

Curating as Governmental Practices

Post-Exhibitionary Practices under Translocal Conditions in Governmental Constellations

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Declaration of Original Authorship

I confirm that this thesis, entitled

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is my own work, that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

When I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always indicated. In cases where the work is based on work that I have carried out jointly with others, I have indicated what was carried out by others and what I contributed myself. Parts of Chapter 3.2, Chapter 3.3., Chapter 3.4 and Chapter 5.2 are based on papers I have published in academic journals or written for conferences and various presentations I have given as part of my academic and curatorial activities. These parts have been revised for the purpose of this thesis. The published contributions are indicated in the footnotes.

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Abstract

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This PhD research – triggered by the rise of reactionary, identitarian political movements worldwide – posits complex inquiries that traverse the disintegration of neoliberal hegemony and its potential impact on (“Western”) art, its artistic and curatorial practices, its institutional apparatus and the broader infrastructure of the exhibitionary complex. This study dissects the emergence of new roles for artistic and curatorial practices beyond the purview of neoliberal paradigms, expanding the definition and artistic-curatorial practices of the exhibitionary complex towards governmental thinking to envision more sustainable, power-sensitive and equitable cultural projects.

The study analyses the exhibitionary complex (Tony Bennett) under contemporary curatorial discourse and within its global (translocal) entanglements. With an in-depth analysis of the concepts of *governmentality* (Michel Foucault) and *situated knowledges* (Donna Haraway), the thesis aims to decipher forms of knowledge production within the exhibitionary complex. Through the research, the argument is made for a repositioning of conventional universalised knowledge production in favour of more nuanced, situated and networked forms of knowledge production and dissemination and their governmental infrastructures. The thesis therefore proposes the concept of the “post-exhibitionary complex”, which sees exhibitions as active social spaces – as contact zones –, reaching outside the aesthetic “autonomous” art field. In this sense, the concept of the post-exhibitionary complex expands the exhibition space and favours transversal, participatory and direct modes of learning, which are articulated by artistic and curatorial practices of making things public, over traditional hierarchical teaching methods. This scholarly narrative advocates for a vision of research-based methodology grounded in a renewed (scientific) discourse of truth in feminist thought, that is, as embodied, situated knowledges (“feminist materialism”).

Methodologically, an analytical tool kit is introduced to assess exhibitionary projects and their intricate institutional frameworks by scrutinising the degrees of relationality between art–institution–audience according to their governmental and economic aspects.

The investigation concludes with two case studies of curatorial-artistic projects: *Philadelphia Assembled* demonstrates the complicated power dynamics within collaborative artistic practices, while *documenta fifteen* highlights the many complex challenges that the commons approach, and thus more horizontal forms of knowledge production, bring to the art field.

Overall, the thesis offers an in-depth examination of the evolving landscape of art and curatorial practices in response to changing global political and economic conditions, emphasising the need for transversal and post-exhibitionary approaches.

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1 Introduction

Trigger: Reactionary Politics on the World Stage

This research was triggered by the visible shift in political power by reactionary populists gaining influence in the US, Europe and globally, culminating in the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America in 2016.

In parallel with the palpable crisis of neoliberal capitalism on a global scale and the inability of this system to find solutions for societies at large – which has led to this political shift – I was initially concerned how those developments would affect artistic and curatorial practices in the exhibitionary complex. The reactionary political forces did not only make use of (aesthetic) strategies of identity politics usually attributed to the “Left”. On an economic level, the comfortable position of art and artists established as models of a progressive neoliberal condition (independent, self-employed, self-authorised, creative, flexible, etc.) as depicted by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*¹ is also threatened, and with it the extended infrastructure that the exhibitionary complex has had in capitalist logic at large since its inception in the 19th century. Based on the assumption that the neoliberal hegemony of globalization is crumbling and breaking apart (a process still ongoing following the time of this research), my research questions from start to finish deal with the implications of these global changes in the exhibitionary complex, in artistic and curatorial practices working in public spheres – both in more representational settings and in more operational contexts of social practices. Concretely, the questions are the following: What does this shift – the disintegration of a neoliberal hegemonic globalist alliance – mean for (“Western”) art, its art institutions and the broader infrastructure of its exhibitionary complex? What new roles of artistic and curatorial practices beyond the neoliberal condition will need to emerge? Which of these can give relevant direction and should be strengthened? What can be used to imagine the construction of new ecological, sustainable and better infrastructures?

In the meantime, and in addition to the permanently looming climate catastrophe as a worldwide extinction scenario for humanity, Putin’s war against Ukraine entered in full force in February 2022 after the “annexation” of Crimea in April 2014, and – after the completion of the writing of my dissertation, and before the completion of this introductory chapter – the Hamas terrorist attack in Israel took place on 7 October 2023 which was followed by the still ongoing backlash from the Israeli military in Gaza, a well calculated countermeasure by Hamas. It is painstaking to formulate scholarly arguments derived from good research practice based in specific historical contexts in cultural and critical analyses that aim to reinforce or falsify assumptions to form knowledge to help understand the social fabric and its political apparatuses and instruments and cultural articulations. It is even more painful to witness that this form of precise research, which should help to gain an informed position for agency in the

¹ Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2005).

public sphere, can turn so abruptly into an existential feeling of being without agency when a machinery of violence takes over.

Nonetheless, I have to remain hopeful that my study can contribute to creating knowledge in a cultural field that not only helps to critically analyse art and curating, but also helps to improve their practices, thus helping to articulate more equitable, precise and power-sensitive cultural projects.

Catalysts of My Research on the Personal Stage: Curators' Governmental Thoughts in Global Interdependencies

The starting point for an understanding of curating as a governmental practice under translocal conditions originated from the many encounters with curators in different contexts. While many turned away from (neoliberal) globalisation, I myself came into contact in 2015 with an international art scene with the interview project "Curating! Explored with a Camera", which was in line with the cosmopolitan side of globalism. Dorothee Richter and I carried out over 70 interviews with international curators in Amsterdam, Bonn, Berlin, Cape Town, Dhaka, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Karlsruhe, Linz, Los Angeles, Rotterdam, San Francisco, Stuttgart, Singapore, Stockholm, Tel Aviv, Utrecht, Vienna, and Zurich from 2015 to 2018. The curators often described their position in transversal terms, navigating between individual aesthetic practices and societal governmental frameworks. We discussed how art and curatorial practice are embedded in broader societal, national, and international public spheres, often choreographed within colonial and postcolonial entanglements. Starting here in 2017, these encounters ultimately led me to examine the art field and its practices according to two aspects: first, what I consider a governmental practice enacted through exhibition making; second, how these practices operate in global entanglements. The analysis of art as a governmental practice is being executed within the infrastructural concept of the exhibitionary complex. The exhibitionary complex suggests the exhibitionary function as a public practice for educational purposes. The museum constitutes a public space of representation for a soft persuasive technique of governing, whose function is "to show and tell so that the people might look and learn."² For global entanglements, it is necessary to understand our contemporary living conditions in their global interconnectedness. This means looking at globalisation not only from the purely exploitative economic side of forced unification, but also examining the cultural, social and global relations that have for some time produced different ways of looking at the world. This understanding of globalism incorporates postcolonial, decolonial and postmigratory aspects, as well as ecological and planetary dimensions.

² Tony Bennett, "The Political Rationality of the Museum," *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 98.

Context: Curatorial Studies and Postcolonial Theory / Globalism

For an informed analysis of my research questions, I have traced contemporary curatorial discourse that has gained momentum since the 1980s. My study is therefore not so much concerned with art history and art per se, but with the exhibitionary forms that intersect with the public sphere and with the position of the curator often seen as its facilitator and producer of meaning. Chapter 2 takes the discourse of curating/the curatorial as a starting point but already emphasises the changing understanding of the curator as an authorial figure towards a collaborator in the assemblage that brings about an exhibition. Alongside historical examples of artistic practices in governmental thought (e.g., by Group Material), the more recent shift in curatorial discourse already places the exhibitionary in the ranks of research and knowledge production. Then, curating and exhibitionary practices can not only construct ideas about art but must make our ways of life tangible and demonstrate cultural embeddedness in our ways of living by entering into a mode of social self-reflection of our governmental entanglements. The overview of this discourse already leads me to what I call post-exhibitionary practices that are able to set out “contact zones” and change their relation to a representative space of a “top-down” knowledge production in order to create a transversal self-critical operation of shared knowledge productions.

Chapter 2 follows with a consideration of the representative orderings of exhibitionary projects in their globalised relations. To this end, I highlight the terminological differences between “globalisation” as an exploitative process of forced unification based on economic hegemony and various concepts of globalism that speak of enrichment by diversification. These fall under the concepts of “globalism”, “mondialité” and translocality, which speak of the transcultural social dimensions of globalisation processes. Other terms like “planetary” or “the terrestrial” emphasise the ecological and more-than-human idea of interdependence on a world scale. Globalisation in this sense would mean staying with differences and an unimagined diversification of living conditions, cultures, economies and ways of life. This chapter also looks at the relationships between modernity, the Enlightenment and postcolonial theory to gain an understanding of the struggles on an epistemic level. “Subjugated Knowledges” and decolonial practices are explored in their relationship to the exhibitionary complex. In particular, the mode of representation is problematised. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak arguments about the double-bind of representation as *Vertretung* as a “speaking for” (and in a linguistic reading: “standing for” and “standing against”), and as *Darstellen* (re-presentation) as a “speaking about”. I transfer this problematisation to the exhibitionary complex and argue that it is exactly this mix-up that has been and still is being used to produce significations and universalise specific knowledge. This conflation poses a serious problem for post-exhibitionary formats that seek to leave behind the representational logic of a museum with all its identity-building functions, national and otherwise. It touches on the political representation of “identities” in current forms of “identity politics”, which weaponises and essentialises every act of representation (as *staging*)

as a political act of representing identities. Nonetheless, the rationality of representation is crucial for the exhibitionary complex. Representation has enormous power to amplify meanings and knowledge, and exhibitionary practices rely on this function to this day. In a philosophical dimension, representation, as in “being represented” in a certain way, may be beyond one’s control, as representation is inherent to violent, stereotypical thought patterns. In the exhibitionary complex, there is no way out of representation. There are strategies to redress the exclusions of subjugated knowledges and marginalised histories, but it cannot escape re-presentation as a meaning-producing formation of signification.

Instead, a post-exhibitionary practice seeks to operate in contact zone-like settings and in a kind of “speaking about” and “speaking with”. Consequently, this chapter ends with clarifying of an understanding of governmentality in order to analyse the relationships between citizens, communities and their government, and moreover, translocal relations in a global context.

Governmentality and Situated Knowledges

In Chapter 3, I lay out the theoretical foundations and modes of curating by tracing the genealogy of the exhibitionary complex proposed by Tony Bennett. Before addressing the transformation of the exhibitionary complex to governmental assemblages and my own expansion towards a post-exhibitionary complex, I elaborate the theoretical framework underlying the concept of the exhibitionary complex by examining Michel Foucault’s concept of *governmentality*, and other concepts of power. *Governmentality* helps us understand the techniques of subjectification present in traditional museum settings, but also points to potential self-giving rules at work in post-exhibitionary practices and contemporary art history in general – since, in the end, art history is a form of making artifice. Crucial for the exhibitionary complex is the discursive formation of knowledge. If we are willing to follow the idea of exhibitionary practices producing knowledge and meaning for the public sphere, we have to ask ourselves what knowledge is produced, whose knowledge and in what forms does it come. To find important answers to these questions, the research turns to Donna Haraway’s concept of *situated knowledges* in order to understand the positionality of knowledges. *Situated knowledges*, formed as a method for the exhibitionary complex, challenge the universalising aspect of art exhibitions and art history. It offers a much-needed correction towards a situated “discourse of truth” in feminist thought. While Foucault focuses more on individual practices of governance within the framework of governmentality, Haraway focuses on networked processes and already points to contemporary practices embedded in communal and relational knowledge networks. Nevertheless, in my reading, both concepts make clear the intersection between techniques of (self-)governance and knowledge production and their connection to the discourse of truth within an underlying educational complex: Foucault does this in reference to the “Western” modern state and its techniques of governance; Haraway in a proposal for a feminist objectivity and an embodied scientific way of thought.

Modes of Curating in the Exhibitionary (Biennial) Complex

After this theoretical survey, I focus on the analyses of public exhibitionary practices following Tony Bennett's own methodological shifts: from an exhibition analysis based on disciplinary power – as presented in *The Birth of the Museum* in 1995 – to an analysis under governmental conditions – as presented in the 2015 text “Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage”. I follow this approach to show extended contemporary exhibitionary practices that often come in the form of agency and activism with Foucault's concept of governmentality. Expanding on this, the exhibitionary complex is being examined therefore in terms of its governmental power – between a model of (neo)liberal cooperative production and a commons-based collective practice of *situated knowledges* – that can create specific, highly situated, temporal, flexible, precarious, open and self-conscious rule-making formations/assemblages. In doing so, it highlights the entanglements of the exhibitionary complex that emanate from individuals, communities and the representative and political spheres and the need for a careful and responsive understanding of the knowledge production in these projects that have to transform from universal (and universalising) knowledge production and distribution to networked, situated ones.

In particular, I transfer this governmental and situated understanding of the exhibitionary to biennials as a prime example of an exhibition format with visible governmental entanglements, where art, artistic practices and representational politics are played out on many levels, from the local to the national to “the will to globality”, in an exhibition project that prominently engages the public sphere outside of a traditional museum space. Analyses of the “exhibitionary biennial complex” are thus situated in the midst of contemporary, complex constellations of worldviews within post-/decolonial thought, expressed through the lens of aesthetic and visual art practices and their representations.

Expanding Curating in Governmental Thought: Post-Exhibitionary Practices

The chapter concludes with my proposal for a new mode of the exhibitionary. The specific networked practices in contemporary art (governmental assemblages, collectives, art as social practice, community-based projects, commoning in artistic and curatorial thought, etc.) are embedded in complex economic, political and cultural contexts. These contexts must be the focus of the exhibitionary. I am interested in contemporary artistic and curatorial practices that use the public exhibitionary space as an active social space of negotiation – a contact zone. I like to call this the post-exhibitionary complex.

Exhibiting would then not primarily mean a spatial constellation of art objects (and their vertical mediation), but the creation of a contact space that enables, endures, and at the same time wants to influence conflictual, political and social confrontations (and thus would have a rather horizontal kind of mediation as a starting point). Exhibitions would then be exercises in thinking about forms of governing and being

governed, and practices of exhibiting (artistic and curatorial and other practices) would then be an “art of (not) being so governed”. Post-exhibitionary practices would not be content with the “show and tell”-part of the exhibitionary complex (either bottom-up or top-down) but would aim to shape a discourse of truth that I would like to see formed by an embodied feminist objectivity in line with networked, *situated knowledges*. Furthermore, these practices would aim to integrate criticality on an infrastructural level by challenging the economic logic of distribution and representation in favour of an operational logic of direct contacts. These practices ultimately aim to establish influence beyond the art field by targeting sustainable relative self-controlled infrastructures that are often embedded in regular living conditions for communities. These practices unfold best in more horizontally structured environments of (un)learning with distinction-reduced language, moving between more or less pre-structured participatory forms of “intermingling”. If one is inclined to reduce the post-exhibitionary complex to a formula in relation to its original field, the exhibitionary complex, it would be: first assemble / convene / discuss / exchange, then “show and tell” to look and (re-)learn. And make this process permanent.

Knowledge Formations in Post-Exhibitionary Practices

These practices would have to avoid the top-down, covert persuasions of the museum towards a universalised artifice of making art history, nor would it be sufficient to remain in bottom-up learning formations of governmental assemblages; instead, it would have to enter into a transversal learning space of direct encounters in contact zones with responsive, asymmetric power relations. A new relationship of art/artist–institution–public/audience would have to be established, as these post-exhibitionary practices would have to work operationally rather than representationally by making things public. Exhibiting would then be an active, self-critical exchange between art institutions and their audiences, and a practice of insight and embodied knowledge.

A related autonomy and its institutional permeability coupled with the recognition of asymmetric constellations of knowledge in transversal ways encompass an expanded governmental-institutional practice that would set up a profoundly new relationship between the museum space and its audience, which becomes its users, constituents or co-producers. It creates learning situations that do not follow the more hierarchical teachings in classrooms but are mediated through smaller inputs, discussions, encounters and workshops.

I argue that navigating within the framework of governmentality – being aware of one’s own governing, the governing of self and others, and the apparatuses of government by others – together with the notion of a critical feminist embodied objectivity – confer the power to analyse exploitative situations more comprehensively than the discursive concepts of infrastructure or care. Like the discursive notions of infrastructure and care, *governmentality and situated*

knowledges explicate an interdependent formation of the world. Yet, governmentality is seen in its foundation as a critical and self-critical way of enacting its own governing principles. Together with the concept of situated knowledges, it helps us understand the human-based system of ecology within a more-than-human environment.

Proposed Analytical Tool Kit

After thorough research into (post)exhibitionary practices, I undertake to develop a set of tools for analysing exhibitionary projects and their institutions. To this end, I establish relational categories that evaluate exhibitionary projects on a spectrum. In this way, curatorial and artistic projects in general, as well the exhibitionary and post-exhibitionary complexes, can be analysed – both within and outside of museums, galleries and project spaces. What can be done with and in an exhibition space is put to the test by reconfiguring the notions of audience, art institutions, different cultural producers, economic backgrounds and the infrastructural dimension that binds them all together.

I attempt to expand the criteria commonly used in museum studies from a rather fixed art–institution–audience triangular scheme to one that allows for a more accurate representation of this complex formation. The hyphens between “art”, “institution” and “audience” must be brought into focus, as they express the relationships between the nouns. It is more revealing to consider what kind of relationality is established, how these relationships are cultivated, maintained and cared for, and how utterances between these nouns are responded to by the others. It marks the differences between exhibitionary projects and their broader infrastructure.

I am far from undertaking a holistic or systemic analysis on exhibitions. Rather, I have developed this analytical tool kit to better understand how exhibitionary projects are embedded in their governmental infrastructures. Summarised in one sentence, I propose asking the following:

(Post)exhibitionary projects need to be scrutinised in terms of their relationship to **state structures and their political representation**; the **integration of the institution–audience relationship** (or that of producer–consumer, educator–visitor, etc.); their **permeability** and **composition in relation to difference**; their relationship to **local–global issues**; their **financial integration** and **transparency**; their **sustainable structures** and the **construct of organisational procedures**; and the **transversality of power** in their structures.

In Praxis: Realised Exhibition Projects in Governmental Thought and My Own Curatorial Projects

In the final chapter, I apply the acquired knowledge and analytical methods of my research to two distinct curatorial-artistic projects. The first is *Philadelphia Assembled* by Jeanne van Heeswijk, a three-year project that demonstrates how to deal with delicate asymmetric power relations in communal artistic practice. Van Heeswijk developed a specific social-artistic practice of careful inspection of local conditions and created exhibitionary events out of intensive processes of encounters in communities with these formations. *Philadelphia Assembled* was the largest project in van Heeswijk's oeuvre so far, spanning over three years and starting out with the question, "What is the spirit of Philadelphia?" Van Heeswijk first conducted a fieldwork phase with over 500 conversations with various members of the Philadelphia urban community, creating a network of participants who took active roles in programming events in the second phase of this project. Finally, the third phase took place in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the partner institution that initiated this project. Eventually in conflict with a certain understanding of the art institution, van Heeswijk described the vision of this project as "different ways of gaining access to this institution according to one's own terms, by setting up one's own methods and other ways of learning than the museum has developed and offered so far".³ The exhibition, the displaying of objects in the art institution itself, is only one part of this exhibitionary project. I consider the research and the production of shared knowledge as community-building and the dissemination of these *situated knowledges* in the public programmes of the city of Philadelphia as the more important or relevant parts of this post-exhibitionary project. I argue that this project represents an artistic-governmental-institutional practice that establishes a profoundly new relationship between the museum space and its audience, who become its users, constituents or co-producers.

While *Philadelphia Assembled* succeeded in containing the obvious frictions between the citizens of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, *documenta fifteen*, the other project I dared to analyse, was too large to carefully handle all conflicts. While I know Jeanne van Heeswijk personally, my analyses of *Philadelphia Assembled* relied on given literature and interview material (both published and self-generated). For the second case study, I was directly on site and visited the exhibition several times; I also co-organised the two-week summer school "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education" that was part of the educational program. *documenta fifteen* showcases a vast and complex field full of tensions and frictions within artistic-curatorial practices. It exemplifies the many challenges of our contemporary global entanglements, of traditional forms of art and post-exhibitionary projects, even reaching beyond the art field of epistemic discontent. My analysis closely follows possible challenges and threads of the implementation of a commons

³ Jeanne van Heeswijk, interview from January 2018, Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the film project "CURATING – explored with a camera".

approach in the established art field, not leaving out extremely problematic reflexes of notions of resistance entering into old stereotypical binary worldviews. In my view, commons do not only challenge the rationality of the single author as artist, but also the established structures of the art market and art historical categorisation. Among many other aspects, commoning practices suggest profound changes in the function of the curator and, with this, the need to organise changes in accountability and responsibilities. Commoning operationalises modes of representation in the arts that create a different relationship between the audience and art, under commons-guided direct engagements – ultimately a threat to the “modern autonomous individual”. In my analysis, I highlight the multiplicity of artistic expression one could find at *documenta fifteen* as articulations of individuals – in our case, of artist-curators – towards their superstructure, embedded in governmental formations from personal life experiences to state structures and their own interpellations in state institutions, and in this case, additionally expanded in a global and postcolonial framework. This is the governmental reading of exhibitionary practices. Yet, one cannot overlook the ideological hegemonic underpinnings at play either. Heterogeneous and complex issues were dealt with by at least two types of artworks: you could find situational and relational artistic collective practices that aimed for post-exhibitionary sustainable structures. Other artworks followed a binary logic using the power of representation of the exhibitionary complex to (re)produce myths of “unconditional solidarity”.

Educational-Exhibitionary Projects in Curatorial-Governmental Constellations

This chapter ends with my own insertions into the field with my curatorial-educational-artistic practice and projects, in particular two projects: *Small Projects for Coming Communities* – initiated by Dorothee Richter and me in March 2018 – is an ongoing research, workshop and exhibition project that aims to establish communal formations in a playful, artistic and performative way to create a space for negotiation and exchange, a contact zone. The second project, *COMPOST-The Open Bin (Composting Knowledge)*, is directly related to *documenta fifteen* and can be summarised as a sequential and choreographed series of interlocking events on the theme of “Composting Knowledge” that took place over 100 days before the start of *documenta fifteen* in June 2022.

For several years, I have been developing a transversal practice that combines knowledge transfer and active knowledge production with publishing, designing and exhibiting, mostly in collaborative constellations in shared formations. In addition, I see my position as (co-)organiser of a collaborative process (often beginning in workshops) that allows participants – learners, curators, artists and the public – to negotiate their engagement and role in an exhibition project in an internal contact zone-like framework. In all these different exhibition projects, with their media-specific articulations, teaching and learning are inseparable from knowledge transfer and knowledge production in transdisciplinary, performative, artistic-curatorial and transversal practices.

My research has led me to strongly advocate for a rationale of these practices following a research-based methodology embedded in a scientific discourse of truth conceived through situated knowledges as an embodied objectivity.

My Chosen Scientific Methodological Framework

My theoretical background is informed by poststructuralist theory, cultural studies, critical theory and feminist historical materialism. In my former education, I was trained foremost in cultural studies (with a focus on Stuart Hall, particularly his later phase with postcolonial topics on identity, “othering”, etc.) and the poststructuralist theory of Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and foremost Michel Foucault, and the critical theory of Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Louis Althusser. Additionally, the theory of social practice by Pierre Bourdieu was relevant to me, yet never stepping into surveys. I came into contact with the theoretical thought of what I would call a feminist materialism later with Donna Haraway, Silvia Federici and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Through this prism, I engaged with the postcolonial theories of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, Walter Dignolo and Anna Tsing.

Poststructuralism’s discourse of truth shaped my understanding of the construction of our social truth. While already neglecting binarism and universal principles, only with the understanding of a feminist historical materialism of Donna Haraway, the concept of a situated production of knowledge helped me see potential blind spots and dangers of an assumed post-truth reading of poststructuralism. I see major differences between poststructuralism and postmodernism. Although postmodern thought builds on the ideas of poststructuralism and opposes universalising principles, I would argue that postmodernism draws clearly erroneous conclusions from the body of knowledge that poststructuralism created. Analysing cultural articulation in non-binary systems and pointing to the genealogy of “Western” humanities’ achievements as naturalising processes of governing, as well as critiquing these processes to show that “common sense” and a widely shared common worldview are actually produced in epistemic systems, is a profoundly valuable insight. Postmodernism’s interpretation of a free-floating sign system that renders all signs equal, is, in my view, a misreading of poststructuralist knowledge. It is only with Donna Haraway’s insistence on an empirical, embodied objectivity in *situated knowledges* that poststructuralist theory is of contemporary relevance, I would argue.

My approach to theoretical methods can be described as trans- or even postdisciplinary, in a good practice of cultural studies, which has established a bricolage-like approach to critique and criticality that I see as distinct from the “traditional” human sciences that still form the core of art history. In line with an amalgamation of cultural studies and poststructuralist theory, I use many elements and concepts of the aforementioned theories to analyse a changing contemporary exhibitionary complex and to find consistent arguments to evaluate them. I also consider non-literary sources as valuable statements. I have therefore included not

only theoretical texts, but also oral testimonies collected in interviews that I co-conducted. I take this approach from an experimental ethnographic thought that I see derived from poststructuralism.

Theory as Practice

My research method uses theory as practice, thinking theoretical thoughts in terms of their application. In this sense, it follows a *practice theory* that considers theory and other forms of knowledge and cultural articulations as an established practice that has developed over time in specific historical contexts. This means that theory is not perpetuated in autopoietics but is an instrument for understanding social life and social practices. Theory, in this respect, is a tool to not only criticise but to critique and thus not only to better understand the world in which we live, but also (ideally) to help us to interact and act more consciously. Feminist theory, in particular, is a theory-practice in this respect because, apart from its material-subjective, embodied knowledge production, it cannot accept structural inequalities and therefore must act to change them. This approach also hampers the use of theory and its practices of critique not as a tool for a gain of distinction.

Methods for the Post-Exhibitionary Complex: Rationality, Research and Forms of Knowledge Production

Equipped with this theory-practice infrastructure, I interrogate the exhibitionary complex in light of the analytical tools I have developed. Specifically, I expand readings of the exhibitionary complex from governance as a neutral term of politics to “governmentality” as an analytical and critical tool of forms of power.

Epistemically speaking, the exhibitionary complex is based on articulations and formations of knowledge and its production, on research and its methods, and on the representation and distribution of these knowledges for a public sphere.

The methodical questions are thus the following: What forms of knowledge are produced? What rules do these follow? What rationality and what objectivity underlie them?

I understand research, while based in scientific rationale, as a broad practice with rather undefined instruments: i.e., a postdisciplinary approach to research. I see artistic research in this line of thought: ideally, it uses idiosyncratic instruments of social science, the natural sciences and arts and humanities in postdisciplinary ways for informed artistic statements.

With Haraway's insistence on an empirical or embodied objectivity, I can more accurately assess the forms of knowledge production that are at the heart of exhibitionary practice. What are the rules of this production? Who can produce knowledge, who can actively shape it? Do exhibitions still follow a scientific logic, or are they more concerned with the aestheticised display of objects primarily for economic purposes? I deploy Haraway's concept of *situated knowledges* to rethink the rational practice of science in situated, open and networked research and to

propose a renewal of a discourse of truth in situated complexity. Critical theory (and poststructuralist theory in particular) has complicated and critiqued the discourse of truth and the associated problems of the scientific method, which may have led to the dismissal of scientific objectivity as purely partisan or biased. However, if objectivity is understood as an ongoing attempt to understand the world more accurately based on observation and scientific methods from a situated, embodied position, where the research position is not a universal one, we speak of a different concept of objectivity. In this understanding, analytical research is not so much concerned with evaluations or assertions or judgements, producing arguments, propositions or meanings, but it instead springs from a precise descriptive and expository method that is aware of its own entanglements and favours the exchange or compilation of these perspectives to form an embodied knowledge formation.

These expository methods of specific presentations oppose a historiography that produces universalised, self-contained narratives of science as world history that ultimately serve as instruments of subjugation. On a methodological level, I want to show that the exhibitionary complex is predestined for this embodied, situated production of knowledge. To do so, this formation must be seen as a contact zone-like environment that allows for an open exchange with different actors producing knowledge together – a knowledge informed by a critical feminist material theory that is capable of analysing and combating structural injustices. It is a power-conscious reflection on the construction of societies and their epistemes, which makes conscious the specific positionality of subject positions.

From a Personal Perspective

I have only become aware in recent years (maybe with the birth of my daughter) that my background has a stronger influence on me than I had previously perceived. I was born in Romania in 1978 and emigrated to Germany with my parents and grandparents when I was five years old. The emigration was facilitated by the fact that we belonged to the German minority in socialist Romania. Although there was no language barrier (a German vernacular was spoken in the German community in Romania), my childhood and life experiences are postsocialist and postmigrant. Perhaps this experience plays a role in my efforts to create an inclusive, low-boundary, distinction-reducing environment for scholars of all backgrounds while strengthening translocal, international networks. I understand this as an emancipatory approach that enables cultural education (and cultural advancement) for those not necessarily grounded in a bourgeois context.

2 Context

Curatorial and Artistic Formations in Interconnected “Global” (Translocal) Practices in Governmental Manners of Self and Others

Nowadays, the cosmopolitan curator seems like a figure from the distant past, considering that this chapter was written in February 2023, after the standstill of international travel due to global Covid restrictions in 2020 and 2021. As impactful and transformative as the pandemic has been on our lives – and will be for some time to come – it is complemented and infinitely overshadowed by the greater threat of human extinction that we face with the climate catastrophe. The carbon footprint of international, constantly travelling curators – the figure of the cosmopolitan star curator – is not just a burden from a pre-Covid past, a past with an apparent sense of unlimited resources. Today, major exhibitionary institutions consistently agree on agendas focused on long-term ecological sustainability and develop their own policies and projects.⁴ Similar agendas are a matter of politics and governance and will certainly be implemented legally in the near future.

My own formative insertion into the international sphere of art and curating occurred just a few years before Covid, and in retrospect at a time when ecological issues were surely present but not urgent. From 2015 to 2018, Dorothee Richter and I conducted video interviews with 71 curators or artists with a curatorial practice internationally in Amsterdam, Bonn, Berlin, Cape Town, Dhaka, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Karlsruhe, Linz, Los Angeles, Rotterdam, San Francisco, Stuttgart, Singapore, Stockholm, Tel Aviv, Utrecht, Vienna, and Zurich. Far from a comprehensive mapping of a global field of curatorial practice, we reached out to established curators or cultural practitioners ranging from an interesting institutional practice to self-organised practices in off-spaces and politically motivated arts initiatives that were accessible to us through various travel itineraries.⁵ During the

⁴ “There is general agreement within the international museums community that it is time to shift policies for environmental control, loan conditions and the guidance given to architects and engineers from the prescription of close control of ambient conditions throughout buildings and exhibition galleries to a more mutual understanding of the real conservation needs of different categories of object, which have widely different requirements and may have been exposed to very different environmental conditions in the past.”

National Museum Directors’ Council, “Environmental sustainability - reducing museums’ carbon footprint,” <https://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/what-we-do/contributing-sector/environmental-conditions/>.

⁵ Detailed information, including the questionnaire of the research project titled “CURATING – explored with a camera. A digital platform on curatorial practice” can be found in the Appendix. The following is a list of the interviewed curators in chronological order according to the dates of the interviews:

Peter Weibel, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Pauline J. Yao, Christina Li, Aric Chen, Qinyi Lim, Freya Chou, Cosmin Costinas, Young Ma, Hammad Nasar, Joshua Simon, Ruti Direktor, Meir Tati, Eyal Danon, Hila Cohen-Schneidermann, Chen Tamir, Sergio Edelzstein, Lars Nittve, Stella Rollig, N’Gone Fall, Omar Kholeif, Oliver Ressler, Susa Gunzner (Grandhotel Cosmopolis), Ellen Blumenstein, Marius Babias, Rein Wolfs, Florian Ebner, Rob Hamelijncx and Nienke Terpsma, Binna Choi, Beatrix Ruf,

interviews, we loosely followed a prepared questionnaire covering a wide range of topics on curating: from personal background to the practicalities of exhibition-making, the political, postcolonial, and gender aspects of curating, and the economic side of art practices within and outside of the art market and the digital sphere. The questionnaire was designed to help us analyse the statements on the abovementioned topics in a comparable way, clustering statements to create a discourse on each topic. In the end, the interviews turned into long conversations, but for the most part they still followed the structure of the questionnaire.⁶ We

Daniel Baumann, Bice Curiger, Hedwig Saxenhuber, Luisa Ziaja, Can Gülcü, Vanessa Joan Miller, Nicolaus Schaffhausen, Katharina Morawek, Iris Dressler / Hans Christ, Anshuman Dasgupta, Kate Fowle, Monica Narula, Nkule Mabaso, Kadiatou Diallo, Riason Naidoo, Terry, Ntone Edjabe, Chimurenga, Khwezi Gule, Nontobeko Ntombela, Jay Pather, Yuko Hasegawa, Bruno Latour, Sarah Rifky, Ashok Sukumaran & Shaina Anand (CAMP), Ute Meta Bauer, Patrick D. Flores, Shwetal. Patel, Jennifer Teo + Tien Woon (Post-Museum), Maria Lind, Axel Wieder, Azar Mahmoudian, Anuradha Vikram, Hamza Walker, Jason Underhill, Mara Mc Carthy, Dena Beard, Apsara DiQuinzio, Lawrence Rinder, Michelle Wong, Fatima Hellberg, Heike Munder, Jeanne van Heeswijk, and Bonaventure Ndikung.

⁶ The questionnaire followed these topics:

1. Curatorial Statements:

Starting with the question of one's own concept of curating, we want to show that curating is a kind of cultural production that is highly influenced by artistic practice, by books, by theoretical inputs, by important moments in personal experiences, and by socio-political situations. We are not emphasising a biographical approach, because for us curating is a field that develops in relation to other practices and as a co-authored type of production.

2. Exhibition-Making:

We asked about the material aspect of curating, the planning, designing, and displaying methods, the obstacles one encounters in mounting an exhibition, ways of dealing with production and materiality, and the way to work together with artists and other involved partners; we tried to obtain behind-the-scenes information.

3. Political Aspects and Dependencies:

A curator often acts as a mediator between institutions and artists; s/he is also expected to transfer meaning to the public; therefore, the position is a very relational one. A curator must take into consideration the agendas of an institution, the politics of the city and country where the project or exhibition is produced, and s/he has to have connections to collectors and to funding bodies. Also, nowadays, a curator, together with artists, is expected and also wants to offer a specific political view, or a position, on a relevant topic. Curatorial projects can be censored and are under surveillance, which obviously differs considerably depending on the specific country.

4. Gender Aspects, Identity, and Community:

Like all other parts of a specific society, curating is an engendered space, where gender equality has not yet been reached. Furthermore, an exhibition will also make proposals about gender, about communities, about identities. Has the respective interview partner thought about this in his or her practice as a curator (in relation to artists, in relation to the audience), and is s/he aware of this as director of an institution? Is s/he conceiving the society as a diverse community, and does this eventually have an influence on his or her practice?

5. Race/Class/Postcolonial Aspects:

"Race", class, and gender play a major role in the arts, as today there seems to be general agreement that artists and curators from non-Western origins need to be included; nevertheless, underrepresentation persists. How and in what way does an interviewee take this into consideration? How much are art and curating used as a national representation or a tourist attraction? How can

encountered highly skilled curators and were privileged to hear their thoughts on art, their curatorial practices, and institutional thinking, aware of their own situatedness in the art field, but also their connections to the respective societies in which they are embedded, the representative and representational power that art and exhibitions can hold, and how exhibitionary practices desire social change, too.

What struck me most was their precise depiction of their exposed pivotal position within the art field and within society. They described a transversal position that navigates between and enacts on a micro-level of art and artistic practices related to personal experiences and freedom, obstinacy and exceptional positionality, from exclusive circles to society's public sphere in a national framework, and the macro-level of institutional governance on a national and international scale connected to politics, economics, art history, and cultural identities at large. They discussed – among many other things – the relationship of art to a society and its public sphere, and one step further to a “global” or international scene, often choreographed within colonial and postcolonial entanglements.

My thesis initially aimed to not only theoretically analyse these profoundly interesting statements by the curators in written form, but also to practically edit the video material and produce an essay film from the material. The experimental ethnographic film practice of Trinh T. Min-ha would have been influential for me in this respect. Minh-ha is an early example in many aspects: as a female filmmaker, her transversal work combines film practice with music composition and literature. Her first film, *Reassemblage* from 1982, not only deconstructs the aesthetics of documentary film, but also manages to recontextualise the position of the spectator within a postcolonial framework – an uncomfortable repositioning of the observer and the observed (the spectator in front of the canvas and the filmed subject in front of the camera), an attempt to question or complicate the gaze in the disciplines of ethnography and film alike. She defines her practice as “speaking nearby”, instead of

decolonising find an entrée into contemporary art and art institutions? For whom does an exhibition make sense?

6. Personality Cult:

What is the individual's encounter with the international star system in the arts? What does it mean to be a very well-known person? We asked the well-known curators in particular about their personal situation. How does gossip work in the arts?

7. Art Market:

How does the interviewee see the influence of the art market on curating? What are the problems, and how has the art system been reorganised in recent years?

8. Digital Space:

How is the digital space used for curating, mediating, and producing curatorial projects? How does the digital space as a new epistemic relation of space and time and as a new public space influence and change curating in the future?

9. Strategies as a Curator (advice to young curators):

Are there strategies to becoming a curator? How does one build good relationships with artists? How does one position oneself on the map, and which kinds of self-representation are important?

the “speaking for” in relation to truth, which already points to the problem with which this research will have to contend, since the representational function of the exhibitionary complex will become a crucial issue. On that matter, Minh-ha states in an interview:

The term of the issue raised is, of course, much broader than the questions generated by any of the specific work I've completed (such as REASSEMBLAGE, in which the speaking about and speaking nearby serve as a point of departure for a cultural and cinematic reflection). Truth never yields itself in anything said or shown. One cannot just point a camera at it to catch it: the very effort to do so will kill it.⁷

Minh-ha's films are in this sense an exercise in engagements in contact zones where positions lose their solidity and become complicated. The films problematise the mode of representation on many fronts using the tools of film and ethnology.⁸ Many of these aspects will be significant in my research and will be addressed throughout the study. However, my focus shifted from film research and film practice with its visual and auditive multi-layeredness to analytical research on artistic and curatorial practices, ignited by the video interview source material. Both the interview material and Minh-ha's practice raise similar problematics: namely, the issue of representation (both in ethnographic filmmaking and in exhibition-making) and the governmental constellations in the *g/local* framework between a film or exhibition and its audience. In my investigation, I will concentrate on the exhibitionary complex alone.

2.1 Art and Curating in the Exhibitionary Complex

I will contextualise my research through selected transcripts of the testimonies of the curators from the video material, which I will use as a primary oral source. Contemporary artistic and curatorial discourse, with its problems and frictions, will be located through these statements, which I will comment on and contextualise. As a starting point, however, I want to define the infrastructural context in which all these statements are situated, namely in the *Exhibitionary Complex*.⁹ An in-depth discussion of the exhibitionary complex conceived by Tony Bennett will follow in Chapter 3. For a contextual understanding of contemporary artistic and curatorial practices in translocal entanglements, a brief historical definition of the exhibitionary complex is given here. Exhibiting is considered a public practice of “showing” objects (artefacts) and “telling” their stories with educational purposes. Whereas expositions

⁷ Nancy N. Chen, “‘Speaking Nearby’: A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 8, no. 1 (1992): xx, doi:10.1525/var.1992.8.1.82.

⁸ I encountered Trinh T. Minh-ha's film *Reassemblage* in a screening event and discussion at Württembergischer Kunstverein WKV, which was part of the exhibition *Trinh T. Minh-ha: The Ocean In A Drop*, 22 October 2022 –22 January 2023, Württ. Kunstverein Stuttgart: Aktuelle Ausstellungen, accessed 26 July 2023, <https://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/2022/exhibitions/trinh-t-minh-ha/film-series>.

⁹ The exhibitionary complex is a term from Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*.

of artefacts in the Middle Ages tended to show (represent) “only” the wealth and power of their owners (kings and royalty) and were potentially accessible only to a certain group of people, the exhibitionary complex within newly founded nations in the 19th century aimed toward public display. Public exhibitions providing a space for “cross-class intermingling” with the goal of “telling” a story, thus introducing the public to and convincing them of a favoured ideological framework that was at that time embedded in the proposition of bourgeois-capitalist living conditions followed by the Industrial Revolution. The staging of artefacts is embedded in an institutional infrastructure and is related to architectural formations, but also to governmental practices within subject constitutions in disciplinary and (self-)governing modes. In a simple summary, Tony Bennett wrote: “*The orientation [...] of the museum is to show and tell so that the people might look and learn.*”¹⁰ Ultimately, the exhibitionary complex established soft persuasive governing techniques for the control of citizens through the means of education (originally for the introduction of new “scientific” disciplines, like history, archaeology, geology, biology, art history, and anthropology) with aesthetic practices of displaying/staging/exposing. In the end, the exhibitionary complex constitutes a public space of representation.

The Curatorial Function

In June 2015, Joshua Simon described his experience and practice as director of the small municipally funded Bat Yam Museum, situated in Bat Yam, a city with residential neighbourhoods close to Tel Aviv, with the following words:

I think that the question of politics, such as the ones you mentioned are on the one hand basic and we all share them in the art world, but at the same time are very local. This is a specific institution, the museum of Bat Yam, the building looks like a spaceship that just dropped one morning in the middle of this park, in a residential neighbourhood. And then the residential neighbourhood has its own characteristics in this specific town, that is Bat Yam in the metropole area of Tel Aviv, which also has its own characteristics in Israel, which has its own specifics... On each of these levels you must – all the time – not only negotiate, but also initiate. It's not only that we are asking ourselves, what do the people of this neighbourhood and you need. It is also asking ourselves what would provoke them? What would make them think? What would – based on what we know about them – kind of change the perspective on things.¹¹

Simon lays out the many ways a curator is involved on various levels, along with the transversal thinking of a curator and the situatedness of the institution. In this logic, the curator has a comprehensive social function, not only towards art and artists, but

¹⁰ Tony Bennett, “The Political Rationality of the Museum,” *Birth of the Museum*, 98.

¹¹ Joshua Simon, interview from June 2015, in Bat Yam Museum, Israel, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

also beyond that towards the community in which the museum is embedded and the museum's audience. In addition to understanding the economic dependencies of an art institution – from a local government level to national and international funding bodies – he also addresses in an interesting way the concern for the institution's audience: he not only talks about the needs of the public (in the sense of governmentally provided care), but he also addresses the will to “provoke” it with critical thinking. It shows a quasi-educational practice of curating with the means of exhibiting, a practice that does not only seek to satisfy the (assumed) needs of the public of the museum but aims to initiate new “perspectives on things”.



Fig. 1: Joshua Simon with Dorothee Richter in his office at Bat Yam Museum, Israel, 2015. Screenshot.

Beginnings of Contemporary Curating

Curating as a distinct discourse and its educational form of curatorial studies are rather new disciplines in the academic context. This transdisciplinary and transversal practice, which began to slowly break away from the traditional discipline of art history in the mid-1990s¹² and formed a separate academic discourse around

¹² The Curatorial Program of *de Appel arts centre* in Amsterdam, Netherlands, started out in 1994 (actually as a residency program), the same year as the first two-year study program of the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (CCS Bard) in New York, USA. The earliest “Curatorial training program” was established in 1987 in Grenoble, France, in Europe at the *École du Magasin* by Jacques Guillot, with an emphasis on the combination of research and practice. The program came to an end in 2016. For a closer look into the history of the school, <https://www.e-flux.com/education/features/214463/cole-du-magasin-1987-2016-how-fitting-an-end>.

exhibition history in the mid-2000s, established a new discursive formation that unites diverse professional skills within research-based, meaning- and knowledge-producing forms of representation in art and culture. A prime example of curating as a practice is Harald Szeemann, who is considered the first “independent” curator, establishing the curator as an authorial figure within the field of art history. Szeemann’s sole directorship of *documenta 5* in 1972 introduced this figure to the world stage of art discourse, yet the development of this position had already started in the 1960s with his exhibitions at the Kunsthalle Bern. Whereas museum curators could previously be defined more as archivists or caretakers of artefacts and art objects within art history, Szeemann took the place as the central figure between artworks and the art institution, enabling a discourse that extended art history towards political and social issues. Obviously, this development must be seen within a wider societal shift and ruptures at that time, preceded by oftentimes collectively practising art movements of the neo-avantgardes like Neo-Dada, Fluxus, Intermedia Art, Zero, and culminating in the students’ movements in the “Western” world and beyond. In this sense, the figure of the curator reshaped collective (art) movements into the central position of a curator. Following Dorothee Richter’s 2013 text “Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?”,¹³ we should not forget that many artists, and specifically artist groups, occupied this artistic-curatorial practice, but were not identified as “curators”. The advent of the “independent” curator introduced a new version of the singular author into modern exhibition practices, which continues to cause friction between artists and curators to this day. Group Material was one such group that began as a collective of conceptual artists and established their own exhibition space with the same name in New York from 1979 to 1996. While most members of the group (including Jenny Holzer, Julie Ault, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Félix González-Torres, and Hans Haacke) focused their practice on art making, separating from Group Material and started having enormous careers as artists in the established art market, co-founder Julie Ault maintained a rather unresolved position between artist, curator and editor. In her lecture *Exhibition as Political Space* – which later became a published article by Ault – for the conference “Dürfen die das?” (“Are they allowed to do that?”) at the O.K. Centrum für Gegenwartskunst in Linz, Austria, in 2000, she gives a compelling definition of curatorial practice, referring to the exhibitionary practice of Group Material from the early 1980s:

Exhibition-making, as a practice, involves numerous activities including the conceptualizing of a subject, conducting research, distilling information and ideas, working with artists and others, collaborating with various people in the

At the same time, in the US in 1987, the Curatorial and Critical Studies program was created, directed by Hal Foster, which was later renamed the “Independent Study Program” (ISP) at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

¹³ Dorothee Richter, “Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?,” in *OnCurating 19: On Artistic and Curatorial Authorship*, ed. Michael Birchall (2012): 45–47.

administration and making of an exhibition, designing the installation and display, and representing the project publicly through texts, formal presentations, and casual conversations.

All aspects of making an exhibition – from inception to reception – involve social processes and dimensions. Consequently, I view exhibition-making as a political process that takes place in the cultural field. I consider exhibitions to be active contexts for presenting art and artifacts and their related cultural and political histories.¹⁴

Whether it would have been beneficial for Ault to distinguish herself as a curator is not a question that can be answered academically. Others from Group Material have positioned themselves as artists and have had successful careers. The art discourse, I focus on, was driven by curatorial themes, focussing on the curator figure and produced, from the 1980s on, many varying ideas about what curating was as a practice and what scholarly methods were involved. The understanding of curatorial practice in the contemporary discourse expanded the idea of the curator as a caretaker of artworks and artefacts to focus on the social and political effects and influences that exhibition-making can create in the public sphere. In a broader sense, curatorial/curating practices are seen as forms of knowledge production – the displaying of knowledge and research for the interested general public. This mode of practice is not solely subject to the staging of objects but is also concerned with the transmission (or mediation) of knowledge and research and is rather embedded in discursive-pedagogical learning environments. At least, the academic discourse advocates this reading of curatorial practice. Whether this holds true in the everyday reality of exhibition-making, in prominent public museums or in art galleries, is another story. Besides the practical dimensions of the discourse of the day-to-day work, exhibition projects that foreground the presentation of knowledge and research still need to ask which and whose knowledge we are getting to see.

Contemporary Curatorial Discourse

One major distinction in curatorial discourse comes with the terms “curating” and “the curatorial”. Whereas *curating* tends to be understood as the hands-on part of exhibition-making and the practice of setting up an exhibition, “the curatorial” is considered to be occupied with the theory of exhibitions, the philosophical and reflective implications of exhibition-making as a site of knowledge production, and as a site for displaying research. In the English-speaking discourse, Jean-Paul Martinon’s *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* from 2013 prominently featured this distinction between practice and theory – in a relational way at least.¹⁵ I doubt that this terminological distinction is of use, either in theory or in practical matters,

¹⁴ Julie Ault, “Exhibition as Political Space,” in *Dürfen die das?: Kunst als sozialer Raum ; art, education, cultural work, communities*, ed. Stella Rollig (Vienna: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2002), 360.

¹⁵ Jean-Paul Martinon, “Introduction,” in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 8–18.

since exhibitionary practice is a specific articulation of forms of knowledge made public. Like other cultural articulations, it follows specific (historically formed) formulations and procedures, in which “form” and “content” cannot be artificially separated but are developed in mutual dependency; hence, practice and theory can only be divided on paper. From here onwards, when I speak of “practice”, I mean the acquired skills of ways of seeing and doing, the embodied knowledge shaped by the experience of bodily and theoretical-critical engagement with a specific matter. This definition will be developed further with Donna Haraway in Chapter 3.2.

Since 2005 at the latest, curatorial discourse has gained momentum, with a plethora of new interpretations of curatorial practices, all adding new nuances to what “the curatorial”/curating might be. Irit Rogoff’s interventions in this discourse are influential because of her emphasis on the reflective mode, and specifically on research. She highlights the importance of the mode of criticality (as a distinction of critic and critique) for exhibition-making,¹⁶ and her occupation with curating as infrastructure, among others, as a further expansion of the traditional notion of exhibitions in art history deserves mention. The 2015 publication *Curating Research* by Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson marked research as “a new phase in developments of the profession globally”,¹⁷ pointing to the global dimensions of exhibiting. O’Neill in particular is a prolific writer on curatorial discourse. In *Culture of Curating, Curating of Culture(s)*, a broader understanding of curatorial practice is played out. O’Neill uses Michel Foucault’s concept of the “discursive formation” for exhibitions and emphasises the argumentative aspects of exhibition-making. In O’Neill’s words:

The book seeks to demonstrate how curating has changed art and how art has changed curating. It attempts to explicate what we mean when we use the term “curatorial discourse.” It seeks to do so by drawing on Foucault’s understanding of discourse as a meaningful but malleable assemblage of statements, brought together and classified as belonging to the same discursive formation.¹⁸

The Curatorial Complex: Social Dimensions of Knowledge Production, the 2015 dissertation by Wiebke Gronemeyer (published in 2018), attempts to look at “the curatorial”/curating from a social perspective and speaks of the “intrinsic social

¹⁶ Irit Rogoff, “From Criticism to Critique to Criticality,” *Transversal Texts*, accessed March 6, 2023, <https://transversal.at/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>.

¹⁷ See back cover: Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, *Curating Research* (London and Amsterdam: Open Ed and de Appel, 2015). The publication is a compilation of contributions, several case studies and other more analytical pieces on curatorial research: contributions by Hyunjoo Beyeon, Carson Chand and Joanna Warsza, Chris Fite-Wassilak, Olga Fernandez Lopez, Kate Fowle, Maja and Reuben Fowkes, Liam Gillick, Georgina Jackson, Sidsel Nelund, Simon Sheikh, Henk Slager, and Transit.hu.

¹⁸ Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 6.

dimension” of curatorial practices and its potential activations of “dialogical spaces”.¹⁹ The most recent contribution to the curatorial discourse, from 2022, which takes a similar stance and places the public at the centre of the exhibitionary formula, is by Beatrice von Bismarck in her book *The Curatorial Condition*. Here, the curatorial is understood as “a field of cultural activity and knowledge that relates to the becoming-public of art and culture—as a domain of practice and meaning with its own structures, conditions, rules, and procedures.”²⁰ Bismarck aims to expand the scope of the field of analysis around curating from the many actors within the exhibitionary complex²¹ to a comprehensive level, adding two factors to this equation with “*collectivity and orientation toward a public*.”²² She terms this newly expanded definition of curatorial practice “curatoriality”.

A General Turn Toward *Participation*

The general tendency in the curatorial discourse shifts to see forms of exhibition-making as a relational practice that develops infrastructurally between displayed objects, institutions and the bodies that have the privilege of observing art. The emphasis is on participatory, performative and interactive structures in the exhibitionary complex. The contexts in these approaches show an enormous range: while many participatory,²³ performative²⁴ and educative²⁵ “turns” – all showcasing relationality in exhibitionary practice – aim not to shake up too much of the established infrastructure of art institutions based on the rules of the art market and art history, and rely on the established relationship between art–institution–audience,²⁶ other less well-known approaches dare to reconfigure these constellations more profoundly (more on this later in this chapter).

¹⁹ Wiebke Gronemeyer, *The Curatorial Complex: Social Dimensions of Knowledge Production* (Paderborn: Brill Fink, 2018), 11.

²⁰ Beatrice von Bismarck, *The Curatorial Condition* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022), 8.

²¹ Bismarck lists these actors in the exhibitionary complex: “interrelations among all of the various human and non-human participants – the exhibits, artists, and curators, but also critics, designers, architects, institutional staff, various recipients, and publics as well as the display objects, mediating tools, architecture, the spaces, sites, information, and discourses.”

von Bismarck, *The Curatorial Condition*, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ Between 2003 and 2008, a discursive dispute on socially engaged art and participatory art practices was drawn out between Claire Bishop and Grant Kester, among others. Simply put, while Bishop rather wants to stay within the autonomous art field, Kester opts for political interventions with art. Jason Miller, “Activism Vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond,” *FIELD | A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* 3 (Winter 2016), <https://field-journal.com/issue-3/activism-vs-antagonism-socially-engaged-art-from-bourriaud-to-bishop-and-beyond>.

²⁴ For example: Dorothea von Hantelmann, *How to Do Things with Art: The Meaning of Art's Performativity* (Geneva: JRP | Ringier, 2010), and Maria Lind, *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, ed. Maria Lind (Stockholm: Sternberg Press, 2012).

²⁵ For example: Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., “*Curating and the Educational Turn*,” in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012).

²⁶ I see “relational aesthetics” in this sense. On one hand, it emphasises relationality, but only shows this relationality between artists, curators and the art institutions.

All the above-mentioned contributions to the discourse – although expanding it – remain within the institutional framework of the art field, of art history and its specific rules of value creation and legitimation. They still revolve in one way or another around artworks and their display in representative museum spaces, around artists as professionals and their (separate) audience.²⁷ This discourse hardly penetrates the realm of real politics (“Realpolitik”) (although it always mentions the political dimensions of exhibitions), even less so the economic and material issues (funding, sustenance, equality). For the sake of my argument, I will distinguish between two lines of utterances in the discourse:

a) On the one hand – although constantly expanding the idea of what an exhibition is and can be – the aforementioned discursive arguments very much rely on the art historical framework of art institutions, thus on the specific infrastructure of the art field in which art objects are embedded as commodities and markers of a chronologically ordered historiography, and consequently rely on and reproduce the current form of the educational sector of art that trains artists as professional “object” makers and directs their ambitions. All of this follows a representational logic of an instituting practice in the “Western” episteme.

b) On the other hand, there is what I like to call discursive input into the exhibitionary practices in *governmental thought*. These are practices and contributions to the discourse that go beyond the logic of representation in exhibition spaces and tend to dissolve the clear positions of art–institution–audience by actively integrating the public into the process of exhibition-making and sometimes even leaving the strict discipline of the medium of the exhibition. These practices also draw inspiration from art history but are not primarily preoccupied with producing artworks for art history.

2.2 Curating as a Post-Exhibitionary Practice in Governmental Thought

In an interview with Binna Choi at Casco Utrecht in August 2015, she described her collaborative practice, which had developed at Casco over many years, as follows:

It's not a traditional exhibition space. [...] It's what I call a micro community. [Casco] is a test site for a different kind of society, a postcapitalistic society. Together with artists and other practitioners we instigate projects based on questions, that come up, maybe related to anger as well as desire. These are often long-term processes, the different stages of development have different moments and forms of public sharing and exhibitions are one of them. [...] It is really important how we develop things and how we relate among ourselves within our team, but also to our environment, our neighbours and communities

²⁷ Similar to the art movement of institutional critique, these utterances need to stay within the framework as an area of friction.

besides the art professionals. One principle is that everyone should be a researcher. Everyone should develop their theory or their own material.²⁸



Fig. 2: Binna Choi at Casco, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2015. Screenshot.

Besides the idea that an art space can develop a propositional dimension for a larger society (“institution as a test site”), Choi speaks, in my view, of a different relationship of art (practice) towards its “audience”, the “environment, our neighbours and communities besides the art professionals”. And this relationality is also applied in Casco’s institutional practice, which I learnt from our encounter with her. This reference alone is indicative of a profoundly different understanding of the structure art–institution–audience. This is also reflected in the title of the institution, which was changed a few years ago to *Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons* and its slogan “Welcome to Casco, a platform where art invites a social vision”.²⁹

The major difference is how art and its practices are oriented towards society and the public sphere. I would like to add a different expression to the curatorial discourse with the theoretical proposal that will lead to an “applied” form of art, its practice and discourse, and will lead me to what I would like to call post-exhibitionary practices of art. For example, the *Arte Útil* project initiated by artist Tania Bruguera works in this direction. In 2012, Bruguera defined the practice of *Arte Útil* in this way:

“to imagine, create, develop and implement something that, produced in artistic practice, offers the people a clearly beneficial result’. [...] *Arte Útil* has to do with the understanding that art, only as a proposal, is not enough now.

²⁸ Binna Choi, interview from August 2015, at Casco, Utrecht, Netherlands, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

²⁹ Casco Art Institute – Working for the Commons, accessed 8 July 2023, <https://casco.art/>.

Arte Útil goes from the state of proposal to that of application in reality. It has to do with understanding that proposals coming from art must give their next step and be applied, must leave the sphere of what is unattainable, of the desired impossibility, to be part of what exists, of the real and functional sphere.”³⁰

She argues for a practice that no longer relies solely on the representational power of the museum space, but aims at real-life change and implementation in the social fabric of our societies. Alistair Hudson, one of the co-founders of the platform *Arte Útil*³¹ – together with Bruguera, the directorial team – condensed this other form of artistic and curatorial practice down to three sentences in a *TEDx Talk* in 2019:

Art is actually a way of doing things.

[...]

Art is a way of making.

[...]

Art is a means to power.³²

Furthermore, Hudson explained the strategy of *Arte Útil* in a mission statement for the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art³³ – where he was director from 2014 to 2018 – which envisages a repositioning of art institutions and exhibitionary practices towards a “civic agenda with a social purpose”. There are numerous contemporary artistic-curatorial examples with practices similar to *Arte Útil*. I will discuss some of them in the course of my research. Tania Bruguera, Alistair Hudson, and Group Material have already been mentioned. WochenKlausur, The Holon Digital Art Center, Post-Museum and C&G Hong Kong are some examples that crossed my path, while others will be taken up later.

I conclude this sub-chapter by concentrating on assured positions within the academic curatorial discourse on this topic. Simon Sheikh, for example, speaks of a post-curatorial perspective and points to a new role for the curator. He argues with regard to expanded exhibition-making that, “Ideas must thus not only be enacted, but embodied, which always accepts a lessening of curatorial authorship and authority. Such post-curatorial approaches take place on a dual background of lack and loss,

³⁰ Tania Bruguera, “Reflexions on Arte Útil (Useful Art),” last modified 12 January 2013, accessed 7 July 2023, <https://taniabriguera.com/reflexions-on-arte-util-useful-art/>.

³¹ The digital platform of Arte Útil shows a comprehensive list of self-initiated projects and also compiles case studies that work in the direction of their self-given practices. See Arte Útil, accessed 9 July 2023, <https://www.arte-util.org/>.

³² Talk by Alistair Hudson, TEDxMacclesfield, 4 May 2019, Townley St. Chapel, Macclesfield, accessed 7 July 2023, <http://tedxmacclesfield.com>.

³³ “New Mappings of Europe,” *New Mappings of Europe*, accessed 9 July 2023, <https://www.newmappingsofeurope.si/de/Uber/MIMA>.

however.”³⁴ By lack, he means that which is literally lacking in the exhibitionary complex, in theory and practice, i.e., its exclusionary mechanisms, marginalised knowledges, and the non- and under-represented. Loss, however, refers to what may have to be given up, e.g., the well-running infrastructure of institutions connected to the art market and its proper audience (and the idea of contemplation of art according to a bourgeois aesthetic logic). In his essay “The Curatorial Function”,³⁵ the political theorist Oliver Marchart calls directly for a political positioning of curators and art institutions in general. He argues for a curator as organiser of public spheres – a proposal for the exhibitionary complex that unapologetically influences politics. At least since the founding of OnCurating.org³⁶ in 2008, a self-organised publishing platform on topics of curating, Dorothee Richter has constantly inserted curatorial thought in a political, societal and strongly feminist and materialist way, advocating to build “chains of equivalence” within the exhibitionary complex to reach out to activists, realpolitik and other social actors to change society. Curating, then, cannot remain within the self-imposed disciplinary boundaries of fine art. *OnCurating Issue 35: Decolonizing Art Institutions*,³⁷ for example, an issue that Dorothee Richter and I edited, not only asked about art collections in neo-colonial entanglements, but also addressed knowledge-producing mechanisms of exhibition-making and opted for decolonial practices within museum practice. My research will articulate the history of the exhibitionary complex in all its depths, following Tony Bennett in Chapter 3, but I will conclude my overview of the contemporary curatorial discourse with James Clifford’s notion of the “contact zone”, as it again conflates ethnography and exhibiting, which I began with Trinh T. Minh-ha. What else is ethnographic practice but an introspection of *others* from the position of the *self* (via the ethnographer’s own position), as art is a practice often engaged in making one’s own positionality public for *others*. Both practices easily produce the “other” along the way.

Museums as Contact Zones

The interdisciplinary scholar and founding director of the Center for Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, James Clifford, wrote *Museums as Contact Zones*³⁸ in 1997, which I would call an influential idea for curatorial formats

³⁴ For an overview on the artist-curatorial discourse, see Simon Sheikh, “From Para to Post: The Rise and Fall of Curatorial Reason,” *Springerin | Hefte Für Gegenwartskunst* 1 (2017), accessed 22 September 2022, <https://www.springerin.at/en/2017/1/von-para-zu-post/>.

³⁵ Oliver Marchart, “The Curatorial Function – Organizing the Ex/Position,” *OnCurating 9: Curating Critique*, ed. Marianne Eigenheer (2011): 43–46, accessed 16 September 2023, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-9-reader/the-curatorial-function-organizing-the-ex-position.html>.

³⁶ The publication platform *OnCurating* was founded in 2008 by Dorothee Richter. Issues have had various guest editors, often in collaboration with Dorothee Richter. I have myself been involved in OnCurating.org, since 2013 as producer and since 2017 in a major editorial role. ONCURATING, accessed 9 July 2023, <https://www.on-curating.org>.

³⁷ Dorothee Richter and Ronald Kolb, eds., *OnCurating 35: Decolonizing Art Institutions* (December 2017).

³⁸ James Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

that address the governmental relations between art and its public. The paper is written in the context of ethnographic museums with their problematic collections in colonial entanglements. Nora Sternfeld in particular has developed the concept of the *contact zone* in relation to the contemporary field of exhibition-making.³⁹ James Clifford took up the term *contact zone* from literary critic Mary Louise Pratt and her essay “Arts of the Contact Zone”, in which she lays out historical colonial encounters found in “travel writing”.⁴⁰ Clifford writes by quoting Pratt:

I borrow the term from Mary Louise Pratt. In her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (6-7), she defines “contact zone” as “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.” [...] “A “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. [It stresses] copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.”⁴¹

Clifford then translates Pratt’s *contact zone* to his museum context in 1997 and the colonial context of *transculturation*⁴² (Pratt) with all its “asymmetrical relations of power” to the field within a nation-state. Asymmetric power relations may sound like a euphemism for violent colonial acts that continue to create separation and recreate disparities to this day.⁴³ The open wounds of these violent acts, some of which are not even thematised let alone accepted as structural violence, and practices of healing, embodied or as collective trauma, are an important driving force of postcolonial studies today.⁴⁴ In the exhibitionary context, practices of restitution – the return of cultural artefacts to individuals or communities – and repatriation – a broader process of making amends that usually takes place on state levels and involves the allocation of objects as well as economic resources – are becoming increasingly instituted in ethnographic museums.⁴⁵ The fact that the processes of

³⁹ See, for example, Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, “WHAT COMES AFTER THE SHOW? ON POSTREPRESENTATIONAL CURATING,” *OnCurating 14: From the world of art archive*, eds. Saša Nabergoj and Dorothee Richter (2012): 21–24.

⁴⁰ Mary L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴¹ The part in quotation marks is a direct quote from Pratt.

See Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones,” 192.

⁴² On another note, “transculturation” was introduced by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1940 in his essay “Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar.”

⁴³ Current examples are plentiful. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement reveals a structurally reproduced inequality within a nation-state.

⁴⁴ For example, Silvia Martínez-Falquina, “Postcolonial Trauma Theory in the Contact Zone: The Strategic Representation of Grief in Edwidge Danticat’s *Claire of the Sea Light*,” *Humanities* 4, no. 4 (2015).

