

# What is Curatorial Research? On Defining and Undefining...



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## Between and Beyond Theory and Practice

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Master Thesis

What is Curatorial Research?

On Defining and Undefined Between and Beyond Theory and Practice

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## Abstract

Curatorial research is an elusive concept that inherently resists being defined, in order to continuously remain a contested and active part of discourse. This thesis explores the manifold definitions of “the curatorial,” as well as the opportunities curatorial research holds within the realm of questioning historical narratives and challenging public conceptions through concepts withdrawing from certainty, methods of broad-based participation, as well as long-term research projects as an answer to restless, event-based cultural production.

From the vantage point of the exhibition as a tool of research, turning the exhibition into a site for carrying out research, the thesis reflects on curating and the curatorial as a space beyond the tension between theory and practice, and emphasises additional juxtapositions at play, such as the tension between theory and “intuition,” “astra and monstra,” “the inexhaustible and unfathomable,” the immaterial and material, the specific and the overview. My findings suggest a detachment of an understanding of theory as the sole mediator between curator and exhibition; exhibition and audience, and encourage a curatorial process driven by the ineffable that forms new relations of knowledge.

Kuratorische Forschung ist ein schwer fassbares Konzept, das einer eindeutigen Begriffsbestimmung ausweicht. Dies birgt das Potential, es als aktiven Teil des Diskurses zu halten.

Die vorliegende Arbeit erforscht die vielfältigen Definitionen des „Kuratorischen“, sowie die Möglichkeiten der kuratorischen Forschung, historische und zeitgenössische Narrative zu hinterfragen und herauszufordern. Zu nennen sind hier beispielsweise Konzepte, die sich einer Gewissheit entziehen, partizipative Prozesse, sowie Langzeitforschungsprojekte als Gegenkonzept zu einer event-basierten Kulturproduktion.

Ausgehend von einem Verständnis der Ausstellung als Forschungsmedium, ist diese Masterthese eine Reflektion auf das Feld des Kuratierens und des Kuratorischen, jenseits des Spannungsverhältnisses zwischen Theorie und Praxis. Die Arbeit beleuchtet weitere Gegenüberstellungen, die in kuratorischen Prozessen wirksam werden: das Verhältnis zwischen Theorie und Intuition, „astra und monstra“, dem „Unerschöpflichen“ und „Unerforschlichen“, dem Immateriellen und Materiellen, dem Spezifischen und der Übersicht. Die These fordert ein Umdenken des Alleinstellungsmerkmals von Theorie als Vermittlerin zwischen Kurator\*in und Ausstellung sowie zwischen Ausstellung und Publikum. Dadurch wird auf einen kuratorischen Prozess verwiesen, der von sprachlich nicht fassbaren Vorgängen angetrieben wird und neue Wissensrelationen formt.

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“The meaning of a question is the method by which to answer it. ...Tell me how you seek, I will tell you what you are looking for.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Remarks*, New York 1975, as quoted by Georges Didi-Huberman, in: Georges DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Atlas, Or the Anxious Gay Science: How to Carry the World on One's Back?*, Chicago 2018, p. 232.

## 1. Introduction

Based on an understanding of curating as a method of entering a discourse (rather than the illustration of a theory or hypothesis) and the exhibition as a tool of research (rather than a static display) this thesis explores the concept of curatorial research, in which the research process simultaneously constitutes its platform of display. That is to say, the exhibition turns into a site, not only for displaying and mediating but also for enacting and carrying out research. Ridden with questions, contradictions and vagueness, what is the potential of exhibiting something to a viewing public that one cannot yet explain with language, or is still in the midst of figuring out? How can a curatorial process – driven by the ineffable – disrupt inherited sedimented knowledges and help re-read the allegedly known?

To me, there are three significant aspects in explaining the relevance of remaining in a state of questioning, of narrating a story one cannot yet tell.

First, a particular narrative or understanding of a circumstance might actually not yet exist and everyone involved in a particular curatorial project is participating in a process of learning. Learning something entirely new, or rather, something that is yet to be created. In a short text introducing the seminar “Negotiating with Reality,” curator and educator Nora Sternfeld follows the alleged paradoxical question of how we can learn something that does not yet exist, with the statement “[l]earning as a political and emancipatory practice has always been understood as a process towards another possibility: as a way to understand the social relations in order to change them.”<sup>2</sup>

The second important aspect involves the question of how we can look at the present from within the present, and engages with a particular demonstration of contemporaneity as the assembly of a multiplicity of positions, temporalities and realities, therefore adding to a collective, relational production of knowledge. Implementing this conception of the contemporary – looking at specific phenomena from multiple perspectives – as an integral part of a curatorial research project can resist the continuation of a linear narrative in which one comes after the other. From the vantage point of “multi-layered historical frames”<sup>3</sup>, I believe that it is possible to counter a canon in which, for example, one side is portrayed as more advanced, thus marginalising another side into the position of always being chronologically behind and having to catch up.<sup>4</sup> This understanding of contemporaneity further implies that the

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<sup>2</sup> TABAKALERA. International Centre for Contemporary Culture, Curation and Mediation: Negotiating with Reality. Curating programme: module 4. Directed by Nora Sternfeld, in: [www.tabakalera.eu/en/curation-and-mediation-nora-sternfeld](http://www.tabakalera.eu/en/curation-and-mediation-nora-sternfeld) (3 March 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Olga von SCHUBERT, “100 Years of Now” and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, Berlin 2019, p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the socio-economic divide between the Western world and the Global South.

grappling with history and the present cannot be represented through a clear, unambiguous statement or the sole temporal staging of unchanging objects, but has to be demonstrated through strategies of negotiation; through intangible and perhaps ineffable processes that go beyond the accumulation of knowledge through the human and natural sciences.

But how can these processes be comprehensively communicated? Do we only need to think about interleaving theory and practice more with one another, or are there additional logics at play between curator and exhibition; exhibition and audience that we should consider including? Logics such as “intuition” (Chus Martinez), or “astra and monstra” and “the inexhaustible and the unfathomable” (Georges Didi-Huberman).<sup>5</sup>

This brings me to the third significant aspect centred on Donna Haraway’s concept of “situated knowledges.”<sup>6</sup> Anticipating that we are all speaking and acting from a subjective and partial perspective; from within a specific body that is exposed to particular social conditions and power relations, I deem it important to consciously explore the impossibility of neutral knowledge, as well as the purposes and potentialities of interlinking intellectual and sensual knowledge with one another as part of curatorial research. Situated knowledge is “in the middle – in-between spaces that emerge between art and reality, representation and presence, theory and practice, and above all between the current state of affairs and the possibility of changing it.”<sup>7</sup> I am interested in the associative thoughts that arise within these charged tensions. At first escaping the grasp of reality, they can in fact act as guides for our imagination and lead us to new, unbeaten tracks. Based on this perception, I understand the curatorial as an artistic practice and thus curatorial research as a form of artistic research.

All three aspects attribute great significance to the research process. Alluding to Wittgenstein’s quote, paying close attention to the method of approaching a project has the potential to reveal the meaning of the question one is asking.

In 1978 the philosopher Michel Foucault delivered a lecture titled “What is Critique?” Referring to the question by Immanuel Kant “What is the ‘Aufklärung?’” (1784), the lecture prepared the grounds for Foucault’s eponymous essay “What is Enlightenment?”

Foucault stated in his talk that his aim was “not to define critique, but precisely to define something else”<sup>8</sup> thus viewing the question relative to its conditions. He cautioned the audience at the onset that there was not *one* definition and that critique “only exists in relation to

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<sup>5</sup> “Logics” here are understood as possible forms of alternative knowledges.

<sup>6</sup> Donna HARAWAY, Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, in: Claire G. MOSES et al. (eds.), *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 3., College Park, MD 1988, pp. 575–599.

<sup>7</sup> Nora STERNFELD, Para-Museum of 100 Days: documenta between Event and Institution, in: Nanne BUURMAN, Dorothee RICHTER (eds.), *oncurating*, Issue 33 (June, 2017), Zürich 2017, pp. 166.

<sup>8</sup> Michel FOUCAULT, Sylvère LOTRINGER (eds.), *The Politics of Truth*, Los Angeles 2007, p. 47.



something other than itself: it is an instrument, a means for a future or a truth that it will not know nor happen to be.”<sup>9</sup>

With reference to asking a question to which there is not one singular or sole answer, I have defined the research question for this thesis as “What is Curatorial Research?” This also manages to encompass my interest in exploring methods of narrating a story that cannot yet be told – either because it doesn’t exist or because it consists of multiple strands that have yet to be brought together. Rather than aiming to arrive at a rigid definition, this thesis provides an approximative attempt to understand the many opportunities and possibilities curatorial research holds within the realm of altering historical narratives, public conceptions, and for imagining a different reality, future, and indeed perhaps even truth.

The structure of the following thesis is, in parts, itself a reflection on the approaches explored. Therefore, the introduction is directly followed by a detailed description of a case study, namely a specific example from within practice. Before “zooming out” so to speak, I wish to “zoom in” and in a sense, emulate a visual, receptive experience that will provide the reader with opportunities to perhaps first look, then contextualise. The case study “Curatorial Dictionary” both delineates the difficulty of defining terms within “the curatorial” while pointing to the manifold formats a curatorial project can encompass. Following the concept of the expanded field of exhibition-making, the outcome of a curatorial research project seeks the medium most appropriate. Next to an exhibition, this could entail a lecture series, film program, an action in public space, a reader or a dictionary, among countless other examples.

The first two chapters of the thesis dissect the research question, by splitting it into two parts. First, I include a brief historical derivation of the curatorial, its elusive definitions and how it is distinguished from the term curating with particular reference to a conversation between the curators Beatrice von Bismarck and Irit Rogoff.

Second, I differentiate between various notions and practices of research. Oscillating between the concepts of “starting in the middle” formulated by Rogoff and the idea of gaining an overview through montage delineated by Georges Didi-Huberman, I aim to deduce what kinds of research I am pairing with the notion of the curatorial in the titular question of the thesis: What is curatorial research?

I then examine the potential problems arising from practice-based research methods, departing from Claire Bishop’s critique of developments in contemporary art praxes that are focused on the display of aggregated research.

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

The theoretical part (chapter 2 and 3) is followed by the analyses of two case studies. The first traces the conceptual approach of dOCUMENTA (13) and how its “non-concept” was mediated through the publication series “100 Notes – 100 Thoughts.” The arguments are largely based on a theoretical essay by the curator Chus Martinez, who was head of the curatorial department during the 2012 documenta, where she developed the concept of the “maybe” as a gesture withdrawing from certainty.

The second case study condenses the implications of continuous research projects where each production builds on the next, such as those conducted at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin since 2013. I explore the long-term research projects “The Anthropocene Project” and “100 Years of Now” as well as evaluate the exhibition “The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside” by Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke in more depth.

The case studies do not only display and portray a productive tension between theory and practice, in addition they also demonstrate a number of other highly charged juxtapositions that I identify and specify in the conclusion.

The figures accompanying the text work on either an illustrative level, by depicting something that is described in the text, or on an associative level, through images that are not directly mentioned in the text, but expand the line of thought into a further, visual and perhaps serendipitous direction.

## 2. What is the Curatorial?

### 2.1. “Curatorial Dictionary”

#### A Research and Problematising Tool

“Curatorial Dictionary” is collaborative research project that was initiated by the art and research network tranzit.hu in 2012.<sup>10</sup> It is an open-access, online, Hungarian and English language dictionary that assembles essayistic interpretations of words commonly used within contemporary curatorial discourse and practice. On the one hand, the dictionary raises awareness of the untranslatability of certain terms into Hungarian and other languages than English. On the other, the collection and characterisation of frequently deployed curatorial concepts also emerged as a reaction to the difficulty of clearly defining these terms. An obstacle collectively experienced by the participants of a reading seminar held in preparation for one of the workshops of tranzit.hu’s “Free School for Art Theory and Practice” in Budapest.

[...] we recognized a gnoseological uncertainty: we could clearly point to (or defer to) projects and relevant authors/texts which ‘reflect’ on the specific concepts; yet – despite the vast amount of writings related to curating – we proved to be unable to determine more general textual surveys about the ‘meanings’ and conceptual roots of these very notions. After taking a more meticulous look into how concepts work and come about within curatorial discourse, we found that notions, such as ‘performative curating,’ ‘new institutionalism,’ or ‘collaboration,’ are deliberately vague – as they attempt to delineate a particular practice, rather than a theoretical line of inquiry.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of the elusive character of these notions being intentional and perhaps even strategically ambiguous points to the opportunity they represent, by continuously remaining contested and therefore an active part of discourse.

Rather than finding the missing encyclopaedic meanings of the selected concepts, the group working on the dictionary aimed at developing an understanding of the surrounding contexts, interrelations and interactions of the words in question. “Curatorial Dictionary” examines how various lines of discourse create significance, by tracing back historical and socio-cultural origins, as well as appearances of the terms in artistic contexts and their citations by writers, therefore going beyond a philological and etymological analysis.<sup>12</sup>

The assumed objectivity of a more conventional dictionary is juxtaposed with the “definitions” of the “Curatorial Dictionary” being written in the form of short essays (fig. 1). The definitions

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<sup>10</sup> tranzit has been working independently in Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Romania since 2002. The focus of the network has been on challenging post-war European canons and the re-examination of (art) histories.

<sup>11</sup> Eszter SZAKÁCS, Curatorial Dictionary: Unpacking the Oxymoron. An Introduction (2012), in: <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/> (26 November 2018).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

termed as “essays” – “for want of a better genre category”<sup>13</sup> – leading from terms like “Collaboration/Együttműködésen Alapuló Művészeti Gyakorlatok” to “Authorship/Szerzőség” and “New Museology/Új Muzeológia” – create a hypertextual web, referencing and linking to further published texts on these terms. The selection of the words themselves is based on the individual interests of the authors and reflects on discordances within the working group. The online dictionary therefore openly points out the subjectivity, situatedness and partial perspective inherent to any such format. “[The] dictionary is again grounded in discourse.”<sup>14</sup> Its format has been adapted to function as a research and problematising tool.

Each definition credits its author. The working group includes individuals who are active in the fields of contemporary art, curating, ethnography, visual culture, and education in Hungary: Balázs Beöthy, Nikolett Erőss, Zsófia Frazon, Eszter Lázár, and Eszter Szakács. The curator, writer, artist and educator Paul O’Neill likewise contributed to the project through his correspondence.

The essays reflect the personal interests and socio-cultural backgrounds of their authors. In her introductory text on the motivations behind the project, Eszter Szakács, curator at tranzit.hu and also the editor of the dictionary, explains how, when choosing case studies to further delineate a concept, the group wanted to go beyond often-cited examples of exhibitions, institutions, spaces and so on, and chose to primarily reference curatorial projects that took place in Hungary or Eastern Europe. However, as she notes; “we came to realize that the concepts we discuss in the dictionary have been predominantly developed in Western Europe and North America.”<sup>15</sup> Meaning that the words so frequently used might not even be applicable or relevant to curatorial practices globally. This is why the group aims to find ways of diversifying the prevalent “international” notions of the curatorial by geographically mapping out the various concepts in use, including their manifestations and relevance in a further phase of the “Dictionary.”

The constant development of the curatorial field and its elusive, contested character, not only entail an ongoing revision of the words used but evidently a continuous emergence of new vocabulary. Having evolved from the noun “curator,” the verb “to curate” was followed by the adjective “curatorial,”<sup>16</sup> i.e. the “curatorial turn,” which subsequently gave rise to a new figure in the history of curating: “the curatorial.”

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> For example, in “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse” Paul O’Neill mentions the curatorial “turn,” “position,” “gesture,” “star system,” “project” and “field,” but does not yet make use of “the curatorial” as a cohesive

The following definitions of the curatorial do not demonstrate how the verb “curating” was replaced by the noun “the curatorial,” but portray the inherent relationship between the two. While some take the position of considering the curatorial as a progression of curating – and an answer to the problems encountered throughout the history of curating (Lázár, Rogoff), others fold the two concepts into one another,<sup>17</sup> by viewing curating as embedded in the “dynamic field”<sup>18</sup> that constitutes the curatorial (Bismarck, O’Neill).

## 2.2. The Curatorial – An Abridgement from Verb to Noun

The word “Curatorial” itself, in Hungarian “Kurátori (szemlélet),” constitutes one of the words selected for the “Curatorial Dictionary.” Set in parenthesis, the Hungarian word “szemlélet” translates to “approach,” already indicating one of the myriad interpretations, conceptualisations and definitions regarding both theory and practice of this notion. The curatorial could be described as an approach or attitude; a form of critical thought “that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict.”<sup>19</sup> The crucial aspect of this statement being, how curatorial projects can achieve to continuously question themselves in a productive way, while also staying informative for a viewing audience.

In her definition, or rather – contextualising essay – in the “Curatorial Dictionary,” Hungarian curator Eszter Lázár begins by delineating the concept of the curatorial as an expansion of curating and the field of exhibition-making. The elusive concept arose in the 1990s – adjacent to a rising common interest in the profession of the curator and its social significance<sup>20</sup> – as a reaction to representational, consolidated forms of exhibition-making and a stagnation of institutional critique.<sup>21</sup>

It appears that there are two turning points that took place during the twentieth century, without which the unfolding of the curatorial seems unimaginable. Both of them are highlighted in Paul

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concept that stands on its own. See Paul O’NEILL, *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse*, in: Judith RUGG et al. (eds.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Chicago 2007, pp. 11–28.

<sup>17</sup> Irit ROGOFF in conversation with Beatrice von BISMARCK, *Curating/Curatorial*, in: Beatrice von BISMARCK, Jörn SCHAFER, Thomas WESKI (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Berlin 2012, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Beatrice von BISMARCK, *Curating/Curatorial*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Irit ROGOFF, *Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality* (2006), in: [https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff\\_smuggling.pdf](https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf) (28 November 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Paul O’NEILL, *The Curatorial Turn*, pp. 13–14.

<sup>21</sup> Magda TYŽLIK-CARVER, | Curator | Curating | The Curatorial | Not-Just-Art Curating. A Genealogy of Posthuman Curating (2017), in: [www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/kuratorin-kuratieren-das-kuratorische-nicht-nur-kunst-kuratieren/](http://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/kuratorin-kuratieren-das-kuratorische-nicht-nur-kunst-kuratieren/) (3 March 2020).

O'Neill's text on the discursive contestation of curatorial practice "The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse."

The first shift O'Neill mentions took place in the 1960s and constituted the ascendancy of curatorial criticism. Critique became less about the artwork as an autonomous object of study and more about the exhibition as a whole, making a previously invisible praxis institutionally visible and therefore began to move the role of the curator and the structures, politics and economies behind exhibition-making into the centre of attention.

At this point one must add, the newly evoked interest of critics evolved parallel to a change in the way curators practiced their occupation. Among others, the curatorial idiosyncrasies of exhibitions by Lucy Lippard, Seth Siegelaub or Harald Szeemann depicted a shift from the curator as someone working with "practicalities of exhibition-making and museums' collections"<sup>22</sup> to someone following a strong conceptual approach, akin to many artists' practices at the time (figs. 2 and 3).

In conjunction to developments in the art world in the 1990s, the curatorial field experienced an institutionalisation of institutional critique that took place in the 1960s and 70s. "Thriving independent curatorial practices often merged the curatorial vision with the self-interest of the institution."<sup>23</sup> As an answer to the perceived stagnation of critical practice the so-called "curatorial turn" of the 1990s led to curators adopting – and many argue consequently replacing – the role of the critic. Through the growing significance of the curatorial gesture and its professionalisation, a "neo-critical" space of curating began to open up, leading to the aforementioned further expansion of the boundaries of the exhibition format. From "practice to discourse." Critique now took place in all stages of curating: before (a new focus on the process of exhibition-making and reflection on its ideological and institutional utterances), during (the exhibition as a space for discussion, critique and debate), after (the continuation of the discourse, e.g. through the exhibition catalogue<sup>24</sup>) and in-between the exhibition (the discourse of the curatorial turn is largely led by curators themselves).

According to Lázár's definition in the online dictionary, "the curatorial" departs from solely making exhibitions to working on more longer-term, process-oriented, less object-focused projects with an emphasis on discursivity and radical educational methods. In its broadest and ideal sense, the curatorial can be understood as a contribution to socio-political realities; as an attempt to understand and maybe even change them through developing curatorial concepts

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> "It is arguable that the most important essays about art over the last ten years have not been in art magazines but they have been in catalogues and other material produced around galleries, art centres and exhibitions." Liam GILLICK (2005), quoted in: O'NEILL, *The Curatorial Turn*, p. 14.

that try to go beyond the realm of the representational. Discourse around the curatorial instigated “a shift from representation to the possibility of action.”<sup>25</sup>

The outcome of this research and process-based approach can be manifold and is liberated from the exhibition space. Whether it turns into a public program, an action, a website or a dictionary, curatorial work seeks the medium most appropriate in mediating the concepts negotiated. According to this conception, the “Curatorial Dictionary,” seen as a platform of display, constitutes an example of a curatorial project itself. Hence, the decision to realise this thesis by first delineating the notion of “the curatorial” through the example of a meta-analytical project which writes “about writings on curatorial and artistic practices”<sup>26</sup> – likewise follows the desire to look at “how different lines of discourse create meanings.”<sup>27</sup>

Despite resistive traits towards more authorial and representative models of curation – that basically say “this is how it is” – O’Neill stresses that the various conceptions of the curatorial are not meant to be in opposition to curating or exhibition-making. The prime objective of “the curatorial” is discursiveness and self-reflection, occurring in temporary spaces of collaboration and participation. “However dissensual, this co-habitational time can be made public, warts and all.”<sup>28</sup> The curatorial stresses the process of questioning, rather than striving to arrive at a polished argument that is put on display.

In a conversation between the curators Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck on the differences between curating and the curatorial, Bismarck describes how she views curating as intrinsically interwoven with the curatorial. The preceding notion of curating, which is both “aesthetically, [...] socially, economically, institutionally, and discursively defined,”<sup>29</sup> is embedded in the larger frame of the newer concept: the curatorial. To Bismarck, the main motivation behind curating is the “need to become public.”<sup>30</sup> Namely the need to create a public platform for new, uncharted relations between “artworks, artefacts, information, people, sites, contexts, resources.”<sup>31</sup> The curatorial, on the other hand, is the “dynamic field” – or as described by O’Neill: “a continuous space of negotiation”<sup>32</sup> – in which curating takes place. Hence, curating is conditioned by the curatorial.

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<sup>25</sup> Nora STERNFELD, *Negotiating with Reality: Artistic and Curatorial Research* (2018), in: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaMs36HXun0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaMs36HXun0) (3 March 2020).

<sup>26</sup> SZAKÁCS, *Curatorial Dictionary*.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Paul O’NEILL, *The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox*, in: Jens HOFFMANN (ed.), *The Exhibitionist* no. 6, Berlin/Turin 2012, p. 57.

<sup>29</sup> BISMARCK, *Curating/Curatorial*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> O’NEILL, *The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox*, p. 56.

O'Neill refers to the exhibition as a component of a constellation, which makes up the aforementioned "dynamic field." Therefore, O'Neill once again suggests, that the exhibition is only one of many possible options of display. The term constellation, drawn from the Frankfurter Schule, does "not [create] a complete picture, but rather a combination that allows one to draw a picture, and make proposals based upon this picture."<sup>33</sup> In "The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox" O'Neill explains how curatorial processes can overlap and combine a myriad of possible aesthetic and discursive forms. The constellations can both include the hermetic form of the exhibition and at the same time question and point out its structural errors through intersecting with other processes, placing together "incommensurable social objects, ideas and subject relations."<sup>34</sup> "[In the Adornian sense] the constellation [...] is an ever-shifting and dynamic cluster of changing elements that are always resisting reduction to a single common denominator. By preserving irreconcilable differences, such praxis retains a tension between the universal and the particular, between essentialism and nominalism."<sup>35</sup> According to Bismarck and O'Neill, the curatorial does not negate curating or the exhibition (which is commonly seen as the most principal form of curating) but allows curating to seep into a larger system.

Despite agreeing on many things, Rogoff instead attempts to make clear distinctions between curating and the curatorial in her dialogue with Bismarck. She does this through elaborating on an operative differentiation. In questioning the two concepts – platforms of knowledge production and what they can be – comprise Rogoff's point of departure.

Rogoff explains curating in terms of a professional practice and its accompanying toolbox. Curating is focused on an outcome (such as an exhibition) and operates within the realm of the representational. The curatorial, on the other hand, delineates a more process-oriented approach. It isn't finished as soon as something is presented in a tangible form for others to view. The outcome can, in a slightly abstract sense, be understood more as an epistemic structure than a finished display; a form of critical thinking. Rogoff speaks about multiple knowledges meeting and interacting with each other for a moment to produce an "event of knowledge"<sup>36</sup> and continuously highlights the importance of togetherness and involving the public. Understanding cannot come from the mere provision of information – it is the relations of objects, artworks, people, places etc. – and the processes of negotiation that happen between them that produce knowledge. Rather than describing the curatorial as a larger entity that

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<sup>33</sup> Simon SHEIKH, From Para to Post: The Rise and Fall of Curatorial Reason (2017), in: [www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/von-para-zu-post](http://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/von-para-zu-post) (3 March 2020).

<sup>34</sup> O'NEILL, The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox, p. 57.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> BISMARCK, Curating/Curatorial, p. 23.



curating is part of, to Rogoff, the curatorial posits a different approach. Albeit one, that is still inherently interlocked with curating.

To Rogoff the two notions work in different ways and can point towards each other's potentials as well as boundaries. In distinguishing between the two, Rogoff aspires "to a situation in which a discussion on the curatorial would chase around after curating and make it uncomfortable"<sup>37</sup> encouraging it to be more self-reflective and aware of operating under a set of both explicit and implicit conditions. She uses the concept of intervention in distinguishing between the two. The curatorial intervenes into curating – and sometimes the other way around. Rogoff suggests an interdependency and explains that the relation between curating and the curatorial "stops knowledge from travelling as information and makes it begin to travel as a series of proposals or a series of provocations."<sup>38</sup> One reacts to the other and therefore both are intertwined with one another.

### 2.2.1. Caught Between Two Modes of Production

The individual definitions of Rogoff and Bismarck both suggest an inherent and necessary interplay between curating and the curatorial. The possibly inseparable relationship between the two terms points to a general struggle within the curatorial field, caught between two modes of production:

Two modes that always shift between being complementary and conflictual: the idea of research in an academic sense, and the idea of practice in a professional sense. On the one hand, then, the curatorial is examined and executed as an academic form, and on the other, curating is seen as a practice within galleries, museums, biennales and other forms of exhibition-making. And more often than not, these streams are seen as separate, particularly in terms of research methods and aims: on the one hand, there is an apparent meta-level of curating, sometimes called the curatorial, with its aspects of theorizing, historicizing and politicizing the practice, and on the other the hands-on, realpolitik of exhibition-making, and its concerns with installation, funding and publicness.<sup>39</sup>

In her ruminations, Rogoff highlights the productive potential of this divergence which she exemplifies as "the gap." The gap could constitute something that was forgotten or cannot be implemented within the constraints of production and/or the space one is working with. Rogoff describes the tension between one's aims and aspirations when making an exhibition and the actual impact it has on the world, as one core relevance of the curatorial process. The

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<sup>37</sup> ROGOFF, *Curating/Curatorial*, p. 26.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31

<sup>39</sup> SHEIKH, *From Para to Post*.

“impossibility of curating.”<sup>40</sup> In this very gap, that opens up between the urgency one wants to draw public attention to and to what is possible within the protocol of exhibited culture, the curatorial takes place. Evidently, the “realpolitik of exhibition-making” also entails all that is lost, and at the same time gained, along the path between the transmission and reception of the project by a viewing public. In making the gap visible, the role of the audience is critical. “This is where I hold such a belief in the audience, as people recognize the gap and go to work with it – sometimes in a conscious way, sometimes in an unconscious way, but the gap is enormously active.”<sup>41</sup> Consequently, in Rogoff’s curatorial work, there is always a central element of creating platforms that allow an audience to take part in the project for the purpose of a collective and more open process of knowledge production (fig. 4).

### 2.2.2. Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice

The central notion of collective knowledge production – for example exposing the gap, by talking about it with the viewing audience – was also adopted institutionally by museums and other exhibition spaces through discursive concepts such as temporary schools or academies. From the 1990s onwards, curatorial institutions consequently provided new formats of engagement and education, and were fitted with archives, libraries, research centres and cinemas. Albeit often still perceived as an “accompanying programme” by the public today, this curatorial turn instigated that discursive events were given parity with the installation of exhibitions. The lecture series, the reader, the seminar, all constitute “arenas that have taken the place of the exhibition.”<sup>42</sup>

What was historically once connected, was now starting to remerge. In the introduction to “Libraries and Museums,” the architect Paulgerd Jesberg delineates the spatial and cognitive unit that art and books had formed for centuries, until new institutions had to be established for each, due to the continuous growth of collections during the 1800s.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, the conceptualisation of discursive spaces was not only connected to bringing theory and practice closer together by, for example, enabling a public reflection of the work process as well as feedback from the audience. These new formats also constituted a reaction to representational, mono-directional forms of exhibition-making. However, despite these developments going hand in hand with more open and democratic gestures towards the audience, critique was also voiced towards the expansion of the notion of curating regarding

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<sup>40</sup> “Derrida and his spectral logic of the pledge, the promise, might have seen the ‘impossibility of curating’ – its unfulfilled potential lurking at its edges – as its very significance.” See ROGOFF, *Curating/Curatorial*, p. 24.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>42</sup> Vanessa Joan MÜLLER, *Relays*, in: Jens HOFFMANN (ed.), *The Exhibitionist* no. 4, Berlin/Turin 2011, p. 66.

<sup>43</sup> Paulgerd JESBERG, *Bibliotheken und Museen (Libraries and Museums)*, Stuttgart 1964, p. 14.

the consequences it may have on institutions that originally hold or held these duties, such as universities, arthouse cinemas or community centres. In her text “Relays,” the art historian and curator Vanessa Joan Müller urges for more collaboration and the initiation of communication processes to take place between institutions, rather than relieving existing institutions from their work as part of a movement of a seemingly ever-expanding field (fig. 5).

In addition to work that involves the conception and installation of exhibitions, curating has become synonymous with: “writing accompanying texts, programming film series, organizing lectures.”<sup>44</sup> Is the notion of the curatorial (seen as the continuous discursive contestation of curatorial practice) compatible with an ever-expanding skill set? Can both curators and institutions remain critical and focused on in-depth research, if they constantly have to keep up with publishing books, moderating lectures, collaborating with institutions and conceiving public programs while also producing exhibitions?

### 2.3. Elusive Definitions

Most discourse around what the curatorial may be took place in the early 2000s (e.g. “Smuggling—An Embodied Criticality” by Irit Rogoff, 2007) and slowly ebbed away after the second edition of “The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating,” edited by Jean-Paul Martinon, which was published in 2015.<sup>45</sup> Further iterations include the “Paracuratorial,” e.g. discussed in three separate texts in an issue 4 of *The Exhibitionist* in 2011, or the “The Post-Curatorial Turn” announced by the editors of the first 2017 issue of *Die Springerin* with the same title. It doesn’t appear necessary to arrive at a definition everyone agrees on. The various concepts mainly appear as a trigger to instigate a process of self-reflection for curators and institutions working in the field, as well as collective discussion. Whether one chooses to understand the curatorial as a philosophy, i.e. a form of critical thinking, or more in terms of a space of constellations, what one can surmise is that all definitions appear to distinguish this notion through its elusiveness, both in terms of its understanding and what its outcomes might be – regardless of whether one finds the developments of the curatorial positive or negative. The curatorial “doesn’t rush to embody itself” but persists in withstanding and questioning the established order of things.

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<sup>44</sup> MÜLLER, *Relays*, p. 66.

<sup>45</sup> Despite the beginning of the conversation surrounding “the curatorial” also falling into place with a greater emergence of publications on curating, seen as an own entity, in 2003 the Wikipedia article on curating consisted of only one sentence that read: “a person who manages the institution’s collection.”

“OPEN CALL: 2019 Research-Based Curatorial Project

The OCAT Institute is pleased to announce the official launch of the ‘2019 Research-Based Curatorial Project.’ We are now accepting research-based exhibition proposals from academic and art circles. Submissions should be received by 24:00 on 31 March 2019.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> CALL FOR CURATORS, OPEN CALL: 2019 Research-Based Curatorial Project (2019), in: [www.callforcurators.com/call/open-call-2019-research-based-curatorial-project/](http://www.callforcurators.com/call/open-call-2019-research-based-curatorial-project/) (3 March 2020).

“The Research-Based Curatorial Project is a program launched by OCAT Institute with the aim of encouraging curatorial research in conjunction with exhibition curating. Since its inauguration in 2015, OCAT Institute has organized and presented a number of research-based exhibitions, including “La Mémoire Brûle,” “Ten Years of OCAT,” “An Exhibition about Exhibitions” and “Big Tail Elephants: One Hour, No Room, Five Shows,” as well as their related academic research activities, and has been devoted to the collection, organization and preservation of archives of contemporary art and exhibitions. Dedicated to discovering and facilitating art research programs and comprehensive exhibition of the research results, this curatorial project aims to provide institutional guidance and resources for outstanding young scholars and curators in the fields of contemporary art and art history, and build a platform that promotes communications in the arena of the arts.”

### 3. What Kind of Research?

“The curatorial could be posited as a form of research, not just into exhibition-making, but a specific mode of research that may or may not take on the spatial or temporal form of an exhibition”<sup>47</sup>

The curator Simon Sheikh understands the curatorial as a field for and of research. He explains the curatorial as “something that employs the thinking involved in exhibition-making and researching”<sup>48</sup> and delineates two strands, one constituting of research into the history of curating and the other comprising the expansion of the notion of curating that views the exhibition and curatorial projects as a form of research itself. The former strand comprises research into past exhibitions, the figure of the curator and curatorial canons. The latter views the curatorial project as a method of research and its presentation, within a specific topic, particular location or local art practice, in a discourse set apart from science, journalism, politics and sociology. The curatorial comprises a discourse of its very own.

Sheikh describes the curatorial as a specific form of knowledge production and outlines its relationship to other forms of research as well as how it contributes to the relation between knowledge and power, knowing and unknowing.

Designating the exhibition as a research tool, as Sheikh explicitly suggests, transmits an idea of an unfinished process. The focus is not on the final display. Despite objects and texts possibly being in place, the curator(s) are still in a process of figuring things out – akin to the visitors – who point out gaps, question and expand the research. In that sense, the curatorial has the possibility to turn less into a gesture of power stating “this is how it is” and rather into one communicating “this is my/our process of trying to figure things out” or even “this is how things could be...”

#### 3.1. “Recherché” and “Forschung”

Understanding the curatorial both as historical and expanded, Sheikh explains further the notion of research, which to him is crucial in understanding the notion of curatorial research. In differentiating between two types of research modes, Sheikh refers to the definition of the term in two different languages. He starts with the French term “recherché” understood as the

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<sup>47</sup> Simon SHEIKH, *Towards the Exhibition as Research*, in: Paul O’NEILL, Mick WILSON (eds.), *Curating Research*, London/Amsterdam 2015, p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34.

gathering of facts in a journalistic manner, in order to “uncover” a story or, perhaps more aspirationally, the truth. This approach is juxtaposed by the German word “Forschung,” a translation of the term “research” in the scientific sense. Always requiring a hypothesis or proposition about its objects of study, “Forschung” deals with the forming of new ideas and concepts.

Sheikh distinguishes between two counteracting movements. In the French definition, research moves from objects to discourse, whereas the German meaning suggests a movement from discourse to objects. “recherché” is suggestive of a journalistic type of research in which conclusions are made according to specific findings, i.e. objects. By contrast, “Forschung” entails a scientific model of research that departs from a number of learned strategies, rules and a hypothesis that is applied to its objects of research. “Science implies a specific way of looking, through apparatuses of knowledge, as exemplified by the microscope and the laboratory.”<sup>49</sup> According to the reaction of an object of study to an experiment, the hypothesis made on the onset is either proven, disproven or changed. “So, unlike ‘recherché,’ which treats its findings as facts, ‘Forschung’ treats them as uncertainties and concepts that need to be defined and may contradict the pre-emptive thesis about them.”<sup>50</sup>

Sheikh argues that, “the specific way of looking” in scientific research implies a constant revision of its frameworks of truth, whereas journalistic methods won’t be adapted or modified if the collected material doesn’t lead anywhere or if a story turns out to be uninteresting and not newsworthy.

So, in a sense, “Forschung” is more flexible and adaptable in regards to its methodologies, however it is less adjustable regarding the place or location the research is conducted in. A journalist, for example, can carry out her/his/their investigations in the archive or in the field, whereas a scientist is often bound to a laboratory and the use of instruments.

Both aspects of research are deployed in curatorial practices. Sheikh mentions “recherché” as a pertinent, and therefore unquestioned, process of curatorial research. Especially when considering the strand of research into the history of curating. When interested in the historical context, “recherché” is vital in figuring out questions along the line of: “How did the exhibition actually look, what was included and how and what has been highlighted or downplayed in the subsequent historicisation?”<sup>51</sup> Every exhibition in some way or another deploys elements of “recherché,” but not every exhibition demonstrates a hypothesis, proposition or takes place in a laboratory-like environment.

