knowledge along with the groundless basis of the aesthetic experience and the importance of aesthetic self-education, he does not appeal to 'the happy dream of a community united and civilized by the contemplation of eternal beauty.'[131] Neither does he appeal to a purely sensible art entirely distinct from social interaction or intellectual mediation. He appeals, instead, to the necessary complement of sensibility and thought, and how they are mutually and equally cancelled in the undetermined experience offered by the exhibition. Art, in this sense, is a dissensual activity creating aesthetic experiences that go beyond their possible conditions. This effect can also be occasioned through discourse – the Magazine Project and the community it forged or the playful creation of meaning in the exhibition site – inasmuch as what it produces is neither 'rhetorical persuasion about what must be done' nor the predetermined 'framing of a collective body.' Instead, what it produces is 'a multiplicity of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are "equipped" to adapt to it.' As such, it changes 'the cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible' and

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[129] Jacques Rancière, 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community', in Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009 [2008]), pp. 51-82 (59).
[130] Ibid., pp. 69, 70.
[131] Buergel, 'Der Ursprung/The Origins', p. 39; Rancière, 'Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community', p. 69.

'allows for new modes of political construction of common objects and new possibilities of collective enunciation.'[132]

Rancière thereby provides an aesthetic alternative to the question of the 'politics of art' and the 'common', which 'escapes the dilemma of representational mediation and ethical immediacy' of most critical art today. He introduces 'aesthetic efficacy itself' as a 'third term' making clear that this is 'a paradoxical kind of efficacy that is produced by the very rupturing of any determinate link between cause and effect.'[133] The political effect occurs, for Rancière, only under this 'original disjunction', and thus 'political subjectivation proceeds via a process of dis-identification.'[134] Buergel, both in his reading of D1 and the making of D12, repeatedly emphasizes the political potential of the effect of dis-identification – which he calls a 'crisis' or a state of 'oscillation' between being connected and being disconnected, being together and being apart – as it enables new forms of subjectification to emerge without determining them according to a pre-existent political programme.

Art maintains a paradoxical form of identity and politics of both autonomy and heteronomy

The liberation from such instrumentalized relations affects the identity, role, and political efficacy of contemporary art. 'The aesthetic alternative', Rancière argues, 'does not oppose, as is often assumed, autonomy to heteronomy. It opposes one linkage of autonomy and heteronomy to another linkage of them.'[135] This allows Rancière at once to reject the purity of art and claim that 'there is no conflict between the purity of art and its politicization.'[136] These oppositions are different interpretations of the 'key formula' of the aesthetic regime of art that 'art is an autonomous form of life': either autonomy is stressed over life (autonomous modernist art) or life over autonomy (postmodern non-art), and these approaches either are opposed or intersect. For Rancière, modernist life-into-art and postmodern art-into-life are not opposed because they are both contained in the same contradiction

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[132] Ibid., p. 72.
[133] Ibid., p. 63.
[134] Ibid., pp. 72-73.
[135] Rancière, 'The Sublime from Lyotard to Schiller', p. 14.
[136] Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', p. 32.

at the heart of the aesthetic experience. Each is 'a variant' of the politics of aesthetics, of a shared attempt at reframing the space of politics by creating dissensus in the distribution of the sensible.[137] Rancière repeatedly states that 'The politics of art in the aesthetic regime of art, or rather its metapolitics, is determined by this founding paradox', which he defines as follows: 'art is art insofar as it is also non-art, or is something other than art.'[138]

The aesthetic regime maintains a form of politics premised upon the paradox that art is a sphere both at one remove from politics and always political as it bears the promise of a new form of life. Accordingly, there is no need to assume the emergence of postmodern non-art that put an end to the modernist undertaking of art's autonomy and emancipation through art. 'There is no postmodern rupture', Rancière contends. 'There is a contradiction that is originary and unceasingly at work.'[139] What is important is to hold open the zone of exchange between 'art' and 'life' that allows art to bear the promise of a new life precisely by keeping itself at a distance. Art is political because, by being separate and refusing its transformation into a form of life, it creates heterogeneous experiences that suspend the ordinary relations determining life and dissents from the hierarchical divisions of the sensible; also by seeking to construct new forms of life in common and refusing to remove itself into a separate reality, art-as-dissensus is transformed into a new life.

In a similar vein, Buergel and Noack distance themselves equally from a traditional understanding of aesthetic autonomy and political art as a critical project that organizes its forms on the basis of the representation or explanation of the existing order, implying how the world ought to be. They address, instead, the need to renegotiate the relation of art to life by holding open an ambiguous political space of interaction and permeability between aesthetic separation and social involvement:

> If an exhibition wants to do more than recognize existing positions, that is to say, wants to become part of a political reality without being swallowed up by it, then it has to walk the line between social involvement and aesthetic autonomy. Hence we need works that can do both: establish relationships and create distance. … the aesthetic autonomy does not live in the things

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[137] Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes', p. 137.
[138] Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', p. 36. See also Rancière, 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes', p. 137.
[139] Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', p. 36.

themselves but is an effect of perception. […] In order for an exhibition to be able to change the world, it has to make itself radically permeable.[140]

