

**Manifest Paper Exhibitions**

*Curating as a Radical Re-materialisation of Forms*

Mathieu COPELAND

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Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture

Kingston University

Student number: 1941569

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### ***Curating as a Radical Re-materialisation of Forms***

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## **Manifest Paper Exhibitions**

### ***Curating as a Radical Re-materialisation of Forms***

*Voids*, *Choreographing Exhibitions*, *the exhibition of a film*, *The Anti-Museum*, and *Gustav Metzger, Writings 1953 – 2016*. It is through the prism of emptiness, choreography, cinema, dialectic antagonism and an artist's corpus of writings that these experimental publications propose a redefinition of the semantics involved. They foster new theoretical and practical perspectives through the exploration of extreme philosophies and cultural practices.

These publications deconstruct the normative acceptations of what exhibitions, and catalogues, can be. Advancing extreme forms for exhibitions, these manifest anthologies are calls for action. In addressing their inherent materialities, I challenge the tacitly accepted theories of what *to curate* is. A curator is in turn and simultaneously a playwright, a choreographer, a filmmaker, a writer, a historian, (...). A curator voices a voice, as s-he builds a repertoire.

Considering exhibitions as materials, *Voids* and *The Anti-Museum* stem from a history of radical exhibitions. Both offer a re-appraisal of modern and contemporary art history seen through the prism of radical culture. Seizing the materiality of exhibitions, *Choreographing Exhibitions* recast exhibition-making in museum contexts, whilst *the exhibition of a film* challenges the museology of cinema and exhibitions made films. *Gustav Metzger, Writings 1953 – 2016* offers a lasting testimony to a revolutionary artist, a radical theorist, and critic of our times. Metzger consciously produced sparingly. The accumulated wealth of his writing is akin to proposing a retrospective of his work in its original materiality, an art of propositions.

The red thread that binds these publications together is a study in radicality. Uncompromising attitudes as forms, radical exhibitions as books and a complete re-materialisation of forms: all affirm a voice as a polyphony of voices. As Manifest Paper Exhibitions, these publications comprise a complex autonomous entity of manifest positions where the exhibition is the catalogue, and the catalogue is the exhibition.

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## **Introduction**

### **Notes on Methodology**

Where is the sound of my voice in these publications? Aside from the natural *I* that prevails in the authored texts, what is my place within the editing of these publications, within the commissioning of these texts, within the choosing of the reprints, and within these conversations? At the onset of each project lies the desire to give the most possible autonomy to the exhibition and publication. As such, the uniqueness of each, and the general ‘voice’ of the project must prevail. Yet, all the books are signed, all the texts are credited, and all partakers in the discussions duly acknowledged. Within these publications, what are my capacities, conditions, and state of acting? How is power exerted, and the end(s) achieved? Quite clearly, one of the main challenges of this PhD by Publication is to assert where my agencies are within these polyphony of voices.

In as much as I do not curate theme shows as a rule – voids and closure, for the retrospectives considered, are not themes, but materialities for art –, when preparing any publications I do not think of a thesis to be illustrated. I may follow a narrative, especially as with *The Anti-Museum*, that I conceived as a journey to be read from the first page to the last page, taking us from anti-art to everything is art. All these publications are process-based, in as much as they all follow a process, a sensitive method. This approach to working is very intuitive, and highly subjective. These publications offer an opportunity to engage with historical surveys and broader themes that both encompass, and expand from, their respective exhibition. It is worth noting, for instance, that I propose *A* retrospective of closed exhibitions, not *THE* retrospective of closed exhibitions.

As part of these journeys, the process of editing the publication and the organisation of their structures do not follow a pre-planned list of content with a finite arrangement. I approach the final content-layout (as opposed to designed-layout) as a filmmaker approaches the editing, the montage, of a film. It is a process that occurs when all the footage has been shot, to make a coherent and comprehensive piece. The dramaturgy of the book is organised once all the materials are present. The critical commentary is

another tool to reveal what is in the work, what happened, and how to go further. In other words, it offers the opportunity to follow that red thread that binds all together, and see where it may lead.

The present publications all raise a set of interrelated critical point-of-views. The different approaches that each publication put forward all revert to precise preoccupations with a high level of proximity from one to the other. It is within the minute variations that each acquires its autonomy, according to specific circumstances, opportunities and limits. All follow a specific path through openness, uncertainty, and sheer serendipity. Each publication retains its singularities.

Rather than bringing theories *to* the work, the critical commentary offers an opportunity to draw theories *from* the work. I did not start any of these endeavours with the thought that these would be manifest paper exhibitions. It is in retrospect that these can be considered as such. All began as a thought, a dreamed conception that gradually arose as the works were taking shape.

The production of this critical commentary offers a significant opportunity to reflect on many key questions that are at the roots of each publication, but also at the heart of my curatorial work. Essentially, this critical commentary enables us to ask how this connects with issues around knowledge. What is my contribution to knowledge and to curating? Are there philosophical strands? What are the aesthetics and curatorial considerations? As we will see, all contribute to an expanded knowledge on, and a possible redefinition of, curating. It questions frontally and in radical terms what exhibitions can be. These publications all challenge their accepted nature and aims at offering an alternative to the classical canons, in practical, experiential and theoretical terms.

However, it is important to notice that my desire here is not to produce a PhD by exhibitions, but very much a PhD by publications. As such, all commentaries bring forward the publications. Obviously, these books do not consist solely of my writings. Most of the material submitted here is an invitation to take part in past conversations with invited contributors. It is however my belief that through the choices, the

invitations, the commissions, the reprints, a singular voice is raised. All these contribute to the creation of a specific and very unique cosmology.

To commission a text in a publication is to delegate essential points. These contribute to the overall argument, through the author's expertise. To commission a text is to voice one argument that takes part within a whole – it is one stone in the building. It is through the agency of guest and esteemed writers who, through their unique words, voices and knowledge – a subjectivity that is unequivocally theirs – contribute to the overall project. My publications are books that are built on the cross-references between texts of diverse nature, a sensitive architecture that enables knowledge to rise.

All invited authors, guest contributors, with their specific histories, contribute to the feeling of each book. A critical part of the making of any publication is to seek these voice agencies, in both the search of the subject and the research for the right author to address this given topic. It could be argued that from these commissioned texts, I speak through the authors' agencies. To delegate is to define an area, assume a linkage and maximise an impact. The same can be said when approaching historical reprints. All contribute to the making of a specific cosmology unique to this very endeavour. To choose a text, and to invite an author, is akin to mapmaking. It defines a territory where all voices cohere. It lays bare the map of a publication. I endeavour at drawing the lines between all contributions. Building in from the texts, I weave a map of definite and specific voice agencies.

At this point I want to make clear and address an important and fundamental caveat. At no time does my work come close to speaking through other people's voices, or writing with other people's writings. To commission a text is to give a voice. To invite someone in a conversation is to offer a platform for each specific voice to be heard. None are *paper* contributors in a puppet show. I do not seek to sign what is someone else's contribution. Nor do I want to instrumentalize one's proposition as mine. The questions of subjectification and objectification that I address at length in the section devoted to *Choreographing Exhibitions* is a fundamental understanding of my work.

Seen as a whole, the critical commentary draws from all the contributions that are referenced within all projects. Yet what are these texts for? What are the reasons

behind all? How is *this* my writing? These questions are what must be addressed. These are the tensions under which all was written. As such, what did my writing do, why was it like that, why was it important, and why did it work? It is worth mentioning that in the critical commentary, not all the conversations are mentioned or quoted.

A major part of the submitted content consists of conversations. First of all, the semantics used is of importance. Since the *Voids* publication – which still uses the word ‘interviews’ –, all the discussions are labelled as “in conversations.” This became fundamental to highlight the fact that these texts are a conversation between individuals with equal voice and agency within the framework of the topic raised, as opposed to being subservient to the interviewee. These conversations are not transcribed interviews. They are not the straightforward transcripts of the words spoken. These are texts. All voices and words spoken become the material for a published piece of writing. They are words and thoughts to be rewritten, reorganised, and rearranged; and ultimately assembled for the purpose of the book, offered for final approval to the guest invitee.

Every conversation is realised with a precise query in mind, on a precise topic<sup>1</sup>. Most are realised for a specific exhibition and/or publication, but not necessarily with a publisher identified. Most often, these are realised sequentially at the time of research. However, I also conduct conversations with key figures that at the time may appear to be singular and standalone projects which ultimately find themselves in the vicinity of a project<sup>2</sup>. It is also worth mentioning here the vast amount of recorded conversations that remain un-edited, un-transcribed, and as such unfinished. There are also all the

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<sup>1</sup> I revelled in the desire to do a series of “one question” conversations, such as the one with Malcolm McLaren. The conversation with McLaren was recorded in the morning of 16 February 2007 at his Covent Garden Hotel, in London, and published for the first time in *CE*, after Malcolm’s death in April 2010. When I first met McLaren, I told him that I truly wanted to do a conversation with him, which would ‘only’ consist of one question. His answer would then span over the next hour, 4 pages totalling 3585 words.

<sup>2</sup> A fascinating example was the conversation with India Adams from 11 April 2018. After an initial contact by email with a series of questions sent on 15 March 2018, India wrote back a couple of days later telling how intrigued she was with these, and that she definitely wanted to answer. Zane Stanley – India Adams’ son – recorded the questions virtually verbatim, with India answering. The following conversation is a full transcript of this discussion. A conversation mainly about India Adams’ legendary Ghost Singing, with me Copeland as the interviewer ghost spoken by India’s son. A conversation that will appear in a forthcoming publication, *Staging Exhibitions*, 2021.

conversations that are unpublished because of different reasons that may have arisen post-discussion with the invited guest<sup>3</sup>, along with all the conversations that were not recorded<sup>4</sup>. All remain material for the future, and memories of a past shared moment.

Conversations are often the beginning of an exhibition, the reason for a project. They almost always lead to something else. I never come to a conversation with a set of written questions that I follow. Even though I do follow a precise mental construction of desired queries and with the necessity to address given facts or topics, it is crucial for me to follow the natural flow of the discussion, and the direction that happens in the present moment in presence of the 'interviewee.' It is after all with them that I want to talk to at this given time. All conversations follow a long and in-depth period of research. However, there were occurrences where I had to seize a moment or an occasion, yet these are rare.

It is also interesting to consider a conversation with a person based on a topic that has been widely covered and discussed. Such conversations may not necessarily bring forward 'new' answers, concepts or revelations: however, I strongly believe that to be told these facts, statements, well-rehearsed answers serve an important purpose. It will be told to *us*. It is through the publication that these will be reframed within a unique context, in proximity with a unique set of other voices that will offer a particular resonance. It is also worth noting that with advancing age an answer given by a respondent may change, sometimes to reveal something unheard, something close to one's heart, and sometime to face a loss of specific or general memories. The conversations within a book create a unique cosmology of parallel guests. Within all conversations realised, a map of other respondents will be revealed, thus leading to a natural progression and other invitations.

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<sup>3</sup> As guise of example, I could refer to an unpublished three-way conversation for *the exhibition of a film* between David Cunningham, Charles de Meaux, and myself on 10 June 2014 in Paris. Despite being a fascinating and enlightening moment, we all left the conversation agreeing that it would be important, and necessary, to expand and amend what was said. As we considered the transcript, David ultimately wrote in a private email dated 23 February 2015 that he "would really prefer this interview wasn't used." Feeling that he wasn't "able to contribute anything of relevance, or the sort of relevance I believe is foregrounded in my work - spatial situations, time, audience, context, expectation and more." *Partie remise*.

<sup>4</sup> I especially have in mind a three-hours plus conversation with La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela that was tacitly requested to not be recorded.

The conversations have no set format, and sometimes fragments of a discussion can embody all that there is to consider on a given topic. Conversations also permit to answer and expand on personal obsessions and interests, and offer opportunities to return regularly to specific respondent, thus offering a recurrent presence on a multitude of topics. I here think especially of Ben Vautier (who appears in three of the publications), Fia Backström (3), Henry Flynt (2), Jacques Villeglé (3), Kenneth Goldsmith (2), Mai-Thu Perret (3), Maria Eichhorn (2), Reiko Tomii (2), Robert Barry (2), Tim Etchells (2) but also Graciela Carnevale, Phill Niblock, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Claude Rutault, John Armleder, Susan Stenger and FM Einheit. These luminaries are amongst the two hundred and forty-four individual contributors whose voices constitute these five books. Gustav Metzger is a pivotal and recurrent figure within these complementary publications as a contributing editor (*Voids*), interviewee (*Choreographing Exhibitions*), the subject of in-depth studies (*The Anti-Museum*), and author.

A history of conversation calls for a plethora of references. To name but one in the field of modern art, one can refer to the David Sylvester / Francis Bacon interviews for instance. I would also like to suggest Hans Ulrich Obrist's methodology. To borrow Philippe Parreno's words, "Hans Ulrich Obrist presents himself as a character who frenetically traverses the known universe, who seeks to question all those who dream it, think it, and who shape a poetic world in which he lives or would like to live. A cyberpunk character, therefore, who explores and lives information, verifies it and connects to people and ideas."<sup>5</sup> As Hans Ulrich told me, his interview project started as a "protest against forgetting, as Eric Hobsbawm would say, to learn more about certain exhibitions like Jean-François Lyotard's "Les Immatériaux" [The Immaterials], for example... I thought it would be interesting to talk about this missing history with my professional great grandparents and grandparents, to compile an oral history". Obrist continues, "this oral history requires witness accounts, since it is always a matter of experience. This is really important, the way in which hearsay works in transmitting exhibitions."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Parreno, Philippe. Preface, in *Hans Ulrich Obrist, Conversations, vol. 1*, Manuella Editions, 2011, p11-12, my translation

<sup>6</sup> *Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, The Fragility of Exhibitions, Stroll in Hyde Park, London, 31 October 2011*, CE, p168

A major concern lies in how to draw from the conversation, and what to collect from themes discussed. Multiple conversations allow for concerns to be distilled throughout a publication, and throughout publications. It is within the parallel between books that the overall endeavour can be felt. All discussed themes are entry points and aspects of the interrelationship nature of all. These are post factual links, ultimately condensed and synthesised. All are part of the development, something that can otherwise not be seen. Conversations offer meta-biographies of hyper-textual constructions. It gives a sense of a role, and within the cosmology of voices, reveals points of contacts, tensions, and resolutions.

The French expression 'Être à l'écoute' translates as 'to listen.' A verbatim translation offers both 'to be listening,' and 'listening being.' The latter contributes critically to the topology of the intellectual and sensitive landscapes these publications are. To compose a publication, one must 'listen': listen to the subject studied and follow its essential constructs through in-depth researches. In tackling fields of knowledge that were, until then, unstudied, one must accept that these are uncharted landscapes. Their realities crystallise through conversations, through journeys from persons to persons.<sup>7</sup> Beginning with an initial set of referents, as a listening being I follows these

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<sup>7</sup> A few journeys: Learning that he would be in Paris, my first interview was with Jeff Koons, in 1997, followed with a chance interview with César the same evening.

Meeting John Armleder during an opening in Paris in 2004 led to a constant discussion ever since, who would introduce me to many including Mai-Thu Perret and Philippe Decrauzat, with whom I have been in constant conversation since.

Thanks to Gustav Metzger to whom I was introduced to in Newcastle upon Tyne in 2002, I met Ivor Davies with whom Metzger co-organised the DIAS-Destruction in Art Symposium in 1966. I conducted a series of conversations with Ivor in 2019, ten years after our initial meeting and me visiting him to his place in Penarth near Cardiff. In 2020, I had the privilege of spending an afternoon and being in conversation with Paul Van Hoeydonck, an artist that Ivor had exhibited during his tenure as director of the Talbot Rice Art Center, in Edinburgh, in 1973.

My extensive research on Yves Klein for *Voids. A Retrospective* lead me to meet, amongst many others, Claude Parent and especially Jacques Villeglé, with whom I would develop a close collaboration since 2008.

I am overwhelmingly indebted to Susan Stenger that I met thanks to Cerith Wyn Evans in London in 2003. Stenger introduced me to Phill Niblock, FM Einheit, Robert Poss, (...), with whom I would continuously converse and collaborate. Poss later introduced me to Steve Albini, Niblock to Elaine Summers who in turn introduced me to Meredith Monk, a major influence during my formative years... The chance element is essential. When in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for a conference and a screening of *the exhibition of a film*, the museum asked me who I would want to meet. Being a fan of Graciela Carnevale, they reached out to her and introduced me. A meeting was arranged in her hometown Rosario, the beginning of a continuous conversation since.

chains of interpersonal connections. A conversation leads to another, eventually reflecting back, often bringing to the foreground new sets of references. Following these red threads will unequivocally take us to unexpected environments. This process reveals a universe in constant expansion whose temporary finitude is essentially that of the printed book.

The cosmologies composing the books that are at the heart of the critical commentary are inherently inter-personal. These are the results of thorough explorations of the common and shared knowledge to each a given fields. These publications are both scientific in their approach, and inherently free in their construction. These researches follow a scientific methodology and are the results of systematic, specific and thorough investigations. Yet the publications also allow at their core idiosyncrasy. This brings forward the question of my role, the role of my books and the writing's role within the equation that is manifest paper exhibitions. A conscious decision was to follow the system used in the signature of my exhibitions – ‘an exhibition *by*’ – and to transpose this to the signature for the publications *Choreographing Exhibition, the exhibition of a film*, and *The Anti-Museum*, in affirming ‘a book *by*’. To do so it to insist that these publications are authored. They reflect manifest, singular, choices. However, these five publications also reflect the necessity of the collective.<sup>8</sup> All partakers that contribute the prime material constituting these manifest paper exhibitions come with their own authored voice. To quote Franck Leibovici, “an extended and redescriptive writing practice must today be coupled with an institutional invention. This articulation can only be thought of in the collective mode, and

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A great admirer of his art, I first reached out to Ben Vautier in 2002, and have been in conversation ever since. The same goes for Henry Flynt, since 2008, or Michael Snow, whom I first met and interviewed in 1998, and again in 2019 in London and Toronto. (...).

<sup>8</sup> Two collectives: the journey for ‘A retrospective of empty exhibitions,’ that became *Voids. A Retrospective*, began in Valencia in 2005 during a conversation that I organised in preparation to my 2006 exhibition *Soundtrack for an Exhibition* and its eponym publication, between John Armleder, Gustav Metzger, and myself. When we met again in London a month or so later, John invited Mai-Thu Perret to join us, and Gustav asked us to invite Clive Phillpot. Our group was formed, and we decided to call ourselves the ‘curatorial committee’ – an homage to the committee that Gustav set up in 1966 when preparing for DIAS.

As I began work on *the exhibition of a film*, it quickly became clear to me that I did not want this feature film to be seen as a ‘work by Mathieu Copeland.’ As I had invited Tim Etchells to write the dramaturgy for a non-narrative film, this made apparent that if I was the curator of this exhibition, and signed it as an exhibition by myself, this was not my meta-work of art. This was a collective endeavour, with my name coming last.

collaborations are one of the obvious modalities.”<sup>9</sup> To consider all but one, not only does *The Anti-Museum* constitute a re-appraisal of contemporaneity seen through the prism of radical culture, it proposes a complete recast of the institutional framework.