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

However, Sheikh draws out the, to him very apparent, correlation between the focused, isolated view and experimental character of the scientific laboratory and the white cube of the museum or gallery. Both scientific research and the exhibition are bound to one location and a specialised “lab-team.” Going hand in hand with this comparison, is the critique that both the experiment and the exhibition in the white cube are not exposed to societal relations due to their isolation.

Assuming curators of an exhibition set out with a theory, like one would in “Forschung,” which during the course of their research gets disproven, Sheikh asks whether the presentation of findings in a curatorial context would then display the projects’ failure? He further questions, whether this would lead to a modification of the method of research applied and other processes involved in curatorial practice?

Although the two strands of research hold a monopoly in the production of knowledge in the public realm, Sheikh mentions a hierarchical relationship between the two. Being part of the academic discourse, “Forschung” is raised above “recherché.” Sheikh defines the curatorial, in its expanded sense, as taking place in a discourse outside of “Forschung” (science) and “recherché” (journalism) and points to its proximity to sociology – positioned in the grey area between the two – in terms of its fuzziness and complexity in defining its research culture in relation to the hierarchy of knowledge.<sup>52</sup> The curatorial thus constitutes its own form of research.

“[C]an the exhibition [itself] be a site of research and, if so, can one, then, also think of it as a type: the research exhibition? We would then have to understand the exhibition as a proposition.”<sup>53</sup> A proposition that, next to the format of the exhibition, can take on other forms of assemblage and assembly. In asking this question, Sheikh consciously chooses the term proposition, instead of theory or thesis, because a proposition offers the consideration of a certain possibility. Similar to a suggestion, a proposition cannot be proven or disproven. Akin to the aforementioned understanding of the curatorial offering different perspectives on the world and making new realities thinkable, Sheikh speaks of the curatorial as “political imaginary”<sup>54</sup> that allows for speculation through both a logical, philosophical and aesthetic proposition. Sheikh further stresses that the modes and aesthetics of display and exhibition design are an integral part of this knowledge production.

The research exhibition turns into the site, not only for displaying and mediating, but for enacting and carrying out the research.<sup>55</sup> The research doesn’t only precede its presentation,

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

but is realised throughout and because of its actualisation during the course of the curatorial project.

Sheikh concludes on the potential of the research exhibition to change both the practice of research and the production of knowledge. “[T]he exhibition as research can challenge the monolithic and populist tendencies of exhibition-making and history writing and contribute to the overall culture of research, altering what is understood as either ‘recherché’ or ‘Forschung’ and their virtual monopoly on truth production. But it can only do so by avoiding solidification and codification, remaining unwieldy, uncertain and unfinished.”<sup>56</sup>

### 3.2. Researching from Within the Conditions. Thinking and Acting Without an Overview

Every knowledge system would like to have a beginning,” but at the same time, “[w]hen one asks the question of origin, it is always too late. Too much has already happened. Indeed, only this ‘too much’ allows us to formulate a question. This accumulation is the very material of a question. In fact, the quantity – and the quality – of the accumulation constitute the dimensions of the ground, the platform from which the question can be posed. In fact, the history of the question marks the dimensions of possibility of the question.”<sup>57</sup> (fig. 6)

In April 2018, the curator and theorist Irit Rogoff held a lecture titled “Becoming Research. The Way We Work Now” in which she speaks of a “research turn” in cultural production distinguished by new forms of knowledge production and a visible paradigm shift in the production of work towards more practice driven forms of research. Her elaborations could help further understand what Sheikh means by the particular research culture of the curatorial, characterised neither entirely by “Forschung,” nor by “recherché,” but through a different approach, characterised by a malleable methodology.

Rogoff portrays a move from working with inherited and received knowledge(s) to working from within the environment and circumstances; from within the “conditions.” Working from the conditions and not on them. Our conditions are economical, geographical, “propelled by subjectivity” and constitute the driving force behind our work. Rather than positioning oneself at the end of organised trajectories in order to add to an existing body of knowledge (and rather than starting with a clearly defined research question or hypothesis) a shift to inhabiting and

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46

<sup>57</sup> Mattia PAGANELLI, *Beyond Doubt*, lecture held on 1 March 2019 at AIL, Vienna, in the framework of the exhibition “DATA LOAM: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft.” (26 February – 8 March 2019).



positioning oneself “in the middle”<sup>58</sup> of the conditions and material one is exploring is taking place.

As the artist, researcher and lecturer in art and philosophy Mattia Paganelli states in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, it is even near to impossible to start at the beginning or the end. The beginning suggests a clean slate, the end assumes a clean cut that the researcher can latch on to. Thus, a perceived shift to working from within the conditions, could also be seen as the researcher’s conscious recognition of a scenario that is, in fact, inevitable. Hence, Rogoff encourages this change as it accepts the impossibility of producing an objective distance towards one’s subject of interest as well as the difficulty of separating our situatedness in a specific environment from the way in which we work. Referring to a text by Rogoff from 2010, one could argue that an undisciplining of knowledge, which is – coined by the age of Enlightenment – linear, teleological and needs to be empirically or logically verifiable,<sup>59</sup> is taking place.

From the vantage point of an era dominated by fake news and alternative facts, where politics are “reduced to the anxious performance of individuality”<sup>60</sup> Rogoff is challenged with the question that one surely can’t turn everything into subjective opinion during the Q&A at the end of her lecture. Rogoff answers that the only thing at her disposal is “seriousness as a weapon.” Armed with earnestness implies diligent attendance and analysis of what one is working on as a counter movement to the mere absence of something (e.g. scientific proof) already qualifying for the emergence of an opposing “equally valid” opinion, or conspiracy theory for that matter (fig. 7).

It is possible that the aspect of seriousness, described by Rogoff as a heavy burden based on privilege, opens another bigger problematic issue Rogoff sees herself confronted with in her curatorial practice: “We do not know the ways in which research can become an active and enjoying viewing position.”<sup>61</sup> If research is not about making predictions and presenting conclusions, but about immersion – positioning oneself in the middle – and engagement, how can viewers navigate a state of research that is often ambiguous and fragmented or too detailed? “What does it mean to be the viewer of research?” “How can displays be constantly productive, rather than passively informative?”<sup>62</sup> and at the same time not overwhelm the viewing

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<sup>58</sup> ROGOFF, *Smuggling*.

<sup>59</sup> Irit ROGOFF, *Practicing Research: Singularising Knowledge*, in: Henk SLAGER (ed.), *maHKUzine. Journal of Artistic Research*. Summer 2010, Utrecht 2010, pp. 37–42.

<sup>60</sup> See Joshua SIMON, *The Way Things Are Organized: The Mesoscopic, The Metastable, The Curatorial*, in: Paul O’NEILL, Simon SHEIKH, Lucy STEEDS, Mick WILSON (eds.), *Curating After the Global*, Cambridge, MA 2019, p. 163.

<sup>61</sup> Irit ROGOFF, *Becoming Research. The Way We Work Now*, lecture held on 9 April 2018 at ACT Cube, Cambridge MA. <https://vimeo.com/271887079> (3 March 2020).

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*

audience, already immersed in an “oversaturated information culture, where attention itself is increasingly commodified and subject to pressure”?<sup>63</sup>

### 3.3. The Atlas Principle or “Reading Before Language”

Many press releases and detailed curatorial statements intended to help clarify things end up telling the art work and us what it is before it’s had a chance to exist as what it is for itself, or us for it. Is there a better way to look and think about art that involves slowing things down? Or speaking about art works differently? In less fixed terms; or in more fixed terms, but less of them?<sup>64</sup>

Curator Chus Martinez criticises the alleged necessity of a continuity between experience and language in her text “Toward a Theory of Artistic Research.”<sup>65</sup> Do we always have to create a new language, methodology or theory in order to describe what is happening in an exhibition that is seemingly withdrawing from something already seen or known? Or are there other ways to communicate, for example the display of art oscillating between concrete and abstract, or the gap between the curators aim with an exhibition and what is received and understood by the audience? In her practice as a curator Martinez calls for a detachment of an understanding of theory as a mediator between spectator and art work, and instead let other logics inform our thinking about art. (See chapter 4.1.)

So, in that respect, isn’t also the “detour” of presenting something in a spatial, visual and/or experiential way, rather than through an academic text, about arriving at an understanding that lies outside of theoretical reason? With all of the factors of curatorial practice at play, isn’t one of the aims of exhibition-making to also surpass what the curatorial project set out to do on the onset, seeing as the coming together of objects and people in a space can still be an integral part of the research process itself?

With these thoughts in mind, this chapter looks at Georges Didi-Huberman’s analysis of Aby Warburg’s “Mnemosyne Atlas,” by exploring the art historian’s endeavour of rewriting history by applying the atlas principle as a dynamic system of montage and generating new knowledge through associative connections and serendipitous juxtapositions. Didi-Huberman links the project that shaped many contemporary ways of producing, exhibiting and understanding

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<sup>63</sup> Bergen Assembly, About (2016), in: [www.2016.bergenassembly.no/en/about](http://www.2016.bergenassembly.no/en/about) (3 March 2020).

<sup>64</sup> Kate NEWBY, *Casualness: it’s not about what it looks like it’s about what it does.*, Dissertation University of Auckland 2014, p. 57.

<sup>65</sup> Chus MARTINEZ, *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog. Belated Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research*, in: documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungen-GmbH, *The Book of Books*, Berlin 2012, pp. 48–53.

images to Walter Benjamin's theory of reading before language, that liberated the word "reading" from its usually intended meaning: the study of textual material.

When thinking about the curatorial as a method of research and its display, Warburg's project is relevant in the sense that his externalised thought process was simultaneously its visual and public presentation.

### 3.3.1. Atlas: The Secret Relations Between Things

The art historian and philosopher Didi-Huberman begins his book "Atlas or the Anxious Gay Science" by describing the atlas as a medium.

Unlike a story or premise of an argument, an atlas has no clear beginning nor end; an observation that is correspondingly reflected in its use. One wouldn't usually read an atlas from front to back, neither from page to page, as Didi-Huberman notes; an atlas lets the reader's gaze travel from plate to plate, and from image to image on each plate. In this the author detects a dual and paradoxical use of the medium. On the one hand, an atlas is consulted with the intention of looking up a specific piece of information. On the other, one can erratically leaf through the plates, without any precise target. Browsing can be free of any use, or lead to the reader stumbling upon something inspiring and useful. Contrary to the use of a dictionary, for example, the use of an atlas leads to the combination of, what Didi-Huberman refers to as the epistemic paradigm of knowledge with an aesthetic paradigm of the visual form. After successfully having found what one was looking for, the reader corollary gets lured into the atlas' many ramifications.<sup>66</sup> The dictionary is organised in alphabetical lists, the atlas maps a topography that stretches into all directions.

Through its dual use, the atlas bursts the frames of the canonical forms of the two aforementioned paradigms. The dominant canon does not think of the epistemic together with the aesthetic. According to the classical platonic tradition, one can only achieve true knowledge if not distracted by the manipulating effects of the visual. True rational insight is only possible, by stripping away the space of the sensual, i.e. that of the image. The atlas as an epistemic device, however, merges the dimension of knowledge with the dimension of the sensual and the incompleteness inherent to every image. By following the principle of the montage, the atlas introduces a multiplicity into an alleged epistemic purity and is inherently flexible and temporal in its configuration.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Georges DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Atlas, Or the Anxious Gay Science: How to Carry the World on One's Back?*, Chicago 2018, pp. 3–4.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4–5.

### 3.3.2. Rereading the World

Didi-Huberman describes the atlas as a tool for the “inexhaustible opening of possibilities that are not yet given”<sup>68</sup> rather than the logical singling out of all possible options. From this Didi-Huberman derives that the atlas’ principle and motor lies in imagination, intrinsically embracing the diverse and manifold. Didi-Huberman is concerned with a particular understanding of the word imagination, that goes beyond a definition of subjective imaginary. “Imagination: a dangerous word if anything (as is, already, the word *image*). But it is necessary to join Goethe, Baudelaire, or Walter Benjamin in saying that the imagination, however disconcerting it is, has nothing to do with any personal or gratuitous fantasy. On the contrary, it gives us a knowledge that cuts across – by its intrinsic potential of montage consisting in discovering – in the very place where it refuses the links created by obviated resemblances, links that direct observation cannot discern[.]”<sup>69</sup>

In other words, direct observation cannot distinguish what the imagination can perceive.

Imagination helps us perceive the secret relations between things, the correspondences and analogies, which are all equally important and necessary in “reading the world” something far too essential to be entrusted to words alone. This “cutting across” could imply the necessity of an “in-between” that establishes a context of meaning, by creating a link that fills a gap. Didi-Huberman writes that imagination “has nothing to do with any personal or gratuitous fantasy,” however one could argue that the act of “cutting across” is only made possible through the coming together of personal, hence subjective and perhaps not instantly comprehensible references.

In his philosophical ruminations on “legibility” (“Lesbarkeit”), “reading before anything else” (“Lesen vor allem”) and “reading what was never written” (“Was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen”) the philosopher Walter Benjamin liberates the word reading from its usually intended meaning: the study of textual material (fig. 8).<sup>70</sup> That said, he also claims that the reading of a text requires the capacity of the imaginative mind to decipher resemblances: ““The nexus of meaning of words or sentences is the bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears’ between things.”<sup>71</sup> Didi-Huberman refers to the atlas of images as an ostensive example of Benjamin’s expanded concept of reading; a primal form of reading that happens before language; “Das Lesen vor aller Sprache.”<sup>72</sup> Didi-Huberman delineates this further with a

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 6–8.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

description of one of his key research domains: Aby Warburg's unfinished, yet significantly influential, "Mnemosyne Atlas."

The Warburgian atlas is an object thought on a bet. It is a bet that images, collected in a certain manner, would offer us the possibility – or better still, the inexhaustible resource – of rereading the world. To reread the world is to link the disparate pieces differently, to redistribute the dissemination, which is a way of orienting and interpreting it, no doubt, but also of respecting it, of going over it again or re-editing and piecing it together again without thinking we are summarizing or exhausting it.<sup>73</sup>

As part of his "iconology"<sup>74</sup> of intervals" the project "Mnemosyne Atlas" (1924–1929) conjoined memory<sup>75</sup>, imagination and montage, and shaped contemporary ways of producing, exhibiting and understanding images.<sup>76</sup> The assemblages of photographic reproductions Warburg had famously clipped onto large plates, draped in black cloth, didn't serve the purpose of mnemonic devices, nor did they constitute visual summaries of the art historian's thinking. To him, the plates comprised an apparatus that triggered a new reading of history, by "reading what was never written." By turning the image from an object being interpreted into the interpreting object itself, Warburg's use of images in the atlas is not to be understood as a retrospective illustration, but as a way for a thought to find suitable (visual) form.<sup>77</sup> By not starting with a clearly formulated argument but by nonsequentially positioning images onto a plate (initially primarily following associative trails) one could argue that the atlas principle is also a way of "starting in the middle."

By laying out a transdisciplinary assembly of ca. 1,000 images<sup>78</sup>, leading from art historical depictions to mass produced ephemera, onto the different plates, Warburg sought to construct a new approach towards "writing" and reading history. Positioning the human being and her/his/their thoughts, gestures and passions at the core of his project, he set out to analyse the so called "Pathos Formulas," and study their transmission and transformation from classical Antiquity until today. The formulas entail bodily gestures such as simply a grasp to the head, or more abstract examples that represent love, war, melancholia, hysteria, victory and surrender. Always showing or demonstrating something, the history of human gestures constitutes – in further consequence – a type of origin of the history of our images.

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>74</sup> The semiological analysis of images.

<sup>75</sup> The goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, was impregnated by Zeus and gave life to the nine muses. In Greek mythology, the muses, each of them governing a discipline within the arts, are said to stimulate and stir the imagination of artists and poets. Hence, one could suggest that the origin of inspiration and creativity lies in memory.

<sup>76</sup> DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Atlas*, p. 8.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 224.

<sup>78</sup> Didi-Huberman repeatedly refers to this being a very small number, considering Warburg's profession as an art historian and his expansive photographic collection he had compiled together with the art historian Fritz Saxl.

The montages brought volatility into thinking in those areas of history that were no longer questioned, or those lacking the necessary vocabulary in order to be satisfyingly described through words. Warburg aimed to develop a matrix that would reconfigure history off the beaten paths of a collective historical memory, by refraining from a definite final order or chronology of the images, neither grouping them according to visual, canonical parameters thus refraining them as a revolt against “hierarchical compartmentalisation.”<sup>79</sup> After a plate was documented photographically for the atlas, it was dismantled and destroyed, in order to start another anew.

Didi-Huberman describes the Atlas as rampant plates teeming with images detracting from any form of classification. Warburg’s psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger had once implied that, despite its Sisyphean nature, the “Mnemosyne Atlas” had saved the art historian from his own madness; his flight of ideas. He had often feared to lose himself in the multiplicities of his thoughts, which, nevertheless, were precisely what was feeding the engine behind his method,<sup>80</sup> leaving only a small gap between knowledge and madness. Warburg’s “exhibition of multiplicities”<sup>81</sup> is neither defined by complete chaos, nor by an overcautious planned out layout. The art historian understood that thinking is not a matter of found forms, but of their continual transformation. Enabling an unceasing collision of ideas and manifold serendipitous encounters between images, the atlas lead to new dialectic insight of Western culture, which Didi-Huberman describes as a continuous performance between reason and unreason. Without any prospect of synthesis, Warburg delineates the two poles at the ends of this tension as a tragedy between “astra,” the infinity of the sky, and “monstra,” the monsters inside our own bodies. Both of which constitute areas of the unknown.<sup>82</sup> Driven by the power of imagination, it appears that it was Warburg’s aim to think these most distant, incongruous orders of reality together.

The coming together of these two opposing spheres is exemplified in the first plate of Mnemosyne (fig. 9). The bottom half shows a collection of images that are easily identified as astronomical or astrological figures. The upper half aligns four variants of clay or bronze sheep livers (fig. 10). These (either old Babylonian or Etruscan) organic depictions function as dialectical images, which, within one object, create a dialogue between the visceral and the celestial sphere.

Carved into the surfaces of the moulded sheep livers – that Warburg had pinned onto the first plate of his atlas – are lines forming a grid. Their purpose was the decomposition of the

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<sup>79</sup> Benjamin BUCHLOH, Gerhard Richter’s Atlas. The Anomic Archive (1996), in: Charles MEREWETHER (ed.), *The Archive*, London 2006, p. 88.

<sup>80</sup> DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Atlas*, p. 224.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

“reading” of a liver. Interpreting the shapes and forms of the liver of a sacrificed animal used to be part of ritual divinations. The characteristics of each zone of the organ meant a different prophecy. Didi-Huberman again deduces from this an example of something that can be read before it has been written. Being highly accurate sculptural depictions, the livers connect the natural and organic, with the synthetic and constructed. Aby Warburg wasn’t only aware of the method of montage as a specific combination of images leading to new knowledge; he saw every image as a montage in itself.

### 3.3.3. “Plötzlich diese Übersicht”<sup>83</sup> (fig. 11)

Through the assembly of images, the Atlas first and foremost generates a synoptic “surveying gaze” (“Übersicht”). It goes beyond canonical models of explanation and narrative, by transgressing “the boundaries of thought and of seeing, of discourse and of image, of the intelligible and of the sensible.”<sup>84</sup> Ensuing from the philosophical debates of the 1920s regarding concepts of truth and knowledge, Warburg’s project was embedded in a crisis of scientific explicability and the legibility of facts. He was faced with the following question in his endeavour: How do you present an argument that you cannot explain through words and sentences, but through images? And further: How can one go beyond tried iconographic depictions e.g. juxtaposing the antique “source” on the one hand with the “copy” of the Renaissance on the other?<sup>85</sup>

The Mnemosyne plates functioned both as conceptual apparatus and exhibition. Warburg’s visualised thought processes and research was not separate from their public presentation. Yet, in contrast to many interpretations of the Atlas as an invention of an art history without words, Didi-Huberman states the impossibility of deciphering the plates outside of the Warburgian “Denkraum” (thinking space) constituted by the entirety of his writings, his library and the photographic collection. Furthermore – next to explanatory manuscripts – Warburg had always planned to accompany the plates with two extensive volumes. Despite the whole project being unfinished, it is distinctive to the entire method that the art historian appeared to struggle most at formulating his thinking behind the plates through written linear arguments in the form of a bound book. Albeit immensely difficult, expressing his thoughts through images in visual installations, that give space to many causes for one effect (overdeterminations) and other multiplicities, seemed the easier challenge. He set out presenting his arguments through images, because he initially was not able to through words and sentences. Warburg himself

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<sup>83</sup> The subtitle (Suddenly This Overview) references a work with the same name by the Swiss artists David Fischli und Peter Weiss.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 222.

used the metaphor of an eel soup<sup>86</sup> in describing his writing style, while Didi-Huberman alluded to the painful contortions of Laokoon fighting off the snakes meandering between his limbs (fig. 12).<sup>87</sup>

Without seeking synthesis or totality, Warburg was interested in the agency of the assembled images as well as their relationship to text; how they can both support and at the same time modify and undermine each other.<sup>88</sup>

The allure of Warburg's approach – that influenced manifold academic disciplines, as well as artistic practices in both form and content – was that through the dynamic display, and opening up “multiple topographies,”<sup>89</sup> he cunningly united the inexhaustible, with the unfathomable; something infinite with something that we might never understand. It is the allure and both danger of his project. A danger that can lead to art works or curatorial approaches using the “Mnemosyne Atlas” as a conceptual “excuse” for the display of an aggregation of content that is not decipherable from the inconceivability of overwhelming masses of information on the internet or in an analogue archive.

### 3.4. Research-Based Art.

#### Or the Difference Between Search and Research

“The relationship between artist and curator has undergone a fundamental change [...] art today is defined by an identity between creation and selection. At least since Duchamp, it has been the case that selecting an artwork is the same as creating an artwork.”<sup>90</sup>

In his essay on “Multiple Authorship” Boris Groys describes how the occupations of artists and curators can no longer clearly be distinguished. With the advent of the readymade, the former division between the artist, concerned with creation, and the curator, concerned with selection, successively became increasingly blurred. This change, however, is of course married to a wider set of developments. Along with viewing the curatorial notion of selection as a productive and creational artistic process, functions such as authorship – previously

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 370.

<sup>90</sup> Boris GROYS, Multiple Authorship, in: Barbara VANDERLINDEN, Elena FILIPOVIC (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, Cambridge, MA 2005, p. 93.



associated with the artist – were usurped by the figure of the independent, autonomous curator through individuals such as Harald Szeemann.<sup>91</sup>

With this entanglement of two formerly separated professions it is needless to say that the notion of curatorial research is seemingly closely connected to the contested discipline of artistic research or research-based art, particularly regarding its visual and aesthetic manifestation, as well as a general approach spanning across a variety of disciplines. In a talk held on 7 January 2019 in the Auditorium of the University of Applied Arts, the art historian Claire Bishop, especially known for her writings on relational aesthetics and participation,<sup>92</sup> spoke about a development (to her worrying) of/within research-based art. The talk focused on the genealogy and history of this discipline and its growing importance in contemporary art practices. Bishop began by showing slides of glass vitrines under which a plethora of documents, photographs, book spreads and other ephemera are laid out. She followed the portrayal of this display – dominating current biennales, museums and other curatorial spaces – with a description of her personal unease as a visitor continuously being confronted with masses of aggregated research – and the “wild panic” it evokes due to the feeling of “having to take it all in.”<sup>93</sup>

Tracing the lineages of artistic research via the history of art, Bishop started off with the introduction of extended captions in art works, for example beneath the images of Lewis Hine’s photographic essays produced in the beginning of the twentieth century. Bishop continued with the example of the film essay, reaching from the post-war collaborations between Chris Marker and Alain Resnais to Harun Faroki, Black Audio Film Collective, and more recently Hito Steyerl, concluding with the emergence of a conceptual art practice in the 1970s. The genealogy Bishop lines out is that of a linear presentation of research – whether it is a row of images on the wall or a sequence of images in a film – a tendency that was starkly criticised in the 1980s along with post-structuralist, feminist and post-colonial thought. Criticism against linear ways of writing and reading history, single authorship and didacticism was addressed during this period, and had a strong impact on the emergence of artistic research practices in the 1990s dealing with various constellations and forms of display for gathered research. New forms of the representation of research were thus further tested. Research appeared in spatial installations or as hyperlinks on CD-Roms (fig. 13). Knowledge was viewed as networked,

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<sup>91</sup> Oliver MARCHART, *The Curatorial Subject. The Figure of the Curator Between Individuality and Collectivity*, Texte zur Kunst No. 86, Berlin 2012, p. 28.

<sup>92</sup> See Claire BISHOP, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* (2004), in: Simon LEUNG, Zoya KOCUR (eds.) *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, Chichester 2012, p. 166–194, or Claire BISHOP (ed.), *Participation*, London 2006.

<sup>93</sup> Claire BISHOP, *Information Overload: Research Based Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, lecture held on 7 January 2019 at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna.

collaborative and in process. Research was regarded as a public resource that left the “viewer to decide what conclusions to draw.”<sup>94</sup> The material presented functioned more as a catalyst for discussion, than the display of a declarative message. Afraid of sounding conservative, Bishop nevertheless argued that since the 1990s the development of artistic research has gone further and further into this direction, making artists more and more hesitant to draw their own conclusions and more willing to confront their audience with amassed material that has undergone little to no synthesis and transformation. According to Bishop, this development has the following consequence: The withdrawal of the author – which seemed important and necessary in the 1980s and 90s – has resulted in the abandonment of the viewer. The viewer already enters the exhibition space with a subliminal frustration caused by day to day information overload, primarily fed by the exposure of content on our computers and phones. Research-based art displaying a reluctance to synthesise and organise the researched information, leaving the viewer “to do the work of drawing the strands together” themselves, doesn’t challenge, but “rather bolsters present-day economies of attention.”<sup>95</sup> The technological development of the internet and search engines further promoting the sampling of information, rather than an in-depth engagement with it, has changed how content is both received and produced. Sampled, skimmed, accelerated, and fragmented.

One of Bishop’s main arguments involves the difference between search and research. Whereas research is about asking new questions and finding new meanings, a Google-search merely looks for existing answers. A difference that to a large degree is forgotten in many artistic research projects. “Bishop contends that research-based art presents both ‘a resistance to and an internalisation of internet logic’, and ‘despite making an explicit critique of digital presentism and algorithmic aggregation [...] this [type of] work is nevertheless inseparable from the internet search engine as an extension of our consciousness.’”<sup>96</sup>

Bishop argues that this model corresponds to present-day modes of production (and reception), as assemblages of re-contextualised material, leading to work in which “images and information are arranged without any hierarchy or narrative.”<sup>97</sup> This leaves the viewer with a situation comparable to that of online searching and browsing. She finds an example of this in Wolfgang Tillmans’ “truth study center” (2005–ongoing). Comprising a series of tables with digital printouts, newspaper clippings, photographs, alongside every-day materials (such as leaflets and bus tickets). These are “laid out in an apparently aleatoric composition, the

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Christoph CHWATAL, Notes on Claire Bishop’s lecture: “Information Overload: Research Based Art and the Politics of Spectatorship” (22 January 2019), in: [www.kunsthallewien.at/#/blog/2019/01/notes-claire-bishops-lecture](http://www.kunsthallewien.at/#/blog/2019/01/notes-claire-bishops-lecture) (4 March 2020).

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

arrangement does not seem to have an underlying logic.”<sup>98</sup> The work corresponds to the logic of the internet, requiring quick skimming, elliptic reading, and browsing, while inviting viewers to make sense of the material themselves. Being both drawn into, and overwhelmed by the sheer quantity and eclectic mix of information presented in the horizontal wooden tables with glass supports, Bishop criticises this type of work as merely reproducing the digital world and the daily response of users to it.

Despite the fact that striving for synthesis and transformation of researched material is relevant in both an artistic and a curatorial context, inevitably, Bishop’s criticism of artistic research triggers one to question the difference between an artwork that consists of an aggregation of material and a curatorial project that works with the presentation of research material. What appears most frustrating – being unable to follow a statement put forth by an artwork or an exhibition?

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<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

## 4. Case Studies

### 4.1. The Display of Uncertainty and the Unruliness of Notes.

#### dOCUMENTA (13) (2009–2012)

“[...] those spontaneous phrases that cannot be repeated, too vague for anything but one’s notebook.”<sup>99</sup>

The following chapter analyses aspects of dOCUMENTA (13) as a successful example of communicating something, despite still having questions; an example of the displayed tension between quality and vagueness. After a short introduction into the exhibition as a whole, particular focus is placed on the pocket-sized publication series “100 Notes – 100 Thoughts,” which conceptualises the approach and mental space of the exhibition, as well as constituting an integral part of it.

#### 4.1.1. A Short Introduction into the Sites and Conditions of dOCUMENTA (13)

By announcing that the documenta taking place in 2012 will not have a concept<sup>100</sup> the designated curator<sup>101</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and her team chose to actively work with their collective state of not knowing and the preliminary. “dOCUMENTA (13) is dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory.”<sup>102</sup>

In parallel with a strong focus on artistic research by the works presented, the large-scale exhibition also drew close attention to its curatorial research process. Along with the two books published as part of the exhibition “The Book of Books” and “The Guidebook,” the third publication “The Logbook” provides further and specific insight into the research and formation process of the exhibition between 2009 and 2012 by means of pictures, correspondences and interviews (fig. 14).

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<sup>99</sup> Andre WOGENSCKY, Preface, in: Fondation Le Corbusier (ed.), *Le Corbusier Sketchbooks*, vol. I, 1914–1948, Cambridge, MA 1981), n.p.

<sup>100</sup> Milena BERMAN, dOCUMENTA (13) “Non-Concept” (30 August 2012), in: [www.dailyserving.com/2012/08/documenta-13-non-concept](http://www.dailyserving.com/2012/08/documenta-13-non-concept) (4 March 2020).

<sup>101</sup> To be precise, in this year’s documenta curators were referred to as “agents” and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev “artistic director.”

<sup>102</sup> Carolyn CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV, *Front Matter*, in: *documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, The Book of Books*, Berlin 2012, p. 4.

Highlighting the significance of a physical space and at the same time aiming for dislocation, dOCUMENTA (13) was “physically and conceptually sited”<sup>103</sup> in four locations: Kassel, Kabul/Bamiyan in Afghanistan, Alexandria/Cairo in Egypt, and Banff in Canada. The “apparent simultaneity of places and times”<sup>104</sup> was not only implemented through a physical displacement, but seeped into the entire conceptual approach of the curatorial endeavour – suggesting that the present is made up of many places and times happening simultaneously. Next to the main, venerable exhibition site in Kassel, lasting the full 100 days, the other three sites came into play one after the other; first the exhibition in Kabul, lasting one month; then Egypt, lasting one week; and Canada, fourteen days. The events staged in Egypt and Canada mostly excluded the public, consisting of seminars which were restricted to invitation only.<sup>105</sup> For the four sites, four conditions were defined, all of which describe positions of acting in the present and ways of handling time. Kassel was allocated “On stage. I am playing a role, I am a subject in the act of re-performing,” Kabul “Under siege. I am encircled by the other, besieged by others,” Alexandria “In a state of hope, or optimism. I dream, I am the dreaming subject of anticipation” and Banff “On retreat. I am withdrawn, I choose to leave the others, I sleep.”<sup>106</sup> Although each location was given one condition, the positions obtained their meaning through their intercommunication.<sup>107</sup> That is to say, the locations might have stood for one condition in particular, but the works on display at a specific site could pertain to any of the four positions. Within the same event of the exhibition, decidedly pre- and exceeding the 100 days through its publicised formats, events and workshops taking place outside the city of Kassel, elements of synthesis were shown besides a more fragmented process. A multi-layeredness oscillating between private and public, allowing for in-depth examinations, through books and seminars, and shared, spatial exhibition experiences, equally informing and existing next to each other. The exhibition combined two strong elements at play that one could argue constitutes curatorial research: individual and collective knowledge production.

#### 4.1.2. “100 Notes – 100 Thoughts”

The “Book of Books” is a 768-page heavy exhibition catalogue that gives insight into the leitmotifs guiding dOCUMENTA (13), by assembling essays, artists’ projects and the publication series “100 Notes – 100 Thoughts.” In, “How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog. Belated

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<sup>103</sup> dOCUMENTA (13) Press Release, Introduction to dOCUMENTA (13), in: [https://d13.documenta.de/uploads/tx\\_presssection/3\\_Introduction.pdf](https://d13.documenta.de/uploads/tx_presssection/3_Introduction.pdf) (4 March 2020).

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> documenta, Retrospective. dOCUMENTA (13). 9 June–16 September 2012, in: [www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta\\_13#](http://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_13#) (4 March 2020).

<sup>106</sup> dOCUMENTA (13) Press Release, Introduction to dOCUMENTA (13).

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*

Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research” the curator Martinez, who was then in charge of the curatorial department of dOCUMENTA (13), approaches artistic research through concepts of intuition and the note, both defined by their elusiveness and, to some extent, an uncertainty of knowledge.

Martinez writes about how scepticism has always been central in the validation and examination of knowledge, and thus develops the concept of the “maybe” as a positive withdrawal from certainty, which holds the potential to disrupt inherited and sedimented knowledge as well as orders from within<sup>108</sup>. The word research in artistic research “does not name the embodiment of any particular form of academic training, but the gesture of placing the ‘maybe’ at the core of the real. And this causes something very simple to occur: knowledge vacillates.”<sup>109</sup>

Following this approach into praxis, the educational program was titled “The Maybe Education and Public Program” its most recited example being the “d-tours” led by citizens of Kassel from various backgrounds, who guided visitors through the different locations while passing on their highly personal knowledge of the city and the exhibition.<sup>110</sup>

In her essay in “The Book of Books” Martinez delineates her theory on artistic research by describing Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and her team’s curatorial approach for dOCUMENTA (13) as a whole, as well as one specific element of it: the publication series “100 Notes – 100 Thoughts.”

“100 Notes – 100 Thoughts” is a publication series of one hundred notebooks, in which artists, anthropologists, philosophers, poets and scientists contributed facsimiles of existing notebooks, commissioned texts, images and excerpts of artists’ books. The pastel coloured booklets – printed in one of three different formats, between sixteen to forty-eight pages long – were successively published before the opening of the documenta as a prelude to the exhibition. On some level, this gesture let the public partake in the curatorial research process in the months and years preceding the actual opening of dOCUMENTA (13), similar to the very nature of the note “presenting the mind in a prologue state.”<sup>111</sup> Notes are distinguished by floating in a limbo of the preliminary, maintaining a partial unknowingness in their language and meandering outside of mediation. The state of the preliminary offers time and space to find

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<sup>108</sup> Chus MARTINEZ, *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog*, *Belated Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research*, in: *documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungen-GmbH, The Book of Books*, Berlin 2012, pp. 46–57.

<sup>109</sup> MARTINEZ, *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog*, pp. 46–47

<sup>110</sup> *documenta*, *Retrospective*. dOCUMENTA (13). 9 June – 16 September 2012.

<sup>111</sup> OCA. Office for Contemporary Art Norway, dOCUMENTA (13) notebook no. 067: “Hannah Ryggen” (May 2012), in: [www.oca.no/press/releases/2012/05](http://www.oca.no/press/releases/2012/05) (4 March 2020).

a voice and, or perhaps more importantly, a tone one wants to speak in.<sup>112</sup> “Notes are ‘maybe’ texts – not fragments, not in a relation of weakness to any whole, just not yet at the service of illustrating any argument or philosophical conclusion known in advance.”<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, even if just scribbled on a paper napkin, they seem important enough to be recorded in some form or another. In their unfinished, yet documented form, lies a certain power of unruliness and post-disciplinarity.<sup>114</sup>

Martinez bridges her description of the note as a concept, in its opaque and uncertain nature, with her understanding of artistic and curatorial research. The medium of the notebook, a speculative manifestation of a preliminary moment, conveys central aspects of the curatorial non-concept of dOCUMENTA (13). Rather than statements or hypotheses, the booklets contain thoughts and propositions, and – as a continuity of fragments – re-trace how thinking emerges and generate space for new possible realities. The series of booklets is as much part of the exhibition and curatorial research, as all other artistic and non-artistic elements operating in dOCUMENTA (13). The curator and writer Anna-Sophie Springer refers to the series as a “space within dOCUMENTA (13)”<sup>115</sup> that constitutes an essential part of the expansive exhibition which also consisted of performances, installations, screenings, public art, interventions and more traditional presentations in gallery contexts. The notebooks were a strategy to open the exhibition to further interpretations and readings.<sup>116</sup>

The first page of each notebook shows a snippet of a black and white photograph. All notebooks are part of a different puzzle. For example, when opening a number of certain notebooks and laying them out next to each other in a specific order, an image of the Fridericianum in Kassel appears (fig. 15). The visual element could be seen as a metaphor for the entire documenta. In the end, just like the images and texts in the notebooks, the exhibition should yield an image that combines “forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory.”<sup>117</sup>

This historical site of documenta, the Fridericianum, is where the “Reader’s Circle” took place.<sup>118</sup> Every evening for the consecutive 100 days of dOCUMENTA (13) a performative reading or conceptual interpretation of one of the notebooks was staged. In her essay on “Books as Exhibitions” Anna-Sophie Springer describes the “Reader’s Circle” as further intensifying,

<sup>112</sup> MARTINEZ, *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog*, p. 49.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Anna-Sophie SPRINGER, *Volumen: Bände – Räume. Das Buch als Ausstellung (Volumes: The Book as Exhibition)* (2012), in: <https://rheinsprung11.unibas.ch/ausgabe-05/kritik/volumen-baende-raeume-das-buch-als-ausstellung> (4 March 2020).

