

# Contemporary Research Intensive

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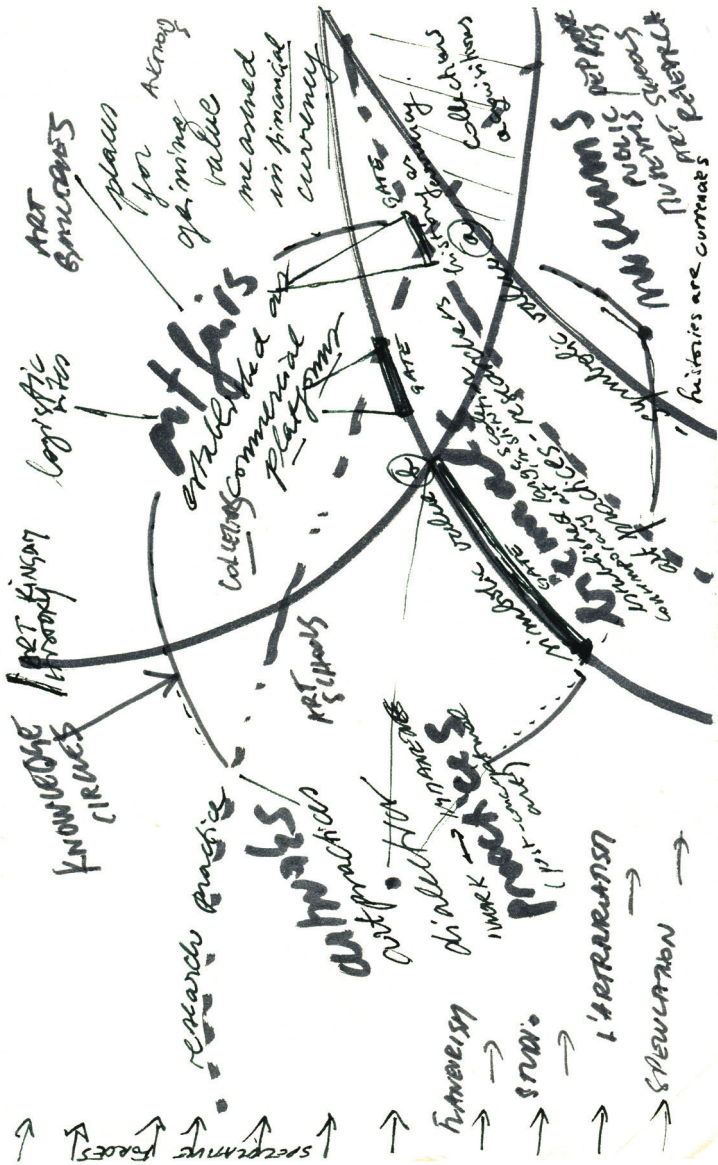
*Contemporary Research Intensive* follows an event organized in the context of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Art Biennale to investigate the concept of “contemporaneity.” Gathering together artists/curators/researchers through an open call, we asked how the temporal complexity that follows from the coming together of different temporalities in the same present could be made known in the context of contemporary art research, and particularly through practices that involve exhibitionary forms. The temporal structure of current large-scale exhibitions at the time of the workshop — such as documenta 14 or the Venice Biennale provided concurrent examples of how contemporaneity could be seen to be produced through such events. We were interested to explore how researching the contemporary and contemporary forms of research might come together to generate new ways of thinking and alternative forms of knowledge.

The book you are now reading is both part and the result of this process, the intensive sharing of ideas and working together to produce something that might capture the spirit of both the discussions at that time and the publication process as a temporal form. If the ideas seem rather eclectic and speedy, this is indeed one of the consequences of a willfully collective and relatively non-hierarchical process, where the editing of materials for publication continued beyond the workshop as a way to continue exchange and develop ideas. Setting ourselves against the dominant academic paradigm in this way is clearly a risk and we make no particular claims for success, only inasmuch as the book reflects our aim to engage with the contemporaneity of ideas and their distribution through printed form as necessarily work in progress.

“Contemporary Research Intensive” was held on October 3–4, 2017, at the Research Pavilion, Sala del Camino, Chiostro SS. Cosma e Damiano, Giudecca, 621, Venice. See <http://contemporaneity.au.dk/workshop/>.

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Research Intensive: Workshop Key Threads

## BIENNIALS, TRIENNIALS, DOCUMENTAS

To correctly pose the question of how biennials, triennials and documentas relate to the production and presentation of contemporary art, a preliminary, temporal, remark is needed. In fact, it is in the cultural and geopolitical aftermaths of the fall of the Berlin Wall (followed by the virulent expansion of the Internet) that we can recognize the lowest common denominator of the phenomenon of the international large-scale exhibition as we experience it today. Therefore, the dismantling of the *three worlds order* after 1989 and the radical capitalist escalation that followed the dissolution of Russian Communism define the primary historical and geopolitical frame of this essay.<sup>1</sup>

This remark is important because, after the loss of the horizon of communist revolution “a critique of the dialectics of social exchange in capitalist culture should be at the heart of any critical theory or practice of contemporary art [...]”<sup>2</sup> Addressing the relation of the periodical large-scale exhibition-form to such critique is pivotal to decipher the incongruences grounding most of the contrasting views on the historical and political potential underlying biennials, triennials, and documentas.

My argument is that although international large-scale exhibitions are the privileged form for the presentation of the coming together of the different times and social spaces of the contemporary *in art*, contemporary post-conceptual art’s critique of the dialectics of social exchange in capitalist culture cannot be reduced to such occasions. Arguably, in fact, art’s intellectual freedom stays in the very indeterminacy of its forms and politics of presentation. I am not simply remarking once again on the friction between artists’

1. I am here referring to Russian Communism since the fall of the wider concept of international Soviet Communism.

2. Stewart Martin, “Critique of Relational Aesthetics,” *Third Text* 21, no. 4 (July 2007): 386.

and curators' authorship in the programmatic contexts of large-scale periodical exhibitions. Rather, I am stressing the importance of distinguishing the critical potential of contemporary art (practice) from its thematic and chronological compartmentalization in the context of the biennial form. In other words, contemporary art coincides neither with the art presented in the last biennial, nor with that being selected for the upcoming ones. A banal but very much needed statement of the obvious.