These notes on methodology also highlight methodological limits. Some aspects of the construction of these publications are resistant to interpretation. For instance, not everything finds its way into the research. There is an essential necessity to choose what gets into a book as it is being realised. It also may be that it is not productive or constructive to try to give rules on how publications are assembled. To do so is to remove and ignore their subjective nature. These are not the final words or the conclusions to given topics. These are propositions. These are books that, in nature, must lead to discussions and debates.

A noted critical concern for instance lays with my introduction to *the exhibition of a film*. I consciously made it a very short text. This was a decision made with the affirmed hope that readers will experience my voice not in the opening lines that would sum-up all that is about to be unfolded in the coming pages, but very much to be felt within the parallels between all the commissioned texts, reprints and conversations. This publication pushes to the limits the construct that my voice comes from, and comes with, all the voices that make this book be. This arise through all the conversations realised with all the invitees during the preparation of the exhibition, through all the texts that informed the making of the film, and through all the cross referencing within all texts, with all the recurring queries and shared obsessions. My desire here was not to give a final say on a specific topic, but to offer a sensitive reading as the ideal catalogue for a filmed exhibition.

We also must ask ourselves, where is the reader within these pages, and how are the books structured to be read? Do we lead the reader from the first page to the last as an invitation to lose themselves, or do we expect multiple entries and exits? Where is the subject position, and where do the readers and critics sit? All publications allow

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<sup>9</sup> Leibovici, Franck. *des opérations d'écriture qui ne disent pas leur nom*, Paris: Questions théoriques "forbidden beach", 2020, p178. My translation: "Une pratique d'écriture étendue et redescriptive doit aujourd'hui se doubler d'une invention institutionnelle. Cette articulation ne peut se penser que sur le mode collectif, et les collaborations en sont une des modalités évidentes."

multiple links, moves, and a welcome change of fortune. The position of the readers is prevalent, in as much as it is they who ultimately post-rationalize all that is presented to them, and can draw for these overlapping thought patterns. All these publications offer a tacit understanding that is drawn from the texts, and the exhibitions. The critical commentary draws on those references, and offers an overview of references between projects.

*Choreographing Exhibitions* led to *the exhibition of a film*, the latter taking and expanding on the structure of the former. *The Anti-Museum* vividly relates to *Voids*. Both are complementary, with radical different aims. One is concerned with the radical materiality of nothing, the other with offering a radical redefinition of museums. The anthology of Gustav Metzger's writings is constructed with the affirmed desire to exhaust a subject (the writings), whilst fully revealing a subject (the artist).

A critical commentary is about time. It is about the time taken to write it, and time relevant to when it was done. A critical commentary written five years ago, or five years from now, would be radically different. A critical commentary is about the now. It also addresses the time of the publications. Would I do this all over again identically, with the same persons, knowing what I know now, and envisaging what I am about to know? It reflects what I was trying to do and the conditions under which I was trying to do *that*. The critical commentary is tactical, strategic, and an attempt at historicizing it all. It offers a moment to reflect upon the wealth of material produced.

## *Manifest, Paper, Exhibition*

The critical commentary highlights the inherent coherence within all the material submitted, whilst bringing in something new. Manifest paper exhibitions is something that I have been thinking about for a number of years, but only now does it seem in retrospect a fitting umbrella terms to look at the work produced over 17 years since my first publication exhibition, *Perfect Magazine* in 2003. This terminology was not at the roots of the making of any of these publications, and yet all can now be addressed through this proposition. This can be seen as a unifying factor. I would like to analyse the semantics used, as a way to define in retrospect what comes next.

## *Manifest*

The use of the term *manifest* within ‘manifest paper exhibitions’ is informed with its etymology, essentially the understanding of *manifesto*. For Gustav Metzger, “since 1959, his manifestos have been the cornerstone of his radical and everlasting impact on art, art history and society.”<sup>10</sup> As Metzger wrote, he consciously worked “the style of the manifesto deliberately flat – there is no enthusiasm, no typographical extreme.”<sup>11</sup> He continues, “from the time of preparing the first manifesto, I saw auto-destructive art as a movement. I wrote not only for myself but bearing in mind others who might join in this direction. There have occurred many changes since Futurist and Dada manifestos screamed their message across the world.”<sup>12</sup>

When André Breton attempted at giving his 1924 book *Manifeste du surréalisme* (*Surrealism Manifesto*) a title, he first considered in place of the word ‘Manifeste (*Manifesto*)’ the words ‘Préface (*Foreword*),’ and ‘Introduction (*Introduction*).’<sup>13</sup> The historical weight that the word ‘Manifesto’ bears to *The Communist Manifesto* written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, to its distant ancestor *Manifeste des*

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<sup>10</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Introduction, Gustav Metzger, Writings 1953 – 2016*, Geneva: JRP|Editions, 2019 (publication subsequently referred to in footnotes as ‘GM’), P11

<sup>11</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Auto-Destructive Art: A Talk at the Architectural Association London by Gustav Metzger*, GM, p102

<sup>12</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Auto-Destructive Art: A Talk at the Architectural Association London by Gustav Metzger*, GM, p102-103

<sup>13</sup> For more on this, please refer to Sebbag, Georges. *Logique dormante du Manifeste du surréalisme*, in *Manifesto 24*, edited by Bruno Pompili, Bari: éd. Graphis, 2006

*Egax (Manifesto of Equals)* written by Sylvain Maréchal in 1796, and its problematic use as highlighted by Louis Aragon in *Le Manifeste est-il mort? (Is Manifesto dead?)*<sup>14</sup> – ironically subtitled, ‘Manifest (*Manifesto*)’ – made ‘Manifesto’ a cumbersome word to use. Breton would nonetheless use the format throughout his life, making manifestoes a fixture in Surrealism, including the essential 1938 manifesto *Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant (For an independent revolutionary art)*<sup>15</sup>.

A most striking definition of ‘manifesto’ was proposed by Tristan Tzara in 1918, who wrote that “to put out a manifesto you must want: ABC to fulminate against 1, 2, 3 to fly into a rage and sharpen your wings to conquer and disseminate little abcs and big abcs, to sign, shout, swear, to organize prose into a form of absolute and irrefutable evidence (...) To impose your ABC is a natural thing— hence deplorable. Everybody does it in the form of crystalbluffmadonna, monetary system, pharmaceutical product, or a bare leg advertising the ardent sterile spring. The love of novelty is the cross of sympathy, demonstrates a naive je m'enfoutisme, it is a transitory, positive sign without a cause.” Tzara continues: “I write a manifesto and I want nothing, yet I say certain things, and in principle I am against manifestoes, as I am also against principles.”<sup>16</sup> This is a proposition that announces fascinating parallels with two other manifest statements, that of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s conclusion to his *Tractatus* 7, “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent”<sup>17</sup> and John Cage’s “I have nothing to say, and I am saying it and that is poetry as I need it...”<sup>18</sup> These are conceptions with lasting impact on the construction of *Voids*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Aragon, Louis. *Le manifeste est-il mort?*, in *Littérature* 10, May 1923

<sup>15</sup> Breton, André. Trotsky, Leon. Rivera, Diego. *Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant*, Paris: self-published, 1938. Written by Breton and Leon Trotsky in 1938, yet for strategic reasons ultimately signed by Breton and Diego Rivera, the manifesto is concluded with these memorable lines:

“l’indépendance de l’art – pour la révolution: la révolution – pour la libération définitive de l’art (the independence of art – for the revolution: the revolution – for the definitive liberation of art).”

<sup>16</sup> Tzara, Tristan. *Manifeste Dada*, 1918, as published in *Dada* vol. 3 (December 1918). The English is based on the University of Pennsylvania version, [http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Tzara\\_Dada-Manifesto\\_1918.pdf](http://writing.upenn.edu/library/Tzara_Dada-Manifesto_1918.pdf) last accessed 25 June 2020

<sup>17</sup> Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd, 1922, p90, original: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen,” translated by C. K. Ogden

<sup>18</sup> Cage, John. *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2010, p109, first printed in *Incontri Musicali*, August 1959

<sup>19</sup> John Cage appears in over 120 occurrences throughout *Voids*.

## *Paper*

I would like to characterize the use of the word ‘paper’ in manifest paper exhibitions essentially through its materiality, and two occurrences as an adjective in the expressions ‘paper tiger,’ and ‘paper architecture’.

‘Paper tiger’ is the literal English translation of the Chinese phrase zhilaohu (紙老虎). The term refers to something or someone that claims or appears to be powerful and/or threatening, but is actually ineffectual and unable to withstand challenge. The expression became a recurrent slogan that Mao Zedong would use against his political opponents, particularly the U.S. government.

Mao defined all reactionaries as paper tigers in a 1946 discussion with American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong. He explained that “in appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality, they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are powerful.”<sup>20</sup> Later, in a 1957 speech at the Moscow Meeting of Representatives of the Communist and Workers' Parties, Mao said “all allegedly powerful reactionaries are merely paper tigers. The reason is that they are divorced from the people. Look! Wasn't Hitler a paper tiger? Wasn't he overthrown? I also said that the tsar of Russia was a paper tiger, as were the emperor of China and Japanese imperialism, and see, they were all overthrown. U.S. imperialism has not yet been overthrown and it has the atom bomb, but I believe it too is a paper tiger and will be overthrown.”<sup>21</sup>

Complexifying this pejorative use of the term ‘paper,’ the expression ‘paper architecture’ is often used derogatively to refer to architects making utopian, dystopian

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<sup>20</sup> *Talk with the American Correspondent Anna Louise Strong*, (August 1946), Selected Works, Vol. IV, p. 100. [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4\\_13.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_13.htm), last accessed 4 May 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Mao Zedong, 'Speech at a Meeting of the Representatives of Sixty-four Communist and Workers' Parties' (Edited by Mao),” November 18, 1957, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Mao Zedong wenji (Selected Works of Mao Zedong), vol. 7 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999). English translation from Michael Schoenhals, "Mao Zedong: Speeches at the 1957 'Moscow Conference'," *Journal of Communist Studies* 2, no. 2 (1986), p109-126 <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121559.pdf?v=d41d8cd98f00b204e9800998ecf8427e>, last accessed 4 May 2020.

or fantasy projects that were never meant to be built. However, it can also be used as a praise of visionary architecture. Paper architecture has often been used to qualify the speculative work of Superstudio, Archigram, Lebbeus Woods, Aldo Rossi and the New York Five... For Tim Love, whereas “the paper architecture of the 1970s (...) focused on alternative futures rather than disciplinary mechanics, recent proposals range from realistic to utopian — and yet so far they remain largely within the realm of provocation rather than practice.”<sup>22</sup> Love went on to share James Murdock’s concern, wondering if after the 2008 economical crash, we were to “see a new generation of “paper architects” — the archetypal figure from the last recession?”<sup>23</sup>

Nishat Awan, Tatjana Schneider, and Jeremy Till wrote in *Spatial Agency* about a group of young graduates mainly from the Moscow Architectural Institute who took on the title Paper Architects in the 1980s. “The group which included Michael Belov, Alexander Brodsky and Ilya Utkin, Mikhail Flippov, Nadia Bronzova and Yuri Avvakumov amongst others, produced paper architecture as a way of bypassing restrictions and dissenting, as a way to critique the dehumanising nature of Russian architecture of the time and the lack of care for traditional building.”<sup>24</sup>

Architect Shigeru Ban gave a talk entitled “Paper Architecture” at the 2015 World Economic Forum<sup>25</sup> in which he discussed his paper ethos<sup>26</sup>, especially in regard to his paper tubes, his infamous urgent-response architecture construction tools. During this talk, Ban offered this powerful statement: “What is permanent? What is temporary? Even a building out of paper can be permanent.”

### *Exhibition*

I proposed in 2013 the following alternative definition to the word exhibition:  
“Exhibition. /ek.sɪ.bɪ.n/, noun—a material, textual, textural, visceral, visual...

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<sup>22</sup> Love, Tim. *Paper Architecture, Emerging Urbanism*, Places Journal, April 2010. Accessed 04 May 2020. <https://doi.org/10.22269/100413>

<sup>23</sup> Murdock, James. *Drawing, Thinking, and Digitizing: Recession’s Modus Operandi*, Architectural Record, December 2009, 37-38

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.spatialagency.net/database/paper.architects>, last accessed 4 May 2020

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4868IrgVYXQ>, last accessed 4 May 2020

<sup>26</sup> It is also worth noting that in Japanese, the word *kami* can mean either god or paper.

choreographed polyphony.” This came out of the observation that “too often, an exhibition is none other than a temporal gathering of disparate objects in a given space.”<sup>27</sup> With a desire to propose a complete redefinition that made use of its word-construction, I propose that “to consider the word ‘exhibition,’ and its French translation ‘exposition,’ is to assert the possibility of both an exhibition stripped bare of all content— as in exposed—and the idea of an ‘ex-position’—a position that was, but is no more, that moves on; a position that is yet to happen.”<sup>28</sup>

To challenge the nature of exhibitions is to confront the entire apparatus that surround their inherent contexts. It is to redefine what curating is. I have strived to question the accepted role of what defines being a curator, and the theories of curating. The commonly accepted conventions inherent to the role of a curator must be challenged. The signature that I appose to my exhibitions acts as a statement. “An Exhibition by Mathieu Copeland” insists that to curate is to voice a voice. A curator builds a repertoire, and has a unique approach to his/hers art. A curator is at once a dramaturge, a choreographer, a filmmaker, a writer, (...).

To give a broad overview, I realised exhibitions that happen when the museum is closed (*EA C*, 2004 – 2005) ; exhibitions as soundtracks for museums (*Soundtrack for an Exhibition*, 2006) ; spoken exhibitions (*A Spoken Word Exhibition*, 2004 – on-going) ; exhibitions of movements (*A Choreographed Exhibition*, 2007) ; retrospectives spoken (*A Series of Spoken Words Retrospectives*, 2007) ; exhibitions constructed with ruins of past exhibitions (*Exhibition's Ruins*, 2007) ; continuous exhibitions (*L'exposition Continue*, 2008) ; exhibitions to be read (*An Exhibition To Hear Read*, 2010 – on-going) ; studies as exhibitions (*Studies for an Exhibition*, 2011) ; bootlegs of exhibitions (*Reprise*, 2011 – on-going) ; metonymic exhibitions (*Le Confort Moderne*, 2012) ; exhibitions without texts (*une exposition sans textes*, 2013) ; exhibitions as events (*une exposition – un événement*, 2013) ; exhibitions for cinemas (*the exhibition of a film*, 2015) ; dreamed exhibitions (*the exhibition of a dream*, 2016) ; (...).

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<sup>27</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, *Choreographing Exhibitions*, Dijon: la Ferme du Buisson/ Kunsthalle St.Gallen/Les Presses du Réel, 2013 (subsequently referred to in footnotes as ‘CE’), p19

<sup>28</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, CE, p20

With a clear drive on radicality<sup>29</sup>, and the limits of art, I have worked consistently to develop the possible understanding of a re-materialised form of exhibitions. In doing so I deconstruct the accepted normative understanding that structure exhibitions, and exceed their assumed limits. This re-consideration of what exhibitions can be comes with a complete redefinition of the semantics involved. The recurrence of the word ‘exhibition’ within my titles insists that these are self-reflective. The affixed qualification – ie. choreographed, spoken word, soundtrack, to hear read, of a dream, of a film, ... – affirms the fundamental materiality enabling their constructions. The titles are literally the prisms enabling these conceptual and experiential environments.

“What remains of an exhibition, once it has run its course, is crystallised in its catalogue, the materials it generated, and the memories of those who experienced it.”<sup>30</sup> A catalogue generally makes available the details of the works that were included in an exhibition. It ‘reproduces’ images of the artefacts that made it be and/or views of the exhibition itself. Catalogues are at best the memory of an exhibition, at worst its checklist. The catalogue can also be a way to further and expand upon the exhibition. Telling what was shown through words, explaining what it was about, developing on paper its concept and approach. However, why are most catalogues little other than the compilation of all exhibition wall texts, slightly expanded? Is a catalogue just the three-dimensionality of the exhibition flattened out onto pages?

Do paper exhibitions, like paper architectures, relate to the creating of something by not constructing it? Are paper exhibitions, exhibitions whose reality is the potentiality it only has on paper? A critical approach to Paper Exhibitions would be to discuss if this is anything other than an equivalent to ‘artist’s book’<sup>31</sup> transposed to exhibitions.

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<sup>29</sup> A recurrent term within my personal vocabulary, I would define ‘radicality’ as a state of being – and state of mind – fundamental and resolute. I would like to offer this in parallel to the most profound definition that Genesis Breyer P-Orridge offered during our conversation realised for The Anti-Museum that he concluded with these definite words, “a belief which is so strong that you can risk everything you have.” In *Genesis Breyer P-Orridge in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 12 February 2016*, TAM, p683

<sup>30</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, CE, p22

<sup>31</sup> For a cosmology of artist’s books, please refer to, among others, the work of Clive Phillpot, Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, and Peter Downsbrough in the critical commentary.

Is this akin to define what could be labelled as ‘exhibition’s book,’<sup>32</sup> or even, a ‘curator’s book.’ Such terminology offers an exponent to the exhibition, it squares things and multiply the exhibition by the book. An exhibition made book is a thought-process laid on paper.

The cultural labour, the methods and research, the conversations, all have deep links to my approach of curating. To curate is mostly to write. This epistolary way of working encompasses the necessary discussions that are at the roots of a polyphonic approach to working. It may be that I am an independent curator, and the reality is interdependency: the dependency to the artists, to the institutions, to the publics. It is a dependency that however goes far beyond me being an interface. To curate is to work in collaboration. Now, how do we extract from this frantic group activity one’s own original contribution? This is the point of this PhD: to frame the collective act through books, and to show and educate what my role is in that regard. It examines the roots, and offer responses. Somehow, I seem to take quite literally the announced framework of a *PhD by Publications*. I address through a precise set of publications my contribution to knowledge and culture. I address these as books – as publications – focusing on my writings, my edited conversations, and when relevant in bringing in my commissioning of texts. There is an unevenness in what a PhD by publication is. Its content cannot be synthesized, unified, let alone simplified. We are reflecting on a passage through time of something that accumulates. A retrospective exhibition of exhibitions is a show of shows. A PhD by Publication has a contiguous relation to this practice, being one’s writing on one’s writings. A manifest paper retrospective, so to say.

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<sup>32</sup> Within all historical precedents for book exhibitions, let us consider for instance the iconic *Xerox Book*, as it is often referred as, that Seth Siegelaub and Jack Wendler curated and published in 1969.

## Critical Commentary

### A – Voids

*Voids. A retrospective*<sup>33</sup> is an experimental exhibition that refuses the classic rules of exhibition making whilst affirming historical radical artistic gestures. Since Yves Klein's landmark exhibition at the Iris Clert gallery in 1958<sup>34</sup>, "the empty space as an object of exhibition became a kind of classic of the radical mode, and was to be replayed in other contexts, other places, and other times by other artists with similar, or to the contrary different, even opposite, intentions."<sup>35</sup> This radical retrospective offered the opportunity to explore a crucial chapter in the history of art in bringing together the recreation of nine historical empty exhibitions.