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Carolyn CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV, *Front Matter*, in: *documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, The Book of Books*, Berlin 2012, p. 4.

<sup>118</sup> All keynote lectures, on the other hand, were held in the Ständehaus.

or doubling, the tension between the private and public. In the first iteration, the personal notebooks of various thinkers move to the public domain in the form of published booklets, followed by the intimate act of reading and finally moving again from the private realm to the public stage in the Fridericianum. For the duration of the exhibition the project transformed from a series of objects to a temporal event, further intertwining the editorial with the curatorial and artistic.<sup>119</sup>

DOCUMENTA (13)'s non-concept is elaborated on in Martinez' text. The exhibition was not based on a hypothesis or clear statement but on intuition. Referring to the nineteenth century philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson and his definition of two types of knowledge: intuition (first-hand knowledge) and tuition (second-hand knowledge), Martinez does not understand intuition as a superficial emotion but as the coming together of the both intellectual and sensual reception of art works, texts, ideas and theories, that have been absorbed in the past – forming a specific relation in a certain moment of time. Intuition has a history, but will always remain partial. In this sense, intuition and Didi-Huberman's understanding of imagination dovetail, particularly due to the concern of both Martinez and Didi-Huberman that the terms will be misread.

Martinez differentiates between methodology and tactic. Whereas methodology follows intuition, tactic is based on hypothesis. She urges the reader to imagine a force or movement permeating an entire curatorial project. It is often only right at the end, through the assembly of multiple logics, artistic or discursive materials and different languages, that a certain methodology that has been at work in a curatorial project can be perceived.<sup>120</sup>

“This is completely different from a tactic; if the inquiry is a genuine one, a space is produced in which all the elements can name themselves, rather than being called up in advance, by sitting at a table and drawing up a plan.”<sup>121</sup>

Martinez does not stop her argument in favour of intuition by rendering homage to the process and attributing undisputed value to the unpredictable. Her point is not that curators should just subdue themselves to the process and be surprised by the result at the end, but rather point out the value in the agency of intuition.

An exhibition departing from a hypothesis asks for evidence. The selection process of what is shown is determined by the hypothesis. The curator is making a statement through the presentation of selected objects that substantiate her/his/their hypothesis. Intuition, on the other

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<sup>119</sup> Anna-Sophie SPRINGER, *Volumen: Bände – Räume*.

<sup>120</sup> MARTINEZ, *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog*, p. 49.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, p. 49.



hand, does not ask for any form of evidence but wishes to understand something. Martinez writes that an intuitive curatorial approach might actually not even allow for any form of proof. It is always partial and therefore not striving to be universal or neutral in any form. It is the opposite of norm, rule and conclusion. Consequentially this encourages a deeper reading and understanding of the passionate drive behind a curatorial project and how intuition can be made comprehensible to an audience.

Not to be confused with topics, Martinez defines the guiding themes of dOCUMENTA (13) – “Collapse and Recovery” – as a function of intuition. In using intuition analogous to the leitmotifs, Martinez’ understanding of the concept of intuition must de facto supersede the realm of the personal and merely subjective. This is highlighted in her statement: “An intuition does not belong to the realm of the merely subjective; it has a function that surpasses the personal, even if it is true that one of its qualities is partiality.”<sup>122</sup> However, this sentence alone does not extrapolate in what way intuition can be understood as a collective ambition or approach. Perhaps one answer lies in Martinez’ definition based on Emerson, that intuition has a history. Regardless of various interpretations and readings, history and its references are something we share with others, be it through experience(s), the books we have read, the artworks we have seen, the exhibitions we have visited.

The whole project can be seen as a language that did not exist previous to the exhibition and is capable at the same time of emerging and elucidating many aspects and questions – the memory of matter, the relationship between historical and ahistorical time, the number of wisdoms that inform what we call knowledge, the many intelligences that constitute life and their intra-activity, the role of the disciplines that inhabit art, like art history or philosophy, the million forms of fiction and meaning emerging from it. The exhibition can produce a cognitive situation where to grasp these questions, instead of translating them using ordinary criteria in order to produce an ‘opinion’ on the matter, can make all these epistemic relationships turn, can set them in motion again. This is a journey in scepticism, or an understanding of criticality in the field of art.<sup>123</sup>

Martinez’ elaboration towards an understanding of artistic and curatorial research emphasises that drawing conclusions or arriving at a result with regard to – for example – the leitmotifs of dOCUMENTA (13) is not the main aim. The objective appears to be to provoke knowledge that “vacillates” through an exchange between the many different “intelligences.” Martinez aims to evoke a disruption of the canon and the notion of a “we,” which often seeks to arrive at a consensus. Rather than arriving at a particular opinion, she instead promotes awareness and an embrace of unusual and/or conflicting forms of knowledge.

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<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

By agreeing that art and its institutions should continuously strive to be sceptical about their own structures and ideas begs one to question whether this (necessarily) entails the exclusion of the formulation of an opinion? Perhaps Martinez is only concerned with avoiding the collective formulation of an opinion. As with any exhibition or project in which a group of people is involved in the curatorial process, the presentation of the multiplicity of opinions and angles to the leitmotifs is a more honest portrayal of the overall process. Similar to the “Curatorial Dictionary” (in which the terms in the dictionary were selected individually and not collaboratively therefore a reflection on the discordances within the working group), Martinez points out that multiplicity is not a theme of dOCUMENTA (13), but describes it as its building stock. The multiplication of styles, attitudes, logics, places and languages creates a dialogical space for art and its potential to explore knowledge entities.<sup>124</sup>

At the same time, withdrawing from clear conclusions serves as a possibility to avoid objects and artworks merely functioning as illustrations behind theories. “Man kann mit einer gewissen Skepsis akzeptieren, dass Kunst gleichzeitig Norm und Ausnahme ist und nicht Teil von etwas, das sich reglementieren lässt.”<sup>125</sup>

In order to better understand Martinez’ theory of curatorial research and its presentation she draws an analogy between the leitmotifs of the dOCUMENTA (13) and “the clue” in a detective story. She refers to a foreword written by Jorge Luis Borges in the novel “The Invention of Morel” (1940) by Adolfo Bioy Casares in which he describes the close relationship between the clue and the murder mystery that is to be solved. Martinez is interested in the nature of the clue, as an epistemic entity, which nonetheless does not hold any concrete information. It is the intelligence of a case and the precursor in solving it, even though, in the end, it might not have anything to do with the actual murder. Not every clue, at least. The relationship of the clue pointing to a potential solution to a puzzle, is juxtaposed with the relationship between the leitmotif and intuition. The puzzle, like intuition, acts as a catalyst that brings together all there is to know.<sup>126</sup> The leitmotif offers direction in understanding intuition, which is often hard to grasp and explain.<sup>127</sup> How does one articulate intuition, let alone create an exhibition based on it, one that still manages to communicate its audience?

In order for a detective to even consider something as a clue, she/he/they first has/have to be guided by intuition. The detective has to have a hunch, a feeling, a speculation regarding the relevance of the clue to the case in question. Intuition and the mystery puzzling the detective

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<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>126</sup> Needless to say, in the realm of the possible for the team working on the case, or exhibition.

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

are necessary in turning a thing into a clue, hence interlacing it into the story. So even though the leitmotif – which adopts the position of the clue in Martinez’ analogy – helps in comprehending the intuition at work in a curatorial project, intuition is necessary in defining the leitmotif as such in the first place. It is possible that Martinez, due to the close conditional relationship between the two therefore uses the terms intuition and leitmotif interchangeably at the beginning of her text.

The detective might only “understand” or be able to reason with her/his/their hunch, defined by its preliminary and elusive state, with the coming together of all elements and the solving of the mystery. Just as the coming together of all elements of a curatorial project in a specific space (be it physical or virtual) might only reveal the immediacy and importance behind the initial hunch to work in a specific direction. This can be argued as applicable for both the curators and the visitors. The analogy to the detective mystery highlights how the research process in a curatorial project continues throughout its entire progression and how the process itself can lead to insight.

In a crime novel, every piece – whether it is important in solving the puzzle or not – is important for the story. Without diverging strands of alleged evidence, various suspects and false alibis, the story told by the author would be an entirely different if not dull one. Drawing upon Martinez’ analogy, one could argue further, that all elements – theory, discourse, objects, documents, art works, display, sites, texts, publications – of a curatorial project, even if they might not lead to extended rational understanding, are significant parts of the whole. Each element has its own *raison d’être*; some falling more into place than others.

Some only disclose themselves to a few while they remain opaque to others.

#### 4.2. Creating Spaces.

##### Long-term Research Projects at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin

#### 4.2.1. “The Whole Earth – California and the Disappearance of the Outside”

An item is listed in the CATALOG if it is deemed:

1. Useful as a tool,
2. Relevant to independent education,
3. High quality or low cost,
4. Not already common knowledge,
5. Easily available by mail.<sup>128</sup> (fig. 16)

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<sup>128</sup> Stewart BRAND (ed.), *Whole Earth Catalog. Access to Tools* (1968), in:  
[https://monoskop.org/images/0/09/Brand\\_Stewart\\_Whole\\_Earth\\_Catalog\\_Fall\\_1968.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/0/09/Brand_Stewart_Whole_Earth_Catalog_Fall_1968.pdf) (9 March 2020).

In 1968, the American author and activist Stewart Brand published the first issue of the “Whole Earth Catalog.” It collated tools in the form of objects and ideas that together represented a new planetary thinking that was surfacing in California’s counter cultural movement during the 1960s and 70s. Young Americans were striving for a lost unity between humans, nature and the cosmos, and many became involved in communal living. The catalogue is considered a central document of the movement and gave “access to tools”<sup>129</sup> for living outside of official society by compiling a wide assortment of items such as: books, maps, forestry gear, carpentry and masonry instructions, as well as advanced technologies, such as personal computers and early synthesisers. Along with a photographic or illustrated depiction, the entries were supplemented with reviews by experts, as well as information on price and accessibility. Besides a holistic, “do-it-yourself” attitude, the catalogue addressed timely/contemporary discursive themes by covering topics such as cybernetics, ecology, management and psychology.

The catalogue’s format was oversized, images and text were printed in black and white, and positioned in a way that made use of the maximum amount of space on the page, thus visually corresponding in some sense with the atlas principle, exemplified by Didi-Huberman, discussed in chapter 3.3.

Bernd M. Scherer notes that instead of summarising a new era using theoretical language, Stewart Brand chose to represent the newly emerging philosophy through a collection of things.<sup>130</sup> Not only the content but also the process of putting the catalogue together reflected on the principles of contemporary thought. Advocating for more participation and complexity, by avoiding exclusive/singular authorship, the editor invited experts to select and write texts on products, therefore helping to “reestablish the value of individual subjectivity.”<sup>131</sup>

In 2013 Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke curated the exhibition “The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside,” as part of the two-year transdisciplinary research endeavour “The Anthropocene Project,” conducted by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin.

Diederichsen and Franke based their narrative on the context and archive of Stewart Brand’s catalogue, and in the frame of the larger curatorial research project, examined “a basic trope of

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<sup>129</sup> “Access to tools” is the catalogue’s subtitle.

<sup>130</sup> Bernd M. SCHERER, Foreword, in: Diedrich DIEDERICHSEN, Anselm FRANKE (eds.), *The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside*, Berlin 2013, pp. 6–7.

<sup>131</sup> Sheila Levrant de BRETTEVILLE, A Reexamination of Some Aspects of the Design Arts from the Perspective of a Woman Designer, in: Edward KAMARCK (ed.), *Arts in Society: Women and the Arts. Volume 11. Issue 1*, Madison, WI 1974, p. 117.

the Anthropocene view of the world – a planetary perspective on the world as a whole.”<sup>132</sup> Based on insights from the book “From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism” by professor of communication Fred Turner, the curators probed the lineages of the universalist paradigm, asking who wrote its history and continues to write its present. The exhibition located the origins of an all-encompassing worldview paradoxically both to the hippie movement, as well as the American space program, which – fuelled by the arms race of the Cold War – enabled mankind to see an image of the whole earth. The image of the “Blue Marble” photographed from out of space adorned the cover of the catalogue and was the first instance the public would see the world in its entirety. The cultural-historical exhibition traced how the depiction of our world – i.e. a single image in a sense – would trigger a new ecological consciousness and feeling of collectivity.

The assembly of images, texts, sounds and documents proposed a rereading and reevaluation of an intellectual history of ideas, i.e. how “the countercultural communality, ecopsychodelia and cybernetics of the 1960s” constituted the beginning for “the networked neoliberalism of today.”<sup>133</sup> The subtitle “California and the Disappearance of the Outside” points from the hippie movement to a present condition of modernity. Within the capitalist system there is no outside, like there was in the USSR, for example. Capitalism is accepted as inevitable and all encompassing.<sup>134</sup>

Selected works of art that had either emerged directly from the counterculture in a significant way or discursively dealt with its history intervened into and shifted the storyline. Questioning the canonised grand narrative of the turmoil of 1968 was precisely what the exhibition set out to do. It did this both in regards to the researched content and its display.

In her review of the exhibition project, art historian and writer Sarah James wrote:

Based upon the constellation of art works, which were presented not strictly as aesthetic objects, but also as artistic and social positions that were put to work, activating new relations and tensions among the works themselves, but also mobilizing them in relation to cultural artefacts from the period. This combination worked to re-map the historical, political, cultural and aesthetic geographies and temporalities that they articulate and problematize. This might sound a little abstract, but in fact it evidenced a curatorial practice that approximates a kind of cultural geography, with the exhibition repositioned as a complex visual and audio essay.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Haus der Kulturen der Welt, *The Anthropocene-Project. A Report*, Berlin 2014, p. 6.

<sup>133</sup> Sarah JAMES, *The Whole Earth* (October 2013), in: <https://frieze.com/article/whole-earth> (5 March 2020).

<sup>134</sup> Joshua SIMON, *The Way Things Are Organized*, p. 161.

<sup>135</sup> JAMES, *The Whole Earth*.

Juxtaposing seemingly disparate phenomena is a frequently deployed strategy in curatorial research projects at the HKW. Rather than drawing a linear historical genealogy of the researched condition, “invisible structural, aesthetic, narratological, and even poetic connections between different historical techniques and technologies”<sup>136</sup> are made. By exhibiting the relationality between the putatively dissimilar or unconnected this methodology aims to display how history is not linear as well as the multiple lineages that make up the contemporary.

The exhibition was narrated along seven chapters, such as Universalism; Frontier: At the Pacific Wall; Whole Systems; Boundless Interior; Apocalypse, Babylon, Simulation; Self-Incorporated/Networks and the Log Boom; and The Earth is Not Whole. The walls built for the display revealed their structure of black cross-braces, calling to mind constructions by Buckminster Fuller, the architectural hero of America’s counterculture. The structure created spaces for montages with texts, images, music, films and books. Paintings and large photographs were suspended from the ceiling with black wire, comfortably arranging themselves within the overall display (fig. 17 and 18). An array of black chairs was positioned in the wide, open exhibition space and could be moved at the visitor’s own convenience, enabling or inviting the viewers to study and engage more deeply with “the immense amount of contextual texts and films.” “[T]he visitor had a lot of work to do.”<sup>137</sup> The exhibition concluded with the quote: “The whole is the untrue” by Theodor W. Adorno. This holistic approach of viewing the world as a whole (from the perspective of the West Coast) somewhat paradoxically involves the danger of exclusion, creating an inside and multiple outsides. Scherer claims that this danger made all the mini cosmoses of the communes fall apart within only a few months<sup>138</sup>, but, if the central thinking models of 1968 came to develop standards of the neoliberal era of today, how does network capitalism continue to succeed? It is this transformation of a universalist, global conception of order of the immediate past affecting our present that the exhibition tried to fathom, while simultaneously questioning the meaning of the meanwhile ubiquitous, iconographic image of the whole world seen from an outside perspective. What are the particular ideological circumstances under which this picture came into being? The image of the whole Earth suggests a holistic symbol that unites all, but the circumstances of its production are local, particular, ideological and situated.

The question “What comes after universalism?” is negotiated in further iterations of investigations that take place at the HKW. The “Dictionary of the Now” discussing how we

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<sup>136</sup> SCHUBERT, “100 Years of Now” and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p.13.

<sup>137</sup> JAMES, The Whole Earth.

<sup>138</sup> SCHERER, Foreword, p. 6–7.

can communicate about a globalised present and at the same time challenge linguistic universalism is one example.

#### 4.2.2. “The Anthropocene Project” (2013–2014)

As mentioned, “The Whole Earth” was embedded in the broader context of “The Anthropocene Project.” The Anthropocene is a term proposed for a geological epoch defined by humans having transformed the environment in a way that cannot be undone. A geological age must be global; therefore, the Anthropocene assumes the immense impact of human existence on the planet as a whole. Mankind has created an entire stratum that spreads out over the entire earth. First formulated in the beginning of the twenty-first century by the meteorologist Paul Crutzen, this paradigm blurs the lines between nature and history, i.e. not man-made and man-made. The Anthropocene both articulates the romanticised unison between nature and culture, as well as the danger of cancelling out history through a-historicising man-kind by naturalising everything.<sup>139</sup>

HKW’s exploration of this new geological age encompassed a number of exhibitions, performances, workshops and events and is described as a prelude to further ongoing examinations on the topic, all probing alternative forms of knowledge production. Scherer, Director of the HKW, claims that the developments in which humanity is affecting and shaping nature – by changing the climate, exterminating species, polluting and so on – can no longer be evaluated and grasped through the sole accumulation of knowledge through the human and natural sciences. “The reassessment of our situation requires a sensuous-aesthetic praxis, which sharpens our powers of judgment with respect to the epochal transformation of the Anthropocene.”<sup>140</sup>

Among the participants of the project the following questions were to be negotiated:

If the opposition between humanity and nature has been dissolved, what processes must we undergo to shift our perspectives and trained perceptions? Where to draw the borders of an ever-expanding ‘planetary garden’? Is it necessary to rethink the nature of economies, or should we assign nature its own economy? What impact does the Anthropocene have on global, political decision making? What image of humanity forms if nature appears in the image of man, as if it were human?<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Diedrich DIEDERICHSEN, *The Whole Earth*, in conversation with Bernd M. Scherer, talk held on 1 July 2013 at the HKW, Berlin, in the framework of “The Anthropocene Project” (2013 – 2014). [www.hkw.de/de/app/mediathek/video/22380](http://www.hkw.de/de/app/mediathek/video/22380) (5 March 2020).

<sup>140</sup> Haus der Kulturen der Welt, *The Anthropocene-Project. A Report*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>141</sup> e-flux, *The Anthropocene Project* (3 January 2013), in: [www.e-flux.com/announcements/33281/the-anthropocene-project](http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/33281/the-anthropocene-project) (5 March 2020).

Particular examples of the specific questions posed include:

What happens when birds adopt melodies from people or transform them into new sound patterns?<sup>142</sup>  
Who is responsible for acts of violence when the aerosols emitted by European industry, through a complex chain of interactions in the atmosphere, change the rainfall patterns in the African Sahel region to such an extent that entire areas are devastated, resulting in conflicts over resources between the people affected?<sup>143</sup>

Scherer describes the project as a (judicial) forum, terming the exhibitions, concerts, performances, installations, films, conversations and games as “hearings” in which the protagonists of the world “things, emotions, theories, music, and animals, are given a voice, while simultaneously becoming subjects of the proceedings.” Each hearing was based on a specific particularity – reaching from wildlife or computers imitating human sounds, to the disruption of classical legal categories. Together, however, each program contributed to forming a semantic grid in making sense of the newly articulated, yet still intangible, relationship between humanity and nature.

“The Anthropocene Project” itself is a prelude for further, ongoing investigations conducted by the HKW, taking on different shapes, such as a glossary, a campus, a theatre piece, publication series and forming collaborations with and between ecologists, physicists, philosophers, visual artists, musicologists, dramaturgists among others, leading to a cross-fertilisation of diverse research practices and themes.

#### 4.2.3. “100 Years of Now” (2015–2019)

Starting in 2013, “The Anthropocene Project” was the first of a series of long-term curatorial frameworks devised as a reaction towards the prevailing “temporality of the now”<sup>144</sup> shaped by event-based cultural production and fast-moving, self-contained projects. The HKW conducted “100 Years of Now,” curated by Bernd M. Scherer and a team of numerous curators working on various sub-projects, “each production building on the previous one,”<sup>145</sup> with Annette Bhagwati operating as Head of Project.

In its broadest sense, “100 Years of Now” was a curatorial research project that asked questions on how the past affects the present through a “critical investigation into the temporality of

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<sup>142</sup> Haus der Kulturen der Welt, *The Anthropocene-Project. A Report*, p. 7.

(Asked in the frame of the program “Inhuman Music. Compositions by Machines, by Animals, and by Accident” curated by Detlef Diederichsen and Holger Schulze).

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*

(Asked in the frame of the exhibition: “Forensis” curated by Anselm Franke and Eyal Weizman).

<sup>144</sup> SCHUBERT, “100 Years of Now” and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p. 8.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*



contemporaneity,”<sup>146</sup> which was reflected in both the structure and content of the project. The project continued questioning the assumption that there is one globalised world, and engaged with the idea of asymmetrical contemporaries taking place at the same time. Next to in-depth explorations of specific phenomena, the project also posed a lot of questions regarding the curatorial framework of such an endeavour:

How can the same research questions be followed up across a long period of time, allowing for prisms of different perspectives on the same question to deepen an understanding of a topic and to continue a conversation between actors within a given discourse? How can an institution avoid presenting topics as new information, subordinating itself to the regime of the Now while still offering multiple points of access for the audience or participants at any time without being too presuppositional? How can the same be said differently again and again in a productive way and applied to recent phenomena, but still resist the logic of progress, innovation, and discovery? How can institutional knowledge that accumulates within different media and people, be cultivated as an archive, establishing a research community and providing resources for it? And how is this interesting for the public?<sup>147</sup>

Olga von Schubert worked as research consultant to the project. Reflecting on the process, she has described the project as a deep analysis of what was/is already there, focusing on forms of reappropriation, continuation and recycling, in order to rethink the contemporary as a temporality defying logics of “innovation, newness and singularity”<sup>148</sup> that perpetuate a system that ignores the effects presentism is having on the future. Already the project title itself intertwines the past with the present. Similar to dOCUMENTA 13, “100 Years of Now” did not concentrate on one specific overall topic in its inquiry into what produces contemporaneity. By looking at developments that started at least one hundred years ago that are still shaping present political and cultural processes, a myriad of case studies and explorations of particular conditions created a constellation of ideas that spread out over the course of four years.

The project asked what it actually means to be sharing the same time and whether the temporality of contemporaneity is actually defined as the conjunction of different times, which nevertheless are happening at the same time. So, instead of creating a theory on the contemporary, Schubert writes that the project’s ambition might be more about the assembly of differing and different positions. So, “[I]f contemporaneity is characterised by the coming together of different notions of temporality, it also abolishes the idea of stable temporal objects as a set of reference points.”<sup>149</sup> Contemporaneity is not something one can record in that sense, but is characterised by its expression through the process of coming together. “History in a

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<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>147</sup> SCHUBERT, “100 Years of Now” and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p. 13.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

contemporary perspective can thus not be represented in objects, but only by negotiated processes.”

Examining the findings of “100 Years of Now,” Schubert offers a definition of curatorial research:

Assuming that curating is the practice that emerges in a relational field of contemporaneity and from which the idea of the contemporary as a coming together of different times, which have to be negotiated in order to arrive at situated knowledges of a shared reality, is deduced, curating could be characterised as moderating collaborative processes and creating a setting in which contemporary approaches can be employed. Rather than representing results from science or academic research and making them accessible for a wider audience or putting on ‘core programs, such as education,’ (Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*) curatorial research could mean to organize and moderate ‘open’ processes in which people with different approaches who would normally not encounter each other because of their disciplinary boundaries or because of their opposed perspectives are brought into contact so that new relations of knowledge can be produced. The task of the curatorial team then lies in creating spaces in which things can happen rather than be shown, in which they can be researched rather than being represented.<sup>150</sup>

The exhibition “Nervous Systems: Quantified Life and The Social Question” (2016) followed up on topics such as cybernetics raised in “The Whole Earth.” As part of their curatorial research process, Stephanie Hankey and Marek Tuszynski from the Tactical Technology Collective and Franke put an installation format, which they named “triangulations,” to the test. In the social sciences, the term refers to a research method that tries to open up a prism of perspectives on the same phenomenon or condition, by applying a multiplicity of theories, empirical materials and methodologies. So, in order to better overcome biases, multiple researchers work on the same research questions, various methodologies – interviews, questionnaires, documents, observations – are applied to gain data and more than one theory is applied in order to interpret the information gathered. Further, the social sciences borrowed the term from a technique in land surveying or cartography, by which the position of one specific point is determined by converging the measurement between two other positions, distinct to one another.<sup>151</sup>

The triangulations were constructed of hexagonal structures that were positioned in a grid among the other elements of the exhibition. Media activists, historians and writers conducted research on various aspects of the algorithmic surveillance society, drawing “connections between historically and spatially disconnected events or phenomena.”<sup>152</sup> While “The Whole

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<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>151</sup> Paulette ROTHBAUER, *Triangulation*, in: Lisa GIVEN (ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Thousand Oaks, CA 2008, pp. 892–894.

<sup>152</sup> SCHUBERT, “100 Years of Now” and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p. 27.

Earth” and the “Anthropocene Project” were mainly concerned with the new relationship between humans and nature, “Nervous Systems” explored the relation between man and machine.

In the essay “‘100 Years of Now’ and the Temporality of Curatorial Research” Schubert expands on one of the triangulations titled “Patterns of Life” by the media theorist Grégoire Chamayou. His point of departure was a technology introduced by the U.S. Intelligence community in 2010 developed for rhythm-analysis in the military. The “Activity-Based Intelligence” paradigm is based on the use of programs that detect behaviour departing from ordinary motion patterns, by comparing it to previously collected data on tracked movement. In order to anticipate what may happen, this military intelligence is for example used to detect suspicious behaviour in warfare and to execute pre-emptive drone attacks.<sup>153</sup> Rather than looking into the history of technological developments in the U.S. military, Chamayou approached exploring the phenomenon through the evolution of other scientific as well as artistic trajectories concerned with the traceability of bodily movement. For example, Frank B. Gilbreth’s study of gestures of factory workers using the technique of chronophotography. The workers hands and arms were studded with little light bulbs that then created traceable lines on long-exposure photographic prints, while blurring the image of the individual performing the movements. The motion sequences were then analysed and optimised for a more efficient work process in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Based on Chamayou’s research Julien Prévieux developed the dance film bearing the same name as the triangulation “Patterns of Life” (2015) (fig. 19). Commissioned for the exhibition, the film explores how collected data on movement can act as a way to control and influence individual as well as group behaviour, and poses questions such as “Can our inner thoughts be transmitted by our eye movements? Can our future actions be predicted by our current behaviour?” Together, Chamayou and Prévieux showed how cartographic tracings are never politically neutral, and the inherent power relation between the knowledge produced about a subject and the people having the knowledge at their disposal, as well as pointing to the gradual shift of technology that traces movement to the military and capitalist realm.<sup>154</sup>

These case studies all portray a type of curatorial approach that exemplifies the multiple, complex forms of process-based research in-between and beyond theory and practice.

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<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>154</sup> Grégoire CHAMAYOU, *Patterns of Life: A Very Short History of Schematic Bodies*, *The Funambulist: Bodies, Designs and Politics* (14 December 2014), in: <https://thefunambulist.net/history/the-funambulist-papers-57-schematic-bodies-notes-on-a-patterns-genealogy-by-gregoire-chamayou> (5 March 2020).

## 5. Conclusion – Defining Curatorial Research

### 5.1. Methodology as Storyline

Attempting to synthesise my ruminations, readings and case studies, almost seems to render the term “curatorial research” a pleonasm. One of the guiding threads throughout the thesis is that “the curatorial” is in itself a method of research, albeit one that resists being defined.

In an issue of the *Springer*in Simon Sheikh writes that the use of “the curatorial” as an analytical tool and a philosophical proposition makes it “a separate form of knowledge production that may actually not involve the curating of exhibitions, but rather the process of producing knowledge and making curatorial constellations that can be drawn from the historical forms and practices of curating.”<sup>155</sup> The curatorial is a technique for “producing and organising knowledge.”<sup>156</sup>

Whether this methodology follows the concept of “starting in the middle” and “from within the conditions,” applies the “atlas principle,” or submits to intuition; a hunch and perhaps the unfathomable monsters inside of you – comprising a discourse of its very own – the curatorial does not follow any one method. According to Martinez, the methodology at play might even only become apparent at the end of a project. Nevertheless, one could argue, that this would still be part of a conscious approach.

In any case, returning to the beginning of this thesis, how we seek reveals the meaning of the question we are asking. Starting with an approach, rather than a thesis or hypothesis, might make the process more arduous, but it might also encourage us to investigate further, in order to bring the unfathomable and/or the inexhaustible closer together.

Having established the significance of methodology in relation to what it is one would like to say, show, stage or create a space for, I deem it important that the audience is welcomed into the approach used for the research process, in some way or another, in order to negotiate and communicate more clearly and avoid “abandoning the viewer.” Being the viewer or interpreter of research, it is important to be aware of the processes at play as integral parts of the work, especially if a project is not trying to prove a hypothesis, or illustrate a thesis, and perhaps constitutes something that still withdraws from being expressed in words, or from existing yet at all.

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<sup>155</sup> SHEIKH, *From Para to Post*.

<sup>156</sup> SIMON, *The Way Things Are Organized*, p. 165.

In museums and exhibitions, the term storyline can function as the guiding thread meandering through a curatorial project.<sup>157</sup> It creates an overall narrative with a beginning and end, connects objects juxtaposed with texts and other media, and takes away the solitary gaze on single exhibits.<sup>158</sup> According to Rogoff's distinction between curating and the curatorial, the storyline belongs to the toolbox of curating.

Every exhibition can be analysed according to its storyline, be it its conceptual narrative, or the unconscious passing on of seemingly intrinsic societal values.<sup>159</sup> The curatorial, on the other hand, has the potential to question the storyline, its alleged beginning and end and its definition of narrative, borrowed from theatre. So, perhaps the narrative guiding the viewers of curatorial research, could be the disclosure of the methodology used for the project. Methodology as storyline.

To me, part of why the publication series "100 Notes – 100 Thoughts" was so successful, was because it embodied the concept of the "maybe" – delineated so precisely by Chus Martinez – and the preliminary qualities of both the note and documenta itself (seeing as the booklets were published and made accessible before the official opening) in such a comprehensive way. Along with "The Logbook," the public was allowed access to a part of dOCUMENTA (13)'s research process. On the one hand, this was achieved through the publication of the preparatory readings and references of the agent group, and on the other, by suggesting the curatorial approach through the selected texts, often having an unfinished, note-like format themselves. Announcing that dOCUMENTA (13) would follow a non-concept, definitely wasn't going to make the exhibition's mediation easy, but the way Christov-Bakargiev and her team executed and contextualised their curatorial research demonstrated that having a concept is not a necessary part in creating an active viewing position for the public. And, that a non-concept is in fact also a concept, its confusion likely rather intentional.<sup>160</sup>

In the case of the "Curatorial Dictionary," the simple gesture of mentioning the author's name under the definition of every word, or essay, points to the method of broad-based participation and perhaps even the discrepancies that become visible through the authors divergent perspectives, which intrinsically define this project.

As for the long-term research projects at the HKW, despite being precursory in the way the institution relates and contextualises very specific topics with more general concerns of the present, perhaps it would be helpful if the single exhibitions and events were more clearly embedded and distinguished as part of a larger research project. Due to the many past and

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<sup>157</sup> See Schnittpunkt (ed.), *Storyline. Narrationen im Museum (Storyline. Narrations in the Museum)*, Vienna 2009.

<sup>158</sup> Beatrice JASCHKE, *Kritisches Glossar: Storyline (Critical Glossary: Storyline)*, in: ARGE schnittpunkt (ed.), *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis (Manual for Exhibition Theory and Praxis)*, Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2013, p. 190.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> BERMAN, dOCUMENTA (13) "Non-Concept."

present projects consisting of multiple subprojects such as events, symposia, exhibitions etc., it took me a significant amount of time during my research on HKW's website to realise that every project is in fact part of a larger one and to decipher what format a subproject took. Furthermore, upon visiting the exhibition "Neolithic Childhood. Art in a False Present, c. 1930" I was not aware that it was part of the wider research project "Kanon Fragen," critically contending "the canonization of modernity."<sup>161</sup> This didn't make me appreciate the exhibition any less, but perhaps it would have made it easier for myself and others to understand why this specific exhibition took place at this time, in this space, and to further relate to the questions it raised to the present.

In a sense, the entangled semantic grid being formed by HKW's multiple projects reflects the asymmetry of contemporaneity and its inherent multiplicity. However, is it then also necessary to maintain some form of organisational structure in mediating formats, such as the institution's website, or the apparent poor (as reportedly criticised) signage at dOCUMENTA (13)?

From her experience, as one of the members of dOCUMENTA (13)'s press centre, Milena Berman wrote about the repeated complaints of visitors who could not find their way: "I couldn't help but wonder if this too was part of a ploy to maintain a degree of disorientation. I felt as if somewhere Christov-Bakargiev was scoffing at the idea of visitors attempting to control the way in which they would encounter the art."<sup>162</sup>

## 5.2. Tension and the Potential of Exhibiting the Ineffable

Curator and writer Joshua Simon uses the concept of metastability, derived from thermodynamics, to explain the syntax holding the contemporary art exhibition together. "Metastable forms are structurally unstable, yet somehow balanced systems [...] By their nature metastable structures are temporary. With a pile of ice crystals and snow on a steep slope, or a pile of sand grains, very specific conditions are needed to contain their unstable configurations – intense relations that are held by the smallest contact point of each grain. In this sense, the exhibition organizes the conditions that contain the energy of an avalanche without collapsing."<sup>163</sup>

I propose to think of this metaphor in relation to the concept of curatorial research. Through the coming together of disparate research conducted during a curatorial project, plus the exhibition's design and architecture, conditions of high intensity can be met. These conditions

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<sup>161</sup> Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Kanon-Fragen (2016), in: [www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2016/kanon\\_fragen/kanon\\_fragen\\_start.php](http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2016/kanon_fragen/kanon_fragen_start.php) (5 March 2020).

<sup>162</sup> BERMAN, dOCUMENTA (13) "Non-Concept."

<sup>163</sup> SIMON, The Way Things Are Organized, p. 172.

can only take place at this time in this very space. Resonating with the concept of metastability is the uniqueness of every curatorial project. The assumed temporary frozen avalanche can only be formed by the assembly of the research and possibly its viewers, making it impossible for the curators to explain everything about the avalanche before the system has reached its particular, distinctive balance. Rather than being about staging the event, the curatorial is about what happens at the actual event.<sup>164</sup>

Throughout my research I have made out a couple of juxtapositions that, to me, offer productive tensions within the curatorial. In addition to the conditions mentioned above, I also understand metastability as a space that is created due to the intersection of various tensions. Far from being exhaustive, this list is also very much about the interrelation between each juxtaposition. None precedes the other, or is more significant than the other.

Theory	$\leftrightarrow$	Practice
Theory	$\leftrightarrow$	Intuition
Monstra	$\leftrightarrow$	Astra
The Unfathomable	$\leftrightarrow$	The Inexhaustible
Material	$\leftrightarrow$	Immaterial
Specific	$\leftrightarrow$	Overview
Event	$\leftrightarrow$	Institution
Statement/Hypothesis/Proposition	$\leftrightarrow$	Methodology

Trying to interweave theory and practice more closely with one another continues to be a struggle in the expanded field of the curatorial. However, as explored in the first chapter of this thesis, this tension can also be productive and a lot can be learned from what happens within the gap between the two notions.

In the following paragraphs, I will try to extrapolate the tensions I have distinguished, that expand the tested and familiar space of thinking between theory and practice.

### 5.2.1. Theory $\leftrightarrow$ Intuition

The tension between theory and intuition likely lies at the core of what I am attempting to convey. Theory being executed by semantic references, statements, explanations, neologisms, and definitions, and intuition almost working like a montage of both intellectualities and

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<sup>164</sup> Jean-Paul MARTINON, Irit ROGOFF, Preface, in: Jean-Paul MARTINON (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, London 2013, pp. 5–7.

sensibilities. I decided to juxtapose the concept Martinez uses to describe the approach to DOCUMENTA (13) with theory, because “the curatorial” is often portrayed as an academic, theoretical form<sup>165</sup> and perhaps could be distinguished by other attributes as well.

In “How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog [...]” Martinez asks for alternatives to always create and name a new methodology or theory, in order to fathom what is happening in an exhibition that is withdrawing from something already seen or known. She suggests letting equally valid logics such as intuition communicate by also allowing some things to remain opaque. While aware of the contradiction the neologism “intuition as methodology” might hold in this argument, intuition as methodology can however itself serve as mediator between the exhibition and the viewer.

Though Martinez was careful in not letting her readers misinterpret her understanding of intuition as a superficial emotion, intuition is successfully argued as a process that taps areas outside of rational thought. Due to the sensation that intuition is coming from a place that is somehow “deeper inside” – because it escapes certain cerebral logics – I believe that it is important when in the process of comprehending one’s own intuitive approach, one also tries to understand where one’s intuition is coming from, in order to recognise whether mechanisms outside of our bodies are tricking us into thinking that a sentiment is coming from inside. Martinez also stresses, however, that the montage making up our intuition, made up of the art works we have understood, books our bodies remember, spaces we have smelled, theories we were touched by or never fully grasped, goes beyond that of the personal “gut feeling,” as others will have seen that art work, read that book and worked through that philosophical treatise.