Recent critical discussion on the nature of international large-scale exhibitions orbits around two opposed but inherently interconnected poles. On the one hand, biennials, triennials, and documentas are approached genealogically, confronting the transformations of individual biennials across history, analyzing the social impact on their discrete geopolitical environments, and their importance for a global, post-colonial, history of contemporary art and curating. The different strands of this approach share the idea that "curating the history of the present may contribute to this endeavor to move beyond the global capitalist status quo."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, a loose variety of left-wing approaches labels the international large-scale exhibition form as just another symbol of the high capitalist process of art's commodification.

Of course, the genealogical approach of the first order of critiques is indispensable to investigate the impact of the biennale-form on ways of perceiving and historicizing art today. By virtue of this, however, international large-scale exhibitions also reveal to be *forming machines*. The history of the present *curated* in this context produces a historicist, chronological, partitioning of time. There is no movement beyond the global capitalist status quo. The periodical,

3. Nanne Buurman and Dorothee Richter, "documenta: Curating the History of the Present," *On Curating* 33 (June 2017): 7.

international, large-scale exhibition format cannot transfigure into a political form of historical change. Biennials, triennials, and documentas have not developed in order to question and overcome their own conditions of material and financial possibility.<sup>4</sup> Thematic and curatorial innovativeness, strategic geopolitical locations, and increasingly complex spaces for critical confrontation are, logically, insufficient strategies to bypass this limit.<sup>5</sup>

While successfully recognizing the political sterility inherent to the biennial form, the second order of critiques tendentially neglects that all conceptions and realizations of autonomous spaces for and of art — either social, revolutionary, or institutional — belong to the history of art's liberation from the heteronomous determinations of Church and feudal patronage by early capitalist commodification processes. This is why a conscious struggle against the alienation of social relations is so important for contemporary art.

Two considerations necessarily follow:

I. The idea that the international large-scale exhibition form configures a critical space able to unlock innovative forms of democratic, political experimentation is strongly rhetorical. It is naïve to think of the transnational spaces of the art industry as the *locus* for a structural rethinking of established social and political relations. The speculative collectivities of contemporary biennials will hardly transform into bearers of common political interests.

4. "Documenta 11 is proposed as the *détournement* of the spectacular visibility of Documenta, in order to pursue a destructive critique of Documenta. But this is par for the course of contemporary exhibiting. Otherwise, let's face it, Documenta wouldn't have let it happen." Stewart Martin, "A New World Art?," *Radical Philosophy*, no. 122 (November/December 2003): 19.

5. Interestingly, the temporal frame in which we are moving also corresponds to the space-time where the art historical *social turn* and the critical discourse of *relational aesthetics* were conceived. Both these ideas, in fact, are grounded in the understanding of art after institutional critique as the space for the production of a specific kind of sociability, where artworks embody an immediate critique of the social relations subtending commodification.

II. The international large-scale exhibition form cannot be simply dismissed. It is, in fact, an extremely aware and self-critical institutional stage for contemporary art's confrontation with the changed, global conditions where its struggle against the subjection to the commodity form takes place.<sup>6</sup> But does it exhaust the formal possibilities for art's critique of capitalist forms of social alienation? The answer is no. It does not. It can not.

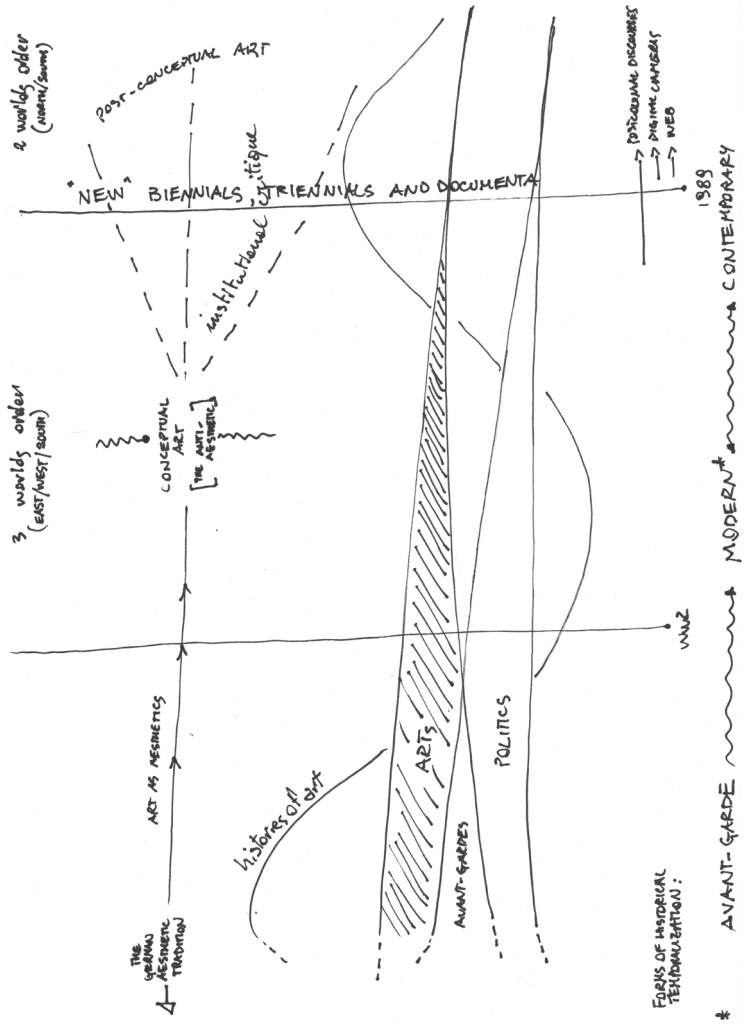
*Contemporary art is neither the art presented in the last biennial, nor that selected for upcoming ones.* I am not here attributing a discrete political potential to the art falling outside of institutionalized exhibition forms. Of course, the radically distributive unity of contemporary post-conceptual art is itself necessarily subjected to structural institutional pressures, practical exhibiting opportunities and individual artistic choices.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, there is still reason to think that at the very forefront of contemporary art's "immanent self-critique"—of art's struggle against commodification—remains the need for a constant systematic problematization and transformation of art's own multifaceted forms of publicity and presentation.<sup>8</sup> Biennials, triennials, and documentas cannot be an exception.

6. Martin, "A New World Art?": 28, 167.

7. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not At All: The Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 161.

8. "Art's resistance to commodification is obliged to take the form of an immanent critique or self-criticism. This suggests that the self-critical constitution of modern art is due to its commodity-form, and that this is misrecognized by various formalist narratives." Martin, "Critique of Relational Aesthetics," 373.