"The exhibition was put together by a group of friends—three artists, a curator and a writer—during fortuitous meetings and discussions."<sup>36</sup> The curatorial team comprises John Armleder, myself Mathieu Copeland, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, and Clive Phillpot. The retrospective presented only exhibitions where the space was left rigorously empty, without any additions or subtractions. This excluded, for instance, shows or works involving the modification of lighting, the installation of sound, the construction and destruction of partitions and the presence of the public. The aim was not to reconstruct the original physical spaces. Each exhibition offered a different reading of the empty space, some presenting a claim, a renunciation, others a

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<sup>33</sup> *Voids. A Retrospective*, with Art & Language, Robert Barry, Stanley Brouwn, Maria Eichhorn, Bethan Huws, Robert Irwin, Yves Klein, Roman Ondák, Laurie Parsons. Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle - Centre Pompidou, 25 February – 23 March 2009. The retrospective was subsequently realised at the Kunsthalle Bern – *Voids, Eine Retrospektive*, 13 September – 11 October 2009, forty years after Harald Szeemann's infamous exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*. Alongside with the Kunsthalle exhibition, we curated an offsite project at the Museum Haus Lange, opening to the public in 20 - 27 September 2009 the void room entitled *Le Vide*, realised by Yves Klein for his retrospective *Yves Klein Monochrome und Feuer*, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, Germany 14 January 1961 - 26 February 1961, a piece that to this day still exists.

<sup>34</sup> *The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility* [*La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée*]. Galerie Iris Clert, Paris. 28 April – 5 May 1958

<sup>35</sup> Armleder, John. Copeland, Mathieu. Metzger, Gustav. Perret, Mai-Thu. Phillpot, Clive. *Voids, A Retrospective*, Voids, Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2009 (publication subsequently referred to in footnotes as 'Voids'), p29

<sup>36</sup> Armleder, John. Copeland, Mathieu. Metzger, Gustav. Perret, Mai-Thu. Phillpot, Clive. *Voids, A Retrospective*, Voids, p31

celebration of the institution's architecture. This accumulation of empty spaces, similar in appearance but radically different in reality, has echoes and implications beyond its walls.

This retrospective brings together the work of artists who have attempted the extreme gesture to show without showing an object, without making any intervention other than a single announcement. As Robert Barry explains, discussing his piece *Be free to think about what you are going to do* – a sentence borrowed from Herbert Marcuse's *An Essay on Liberation* – it “is about designating something, a particular place, and seeing how this affects the situation.”<sup>37</sup> From the search for a renewal of perception, through political or ideological statement, to the deconstruction of the very principle of ‘exhibition’, these projects pose a range of crucial questions about the role of the museum, and this unprecedented marshalling of eloquent emptiness represents a true challenge to the institution.

At once the support and an extension of the retrospective, the publication *Voids* proposes an evaluation of the origins, the mechanisms, and the resonances of this major artistic gesture consisting of emptying the exhibition space rather than filling it, and outlines the concept of the void in art, philosophy, religion, science, popular culture, architecture, or again, music.

*Voids* was edited by myself Mathieu Copeland together with John Armleder, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, and Clive Phillpot, along with Laurent Le Bon – then Director of the Centre Pompidou-Metz and co-curator of the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou Paris, and Philippe Pirotte – then Director of the Kunsthalle Bern and co-curator of the exhibition at the Kunsthalle. The publication was published by JRP|Ringier in collaboration with Ecart Publications, Geneva, in co-edition with Éditions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, and Centre Pompidou-Metz. The book was released for the opening of the exhibition at the Centre Pompidou on 23 February 2009. In both institutions, copies of the book were on display for open consultation, in an open space situated before the galleries devoted to the exhibition. George Brecht, a

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<sup>37</sup> *Ideas Come Out of Objects*, Interview with Robert Barry by Mathieu Copeland, *Voids*, p87

great proponent of the void, had recently passed away by the time of going to press. The book is dedicated to his memory.<sup>38</sup>

The book opens with 6 double-page full-spread images of the empty exhibitions spaces, three from the Centre Pompidou, and three from the Kunsthalle Bern. Since the book was printed before the exhibition, the graphic designers – Gilles Gavillet and Corinne Zellweger – used installation shots of the galleries of the Centre Pompidou that were to be devoted to the retrospective, and digitally erased the works of art that were installed in the gallery. This design gesture somehow echoed the physical realisation of the exhibition. The retrospective took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the museum where the permanent collections are displayed. As such, all artworks had to be removed to present the galleries empty. The images from the Kunsthalle Bern came from Maria Eichhorn’s 2001 solo exhibition *Money at the Kunsthalle Bern*. Eichhorn decided to devote the exhibition budget to the renovation of the building, leaving the exhibition spaces empty by necessity. Using Eichhorn’s photographs of her ‘empty’ exhibition offers a fascinating paratext to the retrospective. These photographs show the empty Kunsthalle – raising the following questions: Is the retrospective at the Kunsthalle the formal recreation of Eichhorn’s void in situ? To experience the retrospective, is one invited to walk though all the 9 spaces dedicated to each artist’s original exhibitions? Or, to walk through the entire 9 empty spaces 9 times to experience as many empty exhibitions?

The retrospective was to present nothing but empty spaces; however during the research stages a wealth of materials was unearthed and accumulated. Essentially, this comprised all the memorabilia produced for each of these exhibitions. These included, for instance and amongst many others:

– The invitation card to the opening of Yves Klein’s exhibition on the 28th of April 1958 at the Galerie Iris Clert, written by Pierre Restany and bearing Klein’s fake IKB stamps as reproduced p41, along with the attached ‘Special little cards’ that Klein conceived as ‘free admission tickets’ for his guests—those without had to pay 1,500 old francs as Klein feared that visitors would steal “by impregnation, whether

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<sup>38</sup> For more on George Brecht, please refer to Martin, Henry. *George Brecht: Voids and VOID-Stones*, Voids, p199

consciously or not,” whole sections of the “pictorial sensibility”<sup>39</sup> exhibited, reproduced p55.

– Michael Baldwin & Terry Atkinson’s poster for *The Air-Conditioning Show* from the Visual Arts Gallery, New York, 1972 reproduced p62. The featured text to this exhibition conceived in 1966 first appeared as an article<sup>40</sup> in 1967 is reprinted pages 65–69.

– Laurie Parsons’ invitation card for her exhibition at the Lorence-Monk Gallery, New York, 1990, bearing nothing else but the name and address of the gallery, reproduced p115.

– (...)

The exhibition was such that none of this material would be presented in the exhibition spaces, which were all devoted to the experience of the void, yet we felt the urgent need for all these images, photographs, documents, histories, tales, and memories to be made available, thus developing the relationship between the *exhibition* and its *cataloguing*. “While the exhibition dryly renounces documentary fetishism, this publication attempts to cover broader ground.”<sup>41</sup> The retrospective presents us with nothing but an allegory of past empty spaces; all the paratexts to the exhibitions are in the publication.

The catalogue is a delayed experience to what once was. It reflects on the exhibition as it questions the representation of something that has happened. It *re*-presents stories and narratives. With *Voids*, it tells the history of an absent something. Conversely, the publication becomes the ideal venue for exhibitions that annul or cancel the host institution – to empty museums nullify the very function of the museum, thus contributing to the philosophy of an anti-museum. The catalogue is the nodal point to all these ramifications. *Voids* considers frontally the role of the catalogue as it analyses exhibitions that cannot be transcribed nor represented.

The architecture of the publication is organised as such: following a cover that made use of the infamous photograph of Yves Klein jumping into space, altered in deleting

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<sup>39</sup> For more information, please do refer to Klein, Yves. *The Specialization of Sensibility in Raw Material State into Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility*, *Voids*, p52

<sup>40</sup> Baldwin, Michael. *Remarks on Air-Conditioning*, *Arts Magazine*, November 1967, p22–3

<sup>41</sup> Armleder, John. Copeland, Mathieu. Metzger, Gustav. Perret, Mai-Thu. Phillpot, Clive. *Voids, A Retrospective*, *Voids*, p30

Klein from the picture thus showing... nothing but an empty street (a proposition by John Armleder), the book opens with the digitally rendered exhibition views, followed by the forewords and the general introduction. These lead to the catalogue section, documenting and discussing all empty exhibitions. The anthology of more than forty texts follows, many of these published for the first time, along with a *cahier d'images* – a series of colour reproductions not necessarily discussed in the texts, all alluding to nothing, as for instance the reprint of John Cage's score for 4'33'', originally published by Edition Peters in 1952. 58 original artists' pages conclude the publication. This was "partly inspired by the conversations we have had with numerous friends who expressed their interest since the inception of this project. This made us curious about the reactions of other artists, thus enabling us to put together an ensemble of new creations, and maybe to reach beyond the academic scope of our research."<sup>42</sup>

The retrospective presented the works of Yves Klein, Art & Language, Robert Barry, Stanley Brouwn, Robert Irwin, Laurie Parsons, Bethan Huws, Maria Eichhorn, and Roman Ondák, yet it was necessary to envisage in depth the art of other great exponents of the void, namely Michael Asher, Maria Nordman and Emilio Prini. The latter three were not included in the exhibition following discussions with each<sup>43</sup>. The cases posed by Michael Asher and Stanley Brouwn are both of particularly fascinating interest. Michael Asher's work is included in the catalogue, where it is described, but it is not physically included in the exhibition, at his request. Invited to participate in the retrospective, Michael Asher ultimately turned down the invitation, specifying that: "each of my installations which have no objects, and present just the exhibition space, addresses specific questions or concerns about that space which are particular to its context. These exhibitions are not transportable, and to actualize any of the works would imply that the original exhibition would lose its meaning entirely and become a different artwork, which would, very likely, address other issues."<sup>44</sup> As for Stanley Brouwn, conversely, the work "is presented in the museum, but not listed in the

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<sup>42</sup> Armleder, John. Copeland, Mathieu. Metzger, Gustav. Perret, Mai-Thu. Phillpot, Clive. *Voids, A Retrospective*, Voids, p30

<sup>43</sup> A precise account of the discussion with Asher, Nordman and Prini can be found in Copeland, Mathieu. *Qualifying the Void*, p169. It is worth noting that Prini also contributed an artists' page, Voids, p479

<sup>44</sup> Private letter from Michael Asher to Mathieu Copeland, dated 10 September 2007

catalogue, according to the artist's desire (it is mentioned in some of the more general studies compiled in the publication)."<sup>45</sup> Brown was invited to participate in the retrospective based on his 1973 exhibition *Walking Through Cosmic Rays* at the Städtisches Museum at Mönchengladbach, where "he emptied the institution of its artworks and invited the visitors to walk through the cosmic rays in the cleared space."<sup>46</sup> Brown accepted this invitation, yet decided to create a new piece for the exhibition, one for each venue. The presence of these pieces entitled *An Empty Space in the Centre Pompidou*, and *An Empty Space in the Kunsthalle Bern*, only appear in the table of content, without a page number but situated where it should have been. The table of content for the catalogue section follows the chronological order of the realisation of the works. As such, these were added as 2009.

"This book, with its anthology of essays from all viewpoints and all disciplines, offers possible readings of the void—or rather the voids—through the historical prism of a retrospective on empty exhibitions."<sup>47</sup> Working on the exhibition offered many parallel interrogations. As Ben Vautier told me, his "own Nothing is not Manzoni's or Klein's Nothing; it's a different Nothing."<sup>48</sup> A study in semantics was thus deemed necessary – for instance nothing is not the void, and to quote Vautier's mother: "there is no such thing as nothing"<sup>49</sup>. It was thus decided to not 'just' have the catalogue be a 'cataloguing' of what was present through its absence, but to go beyond, and within. The questions that arose during the making of the catalogue included what would be the equivalent of the void in philosophy, in architecture, in music, in science or religion... The commissioned essays, conversations and reprints of historical texts that construct the anthology were structured according to five chapters, namely *Void*; *Nothing*; *Vacuity/Empty*; *Invisible/Ineffable*; *Rejection/Destruction*. A terminology with direct relation to the void, each term becomes an empty compartment to organise the specific concerns that are at the heart of the researches.

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<sup>45</sup> Armleder, John. Copeland, Mathieu. Metzger, Gustav. Perret, Mai-Thu. Phillipot, Clive. *Voids, A Retrospective*, Voids, p30

<sup>46</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Qualifying the Void*, Voids, p168

<sup>47</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Qualifying the Void*, Voids, p167

<sup>48</sup> *Less is more, but I prefer nothing*, interview with Ben Vautier by Mathieu Copeland, Voids, p253. Ben Vautier clarifies later his relation to nothing, stating that "I've worked a lot on Nothing, but Nothing is a failure. When the ego says, 'Look, I've done Nothing!' the I is more important than the Nothing. Nothing cannot exist in art without the I."

<sup>49</sup> *Less is more, but I prefer nothing*, interview with Ben Vautier by Mathieu Copeland, Voids, p257

Clive Phillpot, who is part of the curatorial team, served as the director of Museum of Modern Art Library in New York from 1977 to 1994 and is an influential specialist in artists' books. Phillpot established the “distinction between ‘artists’ book,’ meaning books and booklets authored by artists, and ‘bookworks,’ meaning artworks in book form.” Phillpot continues, “Artists’ book sit provocatively at the juncture where art, documentation and literature all come together. Indeed, one the characteristics of the field is its mongrel nature.”<sup>50</sup> It is a conception echoed by artist Peter Downsbrough, who when discussing how to locate art within the book as a space replied, “the book is the work. It holds together as art, and it’s an object.”<sup>51</sup> To extend this conception, leading specialist in blank books by artists Anne Moeglin-Delcroix was commissioned to write a text on artists who make empty books. Moeglin-Delcroix opens her remarkable essay, *Neither Word Nor Image: Blank Books*, with this outstanding quote by Herman de Vries, “an empty page signifies more than a written page.” Though a strict study of radicality, Moeglin-Delcroix discusses books whose “obvious emptiness hides nothing readable or visible” and that “state their materiality, ideal books, transparent to ideas, where the paper is altogether penetrated by meaning, inferred by a title, a warning, directions for use, a context, which function like so many paratexts—in the manner of labels or invitation cards on the periphery of exhibitions—in other words as ‘text’ margins, if we can talk in this way of the white pages which make a book.”<sup>52</sup> What could be more appropriate than to talk about an empty page in regard to an empty show? Analysing blank books is to further the thoughts highlighted in the exhibition, and to insist on their interdependent nature as both share common roots.

The radicality of the empty page is the manifest at the onset of manifest paper exhibitions. To quote Claude Parent, “emptiness is more important than fullness.”<sup>53</sup> To consider the word *exhibition* within manifest paper exhibitions allows us to propose an analogy between the display of works of art and the layout that organises a page in

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<sup>50</sup> *Books by artists and books as art*, by Clive Phillpot, p33, in *Artist/Author, Contemporary Artists’ Books*, ed. Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot, published by D.A.P., 1998.

<sup>51</sup> *Peter Downsbrough in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Geneva, 28 October 2014, the exhibition of a film*, Dijon: Les Presses du Réel/HEAD, 2015 (publication subsequently referred to in footnotes as ‘TEOAF’), p139

<sup>52</sup> Moeglin-Delcroix, Anne. *Neither Word Nor Image: Blank Books*, Voids, p397

<sup>53</sup> *To Teach People to Create the Void in their Memories*, Interview with Claude Parent by Mathieu Copeland, Voids, p440

regard to all other pages. “Too often, an exhibition is none other than a temporal gathering of disparate objects in a given space.”<sup>54</sup> Applying this definition of exhibitions to the page, would a paper exhibition be a permanent (or considering that even paper ultimately decays, at least, *semi* permanent) gathering of disparate constituents (in its widest understanding – texts, images, paper, materiality...) in the fixed paper context? To organise a book is to arrange a multiplicity of two-dimensional objects in the space of the pages, in the time to be read. As such, it is akin to the realisation of any exhibitions, something other than an exhibition assigned to pages, manifest paper exhibitions expands and fragments, crystallises and diffracts. The publication *Voids* is a possible understanding of what a paper exhibition can be: radical in content, and a manifest by nature.

Gustav Metzger came to the Centre Pompidou for the opening of the retrospective on 23 February 2009, one of his last journey outside of the UK. Gustav, as we received the first copies of *Voids* in time for the opening, proclaimed to us the curatorial committee over lunch that “there is a BC and an AC, that is before the catalogue and after the catalogue!” Playing upon the classical use of BC/AD (Before Christ and Anno Domini), Gustav with these definitive words made the powerful point of the autonomy of the publication.

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<sup>54</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, CE, p19

## **B – Choreographing Exhibitions**

*A Choreographed Exhibition* is an exhibition solely composed of movements. During the time of an exhibition, *any* three dancers occupy continuously the spaces of *any* institutions. The dancers interpret a choreography of gestures, figures, displacement and movements, following the scores and instructions written by invited choreographers – Cecilia Bengolea, Jonah Bokaer, Philippe Egli, Jennifer Lacey, musicians – Michael Parsons, dramaturges – Tim Etchells, or again visual artists – Roman Ondák, Karl Holmqvist, Fia Backström and Michael Portnoy. I curated *A Choreographed Exhibition* at the Kunsthalle St Gallen (1 December 2007 – 13 January 2008,) and La Ferme Du Buisson (8 November – 21 December 2008,) these two institutions being co-producers. The exhibition was then reprised and expanded for its tenth year anniversary at the Spanish art centre CA2M (16 September – 15 October 2017).

To choreograph an exhibition is an invitation to work with the ephemerality of movement. It is to question how to work together, and how to write – and transmit – works of art. Heterogeneous practices come together as one in composing movements for dancers, leading to radical semantic shifts. The materiality of ‘gestures’ poses the question of the memory of a work of art, and of its exhibition. A gesture, a movement, once it has been realised ultimately exists only in the memory of the dancers, and through the fragments of souvenirs as experienced by spectators.

Expanding upon the etymology of ‘choreography’, to conceive of a choreographed exhibition is to work with movements in the time of an exhibition, and the space of an institution. This serves as an echo to Jérôme Bel’s definitive statement that he knows he has his “hands on a piece when (he) finds the title,”<sup>55</sup> “to name is to propose that, through the title, the entire program of an exhibition is being laid out and presented.”<sup>56</sup> Within the title the program of the exhibition is introduced: *A Choreographed Exhibition* announces the choreography constituting each piece, and the choreography of all pieces in time, and space. *A Choreographed Exhibition* is defined ultimately by

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<sup>55</sup> Jérôme Bel in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, London, 22 November 2011, CE, p50

<sup>56</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, CE, p21

its duration, and the specific temporality of each works. The time of the exhibition becomes an articulated score that encapsulates the different scores written by artists to be read, worked and realised by the dancers.