#### 5.2.2. Monstra/The Unfathomable ↔ Astra/The Inexhaustible

In his many research projects, most prominently the “Mnemosyne Atlas”, it was Warburg’s desire to submerge the most distant orders of reality with one another. He wanted to interweave the unfathomable monsters inside of us (“monstra”) with the inexhaustibility of the sky (“astra”). The Atlas had perhaps saved the art historian from his own monsters, but at the same, they were probably a crucial driving force behind the entire project, which ended up influencing both form and content in disciplines such as the human sciences, cultural studies and artistic practices. With his montages Warburg did not only want to demonstrate a productive tension through the juxtaposition of images, he wanted to point out the inherent

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<sup>165</sup> As opposed to curating, which is usually allocated to the practical side of exhibition-making.



tension within every image and, according to Didi-Huberman, saw every image as a montage in itself (see sheep livers in chapter 3.3.2.).

### 5.2.3. Material $\leftrightarrow$ Immaterial

According to Martinez' comparison of dOCUMENTA (13) with a detective story, every image and every object of a curatorial research project constitutes a necessary piece in the puzzle. Every piece has to be regarded as a possible clue, even if some pieces might not hold any concrete information. Every fragment is deemed essential in telling the story. As Didi-Huberman wrote about the Atlas: the images are not only being interpreted, but are active, interpreting elements themselves. Similarly, I believe that in curatorial research, everything becomes an active element of the constellation, both on a material and an immaterial level.

In their exhibition, "The Whole Earth" Diederichsen and Franke do not "[engage] with images as sealed representations"<sup>166</sup> but trace the conditions that enabled specific, influential images to appear, consequentially pursuing Warburg's intention of turning the image from an object being interpreted into the interpreting object itself.

In Joshua Simon's text "The Way Things are Organized" he employs the well-known twofold image of the duck/rabbit (fig. 20) to describe the tension between the material and immaterial in an exhibition or an object on display. Say the duck represents the material and the rabbit the immaterial aspect of an exhibition and/or object. An exhibition performs both the assembly of the concrete, tangible and visible elements, and at the same time actualises conceptual and curatorial processes – often abstract, intangible and immaterial.<sup>167</sup>

Simon claims that as power and politics are becoming increasingly virtual (such as the rise of immaterial labour, the internet, and crypto-currencies), the curatorial, predominantly communicating visually, must renegotiate how it can show and communicate forms of power in an exhibitionary sense through the visual.

Increasingly, what one raises when discussing the negotiation of reality is in fact an address of processes that are not visible.

Albeit an illustrative and catchy comparison in showing that there is never only one reading of an object, I find the duck/rabbit image as slightly flawed in the sense that one can never see both animals at the same time. However, perhaps the metaphor needs this shift in order to demonstrate that the rabbit adheres to different logics than the duck, despite being the same image.

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<sup>166</sup> SIMON, The Way Things Are Organized, p. 164.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, p. 171.

#### 5.2.4. Specific ↔ Overview

What all projects have in common is the attempt to bring volatility into certain narratives of history and the present. The aim is to offer a re-reading, by proving that there is not one reading. Schubert writes about the central aspect of “creating space” that allows for multiple realities (that would ordinarily not meet) to come together. Evoking a volatility of knowledge perhaps first leads to confusion but challenges simplification – thus control – and resists turning to representative gestures.

The demonstration of multiple perspectives is juxtaposed with the importance to be specific in curatorial research, albeit the “building stock” of the particular can also be multiplicity. In order to fathom the complexity of a circumstance, curatorial research arguably needs to turn to particular examples and cases that can be pondered upon. An exhibition like “The Whole Earth,” based in a particular time – the 1960s and 70s – in a specific place – California – and on a specific philosophy – universalist thought – urges the viewing and participating audience to question the very specificity on display at the HKW, as well as how it relates to the present. Rather than starting with an overview, one begins with a “zoomed-in” or particular perspective, somewhere in the middle, which in the case of Diederichsen and Franke’s exhibition lies in the past. A past that still very much influences our reading of the present.

The overview (or the “surveying gaze”) creates a productive tension with the specific. For instance, the reconstruction of how the image of the “Blue Marble” came into being, and the discourse surrounding the “Whole Earth Catalog” became part of the broader research context of “The Anthropocene Project.”

The particular is woven into the semantic grid that successively reveals connections and interrelations. Within the grid, concepts and ideas are continuously renewed, re-appropriated, recycled and re-evaluated.

Creating the infrastructure that enables us to perceive everything in a wider, more connected scope, might slowly make the dominance of the short-term research project and “regime of the now” crumble.

Lastly and significantly, the overview remains important in order to continue questioning the accepted frameworks from within which we are working and thinking. Capitalism constitutes a closed system that is continuously deluding us into believing that there is “no outside.” An overview might also imply seeing the paradigm we are allegedly stuck in from an exterior perspective, which bears the potential to imagine different possible realities.

### 5.2.5. Event ↔ Institution

For documenta 11 (2002) co-curator Sarat Maharaj refers to each iteration of documenta as a singularity that nevertheless is part of a constellation. “[E]ach is a one-off affair with its own distinct stamp. At the same time, the regular five-year basis on which they take place, their periodicity, lends them a sense of seamless continuity.”<sup>168</sup> From this perspective, dOCUMENTA (13) – with its notoriously hard to remember title: “The dance was frenetic, animated, clattering, twisted, and lasted a long time” – also needs to be seen as located at the in-between of the staging of a unique, large-scale curatorial event, as well as viewed with the permanence of a durable institution that has acquired a continuity spanning over sixty-five years by now. In the essay “Para-Museum of 100 Days” curator and documenta professor Nora Sternfeld writes that when viewing documenta’s history and future it is not about making a decision for either one side or the other, by for example believing that one can position the curatorial process somewhere outside of the institution. She stresses an insistent but critical engagement with the institution and its infrastructure, including its archive, as well as the fact that the succeeding documentas will again re-shuffle the history and future of the quinquennial “one-hundred-day museum.”<sup>169</sup>

### 5.2.6. Statement/Hypothesis/Proposition ↔ Methodology

The two poles of the tension between proposition and methodology infer not leaving the viewer alone in trying to distil a statement out of the research on display, on the one side of the spectrum, and methodologically leaving gaps on the other.

In the preceding description of how methodology can turn into a statement itself (5.1. Methodology as Storyline), the tension transforms into a friction. Rather than creating a space between two opposites, the two ends collide with one other.

Unremittingly intersecting and influencing each other, these multiple tensions hold the potential to create a highly charged field in which new insights can thrive.

Exposing one’s aggregated research to the forces exercised by the tensions will prevent the research from remaining a subjective collection of stuff that has not undergone any substantial type of synthesis or transformation, as Claire Bishop critically observed. The tensions exercise

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<sup>168</sup> Sarat MAHARAJ, Merz-Thinking – Sounding the Documenta Process Between Critique and Spectacle, in: Marianne EIGENHEER (ed.), *oncurating*. Issue 9, Edinburgh 2011, p. 11.

<sup>169</sup> Nora STERNFELD, Para-Museum of 100 Days: documenta between Event and Institution, in: Nanne BUURMAN, Dorothee RICHTER (eds.), *oncurating*. Issue 33, Zürich 2017, pp. 165–170.

the capability to stop a curatorial research project from merely being associated with Sheikh's definition of "recherché:" research practiced as journalism, or Bishop's definition of search, often mistaken for research. The conscious integration of the monsters, the material and immaterial, the particular and the outside, and the unknown, holds the possibility of going beyond the boundaries of existing knowledge and at the same time creates a resistance to making quick connections and deductions, that appear to be inherent to the digital condition.<sup>170</sup> Premature leaps will probably not be made if research remains in conscious negotiation with the space in-between these tensions. Each charged spectrum or juxtaposition proposed has a completely different way of questioning an item, and each one bears a different desire and alternative approach to understand, whether through alteration, through categorisation, through bodily knowledge, ... the list goes on.

By exposing research to such tensions, does the material in turn transform into a statement? Or at least transform? Is revealing these tensions to the viewers a chance to avoid the audience being overwhelmed with unclear, loose ends, or too much material?

### 5.3. Struggle

Staying within these tensions is undoubtedly a struggle; staying in the realm of not being able to explain what it is one is trying to say, is too. Only after having written a good thirty pages of my thesis, did I establish what my research question actually was and is. Moreover, this was only possible with the essential help of my meticulous and patient supervisor Nora Sternfeld. The process I underwent in writing my thesis makes the introductory quote by Wittgenstein somewhat even more tangible to me. The struggle of curatorial research was translated into my writing process. I knew *how* I wanted to say it, but I did not know *what*.

In addition, I also gave in to my monsters, which were conjured while delirious with a fever and enabled me to finally write this conclusion. My thoughts all of a sudden fell into place.

Despite being very central aspects to my understanding of what curatorial research is and can be, I suppose at first view this thesis does not directly tick the box of broad-based-participation, nor is it embedded in a continuous long-term project. Nevertheless, it is written in the frame of a broader context: the /ecm – Master's Programme in Exhibition Theory and Practice. The programme, conducted at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, has been ongoing for almost twenty years and has brought forth a considerable number of theses on the topics of educating, curating and managing. Throughout my research and writing process I often thought about the

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<sup>170</sup> CHWATAL, Notes on Claire Bishop's lecture.

development of an online archive that assembles all of these texts. An online tool that can point to cross-references through selected keywords, peer-reviews, images and other connecting parameters, thus re-placing each thesis in the collective context it was written in. The archive could serve as a source of research and a practical and visual exhibition of how research is in fact almost never a solitary activity.

#### 5.4. End

Curatorial research can be understood as a research methodology in which tensions that go beyond the gap between theory and practice are put to the test. Using methodology as storyline and intuition as methodology bears the power to narrate and negotiate something that might not yet even exist. Curatorial research, one can arguably claim, aims at disrupting the reproduction of canonised knowledge of history, of the present and of the future.

Locating curatorial research in the in-between space of multiple juxtaposing poles also prevents the term from ever arriving at one definition. It suggests that curatorial research will always be positioned in an idiosyncrasy that is subject to its conditions; “a relation within relations.”<sup>171</sup> The controversy of what curatorial research is, is one that does not have to be resolved; does not have to choose a side, precisely because it uses the struggle *between* representation and presence, temporality and continuity, inside and outside,<sup>172</sup> in order to maintain the potential its conundrum holds. Both in theory and practice, the unfathomability and inexhaustibility inherent to curatorial research will enable it to forever remain an unruly, insatiable part of discourse.

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<sup>171</sup> STERNFELD, Para-Museum of 100 Days, p. 166.

<sup>172</sup> The number of possible tensions is probably infinite.

## 6. Appendix

6.1. Figures

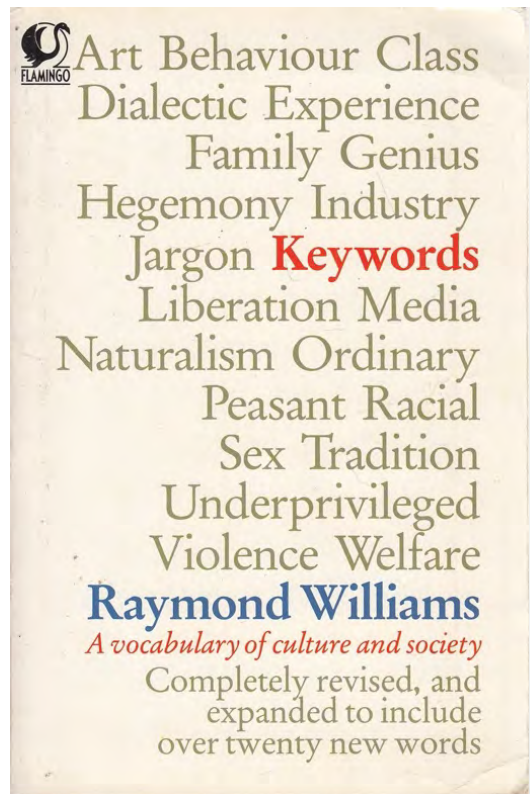


Fig. 1: Raymond Williams, *Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, first published 1976

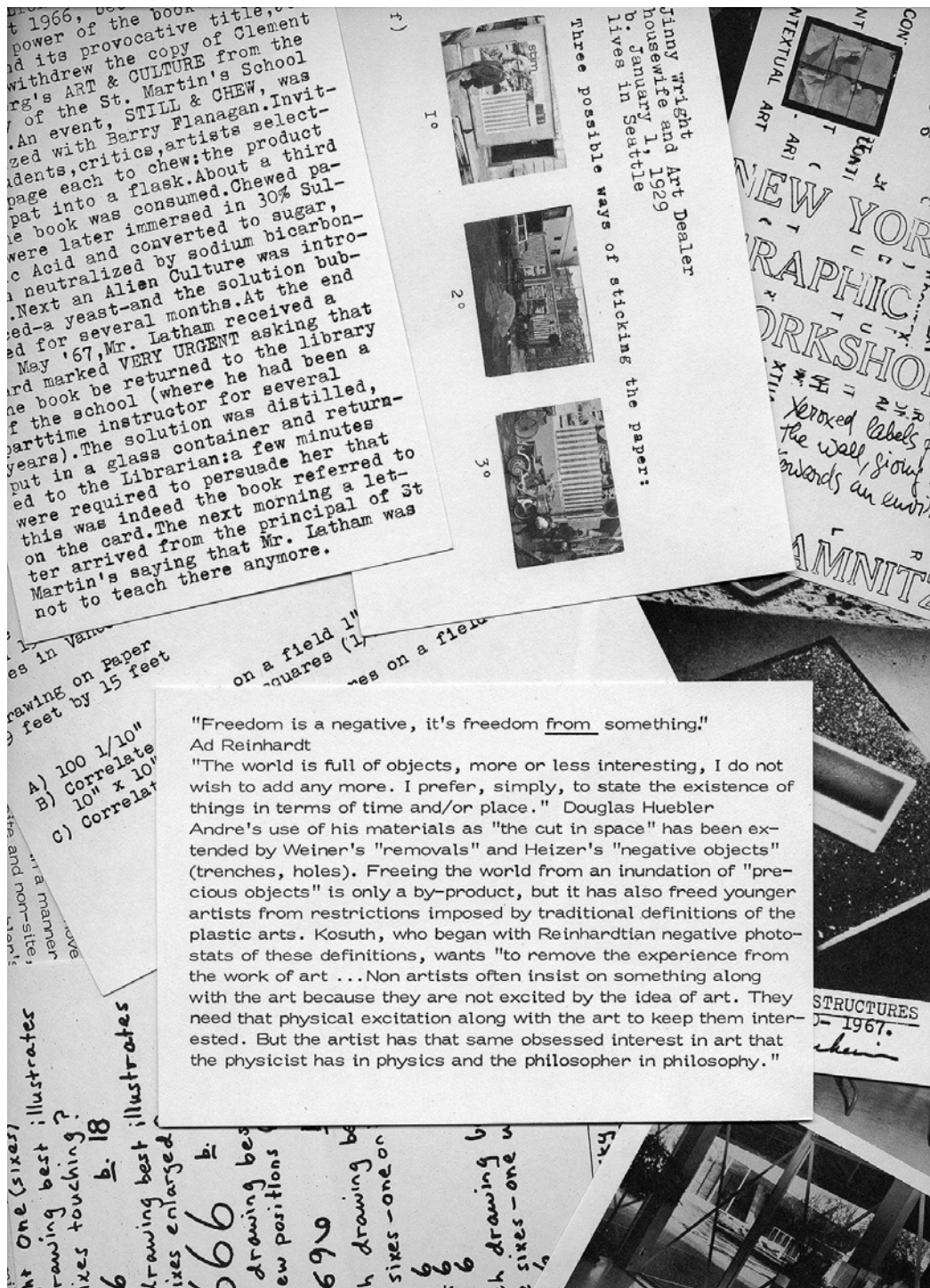


Fig. 2: Lucy R. Lippard, 557,087/955,000, 1970



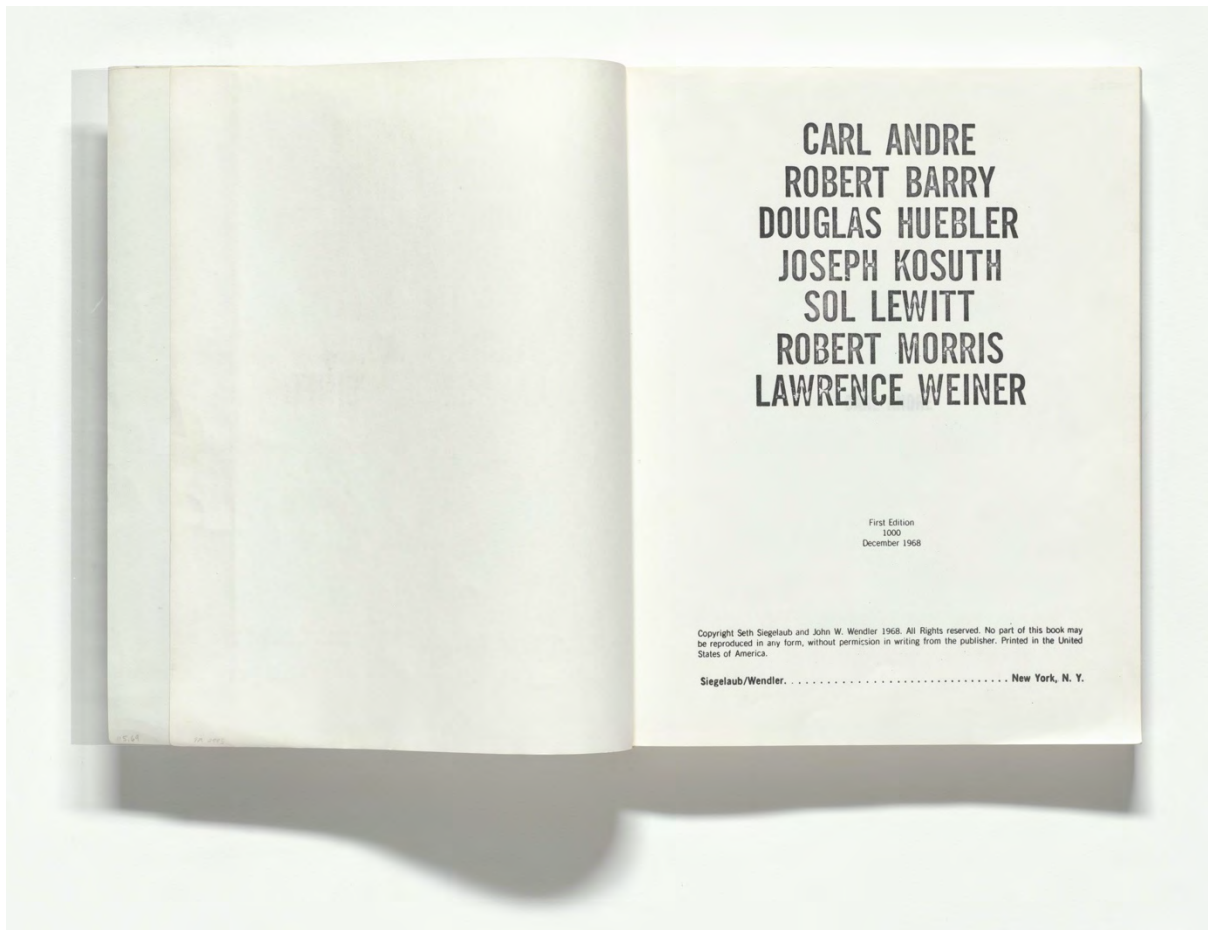


Fig. 3: Seth Siegelau, Xerox Book, 1968

In the 1960s, experimenting with exhibition formats constituted a vivid manifestation of the changing conceptualisation of the curator. Lippard's "Number shows" (1969—1974) displayed work associated with post-minimalism and conceptual art and always included a catalogue in the form of a set of index cards (10 x 15 cm). The cards included the artist's proposals for the respective exhibition and could form a new exhibition anywhere outside the gallery space.<sup>173</sup> The exhibition titles reprised the population count of the city in which the exhibition took place.

A year prior to Lippard's first show in the series, "557,087" in Seattle in 1969, curator and publisher Seth Siegelau had implemented his first group exhibition in the form of a book. "Number shows" and "Xerox Book" not only expressed critique by taking art outside of an institutional context and questioning the evaluation and access of art works. By, for example, determining a set of requirements such as page format and number of pages, their curatorial approach also posed a new façon of collaboration between curator and artist.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>173</sup> Lucy R. LIPPARD in conversation with Antony HUDEK, Number Shows (11 November 2015), in: <https://flash---art.com/article/number-shows/> (6 March 2020).

<sup>174</sup> Joe MELVIN, Seth Siegelau (19 June 2013), in: <https://www.afterall.org/online/8339#footnote8340> (6 March 2020).

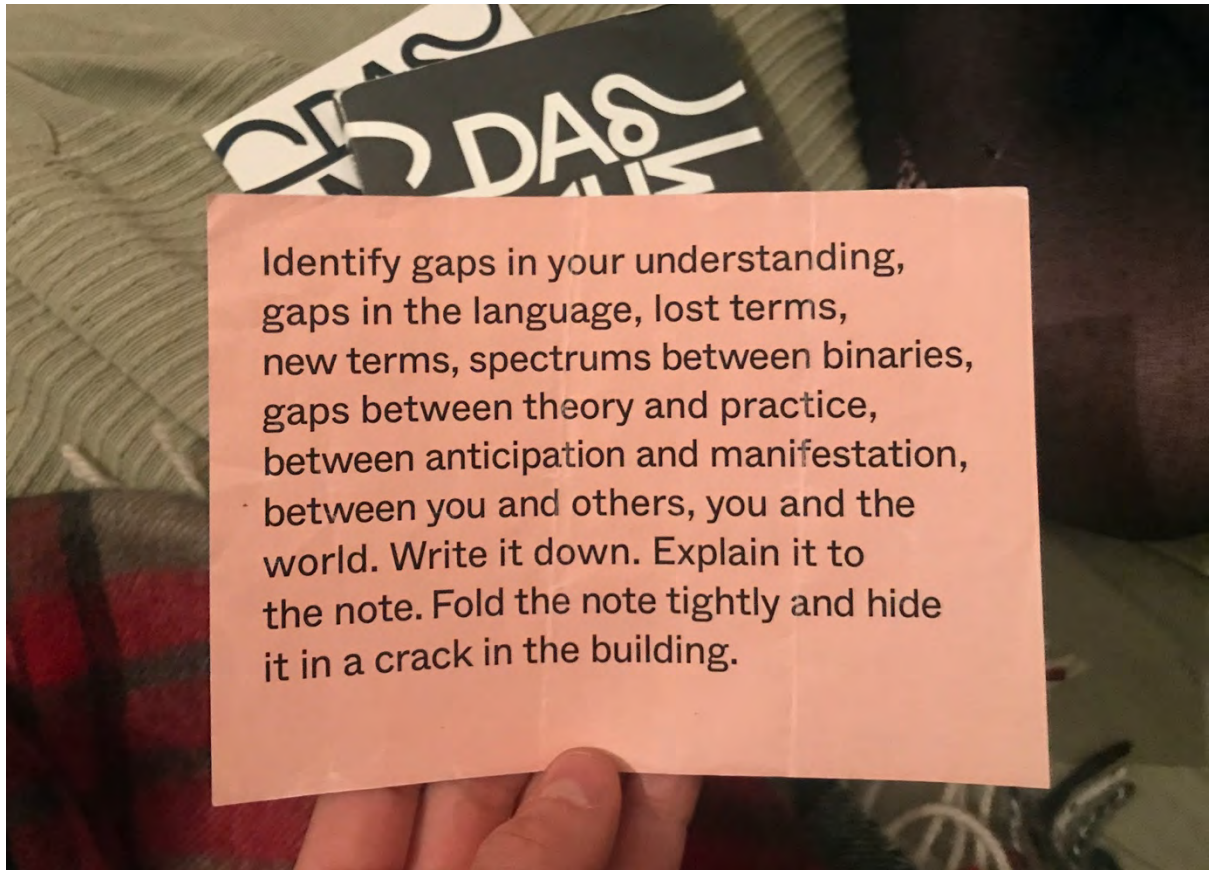
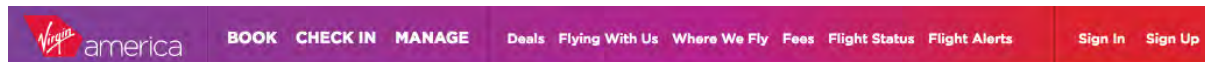
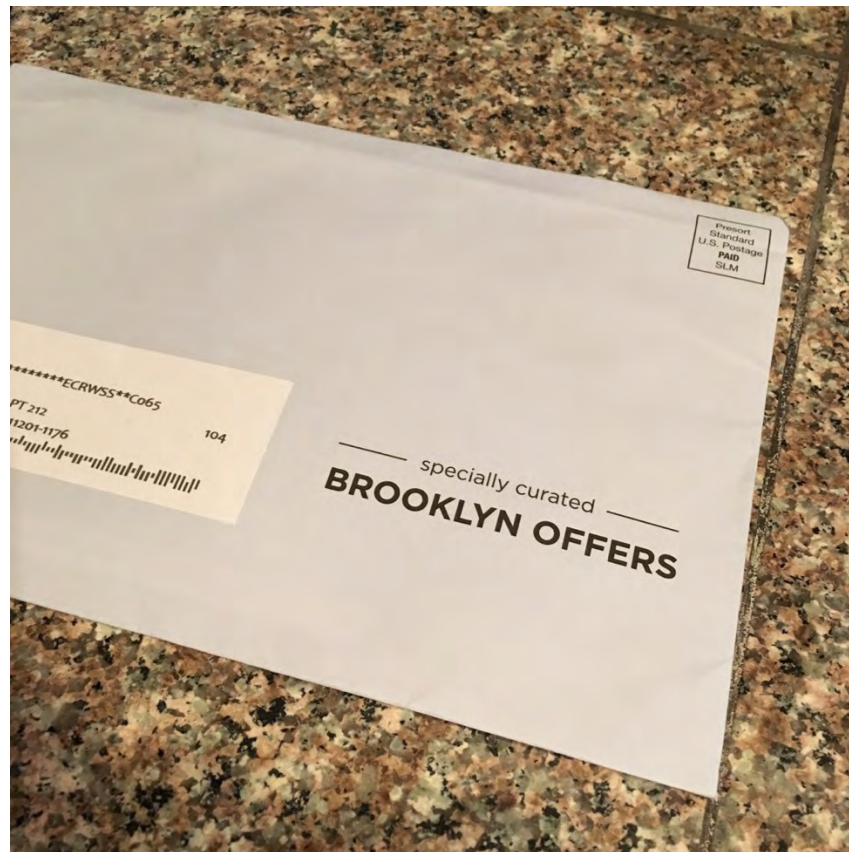


Fig. 4: Gilly Karjevsky, Gaping, 2019  
For "Das Neue Alphabet," Haus der Kulturen der Welt.



#### **VIRGIN AMERICA INTRODUCES NEW FOOD MENU FOR WINTER TRAVELERS**

*Award-Winning Airline Launches New Seasonal First Class and Main Cabin Menus and Expands Healthy Food Selection with "Travel Light" Options for Calorie-Weary Holiday Travelers*

San Francisco — [December 18, 2012] — Virgin America, the California-based airline known for its award-winning cuisine, today announces its new seasonal winter menu. The airline refreshes its offerings quarterly to provide travelers with a wide range of seasonal and locally-sourced food options. The latest menu update includes a new selection of specialty cocktails — and to toast Virgin America's new partnership with The Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas (the newest luxury resort located in the heart of the Las Vegas Strip) — the airline is featuring a signature Cosmopolitan cocktail onboard all flights. Virgin America is also debuting a brand new selection of "Travel Light" menu items like the roasted Portobello wrap and Tuna Nicoise Salad curated by Gilt Taste and even a gluten free snack, Kuko Bites — all natural cookies made with goji berries, seeds, nuts, dried fruit and cacao nibs. The latest "Travel Light" menu options list nutritional content and calorie count for those guests trying to watch their waistline during the holiday season and includes both fresh food items as well as snack options — like the delicious 479° Popcorn Sea Salt Carmel. In First Class, flyers onboard Virgin America will also enjoy a selection of delicious new menu offerings including the yellow beet and citrus salad, followed by a char grilled Wagyu beef burger served with a side of warm German style potato salad, and finished with L'Artisan French macaroons.

Fig. 5: Two images from a Tumblr titled "Curating in the Expanded Field." Between 2014 and 2015 the blog collated various uses of the word "curating" outside of an exhibitionary and curatorial context.

<http://curatingintheexpandedfield.tumblr.com>



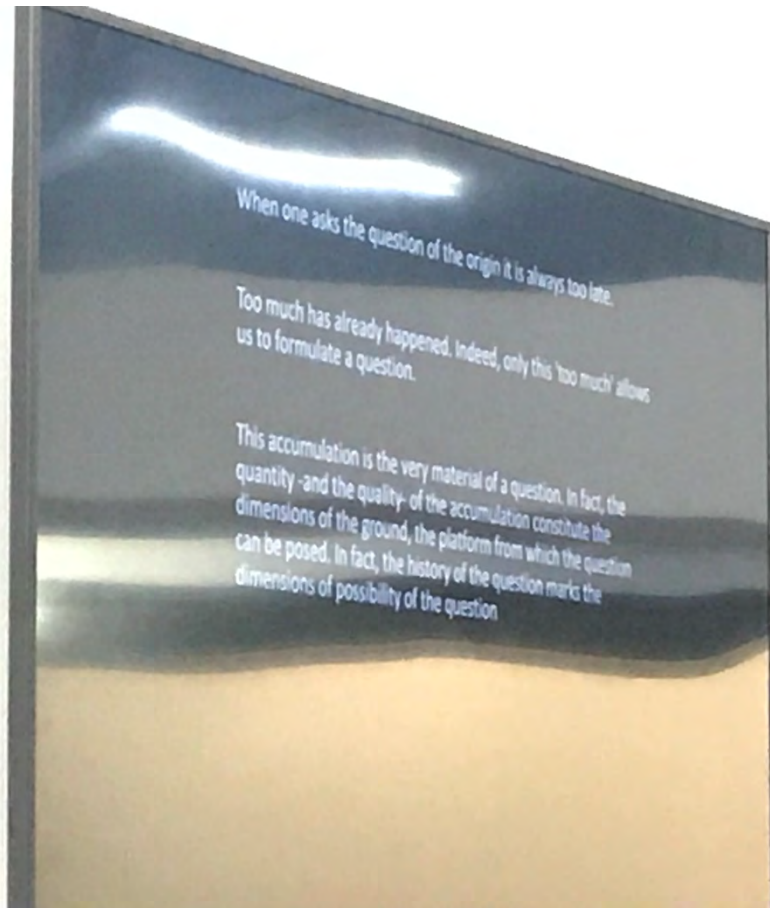


Fig. 6: From Mattia Paganelli's presentation "Beyond Doubt," 1 March 2019. Photo: Marie Artaker



Fig. 7: Juliana Huxtable, The War on Proof, 2017

In this poster series, the artist refers to the “absence of something” as the lowest common denominator where conspiracy theorists converge, meaning anything can be true, if it cannot be disproven. In an interview, Huxtable elucidates how the notions of verifiability and truth are under attack with a well-known example: “[T]he idea that you can always know what you are seeing has really become a battle over proof. The clearest example, or the most absurd example, is when Trump was elected and he would say, ‘I had the most people that we ever had at the histories of inaugurations.’ And then someone would respond and say, ‘Well, actually we had more people at the inauguration of Obama,’ Or, ‘Actually, there were more people at the Women’s March.’ And then someone would say, ‘Well, actually this could all be Photoshopped.’”<sup>175</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Juliana HUXTABLE quoted by Emma van MEYEREN, in: Emma van MEYEREN, Juliana Huxtable and the desire to be. In conversation with the artist, performer, DJ, writer and nightlife icon (19 July 2018), in: [www.glamcult.com/articles/juliana-huxtable-and-the-desire-to-be](http://www.glamcult.com/articles/juliana-huxtable-and-the-desire-to-be) (9 March 2020).



Fig. 8: Hendrick ter Brugghen, Marcus Evangelist, 1621

It is interesting how the pose and gesture in a painting from the seventeenth-century can appear so modern.





Fig. 9: Aby Warburg, Bilderatlas Mnemosyne, pl. 1, 1927–29





Fig. 10: Anonymous Babylonian, Divinatory Liver, c. 1700 BCE





Fig. 11: Fischli/Weiss, *Plötzlich diese Übersicht*, 1981  
Installation view of 350 unfired clay sculptures at the Kunstmuseum Basel, 2000.



Fig. 12: Maria Lassnig, Woman Laokoon, 1976



Fig. 13: Renée Green, Import/export Funk Office, 1992



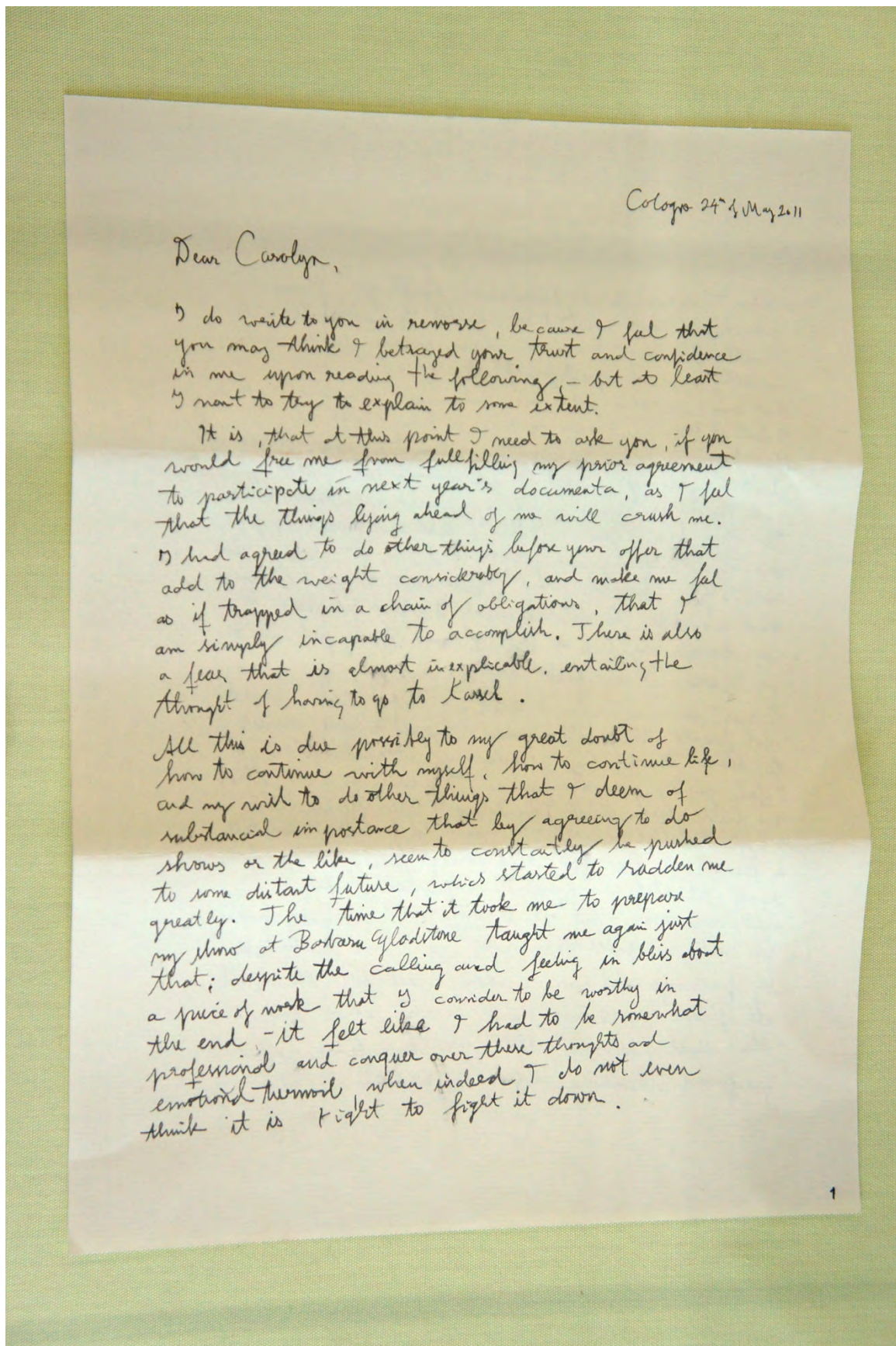


Fig. 14: A letter to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev by Kai Althoff, 24 May, 2011. Exhibited in the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel during DOCUMENTA (13) on the initiative of Christov-Bakargiev and with the permission of the artist.