## EVIDENCE ONE

I use my autobiography. I will be honest. I am a product of cultural circumstances. I am a product of the East, imploding. I am the result of two ideologies clashing. A macro car crash. I am the exponential rise of capitalism, I am YouTube, YouPorn, H&M, Zara. I am the war against terrorism, #blacklivesmatter, #queerrights, Putin, and the iPhone 8. I am surrounded by screens, nomadic and mindful; the eternal spectator of the 21st century.

A young woman, born in Germany, growing up elsewhere, speaking 7 languages, being tormented by my Russian origins and the decision to become a writer. I question origin, gender roles, culture, patriarchy, and expectations. At the age of 24, I have lived in 5 countries and never visited Russia. I have been studying nonstop without taking detours or gap years, yet have travelled to 20 countries in and outside of Europe. My health record includes anorexia at the age of 20, burn out and panic disorder at the age of 22, heart rhythm disorder, muscular tissue disorder, chronic pain and migraines, several allergies, chronic eczema, hormonal and personality disorders, and a number of psychosomatic symptoms. I have nearly died 5 times and I am insecure about my artistic abilities. Like I said, just a young woman; white, heterosexual, educated.

*Autobiography — A depiction of a specific, relatively short time (bound to the time frame of an individual's life at most), in an immediate way. The subject is in control of telling its story and decides what to share and how to share it. The subject shapes evidence of its contemporaneity.*

## SOUTH

Long before the opening of documenta 14 in Athens and Kassel in 2017, the quinquennial exhibition inhabited the Greek arts and culture magazine *South as a State of Mind*. From the preparatory stages of the large-scale exhibition in the fall of 2015, the magazine temporarily became the documenta 14 journal, publishing two annual issues until the conclusion of the exhibition in Kassel. As a way to transcend or unite the different temporalities and localities of the bi-located documenta — split between Germany and Greece as simultaneously real and metaphorical sites — the journal aimed to unfold as a manifestation of documenta 14 rather than a discursive format that framed the topics of the eventual exhibition.

*South as a State of Mind* first came to existence as a bi-annual arts and culture magazine, published in Greece in 2013 and distributed internationally. Founded by curator, writer and editor Marina Fokidis, who served as the head of artistic office in the Athens section of documenta 14, the magazine was established upon a wish to “give form to the concept of South as a ‘state of mind’ rather than a set of fixed places on the map.”<sup>9</sup> Through critical essays, artist projects, interviews, and features, “people from different — literal or metaphorical — ‘Souths’ renegotiate the southern attitude, partly to define it and partly to invent it, within the post-crisis world. Opening up an unexpected dialogue among neighbourhoods, cities, regions, and approaches, *South as a State of Mind* is both a publication and a meeting point for shared intensities.”<sup>10</sup>

This is the horizon that documenta embarked on when occupying *South* as one of its primary existing structures

9. See Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter,” *South as a State of Mind*, #6, [documenta 14 #1] (Fall/Winter 2015); Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk “Editors’ Letter,” *South*

*as a State of Mind*, #8 [documenta 14 #3] (Fall/Winter 2016).

10. Latimer and Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter,” #6.

during its genesis. During the course of two years, from 2015 through the conclusion of the Kassel exhibition in 2017, *South* temporarily took on the role as host and transformed into the documenta 14 journal, edited by documenta 14's artistic director Adam Szymczyk and editor-in-chief Quinn Latimer. Thus, from an early stage the journal became part of documenta as a "thinking organism,"<sup>11</sup> aptly thought of as documenta 14's very own *Athenaeum* by documenta curator Dieter Roelstraete.<sup>12</sup> Taking part in the development of documenta as a continuous aesthetic, economic, political, and social experimentation, the journal invoked a space—real as well as imagined—where research, critique, art, and literature came together and formed, alongside the exhibitions, what they conceived of as "a theatre of actions."

Entitled *Learning from Athens*, documenta 14 operated in line with its long heritage of questioning pressing issues of the present—the contemporary condition, so to speak—in presenting what art is and can be in the present. In trying to understand the world that surrounds us, *South as a State of Mind* addressed this process of learning (or unlearning) in its first editorial letter: "In this process, we will insist on 'Learning from Athens' not as from the cradle of Western civilization but as a place where the contradictions of the contemporary world, embodied by loaded directionals like East and West, North and South, meet and clash."<sup>13</sup> Far more than actually being about Greece, the title asks of you to learn to see the historically dominated: striving to be a decentered post-colonial event, documenta 14 brought to the fore voices that normally do not get heard. In line with this achievement one of the tasks *South* set out to explore was the development of a new vocabulary,

11. Klaus Siebenhaar, *documenta: A Brief History of an Exhibition and its Contexts* (Berlin: B&S Siebenhaar Verlag, 2017), 71.

12. Dieter Roelstraete, "An Eight-Point Program for Fathoming German-Greek

Relations. *documenta 14: The View from Kassel*," *Mousse Magazine*, no. 58 (April–May 2017): 57.

13. Latimer and Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter," #6: 6.

to be performed by a multiplicity or “polyphony” of different voices.

Addressing a vast array of predicaments that formed the trajectories of our global present, the editors wished to offer an alternative cartography or “chorus,” focusing on often dissident and marginalized histories “rewritten” through the disparate forms that language takes. Through diverse forms and figures that structure our reading of the world, — letters, stories, parables, essays, diaries, speech acts, legal documents, propaganda, poetry, and other forms of literary hybrids — the publications inquired into different modes of address, thereby wishing to explore language itself. In the editorial letter of the third volume the editors elaborated on their interest in “inventing” a new vocabulary to better articulate their intentions while reflecting on the process of creating the project of documenta 14:

While *doing it*, we have collected a rich and historically well-founded critical, theoretical, and artistic vocabulary to challenge and perhaps eventually replace the worn [...] terms of a large international exhibition (or LIE). Instead of continuing to explain that this documenta 14 is not another readymade biennial, triennial, quadrennial, or even quinquennial (despite the fact that it has happened in a predictable five-year rhythm in the city of Kassel since the 1970s), we decided to focus our attention on languages — near extinct or near forgotten, suppressed or newly conjured — that better correspond to what is at stake here than the usual lexicon of art events, spectacles, LIEs, and other commodities.<sup>14</sup>

Opposing the spectacular, “eventual,” and commoditized character inherent in the biennial circuit — competing for