The exhibition raised a multitude of questions that ultimately led to a book, *Choreographing Exhibitions*. It was published in December 2013, six years after the first realisation of the exhibition. This time allowed to reflect, and “articulates what the show highlighted: the fact that my entire curatorial approach is based on the idea of choreographing an exhibition.”<sup>57</sup> The title to Julie Pellegrin’s forewords could hardly be more apt: *This is not a Catalogue*. Pellegrin described the publication as a “formidable panorama of possible articulations between choreography and exhibition,”<sup>58</sup> then endeavours to give a summary of my work as a curator in these definitive words: “a conception of the exhibition that never fixes itself in one form but rather integrates the possibilities of the immaterial and temporal nature of the artwork.”<sup>59</sup> Confronted to a new way of making exhibitions led me to question the legacy of an exhibition, and propose a book that would be both an anthology and a manifest. A publication as a ‘manifest call’ that voices a voice through a plurality of contributors, as it crystallises one’s work in a definitive statement. The exhibition being entitled *A Choreographed Exhibition*, the book was naturally to be *Choreographing Exhibitions*. This shift of terminology contributes to this desire of a radical manifest position.

By being a call for action, – the title is a clear invitation to *choreograph* exhibitions – this publication presents a unique overview of choreography and exhibition, through the contributions of over thirty international visual artists, choreographers, musicians, filmmakers, theorists, and curators. An orchestrated polyphony of points of view as seen through 5 prisms: “Choreographing Exhibitions envisages exhibition-making through the prism of choreography, by means of the terms that compose an exhibition: score, body, space, time and memory. To curate an exhibition encompasses the score that enables its realisation, the bodies that make it be, the location it inhabits, the time

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<sup>57</sup> Jérôme Bel in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, London, 22 November 2011, CE, p49

<sup>58</sup> Pellegrin, Julie. *This is not a catalogue*, CE, p18

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

taken for its experience, and the memory that remains once its course has run.”<sup>60</sup> I propose these as the fundamental core of exhibition making. Following this structure in 5 chapters, and explicitly designed by Nicolas Eigenheer and Jeremy Schorderet as a continuous column that dances from text to text through the pages, the publication was devised as a manifest publication that proposes choreographing exhibitions as a renewed understanding to curating.

The question of the possibility, and limits, of titling encompasses all, as exemplified in the conversation with Boris Charmatz. Charmatz radically confronted this when he became in 2009 director of the *Centre chorégraphique national de Rennes et de Bretagne* (Rennes and Brittany’s National Centre for Choreography,) and renamed it *Musée de la Danse*. Charmatz’s radical move was to “rename it without physically transforming the spaces—the rehearsal studios or the performance space remain unchanged. In other words, (*he*) project(s) something extra onto them. (*He*) ties together.”<sup>61</sup> This gesture offers a fitting parallel, as I told him, “with the *Musée du Cinéma*, the words Henri Langlois, its founder, had engraved in June 1963 on the entry to the palais de Chaillot after the Cinémathèque française had moved to the Messine avenue, or André Malraux’s *Museum without Walls*.”<sup>62</sup> In renaming an institution both Charmatz and Langlois entirely transformed an existing entity without altering any of its content. At no time with le *Musée de la Danse* did Charmatz intend to create a museum with a collection and all its classical apparatus. Instead, through a renewed indexation Charmatz proposes a new museum. To rename is to redefine. To choreograph exhibitions is to affirm a renewed approach to the adaptive nature intrinsic to what exhibitions are, and are made of.

Lilo Nein, in her commissioned text “*The Curator as Choreographer: Authorship in Moving Structures*,” set out to question “how authorship is dealt with, and implicitly negotiated, and which understanding of it is conveyed in *A Choreographed Exhibition*.”<sup>63</sup> Harald Szeemann would write exhibitions<sup>64</sup> the same way an author

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<sup>60</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, CE, p19

<sup>61</sup> Boris Charmatz, in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Paris, 28 October 2011, CE, p107

<sup>62</sup> Boris Charmatz, in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Paris, 28 October 2011, CE, p109

<sup>63</sup> Nein, Lilo. *The Curator as Choreographer: Authorship in Moving Structures*, CE, p173.

writes a novel, and as such would affirm a new definition of what being a curator can be. Nathalie Heinich asked Szeemann if he remembered the moment press reviews began to mention his name. He replied, “it was obvious, it was known that it was mine – my decision, my writing (...).”<sup>65</sup> This conception echoes that of filmmakers from the Nouvelle Vague, especially Jean-Luc Godard, who labelled themselves *authors* of their films. This afforded the conception that curators are authors too. Let us expand from there on with the acceptance that the term curator encompasses being a choreographer, along with being an author, a writer, an historian, a filmmaker, a dramaturge (...).

The publication enables us to shift the analyses from the *content* of the exhibition to that of the *object* that exhibitions are. The publication allows us to embody through a definitive statement the new thoughts, new approaches, and new concepts that the exhibition exposed. This proposition became a focal for a publication in regard to *its* exhibition, highlighting the natural yet confrontational relationship between the printed matter, and the exhibited matter.

It was decided from the onset of the making of the exhibition that there would be no catalogue. “We did not want to substitute the representation of gestures for the gestures themselves.”<sup>66</sup> This led to question the presence of images in catalogues. Whilst working on the exhibition in St Gallen, Roman Ondák noticed all the marks that were left by the dancers on the gallery floor and walls. He invited me to take photographs of all these once the exhibition was over, a task that I was honoured to diligently carry out. These visual traces became the only photographs of the book as a fitting testimony to past movements. The publication ends with two scores that formed part of the exhibition, one by Karl Holmqvist, and one by Fia Backström & Michael Portnoy. The book has a natural relationship to its exhibition. To further this understanding, let us ask what happens when the outcome becomes the enabler. What

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<sup>64</sup> In this I refer to the French anthology of Szeemann’s writings Baudson, Michel (ed.). *Harald Szeemann, Ecrire les Expositions*, la lettre volée, 1996

<sup>65</sup> Heinich, Nathalie. *Harald Szeemann, Un cas singulier (entretien)*, L’Echoppe, 1995, p23, my translation. “Mais les expositions, c’était logique, on savait que c’était moi – ma décision, mon écriture...”

<sup>66</sup> Jérôme Bel in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, London, 22 November 2011, CE, p49

happens when the book is ultimately the one that permits the realisation of the exhibition? This exemplifies the possibility of re-presenting transient works of art.

What can a catalogue be in regard to its exhibition, when the catalogue does not catalogue the exhibition but quite to the contrary furthers the possibility of an exhibition in making a statement? Hans Ulrich Obrist encapsulated this through this definitive, even though controversial, statement: “it has always been clear to me that an exhibition that does not produce a catalogue does not exist.” He continues, “if you look back at the very first shows, for example Manet’s shows, you will notice that there was always a little book with the list of works. This is a crucial trace. (...) So, from the beginning, I believed that an exhibition not only needed a catalogue but also that the catalogue was an extension of the exhibition. The catalogue can also be an exhibition in itself because it is the mobile version of it.”<sup>67</sup>

Together with Pierre Huyghe we interrogated this conception as we envisaged how the memory of an exhibition usually lives on within the catalogue. Huyghe admitted that he has “a hard time formalising books precisely because the complexity gets pinned down. The book can relate to research, to an ideal score and at the same time, to this obscure part that hasn’t been shown.” He concludes with the powerful evidence that “the book is what was *not* exhibited.”<sup>68</sup>

With an exhibition solely made of movement, one is de facto redefining the possibility of any art centre or museum. These seemingly rigid institutions are not made for moving bodies other than the public to be there as transient occupants of spaces. The relationship between ‘bodies’ and ‘museum’ became in the 2000s a major focus in curatorial endeavours. *A Choreographed Exhibition* contributed to this zeitgeist. As Catherine Wood remarked in her commissioned essay, *People and Things in the Museum*, “The increasing number of experiments with the ‘choreographic’ within the museum in the past decade, the staging of the live body as a work of art, prompt not only a reconsideration of the museum’s object-centric infrastructure in a practical

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<sup>67</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, *The Fragility of Exhibitions, Stroll in Hyde Park, London, 31 October 2011*, CE, p168.

<sup>68</sup> Pierre Huyghe in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, *Abrons Art Center, New York, 6 October 2011*, CE, p150 – (the italic is my emphasis)

sense, but a more nuanced consideration of how subject-object boundaries are defined—and elaborated—within this context.”<sup>69</sup>

This fundamental and problematic question echoes Maite Garbayo Maeztu's commissioned essay *I Object*, in which she reflects upon Hannah Wilke's performance *Hannah Wilke Through the Large Glass* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where in front of Duchamp's *Large Glass* “the artist did a strip-tease that proposed a critical rethinking of the assumed relationship between the naked female body and objectification.” A year later, “In Cadaqués, Hannah Wilke lay down naked on the rocks to cite and subvert the image of the fragmented and possessed body of *Étant donnés*. Hamilton took two photographs of the action, which Wilke entitled *I Object: Memoirs of a Sugargiver*. (...) At the same time that the artist ‘objects’ to the fetishising fragmentation perpetrated by Duchamp, she upsets the classic subject-object relationship through a conscious decision to occupy the place of the object of desire.” As Garbayo Maeztu concluded, “In order to subvert the subject-object opposition, it is necessary to iterate critically the position of the object, to confuse it with that of the subject, to blur the limits of this division.”<sup>70</sup>

The question of objectification is at the heart of the discussion with Kenneth Anger. Our conversation was focused mainly on his 1949 film *Puce Moment*. This iconic movie deals with film stars from the silent era that “were to be filmed in their actual houses. (...) They were the past of themselves, mirrors of who they were.”<sup>71</sup> Anger went on to make this definitive statement that he was, “in effect, filming ghosts.”<sup>72</sup> He was celebrating the icon's body, whilst treating the absent bodies as icons. When he approached the making of *Puce Moment*, history has it that he wanted to film the great goddess of the silent screen. In filming these stars, there is both a celebratory aspect and the desire to ‘capture’ the person filmed through the cinematic medium. Anger explained, “it was referring to the 1920s, which was when the collection of gowns came from. They belonged to my grandmother and many of the gowns were from

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<sup>69</sup> Wood, Catherine. *People and Things in the Museum*, CE, p113

<sup>70</sup> Garbayo Maeztu, Maite. *I Object*, CE, p84

<sup>71</sup> Kenneth Anger, in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, London, 22 March 2013, CE, p85

<sup>72</sup> Kenneth Anger, quoted in Rayns, Tony. *Dedication To Create Make Believe*, Time Out, n91, 1971, requoted in Hunter, Jack. *Moonchild, The films of Kenneth Anger*, p.114, Creation Books, 2002

well-known silent stars such as Clara Bow, Barbara La Marr, and others of that period. So, when the clothes go by in the film, in a way, it's like invoking spirits or ghosts.”<sup>73</sup>

Our conversation with Malcolm McLaren unpicked his controversial use of the subject-object relation, especially with his work with The Sex Pistols. I began our discussion, “In 1999, in your essay ‘The Casino of Authenticity and Karaoke,’ you wrote that ‘it was an art thing. Instead of paint and canvas, clay or bronze, I used real people.’” I continued, “even though this quote addressed the Sex Pistols, it seems that it may be more evident with Bow Wow Wow and in your later work. What fascinates me is how this sentence echoes such a dense history, being at the crossroads between the work of Joseph Beuys and the concept of the social sculpture<sup>74</sup>, and Gilbert & George’s art of living sculptures. (...) It all comes down to that quote and raises the notion of the ‘use’ of people, and all its implications ranging from the act of abusing someone to that of transforming someone into an art form.”<sup>75</sup>

What is a subject in space? How do you not objectify a person? How do you retain the subjective integrity of the performer? For McLaren, vocalist Johnny Rotten (John Lydon), guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook and bassist Glen Matlock, later replaced by Sid Vicious, were all constitutive materials of *his* artwork. This was vehemently denied by all the partakers, especially Rotten. Even though it was obvious to me that all the dancers that made *A Choreographed Exhibition* all retained their inherent subjectivity, I wanted this publication to allow this very questioning in offering a critical analyse.

This is shared concern cross-references once more our conversation with Pierre Huyghe. Discussing the nature of the spectator, Huyghe recalled from a discussion he had with Jérôme Bel. They concluded, “we can say something took place because it had an audience. So it is a question of presence. But I’d rather call the audience ‘witnesses,’ ‘wild’ or ‘undomesticated’ witnesses who experience this temporality, which is accidental and not accidental. (...) When you talk about the witness, it seems

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<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Anger, in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, London, 22 March 2013, CE, p85

<sup>74</sup> For more on this, please do refer to Mesch, Claudia. *Institutionalizing Social Sculpture: Beuys’ Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum Installation (1972)*, TEOAF, p170-182

<sup>75</sup> Malcolm McLaren in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, London, 16 February 2007, CE, p88.

to me that, all the same, you are avoiding the pitfall of the spectator's objectification."<sup>76</sup> To examine this conception, let's consider how the ecosystem that is an exhibition encompasses artworks that only live on through the experience that we have of them. As spectators, we ultimately perceive what we project, and as such are the main protagonists in activating the works.

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<sup>76</sup> *Pierre Huyghe in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Abrons Art Center, New York, 6 October 2011*, CE, p144

## C – the exhibition of a film

*the exhibition of a film*<sup>77</sup> is an exhibition as a feature film for cinemas that brings together visual artists, filmmakers, musicians, performers, choreographers and writers. Structured as a film for cinematic standards, *the exhibition of a film* is an all-encompassing polyphony of sounds and images. This curatorial and cinematographic experimental exhibition is neither a ‘structuralist epic’<sup>78</sup>, nor a compilation of artist’s films one following the other. Each constituting layer – ranging from the projected image to the polyphony of sound, from piece of pure abstraction to filmed scenes – contributes to the experience as a whole.

An exhibition for a context, namely a film to be screened in cinemas<sup>79</sup>, and constrained by the properties unique to this social environment, *the exhibition of a film* is a feature movie that works both the spatialization of sounds and the fragmentation of images on the screen. Lawrence Weiner’s first of two contributions realised for the exhibition is a text piece that act as the opening words to the film: “ALL THAT WE SEE IN CINEMA IS FALSE, & YET IT IS THE ONLY REALITY WE KNOW.” The nature of the context is indeed everything to an exhibition that questions all that makes it be. As Weiner told us, with *the exhibition of a film* “the cinema becomes the spectacle”<sup>80</sup>. As a too rare occurrence for a whole exhibition, *the exhibition of a film*

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<sup>77</sup> *the exhibition of a film*, with Mac Adams, Fia Backström, Robert Barry, Erica Baum, Stuart Brisley, Jonathan Burrows, Nick Cave, David Cunningham, Philippe Decrauzat, Peter Downsbrough, Maria Eichhorn, F.M. Einheit, Tim Etchells, Alexandre Estrela, John Giorno, Sam Gleaves, Kenneth Goldsmith, Myriam Gourfink, Karl Holmqvist, Marie-Caroline Hominal, Myriam Lefkowitz, Franck Leibovici, Benoît Maire, Charles De Meaux, Karen Mirza & Brad Butler, Ieva Misevičiūtė, Meredith Monk, Charlotte Moth, Phill Niblock, Deborah Pearson, Vanessa Place, Michael Portnoy, Lee Ranaldo, Lætitia Sadier, Laurent Schmid, Leah Singer, Mieko Shiomi, Susan Stenger, Sofia Diaz + Vitor Roriz, Kasper T. Toeplitz, Daniel Turner, Cosey Fanni Tutti, Alan Vega, Lawrence Weiner. An exhibition as a feature film by Mathieu Copeland, 2015

<sup>78</sup> An expression told to us by David Cunningham in a private discussion during the preparation of the film

<sup>79</sup> *the exhibition of a film* was shown, amongst many others, at Musée national d’art moderne/Centre de création industrielle - Centre Pompidou, 2015 ; Tate Modern, 2015 ; Cinémathèque québécoise, Montreal, 2016 ; Melbourne Festival, 2017 ; Vancity Theatre, Vancouver, 2017; Cineteca Nacional, Mexico City, 2018 (...).

<sup>80</sup> Lawrence Weiner, fragments of a conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 24 March 2014, p168

entered the permanent collections of the Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle – Centre Pompidou, Paris, in 2018.

This exhibition takes its constitutive structure as its material. Working the constraints intrinsic to a feature-length movie, *the exhibition of a film* can be considered an exhibited film, the film of an exhibition, and a filmed exhibition. This hovering between realities echoes Liam Gillick and Philippe Parreno powerful question: “is an exhibition documentary or fiction?”<sup>81</sup>. A thought further articulated by Pierre Leguillon, for whom with the exhibition of a film “we are not in the documentation of a gesture but rather in the fabrication within the images of a particular space for objects specific to that space”<sup>82</sup>.

I would like to insist that an exhibition is akin to a polyphony – a polyphony of works, of words, of thoughts, of people coming together and expressing their voices. As such, considering the work of Meredith Monk is essential. I am extremely indebted to Monk, as I conceived this exhibition thanks to her art. Monk considered her 1971 debut record *Key* as an ‘invisible theatre.’ In her words, “the reason I talked about an ‘invisible theatre’ is that you would have your own images. The whole album is structured like a journey and this is the reason why I called myself the ‘travelling voice’”<sup>83</sup> Monk has dealt with such mastery throughout the years with polyphony, may it be the polyphony of voices, or polyphony within spaces. She described her relation to polyphony, “throughout my whole work, from the beginning onwards, I was actually thinking in terms of polyphony of perceptual modes. In a way, in my large works that included music and gesture, light and film, sound and objects, I was thinking of that as perceptual polyphony.”<sup>84</sup>

The book *the exhibition of a film* follows the eponymous exhibition. Expanding on the issues raised through the exhibition, the publication pursues the manifest and

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<sup>81</sup> Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 14 March 2014, TEOAF, p161

<sup>82</sup> Pierre Leguillon, in a private discussion, quoted in Copeland, Mathieu. *The Exhibition of a Film*, TEOAF, p5

<sup>83</sup> Meredith Monk, in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, in-between London and New York, 25 January 2015, TEOAF, p208

<sup>84</sup> Meredith Monk, in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, in-between London and New York, 25 January 2015, TEOAF, p206

anthological construct of *Choreographing Exhibitions*. Articulated through commissioned texts, conversations, reprints and artists pages<sup>85</sup>, the book examines the radical relationship between exhibition and film, especially their temporalities, their space, and their mode of production. As such, it poses the questions of the relationship between the publication and the exhibition, and the possibilities of an exhibition crystallized within the publication. This is to ask, how can an exhibition find a different form, or a different resonance, within a paper reality?

The catalogue proposes a specific polyphony of thoughts and voices. It offers something that can be nowhere else but within its pages, something that arises through the confrontation of one voice with another. The publication offers a polyphony where different voices come together sometimes in homophony, sometimes in heterophony, and even sometimes in cacophony.

To consider the polyphony stemming from the objects that make an exhibition be is to consider the objects the exhibition produces. All these disparate elements produced for the exhibition aggregates together through polyphony, and as such produces a film. The construction of a book is to be envisaged too through the concept of polyphony, as diverse material comes together in the specific context that is the publication. It is through a profusion of possibilities that meanings occur when one constitutive element is confronted to another. A polyphony arises in the readers' minds where all materials resonate together and echo one another.