This tension between the aestheticized and the politicized approach was best demonstrated in Allan Sekula's outdoor installation of the third edition of his photographic series *Shipwreck and Workers* (2007). The series deals, in a new form of documentation, with the wider changes that have taken place within the context of the globalization of economy and politics. In the Kassel version, defined by the artist as a 'Portable and Temporary Monument for Labour', the photographs of ordinary workers were installed as billboards alongside the early eighteenth-century Cascade and Herculaneum, above the Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, on a hill over the city (Fig. 6.15). The installation-qua-monument to labour not only rethinks the tradition of monumental public sculpture but also establishes a tension with the neo-baroque aristocratic setting of waterfalls and gardens in the Herculaneum. Walking uphill, the visitors directly confront the realism of the featured workers; going down the hill, they only see the monochrome backs of the billboards, a kind of 'screen' onto which they can project their own thoughts and 'imagine possible worlds today' (Fig. 6.16-6.17). Avoiding the usual didacticism and strict conceptualism of documentation, the aesthetic and the political here implicate each other, they become visible and affectively irreconcilable, creating an encounter with what Sekula describes as 'the issue of the "unwaged collective Sisyphus".'[141]

In a similar fashion, Danica Dakić's media installation *El Dorado* (2006-2007), on display in Schloss Wilhelmshöhe amongst the Old Masters, and in Kassel's German Museum of Wallpaper, maintained an ambiguous and complicated subject space, which, in a Rancièrean way, reframed the relationship between places and identities, the distribution of places and the (in-)capacities attached to them. In a video projection performed by teenage refugees stranded in Kassel, they struck poses and recounted their own stories against the backdrop of a nineteenth-century panoramic wallpaper at the Tapetenmuseum (Fig. 6.18). The artist's collaboration with young people, to whom she gave voice, did not preclude the use of a refined, elegant

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[140] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, 'Words from an Exhibition', in Eigenheer Marianne, ed., *Curating Critique: ICE Reader 1* (Frankfurt: Revolver, 2007), pp. 104-108 (106-107).
[141] See Hilde Van Gelder, 'Allan Sekula: Shipwreck and Workers (Version 3 for Kassel), 2007', in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007 Katalog/Catalogue*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 298-299.

cinematography and exoticizing framing. Rather, echoing Rancière's understanding of the flatness of 'surface' as a kind of social 'interface' and the invention of new experiences,[142] the decorative wallpaper surface, we read in the D12 catalogue, was populated with the youngsters' 'narratives of the search for self, of courage and beauty' as 'actively forging a "new world".'[143]

Contemporary approaches to political art: The impasses of political 'content' and 'critique'

Contrary to widespread contemporary complaints about the loss of art's critical capacity, Rancière sees in the condition of heterogeneity, in 'art's indefiniteness *and* identifiability', its political specificity and efficacy.[144] For Rancière, the present is 'a topography of the configuration of possibilities',[145] therefore what characterizes 'contemporary art' and gives it 'its form of efficiency' is precisely its lack of normative criteria, the way in which the 'disjointed junction between aesthetic separation and artistic indistinction becomes the form and matter of art.' Artistic efficiency lies in the blurring of borders and the redistribution of established relations. This, importantly, is 'not a question of reversing the roles', but rather of 'creating a room for play' – what Buergel above aptly called a 'breathing space' – in which the real and the fictional, and the partitions of the consensual order are obscured. In this respect, Rancière claims, contemporary art can play a more radical part in politics, given that 'political groups don't play it much today', without being turned into political practice.[146]

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[142] While Rancière clearly rejects formalist modernism, he argues for the political significance of the surface of abstract painting. Contrary to the modernist understanding that the surface has been 'a boundary, isolating the purity of an art', it is rather 'a place of slippage between various spaces.' Rancière, 'Art of the Possible', p. 266. It marked 'the belonging of the new pictorial gesture to a surface/interface where pure art and applied art, functional art and symbolic art, merged…' Rancière, 'Aesthetics as Politics', p. 33. More on this subject and how the flatness of painting is 'the flatness of an interface' linked to the 'flatness of pages, posters, and tapestries' in a context where 'pure art and decorative art are intertwined', in Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, pp. 16-17.

[143] Wanda Wieczorek, 'Danica Dakić: El Dorado, 2007', in Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds, *Documenta Kassel 16/06 - 23/09 2007 Katalog/Catalogue*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), pp. 230-231.

[144] See Suhail Malik and Andrea Phillips, 'The Wrong of Contemporary Art: Aesthetics and Political Indeterminacy', in Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp, eds, *Reading Rancière* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp. 111-128 (111). Italics in the original.

[145] Rancière, 'Art of the Possible', p. 257.

[146] Rancière and Höller, 'The Abandonment of Democracy', p. 464.

Contrary to what is normally believed, Rancière argues that topical or political content and criticism are not essential to political art; 'critical' artistic strategies, especially those that aim to provoke political action either by representing pre-existing political programmes or raising consciousnesses about the state of the world, are counterproductive. These strategies dominated D11, as we have seen. However, as Gioni argues, '… entering the realm of ethics through the back door of contemporary art puts us in a quite ambiguous situation' for it most often turns us into guilty spectators, unable to act. Besides, it is questionable whether it preserves 'that coefficient of weirdness, lyricism, or sensibility we still associate with the idea of art.'[147] A work's investment in understanding, Rancière points out, eradicates the 'strangeness of the resistant appearance' that bears testimony to the oppressive intolerability of the world. Understanding, explication, and feelings of guilt are not transformative in and of themselves. Resonating with Buergel's credo, Rancière is here explicit: It is not lack of understanding that sustains the existing order of domination but lack of confidence in our capacity to transform it.[148]