14. Latimer and Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter,” #8: 5.

contemporaneity (to borrow from Peter Osborne)<sup>15</sup>—the curatorial team of documenta 14 created an arena of decolonial, anti-fascist, indigenous, feminist, and queer deconstructive investigations, drawing attention to new or forgotten knowledge in order to further our understanding of our collective past before moving towards our future.<sup>16</sup> As stated in the opening remarks of the first editorial letter of *South*, the journal aimed at operating against the experience of a loss of history, often characterized as one of the prominent features of our contemporary condition, our contemporaneity<sup>17</sup>:

We have chosen to begin in this first issue by going back, in part, to some of the historical staging grounds of Western hegemony, which we believe might help us understand the often abstracted powers structuring our present, as well as the ways in which the practice of democracy and the ideals of freedom have always been inexorably tied to their denial. Thus does this first volume of the documenta 14 *South* work against the politics of forgetting—forgetfulness of the history of colonialism and mass enslavement and displacement that brought us here, to our collective contemporary world; and forgetfulness of the dissident histories and peoples that have often been left out of the Western canon.<sup>18</sup>

*All four documenta issues of South as a State of Mind can be found online at: [www.documenta14.de/en/south](http://www.documenta14.de/en/south). In addition, the online edition features content from the print magazine in English, German, and Greek.*

15. Peter Osborne, "Existential Urgency: Contemporaneity, Biennials and Social Form," *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, 24, no. 49–50 (2015): 186.

16. Adam Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness—Learning and Working from Athens," in *The documenta 14 Reader*, ed. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk

(Munich: Prestel, 2017), 37.

17. Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund, *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 9.

18. Latimer and Szymczyk, "Editors' Letter," #6: 6.

## THE ART MAGAZINE

The contemporary art magazine has become a major element within the art world. Not only is it an instrument to achieve artistic and institutional legitimation, or a means of creating and distributing local and international critical dialogue, but it is also a space for research and the formation of debate and discussion.

The magazine, as defined by Gwen Allen, is “a type of periodical: it is issued at regular intervals, and exists serially across a span of time.”<sup>19</sup> Its temporality is determined by recurrence and innovation. Publishing a magazine entails entering in direct contact with the present, as each consecutive issue replaces a previous one.<sup>20</sup> The transience that characterizes magazines is also the very feature that allows them to question and react to specific concerns of our time, our contemporaneity, understood as “the coming together of different, but equally ‘present’ temporalities or ‘times’” and as a “decisive element of the globalization of our historical present.”<sup>21</sup>

The periodical character that pertains to the magazine, and which refers also to something that occurs episodically, may also apply to exhibitions, such as biennials and triennials. These periodical exhibitions, or “exhibitionary events” as Terry Smith describes them, are also defined by recurrence and innovation.<sup>22</sup> This allows them to remain up to date and to address the urgencies of our contemporaneity. Indeed, the similarities intrinsic to the temporal format of biennials and

19. Gwen Allen, “Introduction,” in *The Magazine (Documents of Contemporary Art)*, ed. Gwen Allen (London: MIT Press, 2016), 12.

20. For a more comprehensive analysis of the features and ephemerality of the magazine, see Gwen Allen, *Artists Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 1.

21. Cox and Lund, *The Contemporary Condition*, 17.

22. Terry Smith, “Biennials within the Contemporary Composition,” *Stages*, no. 6 (April 2017), <http://www.biennial.com/journal/issue-6/biennials-within-the-contemporary-composition>.

magazines—their periodical or episodic character—make them both ideal instruments for research and discussion concerning contemporaneity.

In the introduction of “Talking Contemporary Curating,”<sup>23</sup> Smith points out how in recent years curators have developed a language specific to their field and that there has been an exponential growth regarding self-reflective “discourse” in curating. Indeed, a branch of contemporary art magazines, edited not only by art critics but also by curators, has particularly focused on the investigation and understanding of curatorial practices. A key case is the *Manifesta Journal*, which was launched in 2003 by the itinerant Manifesta Biennial. The journal focuses on the biennial’s aims and activities, but most importantly on curatorial practices and theories. The magazine component has become increasingly important within the context of large-scale periodical exhibitions, evolving from an institutional informative instrument to a space for thinking and research. The first biennial that published a magazine was the Venice Biennale. The magazine *La Biennale di Venezia* was published from 1950 to 1969. It was conceived as an institutional instrument, to keep its audience informed about the activities of the Biennial during the year. It pursued the same international objectives as the exhibition, facilitating a network and exchange between different nations, as well as a medium to foster local and international critical dialogue. During its lifetime the publication evolved from an informative instrument into a point of reference for critical thought and theory.

Within the context of documenta, the magazine format has been experimented with in diverse ways. One is documenta 12’s “Magazine Project,” in which the curators used the magazine as a mechanism to access and engage with specific knowledge

23. Terry Smith, “The Discourse,” in *Talking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2015), 13–36.

24. Latimer and Szymczyk, “Editors’ Letter.”



in the world, to generate new knowledge and discussion around contemporary art and exhibitions and, furthermore, it served to communicate and network. For the last edition of *documenta*, the *documenta 14 journal* was hosted for four issues in the pages of the Athens-based magazine *South as a State of Mind*. The journal of *documenta 14* was described by the editors as a “manifestation,” and “a place of research, critique, art, and literature paralleling the years of work on the exhibition overall, one that will help define and frame its concerns and aims.”<sup>24</sup>

From *La Biennale di Venezia*, to *the Manifesta Journal*, to the most recent journal *Stages* launched by the Liverpool Biennial or the *documenta 14 journal* itself, these magazines all conduct themselves as a research and thinking tool in addition to being a platform for the debate stimulated by exhibitions. These magazines are conceived with the intention to research, theorize, and develop a discourse around contemporary conditions, epitomized by biennials, amongst others.

## EVIDENCE TWO

What you should know about me? I dislike name-dropping. I remain mostly uninformed about the agenda of the art world. I like watching the news instead. My mother told me not to gossip, not to talk about people that are not present. So why should I bother remembering all of the fancy names? I profoundly believe in the power of honesty and art. Art is spiritual, when everything around is narrow. I am working in the first-person narrative because it allows me to work frankly. I like typing letters as I am thinking. I like telling stories from my life and stories that I have heard and seen along the way. You see, the I is interchangeable. The I can be everyone. I is me, yet also the other. As long as I is not named officially, I remain universal.