John Giorno was a great prolific polyphonic artist. As Giorno recalled, "Polyphony is simply sound. (...) From 1965 for fourteen years, I made complex sound compositions. Working with polyphony through repetition and electronics, recording on sixteen and twenty-four track tape recorders. The idea was to bring out the musical qualities inherent in the words in the poem. (...) Since 1989 I've been working with the polyphony in my voice, the many sounds of the solo voice in performance."<sup>86</sup> I invited Lee Ranaldo to contribute to the exhibition. During the filming session with

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<sup>85</sup> A series of 16 posters realised especially for *the exhibition of a film* by Mac Adams, Darren Banks, Eva Barto, Peter Downsbrough, Olivier Castel, Philippe Decrauzat, Nicolas Eigenheer et Jeremy Schorderet, Charles de Meaux, Charlotte Moth, Mai-Thu Perret, Phoebe Unwin, Denis Savary, Laurent Schmid, Alan Vega, Jacques Villeglé, Lawrence Weiner.

<sup>86</sup> *John Giorno in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 17 November 2014*, TEOAF, p200

John Giorno in Geneva, 12 – 15 April 2012, I told John that his NY musician friend and colleague Lee was contributing to the film too. Giorno thus proposed that I give Ranaldo the recording session of him reading his poems JUST SAY NO TO FAMILY VALUES and THE DEATH OF WS BURROUGHS, to work from these. Lee composed two pieces in response – including the recording of Giorno reciting the poems – two striking pieces that are to be heard in the film. Giorno’s response upon listening to the composition was simply: “I love Lee's music for the two poems, beautiful and perfect.”<sup>87</sup> This open approach of ‘passing on’ is a great tool to exhibition making. As it starts to snowball, the exhibition naturally grows, accumulates and resonates in unique and complex ways. People gathered together choreograph a polyphony. In the words of Fia Backström, “In a polyphonic collaborative and collective form, you don’t give up your difference, instead you turn it into a heterogeneous force.”<sup>88</sup>

It was with this very concern in mind that I invited Tim Etchells to write the dramaturgy for a non-narrative film. It was essential for me that the polyphonic nature of the exhibition be reflected in regards to authorship too. Especially, I was adamant that it would not be assumed that I would be co-opting the contributions made by artists, for me to make a *meta*-work of art that would ultimately be signed by me. If I would sign the *exhibition* as being the curator, all works of art retain their specific intrinsic authorships. Tim’s art, and his expertise in orchestrating large group arrangements, offered not only a most beautiful resolution to the realisation of the film giving it its final form, but also made it clear that at no point it was a work of art by any one person. This exhibition is a collective endeavour. The exhibition comprises the contributions realised by 48 artists – films, slide pieces, sounds, music compositions, instructions, scores for performers, texts...–, all brought together as one in the form of a feature film. Etchells was instrumental in orchestrating this polyphony of contributions in the time of a film. As “we combined these invitations, one contributor’s material would meet another’s,” Etchells pursues, “something always happened in this kind of meeting, and, of course, in a sense, we had no idea of what

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<sup>87</sup> In a private email from John Giorno to Mathieu Copeland, dated 5 August 2014

<sup>88</sup> *Fia Backström in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 24 November 2014*, TEOAF, p146

would arrive.”<sup>89</sup> Etchells, who had previously contributed an essential text in *Choreographing Exhibitions*<sup>90</sup>, joined me in a three-way conversation included in the publication with musician Susan Stenger about working methodologies in the making of the film, and their respective histories.

With a clear intention to play on and deride the famous cliché attributed to Jean-Luc Godard that “a film is a gun and just any girl”<sup>91</sup>, and having several guns featured in Mac Adams’ most powerful *film-noir* contribution, to further the pastiche I wanted to add to this movie a ‘love story’. I commissioned Susan to write three love songs for the film, knowing perfectly well that Stenger would pervert this invitation. In turn Stenger wrote *Three Disembodied Love Songs*, three compositions deconstructed to the 5.1 sonic space of the cinema. These compositions “drew on three archetypal sets of song ‘vocabulary’, both tonal and lyrical. All three songs reflect a kind of obsessive internal dialogue about love.”<sup>92</sup> The first one, *Johnny is My Darling* is based on idioms of Appalachian folk ballads and interpreted by Sam Gleaves. The second song, *Bye Bye Baby*, is based on the conventions of American “girl group” pop from the ’50s, by groups such as The Shirelles and The Chiffons here interpreted by Lætitia Sadier, Cosey Fanni Tutti and Stenger herself. As for the last one, “the essence of the third song, *Middle of the Night*, came from a certain piano sound.” Susan pursues, “I played with Nick Cave for a few years as a bass player and got to know him well. I was always very moved by his touch on the keys, by the delicate way he coaxes sound from the piano in slow ballads. When we went into the studio near Brighton to record, I asked him to go deeply into what I think is one of the saddest chords, ‘A Minor.’ It appears in a lot of his songs. But I didn’t want him to take it anywhere harmonically, but just to hover in that A minor world, to reflect that kind of ‘feedback loop’ of emotion one can get into during a sleepless night. It was the same for his vocals. I chose a couple of phrases from an Alan Vega song, which I gave to Nick and asked

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<sup>89</sup> *Susan Stenger and Tim Etchells in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Geneva, 19 September 2014*, TEOAF, p188

<sup>90</sup> Etchells, Tim. *The Planned, the Unplanned and the Planned Unplanned*, CE, p26

<sup>91</sup> A quote that repeatedly appears throughout Jean-Luc Godard’s *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1988-1998), DVD, Paris: Gaumont, 2007. A thorough analyses of this quote in Godard’s work can be found: <https://www.thecinetaurist.net/a-girl-and-a-gun.html>, last accessed 17 July 2020

<sup>92</sup> *Susan Stenger and Tim Etchells in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Geneva, 19 September 2014*, TEOAF, p184

him to repeat however he wanted. Then I chose a few words from a Nick Cave song, and asked Alan, who was in New York, to sing those however he liked.”<sup>93</sup>

Words are arguably the primary content-construct that makes books. Working on the final cut of the film, it became clear that this movie was essentially about language, especially fragmented language. For *the exhibition of a film*, Fia Backström proposed a polyphony of conflicting feelings, a piece that consisted in a series of Word Clouds that came as punctuation throughout the films, “an attempt to map a subject through its fleeting feelings via a daily practice. To name feelings is to create the subject and the object.”<sup>94</sup>

Peter Downsbrough has always thought of “words as objects composed of letters.”<sup>95</sup> In *the exhibition of a film*, Downsbrough’s *strings of words* defined the space of the screen, with words literally sitting on the very bottom, on the edge, and that became the link between all of the works. Downsbrough’s words are the unifying factor between one piece and the other. They also offered the perfect conclusion to the film, with Downsbrough’s words spoken, and gradually fragmented by FM Einheit over the soundscape of Munich. As Downsbrough explained, “the city noise is not about ‘music’. The question of ‘here’ or ‘there’ is touching something that is more real than music. The sound from the city is a very specific, real situation.”<sup>96</sup> The fragmentations of the words, and the use and abuse of language, are ultimately the underlining of *the exhibition of a film*, as it proposes an exhibition in cinema, and exposes a film.

The publication brings together Isidore Isou’s Lettrist cinema and Maurice Lemaître’s supertemporal frame, along with – among others –, Ben Vautier’s frame through which the artist signs a fragmented reality, thus reconstituted, of the world. Isou, along with most of the artists involved in Lettrism, was able to deconstruct a medium still in its infancy– and sabotage it. Cinema was merely 50 years old when Isou’s *Traité de*

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<sup>93</sup> Susan Stenger and Tim Etchells in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Geneva, 19 September 2014, TEOAF, p184

<sup>94</sup> Fia Backström in conversation with Mathieu Copeland New York, 24 November 2014, TEOAF, p148

<sup>95</sup> Peter Downsbrough in conversation with Mathieu Copeland Geneva, 28 October 2014, TEOAF, p138

<sup>96</sup> Peter Downsbrough in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Geneva, 28 October 2014, TEOAF, p142

*bave et d'éternité (On Venom and Eternity)* was released in 1951. A toddler art, when compared to the old masters that are painting and theatre. Isou wrote the foreword to the publication that Maurice Lemaître edited about his own Lettrist film *Le film est déjà commence? (Has the film already started?)*. These forewords are a great lesson on cinema, especially its lettrist interpretation – here published for the first time in English<sup>97</sup>. Isou's concept of the discrepancy (le discrepant) between what is seen on screen and what is heard in space is a conception that is at the core of *the exhibition of a film*, where neither the sound nor the image is an illustration of the other. Both are autonomous fields. It is worth noting that Manifest Paper Exhibitions affirm a similar discrepancy between the exhibition, and the catalogue.

The historical relation between cinema and exhibition is long and dense. A fragmentary history is to be found within the commissioned essays: *Film and Exhibition* by François Bovier, *Film as Exhibition* by Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Cunningham's Lost Assemblage (1968): Moving in an Expanded Field* by Andrew V. Uroskie, *Open Space: 3D for the Use of Those Who See and Hear badly* by Anne Marquez and Ian White's key 2008 *Kinomuseum*. Jean Luc Godard's notorious 2006 exhibition *VOYAGE(S) EN UTOPIE, JEAN-LUC GODARD, 1946-2006* at the Musée national d'art moderne/Centre de création industrielle – Centre Pompidou was a great example of the possibilities offered by cinema in exhibitions. Another key was to be found with Chantal Akerman.

The beauty of a book is to offer a lasting, if final, voice. Chantal Akerman's art was essential in envisaging the relation between art and cinema. I thus commissioned Lore Gablier – who has worked as my editorial coordinator on all my books since 2013, and who also was Akerman's personal assistant – to realise a conversation of the two together in Paris, on 1 February 2015. This was to be one of the last interviews before Akerman's untimely death the following December. A book also offers an extended voice, especially here that of Liam Gillick – an artist with whom I have had the honour to be in discussion since 2001. Even though Liam was not invited to contribute to *the exhibition of a film*, his voice was essential to the publication. It was however with great serendipity that he should too appear within several parallel discussions,

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<sup>97</sup> As authorised by Isidore Isou's daughter, Catherine Goldstein

essentially those with Joanna Hogg<sup>98</sup> and Lawrence Weiner<sup>99</sup>, and that our discussion was to be a fascinating read in regard to Claudia Mesch's reprint of her classical essay *Institutionalizing Social Sculpture: Beuys' Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum Installation (1972)*.

Joanna Hogg directed the film *Exhibition* in 2013. Playing on the polysemy of the word 'exhibition,' the film brings on the notion of exhibitionism, encompassing the privacy of the film and the public exposure of Viv Albertine who plays an artist and Liam Gillick who plays an architect. This is a casting that gives "the film a life and complexity which I believe pure fiction lacks."<sup>100</sup> Joanna Hogg's *Exhibition*, and *the exhibition of a film* were produced at the same time. They shared the word 'exhibition', and yet could not be of more different natures. *the exhibition of a film* is a self-reflective exhibition that challenges the materiality of films. *the exhibition of a film* considers the medium 'exhibition' itself, and how an exhibition can live in the given environment of cinema. Hogg's film is an outstanding narrative cinematographic exposition of the word "exhibition" through the life of two cultural workers. Both films offer an understanding of the concept 'exhibition.' Another interesting parallel between *Exhibition* and *the exhibition of a film* is that both were filmed in parts at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. In Hogg's movie, Gillick – who had been exhibiting and gave so many talks at the ICA – returns to his natural setting for a filmed fictive interview on the stage of the ICA's cinema. It is a beautiful moment of self-reflexivity, yet ultimately Liam Gillick was "unhappy when I decided to call it *Exhibition*, possibly worried that people would think it was a film about him, and that there would be confusion between him as an artist and him as an actor."<sup>101</sup> Covertly, it seemed to me important that within *the exhibition of a film* an institution would be both exhibiting, and exhibited, thus questioning the locality of exhibitions, and films.

'Structure' is an important word for both Liam Gillick and Lawrence Weiner. As Gillick explained, Lawrence Weiner refers to it "as a thing that can potentially exist or

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<sup>98</sup> Joanna Hogg in conversation with Mathieu Copeland Geneva, 24 March 2015, TEOAF, pp111-115

<sup>99</sup> Lawrence Weiner fragments of a conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 24 March 2014, TEOAF, pp168-169

<sup>100</sup> Joanna Hogg in conversation with Mathieu Copeland Geneva, 24 March 2015, TEOAF, p115

<sup>101</sup> Joanna Hogg in conversation with Mathieu Copeland Geneva, 24 March 2015, TEOAF, p111

that you can carry as an idea, whereas I tend to mean it in a sociological or urbanistic way. I think he's indifferent to that. He has issues about authoritarianism that are different to mine; we see it in different locations. He sees it in typefaces, in the choice of words, and I see it in roots and directions, and points of departure.”<sup>102</sup> A semantic complexity that makes the word ‘structure’ interchangeable with ‘exhibition’, according to Weiner, and that could also be replaced by ‘idea’ and ‘movie’. As Weiner elaborates, “once you make it as a structure, you have no idea what’s holding it together. And it is not important that anybody any longer knows what is holding it together. The same applies to your idea of using the cinema as a spectacle. It is no one’s business how you digitally timed it.”<sup>103</sup>

The desire for an in-depth conversation with Liam Gillick had been, for me, long overdue. Above all, I had the intention to unfold Gillick’s key notions of *Communication Platforms*. This echoed an informal conversation that I had in Zurich in January 2014 with Christian Bök, Kenneth Goldsmith and Karl Holmqvist that dealt with the possibility of Gillick’s own semantics – essentially platforms and communication. “Christian thought that ‘language is a flat form for language’; Kenneth asserted: ‘language as a platform against communication’; and Karl reaffirmed his desire to create a platform through his words and ‘to make language a platform (for) communication’.”<sup>104</sup> Using a very cinematic word, I asked Gillick whether, if his sculptural platforms were ‘props’, we could forgo these whilst still defining this abstract space. Liam acquiesced, “because they designate a space for something to take place. They are there as long as they are required, and then they could just go away.” Yet he ultimately concluded “Nothing is always surrounded by a context. As the Zurich conversation shows, you need platforms in order to designate a space until a better context appears. This is why my work has always been semi-autonomous. It needs something to hang on, or hang off.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland New York, 14 March 2014*, TEOAF, p164

<sup>103</sup> *Lawrence Weiner fragments of a conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 24 March 2014*, TEOAF, pp168-169

<sup>104</sup> The Zurich conversation is discussed in: *Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland New York, 14 March 2014*, TEOAF, p166

<sup>105</sup> *Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland New York, 14 March 2014*, TEOAF, p166

Our conversation also dealt with the permanent work *Prototype Conference Room* that Gillick realised for his 2002 exhibition *The Wood Way* at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, a work that treats the Whitechapel's cinema/auditorium as a social space for a sculptural piece. Shaping the construct of cinema, this work affirms in its very core its social nature. Discussing this very work, Gillick would use the term social sculpture – albeit, in his own words, ironically<sup>106</sup> –, thus bringing to mind the possibility of the social sculpture as defined by Joseph Beuys.

In a fitting analysis that echoes the critical appreciation of *The Anti-Museum*, “the museum is constructed upon the relatively free choreography of the spectator. Instead, and following Claudia Mesch’s analysis, let’s consider this social sculpture as a counter-institution. The dark room of the cinema denies spectators both their mobility and their perception of space. On the contrary, *the exhibition of a film* invites them to reject their passivity vis-a-vis the film and assume an active role in its construction by concentrating their attention on a chosen work, on the confrontation between the different works and by contributing to creating this mental dramaturgy.”<sup>107</sup> As Morgan Fisher reminds us, traditionally cinema is the place to forget oneself. Fisher explains, “at the movies, the only choice is the movie. Watching a conventional film, you expect to be passive”<sup>108</sup>. This assertion became a leitmotiv within the publication, offering to all those asked the possibility to present their views. Their diversity of approaches cast a fascinating light on our experimental endeavour:

For Apichatpong Weerasethakul:

“I only think about this from my own point of view. It’s interesting because from my personal practice—in work and in life—there’s quite a contrast. In life, I’m rather interested in Buddhism, which is to be aware of oneself. You basically watch your mind, you’re aware of how your mind and body work. It is quite the opposite

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<sup>106</sup> “MC: And yet, didn’t you use the term social sculpture when discussing the auditorium and cinema piece for the Whitechapel? LG: That was partly an ironic reference to some of these earlier things, a social structure for something, but it doesn’t mean that this is taking place there, as if the work existed in parallel to the reality that we are living in, as if things had started from a different point, you might have ended up with that. I think that these questions of social sculpture, when discussed in a meaningful way, are often connected to time games, which are longer and bigger than it seems to be in a work.”

*Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland New York, 14 March 2014, TEOAF, p165*

<sup>107</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *The Exhibition of a Film*, TEOAF, p5-6

<sup>108</sup> *Morgan Fisher, in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Los Angeles, 9 March 2015, TEOAF, p30*

experience that you have in cinema. But somehow, when I make films, I try to keep that approach to remind the audience that they're sitting in a theatre, watching this artificial world. When I make an artwork, it's the other way round. I want people to feel immersed. I don't analyse myself so I don't know why I don't operate in art as I do in cinema... Why don't I remind people that they're watching a two dimensional thing. The most I do is sometimes to show the process of making it?"<sup>109</sup>

For Joanna Hogg:

"No. I think it is to find oneself."<sup>110</sup>

For Philippe Grandrieux:

"Cinema is a world in which we evolve, in which we advance, in which we fall asleep. It is a projected world that demands a certain type of abandonment, to forget oneself, not dissimilar to certain forms of hypnosis. There is a fascinating attachment to cinema."<sup>111</sup>

Cinemas and exhibitions are platforms *and* social sculptures, bringing people together. Both are polyphonies, passive and explosive to seize the expression Gustav Metzger coined for his visionary 1981 exhibition<sup>112</sup>. The exhibition *the exhibition of a film* asserts the singular autonomy of each spectator. The eponymous publication is a manifest paper exhibition that postulates that of the readers.

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<sup>109</sup> *Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, London, 7 April 2014*, TEOAF, p99

<sup>110</sup> *Joanna Hogg in conversation with Mathieu Copeland Geneva, 24 March 2015*, TEOAF, pp111-115

<sup>111</sup> *Philippe Grandrieux in conversation with Mathieu Copeland Paris, 4 May 2014*, TEOAF, p118

<sup>112</sup> For more on *Passive – Explosive*, please refer to *Passive – Explosive: Proposal for an Exhibition*, in GM, p511 ; and for an in-depth analysis, please refer to Schmeling, Sören. *a Model—a Museum for Today and for the Future, The Anti-Museum*, London: Koenig Books, 2017 (publication subsequently referred to in footnotes as 'TAM'), p397

## D – The Anti-Museum

*A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions*<sup>113</sup> began on 6 August 2016, the day of Fribourg's Kunsthalle Fri Art's official summer break, with the recreation of Lefevre Jean Claude's closed exhibition. Taking advantage of Yvon Lambert's gallery 1981 summer closure, Lefevre used the gallery written communication font to write on the gallery windows "an exhibition by lefevre jean claude 11.07/31.08 '81." In doing so, Lefevre proposed "A WORK, JUST A WORK or maybe AN EXHIBITION, JUST AN EXHIBITION." Lefevre developed, "the very location where reading takes place will become the very location of the work; in this case, the parts that make an exhibition truly happen in this exact place."<sup>114</sup>

Until 19 November 2016, over the course of four months, eleven exhibitions closed the Kunsthalle, one after the other in a repetitive mode of a recurrent pattern, all realised through highly diverse modes of action. The retrospective genre is, as was *Voids. A Retrospective*, approached in an experimental manner as it explores the extreme limits of art, and defies visitors' expectations by bringing into play aesthetic, and political, questions. "To envisage 'closure' is to confront spaces being sealed. A retrospective offers us the opportunity to experience a work in the present, as an echo of what it once was. Re-enacted today, these historic works highlight changes in context, different effects and different meanings, with regard to their initial iterations."<sup>115</sup>

These uncompromising works confront us with the closed space, and invite us to experience their physical, sensory and conceptual reality. The history of closed exhibitions began with the *Great Panorama Exhibition* by Hi Red Center who closed the Naika Gallery in Tokyo in May 1964. As stated in the exhibition announcement, "Right now, the gallery is being closed by the hand of Hi Red Center. When you have

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<sup>113</sup> *A retrospective of closed exhibition*, With Robert Barry, Daniel Buren, Graciela Carnevale, Maurizio Cattelan, Maria Eichhorn, Svetlana Heger & Plamen Dejanov, Hi Red Center, Lefevre Jean Claude, Santiago Sierra, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Matsuzawa Yutaka. FriArt – Kunsthalle Fribourg, 05 August – 19 November 2016. An Exhibition by Mathieu Copeland.