Fig. 15: Leftloft, 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts, 2012

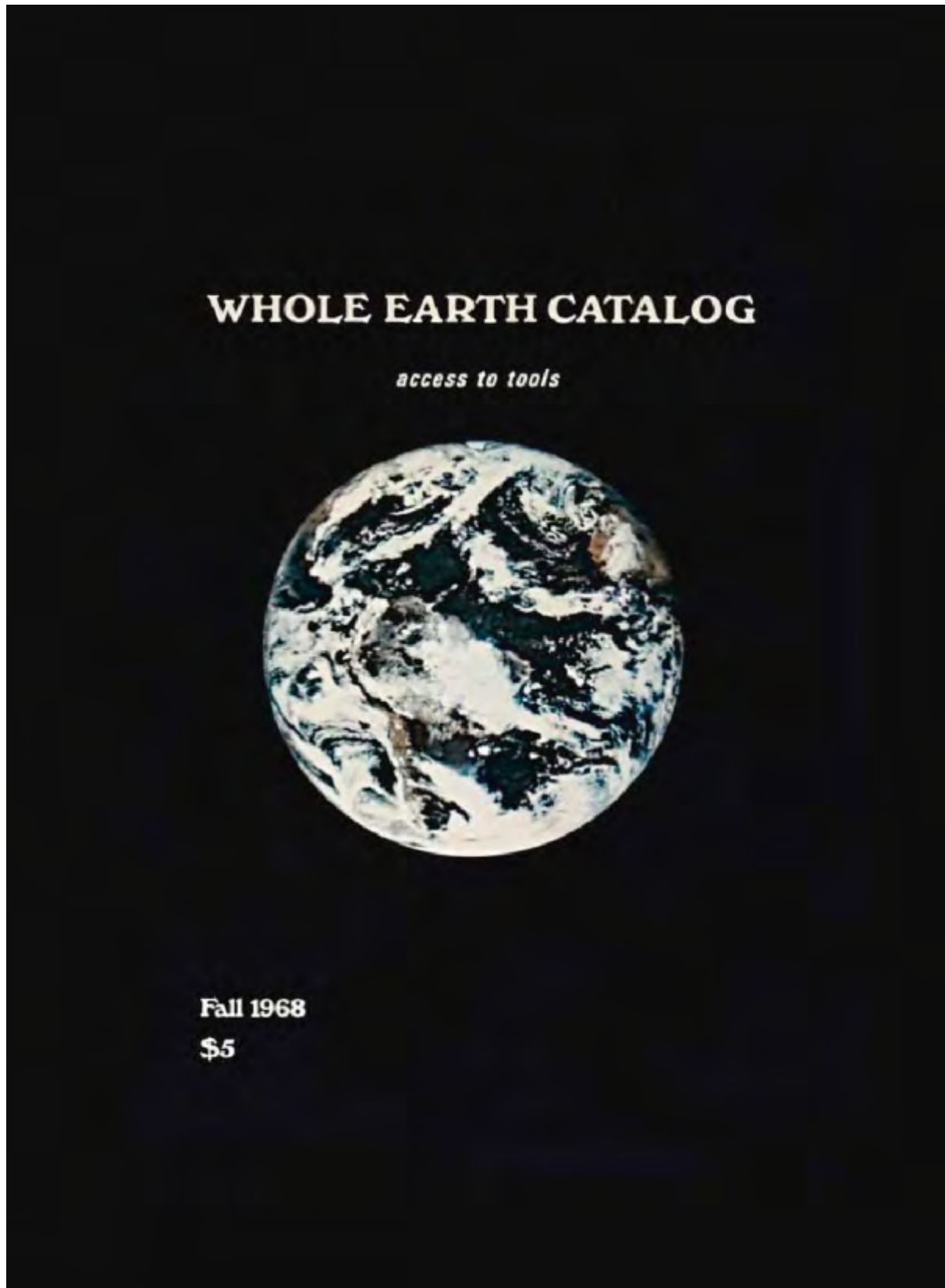


Fig. 16: Whole Earth Catalog. Access to Tools, 1968 (Cover)



Fig. 17: Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man*, 1955

Installation view of the first showing of the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

503 black and white documentary photographs formed a collage in space. The images were taken by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Dorothea Lange, Robert Doisneau, August Sander and Ansel Adams, and depicted scenes from all over the world after the end of World War II. They formed a collective “manifesto for peace and the fundamental equality of mankind.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> The Steichen Collections at CNA, *The Family of Man* at Clervaux Castle, in: [https://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1\\_the-family-of-man](https://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1_the-family-of-man) (30 April 2020).



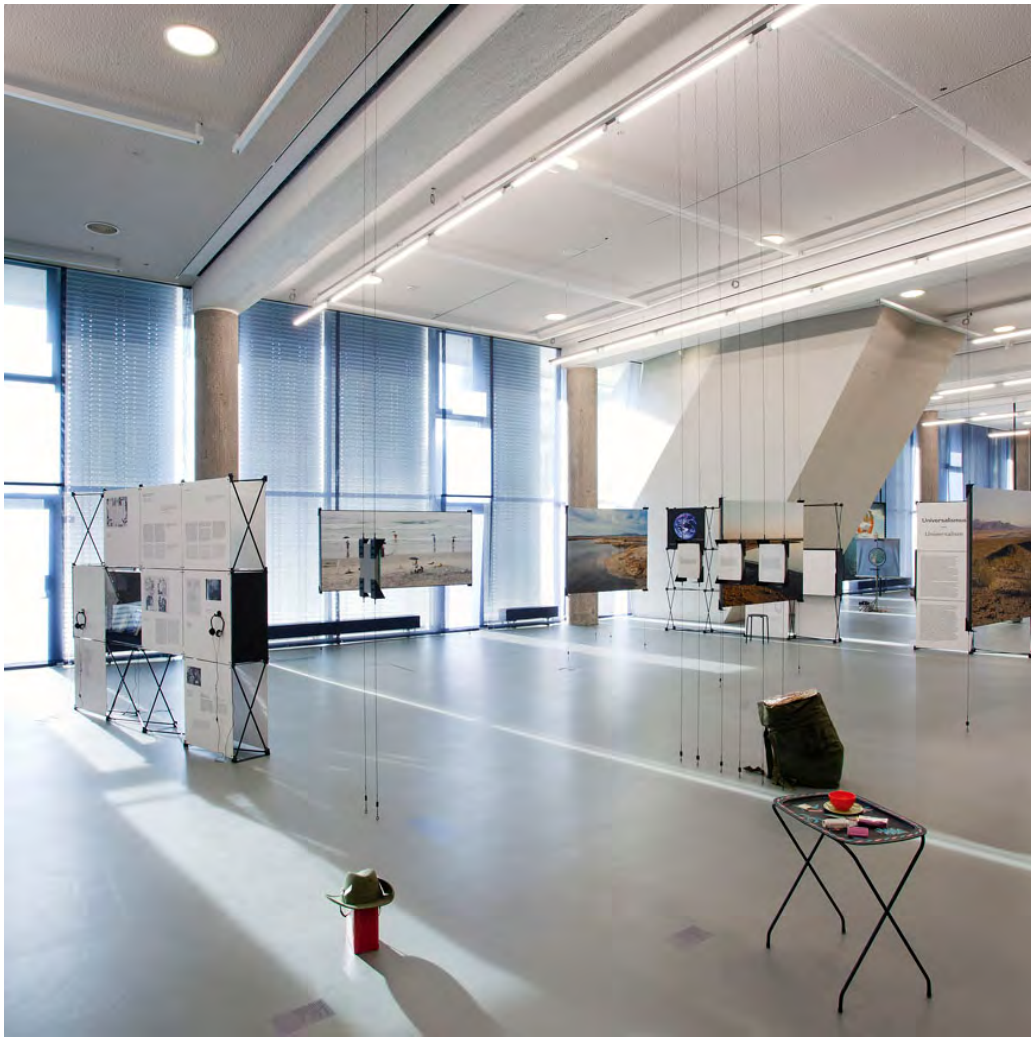


Fig. 18: Installation view “The Whole Earth,” 2013

Next to comparing the exhibition “The Whole Earth” to “The Family of Man,” Sarah James describes the “magazine-like editorial display” of the exhibition at the HKW as “provocative.” Perhaps the intention behind this aesthetic was to – next to the exhibition essentially being based on a magazine – on a visual level point towards how the central thinking models of 1968 came to develop standards of neoliberal processes of today. Standards, which are captured in glossy pop cultural and lifestyle magazines.



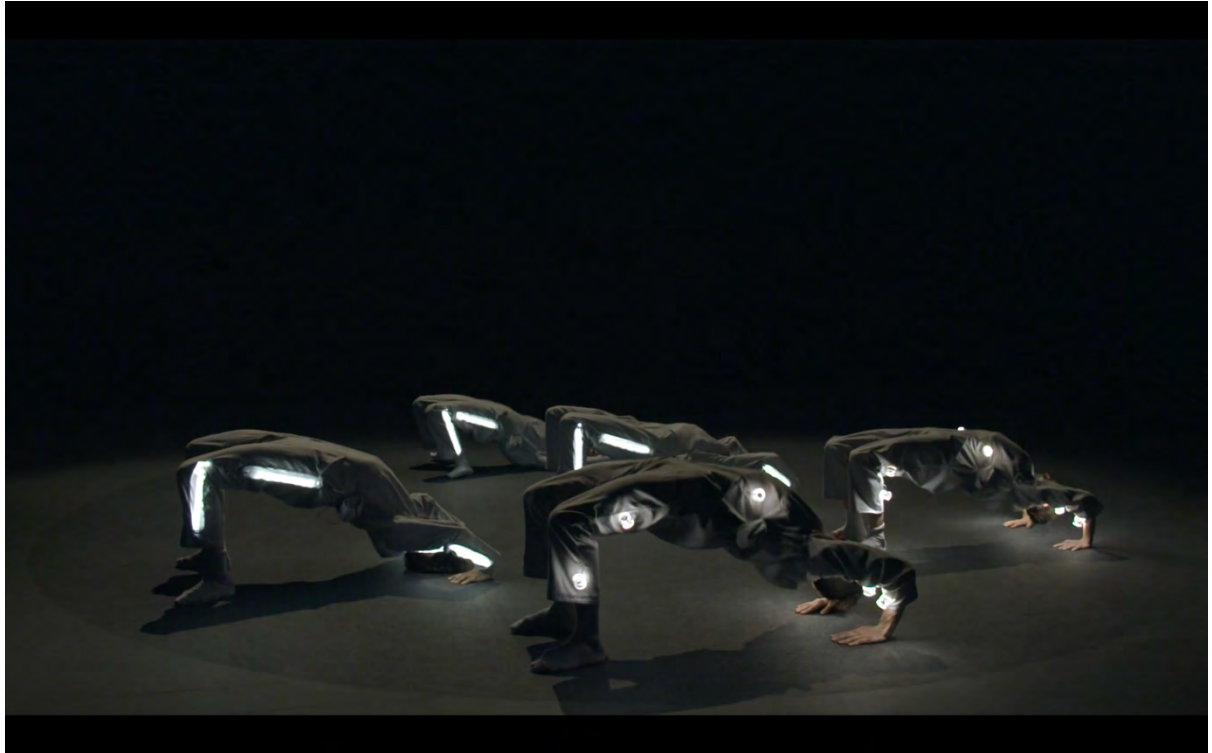


Fig. 19: Julien Prévieux, scene from "Patterns of Life," 2015

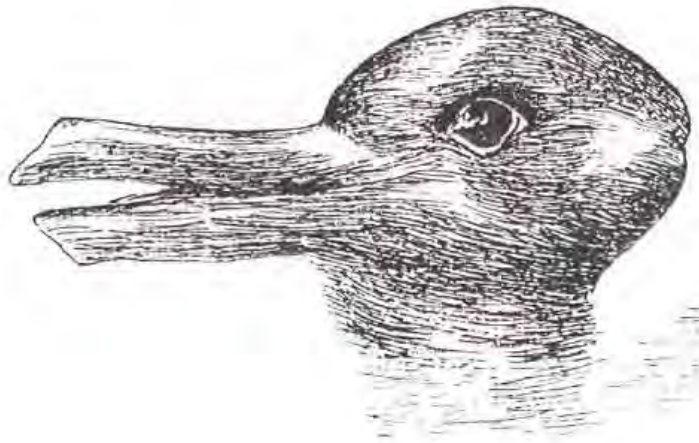


Fig. 20: Joseph Jastrow, Duck/Rabbit Figure (Shifting Figure), 1900

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November – December 2016

**Volkstheater, Vienna**

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**STARTStipendium für Architektur und Design 2014, bmukk**

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Project title: For Future Reference

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**studio VIE, Vienna**

Graphic designer

November 2013 – June 2015

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Internship: Assistance in the design of books, exhibition catalogues and printed matter with an emphasis on arts and culture

Projects (selection):

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— Klaus Zwerger, Die Architektur der Dong (The Architecture of the Dong) (Award: The most beautiful Austrian Books 2013)

February 2013 – August 2013

**W@LZ-Bibliothek, Vienna**

Project proposal for a school library, as well as an introduction into research with books

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**OFF SIGHT, Camp, London**

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**Laurence King Publishing, London**

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**FERA – Federation of European Film Directors**

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**ABC Level 3 Award in Application of Visual Thinking**

2009



# What is Curatorial Research? On Defining and Undefining...

Between and Beyond  
Theory and Practice

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Marie Artaker

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# What is Curatorial Research? On Defining and Undefining...

## Between and Beyond Theory and Practice

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Master Thesis

ecm – educating/curating/managing 2016–2018

Vienna, May 2020

Supervised by Nora Sternfeld and Monika Sommer

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educating  
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ausstellungstheorie & praxis  
an der universität für  
angewandte kunst wien

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EN

## Abstract

Curatorial research is an elusive concept that inherently resists being defined, in order to continuously remain a contested and active part of discourse. This thesis explores the manifold definitions of »the curatorial,« as well as the opportunities curatorial research holds within the realm of questioning historical narratives and challenging public conceptions through concepts withdrawing from certainty, methods of broad-based participation, as well as long-term research projects as an answer to restless, event-based cultural production.

From the vantage point of the exhibition as a tool of research, turning the exhibition into a site for carrying out research, the thesis reflects on curating and the curatorial as a space beyond the tension between theory and practice, and emphasises additional juxtapositions at play, such as the tension between theory and »intuition,« »astra and monstra,« »the inexhaustible and unfathomable,« the immaterial and material, the specific and the overview. My findings suggest a detachment of an understanding of theory as the sole mediator between curator and exhibition; exhibition and audience, and encourage a curatorial process driven by the ineffable that forms new relations of knowledge.

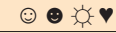
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Kuratorische Forschung ist ein schwer fassbares Konzept, das einer eindeutigen Begriffsbestimmung ausweicht. Dies birgt das Potential, es als aktiven Teil des Diskurses zu halten.

Die vorliegende Arbeit erforscht die vielfältigen Definitionen des »Kuratorischen,« sowie die Möglichkeiten der kuratorischen Forschung, historische und zeitgenössische Narrative zu hinterfragen und herauszufordern. Zu nennen sind hier beispielsweise Konzepte, die sich einer Gewissheit entziehen, partizipative Prozesse, sowie Langzeitforschungsprojekte als Gegenkonzept zu einer event-basierten Kulturproduktion.

Ausgehend von einem Verständnis der Ausstellung als Forschungsmedium, ist diese Masterthese eine Reflektion auf das Feld des Kuratierens und

des Kuratorischen, jenseits des Spannungsverhältnisses zwischen Theorie und Praxis. Die Arbeit beleuchtet weitere Gegenüberstellungen, die in kuratorischen Prozessen wirksam werden: das Verhältnis zwischen Theorie und Intuition, »astra und monstra,« dem »Unerschöpflichen« und »Unerforschlichen,« dem Immateriellen und Materiellen, dem Spezifischen und der Übersicht. Die These fordert ein Umdenken des Alleinstellungsmerkmals von Theorie als Vermittlerin zwischen Kurator\*in und Ausstellung sowie zwischen Ausstellung und Publikum. Dadurch wird auf einen kuratorischen Prozess verwiesen, der von sprachlich nicht fassbaren Vorgängen angetrieben wird und neue Wissensrelationen formt.



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»The meaning of a question is the method by which to answer it. ...  
Tell me how you seek, I will tell you what you are looking for.«<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig WITTGENSTEIN, *Philosophical Remarks*, New York 1975, as quoted by Georges Didi-Huberman, in: Georges DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Atlas, Or the Anxious Gay Science: How to Carry the World on One's Back?*, Chicago 2018, p. 232.

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1.  
Introduction

Based on an understanding of curating as a method of entering a discourse (rather than the illustration of a theory or hypothesis) and the exhibition as a tool of research (rather than a static display) this thesis explores the concept of curatorial research, in which the research process simultaneously constitutes its platform of display. That is to say, the exhibition turns into a site, not only for displaying and mediating but also for enacting and carrying out research.

Ridden with questions, contradictions and vagueness, what is the potential of exhibiting something to a viewing public that one cannot yet explain (with language), or is still in the midst of figuring out? How can a curatorial process—driven by the ineffable—disrupt inherited sedimented knowledges and help re-read the allegedly known?

To me, there are three significant aspects in explaining the relevance of remaining in a state of questioning; of narrating a story one cannot yet tell.

First, a particular narrative or understanding of a circumstance might actually not yet exist and everyone involved in a particular curatorial project is participating in a process of learning. Learning something entirely new, or rather, something that is yet to be created. In a short text introducing the seminar »Negotiating with Reality,« Curator and educator Nora Sternfeld follows the alleged paradoxical question of how we can learn something that does not yet exist, with the statement »[l]earning as a political and emancipatory practice has always been understood as a process towards another possibility: as a way to understand the social relations in order to change them.«<sup>2</sup>

2 TABAKALERA. International Centre for Contemporary Culture, Curation and Mediation: Negotiating with Reality. Curating programme: module 4. Directed by Nora Sternfeld, in: [www.tabakalera.eu/en/curation-and-mediation-nora-sternfeld](http://www.tabakalera.eu/en/curation-and-mediation-nora-sternfeld) (3 March 2020).

The second important aspect involves the question of how we can look at the present from within the present, and engages with a particular



demonstration of contemporaneity as the assembly of a multiplicity of positions, temporalities and realities, adding to a collective, relational production of knowledge. Implementing this conception of the contemporary—looking at specific phenomena from multiple perspectives—as an integral part of a curatorial research project can resist the continuation of a linear narrative in which one comes after the other. From the vantage point of »multi-layered historical frames«<sup>3</sup>, I believe that it is possible to counter a canon in which, for example, one side is portrayed as more advanced, thus marginalising another side into the position of always being chronologically behind and having to catch up.<sup>4</sup> This understanding of contemporaneity further implies that the grappling with history and the present cannot be represented through a clear, unambiguous statement or the sole temporal staging of unchanging objects, but has to be demonstrated through strategies of negotiation; through intangible and perhaps ineffable processes that go beyond the accumulation of knowledge through the human and natural sciences.

But how can these processes be comprehensively communicated? Do we only need to think about interleaving theory and practice more with one another, or are there additional logics at play between curator and exhibition; exhibition and audience that we should consider including? Logics such as »intuition« (Chus Martinez), or »astra and monstra« and »the inexhaustible and the unfathomable« (Georges Didi-Huberman).<sup>5</sup>

This brings me to the third significant aspect centred on Donna Haraway's concept of »situated knowledges.«<sup>6</sup> Anticipating that we are all speaking and acting from a subjective and partial perspective; from within a specific body that is exposed to particular social conditions and power relations, I deem it important to consciously explore the impossibility of neutral knowledge, as well as the purposes and potentialities of interlinking intellectual and sensual knowledge with one another as part

of curatorial research. According to a definition by Sternfeld, situated knowledge is »in the middle—in-between spaces that emerge between art and reality, representation and presence, theory and practice, and above all between the current state of affairs and the possibility of changing it.«<sup>7</sup> I am interested in the associative thoughts that arise within these charged tensions. At first escaping the grasp of reality, they can in fact act as guides for our imagination and lead us to new, unbeaten tracks. Based on this perception, I understand the curatorial as an artistic practice and thus curatorial research as a form of artistic research.

All three aspects attribute great significance to the research process. Alluding to Wittgenstein's quote, paying close attention to the method of approaching a project has the potential to reveal the meaning of the question one is asking.

In 1978 the philosopher Michel Foucault delivered a lecture titled »What is Critique?« Referring to the question by Immanuel Kant »What is the »Aufklärung?« (1784), the lecture prepared the grounds for Foucault's eponymous essay »What is Enlightenment?«

Foucault stated in his talk that his aim was »not to define critique, but precisely to define something else«<sup>8</sup> thus viewing the question relative to its conditions. He cautioned the audience at the onset that there was not *one* definition and that critique »only

3 Olga von SCHUBERT, »100 Years of Now« and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, Berlin 2019, p. 40.

4 For example, the socio-economic divide between the Western world and the Global South.

5 »Logics« here are understood as possible forms of alternative knowledges.

6 Donna HARAWAY, Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, in: Claire G. MOSES et al. (eds.), Feminist Studies, Vol. 14, no. 3., College Park, MD 1988, pp. 575–599.

7 Nora STERNFELD, Para-Museum of 100 Days: documenta between Event and Institution, in: Nanne BUURMAN, Dorothee RICHTER (eds.), *oncurating*, Issue 33 (June, 2017), Zürich 2017, pp. 166.

8 Michel FOUCAULT, Sylvère LOTRINGER (eds.), *The Politics of Truth*, Los Angeles 2007, p. 47.

exists in relation to something other than itself: it is an instrument, a means for a future or a truth that it will not know nor happen to be.«<sup>9</sup>

9 *ibid.*, p. 42.

With reference to asking a question to which there is not one singular or sole answer, I have defined the research question for this thesis as »What is Curatorial Research?« This also manages to encompass my interest in exploring methods of narrating a story that cannot yet be told—either because it doesn't exist or because it consists of multiple strands that have yet to be brought together. Rather than aiming to arrive at a rigid definition, this thesis provides an approximative attempt to understand the many opportunities and possibilities curatorial research holds within the realm of altering historical narratives, public conceptions, and for imagining a different reality, future, and indeed perhaps even truth.

The structure of the following thesis is, in parts, itself a reflection on the approaches explored. Therefore, the introduction is directly followed by a detailed description of a case study, namely a specific example from within practice. Before »zooming out« so to speak, I wish to »zoom in« and in a sense, emulate a visual, receptive experience that will provide the reader with opportunities to perhaps first look, then contextualise. The case study »Curatorial Dictionary« both delineates the difficulty of defining terms within »the curatorial« while pointing to the manifold formats a curatorial project can encompass. Following the concept of the expanded field of exhibition-making, the outcome of a curatorial research project seeks the medium most appropriate. Next to an exhibition, this could entail a lecture series, film program, an action in public space, a reader or a dictionary.

The first two chapters of the thesis dissect the research question, by splitting it into two parts. First,

I include a brief historical derivation of the curatorial, its elusive definitions and how it is distinguished from the term curating with particular reference to a conversation between the curators Beatrice von Bismarck and Irit Rogoff.

Second, I differentiate between various notions and practices of research. Oscillating between the concepts of »starting in the middle« formulated by Rogoff and the idea of gaining an overview through montage delineated by Georges Didi-Huberman, I aim to deduce what kinds of research I am pairing with the notion of the curatorial in the titular question of the thesis: What is curatorial research?

I then examine the potential problems arising from practice-based research methods, departing from Claire Bishop's critique of developments in contemporary art praxes that are focused on the display of aggregated material.

The theoretical part (chapter 2 and 3) is followed by the analyses of two case studies. The first traces the conceptual approach of dOCUMENTA (13) and how its »non-concept« was mediated through the publication series »100 Notes – 100 Thoughts.« The arguments are largely based on a theoretical essay by the curator Chus Martinez, who was head of the curatorial department during the 2012 documenta, where she developed the concept of the »maybe« as a gesture withdrawing from certainty.

The second case study condenses the implications of continuous research projects where each production builds on the next, such as those conducted at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin since 2013. I explore the long-term research projects »The Anthropocene Project« and »100 Years of Now« as well as evaluate the exhibition »The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside« by Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke in more depth.

The case studies do not only display and portray a productive tension between theory and practice, in addition they also demonstrate a number of other

highly charged juxtapositions that I identify and specify in the conclusion.

The figures accompanying the text work on either an illustrative level, by depicting something that is described in the text, or on an associative level, through images that are not directly mentioned in the text, but expand the line of thought into a further, visual and perhaps serendipitous direction.

2.

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What is

\_\_\_\_\_ the Curatorial?

## 2.1.

### »Curatorial Dictionary.« A Research and Problematizing Tool

»Curatorial Dictionary« is a collaborative research project that was initiated by the art and research network tranzit.hu in 2012.<sup>10</sup> It is an open-access, online, Hungarian and English language dictionary that assembles essayistic interpretations of words commonly used within contemporary curatorial discourse and practice. On the one hand, the dictionary raises awareness of the untranslatability of certain terms into Hungarian and other languages than English. On the other, the collection and characterisation of frequently deployed curatorial concepts also emerged as a reaction to the difficulty of clearly defining these terms. An obstacle collectively experienced by the participants of a reading seminar held in preparation for one of the workshops of tranzit.hu's »Free School for Art Theory and Practice« in Budapest.

[...] we recognized a gnoseological uncertainty: we could clearly point to (or defer to) projects and relevant authors/texts which ›reflect‹ on the specific concepts; yet—despite the vast amount of writings related to curating—we proved to be unable to determine more general textual surveys about the ›meanings‹ and conceptual roots of these very notions. After taking a more meticulous look into how concepts work and come about within curatorial discourse, we found that notions, such as ›performative curating,‹ ›new institutionalism,‹ or ›collaboration,‹ are deliberately vague—as they attempt to delineate a particular practice, rather than a theoretical line of inquiry.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> tranzit has been working independently in Austria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the Slovak Republic and Romania since 2002. The focus of the network has been on challenging post-war European canons and the re-examination of (art) histories.

<sup>11</sup> Eszter SZAKÁCS, Curatorial Dictionary: Unpacking the Oxymoron. An Introduction (2012), in: <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/> (26 November 2018).

The idea of the elusive character of these notions being intentional and perhaps even strategically ambiguous points to the opportunity they represent, by continuously remaining contested and therefore an active part of discourse.

Rather than finding the missing encyclopaedic definitions of the selected concepts, the group working on the dictionary aimed at developing an understanding of the surrounding contexts, interrelations and interactions of the words in question. »Curatorial Dictionary« examines how various lines of discourse create significance, by tracing back historical and socio-cultural origins, as well as appearances of the terms in artistic contexts and their citations by writers, therefore going beyond a philological and etymological analysis.<sup>12</sup>

The assumed objectivity of a more conventional dictionary is juxtaposed with the »definitions« of the »Curatorial Dictionary« being written in the form of short essays (fig. 1). The definitions termed as »essays«—»for want of a better genre category«<sup>13</sup>—leading from terms like »Collaboration/Együttműködésen Alapuló Művészeti Gyakorlatok« to »Authorship/Szerzőség« and »New Museology/Új Muzeológia«—create a hypertextual web, referencing and linking to further published texts on these terms. The selection of the words themselves is based on the individual interests of the authors and reflects on discordances within the working group. The online dictionary therefore openly points out the subjectivity, situatedness and partial perspective inherent to any such format. »[The] dictionary is again grounded in discourse.«<sup>14</sup> Its format has been adapted to function as a research and problematising tool.

Each definition credits its author. The working group includes individuals who are active in the fields of contemporary art, curating, ethnography, visual culture, and education in Hungary: Balázs Beöthy, Nikolett Erőss, Zsófia Frazon, Eszter Lázár, and Eszter Szakács. The curator, writer, artist and educator Paul O'Neill likewise contributed to the project through his correspondence.

The essays reflect the personal interests and socio-cultural backgrounds of their authors. In her introductory text on the motivations behind the

project, Eszter Szakács, curator at tranzit.hu and also the editor of the dictionary, explains how, when choosing case studies to further delineate a concept, the group wanted to go beyond often-cited examples of exhibitions, institutions, spaces and so on, and chose to primarily reference curatorial projects that took place in Hungary or Eastern Europe. However, as she notes »we came to realize that the concepts we discuss in the dictionary have been predominantly developed in Western Europe and North America.«<sup>15</sup> Meaning that the words so frequently used might not even be applicable or relevant to curatorial practices globally. This is why the group aims to find ways of diversifying the prevalent »international« notions of the curatorial by geographically mapping out the various concepts in use, including their manifestations and relevance in a further phase of the »Dictionary.«

The constant development of the curatorial field and its contested character, not only entail an ongoing revision of the words used but evidently a continuous emergence of new vocabulary. Having evolved from the noun »curator,« the verb »to curate« was followed by the adjective »curatorial,«<sup>16</sup> i.e. the »curatorial turn,« which subsequently gave rise to a new figure in the history of curating: »the curatorial.«

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> For example, in »The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse« Paul O'Neill mentions the curatorial »turn,« »position,« »gesture,« »star system,« »project« and »field,« but does not yet make use of »the curatorial« as a cohesive concept that stands on its own. See Paul O'NEILL, *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse*, in: Judith RUGG et al. (eds.), *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Chicago 2007, pp. 11–28.

The following definitions of the curatorial do not demonstrate how the verb »curating« was replaced by the noun »the curatorial,« but portray the inherent relationship between the two. While some take the position of considering the curatorial as

a progression of curating—and an answer to the problems encountered throughout the history of curating (Lázár, Rogoff), others fold the two concepts into one another,<sup>17</sup> by viewing curating as embedded in the »dynamic field«<sup>18</sup> that constitutes the curatorial (Bismarck, O'Neill).

## 2.2.

The Curatorial –  
An Abridgement  
from Verb to Noun

The word »Curatorial« itself, in Hungarian »Kurátori (szemlélet),« constitutes one of the words selected for the »Curatorial Dictionary.« Set in parenthesis, the Hungarian word »szemlélet« translates to »approach,« already indicating one of the myriad interpretations, conceptualisations and definitions regarding both theory and practice of this notion. The curatorial could be described as an approach or attitude; a form of critical thought »that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict.«<sup>19</sup> The crucial aspect of this statement being, how curatorial projects can achieve to continuously question themselves in a productive way, while also staying informative for a viewing audience.

In her essayistic definition in the »Curatorial Dictionary,« Hungarian curator Eszter Lázár begins by historically outlining the concept of »the curatorial« as an expansion of curating and the field of exhibition-making. The fugitive concept arose in the 1990s—adjacent to a rising common interest in the profession of the curator and its social significance<sup>20</sup>—as a reaction to representational, consolidated forms of exhibition-making and a stagnation of institutional critique.<sup>21</sup>

It appears that there are two turning points that took place during the twentieth century, without which the unfolding of the curatorial seems unimaginable. Both of them are highlighted in Paul O'Neill's text on the discursive contestation of curatorial practice »The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse.«

The first shift O'Neill mentions took place in the 1960s and constituted the ascendancy of curatorial criticism. Critique became less about the artwork as an autonomous object of study and more about the exhibition as a whole, making a previously invisible praxis institutionally visible. As a result the role of the curator and the structures, politics and economies behind exhibition-making began to move into the centre of attention.

At this point one must add, the newly evoked interest of critics evolved parallel to a change in the way curators practiced their occupation. Among others, the curatorial idiosyncrasies of exhibitions by Lucy Lippard, Seth Siegelaub or Harald Szeemann depicted a shift from the curator as someone working with »practicalities of exhibition-making and museums' collections«<sup>22</sup> to someone following a strong conceptual approach, akin to many artists' practices at the time (figs. 2 and 3).

17 Irit ROGOFF in conversation with Beatrice von BISMARCK, *Curating/ Curatorial*, in: Beatrice von BISMARCK, Jörn SCHAFHAFF, Thomas WESKI (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Berlin 2012, p. 26.

18 Beatrice von BISMARCK, *Curating/ Curatorial*, p. 24.

19 Irit ROGOFF, *Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality* (2006), in: [https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff\\_smuggling.pdf](https://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf) (28 November 2018).

20 Paul O'NEILL, *The Curatorial Turn*, pp. 13–14.

21 Magda TYZLIK-CARVER, | Curator | Curating | The Curatorial | Not-Just-Art Curating. A Genealogy of Posthuman Curating (2017), in: [www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/kuratorin-kuratieren-das-kuratorische-nicht-nur-kunst-kuratieren/](http://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/kuratorin-kuratieren-das-kuratorische-nicht-nur-kunst-kuratieren/) (3 March 2020).

22 *ibid.*

23 *ibid.*

In conjunction to developments in the art world in the 1990s, the curatorial field experienced an institutionalisation of institutional critique that took place in the 1960s and 70s. »Thriving independent curatorial practices often merged the curatorial vision with the self-interest of the institution.«<sup>23</sup> As an answer to the perceived stagnation of critical practice the so-called »curatorial turn« of the 1990s led to curators adopting—and many argue consequently replacing—the role of the critic. Through the growing significance of the curatorial gesture and



its professionalisation, a »neo-critical« space of curating began to open up, leading to the aforementioned further expansion of the boundaries of the exhibition format. From »practice to discourse.« Critique now took place in all stages of curating: before (a new focus on the process of exhibition-making and reflection on its ideological and institutional utterances), during (the exhibition as a space for discussion, critique and debate), after (the continuation of the discourse, e.g. through the exhibition catalogue<sup>24</sup>) and in-between the exhibition (the discourse of the curatorial turn is largely led by curators themselves).

According to Lázár's definition in the online dictionary, »the curatorial« departs from solely making exhibitions to working on more long-term, process-oriented, less object-focused projects with an emphasis on discursivity and radical educational methods. In its broadest and ideal sense, the curatorial can be understood as a contribution to socio-political realities; as an attempt to understand and maybe even change them through developing curatorial concepts that try to go beyond the realm of the representational. Discourse around the curatorial instigated »a shift from representation to the possibility of action.«<sup>25</sup>

24 »It is arguable that the most important essays about art over the last ten years have not been in art magazines but they have been in catalogues and other material produced around galleries, art centres and exhibitions.« Liam GILLICK (2005), quoted in: O'NEILL, The Curatorial Turn, p. 14.

25 Nora STERNFELD, Negotiating with Reality: Artistic and Curatorial Research (2018), in: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaMs36HXun0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaMs36HXun0) (3 March 2020).

The outcome of this research and process-based approach can be manifold and is liberated from the exhibition space. Whether it turns into a public program, an action, a website or a dictionary, curatorial work seeks the medium most appropriate in mediating the concepts negotiated. According to this conception, the »Curatorial Dictionary,« seen as a platform of display, constitutes an example of a curatorial project itself. Hence, the decision to

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\* Lucy R. LIPPARD  
in conversation with Antony  
HUDEK, Number Shows  
(11 November 2015),  
in: [https://flash---art.com/  
article/number-shows/](https://flash---art.com/article/number-shows/)  
(6 March 2020).  
† Joe MELVIN, Seth  
Siegelau (19 June 2013),  
in: [www.afterall.org/  
online/8339#footnote8340](http://www.afterall.org/online/8339#footnote8340)  
(6 March 2020).

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fig. 1 Raymond Williams → p. 24

»Keywords. A Vocabulary of Culture  
and Society,« first published 1976

fig. 2 Lucy R. Lippard → p. 27

»557,087/955,000,« 1970

fig. 3 Seth Siegelau → p. 27

»Xerox Book,« 1968

In the 1960s, experimenting with exhibition formats constituted a vivid manifestation of the changing conceptualisation of the curator. Lippard's »Number shows« (1969–1974) displayed work associated with post-minimalism and conceptual art and always included a catalogue in the form of a set of index cards (10 x 15 cm). The cards included the artist's proposals for the respective exhibition and could form a new exhibition anywhere outside the gallery space.\* The exhibition titles reprised the population count of the city in which the exhibition took place.

A year prior to Lippard's first show in the series, »557,087« in Seattle in 1969, curator and publisher Seth Siegelau had implemented his first group exhibition in the form of a book. »Number shows« and »Xerox Book« not only expressed critique by taking art outside of an institutional context and questioning the evaluation and access of artworks. By, for example, determining a set of requirements such as page format and number of pages, their curatorial approach also posed a new façon of collaboration between curator and artist.†

fig. 4 Gilly Karjevsky → p. 37

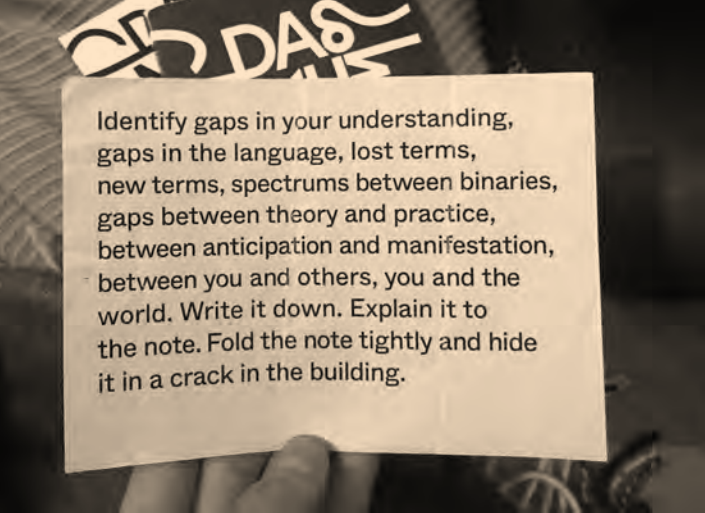
»Gaping,« 2019

For »Das Neue Alphabet,« Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

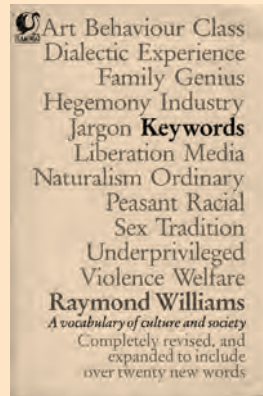
fig. 5 curatingintheexpandedfield.tumblr → p. 38

2014–2015

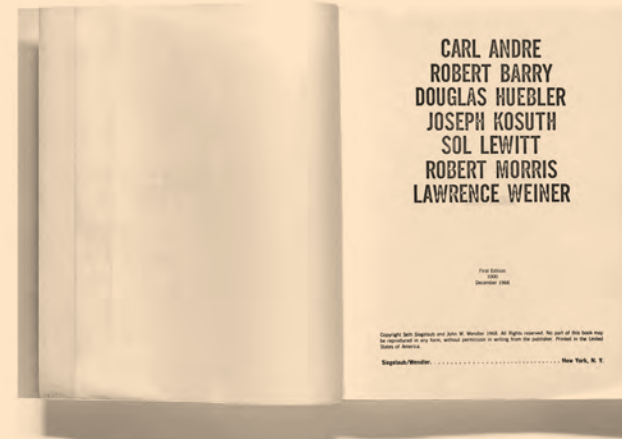
Two images from a Tumblr titled »Curating in the Expanded Field.« Between 2014 and 2015 the blog collated various uses of the word »curating« outside of an exhibitionary and curatorial context.