Unlike the critical logic that defines a correspondence between political aims and artistic means, Rancière calls for an interface in which there is no criterion for establishing a determinate relation or privileged mediation 'between "representations" considered artistic and "engagements" considered political.'[149] To avoid the pitfalls of didacticism, he stresses the affective capabilities of art that evade representation in favour of ambiguity and rupture. Politics and aesthetics exist in the constant tension of these opposites. Political art, Rancière maintains, cannot work in 'the simple form of a meaningful spectacle' intended to lead to 'an "awareness" of the state of the world'. Rather 'suitable political art' would ideally produce 'a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely … by that which resists signification.' This political effect is the object of a constant 'negotiation … between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning.'[150] This logic of 'undecidability' is explored in Manglano-Ovalle's *Phantom Truck, The Radio* (2007). The work retains the strangeness of

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[147] Gioni, 'Finding the Center', pp. 107, 106.
[148] See Jacques Rancière, 'Problems and Transformations of Critical Art', in Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009 [2004]), pp. 45-60 (45).
[149] Rancière, 'Art of the Possible', p. 259.
[150] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics,* p. 63.

appearance – necessary for any claim of aesthetic autonomy – yet strategically disrupts a sense of modernist aestheticism and offers itself to a political reading that, nonetheless, resists overt political representation. It efficiently disrupts the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable 'without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle.'[151]

The claim that political 'content' or 'criticism' are not necessary to political art does not mean that the redistribution of the sensible is demonstrated only through abstract forms entirely unrelated to political themes. What Rancière highlights, and this is also evident in D12, is that artistic forms have no inherent or fixed political affiliations. The political agency of art derives from its ability to go beyond the everyday system of meanings. At the heart of the aesthetic experience there is a gap between sense and the meanings made from it, and in this gap new capacities can be discovered and invented. The challenge of political art and exhibition-making is, therefore, as Rancière puts it, to 'transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations.'[152]

In light of the cul-de-sac that now affects 'critical' art, according to Rancière, the political issue of the present is to relate to culture from the viewpoint of the capacities it mobilizes. We have ended up, Rancière argues, with a culture that has assimilated critical strategies, 'capitalizing on the impotence of the critique that unveils the impotence of the imbeciles' in the sense that cultivated spectators are supposedly capable of recognizing the messages hidden in the seductive images of the capitalist spectacle.[153] The postmodern attempt to reverse the modernist paradigm disconnected the critique of capitalist spectacle from any process of emancipation through the operation of a 'melancholic version of leftism' or 'postmodern nihilism'.[154] In contrast to the widespread dismissal of art's capacity to engage in effective forms of political critique, Rancière emphasizes the need to 'uncouple the link between the emancipatory logic of capacity and the critical logic of collective inveiglement'. He suggests a reorganization of the sensible that neither proposes the existence of 'a reality concealed behind apparatuses' nor 'a single regime of presentation and interpretation', but rather it opens every situation 'from the inside',

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[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Jacques Rancière, 'The Misadventures of Critical Thought', in Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009 [2008]), pp. 25-49 (48).
[154] Ibid., pp. 35, 45.

confronts its underlying structures and conditions of possible visibility and intelligibility, and potentially transforms the coordinates of the sensible we all share. Collective emancipation, Rancière claims, is 'the collectivization of capacities invested in scenes of dissensus.'[155]

Emancipated spectatorship is a capacity of everyone: 'Looking is also an action'

Rancière is particularly critical of those who pitch themselves against the ubiquity of the market, the spectacle and art's commodification because, contrary to their stated aims and oppositional rhetoric, they tend to be 'caught up in this police logic of the equivalence of the power of the market and the power of its denunciation.'[156] Artists denounce the impasse of critique and call for a return to politics, yet continue to confirm a consensual logic of political action inasmuch as their practices are still grounded on the hierarchical order.[157] What is problematic, for Rancière, is that most often these practices regulate the agency of the spectator insofar as they assume spectatorship as fundamentally 'passive or distant, and therefore apolitical', and then work to overcome it.[158] Considering D12's affirmation of active viewing Rancière's reconceptualization of spectatorship as already emancipated becomes more pertinent.

In the essay 'The Emancipated Spectator' from 2008, Rancière questions the assumption that spectators remain ignorant of the reality lying behind what they look at, and are passive because they merely look at it. Against this, he argues that emancipated spectatorship is a capacity of everyone, and is postulated upon 'the

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[155] Ibid., pp. 48, 49.
[156] Rancière, 'Art of the Possible', p. 266.
[157] Rancière often illustrates his position with examples of contemporary installations such as Paul McCarthy and Jason Rhoades's *Shit Plug* (2002) in *Documenta 11*: a spectacular installation of glass bottles containing the excrement of visitors to D11, in order to show the waste of the society of the spectacle and to reveal the participation of art in it. He also cites Josephine Meckseper's installation *Untitled* (2006) at the second Biennial of contemporary art in Seville, 2006, curated by Okwui Enwezor. The work comprises photographs of the waste carelessly discarded by anti-war protestors accompanied with a vitrine of objects – perfume bottles, advertising notices, etc. – elsewhere in the city. While it was described as taking advantage of the inversion of the critical method of juxtaposing clashing images by which art once incited critical insight, it is typical of the rhetorical strategies of contemporary art intended to reveal to the viewers their complicity in the commodification of the world. According to Rancière, both ultimately reproduce the didactic model that sets up the artist as the one with insight into the status of commodity culture and viewers as those to whom this knowledge must be transmitted implying what they ought to do. See ibid., pp. 264-265; also Rancière, 'The Misadventures of Critical Thought', pp. 26-30.
[158] Rancière, 'Art of the Possible', p. 266.