<sup>114</sup> *Lefevre Jean Claude in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Paris, 29 October 2015*, TAM, p99

<sup>115</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)*, TAM, p38

free time, please make sure not to visit it.”<sup>116</sup> A history that was then concluded with Maria Eichhorn’s *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*, closing the Chisenhale Gallery in London in 2016.

Let us consider Graciela Carnevale and Daniel Buren as case studies. Both their closed exhibitions took place in October 1968, and presents us with two different approaches within a history that encompasses 11 occurrences where artists seized the radical gesture of closing a space as a work of art

For her first solo exhibition, in October 1968 as part of the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* [Experimental Art Cycle] in Rosario – Argentina Graciela Carnevale locked unaware visitors inside the gallery during the opening evening, on 7 October, and left. After four hours, a passer-by smashed the gallery window, thus releasing the trapped spectators. This piece embodied a most striking violence, not only towards the public, but also towards the institution. The violence of the piece and the locking-up of the public remains an uncompromising historical precedent. As Carnevale stated, “the fact that galleries and museums were still going on, under repression of a military government, as if nothing was happening outside. It made no sense.”<sup>117</sup>

On 23 October 1968, for his first ever solo exhibition too, Daniel Buren closed the Apollinaire Gallery in Milan with a green and white striped wallpaper, thus creating a dialogue between his refusal of the traditional use of the walls and his acceptance of the gallery and some of its purposes. As Buren recalled, “it was actually impossible to enter the gallery without destroying the work that concealed its entrance.” He concluded in stating, “in this case, the commercial gallery could exhibit (which was its primary goal) but could not physically sell the exhibited work (unless it sold the gallery with it!).”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Statement printed on the postcard announcing *Hi Red Center, Great Panorama Exhibition (aka Closing Event)*, 1964, TAM, p47 and quoted in Genpei, Akasegawa. *A Can of the Universe*, TAM, p51

<sup>117</sup> *Graciela Carnevale in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Rosario, Argentina, 29 May 2015*, TAM, p79

<sup>118</sup> *Daniel Buren in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Paris, 15 March 2016, revised and completed in Naples in August 2016*, TAM, p83

At the onset of the preparation of the retrospective was the desire for a publication that would expand from being just a catalogue for the retrospective exhibition, and propose a radical and manifest paper museum. If *A retrospective of closed exhibitions* “can be approached as an anti-exhibition, when envisaged within the classical frame and understanding of what constitutes an exhibition”<sup>119</sup>, it seemed necessary to further study the ‘anti’, and ultimately propose an anti-museum. Far from the oversimplification of an apparently violent dissident notion, *The Anti-Museum* proposes a dialectic in which the museum itself becomes the agent of its own deconstruction, taking the reader on a journey that begins with this radical history of closure and is concluded with the renewed acceptance that everything is art. This publication is also envisaged as a toolbox, an invitation to pick and choose and to lose oneself at random, within this vast panorama where negation exists as a powerful breath of life.

Not so much a guidebook to the erection of anti-museums, the publication itself is to be considered as an anti-museum. It asserts through 80 texts, reprints and conversations the broad understanding of the ‘anti’ encompassing anti-art, anti-artist, anti-exhibition, anti-design, anti-architecture, anti-technology, anti-music, anti-cinema, anti-writing, anti-culture, anti-university, anti-philosophy and anti-religion. As stated in its colophon, “This anthology is published on the occasion of ‘A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions,’ an exhibition by Mathieu Copeland at Fri Art, Kunsthalle Fribourg, Switzerland. August 6 to November 19, 2016.” The Kunsthalle was the principal publisher, along with Koenig Books, London, and in partnership with KW Institute for Contemporary Art and its director Krist Gruijthuijsen. Together with Balthazar Lovay in its function of the then director of Fri Art Kunsthalle Fribourg, I was the co-editor of the publication. Lovay<sup>120</sup> was a perfect partner to realise this book with. Being receptive to my initial desire to realise this impressive volume, he accepted my ever-growing propositions and aspirations that I laid out in

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<sup>119</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)*, TAM, p43

<sup>120</sup> Balthazar Lovay penned an essential text, *Anti-Museums that Aren't: Notes on a few Contradictions*, and was essential in securing the texts historical text on the anti-design section by Andrea Branzi, Ettore Sottsass, Alessandro Mendini, the anti-architecture section with the piece by Yona Friedman, and Beatriz Colomina, the commissioned texts in the anti-music section to Matthieu Saladin, Thibault Walter, and the reprint by GX Jupiter-Larsen, the commissioned text on anti-manga by Ryan Holmberg, along with the reprints of the text by Johannes Cladders, Richard Goldstein, Hans Hollein, Alan Wallach.

my general introduction, with critical comments and thorough encouragement, whilst complementing this with his expertise and knowledge.

The graphic system we developed together with Geneva based designers Schaffter Sahli was to use graphic symbols as signifiers, in lieu of wording. The most striking example is to be found on the front cover, where the words *The Anti-Museum* are replaced by large cross<sup>121</sup>, an X that negates all that should have been. This was further developed within the publication, where all changes from texts to texts, and all chapter headings, were replaced with a slash symbol<sup>122</sup>, and section changes with a large cross. Whilst these decisions were to reflect on the desired radicality of this book, in retrospect it seemed that it would have been wiser for the sake of clarity to keep the wording – such as Anti-Art, Anti-Artist, Anti-Music, Anti-Writing... – of the chapter headings and within the table of content (information that is given in my introduction, that was written on the front sticker affixed to the protective cellophane of the books, and that can be felt in reading the texts and the typographical signs).

A polyphony arises from each contribution, as historical reprints echo conversations and resonate with commissioned texts. It is within the parallels of all these possible understandings that lay the possibility of a plural reality defined by antagonisms. “The anti-museum surpasses the dialectic of the positive and the negative, one thing and its contrary, the x and the anti-x, as it reflects an anti-position that exposes, reveals and displays a state in flux. *The Anti-Museum* does not adequate the museum to a mausoleum, nor shall it be approached as being the mausoleum of the museum as its function would be no more than a museum for museums.”<sup>123</sup>

The architecture of the publication offered a unique opportunity to interrogate singular radical practices – such as NO!Art, GUERRILLA ART ACTION GROUP, Henry Flynt, Andrea Branzi, Alessandro Mendini, Ben Vautier, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, and the work of researcher Dr Reiko Tomii (with her commissioned introduction notices for Hi Red Centre and Matsuzawa Yutaka, the reprint of her 2007

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<sup>121</sup> The designers originally advised us against doing so as bookshops often display such books as covers only, cover side up, but the sheer beauty of a simple cross overrode any commercial reasoning.

<sup>122</sup> It is worth noting that for the section on *A retrospective of closed exhibitions* the slashes are backslashes, whereas for the anthology section all the slashes are conventional.

<sup>123</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)*, TAM, p43

influential essay *Geijutsu on their Minds: Memorable Words on Anti-Art* that opens the anthology section, and her commissioned essential text *The Impossibility of Anti: A Theoretical Consideration of Bikyōtō*).

The sensitive architecture of *The Anti-Museum* offers a moment to reflect upon practices that contextualises both the retrospective, and the publication. Let us consider two instances. Déborah Laks' commissioned text *Arman's "Le Plein" (Full Up): The Key is on the Inside*,<sup>124</sup> is an essay that articulates the relation between *Voids* and *The Anti-Museum*, Arman's *Full Up* being a reaction to, and historically complementing, Klein's *Void*<sup>124</sup>. Arman's piece plays both as a closed exhibition – the public unable to enter the filled up gallery–, and a perfect anti-institution, the Iris Clert gallery being filled with garbage. The reprint of Dora Vallier's 1969 essay *Anti-Art Non-Art Art* offers an early account that is as valid today as when it was written, offering a just criticism of the commercial aspect of said radicality. Vallier wrote, “a lack of attention to this nuance has given rise, in recent years, to a tidal wave of non-art, which has been kept afloat by galleries, advertising, the mass media and museums.”<sup>125</sup>

All texts must be appreciated for themselves, yet the publication is an invitation to read each in relation to one another. Guillaume Apollinaire's 1913 *L'Antitradition Futuriste* is a powerful futurist manifesto that touches on destruction (and construction) in writing, here to be read in parallel to Kenneth Goldsmith's essential commissioned text, *A Brief Overview of Anti-Writing*. Stewart Home offered a critical array into extreme radicality in his commissioned essay<sup>126</sup>, which acts as another toolbox with this all encompassing anti-museum in discussing the uncompromising

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<sup>124</sup> “The exhibition *Le Plein* [Fullness], inaugurated on October 23, 1960, formed an antithetical pairing with *Le Vide* and was immediately declared such by Pierre Restany, whose text for the invitation to the event read, ‘Until now, no gesture of appropriation at the opposite extreme to the Void has come so close to identifying the authentic organicity of the contingency of reality,’” in Riout, Denys. *Exaspérations 1958*, *Voids*, p43

<sup>125</sup> Vallier, Dora. *Anti-Art Non-Art Art*, 1969, TAM, p 236

<sup>126</sup> Home, Stewart. *The Mighty Grimoire of Mystic Spells, Rituals and Incantations That Deploy Dialectical Immaterialism To Transform The Bad Energy Of White Male Guilt Into A Magical Tool To Make Anti-Art Disappear And The World A More Sisterly Place! Translated from the French by Paschal Beverly Randolph and retrieved from the future by Stewart Home. Originally published by Beringos Fratres of Lyon at The Sign of Agrippa in 2262*, TAM, p165

practices of, amongst others, King Mob, John Latham, the Motherfuckers and Ben Morea<sup>127</sup>.

*The Anti-Museum* explicitly poses the question of the relevance of ‘Museums.’ Gustav Metzger and Jean Tinguely announced two historical anti-museums. Tinguely realised, and Metzger proposed, what they both considered their ideal museum. Upon close scrutiny, both are akin to being anti-museums when we consider what is expected from museums. Tinguely even described his own institution as such. Olivier Sutter wrote in his commissioned essay that “(Tinguely) used the energy of his last days to develop his total anti-museum, the *Torpedo Institute*, the largest work he had ever created.”<sup>128</sup> Metzger realised for the exhibition *Passiv – Explosiv*, (Hahnentorburg, Cologne, 1981) a model for his *museum for today and for the future*. To quote the artist, “The concept of a museum is introduced. *Passiv – Explosiv* asks the question: How is it possible adequately to represent ‘transient’ art? Four examples of rooms with flexible exhibition possibilities. They are only one part of the museum space available for mediating art that is no longer in existence. The four rooms offer opportunities for: Room 1: Actions; Room 2: work with water – the material can fill the room up to the ceiling; Room 3: destruction room, where material can be destroyed and where walls, ceiling and floor may be destroyed and repaired; Room 4: technological possibilities such as compressed air, laser, electronics. The laboratory will be integrated into the museum. All four rooms are accessible from a central core. The rooms are available to artists. Past works will be reconstructed. *Passiv – Explosiv* wishes to influence the planning of museums.”<sup>129</sup>

A key figure within the panorama of *The Anti-Museum* is Henry Flynt. Flynt went “through this phase of true iconoclasm. I actually had this anti-art insight in February

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<sup>127</sup> Morea’s extreme relevance to *The Anti-Museum* cannot be stated enough. On the front page of the first issue of *Black Mask* (1966) that he edited, Morea begins the first paragraph with these definitive words: “A new spirit is rising. Like the streets of Watts we burn with revolution. We assault your gods... We sing of your death. DESTROY THE MUSEUMS... our struggle cannot be hung on walls. (...)” On 21 September 2018, Ben Morea, along with Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and Kenneth Goldsmith joined me on stage during the second day of the *SYMPOSIUM | THE ANTI-MUSEUM* at the Swiss Institute, NY, for a panel discussion on radicality, anti-culture, anti-society and anti-writing.

<sup>128</sup> Sutter, Olivier. *Art is everywhere—at my grandmother’s house—in the most improbable kitsch, even under a rotten floorboard*, TAM, p421

<sup>129</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Passive – Explosive, Proposal for an Exhibition*, GM, p513. This citation is also quoted in Schmelting, Sören. *a Model—a Museum for Today and for the Future*, TAM, p402

1962. (...) It was a reaction to the self styled avant-garde that I was very much in the middle of. The only way that I could react then was to write my *Down With Art* pamphlet.”<sup>130</sup> Flynt proposed in 1963 to ‘Destroy Serious Culture,’ picketing institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York with Tony Conrad and Jack Smith. A radical gesture he accompanied with theoretical groundings, especially through his lecture *From Culture to Veramusement* at Walter De Maria’s loft in downtown New York, on 28 February 1963. On the occasion of the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this lecture, I invited Flynt to revisit this historical event as part of *The Anti-Museum Symposium* at the Swiss Institute in New York, a memorable evening during which Flynt asserted these final, and uncompromising words, that “there ought to be, and that there can be, a civilisation beyond the one that we now live in. I would say that if capitalism is the last economic system then I would call the human race a failed experiment.”<sup>131</sup>

In August 2016, whilst being in the final stages of proofreading the book, Flynt wrote that he had “began a memo on whether (*he*) wanted to destroy the museums.”<sup>132</sup> This was fascinating news, and we set everything in motion to secure the inclusion of this essential, if unexpected, text in *The Anti-Museum*. Flynt began his essay with these definite words: “Mathieu Copeland has asked me whether I was serious about razing the institutions in 1963. In a word: I was. But it seems that an explanation from today’s vantage-point is much needed.”<sup>133</sup> This was an analysis to a question that was at the heart of our previous discussions held in 2012 and 2016, both featured in the book.

During our 2012 conversation, Flynt discussed Robert Morris’s planned section for the 1963 book *An Anthology* that La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low edited. Morris ultimately pulled out of the book. Flynt reflected during our conversation, “if he had left it in he would be given credit for the entire conceptual art development. In other

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<sup>130</sup> Henry Flynt in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 9 October 2012, TAM, p173

<sup>131</sup> Henry Flynt, REVISITING MY PANORAMIC CRITIQUE OF CULTURE FIFTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, a retrospective consideration of the panoramic critique of culture he presented in Walter De Maria’s loft in February 1963. Before the talk, Flynt presented a rock instrumental for electric violin. 20 September 2018, 8:15PM

<https://www.swissinstitute.net/event/symposium-the-anti-museum/>

<https://vimeo.com/295258964> (last accessed 8 April 2020)

Another memorable quote from the event is: “Architecture is sculpture that you cannot refuse”

<sup>132</sup> Henry Flynt, private email conversation to Mathieu Copeland, dated 20 August 2016

<sup>133</sup> Flynt, Henry. *1962-63: Razing the Institutions?*, TAM, p196

words, he pulled out absolutely the best he had to offer. One of the original subtitles for his section was: Anti-art. (...) You look at those today and think that he would have been sort of the godfather of everything that was post-pop.” This 1961 essay, “M.D. – Rx,” was finally re-published with Morris’ authorisation in *The Anti-Museum* and opens with these definite lines: “The death of art is its concern for itself.” Comforting Flynt’s words of Morris’ prescience, the essay follows: “appearing now are the first signs of an art the concerns of which are successions of concepts to which materialisations are referential. Whether the materializations (signs) be actions or objects they exist as counterpart and/or exposition of ideas rather than resultant developments, through process, of forms.”<sup>134</sup>

*The Anti-Museum* offers a study in semantics, especially that of ‘anti-’ and its connected recurrent vocabulary. When asked if ‘anti’ was the most appropriate word to qualify her art, Lydia Lunch replied that she preferred ‘No’! Lunch pursued, she loves “No Wave, which means ‘audience unfriendly.’ It is rarely melodic. It is personal insanity, instead of political insanity like punk rock. In the beginning of my musical schizophrenia, I was anti-everything, even anti–my own music by constantly contradicting it. I was not immune against my own anti-nature. I am anti–what you see. I am anti-definition, anti-categories, anti-genres...”<sup>135</sup> Another personal etymology is to be found with the late Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and the word ‘radicality,’ that he defined as, “actions taken in a social, political way that are beholden to no other philosophical, political or economical groups, completely independent of any other pressure group, for the sake of a belief which is so strong that you can risk everything you have.”<sup>136</sup> A profound definition for a word so present in my own endeavours, especially when we consider anti-culture and the anti-museum.

Asked about his definition of an anti-museum, Ben Vautier proposed “a non-art museum (*that*) could be a museum where we would discuss the idea of non-art, the limits of truth, the limits of art...” and went on to consider how “If everything is art, how can I be an artist, how can I bring something to the world which is mine? If

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<sup>134</sup> Morris, Robert. M.D. – Rx, 1961, TAM, p210

<sup>135</sup> Lydia Lunch in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 10 April 2016, TAM, p605

<sup>136</sup> Genesis Breyer P-Orridge in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 12 February 2016, TAM, p683

everything is art, then my shoes are art. Yet when I show shoes in the framework of ‘tout est art,’ I become a variation of Duchamp. What are the variations of non-art? What are the variations of ‘everything is art?’<sup>137</sup> Such a proposition furthers the proximity between ‘tout est art’ [everything is art] and the concepts underlining the anti-museum. The opening of my introductory paragraph on *The Anti-Museum* in my general introduction reminds that ‘All Is Art’ “assumes a clear, complete acceptance of everything and anything as Art. It also leads to a negation of the institution. If all is art, how can we conceive of a museum within such a context, a context which requires no consecrated environment dedicated to sanctifying non-existent specialities?”<sup>138</sup> Ben, who has dealt with both the notions of the limits of art and the understanding that everything is art throughout his life, assesses that most “artists today have a conscience that everything is art, and thus have changed the limits of art.” As Ben concludes, *he* wants to know what the limits of art are.