⁴⁵ “Restitution and Repatriation · V&A,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed 22 July 2023, <https://www.vam.ac.uk/info/restitution-and-repatriation>.

repatriation are anything but clear and clean has been expressed by Clémentine Deliss in the German-speaking discourse and internationally for some time. Deliss argues for staying with “the complexities inherent in these objects’ agency” and for remediation practices that “takes into account a notion of contemporaneity and teamwork”.⁴⁶

Today’s demands for financial repatriation not only stem from the historical colonial phase – established and maintained over centuries – but also aim to “repair” the constantly reproduced structural social inequalities. Allocated funds can clearly lead to balancing inequality, but they alone will not be enough. Nevertheless, the notion of *asymmetrical power relations* help us understand these colonially produced unequal situations discursively as still relational and thus as directly susceptible to influence. In addition to the power dynamics between empires as *centres*, and colonised *peripheries*, Clifford points to contemporary local constellations by saying:

The distances at issue here are more social than geographic. For most inhabitants of a poor neighbourhood, located perhaps just blocks or a short bus ride from a fine-arts museum, the museum might as well be on another continent. Contact perspectives recognize that “natural” social distances and segregations are historical/political products: apartheid was a relationship. In many cities, moreover, contact zones result from a different kind of “travel”: the arrival of new immigrant populations.⁴⁷

Consequently, the museum that wants to willingly engage in this new global or postmigrant context (I would expand this context, framing it as “postcolonial”, but more on that in the next sub-chapter) cannot be “simply educating or edifying a public”, it needs to “operate – consciously and at times self-critically – in contact histories.”⁴⁸ What Clifford refers to here with “edifying a public” is something to which I will devote myself thoroughly in Chapter 3, making it clear that the educational aspects of exhibitions in general need to be approached critically (top-down, bottom-up or transversal educational methods). Clifford goes on to give examples of this new operation of museums from within his field of knowledge. His main example is his involvement as a “consultant” at a gathering run by the Portland Museum of Oregon, who invited elders of the native Tinglit clan to engage with the museum’s so-called “Northwest Coast Indian Collection”. For a contemporary example of exhibition practice as a contact zone, I would like to mention here the first exhibition project

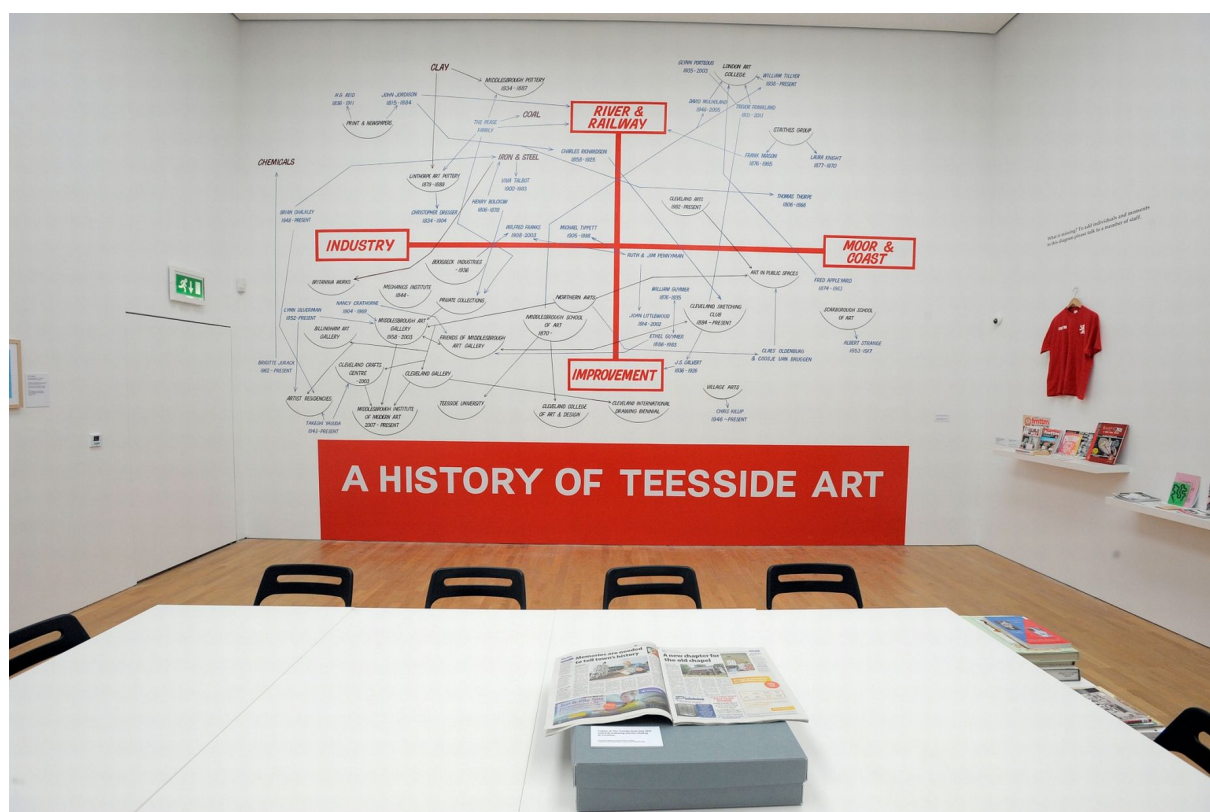
⁴⁶ “Occupy Collections!* Clémentine Deliss in Conversation with Frédéric Keck on Access, Circulation, and Interdisciplinary Experimentation, or the Urgency of Remediating Ethnographic Collections (before It is Really Too Late),” *South as a State of Mind #7 [documenta 14 #7]*, trans. Sandra Reid, accessed 22 July 2023,

https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/456_occupy_collections_clementine_deliss_in_conversation_with_frederic_keck_on_access_circulation_and_interdisciplinary_experimentation_or_the_urgency_of_remediating_ethnographic_collections_before_it_is_really_too_late.

⁴⁷ Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones,” 204.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

organised by Alistair Hudson in 2015 at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in Teeside, UK, entitled “Localism, an exhibition about history, visual culture, politics and making in Middlesbrough”.⁴⁹ It collected artworks and materials from local artists and the neighbourhood through an open call, and more interestingly, generated material during weekly meetings, convenings and communal meals around the following questions: “How would you as a community write your history using art?” and “What should be in the museum?” However, far from proposing a coherent local cultural identity, the project involved migrants and asylum seekers who were housed in the immediate proximity of the museum. In another *contact zone* practice, the exhibition project also clearly came into conflict with an internationally legitimised art scene that usually follows the logic of presenting artists, sanctioned in cultural centres, in culturally peripheral areas like Middlesbrough. It is no coincidence that the project designed a diagram in reference to Alfred Barr’s famous 1936 diagram⁵⁰ depicting “modern art history” that became canonical (also in its exclusions of art movements). The project at MIMA aimed to create a version of local art history tailored to the community’s needs.



⁴⁹ See Talk by Alistair Hudson, TED^xMacclesfield

⁵⁰ See Glenn Lowry, “Abstraction in 1936: Barr’s Diagrams,” in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, ed. Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), accessed 29 May 2022, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/archives/InventingAbstraction_GLowry_359_363.pdf

Fig. 3: Exhibition View, “Localism, an exhibition about history, visual culture, politics and making in Middlesbrough,” Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Teeside, UK, 10 October 2015–1 February 2016, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/campaigns/museums-change-lives/creating-better-places-to-live-and-work/mima/>.

There are striking similarities to Clifford’s writing on the potential functions of museums as contact zones:

Until museums do more than consult (often after the curatorial vision is firmly in place), until they bring a wider range of historical experiences and political agendas into the actual planning of exhibits and the control of museum collections, they will be perceived as merely paternalistic by people whose contact history with museums has been one of exclusion and condescension. It may, indeed, be utopian to imagine museums as public spaces of collaboration, shared control, complex translation, and honest disagreement. Indeed, the current proliferation of museums may reflect the fact that, as historically evolved, such institutions tend to reflect unified community visions rather than overlapping, discrepant histories. But few communities, even the most “local,” are homogeneous. In practice, different groups may come together around a specific issue or antagonism [...] yet divide on others.⁵¹

Consequently, a *contact zone* museum would democratically engage in the writing of history through exhibitionary practice, challenging hierarchies and authorities’ formations and established knowledges that we are used to finding in traditional museum settings. It would be in contact with histories that allow for personal narratives and emotions as well as embodied and situated knowledges. Ultimately, it would be a political space.⁵²

Nora Sternfeld, together with Luisa Ziaja, outlined the *contact zone* as a curatorial method in “What Comes After the Show? On Post-Representational Curating”.⁵³ They draw attention to the fact that a museum turned into a contact zone will be in favour of finding solidarity with social debates and political movements beyond the safe space of supposedly neutral museums and their representational logic. In doing so, it will also need to question the logic of representation within the practices of display familiar to museums, noting that, “exhibitions are no longer sites for setting up valuable objects and representing objective values but rather spaces for curatorial action in which unusual encounters and discourses become possible [...]

⁵¹ Clifford, “Museums as Contact Zones,” 207–208.

⁵² Ibid., 214.

⁵³ Sternfeld, Ziaja, “What Comes After the Show?,” 22–24.

Emphasizing the referential and relational dimensions of presenting art transforms exhibitions into spaces where things are 'taking place' rather than 'being shown'.⁵⁴

Contact Zones in Global Entanglements

I would like to close with Clifford's final insights, which sets up the global entanglements of which we are part. He paints a comprehensive picture of the function of museums within the logic of the nation-state, of the museum's inherent mechanism of exclusion in the logic of an "imagined community":

From their emergence as public institutions in nineteenth-century Europe, museums have been useful for polities gathering and valuing an "us." This articulation – whether its scope is national, regional, ethnic, or tribal – collects, celebrates, memorializes, values, and sells (directly and indirectly) **a way of life**. In the process of maintaining an imagined community, it also confronts "others" and excludes the "inauthentic." This is the stuff of contemporary cultural politics, creative and virulent, enacted in the overlapping historical contexts of colonization/decolonization, nation, Formation/minority assertions, capitalist market expansion / consumer strategies.⁵⁵

It is clear that one cannot separate exhibitionary projects within the nation-state and its representational orderings from the global world and its globalised relations in which we live, certainly not from postcolonial ways of thinking and practices that help us understand global entanglements, our interconnectedness in them, the formations of exploitative and violent procedures in which everyone is positioned somewhere. In what follows, I will engage with the discourses of globalism, specifically postcolonial thought, concentrating on representational matters. This is in favour of defining an expanded curatorial practice that holds on to the uncomfortable position of representation and authority, but with different, inclusive, and open forms and empowering ways of carrying it out. It would be a practice in favour of a transparent, open invitation policy for distinction-reduced access to contemporary exhibiting in a *contact zone* that needs trust, openness and a willingness for permeable solidarity over hegemonic politics. This could be a sketch for an ideal infrastructure that has yet to come.

2.3 Concepts of Globalisation/Globalism/Postcolonialism (Translocal Practices)

In common parlance, globalisation refers to processes of unification of the world economy based on a neoliberal capitalist logic (big capital, large corporations, venture capitalism, unregulated financial markets, etc.) and is accomplished through the most comprehensive standardisation of transport and goods (trade routes, container standardisations, etc.) and all-encompassing networked communication

⁵⁴ Sternfeld, Ziaja, "What Comes After the Show?," 22.

⁵⁵ Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," 218.

technology (logistics, digitisation, mass media, internet, smart devices, etc.). Globalisation strives to comprehensively “integrate” the whole world and humanity into a network of (economic) relations. These relations are clearly asymmetrical in power and are ultimately based on historical colonial formations and tend to reproduce them and form new dependencies (see the centre–periphery model).⁵⁶ Currently, globalisation still takes place under the domination of a neoliberal capitalist logic, which enables a free global marketplace and distribution of goods but maintains national borders (not least maintaining a labour disparity between cheap/physical work and high-priced/intellectual work, and thus guaranteeing profit margins). The American political philosopher George Caffentzis condenses it down to this formula: the capacity of neoliberal capitalism is “to organize the reproduction of our lives outside of its structures”,⁵⁷ referring to the enormous degree of organisation of global relations that the capitalist system with its neoliberal agenda has created over the past forty years as well as the creation of wealth. In a broader – one might even say enormous, because world-changing – framework, we would need to examine the history of globalisation and how neoliberal policies (the latest stage of Western-driven globalisation, perhaps already heralding its demise) have succeeded in organising and rationalising trade and finance on a world scale, largely through the privatisation of public enterprises and the deregulation of economies – both in the direction of individualisation and individual ownership and through the dismantling of structures of public projects established by states in a national framework. We should not dismiss *globalisation* processes as a whole or think that globalisation is only a result of neoliberal policies. Other versions of a globalised world without the hegemony of profit are quite conceivable and may have to develop sooner rather than later, as neoliberal policies are unable or unwilling to deal with our current global crisis.

⁵⁶ “Referring to the Centre–Periphery (or the Core–Periphery) model, one must be aware of its origins in economics: Centre–Periphery basically describes an (unequal) relationship between places. It is used as a spatial description of a relation between a so-called ‘advanced’ (or dominating) place and its allegedly ‘lesser developed’ (or serving) periphery. In this model, the centre is the place of power (of law, of trade, of military force) and is a door to the rest of the world. The periphery is a remote, rural place, and it delivers raw materials, food, and other resources to the centre under the condition of exploitation. The centre provides goods and ‘superior’ products. This relation is described as exploitative in the Marxist tradition: from a global point of view, so-called underdeveloped countries (the periphery) have to be kept in dependency to Wealthy States (the Core or the Centre). [...] According to the centre–periphery model, underdevelopment is not the result of tradition, but is produced as part of the process necessary for the function of accelerated capitalism in the central capitalist countries – and its continued reproduction on a world scale”.

See my editorial in *OnCurating 41: Centres/Peripheries–Complex Constellations*, eds. Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb, Ella Krivanek, and Camille Regli (June 2019): 3–4.

⁵⁷ George Caffentzis, “The Future of ‘The Commons’: Neoliberalism’s ‘Plan B’ or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?,” *New Formations* 69 (2010), 26.

In the context of my research, I instead want to investigate other modes of globalisation, grouped under the terms of “globalism”, “mondialité”⁵⁸, the “planetary”⁵⁹ or “the terrestrial”⁶⁰, and speak more of the cultural and transcultural social dimensions of globalisation processes embedded in disciplines of politics, exhibitions and artistic practices in translocal thinking. Translocality originally described a migratory and diasporic experience that connects at least two different localities and their cultural formations. It has recently been brought into the art discourse, gaining significant momentum and an expanded meaning after the impossibility of travelling during Covid. Translocality refers not only to spatial dimensions, but also to the social and political dimensions of “simultaneity and identity formation that transcend boundaries – including, but also extending beyond, those of nation states”⁶¹ – and, I may add, are more prevalent than ever in our digital culture. It is worth noting, that the older term *glocalisation* – a neologism that merges the global with the local – describes the tension and relationality between universalising processes of globalisation and their local adaptations⁶² or possibilities of local resistances.⁶³ In *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, the late Bruno Latour attempted to re-arrange the constellations of our “postmodern” world in the face of an impending climate catastrophe, in a translocal or glocal way by subsuming the

⁵⁸ This term is broadly attributed to Édouard Glissant. Especially in the curatorial cultural discourse, Glissant’s terminology was introduced by curator Hans Ulrich Obrist and artist Asad Razā. See Hans U. Obrist and Asad Razā, *Mondialité: Or the Archipelagos of Édouard Glissant* (Paris: Éditions Skira, 2017).

⁵⁹ For a proposal of the distinction between planetary and global, see:

“The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with the globe.”

Gayatri C. Spivak, “Planetary,” in *Death of A Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 72.

In this way, I also understand this: “If the global tends toward the universal, the planetary tends toward the mutual, the patchy, and the partial – the discontinuous world that cannot be parsed with an elementary particle or organized around a single ideology.”

Keller Easterling, “Another Part of Speech,” *INSITE*, last modified 14 November 2022, <https://insiteart.org/journal-speech-acts/essays/another-part-of-speech>.

⁶⁰ Bruno Latour coined “The Terrestrial” to distinguish the concept from the planetary view from above. He aimed for human’s participatory role in worldly relations: “For the Terrestrial is bound to the earth and to land, but it is also a way of worlding [Donna Haraway], in that it aligns with no borders, transcends all identities.” Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 54.

⁶¹ See Clemens Greiner and Patrick Sakdapolrak, “Translocality: Concepts, Applications and Emerging Research Perspectives,” *Geography Compass* 7, no. 5 (2013).

⁶² For a definitional perspective, see Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in *Global Modernities*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1995).

⁶³ Arif Dirlik complexifies the global and local perspectives, opting for a “critical localism” instead of a localism thought from the perspective of “global capital”.

See Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 1997).

various climate-denying groups in the formation of a *New Climatic Regime*. He distinguishes between “globalization-plus” and “globalization-minus”,⁶⁴ the latter being what we understand by “neoliberal globalisation”, an exploitative approach of forced unification and a reduction of possibilities, a “single vision” of few, for hegemonic power with the aim of dominance and profit. “Globalization-plus”, on the other hand, is in Latour’s words: “Shifting from a local to a global viewpoint ought to mean *multiplying* viewpoints, *registering* a greater number of varieties, *taking into account* a larger number of beings, cultures, phenomena, organisms, and people.”⁶⁵ Globalisation in this sense would mean staying with differences and an unimagined diversification of living conditions, culture, economy, and ways of life.

Recent Historical Discourse of Globalisation

From a historical perspective, one tends to consider the end of the Cold War (1991) – starting with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – as a crucial moment in contemporary (art) history. We can assume that only after the Cold War had ended, and with it the focus on a geopolitical hegemony dictating the shape of the world and the narrative of world history according to one dichotomy of ‘The East’/ ‘The West’, could other regions’ identities and their histories and contexts be inaugurated. A truly global discourse emerged on a world stage only after this heavy lift. After that, postcolonial studies picked up momentum in the 1990s with Stuart Hall,⁶⁶ Gayatri Spivak⁶⁷ and many others, preceded by Frantz Fanon,⁶⁸ Edward Said⁶⁹ and Michel Foucault.⁷⁰ These new narratives emerged in the discourse, critiqued it and established themes of plurality, complexity and a new formation of globalism (detached from the project of economic globalisation).⁷¹ In a long interview with Peter Weibel, who passed away in early 2023 and was then director at the ZKM, Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe, in February 2015, Weibel discussed plainly the notion of “global art” and the exclusionary mechanisms of an art history that for a long time accepted only European or “Westernised” art in its canon:

⁶⁴ “The term is used to mean that a *single vision*, entirely provincial, proposed by a few individuals, representing a very small number of interests, limited to a few measuring instruments, to a few standards and protocols, has been imposed on everyone and spread everywhere.”

Latour, *Down to Earth*, 12.

⁶⁵ The terms in italics hint strongly at Donna Haraway’s thinking, which will be analysed in Chapter 3.2. Latour, *Down to Earth*, 12–13 (italics in original).

⁶⁶ See specifically Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shoha (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 173–187.

⁶⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

⁶⁸ Frantz Fanon, “National Culture,” in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 65 ff.

⁶⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

⁷⁰ See especially in relation to power structures, inclusion and exclusion: Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

⁷¹ See my editorial in *OnCurating 39: Draft: Global Biennial Survey 2018*, eds. Ronald Kolb and Shwetal Patel (June 2018).

[...] raising the question of the fate of Europe. It became very clear to me after a while that art is defined and controlled only by a Western point of view. "Western point of view" means first of all Europe, and then North America, since North America was founded by people who moved away, and "immigrated" from Europe to North America. This axis in fact excluded all the cultures and continents and their art practices, which are not part of this axis. Only artists were included who have been imitating this kind of Western culture. So, when an artist from Brazil, or from China, who imitated so-called Western art, only then they were accepted. This has a lot to do with the role of colonization. [...] If your goal – like mine – is to come to a more just world, you need more inclusion in the art system. Somebody like Jimmie Durham even said, "Art is a Western invention". I cannot accept this because art should be something universal. We have to look for world art, or global art, whatever this is. But we cannot stay with this axis and divide the world again into colonised countries and countries who colonize or subjugate other countries.⁷²

I read Weibel's statement as a desire for what was coined "cosmopolitanism", the idea of a world citizenship or of a "world community" coming together under universal moral standards. A similar concept is associated with the term multiculturalism, focusing on co-existence of different cultures or ethnicities in balance/harmony. This – what I would rather call a strategic desire for a more commons-based and just world under universal conditions – has already had its fair share of critics: scholars like Paul Gilroy⁷³ and Stuart Hall showed that globalisation and cosmopolitanism can produce rather unequal constellations in neoliberalism; Hall calls it "cosmopolitanism from above".⁷⁴ Nikos Papastergiadis, who is more present in the contemporary art discourse (he wrote for *d14*, and gave a talk at a panel discussion at *documenta fifteen*), relates a positivistic notion of cosmopolitanism to the art field in *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* as follows: "The discursive turn in artistic and curatorial practice, with its wild embrace of hybrid identities and its committed efforts to hijack capital, was also aligned with a desire to build a new global public sphere."⁷⁵ And the concept of *mondialité* as "worldmentality" attributed to Édouard Glissant also needs mentioning,⁷⁶ especially since Glissant's idea have been advocated by the well-

⁷² Peter Weibel, interview from February 2015, at ZKM Centre for Media Arts Karlsruhe, Germany, as part of the film project "CURATING! – explored with a camera".

⁷³ Paul Gilroy, "Postcolonialism and cosmopolitanism: towards a worldly understanding of fascism and Europe's colonial crimes," in *After Cosmopolitanism*, eds. Rosi Braidotti, Patrick Hanafin, and Bolette Blaagaard (London: Routledge, 2012),

⁷⁴ Today's Remedy, "Stuart Hall on Cosmopolitanism," Interview with Stuart Hall, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcaGhyYvMI0>.

⁷⁵ Nikos Papastergiadis, *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2012), 114.

⁷⁶ Manthia Diawara, "Édouard Glissant's Worldmentality," in *Documenta 14 — South as a State of Mind #9*, eds. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, accessed 13 July 2023, <https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/>.

known Hans Ulrich Obrist, who can be seen as the poster boy for a cosmopolitan curator. In the interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist for our 2015 interview project in Zurich, he said the following in response to the question about globalisation:

The art world always was polyphonic, but it was just not recognised as such. You know, basically people didn't look, they looked at Cologne, they looked at New York, only a very few Western centres. [...] I can't answer your question (on globalization) without talking about Édouard Glissant. [...] He really showed me the way, how to work within globalization. [...] There are lots of opportunities for a truly global dialogue, which previously we didn't have. And at the same time there are dangers of homogenizing forces making difference disappear, but also the danger that the reaction to those forces of globalisation is deeply reactionary, sort of modes of retirement into nationalisms and as we can observe it now in Europe, a lack of tolerance [...]. Édouard Glissant beautifully describes how we can basically address these problems, how we should engage with this global dialogue and actually use it [...] He calls it *mondialité*, a global dialogue, which produces difference and doesn't destroy difference.⁷⁷



Fig. 4: Hans Ulrich Obrist in his office at Serpentine Gallery, London, Great Britain, 2015. Screenshot.

⁷⁷ Hans Ulrich Obrist, interview from February 2015, at Serpentine Gallery, London, Great Britain, as part of the film project "CURATING! – explored with a camera".

Glissant's poetological idea of "one world in relation" resembles similar definitional concepts such as cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism, but what is known as *créolité* can be seen as transcultural practice within a complex dialogical framework. Moving away from universal concepts towards heterogeneous practices – like *créolité* – articulations such as *transculturation* from ethnography/anthropology and *cultural translation*⁷⁸ and *hybridity* from postcolonial studies understand culture as something in constant flux, as relational practice and as (uneven) exchange, and therefore question a fixed and naturalised cultural identity, be it a national, communal or ethnographic identity. Homi K. Bhabha was influential in the discourse around hybridity, especially on the notion of the "Third Space". In 1994, Bhabha wrote in *The Location of Culture*:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory [...] may reveal that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*.⁷⁹

A more thorough look at global desires in the field of tension between cosmopolitanism and postcolonial entanglements will be taken up in Chapter 3.4 in the discussion of the exhibitionary complex under the topic of biennials.

Modernity, Enlightenment and Postcolonial Theory

To take up another strand of the discourse, I want to go back to the thinking of Peter Weibel – one could call it a traditional universalist claim – in the tradition of modernity. Weibel himself, who had a migratory background and grew up in orphanages in non-traditional family structures, was informed by modernity throughout his life. Consequently, the exhibition project *Reset Modernity!*,⁸⁰ which he carried out with Bruno Latour in 2016, did not call for an exit from modernity, but for a "resetting" of modernity. Neither Weibel nor Latour wanted to abandon modern ideas, nor were they willing to continue in, let's say, the relativistic tendencies of postmodernism. Rather, the project aimed to reevaluate or recalibrate the instruments of modernity in order to gain a new positioning. As part of our interview project, we

⁷⁸ See, for example, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "More Thoughts on Cultural Translation," *Transversal Texts* (2008), accessed 13 July 2023, <https://transversal.at/transversal/0608/spivak/en>. "What people call transculture is culture as it happens. Culture alive is its own counter-example. Transculturation is not something special and different. It is a moment in a taxonomy of the normality of what is called culture."

⁷⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 38 (italics in original).

⁸⁰ *Reset Modernity!* was part of GLOBALE – The New Art Event in the Digital Age, a biennial-like exhibition project from 2015 to 2016 that went on for 300 days to celebrate the 300-year anniversary of the foundation of Karlsruhe. See <https://zkm.de/en/project/globale-0> and <https://zkm.de/en/exhibition/2016/04/globale-reset-modernity>.

asked Patrick Flores in Singapore in January 2017 about the still prevailing, modern distinction between fine art (as a supposedly “Western” invention) and craft and other cultural productions from the Philippines:

I'm trying to move away from the concept of hybridity. I think it's useful only at a certain level while we acknowledge the presence of mixture or heterogeneity in the cultures. We should acknowledge that the Philippine culture is Western, it is entitled to the promise of its modernity. But needs to be at the same time critical of its failures, to be critical of coloniality and the actual existing colonialism as we speak. [...] But at the same time, I am also interested in this entitlement now, to a modernity the Philippines co-produced. We are entitled to its afterlife. I always want to go beyond this binary.⁸¹



Fig. 5: Patrick Flores in a hotel room in Singapore, 2017. Screenshot.

Not thinking of “modernity” in a binary system that separates the “West” and its epistemes from the “primitive” former colonial territories would help to avoid such controversial exhibitions as *Primitivism” in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* at MoMA, New York, from 1984-1985. The discursive complex around modernity and coloniality is captured in the writings of Walter D. Mignolo and

⁸¹ Patrick Flores, interview from January 2017, in Singapore, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

Rolando Vázquez Melken, among others. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*⁸² from 2011, Mignolo makes clear that the stable “modern” nations with their accumulation of wealth were only made possible through colonisation and coloniality. He sees this power structure established by the European colonisers as being in direct line with the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The concept of Enlightenment, which is revealed as a “Western” episteme of dominance that excludes other forms of knowledge from a legitimised field of knowledge, was also touched upon in Michel Foucault’s 1966 *The Order of Things*,⁸³ where he questioned the concept of “man”. For him, “man” was a concept invented in the Enlightenment within the framework of the modern idiom and considered a fixed object, a universal category untouched by history and context, an object to study. Within the colonial system, this meant the studies of others as “objects” denying them full subjectivity and the study of objects of foreign “unmodern” cultures in anthropology and ethnography⁸⁴. A thorough study of “man” as the object of being “white, bourgeois, male, and European or North American”⁸⁵ – was apparently never up for debate. Feminist scholars in particular fundamentally challenged this epistemic thinking, which is still anchored not only in general thought but also in many scientific disciplines. An early mention of the enormously influential notion of “epistemic violence” comes from feminist postcolonial thinker Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.⁸⁶ Epistemic violence is expressed through epistemic mechanisms in the discursive formation in which the “Other” or the “Subaltern” is simultaneously constructed (conceived in opposition to a “Western” subjectivity) and excluded from discourse/knowledge formations and consequently from power.⁸⁷ More recently, Rosi

⁸² Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁸³ See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

⁸⁴ See James Clifford: “Ethnography is still very much a one-way street.” James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: a School of American Research Advanced Seminar* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1986).

⁸⁵ Tony Bennett, “Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage,” in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015), 25.

⁸⁶ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 76.

⁸⁷ Spivak refers to Michel Foucault’s study on sanity as a formation of epistemic violence in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965). She translates this concept to colonial constellations in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993). Specifically, on page 76: “The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity. It is well known that Foucault locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century. [...] But what if that particular redefinition was only a part of the narrative of history in Europe as well as in the colonies? What if the two projects of epistemic overhaul

Braidotti has developed a comprehensive study in which she critiques not only Enlightenment and humanism, but also terminologies such as the Anthropocene as a human-centred concept that oftentimes still upholds the traditional image of “man” as a universal figure.⁸⁸ From a post-ethnographic, indigenous perspective, Anna Tsing points to our rather contemporary situation in a postcolonial framework:

In contrast to Enlightenment universals, international indigenous politics opens a global politics in which inconsistency and contradiction become our greatest assets. Not that any old thing will do: Indigenous politics requires us to judge between the real and the fake, empowerment and co-optation, good and bad allies. [...] Still, indigenous victories depend on mismatching universal rights and local cultural legacies, expert science and place-based knowledge, social justice, and communal precedence.⁸⁹

Epistemic Exercises in Decoloniality

After this overview of global and postcolonial thinking, I want to focus on the practices of decoloniality, and thus rather on applications to our contemporary life and the exhibitionary complex. How – if at all – does postcolonial theory influence art discourse and thus art institutions and artistic and curatorial practice? Apart from the problems discussed elsewhere by others on key historical exhibitions like *Magiciens de la terre*⁹⁰ or *‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*,⁹¹ it is time to actively *decolonise* institutional practices and find different strategies for global constructions in contemporary art institutions and artistic and curatorial practices. ZKM, Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, for example, has a track record of thinking in global terms, yet remains locally active.⁹² And institutions like *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin name global entanglements, at least on paper.⁹³ In Chapter 3.4, I will discuss the biennial model more specifically as an

worked as dislocated and unacknowledged parts of a vast two-handed engine? Perhaps it is no more than to ask that the subtext of the palimpsestic narrative of imperialism be recognized as 'subjugated knowledge', a 'whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity' [...].” 78.

⁸⁸ Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2019).

⁸⁹ Anna Tsing, “Indigenous Voice,” in *Indigenous Experience Today*, eds. ed. Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 57.

⁹⁰ *Magiciens de la terre* at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette, Paris, was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989.

⁹¹ The exhibition *‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* took place at Museum of Modern Art, New York, from September 1984 until January 1985 and was organised by William Rubin, Head of the Museum’s Department of Painting and Sculpture in collaboration with Professor Kirk Varnedoe. <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/1907?locale=de>.

⁹² See, for example, the large-scale exhibition *GLOBALE*, which took place from June 2015 to May 2016 at ZKM, Karlsruhe, and *Critical Zones: Observatories for Earthly Politics* from May 2020 to January 2022.

⁹³ See the home page of Haus der Kulturen der Welt: “In the midst of profound global and planetary transformation processes, HKW re-explores artistic positions, scientific concepts, and spheres of

interesting, flexible institution that navigates on a global scale or with a global concept in mind, yet always remains anchored in local realities. These biennials are locally situated and assemble specific artistic works and artistic practices that often deal directly or indirectly with local communities, national identities and the contemporary global. Major contemporary exhibitions like *documenta 14*⁹⁴ emphasised the inclusion of indigenous peoples, and the 10th Berlin Biennale, curated by Gabi Ngcobo, focussed on the perceived threats of subjectivity constructions in postcolonial societies.⁹⁵

Monika Narula, a member of the New Delhi-based artist/curator group Raqs Media Collective, gives a wonderful response with regard to decolonial practice in a self-determined scope in the filmed interview in Dhaka in February 2016:

Dorothee Richter: How do you deal with race, class and postcoloniality and hegemony?

Monika Narula: If you put it in those categories, I'm going to say, I refuse to deal with them in those ways. These are the big questions of the everyday. It starts in your own studio: Is everyone in equal positions... I mean, you have to be as much aware of your day-to-day practice, as you are about what you're doing in your work, as you are about what you're doing in an exhibition. A lot of our work thinks aloud on these questions, at least of class in a very articulate way. We think about systems and structures and how one can create seepages. We have a whole book called *Seepage*. The questions are how one creates ferocities and open up structures or crack things to challenge the facts. [...] If I repeat the facts, then they become more entrenched. While living the facts, I must make situations happen that change the facts or challenge the facts at least for that moment, for that time. Let it be at a place and a time where these things are unstable. Let it be a place and a time where these things cannot be assumed, that this is how it is because it has always been like this. And let it be for that time and place that I can imagine that we are talking to each other not in those terms. As Jeebesh [Bagchi] says, "we are not interested in sad passions. We will not be driven by sad passions."⁹⁶

political activity, asking: How do we grasp the present and its accelerated technological upheavals?" https://www.hkw.de/en/hkw/ueberuns/Ueber_uns.php.

⁹⁴ *documenta 14*, with Adam Szymczyk as the artistic director, took place in Athens from 8 April to 16 July 2017, and in Kassel from 10 June to 17 September 2017.

⁹⁵ The 10th Berlin Biennale ran from 9 July to 9 September 2018. <http://bb10.berlinbiennale.de/about>.

⁹⁶ Monika Narula from Raqs Media Collective, interview from February 2016, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, as part of "CURATING – explored with a camera".



Fig. 6: Monika Narula from Raqs Media Collective at a hotel in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2017. Screenshot.

Narula describes an artistic-curatorial practice that aims to create (at least) temporary spaces and constellations that step out of disparate situations, a practice that begins in daily life. Similar thoughts can be found in discourse, yet with distinctions. Relating modernity, its epistemes and decoloniality directly to the museum space, Rolando Vázquez Melken suggests a new reading of decolonial thought that “has been concerned with bringing to the fore how the aesthetics and epistemology of modernity are implicated in coloniality. Decolonial aesthesis questions the role that museums have played in the constitution of the modern/colonial order.”⁹⁷ Vázquez Melken understands decolonial practices as an active way of listening, and sensing, of addressing the colonial wound and its erasure, and ultimately ask for a politics “for”, and not against.⁹⁸

Kadiatou Diallo, co-director of the experimental curatorial and residency platform SPARCK – Space for Pan-African Research, Creation and Knowledge,⁹⁹ describes a decolonial and very practical artistic and curatorial mindset that often arises from the material conditions in which practitioners find themselves. In the interview we

⁹⁷ Rosa Wevers, “Decolonial Aesthesis and the Museum. An Interview with Rolando Vázquez Melken,” *Stedelijk Studies 8: Towards a Museum of Mutuality* (Spring 2019), last modified 9 March 2023, <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/decolonial-aesthesis-and-the-museum>.

⁹⁸ See Rolando Vázquez Melken’s contribution for the launch of *OnCurating 55: Curating Dance: Decolonizing Dance* (January 2023).

⁹⁹ SPARCK – Space for Pan African Research, Creation and Knowledge, accessed 17 July 2023, <https://sparck.org/>.

conducted with her in February 2016 at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town, she describes their practice:

There's no office. We work virtually with one another over Skype. Sometimes when there's a project that gets us to travel together, we meet and then work face to face. And the residencies tend to be projects that emerge from conversations around the things that we're all interested in: for example informal economies and informal networks, local politics, gender, neoliberalism. Sometimes it's artists traveling together to a place that they both don't know. That was the case for a series that we did called *South South*. Two artists – one from Cape Town and one from Cameroon – travelled together to China. But their visit was shortened due to visa issues. These issues still exist around traveling visas and actually getting people to places. But the project and their artists were looking at the sort of migration from Africa to China for business and economics, but also the kinds of lifestyles that emerged, the kind, how people then settled, the kinds of attitudes that exist. They created a really interesting video as a result of this, which was then shown, in the back of taxis in various contexts.¹⁰⁰



Fig. 7: Kadiatou Diallo at Michaelis School of Art in Cape Town, South Africa, 2016. Screenshot.

Diallo describes a flexible (self-)institutional practice that could be called precarious seen from a rather stable perspective of “Western” art institutions. Nevertheless, it is

¹⁰⁰ Kadiatou Diallo, interview from February 2016, at Michaelis School of Fine Art, South Africa, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

capable of creating interesting projects. In attempting to institutionalise these flexible, precarious practices for a large-scale exhibition project such as documenta, I want to refer to Nikos Papastergiadis's concept of the "South" outlined in the essay "What Is the South?"¹⁰¹ for *documenta 14*. The "South" is not to be understood as a place, but as a "little public sphere" in which dialogue and collaboration are still possible, removed from fragmentation and commercialisation.¹⁰² This practice would shift away from place-making and foreground a mode of thinking and sharing. Papastergiadis conceives this "spherical concept" within a global network like this:

In the recent past it [the South] has been revived as a possible frame for representing the cultural context of not just regions that are geographically located in the South, but also those that share a common postcolonial heritage. [...] In geopolitical terms the South is not confined to the southern hemisphere as it captures elements that are located on both sides of the equatorial divide. The only constant for those who identify with the concept of the South is a dual awareness that the Euro-American hegemony in global affairs has concentrated power in the North, and that survival requires a coordinated transnational response.¹⁰³

Transferring decolonial practices into museum spaces comes with its own problematic frameworks in the "Global South" and the "Global North". The dominance of European epistemes and their logic of preservation in museum collections can be observed with the help of Khwezi Gule, former chief curator of the Soweto Museums. In the interview we conducted with him in Johannesburg in February 2016, Gule spoke about the European model of museums in South Africa:

Someone said, we have European universities in Africa. And I think to some extent I would say the same about many museums in Africa, because what we have is a certain kind of notion of what a museum is. But it just happens to be in this geographical location [Johannesburg, South Africa]. There are new museums that were built after 1994 [end of apartheid regime], but there are many others that were built before 1994. And there has got to be work done on those museums. How can they be transformed to speak a different language, to say, if they represented a particular ideology? [...] The term heritage is very problematic. You must ask the question of whose heritage are you talking about? And the follow up question is, what kind of heritage? Because certainly, if you're talking about a museum, part of its heritage is colonial violence. So, if you're saying that you want to preserve heritage, do you also want to preserve the violence? Heritage on its own for

¹⁰¹ Nikos Papastergiadis, "What is the South?," *South as a State of Mind*, accessed 28 May 2019, <https://southasastateofmind.com/south-remembers-south-nikos-papastergiadis>.

¹⁰² See my editorial in Richter, Kolb, Regli, eds., *OnCurating* 41, 4.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

me does not properly articulate the social and political imperatives of society. One can for purpose of simplicity refer to things as heritage, but one must see the wider social transformation that is taking place. So, yes, objects must be preserved, but you have to look at the social, historical context as well.¹⁰⁴



Fig. 8: Khwezi Gule at Soweto Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2016. Screenshot.

Not only do museums serve to build formations of national identities (and heritage in line with a national framework), but in the worst cases (colonial) violence is reiterated and reproduced by putting and keeping things on display. A closer look at colonial violence in epistemic formations within museums will be addressed in Chapter 3. I would like to briefly mention here the attempt to tackle these issues with transnationality: in *The Museum Is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums 1750-1940*, Andrea Meyer and Bénédicte Savoy bring the idea of transnational museums into the discourse by highlighting the inherent transnational aspects within the arts and science and arguing this from a historical point of view with the aim of re-narrating museum history within a trans-national framework.¹⁰⁵ This project would surely offer a perspective on decolonial practice for museums, but perhaps would not go far enough.

¹⁰⁴ Khwezi Gule, interview from February 2016, at Soweto Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, as part of “CURATING – explored with a camera”.

¹⁰⁵ Andrea Meyer and Bénédicte Savoy, *The Museum Is Open: Towards a Transnational History of Museums 1750-1940* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013).

Issues of Representation: Globalism and the Danger of a Continued Universalism and Postcolonial Theory and the Danger of Essentialism

After tracing the context of the exhibitionary complex, its contemporary discourse on art and curating, and framing global entanglements in postcolonial theory between modernity and coloniality, I want to focus on the question of representation in this context. The representational function of a museum within a national identity brings its problems, not to mention transnational, global or translocal formations with multiple cultural backgrounds. Besides the political meaning of representation in representative state structures, to “speak for” or “stand for” the constituents or the people, I suggest following Stuart Hall’s definition of *representation* as a constructivist practice in culture:

Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things.¹⁰⁶

This notion of representation is particularly relevant to cultural articulation, and no less so to exhibition making. The semiotic basis here originates from Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who proposed understanding language as a syntax of signs, symbols and their use or interpretation in a “language community”. The understanding of the production of signs and their interpretation is formed in a (kind of) communal act of agreement (or a convention) within a “language community”. Roland Barthes’ “second-order signification” or *connotation* in *Mythologies* is based on de Saussure’s concept of the sign, too. Barthes’ concept was already sketched by Dorothee Richter as an analytical framework for curating.¹⁰⁷ The second element of Hall’s understanding of the constructivist notion of representation draws on Michel Foucault’s concept of a *discursive formation*. A discursive formation describes a system of complex procedures that regulates and orders the many different utterances, written and spoken statements, and brings them into a semantic and signifying relationship within a particular body of knowledge (in disciplines such as ethnography, curatorial studies, etc.). It is the practice of knowledge production through argument by bringing in different statements, spoken words, interview material and own evaluations. Metaphorically speaking, one can be reminded of a digestion process or composting, where various elements come together and are transformed into something new with an altered significance through a long, complex process in a more-than-human environment. With Hall’s understanding of *representation*, it is clear that a *reading* of signs and codes is necessary. In the communication of a *sender* and a *receiver*, an ongoing encoding and decoding

¹⁰⁶ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1997), 15.

¹⁰⁷ “Curating produces meaning in the manner analysed in Roland Barthes’s *Mythologies* (1957) for complex sign systems.” See Dorothee Richter, “Propositions on Curating,” in *Defragmentation: Curating Contemporary Music (Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik)*, eds. Sylvia Freycank, Michael Rebhahn (SCHOTT MUSIC GmbH & Co KG, Mainz, 2019), 11.

process is required, depending on the different contexts.¹⁰⁸ This reading is very much linked to cultural backgrounds and cultural identities.

Christina Li, then curator at Spring Workshop in Hong Kong, talked about the generalising comparisons in the art field with its dominance in “Western” art history in the interview we conducted with her in Hong Kong in March 2015:

I've worked with the wonderful, dedicated curator Kathrin Rhomberg, who has spent 10 years in Eastern Europe, and I was working with her in the Former West Project. And we were having discussions about China, about Asia. And she's like: “You know what? It took me 10 years to understand artists from Eastern Europe”. So I think I'm not confident to just work with people without understanding context and I think that is a perfect counterpoint to other working methods... I'm of course very mindful of all these postcolonial issues, to point out discursive holes that fellow curators may miss because they all do come from a Eurocentric point of view. And I feel like it's somehow a responsibility for me. I feel the need to also educate people about these things [chuckles]. You know, you can't just appropriate things just like that. There's a larger chain of things that come with it. I would not say I curate these issues directly. But I would like to always present them somehow. It's complicated. Also the language in the art discourse is very “Western”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Stuart Hall also developed a communication model of cultural studies with “the encoding/decoding model of communication”.

Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse [originally 1973; republished 2007],” *Essential Essays, Volume 1* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ Christina Li, interview from March 2015, at Spring Workshop, Hong Kong, as part of “CURATING – explored with a camera”.



Fig. 9: Christina Li at Spring Workshop in Hong Kong, 2015. Screenshot.

A deeper understanding of the different contexts (not only of the art historical references, but also the *reading* of the representational system of signs and codes and its significations in local cultures) may lead, on the one hand, to a vast field of misunderstandings, failed understandings and miscommunication. On the other hand, naïve comparisons in the form of *Whataboutisms* are ripe for establishing new stereotypes – or repeating old ones – in hegemonic strategies. The crucial question in representation of “Who speaks for whom?” – hence, the question of who is able to speak and who can be heard and is therefore able to influence the representational space, produce meaning and propose new readings – is the main concern of subaltern studies and of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” from 1988.¹¹⁰ Spivak starts out interrogating the speech acts by French intellectuals Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze who speak about subjugated classes and opt for workers to speak for themselves.¹¹¹ Spivak’s argument is that both blur the distinction between a *representation* (in German, *Vertreten*) of a group or a class – representatives in political contexts – and the *re-presentation* (in German, *Darstellen*) of an identity or an object or a matter. One must distinguish

¹¹⁰ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 66–111. The text was originally published in 1988 in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson/Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

¹¹¹ Spivak takes her trajectory from a discussion between Deleuze and Foucault, who discuss the role of intellectuals in society. Spivak summarises: “[...] intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society’s Other. Yet the two systematically ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history.” Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 66.

between *Vertretung* as representation, as in a case of *proxy*, and *Darstellen* as re-presentation, as in case of a *portrait*. This mix-up may lead to essentialist politics. Spivak writes:

In the guise of a post-Marxist description of the scene of power, we thus encounter a much older debate: between representation or rhetoric as tropology and as persuasion. *Darstellen* belongs to the first constellation, *vertreten* – with stronger suggestions of substitution – to the second. Again, they are related, but running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act and know for themselves, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics.¹¹²

Problems of Representation in the Exhibitionary Complex

In the exhibitionary complex, too, both forms of representation meet and are constantly blurred. I would even argue that in the logic of the production of national identities, the exhibition space in canonical museums uses this double bind of *Vertreten–Darstellen* to produce significations and universalise specific knowledge (“second-order significations” as in myth-building à la Barthes). Museums are very good in this respect, fixing a particular reading of an object of interest within a preferred narrative. The power of being able to re-present and stage (to select what is shown to the public) is in itself powerful political representation. What is on display clearly sets up a political directive. Historically, public museums came into being to break with representational spaces of the monastery or royalty. These new spaces of representation were meant to educate the public in the episteme of the newly founded disciplines of the natural sciences, rationality and democratic thought. Tony Bennett writes on this topic:

In the course of the nineteenth century, the museum’s space of representation comes to be reorganized through the use of historicized principles of display which, in the figure of ‘man’ which they fashioned, yielded a democratic form of public representativeness, albeit one which organized its own hierarchies and exclusions.¹¹³

In this sense, the two modes of representation – again, in Spivak’s words, “representation as *Vertretung* (in the constellation of rhetoric-as-persuasion) behaves like a *Darstellung* (or rhetoric-as-trope)”¹¹⁴ – conflates within each other in the public museum. An exhibition space beyond representation is not possible in this logic. The procedures of *staging* or *displaying* an object of interest that is open for public debate, in the line of “speaking about” – an expository practice –, is at the very core of the public exhibition space. The question of representation as “speaking for”

¹¹² Ibid., 71.

¹¹³ Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 33.

¹¹⁴ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 72.

promotes a rather sticky message. In addition to museums as image producers of national identities in a political representational logic, the propagandistic political representation of “identities” in current forms of “identity politics”, which weaponises and essentialises every act of representation (as in “speaking about”) as a political representational act of fixed identities (as in “speaking for”), can also find its way into the museum. It is much more difficult to control the political form of representation because speech acts and other cultural articulations can easily be subsumed and “translated” according to different ideological frames. The “exploitative quality” of cultural signs for political projects is endless, and “chains of equivalence” can be made from the “left” and the “right”. The “alt-right” specifically has recently discovered this approach for itself. This dilemma is further problematised and analysed in Chapter 3.2 with Donna Haraway’s approach.

The strength of an exhibition space as a contact zone could be to reinforce the dialogical function within a clearly delimited space (not the World Wide Web), where relationships in a direct encounter make it more challenging to take over and exploit representational power. This would bring the act of (mutual) teaching into the exhibitionary complex, as the inclusivity by representational acts is constitutive for the public museum, according to Bennett:

When contrasted with earlier absolutist or theocratic spaces of representation – spaces constructed in relation to a singular controlling point of reference, human or divine, which does not claim a representative generality – the space of representation associated with the museum rests on a principle of general human universality which renders it inherently volatile, opening it up to a constant discourse of reform as hitherto excluded constituencies seek inclusion – and inclusion on equal terms – within that space.¹¹⁵

Indeed, the museum as a space of representation on a principle of general human universality must be dismantled, and already has been questioned for some time, but the function of this space for a “constant discourse of reform” is worth keeping. As mentioned, a close look into knowledge formations beyond universalism and relativism will be dealt with in Chapter 3 with Haraway, with her concept on “situated knowledges”.

2.4 Conclusion: Post-Exhibitionary Practices: Translocal Projects in Light of Governmentality

The rationality of representation is crucial for the exhibitionary complex. Representation holds enormous power to amplify meanings and knowledges, and exhibitionary practices rely on this function to this day. From a philosophical reading, the “standing for” of representation, as in being seen by others in a certain way, may be beyond one’s own control, this is inherent to violent stereotypical thinking. But

¹¹⁵ Bennett, *Birth of the Museum*, 97.

there is no way out of the other notions of representation in the exhibitionary complex. There are strategies to redress the exclusions of subjugated knowledges and marginalised histories, but it cannot leave out re-presentation as a meaning-producing formation of signification. The inclusion of “other” voices in the museum setting can be a practice of supplementation that does not disturb the ideological function of museums other than the expansion of voices. Similarly, the proposition for a transnational museum would still have to cope with a (hidden) ideology, albeit not according to a national logic, but in line with other universalist ideas of capital and of art history, preservation and heritage in collections.

Nora Sternfeld, together with Luisa Ziaja, propose a new mode of curating called post-representational curating¹¹⁶ that could address some aspects of the dilemma. They define post-representational curating in three aspects: *curating the archive* as “curating as actualizing”; *curating as organising* as “curating entails agency, unexpected encounters, and discursive examinations [...] openly addressing contradictions within seemingly symmetrical relations” and *turning to the educational* by “exploring possibilities of an alternative and emancipatory production of knowledge that resists, supplements, thwarts, undercuts, or challenges powerful canons.”¹¹⁷ All these aspects make a strong case for a renewed and activating curatorial practice within the museum – a practice of “*taking place*’ rather than *‘being shown*’”.¹¹⁸ Yet, I fear that this will not escape the representational space of a public museum. I strongly agree with the impetus that art objects should not be centre stage in exhibitionary spaces and that it is instead about a production of knowledges organised in encounters in contact zones. Nonetheless, the question still remains of who can “speak for themselves” and “who can be heard”. The struggle to make oneself heard is still up in the air, as is further representation in the discourse and in mass media. This research will explore questions of representation and stay with the dilemma that representation can pose. I therefore choose to call curatorial and artistic practices of *contact zones* rather post-exhibitionary practices, as this tends to leave behind the rather strict specifications of the exhibitionary complex but cannot leave the representational space (even if it wanted to). The mere avoidance of representation means a withdrawal from influencing and changing society at large through the exhibitionary complex.

The forthcoming Chapter 4 will explore these tensions in order to develop a refined analytical toolkit and proposals for the implementation of new practices. Within this expanded field, curatorial practice is not only concerned with the caretaking of art and its spatial exhibition, but also (self-)critically works, researches and develops together with artistic practitioners and with and sometimes against institutions in the direction of a “making things public” from a situated point of view. I

¹¹⁶ Sternfeld and Ziaja, “What Comes After the Show?,” 21–24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 24.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

would like to emphatically add to this discourse the governmental aspects of exhibition making, emphasising the understanding of one's own embeddedness in society, its institutions and economy, and the embeddedness of art and artists in a learning environment. This will lead to situated and more responsible positions with regard to expressions in the exhibitionary complex and beyond and to expanding curating again to include a broader social responsibility towards the public and society, one that is aware of its own entanglements in a comprehensive governmental framework. The research will go on to address the question of how to develop an exhibitionary practice that displays art and art objects in exhibitions not only as a gesture (for critique) or as a proposal for alternative, counter-hegemonic formations. It must see curatorial and artistic practices as a broader cultural practice that aims at a process of application to society. In this respect, it must express sustainable, infrastructural and ultimately self-governmental capacities.

Governmentality in Demarcation to Autonomy

The double-sided critiques of representation as carried out in many iterations within the arts with, for example, the artistic practice of *Institutional Critique*, will not suffice. These critiques remain within the relationality of the institution as a monolithic and hegemonic machine of ideology, I would argue. Although *Institutional Critique* at times sharply exposes art's aesthetic claims to autonomy vis-à-vis its economic and material structures, making visible not only the institutional background and ideology but also the gendered labour and workers' rights that are anything but autonomous,¹¹⁹ they still rely on the institutional infrastructure of the art field. In the aesthetic tradition, the assertion of an autonomous art – as in the Greek *auto + nomos*, that is, an aesthetic practice that follows its own rules – was famously proclaimed by Immanuel Kant, published in 1790 in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Kant spoke of the “disinterested pleasure” of autonomous art, which is based on the claim (or perhaps rather the desire) of an art that can speak freely in the face of power. It wants to strengthen a detached thinking beyond religion or sovereignty and can therefore withstand external powers of representation. It can be argued that it wants to create, through the authorial practice of writing, publishing and disseminating, the intellectual author figure, independent and capable of critical judgement. I understand the Kantian insertion as a historical necessity for a major governmental change from governance by monarchies, the Church, and royalty to a citizen-based structure with a stronger influence on the logic of governance. This major shift was accompanied by a new formation of subject constitution, with the new instrument of “critique” as a model of an individual becoming a subject as an author in aesthetic judgement. This strong argument for an autonomous field must be seen

¹¹⁹ See, for example, early performative works by Andrea Fraser such as *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* from 1989. I would also consider Mierle Laderman Ukeles's “maintenance work as an example to speak of art's economic side, questioning autonomy. See, for example, *Maintenance Art Manifesto 1969! Proposal for an exhibition “CARE”*. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Manifesto for Maintenance Art,” Queens Museum, accessed 10 October 2023, <https://queensmuseum.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Ukeles-Manifesto-for-Maintenance-Art-1969.pdf>.

in its historical, geographical moment in time. To still invoke the romantic *l'art pour l'art* in our contemporary times might miss the point.

The demands for political autonomy, which in the last century up to the present day have sought to establish and maintain a politically autonomous zone, take many forms and tend to desire a clear-cut separate governing formation against a superordinate governing structure in nation-states. The Italian Communist-anarchist movement *autonomia operaia* from the early 1970s is worth mentioning here, as is Hakim Bey's idea of "Temporary Autonomous Zones", which aims for temporary interventions and abandons the idea of creating a quasi-sovereign territory within a sovereign state. I will not give examples from the right-wing spectrum here, but clearly the desire for a self-determined "free" zone can also develop dark sides. Most contemporary projects are to be found in area of digital technology, for example, the uncontrolled digital space called the dark web. The (false) promise of autonomy from the traditionally established market economy in joining the Bitcoin frenzy is another example.

Returning to art, post-Marxist theory would simply refer to the economic basis of art production and its material side, questioning a "pure" autonomy of art. Post-Marxists therefore speak of relative autonomy. Linguistically, the term is a contradiction in itself. Is there such a thing as *relative freedom*? But it describes very well the relationality of a demand, an attitude or even an entitlement of freedom within highly interdependent cultural practices that does not produce sustenance per se. In this logic, autonomous art was called *bourgeois autonomous art*. Calls for political art, or art as political propaganda, were made (Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin et al.), while others proposed seeing autonomy in art as a resistance against capitalism (Theodor W. Adorno et al.). A complexified conception of autonomy is found in Pierre Bourdieu, who places autonomy in a social-economic field and expands it from a post-Marxist reading. Bourdieu's field theory describes autonomy as relative, i.e., in relation to the social conditions of production, distribution and use and their representation.¹²⁰ What can be achieved is the relative autonomy of a field that is not purely dependent on one factor and gains a relative freedom. Bourdieu analysed this for the scientific academic apparatus, which achieved greater relative autonomy than others, according to him. The art field has a similar privilege of autonomy, although he thoroughly criticises Kant's principle of aesthetic judgment as subjective.¹²¹

Governmentality, as distinct from autonomy, is only conceivable in interdependent relations. The desire for freedom and self-determination (in individual subject constitutions and communally) is also expressed with the concept of governmentality, yet it is already formulated in relations of dependencies towards hegemonic power and sovereign and other superordinate structures. Furthermore, interdependent

¹²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1979).

¹²¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

formations in both social and economic fields are conceived. In governmental artistic practice it is about the degree of autonomy, and rather what can be realised. In this sense, autonomy is a nice claim if economic pressure can be kept to a minimum. In an exaggerated metaphor, the entitlement to autonomy feels great as long as there is champagne to pour. However, when the financial abundance runs out, autonomy becomes a pitfall. Taking a cue from the champagne, governmental (post-)exhibitionary practices would rather start producing their own champagne.

Governmentality as a Theme for Exhibitions

Exhibition formats are embedded in governmental thinking in many ways, not only from a top-down approach of deploying ideology, but also from bottom-up initiatives, as the positioned self-expression of individuals and groups. Although many of Foucault's concepts have been transported into the exhibitionary complex (discursive formation, disciplinary power, biopolitics), governmentality is not yet fully applied to it, especially not in terms of a profoundly different idea of artistic practice beyond gesture, critique and representation. Tony Bennett speaks of "governmental assemblages" (which I will look into in Chapter 3). From a more postmodern artistic-curatorial approach, Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, the artistic directors of *documenta 12*, have used *governmentality* in their earlier exhibition projects¹²²: the exhibition *Gouvernementalität. Kunst in Auseinandersetzung mit der internationalen Hyperbourgeoisie und dem nationalen Kleinbürgertum* (Governmentality: Art in Debate with the International Hyper-Bourgeoisie and the National Petty Bourgeoisie) at Alte Kestner Gesellschaft Hannover in 2000 and a series of exhibitions entitled *Die Regierung* (The Government) between 2003 and 2005.¹²³ Both exhibition projects concretely addressed governing structures as a theme for the selection of artworks occupied with said topic. Historically contextualised, there was a moment after 2000 in the general academic discourse and specifically in the German-speaking world when *governmentality* was heavily discussed. Although Buergel and Noack used "the topic of governmentality, a term used by the late philosopher Michel Foucault to describe the tricky-sometimes beneficial, sometimes destructive-relations between individuality and contemporary power",¹²⁴ their actual exhibitions or *documenta 12* did not go profoundly beyond the infrastructural framework of the exhibitionary complex to tackle governmental conditions of the daily life. On the discursive level, Buergel criticised modernity and its *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated bourgeois/middle

¹²² "Ursula Maria Probst im Gespräch mit Roger M. Buergel, dem Künstlerischen Leiter der Documenta 12," in *Kunstforum International*, vol. 170, 374-376.

¹²³ The exhibition series "Die Regierung," curated by Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack travelled to Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg; MACBA-Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Miami Art Central; Secession, Vienna; Witte de With, Rotterdam, from 2003 to 2005.

See: "Die Regierung," Kulturstiftung des Bundes, accessed 18 July 2023, https://www.kulturstiftung-des-bundes.de/de/projekte/bild_und_raum/detail/die_regierung.html.

¹²⁴ Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, "How Do We Want to Be Governed? (Figure and Ground)," *e-flux* announcement, accessed 18 July 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/42396/how-do-we-want-to-be-governed-figure-and-ground/>.

class), but the theoretical focus was not on global or postcolonial issues (perhaps *documenta11* led by Okwui Enwezor, had already occupied this field too much...). The postulated themes of “Modernity?, Life! and Education”¹²⁵ were given three questions: “Is modernity our antiquity?”: this was prominently developed in the exhibition as a form of aesthetic retrospection of the beginnings of *documenta* (referencing *documenta 1* from 1955 with display elements) and more broadly by following the curatorial method of “migration of form”.¹²⁶ This can be described as an aesthetic practice that reveals the movements or migrations of visual motifs in a transcultural way.¹²⁷ I will problematise this approach, which I see in line with an aestheticised relativisation in postmodern thought, in Chapter 3.2. The second question, “What is bare life?”, referred to the biopolitical terminology of Giorgio Agamben and dealt with rather extreme conditions of governmental control over life and death. *Governmentality* would address the conditions in the exhibitionary complex more comprehensively. A distinction between *biopolitics* and *governmentality* in Michel Foucault’s study and a critique of Agamben’s notion of “bare life” will be made in Chapter 3 in the discussion on Michel Foucault. The third questions, “What is to be done?”, referred to “aesthetic education as a possible

¹²⁵ “Modernity? Live! And Education” was the title of the magazine project that started two years before the opening of *documenta 12*. See: documenta and Museum Fridericianum Veranstaltungs-GmbH, “Documenta 12: Magazines,” *documenta 12: Rückblick 100 Tage*, accessed 18 July 2023, <https://www.documenta12.de/en/magazine.html>.

¹²⁶ The “migration of form” still seems to be Buerger’s preferred curatorial methodology, see Roger M. Buerger and Sophia Prinz, *Migration of Form: A Museum and Its Method* (Zurich: Scheidegger and Spiess, 2023).

¹²⁷ “Together, they developed a clearly defined programmatic concept under the banner of ‘The Migration of Forms.’ What that meant was that, over the course of human history, visual culture has had only a limited number of basic forms with which to work—forms that have been used in different contexts and with different conceptual focuses throughout the history of art. [...] In order to bring these “unexpected concurrences” to light, relationships were established between works of art from different decades and cultures in which similar formal patterns have emerged—a process that has led to a “migration” of aesthetic forms across temporal and cultural boundaries culminating in the art of our postmodern world.”

“documenta 12 – Retrospective,” *documenta*, accessed 18 July 2023, https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_12#.

In a more elaborate form:

“To study the mobility of forms and to understand the historical circumstances that made them travel is without doubt a highly rewarding exercise. However, it is one among many facets of the migration of form - one of the most literal, to be sure, but there is a case to be made for speculation as well. By offering unexpected constellations, an exhibition can free the work of art from the restrictions put upon it by conventionalised meaning production or relational regimes based on ‘knowledge’. Aspects of the work that might not have been noticeable within the prevailing framework of interpretation are allowed to surface. Again, an attempt to take risks in order to realise the anti-rational streak in aesthetic experience must necessarily implicate the viewer - he or she must have reason to think ‘beyond the frame’ - must be, so to say, a willing victim of the curatorial folly.”

Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buerger, “Some Afterthoughts on the Migration of Form,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 18 (Summer 2008): 5-15, accessed 18 July 2023, <https://www.afterall.org/article/some.afterthoughts.migration.form>.

alternative to both commodity fetishism and the complacency of critical studies”.¹²⁸ How this would have come to be realised is beyond my grasp. There was clearly a critical and political background, but it did not surface in the exhibition itself – despite many strong works from different contexts.¹²⁹ With the impetus toward aesthetics and the “migration of form”, a critical, postcolonial and material discourse was not incorporated into the exhibition, let alone an infrastructural thought of expanding the exhibitionary format itself. Ultimately, the outcome was a rather traditional exhibition that selected artists and artworks that might have reflected on subjectivity and power, but they were still embedded in a renewal of the art system and worked through a bourgeois concept of art as an autonomous criticality. It did not produce a form of governmentality with ripple effects outside the exhibition space. My argument in this research aims to go well beyond artworks that are influenced by and represent or question governing power.

Furthermore, the concept of governmentality can be used as a tool set for analysing relations between citizens and communities and their government, and beyond that, transnational relations in a global context. In this respect, our contemporary global world constellation needs to be addressed. The relationship of individuals to the world has shifted from a local context to a context of nation-states, to a supranational and, finally, global relationship – not only are work and labour, goods and money globally connected, but the understanding of the world has also changed. The situation of each individual is clearly not the same in this vast network. We must remember that global connections at the individual, local and national levels can have drastically different outcomes, depending on class, gender, ethnicity and the governmental structure in these different contexts. Our global techniques of governance and technologies have for some time entered a digital age that sets up new modes of conduct. Today, digital technologies reformulate a new relationship of the techniques of governance and their apparatus. Digital technologies force us to critically consider governmentality on a global scale beyond the hard technologies of governance. A transition to our contemporary form of globalism with digital technologies and postcolonial and feminist thought will be necessary: a translocal governmental practice of art and curating in critical and embodied thinking.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ See the evaluation paper provided by Prof. Dr. Gerd-Michael Hellstern, University of Kassel, https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_12#.

3 Theoretical Methodology & Modes of Curating: Governmentality & Situated Knowledges in the (Post-)Exhibitionary Complex

Introduction

In this chapter, I develop my methodological tools by scrutinising Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality* and Donna Haraway's concept of *situated knowledges* with the aim of applying them to the exhibitionary complex, particularly biennials and other flexible exhibition projects that engage the public sphere (at least more intensively than permanent exhibition spaces such as museums). *Governmentality* helps us understand the techniques of subjectification present in traditional museum settings, but also points to potential self-giving rules at work in post-exhibitionary practices, and contemporary art history in general – since, in the end, art history is a form of making artifice. *Situated knowledges* helps us understand the positionality of knowledges (including that of Foucault's studies of a specific knowledge system genealogically embedded in "Western" societies). And, in this way, it challenges the universalising aspect of art exhibits and art history. It offers a much-needed correction towards a situated "discourse of truth" in feminist thought. While Foucault focuses more on individual practices of governance within the framework of governmentality, Haraway focuses on networked processes and already points to contemporary practices embedded in communal and relational knowledge networks. Nevertheless, in my reading, both concepts make clear the intersection between techniques of (self-)governance and knowledge production and their connection to the discourse of truth within an underlying educational complex: Foucault does this in reference to the "Western" modern state and its techniques of governance; Haraway in a proposal for a feminist objective and scientific way of thought. Furthermore, I want to apply these concepts to exhibition-making – in the broadest sense, as in making things public –, to specific traditional frameworks in art (historical) institutions, to participatory projects outside the museum space and to small-scale, artist-run projects. The exhibitionary complex can then be examined in terms of its governmental power – between a model of (neo)liberal cooperative production and a commons-based collective practice – that can create specific, highly situated, temporal, flexible, precarious, open and self-conscious rule-making formations/assemblages. In doing so, it highlights the entanglements of the exhibitionary complex that emanate from individuals, communities and the representative and political spheres.