equality of intelligence […] in all its manifestations.'[159] The oppositions of 'viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, activity/passivity' define an *a priori* distribution of the positions and the capacities or incapacities attached to them. In this respect, the emancipation at stake is not about reversing these positions – turning passive spectators into active participants, and 'ignoramuses into scholars' – but about challenging the underlying structure of inequality that counter-poses capacity to incapacity.[160] 'Emancipation starts from … the principle of equality', Rancière contends.[161] 'It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions.'[162]

Rancière's affirmation of active looking – not unlike D12's invitation to visitors to pursue the relationships between the works and create their own connections –[163] is a process activating aesthetic capacities, modes of thinking and communication that evade causal logic and the fixed positions it establishes. The spectator 'observes, selects, compares, interprets', and 'links' what is there to be seen, drawing on his/her own knowledge and experience.[164] For Buergel and Noack, 'The beginning of art education is not so much acquisition of factual knowledge as collection of one's own emotional and intellectual resources.' Any sense of ignorance is, thus, valued as the precondition for the process of aesthetic education. The significance of an artwork, they point out, is constantly recreated in an ongoing process related more to 'receptiveness than expertise.'[165] Spectators, Rancière

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[159] Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', in Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009 [2008]), pp. 1-23 (10). For the earlier version of the essay, see Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Artforum*, vol. 65, no. 7 (March 2007), pp. 270-281. Unless otherwise indicated, references are here made to the later version of the essay.
Rancière builds upon his line of thought in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* to draw parallels between Joseph Jacotot's early nineteenth-century pedagogy of intellectual emancipation with spectatorship in theatre and the visual arts, and to transfer emancipation in a collective level. Against the classical instructional model, which repeatedly produces a hierarchical distance of domination and subjection between the 'knowing' teacher and the 'ignorant' pupil, according to the stultification logic of uniform transmission and the attempt to overcome the latter's ignorance, Jacotot developed a pedagogy based on a communication process of translation and counter-translation that assumes the equality of intelligence. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991 [1987]).
[160] Ibid., pp. 12, 17.
[161] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Artforum*, p. 277.
[162] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p. 13.
[163] Ruth Noack, 'Canons and Publics', in Margriet Schavemaker, and others, eds, *Now is the Time: Art and Theory in the 21st Century* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2009), pp. 100-106 (104).
[164] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p. 13.
[165] *Documenta 12 Press Kit:* Press Conference on 13 June 2007 in Kassel, pp. 1-42 (28) <http://www.metabol.net/d12/Press_engl.pdf> [accessed 10 February 2015]. To encourage collective engagement with art as well as to invoke a discussion on the relation between aesthetic experience and discourse, D12 offered a designated area within the exhibition space, called *Circles of Enlightenment*,

stresses, 'compose their own poem', 'develop their own translation', and 'make …
their own story'.[166]

However, this 'poetic labour of translation' at the heart of all emancipation
requires a space of play to evade expectations and allow for 'the enactment of that
equal power of translation and counter-translation' that belongs to all.[167] Contrary to,
for example, the contemporary attempts of Relational Aesthetics to erase the distance
between the spectator and the real world, Rancière insists that distance is 'the normal
condition of any communication' and intellectual act of emancipation.[168] Actually,
there is no distance that needs to be abolished between the spectator and the reality of
political action because spectatorship is an action that intervenes to confirm or modify
the consensual order. 'The problem', Rancière specifies, 'is to define a way of
looking that doesn't preempt the gaze of the spectator. […] Emancipation is the
possibility of a spectator's gaze other than the one that was programmed.'[169] In this
sense, there is no need to compel viewers to become active, and most often dictate the
terms of participation. Rather, we have to recognize the specificity of the 'knowledge'
and the 'activity' already at work in the ignoramus and the spectator alike.[170]

In a similar fashion, D12 affirms the spectators' 'knowledge', 'instead of
dismissing [them] as ignorant', and avoids methods intended to counteract their
supposed ignorance.[171] On the contrary, with the deployment of local groups in the
D12 Advisory Board and the *Inhabiting the World* education programme, among
others, it provided the stage for the enactment of the principle of equality, allowing
previously excluded, invisible voices (the part of no part) to manifest themselves and
articulate their positions. *Inhabiting the World* enabled students from local schools to
relate to the exhibition and develop their own perspective on it by assuming the role
of art educators and providing guided tours through D12 with their own format and
content.[172] It is not a matter of reversing the roles of educator and pupil, but rather of
affirming the capacity of anybody to reorganize the distributions of the consensual

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dedicated to contemplation and exchange. The arrangement was made by a part of Ai Weiwei's work
Fairytale (2007), 1001 old Chinese wooden chairs, inviting visitors to sit and share in their experience
and exploration of the art in the show.
[166] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', pp. 13, 22.
[167] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', *Artforum*, p. 275.
[168] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p. 10.
[169] Rancière, 'Art of the Possible', p. 267.
[170] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p. 17.
[171] *Documenta 12 Press Kit:* Press Conference on 13 June 2007 in Kassel, p. 28.
[172] Ibid., p. 29.