My journey as a young Kurdish man has led me from Iraq through Turkey, Greece, and the harbor of Athens to Berlin, where I live now. I am a refugee. I miss my mother. My father, back home, wanted me to become a calligrapher, just like him. But I loved to paint. I am an artist. Some call me a star. But I am a moon.

*Gaze—Autobiographies emerge from the inside, not the outside gaze; the outside gaze, voyeuristic and distanced, the men with the cameras. The format and the first-person narrative urge the audience to place itself on the side of the storyteller.*

## BODIES AND RHYTHMS

I was thinking about the body as a significant perspective for Lefebvre in his analysis of rhythm. The body used as a measuring device of the coming together of biological and social rhythms, a kind of “metronome.”<sup>25</sup> I am also thinking of how the body is implicated in the curatorial intentions of documenta 14 (henceforth d14) public program, becoming the main instrument of contesting (political) representation. Although I am not sure to what extent it developed new modes of subjectivation, “The Parliament of Bodies,” composed by the presence and co-presence of the various participants, introduces a corporeal understanding of rhythm at the heart of d14.

I agree that Lefebvre provides a useful framework for discussing the idea of political, cultural, or other representation through a focusing in on the body both as metaphor for social assemblages and as the biological organism of each individual being. First of all, I was inspired by his reading of the everyday as polyrhythmic: “Polyrhythmia? It suffices to consult one’s body; thus the everyday reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia from the first listening,”<sup>26</sup> and I would suggest to read d14 as exhibition and event with sensitivity to this polyrhythmic quality. There are the rhythms of the visitors: of people moving around; paces and paths through the city, queuing up outside and inside exhibition spaces, *traffic*. The rhythm of bodies: hunger, thirst, sleep, etc. ... Movements to and from Athens and Kassel, respectively, traveling by plane, train, car, bus. Also, there are the different rhythms and histories of the places: of Athens and Kassel, of the exhibition venues, and of the artworks. I find it challenging, however, to decide which rhythm or cluster

25. Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* (London: Continuum, 2004), xii.

26. *Ibid.*, 16

of rhythms to zoom in on and approach the exhibition event through. Even though Lefebvre suggests using one's own rhythms as a reference, he also maintains that other—outer—rhythms impose themselves on the natural ones. (Thus producing new natural rhythms?) “Rational, numerical, quantitative and qualitative rhythms superimpose themselves on the multiple natural rhythms of the body (respiration, the heart, hunger and thirst, etc.), though not without changing them.”<sup>27</sup> From this perspective, it seems impossible to leave out the ubiquitous flows of capital, which seeps through all these levels. In the words of Lefebvre, “capital: a chain of bacteria that grabs passing matter, that feeds itself by dividing itself, that multiplies by dividing itself,”<sup>28</sup> and thereby d14 becomes one great body of economic exchanges, reaching far beyond the localities of Athens and Kassel. Insisting on the level of the body, however—in inhabiting a shared space and synchronizing with a shared rhythm<sup>29</sup>—may be a way to counter the indifference and ungraspable character of capital.

To pick up on your points about shared space and rhythms, let me add to our conversation the perspective of commoning. This is linked to d14's ambition to connect to instances and practices that aim at rethinking democracy beyond representation and identity politics. One of those instances was the “squares movement,”<sup>30</sup> a reference especially resonant for d14 in Athens, a city marked by protests and occupations in the last decade. People came together in solidarity, and in difference, to develop

27. *Ibid.*, 9.

28. *Ibid.*, 52.

29. Laying down a shared rhythm is comparable to ritualistic practices, which played a central role in the “34 Acts of Freedom,” part of d14's public program.

30. Despite differences between them, the term “squares movement” refers to a

number of protest, anti-austerity, and pro-democracy movements that have occurred roughly between 2011 and 2013, such as Occupy Wall Street in New York, the Indignados in Spain, the Aganaktismenoi in Syntagma, Tahrir Square in Cairo, or the occupation of Gezi Park in Istanbul.

ways of collaborating and sharing, which enacted the kind of democracy that they wished to see actualized. Although commoning here is predominantly understood as a socio-spatial form of organizing, it could also be seen as a testing ground for new shared rhythms. Following Lefebvre, Stavros Stavrides offers an entry point to consider commoning on the squares as polyrhythmicities emerging through dispersed and recentralized, improvised and structured activities, which are the opposite of the disconnected, localized rhythms imposed by the logic of urban enclaves.<sup>31</sup> To contest the dominant contemporary urban rhythms in this way means to create spaces where differences become visible, can be compared, negotiated, and not enclosed within spatiotemporal boundaries.<sup>32</sup> When considering the Syntagma occupation, for example, those comparisons and negotiations emerged through the coexistence of various micro-squares (areas for reading and meditating, a first aid group, a “time-bank” group, etc.) that hosted an array of gathering modes, of different routines, aesthetics, and rhythms. Those were connected to each other through exchanges, and to the general assembly as the main collective decision organ. In moments where urgent action was needed, to respond to a blockade or to being tear-gassed, protesters formed chains, holding hands to dance or to carry water to clean the pavement, synchronizing their bodies spontaneously and with no center, becoming “a rhythmicity of differences in coordination.”<sup>33</sup>

There is also Lefebvre’s take on the moment in relation to crisis, as an instant in which things can be radically challenged, building on Nietzsche’s *Augenblick*,

31. Stavros Stavrides, “Contested Urban Rhythms: From the Industrial City to the Post-Industrial Urban Archipelago,” in *Sociological Review* 61 no. S1 (June 2013): 34–50.

32. *Ibid.*, 45.

33. *Ibid.*, 46–47.

the blink of an eye which is perpetually both in the past and the future.<sup>34</sup> I am particularly interested in this in relation to commoning practices as entangled in moments of crisis, but also as moments of prefiguration, oriented, thus, towards developing a non-capitalist society based on egalitarian social relations.<sup>35</sup> When striving to go beyond the dominant modes of sociality imposed by capitalism, commoning can be understood as a production of social rhythms that interrupt flows of capital and cause certain arrhythmias. What also seems to me an interesting point to discuss is that in such threshold moments the present is the future. I am pointing here to the negation of (political) representation, linked to conceptualizations of the now-time (*Jetztzeit*) by Walter Benjamin, which, like Lefebvre, breaks with the linear understanding of time, the notion of progress oriented towards the future, and sees emancipation actualized in the present.<sup>36</sup> To follow Isabell Lorey's reading of Benjamin's now-time as rupture, "It is constructive temporality, in which the slivers of history are newly composed, in which history persistently emerges. The now-time is the creative midpoint, not a transition of the past into the future."<sup>37</sup> Following on from the above, a point to consider might be the relation between the rhythms of the present and presence, and how through rhythmanalysis the present transforms into presence.<sup>38</sup>

I really like this reading of the moment as a possibility to take hold of the future. As you mentioned elsewhere, d14 after its conclusion declared itself a "commons,"

34. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, x.