For the implementation of aforementioned theories, I will review Tony Bennett's historical analysis of public museums from *The Birth of the Museum*¹³⁰ (1995) to his more recent reflections in *Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to*

¹³⁰ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).

*Governmental Assemblage*¹³¹ (2015). While the first study approached the historical origins of public museums through Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, the second study provides insights into Foucault's concept of governmentality in the context of extended contemporary exhibitionary practices, often in the form of agency and activism. I will apply the findings specifically to the contemporary exhibition formats of biennials and similar large-scale contemporary art events. Foucault's writings on governmentality as an early and historical analysis of neoliberal conditions are applied to this contemporary exhibitionary complex that often challenges the representational ties of museums to the state. The analysis shows liberal and neoliberal conditions are closely interwoven in these new forms of collective curating, too, which can be described as operations of collective knowledge production in different group settings.

The chapter concludes with a proposal for a new mode of the exhibitionary. The specific networked practices in contemporary art (governmental assemblages, collectives, community-based projects, commoning in artistic and curatorial thought, etc.) are embedded in complex economic, political and cultural contexts. These diverse practices are in tension with at least two prominent readings: on the one hand, these practices seem to be synchronised with the neoliberal conditions of a capitalist system, often triggered by state regulations in order to "repair" deficiencies, and prone to precarious, low-paid, fluid labour conditions and self-exploitation, and on the other hand, they are highly self-authored, self-organised and self-sustained forms of governmental assemblages with the will to fight for democratisation, social and economic justice, equality and equity, often using methods of critique and resistance.

My interest lies in these contemporary practices that dodge the representational aspects of the exhibitionary complex and aim to establish rather operational projects, that use the exhibition space as an active social space of negotiation – a contact zone. I like to claim this the post-exhibitionary complex.

3.1 Governmentality and Other Forms of Power (Michel Foucault)

In this chapter, I will primarily elaborate on the terminologies of Michel Foucault's concepts of power, governance and their relationship to knowledge embedded in the discourse of truth. For the most part, I will refrain from relating these complex thoughts to concrete projects of the exhibitionary complex in order not to interrupt the comprehensive theoretical formation. In the following subchapters, I will apply the theoretical thoughts to the exhibitionary complex.

Michel Foucault's life-long studies shed light on how modern states came into being.

¹³¹ Tony Bennett, "Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, eds. Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message (Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2015).

He looks at the techniques of governance and aims to illuminate their genealogy by searching for the changes in modes of governance throughout history – albeit largely in “Western” trajectories, with the horizon of Greek philosophy. His own thought processes and later changes of emphasis can be closely traced through the lectures he gave at the Collège de France from 1970 until his death in 1984.¹³² We can call these texts oral speeches by Michel Foucault. Some of the thoughts he expressed in the lectures were used for his publications; other ideas found no place in them or were dropped altogether.

Foucauldian scholars speak of Foucault’s journey of thought in three phases: archaeology – genealogy – governmentality/subjectification/ethics.¹³³ With his two publications, *The Order of Things* (*Les mots et les choses*, 1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (*L’archéologie du savoir*, 1969) – the archaeological phase –, Foucault developed his own methodological toolset, if one can call it methodological, since it’s not in the strictest scientific sense a closed and systemically disciplinary methodology, resembling more the bricolage-like approach of cultural studies, a discipline that was established a few years later in the humanities. *The Order of Things* is occupied with characterising epistemes of its historical period, how the production of knowledge is formed respectively in each period in discursive formations, how the discourse of truth determines what is acceptable and accepted in a society, and how ultimately the dominant episteme shapes the respective way of thinking in each period of time. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he sets this out more methodologically, explaining the relations between “systems of thought” (epistemes) and the discursive formations of knowledge and how they operate subjects specifically. It is – one could say – Foucault’s version of Louis Althusser’s concept of *interpellation* minus the Marxist substructure.¹³⁴

The genealogical phase (*Discipline and Punish*, 1975; *The Will to Knowledge*, 1976) focused on juridical conceptions of power, sovereign power and the emerging of disciplinary power. These forms of governing were exclusively thought of as techniques and mechanisms of control of *bodies*, stemming from a rather rigid idea of the relationship between the state, or a former sovereign, and individuals and their bodies.

¹³² In the meantime, all these lectures have been published posthumously, based on the audio recordings of Michel Senellart, who edited them in French.

¹³³ See Thomas Lemke, “Gouvernementalität,” Thomas Lemke – Theorie & Werkzeugkiste, accessed 4 July 2023, https://www.thomaslemkeweb.de/publikationen/Gouvernementalit%E4t%20_Kleiner-Sammelband_.pdf.

¹³⁴ Michel Foucault studied with Louis Althusser. Althusser’s concept of interpellation aims to show how individuals are made (interpellated as) subjects through constant embeddedness in the ideological formation of state apparatuses. Foucault – as he did often – tried to understand subjectification not only through Marxist theory, but also choosing a more general historical materialist approach.

Only in the third phase – which stayed mostly fragmentary due to his early death by AIDS – did Foucault analyse the relationship between individuals and state structures in a complex way in their processes of subjectification and in terms of freedom and agency – I will call this phase *governmentality* – although the idea of governance in biopolitical terms, which again relies on a rather binary power constellation between bodies and the sovereign, was also developed in this phase. Governmentality in particular describes then these complex relational and manifold forms of governing, and self-governing, and of subjugating oneself to certain rules, or resisting them (“counter-conduct”) within the whole apparatus of power through which modern societies developed over time. His study aimed to understand the complex idea of modern states and their transversal power dynamics, where governmental institutions are not impenetrable and fixed entities for eternity but are formed by various social power relations between institutional power and governmental techniques of the social. In this scenario, the subject gains agency, and this thoroughly expands the understanding of individual bodies’ determination in disciplinary formations beyond a sole dominant logic (sovereign, bourgeois, capital, church, etc.). It is safe to say that Foucault investigated histories of governmental frameworks nearly exclusively from the position from and within “Western” modern democratic states, with his oldest points of reference coming from Greek philosophy. Especially in the last period of Foucault’s life, he wanted to move away from a mere critique of technologies of power as repressive and instead aim at the self-empowering effects that governing techniques could hold. His context here speaks of subjects in a more or less democratic state structure and might work for similar governing structures with interrelating formations. In this regard, his concept of “pastoral power” provides deep insights into the modern “Western” state since he draws a picture of Western subjects and their technologies of care and self-care from the Christian governmental formation depicted in the relationship of the shepherd and his flock.¹³⁵

Despite its clear basis in “Western” thought, Foucault’s thinking is an enormously influential and profoundly helpful entry into the critical thinking of one’s own situatedness in a governmental framework – whether it is in a modern society, a village community, a family structure or in globalised spheres. Based on Foucault’s *oeuvre* and thought, not only were governmental studies established in Germany, the UK and the US, but many postcolonial thinkers like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Achille Mbembe, and others and feminist thinkers like Donna Haraway were also influenced by his ideas and critiqued and expanded them.

¹³⁵ See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*, ed. M. Senellart, trans. G. Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2007), 123 ff.

Newer entries in the scientific discourse, e.g., those produced by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,¹³⁶ Achille Mbembe, Roberto Esposito,¹³⁷ Paul Preciado¹³⁸ and Bernard Stiegler,¹³⁹ concentrate on a disciplinary connoted biopolitical terminology of Foucault, and with that on the population and the government of life in general – as a species. These statements are more occupied with the bodies of the population (as a whole) – as developed in the concept “disciplinary power” –, and not so much with subjects in relations and with agency within their given governmental settings – as sketched in the concept of governmentality.

Achille Mbembe, for example, worked out the concept of *necropolitics*, leaning on Foucault’s notion of biopolitics and fusing it with Giorgio Agamben’s *bare life* to understand the biopolitical dimensions of governing mechanisms in systems, where modern forms of repressive power – state violence and domination – prevail. *Necropolitics* is then “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die”.¹⁴⁰ This is not the moment to go into this concept in depth, but I would like to agree with the criticism of Giorgio Agamben’s *bare life* – which is based on Foucault’s biopolitical thoughts – by Thomas Lemke, who writes:

“My main thesis is that while Foucault’s analysis and critique of the biopolitical project stresses the link between forms of subjectivation and political technologies, this important dimension is completely lacking in Agamben’s work. To put it shortly, Agamben subscribes to exactly the juridico-discursive concept of power that Foucault has shown to be insufficient for the analysis of modern biopolitics.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri contributed to an interesting bridging of biopower and commons. I would argue they attributed the positive effects of biopower as politics for sustaining and bettering life (in Foucault’s thought) to an expanded idea of commons, where not only natural resources, but also language, social practices, relationality and communication is part of them, reformulating these aspects as productions of common values, with the aim to make it detachable from capitalist production.

See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), VIII.

¹³⁷ See Roberto Esposito, *Bíos: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

¹³⁸ See Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2013).

¹³⁹ Bernard Stiegler looks at media as a new and dangerous governmental technique that strips away the ability to form a responsible position as a subject.

See Bernard Stiegler and Susanne Baghestani, *Von der Biopolitik zur Psychomacht: Logik der Sorge I.2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009).

¹⁴⁰ See Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” in *Biopolitics: A Reader*, eds. Timothy C. Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 161 ff.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Lemke, “A Zone of Indistinction – A Critique of Giorgio Agamben’s Concept of Biopolitics,” Thomas Lemke – Theorie & Werkzeugkiste, accessed 3 July 2023, <https://www.thomaslemkeweb.de/engl.%20texte/A%20Zone3.pdf>.

While contemporary power constellations of governance in modern states surely vary, it would be still lacking – even for the most repressive state apparatus one can imagine – to only think of governance as a combination of repressive and disciplinary power and its control over bodies and population. This deficiency continues in Mbembe's concept of *necropolitics*, I would argue. Bernard Stiegler focuses on the psychological forms of control through digitisation in mass media and contemporary digital technologies; he speaks in notions of *pharmacology* and *psychopower*, while Preciado investigates the pharmaceutical dimensions of biopolitics from an auto-theoretical point of view. Esposito highlights immunisation effects in biopolitical formations (2004), in a tension field between his main terminologies *communitas* and *immunitas* and, in so doing, expands Foucault's thought on biopolitics into the realm of a communal relation and a molecular level of bodies.

These writings, informed by the terminology of biopolitics, tend, in my opinion, to re-create a split between an imagined passivised population and a sovereign-like state, and thus often imagine a view from the position of a sovereign, whereas the concept of governmentality, in my understanding, allows us to observe situated positionings in a complex governmental system and therefore demonstrates that this system can be influenced and changed structurally and infrastructurally – beyond a mere exploitative merit-based advancement within this system.

Already in 1991, Donna Haraway herself thought about the immune system in terms of Foucault's biopolitical thinking, yet with governmental effects:

My thesis is that the immune system is an elaborate icon for principal systems of symbolic and material "difference" in late capitalism. Pre-eminently a twentieth-century object, the immune system is a map drawn to guide recognition and **misrecognition of self and other** in the dialectics of western biopolitics. That is, the immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may **count as self and other** in the crucial realm of the normal and the pathological.¹⁴²

Explanatory Note: Why I Use Governmentality

Nonetheless, the many forms of power in Foucault's studies also inspired scholars of cultural studies, and especially of museum studies. We will consecutively investigate Tony Bennett's influential thinking and his own journey from *The Birth of the Museum*, seen mostly through Foucault's disciplinary power, to his later writings where ideas of governmentality – hence, societal technologies of governing the self and others – are emphasised in his concept of the exhibitionary complex. In a

¹⁴² Donna Haraway, "The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, ed. Donna J. Haraway (London: Routledge, 1991), 204.

historical scope, and for a long time in a capital-bourgeois world view, museums and exhibitionary spaces were established as places of subjectification – where the individual observer was placed in front of an aesthetic experience, aka the artwork, and became embedded in an ideological framework or a *discursive formation*. Governmentality – differentiated from disciplinary power and biopower – is specifically helpful to understand current dynamics of self-organised and self-authorised projects in arts and cultures, more so than understanding exhibitions only under disciplinary power and under a universalising framework, which – in the end – falls short of accounting for other techniques of governance in the setting of contemporary art. That is why I do not consider the concept of biopower a good fit to analyse these specific artistic and curatorial practices affecting the public sphere in the exhibitionary complex – hence with educational means – since biopower rather speaks of mechanisms of governance related to the population as a species, rather than of individuals, their subjectivation processes and their potential influences.¹⁴³

This is the major difference of these mechanisms of (self-)control of the population: governmentality describes (self-)governmental practices of subjects or groups addressing the public and society at large (within a discursive formation) – this is the population as public – versus biopower describing manifold formations of control of life and death (constitutional, juridical, sovereign powers) addressing the population as a species in general. Here, I want to use the distinction made by Bennett, who refers to Foucault's lectures "Security, Population, Territory" at the Collège de France in 1977-1978¹⁴⁴:

[...] governmental practices which work through campaigns that address the population as subjects and those which relate to population as an object that is ignorant of how it is affected by such practices. He [Foucault] elaborates this distinction in a couple of related lectures where he translates it into a distinction between the population as species and the population as public.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ "What is the difference between these two mechanisms? In the case of the public, practices of government relate to the population via educative programs and campaigns which seek to influence conduct by acting on their beliefs, opinions, fears, prejudices, and customary ways of doing things. In the case of biopower, where population is related to as species, it is the milieu that constitutes the point to which power is applied and the mechanism through which it operates where milieu is defined as 'a set of natural givens – rivers, marshes, hills – and a set of artificial givens – an agglomeration of individuals, of houses, etcetera [...] [producing] a set of overall effects bearing on all who live in it' (Foucault 2007, 21). Both mechanisms relate to populations as subjects of wants and needs, but only governance via the public relates to population as subjects whose opinions, views, convictions, and so on constitute the mechanisms through which they are to be governed."

See Bennett, "Thinking (with) Museums," 16.

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 75.

¹⁴⁵ Bennett, "Thinking (with) Museums," 16.

Drawing from Foucault's thoughts on governmentality, we can envision horizons of self-determined constellations of living and working, thinking of governmental techniques themselves in relation to the privilege of freedom – to “choose” your own rules – and of creative techniques. Along this line of thought, one can in general see contemporary art history as a making of, where artists (and their benefactors and beneficiaries) in artistic-curatorial formations have been creating their own governing principles for a while now. Exhibition history is full of examples of these interventions that propose another worldview, where artist groups have set up their own exhibitions, establishing their own idea of an artistic movement, often in conjunction with a specific worldview: the Surrealists' *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, in Paris in 1938 can be seen as a proposal of new ideas of rationality in relation to the unconscious. The *First International Dada Fair* in Berlin in 1920 is another example of how exhibiting can propose new ideas of societies beyond the art field and the desire to expand artistic material with mass media and other materials of daily life. *Les Peintres Futuristes Italiens* organised by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti is another example of how exhibitions driven by a group aim to influence society. Specifically in the Futurists' approach, a closer critical look would be needed since the whole movement was very reliant on Marinetti's wealth. The Futurists' governmental proposals in the exhibitionary complex also provide insights into the problematic aspects of self-governing approaches. Their fascistic ideology beyond the art field is a lesson to take into account for proposals of self-governmental practices.

Distinguishing Between Governmentality and Other Forms of Power

Taking a few steps back, Foucault examines government and the rationality of governing in a comprehensive way: government not only speaks of a modern state, administration and its techniques of control, it also stems from a historical, broader idea of *government*, as a form of governing of individuals' practices of (self-)control, guidance for a bigger family, children, households, religious guidance, etc. Foucault writes:

This word [government] must be allowed the very broad meaning it had in the sixteenth century. 'Government' did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed – the government of children, of souls, of communities, of the sick [...].

To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others.¹⁴⁶

In this sense, he wants us to picture government as conduct, and the practice of governmentality as “the conduct of conduct”. It brings together “governing the self” and “governing others”, sets up governmentality as an “art (not) to be governed” and strongly emphasised – ideally – individuals' self-determination by creating and

¹⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power” in *Michel Foucault, Power: Volume 3: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. J Faubion, trans. R Hurley (London: Penguin, 2002), 326, 341.

changing governing structures, and not only being aware of the ways of being governed. Foucault literally asks in one of his lectures at the Collège de France in 1978: “[H]ow to govern oneself, how to be governed, by whom should we accept to be governed, how to be the best possible governor?”¹⁴⁷

But, of course, this reciprocal “encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self”¹⁴⁸ might not always come in non-violent forms. Foucault therefore discusses dissident forms of resistance to power in the logic of “conduct” as “counter-conduct”. Transported into contemporary exhibitionary practices that negotiate within a rather contained space, I would like to read Group Material’s early exhibitions in the 1980s very much as a survey of conduct and counter-conduct, created by the artist group and the interested public and neighbourhood, who often provided material and feedback to the exhibition. These instances of “counter-conduct” are not solely triggered by struggles over subsistence, but rather are directed at being able to form one’s own living conditions – needless to say, these conditions come with economic and political aspects. Historically, Foucault refers to revolts against feudalism, and of liberation attempts and women’s rights, even in the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁹ In this field of research, but in critical opposition to Foucault, Silvia Federici looks specifically into witch hunts, which show that male and female populations were targeted differently throughout this specific history of pre-accumulative upheavals.¹⁵⁰

On a bigger scale, *government* understood according to Foucault is “the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument.”¹⁵¹ Oftentimes, Foucault

¹⁴⁷ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 88.

¹⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Essential Works of Foucault, Vol 1: Ethics*, (New York: The New Press, 1994), 225.

¹⁴⁹ See: “Throughout the Middle Ages resistances of conduct are linked to struggles between the bourgeoisie and feudalism, in the Flemish towns, for example, or in Lyon at the time of the Waldensians. They are also linked to the uncoupling of the urban and rural economies that is particularly noticeable from the twelfth century. There are the Hussites and Calixtines on the one hand, and the Taborites on the other. You also find revolts, or resistances of conduct linked to the completely different but crucial problem of the status of women. These revolts of conduct are often linked up with the problem of women and their status in society, in civil society or in religious society. You see these revolts of conduct flourish in convents, in the movement that is called Rhenish Nonnenmystik in the twelfth century. There are also all those groups formed around women prophets in the Middle Ages, like Jeanne Dabenton, Marguerite Porete, and so on.” Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 196.

¹⁵⁰ Silvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-hunting, and Women* (PM Press, 2018).

¹⁵¹ See: “By this word ‘governmentality’ I mean three things. First, by ‘governmentality’ I understand the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential

draws no clear distinction between governmentality and government in general (especially in his later thoughts, which only came in the form of the lectures given as speech). I will try to map out a constellation of the different forms of governmental powers that Foucault had in mind – perhaps not in the way he intended.

The most established power in Europe from the Middle Ages and earlier comes in the form of the sovereign. **Sovereign power** was not as total as one may think; it “only” had a drastic turnout. The sovereign did not control his or her subordinates comprehensively – he (since it was usually male) wasn’t able to. The sovereign’s major power came with the juridical decision over life and death.¹⁵² Only with an increase in the population in the 18th century did new techniques of control have to emerge: **disciplinary power**, a far more comprehensive apparatus of control that concentrates on disciplining the body in newly founded institutions (school, military, science, museums, etc.) with the focus of its subjectification.¹⁵³ Foucault’s term **pastoral power** follows the shifts of governance historically from the 8th century onwards showing that individuation practices of the modern state followed a Christian-religious pastorate model, at least for many territories in Europe. Processes of subjectification (in an etymological and literal sense, subjugating comes from the Latin word *sub-iacere*) in the religious context, as a finding of “inner truth” – through practices of individualised confessions, techniques of discursivisation individually and in communal settings, etc. – transformed into a secularised version in societies of the modern state with its partly self-controlled and introspected mechanisms.¹⁵⁴ That being said, the caring dimensions of a pastor and his flock – pastorate translates etymologically to *economy of souls*¹⁵⁵ – was also transfigured into the care of life and health, and transformed in modern capitalist societies into medical knowledge and the caretaking function of states by sustaining and bettering individuals’ lives.¹⁵⁶

technical instrument. Second, by ‘governmentality’ I understand the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power—sovereignty, discipline, and so on—of the type of power that we can call ‘government’ and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (appareils) on the one hand, [and, on the other] to the development of a series of knowledges (savoirs). Finally, by ‘governmentality’ I think we should understand the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually “governmentalized.”

Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108.

¹⁵² Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trans. R. Hurley, (London: Penguin, 1998 (1976)), 136–138.

¹⁵³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

¹⁵⁴ Thomas Lemke, “A Zone of Indistinction” – A Critique of Giorgio Agamben’s Concept of Biopolitics,” Thomas Lemke – Theorie & Werkzeugkiste, accessed 3 February 2023, <https://www.thomaslemkeweb.de/engl.%20texte/A%20Zone3.pdf>.

¹⁵⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 192.

¹⁵⁶ See: “In its modern forms, the pastorate is deployed to a great extent through medical knowledge, institutions, and practices. We can say that medicine has been one of the great powers that have been heirs to the pastorate. And to that extent it too has given rise to a whole series of revolts of conduct,

In what way can exhibitionary practices also translate into a careful and caring constellation, not only for objects – in which most of the concern is placed in museums at least – but for its public needs to be seen.

Here, Foucault's reflections on pastoral power already touch on biopower. It is obvious that these different designs of power cannot be easily separated from each other since their interweaving of historical processes and cultural techniques is never clearly delineated. A certain vagueness also follows the terminology of biopower and consecutively biopolitics. Oftentimes, biopower is understood as the comprehensive framework of governmental powers, but scholars will find also passages from Foucault distinguishing biopower from sovereign power and especially from disciplinary power, whereas sovereignty means that "[f]or a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death".¹⁵⁷ In addition, the concept of disciplinary power sees only the repressive side of control over the population,¹⁵⁸ while biopower was drafted as "a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations."¹⁵⁹ Yet, at the same time, Foucault makes the distinction between species and population in relation to biopower and emphasises the control of biological processes in governance:

[Biopower] focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*.¹⁶⁰

It is not my task to create a comprehensive theory system out of these thoughts – indeed, the charm of Foucault's ideas might lie in the vagueness and open-endedness. However, in my reading, I will position biopower as a set of procedures and mechanisms that are occupied with biological matters on the level of human and non-human species, and biopolitics as the political project of the governing technique of an entire population. In this sense, I feel that biopower is not what best fits my research into the exhibitionary complex – with its individual subjectification

what we could call a strong medical dissent, from the end of the eighteenth century and still today, which extends [from] the refusal of certain medications and certain preventive measures like vaccination, to the refusal of a certain type of medical rationality: the attempt to constitute sorts of medical heresies around practices of medication using electricity, magnetism, herbs, and traditional medicine; [the] refusal of medicine tout court [...]"

Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 199.

¹⁵⁷ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 135.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 82.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 137.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 139 (italics in original).

procedures and in communal settings –, whereas governmentality focusses on the relation of the individuum and its superordinate governing framework, a relationality that may or may not be chosen freely – as an “art (not) to be governed like that”.

Governmentality and the Exhibitionary Complex

Going forward from here, I will concentrate foremost on the concept of *governmentality*. I aim to expand *governmentality* to the contemporary exhibitionary complex – derived from Foucault – as a practice (and not only as a theoretical critique) and as a way of thinking – a rationality – in a globalised, postcolonial, feminist episteme. Governmentality will help in the analysis of public museums – not only under disciplinary power – with other techniques of governance in the setting of contemporary art. It will offer insights into the exhibitionary complexes’ reversed ideological function – not as in representational logic “from the top” – but as individuals’ and groups’ agency to make things public by exhibiting – and in doing so, influencing the public domain and its discourses. Governmentality as “the art (not) to be governed like that” speaks to the inherent artistic-curatorial formations, that in parts can create and establish new forms of governance and proposals of other living conditions and runs on the privilege of freedom and autonomy (with all its problems).

In this respect, Foucault's concept of governmentality can only be taken up as a historical entry point into the discussion about (self-)governing structures within the exhibitionary complex. His thinking is very much embedded in “Western” trajectories and did not dare to investigate global entanglements¹⁶¹; it also is very focussed on the individual subjectification and the institution that aims to control the population. The creation of specific subjects and their control was mirrored in museum spaces as a place of “pure” subjectification: the individual observer, contemplating as a singular individuum in front of an artefact or work of art and only entering into contact with other visitors through aesthetic judgment – and not in a political formation – was for a long time embedded in an ideological framework of a capitalist-bourgeois worldview. What is missing in this scenario, at least from today’s perspective, are the transindividual and communal aspects of governmentality: communal moments, commons and its commoning formations.

Even in his research on pastoral power, despite mentioning its origins of horizontal governance by early religious communities without a pastoral role, Foucault concentrates rather on the function of the shepherd as the primary and only responsible caretaker of a (religious) community and its transformation in modern societies. For contemporary formations in the exhibitionary complex, pastoral power is indeed an interesting thought to seize upon, since the curator role for

¹⁶¹ In Foucault’s defence, the globalisation effects from the US neoliberalism of the Reagan/Thatcher Years from 1980s onwards, with all its problematic global formations, entered the discursive level too close to his death in 1984. Only after the end of the Cold War in 1989 could a global and postcolonial discourse be established beyond a binary world order, it seems.

contemporary art resembles the shepherd in the relational framework of the shepherd (as the curator) and his flock (as the artists and the public alike). An iconic example of the curator as shepherd with his flock is Harald Szeemann since he introduced himself as the figure of a curator as the sole caretaker of an exhibition.¹⁶² I would argue this is the concept of a “traditional” curator in 2023. In Dorothee Richter’s text “Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?” from 2013, an early discussion on the still persistent friction between artists and curators, Richter undertook, among other things, a pictorial analysis of Harald Szeemann’s famous image as the director of *documenta 5*, depicting a sitting Szeemann in the centre of a scene surrounded by artists and the public, concluding: “Seen thus, Harald Szeemann’s pose is a distinctive positioning, based on historical schemata, especially of the curator as a god/king/man among artists.”¹⁶³

A reading with pastoral power in mind, I would interpret this scenario as a showcase of a governing formation of the shepherd – with his superior (apotheosised) power – and the flock – the surrounding artists and informed public. His position does not strictly resemble one of a sovereign (a king); rather, he is a legitimised caretaker of the artist community, managing the conflicts in the group, representing to the public – and, for that, in a powerful position, yet not an absolute one. Today, the curator as caretaker is quite a common understanding and reproduces – if we are inclined to use Foucault’s thoughts as a scheme – relations of pastoral power as an institutionalisation of a priest’s (curator’s) sacramental power.¹⁶⁴ However, the question remains: What forms of relations are at play in these power formations? Promises of self-governmental strategies would need to examine constellations of pastoral power in more horizontal formations before the implementation of *clergy* and *laity*,¹⁶⁵ and with it a professional division and a hierarchisation of (divine) knowledge. It would require a reformulation of pastoral power in terms of an actualised theory of the commons and its power structures oriented towards horizontality, and a bridging

¹⁶² Beatrice von Bismarck gave this then-new definition of a curator by showcasing Harald Szeemann’s role as the main author responsible for the selection and arrangement of art in the exhibition spaces, see Beatrice von Bismarck, “Curating,” in *Dumont’s Begriffslexikon zur zeitgenössischen Kunst*, ed. Hubertus Butin (DuMont Verlag, Cologne, 2002), 56–59.

¹⁶³ Dorothee Richter, “Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?,” *OnCurating 19: On Artistic and Curatorial Authorship*, ed. Michael Birchall (June 2013): 45–47.

¹⁶⁴ See: “A further fact that we should recall in this institutionalization of the pastorate is the definition of a theory and practice of the priest’s sacramental power. Here again, like the appearance of the dimorphism between clergy and laity, this is a relatively late phenomenon; the presbyteros, or bishop or pastor of the first Christian communities did not have sacramental power. He receives the power to implement the sacraments, that is to say, have direct effectiveness in the salvation of the sheep through his action, his words, in the wake of a whole series of developments. These are the major purely religious transformations of the pastorate.”

Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 203.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

of the concept of pastoral power with the discourse of the commons as a complex multitude of governmental assemblages.

(Neo)liberal Governmentality

As noted earlier, Foucault's studies on practices of governance stood in many respects under the history of individualisation established in a "Western" episteme with its emphasis on subjectification, hence, "how the modern sovereign state and the modern autonomous individual co-determine each other's emergence."¹⁶⁶ This makes sense in liberal and neoliberal societies of which Foucault was a part. In my view, the neoliberal logic of individuation has fallen apart in the last two decades and with it the hyper-individualisation procedures. A sign of this change comes in the many contemporary collaborative projects in the exhibitionary complex, especially at *documenta fifteen*, which foremostly assembled communal art projects. Foucault's early study on the political shift from liberalism to neoliberalism is a very helpful thought on how the modern state set up and controlled the exhibitionary complex in different forms: in museums as a representational and educational apparatus for the dominant ideology (in the logic of a national identity), in more flexible large-scale exhibitions, like biennials as rather uncontrolled, and more speculative vehicles of critique in an economic logic.¹⁶⁷

For the following argument, it is necessary to contextualise Foucault's research into governmentality in a neoliberal formation and its surrounding terminology (freedom, creativity, techniques of self and others) in the early 1980s and how these were heavily problematised two decades later as terminologies of a neoliberalist agenda.¹⁶⁸ For a precise argumentation, I want to briefly present Foucault's lesser-known thoughts on neoliberal governmentality, and his research into the crossroads of two versions of a neoliberal system: German post-war liberalism (ordoliberalism of the Freiburger School) and the liberalism of the Chicago School (US neoliberalism). In my view, these insights show an interesting complication of neoliberal thought that was also imagined at a point in time detached from the hegemony of the economy.¹⁶⁹ It is a general conception that neoliberalism is a monolith and only comes in its most radical form of a free-market fundamentalism (or "total market economy"). However,

¹⁶⁶ Thomas Lemke, "The Birth of Bio-politics': Michel Foucault's lecture at the Collège de France on neo-liberal governmentality," *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (May 2001): 191.

¹⁶⁷ A thorough investigation of this is provided in Chapter 3.1.

¹⁶⁸ See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2005). From 2000 onwards, in the German-speaking discourse, where I was socialised, a multitude of publications dealt with the topic of artists as entrepreneurs, a constant act of self-optimisation in a creative neoliberal paradigm that was often discussed under the umbrella term of "post-Fordism". See, among others:

Marion von Osten and Peter Spillmann, *Be Creative – Der kreative Imperativ* (Zurich: Museum for Design, 2003).

Gerald Raunig and Ulf Wuggenig, *Kritik der Kreativität* (Vienna: transversal texts, 2016).

Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought In Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁹ For a historical contextualisation, see Lemke, "The birth of bio-politics," 192 ff.

another version of neoliberalism arose as a “social market economy” from the ordoliberals. Similar attempts to set up alternative forms of a market economy dominated by social and ethical dimensions have surfaced to this day, for example, by Peter Ulrich with his coined term of “civilized market economy”.¹⁷⁰ The dominance of today’s economic structure was established by the politics of the USA in the last thirty to forty years, though the perception is more dominant than the actual implementation, since there are still differing economic procedures at play, even in a globalised world with a rather universalised neoliberal agenda. In contrast to the neoliberal idea of capital formed by the Chicago School, ordoliberalism is characterised by its “radical anti-naturalistic conception of the market and of the principle of competition.”¹⁷¹ It neglects a naturalised idea of capital but imagines capitalism in its “economic-institutional history”. Setting aside the historical philosophical aspects on economy in my research, it is important to note that a capitalist system is not fixed but can be changed, or rather, new forms of global economic models can be established by political, social, and artistic interventions, and by proposals of different forms of (self-)governance. Thomas Lemke summarised Foucault’s thought on this topic this way:

In other words, we have to do with something which is open for a specific number of economic and institutional variables and operates in a field of possibilities: a ‘capitalist system’. Thus, the focus of theoretical debate is on the fact that capitalism is a construct: If capitalism is an economic-institutional unity, then we must be able to intervene in this ensemble in such a way that in one and the same process we both change capitalism and ‘invent’ (‘intervenir’/‘inventir’) a new capitalism.

From this angle, we consider less an existing form of capitalism and instead try and create a new one. The Ordo-liberals replace the conception of the economy as a domain of autonomous rules and laws by a concept of ‘economic order’ (Foucault uses the original German term ‘Wirtschaftsordnung’) as an object of social intervention and political regulation (Lecture, 20 February 1979).¹⁷²

I would like to make the point, that many artistic and commons-based projects are working on interventions for a change. Artistic practices within the exhibitionary complex tend to stay in a critical mode of reflection – highly informed with pointed, radical concepts, but rather unwilling to shift the structure in which they are embedded –, while commons projects instead implement other forms of governing structures, but oftentimes lack broader critical reflections and scope. With regard to the exhibitionary complex, the dominant theoretical discourse in arts and curating

¹⁷⁰ Peter Ulrich, *Zivilisierte Marktwirtschaft. Eine wirtschaftsethische Orientierung*. (Bern; Stuttgart; Vienna: Haupt Verlag, 2010), 155.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 193.

¹⁷² Lemke, “The Birth of Bio-Politics,” 194.

stems from the distinction between capitalism and socialism/communism with many references to post-Marxist discourse. Yet, with a rise in communal and commons projects, the discourse might have to shift toward relations of liberalism and social and political forms of interventionism (different from state interventions in a “totalized” market). The emphasis on the social would gain dominance, whereas today a naturalised logic of the economy still prevails. Critical positions might have to shift from the wish for a *revolutionary* systemic change, to slow interventionist changes in new forms of governance. Ultimately, it is about with what primary guiding principal societies want to govern: with a hegemony of economic policy (“Wirtschaftspolitik”) or social policy (“Gesellschaftspolitik”). In summary, the constant preoccupation with neoliberal logics in purely economic terms in cultural discourse does not lead to a more complex understanding of the possibilities of contemporary living conditions.

Governmentality and Commons

In order to understand these new articulations in the exhibitionary complex, a closer look into the commons in the theoretical framework of governmentality has to come in – a field that was not widely covered by Foucault. Thoroughly scrutinised for the exhibitionary complex with the example of *documenta fifteen* in Chapter 5.2., here I want to provide a short overview of the contemporary discourse of the commons. The commons cannot be considered a form that is easy to define, it can take different (self-)governmental forms today, ranging from very strictly horizontally governed community projects to loose formations led by a core group with peers and partners attached in lesser responsible roles. One can instead think of differing forms on a scale. Historically, commons can be seen as communally shared and cultivated (farm)land within a territory that is used but not necessarily owned or in which there is common ownership. Through Silvia Federici¹⁷³ and Peter Linebaugh,¹⁷⁴ we can learn how these relatively resilient, self-organised formations of pre-accumulative production have often been forcibly dissolved for primarily economic reasons throughout history. Contemporary projects of commons combine urban life, ecological issues, and autonomous desires.¹⁷⁵ These commons typically run parallel to a capitalist system and create spaces where community life can be economically sustained, often leading to long-term infrastructures and networks. The newest forms of commons can be found in the digital realm, where the shared production of software and building of digital communities goes hand in hand with the vocabulary

¹⁷³ For a specific insight into violent enclosures and the destruction of communal life in female populations, see Silvia Federici, *Silvia Federici's Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2019).

¹⁷⁴ For a historical analysis of commoners' struggle in relation to the power of the sovereign from the perspective of the Magna Carta, see Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009).

¹⁷⁵ Common projects might have started in a “Western”-known context with the Italian *autonomia* movement of the 1960s, and with kibbutz projects in Israel as a kind of enclosure for communist ideas on a small scale.

of commons but does not provide a community life with physical interpersonal interaction that could be considered crucial.¹⁷⁶

Nonetheless, commons can be seen primarily as non-fixed conglomerations (or governmental assemblages¹⁷⁷) with practices of commonly shared and governed goods and resources that defy profit-oriented capitalism – and offer resistant practices to neoliberalisms individualisation and speculative mode – though they neither dissolve nor universalise property relations as a whole, but rather shift them from sole ownership to collectively shared ownership by a group. Commons can be seen as ambiguous in this sense, as these projects can often be quite easily situated within capitalist or state structures. They do not place themselves in total opposition to capitalism, nor do they crystallise into an ideology of all-encompassing public means of production. There is a certain practicability to the commons projects: DIY and DIWA practices are an integral part, decision-making goes hand in hand with gatherings, subsistence takes precedence over ideology, etc.

In 2010, George Caffentzis pointed out the ambiguous relationship of the commons (and its plural forms) to the capital system in his essay “The Future of 'The Commons': Neoliberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital” with the aim of strengthening certain forms of commons while rejecting others.¹⁷⁸ For him, certain commons can be used to repair neoliberalism’s devastating neglect of social relations. And specifically because the practice of commons can take care of communities – they even actively produce them –, by forming social interconnections between people that would be otherwise suspended in a capitalist system, commons seem to be a good fit for the neoliberal agenda of Western nation-states, aiming to outsource their social responsibilities. I have argued before that neoliberalism should not be viewed as a unitary development, as it adapts to different contexts and appears in different forms and represents a fusion of the ostensibly capitalist logic with a progressive agenda (“self-actualisation”, etc.).¹⁷⁹ Nonetheless, some desire for belonging is crucial to the formation of commons and any community and society – in a national identity logic, in a neoliberal framework or otherwise. The moments of belonging – which are still so strongly directed toward a national community dovetailed with capitalist logic (individualisation, meritocracy, cooperation) – seem, at best, to find their new home in smaller, self-selected networks or are locally anchored in microcultures. In this sense, a renewed concept of citizenship – and its aspects of self-selected forms of belonging beyond the legal framework – can develop into a

¹⁷⁶ For a stance towards (post-)digital commons, see Cornelia Sollfrank, Felix Stalder, and Shusha Niederberger, *Aesthetics of the Commons* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

¹⁷⁷ See Kolb, “The Curating of Self and Others.”

¹⁷⁸ George Caffentzis, “The Future of 'The Commons': Neoliberalism's 'Plan B' or the Original Disaccumulation of Capital?,” *New Formations* 69 (2010).

¹⁷⁹ See Ronald Kolb, “Situated Knowledges and Interdependence in the Exhibitionary-Educational Complex, *OnCurating 53: Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating*, eds. Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter (June 2022): 44.

collective process of community building.

For the notion of citizenship and its creation beyond a nation-state, I may draw our attention to one of *documenta fifteen*'s very ambitious projects called *citizenship*. This participatory project is being conducted by ZK/U Center for Art and Urbanistics and aims to create a community through an elaborate constellation: the participatory project turned the roof of the ZK/U building literally upside down to become a ship – though it's more like a raft – to “sail off in it to *documenta fifteen* – a trip of 650km, fuelled entirely by people power.”¹⁸⁰ The boat trip relies completely on the help of communities along the way (small village societies), volunteers and friends, who help with moving the boat, but also with sustaining the crew with food, accommodation, and other needs. A project like this interlocks different groups of people in new ways – even for the experimental field in contemporary art – and creates an alternative form of an open community with its own fabricated formation of belonging – at least temporarily. And, of course, these artistic practices always come with a risk of getting stuck, and of falling apart. On 28 June 2022, in a contribution for the series of talks *Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education*,¹⁸¹ we¹⁸² learned from the artists behind *citizenship*, Philip Horst and Matthias Einhoff, about their current troubles with low water levels and defunct machinery.¹⁸³ On a heart-warming side note, Horst and Einhoff asked the audience for a skipper in the discussion following their talk. They had lost their skipper due to the changed timeline, and by chance, Dan Farberoff, from Common Views, another lecturer from the series attending their talk, was able to help out by recommending a friend of his. I consider this act as a type of participation in this project of citizenship, and therefore as a form of belonging to this temporary community.

¹⁸⁰ For more information to this project, I want to refer to the project website of *citizenship*: <https://citizenship.zku-berlin.org/about>, accessed 29 August 2022.

¹⁸¹ The two-week summer school and public talk series “Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education” organised by Dorothee Richter and Ronald Kolb took place from 23 June to 7 July 2022, at the Shared Campus Platform, Zurich University of the Arts, as part of *CAMP notes on education* for *documenta fifteen*. Among other invited lecturers, we had a contribution from ZK/U live from their boat journey with *citizenship*.

¹⁸² By using “we”, I am referring to the group that was established by the participants and the staff of the summer school “Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education” that Dorothee Richter and I organised. We not only visited many exhibition areas together, but also talked intensively about what we saw and experienced. All participants conducted a workshop derived from their own practice.

¹⁸³ You will find most of the presentations by the guest lecturers here: <https://camp-notesoneducation.de/events/commoning-curatorial-and-artistic-education-6-philip-horst-matthias-einhoff-einhoff-zku-zentrum-fur-kunst-und-urbanistik>, accessed 29 August 2022.



Fig. 10: Online Talk with Philip Horst and Matthias Einhoff on *citizenship*, at Hafenstraße 76, Kassel, *documenta fifteen*, 28 June 2022. Screenshot.

To stay with Caffentzis, his wish for the commons to become the “Original Disaccumulation of Capital” is less clear-cut than his critique of the neoliberalist reading of the commons. He refers to capitalism’s ability “to organize the reproduction of our lives outside of its structures”,¹⁸⁴ pointing to the enormous degree of organisation of global relations that the capitalist system and the neoliberal agenda have created over the past forty years. In a broader – one might even say enormous, because world-changing – framework, we would need to examine the history of globalisation and how neoliberal policies (the last stage of Western-driven globalisation) have succeeded in organising and rationalising trade and finance on a world scale, largely by privatising public enterprises and deregulating economies – both in the direction of individualisation and individual ownership, and in dismantling structures of public projects established by states in a national framework. As stated earlier, we should not dismiss globalisation as a whole or think that globalisation is only a result of neoliberal policies. Other versions of a globalised world without the hegemony of profit are certainly conceivable and may have to develop sooner rather than later, as neoliberal policies are unable or unwilling to deal with our current global crises.

Discourse of Truth and Political Rationality

In order to fully apply governmentality to the exhibitionary complex, we must come to terms with what Foucault called the *discourse of truth* and *rationality*. It is the last

¹⁸⁴ Caffentzis, “The Future of ‘The Commons,’” 26.

puzzle piece of a comprehensive understanding of cultural production and articulations, inside exhibition spaces and outside for the public sphere.

The general understanding of rationality as “the quality of being based on clear thought and reason, or of making decisions based on clear thought and reason”¹⁸⁵ might lean in too easily into a naturalised or neutral version of reason. In Foucault’s thought, rationality is interconnected to the dominant systems of power and its epistemes. Rationality gives reason to the truth discourse and creates a way of thinking in epistemes. It is a specific way of thinking and not a natural “law of logic” nor a natural common sense. In his research of the modern state, he refers to *state reason* as a political and governmental *rationality*. In Foucauldian scholar Thomas Lemke’s words:

For a political rationality is not pure, neutral knowledge which simply ‘represents’ the governing reality; instead, it itself constitutes the intellectual processing of the reality which political technologies can then tackle. This is understood to include agencies, procedures, institutions, legal forms, etc., that are intended to enable us to govern the objects and subjects of a political rationality.¹⁸⁶

Political rationality – a certain way of thinking in a logic of a nation state – can well be observed in large-scale exhibitions like biennials, as these are usually intertwined with the political and economic apparatus of governing which exemplifies the specific forms of *state reason* – by presenting itself in forms of a hegemonic narrative (of national identities, of a neoliberal economical “global” ideology), or within critical narratives and places for interventions (a critical mode within liberal thought, hence self-regulating and self-governmental). How political rationality has developed alongside scientific disciplines and how it relies on scientific truths institutionalised in disciplinary practices have also shaped the traditional exhibitionary complex in museums.

The way truth is socially established is described by the *discursive formation* – a (scientific-led) discourse of truth based on rules of academic rationality – and its criteria for “legitimate” knowledge, and furthermore explains how truth and scientific discourse are (or better: were) essential for economic and political reasons and ultimately for the structures of governing itself. Foucault expressed this comprehensive understanding here:

“Truth” is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the

¹⁸⁵ See “Rationality,” Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus, accessed February 4, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/rationality>.

¹⁸⁶ Lemke, “The birth of bio-politics,” 191.

demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (“ideological” struggles).¹⁸⁷

For the sake of a distinction-reduced approach, I want to emphasise that “truth” here does not mean the same with a common understanding of truth as factuality or reality. *Truth* established in discursive formations explains rather the societal mechanisms of finding truth, establishing a social fact by fixing text into a specific meaning. This procedure comes in organised and controlled practices – at least for the recent history of so-called modern states. Foucault made us aware of these procedures and their inclusions and exclusions of the production of the discourse that produces knowledge and meaning:

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.¹⁸⁸

The term *knowledge/power* explicates Foucault’s proposed relation of knowledge (and the truth in discursive formations), power (economic and political mechanisms of control) and, in the end, governance – as conditional on one another and on the formation and development of capitalism:

“Truth” is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. “Truth” is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. A “regime” of truth. This regime is not merely ideological or superstructural; it was a condition of the formation and development of capitalism.¹⁸⁹

The so-called *truth regime* is certainly under constant struggle, as it is formed in conflictual discourse. Today, we can observe a widespread erosion of institutionalised mechanisms of control in a society-led discourse of truth, at least when we consider the established – from our contemporary point of view –

¹⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (1984), 73.

¹⁸⁸ Michel Foucault “The Order of Discourse”, in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. R. Young (1981), 53.

¹⁸⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (1984), 74.

“traditional media” like channelled technologies of mass communication within the last fifty years, foremost TV and radio culture, and its predecessors art fairs and public museums. What is coined “post-truth” refers to a lesser extent to objective facts and social – agreed upon – truths that are produced in a common discourse but exemplifies the struggle over a political rationality, in a Foucauldian reading at least. Foucault’s thought on *parrhesia*, as the practice of “truth-telling” from an individual position as “free speech”, or “speaking frankly” – etymologically derived from the Greek concept of *parrēsia* – might be seen as a blueprint for the speech acts in terms of post-truth:

More precisely, *parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.¹⁹⁰

I would argue that speaking against power is not only a critical author’s privilege but finds itself as a core position in conspiracy theories and other opinionated speech acts. The quasi-author figure of *parrhesia* as an individuum, whose duty it is to speak truth in a risky way, pleases, it seems. What is neglected in the conspiratorial speech act is the referential framework of a (scientifically led, objective) discursive of truth. What is lost in the contemporary figure of *parrhesia* is “a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself)”. This argument of the idea of bettering or improving social life is a thriving concept in Foucault’s later research. It is a rather profound – yet simple – answer, how a governmental structure of relative freedom has succeeded in modern “Western” states, at least speaking from an already historical position as Foucault argued (he clearly misses an intersectional approach throughout, since freedom was surely not equally distributed). If truth-telling becomes only a vehicle for rhetorical persuasion, disconnected from an objective discourse of truth with its set of scientific rules, it becomes opinion. It is clear that opinionated speech acts in the framework of post-truth (“alternative facts”, “fake news”, etc.) aim to create a new discursive formation with a radicalised form of the former established political rationality, departing even further from scientific discourse.¹⁹¹ Within the post-truth movement, we can observe what a political rationality looks like if it is not embedded in a knowledge system that is shaped by an “intellectual” author- and authority-based scientific discourse but shifts its primacy to a mere economy-based system of life that only draws its authority by the provision and maintaining of wealth

¹⁹⁰ Michel Foucault and Joseph Pearson, *Fearless Speech* (Semiotext(e), 2001), 19–20.

¹⁹¹ I would argue that these attempts do not try to influence an established discourse of truth, as they are not interested in scientific disciplines, but rather aim to create a new separate discursive formation that would exceed a rather limited idea of the filter bubble and its communication in an echo chamber.

and profit. What else can the total dismissal of climate change mean than to put one's own living conditions, established in large part through exploitative and extractivist practices, over others and future generations?

The very core of the exhibitionary complex is composed of knowledge, its forms, and the educational procedures that come with its display. In order to gain a contemporary, more precise understanding, we need to re-examine the production and dissemination of knowledges, of truths and of objectivity, in the much-needed, power-sensitive, interdependent theoretical framework that is developed within feminist theory.

The exhibitionary complex, in many places, has strayed from its origins based on knowledge derived from a scientific discourse of truth and is now instead occupied with the aestheticised display of objects unlocked for economic speculation and legitimised by primarily economic procedures. Not only do so-called blockbuster exhibitions speak to this, but so do the many practices of artists adapting to this exploitative logic by creating artworks for a speculative market alone. To socialise the exhibitionary complex, it is not enough to establish governmental practices of the self and others in exhibitionary spaces influencing the public sphere. The ultimate question is this: What rules do we set up and want to follow when we establish a self-governmental formation for the exhibitionary complex? What are the ways of thinking? What rationality and what objectivity do we want to follow?

3.2 Situated Knowledges and Interdependence in the Exhibitionary–Educational Complex (Donna Haraway)

In the following chapter, I aim to answer the question of rationality by expanding it within feminist discourse. Feminist theory is for my research – and in addition to an important movement towards equality – an enormously powerful analytical tool for understanding structural injustices. It is a power-sensitive reflection on the construction of societies and its epistemes, bringing awareness to the specific positionality of subject positions. Besides a sizeable canon on gender inequality, social roles, psychoanalyses and philosophy, I will follow the critique on epistemic violence via Donna Haraway's term *Situated Knowledges*. In doing so, I want to propose a rethought rational practice, embedded in a feminist understanding of science, and with that a renewal of a discourse of truth in situated complexity.

Critique of Science

The criticism of science is not unfounded, specifically certain scientific methods, and especially the inherent closed-off-ness and exclusions it produces, let alone the role sciences play in the economic field of maximising profits (e.g., in the medical field). Relativising scientific rationality as always being biased was a widespread criticism that may have emerged from poststructuralist theory. In my impression, it is rather

necessary to thoroughly critique and expand on a scientific discourse of truth in feminist thought, redirecting it with Donna Haraway's concept of situatedness and positionality. Critiques of the scientific discourse of truth – beyond a relativist dismissal of scientific methods altogether – were also articulated by Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour. Stengers' thought especially – whose 2018 book sets out to transform the scientific method¹⁹² – can be considered very close to Haraway's proposals on a theoretical level, but it unfolds on a more traditional philosophical field, researching the history and development of science from a philosophical point of view. Meanwhile, Haraway and the late Latour also aimed to put changes into practice. In the field in which I am engaged, I consider Haraway's insights to be the most applicable ones, since her idea of the scientific method is based on broad and transdisciplinary research, and in that way resembles artistic-curatorial and creative practices that are at play in the exhibitionary complex. Expanding the discourse of truth with the help of Haraway also enables a much-needed reconsideration of Foucault's limiting thoughts that only speak through the lenses of subjectification models developed in "Western" thought, leaving out for the most part issues of intersectionality, gender differences, and other asymmetric power relations beyond the "Western episteme" – as in the good philosophical tradition of a master narrative.

Situated Knowledges in Science

The world neither speaks itself nor disappears in favour of a master decoder.¹⁹³

Donna Haraway's influential concept of "situated knowledges" came to life in her article "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in 1988,¹⁹⁴ at a pivotal historical moment on the cusp of the end of the "Cold War", with a conservative – or traditionalist – backlash in US politics and society under Ronald Reagan.¹⁹⁵ I want to use her proposal of "situated knowledges" to approximate where we are today, because what Haraway identifies as problematic back then (specifically directed to the scientific discourse at that time), is, in large part, still with us and continues to haunt the cultural fabric to this day. Her text, written with wit and humour against the masculinised scientific objectivity of her time

¹⁹² Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science*, trans. Stephen Muecke (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).

¹⁹³ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 593.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 575–599.

¹⁹⁵ In Haraway's words: "This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word "objectivity" to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies, that is, here, in the belly of the monster, in the United States in the late 1980s." *Ibid.*, 581.

and towards a “feminist objectivity”,¹⁹⁶ promotes recognition of one's positionality and privilege therein. However, this text does not want to stay in this specific historical context but aims to propose the use of “situated knowledges” as a resilient methodology that, first of all, resonates in our more-than-ever intertwined current global context and for future situations, and that, second, can be transported into the curatorial, artistic, and pedagogical field within the exhibitionary complex.

In my understanding, Haraway broadly addresses the paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity and has prescribed a specific reductionist narrative of postmodernity (the playfulness of signs as the sole carrier of meaning, dissolving factuality into relativism) to become a somewhat dominant formation within the discourse of truth – where “truth” is only rhetorical practice –, which comes to the full and darkest vision as a revival of a constructivist idea of the construction of truth¹⁹⁷ – post-truth apologists and “fake news” devotees – ending in a constant ideological struggle for the hegemony over representation and signification.

Haraway's simple but pervasive idea points out that all knowledge and therefore forms of “truth” are shaped from a positional perspective: the formation of knowledge is positional, and objectivity is situated in a specific context and environment, historically, societally, culturally, personally, and embodied.¹⁹⁸ Our positionality inherently determines what is possible to know about an object of research.¹⁹⁹ The concept of situated knowledges therefore “allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see.”²⁰⁰ With this epistemological logic, scientific objectivity needs to be locatable, therefore responsible, and only then can it be held accountable.

In juxtaposition, supposedly neutral and universal objectivity, or a supposedly naturalised “common sense”, is likewise positional²⁰¹ but has developed a

¹⁹⁶ A term she “borrows” from Louis Althusser: “Feminist objectivity resists ‘simplification in the last instance.’” Ibid., 590.

¹⁹⁷ Needless to say, this constructivist idea of truth in right-wing propaganda and populist mainstream media only displays a reductionist and mutilated version of this idea.

¹⁹⁸ Interestingly enough, the “body” as an important aspect in knowledge production only entered “proper” science rather late and through research on AI. The body as an inherent part of the learning machine with a visual viewpoint was made important because, in robotic sciences, AI couldn't easily learn orientation without a functioning movable body. See Mark Lee, “Why AI can't ever reach its full potential without a physical body,” *The Conversation*, 5 October 2020, accessed 29 May 2022, <https://theconversation.com/why-ai-cant-ever-reach-its-full-potential-without-a-physical-body-146870>.

¹⁹⁹ See Rua M. Williams and Juan E. Gilbert, “Cyborg Perspectives on Computing Research Reform,” *Extended Abstracts of the 2019 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems - CHI EA '19*. New York (New York: ACM Press, 2019), 1–11. doi:10.1145/3290607.3310421.

²⁰⁰ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 583.

²⁰¹ My argument refers to Ming Tiampo and Dipesh Chakrabarty in relation to the “de-universalizing,” “decentering,” and “provincializing” prospects of a specific “Western” knowledge for cultural articulations in Ronald Kolb, “The Curating of Self and Others—Biennials as Forms of *Governmental Assemblages*,” *OnCurating* 46, *Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency* (June 2020):

sophisticated apparatus to disguise its positionality as universality. Important to recall, this historically universalised scientific objectivity is rooted in patriarchal structures and reproduced through the mechanisms of funding, representation, and distribution, and has been thoroughly explored historically by Michel Foucault through the concept of “discursive formations” and, in particular, articulated in his early publications *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), among others. Yet, Foucault’s analyses tended to speak from a rather abstract authorial position and had their blind spots, remaining within a field of dichotomy (sovereign vs. individual) most of the time, with intersectional aspects of gendered and/or racialised exclusion mechanisms remaining nearly undebated within the discursive formation. Yet, in my understanding, it is specifically the differences in the positions of the members in a discursive formation with its differing statements that will change the truth formation and its *truth regime*. I would even argue that heterogenous voices strengthen a scientific discourse, which is established by the exchanges and references of their legitimate statements and positions.

To be as clear as possible, Haraway does not want to abolish objectivity as a scientific instrument that ultimately feeds into a rationality that shapes societal, political, and economic interests; instead, she wants to reshape the instruments of objectivity with situated knowledges and thereby preserve objectivity – a rethought version through feminist critique and practice – and therefore she grounds the discursive formation in rules of science as a common ground for encounters and discussions. Even if one accepts the positional aspects of objectivity, this should not lead to dissolving objectivity as a concept or to dismissing science and “truth” as merely biased, leaving “truth” – and truth-telling – as a machinery of opinion. In what can be seen as an unfortunate prediction into the future, Haraway already identifies one of the major fissures in most contemporary societies:

So much for those of us who would still like to talk about reality with more confidence than we allow to the Christian Right when they discuss the Second Coming and their being raptured out of the final destruction of the world.²⁰²

As I see it, Haraway proposes a new mode of operation for the discourse of truth – a discourse that was clearly established under bourgeois, capitalist, and patriarchal

“While Ming Tiampo questions the dominance of the concept of modernism in the arts as a Western phenomenon by situating and theorizing non-Western modernisms that hold histories of its own, Dipesh Chakrabarty suggest to “provincialize Europe”. Europe – not as a region, but as an epistemology of the enlightenment – separated non-Western space and thought as back warded and underdeveloped. A grand trick to make others imagine themselves with a ‘lack,’ that can only be overcome by becoming the supposedly developed modern ‘West.’ Chakrabarty effort to provincialize this dominance would give way to other forms of governing in a less dominant relationship to capital and global economy.”

²⁰² Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 577.

hegemony, and to a large extent still exists as such. This new mode of operation clearly borrows from Michel Foucault's "discursive formation", although Haraway opposes it, in part because of its structural indifference to various "subjugated" or excluded subjects and positions. Her proposal changes the relation of the operation of the discourse of truth, from universal rationality to positional rationality, to a web of positional *knowledges*. Her rejection of Marxist theory as a totalising theory is even more evident, which – originally – does not differentiate intersectionally between specific conditions of life and (re-)production and therefore cannot reveal a more adequate account of the world,²⁰³ but she emphasises staying with Marxian materialist thinking, which insists that the material basis produces the social conditions.

Without shying away from concepts and instruments supposedly drawn from the toolbox of the "master theory", she takes up the *gaze* in particular as a cultural and scientific instrument to be transformed into a partial vision to show how a universalised objectivity not only reduces the view of the world, but also in what ways power is distributed and reproduced through formations of seeing. Haraway writes:

This is the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation. This gaze signifies the unmarked positions of Man and White, one of the many nasty tones of the word "objectivity" to feminist ears in scientific and technological, late-industrial, militarized, racist, and male-dominant societies, that is, here, in the belly of the monster, in the United States in the late 1980s. I would like a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*.²⁰⁴

This visual metaphor of the "universal" gaze from "nowhere and everywhere" that marks the observed – cultivated in monotheistic religions and with a long tradition in Western culture – not only exposes the power relation in scientific terms – in post-Marxist terms, one could speak of the ideological apparatus and the function of concealing the real power dynamic, which makes exploitative relations possible – but it also exposes – when applied to the cultural sphere – the dominant discursive formation of art history, exhibition history, and the formulas of representation of a dominant culture (usually within formerly bourgeois, national, and capitalist frameworks).

The strength of Haraway's proposal is that it does not stop at analysis and the revelation or exposure of universality as a "god trick" but seeks to create and sharpen

²⁰³ Working class: men, women, "others," slaves? Marx never really differentiated the working class, and this shows in the early discourse in Marxist theory.

²⁰⁴ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 581.

scientific tools that make us aware of our responsible and locatable positions from which we speak. Partiality and situatedness, in this sense, are forms of responsibility to self and others, towards a more precise accountability, and ultimately lead to a different distribution of power by taking into account one's own positionality.

Three Ways to Knowledge

Although Haraway places universal objectivity (the “god trick”) and “postmodernity’s relativism” at the same end of a certain kind of knowledge production based on a binary system, I would like to position these two paths to knowledge in a triad in which universal knowledge and relativism form opposite ends, with situated knowledges in the middle as the third path.

Diagram:

Universal objectivity	Situated Objectivity	Relativism
Modernity	Interdependence	Postmodernity / Relationality
Universal rationality	Positional rationality	Autotheory?
Myth	Networked “Truth”	Opinion / “Biased objectivity”
Common sense		Whataboutism

A) The way of knowledge as the “god trick”

Universalist theories (and I would say that, even today, most theories in philosophy, culture, and science are universalistic in nature) negate any positioning – they are “unmarked” and therefore not locatable – , making a claim for a totalising objectivity, speaking from nowhere, while covering everything. This neutrality is in denial of “subjectivity” and voice, and it does not allow for agency, as this would also disrupt the hegemonic logic of those in power. In Haraway’s sparkling words:

Knowledge from the point of view of the unmarked is truly fantastic, distorted, and irrational. The only position from which objectivity could not possibly be practiced and honored is the standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose Eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference. No one ever accused the God of monotheism of objectivity, only of indifference. The god trick is self-identical, and we have mistaken that for creativity and knowledge, omniscience even.²⁰⁵

Her approach toward a feminist way of thinking about objectivity aims to shift objectivity away from a universalist approach (“the god trick” – the “conquering gaze from nowhere”²⁰⁶ or a universalism in the guise of a very specific position – a “Western”, male, white, heteronormative, world conqueror type, etc.), to a situated objectivity that is based on being aware of and allowing situatedness: that is, a

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 587.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 581.

situatedness that is locatable in space and time, that speaks from a position within a particular historically, culturally, and personally anchored context, and therefore an objectivity that can be responsible, that is, which responds, but is also held responsible.

Transported into the exhibitionary field, the resemblance of art canonical exposures in line with art history, fabricated historically from the dominant Western, bourgeois standpoint, comes to mind easily. Here is not the place to look in depth into the exclusionary effects a universalised history of art had and still has for the representation and distribution of artistic practices outside of it. I just want to reference Alfred Barr's diagram from 1936, created for the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art*, at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), from 2 March to 19 April 1936.²⁰⁷ He mapped out art movements, dating them chronologically, placing certain artist practices/movements in time, and for the most part leaving out non-Western art positions – four unplaced non-Western positions found their way into the diagram, distinguished in red: “Japanese Prints”, “Near-Eastern Art”, “Negro Sculpture”, and “Machine Esthetic” –, creating the canon of “modern art history” devoid of artistic or creative practices from regions other than Europe (and also limited only to France, the UK, Russia, Germany, and Switzerland). In 2019, Hank Willis Thomas expanded Barr's famous diagram in a project titled *Colonialism and Abstract Art*,²⁰⁸ adding a more complex understanding of how art movements were influenced, by redrawing Barr's map and adding the traces of “European exploration and colonization of the Congo and ending with the decade of its independence a century later.”²⁰⁹ Suddenly, references and inspirations for Western modern art movements became visible and traceable with “humbling” effects for the dominant narrative of Western art history. For other situational histories, let alone attempts to count art practices by women, one would perhaps need a few more of these revisions of a modernist survey. Nonetheless, these diagrams (expanded or not) tend to rely – in my mind – on a teleological account of art history, that is not able to show the embeddedness of artistic practice in its specific, situated (geopolitical, cultural) context but rather creates – much like a white cube – neat trajectories of art practices detached in time.

B) The Way of Knowledge of Relativism

Haraway also argues against an objectivity of postmodernity's “relativism” that renders all forms of truth equal (equally biased), and thus undermines the discourse

²⁰⁷ Glenn Lowry, “Abstraction in 1936: Barr's Diagrams,” in *Inventing Abstraction 1910-1925: How a Radical Idea Changed Modern Art*, ed. Leah Dickerman (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), accessed 29 May 2022, https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/archives/InventingAbstraction_GLowry_359_363.pdf.

²⁰⁸ Hank Willis Thomas and Sarah Meister, “Hank Willis Thomas's Colonialism and Abstract Art,” *MoMA Magazine*, 15 September 2020, accessed 29 May 2022, <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/421>.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

of truth and scientific objectivity.²¹⁰ And where might this lead? I am inclined to say, among other things, to the “entitlement to my own opinion”, and ultimately to the dissolution of a broader, commonly shared “truth” attached to rules of objectivity.²¹¹ The effects can be observed widely within US “culture wars”: the “entitled to my opinion” phrase together with the defence of the “freedom of speech” allow every opinion to enter the discourse of truth on an equal footing (or so it seems).²¹² Still, this blueprint has found its adherents in various places around the world, usually as an instrument for traditionalist forces to gain political power with a diffused and diffusing logic. I would argue that these opinionated “truths” enabled by the concept of postmodernity’s relativism gave birth to – or at least played into – “fake news” and conspiracy theories, especially with social media’s function of spiralling all utterances into a broadly accessible public sphere, due to the inherent logic of engagement by clicks and the logic of the attention economy.²¹³ These effects can be observed in culture and politics today – Haraway argued within the discourse of science from 1988, we should recall – but still, the effects of obscuring power relations by rendering every utterance equal is schematic:

Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. The “equality” of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both “god tricks” promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetoric’s surrounding Science.²¹⁴

When all opinions are equated, no objectivity is possible. Postmodernity’s relativism goes very well together with the neoliberal agenda and specifically the one formed in

²¹⁰ Even “social constructivists” like Bruno Latour, who actively critiqued the apparatuses of sciences and the discourse of truth, had to admit the problems with a version of post-truth without a common understanding of the world produced by the discursive formation dominated by science for at least the last 200 years. See Ava Kofman, “Bruno Latour, the Post-Truth Philosopher, Mounts a Defense of Science,” *New York Times*, 25 October 2018, accessed 29 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/magazine/bruno-latour-post-truth-philosopher-science.html>.