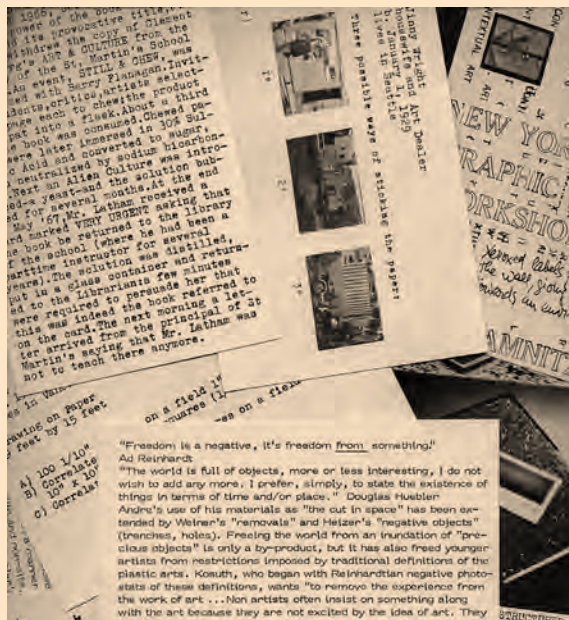
4



1



3



2



Tuna Nicoise Salad curated by Gilt Taste

5



realise this thesis by first delineating the notion of the curatorial through the example of a meta-analytical project which writes »about writings on curatorial and artistic practices«<sup>26</sup>—likewise follows the desire to look at »how different lines of discourse create meanings.«<sup>27</sup>

Despite resistive traits towards more authorial and representative models of curation—that basically say »this is how it is«—O'Neill stresses that the various conceptions of the curatorial are not meant to be in opposition to curating or exhibition-making. The prime objective of »the curatorial« is discursiveness and self-reflection, occurring in temporary spaces of collaboration and participation. »However dissensual, this co-habitational time can be made public, warts and all.«<sup>28</sup> The curatorial stresses the process of questioning, rather than striving to arrive at a polished argument that is put on display.

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26 SZAKÁCS, Curatorial Dictionary.

27 *ibid.*

28 Paul O'NEILL, The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox, in: Jens HOFFMANN (ed.), The Exhibitionist no. 6, Berlin/Turin 2012, p. 57.

29 BISMARCK, Curating/Curatorial, p. 24.

30 *ibid.*

31 *ibid.*

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In a conversation between the curators Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck on the differences between curating and the curatorial, Bismarck describes how she views curating as intrinsically interwoven with the curatorial. The preceding notion of curating, which is both »aesthetically, [...] socially, economically, institutionally, and discursively defined,«<sup>29</sup> is embedded in the larger frame of the newer concept: the curatorial. To Bismarck, the main motivation behind curating is the »need to become public.«<sup>30</sup> Namely the need to create a public platform for new, uncharted relations between »artworks, artefacts, information, people, sites, contexts, resources.«<sup>31</sup> The curatorial, on the other hand, is the »dynamic field«—or as described by O'Neill:

»a continuous space of negotiation«<sup>32</sup>—in which curating takes place. Hence, curating is conditioned by the curatorial.

O'Neill refers to the exhibition as a component of a constellation, which makes up the aforementioned »dynamic field.« Therefore, O'Neill once again suggests, that the exhibition is only one of many possible options of display. The term constellation, drawn from the Frankfurter Schule, does »not [create] a complete picture, but rather a combination that allows one to draw a picture, and make proposals based upon this picture.«<sup>33</sup> In »The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox« O'Neill explains how curatorial processes can overlap and combine a myriad of possible aesthetic and discursive forms. The constellations can both include the hermetic form of the exhibition and at the same time question and point out its structural errors through intersecting with other processes, placing together »incommensurable social objects, ideas and subject relations.«<sup>34</sup>

»[In the Adornian sense] the constellation [...] is an ever-shifting and dynamic cluster of changing elements that are always resisting reduction to a single common denominator. By preserving irreconcilable differences, such praxis retains a tension between the universal and the particular, between essentialism and nominalism.«<sup>35</sup>

32 O'NEILL, The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox, p. 56.

33 Simon SHEIKH, From Para to Post: The Rise and Fall of Curatorial Reason (2017), in: [www.springerlin.at/en/2017/1/von-para-zu-post](http://www.springerlin.at/en/2017/1/von-para-zu-post) (3 March 2020).

34 O'NEILL, The Curatorial Constellation and Paracuratorial Paradox, p. 57.

35 *ibid.*

According to Bismarck and O'Neill, the curatorial does not negate curating or the exhibition (which is commonly seen as the most principal form of curating) but allows the two to seep into a larger system.

Despite agreeing on many things, Rogoff instead attempts to make clear distinctions between curating and the curatorial in her dialogue with Bismarck. She does this through elaborating on an operative

differentiation. Rogoff's point of departure in questioning the two concepts comprises of platforms of knowledge production and what they can be.

Rogoff explains curating in terms of a professional practice and its accompanying toolbox. Curating is focused on an outcome (such as an exhibition) and operates within the realm of the representational. The curatorial, on the other hand, delineates a more process-oriented approach. It isn't finished as soon as something is presented in a tangible form for others to view. The outcome can, in a slightly abstract sense, be understood more as an epistemic structure than a finished display; a form of critical thinking. Rogoff speaks about multiple knowledges meeting and interacting with each other for a moment to produce an »event of knowledge«<sup>36</sup> and continuously highlights the importance of togetherness and involving the public. Understanding cannot come from the mere provision of information. It is the relations of objects, artworks, people, places etc. and the processes of negotiation that happen between them that produce knowledge. Rather than describing the curatorial as a larger entity that curating is part of, to Rogoff, the curatorial posits a different *approach*. Albeit one, that is still inherently interlocked with curating.

36 BISMARCK, Curating/Curatorial, p. 23.

37 ROGOFF, Curating/Curatorial, p. 26.

To Rogoff the two notions work in different ways and can point towards each other's potentials as well as boundaries. In distinguishing between the two, Rogoff aspires »to a situation in which a discussion on the curatorial would chase around after curating and make it uncomfortable«<sup>37</sup> encouraging it to be more self-reflective and aware of operating under a set of both explicit and implicit conditions. She uses the concept of intervention in distinguishing between the two. The curatorial intervenes into curating—and sometimes the other way around. Rogoff suggests an interdependency and explains

that the relation between curating and the curatorial »stops knowledge from travelling as information and makes it begin to travel as a series of proposals or a series of provocations.«<sup>38</sup> One reacts to the other and therefore both are intertwined with one another.

## 2.2.1.

Caught Between  
Two Modes of  
Production

The individual definitions of Rogoff and Bismarck both suggest an inherent and necessary interplay between curating and the curatorial. The possibly inseparable relationship between the two terms points to a general struggle within the curatorial field, caught between two modes of production:

Two modes that always shift between being complementary and conflictual: the idea of research in an academic sense, and the idea of practice in a professional sense. On the one hand, then, the curatorial is examined and executed as an academic form, and on the other, curating is seen as a practice within galleries, museums, biennales and other forms of exhibition-making. And more often than not, these streams are seen as separate, particularly in terms of research methods and aims: on the one hand, there is an apparent meta-level of curating, sometimes called the curatorial, with its aspects of theorizing, historicizing and politicizing the practice, and on the other the hands-on, realpolitik of exhibition-making, and its concerns with installation, funding and publicness.<sup>39</sup>

38 *ibid.*, p. 31

39 SHEIKH, *From Para to Post*.

40 »Derrida and his spectral logic of the pledge, the promise, might have seen the »impossibility of curating«—its unfulfilled potential lurking at its edges—as its very significance.« See ROGOFF, *Curating/Curatorial*, p. 24.

In her ruminations, Rogoff highlights the productive potential of this divergence which she exemplifies as »the gap.« The gap could constitute something that was forgotten or cannot be implemented within the constraints of production and/or the space one is working with. Rogoff describes the tension between one's aims and aspirations when making an exhibition and the actual impact it has on the world, as one core relevance of the curatorial process. The »impossibility of curating.«<sup>40</sup> In this very gap, that opens up between the urgency one wants to

draw public attention to and to what is possible within the protocol of exhibited culture, the curatorial takes place (fig. 4). Evidently, the »realpolitik of exhibition-making« also entails all that is lost, and at the same time gained, along the path between the transmission and reception of the project by a viewing public. In making the gap visible, the role of the audience is critical. »This is where I hold such a belief in the audience, as people recognize the gap and go to work with it—sometimes in a conscious way, sometimes in an unconscious way, but the gap is enormously active.«<sup>41</sup> Consequently, in Rogoff's curatorial work, there is always a central element of creating platforms that allow an audience to take part in the project for the purpose of a collective and more open process of knowledge production.

41 *ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

42 Vanessa Joan MÜLLER, *Relays*, in: Jens HOFFMANN (ed.), *The Exhibitionist* no. 4, Berlin/Turin 2011, p. 66.

## 2.2.2.

Bridging the Gap  
Between Theory  
and Practice

The central notion of collective knowledge production—for example exposing the gap, by talking about it with the viewing audience—was also adopted institutionally by museums and other exhibition spaces through discursive concepts such as temporary schools or academies.

From the 1990s onwards, curatorial institutions consequently provided new formats of engagement and education, and were fitted with archives, libraries, research centres and cinemas. Albeit often still perceived as an »accompanying programme« by the public today, this curatorial turn instigated that discursive events were given parity with the installation of exhibitions. The lecture series, the reader, the seminar, all constitute »arenas that have taken the place of the exhibition.«<sup>42</sup>

What was historically once connected, was now starting to remerge. In the introduction to »Libraries and Museums,« the architect Paulgerd Jesberg delineates the spatial and cognitive unit that art and books had formed for centuries, until new institutions

had to be established for each, due to the continuous growth of collections during the 1800s.<sup>43</sup>

Of course, the conceptualisation of discursive spaces was not only connected to bringing theory and practice closer together by, for example, enabling a public reflection of the work process as well as feedback from the audience. These new formats also constituted a reaction to representational, mono-directional forms of exhibition-making. However, despite these developments going hand in hand with more open and democratic gestures towards the audience, critique was also voiced towards the expansion of the notion of curating regarding the consequences it may have on institutions that originally hold or held these duties, such as universities, arthouse cinemas or community centres. In her text »Relays,« the art historian and curator Vanessa Joan Müller urges for more collaboration and the initiation of communication processes to take place between institutions, rather than relieving existing institutions from their work as part of a movement of a seemingly ever-expanding field (fig. 5).

In addition to work that involves the conception and installation of exhibitions, curating has become synonymous with: »writing accompanying texts, programming film series, organizing lectures.«<sup>44</sup> Is the notion of the curatorial (seen as the continuous discursive contestation of curatorial practice) compatible with an ever-expanding skill set? Can both curators and institutions remain critical and focused on in-depth research, if they constantly have to keep up with publishing books, moderating lectures, collaborating with institutions and conceiving public programs while also producing exhibitions?

Most discourse around what the curatorial may be took place in the early 2000s (e.g. »Smuggling—An Embodied Criticality« by Irit Rogoff, 2007) and slowly ebbed away after the second edition of »The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating,« edited by Jean-Paul Martinon, which was published in 2015.<sup>45</sup> Further iterations of the word include the »Para-

curatorial,« discussed for example in three separate texts in an issue of *The Exhibitionist* in 2011,<sup>46</sup> or the »The Post-Curatorial Turn« announced by the editors of the first 2017 issue of *Die Springerin* with the same title.<sup>47</sup>

It doesn't appear necessary to arrive at a definition everyone agrees on. The various concepts mainly appear as a trigger to instigate a process of self-reflection for curators and institutions working in the field, as well as collective discussion. Whether one chooses to understand the curatorial as a philosophy, i.e. a form of critical thinking, or more in terms of a space of constellations, what one can surmise is that all definitions appear to distinguish this notion through its elusiveness, both in terms of its theoretical understanding and what its practical outcomes might be—regardless of whether one finds the developments of the curatorial positive or negative. The curatorial »doesn't rush to embody itself« but persists in withstanding and questioning the established order of things.

43 Paulgerd JESBERG, *Bibliotheken und Museen (Libraries and Museums)*, Stuttgart 1964, p. 14.

44 MÜLLER, *Relays*, p. 66.

45 Despite the beginning of the conversation surrounding »the curatorial« also falling into place with a greater emergence of publications on curating, seen as an own entity, in 2003 the Wikipedia article on curating consisted of only one sentence that read: »a person who manages the institution's collection.«

46 Jens HOFFMANN (ed.), *The Exhibitionist* no. 4, Berlin/Turin 2011.

47 Springerin (ed.), *The Post-Curatorial Turn*, Springerin Issue 1, Vienna 2017.

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What Kind

\_\_\_\_\_ of Research?

## OPEN CALL: 2019 Research-Based Curatorial Project

The OCAT Institute is pleased to announce the official launch of the ›2019 Research-Based Curatorial Project.‹ We are now accepting research-based exhibition proposals from academic and art circles. Submissions should be received by 24:00 on 31 March 2019.<sup>48</sup>

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48 CALL FOR CURATORS, OPEN CALL: 2019 Research-Based Curatorial Project (2019), in: [www.callforcurators.com/call/open-call-2019-research-based-curatorial-project/](http://www.callforcurators.com/call/open-call-2019-research-based-curatorial-project/) (3 March 2020).

›The Research-Based Curatorial Project is a program launched by OCAT Institute with the aim of encouraging curatorial research in conjunction with exhibition curating. Since its inauguration in 2015, OCAT Institute has organized and presented a number of research-based exhibitions, including ›La Mémoire Brûle,‹ ›Ten Years of OCAT,‹ ›An Exhibition about Exhibitions‹ and ›Big Tail Elephants: One Hour, No Room, Five Shows,‹ as well as their related academic research activities, and has been devoted to the collection, organization and preservation of archives of contemporary art and exhibitions. Dedicated to discovering and facilitating art research programs and comprehensive exhibition of the research results, this curatorial project aims to provide institutional guidance and resources for outstanding young scholars and curators in the fields of contemporary art and art history, and build a platform that promotes communications in the arena of the arts.‹

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»The curatorial could be posited as a form of research, not just into exhibition-making, but a specific mode of research that may or may not take on the spatial or temporal form of an exhibition«<sup>49</sup>

49 Simon SHEIKH, *Towards the Exhibition as Research*, in: Paul O'NEILL, Mick WILSON (eds.), *Curating Research*, London/Amsterdam 2015, p. 33.

The curator Simon Sheikh understands the curatorial as a field for and of research. He explains the curatorial as »something that employs the thinking involved in exhibition-making and researching«<sup>50</sup> and delineates two strands, one constituting of research into the history of curating and the other comprising the expansion of the notion of curating that views the exhibition and curatorial projects as a form of research itself. The former strand comprises research into past exhibitions, the figure of the curator and curatorial canons. The latter views the curatorial project as a method of research and its presentation, within a specific topic, particular location or local art practice, in a discourse set apart from science, journalism, politics and sociology. The curatorial comprises a discourse of its very own.

Sheikh describes the curatorial as a specific form of knowledge production and outlines its relationship to other forms of research as well as how it contributes to the relation between knowledge and power, knowing and unknowing.

Designating the exhibition as a research tool, as Sheikh explicitly suggests, transmits an idea of an unfinished process. The focus is not on the final display. Despite objects and texts possibly being in place, the curator(s) are still in a process of figuring things out—akin to the visitors—who point out gaps, question and expand the research. In that sense, the curatorial has the possibility to turn less into a gesture of power stating »this is how it is« and rather into one communicating »this is my/our process of trying to figure things out« or even »this is how things could be...«

### 3.1.

»Recherché« and  
»Forschung«

Understanding the curatorial both as historical and expanded, Sheikh explains further the notion of research, which to him is crucial in understanding the notion of curatorial research.

In differentiating between two types of research modes, Sheikh refers to the definition of the term in two different languages. He starts with the French term »recherché« understood as the gathering of facts in a journalistic manner, in order to »uncover« a story or, perhaps more aspirationally, the truth. This approach is juxtaposed by the German word »Forschung«, a translation of the term »research« in the scientific sense. Always requiring a hypothesis or proposition about its objects of study, »Forschung« deals with the forming of new ideas and concepts.

Sheikh distinguishes between two counteracting movements. In the French definition, research moves from objects to discourse, whereas the German meaning suggests a movement from discourse to objects. »Recherché« is suggestive of a journalistic type of research in which conclusions are made according to specific findings, i.e. objects. By contrast, »Forschung« entails a scientific model of research that departs from a number of learned strategies, rules and a hypothesis that is applied to its objects of research. »Science implies a specific way of looking, through apparatuses of knowledge, as exemplified by the microscope and the laboratory.«<sup>51</sup> According to the reaction of an object of study to an experiment, the hypothesis made on the onset is either proven, disproven or changed. »So, unlike »recherché,« which treats its findings as facts, »Forschung« treats them as uncertainties and concepts that need to be defined and may contradict the pre-emptive thesis about them.«<sup>52</sup>

50 *ibid.*, p. 34.

51 *ibid.*, p. 37.

52 *ibid.*, p. 37.



Sheikh argues that »the specific way of looking« in scientific research implies a constant revision of its frameworks of truth, whereas journalistic methods won't be adapted or modified if the collected material doesn't lead anywhere or if a story turns out to be uninteresting and not newsworthy.

So, in a sense, »Forschung« is more flexible and adaptable in regards to its methodologies, however it is less adjustable regarding the place or location the research is conducted in. A journalist, for example, can carry out her/his/their investigations in the archive or in the field, whereas a scientist is often bound to a laboratory and the use of instruments.

Both aspects of research are deployed in curatorial practices. Sheikh mentions »recherché« as a pertinent, and therefore unquestioned, process of curatorial research. Especially when considering the strand of research into the history of curating. When interested in the historical context, »recherché« is vital in figuring out questions along the line of: »How did the exhibition actually look, what was included and how and what has been highlighted or downplayed in the subsequent historicisation?«<sup>53</sup> Every exhibition in some way or another deploys elements of »recherché,« but not every exhibition demonstrates a hypothesis, proposition or takes place in a laboratory-like environment.

However, Sheikh draws out the, to him very apparent, correlation between the focused, isolated view and experimental character of the scientific laboratory and the white cube of the museum or gallery. Both scientific research and the exhibition are bound to one location and a specialised »lab-team.« Going hand in hand with this comparison, is the critique that both the experiment and the exhibition in the white cube are not exposed to societal relations due to their isolation.

Assuming curators of an exhibition set out with a theory, like one would in »Forschung,« which during the course of their research gets disproven, Sheikh asks whether the presentation of findings

in a curatorial context would then display the projects' failure? He further questions, whether this would lead to a modification of the method of research applied and other processes involved in curatorial practice?

Although the two strands of research hold a monopoly in the production of knowledge in the public realm, Sheikh mentions a hierarchical relationship between the two. Being part of the academic discourse, »Forschung« is raised above »recherché.« Sheikh defines the curatorial, in its expanded sense, as taking place in a discourse outside of »Forschung« (science) and »recherché« (journalism) and points to its proximity to sociology—positioned in the grey area between the two—in terms of its fuzziness and complexity in defining its research culture in relation to the hierarchy of knowledge.<sup>54</sup> The curatorial thus constitutes its own form of research.

53 *ibid.*, p. 36.

54 *ibid.*, p. 38.

55 *ibid.*, p. 39.

56 *ibid.*, p. 40.

»[C]an the exhibition [itself] be a site of research and, if so, can one, then, also think of it as a type: the research exhibition? We would then have to understand the exhibition as a proposition.«<sup>55</sup> A proposition that, next to the format of the exhibition, can take on other forms of assemblage and assembly. In asking this question, Sheikh consciously chooses the term proposition, instead of theory or thesis, because a proposition offers the consideration of a certain possibility. Similar to a suggestion, a proposition cannot be proven or disproven. Akin to the aforementioned understanding of the curatorial offering different perspectives on the world and making new realities thinkable, Sheikh speaks of the curatorial as »political imaginary«<sup>56</sup> that allows for speculation through both a logical, philosophical and aesthetic proposition. Sheikh further stresses that the modes and aesthetics of display and exhibition design are an integral part of this knowledge production.



The research exhibition turns into the site, not only for displaying and mediating, but for enacting and carrying out the research.<sup>57</sup> The research doesn't only precede its presentation, but is realised throughout and because of its actualisation during the course of the curatorial project.

Sheikh concludes on the potential of the research exhibition to change both the practice of research and the production of knowledge.

[T]he exhibition as research can challenge the monolithic and populist tendencies of exhibition-making and history writing and contribute to the overall culture of research, altering what is understood as either ›recherché‹ or ›Forschung‹ and their virtual monopoly on truth production. But it can only do so by avoiding solidification and codification, remaining unwieldy, uncertain and unfinished.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.2.

## Researching from Within the Conditions. Thinking and Acting Without an Overview

Every knowledge system would like to have a beginning,« but at the same time, »[w]hen one asks the question of origin, it is always too late. Too much has already happened. Indeed, only this ›too much‹ allows us to formulate a question. This accumulation is the very material of a question. In fact, the quantity—and the quality—of the accumulation constitute the dimensions of the ground, the platform from which the question can be posed. In fact, the history of the question marks the dimensions of possibility of the question.<sup>59</sup>

57 *ibid.*

58 *ibid.*, p. 46

59 Mattia PAGANELLI, *Beyond Doubt*, lecture held on 1 March 2019 at AIL, Vienna, in the framework of the exhibition »DATA LOAM: Sometimes Hard, Usually Soft.« (26 February–8 March 2019).

In April 2018, the curator and theorist Irit Rogoff held a lecture titled »Becoming Research. The Way We Work Now« in which she speaks of a »research turn« in cultural production distinguished by new forms of knowledge production and a visible paradigm shift in the production of work towards more practice driven forms of research. Her elaborations could help further understand what Sheikh means by the particular research culture of the curatorial,

characterised neither entirely by »Forschung,« nor by »recherché,« but through a different approach, characterised by a malleable methodology.

Rogoff portrays a move from working with inherited and received knowledge to working from within the environment and circumstances; from within the »conditions.« Working from the conditions and not on them. Our conditions are economical, geographical, »propelled by subjectivity«<sup>60</sup> and constitute the driving force behind our work. Rather than positioning oneself at the end of organised trajectories in order to add to an existing body of knowledge (and rather than starting with a clearly defined research question or hypothesis) a shift to inhabiting and positioning oneself »in the middle«<sup>61</sup> of the conditions and material one is exploring is taking place.

As the artist, researcher and lecturer in art and philosophy Mattia Paganelli states in the quote at the beginning of this chapter, it is even near to impossible to start at the beginning or the end. The beginning suggests a clean slate, the end assumes a clean cut that the researcher can latch on to. Thus, a perceived shift to working from within the conditions, could also be seen as the researcher's conscious recognition of a scenario that is, in fact, inevitable. Hence, Rogoff encourages this change as it accepts the impossibility of producing an objective distance towards one's subject of interest as well as the difficulty of separating our situatedness in a specific environment from the way in which we work. Referring to a text by Rogoff from 2010, one could argue that an undisciplining of knowledge, which is—coined by the age of Enlightenment—linear, teleological and needs to be empirically or logically verifiable,<sup>62</sup> is taking place.

60 ROGOFF, *Smuggling*.

61 ROGOFF, *Smuggling*.

62 Irit ROGOFF, *Practicing Research: Singularising Knowledge*, in: Henk SLAGER (ed.), *maHKUzine. Journal of Artistic Research*. Summer 2010, Utrecht 2010, pp. 37–42.

From the vantage point of an era dominated by fake news and alternative facts, where politics are »reduced to the anxious performance of individuality«<sup>63</sup> Rogoff is challenged with the question that one surely can't turn everything into subjective opinion during the Q&A at the end of her lecture. Rogoff answers that the only thing at her disposal is »seriousness as a weapon.«<sup>64</sup> Armed with earnestness implies diligent attendance and analysis of what one is working on as a counter movement to the mere absence of something (e.g. scientific proof) already qualifying for the emergence of an opposing »equally valid« opinion, or conspiracy theory for that matter (fig. 6).

It is possible that the aspect of seriousness, described by Rogoff as a heavy burden based on privilege, opens another bigger problematic issue Rogoff sees herself confronted with in her curatorial practice: »We do not know the ways in which research can become an active and enjoying viewing position.«<sup>65</sup> If research is not about making predictions and presenting conclusions, but about immersion—positioning oneself in the middle—and engagement, how can viewers navigate a state of research that is often ambiguous and fragmented or too detailed? »What does it mean to be the viewer of research?« »How can displays be constantly productive, rather than passively informative?«<sup>66</sup> and at the same time not overwhelm the viewing audience, already immersed in an »oversaturated information culture, where attention itself is increasingly commodified and subject to pressure«?<sup>67</sup>

63 See Joshua SIMON, *The Way Things Are Organized: The Mesoscopic, The Metastable, The Curatorial*, in: Paul O'NEILL, Simon SHEIKH, Lucy STEEDS, Mick WILSON (eds.), *Curating After the Global*, Cambridge, MA 2019, p. 163.

64 ROGOFF, *Smuggling*.

65 Irit ROGOFF, *Becoming Research. The Way We Work Now*, lecture held on 9 April 2018 at ACT Cube, Cambridge MA. <https://vimeo.com/271887079> (3 March 2020).

66 *ibid.*

67 Bergen Assembly, *About* (2016), in: [www.2016.bergenassembly.no/en/about](http://www.2016.bergenassembly.no/en/about) (3 March 2020).

## 3.3.

### The Atlas Principle or »Reading Before Language«

Many press releases and detailed curatorial statements intended to help clarify things end up telling the art work and us what it is before it's had a chance to exist as what it is for itself, or us for it. Is there a better way to look and think about art that involves slowing things down? Or speaking about art works differently? In less fixed terms; or in more fixed terms, but less of them?<sup>68</sup>

Curator Chus Martinez criticises the alleged necessity of a continuity between experience and language in her text »Toward a Theory of Artistic Research.«<sup>69</sup> Do we always have to create a new language, methodology or theory in order to describe what is happening in an exhibition that is seemingly withdrawing from something already seen or known? Or are there other ways to communicate, for example the display of art oscillating between concrete and abstract, or the gap between the curators aim with an exhibition and what is received and understood by the audience? In her practice as a curator Martinez calls for a detachment of an understanding of theory as a mediator between spectator and artwork, and instead let other logics inform our thinking about art. (See chapter 4.1.)

68 Kate NEWBY, *Casualness: it's not about what it looks like it's about what it does.*, Dissertation University of Auckland 2014, p. 57.

69 Chus MARTINEZ, *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog. Belated Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research*, in: *documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, The Book of Books*, Berlin 2012, pp. 48–53.

So, in that respect, isn't also the »detour« of presenting something in a spatial, visual and/or experiential way, rather than through an academic text, about arriving at an understanding that lies outside of theoretical reason? With all of the factors of curatorial practice at play, isn't one of the aims of exhibition-making to also surpass what the curatorial project set out to do on the onset, seeing as the coming together of objects and people in a space can still be an integral part of the research process itself?

With these thoughts in mind, this chapter looks at Georges Didi-Huberman's analysis of Aby Warburg's »Mnemosyne Atlas,« by exploring the art historian's endeavour of rewriting history by applying the atlas principle as a dynamic system of montage and generating new knowledge through associative connections and serendipitous juxtapositions. Didi-Huberman links the project that shaped many contemporary ways of producing, exhibiting and understanding images to Walter Benjamin's theory of reading before language, that liberated the word »reading« from its usually intended meaning: the study of textual material.

When thinking about the curatorial as a method of research and its display, Warburg's project is relevant in the sense that his externalised thought process was simultaneously its visual and public presentation.

The art historian and philosopher Didi-Huberman begins his book »Atlas or the Anxious Gay Science« by describing the atlas as a medium.

Unlike a story or premise of an argument, an atlas has no clear beginning nor end; an observation that is correspondingly reflected in its use. One wouldn't usually read an atlas from front to back, neither from page to page, as Didi-Huberman notes; an atlas lets the reader's gaze travel from plate to plate, and from image to image on each plate. In this the author detects a dual and paradoxical use of the medium. On the one hand, an atlas is consulted with the intention of looking up a specific piece of information. On the other, one can erratically leaf through the plates, without any precise target. Browsing can be free of any use, or lead to the reader stumbling upon something inspiring and useful. Contrary to the use of a dictionary, for example, the use of an atlas leads to the combination of, what Didi-Huberman refers to as the epistemic paradigm of knowledge with an aesthetic paradigm of the visual form. After successfully having found what one was looking for, the reader corollary gets lured into the atlas' many

\* Juliana HUXTABLE  
quoted by Emma van MEYEREN, in: Emma van MEYEREN, Juliana Huxtable and the desire to be. In conversation with the artist, performer, DJ, writer and nightlife icon (19 July 2018), in: [www.glamcult.com/articles/juliana-huxtable-and-the-desire-to-be](http://www.glamcult.com/articles/juliana-huxtable-and-the-desire-to-be) (9 March 2020).

fig. 6 Juliana Huxtable → p. 50  
»The War on Proof,« 2017

In this poster series, the artist refers to the »absence of something« as the lowest common denominator where conspiracy theorists converge, meaning anything can be true, if it cannot be disproven. In an interview, Huxtable elucidates how the notions of verifiability and truth are under attack with a well-known example: »[T]he idea that you can always know what you are seeing has really become a battle over proof. The clearest example, or the most absurd example, is when Trump was elected and he would say, ›I had the most people that we ever had at the histories of inaugurations.‹ And then someone would respond and say, ›Well, actually we had more people at the inauguration of Obama.‹ or, ›Actually, there were more people at the Women's March.‹ And then someone would say, ›Well, actually this could all be Photoshopped.‹»\*

fig. 7 Hendrick ter Brugghen → p. 58  
»Marcus Evangelist,« 1621

fig. 8 Aby Warburg → p. 61  
»Bilderatlas Mnemosyne, pl. 1,« 1927–29

fig. 9 Anonymous Babylonian → p. 61  
»Divinatory Liver,« c. 1700 BC

fig. 10 Fischli & Weiss → p. 62  
»Popular Opposites: Theory and Practice,« 1981/2006

From the series »Plötzilch diese Übersicht« (Suddenly this Overview). An installation with 350 unfired clay sculptures.

fig. 11 Maria Lassnig → p. 63  
»Woman Laokoon,« 1976

fig. 12 Renée Green → p. 65  
»Import/Export Funk Office,« 1992



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11



ramifications.<sup>70</sup> The dictionary is organised in alphabetical lists, the atlas maps a topography that stretches into all directions.

Through its dual use, the atlas bursts the frames of the canonical forms of the two aforementioned paradigms. The dominant canon does not think of the epistemic together with the aesthetic. According to the classical platonic tradition, one can only achieve true knowledge if not distracted by the manipulating effects of the visual. True rational insight is only possible, by stripping away the space of the sensual, i.e. that of the image. The atlas as an epistemic device, however, merges the dimension of knowledge with the dimension of the sensual and the incompleteness inherent to every image. By following the principle of the montage, the atlas introduces a multiplicity into an alleged epistemic purity and is inherently flexible and temporal in its configuration.<sup>71</sup>

3.3.2.

Rereading the World

Didi-Huberman describes the atlas as a tool for the »inexhaustible opening of possibilities that are not yet given«<sup>72</sup> rather than the logical singling out of all possible options. From this Didi-Huberman derives that the atlas' principle and motor lies in imagination, intrinsically embracing the diverse and manifold. Didi-Huberman is concerned with a particular understanding of the word imagination, that goes beyond a definition of subjective imaginary.

Imagination: a dangerous word if anything (as is, already, the word *image*). But it is necessary to join Goethe, Baudelaire, or Walter Benjamin in saying that the imagination, however disconcerting it is, has nothing to do with any personal or gratuitous fantasy. On the contrary, it gives us a knowledge that cuts across—by its intrinsic potential of montage consisting in discovering—in the very place where it refuses the links created by obviated resemblances, links that direct observation cannot discern.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Georges DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Atlas, Or the Anxious Gay Science: How to Carry the World on One's Back?*, Chicago 2018, pp. 3–4.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4–5.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

In other words, direct observation cannot distinguish what the imagination can perceive.

Imagination helps us perceive the secret relations between things, the correspondences and analogies, which are all equally important and necessary in »reading the world« something far too essential to be entrusted to words alone. This »cutting across« could imply the necessity of an »in-between« that establishes a context of meaning, by creating a link that fills a gap. Didi-Huberman writes that imagination »has nothing to do with any personal or gratuitous fantasy,« however one could argue that the act of »cutting across« is only made possible through the coming together of personal, hence subjective and perhaps not instantly comprehensible references.

In his philosophical ruminations on »legibility« (»Lesbarkeit«), »reading before anything else« (»Lesen vor allem«) and »reading what was never written« (»Was nie geschrieben wurde, lesen«) the philosopher Walter Benjamin liberates the word reading from its usually intended meaning: the study of textual material (fig. 7).<sup>74</sup> That said, he also claims that the reading of a text requires the capacity of the imaginative mind to decipher resemblances: »The nexus of meaning of words or sentences is the bearer through which, like a flash, similarity appears between things.«<sup>75</sup> Didi-Huberman refers to the atlas of images as an ostensive example of Benjamin's expanded concept of reading; a primal form of reading that happens before language (»Das Lesen vor aller Sprache«).<sup>76</sup> Didi-Huberman delineates this further with a description of one of his key research domains: Aby Warburg's unfinished, yet significantly influential, »Mnemosyne Atlas.«

74 *ibid.*, pp. 6–8.

75 *ibid.*, p. 5.

76 *ibid.*, p. 13.

The Warburgian atlas is an object thought on a bet. It is a bet that images, collected in a certain manner, would offer us the possibility—or better still, the inexhaustible resource—

of rereading the world. To reread the world is to link the disparate pieces differently, to redistribute the dissemination, which is a way of orienting and interpreting it, no doubt, but also of respecting it, of going over it again or re-editing and piecing it together again without thinking we are summarizing or exhausting it.<sup>77</sup>

As part of his »iconology<sup>78</sup> of intervals« the project »Mnemosyne Atlas« (1924–1929) conjoined memory,<sup>79</sup> imagination and montage, and shaped contemporary ways of producing, exhibiting and understanding images.<sup>80</sup> The assemblages of photographic reproductions Warburg had famously clipped onto large plates draped in black cloth, didn't serve the purpose of mnemonic devices, nor did they constitute visual summaries of the art historian's thinking. To him, the plates comprised an apparatus that triggered a new reading of history, by »reading what was never written.« By turning the image from an object being interpreted into the interpreting object itself, Warburg's use of images in the atlas is not to be understood as a retrospective illustration, but as a way for a thought to find suitable (visual) form.<sup>81</sup> By not starting with a clearly formulated argument but by nonsequentially positioning images onto a plate (initially primarily following associative trails) one could argue that the atlas principle is also a way of »starting in the middle.«

77 *ibid.*, p. 11.

78 The semiological analysis of images.

79 The goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, was impregnated by Zeus and gave life to the nine muses. In Greek mythology, the muses, each of them governing a discipline within the arts, are said to stimulate and stir the imagination of artists and poets. Hence, one could suggest that the origin of inspiration and creativity lies in memory.

80 DIDI-HUBERMAN, Atlas, p. 8.

81 *ibid.*, p. 224.

82 Didi-Huberman repeatedly refers to this being a very small number, considering Warburg's profession as an art historian and his expansive photographic collection he had compiled together with the art historian Fritz Saxl.

By laying out a transdisciplinary assembly of ca. 1,000 images,<sup>82</sup> leading from art historical depictions to mass produced ephemera, onto the different plates, Warburg sought to construct a new approach

towards »writing« and reading history. Positioning the human being and her/his/their thoughts, gestures and passions at the core of his project, he set out to analyse the so called »Pathos Formulas,« and study their transmission and transformation from classical Antiquity until today. The formulas entail bodily gestures such as simply a grasp to the head, or more abstract examples that represent love, war, melancholia, hysteria, victory and surrender. Always showing or demonstrating something, the history of human gestures constitutes—in further consequence—a type of origin of the history of our images.

The montages brought volatility into thinking in those areas of history that were no longer questioned, or those lacking the necessary vocabulary in order to be satisfyingly described through words. Warburg aimed to develop a matrix that would reconfigure history off the beaten paths of a collective historical memory, by refraining from a definite final order or chronology of the images, neither grouping them according to visual, canonical parameters thus refraining them as a revolt against »hierarchical compartmentalisation.«<sup>83</sup> After a plate was documented photographically for the atlas, it was dismantled and destroyed, in order to start another anew.