*The Anti-Museum* offers an analyses of the fundamental statements that are ‘all is art’, and ‘everyone is an artist.’ Historically, this can be traced back to Novalis who “stated in 1798 that ‘Every man should be an artist. Everything can become a fine art.’ The Comte de Lautréamont (Isidore Lucien Ducasse) claimed in 1870 in his collection *Poésies II* that ‘Poetry must be made by all. Not by one.’ Joseph Beuys considered that ‘Every Man is an artist,’ as he explained in 1972. These radical ontologies are to be seen in parallel to Ben Vautier’s lifelong statement that ‘all is art,’ a declination of the great Dadaist Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, who wrote ‘Poetry: Art, not poetry: Art. Words as a game: Art. Pure sentences: Art. Only meaning: Art; no meaning: Art. Words picked at random: Art. The Mona Lisa: Art. The Mona Lisa with a moustache: Art. Shit: Art. A newspaper ad: Art.’”<sup>139</sup>

This long lasting fascination to this question is to be found again within the parallel conversations with Ben Vautier, and John Armleder. It is worth stating that both artists respect one another immensely and share a historical and longstanding relationship, making this verbal exchange on these critical statements even more interesting. John Armleder comments that “from the moment you say that everyone is an artist, we

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<sup>137</sup> Ben Vautier in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Nice, 29 August 2015, TAM, p272

<sup>138</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)*, TAM, p43

<sup>139</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)*, TAM, p42

imagine the artist to be one thing and not another, since such a thing is inscribed into our cultural system. If everyone is an artist, this claim no longer works.”<sup>140</sup> Armleder then offered this definitive response in discussing the apparent contradiction: “how can you state that everything is art and yet speak of the limits of art. This would mean that there is something else. That is the very concept of the infinite. Understanding the infinite implies that there would be borders to the infinite, which is completely contradictory.”<sup>141</sup>

Anti-art and anti-museum can also bring us to a vindication of art and museums. This dialectic is to be further analysed with the work of Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Ukeles wrote in her *Manifesto For Maintenance Art*<sup>142</sup> “Everything I say is art is art. Everything I do is art is art.” For the artist, “there are no distinctions to be made between (*her*) everyday activities and your art. From then on all that (*she*) will do will be one and the same. Everything is art. (...) In (*her*) manifesto (*she*) goes even further in claiming that life itself is art.”<sup>143</sup> Laderman Ukeles offered a profound redefinition of the commonly accepted unspoken rules that define Art, as she went on to assert that what she offers is “a revolution. I stumbled into the humane limits of my Western education and culture of those who have power. In my art, everybody is in this picture. Everybody. If I call it art, I do not care if you do not call it art. I am just as much responsible as anybody else. I am talking about a lot of people who were not in the picture. That is why instead of being trapped and lost, we have to look around, to look at all the people. Art has to be for them too.”<sup>144</sup>

I would like to conclude the critical commentary on *The Anti-Museum* in deconstructing the last sentence of my introduction: “a plural reality defined by antagonisms, the anti-museum is another side to what is, encompassing all that it is

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<sup>140</sup> John Armleder in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Geneva, 20 May 2016, TAM, p754

<sup>141</sup> John Armleder in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, Geneva, 20 May 2016, TAM, p756

<sup>142</sup> *MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART*, 1969. Proposal for an exhibition: “CARE,” 1969. Originally published in Burnham, Jack. “Problems of Criticism.” *Artforum* (January 1971) 41; and reprinted in Lippard, Lucy R., *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972.../ edited and annotated by Lucy Lippard*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001, p220-221

<sup>143</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 15 February 2016, TAM, p487

<sup>144</sup> Mierle Laderman Ukeles in conversation with Mathieu Copeland, New York, 15 February 2016, TAM, p487

not, making it what it can be.”<sup>145</sup> A critical subjective understanding for this publication is my acceptance that the publication *is* in itself the anti-museum. The publication could be approached as a toolbox to the making of an anti-museum (as for instance with the commissioned texts on Tinguely or Metzger), or a history of anti-museums (as in the history proposed in the commissioned texts to Bob Nickas, Balthazar Lovay, or the reprints by Johannes Cladders and Peter Weibel) – which we could argue it offers. However, my desire with this volume was to propose a fragmented reality of active oppositions. A critical denunciation of the current classical acceptations and canons, *The Anti-Museum* proposes an antagonistic study of all the fields that constitute any ‘museum.’ *The Anti-Museum* ultimately presents us with a radical and manifest paper (*anti-*)museum.

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<sup>145</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)*, TAM, p45

## E – Gustav Metzger, Writings 1953 – 2016

Unlike all the previous four publications, this publication is not linked to an exhibition. Of the 696 pages of this publication that I edited, only 11 pages are my writings. However, it was essential to include this publication as part of my PhD by Publication. Gustav Metzger (1926-2017) was a key and influential figure, and a mentor to me. He appears in all previous publications, either through texts that he wrote (in *Voids*<sup>146</sup>, a text that is also featured in his writings anthology), through conversations (*Choreographing Exhibitions*<sup>147</sup>), texts commissioned on him (*The Anti-Museum*<sup>148</sup>), or as a multiple reference (*the exhibition of a film*<sup>149</sup>). Furthermore, his legacy can be found in all of my publications, and his enduring influence in my exhibitions (Gustav being a co-curator of *Voids. A Retrospective* and seen in the monograph exhibitions that I devoted to him<sup>150</sup>.)

The anthology has been long in coming. I first proposed to Gustav that we begin compiling all of his published writings in the final days of 2007, a tremendous task that I began in February 2008. I did not expect then that this endeavour would reveal such a wealth of material that would take me to 10 October 2019 for this book to finally be released. Unfortunately, Gustav († 1 March 2017) did not get to see the printed book. However, he oversaw the whole process, a journey filled with incredible highs and extreme difficulties, and approved its final form, design and content.

Bringing together more than 190 texts written between 1953 and 2016, this comprehensive volume establishes Gustav Metzger as a prolific writer, theoretician, satirist, and a fierce critic of society. Gustav Metzger's entire oeuvre is defined by his writings. Since 1959, his manifestos have been the cornerstone of his radical and

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<sup>146</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Years Without Art*, *Voids*, p433, and *GM*, p478

<sup>147</sup> *Gustav Metzger in conversation with Mathieu Copeland On Choreography*, London, April–June 2012, CE, p162

<sup>148</sup> Schmeling, Sören. *a Model—a Museum for Today and for the Future*, TAM, p397

<sup>149</sup> *Ben Vautier in conversation with Mathieu Copeland*, Nice, 15 June 2014, TEOAF, p61 ; *Benoît Maire in conversation with Mathieu Copeland*, Paris, 11 December 2014, TEOAF, p156 ; *Liam Gillick in conversation with Mathieu Copeland*, New York, 14 March 2014, TEOAF, p163

<sup>150</sup> *The Need For Art To Change The World*, ZHDK Zurich, 10 October – 12 October 2019 ; *Oeuvres Sur Papier / Works On Paper - Gustav Metzger*, CIRCUIT Lausanne, 2 November – 1 December 2018 ; *Supportive, 1966 - 2011 - Gustav Metzger*, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, 15 February – 14 April 2013

everlasting impact on art, art history and society. Metzger has done more than raise awareness, his art and philosophy are a stark testimony to the alternative world for which he strove.

His writing allows a challenging reading of the contemporary (art) period as analysed by one of its most discerning figures—a pioneering artist and thinker involved in environmental and societal issues very early on. The texts that form this anthology are testimony to an artist whose vision defined and challenged the 20th century, and helped to shape the 21st. Metzger’s philosophy reflects on past reality, the art of the present and challenges to the future. These writings constitute a unique account of the evolution of an artist’s thinking and concerns over the course of 60 years. A life articulated around the “insistence on the need to challenge and change the world – the need for art to change the world.”<sup>151</sup> The book is a toolbox, at times even an uncanny libretto, to our lives in time of crisis.

Gustav Metzger exerted a formidable influence on fellow artists. In the words of Norman Rosenthal, “amongst his contemporaries and those only ten or twenty years younger than himself he has through his works and interventions interacted with and profoundly influenced artists involved with kinetics and with political and conceptual art. Such figures include for instance Mark Boyle, John Latham, Peter Sedgley, David Medalla and Stuart Brisley.” Rosenthal continues, “equally his work has demonstrably fed into the production of artists like Victor Burgin, Richard Long, Bill Woodrow, Barry Flanagan or Bruce McLean. All these artists who have achieved prominence would probably acknowledge and be aware of Metzger as an influential figure.”<sup>152</sup> Metzger’s quiet yet major influence reaches many fields of art and culture, including popular culture. Pete Townshend often acknowledged the impact that Metzger’s lecture had on him as a student at Ealing School of Art in 1962, invited by Roy Ascott (Ascott would later be part of the advisory committee of the Destruction in Art Symposium). For Metzger, “the artist has a duty to destroy not only the work that he creates as an artist but also the tools that he uses to make the work.” Townshend further recalled, “So I thought ‘This is it!’ And my manifesto for The Who – not that

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<sup>151</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Outline for a Retrospective (1959–1974)*, GM, p559

<sup>152</sup> Rosenthal, Norman. *Gustav Metzger – The Artist as a Wanderer*, Gustav Metzger, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1998, p84

any of the other guys bought into it because they were not college boys at all. It was a punk manifesto. The Who would last a year and then we would destroy ourselves. That was our plan, of course a few hit records kind of undermined it. But it was, that was our plan.”<sup>153</sup> Metzger later insisted how Townshend “came out with the concept of ‘auto-destructive pop’.”<sup>154</sup>

Kristine Stiles wrote of Metzger’s lasting influence, essentially through the prism of the Destruction In Art Symposium. Co-organised by Metzger together with John Sharkey and Ivor Davies, DIAS was a month-long event in September 1966 in London that gathered over a hundred “artists, writers, and scientists from various countries to explore and discuss the complex interrelationships of aggression and destruction in art and society.”<sup>155</sup> Stiles stated, “the DIAS affect reflects the aims and purposes of Metzger’s art, the most important object of which was DIAS itself. DIAS must enter the histories of art as a model for post-studio, socially engaged international art practices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and form part of the texture and fabric of how art and artists contribute to social reform, for better or worse.”<sup>156</sup>

Gustav Metzger was both a radical revolutionary and an avant-garde artist. Norman Rosenthal wrote, “(*Metzger*) is the veritable conscience of the world of art reaching out to the rest of the world where most would fear to tread. He is the wanderer and his existence has been both necessary and valuable to all of us.”<sup>157</sup> To name but a few of the areas that Metzger radically impacted in his career that spanned over six decades, we should mention notably his activism from an early age. An anti-nuclear and anti-war activist, Metzger supported the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War and was a founding member of the *Committee of 100* in 1960, the British anti-war group founded by Bertrand Russell and the Reverend Michael Scott<sup>158</sup>. Metzger’s

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<sup>153</sup> Townshend, Pete. *Interview*, Night Waves, BBC Radio 3, Monday 28 September 2009. On a personal note, I am very indebted to Pete Townshend for his extremely generous support, making possible the publication of *Gustav Metzger, Writings 1953 – 2016*

<sup>154</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Outline for a Retrospective (1959–1974)*, GM, p568

<sup>155</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *DIAS – FLYER*, GM, p145

<sup>156</sup> Stiles, Kristine. *The Story of the Destruction in Art Symposium and the “Dias Affect.”* In *Gustav Metzger, History History*, Vienna, Ostfildern-Ruit: Generali Foundation, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2005, p61

<sup>157</sup> Rosenthal, Norman. *Gustav Metzger – The Artist as a Wanderer*, Gustav Metzger, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1998, p85

<sup>158</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Conference on Nothing*, GM, p634

everlasting influence lays with his manifestoes<sup>159</sup>, five in total published between 1959 and 1964. They advocated for Auto-destructive art, Machine Art and Auto-creative art. Metzger would return in various forms throughout his life to Auto-destructive art<sup>160</sup>, an art that is “primarily a form of public art for industrial societies,”<sup>161</sup> “an attack on capitalist values and the drive to nuclear annihilation”<sup>162</sup>.

Whilst Metzger never belonged to any specific art movement, he was closely associated to many and often wrote about these, including Kinetic Arts<sup>163</sup>, Op Arts<sup>164</sup>, Chemical Arts<sup>165</sup>, Political Arts<sup>166</sup>, Fluxus<sup>167</sup>, and Participatory Arts<sup>168</sup>. Metzger was a pioneer of Computer Arts and Cybernetics<sup>169</sup>, and was the editor of PAGE – Bulletin of the Computer Art Society between 1969 and 1972, offering him “an ideal platform not only to publish his own writing, but also to voice both immediate and lasting concerns and highlight causes he campaigned for.”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Cardboards Selected and Arranged by G. Metzger – Auto-Destructive Art (First Manifesto)*, GM, p63

Metzger, Gustav. *Manifesto Auto-Destructive Art (Second Manifesto)*, GM, p66

Metzger, Gustav. *Auto-Destructive Art, Machine Art, Auto-Creative Art (Third Manifesto)*, GM, p76

Metzger, Gustav. *Manifesto World (Fourth Manifesto)*, GM, p87

Metzger, Gustav. *On Random Activity in Material/Transforming Works of Art (Fifth Manifesto)*, GM, p97

<sup>160</sup> For more on this, please refer to: Metzger, Gustav. *Auto-Destructive Art: A Talk at the Architectural Association, London, by Gustav Metzger*, GM, p100. Metzger, Gustav. *Theory of Auto-Destructive Art*, GM, p242.

<sup>161</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Cardboards Selected and Arranged by G. Metzger – Auto-Destructive Art (First Manifesto)*, GM, p63

<sup>162</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Auto-Destructive Art, Machine Art, Auto-Creative Art (Third Manifesto)*, GM, p76

<sup>163</sup> For more on this please refer to:

Metzger, Gustav. *Automata in History: Part 1*, GM, p246

Metzger, Gustav. *Automata in History: Part 2 – Mechanization of an Idea*, GM, p285

An article in two parts that Jonathan Benthall quotes in his essay “Articulate Energy, Kinetic Art in Transformation” written for the catalogue to the Kinetics exhibition published by the Arts Council.

Metzger would offer a review of the Hayward Gallery exhibition in *Art and Artists*, London, September 1970, in: Metzger, Gustav. *Kinetics*, GM, p356

<sup>164</sup> For more on this please refer to Metzger’s January 1966 exhibition “Liquid Crystals” at Better Books, London. Metzger, Gustav. *Art of Liquid Crystals*, GM, p138. A series of works later revised and expanded during his 1968 exhibition “Extremes Touch”. Metzger, Gustav. *Extremes Touch*, GM, p281-282

<sup>165</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *The Chemical Revolution in Art*, GM, p133

<sup>166</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *When is Political Art Political?*, GM, p495

<sup>167</sup> Metzger took part in the Festival of Misfits, which was “the first Fluxus event in Britain although the term was not mentioned in print.” Metzger, Gustav. *Outline for a Retrospective (1959–1974)*, GM, p568

<sup>168</sup> For more on this please refer to: Metzger, Gustav. *Historic Photographs*, GM, p577. Metzger, Gustav. *6 Evenings. 6 Masseurs. 6 Models. 6 Forms of Massage*, GM, p670

<sup>169</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *References to Cybernetics and Computers in the Published Writings of Gustav Metzger*, GM, p233

<sup>170</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Introduction*, GM, p16

Metzger wrote extensively on art and artists – including David Bomberg<sup>171</sup>, Anthony Hatwell, Eduardo Paolozzi and William Turnbull<sup>172</sup>, David Medalla<sup>173</sup>, Archigram<sup>174</sup>, R. Buckminster Fuller<sup>175</sup>, Artist Placement Group<sup>176</sup>, Samson Schames<sup>177</sup>, the Viennese Actionist<sup>178</sup>, Yves Klein<sup>179</sup>, Yoko Ono<sup>180</sup>, Marc Camille Chaimowicz<sup>181</sup>, Eva Weinmayr<sup>182</sup>, Lee Holden<sup>183</sup> or again Ivor Davies<sup>184</sup>. As a whole, Metzger’s writings present him as an acute social activist and political critic<sup>185</sup>, a preeminent historian of art in Nazi Germany<sup>186</sup>, a peace campaigner<sup>187</sup>, a discerning analyst of medias<sup>188</sup> and a Science, Environmentalist, and ecological champion<sup>189</sup> casting him, in the words of Norman Rosenthal, as “the early Prophet of the Mass Extinction Crisis”<sup>190</sup>.

The threat of extinction is of adamant urgency, yet it has been long in coming. The 1972 *Harmony* manifesto drafted by Jerome Ravetz and co-signed by Metzger together with Robin Clark, David Dickson, Peter Harper, Kit Peddler, and Ravetz, offers a chilling prescience in the understanding that a change of course was already needed then, and that actions still have to happen. The third point of the manifesto reads: “For survival, we as a species must regain old attitudes and acquire new skills

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<sup>171</sup> David Bomberg was Metzger’s most influential teacher, and mentor, with whom he studied at the Borough Polytechnic between 1946 and 1953. For more on this, please refer to: Metzger, Gustav. *Dear Mr Cooper*, GM, p24. Metzger, Gustav. *Outline for a Retrospective (1959–1974)*, GM, p559

<sup>172</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *These Artists are Possessed: They Gamble with Life*, GM, p36

<sup>173</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Five Bubble Machine*, GM, p96

<sup>174</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *An Overwhelming Concern with Shelter!*, GM, p182

<sup>175</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Interview with R. Buckminster Fuller*, GM, p333

<sup>176</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *A Critical Look at Artist Placement Group*, GM, p424

<sup>177</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Samson Schames*, GM, p520

<sup>178</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Wiener Aktionismus 1960–1974*, GM, p532

<sup>179</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Yves Klein*, GM, p574

<sup>180</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *On Yoko Ono*, GM, p602

<sup>181</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *On Marc Camille Chaimowicz and Three Life Situations*, GM, p647

<sup>182</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Today’s Question, Road Signs & Teaser Bills*, GM, p654

<sup>183</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *On First Seeing a Performance by Lee Holden*, GM, p664

<sup>184</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *For Ivor Davies*, GM, p685

<sup>185</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *The Artist in the Face of Social Collapse*, GM, p611

<sup>186</sup> For more on this please refer to: Metzger, Gustav. *Art in Germany under National Socialism*, GM, p498. Metzger, Gustav. *AGUN – International Symposium Art in Germany under National Socialism*, GM, p502. Metzger, Gustav. *Fascism Germany – Outline. Analysis. Fight*, GM, p506

<sup>187</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Artists Support Peace*, GM, p516

<sup>188</sup> For more on this please refer to: Metzger, Gustav. *Executive Profile*, GM, p468. Metzger, Gustav. *From the City Pages*, GM, p469

<sup>189</sup> For more on this please refer to:

Metzger, Gustav. *Earth minus Environment*, GM, p540

Metzger, Gustav. *Nature Demised Resurrects as Environment*, GM, p544

Metzger, Gustav. *Earth to Galaxies: On Destruction and Destructivity*, GM, p585

Metzger, Gustav. *Hubble Telescope: The Artist in the Eye of the Storm*, GM, p606

Metzger, Gustav. *Ethics, Aesthetics and Biotechnology*, GM, p638

<sup>190</sup> Rosenthal, Norman. In a private email dated 25 September 2019

for our interaction with the world around us. In the simplest terms, our planet and its resources must be a heritage, to be protected and improved for our descendants. Instead of ‘consuming’ materials and energy, we must fit into stable cycles of transformation of energy and matter. The knowledge which enables such a harmony to be achieved without millennia of prior experience can be gained by a natural science transformed for this function. Its new style will necessarily be of unity rather than fragmentation; of reverence for its materials rather than cold contempt; of synthesis of the natural, social and spiritual aspects of a situation, rather than their destructive separation. It will find its insights and inspiration not only from natural philosophers and creative engineers of our recent past, but from poets, prophets and craftsman, famous and nameless, from all cultures and all history.”<sup>191</sup>

Metzger resolutely exposed the raw nature of our societies, and was above all concerned with the looming threat of extinction. To this end, or rather to avoid such end, Metzger sought to create “worldwide movements in response to the accelerating decimation of the natural world through human-made activities leading to mass extinction.”<sup>192</sup> As I concluded the introduction, Gustav Metzger’s “writings and philosophy must be disseminated and shared in order to foster his fundamental beliefs and his lifelong concern that we should all fight against extinction. Extinction does not have to be inevitable, and we must constantly challenge the status quo.”<sup>193</sup>

Metzger wrote relentlessly, and throughout his life. For him writing was a means not only to disseminate his critical thinking, but also to make his work exist. While he embraced the ephemerality of his art, defined so often by its transience – an art only too frequently realized in semi-private contexts – it was through pamphlets, handouts and self-publications that his work existed in the public realm and consciousness. Metzger experiments in his writings with an art of propositions, as these are the first, and often the only, realization of any work. As Gustav foresaw, “however one organizes and presents a retrospective of my work, it will be dominated by an absence. Auto-destructive art set out more than thirty years ago to build public monuments.