²¹¹ This can be observed widely within US “culture wars” with the phrase “entitled to my opinion.”

²¹² There are still clearly different programs in place in the projects from the left and the right, but the instruments for how to enter and try to “win” the hegemonic play of meaning may have their structural similarities in certain aspects.

²¹³ See “attention economy” in social media, “click bait”, etc.

²¹⁴ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 584.

the US.²¹⁵ Political particularisation²¹⁶ coupled with individualisation and its economic promises through meritocracy not only obscure power but allow the dominant power structures to remain undisturbed.²¹⁷ Postmodern-induced projects of “diversification” are also possible in this sense without dismantling or even changing the fabric of the respective (economic, political, societal) power structure. It ends up “adding” singular diverse voices to the canon. To stay with Barr’s aforementioned diagram revised by Hank Willis Thomas from 2019: while the art canon is added to and expanded (or diversified), art history, its exhibiting institutions, and its underlying relationship to the commodity and capitalist logic of surplus remain unaffected.

The emphasis on relativising aspects in the art field carries the same danger of obscuring power relations when notions of horizontality serve a universalising procedure that makes all positions appear equal. While the equality of rights must be guaranteed from the legal side (not only on paper, but also in society and in the public sphere), in the discourse of truth in science (as in the discourse of truth in culture), we should not be afraid to agree on “truths” – which are called objective or more relevant than others for the sake of a feminist objectivity. Even a web or network of shared knowledge has its nodes, not to mention the often-invisible power structures that are able to steer economic benefits always in one direction.

C) The Way of Situated Knowledges

Haraway does not want to end with a critique of science and the discourse of truth as biased,²¹⁸ but rather to strengthen “objectivity” by re-composing objectivity with the concept of “situated knowledges” as a scientific, political, and social tool. Therefore, it is necessary to get rid of simplifications (“god trick” and “relativism”) and to reveal “a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others’ practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions.”²¹⁹ This extraordinary quote by Haraway interconnects the social fabric with political objectivity based on a scientific-disciplinary discourse of truth, critical methods of thinking, and a power-sensitive awareness of one’s own position in an unequal field of (counter-)hegemonic movements.

²¹⁵ I would like to argue that “neoliberalism” comes in different forms, of course, as it is an amalgamation of a primarily capitalist logic with oftentimes progressive agendas. In different cultural and geographical contexts, this has led to different outcomes. For the US’s specific neoliberal progressivism, see Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2019); for an early historical insight of at least two rather contradictory forms of neoliberalism, see Chapter 3.1.

²¹⁶ As an early critique of postmodernism (maybe for the wrong reasons?), see Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Ben-Habib, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 22, Special Issue on Modernism (Winter 1981): 3-14.

²¹⁷ For example, a critique of meritocracy by Nancy Fraser, *Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond*. (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2019).

²¹⁸ For her critique on post-structuralism, see Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 578.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 579. This remark is made in direct relation to “feminist empiricism.”

The emphasis here lies in referring to the social fabric (that is inextricably intertwined with politics and economy) and, for me more specifically, to governmental conceptions of the self, others, and the communities in which we are embedded. Systems of knowledge and power, individuals embedded in disciplinary power, sovereign power, and communal power can be taken from Foucault's writings and need to be adjusted to the situatedness of our research. This means, we must accept the complexity of positionality – and with it the privilege of “centred” and “peripheral” – or dominant and subjugated – positions and the partiality of all knowledge. Situated knowledges need to consider the historical context in particular locations. It can only be reached in connections, in webs, in networks, in practices of solidarity and sharing. And it must be a critical vision, power-sensitive, brought forward in the best feminist practices. The practices of situated knowledges are ultimately political:

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. [...] I am arguing for the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.²²⁰

Situated knowledges in this dimension provide a contextualised description of the world and situated categorisation of objects.

Frameworks and Methods of *Situated Knowledges*: Privileged Positions

Haraway's critique of poststructuralists, although critically analysing power and domination, points to the remaining lack of awareness of their own position. But she also hints at the problematics of essentialised and “innocent” positions of the subjugated “structured by gender, race, nation, and class” that can be turned into a privileged subject position, too, in “[t]he search for such a ‘full’ and total position [...] for the fetishized perfect subject of oppositional history, sometimes appearing in feminist theory as the essentialized Third World Woman.”²²¹

I would argue that Haraway critically relates here to Sandra Harding's “standpoint theory” laid out in the 1986 book *The Science Question in Feminism*, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's term “intersectionality” coined in 1989, which introduced (at the same time Haraway's text was published) another analytical framework mapping out the interconnected nature of social categorisations revealing modes of discrimination and privilege. In the logic of situated knowledges, a contextualised description of reality is needed – this goes hand in hand with standpoint theory and intersectionality, I would argue –, but relying on categorisations of generalisations – even while trying to overcome inequalities politically and culturally – sway into (self-)marginalisation – and ultimately might stand in the way of practices of solidarity. Haraway writes:

²²⁰ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 589.

²²¹ Ibid., 586; Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes,” *Boundary 2*, no. 3 (1984): 333-58.

A commitment to mobile positioning and to passionate detachment is dependent on the impossibility of entertaining innocent "identity" politics and epistemologies as strategies for seeing from the standpoints of the subjugated in order to see well. One cannot "be" either a cell or molecule – or a woman, colonized person, laborer, and so on – if one intends to see and see from these positions critically. "Being" is much more problematic and contingent. Also, one cannot relocate in any possible vantage point without being accountable for that movement. Vision is always a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices.²²²

Changing position is not possible without being held accountable for it. The new position comes with a new vision and instruments of power. These transitions require critical, careful, and trustworthy practices; "infinite mobility and interchangeability" are the opposite of that.²²³ From my perspective, expressions of whataboutisms in our daily life lend testimony to this naïve, uncontextualised, and superficial comparability trick. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay from 1988, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", resembles Haraway's notion of privilege, though it might tend to fix the positions of the subjugated subjects too much. More interesting to me is Spivak's interweaving of the problem of representation and her subsequent analyses of the neglect of representation of non-European subjects as "fully human subjects." In particular, her notions of "learning and unlearning" in historically privileged perspectives point to the delicate lack of knowledge about "others" in one's own knowledge system and the daunting and hurtful endeavour of arriving at other, less "privileged" positions.²²⁴

Collaboration over Competition in *Situated Knowledges*

It cannot be overemphasised enough that a discourse of truth driven by situated knowledges – our critical episteme – is possible only in conjunction with other situated contexts and experiences. Otherwise, situated knowledge remains singular.

²²² Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 585.

²²³ "All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view, even when the other is our own machine. That's not alienating distance; that's a possible allegory for feminist versions of objectivity. Understanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, and psychically, ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity." Ibid., 583.

²²⁴ "Unlearning one's privilege by considering it as one's loss constitutes a double recognition. Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender, and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge: not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social positions." Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

Singularisation and individualisation without reference to other positions or the exchange of perspectives will not lead to a more accurate understanding of the world:

Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere.²²⁵

I only want to briefly reflect on Lynn Margulis here, as she was another node in Haraway's web of kin and adds another layer to the feminist approach of science and culture at large that I want to propose. Margulis was an evolutionary biologist, known for the "Gaia hypothesis" created together with James Lovelock. Recently, her position prominently entered the exhibitionary complex in *Critical Zones: Observatories for Earthly Politics*,²²⁶ a research-based, long-term exhibition project that spanned over two years from May 2020 to 9 January 2022 at ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany. The exhibition highlighted the connectedness or, to use the terms of evolutionary biology, "symbiosis"/symbiotic relationships between organisms as the main driving force in evolution. In her scientific studies, she argued against the neo-Darwinist idea that competition creates evolutionary changes. She prominently opposed this competition-oriented views of evolution – which, needless to say, are still in place in scientific discourse – and proved with others her theory to be true in scientific terms.²²⁷ A competition-oriented view is even more alive in the economic structures of financialised capitalism and the traditional capitalist industry of production alike, whereas Margulis points out the collaborative relationships between species in evolution. Adapting this biological scientific truth freely to culture and societies, it would suit us well to concentrate on forms of collaboration and interdependencies over competition, separation, and antagonism. Margulis brings it to a point: "Natural selection eliminates and maybe maintains, but it doesn't create."²²⁸

²²⁵ Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," 590.

²²⁶ See "Critical Zones. Observatories for Earthly Politics," Exhibition at ZKM, Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, 23.05.2020–09.01.2022, accessed 29 May 2022, <https://zkm.de/en/exhibition/2020/05/critical-zones>.

²²⁷ See Institut de Ciències del Mar, "When we learned that competition was not the only driver of evolution", 2 November 2021, accessed 29 May 2022, <https://www.icm.csic.es/en/news/when-we-learned-competition-was-not-only-driver-evolution>.

²²⁸ See Dick Teresi, "Discover Interview: Lynn Margulis Says She's Not Controversial, She's Right," *Discover Magazine*, 17 June 2011, accessed 29 May 2022,

Feminist Interdependence Theory

Making situatedness and interdependence tools for research and practice is easier said than done. The complexity of the world in which we live cannot be researched from a reductive point of view from one position; only in careful and trustworthy exchanges in solidarity can we learn how to see from another's point of view. Partiality can form a network of solidarity and can merge individual perspectives – not only as opinion, but in the exchange with peers – to establish a feminist objectivity, which Haraway calls “feminist empiricism”.²²⁹ Situated knowledges enabled through partiality – a “multiplicity of local knowledges”²³⁰ in translocal networks (“earthwide projects”²³¹), not neglecting “multiple desires”,²³² staying with “irreducible difference”²³³ and in modesty – careful and trustworthy practices: This operational framework, I feel, is more relevant than ever:

[...] but we do need an earthwide network of connections, including the ability partially to translate knowledges among very different- and power-differentiated- communities. We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life. Natural, social, and human sciences.²³⁴

I will only include small traces here as a fragmentary reference to ruangrupa's lumbung practice for *documenta fifteen* which I will discuss later in detail. Lumbung practice functioned as a shared resource for a multiplicity of artists and participants of *documenta fifteen*. In this sense, it manifested in a translocal network with multiple desires. Seen from the outside, it might instead appear to be opaque or impenetrable. Ill-intended viewpoints might follow relativism's effect of decontextualised comparisons of positions, wordings, and objects and are clearly triggered from a universalised knowledge position despite being in a critical mode.

<https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/discover-interview-lynn-margulis-says-shes-not-controversial-shes-right>.

²²⁹ “Another approach, ‘feminist empiricism,’ also converges with feminist uses of Marxian resources to get a theory of science which continues to insist on legitimate meanings of objectivity and which remains leery of a radical constructivism conjugated with semiology and narratology.” Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 583.

²³⁰ “[...] for making meanings, and a [...] commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness. Harding calls this necessary multiple desire a need for a successor science project and a postmodern insistence on irreducible difference and radical multiplicity of local knowledges.” Haraway, “Situated Knowledges”, 579.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid., 579–580.

If utterances of *documenta fifteen*'s artistic directors ruangrupa, speaking about themes of "soil" – trying to metaphorically picture trees, plants, and communities translocally, in order to create a metaphor for another form of global entanglements, rooted in locality, in line with contemporary ecological and sustainable issues²³⁵ – are being forcefully pigeonholed in the discourse surrounding Nazi terms like "blood and soil" ("*Blut und Boden*"),²³⁶ then context-sensitive practices clearly did not take place, but rather a misconstrued relativistic formula of reducing similarities in vision and semantics for personal political agendas. The – intentional? – neglect of the specific situatedness of ruangrupa follows a well-known formula of diminishing knowledges from non-Western trajectories. What can be seen as a riposte to these strategies of othering, ruangrupa – somewhat related to Joseph Beuys' project *7000 Oaks – City Forestation Instead of City Administration* for *documenta 7*, that took place from 1982 over five years, where seven thousand oak trees were planted in Kassel – initiated an own tree-planting project: During *documenta fifteen*, the first Kiri or paulownia tree was planted in front of Hallenbad Ost on Friday, 1 April 2022, under the project title *KIRI Project / one hundred trees*, 100 kiri tree seedlings were cared for by volunteers.²³⁷ Kiri trees are considered to be one of the fastest growing plants, even though they might not find ideal environmental conditions in Kassel. Cultivated primarily in Eastern Asia (especially Japan and Korea), these light-demanding trees thrive best in warmer climates. These trees – opposite to what biologists call invasive plants, since they won't cause harm to the native bioregion –, if grown at the proposed rate, will reach the dimension of Beuys' oaks in just ten years. Not only does this speak to a world of translocal interdependence in which we live, but kiri trees are also considered a magic bullet against global warming because of their ability to absorb a large amount of CO2 emissions: they could also help find solutions to ecological problems, and furthermore, reveal power relations in postcolonial entanglements.

²³⁵ "The first *lumbung calling* focuses on the value of Local Anchor. The metaphor of an anchor describes the value of soil in our globalised yet divided world: soil that enables roots to grow and connects trees located miles and miles apart." See "lumbung calling: Local Anchor," 4 April 2021, accessed 29 May 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/events/lumbung-calling-local-anchor/>.

²³⁶ A Nazi slogan that focused on racial purity ("blood" as the national body), encouraged by the Nazis to legitimate in the end a colonialist war expanding its own territory into Eastern Europe with a settlement area ("*Boden*", soil). On that note, we could also talk about translation as active practices of culture, embedded in the discourse of truth.

²³⁷ The kiri project will be developed in three parts. ruangrupa plans to connect Wilhelmshöher Allee to Hallenbad Ost with a walkway made out of Kiri wood.

See "First Tree Planted at Hallenbad Ost: Partner Project "KIRI Project / one hundred trees" was launched", 13 April 2022, accessed 29 May 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/first-tree-planted-at-hallenbad-ost-sustainability-project-kiri-project-one-hundred-trees-launched-on-april-1-2022/>.

Outlook: Recalibrating Critical Tools of Situated Knowledges for Exhibitionary–Educational Projects

If we are willing to transfer the proposed concepts from “cognitive science” to educational and curatorial formations, we might be able to come up with new tools that would help us shape the public sphere, not by opinion, but within a discourse of truth – one that is not held hostage by the master narratives’ hidden agenda. But for now, we find these tenacious crusts of violence that produce universal knowledge largely intact in our Western educational and exhibition institutions. Talking about these issues will not make them disappear; our experience has been formed over the years in our bodies and in the institutions that have produced universalised knowledge most of the time. Artistic practice might be considerable as an exemplary field of positionality – it is the fortune of art to be committed to one’s own (“eccentric”) positionality nonetheless – though art education might lean too far towards a relativist proposal for subjectivity and towards singularising practice, as most educations in fine arts aim at finding a place in the commodity system of art, rather than in the communal artistic practices of collaboration. Learning and teaching environments need to be prepared for (or at least open to) the condition of situatedness – between students, teachers, publics, producers – to enable a “we”: a trans-individuation, that is, an exchange between situated, embodied knowledges, between histories and contexts, between generations and epistemes.

3.3 From Disciplinary Power to Governmental Assemblages in the Exhibitionary Complex

Above all else, Foucault’s study on governmentality showcases the reciprocity of power techniques and the production of knowledges, of which the exhibitionary complex is part. Although my research heads into formations of situated knowledge production, rather outside of classical exhibition spaces in global entanglements, I feel the need to be informed on the origin of the museum spaces of modern “Western” societies, related to a democratic public sphere in capitalist conditions; hence, I will offer an historical outlook into the “birth of the museum”. Furthermore, I will continue outlining the recent developments of exhibition formats in transitional and temporal conditions in – what I will call – the *Exhibitionary Biennial Complex*. Biennials illustrate, unlike many other exhibition formats, global and postcolonial entanglements, and are therefore an interesting field of research. This historical outline will help me contextualise governmental practices of exhibiting that “use” the public space of a museum in order to bring local and situated knowledges of an empirical discourse of truth in feminist objectivity – and its methods and modes of critique – to the forefront.

The Origins of the Exhibitionary Complex

Written in 1995, Tony Bennett’s most famous book, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*,²³⁸ recounts a compelling history, pointing not only to the

²³⁸ Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*.

“birth” of public museums, embedding it in a historical development of early capitalism and the nation state, but it also formulates the intrinsic functions of these institutions, and their role in a dominant ideology and state representation with the help of Michel Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power. Bennett declares *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*, or, in short, the Crystal Palace Exhibition at Hyde Park in London in 1851, as a pivotal point in history that gave rise to a new institution – the public museum – which establishes a new regime of bourgeois ideology in line with the mechanisms of the *discourse of truth*.

The Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851 originated from the *Exposition des produits de l’industrie française* (Exhibition of Products of French Industry). These recurring exhibitions in Paris can be imagined as sorts of early world fairs and expositions presenting cultural goods and achievements from all over the newly founded Republic of France. The public events displaying goods and themes for education were clearly set up to create the new French identity of the republic and of the new democratic government²³⁹: all held in Paris, the first iterations were rather public festivities that were brought together in the middle of the French Revolution (1789–1798) with themes like *Festival of Law* (1792), *Festival of Reason* (1793), *Festival of the Supreme Being* (1794), and *Festival of the Foundation of the Republic* (1796). These were followed by the *Exhibition of Products of French Industry* under different themes from 1798 to 1849. The intention of these early public festivals amid the French Revolution was clearly educational for the newly founded democratic state in liberal thought and aimed to help form an identity of this newly established nation under the new order of scientific rationality (and of natural sciences) – directly positioned against the Church. The yearly exhibitions, which followed the first iteration of the French Revolution, already began to lose its revolutionary edge from 1796 onwards, and instead focused on commerce and market interests, starting to showcase the future entanglements between capital, culture, and national identity. It is therefore not surprising that Eilean Hooper-Greenhill even declared the French Revolution the major rupture regarding exhibitory institutions that led to the formation of the public museum. She wrote this in an essay titled “The Museum in the Disciplinary Society” that was published in 1989, prior to Bennett’s *Birth of the Museum*, and at the same time that *The Exhibitionary Complex* was published in 1988.²⁴⁰ Both thoughts (by Bennett and Hooper-Greenhill) rely on Michel Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power.

²³⁹ The First Republic of France was founded during the French Revolution; its governmental form changed multiple times and ended with Napoleon’s First Empire, hence not a “real” democracy from our contemporary point of view. Despite that, democratisation processes were clearly institutionalised with fall of the monarchy, as was the turn towards the populace and its representation in governing structures.

²⁴⁰ See Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, “The museum in the disciplinary society,” in *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (Leicester; Washington, D.C.: Leicester University Press; Smithsonian Institution, 1989), 61–72. Hooper-Greenhill and Bennett published pivotal essays on the museum in line with Foucault’s terminology nearly at the same time. Tony Bennett published *The Birth*

The British Empire's answer to this development in France was the *Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*, which drew from this concept in a competing manner: the exhibition as a showing-off of the British Empire's prowess and achievements in industry, culture, and colonial power (read: military dominance) inextricably joined forces with the state's representational ideology in culture. The Crystal Palace Exhibition expanded the range of participants in the British Empire and its colonies and exhibited works and goods of "All Nations" – in 1851, "All Nations" meant: Britain and its "Colonies and Dependencies and 44 'Foreign States' from Europe and the Americas."²⁴¹ This major exhibition showed cultural and industrial achievements and eventually enabled engagements in trade. The British answer to the French "Great Exhibition" was closely tied to 19th-century capitalism, while the revolutionary moment of democratic ruptures of the early French festivities moved into the background. Today's industrial fairs or art fairs follow the same formula, structurally speaking, maybe with a lesser degree of national representation, and a stronger transnational globalist capital economy in mind, but, even in the Crystal Palace exhibition back then, the approach to globalisation took form.

From Private to Public Exhibits

The historical turning point in exhibitionary practices from "private museums" (salons, cabinets of curiosity, *Wunderkammer*, private collections of the nobles for the nobles) to a public museum, which Bennett pins down with the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851, coincides with a new prison model. The Pentonville Prison was built in 1842 – nine years before the Crystal Palace exhibition – and was clearly influenced by Jeremy Bentham's idea of the Panopticon. Bennett concludes with the help of Foucault that this new idea of a prison had major impacts on society at large and ultimately shifts general governing structures from spectacle to disciplinary control.²⁴² The English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham developed the concept of the Panopticon at the beginning of the 19th century. The panopticon imagines a prison of surveillance through separation, where only the watchman in a pivotal position can see all inmates, whereas the inmates cannot see the watchman and cannot see each other. Although never realised, the Panopticon is even stronger as an image than as a real infrastructure; it is a powerful self-projection turned into ideology as an educational infrastructure and system of control. Stripped of its architectural dimensions, the Panopticon stands as a "kind of weirdly beautiful, terrifying" principle of constant self-monitoring – a feeling of being watched all the time, which will eventually adjust one's own behaviour to an introspective surveillance of self-control.²⁴³ This learned behaviour is the core of the control

of the Museum in 1995; Hooper-Greenhill published *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* in 1992, in which she examines the public museum using Foucault's concept of disciplinary knowledge.

²⁴¹ <https://wellcomecollection.org/works/pdp6m5e3/items?canvas=21>.

²⁴² Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 61.

²⁴³ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

mechanism of disciplinary power. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault works out the genealogy of disciplinary power and its various technologies that regulate the individual's behaviour and thought. Historically, the spectacle of punishment embodied sovereign power for the populace through the visible torturing of dissidents and criminals alike.²⁴⁴



Fig. 11: Protestant reformer burned at the stake during the reign of Henry VIII.²⁴⁵

The woodcut of the burning of Anne Askew at Smithfield in 1546 depicts a public punishment. The spatial setting allows every spectator to observe the punishment; the group of spectators can see themselves, and they can see the sovereign on higher ground; the sovereign can see the whole scenario. The spectacle – often distributed beyond the event through word-of-mouth – wants to teach a lesson quite drastically by presenting the outcome of any misconduct. Whenever Foucault speaks of spectacle, he refers to this surprisingly transparent setting of the scaffold: spectacle is the spectacle of the scaffold.²⁴⁶

By the late-18th and early-19th centuries, Foucault argues that the forms and technologies to keep the populace regulated changed significantly, though only for reasons of efficiency, not humanist ones. Disciplinary power stopped the spectacle of punishment in many areas of the world yet established regulations of people's space and time in newly founded institutions and organised their activity and behaviour with

²⁴⁴ See specifically the "The spectacle of the scaffold," in Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 32–71.

²⁴⁵ Woodcut of the burning of Anne Askew at Smithfield in 1546, Wikimedia Commons, accessed 18 October 2023, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29730558>.

²⁴⁶ On a side note, this also explains the interchanging effects of different governmental techniques: Bennett also names the Eiffel Tower as an example of surveillance-spectacle. The mutual monitoring of each other on the Eiffel Tower and from the ground floor, expanding to another layer of remote monitoring in social media through the sharing of pictures and selfies online.

the help of architectonical and introspective systems of surveillance.²⁴⁷ The Panopticon is such an example, where people are transformed using disciplinary techniques of surveillance with the aim of having them control themselves, rather than be controlled. A certain set of desired – for a long-time bourgeois – behaviours is exercised until it is inscribed in the body and mind. For Foucault, a prison is not the only disciplinary institution, but hospitals, asylums, and schools are as well and, of course, also the scientific disciplines to which this study is committed. Foucault did not specifically mention museums in the context of disciplinary power.²⁴⁸ Ultimately, scholars like Hooper-Greenhill and Bennett picked up his line of thought and applied it to museums in detail. A museum is in that regard – as described in *The Birth of the Museum* – an institution not unlike the prison, speaking from a disciplinary point of view, aiming to produce sets of behaviours: thinking in the tradition of the Enlightenment and rationality, in a new regime of truth, conduct for a bourgeois-democratic and civic society and in line with capitalist-driven ideology. This is achieved firstly through a spatial infrastructure, and secondly through educational tools of presentation and representation. Especially in state-run public museums, which signal by definition and with their collection a strong representation of a nation's culture, history, and achievements, the visitors' rules of behaviour can be compared structurally in a literal sense to the prison. A separation of spaces, guards, and guides in every room, but also open architectural settings to easily observe the others “were used to transform the crowd into an ordered and, to a degree, self-ordering public. Self-ordering *and* self-civilizing: in the sense that the museum provided a context in which, first, new rules of public comportment might be acquired through the occasions afforded for cross-class commingling, and second, visitors might learn their place in the order of peoples and things that the museum constructed.”²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ Foucault makes clear that these different forms of power – disciplinary and sovereign power – are not mutually exclusive. Disciplinary power did not end the sovereign power of punishment. These techniques of control over the population can be found mutual reinforcing each other. One has to think of the so-called “shame sanction” in the USA, where convicted individuals have to put up signs in front of their homes, or any public punishment, be it still executed forms of brutal punishment like stoning or the electric chair.

²⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, Foucault referred to the spatial setting of the Crystal Palace exhibition without mentioning it directly in *Discipline and Punish*: (See the reference to Panorama and Panopticon): “Any panoptic institution, even if it is as rigorously closed as a penitentiary, may without difficulty be subjected to such irregular and constant inspections: and not only by the appointed inspectors, but also by the public; any member of society will have the right to come and see with his own eyes how the schools, hospitals, factories, prisons function. There is no risk, therefore, that the increase of power created by the panoptic machine may degenerate into tyranny; the disciplinary mechanism will be democratically controlled, since it will be constantly accessible “to the great tribunal committee of the world.” This Panopticon, subtly arranged so that an observer may observe, at a glance, so many different individuals, also enables everyone to come and observe any of the observers. The seeing machine was once a sort of dark room into which individuals spied; it has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.”

²⁴⁹ Tony Bennett, “Exhibition, Truth, Power: Reconsidering ‘The Exhibitionary Complex,’” in *The Documenta 14 Reader*, eds. Q. Latimer and A. Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel, 2017), 344.

The difference between the prison and the museum – despite the obvious: freedom to visit and to leave the museum space whenever one wants, even if it feels sometimes like trespassing – lies in the degree of the method of disciplinary power. While the sovereign power chooses to use coercion using spectacle and other openly executed punishments, the museum addresses the public persuasively by making them complicit with power through representation. Bennett writes here:

Thus, if the museum supplanted the scene of punishment in taking on the function of displaying power to the populace, the rhetorical economy of the power that was displayed was significantly altered. Rather than embodying an alien and coercive principle of power which aimed to cow the people into submission, the museum – addressing the people as a public, as citizens – aimed to inveigle the general populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power which it represented to it as its own.²⁵⁰

The various forms of representation in a public museum set up direct linkages between an individual and state power – or the sovereign and its populace – and even further individualise the individual's relation to the sovereign. It can be described very much as a governmental power, instead of a biopower, that is directed not at individuals and their education, but at the control of life as a species. But what happens if the representational circle is broken in a realising act of misrepresentation, or of becoming aware of the overload of exclusionary moments in an institution related to the archive and collection and its supposedly universalist approach to culture's "history of Man"?

Universalist Principles of the Public Museum

Recapitulating this interwoven, historical complex: Bentham's Panopticon – which was conceived in the beginning of the 19th century – was famously analysed in *Discipline and Punish* by Michel Foucault in 1975 as a pivotal point in history towards a society of discipline (an earth-shaking shift of subjectivity). Foucault's thoughts were taken up by Tony Bennett in the *Exhibitionary Complex* in 1988 to help him critique public museums as places of disciplinary power and of bourgeois-capitalist ideologies with the aim to manage the population and even create the subjects they needed. This was set in motion based on representing the history of the man in scientific rationality. This universalist claim came with enormous exclusionary mechanisms, let alone exclusions within "Western" societies by class and gender, but also reproducing colonial hierarchies.

Originally, the public museum was conceived as a vessel for an adequate representation of "a principle of general human universality".²⁵¹ Needless to say, this was an illusion but – still today – also a powerful humanistic disguise to tell the story

²⁵⁰ Bennett, "Political Rationality," in *The Birth of the Museum*, 95.

²⁵¹ Bennett, "Political Rationality," *The Birth of the Museum*, 91.

of man from the Western narrative of an entrepreneurial, capitalist, profit-oriented ideal.²⁵² It conceals not only profound structural inequality within a nation (the hegemony of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie, sets the ideal and norms of behaviour, structurally disadvantaging a significant part of the non-white, non-male population), but it also obscures the relationship to “foreign” cultures by representing artefacts supplemental at best to a naturalised culture of man in rather biased and dismissive ways. The naturalising and universalising effect of a public museum, in Bennett’s words, “whether on the basis of the gendered, racial, class or other social patterns of its exclusions and biases, [...] can be held to be inadequate and therefore in need of supplementation.”²⁵³

This effect leads to two problems that are intertwined with each other: the problem of representation (as discussed in Chapter 2.3 with Spivak) and of “positioning” (as discussed before with Haraway). For the problem of positioning, postcolonial theory among others asks for the dominant position of a “Western” hegemony to be de-universalised by “provincializing”²⁵⁴ and “decentering”²⁵⁵ it. While Ming Tiampo questions the dominance of the concept of modernism in the arts as a Western phenomenon by situating and theorising non-Western modernisms that hold histories of their own, Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests “provincializing Europe.” Europe – not as a region, but as an epistemology of the Enlightenment – separated non-Western space and thought as backward and underdeveloped. A grand trick to make others imagine themselves as “lacking” something that can only be overcome by becoming the supposedly developed modern “West.” Chakrabarty’s effort to provincialise this dominance would give way to other forms of governing in a less dominant relationship to capital and the global economy.

Museums’ strategies to “add” art objects of non-“Western” tradition to the museum space of the “Western” art canon have resulted in unsatisfactory effects, which in general aimed to not disrupt the hegemonic narrative (of distribution and economic profit). The thoroughly and much elsewhere critiqued exhibitions *Magiciens de la terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin in 1989 at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle de la Villette, and *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* at MoMA, New York, in 1984/1985 may be consulted to imagine the problems of these “additions.” For a more current example – one that shows that these effects are in no way resolved – I want to refer to Maura Reilly’s

²⁵² For further clarification, I refer to Chapter 3.2 (Haraway).

²⁵³ Bennett, “Political Rationality,” *The Birth of the Museum*, 91.

²⁵⁴ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference – New Edition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

²⁵⁵ See Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

critique on the rehang of the MoMA's permanent exhibition space that was introduced in 2019 as a grand gesture of opening to "Modernism Plus".²⁵⁶

Failed/False Universalisms and Gestures of Inclusion

The problematics of representation in exhibitionary formats – beyond the inclusion of marginalised histories in the canon of art and culture, which very often feels supplemental at best – remain somewhat unsolved, since exclusion is inherent to representation, as it is to all language- and sign-based communication. As laid out in the previous chapter, in "WHAT COMES AFTER THE SHOW? ON POSTREPRESENTATIONAL CURATING", Nora Sternfeld opts for a non-representational curating, stepping away from the museum's representational mode into an active organising of social spaces of conflict or contact zones.²⁵⁷ Oliver Marchart closes in on this proposal, calling for the political positioning of curators and art institutions in general in his essay "The Curatorial Function."²⁵⁸ He argues for a curator as organiser of public spheres with political art. Marchart draws his argument from Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and the figure of the *organic intellectual*, who is able to make the hegemony of state culture publicly visible and to organise counter-hegemonic measures.

Bennett himself hints at Gramsci's counter-hegemony theory as a mode for museums to dynamically embrace forces "from outside". At the same time, Bennett highlights that, in fact, the public museum (like other institutions) cannot be seen as a closed institution fixed in time, as museums are subject to internal processes and demands from the outside that force museums to incorporate perspectives that were not represented within the museum walls.²⁵⁹ Sternfeld aims for an "understanding of curating as an enabling process of collaborative knowledge production with an unexpected outcome."²⁶⁰ This understanding comes very close to Bennett's concept of "governmental assemblage", as we will show later.

Art institutions are not a fixed entity; they are discursive formations within the regime of truth, a discourse shaped by many different utterances, speeches, writings, thoughts, opinions... In my opinion, a rigid juxtaposition of hegemonic state institutions and counter-hegemonic practices all too easily paints an overly simplistic,

²⁵⁶ See Maura Reilly, "MoMA's Revisionism Is Piecemeal and Problem-Filled: Feminist Art Historian Maura Reilly on the Museum's Rehang," *ARTnews*, 31 October 2019, <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/reviews/moma-rehang-art-historian-maura-reilly-13484/>.

²⁵⁷ See Nora Sternfeld, "WHAT COMES AFTER THE SHOW? ON POSTREPRESENTATIONAL CURATING," in *OnCurating 14: From the World of Art Archive*, eds. Saša Nabergoj and Dorothee Richter (2012), 21–24.

²⁵⁸ Oliver Marchart, "The Curatorial Function – Organizing the Ex/Position," *OnCurating 9: Curating Critique*, ed. Marianne Eigenheer (2011): 43–46, accessed 16 September 2023, <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-9-reader/the-curatorial-function-organizing-the-ex-position.html>.

²⁵⁹ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 91.

²⁶⁰ Sternfeld, "WHAT COMES AFTER THE SHOW?," 21–24.

binary picture. As always, contexts are specific and situated, and one must always historicise, locate, and contextualise them. The issue of class and exclusion does not disappear within counter-hegemonic effects: examples of a single artist's urge to attack museums and institutions for their own benefit, gaining access only to close off the art field after entering it, are plentiful. A counter-hegemonic movement must be built on heterogeneous solidarity beyond a restricted group of members with more often than not a similar class background. The awareness of one's own position in this discursive formation, which spans from individuals' idiosyncratic selves to communal and national forms of governance, cannot be denied. Obfuscating one's own desires, aims, and interests within a community-based setting can be not only misleading and confidence-breaking, but also toxic in the long run. Despite one's best efforts for non- and post-representational – or “radically democratic” – ways of exhibiting, breaking away from a hegemonic culture of institutions, one cannot so easily get rid of the representational effects of power and dominance leading their way to discrimination. For a close look into the practical side of these problems – especially on daily-life practices in group dynamics, where all its differences in cultural knowledge from various class backgrounds– I want to refer to Chapter 5, and especially the case studies of *Philadelphia Assembled*. The relationship between the initiators (artists and curators) and the public – participating robustly, or passively as an audience – provides an indication of the power relation within the formed temporal assemblage: hidden desires and ideological representations within these assemblages come to the forefront one way or another – sometimes in plain sight by “appropriating” participants and sometimes in obscured manipulations in co-creation. The highly praised discourse around relationality would need to clarify the “quality” of said relations between participants, artists, curators, and all involved...

Discourse of Truth in the Exhibitionary Complex

Another important aspect of the genealogy of the public museum according to Bennett is that public museums were not only scenes of spectacle or surveillance, but they also deployed a new discourse of “truth” by displaying – historically speaking – new forms of rational knowledge (geology, archaeology, biology, and evolutionary sciences) that were meant to be “civic engines” to educate citizens of newly founded democracies, which were already in the beginning indistinguishable from industrialisation and 19th-century capitalism. The discourse of “truth”, according to Foucault, is produced through scientific discourse and institutions that reproduce and transmit it and is controlled (through hegemonic strategies and exclusionary techniques) by political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media). This truth is in fact in high demand for economic and political reasons; it was, in fact, a condition of the formation and development of capitalism. This is the reason why knowledge and power are always interlinked with each other according to Foucault. However, the crucial underlying questions are the following: “What forms of truth

shaped the development of public museums? What kinds of power did these forms of truth constitute and exercise?”²⁶¹

This new regime of “truth” according to rational thought that was represented in the public museum – the humanist ideal at its core – came with its limits for the citizens of these rather newly established representative democratic nations. In this liberal agenda within a national framework, citizens were produced as a closed unity – constructing the norm of a white, male bourgeois subject – and exclusions were made on behalf of rational thought which led to ethnic and gender inequalities in the representation of museum’s collection. It also reproduces colonialist inequality by representing a split between an “inferior” “foreign” art and culture in relation to a “superior” national one; hence, it is directly linked to imperialist power and colonialism. Additionally, I only want to briefly mention not only representational inequality, but also, of course, the factual theft and forceful appropriation of a lot of artefacts in ethnographic museums, specifically. Objects on display – as neutral and universal as they might appear – are not only representationally stripped from their contexts for the narration of a more suitable history of (“Western”) humanity, but they are also quite literally forcefully or duplicitously taken through colonialist enterprises.²⁶² These inherent problems are mirrored in the representation of the museum’s collections up to today. Historical exhibitions – and many collection exhibitions still today, since these problems don’t go away in philosophical and educational turns alone – are meant to be informed by a political rationality and universality, but they can never fulfil their universalist promise in the end.

The exhibitionary complex's evolutionary ordering of things and peoples generated a demand that it should offer a universally inclusive depiction of the history of Man as the culmination of the history of life on earth which it, too, proved unable to meet owing to the fact that the position of Man it constructed was always occupied by historically exclusive examples – usually white, bourgeois, male, and European or North American.²⁶³

On a philosophical level, Foucault already formulates a critique of this rationality (of prisons and other disciplinary institutions) and even broader of the concept of “Man” in *The Order of Things* in 1966.²⁶⁴ “Man”, a concept invented in the Enlightenment within the modern idiom, was considered a fixed object, a universal category untouched by history and context. Specifically arguing in the field of social science, Foucault argues that the Enlightenment’s promise of universal freedom through rationality cannot be achieved, and that studies on “Man” as a universal notion are

²⁶¹ Bennett, “Exhibition, Truth, Power,” 341.

²⁶² For a discourse on current epistemic violence, I would refer to Walter Dignolo’s “The Dark Side of Modernity”; for a critical discourse on repatriation, I would refer to Clémentine Deliss.

²⁶³ Tony Bennett, Bennett, “Thinking (with) Museums,” 25.

²⁶⁴ See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*.

not worth undertaking. He lays the foundations for the scholars of posthuman theory like Rosi Braidotti and her in-depth critique of the notion of the Anthropocene, where the concept of “Man” still being applied. In real-life consequences, the concept of the universalist idea of “Man” shaped after “white, bourgeois, male, and European or North American” sets the example of epistemic violence, which resembles the real violence with the domination of an imperialist power that disguises its political and economic drives with a universalist humanistic ideal.

Bennett considers the last comprehensive epistemic change in exhibitionary practice broadly put, from a Renaissance episteme – of “hidden resemblances” and the representation of curiosities and similarities still in the private spaces of salons and cabinets of curiosity – to the modern episteme of chronological and evolutionary order.²⁶⁵ What shift has occurred since the origin of the public museum in the 19th century, and what relation between the discourse of truth and forms of power do we experience in our times in exhibitionary practices? Bennett revisited the “Exhibitionary Complex” for *Documenta 14*, in 2017, mentioning specifically two new, major – and significantly diverging – influences on public museums²⁶⁶:

1. [...] the displacement of evolutionary orderings of the relations between peoples and cultures by non-hierarchical conceptions of cultural difference.²⁶⁷

2. [...] the development of art-investment funds leading to an increasingly speculative structure for art markets, the rise of corporate sponsorship and collecting [...] have resulted in increasingly strong connections between art museums and representatives of global capital.²⁶⁸

While the first emphasis on cultural difference in non-hierarchical conceptions promotes cross-cultural understanding, highlights tolerance, and speaks from a more locally situated knowledge formation, the second undermines the democratic narrative of public museums. Often, event-based participatory performances in public museums hardly provide a public place of encounter with differences, but rather gather a closed, like-minded group of people with similar backgrounds in wealth and class. Despite beautiful images of people assembling within the aesthetics of entertainment, there is little exchange happening, let alone a visible critical mode. The never-ideal space in public museums of “cross-class commingling” is now filled with stakeholders. Yet, the first mentioned influence can also oftentimes represent a placeholder for incorporating subjugated knowledges into the museum in a way that the overall representational formation is not called into question, and without disturbing the hegemony of a “Western” paradigm.

²⁶⁵ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 96.

²⁶⁶ Bennett, “Exhibition, Truth, Power,” 341.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 346.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 351.

From “Cross-Class Commingling” to Contact Zones

A curatorial approach based on an awareness of one’s own governmental embeddedness for a participatory usage of institutions as a critical-emancipatory and democratising tool to find one’s own “way to be governed” can only happen in an open space, that welcomes multitudes. What makes the museum space predestined for these “curatorial assemblages” – these public fields of contacts, engagements, encounters, and conflicts with highly specific contexts and situations – is its historical mission inherited from the start. According to Bennett:

[T]he museum – in its conception if not in all aspects of its practice – aimed not at the sequestration of populations but, precisely, at the mixing and intermingling of publics – elite and popular – which had hitherto tended towards separate forms of assembly.²⁶⁹

Historically, public exhibitions sought to be zones of “cross-class commingling”, where inclusion and distinction met in one place: an open, democratic platform for people from different class backgrounds to meet and observe each other, with a somewhat hidden agenda to educate in favour of a bourgeois lifestyle:

Thus [...], the public rights demand is produced and sustained by the dissonance between, on the one hand, the democratic rhetoric governing the conception of public museums as vehicles for popular education and, on the other, their actual functioning as instruments for the reform of public manners.²⁷⁰

It’s another question whether this class intermingling still holds true today in public museums; however, I want to emphasise seeing this open space of education as a change, since influence can come from many sides – not only top-down or bottom-up, but transversal. In fact, the museum or exhibition space has been tackled in recent years in various ways, exactly because from the start it enabled a meeting point of differences in a culturally and representationally (more or less) inclusive way – even only as a grand promise or gestural ideal. It seems that now is the time to call for demands of equal representation, but also of a public space to be shaped publicly and with communal engagement.

Analysing the set-up of the exhibition space as a contact zone, I need to come back to thoughts of the relational formation of its participants. While in the traditional sense, “cross-class intermingling” originated from the outset with a certain idea of order, exchanges in contact zones can create conflictual constellations. Yet, it is a self-fulfilling prophecy to consider the museum space only as an enclosed space, not permeable at all, to create a scapegoat entity – the terror of an exclusive institution –

²⁶⁹ Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 93.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 90.

which can be fought in vain.²⁷¹ A Gramscian reading of this situation with a conflictual interchange of a hegemony–counter-hegemony structure can at least bring a certain dynamic into the museum discourse, concludes Bennett:

For once, as in the Gramscian paradigm they generally are, museums are represented as instruments of ruling-class hegemony, then so museums tend to be thought of as amenable to a general form of cultural politics – one which, in criticizing those hegemonic ideological articulations governing the thematics of museum displays, seeks to forge new articulations capable of organizing a counter-hegemony.²⁷²

Museums are then, on the one hand, representations of a “ruling-class hegemony”, and on the other places where forms of public critique can be ignited in line with a counter-hegemonic movement. This juxtaposition between a ruling-class hegemony and its counter-hegemony – yet bringing a conflictual discourse into the public cultural sphere displayed in the museum space – seems like a dialectical one. If, historically, a ruling-class hegemony could be eventually subsumed and imagined in a rather close-minded idea of bourgeois-ness, today’s complex constellations of contemporary society – even within a national framework with all its global relations and migratory conditions attached – makes it impossible to imagine a standardised ruling-class hegemony, specifically in the cultural sphere.

Yet, I feel that only in less traditional exhibition practices – set up as contact zones – can confrontations with overarching governing structures (of state, of a community, of religion) be enacted and acted out in critical ways and carried out as practices of resistance, ultimately creating new ways of governing. These exhibition models can be organised within public museums, but they certainly are in need of renewed critical and situated exhibitionary practices aiming towards the public sphere. Biennials as a specific exhibitionary format can be analysed in this regard. Again, I want to refer to Chapter 5.1, and the analyses of *Philadelphia Assembled*.

The Turn Toward Governmentality with “Governmental Assemblages”

Tony Bennett’s newer writings shift from the idea of public museums as vehicles of disciplinary power (seen through Michel Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power as a regulation of behaviour through spectacle and self-surveillance) to Foucault’s concept of governmentality, which more broadly takes into account the individual’s behaviour in relation to the sovereign. Bennett himself admits that the idea of a disciplinary-based exhibitionary complex has its limits as a method of looking at what a public museum is or could be – especially given the many different diverging models of museums since the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851. The exhibitionary

²⁷¹ In this regard, see especially Tony Bennett’s argumentation against Crimp’s and Adorno’s thinking of an enclosed museum and archive: Ibid., 94.

²⁷² Ibid., 91.

complex seen through disciplinary power doesn't bother with the effects of individuals but describes the top-down process of institutions and their educational power towards the visitors. It is even not applicable to all institutions called museums. Newer exhibition formats might be aware of the pitfalls of the museum's hegemonic power and try to react to it, architectonically and in content. Let's leave aside private museums and galleries completely.

In his essay from 2015, "Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage", Bennett argues that museums were not only sites of knowledge distribution with the means of disciplinary power early on but were also sites of self-improvement and self-governing. This thought derived from Foucault's later writings on the concept of governmentality:

At the same time, however, the public museum also became a significant cultural site for the exercise of the new form of power that Foucault called governmental, in which the activity of governing is directed toward "the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, etc. (Foucault 1991, 100)".²⁷³

Foucault mentioned "private and civic agencies"²⁷⁴ – which were already established in British society at the time of the Crystal Palace Exhibition, and their self-organised practice of exhibiting with the aim of public education and improvement. There are plentiful examples of exhibitionary practices initiated by non-institutional, communal groups (as bourgeois gatherings, and within worker and union contexts). For an intriguing example from a non-British context and in feminist thought, I can refer to Elke Krasny's essay, "The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex".²⁷⁵ She draws her reference to the turn towards discursive formats from salon society in Vienna in the 19th century, which was organised often exclusively by (bourgeois) women, more specifically by marginalised Jewish women, who themselves were excluded from societal circles in two ways – as women and as Jews. These early societies – which developed differently in European societies – were an early form of "governmentalization of the state" (Foucault), where the relation between the state (the sovereign) and the individual regulated through governmental techniques could not be described only as a "top-down" approach. The relationships between individual actors and agents or self-organised communities and institutions are somewhat of an exchange, mutually and in conflict. My research of contemporary curatorial practices draws from these historical engagements of members of civil societies.

²⁷³ Bennett, "Thinking (with) Museums," 8-9.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁷⁵ Elke Krasny, "The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex," in *Feminism and Art History Now. Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice*, eds. Victoria Horne, Lara Perry (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 147–163.

To “use” exhibition spaces – more precisely: exhibitionary practices – to influence society and societies at large using self-organised, self-governing perspectives is today more crucial than ever. For too long, rules of cultural representation were left to a union of an art historical canon and a capitalist-driven economy. We may think of exhibitions and projects on AIDS or exhibitions on climate change as an educational tool to raise solidarity, which are often not triggered by institutions but by activist groups and individuals. As the shortlist of the Turner Prize in 2021 makes abundantly clear, a change in the exhibitionary episteme is upon us: besides the fact that four out of five nominees were collectives (assemblages?), all the nominees’ artistic and curatorial practices are politically motivated directly or indirectly towards influencing societies through governmental techniques of and for self-organised communities.²⁷⁶

I would suggest analysing these artistic and curatorial projects – for now using Bennett’s terminology – as governmental assemblages, expanding on Bennett’s notion, which he specifically relates to the museum space. For me, every exhibitionary practice directed to a public sphere (and not only to the public space of the museum – hence: the streets, the internet, and other spaces where public assemblies are possible) can be occupied and transformed by governmental assemblages. I am interested in these governmental practices that address subjects as a public.

Governmental Assemblages

Governmental practices in this sense, digested with Foucault, are organised practices of governing, embedded in the subject’s consciousness (techniques of the self, self-surveillance, etc.), while the subject is also aware of being governed. “The art of being governed” finds its manifestation historically in a sovereign, a superstructure, which sets the rules for living together. However, especially in democratic states, the framework of governance was hard-fought until a social contract was reached. Turned around, the governmental power of an individual acting in society and its institutions will change society and institutions. Alas, disconnected individuals are hardly ever heard. Forming networks, collectives, communities, assemblies, and assemblages are inherently more powerful. Commonly used, assemblages describe loose collections or gatherings of things and people that are usually organised in a temporary network “of bodies and things”, which might be held together through a common discourse, a common interest, and goal, and realised and practised in acts and statements (like exhibitions, events, and dialogues). Bennett refers to Gilles Deleuze here:

“What is an assemblage?”: it is “a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them,”

²⁷⁶ Information on the Turner Prize Shortlist can be found here: <https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/turner-prize-shortlist-announced-0>, accessed 13 August 2021.

its “only unity is that of a co-functioning [...] It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys.” (Deleuze and Parnet 2002, 69)²⁷⁷

What does “governmental assemblages” bring to the exhibitionary complex?

Governmental assemblages should not be confused with exhibitionary formats in the manner of “relational aesthetics”, where basically a relation is being established between a fixed curator position and the artists, or the artist and the public as “material” – regulated only within the aesthetic field. It is much more occupied with shifting the power position of a curator or a director (and artists) into a network, versus a curator with one singular vision resulting in rather communal formations. This new exhibitionary practice cannot remain only within the aesthetic field; its occupation expands in governmental, political, and, in the end, economic terms. The new challenge for museums, like for biennials, and other exhibitionary formats alike – if these institutions still want to exert relevance and power – is to embrace and support new knowledges and their forms, opening to the critical modes of counter-hegemonic, democratising networks and assemblages, rather than to continually reproduce representations from toxic collections, naturalising ideals of the Enlightenment and market interests.

Problematisation of Governmental Assemblages

Governmental assemblages and other governmental practices in exhibitionary formats can help come to new terms with institutions, shifting the power dynamics towards a commons-based form of living in resistance to hyper-capitalistic ways of exploitation. However, I want to point out the pitfalls of these formations. Class differences are still at play, like in the early British clubs of civic society: people with a specific class background engage in social and artistic public events, as they feel more entitled to speak up in society. More often in a “Western” context, the culturally educated and well-established public is active in self-governmental activities, as they have the time, the cultural capital, and economic capacity at hand.

Bennett’s proposal on governmental assemblages circumvents the aspect of economy, labour, and monetary compensation in this rather precarious field altogether. The subsistence of cultural producers, artists, curators, and researchers relies on professionalised services from paying institutions. The art market – and art transformed into a sellable commodity – is still the most recognised way for artists and curators to earn a living. How is money distributed in these newly formed formations? A problematic aspect of governmental assemblages is the obvious instrumentalisation of a neoliberal state logic to outsource sovereign tasks without appropriate economic compensation.²⁷⁸ The task of taking care of oneself in a neoliberal logic that is forced on individuals comes close to its realisation in these governmental assemblages in exhibitionary formats – at least in “Western” societies

²⁷⁷ Bennett, “Thinking (with) Museums,” 14.

²⁷⁸ See Caffentzis, “The Future of ‘The Commons.’”

with a once-established welfare context. The dominant neoliberal capital system has eroded states and their sovereign tasks to an extent that active parts of a society need to take care of climate change, health, the social fabric, themselves, etc.

On another note, on openness, permeability – and radical inclusivity – towards public museums, Bennett reminds us that exclusionary regulations will still be part of a museum's policy – and maybe for the better:

Museums need to be considered in terms of their relations to [...] governmental assemblages, and less as self-contained knowledge / power apparatuses than as switch points in the circuits through which knowledges are produced and circulated through different networks. As such, they play a part in the distribution of the freedom through which liberal forms of government are organized, according to a capacity for free and reflexive forms of self-government to some sections of the populations they connect with while at the same time denying such capacities to others.²⁷⁹

These free and reflexive forms, which derive from the history of liberal thought, need to be set in stone for representational formats. The shift identified by Wendy Brown²⁸⁰ in public museums toward embracing tolerance and representing difference is not only a counter-hegemonic demand but needs to stay at the core of institutions.

3.4 Exhibitionary Biennial Complex: Exhibited Criticality in Globalised Economic Compliance

In the following, I focus my research on biennial formats. I argue that biennials (and I count all recurring large-scale exhibitions and cultural events loosely connected to contemporary art, even with a different cycle like documenta, as part of this format) are particularly well suited for investigating how such governmental assemblages can work and sometimes are at work. Despite a general critique of the “Biennialisation Circus” – of biennials as pure entertainment (without any educational attachment to a discourse of truth) and an elitist representation of contemporary art with “biennial” artists, very much in line with a “Western” idea of art and its exclusion mechanism, backed up by the art market and powerful galleries – many newer founded biennials paint a different picture – one of a particular, locally driven exhibition format embracing critical modes, with “a will to globality” (Okwui Enwezor).²⁸¹ Biennials usually tend to change their authorial personnel with every iteration; new ideas and knowledges are therefore constantly being displayed with every iteration, they are temporary, and they usually relate to a “global” contemporary discourse in a critical

²⁷⁹ Bennett, “Thinking (with) Museums,” 16.

²⁸⁰ Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁸¹ Together with Shwetal A. Patel, I conducted a comprehensive survey on Biennials. See *OnCurating Issue 39: Draft: Global Biennial Survey 2018*, eds. Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel (Zurich: OnCurating.org, June 2018).

way. In parts, they are freer from their dependency on state structures (since the invited curators and artists are often not permanent employees, thus with a lesser affiliation with the institution), but are therefore often precarious, unstable, and self-exploitative. Biennials also have special relationships to their public, since they are events, related foremost to a region or city, and not specifically to state-dependent art institutions; hence, the access seems to be less of a hurdle to a broader and more diverse local population.

Biennials as Forms of Governmental Practices

Since at least 2010, a great focus on contemporary art discourse has emerged, especially surrounding the “biennial format” from a rather new perspective, considering not only art historical and aesthetic trajectories often associated with museum studies, but also looking into the economic, socioeconomic, political, and geopolitical conditions. The large numbers of justified critiques of the Eurocentric hegemony of art’s modernity and the constant classification of all other art practices in relation to the dominant Western canon is still a matter of negotiation and discussion in many ways. Analyses of the “exhibitionary biennial complex” find themselves in the middle of contemporary, hence complex, constellations of worldviews within post/decolonial thought, seen through the lens of aesthetic and visual art practices and their representation, and display-ability with all its distribution channels.

I want to propose adding to this discourse with a closer look into what a biennial is and can do by applying Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality. As biennials are a rather transparent amalgamation of political and economic apparatuses – of power and knowledge with local and global ramifications – within cultural expressions, they present themselves as prime examples for analysing the function of a neoliberal condition and its effects on everyday life. While the beginning of public museums in the 19th century could be seen as “civic engines”²⁸² in line with a liberal agenda, biennials – maybe conceived as an exhibitionary format that arose from the public museum and its origins, world fairs – took up the neoliberal agenda²⁸³ early on. The simultaneous loud presentations of hegemonic narratives (of national identities, of “global” – often meaning “Western” – ideology, of economic potency) and the enabling of critical interventions²⁸⁴ are inherent to contemporary biennials worldwide.

²⁸² Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex”, in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).

²⁸³ The neoliberal agenda does not only entail self-realisation and the most flexible labour conditions but places all aspects of social life under the dominance of the economy, whereas liberalism had politics – society, and its equalising parameters – at the forefront.

²⁸⁴ The critical mode in Michel Foucault’s “What is Critique?” indicates that critique and governmental state institutions are conditional to each other in modern democratic states. Critique in liberal and neoliberal thought is occupied with the questions of how to be governed, of self-regulation, and self-governing.

Compliance, Critique, and Compliance–Critique

Foucault's analyses suggest that the modern nation-state and its institutions are formed in conjunction with critical thought. In that respect, critique forms the institution and does not utter the desire to get rid of the institution all together.

Critique – as the “Art not to be governed like that” – regulates sovereign power. Yet – looking also at the various biennials out there –, forms of critique can be drastically different, and this should be addressed: there is (“passive”) critique and (“active”) critique. There are so many forms of compliant critique (and so many captured in the hegemonic framework) that one strongly feels that the mere gestures of critical art and exhibitions are like soft pillows for a clear conscience for a bourgeois society which might agree on the critique, but only to calm their nerves without the need to act differently. At the same time, Foucault warns us not to easily and categorically call out as wrong everything that comes with state power and its institutions.²⁸⁵

Ultimately, the most diverse constellation of artists at a biennial can be challenged if the neoliberal economic structure behind it remains intact.

This Biennial, That Biennial, and the Other Biennial – Never the Same

Starting with a rather simple definition of a biennial, one can describe biennials as a recurring (2, 3, 4, 5, 10 years) contemporary art event, usually displaying contemporary artworks in large-scale – “mega” – exhibitions, often accompanied by a discursive environment, with discussions and other public encounters with the audience and artists. The artworks and art practices on display and in discussion are usually engaged within the framework of contemporaneity; living artists often exhibit site-specific art projects that are newly commissioned. The biennial itself is embedded in a city, a region, within a national cultural framework, and/or in a local specific setting, but one can easily observe this by the added “biennial”, “triennial”, etc., to the location in which a biennial is set up.²⁸⁶ Biennials are initiated with a “will to globality”,²⁸⁷ as the late Okwui Enwezor put it, and express a desire (or better: the will) to engage in a global and “modern” public sphere. This may emerge from various origins: one could see certain biennials in light of a national narrative,²⁸⁸ (often newly formed) nations demonstrating industrial development or cultural

²⁸⁵ In the historical context, Michel Foucault addressed this critique against the radical Leftist approach of the RAF and others.

²⁸⁶ Why a certain number of even newly founded biennial exhibition formats like Bergen Assembly refuse to take up the term “biennial” or “triennial” has more to do with art's complicating play with distinction than anything else.

²⁸⁷ “The will to globality” expressed by Okwui Enwezor can be read through Foucault's concept of the will. A concept that lets the subject not only follow rationality or desire but acts as a subject's expression to be determined. In that line of thought, a subject is constituted through her will, because she can determine her own direction.

²⁸⁸ In fact, many long-running biennials were initially meant to exhibit artists from the host nation only. In its inaugural years, the Venice Biennale was foremost for Italian artists and the unified country's new Italian citizens; so were the first iterations of the São Paulo Biennial, which was modelled after the Venice Biennale. Even the Havana Biennial, initiated by the Cuban government and still controlled by the state, started out with an exhibition to show art of “Latin America and the Caribbean” in a counter-representation within the Cold War binary.

progress²⁸⁹ cynically speaking so as to show the world a certain kind of democratic understanding and political freedom for its citizens²⁹⁰ – e.g., Saudi Arabia’s first biennial, the Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale in 2021 – or to counter certain dominant narratives, e.g., the Western narrative of modernity coming all the way from the Enlightenment, and its judgment of reason, making a distinction between contemporary art and crafts, dating crafts to the premodern. Apart from various reasons for setting up a biennial, each biennial enters a dialogue with an audience, a public – internationally and/or locally. Together with Shwetal A. Patel, I conducted a comprehensive survey on (hopefully) all biennials in 2018. The outcome was published in review form with the help of a visual evaluation diagram. Far from claiming a fully comprehensive image of biennials, it mostly reiterated the hugely diverse desires to establish a biennial, yet all relating in some way to a global biennial discourse of contemporary art.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ See, as a profound elaboration on the entanglements of postcolonial desires for progress and colonial pasts that do not wish to be seen in a strict historical trajectory of the biennial models starting from Venice:

Okwui Enwezor, “Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form,” Biennials, monographic edition of *MJ – Manifesta Journal: Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* 2 (Winter-Spring 2003-4);

Ranjit Hoskote, “Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial,” in *The Biennial Reader*, eds. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010).

²⁹⁰ Christian Morgner, “Inclusion and Exclusion in the Art World: A Sociological Account of Biennial Artists and Audiences,” *OnCurating* 46: *Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency*, eds. Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, and Dorothee Richter (June 2020): 34–50.

²⁹¹ Ronald Kolb and Shwetal A. Patel, “Survey review and considerations,” in *OnCurating* 39: *Draft: Global Biennial Survey* (June 2018): 15–34.

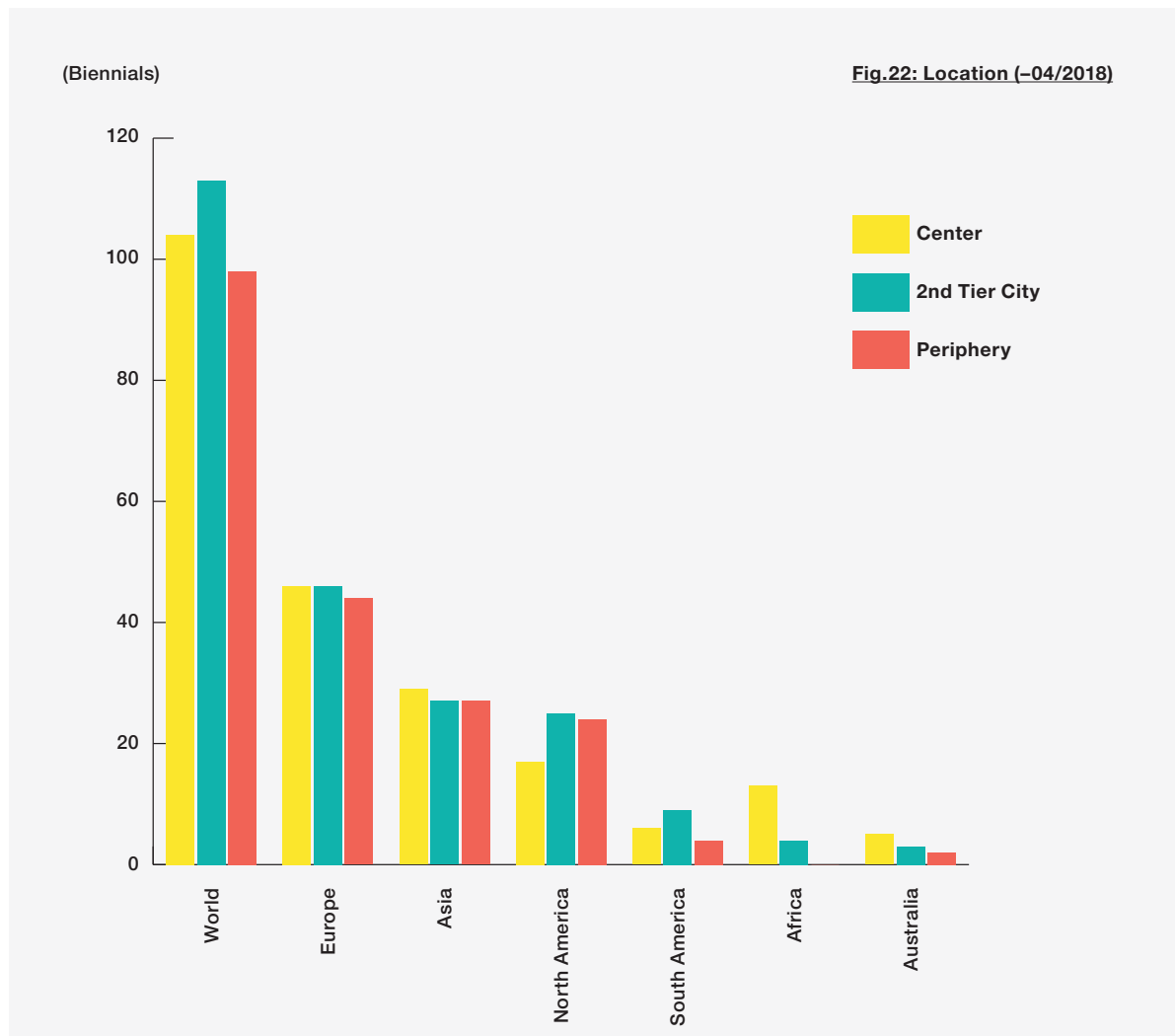


Fig. 12: Diagram of locations of Biennials, Ronald Kolb and Shwetal A. Patel, “Survey Review and Considerations,” in *OnCurating 39: Draft: Global Biennial Survey* (June 2018): 15–34.

Global vs. Local

Some biennials are primarily directed toward the so-called international art scene (whatever this heterogeneous group of actors consists of: poor artists with the hope of becoming famous? Collectors in fur? Professional museum curators and precarious independent workers?) and therefore are often founded in the hope of incentivising tourist visits, but also the local art scene, and hopefully also a more diverse local public is attracted by the biennial’s appeal. In this sense, every biennial is a *glocal* project, a translocal exhibition where transculturation happens, though the question is in what form or relationship. Biennials that cater more to the first group – the international art scene – are confronted with criticism, as they do not play out their site-specificity, their local accessibility, and tend to be seen as a vehicle of the overly dominating art market and its overshadowing interest in profit more than anything

else.²⁹² Yet, the often expressed critique of biennials that host only “international” – meaning art market-relevant – artists contains a similar threat for a biennial that is solely rooted in the local or national art scene, one that would make the presentation of art fall back on a local identity, playing directly into identarian narratives. This can hypothetically lead strangely enough to a reinvigoration of fixed (local) identities with an inherent danger of re-identification with a national or locally connoted project. To follow Jens Kastner here: the reproduction of processes and an insistence on ethnic identities within the vernacular of even the most international biennial preserve ethnicity as a closed formation.²⁹³ An early example of a successful counter-narrative to a “Western” international art scene can be found in the 3rd Havana Biennial. Gerardo Mosquera, one of the founders of the Bienal de la Habana and a co-organiser of the first three iterations, pointed out that, “[a]nother significant change brought by the third Bienal was that European and North American artist with Third World diaspora backgrounds, such as those identifying themselves as black artists from Great Britain, were included, as was the Border Art Workshop from San Diego and Tijuana.”²⁹⁴

Biennial Categorisations To Let Go Of

In 2020, ten years after the *Biennial Reader*, issue 46 of *OnCurating on Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in Times of Emergency*²⁹⁵ was published, for which I was co-editor together with Dorothee Richter and Shwetal A. Patel. Henk Slager – director of the 9th edition of the Bucharest Biennale, invited us to host the conference under the same name. One of the aims of the conference was to potentially renew the discourse on the biennial format. Over the course of the previous ten years, various categorisations had been established in a dialectical style. These categorisations may separate and distinguish certain biennials from others with a rather hegemonic undertone. It may dismiss certain more newly established – often “peripheral” – biennials as a mere representational production for and within a national or regional identity, as art market-driven aesthetic homogenisers for economic reasons, as culture reduced to a spectacle for tourists, and so on. This comes along with polarised descriptions of biennials as “Janus-faced.”²⁹⁶ In the very same year in 2010, the still profoundly relevant and prominent

²⁹² For a more profound analysis, please read Shwetal A. Patel, “Resisting Biennialisation: Institutional and Community Responses to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale,” *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency*, eds. Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, and Dorothee Richter (June 2020).