83 Benjamin BUCHLOH, Gerhard Richter's Atlas. The Anomic Archive (1996), in: Charles MEREWETHER (ed.), *The Archive*, London 2006, p. 88.

84 DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Atlas*, p. 224.

85 *ibid.*

Didi-Huberman describes the Atlas as rampant plates teeming with images detracting from any form of classification. Warburg's psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger had once implied that, despite its Sisyphian nature, the »Mnemosyne Atlas« had saved the art historian from his own madness; his flight of ideas. He had often feared to lose himself in the multiplicities of his thoughts, which, nevertheless, were precisely what was feeding the engine behind his method,<sup>84</sup> leaving only a small gap between knowledge and madness. Warburg's »exhibition of multiplicities«<sup>85</sup> is neither defined by complete

chaos, nor by an overcautious planned out layout. The art historian understood that thinking is not a matter of found forms, but of their continual transformation. Enabling an unceasing collision of ideas and manifold serendipitous encounters between images, the atlas lead to new dialectic insight of Western culture, which Didi-Huberman describes as a continuous performance between reason and unreason. Without any prospect of synthesis, Warburg delineates the two poles at the ends of this tension as a tragedy between »astra,« the infinity of the sky, and »monstra,« the monsters inside our own bodies. Both of which constitute areas of the unknown.<sup>86</sup> Driven by the power of imagination, it appears that it was Warburg's aim to interweave these most distant, incongruous orders of reality.

The coming together of these two opposing spheres is exemplified in the first plate of »Mnemosyne« (fig. 8). The bottom half shows a collection of images that are easily identified as astronomical or astrological figures. The upper half aligns four variants of clay or bronze sheep livers (fig. 9). These (either old Babylonian or Etruscan) organic depictions function as dialectical images, which, within one object, create a dialogue between the visceral and the celestial sphere.

86 *ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

Carved into the surfaces of the moulded sheep livers—that Warburg had pinned onto the first plate of his atlas—are lines forming a grid. Their purpose was the decomposition of the »reading« of a liver. Interpreting the shapes and forms of the liver of a sacrificed animal used to be part of ritual divinations. The characteristics of each zone of the organ meant a different prophecy. Didi-Huberman again deduces from this an example of something that can be read before it has been written. Being highly accurate sculptural depictions, the livers connect the natural and organic, with the synthetic and constructed. Aby Warburg wasn't only aware of the

## 3.3.3.

»Plötzlich diese  
Übersicht«<sup>87</sup> (fig. 10)

method of montage as a specific combination of images leading to new knowledge; he saw every image as a montage in itself.

Through the assembly of images, the Atlas first and foremost generates a synoptic »surveying gaze« (»Übersicht«). It goes beyond canonical models of explanation and narrative, by transgressing »the boundaries of thought and of seeing, of discourse and of image, of the intelligible and of the sensible.«<sup>88</sup> Ensuing from the philosophical debates of the 1920s regarding concepts of truth and knowledge, Warburg's project was embedded in a crisis of scientific explicability and the legibility of facts. He was faced with the following question in his endeavour: How do you present an argument that you cannot explain through words and sentences, but through images? And further: How can one go beyond tried iconographic depictions e.g. juxtaposing the antique »source« on the one hand with the »copy« of the Renaissance on the other?<sup>89</sup>

87 The subtitle (Suddenly This Overview) references a work with the same name by the Swiss artists David Fischli und Peter Weiss.

88 *ibid.*, p. 232.

89 *ibid.*, p. 222.

The Mnemosyne plates functioned both as conceptual apparatus and exhibition. Warburg's visualised thought processes and research was not separate from their public presentation. Yet, in contrast to many interpretations of the Atlas as an invention of an art history without words, Didi-Huberman states the impossibility of deciphering the plates outside of the Warburgian »Denkraum« (thinking space) constituted by the entirety of his writings, his library and the photographic collection. Furthermore—next to explanatory manuscripts—Warburg had always planned to accompany the plates with two extensive volumes. Despite the whole project being unfinished, it is distinctive to the entire method that the art historian appeared to struggle most at formulating his thinking behind the plates through written linear arguments in the form of a bound book.

Albeit immensely elaborate and complex, expressing his thoughts through images in visual installations, that give space to many causes for one effect (»over-determinations«) and other multiplicities, seemed the easier challenge. He set out presenting his arguments through images, because he initially was not able to through words and sentences. Warburg himself used the metaphor of an eel soup<sup>90</sup> in describing his writing style, while Didi-Huberman alluded to the painful contortions of Laokoon fighting off the snakes meandering between his limbs (fig. 11).<sup>91</sup>

Without seeking synthesis or totality, Warburg was interested in the agency of the assembled images as well as their relationship to text; how they can both support and at the same time modify and undermine each other.<sup>92</sup>

The allure of Warburg's approach—that influenced manifold academic disciplines, as well as artistic practices in both form and content—was that through the dynamic display, and the opening up of »multiple topographies,«<sup>93</sup> he cunningly united the inexhaustible, with the unfathomable; something infinite with something that we might never understand. It is the allure and both danger of his project. A danger that can lead to artworks or curatorial approaches using the »Mnemosyne Atlas« as a conceptual »excuse« for the display of an aggregation of content that is not decipherable from the inconceivability of overwhelming masses of information on the internet or in an analogue archive.

90 *ibid.*, p. 364.

91 *ibid.*

92 *ibid.*, p. 349.

93 *ibid.*, p. 370.



3.4.

## Research-Based Art. Or the Difference Between Search and Research

»The relationship between artist and curator has undergone a fundamental change [...] art today is defined by an identity between creation and selection. At least since Duchamp, it has been the case that selecting an artwork is the same as creating an artwork.«<sup>94</sup>

In his essay on »Multiple Authorship« Boris Groys describes how the occupations of artists and curators can no longer clearly be distinguished. With the advent of the readymade, the former division between the artist, concerned with creation, and the curator, concerned with selection, successively became increasingly blurred. This change, however, is of course married to a wider set of developments. Along with viewing the curatorial notion of selection as a productive and creational artistic process, functions such as authorship—previously associated with the artist—were usurped by the figure of the independent, autonomous curator through individuals such as Harald Szeemann.<sup>95</sup>

94 Boris GROYS, Multiple Authorship, in: Barbara VANDERLINDEN, Elena FILIPOVIC (eds.), *The Manifesta Decade. Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, Cambridge, MA 2005, p. 93.

95 Oliver MARCHART, *The Curatorial Subject. The Figure of the Curator Between Individuality and Collectivity*, Texte zur Kunst No. 86, Berlin 2012, p. 28.

96 See Claire BISHOP, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* (2004), in: Simon LEUNG, Zoya KOCUR (eds.) *Theory in Contemporary Art Since 1985*, Chichester 2012, p. 166–194, or Claire BISHOP (ed.), *Participation*, London 2006.

97 Claire BISHOP, *Information Overload: Research Based Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, lecture held on 7 January 2019 at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna.

98 *ibid.*

With this entanglement of two formerly separated professions it is needless to say that the notion of curatorial research is seemingly closely connected to the contested discipline of artistic research or research-based art, particularly regarding its visual and aesthetic manifestation, as well as a general approach spanning across a variety of disciplines. In a talk held on 7 January 2019 in the Auditorium of the University of Applied Arts, the art historian Claire Bishop, especially known for her writings on relational aesthetics and participation,<sup>96</sup> spoke about a development (to her worrying) of/within

research-based art. The talk focused on the genealogy and history of this discipline and its growing importance in contemporary art practices. Bishop began by showing slides of glass vitrines under which a plethora of documents, photographs, book spreads and other ephemera are laid out. She followed the portrayal of this display—dominating current biennales, museums and other curatorial spaces—with a description of her personal unease as a visitor continuously being confronted with artworks in the form of masses of aggregated research—and the »wild panic« it evokes due to the feeling of »having to take it all in.«<sup>97</sup>

Tracing the lineages of artistic research via the history of art, Bishop started off with the introduction of extended captions in artworks, for example beneath the images of Lewis Hine's photographic essays produced in the beginning of the twentieth century. Bishop continued with the example of the film essay, reaching from the post-war collaborations between Chris Marker and Alain Resnais to Harun Faroki, Black Audio Film Collective, and more recently Hito Steyerl, and concluded with the emergence of a conceptual art practice in the 1970s. The genealogy Bishop lines out is that of a linear presentation of research—whether it is a row of images on the wall or a sequence of images in a film—a tendency that was starkly criticised in the 1980s along with post-structuralist, feminist and post-colonial thought. Criticism against linear ways of writing and reading history, single authorship and didacticism was addressed during this period, and had a strong impact on the emergence of artistic research practices in the 1990s dealing with various constellations and forms of display for gathered research. New forms of the representation of research were thus further tested. Research appeared in spatial installations or as hyperlinks on CD-ROMs (fig. 12). Knowledge was viewed as networked, collaborative and in process. Research was regarded as a public resource that left the »viewer to decide what conclusions to draw.«<sup>98</sup>

The material presented functioned more as a catalyst for discussion, than the display of a declarative message. Afraid of sounding conservative, Bishop nevertheless argued that since the 1990s the development of artistic research has gone further and further into this direction, making artists more and more hesitant to draw their own conclusions and more willing to confront their audience with amassed material that has undergone little to no synthesis and transformation. According to Bishop, this development has the following consequence: The withdrawal of the author—which seemed important and necessary in the 1980s and 90s—has resulted in the abandonment of the viewer. The viewer already enters the exhibition space with a subliminal frustration caused by day to day information overload, primarily fed by the exposure of content on our computers and phones. Research-based art displaying a reluctance to synthesise and organise the researched information, leaving the viewer »to do the work of drawing the strands together« themselves, doesn't challenge, but »rather bolsters present-day economies of attention.«<sup>99</sup> The technological development of the internet and search engines further promoting the sampling of information, rather than an in-depth engagement with it, has changed how content is both received and produced. Sampled, skimmed, accelerated, and fragmented.

99 Christoph CHWATAL, Notes on Claire Bishop's lecture: »Information Overload: Research Based Art and the Politics of Spectatorship« (22 January 2019), in: [www.kunsthallewien.at/#/blog/2019/01/notes-claire-bishops-lecture](http://www.kunsthallewien.at/#/blog/2019/01/notes-claire-bishops-lecture) (4 March 2020).

One of Bishop's main arguments involves the difference between search and research. Whereas research is about asking new questions and finding new meanings, a Google-search merely looks for existing answers. A difference that to a large degree is forgotten in many artistic research projects. »Bishop contends that research-based art presents both »a resistance to and an internalisation of internet logic«, and »despite making an explicit critique of

digital presentism and algorithmic aggregation [...] this [type of] work is nevertheless inseparable from the internet search engine as an extension of our consciousness.«<sup>100</sup>

Bishop argues that this model corresponds to present-day modes of production (and reception), as assemblages of re-contextualised material, leading to artworks in which »images and information are arranged without any hierarchy or narrative.«<sup>101</sup> This leaves the viewer with a situation comparable to that of online searching and browsing. She finds an example of this in Wolfgang Tillmans' »truth study center« (2005–ongoing). Comprising a series of tables with digital printouts, newspaper clippings, photographs, alongside every-day materials (such as leaflets and bus tickets). These are »laid out in an apparently aleatoric composition, the arrangement does not seem to have an underlying logic.«<sup>102</sup> The work corresponds to the logic of the internet, requiring quick skimming, elliptic reading, and browsing, while inviting viewers to make sense of the material themselves. Being both drawn into, and overwhelmed by the sheer quantity and eclectic mix of information presented in the horizontal wooden tables with glass supports, Bishop criticises this type of work as merely reproducing the digital world and the daily response of users to it.

100 *ibid.*

101 *ibid.*

102 *ibid.*

Despite the fact that striving for synthesis and transformation of researched material is relevant in both an artistic and a curatorial context, inevitably, Bishop's criticism of artistic research triggers one to question the difference between an artwork that consists of an aggregation of material and a curatorial project that works with the presentation of research material. What appears most frustrating: being unable to follow a statement put forth by an artwork or an exhibition?

# Case

<p>4.1.</p> <p>The Display of Uncertainty and the Unruliness of Notes.</p> <p>dOCUMENTA (13) (2009–2012)</p>	<p>»[...] those spontaneous phrases that cannot be repeated, too vague for anything but one's notebook.«<sup>103</sup></p> <p>The following chapter analyses aspects of dOCUMENTA (13) as a successful example of communicating something, despite still having questions; an example of the displayed tension between quality and vagueness. After a short introduction into the exhibition as a whole, particular focus is placed on the pocket-sized publication series »100 Notes – 100 Thoughts,« which conceptualises the approach and mental space of the exhibition, as well as constituting an integral part of it.</p>
<p>4.1.1.</p> <p>A Short Introduction into the Sites and Conditions of dOCUMENTA (13)</p>	<p>By announcing that the documenta taking place in 2012 will not have a concept<sup>104</sup> the designated curator<sup>105</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and her team chose to actively work with their collective state of not knowing and the preliminary (fig. 13). »dOCUMENTA (13) is dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory.«<sup>106</sup></p> <p>In parallel with a strong focus on artistic research by the works presented, the large-scale exhibition also drew close attention to its curatorial research process. Along with the two books published as part of the exhibition »The Book of Books« and »The Guidebook,« the third publication »The Logbook« provides further and specific insight into the research and formation process of the exhibition between 2009 and 2012 by means of pictures, correspondences and interviews.</p>

<sup>103</sup> Andre WOGENSCKY, Preface, in: Fondation Le Corbusier (ed.), Le Corbusier Sketchbooks, vol. I, 1914–1948, Cambridge, MA 1981), n.p.

<sup>104</sup> Milena BERMAN, dOCUMENTA (13) »Non-Concept« (30 August 2012), in: [www.dailyserving.com/2012/08/documenta-13-non-concept](http://www.dailyserving.com/2012/08/documenta-13-non-concept) (4 March 2020).

<sup>105</sup> To be precise, in this year's documenta curators were referred to as »agents« and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev »artistic director.«

<sup>106</sup> Carolyn CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV, Front Matter, in: documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, The Book of Books, Berlin 2012, p. 4.

Highlighting the significance of a physical space and at the same time aiming for dislocation, dOCUMENTA (13) was »physically and conceptually sited«<sup>107</sup> in four locations: Kassel, Kabul/Bamiyan in Afghanistan, Alexandria/Cairo in Egypt, and Banff in Canada. The »apparent simultaneity of places and times«<sup>108</sup> was not only implemented through a physical displacement, but seeped into the entire conceptual approach of the curatorial endeavour—suggesting that the present is made up of many places and times happening simultaneously. Next to the main, venerable exhibition site in Kassel, lasting the full 100 days, the other three sites came into play one after the other; first the exhibition in Kabul, lasting one month; then Egypt, lasting one week; and Canada, fourteen days. The events staged in Egypt and Canada mostly excluded the public, consisting of seminars which were restricted to invitation only.<sup>109</sup>

For the four sites, four conditions were defined, all of which describe positions of acting in the present and ways of handling time. Kassel was allocated »On stage. I am playing a role, I am a subject in the act of re-performing,« Kabul »Under siege. I am encircled by the other, besieged by others,« Alexandria »In a state of hope, or optimism. I dream, I am the dreaming subject of anticipation« and Banff »On retreat. I am withdrawn, I choose to leave the others, I sleep.«<sup>110</sup> Although each location was given one condition, the positions obtained their meaning through their intercommunication.<sup>111</sup> That is to say, the locations might have stood for one condition in particular, but the works on display at a specific site could pertain to any of the four positions.

107 dOCUMENTA (13) Press Release, Introduction to dOCUMENTA (13), in: [https://d13.documenta.de/uploads/tx\\_pressesection/3\\_Introduction.pdf](https://d13.documenta.de/uploads/tx_pressesection/3_Introduction.pdf) (4 March 2020).

108 *ibid.*

109 documenta, Retrospective. dOCUMENTA (13). 9 June–16 September 2012, in: [www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta\\_13#](http://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_13#) (4 March 2020).

110 dOCUMENTA (13) Press Release, Introduction to dOCUMENTA (13).

111 *ibid.*

#### 4.1.2.

#### »100 Notes – 100 Thoughts«

Within the same event of the exhibition (decidedly pre- and exceeding the 100 days through its publicised formats, as well as the events and workshops that took place outside the city of Kassel) elements of synthesis were shown besides a more fragmented process. A multi-layeredness oscillating between private and public, allowing for in-depth examinations, through books and seminars, and shared, spatial exhibition experiences, equally informing and existing next to each other. The exhibition combined two strong elements at play that one could argue constitutes curatorial research: individual and collective knowledge production.

The »Book of Books« is a 768-page heavy exhibition catalogue that gives insight into the leitmotifs guiding dOCUMENTA (13), by assembling essays, artists' projects and the publication series »100 Notes – 100 Thoughts.« In, »How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog. Belated Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research« the curator Martinez, who was then in charge of the curatorial department of dOCUMENTA (13), approaches artistic research through concepts of intuition and the note, both defined by their elusiveness and, to some extent, an uncertainty of knowledge.

112 Chus MARTINEZ, How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog. Belated Aesthetics, Politics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research, in: *documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, The Book of Books*, Berlin 2012, pp. 46–57.

113 MARTINEZ, How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog, pp. 46–47

Martinez writes about how scepticism has always been central in the validation and examination of knowledge, and thus develops the concept of the »maybe« as a positive withdrawal from certainty, which holds the potential to disrupt inherited and sedimented knowledge as well as orders from within.<sup>112</sup> The word research in artistic research »does not name the embodiment of any particular form of academic training, but the gesture of placing the »maybe« at the core of the real. And this causes something very simple to occur: knowledge vacillates.«<sup>113</sup>

Following this approach into praxis, the educational program was titled »The Maybe Education and Public Program.« Its most recited example were the »d-tours« lead by citizens of Kassel from various backgrounds, who guided visitors through the different locations while passing on their highly personal knowledge of the city and the exhibition.<sup>114</sup>

In her essay in »The Book of Books« Martinez delineates her theory on artistic research by describing Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and her team's curatorial approach for dOCUMENTA (13) as a whole, as well as one specific element of it: the publication series »100 Notes – 100 Thoughts.«

»100 Notes – 100 Thoughts« is a publication series of one hundred notebooks, in which artists, anthropologists, philosophers, poets and scientists contributed facsimiles of existing notebooks, commissioned texts, images and excerpts of artists' books. The pastel coloured booklets—printed in one of three different formats, between sixteen to forty-eight pages long—were successively published before the opening of the documenta as a prelude to the exhibition. On some level, this gesture let the public partake in the curatorial research process in the months preceding the actual opening of dOCUMENTA (13), similar to the very nature of the note »presenting the mind in a prologue state.«<sup>115</sup> Notes are distinguished by floating in a limbo of the preliminary, maintaining a partial unknowingness in their language and meandering outside of mediation. The state of the preliminary offers time and space to find a voice and, or perhaps more importantly, a tone one wants to speak in.<sup>116</sup> »Notes are ›maybe‹ texts—not fragments, not in a relation of weakness to any whole, just not yet at the service of illustrating any argument or philosophical conclusion known in advance.«<sup>117</sup> Nevertheless, even if just scribbled on a paper napkin, they seem important enough to be recorded in some form or another. In their unfinished, yet documented form, lies a certain power of unruliness and post-disciplinarity.<sup>118</sup>

Martinez bridges her description of the note as a concept, in its opaque and uncertain nature, with her understanding of artistic and curatorial research. The medium of the notebook, a speculative manifestation of a preliminary moment, conveys central aspects of the curatorial non-concept of dOCUMENTA (13). Rather than statements or hypotheses, the booklets contain thoughts and propositions, and—as a continuity of fragments—re-trace how thinking emerges and generate space for new possible realities. The series of booklets is as much part of the exhibition and curatorial research, as all other artistic and non-artistic elements operating in dOCUMENTA (13). The curator and writer Anna-Sophie Springer refers to the series as a »space within dOCUMENTA (13)«<sup>119</sup> that constitutes an essential part of the expansive exhibition which also consisted of performances, installations, screenings, public art, interventions and more traditional presentations in gallery contexts. The notebooks were a strategy to open the exhibition to further interpretations and readings.<sup>120</sup>

114 documenta, Retrospective. dOCUMENTA (13). 9 June–16 September 2012.

115 OCA. Office for Contemporary Art Norway, dOCUMENTA (13) notebook no. 067: »Hannah Ryggen« (May 2012), in: [www.oca.no/press/releases/2012/05](http://www.oca.no/press/releases/2012/05) (4 March 2020).

116 MARTINEZ, How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog, p. 49.

117 *ibid.*

118 *ibid.*

119 Anna-Sophie SPRINGER, Volumen: Bände – Räume. Das Buch als Ausstellung (Volumes: The Book as Exhibition) (2012), in: <https://rheinsprung11.unibas.ch/ausgabe-05/kritik/volumen-baende-raeume-das-buch-als-ausstellung> (4 March 2020).

120 *ibid.*

The first page of each notebook shows a snippet of a black and white photograph. All notebooks are part of a different puzzle. For example, when opening a number of certain notebooks and laying them out next to each other in a specific order, an image of the Fridericianum in Kassel appears (fig. 14). The visual element could be seen as a metaphor for the entire documenta. In the end, just like the images and texts in the notebooks, the exhibition should yield an



image that combines »forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory.«<sup>121</sup>

This historical site of documenta, the Fridericianum, is where the »Reader's Circle« took place.<sup>122</sup> Every evening for the consecutive 100 days of dOCUMENTA (13) a performative reading or conceptual interpretation of one of the notebooks was staged. In her essay on »Books as Exhibitions« Springer describes the »Reader's Circle« as further intensifying, or doubling, the tension between the private and public. In the first iteration, the personal notebooks of various thinkers move to the public domain in the form of published booklets, followed by the intimate act of reading and finally moving again from the private realm to the public stage in the Fridericianum. For the duration of the exhibition the project transformed from a series of objects to a temporal event, further intertwining the editorial with the curatorial and artistic.<sup>123</sup>

121 Carolyn CHRISTOV-BAKARGIEV, *Front Matter*, in: documenta und Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, *The Book of Books*, Berlin 2012, p. 4.

122 All keynote lectures, on the other hand, were held in the Ständehaus.

123 Anna-Sophie SPRINGER, *Volumen: Bände – Räume*.

dOCUMENTA (13)'s non-concept is elaborated on in Martinez' text. The exhibition was not based on a hypothesis or clear statement but on intuition. Referring to the nineteenth century philosopher and writer Ralph Waldo Emerson and his definition of two types of knowledge: intuition (first-hand knowledge) and tuition (second-hand knowledge), Martinez does not understand intuition as a superficial emotion but as the coming together of the both intellectual and sensual reception of artworks, texts, ideas and theories, that have been absorbed in the past—forming a specific relation in a certain moment of time. Intuition has a history, but will always remain partial. In this sense, intuition and Didi-Huberman's understanding of imagination dovetail, particularly

due to the concern of both Martinez and Didi-Huberman that the terms will be misread.

Martinez differentiates between methodology and tactic. Whereas methodology follows intuition, tactic is based on hypothesis. She urges the reader to imagine a force or movement permeating an entire curatorial project. It is often only right at the end, through the assembly of multiple logics, artistic or discursive materials and different languages, that a certain methodology that has been at work in a curatorial project can be perceived.<sup>124</sup>

»This is completely different from a tactic; if the inquiry is a genuine one, a space is produced in which all the elements can name themselves, rather than being called up in advance, by sitting at a table and drawing up a plan.«<sup>125</sup>

124 MARTINEZ, *How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog*, p. 49.

125 *ibid.*, p. 49.

Martinez does not stop her argument in favour of intuition by rendering homage to the process and attributing undisputed value to the unpredictable. Her point is not that curators should just subdue themselves to the process and be surprised by the result at the end, but rather point out the value in the agency of intuition.

An exhibition departing from a hypothesis asks for evidence. The selection process of what is shown is determined by the hypothesis. The curator is making a statement through the presentation of selected objects that substantiate her/his/their hypothesis. Intuition, on the other hand, does not ask for any form of evidence but wishes to understand something. Martinez writes that an intuitive curatorial approach might actually not even allow for any form of proof. It is always partial and therefore not striving to be universal or neutral in any form. It is the opposite of norm, rule and conclusion. Consequentially this encourages a deeper reading and understanding

of the passionate drive behind a curatorial project and how intuition can be made comprehensible to an audience.

Not to be confused with topics, Martinez defines the leitmotifs or guiding themes of dOCUMENTA (13)—»Collapse and Recovery«—as a function of intuition. In using intuition analogous to the leitmotifs, Martinez' understanding of the concept of intuition must de facto supersede the realm of the personal and merely subjective. This is highlighted in her statement: »An intuition does not belong to the realm of the merely subjective; it has a function that surpasses the personal, even if it is true that one of its qualities is partiality.«<sup>126</sup> However, this sentence alone does not extrapolate in what way intuition can be understood as a collective ambition or approach. Perhaps one answer lies in Martinez' definition based on Emerson, that intuition has a history. Regardless of various interpretations and readings, history and its references are something we share with others, be it through experience(s), the books we have read, the artworks we have seen, the exhibitions we have visited.

The whole project can be seen as a language that did not exist previous to the exhibition and is capable at the same time of emerging and elucidating many aspects and questions—the memory of matter, the relationship between historical and ahistorical time, the number of wisdoms that inform what we call knowledge, the many intelligences that constitute life and their intra-activity, the role of the disciplines that inhabit art, like art history or philosophy, the million forms of fiction and meaning emerging from it. The exhibition can produce a cognitive situation where to grasp these questions, instead of translating them using ordinary criteria in order to produce an ›opinion‹ on the matter, can make all these epistemic relationships turn, can set them in motion again. This is a journey in scepticism, or an understanding of criticality in the field of art.<sup>127</sup>

Martinez' elaboration towards an understanding of artistic and curatorial research emphasises that

drawing conclusions or arriving at a result with regard to—for example—the leitmotifs of dOCUMENTA (13) is not the main aim. The objective appears to be to provoke knowledge that »vacillates« through an exchange between the many different »intelligences.« Martinez aims to evoke a disruption of the canon and the notion of a »we,« which often seeks to arrive at a consensus. Rather than arriving at a particular opinion, she instead promotes awareness and an embrace of unusual and/or conflicting forms of knowledge.

Agreeing that art and its institutions should continuously strive to be sceptical about their own structures and ideas, however begs one to question whether this (necessarily) entails the exclusion of the formulation of an opinion? Perhaps Martinez is only concerned with avoiding the collective formulation of an opinion. As with any exhibition or project in which a group of people is involved in the curatorial process, the presentation of the multiplicity of opinions and angles to the leitmotifs is a more honest portrayal of the overall process. Similar to the »Curatorial Dictionary« (in which the terms in the dictionary were selected individually and not collaboratively therefore a reflection on the discordances within the working group), Martinez points out that multiplicity is not a theme of dOCUMENTA (13), but describes it as its building stock. The multiplication of styles, attitudes, logics, places and languages creates a dialogical space for art and its potential to explore knowledge entities.<sup>128</sup>

126 *ibid.*, p. 50.

127 *ibid.*, p. 51.

128 *ibid.*, p. 55.

129 *ibid.*, p. 51.

At the same time, withdrawing from clear conclusions serves as a possibility to avoid objects and artworks merely functioning as illustrations behind theories. »One can accept, skeptically, that art is both norm and exception, and not part of what can be regulated.«<sup>129</sup>



In order to better understand Martinez' theory of curatorial research and its presentation she draws an analogy between the leitmotifs of the dOCUMENTA (13) and »the clue« in a detective story. She refers to a foreword written by Jorge Luis Borges in the novel »The Invention of Morel« (1940) by Adolfo Bioy Casares in which he describes the close relationship between the clue and the murder mystery that is to be solved. Martinez is interested in the nature of the clue, as an epistemic entity, which nonetheless does not hold any concrete information. It is the intelligence of a case and the precursor in solving it, even though, in the end, it might not have anything to do with the actual murder. Not every clue, at least. The relationship of the clue pointing to a potential solution to a puzzle, is juxtaposed with the relationship between the leitmotif and intuition. The puzzle, like intuition, acts as a catalyst that brings together all there is to know.<sup>130</sup> The leitmotif, like the clue, offers direction in understanding intuition/ the puzzle, which is often hard to grasp and explain.<sup>131</sup> How does one articulate intuition, let alone create an exhibition based on it; an exhibition that then still manages to communicate with its audience?

<sup>130</sup> Needless to say, in the realm of the possible for the team working on the case, or exhibition.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

In order for a detective to even consider something as a clue, she/he/they first has/have to be guided by intuition. The detective has to have a hunch, a feeling, a speculation regarding the relevance of the clue to the case in question. Intuition and the mystery puzzling the detective are necessary in turning a thing into a clue, hence interlacing it into the story. So even though the leitmotif—which adopts the position of the clue in Martinez' analogy—helps in comprehending the intuition at work in a curatorial project, intuition is necessary in defining the leitmotif as such in the first place. It is possible that Martinez, due to the close conditional relationship between the two therefore uses the terms intuition and leitmotif interchangeably at the beginning of her text.

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\* The Steichen Collections at CNA, The Family of Man at Clervaux Castle, in: [https://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1\\_the-family-of-man](https://steichencollections-cna.lu/eng/collections/1_the-family-of-man) (30 April 2020).  
 † Sarah JAMES, The Whole Earth (October 2013), in: <https://frieze.com/article/whole-earth> (5 March 2020).

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fig. 14 Leftloft → p. 75  
 »100 Notes – 100 Thoughts,« 2012

fig. 15 Stewart Brand (ed.) → p. 86  
 »The Last Whole Earth Catalog«  
 (front and back cover), 1971

fig. 16 Edward Steichen → p. 89  
 »The Family of Man,« 1955

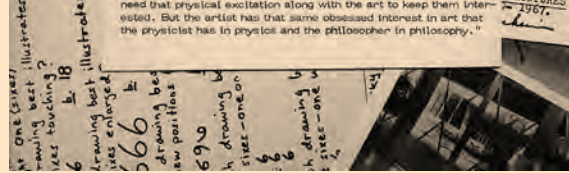
Installation view of the first showing of the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

503 black and white documentary photographs formed a collage in space. The images were taken by Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Dorothea Lange, Robert Doisneau, August Sander and Ansel Adams, and depicted scenes from all over the world after the end of World War II. They formed a collective »manifesto for peace and the fundamental equality of mankind.«<sup>\*</sup>

fig. 17 Installation view »The Whole Earth. → p. 89  
 California and the Disappearance  
 of the Outside,« 2013

Next to comparing the exhibition »The Whole Earth« to »The Family of Man,« Sarah James describes the »magazine-like editorial display« of the exhibition at the HKW as »provocative.«<sup>†</sup> Perhaps the intention behind this aesthetic was to—next to the exhibition essentially being based on a magazine—on a visual level point towards how the central thinking models of 1968 came to develop standards of neoliberal processes of today. Standards, which are captured in glossy pop cultural and lifestyle magazines.

fig. 18 Julien Prévieux → p. 97  
 Scene from »Patterns of Life,« 2015



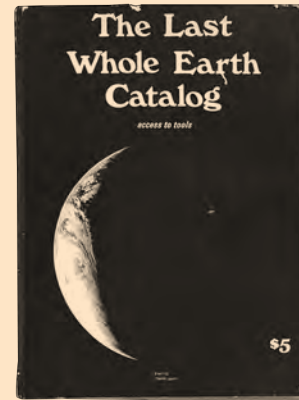
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The detective might only »understand« or be able to reason with her/his/their hunch, defined by its preliminary and elusive state, with the coming together of all elements and the solving of the mystery. Just as the coming together of all elements of a curatorial project in a specific space (be it physical or virtual) might only reveal the immediacy and importance behind the initial hunch to work in a specific direction. This can be argued as applicable for both the curators and the visitors. The analogy to the detective mystery highlights how the research process in a curatorial project continues throughout its entire progression and how the process itself can lead to insight.

In a crime novel, every piece—whether it is important in solving the puzzle or not—is important for the story. Without diverging strands of alleged evidence, various suspects and false alibis, the story told by the author would be an entirely different if not dull one. Drawing upon Martinez' analogy, one could argue further, that all elements—theory, discourse, objects, documents, artworks, display, sites, texts, publications—of a curatorial project, even if they might not lead to extended rational understanding, are significant parts of the whole. Each element has its own *raison d'être*; some falling more into place than others. Some only disclose themselves to a few while they remain opaque to others.

4.2.  
Creating Spaces.  
Long-term  
Research Projects  
at Haus der  
Kulturen der Welt,  
Berlin

4.2.1.  
»The Whole Earth.  
California and  
the Disappearance  
of the Outside«

An item is listed in the CATALOG if it is deemed:

1. Useful as a tool,
2. Relevant to independent education,
3. High quality or low cost,
4. Not already common knowledge,
5. Easily available by mail.<sup>132</sup> (fig. 15)

In 1968, the American author and activist Stewart Brand published the first issue of the »Whole Earth Catalog.« It collated tools in the form of objects and ideas that together represented a new planetary thinking that was surfacing in California's counter cultural movement during the 1960s and 70s. Young Americans were striving for a lost unity between humans, nature and the cosmos, and many became involved in communal living. The catalogue is considered a central document of the movement and gave »access to tools«<sup>133</sup> for living outside of official society by compiling a wide assortment of items such as: books, maps, forestry gear, carpentry and masonry instructions, as well as advanced technologies, such as personal computers and early synthesisers. Along with a photographic or illustrated depiction, the entries were supplemented with reviews by experts, as well as information on price and accessibility. Besides a holistic, »do-it-yourself« attitude, the catalogue addressed timely/contemporary discursive themes by covering topics such as cybernetics, ecology, management and psychology.

132 Stewart BRAND (ed.), Whole Earth Catalog. Access to Tools (1968), in: [https://monoskop.org/images/0/09/Brand\\_Stewart\\_Whole\\_Earth\\_Catalog\\_Fall\\_1968.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/0/09/Brand_Stewart_Whole_Earth_Catalog_Fall_1968.pdf) (9 March 2020).

133 »Access to tools« is the catalogue's subtitle.

The catalogue's format was oversized, images and text were printed in black and white, and positioned in a way that made use of the maximum amount of space on the page, thus visually corresponding in some sense with the atlas principle, exemplified by Didi-Huberman (discussed in chapter 3.3).

Bernd M. Scherer notes that instead of summarising a new era using theoretical language, Brand chose to represent the newly emerging philosophy through a collection of things.<sup>134</sup> Not only the content but also the process of putting the catalogue together reflected on the principles of contemporary thought. Advocating for more participation and complexity, by avoiding exclusive/singular authorship, the editor invited experts to select and write texts on products, therefore helping to »reestablish the value of individual subjectivity.«<sup>135</sup>

134 Bernd M. SCHERER, Foreword, in: Diedrich DIEDERICHSEN, Anselm FRANKE (eds.), The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside, Berlin 2013, pp. 6–7.

135 Sheila Levrant de BRETTEVILLE, A Reexamination of Some Aspects of the Design Arts from the Perspective of a Woman Designer, in: Edward KAMARCK (ed.), Arts in Society: Women and the Arts. Volume 11. Issue 1, Madison, WI 1974, p. 117.

136 Haus der Kulturen der Welt, The Anthropocene-Project. A Report, Berlin 2014, p. 6.

In 2013 Diedrich Diederichsen and Anselm Franke curated the exhibition »The Whole Earth. California and the Disappearance of the Outside,« as part of the two-year transdisciplinary research endeavour »The Anthropocene Project,« conducted by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin.

Diederichsen and Franke based their narrative on the context and archive of Stewart Brand's catalogue, and in the frame of the larger curatorial research project, examined »a basic trope of the Anthropocene view of the world—a planetary perspective on the world as a whole.«<sup>136</sup> Based on insights from the book »From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism« by professor of communication Fred Turner, the curators probed the lineages of the universalist paradigm, asking who wrote its history and continues to write its present. The exhibition located the origins of an all-encompassing worldview paradoxically both to the hippie movement, as well as the American space program, which—fuelled by the arms race of the Cold War—enabled



mankind to see an image of the whole earth. The image of the »Blue Marble« photographed from out of space adorned the cover of the catalogue and was the first instance the public would see the world in its entirety. The cultural-historical exhibition traced how the depiction of our world—i.e. a single image in a sense—would trigger a new ecological consciousness and feeling of collectivity.

The assembly of images, texts, sounds and documents proposed a rereading and reevaluation of an intellectual history of ideas, i.e. how »the counter-cultural communality, ecopsychodelia and cybernetics of the 1960s« constituted the beginning for »the networked neoliberalism of today.«<sup>137</sup> The subtitle »California and the Disappearance of the Outside« points from the hippie movement to a present condition of modernity. Within the capitalist system there is no outside, like there was in the USSR, for example. Capitalism is accepted as inevitable and all encompassing.<sup>138</sup>

137 Sarah JAMES, *The Whole Earth* (October 2013), in: <https://frieze.com/article/whole-earth> (5 March 2020).

138 Joshua SIMON, *The Way Things Are Organized*, p. 161.

Selected works of art that had either emerged directly from the counterculture in a significant way or discursively dealt with its history intervened into and shifted the storyline. Questioning the canonised grand narrative of the turmoil of 1968 was precisely what the exhibition set out to do. It did this both in regards to the researched content and its display.