35. Stavros Stavrides, *Common Space: The City as Commons* (London: Zed Books, 2006).

36. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations* (London: Collins Fontana, 1973), 254.

37. Isabell Lorey, "Presentist democracy: Exodus and Tiger's leap," *Transversal Texts* (blog), June 2014, <http://transversal.at/blog/Presentist-Democracy>.

38. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 23.

which is “not owned by anyone in particular” but “shared among its visitors, artists, readers, writers, and other participants, as well as all those whose work made it happen.”<sup>39</sup> I find it interesting how this single statement epitomizes the way in which d14 has worked with a multiplicity of publics, made up by particular, present bodies as well as dispersed and virtually connected ones. Of course, the problem arises of what exactly it is that d14 was, or is, which has been shared? And at which point in time this sharing has taken or is to take place?

The question that is imperative for me to ask is what kind of processes of sharing and negotiating can ground such a claim. To begin with, I would consider the statement as an intention (even if it comes at the end of d14) and then proceed to examine the curatorial and artistic processes. I think it is too ambitious to claim the whole endeavor as a commons, but thinking in terms of the moment or the element, in Lefebvre’s terms, one might be able to locate instances that potentially contain germs of commoning. I think it is also necessary to address matters of conflict in such processes. For me, one such project during d14 was Georgia Sagri’s *Dynamis (Askese — on Empathy)*, which constitutes one component of her work in d14. This took the form of a preparatory workshop involving breathing scores and exercises for a chorus of twenty-two performers. Breathing, in the work, was a mode of investigating a being-together, a method that employed the natural rhythm of breathing to facilitate social rhythms. Having attended the workshop in Athens, I recall the experience as an exercise in poly-centrality or poly-rhythmicity in the ways the bodies affected each other, and how they negotiated their synchronicity (often

39. documenta 14, Twitter post, September 18, 2017, 4:09 a.m., accessed October 14, 2017,

[https://twitter.com/documenta\\_\\_\\_\\_14/status/909736217000005632](https://twitter.com/documenta____14/status/909736217000005632).

moving in pairs) in space. At times, the artist became very present, and her instructions reinserted her as the one controlling the whole process. She became the center from which the various rhythms had to be coordinated. This constant and inconclusive negotiation between the “I” and the “we” might be an entry point for what we are discussing.

To return to the questions you raised above, I would pose it as a question of how one can connect the subjective and singular experience (of an artwork for instance) with the collective. Because, where and how does the collective form? How is my singular body connected to larger constellations of bodies? Sagri’s performative and participatory work is one attempt to address this issue. Another direction, which I also believe needs to be taken into consideration, is the formation of so-called speculative collectives,<sup>40</sup> following a more traditional thinking about the *sensus communis* that artworks may be seen to address and produce either in the present of their production and display or in a “people to come” as formulated by Rancière.<sup>41</sup> An interpretation of this can be found in Juliane Rebentisch’s analysis of the participatory in art.<sup>42</sup> Here she suggests that some so-called “relational” artworks succeed in making the visitor reflect on his/her own cultural, political, and social context instead of focusing solely on relations between the audiences’ actually sharing of spatio-temporal presence in the gallery space. According to Lefebvre this integration of times is constructed by the rhythm analyst’s sensitivity to the different rhythms at play. This act is at the same time an act of the mind *and* body, making

40. Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*.

41. Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community,” in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 57.

42. Juliane Rebentisch, “Forms of Participation in Art,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2015): 29–54.

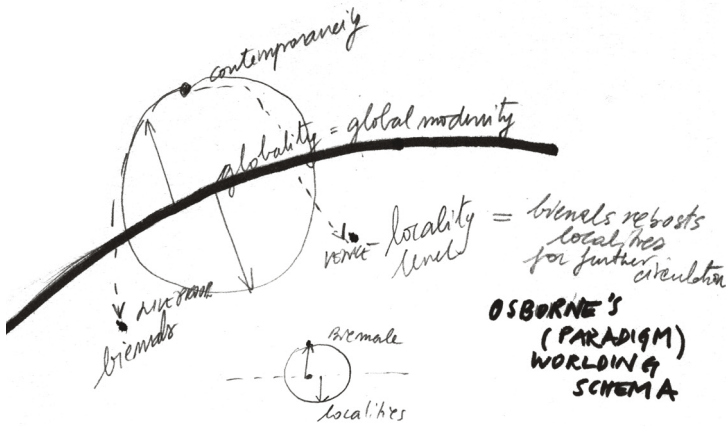


it close to the very definition of aesthetic experiences. “The act of rhythmanalysis (*le geste rythmanalytique*) transforms *everything* into presences, including the *present*, grasped and perceived as such. [...] the act of rhythmanalysis integrates these things — this wall, this table, these trees — in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences.”<sup>43</sup> I am inspired by this act of *presencing* in thinking about the relation between the spectator and an artwork, which represents the experiences or concerns of certain people(s).<sup>44</sup> This is another instance of polyrhythmicity: the many different conditions and experiences of life as it unfolds around the globe, and I would argue that we need to rethink — but also rework — the relations between political and visual representation and non-representational acts of commoning if we are to come to terms with transnational experiences within as well as outside of the art world.

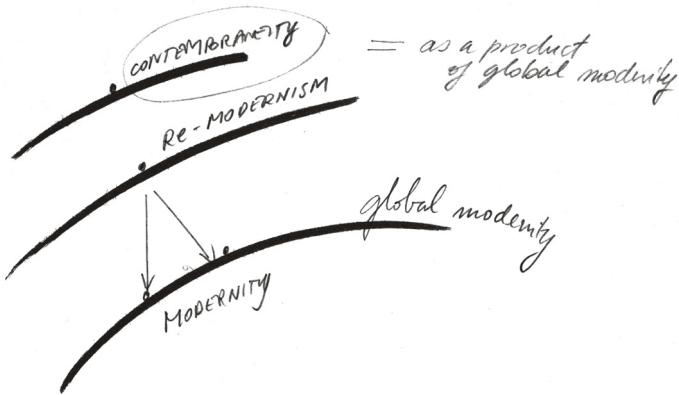
43. Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, 23.