order, and redistribute the capacities and incapacities between proper and improper bodies. This allows new forms of subjectivation to emerge, beyond the determinations of pre-existing political agendas. For Rancière, it is a matter of recognizing the collective power of the equality of intelligence, which emancipates the spectator, who now inhabits a world without 'privileged form', model, and 'starting point'.[173]

In conclusion, D12 merits our critical attention in a genealogy of curatorial aesthetics because it took an alternative aesthetic path within the postconceptual conditions of today in a way that keeps the relations between the aesthetic and the conceptual, the aesthetic and the political, art and life in a productive cohabitation or indeterminate tension. Contrary to how it is widely perceived, it reworked the all too familiar terms of autonomy, spectatorship, aesthetic, and form beyond a de-politicized aestheticism. It articulated a revisionist approach to the aesthetic and the political, a kind of politics of aesthetics, which is neither reductively aesthetic nor conceptually over-determined. In this way, it showed another way of doing politics, both aesthetically and conceptually. It radicalized the aesthetic so that it affirms the political agency of art without it being swallowed by politics. D12, echoing Rancière, offers an understanding of the aesthetic and its politics as the specificity of the autonomous aesthetic experience and its potentially liberating effect, which necessarily passes through processes of dis-identification with established categories and recognized criteria of the consensual order. As such, it allows art to be at a certain remove from the exigencies of the present, and to effect a transformation in the existing conditions of life.

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[173] Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', p. 17.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore an alternative genealogy of exhibitions that maintains the significance of aesthetic experience in curatorial practice after the conceptual turn in the late-1960s. It shows that an Aesthetics of Curating emerges and develops together with the conceptual shift, offering a revisionist perspective to dominant practices and discourses today that tend to downgrade aesthetic modes in favour of concept-driven, theory-based processes that justify contemporary curating's critical and political ambitions. My aim was neither to construct a comprehensive or exhaustive canon nor simply to reserve the received positions, but to reconstruct curatorial practice from the alternative perspective of an Aesthetics of Curating. The thesis offers a reading that contests the prevalence of conceptualism in contemporary curating and revises those established relations by reaffirming the important role of aesthetic elements within and after the conceptual turn.

By selecting exhibitions which had a significant impact on the postconceptual development of curating within their respective socio-cultural contexts – the emergence of the conceptual shift in the late-1960s; the establishment of conceptualism and the shift to contemporary electronic culture in the 1980s; the shift to self-reflective, discourse-based, and politically-engaged forms of curating in the globalized, market-dominated art since the 1990s – the thesis traverses these moments of rupture and offers a narrative that reads history and the present from an alternative perspective. This enables us to see the continuing vital presence of aesthetic elements in contemporary curatorial practice, which have been either repressed or devalued. Through the examination of the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of the exhibitions under discussion, the thesis advances an aesthetic understanding of curating, which has a transformative potential and functions as an effective political force in the present. But it does so, by requiring art's autonomy and assuming a certain alterity of art – either as the inhuman difference of the sublime sensation and the incalculable event or as the constitutive differential tension of art's autonomy and heteronomy. Unlike more classic modernist accounts, this autonomy does not offer a pure 'outside' of social disinterestedness. This difference entails an alternative aesthetic politics to contemporary curatorial attempts to politicize art and activate its critical agency usually through mechanisms of political representation, discourse, overt politicization, and consciousness-raising in the present. It inserts into social life and its

contemporary networks of instrumental forces as a rupturing affect rather than as a critical concept, thereby escapes the pitfalls of literal reflection, reproducibility, didacticism, ultimately the dissolution of the experience of art into the urgencies of the present, within an often vacuous oppositional rhetoric.

When Attitudes Become Form, *Les Immatériaux*, and *Documenta 12* accommodate, engage with, and define aesthetic experience in relation to their conceptual aspects in different ways, yet all assign it significant value and maintain the belief in its political possibilities. More specifically, *When Attitudes Become Form* embodies the problem of artistic creation from the standpoint of exhibiting artistic 'attitudes' and 'gestures' in the various forms these are extended to. 'Attitudes' is affirmed as the primary compositional force and the locus of the aesthetic significance of art, characterizing the process of making itself. The latter defines a material, performance-based as well as a conceptual practice activated by an 'attitudinal' conceptualism that keeps its rational processes apart from its materialization. It is precisely the breadth of 'attitudes' that the exhibition affirmed that gives it its vitality and wide scope. It enabled the exhibition to accommodate both conceptual and aesthetic, material and immaterial elements and practices in a cohabitation that does not efface differences into a harmonious synthesis but keeps them in play.

This intermixing of material and conceptual processes in *Attitudes* allowed it to be a radical curatorial gesture as both an unconventional survey of the art of the time and a premonition of the future of curating. Szeemann rejected the most traditional elements of Modernist formalism and embraced the new postformalist, interactive, and various conceptual forms that emerged as a critical reaction to it, while at the same time kept the most progressive elements of historical modernism such as action and gesture. He created an exhibition of 'structured chaos' in alignment with contemporary art practices that valorizes a materialist, experiential process of production, without thereby abolishing the ideational aspect. Szeemann deliberately deployed the chaotic element in relation to a broader understanding of creation, which is not strictly artistic but also includes the exhibition and, mostly, the experience of making itself. As such, he introduced a certain realm of immateriality – inner attitudes, gestures, subjective expressivity, primary processes, intensive intentions, ideational elements, overall the immaterial processes of creation – into artistic production and subjectivity (artistic and curatorial) to advance and make visible a new form of materialism. This artistic and curatorial materialism valorizes indeterminacy,

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contingency, the intensity of experience here-and-now, thinking processes in the making in order to extend the conditions of possibility of art and exhibition-making and to create the new areas of freedom.