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<sup>191</sup> Clark, Robin. Dickson, David. Harper, Peter. Peddler, Kit. Metzger, Gustav. Ravetz, Jerome. *Harmony*, GM, p362

<sup>192</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Action Mass Extinction*, GM, p681

<sup>193</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Introduction*, GM, p21

There have been none. They have never even been considered for production.”<sup>194</sup> To bring together all of these texts is akin to realising a radical paper retrospective with, for most, the only material reality of an art of manifest propositions.

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<sup>194</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Outline for a Retrospective (1959–1974)*, GM, p560

## Conclusion

### Manifest Paper Exhibitions

To conclude this critical commentary, I would like to reflect on how this retrospective process leads to a prospective outcome. It is in the parallel to all that the whole can be felt. It is with the desire for an open-ended conclusion that I now would want to return to these three words, and the proposition thus laid out: *Manifest Paper Exhibitions*.

As discussed in the introduction, the understanding of manifest paper exhibition was not a concept that was present at the onset of any of the publications that are *Voids*, *Choreographing Exhibitions*, *the exhibition of a film*, *The Anti-Museum*, and *Gustav Metzger, Writings 1953 – 2016*. None was approached with this framework in mind. I still do not consider this to be the case now. However, when experienced collated, this critical commentary offers the opportunity to see how the work realised over the course of the last 10 years can be approach through the umbrella term that is manifest paper exhibitions.

The critical commentary presents us with the opportunity to consider what I have contributed to knowledge through an extensive research and practice (or would it be, through the words of Iggy Pop, search and destroy?<sup>195</sup>). To look back at these offers the rare opportunity to interrogate the plethora of material proposed, information presented, and knowledge generated. I plainly demonstrate what is my work and how it contributes to all these areas and endeavours. From the complete recast of exhibition making to the renewed acceptance of what catalogues are, I propose a radical and prospective re-writing of art histories. The critical commentary presents us with a unique cosmology, a large and wide territory, and a cartography of people, places, concepts, and materialities.

Both *Voids. A Retrospective* and *A Retrospective of closed exhibitions* consider exhibitions as materials, with past exhibitions gathered together by the retrospective genre. *A Choreographed Exhibition* and *the exhibition of a film* challenge the

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<sup>195</sup> *Search and Destroy* is a song by Iggy and the Stooges, released in the group's third album *Raw Power* (1973). For more on this, please refer to *Iggy Pop in conversation with Stefan Brüggemann and Mathieu Copeland, Miami, 9 October 2018*, Hyper-Palimpsest, London: B.C. Press, 2019

materiality of exhibitions, essentially in proposing dancers performing the exhibition, and in challenging the very location of exhibitions. In considering exhibitions as materials, and the materiality of exhibitions, I address what an exhibition can be, and deconstruct its standardized acceptance. In doing so I face the whole apparatus that informs their contexts. It is my believe that we must challenge the accepted nature of exhibitions by reinventing the possible forms these can take in addressing their inherent materialities.

I derided a tacit definition of exhibitions in stating, “too often, an exhibition is none other than a temporal gathering of disparate objects in a given space.”<sup>196</sup> Spaces are interchangeable, durations variable, objects of multiple and varied natures, and the number of objects grouped open. The exhibition space is not the institution, nor is ‘to exhibit’ the filling of three-dimensional spaces. Joseph Grigely wrote, “the idea of the ‘closed’ exhibition during the Pandemic needs to be rethought maybe, as the exhibitions have been reshaped for dissemination in other ways. This links to my idea of the exhibition prosthesis—and how exhibitions are represented by various conventions. For years I have been saying exhibitions do not have to take place physically in order to take place—and the C-19 pandemic has shown us many ways in which the exhibition might be reimagined.”<sup>197</sup> The materiality of exhibitions embraces and exceeds the multiple realities of institutions. It enables the autonomy of the exhibition from whom, and what, makes it be. It questions how exhibitions can be both autonomous and self-sufficient.

With a past rooted within a modernist understanding of physical space, it is within the renewed appreciation of what exhibitions are that we can consider within this unique context the reality that social convention, and temporary distancing, imposes. Exhibitions are re-presented by various conventions. This was what *VOIDS. A Retrospective* so dramatically highlighted. In experiencing emptiness one experiences

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<sup>196</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, CE, p19

<sup>197</sup> Grigely, Joseph. In a private email dated 26 May 2020.

the museum laid bare. These non-spaces, interchangeable in nature<sup>198</sup>, challenged the experiential reality of exhibitions.

To choreograph an exhibition is to highlight the prevalence of audiences. Spectators ‘complete’ the ecosystems that exhibitions are. This becomes a heightened challenge when considered in the times of social distancing such as that followed the COVID-19 Pandemic. If exhibitions are what bring people together, what happens when spectators have to be kept apart? This brings forward a new aspect of choreographing exhibitions. The proposition of exhibitions in the moment of social distancing presents us with choreographies within choreographies. In stating that members of the public must keep a distance from one another, along with the museum construct of secured distance to work of arts and an imposed sense of circulation, are we to choreograph spectators’ behaviours too?

I wrote in the introduction to *The Anti-Museum* “the temporary closure of an art institution, in a climate of inflicted austerity, offers many levels of resonance. To close a gallery in 2016 exemplifies the realities of our time. The current context is both one of opulence and one of self-imposed—or imposed—austerity. In the face of a major humanitarian drama on the shores of Europe, in Italy and Greece in particular, the act of closure bears a terrible parallel to the European Union closing its own boundaries.”<sup>199</sup> In 2020, I would study how a pandemic brought forth a tsunami of closures. An analysis that would encompass how art museums, the institutions that we would hope should thrive for an alternative way of life, laid off their staff instead of protecting them<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>198</sup> As highlighted in realising the exhibition Voids both at the Centre Pompidou and the Kunsthalle Bern, but also in assuming the physical recreation of exhibitions originally realised somewhere/somewhere else, gathered anew in the seemingly neutral spaces of these institutions.

<sup>199</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions (1964-2016)*, TAM, p38

<sup>200</sup> A series of headlines from Artforum, art magazines and newspaper published during the time of COVID19 Pandemic included:

March 25, 2020 at 5:28am: Hammer Museum lays off 150 student employees. Are more coronavirus job losses coming? (LA Times)

March 26, 2020: After Coronavirus Shutdown, MOCA Los Angeles Lays Off All Part-Time Employees. The 97 workers represent half of the museum’s total staff of 185.

March 27, 2020 at 8:48am: MUSEUMS ACROSS THE US LAY OFF WORKERS AS COVID-19 CASES RISE

March 28, 2020 at 6:30pm: LAYOFFS AT FILM AT LINCOLN CENTER, FILM COMMENT ON INDEFINITE INTERMISSION

Museums that were treated for decades as corporations were showed in plain sight during the COVID19 pandemic. In times of utter financial constraint, rather than seize this opportunity to accept that a Museum is NOT a building, but very much the people employed and dedicated to the art, all agenda seemed focus on only protecting the buildings and its contents, and make-by with the soul of these institutions. Museums were treated during the pandemic of 2020 as vectors of conservative ideology for whom Museums are nothing but banks with treasures in their vaults. A museum is classically defined as a building where objects of historical, scientific, or artistic interest are kept. Museums are indeed keepers, not breeders. Museums as buildings now conserve art in formaldehyde air-free environments with no souls in sight. These times were that of a thanatopraxia that conserved the building and its content, but not its people. These times dramatically made the case for the anti-museum.

Gustav Metzger concluded his influential 1974 text *Years without Art* with the following remark: “(...) It will be necessary to construct more equitable forms for marketing, exhibiting and publicizing art in the future. As the twentieth century has progressed, capitalism has smothered art – the deep surgery of the years without art will give art a new chance.”<sup>201</sup> The time of pandemics and the ‘new normality’ that followed embodies this outcome. It contributes to a radical reconsideration of museums and exhibitions. What are the implications to implementing social distancing, when sociality is the ground on which museums and exhibitions stands. With the experience of worldwide Museums closure during the 2020 pandemic, followed by months of exhibitions either postponed or cancelled, what can be the new ways to experience art?

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April 01, 2020 at 8:00am: SFMOMA TO LAY OFF OR FURLOUGH MORE THAN THREE HUNDRED EMPLOYEES

April 22, 2020 at 2:27pm: METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART LAYS OFF EIGHTY-ONE EMPLOYEES

April 22, 2020: The Met Announces Dozens of Layoffs as Potential Losses Swell to \$150 Million. The museum had also initially hoped to reopen in July, but said it is likely to be later. (NYTimes).

April 24, 2020 at 8:50am: ARTS PROFESSIONALS IMPLORE MUSEUMS TO RETAIN EDUCATION WORKERS

May 07, 2020 at 11:04am: MOMA CUTS BUDGET BY \$45M, SHRINKS OPERATIONS FOR FORESEEABLE FUTURE

May 21, 2020 at 7:18pm: COVID-19 IMPACT REPORTS SAY 13 PERCENT OF MUSEUMS MAY NEVER REOPEN

<sup>201</sup> Metzger, Gustav. *Years without Art*, GM, p479

For Joseph Grigely, “there is a possibility for dematerialization—think of mental spaces—and Derrida’s discussion about the blind moment that occurs between when a draughtsman is looking at his subject and rematerializing it as a drawing. It’s like getting beamed up in Star Trek. And to me this is what happens to all art and literature as it is disseminated. It does not exist in a vacuum, but within an ever-expanding array of frames (think of them as rings when a stone is thrown into water)—constantly made by curatorial decision and others—the labels, the work beside it, the descriptive texts, the various ‘representations’ online and otherwise.”<sup>202</sup>

Discussing the terms rematerialization and dematerialization, Lawrence Weiner was quick to assert, “you do not dematerialize anything. There are no magicians.” As I then proposed to him rematerialization as the mediation from one form to another, Weiner concluded, “maybe this is not necessary. Maybe it is simply another word: presentation. And the factor of simultaneity. To rematerialize would be changing what the artist is saying. It is about finding a different way of presenting. And how does a text fit into this? Is it context rather than content?”<sup>203</sup>

In the introduction to *Choreographing Exhibitions*, I proposed, “an exhibition that inhabits the realm of re-materialised forms—as opposed to dematerialised (...)—addresses the possibilities of art, memory, and exhibition-making.”<sup>204</sup> This terminology is a direct reference to Lucy Lippard’s title *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972...*, a publication that was instrumental in the diffusion and understanding of Conceptual Art. In her preface, Lippard reflected on her terminology, “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. Granted. But for a lack of a better term I have continued to refer to a process of dematerialization, or a deemphasis on

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<sup>202</sup> Grigely, Joseph. In a private email dated 27 may 2020.

<sup>203</sup> Lawrence Weiner, *fragments of a conversation with Mathieu Copeland*, New York, 24 March 2014, TEOAF, p168

<sup>204</sup> Copeland, Mathieu. *Choreographing Exhibitions: An Exhibition Happening Everywhere, at all Times, with and for Everyone*, CE, p19

material aspects (uniqueness, permanence, decorative, attractiveness).”<sup>205</sup> An argument that I furthered in defining my understanding of re-materialised forms, noting that “a conceptual object remains an object, as what constitutes an ‘object’ must be constantly reassessed.”<sup>206</sup>

Exhibitions are both material (matter that can be shaped or manipulated,) and materiality (being material, and having a physical existence to work with.) Distinguishing its materiality from its material potential, it can be assumed that the exhibition is not a medium. The exhibition can be a film, a choreography, a show, nothing, the anti, or a book, a record... Playing on the polysemy of the word, the exhibition is not a medium in that it does not read the future. However, an exhibition is a medium in which we can read the future. The exhibition is a medium in as much as we choreograph exhibitions.

In conclusion, manifest paper exhibitions are visionary and speculative sensitive architectures. It is through this complex autonomous entity of manifest positions where the exhibition is the catalogue, and the catalogue is the exhibition, that I ultimately propose curating as a radical re-materialisation of forms.

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<sup>205</sup> Lippard, Lucy R., *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972.../ edited and annotated by Lucy Lippard*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001, p5

<sup>206</sup> Ibid

## Endnotes

### Exhibition Cuttings<sup>207</sup>

Exhibitions are accompanied by an ensemble that presents them, represents them, and thus make them present. This set made up of connected forms, paratexts—to borrow Gérard Genette’s term—and “exhibition prosthetics,” in Joseph Grigely’s provocative turn of phrase, associates the names of the artists and the curator(s), the exhibition’s title, the texts and essays, the notices, the audio guide, all augmented realities, printed media, and the catalogues. Joseph Grigely questions the reality of the exhibition, “where does an exhibition begin and end? Is an exhibition just about the materialization of specific works of art, or is it also — and if so, in what ways— about the various conventions that go into the making of exhibitions, which include press releases, announcement cards, checklists, catalogues, and digital-based media?”<sup>208</sup> He thus prefers talking in terms of exhibition “prosthetics” “to describe an array of these conventions, particularly (but not exclusively) in relation to exhibition practices.”<sup>209</sup>

Let us shift Gérard Genette’s analysis and terminology from one field (literature) to another (exhibition-making). Genette quotes J. Hillis Miller, who, in *The Critic as Host*<sup>210</sup>, defines “para” as “an antithetical prefix which designates both proximity and distance, similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority [...], something that is situated at once on this side and that side of a boundary, a threshold or a margin, of equal status and yet secondary, subsidiary, subordinate, like a guest to his host, a slave to his master. Something that is para is not only at once on both sides of the boundary separating interior and exterior: it is also the boundary itself, the screen acting as a permeable membrane between the within and the without. It involves their confusion,

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<sup>207</sup> An early version of this text was written as part of my conference *Les expositions comme matériaux / La matérialité des expositions*, given during the symposium *Passer à l’histoire: l’exposition et sa reconstitution*, within the 87th acfas convention, at the Galerie UQO/Université du Québec en Outaouais on 29 May 2019. A revised and shortened version was written as the editorial introduction to the journal *Critique d’Art, The international review of Contemporary Art Criticism*, No. 53, Autumn/Winter 2019, Rennes: Archive de la critique d’art. These endnotes are a reworked and expanded text, constituting an original contribution based on these previous incarnations.

<sup>208</sup> Grigely, Joseph. *Exhibition Prosthetics*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010, p6, edited by Zak Kye

<sup>209</sup> Grigely, Joseph. *Ibid.*, p7

<sup>210</sup> Originally published in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, London, Seabury Press, 1979

letting the exterior in and the interior out, it divides and unites them.”<sup>211</sup> The relation to the prosthesis, for its part, is the extension. The prosthesis is constructed in the negative from a damaged body. It contributes to complete a broken entity, a fragmented and incomplete reality. Although attached to the exhibition, the prosthesis does not belong to it and will always be a reminder to its host that it is complementary, and not identity-related. It contributes to it as an added piece, a *parasite*. It wavers around the fabric of the site—and never becomes part of it.

If the material nature of the exhibition is indecisive and intangible, it is also intelligible and intellectual, while also being perceptible, a source of wonder and continually experimental. So let us consider those occurrences where the exhibition *is also* the paratext. It has always seemed fundamental to me not to exploit artworks and put them at the service of a discourse that is not theirs. A work exists through and for what it is. The polysemy of a work of art *comes through* what defines it. The exhibition is one of the vehicles that can temporarily hallmark, and even index, a work. As a bearer of meaning, it declares its desire for autonomy with regard to the work, and in so doing asserts its dependence. The paratext is not a remote value of the exhibition. In the footsteps of Genette for whom the “paratext = peritext + epitext,” when transposed to our area of study this equation contributes to the demonstration that the paratext is an integral part of the exhibition. It is the exhibition, and vice versa. The paratexts of the exhibition structure the sensitive architecture that exhibitions are. I would more readily borrow from the botanical glossary the vocabulary of cuttings and grafts, as augmented organisms. The exhibition is a series of replicated organisms, “re-potted,” which bind together and form just one. A foreign graft that adapts to its host and shares the same material character. A symbiosis that takes root. Let us imagine the exhibition and its catalogue as two autonomous entities that nurture one another, which recognize one another while accepting their differences, and which make each other grow.

The ensemble catalog and exhibition contributes to the feeling of the whole that is ‘Exhibition.’ The catalog, the second generation of the exhibition one might argue, is too often the genetic multiplication of the parent exhibition. If too many exhibitions

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<sup>211</sup> Miller, J. Hillis, quoted by: Genette, Gérard. *Seuils*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1987, p7, (Poétique)

are theses (or ideas, or intuitions) put in spaces, the catalog is not, however, the original thought in its ideal materiality. It is not a work that collects written words illustrated by selected works. It seems so much more enjoyable to consider the publication related to the exhibition as the transplant of one with the other, two autonomous entities that feed on each other, which recognize each other while accepting their differences, and grow.

The exhibition only exists for a given period of time, specified and normalized by the calendars of host institutions. The catalogue reinstates this time-frame and goes beyond. Long after the end of the event, it remains and contributes to a retro/prospective memory. It constitutes the living and ongoing memory of the exhibition, the only surviving part.

Let us try to justify the question of the addendum and the over-production of objects, also involving the industry necessary for the physical production of catalogues and its global impact on an internationalized production. It is urgent that we re-think the ecology of the exhibition, and the catalogue within the ecosystem of the 'exhibition.' By analyzing this science of the reciprocal relations which form these social and economic environments, let us dwell on the possibilities offered by catalogues: these cuttings make it possible to preserve those fleeting balances that exhibitions are.

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