²⁹³ Jens Kastner, “Staat und kulturelle Produktion,” June 19, 2020, http://www.jenspetzkastner.de/fileadmin/user_upload/PDF/Soziologie___Politik/Staat_Kult_Produktion.pdf.

²⁹⁴ Gerardo Mosquera, “The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts,” in *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials*, 120–126.

²⁹⁵ *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency*.

²⁹⁶ At the *Biennale Principle*, a conference held in 2010 at the Bucharest Biennale 4, Beat Wyss and Jörg Scheller described biennials as “Janus-faced.” A text was later published: Beat Wyss and Jörg

Biennial Reader stated in its editorial that biennials are caught between spectacle and critique, with sceptics on the one side referring to biennials as a spectacle of the art market with always the same artists, and on the other encouraging critiques, claiming that biennials create an experimental format for critical discourse and exhibition-making.²⁹⁷ Setting up biennials in this polarised position seems to be less helpful in our times, as it tends to shed light on things in a right–wrong mode or an either–or. Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas suggest analysing biennial exhibitions and formats in a paradoxical way that may not be resolvable.²⁹⁸ In that case, there might not be one side or the other, but an intermingledness in varying degrees: economy, power, artistic expression, and other aspects come together in a sort of contested field with different outcomes, one aspect dominating others in different cases.

Refined Categorisations

A more elaborate categorisation was given by Charlotte Bydler.²⁹⁹ According to Bydler, early biennials started out as “philanthropic-capitalistic enterprises”, e.g., the Venice Biennale and the biennials that followed this model, like Bienal de São Paulo. Biennial formats founded later established themselves as the expression of the international political climate of the Cold War, e.g., documenta and Bienal de la Habana. Meanwhile, the biennials established after 1989 were occupied with a contemporary “global” format, which is often rooted in democratic aspirations in dealing with a collective trauma, e.g., the Gwangju Biennale, and the short-lived Johannesburg Biennale. The Gwangju Biennale was founded in 1995 in reminiscence of the 1980 repression of the Gwangju Democratisation Movement. The Johannesburg Biennale – founded in the same year in 1995 – was introduced to “restore” and enter into an international dialogue for artists of South Africa after the isolation and cultural boycotts the apartheid system had triggered.

The dichotomy between hegemonic narratives and formats of resistance developed by Oliver Marchart³⁰⁰ directs biennials toward a conflictual reading of power relations in a centre–periphery scheme. In the end, it questions the normative belief that a contemporary biennial format of today is a direct successor of the Venice Biennale. Moreover, within a constant struggle, biennials of “the periphery” questioned the dominant “Western” model of modernity and entered the struggle for hegemony a long time ago and may have even won it. This thought is directly in line with the 7th

Scheller, “Comparative Art History: The Biennale Principle,” in *STARTING FROM VENICE: STUDIES ON THE BIENNALE*, ed. Clarissa Ricci (Milan: et al. Edizione, 2010).

²⁹⁷ Filipovic, Hal, and Øvstebø, *The Biennial Reader*, 12–27.

²⁹⁸ Julia Bethwaite and Anni Kangas, “The Paradoxes of the Biennale,” *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials*, 494–502.

²⁹⁹ Charlotte Bydler, *The Global Artworld, Inc.: On the Globalization of Contemporary Art* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2004).

³⁰⁰ Oliver Marchart, “The globalization of art and the ‘Biennials of Resistance’: a history of the biennials from the periphery,” in *World Art 4*, no. 2 (2014): 263–276.

Gwangju Biennale in 2008 and its narrative of resistance. The director of the 7th Gwangju Biennale interestingly enough was Okwui Enwezor, who later directed the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. Ranjit Hoskote, the co-curator, expressed the resistance against a “colonial” Venice Biennale model.³⁰¹ But examples of early biennials also show the distancing of a supposedly “Western” model of art history: the Bienal de São Paulo changed its narrative and departed from the original model of the Venice Biennale rather early on after its foundation. At least since 1978, the Bienal de São Paulo has turned into a very different project, and laid the groundwork for the Havana Biennial, according to Mirko Lauer, following Anita Orzes.³⁰² Other younger, and smaller, “Biennials of Resistance” followed.

Situating Biennials

In our globalised time, however, a differentiation cannot be drawn with a geographical mapping. Biennials in the “North” can be set up as models of resistance, while biennials in the “South” can express highly aestheticized formats for the art market. To complicate things even more, looking into a single biennial’s history – even the Venice Biennale – reveals a mind-boggling transition between artistic forces of the avant-garde, political-activist struggles, and, in the end, the overarching dominance of the art market in its current state. This is the complexity of the world in which we now live: an utterance (of any sort) must be researched and looked at with the specific context and history in mind, making it hard to apply any grand narratives from the past, like “East” and “West” or “Centre–Periphery”. In that regard, biennials can be seen as a mere form with a certain set of parameters; yet, while looking more closely into each one, one detects a rich history of different contents and contexts. This is also highlighted by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung in the conversation with Dorothee Richter in the already cited issue 46 of *OnCurating on Contemporary Art Biennials*.³⁰³

Derailing Biennials from Their Apparent Historical Trajectories

A historical outline provided by Federica Martini (through others, e.g., Peter Sloterdijk)³⁰⁴ put biennials in line with art fairs and festivals, together with public museums (which originated through nation-states and the rise of the capitalist system) and with that, in line with colonial pasts. In that way, biennials are often seen as remnants of world fairs, and with every newly founded biennial and iteration, it

³⁰¹ Ranjit Hoskote, “Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial,” in *The Biennial Reader*.

³⁰² Anita Orzes, “Curatorial Networks: The Havana Biennial and the Biennials in the South,” *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials*, 136–146.

³⁰³ Bonaventure Ndikung in discussion with Dorothee Richter, *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials*, 100–105.

³⁰⁴ Federica Martini and Vittoria Martini, *Just Another Exhibition: Stories and Politics of Biennials* (Milan: Postmediabooks, 2011). The text was updated in April 2020 for *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials*, 479–493.

cruelly refers to an origin in a Western colonial narrative.³⁰⁵ Yet – alas in a rather disciplinary and educational way – at least the art fairs and early public museums had the intention of bringing different classes together. The vision of a rather newly established ruling bourgeois class that was to “educate” the working class by showing them how to behave could be differently read as a reciprocal exchange between the two social groups. Today, the urgent desire for shared platforms where communities of different interests can come together and learn from each other by discussing things (and “educating” themselves admittedly within an asymmetric knowledge/power structure) perhaps sheds a different light on these old formats of fairs and festivals. I even would see it is a strength of biennials with a strong event character, as it can create a public sphere where our finely fragmented contemporary special interest-driven groups can escape their segregation and isolation and come together.

In my thinking, contemporary biennials are unlike public museums; they are not only an utterance derived from its connectedness to a specific time and a specific place. They relate to a global sphere – with all its colonial traces and postcolonial relations – and form a complex dialogue for a rather limited group of people. Public museums instead submit to a much stricter function of national representation, as they are oftentimes heavily financially and politically dependent on state funding. One could argue that biennials are on the front line of contemporary art practices, showing art and mediating discourse that has not yet entered the canonical narrative of art history presented in public museums and their collections.³⁰⁶ Because of their more fluid character and their relationship to the global sphere, biennials tend to move faster than traditional institutions with stricter structures. Biennials are, one could say, more neoliberal in their labour ethics, and more liberal in their line of thought.

Biennials as *Governing of the Self and Others*

I want to highlight the shift from public museums and art fairs reflecting a state-driven, national educational project to biennials as a flexible structure transgressing identities and catering to a global sphere. One could argue that Foucault later rearranged his own theoretical analyses of a somewhat deterministic ideology of the disciplinary power of modern states that he so famously laid out in the Panopticon as a model of the modern state. His thoughts on disciplinary power with the aim of constant self-surveillance derived from the spectacle of punishment shifted to the question of how a police state could have been overcome in the past. This study of history may be helpful to know in order to overcome it today and tomorrow.

³⁰⁵ See Timothy Mitchell, “Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order,” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 293.

³⁰⁶ In reference to the front line, the historical avant-garde movements were last to be discussed in *Documenta11* with Okwui Enwezor, and only in the framework of postcolonialism and a mutually influenced historiography of modernities with more than one dominant agent over another.

An important distinction in Foucault's proposed concept of governmentality – as an analysis of the neoliberal agenda, but also as a proposal of “freedom” in itself – is to position oneself much more clearly against the economic dominance of the neoliberal agenda over all aspects of the social. Foucault sets up governmentality as a much broader concept, trying to “bridge” the “modern sovereign state” and the “modern autonomous individual”, and show how they depend on each other.³⁰⁷ In this sense, governing means thinking of one's own rules of governance. The famous “conduct of conduct” is born. The ultimate trajectory is not getting rid of the state or state structures, but much more seeing the necessity of governing (“the self and others”)³⁰⁸ and institutions – which can be reshaped along the way – that help to govern a society.

Related to the (anti-)hegemonic biennial machine, governmentality makes visible (consciously or not) both the critical attitude of the individual (the artists, the curators, and the publics alike) and at the same time our compliance within hegemonic structures. The questions that arise within these structures, according to Foucault, is embedded in the questions of how to be (or not to be) governed.

And while the mode of self-organisation seems settled, the underlying problems of the governmental assemblages rooted in neoliberal thought need to be taken care of, as the material side is often neglected or left out. Again, the geo-historical and geo-political contexts can vary so extremely that an analysis can only ultimately be thought of for each single case. Propagating liberal ideas of education can mean extremely different things in different contexts. And self-organisation – in certain contexts a much-needed empowering process – can mean neoliberal structures of the “West” outsourcing the responsibility of the sovereign state. One must be careful to understand these terms in their situatedness and not use them generically as a means of devaluing structures and processes in a relativising way of comparable violence. Again, these terms have their own topological and governmental histories, varying greatly in different regions of the world. Even deploying the term “neoliberal agenda” for every situation does not take into consideration that these concepts are embedded in a rather “Western” context and may mean little to nothing other than yet again demonstrating a different form of colonial narrative. As a well-known example of the so-called “West”, one could look to the UK's neoliberal path since the 1980s, dismantling the state (for ruthless economic practices) and stripping the sovereign of its responsibility of caretaking of its citizens at the same time, as one definition of neoliberalism. In other parts of the world, the state may never have established such a high form of control and regulation altogether. Self-organisation can be framed as

³⁰⁷ Thomas Lemke, “The Birth of Bio-politics”, 191.

³⁰⁸ This expression is drawn from the lectures Foucault gave at the Collège de France between 1982 and 1983. “The others” is not meant here as a philosophical concept of “the Other” in a representational way but expresses much more the shared process of coming up with an agreed contract of how to be governed as a society.

totally different concepts than in “Westernised” contexts, where self-organisation is often directly linked to commercialised self-realisation.

New forms of biennials need to not only be discursive, but also set up sustainable, self-governing, long-term structures that overcome a “mere” timed display of artworks or a “mere” assembly of people in discussions. As a final hint toward such new models, I want to refer here to the 2021 established “East Europe Biennial Alliance (EEBA)” between the Biennale Matter of Art in Prague, the Biennale Warszawa, the Kyiv Biennial, and the OFF-Biennale Budapest – not only a network in solidarity, but the consequential contestation of a regional and national identity, forming a sustainable structure that can be made possible in a self-governing manner. The signs of the time all blatantly show us that a national governmental authority is no longer a reference point in any way, neither as representative of a national interest, nor as a caretaker of the social or of equal rights.

3.5 Conclusion: Exhibitionary Complex in Light of Governmentality and Situated Knowledges: Towards the Post-Exhibitionary Complex

While Foucault focuses more on the individual practices of governance in a “Western” neoliberal system within the framework of *governmentality*, Haraway focuses on networked processes and already points to contemporary practices embedded in communal and relational knowledge networks. Nevertheless, in my reading, both concepts are needed to make clear the intersection of techniques of (self-)governance and knowledge production and their connection to the discourse of truth within an underlying educational complex: Foucault does this in reference to the modern “Western” state and its techniques of control; Haraway in a proposal for a feminist objective and scientific way of thinking. Both concepts were transported into the exhibitionary complex and further developed in the exhibitionary biennial complex.

My Proposal for one More Expansion in Curating

The complex process of exhibition-making – making things visible, making them public, putting them up for dispute – generally comes in a multi-state-form: it is simultaneously – depending on the point of view – an assemblage of objects and artefacts, a discourse, an event, an exchange, a production of research, meaning and knowledge and a hegemonic representation or an escapist withdrawal from reality and much more. In the most basic sense, it is a practice of the governing principle of the self and of others. It can be argued that the well-known public museums were all set up according to a bourgeois-capitalist ideology (once associated with educational purposes, nowadays in the full grip of speculative capital), but nevertheless the museum space was a place of permeability, a space that was and is able to offer a civic and civil debate.

Expansions of curatorial practices towards knowledge production, philosophical discourse and research-based public expressions as part of the exhibitionary complex, or even post-exhibition formats outside of the traditional infrastructures of art institutions, have been conceptualised and established.³⁰⁹ Yet, most of these ideas rely on the museal infrastructure and its established traditions in art history and the art market. This is also the representational space that allows very critical statements to enter the public realm just because it is contained in a tamed and taming space separated from the context of economic, political life. Exhibitionary practices beyond gesture, proposal and representation have the incomparably difficult task of critically and self-critically staying with an enormously complex situation in translocal (“global” and postcolonial) conditions. If museums cannot simply exhibit objects in a universalising way (and thus establishing a dominant narrative), then they must develop practices of how to assemble diverse situated knowledges in a meaningful way. This means, on the one hand, sustaining an open-ended, processual, collaborative learning space and, on the other, constantly and critically re-evaluating their own rules and structures. In doing so, I strongly opt for a discursive practice following a scientific-materialist, feminist-empirical objectivity as a guiding principle: a discourse on *truth* and not ideology. This feminist political rationality does not remain on the level of theory but wishes to apply theory to practice in caring, embodied and emphatic ways. It has the task of reflecting on power from different positions, which is only possible in mutual, trusting and trustworthy exchange and engagement. It has to see the material side of unequal conditions that pre-structure the opportunities of less privileged individuals in society.

For curatorial discourse, an expansion of the notions of curating and of exhibitionary practice beyond post-representation or “radical” mediation in contact zones is needed, towards a governmental thinking (citizen agency, communality, commoning) with the means of re-establishing this discourse of truth based on a feminist, power-sensitive, embodied, situated objectivity. The scientific claim is imagined by me in a broad sense as a research-based engagement with an object of study, a method, and committed to accounting the world more accurately in a non-neutral way. Artistic and curatorial research are part of this research, but not exclusively.

Bennett analysed aspects of governmentality for the exhibitionary context with the term “governmental assemblage”. However, I argue that these practices cannot remain exclusively within the aesthetic field, but that the engagement with them must extend to governmental/political and economic/ecological aspects that ultimately take the means of sustenance partly into one's own hands. With a post-exhibitionary practice of governmental assemblages – not only of making things visible, making them public, situating them and exposing them to critique – not only can the process of exhibition-making be revised, but it can help activate communities’ engagement within a supranational discourse to bring situated knowledges and specificities to the

³⁰⁹ See Chapter 2.

public, not only in a representational way, but by realising democratising acts of resistance and self-governing. On the one hand, it is about making infrastructural proposals for governing structures by regulating the public's conduct and one's own. On the other hand, it is about re-presenting open cultural identities by restaging, reframing and ultimately enriching the historical and political canons and multiplying narratives. In short, in our globalised world, where national identities – at least from a geopolitical perspective – have outlived their purpose of producing citizens, museums need to shift their exhibitionary complex to let in “governmental assemblages” and open up to multitudinous formations, to situated knowledges. For that to happen, the separational relation of the producer and consumer, of “audience” and “institution” – which was introduced by the public museum – must be rethought. As beneficial as the educational turn might be, it still makes a hierarchical distinction between the exhibition, the artist and artwork, and the audience, and it places the educational aspects for the audience as thoughts “after” the exhibition. Thinking with Foucault, I would say that art is a discourse of statements uttered by all those involved in cultural formations, be they artists, curators, writers, critics or the public. The greatest effort or challenge is not to think of the audience as a subject to be regulated, controlled or reformed, but to imagine the public as part of the “governmental assemblage”, as an important actor in the coming together of the exhibitionary complex and of subjects that are capable of governing themselves.

Post-Exhibitionary Practices under Translocal Conditions in Governmental Constellations

Exhibiting would then be a practice that is not primarily about the aesthetic display of objects or artworks or about *passive* consumption for an (intellectual) audience, but an active, self-critical exchange and practice of insight and embodied knowledge. These practices avoid the soft persuasion of museums for the universalised artifice of making art history and do not play into commodification strategies of the neoliberal mode of speculation of the art market. They still produce and even strive for alternative economic resourcing, but not in terms of speculative profit. These post-exhibitionary practices work re-presentatively by making things public, but representation is not the main goal. These practices are not only concerned with the “show and tell” of museums but also aim to establish influence beyond the art field by targeting sustainable self-controlled infrastructures, often embedded in regular living conditions for local communities. These practices play out best in more horizontally structured environments of (un)learning with distinction-reduced language, moving between more or less pre-structured participatory forms of “commingling” in contact zones. If one is inclined to condense the post-exhibitionary complex into a formula in relation to its original field, the exhibitionary complex, it would be “first assemble / convene / discuss / exchange, then show and tell, to look and (re-)learn”.

If museum spaces cannot rely on a solidified field of knowledge for display (the “show” part), then a situated and common understanding of the *knowledges* it is going to display and talk about publicly will become the more important activity (the

“tell” part). This first activity in a post-exhibitionary practice (the “convene” part) is a complex practice, a practice that combines not only knowledge from within the institution in discursive formations, but also embodied experiences and messy encounters of all sorts. There are various modes of procedures in terms of how to engage in this practice from artistic, curatorial, sociological and political fields. The willingness to not only listen to, but also digest statements of others in this process is an indication of what the outcomes can be. I consider the many entries for “deep listening” in the curatorial and art discourse lately as a sign of a wish to engage beyond the representational logic one can find in politics in general, in the so-called culture wars, and in the propagandist form of identity politics today. My argument specifically seeks to insist on a feminist rationality that comes in scientific empirical forms of exchange, as situated research of oneself, others and the world in more-than-human thought.

With *documenta fifteen*, commons entered the exhibitionary complex in a major way. Governmental issues are crucial for commons projects since aspects of self-determination and of building structures beyond the exhibition space in these projects are at play. My case study on *documenta fifteen*, with all its problems, will be presented later in Chapter 5.2. But I want to discuss the implementation of the commons in the exhibitionary complex here. The commons approach challenges the established art field on many levels: in addition to removing the distinction between fine art and craft (high/low art dispute)³¹⁰ and addressing the still prevailing issues of inclusion/exclusion in a globalised art world that still mostly only “adds” non-European artistic practices to the established art field,³¹¹ I would like to focus on the specifics that the commons idea can bring to the exhibitionary complex. I would like to analyse this in terms of two crucial aspects: deaccumulation of capital and collectivisation. The former poses a serious threat to aestheticised commodification in line with the established distribution of the art market and singular artistic figures at the top.³¹² The other poses no less of a threat to the “modern autonomous individual”,³¹³ and thus to a much criticised and critiqued model of the “Western” ideal

³¹⁰ Even though these high/low art distinctions have been addressed for at least two decades – since *d11* curated by Okwui Enwezor –, they still trigger many misunderstandings and judgmental assessments.

³¹¹ The press coverage framed the focus of the invited artists for *documenta* under the label of the “Global South”, though I would like to reject this terminology since it produces a simplified and streamlined understanding of the various, utterly diverse art and practices invited to *documenta fifteen*. I would even say that even the curatorial team of *documenta* did not do enough to emphasise the specificities of the invited collectives and their contexts.

³¹² Few gallery artists were involved in *documenta fifteen*. Most of the art on display was created outside of the regular distribution channels set up by galleries.

³¹³ For an early critique on the “modern autonomous individual”, I would like to refer to Michel Foucault’s lecture at the Collège de France on neoliberal governmentality, subsequently published in *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (May 2001): 190–207, 191. For Foucault’s thoughts applied to the exhibitionary complex, specifically for biennials, see Ronald Kolb, “The Curating of Self and Others: Biennials as Forms of Governmental Assemblages,” *OnCurating 46: Contemporary Art Biennials—Our*

of the subject as author-figure, but one that is quickly resurrected against a supposed collectivity of the "Other" as postulated by Bazon Brock,³¹⁴ among others.



Fig. 13: *documenta fifteen*, diagram at the Fridskul area in the Fridericianum, Kassel, Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Commoning practices in the exhibitionary complex have far-reaching consequences and force thorough reconfigurations – besides the look and feel of the actual exhibition in itself. It questions the relationship of contemporary art and its economic basis, especially the neoliberalism of capitalism. Commoning projects care little for the representational function of art institutions and their non-coercive proposals of conduct within their established learning environments and epistemologies, but they instead enact direct encounters. These practices challenge the hierarchical working structures of art institutions and modes of production, where accountabilities and responsibilities are blurred in these collective group settings (for better or worse). Commoning projects rarely insert themselves into the established critical discourse that accompanies the larger art world industry. Chapter 5.2 will show in detail that commoning projects are indeed prime examples for post-exhibitionary practices. However, it will also point to the dangers that these self-organised and governmental practices might propose for the exhibitionary complex and beyond.

After my research led me to the notion of post-exhibitionary practice, I found out that Alistair Hudson used the term “post-exhibitionary” in a lecture he gave at the *L'internationale* confederation conference at the Van Abbemuseum on 8 April 2022.

Hegemonic Machines in States of Emergency, eds. Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, and Dorothee Richter (June 2020): 67–74.

³¹⁴ For a curiously ideological and apologetic stance against collectivity and for the single author, I would like to refer to a talk by Bazon Brock called “On the power-grotesque appropriation of the arts by cultures”, subtitled “A dispute about the whole—the end of Europe”. The title was translated by the author. Lecture at the Kunstuniversität Linz, 16 March 2022, accessed 30 August 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOFuQgzyZQk>.

He wanted to raise the issue of the function of the museum and to overcome the current limitations of museums. His idea was sketched in the direction of the “Constituent Museum”, an approach that makes the audience users of the museum space rather than spectators.³¹⁵ This approach provides fertile methods. My main insertion into this and similar practices is to set a critical anchor so that they are not easily exploited or co-opted or infiltrated. This anchor involves the use of a networked discourse of truth in feminist objectivity and the primacy of a feminist political rationality in truth production that comes with a sensitivity to power relations and material conditions. Exploitation comes in many forms in the art field and also in art education. We are talking here about a highly contested field, overflowing with examples of exploitation of the self and others, of artists originally engaged in collaborative practice who have nevertheless inscribed themselves in art history as an individual position, quickly forgetting any reference to their origins in collective practice. For a post-exhibitionary practice that aims to improve living conditions in communal thought, the self-ish mode of building an artist’s career will be a hindrance.

I have analysed how *governmentality* can be a helpful methodology to show the techniques of subjectification that are present in traditional museum settings. I have also shown how *governmentality* can be a method to actively think and act by governing the self and others. I have extended the Foucauldian notion of governmentality to communal and collaborative thinking. These aspects of governmentality will be useful in post-exhibitionary practices. The principle of collaboration with *situated knowledges* provides a method for acting carefully and responsibly by understanding one’s own positionality. It implements a correction towards a situated “discourse of truth” in feminist thought for the post-exhibitionary complex and ultimately for other learning environments. After this analysis, I will look in depth at the implementation of these practices. I will interpret Jeanne van Heeswijk’s more than twenty years of practice, especially the large-scale project *Philadelphia Assembled. documenta fifteen* will also be scrutinized. For the latter, I was myself involved in the educational programme via a workshop. This chapter of case studies will end by shedding light on my own curatorial works, which can be seen in the vicinity of these practices, in the hope of critically self-evaluating my own practice and finding new forms in the post-exhibitionary complex.

³¹⁵ “I see the philosophy of the Constituent Museum as one which really seeks to take our institutions from a state of autonomy, controlled by a few, into the broader ecology and economics of society; an idea that strives to work with the widest number of people for the greatest benefit. They are the places where we can collectively *make* the culture we want to live in. Yet the multiplicity of the broadband world we now occupy is fostering new forms of art and culture elsewhere, beyond the museum, in technology and the digitised ecosystem we now inhabit.”

Alistair Hudson, “Post-exhibitionary – Constituencies II,” *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, accessed 21 July 2023, <https://glossary.mg-lj.si/referential-fields/constituencies-II/post-exhibitionary>.

4 Analytical Tool Kit: Categories of Expanded Curating as “The Art (not) to Be Governed Like That”

In this chapter, I elaborate a set of relational categories that allow for an analysis of curatorial and artistic projects in general, and for the exhibitionary and post-exhibitionary complex – both inside museums, galleries and project spaces, and outside of them. What can be done with and within an exhibition space is taken to task by reconfiguring the notions of audience, art institutions, different cultural producers, economic background and the infrastructural dimension that binds them all together.

It is certain that a permanent categorisation-based mapping cannot be achieved for a comprehensive analysis of exhibition projects, since exhibitions as cultural articulations are extensive and diverse, are situated in different contexts and change throughout the course of history. There is no universal categorisation to be made here. However, I would like to attempt to expand the usual criteria in museum studies from a rather fixed triangular scheme of art–institution–audience in a way that allows for a more accurate representation of this complex formation. The hyphens between “art”, “institution” and “audience” need to be brought into focus as they express the relations between the nouns. What relationality is established, how these relationships are cultivated, maintained and cared for, and how utterances between these nouns are responded to by the other pillars is more than revealing. It marks the differences of exhibitionary projects and their wider infrastructure. In a first step, my approach aims for a comprehensive objective analysis of an exhibitionary practice or project. It asks what this project has done and what can be done with it. In a second step, an evaluation must be made that leads to disengagement from certain practices and strengthens others. In this expanded field within a relational range, we can examine these projects in light of governmentality and situated knowledges. And at the same time, the relational categories proposed below cannot be strictly divided and considered separately, as these formations have historically emerged in a particular context and their elements are mutually dependent and interwoven. From a constructivist disciplinary rationale, the dissection of these complex constellations may seem to give a good overview, but it always falls short for an analysis of this interdependent field. The exhibition space, like many other spaces, is potentially gendered, classed and racialised. These divisions should not be hidden. For the proposed categories to analyse exhibition projects and their practices, we need to additionally read intersectionally.

Summarised in one sentence, I propose asking the following:

(Post-)exhibitionary projects need to be scrutinised according to their relationship to **state structures and their political representation**, to the **integration of the institution–audience relationship** (or that of producer–consumer, educator–visitor, etc.), to their **permeability** and **composition in relation to difference**, to their relationship to **local–global issues**, to their **financial integration** and

transparency, to their **sustainable structures** and to the **construction of organisational procedures** and the **transversality of power** in their structures.

a) The relationship between state structures and political representation

The relationship of art institutions to the political structure in which they are embedded and the representational role they play in them can usually be found in the self-explanatory materials on websites, in brochures or other publicly available material, at least if one can read between the lines well. If a reference to the state or other superordinate entities is not explicitly expressed – it can often be found in the title, e.g., “National Gallery” –, one has to look for the foundational narrative. The origin story of museums at least explains the original connection of most museums and galleries, and for whom they were intended. Self-description and usage may change over time, of course, but what is in the “About” page on websites bluntly describes the form of representational and governmental structure it follows. What is not mentioned speaks as loudly as what is said there. The logic of representation is cumulative. A national museum can represent a national identity, modernity and even criticality and still perform unhampered for the speculative mode of capitalism. A glance at the archive of exhibitions and the names of the artists will reveal the main focus.

b) Integration of the institution–audience relationship

We will find out about this relationship by asking simple questions: How is the audience addressed? What is the role of the audience? How can they engage with the exhibition? In what form? Is the audience addressed as a visitor, as a participant, as a “user” or a constituent? Is the audience “material” for a socially engaged art practice? Participants in what and how? Audience participation is strongly emphasised through outreach programmes in museums large and small. But how is the audience considered: as a consumer or a co-producer? As a client or a co-author? How is mediation thought of? As a translation of an already set-up exhibition? In what forms do guided tours come? What knowledge is being transported? In what way? Dialogically? As a unidirectional lecture?

c) Permeability and composition in relation to difference

This does not so much refer to the relationship between exhibition producers and exhibition visitors, but rather to the inner procedures of exhibitionary practice. It addresses the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, the distinctions according to which objects, subjects and topics are allowed to be made public. There are major distinctions between high and low art, between fine art and crafts, between popular, mass-produced art and complex, intellectual art. This relation illuminates how an exhibitionary practice handles difference and how permeable it is for new, other, subjugated or marginalised knowledges to enter and be on display. It is about what ways an exhibition can find to be open to difference. Ethnographic museums with historic collections are particularly affected by this. Are artefacts with dubious heritage kept on display? Are the review processes for possible histories of violence

attached to the object? Are these investigations made public or part of the exhibition itself? Does the label say anything about this process? It is not about an exercise of “integrating” or “adding” to a collection – that would be again a thought within a universalising logic – but about finding ways for public examination and debate and situated exchanges.

d) Relationship between local and global issues

This relationship touches on translocal practices in global entanglements but also speaks about an institution’s accessibility to local, postmigratory and postcolonial constellations in its vicinity. Does the art institution prefer to engage mainly with an international contemporary art discourse? Does it only exhibit “international” artists? What is the relationship to the local community (artists and audience)? How is the “wish for globality” lived out? Are there translocal collaborations? How are identities conceived? How are the politics of identity adopted? Or does the exhibitionary practice revert solely to the local community, to a communal or regional identity, and care only about the local artists’ needs? This relationship also touches upon epistemic differences, of a notion of universal knowledge that often stems from an international, legitimised position of art versus situated knowledges in personal and communal narratives. It is about how these knowledges are narrated in the exhibition space. A purely locally driven institution that only has the self-interest of the local community in mind can be ideological in a similar way to a nationalistic museum.

e) Financial integration and transparency

This point plainly asks about the funding situation of the institution. With funding comes influence, “even” in the so-called autonomous art field. Is it primarily a state-funded institution? For how many salaried employees does it provide? Do funding applications need to be worked out? Is it primarily a private, interest-driven venture of individuals, corporations, firms...? Is it crowdfunded? How transparent is the information on the material bases of its operation? Are there conditions attached to the funding? How much influence does the funding party have? How transparent is this influence? Beyond visible walls with sponsors and donors, how are the dependencies of institutional funding and exhibitions made clear? Or are they not? A state-funded museum might have greater freedom than a privately well-funded gallery, despite the administrative bureaucracy and proximity to the state depending on the political context. In other cases, the opposite is true, namely, when private money comes with no questions asked.

The speculative mode of the art market depends on the legitimisation procedures of exhibitions in museums. With a sufficient economic background and paid exhibition spaces, artists’ careers can be made, in that their artworks gain value. The circuit of art’s surplus value was clearly more diverse in the past. The defunding of critics in journalism – this segment of relatively autonomous authors in the art business – makes it much easier for economic power to gain legitimisation through exhibiting.

f) Relationship to sustainable (economic and ecological) structures

On the one hand, this relationship also expresses the economic side, especially for self-run exhibitionary practices. Is there a plan to be structurally sustainable, financially and in accountable ways? Does the project imagine wages for workers and artists? Does it readily rely on precarious, flexible, voluntary, free or self-exploitative labour? Does it have a plan to transition and maintain a long-term structure? In what ways, economically and ecologically? But this relationship also relates to ecological thinking in general. In this sense, ecology is not just about the management of resources as in economics, but about much broader, environmental, interdependent thinking. How aware are exhibitionary projects of their own production in a sustainable and ecological sense? Awareness of art's carbon footprint, of its production costs (not only financially), but also in terms of resource-sensitive thinking, is still in the beginning stages. Major museums have proposals about how to reduce their ecological footprint. Heating, cooling and reducing electrical consumption, etc., are the main concerns. But fundamentally considered, running an art institution with the constant assembling and dismantling of unique display elements and artworks (something art demands in the logic of a distinguishing critical intellectuality), with delicate transport and shipments could be difficult to sustain with the coming crisis.

g) Construction of organisational procedures and transversality of power

These aspects touch on the pillars of museums, especially large art institutions. Looking into these structures, one finds a very hierarchically structured and still very gendered work environment. At the top are the directors (often men), followed by curators, divided into different departments according to art history (contemporary, modern) or medium (digital media, film, new media, sculpture, etc.), and then come mediators and educators (mostly women) in a still representative position visible to the public. The lower ranks are completed with installation staff, guides and maintenance staff. There are clearly points of contact and discussion between the proximate positions, and sometimes transversal points in respective responsibilities, but very unlikely between positions in different places in the hierarchy. Alongside these rather rigid structures, there is also the question of the authorship of an exhibition project. Who is named? In what role? With positions or descriptions of positions? Who benefits most from the exhibition project? Who is paid directly? How different are the hourly rates? If it is a commons-based project with rather horizontal structures, the questions can be very similar: Who benefits most from the exhibition in the long run? Who can reinstate the collaboration elsewhere? Who can continue working in this direction? A horizontally structured project does not resolve power. It is rather a question of how power is dealt with, how it is distributed and accepted, where the responsibilities lie.

5 In Praxis: Realised Exhibition Projects in Governmental Thought, Plus My Own Curatorial Projects

This chapter applies my research findings to two distinct curatorial-artistic practices and looks specifically at two exhibition projects that were brought into being through these practices. Jeanne van Heeswijk's artistic practice takes place within communal settings. I will discuss her practice, especially with her large-scale exhibition project *Philadelphia Assembled*. Her starting point as an individual artist, often entering communities to which she does not belong initially, led to a precise artistic-curatorial and a well-described self-reflective practice. The second case study is *documenta fifteen*, where I myself was involved in a minor role in the educational programme with the workshop "Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education", which took place in Kassel from 23 June to 7 July 2022. For this case study, I will be primarily concerned with the exhibition project itself, as it is a vast and complex field full of tensions and frictions within an artistic-curatorial practice that challenges many traditional forms of art and has many ripple effects outside the art field with much epistemic discontent. Using this example, I will examine the realised exhibitions, but also the potential implementations of commons in the exhibitionary project. This chapter ends with a critical self-reflection of my (compared to the case studies) small-scale experimental projects and an outlook on my future practice.

5.1 Jeanne van Heeswijk's *Philadelphia Assembled*

Jeanne van Heeswijk has been working at the intersection of art and curating on socially engaged art projects from the position of an artist since 1993. Her projects have been realised in museum spaces and public spaces, often commissioned by art institutions, sometimes also by municipal institutions with projects located outside of the exhibition space, in social, private environments and in neighbourhoods. Topics such as resistance to city development, urbanism and gentrification are pervading issues. Working as a single artist on various themes, her projects practice an interaction or active communication with people and citizens or communities and neighbourhoods. Her persona is always involved in this exchange. In the 2007 publication *Systeme*³¹⁶ – an artist book documenting works from 1993 to 2006 – her projects are categorised into three segments: "Games People Play" recaps her works directly related to the exhibition space. These are projects where she is most visible as an artist or curator. In the 2000 project "Acte de Présence – Sans Valeur" initiated by Carlos Basualdo, Heeswijk decided to become a guide for a month for the exhibition *Worthless* at Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, to engage in questions of value and art with the visitors of the museum. The section "Rooms People Inhabit" groups the projects that work with an expanded idea of the exhibition space; these projects use the museum space differently, not in a traditional exhibition logic. Here, a

³¹⁶ Jeanne van Heeswijk – *Systeme* (Berlin: The Green Box, 2007).

proximity to urban struggles can already be observed; for example, the project *De Strip* in Westwijk, Vlaardingen, was able to establish itself as a cultural centre from 2002 to 2004, during which a two-year cultural programme was organised that included local residents in the programming. *De Strip* is an ideal transition to the third segment of projects, entitled “Communities People Create” which demonstrates practices that integrate local communities and neighbourhoods directly into the city’s fabric in a self-organisational way. “Het Blauwe Huis”, a housing project that ran from 2005 to 2009, was launched as a culture and research centre in a newly planned district in IJburg in Amsterdam. The project was in constant exchange with the residents about the development of the urban infrastructure and sought to be “an ideal platform for studying, acting and co-designing its public space”.³¹⁷

Kindred practices come to my mind with Andrea Fraser and Tania Bruguera. Fraser’s series of performances from 1989 entitled “Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk”³¹⁸ related to an exchange similar to “Acte de Présence – Sans Valeur”. Fraser performed guided tours and introductory speeches in museums to address the conventions of the museum, its representational structure, and to bring in emotionality and embodied experience (at one point in the performative speeches, Fraser started to cry...). While van Heeswijk’s practice further developed outside the museum space and departed from the logic of representation of this institution, Fraser remained within the exhibitionary logic and made a profound contribution to a new wave of Institutional Critique. Tania Bruguera’s earliest performance *The Burden of Guilt* (*El peso de la culpa*) at the Havana Biennial in 1997 also used the persona of the artist, but in a much more traditional form of performance art. Bruguera performed in front of a Cuban flag she had made herself from human hair and made a political statement by re-enacting a proverb that indigenous people would rather eat soil, water and salt than being subjugated by Spanish conquistadores.³¹⁹ Bruguera later went on to practise in similar ways to van Heeswijk, engaging directly with museum visitors and beyond, setting up structures of (self-)learning that went far beyond the representational space of the museum.³²⁰ Compared to van Heeswijk, Bruguera acts more directly politically, making strong political statements in her artistic practice in the exhibitionary complex – hence the attributions that regularly follow Bruguera as an artist-activist making political art –, which is not surprising given that she has been directly affected as a political dissident speaking out on Cuba’s politics.

³¹⁷ “Het Blauwe Huis”, in: *Jeanne van Heeswijk – Systeme* (Berlin: The Green Box, 2007), 389–399.

³¹⁸ Tate, “‘Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk’, Andrea Fraser, 1989,” Tate, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fraser-museum-highlights-a-gallery-talk-t13715>.

³¹⁹ “The Burden of Guilt, 1997 - Tania Bruguera,” www.wikiart.org, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/tania-bruguera/the-burden-of-guilt>.

³²⁰ The latest project by Tania Bruguera in this direction is the “INSTAR Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt.” See: <https://instar.org/>.

From the beginning, van Heeswijk's practice brought into contact a personal and embodied experience with an overarching theme of collective processes, state structures, sovereign power or the capital logic of urban planning. This was enacted between her and others in workshops, discussions, encounters, but also manifested transdisciplinarily in public moments, in events, in stagings, in exhibitions, or visually in designs of posters, flyer, leaflets. The direction of her practice went beyond the exhibition space and evolved into practices of working with communities and having serious discussions, taking seriously the respective positions in communities through deep listening practices, sharing experiences in group settings and creating collective activities formed by the communities themselves. I would like to point to the governmental quality this expansive artistic practice has to offer. This is best seen in the project *Homebaked*, which the artist initiated in 2010, commissioned by the Liverpool Biennial. In a two-year process, van Heeswijk, together with neighbours of Anfield and Breckfield in Liverpool, UK, developed a community-owned structure that "gentrified" the area from below, keeping the needs of the neighbourhood in mind, preventing the demolition of a bakery and other houses, and taking the maintenance and preservation of residential and commercial sites into their own hands "as a social enterprise".³²¹ The *socially engaged art* project developed into a sustainable, long-term structure, and the community established the "Homebaked Community Land Trust", which exists to this day.³²²

Art or Social Work? It's Artistic-Curatorial Governmental Practice!

The regular criticism towards these practices either disqualifies them as not being "strong" enough: in the sense of having less aesthetic quality than "proper" artworks one would see in museums, and being less intellectual and less critical, in the sense of being able to visually represent a highly complex critical reflection within an artwork. Other critics would say it is not art at all, but social practice. Jeanne van Heeswijk counters this by saying that visual art's capacity is not only to influence life but to contribute to it, highlighting the specific practice of visual art: "[...] visual art is more than mere works of art: it is a process of reflection, discussion, and activation extremely well-suited to act as an impetus for creating the space where people are invited to start thinking again about how things should be represented."³²³ Art's desire to "step over" into life is anchored in art historical tradition. Specifically avant-garde

³²¹ "2up2down / Homebaked," *Jeanneworks*, Typologies & Capacities, accessed 4 August 2023, https://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/2up2down_homebaked/.

³²² Homebaked, Anfield, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://homebaked.org.uk/>.

³²³ "My entire artistic practice departs from my belief that art has the capacity to contribute to life [...]." "The interesting aspect of visual art is its relatively autonomous position, which provides a sanctuary where new things can emerge. Visual art is the location with the possibility of representation, of portrayal, of shaping images, and of activating the process of perceiving images. With that, visual art is more than mere works of art: it is a process of reflection, discussion, and activation extremely well-suited to act as an impetus for creating the space where people are invited to start thinking again about how things should be represented."

Jeanne van Heeswijk, "Fleeting Images of Community," *Exploding Aesthetics*, eds. Annette W. Balkema and Henk Slager (Amsterdam: Brill, 2001), 175-178.

and neo-avant-garde practices wished to leave the *purely* autonomous conceived field of art. The body of work and activities known under the term *Fluxus* (and *happenings*, among others) tried out many forms to dissolve the separation between art and life. Carlos Basualdo, an occasional facilitator of van Heeswijk's projects, gives art historical references by naming artists such as Joseph Beuys, Helio Oiticia and Gordon-Matta Clark³²⁴ and contemporaries such as Marjetica Potrč and Thomas Hirschhorn. In 2009, together with co-author Reinaldo Laddaga, in the essay "Experimental Communities", he described these practices in this way:

We call "experimental communities" those that are constituted in the universe of the arts (while linking this universe with other regions of human life) to explore forms of articulating competition and cooperation, collective learning and radical innovation, design and execution, direction and realization, in such a way that the archives of this exploration can travel and be exhibited.³²⁵

Despite Basualdo's reference to Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics (which seemed inevitable at the time), he locates these practices within the art field and relates them to art historical figures. I would argue that these practices tend to show their strength rather outside of the art field in the strict sense, but draw only their transversal, transdisciplinary, wild, open-ended, processual, aesthetic-critical modes of research from the art field. In this context, Marjolein Schaap referred to John Dewey's notion of art as a teaching practice embedded in communal life, describing van Heeswijk's work. Dewey saw art as a "significant component of an organised community, not something that acquired meaning in a gallery or a museum".³²⁶ In art's vast field of idiosyncratic, eccentric and subjective practices, van Heeswijk has refined her own particular methodology over time. In the ongoing event series since 2008 called *Public Faculties*, the artist engages in open conversations about social issues with passers-by in a specific location in a city over a few days.³²⁷ In projects with long-term processes, she often begins with non-public meetings with a community in a contact zone-like setting, forming working groups along the way. She describes this phase as "test lab" situations that help her explore a community's background, place and social identities, usually by asking "complex questions and scrutinis[ing] my own research more."³²⁸ Ultimately, it is very delicate to set up a

³²⁴ Carlos Basualdo, "An Artist of Speech," in *Jeanne van Heeswijk – Systeme*, 5.

³²⁵ Carlos Basualdo and Reinaldo Laddaga, "Experimental Communities," in *From Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Beth Hinderliter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 29.

³²⁶ Marjolein Schaap, "Super-directing – The Work of Jeanne van Heeswijk," in *Jeanne van Heeswijk – Systeme*, 10.

³²⁷ "Public Faculty", *Public Faculty*, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://publicfaculty.org/>.

³²⁸ Zara Stanhope, "Questions for Engaging Publics: An Interview with Jeanne van Heeswijk," in *Engaging Publics: Public Engagement*, ed. Zara Stanhope (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery (Toi o Tamaki), 2015), 12.

collaborative process that on the one hand must not be too pre-structured, but on the other hand also wants to remain focused and stay with urgent topics.

Both these approaches – *Public Faculty* as a shorter intervention in a city with incidental and arbitrary public encounters, as well as long-term projects like *Philadelphia Assembled* – require a precise understanding of collective dynamics and the ability to listen and understand what a community has to say. Here, I want to draw on the analogy of the flock and the shepherd and Foucault's reading of pastoral power. In governmental logic, the Christian religious pastoral model professionalised the early communal groups into a hierarchy of *clergy* and *laity*. Clearly, van Heeswijk wants to avoid the dynamic in which she suddenly becomes a spokesperson for a group in these projects, but she also does not want to reduce her role to that of a neutral facilitator alone.³²⁹ Her methods very much resemble a governmental pastoral logic in that she asks questions, listens and initiates collective processes that can be seen as techniques of discursivisation and introspection in communal settings in a deeply caring way. In this regard, she takes a care-taking position that aims to create agency and the bettering of life: "For me, agency is about how we can act upon our desire to have a better life."³³⁰

Refined Methods of Jeanne van Heeswijk

To this end, van Heeswijk has developed particular methods that she calls "diligent listening", "understanding the local condition", and "radicalising the local".³³¹ Diligent or deep listening means engaging in an open-ended conversation that cannot be conducted with speech alone; it is an exercise of attentive listening as a reading of the "emotional texture" that only takes place in repeated encounters and intensive exchanges.³³² Following Marina Garcés, she describes this practice as follows:

It is an embodied experience of relationship. It requires a willingness to listen. Not only hearing what the other has to say, but becoming sensitive to how someone else is. We learn that by sharing notions of how we see ourselves where we are. It can be through food, just by eating together. Or by spending time in each other's places to understand how somebody creates space or well-being. What is important in that learning process is 'allowing' for one's

³²⁹ "I don't direct projects but I always say I have a loud voice so, in the processes with a community, I speak my mind. [...] but in the end I accept the group opinion".

Engaging Publics: Public Engagement, 15.

³³⁰ Jeanne van Heeswijk, "Preparing for the Not-Yet," in *Slow Reader: A Resource for Design Thinking and Practice*, eds. Ana P. Pais and Carolyn F. Strauss (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2016), 43.

³³¹ Van Heeswijk talked about "understanding the local condition" and "radicalizing the local" in *Engaging Publics: Public Engagement*, 16.

³³² In the talk Jeanne van Heeswijk gave for the online conference "Situated Knowledges – Art and Curating in On The Move," 26 June 2021, which I co-organised, she said:

"Public faculty participants collectively listen for nuance that can reveal the emotional texture of a place which is impossible to discern unless through collective radical and diligent listening."

own ideas and even ideals to be withheld momentarily, in order to understand what might emerge from the fact that all these differences are there together.³³³

The willingness to listen to each other goes hand in hand with the allowance to risk oneself. In these encounters, the subject's constitution might not only be on display but also shaken. It is an unsettling situation that requires enormous trust. Van Heeswijk says:

What is critical to that is being able to let go of some of your own subjectivity, to put your subjectivity at risk. Or at least to temporarily extend your own subjectivity in order to approach other kinds of agencies and look at the space that is in between, in order to find a common ground with another person.³³⁴

As in a contact zone, the condition of the group is decisive. Van Heeswijk calls this the *local condition*. The condition of a local identity, which is not so much bound to a place, expresses a belonging toward a community and its collective identity, which is also involved in global conflicts.³³⁵ It touches on what I see as *situated knowledges*, a particular embodied knowledge from a subject-material position within "earthwide" networked relations. In van Heeswijk's practice, understanding this local condition is a long process that usually characterises the initial phase of projects. In the public phase – although these phases of internal processes and making things public cannot be clearly separated –, the research on the local condition goes hand in hand with what she calls "radicalising the local", or, in her words, "[r]adicalising in its two connotations: first as making more emergent, the second one that of re-rooting. And this is a process of not only making things emergent, performative, but at the same time making sure that they re-connect and re-root themselves, find grip again in the ground."³³⁶ Despite the easily confused misconception of different forms of

³³³ van Heeswijk, "Preparing for the Not-Yet," 45.

³³⁴ Ibid., 44.

³³⁵ "That's why I said that 'local' to me is not a place, it's a condition. It's a condition of belonging or not belonging, which we have to work with. It's a 'field'; it's a social interactive, emotional field in which you can operate. I don't like the word 'experts' because it is very much a part of the new Liberal thinking, but I especially use it to define an 'expert on location', who is a person with a knowledge of living locally who can assist others to work with the local condition."

van Heeswijk, *Engaging Publics: Public Engagement*, 16.

"That's how I see the 'local': not as a specific place, but as a condition that embodies global conflicts site-specifically. So if I talk about working at 'local' conditions, I talk about a condition that needs knowledge of place. And knowledge of place or knowledge of the local condition is not necessarily bound to people living there, but also includes people working there or having a relationship to it or a vested interest in it."

van Heeswijk, *Slow Reader*, 46.

³³⁶ "So that becoming a collective is an acting towards it, a coming together and dissolving and recomposing. It is a balancing act between making emergent and re-rooting. This is what I call 'working the ground'; and agency is like that: making your individual agency strong, while at the same

“radicalisation” (and the connotation of the willingness to act violently often triggered by experiences of oppression, or just for power), van Heeswijk points to the etymological meaning of *radical* – in Latin, *radic* or *radix* referring to a literal root – as being rooted, or grounded in a place or an identity. In a wider meaning, it speaks of being “vital to life”.³³⁷ The issue at stake here is the closed-off-ness of identity formations, as is the case with national identities. Aware that communities are “closed territorial entities”, van Heeswijk’s position is to open up in “radical inclusivity” through “repetitive insertions”.³³⁸ This means a protracted exchange in communal gatherings, a constant questioning and requestioning of the identity of the community and the individual role of each person. A collective desire towards a city, its governing structures and state structures is worked out in a delicate balance between individual and collective needs.

Delicate Asymmetric Power Balances in Communal Artistic Practices

After understanding the fabric of a particular community and outlining the collective reimagination (usually of an unjust, urgent issue), a process of self-actualisation is set in motion by the artist, who helps by providing guidance and assistance.³³⁹ Again, I would describe this practice as a careful, governmental insertion with artistic-critical modes and methods, a shepherd-like mode of governing in a more horizontal, self-empowering way. The agenda in the background ignites a resilient condition of life against the exploitative dimension of neoliberal capitalism and a deeply ingrained logic of competition over collaboration. In this sense, Jeanne van Heeswijk aims to

time being willing to break it in order to reconnect anew. 'How can I make things emergent, while re-rooting them, radicalizing them in a different way?'"

van Heeswijk, *Slow Reader*, 45.

³³⁷ “Radical | Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Radical by Etymonline,” Etymonline – Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/radical>.

³³⁸ See:

“Most communities are closed territorial entities, so that the local is in principle an inclusive condition. In most communities that’s immediately disruptive, because outsiders’ values are not cherished. So if you want to open up discussion with an inclusive community you need to think of the local differently. I am working with the local as a condition through what I now call repetitive insertions; going back again and again and again and again to revisit certain understandings and reconstructions of things. All of that is within the realm of art; which can also be a cake or bread, a film, a book or a symposium, like I said, according to what is most effective or needed at a moment in time. I still do things with the skill sets of art or of aesthetics in forms of presentation and representation, to make present or emergent, if you want, in a more classical sense of aesthetics, making, transcending emergent-cy ... van Heeswijk, *Engaging Publics: Public Engagement*, 17.

³³⁹ “[...] it’s about collectively reimagining what might be needed for change to happen, so that people are equipped to evoke change in their own environment. They have to create the change. I cannot do that but I can be of assistance in enabling them to see how to think about their situation.” [...] “I am interested in not only imagining the possibilities of participation but really also getting to understand how your daily environment is **shaped, formed, governed and financed**, so that it is possible for people to have a stake in that. I seek out different ways to support that knowledge, understand these processes and discuss them, even how people can talk about their interest in the conditions of where they live; through past and present, also histories and narratives ...”

van Heeswijk, *Engaging Publics: Public Engagement*, 14.

create an active self-governmental practice for a community and its individuals, as “active citizens”, i.e., “not somebody who just votes, but somebody who actively takes part in the way in which their daily environment is formed, governed, and financed. That is an essential right, and people should be encouraged to take back that right and say, ‘We can be in charge.’”³⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the rationality of representation is also present in the contact zones of the post-exhibitionary complex, as in practices like those of van Heeswijk.

Asymmetric power relations, but also those relations of distribution and of gaining cultural-economic benefit, are part of these complex situations, in all contexts of governance, in large structures and at the communal level. Forms of “exploitation” of communities as the artists’ material cannot be dismissed easily.³⁴¹ The role of the participants of a community needs to be examined. The relation of the participants to the institution, the artists and/or curators will indicate their freedom in these projects. The terminology alone will provide information: are participants “clients”, “audience”, are they “users” of a given structure or “co-creators”? Van Heeswijk is also aware of this delicate role, which requires careful self-positioning:

If as creative practitioners we believe that we are the creators who are negotiating 'on behalf' of others, then that negotiation is a space of translation, rather than a true space of presenting, confronting, and acting towards a collective desire. [...] So we need to think about how to break the artistic persona into a multiplicity of being as well, to unlearn the ways of inserting our skills, in order to ensure that people don't just become service 'users' of another kind, but rather that they are part of the building process, and thereby become true co-creators.³⁴²

From my own research, where I advocate for a method in feminist critical scientific research of situated knowledges (and a renewed research-based embodied discourse of truth), I would perhaps prefer a clear-cut feminist approach to the artistic-governmental practices of Jeanne van Heeswijk. But from a distance, I understand the artist’s open approach. It is an approach that does not come into the foreground with a political and conflictual agenda, but rather works out the local problems and ideally develops a resilient structure in self-governmental practices. After analysing Jeanne van Heeswijk’s previous projects, her artistic–curatorial methods and practices, I would like to look at the large-scale project she organised from 2014 to 2017 in Philadelphia, USA, called *Philadelphia Assembled*.³⁴³

³⁴⁰ van Heeswijk, *Slow Reader*, 48.

³⁴¹ Problems, like those mentioned, of socially engaged practices were addressed in the symposium *Dürfen die das? Kunst als sozialer Raum ; art, education, cultural work, communities*, organised by Stella Rollig and Eva Sturm in Linz, Austria, in 2002. Jeanne van Heeswijk was invited as speaker.

³⁴² van Heeswijk, *Slow Reader*, 49-50.

³⁴³ Jeanne Van Heeswijk, "Project," *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://phlasmsembled.net/project/>.

The Context: Philadelphia Museum of Art

The invitation to *Philadelphia Assembled* came at the initiative of Carlos Basualdo of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, one of the major museums in the US with a vast encyclopaedic collection ranging from industrial objects and other craft items Impressionist, Post-Impressionist and modern works of art. Interestingly, the Philadelphia Museum of Art was founded on the occasion of the *Centennial Exposition* in 1876, which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Modelled on the Crystal Palace Exhibition from 1851 (in full, *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*), the Centennial Exposition, with its full title *International Exhibition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine*, was the first “world fair” in the United States of America. It followed the same formula of inviting nations to exhibit industrial objects, agricultural and horticultural developments, and art. It was realised as an immense exhibition (without the impressive glass structure of the Crystal Palace Exhibition) throughout the city, in many buildings and pavilions, some of which were newly constructed for the event. The exhibitionary project established a shared space that was textured by industrialization, commerce, and art and craft, coming together in international entanglements (37 foreign countries were invited) and in public, private and commercial interests. Like the Crystal Palace Exhibition, it had a great impact on regular citizens with nearly 10 million visitors.³⁴⁴ The *Women’s Pavilion*, a first for a world fair of its kind, was organised by the Women’s Centennial Committee. The Pavilion focused on works by women and was also organised by women only and was constructed after they lost their place in the main hall due to the overwhelming number of foreign countries wanting to exhibit.

Like many other museums of this type, the Philadelphia Museum of Art began acquiring an extensive collection after this initial founding phase, some of which was donated by private donors. In the beginning, industrial objects, metalwork, embroidery, applied art and later objects of fine art (mostly by European artists) and modern art were acquired. In the spirit of the universalist understanding of art and culture, works of art from other regions of the world were also collected, e.g., in 1900, the Department of Oriental Pottery was established. At the same time, educational functions were added: an educational programme “for the general public offered the museum’s first tours for public school children and art history lectures for adults.”³⁴⁵ Today, with a collection of over 240,000 objects mainly from Europe, America and East Asia,³⁴⁶ the museum operates foremost as an exhibition machine with a mixture

³⁴⁴ “The Centennial Exposition of 1876: An Evolving Cultural Landscape,” West Philadelphia Collaborative History, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://collaborativehistory.gse.upenn.edu/stories/centennial-exposition-1876-evolving-cultural-landscape>.

³⁴⁵ “Our History,” Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://philamuseum.org/about/our-history>.

³⁴⁶ “Collections,” Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.philamuseum.org/search/collections>.

of art historical themes and modern and contemporary exhibition projects. In 2013, this major museum with its enormous collection invited Jeanne van Heeswijk for a conversation about socially engaged art. The result of this meeting turned into the three-year project *Philadelphia Assembled*, which opened in the museum spaces in 2017. In the same year, seventeen more traditional exhibitions were on view, among them *Old Masters Now: Celebrating the Johnson Collection*,³⁴⁷ *Marcel Duchamp and the Fountain Scandal*,³⁴⁸ *Cy Twombly's Iliad*,³⁴⁹ *Channeling Nature by Design*,³⁵⁰ *Another Way of Telling: Women Photographers from the Collection*,³⁵¹ *Design Currents: Oki Sato, Faye Toogood, Zanini de Zanine*,³⁵² *Jitish Kallat: Covering Letter*,³⁵³ *Vlisco: African Fashion on a Global Stage*³⁵⁴ and *Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910–1950*.³⁵⁵ As can be seen from this list of titles, the museum curators and organisers are determined to set an inclusive agenda of cultures and art history by showing many artworks and designs by non-European actors. Symptomatically, only male artists were represented in the major solo shows, and only in these shows was the artist's name mentioned in the title of the exhibition: Three major artist stars Marcel Duchamp, Bruce Nauman, and Cy Twombly, and contemporary Indian artist, Jitish Kallat.³⁵⁶ Exhibition projects such as *Another Way of Telling: Women Photographers from the Collection*, which highlighted women artists who have worked with photography, were group exhibitions with seven artists.

³⁴⁷ "Old Masters Now: Celebrating the Johnson Collection," Philadelphia Museum of Art, last modified 19 October 2017, <https://philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/old-masters-now-celebrating-the-johnson-collection>.

³⁴⁸ "Marcel Duchamp and the Fountain Scandal," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/marcel-duchamp-and-the-fountain-scandal>.

³⁴⁹ "Cy Twombly's Iliad," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/cy-twomblys-iliad>.

³⁵⁰ "Channeling Nature by Design," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/channeling-nature-by-design>.

³⁵¹ "Another Way of Telling: Women Photographers from the Collection," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/another-way-of-telling-women-photographers-from-the-collection>.

³⁵² "Design Currents: Oki Sato, Faye Toogood, Zanini de Zanine," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/design-currents-oki-sato-faye-toogood-zanini-de-zanine>.

³⁵³ "Jitish Kallat: Covering Letter," Philadelphia Museum of Art, last modified 26 August 2016, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/jitish-kallat-covering-letter>.

³⁵⁴ "Vlisco: African Fashion on a Global Stage," Philadelphia Museum of Art, last modified 15 April 2016, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/vlisco-african-fashion-on-a-global-stage>.

³⁵⁵ "Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910–1950," Philadelphia Museum of Art, last modified 30 August 2016, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/paint-the-revolution-mexican-modernism-19101950>.

³⁵⁶ "Recent Exhibitions, 2017," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/past-exhibitions/view-all/2017>.

Jeanne van Heeswijk's *Philadelphia Assembled* was also visually present in the same year, exhibited at the museum from 9 September to 10 December 2017, in the Perelman Building. The project also took over the Perelman Café.³⁵⁷

The Philadelphia Museum of Art is situated in a private-public model, where part of the cost is covered by the municipality. Here, the buildings and parks are owned by the city of Philadelphia, and the museum organisation itself is a not-for-profit corporation and is privately administered by a Board of Trustees³⁵⁸. Admission as of August 2023 is US\$30 for an adult (free for those under 18).³⁵⁹ These museum structures are a result of evolved socio-economic, cultural formations, on the one hand, capable of providing valuable and accurate knowledge about art history, aesthetic thought and insights into culture and society, and on the other, exclusionary in nature, just by the ticket prices alone. The museum directors and curators are aware of the problems that these machines might bring with them in our contemporary world. The Philadelphia Museum says it will take action to apply the Equity Agenda, following the "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA) Action Plan".³⁶⁰ This plan aims not only to diversify exhibitions (themes and artists), but also to diversify the workforce within the museum (staff professionals) and the economic ties on the outside (suppliers). In addition, the collection is to be diversified up through 2025. As half of the collection of more than 240,000 objects is accessible online, the museum also expresses awareness of potentially insensitive, violent or toxic elements in the collection. The museum's website states:

The objects themselves, produced by a range of artists across cultures and times, may contain offensive racial, gender, sexual, religious, and other language and imagery, and their records may contain offensive and discriminatory language, or reflect outdated ideas and analyses. We are actively working to address these issues, and we welcome your feedback as we strive to improve our data and our practices.³⁶¹

Another important item on the Equity Agenda is the investment in outreach programmes that aim for "input from, serving, and saluting our city's rich cultural,

³⁵⁷ "Philadelphia Assembled," Philadelphia Museum of Art, last modified 27 September 2017, <https://www.philamuseum.org/calendar/exhibition/philadelphia-assembled>.

³⁵⁸ "Administration," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://philamuseum.org/about/administration#:~:text=The%20City%20of%20Philadelphia%20owns,hi storic%20houses%20in%20Fairmount%20Park..>

³⁵⁹ "Plan Your Visit," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://philamuseum.org/visit>.

³⁶⁰ "Equity Agenda," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://philamuseum.org/about/equity-agenda>.

³⁶¹ "Collections," Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://www.philamuseum.org/search/collections>.

racial, and ethnic communities”.³⁶² I assume, it was in this spirit that Jeanne van Heeswijk was invited by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2013, specifically by the now chief curator, with the official title of Marion Boulton “Kippy” Stroud Deputy Director, Carlos Basualdo, who, as noted before, knows van Heeswijk’s practice well. What clearly started out as an idea for an outreach programme (to ultimately increase attendance and diversify audiences) evolved into a significant interaction between a self-governed communal process (with van Heeswijk and 150 collaborators) and the museum’s infrastructure. Timothy Rub, the George D. Widener Director and CEO of the Philadelphia Museum, expressed this desire from the museum perspective as follows:

What began as a conversation has grown, and it has been fascinating – and rewarding – to watch *Philadelphia Assembled* take on a life of its own. We are looking forward to the moment when our galleries are appropriated to become a stage for the city itself.³⁶³

Philadelphia Assembled

The institution’s desire to connect with the “city” and vice versa can be imagined in very different ways. Van Heeswijk has a track record of stepping outside of the logic of a museum. She did that here as well. Her idea was to set up an exhibition space in the museum that was not filled with objects from collections, but with “a collection of atmospheres” and thus with “different ways of gaining access to this institution according to one’s own terms, by setting up one’s own methods and other ways of learning than the museum has developed and offered so far”.³⁶⁴ The sheer scale of such a project, going beyond a small neighbourhood and engaging with a city community, scared her, as she still wanted to achieve a meaningful exchange, for a change in social and economic relations within the community.³⁶⁵

The project’s press materials read therefore like a coalescence of a critical community practice (“radical community building and active resistance”) and a representational rationality of a cultural institution for a city’s identity (“Philadelphia’s transforming landscape”, “Philadelphia’s changing urban fabric”, “Challenging, inspiring, and as big as the City”):

³⁶² “Equity Agenda,” Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://philamuseum.org/about/equity-agenda>.

³⁶³ “Philadelphia Assembled,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, last modified 11 April 2017, <https://press.philamuseum.org/philadelphia-assembled/>.

³⁶⁴ Jeanne van Heeswijk, interview from January 2018, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

³⁶⁵ Talk with Jeanne Van Heeswijk for the conference “Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating,” Shared Campus, Online, 26 June 2021, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://shared-campus.com/themes/cultures-histories-futures/curatorial-workshop/curating-on-the-move-situated-knowledges/talk-03/>.