In this sense, while *Attitudes* was not overtly politically-engaged, it broke with hierarchical forms of structure and defied its own conceptual determining through a curatorial aesthetics of 'structured chaos'. This allowed Szeemann to set some initial conditions of the exhibition, which then emerged and was exhibited as a process itself or a major gesture actualized by the artists. An 'attitudinal' mode of curating keeps its conceptual elements in play in a way that eludes its regulation by rational mechanisms. It takes place in a realm of indeterminacy that is neither fully visual and material nor entirely conceptual and immaterial, neither absolutely aesthetic nor utterly anti-aesthetic, especially at a time when the potential dissolution of the art object was a central critical issue. It is rather linked to a territory of attitudes in their becoming form, best defined by the 'Live in Your Head' directive in the exhibition subtitle: a realm of more intuitive, imaginary, visionary, speculative ideas and feelings at the limits of conceptual understanding, overall the unbounded realm of potentialities to be occasioned. In *Attitudes*, this immaterial material could be experienced as the immediate process of its actualization of which only material residues were exhibited or whatever form the artistic gesture was extended to.

Art as the experience of a natural process and the manifestation of attitudes and gestures is, for Szeemann, more significant than its understanding as 'primary information' and 'concept'. In this respect, while *Attitudes* integrates conceptual practices, its emphasis on aesthetic experience constitutes an important difference from more restrictively conceptual contemporaneous curatorial practices such as Seth Siegelaub's. Compared to conceptual strategies of the time to integrate art into the networks of information and the linguistic banalities of mass-media in order to achieve a wider distribution and democratization of art, *Attitudes* and its legacy suggests that there is always an aesthetic aspect in art which cannot be clearly defined, analyzed, administered, and so assimilated and intrumentalized by the aesthetics of the social mechanisms it deploys – a certain alterity, which, for Szeemann, can be found in the experience of the process of creation itself.

Due to its philosophical conception and artistic presentation that includes non-art and technoscientific exhibits, *Les Immatériaux* exemplifies the contemporary blurring between art and curating, theory and curating, but at the same time recasts these

relations through a curatorial and philosophical aesthetics of the incommensumerable, specifically the aesthetic of the sublime. Having put at its centre the interrogation and presentation of the 'immaterial materials' produced by the latest technologies and their effects in the contemporary 'postmodern' shift, the exhibition, I argued, explored the tension between its conceptual and aesthetic aspects through the staging of a disturbing incommensurability between sensibility and its comprehension in thought as well as between philosophy, art, and non-art. Notwithstanding its philosophical impetus, *Les Immatériaux* did not intend to illustrate a preconceived thesis in a programmatically ideological way – as is often the case in contemporary postconceptual shows. Instead, it provided a deliberately chaotic space for reflection to avoid forcing determinative concepts upon aesthetic experience. The result was a highly incomprehensible environment with a marked performativity that invoked the new immaterial sensibility in a disquieting 'dramaturgy of postmodernity'. *Les Immatériaux* provided an overwhelming experience, disruptive of the visitors' consciousness and senses that evaded an all-too-easy identification, explication, communicability and understanding according to our habitual discursive mechanisms and modes of thinking. It evinced an affect, which called for a non-determinative reflection – bearing witness to – that takes place at the edge of thinking before its being represented in a concept of understanding. This encounter at the limits of conceptual thought, however uneasy and disempowering, activated and extended a sense of awareness of that which is not yet conceptually defined, but nevertheless can be reflected through this encounter with the unknown. Lyotard defines the singularity of experience in terms of a 'differend', 'event', and 'passibility', overall a sublime quality that gives it both its excessive and transformative potential.

Les Immatériaux maintains incommensurables that allow for unforeseeable occurrences to take place here-and-now, and extend the limits of what is possible to feel and sense beyond conceptually predetermined processes and systems of instrumental thinking. Insofar as art and its exhibition, for Lyotard, is less an object of cognition than of sensation that forces reflection on the limits of our capacities and extends our awareness of otherness, it takes on an ethical imperative. It asks for the capacity to be affected by what eludes our mastery and initial cognition, the sensitivity to open ourselves to what exceeds our habitual, all too human sensibility. This openness allows us to access a heightened level of sensation – the breadth of the things we can sense rather than understand – that enriches a life-affirmative feeling.

Despite its disempowering effect, the experience offered in *Les Immatériaux* has also a liberating potential precisely through the confrontation with the inhuman it entails.

Les Immatériaux invoked an experience of the new immaterial sensibility that reflects the oppressive forms and dehumanizing effects of the new technologies it deploys, but also explores its potential to function as a form of resistance from within. In this respect, despite Lyotard's not connecting the exhibition directly to the sublime, I argue that the sublime emerges in *Les Immatériaux* not merely on the level of curatorial aesthetics, let alone as illustration of contemporary technoscience as it is usually construed, but importantly as a certain ethics-and-politics that explores new, liberating possibilities for both feeling and thought. The disturbing incommensurability of experience staged in *Les Immatériaux* was a means to explore an aesthetics and politics of the sublime within the stakes of contemporary life. However, rather than merely reflecting the exigencies of the present or taking a didactic, reactionary, oppositional, or entirely affirmative stance towards new technologies, the exhibition keeps an ambivalent position. This ambivalence allows it to explore the relevance of the sublime as a possible aesthetic for art and as a wider mechanism of resistance to the rationality, consensual aesthetics, and technological forms of instumentalization of contemporary capitalism. As such, the exhibition moves away from the stakes of traditional aesthetics, but it does so through aesthetics rather than taking an anti-aesthetic or entirely conceptual stance. *Les Immatériaux* places the aesthetic at the centre of contemporary social life and politics, though not in an explicitly political way or what is normally understood today as political or critical practice.