In her review of the exhibition, art historian and writer Sarah James wrote:

Based upon the constellation of art works, which were presented not strictly as aesthetic objects, but also as artistic and social positions that were put to work, activating new relations and tensions among the works themselves, but also mobilizing them in relation to cultural artefacts from the period. This combination worked to re-map the historical, political, cultural and aesthetic geographies and temporalities that they articulate and problematize. This might

sound a little abstract, but in fact it evidenced a curatorial practice that approximates a kind of cultural geography, with the exhibition repositioned as a complex visual and audio essay.<sup>139</sup>

Juxtaposing seemingly disparate phenomena is a frequently deployed strategy in curatorial research projects at the HKW. Rather than drawing a linear historical genealogy of the researched condition, »invisible structural, aesthetic, narratological, and even poetic connections between different historical techniques and technologies«<sup>140</sup> are made. By exhibiting the relationality between the putatively dissimilar or unconnected this methodology aims to display how history is not linear as well as the multiple lineages that make up the contemporary.

The exhibition was narrated along seven chapters, such as Universalism; Frontier: At the Pacific Wall; Whole Systems; Boundless Interior; Apocalypse, Babylon, Simulation; Self-Incorporated/Networks and the Log Boom; and The Earth is Not Whole. The walls built for the display revealed their structure of black cross-braces, calling to mind constructions by Buckminster Fuller, the architectural hero of America's counterculture. The structure created spaces for montages with texts, images, music, films and books. Paintings and large photographs were suspended from the ceiling with black wire, comfortably arranging themselves within the overall display (figs. 16 and 17). An array of black chairs was positioned in the wide, open exhibition space and could be moved at the visitor's own convenience, enabling or inviting the viewers to study and engage more deeply with »the immense amount of contextual texts and films.« »[T]he visitor had a lot of work to do.«<sup>141</sup>

139 JAMES, *The Whole Earth*.

140 SCHUBERT, »100 Years of Now« and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p.13.

141 JAMES, *The Whole Earth*.

The exhibition concluded with the quote: »The whole is the untrue« by Theodor W. Adorno. This holistic approach of viewing the world as a whole (from the perspective of the West Coast) somewhat paradoxically involves the danger of exclusion, creating an inside and multiple outsides. Scherer claims that this danger made all the mini cosmoses of the communes fall apart within only a few months,<sup>142</sup> but, if the central thinking models of 1968 came to develop standards of the neoliberal era of today, how does network capitalism continue to succeed? It is this transformation of a universalist, global conception of order of the immediate past affecting our present that the exhibition tried to fathom, while simultaneously questioning the meaning of the meanwhile ubiquitous, iconographic image of the whole world seen from an outside perspective. What are the particular ideological circumstances under which this picture came into being? The image of the whole Earth suggests a holistic symbol that unites all, but the circumstances of its production are local, particular, ideological and situated.

142 SCHERER, Foreword, p. 6–7.

The question »What comes after universalism?« is negotiated in further iterations of investigations that take place at the HKW. The »Dictionary of the Now« discussing how we can communicate about a globalised present and at the same time challenge linguistic universalism is one example.

As mentioned, »The Whole Earth« was embedded in the broader context of »The Anthropocene Project.« The Anthropocene is a term proposed for a geological epoch defined by humans having transformed the environment in a way that cannot be undone. A geological age must be global; therefore, the Anthropocene assumes the immense impact of human existence on the planet as a whole. Mankind has created an entire stratum that spreads out over the entire earth. First formulated in the beginning of the twenty-first century by the meteorologist Paul

Crutzen, this paradigm blurs the lines between nature and history, i.e. not man-made and man-made. The Anthropocene both articulates the romanticised unison between nature and culture, as well as the danger of cancelling out history through a-historicising man-kind by naturalising everything.<sup>143</sup>

HKW's exploration of this new geological age encompassed a number of exhibitions, performances, workshops and events and is described as a prelude to further ongoing examinations on the topic, all probing alternative forms of knowledge production. Scherer, Director of the HKW, claims that the developments in which humanity is affecting and shaping nature—by changing the climate, exterminating species, polluting and so on—can no longer be evaluated and grasped through the sole accumulation of knowledge through the human and natural sciences. »The reassessment of our situation requires a sensuous-aesthetic praxis, which sharpens our powers of judgment with respect to the epochal transformation of the Anthropocene.«<sup>144</sup>

Among the participants of the project the following questions were to be negotiated:

If the opposition between humanity and nature has been dissolved, what processes must we undergo to shift our perspectives and trained perceptions? Where to draw the borders of an ever-expanding ›planetary garden‹? Is it necessary to rethink the nature of economies, or should we assign nature its own economy? What impact does the Anthropocene have on global, political decision making? What image of humanity forms if nature appears in the image of man, as if it were human?<sup>145</sup>

143 Diedrich DIEDERICHSEN, The Whole Earth, in conversation with Bernd M. Scherer, talk held on 1 July 2013 at the HKW, Berlin, in the framework of »The Anthropocene Project« (2013–2014). [www.hkw.de/de/app/mediathek/video/22380](http://www.hkw.de/de/app/mediathek/video/22380) (5 March 2020).

144 Haus der Kulturen der Welt, The Anthropocene-Project. A Report, pp. 4–5.

145 e-flux, The Anthropocene Project (3 January 2013), in: [www.e-flux.com/announcements/33281/the-anthropocene-project](http://www.e-flux.com/announcements/33281/the-anthropocene-project) (5 March 2020).

4.2.2.

»The Anthropocene Project« (2013–2014)

Particular examples of the specific questions posed include:

What happens when birds adopt melodies from people or transform them into new sound patterns?<sup>146</sup>  
 Who is responsible for acts of violence when the aerosols emitted by European industry, through a complex chain of interactions in the atmosphere, change the rainfall patterns in the African Sahel region to such an extent that entire areas are devastated, resulting in conflicts over resources between the people affected?<sup>147</sup>

146 Haus der Kulturen der Welt, *The Anthropocene-Project. A Report*, p. 7.  
 (Asked in the frame of the program »Inhuman Music. Compositions by Machines, by Animals, and by Accident« curated by Detlef Diederichsen and Holger Schulze).  
 147 *ibid.*

(Asked in the frame of the exhibition: »Forensis« curated by Anselm Franke and Eyal Weizman).

148 Haus der Kulturen der Welt, *The Anthropocene-Project. A Report*, p. 5.  
 149 SCHUBERT, »100 Years of Now« and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p. 8.

150 *ibid.*

151 *ibid.*, p. 10.

152 SCHUBERT, »100 Years of Now« and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p. 13.

Scherer describes the project as a (judicial) forum, terming the exhibitions, concerts, performances, installations, films, conversations and games as »hearings« in which the protagonists of the world »things, emotions, theories, music, and animals, are given a voice, while simultaneously becoming subjects of the proceedings.«<sup>148</sup> Each hearing was based on a specific particularity—reaching from wild-life or computers imitating human sounds, to the disruption of classical legal categories. Together, however, each program contributed to forming a semantic grid in making sense of the newly articulated, yet still intangible, relationship between humanity and nature.

»The Anthropocene Project« itself is a prelude for further, ongoing investigations conducted by the HKW, taking on different shapes, such as a glossary, a campus, a theatre piece, publication series and forming collaborations with and between ecologists,

#### 4.2.3.

»100 Years of Now«  
 (2015–2019)

physicists, philosophers, visual artists, musicologists, dramaturgists among others, leading to a cross-fertilisation of diverse research practices and themes.

Starting in 2013, »The Anthropocene Project« was the first of a series of long-term curatorial frameworks devised as a reaction towards the prevailing »temporality of the now«<sup>149</sup> shaped by event-based cultural production and fast-moving, self-contained projects. In 2015 the HKW started the project »100 Years of Now«, curated by Bernd M. Scherer and a team of numerous curators working on various sub-projects, »each production building on the previous one,«<sup>150</sup> with Annette Bhagwati operating as Head of Project.

In its broadest sense, »100 Years of Now« was a curatorial research project that asked questions on how the past affects the present through a »critical investigation into the temporality of contemporaneity,«<sup>151</sup> which was reflected in both the structure and content of the project. The project continued questioning the assumption that there is one globalised world, and engaged with the idea of asymmetrical contemporaries taking place at the same time. Next to in-depth explorations of specific phenomena, the project also posed a lot of questions regarding the curatorial framework of such an endeavour:

How can the same research questions be followed up across a long period of time, allowing for prisms of different perspectives on the same question to deepen an understanding of a topic and to continue a conversation between actors within a given discourse? How can an institution avoid presenting topics as new information, subordinating itself to the regime of the Now while still offering multiple points of access for the audience or participants at any time without being too presuppositional? How can the same be said differently again and again in a productive way and applied to recent phenomena, but still resist the logic of progress, innovation, and discovery? How can institutional knowledge that accumulates within different media and people, be cultivated as an archive, establishing a research community and providing resources for it? And how is this interesting for the public?<sup>152</sup>

Olga von Schubert worked as research consultant to the project. Reflecting on the process, she has described the project as a deep analysis of what was/is already there, focusing on forms of reappropriation, continuation and recycling, in order to rethink the contemporary as a temporality defying logics of »innovation, newness and singularity«<sup>153</sup> that perpetuate a system that ignores the effects presentism is having on the future. Already the project title itself intertwines the past with the present. Similar to DOCUMENTA 13, »100 Years of Now« did not concentrate on one specific overall topic in its inquiry into what produces contemporaneity. By looking at developments that started at least one hundred years ago that are still shaping present political and cultural processes, a myriad of case studies and explorations of particular conditions created a constellation of ideas that spread out over the course of four years.

The project asked what it actually means to be sharing the same time and whether the temporality of contemporaneity is actually defined as the conjunction of different times, which nevertheless are happening at the same time. So, instead of creating a theory on the contemporary, Schubert writes that the project's ambition might be more about the assembly of differing and different positions. So, »[I]f contemporaneity is characterised by the coming together of different notions of temporality, it also abolishes the idea of stable temporal objects as a set of reference points.«<sup>154</sup> Contemporaneity is not something one can record in that sense, but is characterised by its expression through the process of coming together. »History in a contemporary perspective can thus not be represented in objects, but only by negotiated processes.«

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

Examining the findings of »100 Years of Now«, Schubert offers a definition of curatorial research:

Assuming that curating is the practice that emerges in a relational field of contemporaneity and from which the idea of the contemporary as a coming together of different times, which have to be negotiated in order to arrive at situated knowledges of a shared reality, is deduced, curating could be characterised as moderating collaborative processes and creating a setting in which contemporary approaches can be employed. Rather than representing results from science or academic research and making them accessible for a wider audience or putting on ›core programs, such as education,‹ (Terry Smith, Thinking Contemporary Curating) curatorial research could mean to organize and moderate ›open‹ processes in which people with different approaches who would normally not encounter each other because of their disciplinary boundaries or because of their opposed perspectives are brought into contact so that new relations of knowledge can be produced. The task of the curatorial team then lies in creating spaces in which things can happen rather than be shown, in which they can be researched rather than being represented.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

As part of "100 Years of Now", the exhibition »Nervous Systems: Quantified Life and The Social Question« (2016) followed up on topics that were already raised in »The Whole Earth,« such as cybernetics. As part of their curatorial research process, Stephanie Hankey and Marek Tuszynski from the Tactical Technology Collective and Franke put an installation format, which they named »triangulations,« to the test. In the social sciences, the term refers to a research method that tries to open up a prism of perspectives on the same phenomenon or condition, by applying a multiplicity of theories, empirical materials and methodologies. So, in order to better overcome biases, multiple researchers work on the same research questions, various methodologies—interviews, questionnaires, documents, observations—are applied to gain data and more than one theory is applied in order to interpret the information gathered. Further, the social sciences borrowed the term from a technique in land surveying or cartography,



by which the position of one specific point is determined by converging the measurement between two other positions, distinct to one another.<sup>156</sup>

The triangulations were constructed of hexagonal structures that were positioned in a grid among the other elements of the exhibition. Media activists, historians and writers conducted research on various aspects of the algorithmic surveillance society, drawing »connections between historically and spatially disconnected events or phenomena.«<sup>157</sup> While »The Whole Earth« and the »Anthropocene Project« were mainly concerned with the new relationship between humans and nature, »Nervous Systems« explored the relation between man and machine.

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156 Paulette ROTHBAUER, Triangulation, in: Lisa GIVEN (ed.), The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods, Thousand Oaks, CA 2008, pp. 892–894.

157 SCHUBERT, »100 Years of Now« and the Temporality of Curatorial Research, p. 27.

158 *ibid.*, p. 29.

In the essay »»100 Years of Now« and the Temporality of Curatorial Research« Schubert expands on one of the triangulations titled »Patterns of Life« by the media theorist Grégoire Chamayou. His point of departure was a technology introduced by the U.S. Intelligence community in 2010 developed for rhythm-analysis in the military. The »Activity-Based Intelligence« paradigm is based on the use of programs that detect behaviour departing from ordinary motion patterns, by comparing it to previously collected data on tracked movement. In order to anticipate what may happen, this military intelligence is for example used to detect suspicious behaviour in warfare and to execute pre-emptive drone attacks.<sup>158</sup> Rather than looking into the history of technological developments in the U.S. military, Chamayou approached exploring the phenomenon through the evolution of other scientific as well as artistic trajectories concerned with the traceability of bodily movement. For example, Frank B.

Gilbreth's study of gestures of factory workers using the technique of chronophotography. The workers hands and arms were studded with little light bulbs that then created traceable lines on long-exposure photographic prints, while blurring the image of the individual performing the movements. The motion sequences were then analysed and optimised for a more efficient work process in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Based on Chamayou's research Julien Prévieux developed the dance film bearing the same name as the triangulation »Patterns of Life« (2015) (fig. 18). Commissioned for the exhibition, the film explores how collected data on movement can act as a way to control and influence individual as well as group behaviour, and poses questions such as »Can our inner thoughts be transmitted by our eye movements? Can our future actions be predicted by our current behaviour?« Together, Chamayou and Prévieux showed how cartographic tracings are never politically neutral, and the inherent power relation between the knowledge produced about a subject and the people having the knowledge at their disposal, as well as pointing to the gradual shift of technology that traces movement to the military and capitalist realm.<sup>159</sup>

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159 Grégoire CHAMAYOU, Patterns of Life: A Very Short History of Schematic Bodies, The Funambulist: Bodies, Designs and Politics (14 December 2014), in: <https://thefunambulist.net/history/the-funambulist-papers-57-schematic-bodies-notes-on-a-patterns-genealogy-by-gregoire-chamayou> (5 March 2020).

These case studies all portray a type of curatorial approach that exemplifies the multiple, complex forms of process-based research in-between and beyond theory and practice.

## Conclusion. Defining

5.1.

Methodology as  
Storyline

Attempting to synthesise my ruminations, readings and case studies, almost seems to render the term »curatorial research« a pleonasm. One of the guiding threads throughout the thesis is that »the curatorial« is in itself a method of research, albeit one that resists being defined.

In an issue of the *Springer*in Simon Sheikh writes that the use of »the curatorial« as an analytical tool and a philosophical proposition makes it »a separate form of knowledge production that may actually not involve the curating of exhibitions, but rather the process of producing knowledge and making curatorial constellations that can be drawn from the historical forms and practices of curating.«<sup>160</sup> The curatorial is a technique for »producing and organising knowledge.«<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> SHEIKH, From Para to Post.

<sup>161</sup> SIMON, The Way Things Are Organized, p. 165.

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Whether this methodology follows the concept of »starting in the middle« and »from within the conditions,« applies the »atlas principle,« or submits to intuition; a hunch and perhaps the unfathomable monsters inside of you—comprising a discourse of its very own—the curatorial does not follow any one method. According to Martinez, the methodology at play might even only become apparent at the end of a project. Nevertheless, one could argue, that this would still be part of a conscious approach.

In any case, returning to the beginning of this thesis, how we seek reveals the meaning of the question we are asking. Starting with an approach, rather than a thesis or hypothesis, might make the process more arduous, but it might also encourage us to investigate further, in order to bring the unfathomable and/or the inexhaustible closer together.

Having established the significance of methodology in relation to what it is one would like to say, show, stage or create a space for, I deem it important that the audience is welcomed into the approach used

for the research process, in some way or another, in order to negotiate and communicate more clearly and avoid »abandoning the viewer.« Being the viewer or interpreter of research, it is important to be aware of the processes at play as integral parts of the project, especially if it is not trying to prove a hypothesis, or illustrate a thesis, and perhaps constitutes something that still withdraws from being expressed in words, or from existing yet at all.

In museums and exhibitions, the term storyline can function as the guiding thread meandering through a curatorial project.<sup>162</sup> It creates an overall narrative with a beginning and end, connects objects juxtaposed with texts and other media, and takes away the solitary gaze on single exhibits.<sup>163</sup> According to Rogoff's distinction between curating and the curatorial, the storyline belongs to the toolbox of curating.

Every exhibition can be analysed according to its storyline, be it its conceptual narrative, or the unconscious passing on of seemingly intrinsic societal values.<sup>164</sup> The curatorial, on the other hand, has the potential to question the storyline, its alleged beginning and end and its definition of narrative, borrowed from theatre. So, perhaps the narrative guiding the viewers of curatorial research, could be the disclosure of the methodology used for the project. Methodology as storyline.

162 See Schnittpunkt (ed.), *Storyline. Narrationen im Museum* (Storyline. Narrations in the Museum), Vienna 2009.

163 Beatrice JASCHKE, *Kritisches Glossar: Storyline* (Critical Glossary: Storyline), in: ARGE schnittpunkt (ed.), *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis* (Manual for Exhibition Theory and Praxis), Vienna, Cologne, Weimar 2013, p. 190.

164 *ibid.*

To me, part of why the publication series »100 Notes – 100 Thoughts« was so successful, was because it embodied the concept of the »maybe«—delineated so precisely by Chus Martinez—and the preliminary qualities of both the note and documenta itself (seeing as the booklets were published and

made accessible before the official opening) in such a comprehensive way. Along with »The Logbook,« the public was allowed access to a part of dOCUMENTA (13)'s research process. On the one hand, this was achieved by publishing the preparatory readings and references of the agent group, and on the other, by suggesting the curatorial approach through the selected texts, often having an unfinished, note-like format themselves.

Announcing that dOCUMENTA (13) would follow a non-concept, definitely wasn't going to make the exhibition's mediation easy, but the way Christov-Bakargiev and her team executed and contextualised their curatorial research demonstrated that having a concept is not a necessary part in creating an active viewing position for the public. And, that a non-concept is in fact also a concept, its confusion likely rather intentional.<sup>165</sup>

165 BERMAN, dOCUMENTA (13) »Non-Concept.«

In the case of the »Curatorial Dictionary,« the simple gesture of mentioning the author's name under the definition (or essay) of every word, points to the method of broad-based participation and perhaps even the discrepancies that become visible through the authors divergent perspectives, which intrinsically define this project.

As for the long-term research projects at the HKW, despite being precursory in the way the institution relates and contextualises very specific topics with more general concerns of the present, perhaps it would be helpful if the single exhibitions and events were more clearly embedded and distinguished as part of a larger research project. Due to the many past and present projects consisting of multiple subprojects such as events, symposia, exhibitions etc., it took me a significant amount of time during my research on HKW's website to realise that every project is in fact part of a larger one and to decipher what format a subproject took. Furthermore, upon visiting the exhibition »Neolithic Childhood. Art in

a False Present, c. 1930« (2018) I was not aware that it was part of the wider research project »Kanon Fragen,« critically contending »the canonization of modernity.«<sup>166</sup> This didn't make me appreciate the exhibition any less, but perhaps it would have made it easier for myself and others to understand why this specific exhibition took place at this time, in this space, and to further relate to the questions it raised to the present.

In a sense, the entangled semantic grid being formed by HKW's multiple projects reflects the asymmetry of contemporaneity and its inherent multiplicity. However, is it then also necessary to maintain this entanglement in the organisational structure of mediating formats, such as the institution's website, or the apparent poor (as reportedly criticised) signage at dOCUMENTA (13)?

From her experience, as one of the members of dOCUMENTA (13)'s press centre, Milena Berman wrote about the repeated complaints of visitors who could not find their way: »I couldn't help but wonder if this too was part of a ploy to maintain a degree of disorientation. I felt as if somewhere Christov-Bakargiev was scoffing at the idea of visitors attempting to control the way in which they would encounter the art.«<sup>167</sup>

166 Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Kanon-Fragen (2016), in: [www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2016/kanon\\_fragen/kanon\\_fragen\\_start.php](http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2016/kanon_fragen/kanon_fragen_start.php) (5 March 2020).

167 BERMAN, dOCUMENTA (13) »Non-Concept.«

point of each grain. In this sense, the exhibition organizes the conditions that contain the energy of an avalanche without collapsing.«<sup>168</sup>

I propose to think of this metaphor in relation to the concept of curatorial research. Through the coming together of disparate research conducted during a curatorial project, plus the exhibition's design and architecture, conditions of high intensity can be met. These conditions can only take place at this time in this very space. Resonating with the concept of metastability is the uniqueness of every curatorial project. The assumed temporary frozen avalanche can only be formed by the assembly of the research and possibly its viewers, making it impossible for the curators to explain everything about the avalanche before the system has reached its particular, distinctive balance. Rather than being about staging the event, the curatorial is about what happens at the actual event.<sup>169</sup>

168 SIMON, *The Way Things Are Organized*, p. 172.

169 Jean-Paul MARTINON, Irit ROGOFF, Preface, in: Jean-Paul MARTINON (ed.), *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating*, London 2013, pp. 5–7.

## 5.2.

### Tension and the Potential of Exhibiting the Ineffable

Curator and writer Joshua Simon uses the concept of metastability, derived from thermodynamics, to explain the syntax holding the contemporary art exhibition together.

Metastable forms are structurally unstable, yet somehow balanced systems [...] By their nature metastable structures are temporary. With a pile of ice crystals and snow on a steep slope, or a pile of sand grains, very specific conditions are needed to contain their unstable configurations—intense relations that are held by the smallest contact

Throughout my research I have made out a couple of juxtapositions that, to me, offer productive tensions within the curatorial. In addition to the conditions mentioned above, I also understand metastability as a space or moment that is created due to the intersection of various tensions. Far from being exhaustive, this list is also very much about the interrelation between each juxtaposition. None precedes the other, or is more significant than the other.

Theory	↔	Practice
Theory	↔	Intuition
Monstra	↔	Astra
The Unfathomable	↔	The Inexhaustible
Material	↔	Immaterial
Specific	↔	Overview
Event	↔	Institution
Statement	↔	Methodology

fig. 13 Kai Althoff → p. 71

A letter to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 24 May, 2011. Exhibited in the Kunsthalle Fridericianum in Kassel during dOCUMENTA (13) on the initiative of Christov-Bakargiev and with the permission of the artist.

fig. 19 Joseph Jastrow → p. 113

Duck/Rabbit Figure (Shifting Figure), 1900





13

Colopro 24<sup>th</sup> / May 2011

Dear Carolyn,

I do write to you in remorse, because I feel that you may think I betrayed your trust and confidence in me upon reading the following - but at least I want to try to explain to some extent.

It is, that at this point I need to ask you, if you would free me from fulfilling my prior agreement to participate in next year's documenta, as I feel that the things lying ahead of me will crush me. I had agreed to do other things before your offer that add to the weight considerably, and make me feel as if trapped in a chain of obligations, that I am simply incapable to accomplish. There is also a fear that is almost inexplicable, entailing the thought of having to go to Kassel.

All this is due possibly to my great doubt of how to continue with myself, how to continue life, and my wish to do other things that I deem of substantial importance that by agreeing to do shows or the like, seem to constantly be pushed to some distant future, which started to sadden me greatly. The time that it took me to prepare my show at Barbara Glodstone taught me again just that: despite the calling and feeling in bliss about a piece of work that I consider to be worthy in the end - it felt like I had to be somewhat professional and conquer over these thoughts and emotional turmoil when indeed I do not even think it is right to fight it down.



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Interweaving theory and practice more closely with one another continues to be a struggle in the expanded field of the curatorial. However, as explored in the first chapter of this thesis, this tension can also be productive and a lot can be learned from what happens within the gap between the two notions.

In the following paragraphs, I will try to extrapolate the tensions I have distinguished, that expand the tested and familiar space of thinking between theory and practice.

5.2.1.

Theory ↔ Intuition

The tension between theory and intuition likely lies at the core of what I am attempting to convey. Theory being executed by semantic references, statements, explanations, neologisms, and definitions, and intuition almost working like a montage of both intellectualities and sensibilities. I decided to juxtapose theory with the concept Martinez uses to describe the approach to dOCUMENTA (13), i.e. intuition, because »the curatorial« is often portrayed as an academic, theoretical form<sup>170</sup> and perhaps could be distinguished by other attributes as well.

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<sup>170</sup> As opposed to curating, which is usually allocated to the practical side of exhibition-making.

In »How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog [...]« Martinez asks for alternatives to always create and name a new methodology or theory, in order to fathom what is happening in an exhibition that is withdrawing from something already seen or known. She suggests letting equally valid logics such as intuition communicate by also allowing some things to remain opaque. While aware of the contradiction the neologism »intuition as methodology« might hold in this argument, intuition as methodology can however itself serve as mediator between the exhibition and the viewer.

Though Martinez was careful in not letting her readers misinterpret her understanding of intuition as a superficial emotion, intuition is successfully

argued as a process that taps areas outside of rational thought. Due to the sensation that intuition is coming from a place that is somehow »deeper inside«—because it escapes certain cerebral logics—I believe that it is important (when in the process of comprehending one’s own intuitive approach) that one also tries to understand where one’s intuition is coming from, in order to recognise whether mechanisms outside of our bodies are tricking us into thinking that a sentiment is coming from »inside.« Martinez also stresses, however, that the montage making up our intuition, made up of the artworks we have understood, books our bodies remember, spaces we have smelled, theories we were touched by or never fully grasped, goes beyond that of the personal »gut feeling,« as others will have seen that artwork, read that book and worked through that philosophical treatise.

In his many research projects, most prominently the »Mnemosyne Atlas«, it was Warburg’s desire to submerge the most distant orders of reality with one another. He wanted to interweave the unfathomable monsters inside of us (»monstra«) with the inexhaustibility of the sky (»astra«). The Atlas had perhaps saved the art historian from his own monsters, but at the same, they were probably a crucial driving force behind the entire project, which ended up influencing both form and content in disciplines such as the human sciences, cultural studies and artistic practices. With his montages Warburg did not only want to demonstrate a productive tension through the juxtaposition of images, he wanted to point out the inherent tension within every image and, according to Didi-Huberman, saw every image as a montage in itself (see sheep livers in chapter 3.3.2.).

According to Martinez’ comparison of dOCUMENTA (13) with a detective story, every image and every object of a curatorial research project constitutes a necessary piece in the puzzle. Every piece has to be regarded as a possible clue, even if some pieces might not hold any concrete information.

Every fragment is deemed essential in telling the story. As Didi-Huberman wrote about the Atlas: the images are not only being interpreted, but are active, interpreting elements themselves. Similarly, I believe that in curatorial research, everything becomes an active element of the constellation, both on a material and an immaterial level.

In the exhibition »The Whole Earth« Diederichsen and Franke do not »[engage] with images as sealed representations«<sup>171</sup> but trace the conditions that enabled specific, influential images to appear, consequentially pursuing Warburg’s intention of turning the image from an object being interpreted into the interpreting object itself.

In Joshua Simon’s text »The Way Things are Organized« he employs the well-known twofold image of the duck/rabbit (fig. 19) to describe the tension between the material and immaterial in an exhibition or an object on display. Say the duck represents the material and the rabbit the immaterial aspect of an exhibition and/or object. An exhibition performs both the assembly of the concrete, tangible and visible elements, and at the same time actualises conceptual and curatorial processes—often abstract, intangible and immaterial.<sup>172</sup>

171 SIMON, The Way Things Are Organized, p. 164.

172 *ibid.*, p. 171.

Simon claims that as power and politics are becoming increasingly virtual (such as the rise of immaterial labour, the internet, and crypto-currencies), the curatorial (predominantly communicating visually), must renegotiate how it can show and communicate forms of power in an exhibitionary sense through the visual.

Increasingly, what one raises when discussing the negotiation of reality is in fact an address of processes that are not visible.

Albeit an illustrative and catchy comparison in showing that there is never only one reading of an object, I find that the analogy of the duck/rabbit

5.2.2.  
Monstra/The Un-  
fathomable ↔ Astra/  
The Inexhaustible

5.2.3.  
Material ↔  
Immaterial

image as slightly flawed in the sense that one can never see both animals at the same time. However, perhaps the metaphor needs this shift in order to demonstrate that the rabbit adheres to different logics than the duck, despite being the same image.

5.2.4.

Specific ↔ Overview

What all case studies in this thesis have in common, is the attempt to bring volatility into certain narratives of history and the present. The aim is to offer a re-reading, by proving that there is not one reading. Schubert writes about the central aspect of »creating space« that allows for multiple realities (that would ordinarily not meet) to come together. Evoking a volatility of knowledge perhaps first leads to confusion but challenges simplification—thus control—and resists turning to representative gestures.

The demonstration of multiple perspectives is juxtaposed with the importance to be specific in curatorial research, although multiplicity can be the material or »building stock« of the particular. In order to fathom the complexity of a circumstance, curatorial research arguably needs to turn to particular examples and cases that can be pondered upon. An exhibition like »The Whole Earth,« based in a particular time—the 1960s and 70s—in a specific place—California—and on a specific philosophy—universalist thought—urges the viewing and participating audience to question the very specificity on display at the HKW, as well as how it relates to the present.

Rather than starting with an overview, one begins with a »zoomed-in« or particular perspective, somewhere in the middle, which in the case of Diedrichsen and Franke's exhibition lies in the past. A past that still very much influences our reading of the present.

The overview (or the »surveying gaze«) creates a productive tension with the specific. For instance, the reconstruction of how the (specific) image of the »Blue Marble« came into being, and the discourse surrounding the »Whole Earth Catalog« became part of the broader research context of »The Anthropocene Project.«

The particular is woven into the semantic grid that successively reveals connections and interrelations. Within the grid, concepts and ideas are continuously renewed, re-appropriated, recycled and re-evaluated.

Creating the infrastructure that enables us to perceive everything in a wider, more connected scope, might slowly make the dominance of the short-term research project and »regime of the now« crumble.

Lastly and significantly, the overview remains important in order to continue questioning the accepted frameworks from within which we are working and thinking. Capitalism constitutes a closed system that is continuously deluding us into believing that there is »no outside.« An overview might also imply seeing the paradigm we are allegedly stuck in from an exterior perspective, which bears the potential to imagine different possible realities.

5.2.5.

Event ↔ Institution

Documenta 11 (2002) co-curator Sarat Maharaj refers to each iteration of documenta as a singularity that nevertheless is part of a constellation. »[E]ach is a one-off affair with its own distinct stamp. At the same time, the regular five-year basis on which they take place, their periodicity, lends them a sense of seamless continuity.«<sup>173</sup> From this perspective, dOCUMENTA (13)—with its notoriously hard to remember title: »The dance was frenetic, animated, clattering, twisted, and lasted a long time«—also needs to be seen as located in-between the staging of a unique, large-scale curatorial event and the permanence of a durable institution that has acquired a continuity spanning over sixty-five years by now. In the essay »Para-Museum of 100 Days« curator and documenta professor Nora Sternfeld writes that when viewing documenta's history and future, it is not about making a decision for either one side or the other, by for example believing that one can position the curatorial process somewhere outside of the institution.

173 Sarat MAHARAJ, Merz-Thinking – Sounding the Documenta Process Between Critique and Spectacle, in: Marianne EIGENHEER (ed.), *oncurating*. Issue 9, Edinburgh 2011, p. 11.

She stresses an insistent but critical engagement with the institution and its infrastructure, including its archive, as well as the fact that the succeeding documentas will again re-shuffle the history and future of the quinquennial »one-hundred-day museum.«<sup>174</sup>

174 Nora STERNFELD, Para-Museum of 100 Days: documenta between Event and Institution, in: Nanne BUURMAN, Dorothee RICHTER (eds.), *oncurating*. Issue 33, Zürich 2017, pp. 165–170.

175 CHWATAL, Notes on Claire Bishop's lecture.

5.2.6.

Statement/Hypothesis/Proposition ↔ Methodology

The two poles of the tension between proposition and methodology infer not leaving the viewer alone in trying to distil a statement out of the research on display, on the one side of the spectrum, and methodologically leaving gaps on the other.

In the preceding description of how methodology can turn into a statement itself (5.1. Methodology as Storyline), the tension transforms into a friction. Rather than creating a space between two opposites, the two ends collide with one other.

5.3.

Struggle

Unremittingly intersecting and influencing each other, these multiple tensions hold the potential to create a highly charged field in which new insights can thrive.

Exposing one's aggregated research to the forces exercised by the tensions will prevent the research from remaining a subjective collection of stuff that has not undergone any substantial type of synthesis or transformation, as Claire Bishop critically observed. The tensions exercise the capability to stop a curatorial research project from merely being associated with Sheikh's definition of »recherché:« research practiced as journalism, or Bishops definition of search, often mistaken for research. The conscious integration of the monsters, the material and immaterial, the particular and the outside, and the unknown, holds the possibility of going beyond the boundaries of existing knowledge and at the same time creates a resistance to making quick connections and deductions, that appear to be inherent to the digital condition.<sup>175</sup> Premature leaps will

probably not be made if research remains in conscious negotiation with the space in-between these tensions. Each charged spectrum or juxtaposition proposed has a completely different way of questioning an item, and each one bears a different desire and alternative approach to understand, whether through alteration, through categorisation, through bodily knowledge, ... the list goes on.

By exposing research to such tensions, does the material in turn transform into a statement? Or at least transform? Is revealing these tensions to the viewers a chance to avoid the audience being overwhelmed with unclear, loose ends, or too much material?

Staying within these tensions is undoubtedly a struggle; staying in the realm of not being able to explain what it is one is trying to say, is too. Only after having written a good thirty pages of my thesis, did I establish what my research question actually was and is. Moreover, this was only possible with the essential help of my meticulous and patient supervisor Nora Sternfeld. The process I underwent in writing my thesis makes the introductory quote by Wittgenstein somewhat even more tangible to me. The struggle of curatorial research was translated into my writing process. I knew *how* I wanted to say it, but I did not know *what*.

In addition, I also gave in to my monsters, which were conjured while delirious with a fever and enabled me to finally write this conclusion. My thoughts all of a sudden fell into place.

Despite being very central aspects to my understanding of what curatorial research is and can be, I suppose at first view this thesis does not directly tick the box of broad-based-participation, nor is it embedded in a continuous long-term project. Nevertheless, it is written in the frame of a broader context: the /ecm – Master's Programme in Exhibition Theory and Practice. The programme, conducted at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, has been

ongoing for almost twenty years and has brought forth a considerable number of theses on the topics of educating, curating and managing. Throughout my research and writing process I often thought about the development of an online archive that assembles all of these texts. An online tool that can point to cross-references through selected keywords, peer-reviews, images and other connecting parameters, thus re-placing each thesis in the collective context it was written in. The archive could serve as a source of research and a practical and visual exhibition of how research is in fact almost never a solitary activity.

5.4.

End

Curatorial research can be understood as a research methodology in which tensions that go beyond the gap between theory and practice are put to the test. Using methodology as storyline and intuition as methodology bears the power to narrate and negotiate something that might not yet even exist. Curatorial research, one can arguably claim, aims at disrupting the reproduction of canonised knowledge of history, of the present and of the future.

Locating curatorial research in the in-between space of multiple juxtaposing poles also prevents the term from ever arriving at one definition. It suggests that curatorial research will always be positioned in an idiosyncrasy that is subject to its conditions; »a relation within relations.«<sup>176</sup> The controversy of what curatorial research is, is one that does not have to be resolved; does not have to choose a side, precisely because it uses the struggle *between* representation and presence, temporality and continuity, inside and outside,<sup>177</sup> in order to maintain the potential its conundrum holds. Both in theory and practice, the unfathomability and inexhaustibility inherent to curatorial research will enable it to forever remain an unruly, insatiable part of discourse.

<sup>176</sup> STERNFELD, Para-Museum of 100 Days, p. 166.

<sup>177</sup> The number of possible tensions is probably infinite.

6.1.

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Project title: For Future Reference  
October 2014 – March 2015

**studio VIE, Vienna**  
**Graphic designer**

November 2013 – June 2015

**Martha Stuteregger Typografie, Vienna**  
**Internship: Assistance in the design of books, exhibi-**  
**tion catalogues and printed matter with an emphasis**  
**on arts and culture**

Projects (selection):

– Jasper Sharp, Österreich und die Biennale Venedig / Austria and the Venice  
Biennale (Award: The most beautiful Austrian Books 2013)

– Klaus Zwerger, Die Architektur der Dong (The Architecture of the Dong)  
(Award: The most beautiful Austrian Books 2013)

February 2013 – August 2013

**W@LZ-Bibliothek, Vienna**  
**Project proposal for a school library, as well as an**  
**introduction into research with books**

October 2012

**OFF SIGHT, Camp, London**  
**Exhibition concept and design**

June 2011

**Laurence King Publishing, London**  
**One-day workshop on gathering ideas in order**  
**to improve the publisher's website**

June 2011

**FERA – Federation of European Film Directors**  
**Freelance designer**

2011 – 2013

**ABC Level 3 Award in Application of Visual**  
**Thinking**

2009