Philadelphia Assembled is an expansive project that **tells a story of radical community building and active resistance** through the **personal and collective narratives** that make up **Philadelphia's changing urban fabric**. These narratives will be explored through a **collaborative effort** between the **Philadelphia Museum of Art** and a **team of individuals, collectives, and organizations** as they experiment with **multiple methodologies** for amplifying and connecting relationships in Philadelphia's transforming landscape. **Challenging, inspiring**, and as big as the city, *Philadelphia Assembled* asks: **how can we collectively shape our futures?**³⁶⁶

The Three Phases of *Philadelphia Assembled*

Philadelphia Assembled had three phases. The first phase took place over a year, during which van Heeswijk engaged in over 500 conversations with various members of the community. She calls this the practice of "deep/diligent listening", in which the artist tries to gain an understanding of the local conditions. According to her, she wanted to find out "What is the spirit of Philadelphia? Where are people creating an alternative?"³⁶⁷ She came with her own prefiguration, naming W.E.B. Du Bois³⁶⁸ as influential for her, along with a book by Alain Supiot, *The Spirit of Philadelphia: Social Justice vs. the Total Market*,³⁶⁹ which tells the history of Philadelphia as a key place where labour organisation and neoliberal market values collided. These sources served as a starting point for the many discussions she had with the various people who eventually became local collaborators on the project. The core idea of finding new ideas for collectively shaped future scenarios in a collective process was there from the beginning and stayed as a beacon throughout the project.

The second phase used the findings of the first phase and structured the urgent topics into the five "atmospheres" of *Reconstructions, Sovereignty, Futures, Sanctuary, and Movement*. The project divided the five atmospheres into working groups that organised their parts separately and in different time frames and locations. Each of the five working groups met and had discussions internally, but also realised many public events that took place regularly at different locations throughout the city. At this stage, it also became clear that the representation of the collective activations of this project with its many events could not remain in the museum space or on the online presence of the museum, as the (legal) restrictions

³⁶⁶ "Project," *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://phlassembled.net/project/> (emphasis added).

³⁶⁷ "I worked almost three years on this... Asking people questions about like, you know, what is the spirit of Philadelphia? Where are people creating an alternative?"

Jeanne van Heeswijk, interview from January 2018, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the film project "CURATING! – explored with a camera".

³⁶⁸ Important for van Heeswijk was the study paper *The Philadelphia Negro* by W.E.B. Du Bois published in 1899. It was the first social science case study of a black community in the USA, which profoundly questioned racial stereotypes and tackled unjust divisions.

³⁶⁹ See Alain Supiot, *The Spirit of Philadelphia: Social Justice vs. the Total Market* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2012).

were too high and the verification processes too slow for a lively, collaborative-communal practice in self-governmental thought. It was therefore decided to set up and run a separate website that was both a documentation of the events and a platform for announcements: <http://phlassembled.net>. The website also contains contributions for the period after the official end of the project in 2017 until 2020 but does not seem to be used anymore. It is difficult to say whether the activities from the working groups transitioned into other forms and lived on. Managing these kinds of exhibition projects and making them publicly accessible through documentation is often a difficult task, especially when the high-intensity phase of said projects have faded. Yet, the challenging effects did not only concern the infrastructure of the museum (and its logic of public representation), but also the internal processes among the collaborators. For a project of this magnitude and with over 150 collaborators, a contractually regulated collaboration seems inevitable. Van Heeswijk wanted to create a community agreement, but the participants could not agree on a 24-page contract-like agreement.³⁷⁰ They did, however, agree on three principles (which were less formal than the first legal agreement paper): transparency, collaborative learning and radical inclusivity.

³⁷⁰ “This one was quite a conflictual process because all in all, there are 150 people involved in Philadelphia. So from different parts of the city, from different walks of life that all care deeply for the city and for the city future, but also have different ways, in how they feel that future should come together. [...] So as part of our journey there was this idea to create community agreements. And in the beginning that was very, very difficult because we couldn't agree. We had like 24 pages of community agreements, and we couldn't agree among our editorial group.”
Jeanne van Heeswijk, interview from January 2018, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

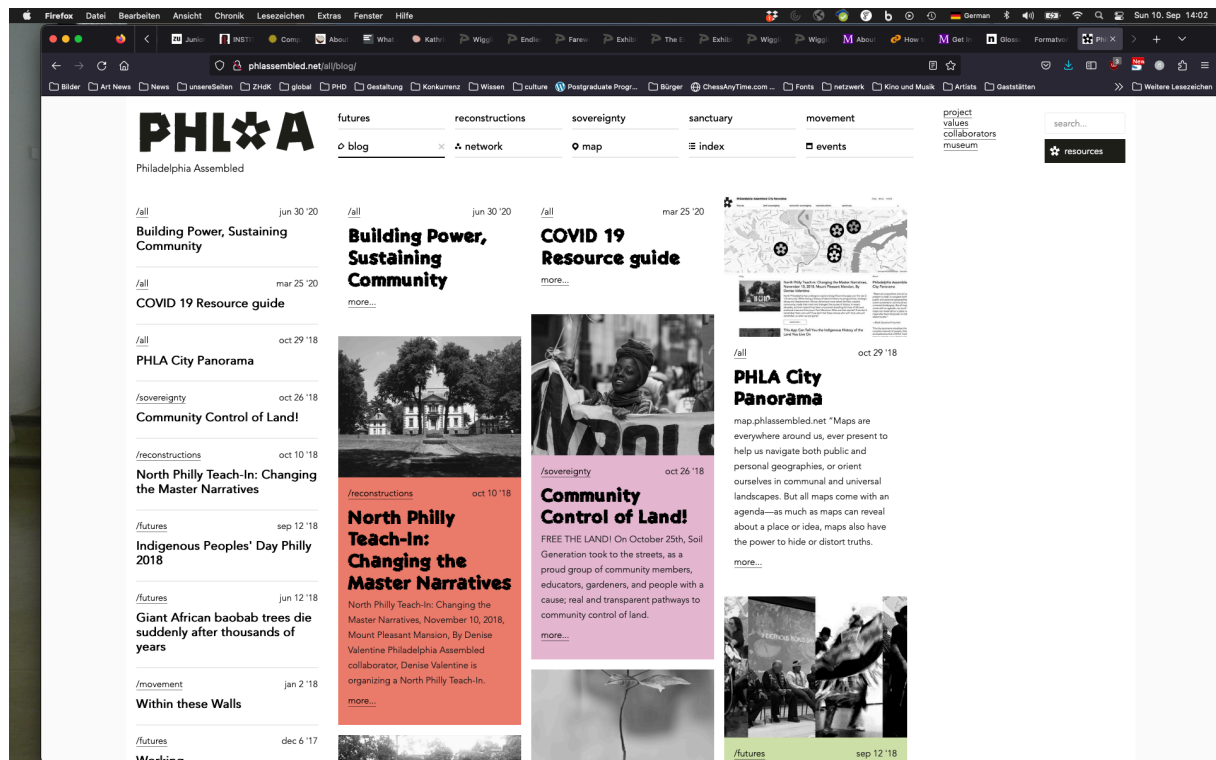


Fig. 14: Website for *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 10 September 2023, <http://phlassembled.net/all/blog/>.

Transparency made the budget visible to all participants and collectivised the budgetary decisions. All participants were informed about the overall budget, structures of commissioning and how the budget was allocated, and they knew what decisions were made about the budgets. This also meant that participants were provided with childcare and meals when needed – an approach to sustenance that is not always achieved in this type of project. Van Heeswijk, together with the groups, managed to pay each participant in the working groups a living wage for their commitment to the meetings and the public events. At that time, this was 17 dollars an hour. The artist was included in this hierarchical payment system.³⁷¹ Of course, this was not possible within the museum infrastructure. **Collaborative learning** meant being willing to participate in listening and speaking sessions as an active practice. **Radical inclusivity** goes hand in hand with this willingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations that give everyone a voice, and potentially frustrating encounters will be had. This radical inclusivity goes beyond the working groups and extends into the public programming with external participants.³⁷² These three

³⁷¹ "...but this also means that the whole fee structure of this project was based on the living wage. So, in Philadelphia, at that moment in time, this was \$17 an hour. And that meant that the whole project's budget was cut in portions of \$17 an hour to provide time for all people to work on the project. And next to this, all working groups were resourced with both childcare, travel expenses and meals." Talk with Jeanne Van Heeswijk for the conference "Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating", Shared Campus, Online, June 26, 2021,

³⁷² "... **radical inclusivity** and packing layers of oppression and privilege by honouring differences and commonalities... And that was also an important one and a very difficult one because radical

principles are a good fit for all practices of contact zones, of open-ended encounters in asymmetric power relations. According to van Heeswijk, many discussions touched on urgent political issues in the highly pressured social fabric of Philadelphia: systemic displacement (racial redlining), mass incarceration, immigration (undocumented workers), African diaspora, the opiate crisis (drug addicts, sex workers)... It is amazing that the artist was able to create these intimate relationships and spark a working method for a self-organised structure within the heated climate of US culture wars and the forced division of political and social identities. Van Heeswijk is nonetheless still a white European artist from the Netherlands. A female artist (perhaps not with an overtly feminist practice), but with the privilege of an internationally known position. And it must also have been more than difficult to mediate the different assumptions and desires between a communal process that addresses the urgent daily questions of sustenance and a good life, and the rationality of the museum to reach a new city audience to increase its reach. The contexts of the term “community” illustrates this perfectly. In the Philadelphia context, “community” projects can refer to poor, low-income neighbourhoods and usually people of colour. It is a rather delicate undertaking for a prestigious museum to reach out to *communities*. Representation will be in dire conflict with re-presentation.

Philadelphia's History with MOVE

Specific to Philadelphia's communal city history is the particular conflict of the Black liberation organization MOVE with the city government and police in the 1980s and 1990s. I cannot go into the deepest layers into this complex history; to do so would require contextualising the liberation movements of the 1970s and 80s in the US, their sometimes radicalising (sometimes militant) tendencies, and the unprecedented excessively violent and brutal countermeasures of the US police.³⁷³ However, I have to summarise this briefly because of its relevance to the project *Philadelphia Assembled*. Founded in 1972 as the *American Christian Movement for Life* or *Christian Life Movement*, MOVE combined communal self-governed living in anarcho-primitivist thought, advocating for animal rights, green politics, against science and technology and ultimately for a “hunter-gatherer society”.³⁷⁴ Ed Pilkington, journalist for *The Guardian*, coined this peculiar mixture in “A siege. A bomb. 48 dogs. And the black commune that would not surrender”, a “strange fusion

inclusivity and uncomfortable conversations go together, because there was, of course, a lot of discussions in the groups about political choice about like levels of radicality, about choices in life, and that all needed to be negotiated.”

Jeanne van Heeswijk, interview from January 2018, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

³⁷³ For an in-depth investigation, I can refer to Charles Abraham, “MOVE: Philadelphia's Forgotten Bombing,” *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal* 7, no. 1 (2020): 27-36, <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/jmurj/vol7/iss1/3>.

³⁷⁴ <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/move/>

of black power and flower power”.³⁷⁵ The movement was founded by John Africa, formerly known as Vincent Leaphart. His writings – written and edited by social worker Donald Glassey due to Africa’s illiteracy – served as the manifesto for this movement under the name *The Guideline* or *The Teaching of John Africa*. Leaving aside issues of this eventually cult-like formation, two major incidents with the police of Philadelphia show racialised injustices in the history of Philadelphia: in 1978, a shootout occurred between MOVE members and the Philadelphia Police Department, which was evicting the squat where MOVE was living. Nine MOVE members were convicted of killing a police officer, although to this day the circumstances are not as clear as the police reports suggest.³⁷⁶ The second incident took place on 13 May 1985 and is known nationally as the “1985 MOVE bombing”. It is the only incident of this kind – an aerial bombing against citizens of the USA on its own territory. Two explosive devices were dropped by police helicopters over MOVE’s occupied house in Cobbs Creek, Philadelphia, resulting not only in the destruction of that building and the deaths of eleven MOVE members, among them five children, but it also led to the destruction of two neighbouring city blocks, leaving many residents homeless. The neighbourhood has not been fully rebuilt to this day. Ramona Africa, survivor of the bombing and now the spokesperson for MOVE, relates the bombing to obvious institutional racism and to police brutality as its helping executioner.³⁷⁷

For a project like *Philadelphia Assembled*, which deals with forms of communal living and questions of sovereignty and resistance, this particularly dramatic history is unavoidable and needs to be tackled. From the point of view of a museum, it might be too delicate. Consequently, and unapologetically, Ramona Africa was involved in *Philadelphia Assembled* and represented MOVE. She is listed among the collaborators of the *Sovereignty* group,³⁷⁸ and MOVE is listed as one of the organisations.³⁷⁹ I would describe the website’s entry under “MOVE” as a manifesto-like document containing a crude mixture of ideas from the liberation movements and the Christian religion, arguing for a *natural law* based on *The Guideline* by founder John Africa and filled with vocabulary like “revolution”, “family”, “God-given”. In its active period as a commune in the 1970s and ‘80s, MOVE “frustrated their neighbours”³⁸⁰ with its rather radical lifestyle, which included wild composting and keeping over 40 stray dogs. There is no excuse for the overly disproportional police measures against a rather peaceful group, which blatantly shows structural injustice

³⁷⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/31/a-siege-a-bomb-48-dogs-and-the-black-commune-that-would-not-surrender>

³⁷⁶ Ed Pilkington, “‘This is huge’: black liberationist speaks out after her 40 years in prison,” *The Guardian*, 18 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/jun/18/debbie-sims-africa-free-prison-move-nine-philadelphia-police>.

³⁷⁷ <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/move/#essay>

³⁷⁸ “Collaborators,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, <http://phlassembled.net/collaborators/>.

³⁷⁹ “About MOVE,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, <http://phlassembled.net/sovereignty/index/move/>.

³⁸⁰ <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1054&context=jmurj>

in all its violence, a fact that is still not acknowledged by officials. That a threat of a newly founded religious community triggers such drastic violent acts by a state institution towards its own people is hard to imagine without racial oppression. There are plentiful self-conceived religions in the USA that haven't been treated in the same way. Yet, in the exhibitionary context of a contact zone in 2017, with open exchange and discussion practices, the question is what possible formations of communal inclusiveness can look like in relation to rather ideologically fixed mindsets.³⁸¹ Here, the notion of "radicality" is put to the test. In van Heeswijk's artistic-curatorial practice, radicality aims at self-empowering techniques under communal formations and surely with conflictual moments. But given the forced segregation of people by ideology-driven believe systems, how can a communal process find self-empowering expressions, that are shared by many? Could there even be a shared outcome? This highly heated battlefield could easily create hardened front lines. All in all, van Heeswijk miraculously managed to keep these different aspects interdependent, at least there was no major fallout, neither from the community or from the museum. Of course, there were challenges and friction, but it seems that this did not spill over to a political level. The question is whether the project would have had a greater impact if it had entered conflictually into the political space (but under what conditions?).³⁸²

Five Atmospheres: Reconstructions, Sovereignty, Sanctuary, Futures, Movement

Going back to the structure of *Philadelphia Assembled*, the five working groups were an interesting formation, a research assemblage in (un)learnings and a production centre for making things public. On the one hand, these groups met and had discussions internally in self-learning and co-teaching ways; on the other hand, they prepared events, posters and other formats to present their jointly established knowledges to the public and at public sites. I would like to briefly summarise the directions of the five atmospheres here: "**Reconstructions**" was designed around topics of "complex identity that encompasses past and present" and avoided the search for authentic identity formations. It asked questions about the fabric of neighbourhoods and their principles of self-governance. Two series of events ran

³⁸¹ I would like to emphasise this paragraph from the self-description of MOVE on the Philadelphia Assembled website, which presents a fundamental idea of nature, in my opinion:

"LIVING AS A REVOLUTIONARY FAMILY

All committed MOVE members take the last name "Africa" out of reverence for our Founder JOHN AFRICA, and to show that we are a family, a unified body moving in one direction. We have Black, White, Puerto Rican members from upper- and lower-class backgrounds, both college and street (mis)educated. While we do not heed the system's legal institution of marriage, we do adhere to the natural law that requires one male and one female to mate and produce new life. We are monogamous. JOHN AFRICA taught us that childbearing is a natural, instinctive function of a mother and requires no drugs or hospital stays."

"About MOVE," *Philadelphia Assembled*.

³⁸² For example, one could have tried to pressure the city of Philadelphia to rebuild Osage Avenue, where the MOVE bombing happened.

under the title “Blueprint for a Just Neighbourhood”, and “Freedom in a Carceral State” with teach-ins, pop-up performances, dinners, community clean-ups and more.³⁸³ Van Heeswijk describes it like this: “Blueprint for a Just Neighbourhood” challenges Philadelphians to look out for each other during a time when gentrification is so prominent in the city. It asks questions such as, “What does it mean to be a neighbour? What can be achieved with brotherly love and sisterly affection? How can we hold ourselves accountable and look out for each other?”³⁸⁴ **Sovereignty** dealt with questions of economics and land. Economics addressed marketplace and cultural exchange in “histories of self-determination and the preservation of community wisdom.” Land sovereignty installed four urban garden projects. This atmosphere drew from bell hooks’ “communities of resistance” and how struggle can create community.³⁸⁵ **Sanctuary** – reframed in an internal process “Towards Sanctuary” due to cultural misconceptions – dealt with “self-care, asylum, and refuge”.³⁸⁶ A series of events on public sites were accompanied by a geodesic dome that was meant to shelter and enabled intimate encounters on topics like LGBTQ safe spaces, (illegal) migration, homelessness, violence in drug use and sex work. In this process, participants named Sanctuary Stewards hosted the ongoing events. **Futures** focused on the question of “how do we reclaim the past in order to decolonise the future?”³⁸⁷ It draws from anti-colonial struggles and decolonial practices to educate themselves and the community. The group set up “The Mobile Futures Institute (MFI)”, a travelling collective-teaching classroom in the form of a shuttle bus. **Movement** had a transversal function “looking at the intersections of the project’s eight public sites and proposing ways in which these sites can influence one another across the city and at the Museum.”³⁸⁸ It worked with the other groups to document and create public material and displays for the museum. It helped to establish a film and sound program, the visual design, the newly drawn city maps for the exhibition, and a “Fathering Festival”, supporting equitable parenting practices in the community.

³⁸³ “Reconstructions,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 4 August 2023, <https://phlassembled.net/reconstructions/all/>.

³⁸⁴ Jeanne van Heeswijk, interview from January 2018, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

³⁸⁵ “Sovereignty,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 14 May 2023, <http://phlassembled.net/sovereignty/all/>.

³⁸⁶ “Sanctuary,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 14 May 2023, <http://phlassembled.net/sanctuary/all/>.

³⁸⁷ “Futures,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 10 May 2023, <http://phlassembled.net/futures/all/>.

³⁸⁸ “Movement,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, <http://phlassembled.net/movement/all/>.



Fig. 15: “Mobile Futures Institute”, *Philadelphia Assembled*. Photo: Janneke-Absil.



Fig. 16: Geodesic dome as mobile space for “Sanctuary”, *Philadelphia Assembled*, 12th Locust Street, Philadelphia. Photo: Chris Kendig.

Third Phase: Entering the Museum.

Finally, the third phase fully entered the museum space with an exhibition. However, it did not occur in one of the main galleries of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, but in the Perelman Building, an adjacent building with smaller gallery spaces, a café, a library and a conference hall. For van Heeswijk, this was a conscious choice “in order to take over the whole ground, to insert Philadelphia's learnings as a full takeover.”³⁸⁹ The museum building was appropriated with landscape drawings called *City Panorama*,³⁹⁰ public meetings and events organised by the five atmospheres, and exhibitions installed by the five groups, the *PHLA Film Program*³⁹¹ and *The Philadelphia Assembled Kitchen*, which took over the Perelman Building's café.³⁹²



Fig. 17: Exhibition View, *Philadelphia Assembled*, Perelman Building, *City Panorama*. Photo: Chris Kendig.

In particular, in the halls, the *City Panorama* visualised a governmental mapping of personal, local and communal views as well as superordinate and global perspectives. The proposed landscapes created a timeline based on situated

³⁸⁹ Talk with Jeanne Van Heeswijk for the conference “Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating”, Shared Campus, online, 26 June 2021.

³⁹⁰ “City Panorama,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 4 August 2023, https://phlassembled.net/movement/index/city_panorama/.

³⁹¹ “PHLA Film Program,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 4 August 2023, https://phlassembled.net/movement/index/phla_film_program/.

³⁹² “The Philadelphia Assembled Kitchen,” *Philadelphia Assembled*, accessed 4 August 2023, https://phlassembled.net/movement/index/the_philadelphia_assembled_kitchen/.

Heeswijk, it was important for the groups to write the labels themselves, to do away with the idea of supposedly neutral statements on the displayed objects and to inscribe their situated knowledges onto the museum walls. Moreover, the guided tours were given by the 150 collaborators and not by the museum's art education department.³⁹⁵ These aspects certainly posed a challenge to the museum's institutional logic of knowledge production and distribution. Taking over the café space was an even bigger hurdle, as not only the museum was involved, but also the external caterer, who had to agree. The kitchen was run by three project collaborators, who invited chefs from the city to come up with special dishes.



Fig. 19: Ramona Africa from MOVE hosting *Sovereignty Gallery, Philadelphia Assembled*, Photo: Jeanne van Heeswijk.

³⁹⁵ “We didn't want to have the wall text and the labels to be written by the museum, but by our collective group of 150 participants. And this was a very difficult thing to achieve, to overcome this idea of neutrality [...] this idea that our wall labels supposed to be neutral. [...] In the groups we were working with, hosting the exhibition and giving guided tours in order to learn about certain of those galleries through their own words. So you could walk for instance in the Sovereignty Gallery with Ramona Africa from move talking about the exhibition.”
Talk with Jeanne Van Heeswijk, “Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating.”



Fig. 20: The Philadelphia Assembled Kitchen, *Philadelphia Assembled*. Photo: Joseph Hu.



Fig. 21: *Reconstruction's* Gallery, *Framework for an Affordable House*, AEA meeting, *Philadelphia Assembled*. Photo: Janneke Absil.



Fig. 22: *Sovereignty Atmosphere*, A-Z Gallery, *Philadelphia Assembled*. Photo: Joseph Hu.

According to the artist, the museum was supportive throughout the whole process, helping with exhibition set-up, contracts, fact-checking of labels and much more. They made it possible to visit the *Philadelphia Assembled* exhibition without buying a ticket to the museum but allowed a “pay what you want” solution. Nevertheless, all these situated, personal, subjective, critical and political voices entering the museum were surely a great challenge for the museum’s infrastructure. Jeanne van Heeswijk’s own assessment also speaks of the lack of a lasting effect on the life of the institution after *Philadelphia Assembled*:

Amanda Sroka was part of the artistic team of *Philadelphia Assembled* and was also Assistant Curator for Contemporary Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art said that the museum trained a muscle it didn't know it had. [...] *Philadelphia Assembled* definitely worked at the institution, let's say it like that. But if you look at its durational effect, you could say it could have taken more of its learnings into the core of its system. Then, on the other hand, a lot of connections made through *Philadelphia Assembled* are still operating today.³⁹⁶

Evaluations Attempts

These kinds of projects cannot easily be evaluated; they even challenge the evaluation methods of the social sciences or aesthetic judgement. Since this artistic practice does not end in a work of art that can be classified in the qualitative measurements of art history, evaluations could mean assessing the direct impact or changes that this project triggered or left behind, which in itself is a complex task to track and document. In a traditional way, an exhibition on racial redlining inside the museum with artworks and their rather hierarchical discursive mode of knowledge distribution might “show” the problem, and “tell” about it, but needn’t be bothered with finding ways to implement practical solutions. In the strictest sense, these classical exhibitions can serve to exert political pressure on the logic of political representation, but they barely have a direct effect on real-life changes in contact zones. One direct result concerning MOVE can be noted: simply by displaying documents and personal objects in the museum space that show this history and thus legitimise it in the representational space. In this sense, one can speak of representational rehabilitation for MOVE in the cultural sphere, which would be desired to continue in the rehabilitation and restitution of MOVE members who are still imprisoned. Visibly, *Philadelphia Assembled* has not taken the step of pressuring politicians for rehabilitation, although it did act as a “solidarity sponsor”³⁹⁷ for the 45th

³⁹⁶ In Q&A, talk with Jeanne Van Heeswijk, “Situated Knowledges in Art and Curating”.

³⁹⁷

http://phlassembled.net/sovereignty/events/on_a_move_a_conference_presented_by_the_move_organization/.

anniversary conference of MOVE, one of the aims of which was to release the imprisoned MOVE9.

On a methodological level, however, the question arises whether an ideological radicality and van Heeswijk's idea of "radicalising the local" go well together. Certainly, the context must be kept in mind: living in constant oppression over several generations may lead to different formulations of empowerment than those from less drastic contexts. Yet, the key question for a community-based practice here is where the (self-given) boundaries lie. These touch on legal, juridical and ultimately sovereign powers. The exhibitionary complex provides still – for better or worse – a decontextualized space and time that tends to tame even the most revolutionary statements in cultural-critical distillments. This is the advantage of the established exhibition space: it can freeze the most conflictual subject into a display to observe and study. The urgent question, however, is whether this is enough for the future. An exhibition space of a contact zone would depend on temporarily freezing conflictual issues, but only in order to collectively negotiate and activate a new meaning. The taming effect of the traditional neutral museum space would thus be overcome. But the most crucial question remains: How to deal with the limits of the negotiating space? How is the exchange structured? This is especially important at a time when ideologically driven opinions refuse to "believe" that the climate catastrophe is real (not to mention the religious belief of God-given natural laws.)

The principal question is then, what can an exhibitionary project do – traditional or participatory? Certainly, these questions need to be specific to the different contexts of culture, institution and people. Yet, in general, it would be interesting to see what a sustained integrated process like that of *Philadelphia Assembled* could activate inside or outside museum walls. The permeability of art institutions inviting these kinds of projects which surely challenge the fabric of the museum machinery would be made permanent. Van Heeswijk would want to maintain the relationship between the art institution and the community, as for her museum spaces are well suited for situated knowledge formations and create a permeable situation:

Autonomy is always relative, but now instead of using that term I like to talk about related autonomy, which is important. Places like museums are still public spaces, especially when they're free, where people can gain knowledge, and gain different views on matters. The question is how can the functions of an institution be re-related to other places? And, as such, offer more of a common ground that people could use, and which doesn't require much more than what some museums are already doing. Museums should allow others to 'trespass' a little bit more often, be more permeable or give others more 'right of way'. [...]

Maybe institutional permeability can be facilitated by asking questions and repeating those questions again and again and again.³⁹⁸

This “related autonomy” and its “institutional permeability” encompass an expanded governmental-institutional practice that would set up a profoundly new relationship between the museum space and its audiences, who become its users, constituents or co-producers. It also establishes learning situations that would not follow the more hierarchical teaching in classrooms, but would be played out through smaller inputs, discussions and encounters. What Tony Bennett calls “governmental assemblages” sketches a blurred group entity that might permeate the museum space for some time, making their situated knowledges public. My insertion argues that these groups need to be connected with each other. Some common principles have to be established, which I see in the empirical research-based feminist objectivity that is created within situated knowledges. My persistent insistence on an embodied objectivity even allows, I believe, the most toxic or problematic elements to be addressed and discussed. The purification of exhibitions – only showing the aestheticised objects and hiding the socio-economic contexts – can also occur in participatory exhibitions where there can be many conflictual, toxic discussions. The communally established knowledges should not become neutral again but can only exist in relation to each other. In this sense, it is about a continuous self-learning process, where one not only takes the narrative into one’s own hands (doing away with a master narrative), but also introduces critical self-practices to evaluate one’s own story-making and epistemes.



³⁹⁸ van Heeswijk, *Engaging Publics: Public Engagement*, 18–19.

Fig. 23: Jeanne van Heeswijk in Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2018. Screenshot.

In this sense, the permeability of museums is only the prerequisite for a permanent networked contact zone that rather works with presentation rather than representation.³⁹⁹ This constant practice would be in awareness of governmental thought, of careful thinking about how one governs oneself and others, and how one is governed by others. As I have argued, in the current scenario, Jeanne van Heeswijk could be seen as the caring (feminist?) shepherd whose methods and practices (simply by asking questions, listening, helping to make things public) aim to establish a horizontal dynamic that leads to ongoing projects. In her words, she said about *Philadelphia Assembled*:

My work is trying to get to the essence of aesthetics, to understand it as an engaged, inclusive, and proactive practice. This type of work is about using imagination to better understand how we live together. Rising, claiming, rooting, caring, moving – this is how we build a collective exercise of care.⁴⁰⁰

5.2 documenta fifteen's lumbung: Threats and Troubles of Commons and Commoning in Contemporary Art and Knowledge Production

Despite the large scale of *Philadelphia Assembled*, the second case study *documenta fifteen* from 2022 is overwhelming in every respect, in terms of the scope of exhibitions and participants and the potential for conflict, friction and exploitation. Unlike *Philadelphia Assembled*, I not only attended *documenta fifteen* several times but was also involved in the “Composting Knowledge Network”,⁴⁰¹ and co-organised the workshop “Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education”, which took place in Kassel from 23 June to 7 July 2022. I will discuss my involvement in a later chapter on my practice. For now, I would like to focus mainly on what the implementation of commoning aspects in the exhibitionary complex might mean. This chapter was published with some adjustments and additions in *OnCurating 54: documenta fifteen – Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices*.⁴⁰² For my doctoral

³⁹⁹ “Displaying things publicly (not representation but presentation) in a loop circle:

Presentation is not a representation of what groups are doing in the city, but it's a presentation that functions as a stage where the city is performed. And as I said before, for my work, it's always important to set up this field of interactions that are circumscribed by questions.”

Jeanne van Heeswijk, interview from January 2018, in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the film project “CURATING! – explored with a camera”.

⁴⁰⁰ “Philadelphia Assembled,” *Philadelphia Assembled*.

⁴⁰¹ “COMPOSTING KNOWLEDGE Network”, accessed 22 August 2023, *documenta fifteen*, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/composting-knowledge/>

⁴⁰² Ronald Kolb, “documenta fifteen's Lumbung: The Bumpy Road on the Third Way: Fragmentary Thoughts on the Threats and Troubles of Commons and Commoning in Contemporary Art and Knowledge Production,” *OnCurating 54: documenta fifteen—Aspects of Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Practices*, eds. Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter (November 2022): 57–94.

thesis, I have shortened and recompiled this text in order to adapt it to my research argument.

Lumbung

The artistic directors of *documenta fifteen*, ruangrupa – a group of ten people with an artistic–curatorial practice, a first for *documenta* – explained the concept of *documenta fifteen* in terms of “lumbung”: the rice barn in small village communities in Indonesia and their practice of collectively managed resources (originally rice) that are freely shared with all community members. Lumbung is a practice of the collective sharing of resources, common ownership and common means and methods of production. In their press release of 18 June 2020, ruangrupa described “lumbung as a collectively governed architecture for the storage of food serves a community’s long-term well-being through communal resources and mutual care, and it is organised around a set of shared values, collective rituals, and organizational principles.”⁴⁰³ Lumbung, however, should not be seen as a mere concept or metaphor for *documenta fifteen*’s large-scale exhibition project – curatorial concepts for biennials tend to embed their exhibitions in a larger political and social picture, although they often do not incorporate any of these ideas into the exhibition practice itself, resulting in a more traditional formula of knowledge display. The lumbung practice proposed by ruangrupa was extensively incorporated into all processes for *documenta fifteen* – as far as it was possible. From that moment on, various conflicts loomed on the horizon, not to mention the internal difficulties of “scaling up” a resource infrastructure and its sharing principles, originally intended for a rather small village community or small group of people, to a global scale.⁴⁰⁴

This commons approach challenges the established art field on many levels. Commons does not only challenge the rationality of the single author as artist, but also the established structures of the art market, and art historical categorisation. Seeing ruangrupa’s background as a non-“Western”⁴⁰⁵ art collective, their commoning approach can be seen in dichotomy against a “Western” project, a postcolonial stand against the Western idea of Enlightenment. This reading may be less the intention of ruangrupa than the view from intellectual standpoints in the “West”. Commons and commoning projects have established themselves in various

⁴⁰³ *documenta fifteen* press release, “documenta fifteen and lumbung practice,” 18 June 2022, accessed 22 August 2022,

<https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/press-releases/documenta-fifteen-and-lumbung-practice>.

⁴⁰⁴ It is said that around 1,500 artists were exhibited or participated in *documenta fifteen*, Kate Brown, “Documenta 15 Opens With a Record 1,500 Artists, Promising to Be Unlike Any Edition That Came Before It,” *Artnet*, 15 June 2022, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/documenta-15-preview-2130857>.

⁴⁰⁵ I must confess that it is becoming increasingly difficult for me to use terms like “Western”, “Global South” and “Global North.” The reductive and oftentimes misleading effects get in the way of a nuanced and precise description of situated knowledges. These loaded terms draw so much attention that a thorough analysis is in danger more often than not of falling short in its interpretation. From here onwards, I will use these terms in quotations to point out the complex context they represent.

cultural contexts and often go hand in hand with specific historical developments. In this sense, commons cannot be seen as a project from the “Global South”. The prevailing reading of ruangrupa as actors of the “Global South” is already a violation that was later used in discourse and in newspapers to downplay them in a certain way – an act of systemic violence? Having already elaborated the historical trajectory of the commons for the art discourse in Chapter 3.1, I will show here in detail how commons and commoning and thus ideas of shared ownership and collaborative practice found their way into the “most important major exhibition”, i.e., documenta in Kassel, Germany, in 2022.

***lumbung*, or Commoning Applied to a Large-Scale Exhibition**

In order to get closer to understanding what a commons-driven practice can produce in a large-scale contemporary exhibition, I would like to mention some insights into ruangrupa's practices and methods, some of which I experienced through my participation in two networks related to documenta⁴⁰⁶ and various meetings with members of ruangrupa, as well as through several visits to the exhibition and related events of my own.

For this, I will offer a quote from a historical perspective by Peter Linebaugh, and use it as a blueprint to understand commons thinking for the exhibitionary complex:

Commoners think first not of title deeds, but of human deeds: how will this land be tilled? Does it require manuring? What grows there? They begin to explore. You might call it a natural attitude. Second, commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast. Common rights are entered into by labor. Third, commoning is collective. Fourth, being independent of the state, commoning is independent also of the temporality of the law and state.⁴⁰⁷

First: translated for the exhibitionary complex, “**Commoners think first not of title deeds, but of human deeds,**” speaks of subsistence over representation. It changes the mode of representation of and in exhibitions. It shifts the power of representation and its vertical mode of establishing a certain understanding of the world, of establishing knowledge through a universalised “objective” public display directed toward a public to a more horizontal interpersonal exchange that offers direct participation enclosed in contact zones. I will later argue that both methods of exhibition-making – the “traditional” representational mode, and a full-body participatory mode of knowledge exchange – have their advantages and disadvantages, the former enabling precise articulations often with the cost of higher levels of exclusion, while the latter enables a fully engaged public with the risk of flat

⁴⁰⁶ Dorothee Richter and I were invited to the Composting Knowledge Network and organised the Summer School “Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education,” as explained above.

⁴⁰⁷ Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, 45.

levelling and relativisations. Both have their blind spots and their strengths.

“[H]ow will this land be tilled?” relates to both a localised analysis of the situatedness in which one finds itself embedded and a working methodology for possibilities of future display. In commons thought, with the definition provided by Linebaugh, tasks are clear: **“What grows there? They begin to explore.”** As early as 2020, ruangrupa began to form networks on three different levels: “lambung inter-lokal” (the international networks with which ruangrupa already had relationships), “Kassel ekosistem” (initiating and connecting various projects, off-spaces and associations in Kassel’s civil society) and “lambung Indonesia” (the collectivising process conducted respectively in locations in Indonesia). This establishment of a network of networks embedded through local practices in a translocal network on such a scale is unparalleled in the art field. In our globalised world – and specifically for exhibitionary projects like documenta and other biennials – working the local depends on global trajectories, inter-local interconnectedness, and translocal alliances. ruangrupa’s vision for *documenta fifteen* was a very compelling enactment on this front. The exclusions of its own that it produces will be discussed later.

To establish the “Kassel ekosistem,” two members of ruangrupa, Reza Afisina and Iswanto Hartono, moved to Kassel with their families in 2020. Though the claim to “localise” biennials is an often-promoted curatorial statement, it more often than not falls short. What ruangrupa set out to achieve by situating two of its core members in the city of Kassel, had in this form never been done in documenta’s history, and for the most part, is very unusual for biennials. This level of engagement in a city and its society is unmatched. Okwui Enwezor’s similarly major impact on the large-scale exhibition as a whole with *documenta11* in 2002 directed much-needed attention toward artists in non-European locations, yet it was not inclined to ground this global endeavour in local issues to too great an extent.⁴⁰⁸

“You might call it a natural attitude” points to a non-formalised way of working: from my experience in the newly established network of “Composting Knowledge,” relationships developed casually – “naturally” – over a period. There were no representative or formalised arrangements at play – for better or worse.

Second: “commoning is embedded in a labor process; it inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast.”

Commoning practices prefer doing, rather than contemplating or representing. For the exhibitionary complex, this means a shift away from the representational mode of display to an active involvement of artists and public alike, artists and public as

⁴⁰⁸ The *Bataille Monument* by artist Thomas Hirschhorn comes to mind as a localised project at *d11*, though one could question the form of the relationship between the local public and the artist and the public’s “participation.” One crucial problem I have with specific forms of socially engaged art is its practice of rendering the audience “material” for the artist’s work.

present bodies on display in the exhibition. In this sense, performativity takes on a new meaning. For example, our workshop group for the Summer School “Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education” was often viewed as an artistic performance. The workshop space of the summer school was placed inside the exhibition space, and, on more than one occasion, our group was considered part of the exhibition by visitors. On an intentional level, many artists present at their given exhibition space were constantly engaged in discussions. The performative aspect of art was expanded to the body of the artist and to the body of the visitor – a fuller embodiment within the exhibition than the traditional contemplative “viewer’s gaze”. I would argue that the relationship between the exhibition of art and the interpellation of its audience was changed by this, and with it forms of mediation. We learned that ruangrupa proposed art mediation as the activation of artists and collectives present in the exhibition space. I experienced this in the first weeks of *documenta fifteen*, where the exhibition was activated by the artists and collectives present on site. For example, the gudskul area at Fridericianum was curated as a contact zone or – in the terminology used on the official website – “gathering space”.⁴⁰⁹ Different artist collectives from Indonesia were invited to actively engage with the audience in a playful manner, yet with the aim of creating a co-learning environment. In their words: “Gudskul is open to anyone who is interested in co-learning, developing collective-based artistic practices, and artmaking with a focus on collaboration.”⁴¹⁰



Fig. 24: *documenta fifteen*, Fridskul area, activated at that time by La Tabebh. Photo: Ronald Kolb

ruangrupa's reticence towards art mediation could also be rooted in the reflex of seeing art mediation as a hegemonic function of the art institution: in this framework, a constellation might occur where artists in the exhibition space engaged with the

⁴⁰⁹ *documenta fifteen*'s description of the Gudskul area on the website: <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/gudskul>.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

audience are confronted with art mediators who additionally "explain" the works to the audience from a seemingly institutionalised point of view. This could become uncomfortable and undermine the direct exchange between art, artists and the audience and trigger problematic forms of "Otherings".

From the proposal of a commoning practice in exhibition-making "**embedded in a labor process**", a "radical" other form of interpellation of the audience in a museum emerges. It brings the individual spectator – still prevalent in museums – into a collective process. We experienced for ourselves how easy it was to engage in a discussion over tea, prepared and served as a tool for starting a discussion in the gudskul area at Fridskul. In this way, the museum space is not only a constellation of display, media and (art) objects, or where labour is shown (in form of artworks), but it also becomes a space to be used. For an incisive experience, we can see Fridericianum's left wing dedicated to toddlers with a sandbox and resting area, and children with an installation of a children's playground and daily program organised by RURUKIDS.⁴¹¹ One has to ask why no biennial or museum addressed parents and their children in this inclusive way inside the exhibition space as an integral part of the exhibition – and not as something offered outside of the exhibition to bridge the time.



Fig. 25: *documenta fifteen*, playground at Fridskul area; Fridericianum. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Our learned behaviour in museums as primarily reflective intellectuals engaged in aesthetic judgment produces an "autonomous individual subject"; it sets the audience in front of a complex artwork. A collective interaction – let alone a loud discussion – is unwanted in the most traditional sense of museums. Although participatory practices

⁴¹¹ "Fridericianum as a school. Fridskul," *documenta fifteen*, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/fridskul>.

have been present in the museum for a while now, I would argue there are significant differences between participatory forms that are located in the relation between audience and museum. There is socially engaged art that addresses the audience – even with participatory means – as reflective individuals only, which is different than an activated public in museum spaces that co-produce exhibitions by engagement as part of a community-building practice.

ruangrupa's aforementioned shift away from a more traditional form of art education did not play out well. Art mediation was still established, yet late, since the institution insisted. Finally, the sobat-sobat (“friends” in Indonesian) were introduced as a separate grouping specifically with the task of art education. In the context of art mediation, sobat-sobat took over the more traditional guided tours and mediation efforts that a more traditional audience expects. In our conversations with members of sobat-sobat, however, it became clear that the mostly young and eager art mediators initially had other forms of mediation in mind and wanted to engage in encounters with the public in a more experimental way. In addition to other issues,⁴¹² the friction in the sobat-sobat group towards the institution when seeking a more experimental form of mediation is an indication of the opposition of art institutions’ mode of representation to direct engagement. It shakes the foundations of the function of museums to produce, reproduce and control a hegemonic narrative. Despite the initial refusal for art mediators, these very instrumentalising aspects of art mediation, which can adopt an integrated institutional formation to convey a specific reading or narrative to the public, was later taken up by the artistic team itself, it seems.⁴¹³ Coming back to the practical-curatorial field, I wouldn’t want to dismiss representational mediation at large, as it can provide a highly informative and precise articulation of knowledge; nonetheless, accompanying forms of collective engagement can produce situated knowledges in non-canonical ways. The question is always how these forms of mediation are embedded and executed, between forms of ideologically instructional and those open to discussion.

⁴¹² We learned that the many art mediators were seriously underpaid or had contracts in rather precarious forms. These problems were considered structural ones, since previous documenta editions had the same policy towards the art mediators giving guided tours.

⁴¹³ Among the many rumour-riddled processes backstage at *documenta fifteen*, one story thread around Emily Dische-Becker was “leaked” in a hidden recording that might show how the sobat-sobat were given specific guidelines in preparatory events on how they could react or deflect problematic questions on the issue of Israel-Palestine, and hence accusations of antisemitism, after they had previously been through workshops on antisemitism given by the Anne Frank institution. For a chronologically well-prepared and thorough insight into this incident, see Dirk Peitz, “Am Rande,” *Zeit Online*, 29 July 2022, accessed 22 September 2022, <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/kunst/2022-07/documenta-antisemitismus-emily-dische-becker/seite-2>.



Fig. 26: *documenta fifteen*, Hübner Areal. Meeting with members of sobat-sobat at Hübner Areal. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Coming back to Linebaugh's definition, I would like to briefly hint here at the particular and situated practices of the commons. At least as I understand this: **"it [commoning] inheres in a particular praxis of field, upland, forest, marsh, coast."** A commoning practice is specific and situated; it needs a precise understanding of the "land" or, in our case, the fields of knowledge in contemporary artistic practices that are on display and put into an exhibition. Transported to *documenta fifteen*, some locations and areas felt neglected, or less formulated and embedded than others, or perhaps I couldn't experience it due my presence at the wrong time, where no activation occurred. It could also be the case that among the many invited artists and collectives and their varying experience in exhibition-making, some were less prepared for a precise exhibition practice and its mediation, especially with the complex global entanglements that were brought to *documenta fifteen*.⁴¹⁴

Third: "commoning is collective."

This category speaks not only of more "horizontal" forms of decision-making or at least of more flexible transversalities within power structures or organisational procedures, but it also aims at collectivising economic benefits. For collective decision-making, ruangrupa established the "lumbung inter-local" network – the largely established network with which ruangrupa already had close ties. The network met and discussed in so-called *majelis* in 2019 in physical form, first in

⁴¹⁴ According to Christina Schrott, some *majelis* participants were challenged to make certain decisions: "According to Christina Schrott, within the *mini-majelis* that Taring Padi belonged to, artists were challenged by the sudden expectation to make decisions about matters with which they have no experience."

Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent, "We need to talk! Art, offence and politics in Documenta 15," *New Mandala*, 29 June 2022, accessed 21 October 2022, <https://www.newmandala.org/we-need-to-talk-art-offence-and-politics-in-documenta-15/>.

Indonesia and in Kassel, and later online.⁴¹⁵ An economic restructuring was initiated within three trajectories: first, the fourteen lumbung members were given two budget pots, the “seed money” (€25,000) and the production budget (€180,000).⁴¹⁶ While the latter was obviously directed to production costs, the “seed money” – transferred upfront – could be spent freely as decided collectively by the respective lumbung members without any attachment to *documenta fifteen* whatsoever. Lumbung members used this budget to pay rent or buy land – to strengthen and sustain their own projects “at home.” Needless to say, this type of artist fee without conditions is rather unusual and unique, even in the particular field of art and its rather opaque compensation in the form of speculative distributions through an increase in recognition.

Second, they established alternative distribution models with the “lumbung Kios”⁴¹⁷ (localised self-run shops to trade goods and resources with low environmental impact), and the “lumbung Gallery”. The latter is a collaboration with *TheArtist*, a non-profit organisation run by professionals from the art field.⁴¹⁸ This collaboration was organised by the lumbung Gallery working group and aimed to set up a distribution model beyond *documenta fifteen* with lumbung principles of collectively shared resources – in this case, of sold art objects. The pricing of the artworks is instead determined by “the collective’s basic needs and artists’ basic income in addition to production costs and other material condition variables rather than speculative market prices,”⁴¹⁹ while 70% of the sales price is aimed to go directly to the artist or collective, and 30% stays with the lumbung Gallery for sustaining the platform.⁴²⁰ This sales platform – ultimately, it is nothing else – comes with a different distribution model embedded in collective needs in the background but mimics a rather slick gallery aesthetic in the front – and is another example of commons compatibility or indifference to capitalist structures, but with a different idea of distribution in mind: not towards an individual artist, but towards a collective.

⁴¹⁵ *documenta fifteen*, “documenta fifteen announces exhibiting lumbung artists” accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/documenta-fifteen-announces-exhibiting-lumbung-artists/>.

⁴¹⁶ ruangrupa, *documenta fifteen Handbook* (Hatje Cantz, 2022). 21.

⁴¹⁷ *documenta fifteen*’s description of “Working Group lumbung Kios,” accessed 25 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-kios>.

⁴¹⁸ See the “about” page for information on the responsible personnel: <https://www.theartists.net/about-us>, accessed 25 September 2022.

⁴¹⁹ For more information on the LUMBUNG GALLERY, see <https://www.lumbunggallery.theartists.net/mission>, accessed 22 September 2022.

⁴²⁰ Not unlike artist-run “Produzentengallerien” from the 1970s in German-speaking areas, the self-governing desires of artists seeking to avoid the gallerist comes to mind. Not only can artists avoid a not-so-small cut taken by the gallerists, which provide the infrastructure that brings not only space and exposure, but – more importantly – cultural capital and, ultimately, legitimation. Gallerists usually also provide powerful collectors and can make an artist’s career. But they can also neglect artists and their works.

On this note, *rasad*, the artwork by Britto Arts Trust, a re-creation of a stand with food and other goods replicated in artistic materials, in ceramic, embroidery and metal, displayed prominently in the documenta Halle – next to the wonderful halfpipe by Baan Noorg, set up to be used – adds another dimension when realising that every single replicated object can be bought via the lumbung Gallery platform.⁴²¹ I don't want to mock this economic procedure. In a lot of large-scale exhibitions, sales and other non-monetary remuneration – like recognition, promised exhibitions in other museum shows, speculative promises in general – advance in rather well-covered areas, carefully hidden from “regular” visitors, whose contemplative experience shouldn't be distracted by the vile power plays of speculative and profit-oriented business. However, despite Britto Art Trust's collective and valuable activist practices, which are also negotiated in other works at *documenta fifteen*, *rasad* seems to me to play with art and its exhibitionary practices – with its enormous empowering function – on a mere economic level of redistribution with its aim to sell each single art piece one by one – and there are plenty of them – via the lumbung Gallery platform.

From a broader perspective, the underlying “de-accumulation of capital” might not be easily achieved even with the Lumbung gallery idea of price calculation according to the needs of the artist collectives – a value calculation detached from the usual evaluation mechanisms in the art field. On the one hand, it creates a platform to place artworks on the market and, through that, redistribute the profits for the collective, but it cannot prevent the secondary circulation in the art market's speculative mode.



Fig. 27: *documenta fifteen*, installation *rasad* by Britto Arts Trust. Photo: Ronald Kolb

⁴²¹ Artworks by Britto Arts Trust on sale at the lumbung Gallery, see <https://www.lumbunggallery.theartists.net/artist/britto-arts-trust>, accessed 25 September 2022.



Fig. 28: *documenta fifteen*, Britto Kitchen, installation by Britto Arts Trust. A kitchen to be used: every day at lunchtime, different people activated the kitchen and cooked for the public. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Third, the working group *lumbung Currency* and its *lumbung* members initiated experimental “community currencies”: the *BeeCoin* by ZK/U – Center for Art and Urbanistics, the *Cheesecoin* by INLAND, the *Dayra* by The Question of Funding, and the *Jalar* by Gudskul. The goal for these separate alternative currency proposals is to connect them in the long run.⁴²² Understanding and analysing the concept and differences of these alternative currencies will have to be undertaken at another time, but what all of these concepts have in common is that they become more independent and resistant to funds that often come with certain conditions, be they funds directly from governmental state institutions that follow a national identity logic or funds from companies that follow a logic of capital.

Fourth: “being independent of the state, commoning is independent also of the temporality of the law and state.”

This relation across a superordinate structure that navigates commoners into a position dependent on the state and on institutions is shaped by an (embodied) experience of violence and control imposed by states or other sovereign entities throughout history – historical struggles of commoners and current struggles of minority communities in various contexts around the world.

The wish to stay “independent” gives us insights into ruangrupa’s artistic–curatorial method. It is their tried and tested practice we can observe from their artistic participation at the 31st Bienal de São Paulo, where they ran a “home”-like spatial

⁴²² “Working Group *lumbung Currency*,” *documenta fifteen*, accessed 25 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-currency>.

infrastructure called “ruru” in 2014⁴²³ and in the exhibiting platform *Cosmopolis #1 Collective Intelligence* at Centre Pompidou in 2017, where they again created a space inside the institution – called “ruangrupasite”,⁴²⁴ in order to make it a living space but also a permeable space to the urban surroundings. For both exhibitions, they established a resilient practice challenging the institution and curators who invited them: a parasitical practice – resistance as a method – that undermines the traditional functions of art institutions, as well as its proposed set of behaviours for audience and artists, its economic structure and so on. For *documenta fifteen*, and with the primary managing position of artistic director, this resistant practice toward (and in playful opposition to) the institution actually became impossible to sustain. This is how I read ruangrupa's gesture to invite *documenta* back to its own “institution” in Jakarta, Indonesia. A complexified notion of an institution would clearly frame collective practice – especially long-term, and self-sustained ones – as an institution itself and as an institutionalised practice, as it follows a set of (self-given) rules, but still embedded in general or even universalising frameworks (e.g., the art field, trade, politics). The desire for the independence from institutions does not only result in the rejection of contractual obligations. It also pits the commoner's wish for independence – sustained or recreated as an artistic practice – all too easily against institutions of contemporary life, art, and culture. A simplistic juxtaposition of institution-artist (or perpetrator-victim?) can occur, portraying the institution as a predetermined formation of state hegemony and control – unable to change – , and in the process, recreating artists as pure, resisting people struggling for a self-determined life. I would have wished for the many invited collectives not only “to bring and activate their practice to Kassel”, but also to use this amplified stage in contemporary art and culture for a critical introspection of their own practices, too. However – as the events turned out – this openness and permeability could not be established. In a rather classical formula, a hegemonic struggle between the so-called “documenta gGmbH”,⁴²⁵ and its alliances in German news media outlets, and the lumbung collectives and their alliance came into being.

The Threatening Scenario of Commons for the Exhibitionary Complex and Beyond

For the first time in the history of *documenta*, a collective – predominantly based in artistic practice – was entrusted with the artistic direction of this major exhibition. The methods and strategies derived from commoning that ruangrupa adopted have been

⁴²³ ruangrupa, “ruru, The 31st Bienal de São Paulo, Fundacao Bienal de São Paulo,” 7 Sept.–7 Dec. 2014, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://ruangrupa.id/en/2014/09/06/ruru-the-31st-bienal-de-sao-paulo-fundacao-bienal-de-sao-paulo>.

⁴²⁴ ruangrupa, “COSMOPOLIS #1 COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE,” 18 Oct.–18 Dec. 2017, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://ruangrupa.id/en/2017/10/18/ruangrupasite-cosmopolis-1-collective-intelligence>.

⁴²⁵ The phrase “documenta gGmbH” is used to denigrate the “real institutions” as accomplices of capital and the state. And, of course, *documenta* as an institution is directly linked to state policy, as a “limited liability company (Germany)” – although not profit-oriented in its status.

explained in detail above. To a large extent, *documenta fifteen* was carried out as a festival – not a classical exhibition – with many public and informal events, with open networks formed in numerous meetings before and during *documenta*, with chance encounters in the many locations scattered throughout the city of Kassel. In this sense, *documenta* can be seen as close to those early forms of spectacle in the 18th century that helped shape the institution we call the public museum, if we are to follow Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Tony Bennett. Already these early forms of exposition were set up as a learning environment with more or less hidden agendas and hegemonic formations attached. What also played out like a spectacle was the various utterances – a rumour-filled buzz – in social media and mass media with regard to *documenta fifteen*, long before the antisemitic iconography in *People's Justice*, a work by Taring Padi, was on view and was removed.

It is difficult to say in what way the challenging and even threatening aspects of this *documenta* will change the established exhibitionary complex, the established art, its discourse and history in the long run. However, I would like to look into some of the basic principles that might see readjustments in the future, concentrating on the following:

- a) serious changes in the function of the curator and a serious threat to “authority”, accountability and responsibilities;
- b) changes in the mode of representation in the arts that create a different relationship between the audience and art, under commons-guided direct engagements – ultimately a threat to the “modern autonomous individual” –;
- c) a new proposal of the modes of production (collectivity vs. cooperation).

The first two points stem from the collectivisation practices at work. The third position speaks against a capitalist logic. Yet, obviously these threats are entangled, just as the “modern autonomous individual” is interlocked with the capitalist system.⁴²⁶

A) The Function of the Curator and the Anxiety of the Authoritative

ruangrupa’s artistic–curatorial collective practice is rooted in their personal situatedness in Indonesia from the foundational year 2000 and is therefore – even in terms of their artistic and curatorial experiences on a global level – not imbued with the “global art discourse” of Western influence and its, at times, universalised terminology and concepts. An early description of the collective’s practice and context was formulated by David Teh in 2012: “To profile ruangrupa is to describe an event: time-based, immediate and loosely structured; with a sense of purpose, yet

⁴²⁶ I’m not saying that the “Western” author figure – the “modern autonomous individual” sketched out during the Enlightenment is inextricably fused with capitalist structures, but it was clearly formed within this structure. I hope that important ideas of this subjectification can be resurrected in different formations.

more celebratory than agonistic.”⁴²⁷ The developed curatorial positioning of ruangrupa was established independently of the art market, and – even if artistically based – it appropriated curatorial function and thought early on.⁴²⁸ For *documenta fifteen* as well, their invitation policy for artists, projects and collectives can be described as the construction of loose networks – of a “collective of collectives” – and is primarily based on trust, a position in contrast to a targeted selection of artworks and its framing within a wider art discourse from a single authorial position. In that sense, their decision not to follow the – still today – hegemonic rules of a curatorial complex of representation that dominates “Western” art history can be said to be intentional.

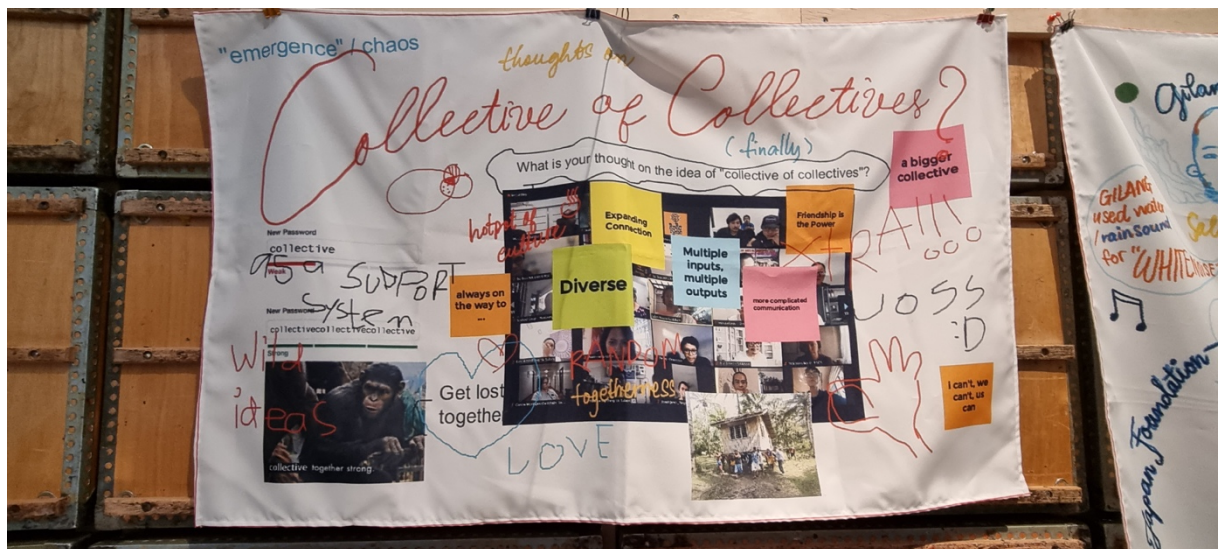


Fig. 29: *documenta fifteen*, Banner “Collective of Collectives,” Fridskul, gudskul area, Fridericianum, Kassel. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

In ruangrupa’s curatorial practice, the curator as the main figure of an exhibition – set up by Harald Szeemann and crystallised in *documenta 5* in 1972 – is clearly called into question, and with it the so-called gatekeeper function that excludes certain art from entering galleries, museums and ultimately art history.⁴²⁹ I would argue that this poses a serious threat to what I would call a traditional curator function – traditional and still prevalent, especially in public museums connected to state structures.

⁴²⁷ David Teh, “Who Cares a Lot? Ruangrupa as Curatorship,” in *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 30 (Summer 2012): 108–117, accessed 22 September 2022, <https://www.afterall.org/article/who-cares-a-lot-ruangrupa-as-curatorship>.

⁴²⁸ Early on, ruangrupa organised/curated events and exhibitions like the *OK Video Festival* and later the *Jakarta Biennial*.

⁴²⁹ How art enters art institutions and art history and ultimately makes an artist’s career, and maintains it financially, is a rather complex and often opaque process. It is a process where friendships and networking, ownership and financial speculation, and aesthetic expressions and evaluations – again embedded in societal and situated contexts – are intertwined.

Nonetheless, in 2023, we should be aware of the contested field of the artistic–curatorial complex. Curatorial work has continued to expand in contemporary discourse, merging into a rather collaborative relationship and should not be reduced to a mere (extractivist?) scheme of “the curator selecting artworks from within a (usually) already legitimised art field.” In the rather academic-led discourse on the curatorial function, whose main protagonists in recent years have been, among others, Simon Sheikh, Irit Rogoff, Dorothee Richter, and Nora Sternfeld, critical redefinitions of expanded notions of curating/the curatorial have been discussed, and with it the triangular relation artist–curator–institution questioned beyond Institutional Critique, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. Within this expanded field, curatorial practice is not only occupied with the caretaking of art and its spatial exhibition, but is working, researching, and developing (self-)critically together with artistic practitioners and with and sometimes against institutions towards a “making things public.” In addition, my research suggests analysing the exhibitionary complex and its discourse in governmental aspects, emphasising the understanding of one’s own embeddedness in society, in its institutions and economy, and the embeddedness of art and artists in a learning environment. This leads to situated and more responsible positions regarding expressions in the exhibitionary complex and expands curating again for a broader social responsibility towards the public and society, one that is aware of its own entanglements in a comprehensive governmental framework.

Astonishingly, this complex and entangled relation of artist–curator–institution was captured poetically in the video installation *Smashing Monuments* by Sebastián Díaz Morales at Hübner Areal. The work was projected – slightly over life-sized – in the first area of the exhibition space, accompanied with simple wooden seating arrangements and depicting five members of ruangrupa in a dialogue – or rather inner monologue – with and in front of iconic Indonesian monuments in Jakarta. On *documenta fifteen*’s website, it states: “Indonesia’s history of independence and ruangrupa’s own path as young citizens of the new republic mingle in these half-improvised and intimate dialogues. The monuments symbolise several lumbung values.”⁴³⁰ I may add that these dialogues between the members of ruangrupa, and their dispute over the representation of a nation-state and its national community were brought up from each member’s individual perspective – a perspective that is, of course, informed by their collectivity. Nonetheless, the discussed subjects came from each one’s personal background. I would like to think of this artwork as exemplary of an articulation of individuals – in our case, of artist-curators – towards their superstructure, embedded in governmental formations from personal life

⁴³⁰ “Sebastián Díaz Morales and Simon Danang Anggoro,” *documenta fifteen*, accessed 22 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/sebastian-diaz-morales-and-simon-danang-anggoro>.

experiences to state structures and their own interpellations in state institutions, and in this case, additionally expanded in a global and postcolonial framework.⁴³¹



Fig. 30: *documenta fifteen*, installation *Smashing Monuments*, on the right side. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

While ruangrupa's refusal of the traditional role of the curator is well understood, the expanded curatorial function that introduced situated, critical, responsive and responsible modes of knowledge production – internally and externally – may have also gotten discarded due to their clear anti-authority stance. To contextualise and complexify this old tension between artists and curators and the disdain towards the curator – but which type? – which was expressed on a few occasions during *documenta fifteen*⁴³² – I would like to draw attention again to David Teh's words:

However ruangrupa might seem to embody the disciplinary merger [of artistic and curatorial practices], then, in attributing to the group the form of a curatorship to come, with or without the italics, we run the risk of mistaking tactical moves for a strategic programme. And however appealing the image of their 'contemporaneity', the group should first be seen in another light, a light in which modernity and nation still matter, and instrumentality is not (yet) the arch-enemy of art; a light in which artists make artworks and curators curate, and it is possible to do both. Perhaps ruangrupa is more a spirit of

⁴³¹ I recall farid rakun in front of a monument facing west arguing that the monument could eventually face east from time to time.

⁴³² For an interesting example, see the installation by the Hannah Arendt Institute of Activism (*INSTAR*) at *documenta Halle*, where the manifesto "Curadores, Go Home" by Sandra Ceballos was displayed, accusing curators of being agents of the art system and of the state. This might be true in certain constellations, like in Cuba, the location about which *INSTAR* speaks. But in a rather uncontextualised display formation at *documenta Halle*, one can only wonder what a non-invested audience picks up from this: I would argue a rather binary opposition between curator (as state) and artist (as suppressed individual).

curatorship – not limited to a single body, yet somehow tied to a place – that would defend the autonomy of artists, singular or plural, but not necessarily that of the artwork.⁴³³

Teh's pointed articulation of ruangrupa's stance towards curating is ten years old, but might still hold true, as there seems to be a clear division set up between the artists and the curator as an authoritative figure and agent of the institution. From the curatorial discourse from 2017, Simon Sheikh anticipates with the term "post-curatorial" a practice of exhibition-making that is challenged with a lessening of an extensive authorial function of a curator, if the wish of participation is being taken seriously. As argued in Chapter 2 Sheikh addresses two aspects of the curator function that is up for change with "lack and loss". The "lack" refers to the missing, neglected and ousted knowledges that are not visible in the museum space. A curator must tackle these. And "loss" refers to an eventually hurtful abandoning of the curator's position of power and the polished infrastructure that enables these position, namely, the museum.⁴³⁴ The two arguments by Teh and Sheikh – arguments uttered in different contexts, and in specific cultural discourses – both expose that a withdrawal from authoritative positions in an assumed oppositional structure (artist–institution) comes at a price: one internal risk that arises from an open and authority-diverting curatorial practice, like the one ruangrupa chose for *documenta fifteen*, can be found in the organisation of responsibilities (as in being able to respond) and responsiveness, resulting in a rather opaque mélange of relativisms. State structures and (art) institutions are rightly called to their responsibilities – being responsive towards a society they represent or aim to govern. The same must be demanded of para-institutions. A call for the artist's (social) responsibility – as in being able to respond – and responsiveness is urgently needed in this regard, too.

Another aspect that arises from shying away from the tough, authoritative curatorial tasks of representation and their entanglements with state policy is the takeover of the void left behind. The representational space in the exhibitionary complex does not disappear just by refusing to take on the central position – and at the moment this is the established "traditional" curator. What it creates is a blank space, a void of a trajectory or a proposed reading, which has thus far usually been taken up by the curator as the main author. This void left a space for amplifications of fractional agendas and hidden trajectories within the many participants of *documenta fifteen* and led to the external rumours and cheap explanations of uninformed or ill-intended actors. I consider these utterances – both from the "inside" and the "outside" – violent acts of representation. By this, I am not referring to the important heterogeneous multiplicity of artistic practices and their situated knowledges that were expressed at *documenta fifteen*, rather, that this heterogeneous multiplicity was

⁴³³ Teh, "Who Cares a Lot?"