Rather than aiming to awaken political consciousness or reaffirm the power of human rationality, *Les Immatériaux* reflects the changing conditions of contemporary life by expanding the exhibition into an aesthetic politics grounded on ethics and openness to the inhuman. Lyotard shows that new technologies can work aesthetically and politically through a dissimulating, rather than representational, logic indebted to Duchamp's inhuman machinery. This is a strategic engagement *within* and *against* the existing mechanisms of capitalism. Through the technological excess and disquieting effect of the incommensurables in the exhibition, Lyotard explores an inhuman aesthetics and politics whose liberating potential is an ability to invent singular intensities, libidinal forces, and uncalculable events – new immaterial materializations – that emerge within the conditions of dehumanization effected by contemporary

capitalist development. The aesthetic sublimity of *Les Immatériaux* allowed for the production of new sensations and affective singularities – not predictable, recognizable, and easily consumable – that flow through the immaterial complex of new technologies. While we cannot fully comprehend them, they give rise to occurrences that leave their traces upon our consciousness and seize our body, thereby heightening our capacities beyond our all too human sensibility.

In this sense, *Les Immatériaux* provides an inhuman experience of the sublime with a commitment to difference itself: the transcendental, and yet immanent, excess of experience in relation to its human conditions of possibility. Significantly, this differend is the mechanism by which the given exceeds its possibilities and produces something new and as yet unknown here-and-now with a transformative potential that is already future-oriented. More than a significant curatorial innovation, *Les Immatériaux*, therefore, is an artistic *and* philosophical attempt to interrogate the new conditions of life through the aesthetic of the sublime, grounded on difference and the inhumanity of experience it entails. It recasts the aesthetic beyond and against the consensus of the beautiful, in terms of a new immaterial materialism. Even within a philosophical framework of interrogation aesthetic experience maintains its radical force as a singular difference, showing that aesthetic and knowledge inhabit different domains, but nonetheless can be compatible within the postconceptual exhibition-work only across the irreducible gap which separates them. In its philosophical conception and artistic presentation, *Les Immatériaux* itself appears in a state of incommensurable differend sustaining the multiplicity of differends occasioned within it in the manifestation of contingencies, affective intensities and discontinuities. The Lyotardian appeal to the sublime may appear at odd with the postconceptual curatorial practices of our time, but actually assumes a radical critical potential insofar as it provides an immanent ontological framework to the aesthetic that gives it its political efficacy within and against contemporary forms of instrumental power and their homogeneous effect.

Documenta 12 attempted a revisionist approach to the established ones through the primacy it gives aesthetic experience and by keeping the relations between its aesthetic and conceptual modes, the aesthetic and its political effect, art and life in a productive cohabitation or indeterminate tension. Driven by a self-reflective criticality, it proposed a model of discovery than of representation through a controversial poetics of aesthetic, formal, and historical associations that allows for a

more fragmentary structure and the production of meaning in the play of unforeseeable relations. While it shares concerns with contemporary curatorial attempts and debates regarding Western centricity and the need to revise the canon of contemporary art beyond the modern concept of the art object in the changing context of globalization, its position is less predicated upon an ideological argument. To avoid the pitfalls of both 'identity exhibitions' and exhibitions-as-essay, it opened up new interpretative and experiential spaces predicated upon the ethico-aesthetic value of the destabilization of the known and the openness to otherness in the complexity of presentation and ambivalence of perception. It willfully departed from the accepted rules and shared values in the artworld – those established by the art market, the common frame of 'critical' and 'political' art, determinative conceptualism, prevalent forms of interpretation – and the sense of community they establish. As such, it was highly criticized as a withdrawal from the conceptually and politically invested practices, especially of dX and D11, back into autonomous aestheticism.

Contrary to how it is widely perceived, I argue, D12's insistence on aesthetic experience – despite any shortcomings in the 'Migration of form' poetics – does not efface the discursive and socio-political. From the perspective of postconceptual discursivity, it may appear under-theorized. D12, however, alternatively and radically deployed theory and discourse as a response to the hyper-intellectualism and academicism prevalent in curating today. Discourse was generated processually in relation to the specificities of knowledge on a local and global level, and its 'Migration of form' methodology accommodated both formal and conceptual elements in the playful creation of meaning and non-didactic content rather than predetermining the content and form of art on display, as it happened with the discourse-driven dX and D11. By taking an alternative aesthetic path, D12 shows that aesthetics can relate to the political in the context of contemporary art not only in terms of political representation and critique, the production of political analysis and knowledge, but also in terms of its specific, liberating effect in the construction of a space of experience that creates new relations and new sensations, and incites new modes of aesthetic thinking to take place.