44. I was particularly touched by Indian photographer Gauri Gill’s photographs from rural Rajasthan, depicting everyday lives and constructed scenarios with people from the region. From a capitalist-critical — but also pessimistic — point of view, the display

and viewing of these photographs within the confines of d14 places the people photographed outside of the economic as well as discursive/representative circuit of the international art world, exemplified by documenta.



**OSBORNE'S  
(PARADIGM)  
WORLDING  
SCHEMA**



From Existential Urgency  
"Art, Remembrance, History"

Global Worldings schema (following Osborne)

## RENEWAL

The re-emergence of sociocultural attitudes linked to modern imperatives<sup>45</sup>—calling for freedom, solidarity, grassroots and community building, decolonization, and collective engagement—seems so double-faced that it would seem prudent to consider these affirmative “cutting-edge and critical” expressions through behavioral patterns. Repeated cyclically over the last decades, cultural and educational organizations seem increasingly immersed in a connectivist empire and unaware of the dangers of late capitalist renewals.

If we connect this to the geography of social media, as philosopher Matteo Pasquinelli remarks, recent applications are not only indicative of new forms of network control, but prefigure “a matrix where social actors come often to fulfil political roles and narratives that have been designed for them.”<sup>46</sup> Something similar can be observed with respect to the increasing tendency of collective mega-settings—like public arenas, forums, symposia—that raise doubts about the expediency of contemporary cultural institutions such as biennials, hitherto seen as “vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debate”<sup>47</sup> and henceforth as non-generative events, as imitations of each other.

Similar problems were addressed in 1884 when sociologist Gabriel Tarde wrote his law of imitation entitled *Qu'est-ce que la société?* [What is a society?] stating that processes of imitation and pattern repetition are direct consequences of the expansion of “progressive powers” of the late 19th century which force education upon everyone. The objective

45. See Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2007), 420–489.

46. Matteo Pasquinelli, “The Spike: On the Growth and Form of Pattern Police,” in

*Nervous Systems*, ed. Stephanie Hankey et al. (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2016), 258.

47. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds., *The Biennial Reader* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 91.

of the latter was not to teach how to strive for better social organization, but for “a flourishing social life” which would be considered sufficient in itself.<sup>48</sup>

In *The Flexible Personality*, published in 2001, art critic and activist Brian Holmes called for a new cultural critique that would urgently tackle some of the above-mentioned problems derived from new techniques of soft control employed by the majority of power clubs. Driven by similar preoccupations, art historian Tom Holert wrote his article “Art in a Knowledge-based Polis” in 2009 in the form of a provocative message,<sup>49</sup> addressed to those “power/knowledge” circles that he thought operated from a position of privilege. He reflected on the gaining of academic reputation through “artistic research practice” within the third cycle of higher education (as part of the agenda of *Lifelong Learning*),<sup>50</sup> demonstrating that it was merely another brick in the knowledge economy.

Present-day educational artistic networks, art museums, foundations, confederations and art fairs are comparable organizational structures which are deeply entangled with the dominant temporal institutions of contemporary art such as biennials (for example, Venice Art Biennale, Sao Paolo Biennale), and other similar events (such as documenta or Manifesta). These occur periodically and through a temporary large-scale exhibition format deploy the credibility of a curatorial narrative (fictional, historical, or ethnographic) that frequently overwrites the work of art and its aesthetic concept.

48. Gabriel Tarde, “Qu’est-ce qu’une société?,” in *Revue Philosophique*, XVIII (1884), ed. Andrea Cavalletti, Napoli: Cronopio, 2010: 505–506.

49. Tom Holert, “Art in the Knowledge-based Polis.” *e-flux journal*, no. 3, February 2009, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68537/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/>.

50. The European Commission project accompanying the Bologna Educational Reform, sanctioned in 2003. See European Commission, *Lifelong Learning Programme*, accessed September 20, 2017, [http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme_en).

At the same time curatorial projects, artistic forms and educational projects (as well as knowledge-sharing meetings and other discursive platforms) regularly follow a dogmatic and repetitive pattern<sup>51</sup> of novel pasts and promising futures, capable of leading to unexplored dimensions and universes.

As a matter of fact, also thanks to discursive<sup>52</sup> large format events in the last three decades, we have been discovering the world's historical richness made of unrealized utopias, sociocultural "lost possibilities for better futures," and iconographic repertoires. Post-1989 geopolitical realities *transitioned* in our historical present following a logic that was neither subsequent nor linear, as would adhere to a cause-effect model of history, but rather as coexisting parallel or sub-adjacent trajectories. When reflecting on the "worlding of the global," and its relationship to "contemporaneity" and "modernity," philosopher Peter Osborne points out that contemporaneity functions as the "temporality of global modernity, the temporal product of globalization."<sup>53</sup> Even though both inhabit the historical present in complete arbitrariness, they are not in competition because what they provide is a "collective fantasy — a powerful self-actualizing institutional fantasy."<sup>54</sup> In this sense, biennials are perceived as controversial institutional realities of the cultural market, as well as testimonies of what Terry Smith would call the "expanded cultural overproduction of the 21<sup>st</sup> century."<sup>55</sup>

51. As an example, see the "Deviant Practice 2016–2017" research program at the Van Abbemuseum of Eindhoven. Van Abbemuseum, accessed September 20, 2017, <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/en/research/research-programme/deviant-practice-2016-17/>.

52. A reference to "Platform 5," organized for documenta 11, curated by Okwui Enwezor in 2002. It also alludes to the "Maybe Education Program" of DOCUMENTA (13), curated by Carolyn

Christov-Bakargiev in 2012, which counted on the support of more than 400 art schools, and approximately one hundred art students animating its activities over the exhibition period of 100 days.

53. Osborne, "Existential Urgency," 34, 176.

54. *Ibid.*, 177.

55. Terry Smith, "Defining Contemporaneity: Imagining Planetarity," *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 24, no. 49–50 (2015): 156–174.

If taken from a lateral point of view, as predicated in the sociological enquiry<sup>56</sup> of Arnaud Esquerre and Luc Boltanski, present-day cultural institutions seem to play a double game in the new economy: a game based on the exploitation of the past, resting on the interconnectedness of the tourist sector, arts and culture, and enterprise.