⁴³⁴ Sheikh, "From Para to Post."

not secured in a representative sense through an expanded curatorial function as the central framework. Instead, the heterogenous multiplicity had to “close off” in solidarity under pressure.

In fact, (post-)curatorial struggles test and contest, between representational and critical and deviant practices, the status quo of museums and its exclusions, as do artistic practices. If you withdraw from this position, you will not be able to influence it.

To conclude this discussion on curatorial discourse and practice on a high note, I want to return to the benefits that an expanded curatorial practice would bring, a practice that holds on to the uncomfortable position of representation and authority, but with different, inclusive and open forms and empowering ways of carrying them out: a transparent, open-invitation policy for large-scale exhibitions with a distinction-reduced access to contemporary art, an embodied practice for artists and audiences, a “contact zone” that needs trust, openness and a willingness for solidarities over hegemonic politics. This could be a sketch for an ideal infrastructure that has not yet been achieved.

B) (Apparent) Threat to the “Modern Autonomous Individual” aka the “Author”

The division between (modern) art and craft (or culture) – each with their separated specific infusions in cultural contexts, in infrastructural dimensions and in knowledge production and value systems – can still be observed in the 21st century. On this matter and speaking from the position of the “Western subject” and the free individual’s aesthetic judgement, Bazon Brock criticised *documenta fifteen* by claiming that “*documenta fifteen* stands for the end of the ‘Western’ idea of authority as the author function”⁴³⁵ or – I might say – the “modern autonomous individual” in its entirety. He sets up culturalism [“Kulturalismus”] – relating to the collective practices of the invited lumbung members – against the free and individual artist in the Western Enlightenment tradition, who can critically challenge the great ideological machines like the Church, religion, kings, and capital through the hard-won “freedom of art.” In a more comprehensive and rather fatalistic lecture entitled “On the power-grotesque appropriation of the arts by cultures”, subtitled “A dispute about the whole, the end of Europe”,⁴³⁶ which Brock delivered prior to *documenta fifteen* in March 2022 at the University of Art and Design Linz, he is concerned with saving the European author, as the exceptional achievement of “Western” philosophy that needs to be universalised. He thus positioned art as a recurring European tradition of individuals and authors, of authorship and authority against a – rather reductionist – conception of collectivity as a totalising instrument. It is obvious that Brock speaks too easily of what I would call the idealising and romanticising – apparently –

⁴³⁵ The excerpts, translated from German by the author, were taken from an interview of Bazon Brock by Michael Köhler about *documenta fifteen* in Kassel, Deutschlandfunk, 21 June 2022, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m20ZIRywiFY>.

⁴³⁶ Brock, “On the power-grotesque appropriation of the arts by cultures.”

“Western” achievement of the “autonomous individual subject”, brought into being by the Enlightenment. We might be aware that within the “Western” discourse, many critical analyses by French philosophers alone – Foucault, Barthes, etc. – have been undertaken on this position of the subject. As a counter-note, in alluding to similar ideas that idealise and romanticise an innocent notion of indigeneity or collective practices – as ruangrupa is aware⁴³⁷ – which are seen as non-hierarchical and non-exploitative *per se*, I want to emphasise that there are neither innocent perspectives nor universalised positions but that all positions come with privilege, and one cannot bail out to the “good” side.



Fig. 31: *documenta fifteen*, works by Gazan artist collective Eltiqa at WH22. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

I would partly agree with Brock in his description of the Enlightenment as an immense endeavour of the people and (bourgeois) individuals against the Church and sovereign structures – a massive amount of resistance and liberating effort at that time. But we need to see the problematic sides of the author function and how it is established and maintained, mainly by diminishing and obscuring contexts and sources, and its exclusions of the “Other” (Foucault’s famous “madman”), who is not allowed to speak – both inside the “Western” system and outside of it with the ripple

⁴³⁷ See this quote by farid rakun in an interview by Katerina Valdivia Bruch, 3 March 2020: “I think there is a danger to romanticise collectives, especially when it becomes a trend, which is the danger right now. But hopefully it is not like another trend. If you think about community building, technology offers another type of collectives that treats individuals differently, which is also something we can learn from. If you think about the young generation, for example, they have a different way of understanding reality, as there is almost no separation between what is real and what is virtual. They socialise and relate to each other differently. I think that it has a lot of consequences. Collectivity also grows through technology.” Katerina Valdivia Bruch, “Interview with Farid Rakun from ruangrupa,” *culture360.asef.org*, accessed 22 September 2022, <https://culture360.asef.org/magazine/interview-farid-rakun-ruangrupa-indonesia>.

effects of European colonialism –, and of its gendered formation in cultural articulations, since the author was established as a male figure. In reference to the poststructuralists and their critiques of the author (“The Death of the Author”, etc.), I would add that the vision of the author as a male figure (individual, universal, free, powerful) might be over, but maybe not the author as a feminist figure (interdependent, situated, connected, accountable).

There were other less grand criticisms uttered against the collective concept of *documenta fifteen* (and their concept of collectivity) as a form of an idealised “We”. Those critics usually spoke from their own art historical frame of reference – of “Western” artist circles and friendship networks from the 1980–90s. They had little knowledge of (or did not want to engage with) the contemporary collective artistic practices that were established by many lumbung members in very different contexts.

In trying to understand positions in a postcolonial context, I can imagine that the positive effects of Enlightenment – and the rise of the author as a powerful agent – were not experienced as an empowering or liberating movement from a perspective outside of protected “Western” identities. Instead, this author function came in formations of colonial power and domination with (real) acts of violence, but was also implemented through non-coercive, “persuasive” hegemonic machines in education and culture. The situated experience of the origin of the figure of the author, a self-empowered individual who uses critical tools to procure authority over ideology as a resisting practice against the Church and monarchy, does not match the situated experience of an externally determined, authorised Other, an Other who experiences this – once resistant – authority at best as a condescending gesture or at worst as a mechanism of control. The subtle difference between “learning” and “teaching” gives an indication of the dilemma we face. Learning is an activity of the self, while teaching requires a teacher.

Ultimately, I would suggest reading Brock’s argument in a universalising way, as he projects his own worldview onto another position. The problem stems primarily from this shift in position. It lacks, at a much deeper level, an understanding of a different way of thinking structured in another historical and cultural background. We find ourselves in the classic thought of Foucault’s *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.⁴³⁸ Foucault analysed the system of knowledge and its development in the European (French) context, but systems of knowledges are plural and situated, and produce slightly different subject constellations through slightly different systems of thought and slightly different discursive formations within different situated contexts.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

⁴³⁹ Why slightly? The current form of globalisation has managed to interlock almost all areas of the world under the same conditions (capital, logistics, trade, etc.). And even earlier, on a worldwide scale, humankind can be considered a migratory species, with peaceful and violent “exchanges” throughout human history.

In the “Western” episteme, the author is set up to be foremost autonomous and critical. The same goes for the artist. That is why artists need to be autonomous, and art objects need a specialised form of representation, always embedded in critical discourse, separated from handicraft.⁴⁴⁰ Considered as specifically embedded artistic practices, the strict separation of (critical) art and craft cannot be sustained. Art under “Western” conditions could be described as ideologised object production – an abstract token ready for fetishisation or speculation –, and easily, yet in a disguised way, implanted in capitalist structures of profit-making. Art practices “outside” of this position might fall under the category of creativity or handicraft and are more inclined to be attached to daily commerce and directed to sustenance. These different notions of artistic practices fit well with what Farid Rakun from Ruangrupa said at the workshop “Practitheatrizing Counterinstitutions” organised by The Question of Funding and OFF-Biennale Budapest in Kassel on 10 September 2022.⁴⁴¹ Rakun mentioned the contested art field in Indonesia, where art is not considered autonomous. In Indonesia, art, creative economies and industrialised culture are not separated. Many artists work between the field of “autonomous” art – hence critical and detached from capital – and creative practices in the economic sphere. This indifferent approach to the specifically “Western” field of art might prove to be another threat, not only to the “Western” concept of art, but also to the “Western” discourse of art, a highly differentiated, critical and self-critical theory built around art as object.



⁴⁴⁰ In this line of thought, art and artists are positioned against the Church and religion, against the sovereign and – one could add – later against capital. At least this is my learned understanding of the role of artists I obtained in my higher education in Germany: art is a critical activity directed against the capitalist system. It would be interesting to even look into the origin of modern-day art (production, market and expression) in parallel with speculative capital. Looking at art production, consumption and distribution starting from Duchamp’s famous *pissoir* turned upside down can be seen as an inspiration for speculation.

⁴⁴¹ “Practitheatrizing Counterinstitutions by The Question of Funding, OFF-Biennale Budapest,” workshop, *documenta fifteen*, 9–10 September 2022, accessed 22 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/calendar/practitheatrizing-counterinstitutions>.

Fig. 32: Picture taken at the workshop “Practitheorizing Counterinstitutions” organised by The Question of Funding and OFF-Biennale Budapest in Kassel on 9–10 September 2022. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

ruangrupa’s avoidance of “theory” can be explained by this logic. They proposed – instead of theory, something they did not have a lot of experience with, according to rakun⁴⁴² – stories and storytelling as a distinction-reducing approach to subjective readings of art, one that allows multiple entries into the discursive formation of art and reduces the full-blown, professional theorisation of art discourse. In colonial entanglements, “theory” according to the logic of “Western” epistemes, with their production in discursive formations through exclusionary apparatuses and reproductions of superiority through distinction, might not hold the promise of freedom, nor the promise of (self-)empowerment. But – and this is a big but – theory, in its most profound form – apart from the distinguishing apparatuses that create and keep power structures alive –, understood as a critical mode of self-reflection, as a critical reflection on one’s situatedness, must not be abandoned.

I would like to propose reconsidering the relationship between art and craft, economics and artistic practices, by acknowledging – not comparing – the differences embedded in different frameworks instead of universalising one epistemology over the other.

Cooperation and Collaboration

To better understand the new mode of production proposed by *documenta fifteen*, I would like to contrast collaboration and cooperation: the former being an intertwined and flexible production mode of collective effort with a shared common goal, and the latter being a solidified process of working together in distinct roles to achieve someone’s goal. While cooperation is very much integral to industrial capitalist production, collaboration on the other hand – although it sometimes enters capital’s start-up economy linguistically without a collectivised goal, let alone an economic structure – usually remains separate from organised work and labour and in the realm of non-organised production apart from large-scale industry. One could say this is for good reason, since the collaborative condition comes with rather time-consuming efforts of horizontal decision-making. In farid rakun’s words, “Collective work is not the most effective, efficient, or even productive way of doing things.”⁴⁴³ Here, communication is direct and interpersonal, the operational range is not strictly separated, roles and responsibilities are flexible, every collaborator almost needs to have an overview of the overall project. There is no assembly line order. Communism – or rather socialism – relies likewise on cooperative modes of production yet subordinates the processes and results of production to a universally

⁴⁴² farid rakun talked about ruangrupa’s decision to emphasise story over theory for *documenta fifteen* in the workshop “Practitheorizing Counterinstitutions.”

⁴⁴³ Bruch, “Interview with Farid Rakun from ruangrupa.”

shared entity. In real socialist terms and in the words of Lenin, the results of production go to the working-class and the “political power [that] owns all the means of production.”⁴⁴⁴ Both forms of cooperative practices – on the one hand, capitalist cooperative practice and its enormous apparatus of exploitation, with its need for cheap labour, the still gendered disparities of production and reproduction and “recruitment” of people believing in the system and, on the other hand, real-life socialists’ needs for a universalised work force, turning all people into workers and transforming individual property into societal property – are not the same as collaboration in a commons project, I would argue.

This specific collective practice proposed by ruangrupa with the many *mini-majelis* – meetings in smaller focused groups of around eight people – and *majelis akbar* – larger gatherings with lumbung members, lumbung artists and other participants of around fifty people – not only challenges a capitalistic logic of cooperation, but is also not the most tried and tested way for artistic practices, be it from the perspective of a single artist or from collective practices with different methods:

Not all documenta fifteen participants are enthusiastic about the Majelis system. Some artists complain that too much time is wasted on lengthy presentations and discussions instead of using it for production. Still others find the bureaucratic hurdles too high that Documenta as an institution sets in order to actually release the collective money.⁴⁴⁵

This experience was related by Christina Schott, a journalist who attended some of these meetings. The quote also points to problems that a collective practice might create vis-à-vis the stakeholders and their evaluation systems, as money is only paid out when clear project descriptions are met. Furthermore, collective practices complicate a clearly delineated ownership relationship, which is quite important for an aestheticised commodification process in line with the art market.⁴⁴⁶

There is tension between a collective practice – which creates almost no fixed roles, but instead builds formations with utmost flexibility and decentralised authority – and the institutional framework of cooperation – even in the more flexible areas of the art field, the recurrent large-scale exhibitions – based on a clear structure and hierarchy that comes with its titles, with deadlines to be met and one overarching goal to be pursued. We can note that capitalist cooperation and commons collaboration are

⁴⁴⁴ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “On Cooperation,” January 1923, Marxists Internet Archive, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/jan/06.htm>.

⁴⁴⁵ Christina Schott, “documenta fifteen: Collaborators wanted,” *Universes in Universe*, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://universes.art/es/documenta/2022/collaborators-wanted>.

⁴⁴⁶ However, we know from the art history of the 20th century that collectively produced artworks can be rather easily taken up by the art market. Even expressions by artists without an object can be integrated into a commodifiable status, e.g., all of the ephemera and pictures of (post-)avant-garde events moved into private collections or state ownership.

accompanied by different modes of ownership and utilisation. One corresponds in an exaggerated way to a neoliberalist logic of individual maximisation and profit, while the other aims more at subsistence and “living well”. To avoid binaries, I do not want to pit collaboration and cooperation against each other, with one being “good” and the other “bad”. Both practices need to be considered in terms of their specific situated formations. To exemplify the complexities that arise with collaborative practices, I would like to direct the attention to Taring Padi’s artistic practice and its elaborate methodology, which will show at the same time the susceptibility of – strategic? – misuse and toxic contraband:

Taring Padi’s own convivial, collective approach to art is crucial to understanding why there are no simple answers to the question of how the offending image appeared in the banner in the first place. Not only does Taring Padi have many members who are involved in the creative process, but they also often invite non-members such as workshop participants to contribute to works in progress. While large-scale works are planned through discussion, notes and sketches and the division of labour is coordinated (though not strictly enforced). It is a process that deliberately eschews authorship – works are not signed by individuals but instead stamped with the collective’s distinctive logo. As Bambang Agung wrote in *Taring Padi: Seni Membongkar Tirani* (Art Dismantles Tyranny), “Collective artworks, in other words, are a critique of the reification of art and the commodification of its artists.”⁴⁴⁷

This quote from Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent, published on 29 June 2022, followed the taking down on 21 June of *People’s Justice*, Taring Padi’s 8-meter x 12-meter banner that had been placed in front of documenta Halle and showed classical stereotypes of antisemitism.⁴⁴⁸ This quote provides us with a rather complex constellation of a collective practice, neglecting authorship and the artwork’s distribution as a commodity.⁴⁴⁹ It also points to the open and relative process of production that obfuscates responsibilities by rendering its own positionality unlocatable inside a collective. I refer to responsibility not in a manner of “find the culprit” – which can be much more easily done in cooperative production –, but in a

⁴⁴⁷ Dirgantoro and Kent, “We need to talk!”

⁴⁴⁸ “ruangrupa and the Artistic Team on dismantling ‘People’s Justice,’” *documenta fifteen*, 23 June 2022, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/ruangrupa-on-dismantling-peoples-justice-by-taring-padi>.

⁴⁴⁹ This practice is not unlike other artistic collective practices, often associated with the avant-garde in Western Europe. In their early phases, avant-garde practices were usually a collective effort, or at least art was produced within cycles and networks of close exchanges. From today’s perspective, art history and the art market peeled off singular artists and artworks, stripping the collective context out of the creative process.

manner of performing a position that is locatable and is able to speak from a position, without tricks of relativism.⁴⁵⁰

There are two relational nodes to be mentioned in this field that might help us understand the deep implications of the different modes of production – cooperation and collaboration – and its implementations in a larger system: Competition–Interdependence⁴⁵¹ and Flexibility–Precarity. In only a short detour, I want to refer to Biao Xiang’s notion of precarity, complicating the idea of it as a universal critique of unstable labour conditions triggered in “Western” societies by the neoliberal economic agendas of individualising working conditions and the consequent outsourcing of many social security programs with it. In this context, precarity as a contested concept became an issue in the “Global North” especially, and in this perspective refers to the end of Fordism and the replacement of stable unionised labour relations by a gig economy. In other parts of the world and in (post-)migratory formations, precarity does not seem to fit as an analytical category.⁴⁵² In (post-)migratory formations, the main concern is not with security or the loss of economic basis, but with forms of oppression. Xiang opts to analyse precarity through the lens of social reproduction – producing, maintaining and improving daily life in terms of childbirth, education, elder care, family structures, etc. – , undertaking systemic analyses that go beyond experiential descriptions such as precarity, to enable the formation of strategies for a transnational social movement.⁴⁵³

To return to the exhibitionary complex: with this understanding of the concept of precarity, not only would the critique of precarious labour in the artistic field have to change its conception to align it with other forms of oppression, but it might also be a misconception of specific “precarious” forms to argue that all flexible labour

⁴⁵⁰ “Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. The ‘equality’ of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity”; I use my interpretation of Donna Haraway’s concept of “accountability” in feminist objectivity, from Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1988): 584.

⁴⁵¹ For a closer look at the notions of competition and interdependence I would like to refer to Lynn Margulis, see Chapter 3.2.

⁴⁵² For situated and systemic analyses of the Chinese precariat and differences from other precariat forms, we can follow Xiang’s statement in “Pocketed Proletarianization”: “Pocketed proletarianization means workers choose to perform intensive proletarian labour in a short period of time and do so repeatedly. They constantly “dive in” and “dive out” of proletarian wage jobs (thus “pockets”), interspersed by periods of self-employment and entrepreneurial undertakings.” Biao Xiang, “Pocketed Proletarianization,” *Precarity and Belonging: Labor, Migration, and Noncitizenship*, eds. Catherine S. Ramirez, Sylvanna M. Falcón, Juan Poblete, Steven C. McKay and Felicity Amaya Schaeffer (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2021).

⁴⁵³ This proposed concept of precarity was presented by Biao Xiang on 8 June 2021 at the online conference called “Creating Commons in an Era of Precarity: A Multi/Trans-Disciplinary Conference on Migration and Asia,” accessed 29 September 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QPDUBeEPK0>.

conditions – self-realisation and DIY/DIWO practices alike – are a universal form of management of the self and a forced entrepreneurial orientation concerning all aspects of one's life in the “Western” neoliberal logic.

Problematisations of Commoning in *Lumbung One*

So far, I have discussed the various threats that could have been seen on the horizon with ruangrupa's proposal for a documenta with methods of decentred authority, of disengagement from the art market and art history, with a focus on collective practices, and a strong impetus toward the formation of webs of solidarity that establish a system of redistribution rather than of recognition. Needless to say, this endeavour, with its multiple threats, presented an enormous challenge. In the next part, I would like to problematise a few subjects that might pose a challenge to the proposal and its actual realisation. I want to state here that I am aiming for a critique that is a truthful and thorough analysis of concepts and phenomena. I will do so using the methods I know best from cultural studies and its authorial referencing and thinking with other sources that are available to me at the time of writing.

Complexities of “Scaling Up”

The problems of “scaling up” commons are often discussed in the discourse on commons and also present a challenge for *Lumbung One*. The intimate collaboration based on interpersonal exchange is easily lost when the number of the commoners is increased from fifty to 1,500 people. Suddenly, the emphasis on the artistic–curatorial practice is occupied foremost with setting up managerial infrastructures to feed in all the contributions by the various participants. A responsive position is nearly impossible to sustain, given the time and financial constraints of every exhibition project. However, this also gives the “strategic” agents enough space amid the vast number of participants in this network for their own agenda. The insistence on an unconditional form of trust⁴⁵⁴ in the network makes it difficult to find nuanced ways to deal with “strategic friends,” “critical friends” or “toxic friends” for an exhibition that is always a “product” of representation – even if it is only temporary. At a very basic level – in daily life, in work environments and on the political stage – , we all are confronted with our problematic friends, with grandparents' traditionalist worldviews, with ideology-imbued peers with racist, antisemitic, misogynist, etc., thought patterns. One way to deal with this is to withdraw. However, I have learned that this is not ruangrupa's method, which is instead a “radically” inclusive one.

The Question of (Un)conditional Solidarity

The “scaling up in solidarity” can become an even more seriously problematic function, as it holds the danger of universalising solidarity in relativising ways and equalising struggles at the global level without their complex, situated contexts and practices. It runs the serious risk of ideologising the specific practices of resistance

⁴⁵⁴ “Trust” is one of the foundational values of ruangrupa and is in line with the emphasis on the building of networks in “friendship”. Hence the slogan: “Make friends, not art.”

under the lowest common denominator and produces – reproduces? – a rather dusty image of an antagonistic, binary world structure in an old-school geopolitical counter/hegemonic sense. Enclosures in communal solidarities – as in identity politics and in identitarian movements – are prone to the same dangers: over-identification, unconditional loyalty and exclusions. The closing-off (in trust or solidarity) can trigger uncanny reservations in a German context. I also read Hito Steyerl's decision to withdraw along this line of thought. She has commented on her decision and hinted at the forces of trench-building according to a hegemonic logic that she saw at work at *documenta fifteen*.⁴⁵⁵ Solidarity becomes then yet another universalist tool to produce trenches. Trenches that cannot be overcome. This is the last stage so far – this text was finalised shortly after the end of *documenta fifteen* at the end of September 2022 – of the final twists and turns of the conflict between *Lumbung One* and its apparent counterparts.⁴⁵⁶ A state that, despite all odds, hopefully can be overcome!

Taking another slight detour and speaking from a “German” perspective, I would like to bring in Ferdinand Tönnies' influential 1887 published study, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society).⁴⁵⁷ In this work, in a somewhat different historical context before the National Socialist Party takeover – yet ultimately still useful – two categories of social relations are introduced: the personal social interactions of communities and the indirect interactions of societies. The “warmth” of the communities (small villages, for example) and their personal and familial infrastructures stand in contrast to the “coldness” of “modern” societies representing state structures, corporations, associations, and academia. I feel that this binary image – which is in itself a reduction of the discourse that Tönnies established in exchange with Max Weber, Georg Simmel and others – is very often still in play, positing one as an inherently ideal formation of social relations and the other as a deeply “evil”, coercive, exploitative, oppressive formation. I feel the need to point out that both forms of social interaction come with their own mechanisms of control; there is not one ideal formation that is free of power relations and forms of exploitation. We

⁴⁵⁵ See her contribution on a panel: “Kunst & Kontext – Von der Mbembe-Debatte bis zur *documenta 15*: Der Kunst- und Kulturbetrieb zwischen Antisemitismuskritik und Postkolonialismus,” Bildungsstätte Anne Frank, accessed in the live stream on YouTube on 22 September 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLIYF6WYuQU>.

⁴⁵⁶ See the statement of the Scientific Advisory Panel, which was brought in by the shareholders of *documenta gmbH* to analyse possible antisemitic expressions and the response by *ruangrupa* and *lumbung* artists: “*Documenta 15* Releases Press Release By New Scientific Advisory Panel,” *Griot*, 11 September 2022, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://griotmag.com/en/documenta-15-releases-press-release-about-findings-by-new-scientific-advisory-panel>.

“We are angry, we are sad, we are tired, we are united: Letter from *lumbung* community,” *e-flux Notes*, 10 September 2022, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/489580/we-are-angry-we-are-sad-we-are-tired-we-are-united-letter-from-lumbung-community>.

⁴⁵⁷ See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, (Leipzig: Fues's Verlag, 1887), subtitled “An Essay on Communism and Socialism as Historical Social Systems.”

can only pay attention to injustice and inequity and actively change the formations in which we are embedded. It is always a work in process. Along this line, I also think of the discussion by Wulan Dirgantoro and Elly Kent, describing how communities' proximity can form a "bubble" and an enclosure:

This communitarian approach is typical of agrarian and indeed urban communities in Indonesia, where the collective is a common form of social organisation and often, social surveillance. It forms a protective bubble which at times can lead to insular perspectives and naivete of the broader context – whether that be the experiences of those outside the bubble, or the social milieu in which it is situated. In our conversation with Taring Padi a few days after their banner was removed, they had no recollection of discussions on the sensitivities of the politics of representation in Germany or the specific historical context that led to it, either in their mini-majelis or the larger meetings. This seems discordant with the artistic directors' earlier commitments to ensuring no such sentiments would emerge; basic intercultural sensitivities should have been a point of discussion.⁴⁵⁸

Both communities and societies can be manipulated on a large scale. This is one of the horrifying "lessons" to be learned from German history, namely how mass propaganda can help shape a whole society's mindset. This form of propaganda as a manipulative method promoting certain ideologies was mastered by the Nazis, whose mass propaganda began prior to taking up political power in 1933.⁴⁵⁹ One of the ways that National Socialism "won over" German citizens at that time was to pit the relatively newly established modern democratic society against their idea of "Socialism" – a purist, harmonious, national community that aimed to leave the class struggle behind while at the same time creating a hierarchical social order for the "greater common good", a rather bizarre stitching together of opposing ideas. Nevertheless, the concept of community – the Nazis called it *Volksgemeinschaft* – is still somewhat poisoned in the German context today, or at least comes with suspicions. The notion of community – as *völkisch* and as a closed-off identity somehow speaking against a modern society, and as a naturalising myth created by the Nazis – is an important experience for Germany and can be called "the dark side of collective action". And it is perhaps too short-sighted to subsume this experience under "German Guilt". Rather, this experience should be seen as a lesson to be learned, the uncomfortableness of a violent and manipulative enclosure of alliances of a pluralised society under a new identity formation. I am not comparing here the misuse of the community aspect by the Nazis to form a supra-loyal fixed identity

⁴⁵⁸ Dirgantoro and Kent, "We need to talk!"

⁴⁵⁹ For an interesting side note on the intertwined history between political mass propaganda and the manipulative rules of advertisements, I would like to refer to Edward Louis Bernays: Bernays established "modern" propaganda. His work included psychological warfare, political propaganda and public relations for commercial advertisements in the UK.

relationship to the state, with communities' self-empowerment against state structures. However, I want to point out different cultural experiences that trigger different kinds of spontaneous readings from specific positions.

The community formations at play at this documenta were based on shared experiences of resistance against many scenarios of oppression, but primarily uttered towards the capitalist system and the logic of the nation-state. This is evident on many levels, in the many works on display that spoke of oppression and communal struggles against large corporate and state structures, and in many written contributions and interviews by ruangrupa and other lumbung members. This is also evident in the decision to omit the mention of the nationalities of the artists and collectives, instead situating the artists and their practice in their local place of residency and using time zones to indicate where they are located. Apart from being a rather helpful side benefit for the various online meetings that had to be organised across different time zones, it also points to the refusal of the classical funding scheme, where all artists must indicate their national identity and are immediately placed in (postcolonial?) hierarchies. Consequently, informational materials on the artists' biographies most of the time only mentioned their place of residence, never their national identity. It is even more surprising that – throughout the whole exhibition and the accompanying texts – one name of a nation-state (at least the project to become a nation) – Palestine – was repeatedly mentioned.

1. Prompt: Re-Location

Imagine transporting *documenta fifteen* as a whole, with all its works and activities, to another city, another country, another context...

Answer the question: what would be found as offensive? What would have been urged to be taken down. Which works? Which practices?

Different Methods of Counter-Hegemony

But let's take a step back. In all the interviews and announcements and personal encounters, ruangrupa talked about their own non-conflictual way that has developed in the culture of Indonesia, where antagonism is rather unknown. In Geronimo Cristóbal's article in *Third Text* on 26 October 2020, he cites from an interview of farid rakun conducted by Pedro Lasch:

'We have different sensibilities'. Cultural differences, however, have diversified their modes of activism, which the group notes in Indonesia lacks the kind of antagonism with government seen in other parts of the world. Such antagonism is 'not the strategy that can work in our context... There's less violence.'⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁶⁰ Geronimo Cristóbal, "Pushing Against the Roof of the World: ruangrupa's prospects for documenta fifteen," *Third Text Online*, 26 October 2020, accessed 29 September 2022, <http://thirdtext.org/cristobal-ruangrupa>.

And even in our encounters and meetings with various members of ruangrupa, I never felt an antagonistic approach was at hand. Rather, our encounters could be described in terms of contact zones, where open discussions and thoughts could be uttered and picked up, or not.

Conflictuality in discourse is a tool developed more in “Western” thought, and adding cultural hegemony struggles to violent real-life contexts takes conflict and its connotations to another level. Speaking from a commons perspective, a – perhaps – tamed contact zone might be better suited to creating a common ground for understanding, exchange and solidarity. And I still consider this approach ruangrupa’s intention, after all.

However, this did not prevent other forms from entering *documenta fifteen*, especially with ruangrupa’s open approach: besides many specific and situated collective practices of resistance, and the creation of solidarities between lumpung artists and the public, there was also an ideology-driven community mobilisation project to be found. It unfolded over time and ended with the compartmentalisation of lumpung (as an entity) in solidarity, which exposed the problematic sides of community building by establishing a clear line between “we” and “them,” the one-to-one of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategies.

2. Prompt: De-Radicalisation

Create a gathering as a contact zone that discusses a relevant local issue.

Avoid weaponizing identities and avoid instrumentalizing speech acts and other utterances.

Be sensitive to these words: “they,” “them,” “us,” “we,” “comrades,” and comparisons or other tricks of whataboutism.

Expand the list of words and phrases that trigger enclosures.

Share your experiences.

Recalling the initial impact by ruangrupa, it is surprising, paradoxical, or even schizophrenic how the scandal and scandalisation unfolded throughout *documenta fifteen*, which began in January 2022 with – to make a long story short – a troll attack. The first accusations against *documenta fifteen* were voiced in a blog of “The Alliance Against Anti-Semitism Kassel”, which spoke of the “involvement of anti-Israeli activists” and alleged support for BDS and condemned *documenta* as a purely antisemitic project.⁴⁶¹ These accusations were picked up by media outlets in Germany and elsewhere and repeated by others – it is fair to say – without doing any research of their own on the matter. In this dynamic, a response letter was put

⁴⁶¹ The Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement was initially established by the civil society of Palestine, speaking against the Israeli politics of occupation towards the Palestinian territories.

forward, distributed via *e-flux Notes* on 7 May 2022.⁴⁶² And I would argue that with this letter, the counter/hegemonic machinery was set in full force.

The long letter dealt in length with a rather academic argument about definitions of what antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and criticism of Israel are. In all its details and specific context, it did not pursue the goal of openly explaining the struggles of Palestinians from the perspective of civil societies, but rather served to set its own agenda, namely, to attempt to redefine the boundaries between what counts as antisemitism and legitimate criticism of the state of Israel:

The Working Definition of Anti-Semitism, often just IHRA definition for short, is a definition originally developed informally for monitoring purposes. Attached to it are practical examples that refer primarily to common examples of criticism of Israel. It has been adopted, sometimes without the controversial examples, by numerous organizations, from governments to soccer clubs. The definition has been heavily scrutinised, one of the authors, Kenneth Stern, has publicly bemoaned its political “weaponizing”. [...]

A [sic] a reaction, internationally recognised scholars from the fields of Holocaust studies, anti-Semitism studies, and Jewish studies have developed the "Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism" in order to more clearly delineate between positions critical of Israel, including anti-zionist, from anti-Semitism (<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>).⁴⁶³

It also made its own accusations that Germany was incapable of a “neutral” (?) discourse on the Israel-Palestine conflict. It was such an extensive piece written with terminological details that the “normal public” was clearly overwhelmed. And between the lines, it seemed like too strong a response to an accusation that was said to be unfounded. Simply put, it seemed to have struck a nerve. If one had not wanted this conflict to be amplified in such a hegemonic way, one would have had to have written deflectively and generalised. An all-encompassing response letter against all forms of racism (naming antisemitism, ableism, misogyny...) was precisely what was presented after the first letter, but it was too late. Experienced in digital communication, we all know: do not feed the troll. Unless you want to end up in a never-ending dispute, no one can “win.” And the first response letter felt exactly like that, an intentional “trolling back” – by someone taking over a public discourse? So, the question of who wrote the first letter is to find out the intentions and the responsible position. It is not about pointing fingers at someone, but about understanding the context from which we speak. This is a prerequisite for situated knowledges and mutual understanding through exchange – which should not be disguised as

⁴⁶² ruangrupa, “Anti-Semitism Accusations against documenta: A Scandal about a Rumor,” *e-flux Notes*, 7 May 2022, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/467337/diversity-as-a-threat-a-scandal-about-a-rumor>.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

something else.

A Short Excursion into (Counter-)Hegemony

Historically, the theory of hegemony describes nothing other than the relationship between the dominance of one party (state, cities, milieus) over other parties (other states, other cities, society at large). It is a framework for looking at the geopolitical power relations between dominance and subjugation. It occurs in different forms in different places and times. In this sense, hegemony can also help describe the colonial power of European states over their colonies, both back then and in today's postcolonial dynamic. Oliver Marchart applies this concept to the cultural realm with Antonio Gramsci's further development of the theory of cultural hegemony – Gramsci analysed the modern nation-state in the early decades of the 20th century and its fascist tendencies with what he called “cultural hegemony” – and Marchart specifically applies this to the history of the last six documenta.⁴⁶⁴ It is essential to understand that these large-scale exhibition projects – the many European biennials and documenta – come from the tradition of the “Western” public museum⁴⁶⁵ and – to keep it short – are set up infrastructurally within the art field and society in national frameworks as tools to convince society at large – not by blunt force, but by persuasion – of a dominant worldview. This worldview was historically attached to nation-building, and in contemporary global terms, large-scale exhibitions might still serve “civil, national, occidental, or Europeanist dominant culture”, according to Marchart, which he therefore calls “Hegemony Machines”.⁴⁶⁶ But like any other not fully determined “public” space, there will be unauthorised behaviour:

On the other hand, however – and herein lies the irony – major exhibitions of this kind will never succeed in keeping the effects they produce completely under control. Wherever resources are available, they will also be tapped by unauthorized persons.⁴⁶⁷

A large-scale exhibition in this sense – precisely because it is embedded in a hegemonic cultural infrastructure – can be changed from the dominant perspective by “unauthorised” persons. Hegemony is not to be confused with the dominant position but describes the “unstable balance of forces, in which there are always dominant and subordinate forces, [...] consolidated by the civil society's institutional network in favour of one side.”⁴⁶⁸

Following this thought, we might be in the fortunate position of being observers of a major hegemonic shift and its impacts on the art field at large with its artists, curators,

⁴⁶⁴ Oliver Marchart, *Hegemony Machines: Documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennialization* (Zurich: OnCurating.org, July 2022).

⁴⁶⁵ For an in-depth analysis, see Kolb, “The Curating of Self and Others.”

⁴⁶⁶ Marchart, *Hegemony Machines*, 9–10.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 11.

cultural producers and publics... Marchart sees these “Tectonic Shifts in the Art Field” starting to occur already with *dX*, the 1997 edition of *documenta* headed by Catherine David, and with Okwui Enwezor’s *D11* in 2002. Others would rather point to *documenta fifteen* as a bigger breaking point in history. This becomes clear when one follows the director of the Van Abbemuseum, Charles Esche, who called *documenta fifteen* “The 1st Exhibition of the 21st Century” at the “Let there be lumbung” conference.⁴⁶⁹ In contrast to critical practices within the art field, this *documenta* exceeded criticality as a rather passive practice and built its own infrastructure of friendship (with an inclination towards subsistence), before art and its embeddedness in modernity; hence the slogan, “Make friends, not art.”

I will leave out the established discourse of criticality and its complex anchored in the exhibitionary complex and its ability to integrate critique (up to a certain point, of course) for the sake of a more pointed argument, referring to the paper I wrote in 2020 for a symposium on biennials:

But – looking also at the various biennials out there – forms of critique can be drastically different, and this should be addressed: there is (“passive”) critique and (“active”) critique. There are so many forms of compliant critique (and so many captured in the hegemonic framework) that one strongly feels that the mere gestures of critical art and exhibitions are like soft pillows for a clear conscience in a bourgeois society, which might agree on the critique, but only to calm their nerves without the need to act differently.⁴⁷⁰

I am willing to go along with the broader trajectory of this discursive formation (as seen in my analyses on commons practices introduced into the exhibitionary complex and society at large, as seen in the quote above). However, I would shy away from following Esche’s argument entirely, which ends in a highly reductionist trenching of the mechanisms of oppression of “White Male Power”, realised in “German mass media” and their “scandalisation” of *documenta fifteen*. Esche spoke of the “calcification of Europe” as a metaphor for the inability to move or open one’s own epistemological system. Ironically, this can be seen as the flip side of Brock’s “End of Europe”. Seen from a distance – or maybe just from a specific feminist perspective – both (Esche and Brock) are powerful hegemonic locutions in the logic of name-making and in the promotion of the self, yet another “Western” practice of the author in cultural capital, an attention-guaranteeing practice that “Western” artists, and “non-Western” artists alike, have perfected.

⁴⁶⁹ In the conference “Let there be lumbung”, held 20–23 September 2022, Charles Esche, member of the search committee for *documenta fifteen*, gave a talk, positioning this *documenta fifteen* as the moment of a paradigm shift. See Charles Esche, “The 1st Exhibition of the 21st Century,” *documenta fifteen*, symposium “Let there be Lumbung”, 21 September 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjGxqUwOk0U&list=PLIk899bYfqf6sIWoiUYqfvsRGkiE2Drbv&index=3>.

⁴⁷⁰ Kolb, “The Curating of Self and Others.”

Seen benevolently, Esche entered into defence mode for ruangrupa and the lumbung community – and ultimately for his own cause, which will be picked up later – an effect of the pressure ruangrupa and *documenta fifteen* had to endure.⁴⁷¹ But on a structural level, with a good counter/hegemonic strategy, Esche took on the task of creating the dominant narrative for this very multi-vocal *documenta* – together with Philippe Pirotte and Nikos Papastergiadis, I might add. All were invited to speak at the symposium. Pirotte and Esche – both important veterans in the European cultural field, as curators and directors of museums and art institutions – spoke from a rather similar anti-imperialist perspective: can this “taking over” be called a form of representation in an extractivist logic? Meanwhile, Papastergiadis complicated the relationship between multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. And I don’t want to miss this opportunity to mention Nuraini Juliastuti’s presentation on the last day of this symposium, since these situated and complex attempts of positioning fall more than often into oblivion. I would argue that she spoke from a non-universalising position, presenting four situated stories – and yet theorised, critically and in attempt to connect to a larger infrastructural way of thinking – that used a different epistemological method.⁴⁷²

Which Ways of Counter/Hegemony?

Esche’s critical thoughts on strategies to “humble” modernity – embedded, I would say, in the critical discourse that the art field has had to offer in recent decades – aimed at a new alliance (or front?) very much in line within counter/hegemony theory, ultimately re-introducing the narrative of the “West and the rest” with slightly altered frontlines. Esche and Marchart report on a huge hegemonic shift in which we find ourselves: Esche is eager to dismantle “European” modernity and its multiple and deep-rooted effects around the world, seeing primarily its exploitative aspects. Marchart emphasises the shift in the art field from apolitical consumption and contemplation of a purely aesthetic experience to a political and theory-driven presentation of art. Both perspectives may have been seen on the “same side” before *documenta fifteen* but find themselves in different areas between the trenches afterwards.

Yet – to complicate matters by introducing a new perspective – I would like to focus for a moment on questions of the hegemonic methods at play: is the process of forming new alliances carried out through means of manipulative propaganda and antagonistic and vigorous campaigns – choosing “sides” – in any way a good way? Is this form of trench-building valuable beyond creating temporary majorities for

⁴⁷¹ Some “attacks” in German news outlets, but also internationally, indeed reduced *documenta fifteen* in its entirety to being antisemitic.

⁴⁷² See Nuraini Juliastuti, “Commons people, lumbung as a traveling concept,” *documenta fifteen*, symposium “Let there be Lumbung”, 23 September 2022, accessed 29 September 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tRTcX1C3AE>.

dominant opinion? In its current form of radicalisation and weaponisation, it seems to be the dominant method. But in the long run, it seems more destructive, as forms of reconciliation are ruled out in this scenario, so it appears. Even in the discourse of hegemony theory, there are suggestions of acknowledgments – not without criticism within the discourse of hegemony, of course – that opponents should not be seen as “enemies”, according to Chantal Mouffe:

A central task of [...] politics is to provide the institutions which will permit conflicts to take an ‘agonistic’ form, where the opponents are not enemies but adversaries among whom exists a conflictual consensus.⁴⁷³

But let us not get into the inner theoretical discourse of hegemony theory here. The current dominance of a certain type of propagandistic method in hegemonic struggles is real and a problem. It is worth examining the current evolution of this radicalisation and its multiple effects on the social fabric. A projected future of scarcity, a feeling of losing power and wealth – for a dominant group of people who have never known it any other way – , the essentialisation of identity and the weaponisation of speech acts in political formations of identity, a profound transformation of interpersonal communication, and forms of social relations shaped by digital mass media, accelerated by a global pandemic beginning in March 2020 – all of these can be starting points for answers.

But on a more profound level, and to put it naively, are these counter/hegemonic strategies – old or new – even capable of producing a “better” world for all – or at least for more people? Or, to elaborate further, are hegemonic strategies capable of “making meanings, and [of making] a [...] commitment to faithful accounts of a ‘real’ world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness”?⁴⁷⁴

Hegemony Formed by Contemporary Propaganda

Unfortunately, however, we have to deal with the propagandistic methods of the hegemony of today. *documenta fifteen* proposed – among other things – highlighting and amplifying many oppressed struggles by inviting various artists and activist collectives who came with their specific practices of resistance. It was hoped that a complex multiplicity of “partially shared” solidarities would emerge, and so it did. But there was another hegemonic instrument at play that shaped a political solidarity movement in ideological formation.

It is one thing to – also – highlight the struggle of Palestinians’ lived experience in Gaza that contains experiences made with Israeli military. It is another thing to

⁴⁷³ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking The World Politically* (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2013), xii.

⁴⁷⁴ Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 579.

(re-)establish an ideological framework that sets out to (re)create the myth of Palestine as the ultimate and universal placeholder for a struggle against oppression. Considered individually, an important contextualisation of Palestinian struggles – e.g., the displayed texts and documentation material alongside the works of Eltigua at WH22, a location curated by Question of Funding – was made.

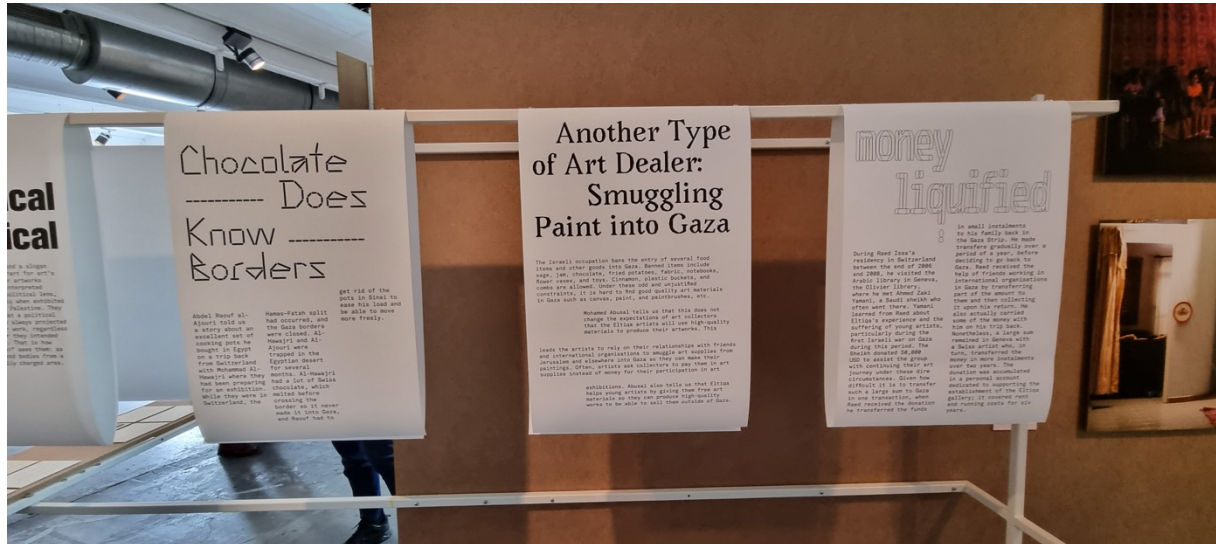


Fig. 33: *documenta fifteen*, picture taken at the area curated by Question of Funding at WH22. The texts describe the artistic practices in Gaza. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

However, seen in its entirety – which is not an easy task to do in this immense *documenta* – , there is a clear ideological structure at work: the aim is to position Palestine as a universal imaginary of resistance and anti-colonial struggle, and further to link the Palestinian struggle with all other collective struggles – in order to form a united front, which some claim is the lumbung community. This was finally expressed publicly by Lara Khaldi, a member of the artistic team of *documenta fifteen*, in a symposium organised outside of *documenta* by Framer Framed, the Van Abbemuseum, and the University of Amsterdam, one day before the end of *documenta fifteen*. Khaldi said: “Many of the artists and collectives of *documenta* included [Palestinian struggle] [...] this is anti-colonial struggles in solidarity. The Black Archives had an amazing shelf of books in the exhibition about solidarity between the black struggle and Palestinian struggle. [...] It’s an intersectional struggle, and it will [now, after *documenta fifteen*] come up everywhere, in queer struggle, in the anti-colonial struggle, it keeps coming out. [...] How will the institutions deal with it?”⁴⁷⁵

If this is not a successful hegemonic manoeuvre, then what is?

⁴⁷⁵ The symposium “(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*” took place at Framer Framed at the Akademie van Kunsten in the Trippenhuis, Amsterdam from 23 to 24 September 2022. The panel I am referring to was titled “Other Ways of *documenta*-ing: Democracy, Inclusion, and Decolonised Models of Art” with speakers Charles Esche, Ade Darmawan, Lara Khaldi, and Gertrude Flentge, moderated by Wayne Modest. I attended via the live stream on YouTube.



Fig. 34–36: *documenta fifteen*, pictures taken of the installation by The Black Archives at Fridericianum. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Hegemonic “Winners”

Curating and curatorial practice then becomes a practice of ideological propaganda, and a new role of the curator emerges as the leader or shaper of hegemonic movements, able to shape new alliances and create a bigger narrative. This capacity for narrative influence and myth-building – not a new capability for curatorial discourse, but one that works unashamedly in a propagandist way – usually pays off. Khaldi was appointed the new director of de Appel, a curatorial programme in Amsterdam, the day after *documenta fifteen* ended.

Mastering hegemonic manoeuvres not only leads to personal gain, it also likely (re-)produces stereotypical structures. At least this is how I understood the oppositional comparison by Gertrude Flentge – also a curator on the artistic team of *documenta fifteen* – after Khaldi’s input, when she stated: “Speaking about Israel and Palestine – [pauses] the institution and the lumbung.” In her thought, Israel stands for institution, and institution stands for capitalism; Palestine stands for lumbung, and lumbung stands for resistance in friendship and solidarity. This shows a clear, old and deeply rooted stereotypical pattern that was reinvented at *documenta fifteen*.



Fig. 37: Panel discussion “Other Ways of documenta-ing: Democracy, Inclusion, and Decolonised Models of Art” with speakers Charles Esche, Ade Darmawan, Lara Khaldi, and Gertrude Flentge, moderated by Wayne Modest, part of the symposium “(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*”, at Framer Framed at the Akademie van Kunsten in the Trippenhuis, Amsterdam, from 23 to 24 September 2022. Screenshot

Far from searching for “culprits,” I would like to bring these hegemonic struggles, which are fought with specific propagandistic means, to a structural level. Let us assume that, in hegemonic thinking, the – temporarily – dominant forces can simply be called “winners”. The “winners” are those who can shape the reading of *documenta fifteen* and produce meaning and a narrative in a larger public framework. You might see these “winners”, at least in the art field, sitting on the panel I mentioned before. But from the perspective of discursive formations, it is not so much the Palestinian artists shown, but rather their spokespersons who can be called “winners”, and also the spokespersons of the imagined “other side” – the Israeli state? Or the defendants of a Jewish community? – since *documenta fifteen* ultimately gave vocal expression to the Israel-Palestine conflict. And basically, not much has changed in the creation of the speaker position, almost fifty years after Michel Foucault's fundamental critique of exclusions in discursive formations. It is once again approved intellectual actors in a discursive formation, this time from “oppositional sides”. In order to break up this well-oiled oppositional framework – still – , other actors have to be able to enter the stage.⁴⁷⁶

From a perspective of situated practices, *documenta fifteen* might have benefitted by starting with ruangrupa's own embeddedness in the Indonesian context.⁴⁷⁷

“Documentation” as Propagandistic Tools

For a better understanding of the various propaganda methods enacted at *documenta*, alongside it and in response to it, I would like to look at one of the controversial works exhibited, the *Tokyo Reels*. Before doing so, however, I should point out that other forms of propaganda were active at *documenta*, for example, in form of caricatures in the works by Taring Padi, or the collages by Eltigua,⁴⁷⁸ or in Richard Bell's and INSTAR's activities, to name but a few. Some resembled an “old-school” leftist kitsch aesthetic and indulged in nostalgic gestures of resistance, while others reduced complexity to make a pointed statement; still others “propagated” important issues to make them visible and sayable. Nonetheless, there was a discernible line that ran throughout *documenta fifteen* that placed some works in an ideological lineage. This was pretty obvious if you counted all the references to nation-states or to national projects. Avoiding nation-state logic was yet another call-for-change idea by ruangrupa to avoid categorising artists under a national flag. For me, this was a strong sign against the determination of a national identity. It spoke not only to commons' desire for independence within national frameworks, but also to a postmigrant idea of belonging, of situated knowledges in collective practices.

⁴⁷⁶ See the paper by Erica Weiss, “Cultural hegemony, speech genres, and reconciliation: creating ‘Middle Eastern’ peace talk,” EASA 2022 Conference, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/easa2022/paper/65170>.

⁴⁷⁷ For the contextualisation of ruangrupa's practice from Indonesia, the last symposium “Let there be lumbung” was motivated to do so eventually by inviting Hilmar Farid, John Roosa, Melani Budianta, and Nuraini Juliastuti, all scholars with profound knowledge of Indonesian culture.

⁴⁷⁸ However, it might not be the best idea to use caricaturesque collages as a learning tool.

3. Prompt: Counting Names of Nation-States

Count the names of nation-states (or names of nation-state projects) in a large-scale exhibition (like *documenta*). Include the names within works, in excerpts, in descriptions...

Which name was mentioned most often? Which name appeared second most often [...]? Which name came in last place?

Trolling, Dog Whistling, and the Revival of (Leftist) Kitsch?

*Tokyo Reels*⁴⁷⁹ is an interesting work in propagandistic terms, since it cleverly brings together an assemblage of themes and aspects – politics of documenting and archiving, themes of solidarity and propaganda, issues of artistic freedom and curatorial contextuality – that may not be immediately apparent and turn out differently depending on the viewer's position. *Tokyo Reels* is a ten-hour screening consisting of approximately twenty historical propaganda films on 16mm by different auteurs. The individual film works come from different contexts and were produced for different audiences. There is lot of promotional material in a tourist point of view, produced from "Western countries" for "Western audiences" to find. Other films depict war-like scenarios, reporting from Israel-Palestine for a national TV audience – for Japan, the United Kingdom and others. Still others cover highly ideological war propaganda and political speeches from a Palestinian perspective. Among the conglomeration of material – a few of them interesting case studies to be analysed and contextualised for cultural and postcolonial studies, e.g., along the line of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, and as cultural forms of the Othering of the "Orient" by "The West" and subsequently self-othering mechanisms – , even the "neutral" perspectives uttered in public media, found "propaganda in the form of exaggerations and untrue insinuations regarding the Israeli 'enemy' [...] that are 'carried out in places in the films'. These are [...] only understandable against the background of the armed Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the time, with its flaming rhetoric on both sides."⁴⁸⁰

The curatorial placement added nothing to the historical contextualisation: the screening was installed with the largest projection of *documenta fifteen*, in a

⁴⁷⁹ See the quote: "Tokyo Reels, a collection of twenty 16 mm films made by filmmakers from the UK, Italy, Germany, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq and Japan, exposing the internationalist scope of militant filmmaking during the period of 1960—1980." "Screening "Mohanad Yaqubi - R.21 aka Restoring Solidarity," Escautville, June 15, 2022, accessed September 29, 2022, <https://www.escautville.org/post/screening-mohanad-yaqubi-r-21-aka-restoring-solidarity-15-june-14-00>.

⁴⁸⁰ This quote comes from Joseph Croitoru, whose aim it was to situate the film material of *Tokyo Reels*. Translation by the author. The text was published in *Die Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine* (HNA), 15 September 2022, accessed 22 September 2022, https://www.hna.de/kultur/documenta/pauschale-vorwuerfe-so-nicht-haltbar-91789526.html?itm_source=story_detail&itm_medium=interaction_bar&itm_campaign=share&fbclid=IwAR0EmtmBdz7-KLSjAmZ7e6orl75dM3QiG1ykxMFNnwFWq3FgJQWmw0xQ.

darkened and rather emptied space reserved solely for the works of the artists' collective Subversive Films. Between the individual films, Subversive Films commented unagitatedly – almost whispering – on the material shown. There were subliminal insinuations of criticism of the archive's function vis-à-vis toxic material, but otherwise little contextualisation or positioning occurred. For example, I heard a comment between two films that stated, "It might be a question if these kinds of materials should be archived, but we think it's worth it." But given the ten hours of material, no one can form a comprehensive impression of the works on view, and the lack of any contextualisation in the whole installation cries for outrage. Intentional?



Fig. 38: *documenta fifteen*, installation view of *Tokyo Reels* by Subversive Films at Hübner Areal. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

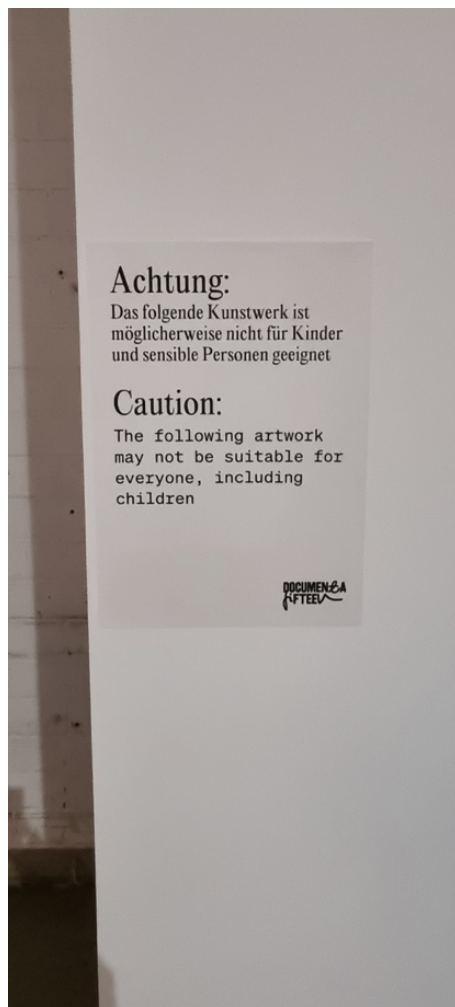


Fig. 39: *documenta fifteen*, a warning sign appeared at the entrance of *Tokyo Reels* by Subversive Films at Hübner Areal Photo: Ronald Kolb.

The accompanying text – on the back of the screening wall and on the website – likewise provided too little to help contextualise the works in their historical contexts and their original fields of use. On the contrary, it obscured or downplayed the contexts of their distribution and archiving, by “shedding light on the overlooked and still undocumented anti-imperialist solidarity between Japan and Palestine.”⁴⁸¹ The footage apparently belonged to Masao Adachi, a former member of the Japanese Red Army whose life story should certainly trigger warnings and require a careful introduction. Adachi was active in the “Japanese New Wave” film movement in Japan, making films with “leftist” political themes, but went on to join the Japanese Red Army in 1970, radicalised, and moved to Lebanon. Calling the Japanese Red Army’s actions “solidarity relations between Tokyo, Palestine, and the world” is euphemistic at best. I can’t help but read this as a huge trolling move, as it calls for solidarity under cheap, “old-fashioned” agit-prop effects of a “transnational militant cinema” – echoing a tried-and-true avant-garde-style shock aesthetic disguised as

⁴⁸¹ “Subversive Film,” *documenta fifteen*, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/subversive-film>.

documentary footage. Mohanad Yaqubi, one of the members of the Subversive Film collective, prefers to define these propaganda films as “solidarity films” or “Restoring Solidarity”.⁴⁸² In the long run, this could be problematic for a peaceful solidarity network like the one lumbung is aiming for.

My impression of being trolled – a speech act invented merely to provoke outrage – or mocked (is Subversive Film trying to poke fun at the rather aesthetic effects of these old-school agit-prop materials?) would point to a historical lineage in radical avant-garde and post-avant-garde artistic practices that reinvented shock and tricksterism. Then the work would subtly comment on the violence of some “Western” avant-garde artistic practices that exploited attention effects and shock as mere gestures for hollowed-out social change. This reading would correspond to a distanced art thinking deeply embedded in the “Western” art discourse of postmodernism of the 2000s.

Another reading might be to call it simply “dog whistling”, a precisely coded articulation for a politicised group under the radar, a politicised speech act masquerading as harmless to the uninformed. Along this line, the soft-spoken, fluffy statement can be taken in: “Subversive Film proposes to collectively reflect on possible processes of unearthing, restoring, and momentary disclosure of the imperfect archives of transnational militant cinema. By bringing back into circulation these moving images, they carefully reactivate present-day solidarity constellations, reflecting the lively utopia of a worldwide liberation movement.”⁴⁸³ What does “carefully reactivate” mean in a militant framework? And what does “worldwide liberation movement” actually mean, given the history of real acts of violence within the history of Red Army Factions? Ultimately, Subversive Film can turn out to be a place for dark tourism.

It would do no favours to the many other works and resistant practices, as it would discredit the significant and relevant issues articulated in *documenta fifteen*: Trampoline House also created an installation at the Hübner Areal – not far from *Tokyo Reels* – that tackled the European and especially the Danish “treatment” of migrants. But there were many other aspects of migration and marginalised struggles to be found throughout *documenta fifteen*. There were science and ecology-related works to be found (*Water System Project* by Cao Minghao and Chen Jianjun,⁴⁸⁴ and the Kiri project⁴⁸⁵); issues of property relations (*Who Is Afraid of Ideology* by Marwa

⁴⁸² “Screening “Mohanad Yaqubi - R.21 aka Restoring Solidarity.”

⁴⁸³ “Subversive Film.”

⁴⁸⁴ “Cao Minghao & Chen Jianjun,” *documenta fifteen*, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/cao-minghao-chen-jianjun>.

⁴⁸⁵ “KIRI Project /one hundred trees,” *documenta fifteen*, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/kiri-project-one-hundred-trees>.

Arsanios,⁴⁸⁶ an ongoing film series showing very complex entanglements of de-commoning threats in Lebanon); confrontations with religious (re)appropriation (the entire exhibition at the Roman Catholic Church of St. Kunigundis by Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennale) and many gender-related issues, especially the struggles of LGBTQI+ (see the works by New Zealand collective FAFSWAG at Stadtmuseum Kassel) and feminist struggles (Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie's archive of the women's movement in Algeria, or Saodat Ismailova's work *Chilltan*, depicting the collective of forty genderless beings – a core of Central Asian spirituality), etc.



Fig. 40: *documenta fifteen*, installation view of the area occupied by Trampoline House at Hübner Areal. Photo: Ronald Kolb.



Fig. 41: *documenta fifteen*, installation view in the Roman Catholic Church of St. Kunigundis curated by Atis Rezistans | Ghetto Biennale. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

⁴⁸⁶ "Marwa Arsanios," *documenta fifteen*, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/marwa-arsanios>.

These heterogeneous and complex issues were ultimately dominated by a hegemonic manoeuvre that produced a subtle red thread with Subversive Film's *Tokyo Reels* as its central point, taking a turn from societal and communal forms of solidarity to a solidarity in militancy. And, ultimately, all the efforts to show the practices of situated collective artists and activists – concrete and relevant struggles – were discarded and shifted to the map of a (supposedly leftist) vintage kitsch agit-prop struggle, still entrenched in the logic of the Cold War.

Two Types of Artworks

Broadly speaking, there were two types of artworks on view here: you could find contemporary (i.e., current) artistic collective artworks that were situational, and relational, and aimed to create new relationships beyond the realm of art. As an example, I would like to refer to the non-profit collective Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture. Baan Noorg built an impressive installation at the documenta Halle called *Churning Milk*, with a video work, a skateboard ramp, and pieces from the Thai shadow puppet theatre *Nang Yai* – both for use. Baan Noorg also managed to create a dairy farm exchange program between a farm in Kassel and Nongpho.⁴⁸⁷ There were plentiful other “artworks” oriented in the same way, which I will not list here.



Fig. 42: *documenta fifteen*, view of documenta Halle: In front the print workshop, in the centre, Baan Noorg's skate ramp, and in the back, Britto Art Trust's *rasad*. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

⁴⁸⁷ “Baan Noorg Collaborative Arts and Culture,” *documenta fifteen*, accessed 29 September 2022, <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-members-artists/baan-noorg-collaborative-arts-and-culture>.



Fig. 43: *documenta fifteen*, Baan Noorg's theatre pieces in use. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Other artworks – usually more traditional works of art that are also traditionally exhibited – followed a more binary logic. These works did not refuse to use to the representational logic that an institution like *documenta* holds. And so, in the best hegemonic fashion, these works – and their curated placement in display – used the power of representation to (re)produce myths, to establish a dominant narrative – to naturalise and universalise it – within the rules of the exhibitionary complex as an educational machine that we had to learn to constantly question.

4. Prompt: Observing Art in a State-Oriented Logic

Can you find works of art that can be considered artworks within a state-oriented logic or can be seen as "state art" in large-scale exhibitions?

What aspects make these artworks an expression of a national identity to you?

Ways Forward

One can assume that the entirety of *documenta fifteen* was envisioned by ruangrupa as a staging of various struggles – a staging that is not exhausted in a mode of representation but aims to strengthen the many collectives – also financially – and to create deeper relationships between the many participants of *documenta fifteen*, especially the artist groups and activists, but also the public. Many of these struggles spring from the artists' own first-hand experiences with marginalisation and can understandably lead to hate towards the oppression. Other works on display spoke to learned or mediated, generational second-hand experiences, most of which can be seen in archival material. And there were also large collective stereotypical narratives touched upon – imaginary, historically (re-)produced over a longer time and naturalised. These were embedded not only in right-wing propaganda, but also in the fabric of anti-imperialist movements and the aspects of their global conspiracy: everything came together and was on display in this *documenta*. One could argue that this amalgamation is nothing new, as it mirrors the mindset of many people around the world on a daily basis to varying degrees. But it was precisely this amalgamation that was the core problem that led to the scandal and scandalisation of *documenta fifteen*, as the different struggles did not stand on their own but were subsumed under a greater narrative. Some saw only their specific struggle in front of them, others saw a stereotypical ideology that potentially incites hate crimes.

How to Go on From Here?

Charles Esche's strategy of "humbling European modernity" turned out, it seems, less humbling in its approach. Rather, he argues for compartmentalising and moving forward with a unified alliance of (forced?) solidarity for "a" change. In his talk at the symposium "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*,"⁴⁸⁸ he concluded his statement by saying: "The conservative radical, conservative left, who

⁴⁸⁸ "(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on *documenta fifteen*."

says, we want a change [of value], we have to have change, but not *that* change, and every specific change is always excluded in the desire of being [colonial? The last word was muffled]. And lumbung is a change, and what Hito Steyerl from the conservative left and those people say, ‘Yes, we want change, but not your change,’ and that is as negative a response as any from the far right.”

Esche spoke out at a delicate moment, in a time of heated awareness amid the hegemonic struggle. His utterance might be a response to the ongoing criticism by rather conservative newspapers, judging *documenta fifteen* as a whole as antisemitic, among other things. Yet, it exemplifies a particular mode of operation, which is to establish the dominant narrative by excluding other positions and “closing ranks”. Esche derides the calls for change expressed in the contemporary and progressive art discourse – for decolonial practices in the exhibitionary complex, for repatriation, for “radical inclusions” – as critiques not willing to be realised. He seems to have lost faith in these discourses, or simply does not want to wait for the change – maybe understandably. But! But how can “change” be produced with these tools of propagation? And what change is produced with that? We must insist – always – to ask and question “what change”!