D12 articulated a revisionist approach to both the aesthetic and the political without succumbing either to autonomous aestheticism, for which it was mistakenly criticized, or to art as representational and discursive political critique. It radicalized more traditional understandings of autonomy beyond de-politicized aestheticism, and

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affirmed the political agency of art without it being swallowed by politics. By not strictly locating the political in content, literal message, and what are considered politically-committed practices today, but on the effect of the specificity of aesthetic experience in a non-didactic context, D12 suggested another way of doing politics aesthetically and conceptually, and/or discursively. The issue, for D12, is to renegotiate the relationship between art and life beyond the ethical immediacy of critical art, political conceptualism, and the ordinary cause-effect determinations of the representational and critical logic. It, therefore, asserts the necessity of aesthetic autonomy – which is not the autonomy of the artwork – as the potentially liberating effect occasioned by the heterogeneity of aesthetic experience in relation to existing conditions.

The production of an experiential space allows for the invention of non-determined, though specific, sensations, aesthetic processes of thinking and forms of expression that, in turn, urge reflection and modes of acting in the world that may have a transformative effect on individual and collective life. Importantly, this potentially liberating effect passes through processes of intelligibility and dis-identification so that new forms of political subjectification can be elaborated beyond the determinations of pre-existent political programmes. Art and its exhibition becomes a dissensual activity of creating aesthetic experiences that go beyond their possible conditions. But, as D12 proved, this effect can also be occasioned through discourse inasmuch as what it produces is a multiplicity of connections and disconnections that reframe existing conditions and allow for new possibilities of individual and collective enunciation. D12 affirmed the power of exhibition-making as an aesthetic intervention of disturbing effect into the given conditions of possibility insofar as it demonstrates the necessary complement of sensibility and thought in the undetermined experience offered by the exhibition, and holds open an ambiguous space of interaction between aesthetic separation and social involvement.

In this respect, D12 resonates strongly with Jacques Rancière's recent philosophical account of redefining the relation of art and politics, art and life in a paradoxical form of political efficacy that keeps art's autonomy and heteronomy in a constitutive tension and exchange. Art is political, for Rancière, because by being autonomous and refusing its transformation into a form of life, it creates heterogeneous experiences that suspend the cause-effect relations determining life and dissents from the hierarchical divisions of the sensible. And, by seeking to construct

new forms of life and refusing to detach itself into a separate reality, art-as-dissensus is transformed into a new life. This account significantly asserts the continuing value of modernism – not limited to Greenberg's position – as it radicalizes the aesthetic beyond the modern/postmodern split and the conceptual/postconceptual frame within which contemporary art is currently understood.

Documenta 12's proposal of art as an autonomous form of life was upsetting because it refused to conform to the shared values in the artworld and deliberately distanced itself from the recognizable knowledge of contemporary art. By refusing to be interventionist in an openly critical, didactic or instructional way, it avoided predetermining the effects of art in the present, and so limiting its possibilities. Instead, it worked to disturb and reframe the limits of the possible – the conditions determining what is visible, sayable, thinkable, and done – in the legacy of both *Attitudes* at the time of the crisis of the modern concept of the art object, and the radicality of sublime experience offered by *Les Immatériaux* in the midst of art's postmodern heteronomy. To a certain extent, D12's contemporary emphasis on the aesthetic is both a continuation and postconceptual contestation to Szeemann's tradition in the sense that it radicalizes the aesthetic back beyond the conceptual/postconceptual frame introduced by *Attitudes*.

What these exhibitions share – despite their differences in historical context, curatorial strategies, and understanding of the aesthetic experience – is a common concern to fully utilize the potential of exhibition-making in a new way, so that it creates a breathing space for art and its audience. They open up a space-qua-laboratory of aesthetic indeterminacy and heterogeneity in which new views and sensations, kinds of imagination, aesthetic thought processes and forms of reflection, modes of expression and communication as well as of intellectual and discursive mediation are invented. As such, new capacities are discovered and new forms of subjectivity can emerge in the invention of a new life and future here-and-now. This is how curating involves aesthetics as much as ethics and politics. This is how curating becomes an aesthetic form of life.

The Aesthetics of Curating is a promising field that opens various trajectories for future research. By exploring this alternative aesthetic genealogy of exhibition-making, this thesis provides a significant reconstruction of curatorial practice and makes a contribution to knowledge across a range of fields: art history, exhibition history, curatorial and exhibition studies, contemporary art theory, and aesthetic

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discourses. The Aesthetics of Curating can be utilized to provide a revisionist account that contests current understandings of contemporary art as fundamentally 'postconceptual', without thereby refusing its conceptual dimension; it opens the realm for discussing the as yet under-developed intersection of curating with philosophical aesthetics. More importantly, by offering different aesthetic understandings of contemporary curating in relation to its conceptual aspects, this thesis challenges our most established assumptions and opens new perspectives in reconsidering significant contemporary aspects of art and its exhibition that tend to be devalued. It constructs a genealogy of Curatorial Aesthetics over the past fifty years and at the same time entails a broader contemporary understanding of the aesthetic that engages with significant exhibitions. Far from being reactionary to postconceptualism or claiming an aesthetic return, the thesis can have an impact on the future of curatorial practice to the extent that it opens a terrain for understanding the political possibilities of the aesthetic in and after the conceptual turn. It calls us to revalue the role of aesthetics in the history of curatorial practice and to discover the new political possibilities and aesthetic forms of thought, as a mode of engaging with the present, offered by an Aesthetics of Curating in its contemporary understanding.

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