In a pointed question posed by Maayan Sheleff to Oliver Marchart during the lecture he gave on 7 July 2022, as part of the Summer School “Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education” at the *CAMP notes on education* format at *documenta fifteen*, in which he mainly presented the arguments of his book *Hegemony Machine: documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennialization*, Sheleff asked Marchart: “You wrote [in your book *Conflictual Aesthetics*⁴⁸⁹], ‘Curating politically means organizing, agitating and propagating.’ If you are ruangrupa, what would you suggest we do in order to enable conflict in different ways [than] the ones at the moment?”

This question puts a finger in the wound of political curating as agitation. Marchart responded by pointing to a more open design of conflictual formations. Despite the concept of conflictuality discussed in hegemony theory as the main driving force of political movements with an agonistic debate that allows for different opinions, he sees the problem of current forms of activism in the avoidance of inner-group conflicts and rather in the externalisation of conflicts through exclusion mechanisms and even more through the pressure to “choose a side”. He argued for an emancipatory form of activism that develops a new sense of how conflicts can be acted out rather than suppressed internally.

However, even with its expanded version of hegemony theory, the political theory of hegemony historically builds on war vocabulary, it speaks of trenches, parties in constant struggle for new alliances for a dominant hegemonic front – a never-ending

⁴⁸⁹ Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019).

battlefield that becomes a political playground in culture for majorities. A “game” played peacefully and without reconciliation only when unlimited resources are available. The image of today’s hegemonic propaganda machine leads to an entrenched scenario – in leftist kitsch? – detached from reality and to winners by distinction. So, the question is, how can we solidarise without radicalisation? Without essentialising identity and without weaponising every speech act into ideology?

Possible answers would have to address how these new formations, which challenge the traditional infrastructure of culture and life – and subsistence – can be constructed in such a way that they are not easily hijacked – or appropriated – by hegemonic manoeuvres from within and from the outside. Answers would need to figure out how to de-essentialise identity – since identity is nonetheless a contingent formation – , how to avoid gestures of innocent positioning as safe rescue zones and how to share responsibilities in all positions.

5. Prompt: Propositional Exhibition

Consider *documenta fifteen* as what is shown and implemented (and not what would be if, or what is missing or needed, or what went wrong).

What does *documenta fifteen* make possible? What can we not do with it?

I strongly believe that we can only achieve this if we re-evaluate our critical tools and situate, contextualise, and – try to – translate positions. Concepts developed in theory and scientific methods in supposedly “Western” thought can be reappropriated for our own use. An utter dismissal of so-called “Western” knowledges is whimsical. I dare to say that I would rather opt for a renewed “discourse of truth” in feminist objectivity than to call for “the end of history” in a postmodern “hegemonic” game that renders all utterances as equally valid⁴⁹⁰ – or equally opinionated.⁴⁹¹

Picturing theory as “only” a mechanism of exclusion and oppression fails to recognise the empowering effect of theory as a useful and practical tool for understanding one’s own position within society and how it is shaped. It also denies the primary function of criticality to help one overcome one’s impulses of a naturalised common sense. It imagines a method only in patriarchal logic but dismisses its potential efficacy in feminist thought.

documenta fifteen presented many different positions, which was rather foreign in this form of a “Western” large-scale exhibition – linked to the logic within a nation-

⁴⁹⁰ As Haraway points out, “The ‘equality’ of positioning is a denial of responsibility and critical inquiry. Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well.” Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 584.

⁴⁹¹ An example of an equalization can be found in *dOCUMENTA (13)* with its postmodern gestures towards historicity, relativizing historical and contextual references by arranging historical objects and artworks side-by-side in the so-called “brain”, a pivotal exhibition space in the Fridericianum.

state, and modernity in general. It was a proposal that was difficult to “read” – or decipher – for “Western” publics and press. In this sense, it was a radical – unapologetic – demonstration that not only shook the normally well sheltered art field – despite claims of “radicalisation” on display –, but also caused cracks in the mode of representation of exhibitions by shifting from a politics of recognition to a politics of redistribution. This proposal is something profoundly different from what we call “socially engaged art” or participatory art in the art discourse. And for better clarification – in this untested field, which has also made its own problems visible – I would call “Lumbung One” rather “Lumbung Zero”.

In terms of the exhibitionary complex, we could call it the “propositional transition” of museums. It can mean developing propositional exhibitions with social formations that take and display specific positions – not universalised ones. But as mentioned earlier, these propositions must be equipped with (self-)critical tools. These propositions must be in permeable solidarities, in constant exchange and debate, not in an enclosed framework of a new hegemony. In contrast to a view that sees the exhibitionary complex primarily through conflictuality, I would argue for creating a framework for a contact zone: a space where different world views, lived experiences and situated knowledges come into contact to be shared and discussed. As conflicts in societies, communities, small groups, families, etc. – in their various forms from micro- to macro-politics – are inevitable anyway, a practice of “commoning” might be a better filter through which to see. It involves “learning” by doing, listening, showing and discussing and trying to understand the situatedness of others, perhaps leading to an agreed understanding of a “truth.” In this way, it is in indeed a matter beyond the politics of the “left” or the “right.”

Once again, I want to refer to Donna Haraway’s words that so aptly summarise the idea of an infrastructure for a feminist objectivity in power-sensitive, rational and situated knowledges that is critical and responsible – and desirably resistant to ideology and simplification:

Rational knowledge is a process of ongoing critical interpretation among “fields” of interpreters and decoders. Rational knowledge is power-sensitive conversation. Decoding and transcoding plus translation and criticism; all are necessary. So science becomes the paradigmatic model, not of closure, but of that which is contestable and contested. Science becomes the myth, not of what escapes human agency and responsibility in a realm above the fray, but, rather, of accountability and responsibility for translations and solidarities linking the cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterise the knowledges of the subjugated. A splitting of senses, a confusion of voice and sight, rather than clear and distinct ideas, becomes the metaphor for the ground of the rational. We seek not the knowledges ruled by phallogocentrism (nostalgia for the presence of the one true World) and disembodied vision. We seek those ruled by partial sight and limited voice-not partiality for its own sake

but, rather, for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. Situated knowledges are about communities, not about isolated individuals. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality. Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living.⁴⁹²

5.3 My Curatorial-Educational-Artistic Practice and Projects

For over fifteen years, I have worked in teaching contexts in addition to my work as a designer of books and websites for leading cultural institutions. An international shift in my field of activity increasingly into university teaching contexts and more open, transdisciplinary forms of knowledge production in artistic–curatorial practices began about ten years ago with the position of co-director of the internationally oriented, English-speaking Postgraduate Programme in Curating at the Continuing Education Centre of the Zurich University of the Arts, founded in 2007 by Dorothee Richter. In this capacity, I have developed my distinct practice that combines knowledge transfer and active knowledge production with publishing and exhibition-making, realised in the form of a curriculum for a university structure, but also in experimental combinations of conference and workshop formats. As editor-in-chief of the journal *OnCurating* together with Dorothee Richter, I have worked on many journals with different group formations. From a pedagogical point of view, we have run some publication issues in collaboration with students to give them agency in the curatorial field and actively contribute to the discourse. My role – besides writing and editing – has been to organise, structure and curate the framework of issues.⁴⁹³ I see this editorial and academic practice as an extended authorial curatorial knowledge production. In this line of practice, I also see the aforementioned long-term film project “Curating! Explored with a Camera!”, for which over 70 video interviews with international curators and artists have been conducted to date. My role in many shared exhibitions that we have realised with students, alumni and externs has followed a similar methodology. Most of my exhibitionary projects took place on a small scale, were fully self-organised with little funding, and rather experimental in

⁴⁹² Haraway, “Situated Knowledges,” 590.

⁴⁹³ See these issues that were produced together with students:

Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, eds., *OnCurating* 39: *Draft: Global Biennial Survey 2018* (June 2018).

Ronald Kolb, Ella Krivanek, Camille Regli, Dorothee Richter, eds., *OnCurating* 41: *Centres/Peripheries – Complex Constellations* (June 2019).

Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, eds., *OnCurating* 48: *Zurich Issue: Dark Matter, Grey Zones, Red Light and Bling Bling* (September 2020).

nature, often at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich, Switzerland. My commitment as an organiser of a collaborative process was to allow participating students, curators and artists to negotiate their engagement and role in the project within an internal contact zone-like framework. The specificity of the exhibition medium – the spatiality and social moments of audience participation – enabled direct encounters with the public and opened up a contact zone with the audience. In addition to the experimental, urgent, social, political themes of the exhibitions, many of them therefore contained an extensive public programme.⁴⁹⁴ The list of all my projects can be found in the appendix of this paper.

Conferences and Workshops as Formats of Experimental Exhibitionary Exercises in Contact Zones

In recent years, I have co-conceived and organised a number of international symposia and workshops in different constellations in a similar practice.

In 2018, I organised a workshop series and a conference for the Merz Akademie, University of Applied Arts, Design and Media, Stuttgart, entitled “Learning for Life – Current forms of knowledge transfer, artistic acting in groups, strategic-artistic forms of governance and research (in and with communities)”.⁴⁹⁵ With Dorothee Richter, I created the travelling workshop series “Curating on the Move”, which brings together transdisciplinary artistic and curatorial topics for a heterogeneous group of participants in a university structure and beyond.⁴⁹⁶ The last two expanded workshop formats of this series are worth mentioning here, as they show the elaborated, refined method for an exhibitionary practice that is not realised in an exhibition but through experimental, educational, performative exercises in a defined space and time.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, we organised the hybrid conference and workshop series “Situated Knowledges – Art and Curating on the Move” in June 2021, based on Donna Haraway’s notion of “Situated Knowledges”, which fed comprehensively into my dissertation research. The project was a collaboration with Shared Campus, a platform of thirteen arts universities.⁴⁹⁷ Most participants attended online from different time zones. After public lectures, we held five workshops in parallel over three days.⁴⁹⁸ One year later, in June–July 2022, the two-week Summer School

⁴⁹⁴ See projects at the OnCurating Project Space, <https://oncurating-space.org/>.

⁴⁹⁵ I was invited by Merz Akademie for their 100th anniversary. For that, I initiated a working group of former students and artists from Stuttgart (Ronald Kolb, Hannah Horst, Jana Thierfelder, Lukas Ludwig, Florian Model). After a year-long internal exchange process with students and staff, we organised a symposium with lectures by Edgar Schmitz, Dorothee Richter, Alistair Hudson, Judith Sigmund and a livestream contribution by Forensic Architecture, and workshops by WochenKlausur (Martina Reuter, Wolfgang Zingg), Chantal Küng, Stefan Wagner, Felipe Castelblanco, notamuse (Lea Sievertsen und Silva Baum) and Verlag für Handbücher.

⁴⁹⁶ See <https://www.curating.org/curating-on-the-move/>.

⁴⁹⁷ See <https://shared-campus.com/about/>.

⁴⁹⁸ An abstract with a detailed schedule can be found here: <https://shared-campus.com/themes/cultures-histories-futures/curatorial-workshop/curating-on-the-move-situated-knowledges/>.

“Commoning in Curatorial and Artistic Education” followed a similar pattern with workshops and lectures in collaboration with Shared Campus and the education department of *documenta fifteen*. It was open to all students of the thirteen universities of Shared Campus and to all study levels.⁴⁹⁹ Thematically built around the topic of the commons, the project was supposed to also open up its own structure for a commoning agenda. We therefore invited all participants (students and external participants) to apply with their own proposal for a workshop. We worked through the proposal with the students to finalise the Summer School programme. This resulted in co-teaching experiences with constantly varying constellations in two student-led workshops per day. In particular, the different cultural and educational backgrounds of the diverse group of students, the mix between advanced students (PhD level) and BA/MA students worked very well, while we were able to manage to avoid a strict hierarchy. The content of the workshops varied: in the morning, there were more lecture-based workshops that unfolded in discussions, and in the afternoon, more action-oriented workshops (physical exercises, playful experiments, etc.). For this large number of projects over two weeks, we created a Padlet, a simple digital tool that displayed the schedule and was then used for documentation.⁵⁰⁰



⁴⁹⁹ <https://shared-campus.com/themes/cultures-histories-futures/curatorial-workshop/commoning-curatorial-and-artistic-education/>.

⁵⁰⁰ The full programme of the two weeks with all workshops and documentation can be found here: https://padlet.com/Ronald_Kolb_d15/commoning-curatorial-and-artistic-education-51qjosexphb0bxh7.

Fig. 44: Summer School “Commoning Artistic and Curatorial Education”, CAMP Notes on education, *documenta fifteen*, Kassel. Photo: Jan-Gottfried Esser.



Fig. 45: Public lecture by Jennifer Deger from FERAL ATLAS accompanying the Summer School “Commoning Artistic and Curatorial Education”, CAMP Notes on education, *documenta fifteen*, Kassel. Photo: Jan-Gottfried Esser.

Educational-Exhibitionary Projects in Curatorial-Governmental Constellations

In all these different exhibitionary projects with their media-specific articulations, teaching and learning is inseparable from knowledge transfer and knowledge production in transdisciplinary, performative, artistic–curatorial, transversal practices. I would like to group these projects under an exhibitionary practice that aims to make things visible and public, sometimes in learning environments of schools and universities, sometimes for a wider public sphere in museum settings. In this sense, publishing, making exhibitions and organising conferences and workshops are interconnected in my practice. I strongly advocate for a rationale of these practices following a research-based methodology embedded in a scientific discourse of truth. Furthermore, learning and making things public in and with temporary communities with heterogeneous subjects require a contemporary understanding of our global, postcolonial entanglements and an understanding of our own and others’ situated knowledges. Our contemporary heterogeneity does not only refer to a diverse cultural background, but also includes financial differences and inequalities as well as intergenerational aspects – all this needs to be read in a transversal project.

Most of my projects over the time my dissertation was being written were collaborative and shared responsibilities with a small group, sometimes with the group of students, sometimes with colleagues. In the following, however, I want to discuss two of my educational-exhibitionary projects that are best suited to demonstrate the (self-)governmental aspects in the exhibitionary complex in my practice. Both projects, even with proper partner institutions, were realised on a rather small-scale and with precarious funding and emerged in a self-organised way in exchange with the partnering institutional environment.

Small Projects for Coming Communities

“Small Projects for Coming Communities”⁵⁰¹ – initiated by Dorothee Richter and me in March 2018 – is an ongoing research, workshop and exhibition project that aims to establish communal formations in a playful, artistic and performative way to create a space for negotiation and exchange, a contact zone. It does this through the means of the contemporary art practice of so-called *scores*. The scores collected in the initial workshop phase of this project and in the course of ongoing workshops and events usually touch on situations of everyday life and vary in format and scope: some may simply evoke thoughts and be poetical in nature,⁵⁰² others call for performative, literary, musical and artistic action and lead to acts of a performance,⁵⁰³ while some give instructions for exercises and group activities,⁵⁰⁴ and the boldest suggest establishing collaborative projects.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰¹ Initially, the project was a collaboration with the *Katholisches Bildungswerk Stuttgart* and hosted a series of workshops from March 2018 with Discoteca Flaming Star, Bill Dietz, Eva Dörr, Jeanne von Heeswijk, Sabrina Karl, Florian Model and Anike Joyce Sadiq, among others, and ended up in an exhibition with scores on display by Chloë Bass, Bill Dietz, Hidden Institute, Discoteca Flaming Star, San Keller, Neue Dringlichkeit, Robert Blatt, Ceyda Oskay, Christine Ellison, Rachel Garfield, Zoncy, Jumzang Dai, Johanna Bruckner, Michael Leung, Kacey Wong, Belle Phromchanya, Eva Dörr, Tilman Kugler, Meitong Chen & Claudia Baena, Anastasia Chaguidouline, Maya Bamberger & Ronny Koren, Eveline Mathis, Gozde Filinta & Camille Regli, Pongpan Suriyapat, Domenico Roberti, Jan Sandberg, Eriko Miyata, Ishita Chakraborty and works by Bill Dietz, Florian Model, Sabrina Karl, Anike Joyce Sadiq, Kacey Wong, Andreina Isea, Axel Crettenand and FOA-FLUX with Gian Martins and Nina Shapiro.

The opening of the exhibition was organised as a 24-hour event at the Hospitalhof Stuttgart with lectures and performances by Grant Kester, Elke Krasny, Sabih Ahmed, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Tine de Moor and Katalin Erdödi.

See <https://www.comingcommunities.org/en/activations/katholisches-bildungswerk/>.

⁵⁰² See, for example, the score “empathy” by artist Robert Blatt, <https://www.comingcommunities.org/en/score/empathy/>.

⁵⁰³ For example, the score “Experiments in Joy”⁵⁰³ by artist Chloë Bass creates a direct exchange. It is an artistic instruction to create an emotional moment of joy between two people by following six steps. I often use the score in workshops, since it vividly creates an instant connection between the participants and breaks the ice.

⁵⁰⁴ For example, the score “A Syncretized Circle” by the artist Zoncy, <https://www.comingcommunities.org/en/score/a-syncretized-circle/>.

⁵⁰⁵ For example, the score “Diversity Dinner” by Anastasia Chaguidouline, <https://www.comingcommunities.org/en/score/score-diversity-dinner/>.

All the scores have a transversal function by bridging micro- and macro-political levels. The producers of the scores exercise governmental practice by writing down instructions for others. Those who are willing to put the scores into action train their awareness of being governed. Both parts encounter the “art of (not) being so governed”, a form of making oneself aware of one’s own governmental constellation, in private everyday life, in communal and societal dimensions. A score as an instruction deployed from an artist is interpreted by someone who wants to realise the score from a different position within a new context. To engage in the realisation of a score is thus to engage with one’s own positionality, with a material-subjective understanding of one’s own embeddedness in relation to the positions of others. Ultimately, it is an exercise in situated knowledges. Starting from a written, context-sensitive score (by a single author, or by a group), a transversal network of statements in multi-positional exchange emerges through the collection of their manifold, specific enactments. In this respect, the exhibitionary results can be seen as activations of a political consciousness, one that trains a political form of thinking, that reflects on one’s own position in a local–global, representational framework of power. These reflections take place in two forms: on the digital platform, “comingcommunities.org” scores are on display together with the enactments that were created in workshops or sent to us anonymously digitally. Potentially, anyone can stage the material and send it in so that it is added to the website. In this way, a translocal communal act – even if not physically – comes into being through the website. The other stage of reflection takes place in the ongoing workshops based on the score material. Here, a communal embodiment in direct exchange can be negotiated in physical form.

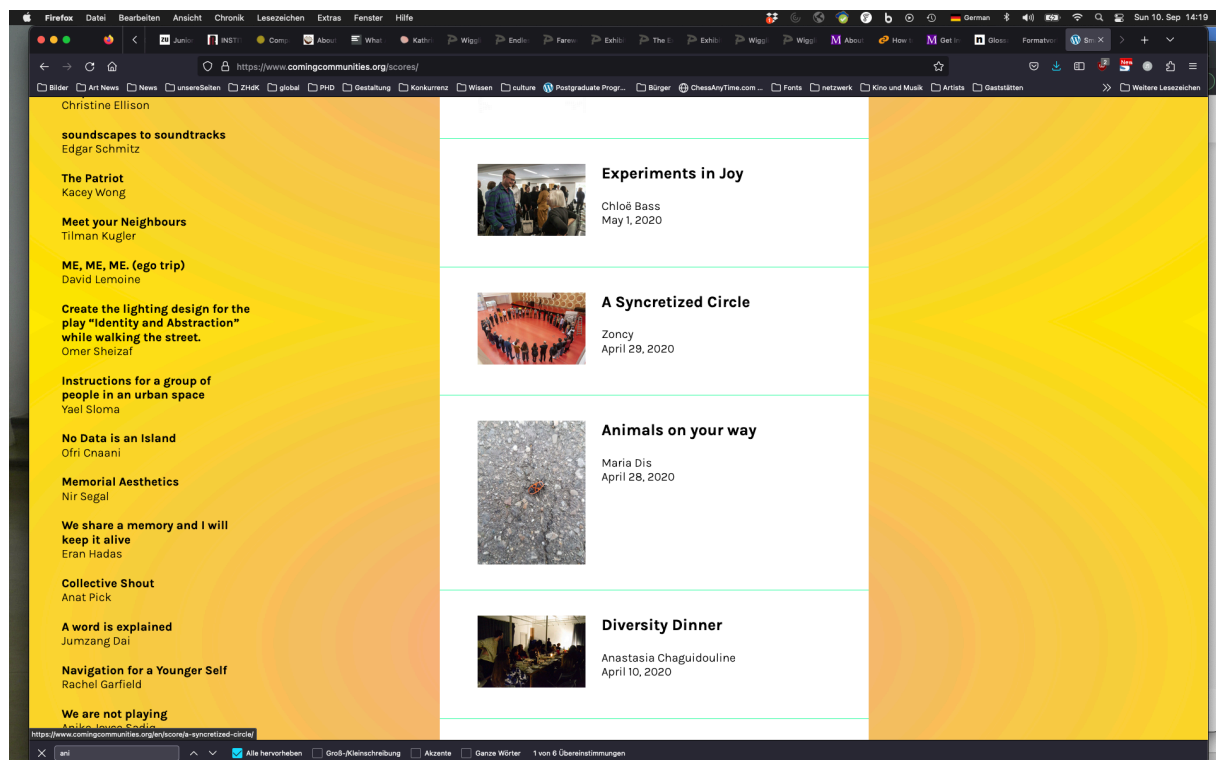


Fig. 46: Website “Small Projects for Coming Communities”, accessed 10 September 2023, <https://www.comingcommunities.org/>. Screenshot.



Fig. 47: Opening of “Small Projects for Coming Communities, Stuttgart 10 May 2017. Lecture with a self-made dinner, with “rescued” food. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

For a better understanding of how the sequence score–enactment–reflection works and consequently a loose, open and oftentimes translocal assemblage of things (visual material) and people (positions) emerges, I would like to briefly discuss two examples. The score “Animals on your Way” by Maria Dis plainly asks the following:

On your ways, consider your surroundings.
Which animals do you encounter?
Photograph them and share them with us.⁵⁰⁶

The enacted realisations can be accessed via the website, which are labelled with the name of the author, the date and the place. The contributions from Switzerland, Germany, India, Ireland Taiwan, South Korea and so on form a surprising web of pictures of animals and their surroundings, a place and the authors participating in this playful collection. The score “Residual Walk”, written by an anonymous group from Hong Kong, works similar to “Animals on your Way”. It assembles different enactments, asking for the following:

⁵⁰⁶ <https://www.comingcommunities.org/en/score/animals-on-your-way/>.

We kindly ask for sharing whatever speaks of an absence around you. It could be a written text (poems, memos, sentences) and/or visuals (photos, screenshots, diagrams) in the absence of ...⁵⁰⁷

In an elaborate process, the anonymous group organised a performative hybrid workshop for “Curating on the Move – Taipei Biennial 2020 x Critical Zones/ZKM” in 2021.⁵⁰⁸ The group worked with the submitted material and created a hybrid contact zone, discussing different experiences of loss and censorship from personal, situated standpoints. The exchange was not primarily a discussion about politics, but by sharing different experiences of visible erasures in the public sphere, it triggered thought processes of one’s own political situation, and created empathy.

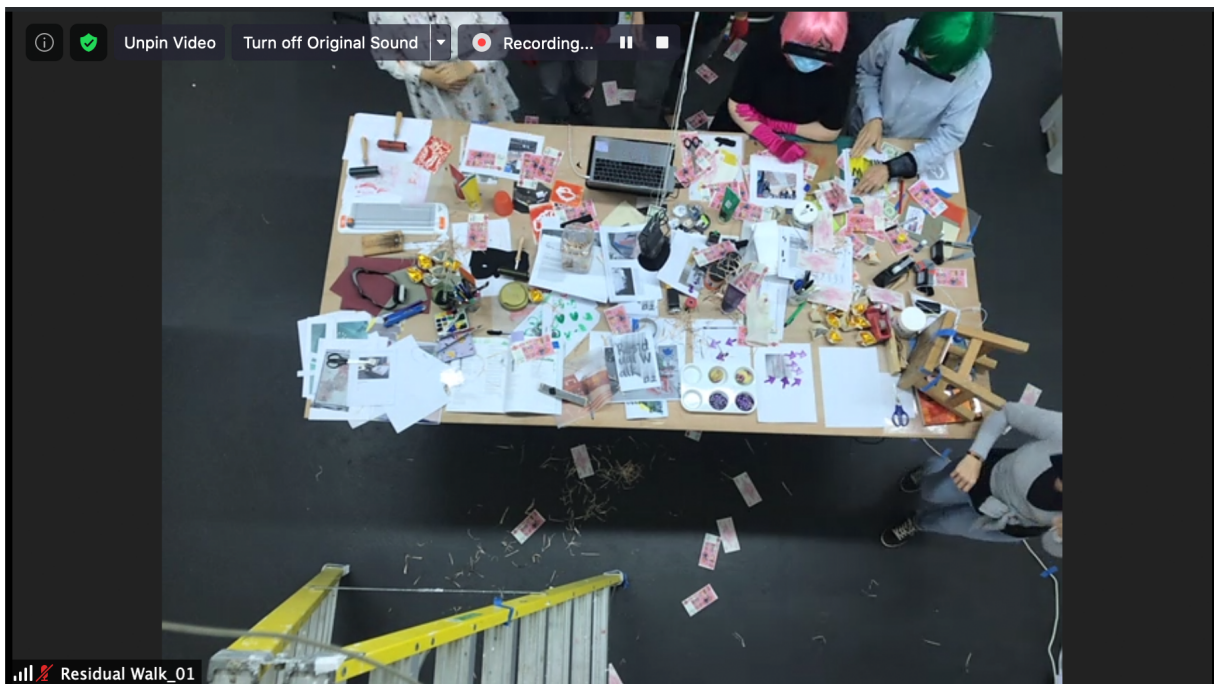


Fig. 48: Hybrid Workshop “Residual Walk”, alongside “Curating on the Move – Taipei Biennale 2020”, December 2020. Screenshot.

COMPOST (Composting Knowledge)

The exhibition project *COMPOST – The Open Bin (Composting Knowledge)* came to life from a whimsical idea at one of the meetings of the “Composting Knowledge” group, which formed at the invitation of ruangrupa, namely Reza Afisina and Iswanto Hartono, on their way to *documenta fifteen*. During the bi-weekly meetings via Zoom, which started about a year and a half before the opening of *documenta fifteen* in 2022, an international collaborative network for alternative knowledge production was eventually established under the name of “Composting

⁵⁰⁷ <https://www.comingcommunities.org/en/score/residual-walk/>.

⁵⁰⁸ <https://shared-campus.com/themes/cultures-histories-futures/curatorial-workshop/curating-on-the-move-international-curatorial-workshop-online/>.

Knowledge”.⁵⁰⁹ Far from having a unified or well-defined theme, the discussions had overlapping and mutually exclusive ideas in mind, but we shared a common sense of experimentation in alternative knowledge production and a willingness to share our knowledges. We got to know each other and our practices over the course of time, and Reza Afisina often spoke about creating this network not only with *documenta fifteen* in mind, but as an ongoing and self-sustaining network for projects and activities before and beyond the 100 days of *documenta*. In the absence of concrete plans from ruangrupa on how the Composting Network could be integrated into the major show, Dorothee Richter and I came up with an “open bin” exhibition format with the aim of creating a communal exhibitionary programme, starting out 100 days before the start of *documenta fifteen*. That is how the exhibition project *COMPOST – the Open Bin* was born, which started on 11 March (100 days before the start of *documenta fifteen*) at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich.

Finally, we managed to organise what I called “a sequential and choreographed series of interlocking events on the theme of ‘Composting Knowledge’”⁵¹⁰ in our self-run off-space. Our aim was to curate an ongoing programme of short interventions in the 80 square metres of the OnCurating Project Space, where different artists would bring their practices, where various activities could come into contact and be displayed, discussed and digested as a shared process of activations. Around thirty individual events – social in nature, including screenings, dinners, roundtables, exhibitions, performances and lectures, all open to the public and accessible in a digitally hybrid format for its whole duration – were self-funded and ran on for almost fourteen weeks with around 50 participating artists until the opening of *documenta fifteen*. The whole project was organised by about 20 curators and organisers⁵¹¹ and was borderline overwhelming for us and our team.

⁵⁰⁹ Initially, the network was compiled by these partners: Reza Afisina, Iswanto Hartono, ruangrupa; Färgfabriken; GAP Tokyo; ICA Sofia; JJ and Mina Ellison from Donkey Mill Art Center; Knowbotiq; Myvillages, and others; it was hosted by Tyuki Imamura and Giulia Rossini. <https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/composting-knowledge/>.

⁵¹⁰ See the press release: <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-bin/>.

⁵¹¹ As the main organiser, I collaborated with Camille Regli and Dorothee Richter, who contributed to the core curatorial team, with former students and peers contributing to the events, inviting artists, claiming funding, helping to set up the programme.

Participant list: A_O_S_A_A, Augmented Materiality Lab (Alvaro Cassinelli, Jayson Haebich, Eugenia S. Kim), Paloma Ayala, Mabe Bethônico, Lara Caluori, Line Chevalley, Leticia Cordero, Club La Fafa, Emma Critchley, Mekhala Dave, Donkey Mill Art Center with James Jack & Mina Elison, Liz Elton, f.f.f.f.fermentation, Anne-Laure Franchette, Matthias Fritsch, Eco-Greenhouse / Ein Shemer Kibbutz Project with Nivi Alroy, Andre Vladimir Heiz, Anim Jeon, Stefanie Knobel & Samrat Banerjee / Institute for Plant, Animal and Human Migration, Alina Kopytsia, Malte Larsen, Marinka Limat, Hunter Longe, Ayumi Matsuzaka, Maya Minder (HumusSapiens, Hackteria, BadLab), Mayté Miranda, Jonathan Ospina, Marisa Raygoza, Simon Risi, Salo & Lucianne, Andreas Siagian, Daniel Späti, Stirnimann-Stojanovic, Teti Group with Gabriel Gee, U5 with Helene Romakin, Paula Vilaplana Miguel, Raffaele Vitto, Claudia Vogel, David Zabel (AfroFutur4000), Adam Zaretsky.

Curatorial team: Nadine Bajek, Chiara Borgonova, Ana Rosela del Bosque, Giulia Busetti, Valeria Brücker, Sophie Brunner, Maryna Donina, Olena Iegorova, Erika Giulietti, Sofia Gkinko, Ronald Kolb,

Compost Practice as an Ecological Theme

In terms of direction, the topic of composting clearly drew from ecology. Practising ecological thinking did not only mean dealing with natural phenomena or drawing attention to the imminent climate catastrophe but was expressed in artistic-scientific research and governmental-curatorial presentations in the interdependent field of more-than-human relations and environments. Often not explicit, many artists demonstrated experimentally and playfully how a more sustainable and ecological life could be possible with a particular ecological and scarcity-aware practice.

For example, artist-scientist Lara Caluori installed a small water tank with oil and added the fungal mycelium that would, over time, degrade the toxic waste into non-toxic substances in the process of “mycoremediation”.⁵¹²



Fig. 49: “Mycoremediation” installation by Lara Caluori. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Another workshop-based contribution by artist Claudia Vogel experimented with actual compost material. Vogel distilled compost in different ways. She used it to create dyes on paper and also distilled the waste for olfactory workshops, to sensitise

Anna Konstantinova, Ronny Koren, Camille Regli, Dorothee Richter, Alexandra Romy, Anita Rosenberger, Smadar Samson, Regina Tetens, Lotte van Ermengem, Anna Wälli. Landesmuseum Zurich provided us with the installation material, and Forum Schlossplatz Aarau co-produced the display structure by Stirninmann-Stojanovic.

A detailed programme of all events, and participating artists, curators, and activists, can be found here: <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-bin/>.

⁵¹² In full disclosure, this experiment did not work out. The fungus dried out and died due to a lack of caretaking by the organisers.

the participants to smell and taste.⁵¹³ In a similar but more sophisticated process, artist Liz Elton produced large “landscape paintings”, all made of compostable material, using recycled bags as a canvas and pigments from various degradable sources.⁵¹⁴ The lecture and discussion by Nivi Alroy on the “Eco-Greenhouse” of Kibbutz Ein Shemer, Israel, founded by artist Avital Geva, showed us an interesting case study where ecological issues intersect with social issues through the establishment of an educational and social centre on the topic of ecological sciences developed through artistic practice.⁵¹⁵ By far the biggest contribution on ecological issues in the programme came from the activities of *Humus Sapiens*, a network of Maya Minder and others. The very active DIYbio network transformed the exhibition space with artistic works and scientific installations and further activated it with a panel discussion on DIY composting practices by Malte Larsen, Maya Minder, Linda Mary Montano, Andreas Siagian and Adam Zaretsky.⁵¹⁶ The panel discussion was accompanied by fermented food and drinks made by Maya Minder.

In addition to the direct contact with ecological issues of the natural environment and humans’ relationship with it, the project dealt with what I would call the governmental aspect of ecology – (self-)reflective research into our interdependence with the world. It was based on the basic understanding of ecology – as in the Greek *oikos* for “home” or “household”, and *logos* as in the Greek for “study” – as a scientific discipline to research “the relationships between organisms and their environment”.⁵¹⁷ On this matter, many projects talked about soil, earth, ecosystems and composting as a natural process in which humans can intervene and of which they are part.

⁵¹³ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-retaste-2/>.

⁵¹⁴ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-tender/>.

⁵¹⁵ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-eco-greenhouse/>.

⁵¹⁶ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-humus-sapiens/>.

⁵¹⁷ “Ecology,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified 26 December 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/science/ecology>.



Fig. 50: Installation view, “Humus Sapiens” event for the exhibition *Composting Knowledges*, 25 March 2022, OnCurating Project Space. Photo: Ronald Kolb.



Fig. 51: “Humus Sapiens” panel discussion for the exhibition *Composting Knowledges*, 25 March 2022, OnCurating Project Space. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

Composting Knowledge as Epistemological Reflection

In terms of an expanded understanding of ecology and composting, I had already indicated in the initial correspondence with the artists that the project imagines “composting” not only as a natural process, a transformation process of digestion and fermentation in direct contact, but also sees the metaphorical notion of composting

as a “wild” coming together of artistic, cultural and political articulations and knowledges, reflecting upon epistemologies. However, this idea of “compost” is not only a metaphorical exercise but extends to the basic idea of ecology as research into our own environmental and social embeddedness, expanding on our limiting idea of “economy” today. Similarly, yet in juxtaposition, the notion of economy – like ecology – stems from the Greek *oikos* as in “home/household” with the variant suffix *nomos* referring more to the managerial aspects of governance. In our current understanding of (neoliberal) economics, this usually means being occupied with a profit-oriented exchange of goods and its supporting legal framework for asymmetric transactions that externalise the devastating aspects of exploitation, such as pollution, overuse and poverty. Setting up this opposition, ecology and thus composting as an artistic-scientific practice would speak of techniques of governing, as a connective practice in scientific thought, since it is not only about managing the “home/household” but also about self-critically reflecting on one’s own position on a planetary scale in order to achieve a more inclusive and just world. In this expanded field of ecology, the structure of the “Composting Knowledge” network was set up as a “Compost Bin” or in other words, as a coming together of different epistemes in a contact zone.

Echoing Donna Haraway’s playful metaphor of compost as a heated, more-than-human assemblage of “each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles”,⁵¹⁸ she vividly argues for compost rather than posthumanism, culminating in the fiery quote “We are compost, not posthuman”.⁵¹⁹ Aside from being a major influence on posthuman discourse, I read her interjections as an exercise in not being afraid to stir things up and disrupt clear categorisations that are so crucial for universalistic disciplines. Our own amalgamation aimed to produce ideas of composting as a joyful resistance in socio-political practice, as a way of reflecting on epistemologies in a cultural-scientific field, and as a natural and direct-contact transformation process.

Exhibitions as Composting Practices

With this background, the project eventually invited artists and collectives with diasporic, transitory, deviant and fermenting practices to come together to explore composting practices literally and figuratively. The “MODULAR STRUCTURE” by the artist duo Stirnimann-Stojanovic gave us a structuring framework for all the different activities. They conceived and produced a flexible display system with recuperated wood from the Landesmuseum Zurich, which kindly provided us with the wooden remnants of their last exhibition. This versatile exhibition system was adapted for the

⁵¹⁸ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 4.

⁵¹⁹ “We are compost, not posthuman; we inhabit the humusities, not the humanities. Philosophically and materially, I am a compostist, not a posthumanist. Critters – human and not – become-with each other, compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in ecological evolutionary developmental earthy worlding and unworlding.” Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 97.

events differently, creating seating and tables for workshops, elements for displaying artworks, stages, a bar, a DJ setup, and so on. Stirnimann-Stojanovic understood the “MODULAR STRUCTURE” as a work of art that needed to be taken care of, referring to the object’s life cycle.⁵²⁰ Consequently, we managed to transport the display system to Kassel, where it was (re)used for the staging of the “Compost Network” for *documenta fifteen*. We also found a new home for the furniture after *documenta*; it will remain (for the time being) in an off-space in Kassel. With this structure, we were able to stage very different events in terms of theme and content, but they were visually connected by the “MODULAR STRUCTURE”.



Fig. 52: Installation view of “Composting Knowledges” with various remnants of passed artistic events staged on Stirnimann-Stojanovic’s “MODULAR STRUCTURE”, 11 June 2022, OnCurating Project Space. Photo: Anja Wurm.

⁵²⁰ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-opening/>.



Fig. 53: Installation view of the commonly staged space of the “Composting Knowledge Network” at *documenta fifteen*, Kassel. The “MODULAR STRUCTURE” by Stirnimann-Stojanovic. Photo: Ronald Kolb.

At the end of the exhibitionary project in Zurich on 11 June 2022, many artworks and residual installations from the previous events were still on display. On this day, Stefanie Knobel and Samrat Banerjee (Institute for Plant, Animal and Human Migration) staged their participatory performance “Training to Access Ecology as a Migratory System #2 – Oceanic entanglements” in the crowded exhibition space.⁵²¹ The performance, a mix of a theatrical play, lecture and workshop, involved the public in a theatre-like participation: the audience was asked to help install certain objects and was invited to take embodied actions. Thematically, the work asked about colonial entanglements in ecology from a local standpoint in Switzerland.

⁵²¹ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-oceanic-entanglements/>.



Fig. 54: Installation view of the participatory performance “Training to Access Ecology as a Migratory System #2 – Oceanic Entanglements”, “Composting Knowledges” by Stefanie Knobel and Samrat Banerjee (Institute for Plant, Animal and Human Migration), 11 June 2022, OnCurating Project Space. Photo: Anja Wurm.

This event was followed by the hybrid “Loving Water Workshop” by James Jack and Mina Elison, from Donkey Mill Art Center, Hawaii.⁵²² Here, participants communally engaged in a deep listening exercise led by James Jack, who facilitated a sensitive exchange about the different situated relationships to water and the oceanic. I want to end with two more examples, highlighting the diverse contributions to this project, which could be seen as arbitrary programming. Club La Fafa, a diverse group working on migration and refugee experiences in Switzerland, hosted the informal gathering “How can we practice #radicalwelcoming?”⁵²³ Over a cup of tea, an intimate exchange took place about the everyday experiences of refugees in Zurich, touching on topics such as law, culture and gender. It was no more than an evening of discussion, but an unusual encounter with people from different backgrounds and life experiences, where everyone had agency and was heard despite language barriers.

⁵²² <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-loving-water-workshop/>.

⁵²³ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-radicalwelcoming/>.

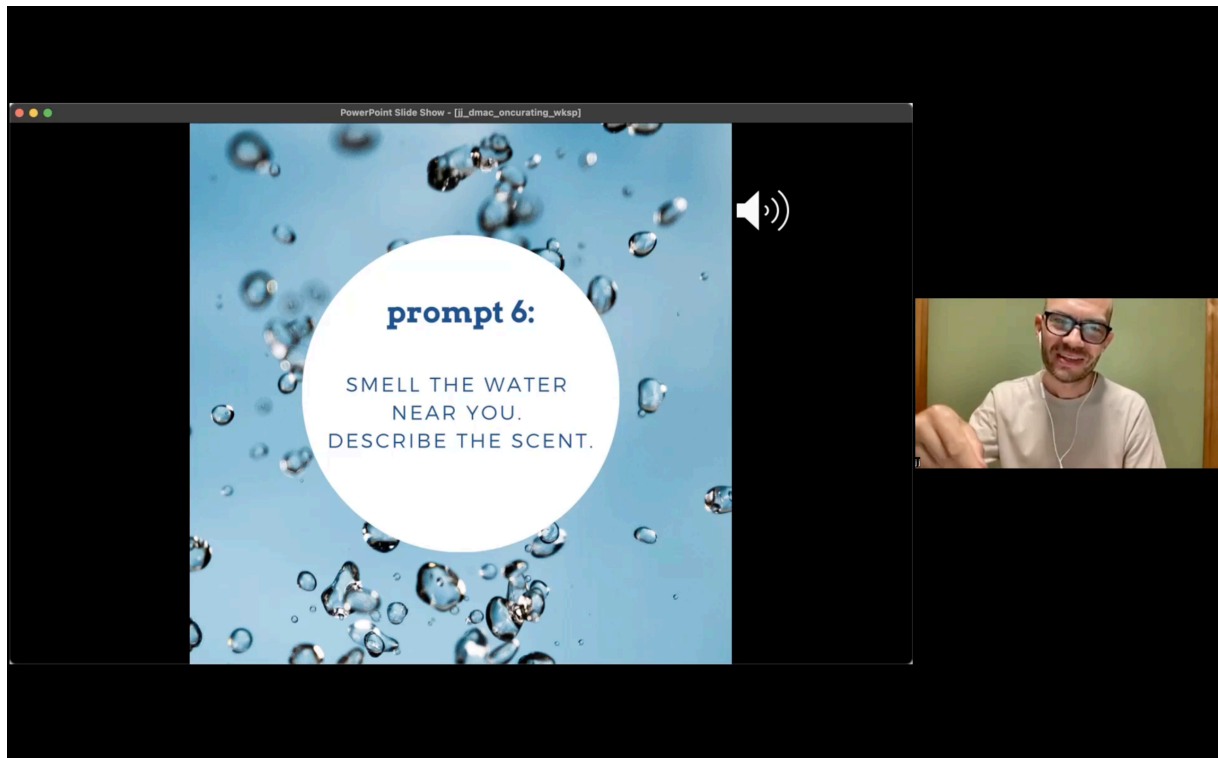


Fig. 55: Screenshot of the hybrid “Loving Water Workshop” by James Jack and Mina Ellison, 11 June 2022, OnCurating Project Space. Screenshot.



Fig. 56: Installation view of “How can we practice #radicalwelcoming?” staged by Club La Fafa, OnCurating Project Space. Photo: Anja Wurm.

Finally, in a similar practice of convening, the performance/reading workshop “Mother Maiz” played out. “Mother Maiz” was performed by ffff (hosted by Leah Nehmert, Mariana Murcia and Laurie Mlodzik), an artist group experimenting with fermentation processes.⁵²⁴ Perfectly combining the social gatherings in the exhibition’s contact zone with the more-than-human interplay of humans and bacteria in a fermentation process, the participants produced chicha through collaborative practice. Chicha is a maize beer that was and is traditionally made by masticating cooked corn and collecting the spit to let it ferment over time. The fermentation process is triggered by the saliva of the communal body, a bodily shared experience in the literal sense, producing a light alcoholic drink. For the workshop, ffff had prepared reading material. Participants took turns reading aloud, while the others chewed and collected the soaked corn. This encounter exemplifies the material-subjective conflation of what composting might offer. On the one hand, the communal gathering of a diverse group of people discussing postcolonial theory and literature in Zurich, Switzerland, demonstrates a governmental awareness of global interconnectedness; on the other hand, the gathering makes a more-than-human interdependence apparent (the bacteria are with us).



Fig. 57: Setup for the workshop “Mother Maiz” by ffff, 12 May 2022, OnCurating Project Space. Photo: ffff.

⁵²⁴ <https://oncurating-space.org/compost-mother-maiz/>.

Composting (Knowledges) as a Curatorial Method

If one is ready to take the concept of “Composting Knowledge” seriously, one might arrive at a promising new understanding that makes visible the concurrency (or ubiquity?) of an ecologically motivated, interdependent, more-than-human approach and the self-critical, situated knowledge formations of the epistemic apparatus. This approach simultaneously addresses ecological consciousness (carbon footprint, production of waste, toxicity) and an epistemic violence still executed through exclusionary educational structures. Thus, to apply the practice of “Compost” and “Composting Knowledge” to the exhibitionary complex, its knowledge production and discourse, is to create exhibitions as a lively and living contact zone – an assemblage full of bodies, minds and things – that enables critical and self-critical thinking together in non-representational practice, a collective-governmental thinking that is aware of the level of representation, an encounter aware of its more-than-human environment. Compost as a method of curating thus means dealing with many different and differing elements in an ever-changing space of contact, arbitrary, unclear, chaotic, confusing constellations and open outcomes. This method also must find answers for “toxic” elements. Ideally, only preferred waste and scraps should enter a compost pile, but in reality, a total control of access cannot be sustained; a certain “chaos” needs to be embraced. Returning to our exhibition project, we had heated moments of friction. In a well-established exhibitionary tradition of singling out artworks in a neat spatial constellation of objects and things, artists are used to finding a defined space for their artworks that is separate from the works of other artists. In our experimental exhibition project, which followed a curatorial method of “composting”, there were constantly changing set-ups, with new works added almost every week, and the remnants of performances left in the space. Some artists embraced this principle of digestion and were willing to expose their work in quite unconventional ways, often beyond their control. Others felt frustrated and demanded that room be made for their work (which is also an appropriate dynamic for a compost pile). One group of artists even cleared out the space to install their own group show, which rather breaks with the idea of a “growing” exhibition with interchanging elements on display. This was an uncontrolled insertion that is still a reaction within the rules of a wild compost.

Composting Knowledges as an Epistemic Method

The representation and reproduction of specific knowledges in educational apparatuses are structurally similar to exhibition-making. What keeps specific knowledge formations on display has much to do with the legitimation processes of the knowledge system itself, that is, with the introspection into epistemic formations. Being critical towards a learned and trained epistemic rationale, crucial questions towards knowledge production have to put forward: not only what stories are told, but also, who can tell the stories that one gets to see in the exhibition? What can we learn in museums and in schools, and how do we learn? What sources do we have access to, and which ones are neglected? The rules and infrastructure of learning environments are always connected to the larger fields of politics and power. These

infrastructures of knowledge necessarily produce exclusions (exclusion in terms of representation in the museum, in academia, in politics...), but when the field of knowledge production becomes fossilised and no longer allows for any dynamic exchange of legitimised subjects, we can speak of what Gayatri Spivak has called “epistemic violence”. Violent epistemic structures deny categorical access to certain themes, topics and subjects. Spivak defined this term in the context of Subaltern Studies, within a larger framework that hints at “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity”.⁵²⁵ This would be an episteme at work that constantly reproduces structural exclusion, as learning infrastructures often produce subjects in a certain way and exclude others through practices of othering, denying them the right to speak (publicly, scientifically, politically ...). “Composting” as an epistemic metaphor of a wild, temporally uncontrolled, yet constantly self-regulating contact zone of shared knowledge production, where various snippets and loose ends, remnants and leftovers of partial and situated knowledges converge in heated surroundings, ready to be fermented – re- and de-constructed, hopefully to become digestible again.

Outlook

My starting point for expanding exhibitionary projects to include aspects of governmental concerns led me to post-exhibitionary practices, which are more about creating contact zone-like environments that allow for an open exchange with various actors. Typically, these projects express the desire to step out of the “autonomous” institutional framework of art and enter the public sphere and the social fabric of cohabitation in all aspects of life, politics, economy, science... My research on Jeanne van Heeswijk’s *Philadelphia Assembled* and ruangrupa’s *documenta fifteen* revealed two distinct approaches in this field. Both produced artistic-governmental evocations, both projects were heated contact zones and, like all practices, not fully determinable. My own projects created moments of exchange, yet in rather defined dimensions and rather controlled circumstances. I see my future practice much more engaged in what I would call the expanded field of ecology, creating active learning and teaching environments enabling epistemologically sensitive and ecologically oriented projects, in governmental awareness of the interdependence of governing the self and others.

⁵²⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 78.

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7 Appendix

7.1 List of Own Projects

Exhibitionary Practice (Selection)

- 2017 Shared Project, “**De-Colonizing Art Institutions**”, Co-curator, 23 May– 06 June 2017, OnCurating Project Space, Zurich, <https://oncurating-space.org/de-colonizing-art-institutions>
- 2018 Shared Project, “**Queering the exhibition**”
Film-based screening exhibition, Co-curator, 23 March – 11 April 2018, OnCurating Project Space, Zurich, <https://oncurating-space.org/queering-the-exhibition>
- 2019 “**Small Projects for Coming Communities**”
co-curator, main organizer, 12 May – 15 June 2019 at Hospitalhof Stuttgart, <https://www.comingcommunities.org/en/activations/hospitalhof-2>
- 2020 Shared Project, “**Games.Fights.Encounters**”
Exhibition and mediation project on art and activism, co-curator, 7–28 March 2020, OnCurating Project Space, Zurich, <https://oncurating-space.org/games-fights-encounters>

- 2021 Shared Project, **“Are we all here? Exploring Embodied Virtuality Today”**
hybrid exhibition on digital intimacy, co-curator, main organizer,
16 October – 27 November 2021,
<https://oncurating-space.org/are-we-all-here-exploring-embodied-virtuality-today/>
- 2022 **“Compost – The Open Bin (Composting Knowledge)”**
A sequential and choreographed series of interlocking events, Co-curator,
main organizer,
11 March – 12 June 2022, OnCurating Project Space, Zurich,
<https://oncurating-space.org/compost-bin>
- 2023 Shared Project, **“stories of water”**
Multi-part exhibition project, co-curator, main organizer,
Nov 2022 – March 2023, OnCurating Project Space, Zurich,
<https://oncurating-space.org/stories-of-water>

Writing & Editing (Selection)

- 2017 ***OnCurating Issue 34: De-Colonizing Art Institutions: Artists’ Book***
Eds. Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, December 2017
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-34.html>
OnCurating Issue 35: De-Colonizing Art Institutions
Eds. Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, December 2017
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-35.html>
- 2018 ***OnCurating Issue 39: Draft: Global Biennial Survey 2018***
Eds. Ronald Kolb, Shwetal Patel, June 2018
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-39.html>
- 2019 ***OnCurating Issue 41: Centres/Peripheries – Complex Constellations***
Eds. Ronald Kolb, Camille Regli, Dorothee Richter, June 2019
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-41.html>
OnCurating Issue 43: Revisiting Black Mountain. Cross-Disciplinary Experiments and Their Potential for Democratization
Eds. Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, December 2019
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-43.html>
- 2020 ***OnCurating Issue 46: Contemporary Art Biennials – Our Hegemonic Machines*** Eds. Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, Dorothee Richter, June 2019
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-46.html>
OnCurating Issue 48: Zurich Issue: Dark Matter, Grey Zones, Red Light and Bling Bling

- Eds. Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, September 2020
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-48.html>
- 2022 ***OnCurating Issue 53: Situated Knowledges – Curating and Art on the Move***
 Eds. Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, June 2022
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-53.html>
OnCurating Issue 54: Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Practices – documenta fifteen
 Eds. Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, September 2022
<https://www.on-curating.org/issue-54.html>

Organizing Symposia and Workshops (Selection)

- 2017 Symposium: **"Decolonizing Art Institutions"**, Kunstmuseum Basel, 20–21 June, 2017, co-organizer, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/128696/de-colonizing-art-institutions>
- 2018 Festival & Workshop **"Learning for Life"**, Merz Akademie Stuttgart, 5–9 November 2018, Curatorial lead, <https://www.merz-akademie.de/veranstaltungsreihen/learning-for-life>
- 2019 Symposium **"Small Projects for Coming Communities"**, 12 May 2019 at Hospitalhof Stuttgart, Co-curator, <https://www.comingcommunities.org>
 Workshop **"Curating on the Move – Venice Biennale 2019"**, June 2019, Venice, co-organizer.
- 2020 Symposium: **"Contemporary Art Biennials—Our Hegemonic Machines in Times of Emergency"**, 27–28 June 2020, alongside Bucharest Biennial 2020, co-organizer, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/333273/contemporary-art-biennials-our-hegemonic-machines-in-states-of-emergency>.
- 2021 Symposium and workshop series: **"Situated Knowledges – Art and Curating on the Move"**, 25–27 June 2021, Hybrid event, Tai Kwun Contemporary and Migros Museum, co-organiser, <https://shared-campus.com/themes/cultures-histories-futures/curatorial-workshop/curating-on-the-move-situated-knowledges>
- 2022 Summer School **"Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education"**, CAMP notes on education, documenta fifteen, 23 June – 8 July 2022, Kassel, Germany, <https://camp-notesoneducation.de/projects/commoning-curatorial-and-artistic-education-2/>

2023 Workshop “**Commoning Collective Care**”, Collaboration with TBA21 Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, 14–17 June 2023, Córdoba, Spain, <https://tba21.org/CommoningCollectiveCare>

7.2 Interview Project “**Curating! explored with a camera**”.

In the last 20 years, new production and formats in contemporary art and culture have emerged. These newly established formats of curatorial practice have gained enormous visibility.

Curatorial work defines a complex field, combining various professions with a research-based form of (re-)presentation in art and culture. It has also structured the field hierarchically. Nonetheless, this rather new profession has not been thoroughly examined and is still in flux. With this project, we want to provide the first comprehensive digital platform on curatorial practices worldwide. As a first step, we can show the thinking behind the making of cultural and artistic formats as a form of meaning production that is concentrated in the figure of the curator, their background strategies, and specific knowledge production. We will also compare different concepts of curating from various international contexts. We conceive curatorial practice as a discursive formation that is embedded at the same time in local contexts as well as in the international discourse on art and culture.

Questionnaire

Curatorial Statements: Starting with the question of one’s own concept of curating, we want to show that curating is a kind of cultural production that is highly influenced by artistic practice, by books, by theoretical inputs, by important moments in personal experiences and by socio-political situations. We are not emphasising a biographical approach, because for us curating is a field that develops in relation to other practices, and as a co-authored type of production.

Exhibition-Making: We have asked about the material aspect of curating, the planning, designing and displaying methods, the obstacles one encounters in mounting an exhibition, ways of dealing with production and materiality and the way to work together with artists and other involved partners; we have tried to obtain behind-the-scenes information.

Political Aspects and Dependencies: A curator often acts as a mediator between institutions and artists; s/he is also expected to transfer meaning to the public, therefore the position is a very relational one. A curator has to take into consideration agendas of an institution, the politics of the city and country where the project or exhibition is produced, and s/he has to have connections to collectors and to funding bodies. Also, nowadays a curator, together with artists, is expected and also wants to offer a specific political view, or a position on a relevant topic. Curatorial projects can be censored and are under surveillance, which obviously differs considerably depending on the specific country.

Gender Aspects, Identity and Community: Like all other parts of a specific society, curating is an engendered space, where gender equality has not yet been reached. Furthermore, an exhibition will also make proposals about gender, about communities, about identities. Has the respective interview partner thought about this in his or her practice, as a curator (in relation to artists, in relation to the audience), and is s/he aware of this as director of an institution? Is s/he conceiving the society as a diverse community, and does this eventually have an influence on his or her practice?

Race/Class/Postcolonial Aspects: “Race”, class and gender play a major role in the arts, as today there seems to be general agreement that artists and curators from non-Western origins need to be included; nevertheless, underrepresentation persists. How and in what way does an interviewee take this into consideration? How much are art and curating used as a national representation or a tourist attraction? How can decolonizing find an entrée into contemporary art and art institutions? For whom does an exhibition make sense?

Strategies as a Curator (advice to young curators): Are there strategies to becoming a curator? How does one build good relationships with artists? How does one position oneself on the map, and which kinds of self-representation are important?

Personality Cult: What is the individual’s encounter with the international star system in the arts? What does it mean to be a very well-known person? We asked the well-known curators in particular about their personal situation. How does gossip work in the arts?

Art Market: How does the interviewee see the influence of the art market on curating? What are the problems, and how has the art system been reorganised in recent years?

Digital Space: How is the digital space used for curating, mediating and producing curatorial projects? How does the digital space as a new epistemic relation of space and time and as a new public space influence and change curating in the future? Detailed information, including the questionnaire of the research project titled “CURATING – explored with a camera. A digital platform on curatorial practice” can be found in the Appendix.

List of Interview partners

	Date	Name	Institution/website	Function
1	Feb	Peter Weibel	ZKM http://www.peter-weibel.at/ http://zkm.de/	Director
2	Feb	Hans Ulrich Obrist	Serpentine Gallery http://www.serpentinegalleries.org https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Ulrich_Obrist	Curator
3	March	Pauline J.Yao	M+ Hong Kong http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/mplus	Curator, Chinese art
4	March	Christina Li	Spring Workshop http://www.springworkshop.org	Curator, contemporary art
5	March	Aric Chen	M+ Hong Kong http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/mplus	Curator, Design
6	March	Qinyi Lim	Parasite Hong Kong http://www.parasite.org.hk/en/about	Curator Art Education
7	March	Freya Chou	Parasite Hong Kong http://www.parasite.org.hk/en/about	Curator Art Education
8	March	Cosmin Costinas	Parasite Hong Kong http://www.parasite.org.hk/en/about http://curatorsintl.org/collaborators/cosmin-costinas	Director, Curator
9	March	Yung Ma	M+ Hong Kong http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/mplus	Curator, contemporary art
10	March	Hammad Nasar	Asia Art Archive http://www.aaa.org.hk/	Head of research and programming
11	June	Joshua Simon	BAT YAM MUSEUM MOBY https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joshua_Simon http://moby.org.il/	Director, curator
12	June	Ruti Direktor	Tel Aviv Art Museum http://www.tamuseum.org.il/default.aspx	contemporary art curator

13	June	Meir Tati	Bat Yam / Holon Centre of Digital Art http://www.meirtati.com/ http://www.digitalartlab.org.il/article.asp?thread_id=14	Artist and the head of community and education program at Moby museum of bat yam
14	June	Eyal Danon	Holon Centre of Digital Art http://www.digitalartlab.org.il/article.asp?thread_id=14; http://www.digitalartlab.org.il	Director, Curator
15	June	Hila Cohen-Schneidermann	Petach -Tikva Museum of Art Israel http://www.petachtikvamuseum.com/en/	Curator
16	June	Chen Tamir	CCA Centre for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv http://cca.org.il/ http://chentamir.com/	Curator
17	June	Sergio Edelsztein	CCA Centre for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv http://cca.org.il/ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergio_Edelsztein	Director, Curator
18	June	Lars Nittve	M+ Hong Kong http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/mplus https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lars_Nittve	Director
19	Aug	Stella Rollig	Lentos Museum Linz https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stella_Rollig http://www.lentos.at/html/de/index.aspx	Director
20	June	N'Gone Fall	Free lance http://www.artpace.org/artists_and_curators/ngone-fall	Curator
21	June	Omar Kholeif	Whitechapel Gallery, Ibaaz, etc. http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/	Curator
22	July	Oliver Ressler	http://www.ressler.at/category/projects/	Artist
23	Aug	Susa Gunzner	http://grandhotel-cosmopolis.org/de/2015/07/29/its-growing-ii/	Member of the collective

24		Ellen Blumenstein	KunstWerke Berlin http://www.kw-berlin.de/de/	Director Curator
25		Marius Babias	Neuer Berliner Kunstverein www.nbk.org	Director, Curator
26	Aug	Rein Wolfs	Bundeskunsthalle Bonn https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rein_Wolfs http://www.bundeskunsthalle.de/ueber-uns/die-bundeskunsthalle.html	Director, curator
27	Aug	Florian Ebner	Museum Folkwang, Essen http://www.museum-folkwang.de/de/sammlung/fotografische-sammlung.html https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florian_Ebner	Head of Photography Department
28	Aug	Rob Hamelijnc and Nienke Terpsma	Fucking Good Art http://www.fuckinggoodart.nl/	Artist/curator
29	Aug	Binna Choi	CASCO Utrecht http://cascoprojects.org/	Curator
30	Aug	Beatrix Ruf	Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beatrix_Ruf http://www.stedelijk.nl/en	Director
31	Oct	Daniel Baumann	Kunsthalle Zürich http://kunsthallezurich.ch/de	Director
32		Bice Curiger	Foundation Vincent Van Gogh Arles www.fondation-vincentvangogh-arles.org	Director
33	Dec	Hedwig Saxenhuber	Springerin http://www.springerin.at/ Kyiv Biennial	Editor, Curator/ Director
34	Dec	Luisa Ziaja	21er Haus Museum of Contemporary Art www.21erhaus.at	Curator for contemporary art
35	Dec	Can Gülcü Stuwerstrasse 25/5 A-1020 Wien	Wienwoche, Shedhalle www.wienwoche.org	Artistic and Managerial director

36	Dec	Vanessa Joan Miller	Kunsthalle Wien http://www.kunsthallewien.at/#/de	Dramaturge
37	Dec	Nicolaus Schaffhausen	Kunsthalle Wien http://www.kunsthallewien.at/#/de	Director
38	Dec	Katharina Morawek	Shedhalle Zürich http://www.shedhalle.ch/2015/	Director/ Curator
39	Jan	Iris Dressler / Hans Christ	Württembergischer Kunstverin, Stuttgart http://www.wkv-stuttgart.de/en/program/	Directors and curators
40	Feb	Anshuman Dasgupta	Art History department in Kalabhavan, Santiniketan (Visva Bharati University) http://art.gold.ac.uk/tagore/anshuman-dasgupta/	Curator and lecturer
41	Feb	Kate Fowle	chief curator for the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow and Director-at-Large at Independent Curators International (ICI) in New York http://curatorsintl.org/collaborators/kate_fowle	Chief Curator, director at large
42	Feb	Monica Narula	Raqs Media Collective	Member of the collective
43	Feb	Nkule Mabaso	Gallery Curator, University Gallery, University of Cape Town, Michaelis School of Arts	Curator, Director
44	Feb	Kadiatou Diallo	SPARKS http://www.sparck.org/about/171-about-kadiatou-diallo	Curator
45	Feb	Riason Naidoo	Curator, former director of African Museum in Cape Town http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/16/blood-on-the-walls-as-south-african-national-gallery-axes-first-black-director	Curator, former Director

			https://artbeat046.wordpress.com/2015/09/08/the-south-african-art-world-according-to-riason-naidoo/ http://curatorsintl.org/collaborators/riason_naidoo	
46	Feb	Terry, Ntone Edjabe Chimurenga	http://www.chimurenga.co.za/ project-based mutable object, a print magazine, a workspace, and platform for editorial and curatorial activities.	Editors, contributors
47	Feb	Khwezi Gule	http://curatorsintl.org/collaborators/khwezi_gule Chief Curator: Soweto Museums: Hector Pieterson Memorial & Museum and Kliptown Open Air Museum	Chief Curator
48	Feb	Nontobeko Ntombela	Lecturer, Curatorial programme University of Johannesburg http://curatorsintl.org/collaborators/nontobeko_ntombela	Lecturer
49	Feb	Jay Pather	Head of Performance Art Institute Michaelis School of Art, Cape Town https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jay_Pather director of Afrovibes	Head of Performance Institute
50	March	Yuko Hasegawa	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo http://www.mot-art-museum.jp/deu/	Chief curator
51	March	Bruno Latour	ZKM Reset Modernity	Guest curator (and philosopher)
52	July	Sarah Rifky	director of CIRCA, the Cairo International Resource Center for Art.	Founder/ curator/ co-curator Doc. 13
53	Aug	Ashok Sukumaran & Shaina Anand / CAMP	CAMP Mumbai www.studio.camp	Founder

54	Jan17	Ute Meta Bauer	NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore	Director
55	Jan17	Patrick D. Flores	Professor of Art Studies at the Department of Art Studies at the University of the Philippines	Curator
56	Jan17	Shwetal. Patel	Kochi Muziris Biennale	cultural producer/organizer
57	Jan17	Jennifer Teo + Tien Woon	Post-Museum, independent organisation post-museum.org	Artists, curators, founders
58	Jun 17	Maria Lind	Tensta Kunsthall, Stockholm	Director, curator
59	June 17	Axel Wieder	Index Contemporary Art, Stockholm	Director, Curator
60	Jun 17	Azar Mahmoudian	Iranian curator (project space together with Tirdad Zolgar) and Gwangju Biennial, 2016	curator
61	Oct 17	Anuradha Vikram	18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica, LA, 18thstreet.org Facebook < https://www.facebook.com/18thStreetArts >	Artistic Director
62	Oct 17	Hamza Walker	Laxart, Los Angeles http://www.dtc-wsuv.org/badavis16/ma1/	Director
63	Oct 17	Jason Underhill, Mara Mc Carthy	The Box LA Gallery	Directors and curators and anything else
64	Oct 17	Dena Beard	The Lab, 2948 16th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 http://www.thelab.org/info/	director
65	Oct 17	Apsara DiQuinzio	Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art and Phyllis C. Wattis, Matrix Curator UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA)	curator
66	Oct 17	Lawrence Rinder	UC Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive 2120 Oxford Street #2250 Berkeley CA 94720	Director

			bampfa.org	
67	Mar 17	Michelle Wong	Asia Arts Archive	Curator / Educator
68		Fatima Hellberg	Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Kunstverein Bonn	Curator
69	Dec 8	Heike Munder	Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst	Director
70	Jan 30	Jeanne van Heeswijk	Jeanneworks, Philadelphia Assembled	Artist
		Bonaventure Ndikung	Savvy Contemporary	Artistic Director