What exactly then is the role of research and curating within these contemporary institutions? Could it be seen as a positive phase in the development of the professionalization of curating,<sup>57</sup> or is it something more functional that ensures the renewal and overproduction of similar statements that say the same thing (where content orientations depend on knowledge resources and protectionist circles)? Moreover, how can we think of the contemporary condition, which seems to offer almost no escape or space for the conception of *other* organizational forms of (cultural) life, and instead develop a differential generational research ecology? Is it still possible to hope that an art project, a research meeting, or even a whole biennial is able to *exhibit* its own contradictions?

What seems necessary is to resist the neutralization of every experience and prevent repetitions that “keep us qualifying forever,”<sup>58</sup> which primarily benefits contemporary mechanisms for the renewal of capital. If there is a remote, yet concrete possibility to consider the use of “outmoded modes of production” and to look for other “recombinatory possibilities and re-appropriations of space and time,”<sup>59</sup> the only way is to enhance human knowledge without reducing cultural existence

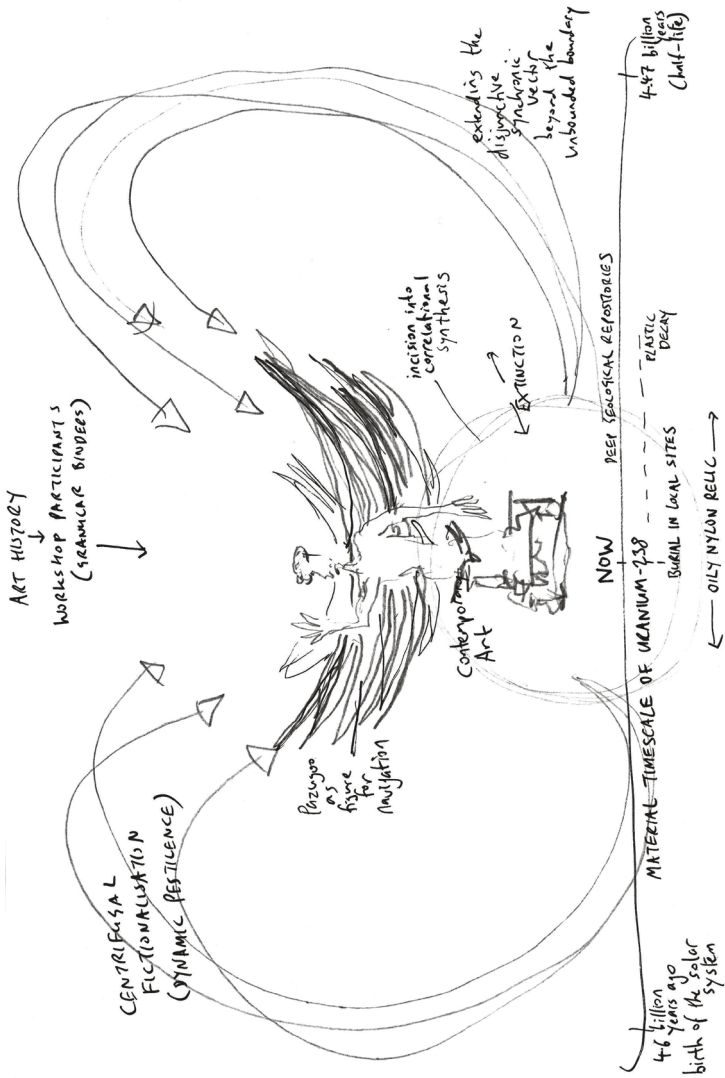
56. Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, “The Economy of Enrichment: When Institutions Play a Double Game,” *How Institutions Think?* symposium program abstract, LUMA Foundation, Arles, February 24–27, 2016, 14–15.

57. Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, eds., *Curating Research* (London: Open Editions, 2013), rear cover text.

58. Lars Bang Larsen, “The Paradox of Art and Work: An Irritating Note,” in *Work, Work, Work: A Reader on Art and Labour*, ed. Jonatan Habib Engqvist et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).

59. Cox and Lund, *The Contemporary Condition*, 23.

to some kind of automatism which flattens (curatorial) research, (knowledge) creation, and (cultural) production to the level of intense exchange for re-storing data and re-selling history.



Double Flight as Navigational Procedure for Deep Time



## ARTIST-LED

In the recent history of Western contemporary art,<sup>60</sup> “artist-led”<sup>61</sup> practice — as a distinct model of knowledge production — has increasingly permeated the global art world. Playing a vital role in artistic development it has arguably become one of the leading areas of conceptual experimentation for artist-practitioners. Emerging from the counterculture movements and happenings in Europe and North America of the 1960s, the wider field inherently takes some form of oppositional stance to dominant institutional power structures, with many current iterations of artist-led practice coalescing around collective forms of self-organization,<sup>62</sup> and as a pragmatic response to the period of worldwide financial austerity beginning in 2008 and resultant cuts in cultural provision. The impact of this recession has been felt across the world, yet at the same time has encouraged those in the field to adopt inventive models<sup>63</sup> to sustain their cultural activity.

Concerned with provincial artist-led practice based in Northern England — using an expanded definition of the “North” as “socially constructed, and engrained in the way in which people *perceive* and *perform* it as a cultural, social and political space, as part of their everyday practices”<sup>64</sup> — what follows is a brief outline of “the artist-led” as a site of knowledge

60. Itself a problematic term but here used to denote anything created from 1989 onwards. See Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh, eds., *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, (London: MIT Press, 2017).

61. Artist-led is also defined as artist-run, self-organized, independent, etc., with the specific terminology depending on the geographical location.

62. Instead of singular exhibitions or projects.

63. This is broadly similar to how artist-led spaces expanded and developed as social support structures and sites of

experimentation in North America and Europe following the financial crises of the 1970s. See Gabriele Detterer, “The Spirit and Culture of Artist-Run Spaces,” in *Artist-Run Spaces*, ed. Gabriele Detterer and Maurizio Nannucci (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2012), 10–49.

64. Richard Hayton, Arianna Giovannini, and Craig Berry, “Introduction,” in *The Politics of the North: Governance, Territory and Identity in Northern England*, ed. Richard Hayton et al. (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2016), 6. The North here operates as a corollary to South, described earlier in this book.

production. To begin to discuss such issues, the significance of digital media in global society must be acknowledged, as access to the Internet,<sup>65</sup> and thus its immaterial forms of communication and exchange, implicitly shape human relations and our experience of time. As curator Lauren Cornell argues, Jean Baudrillard's observation "that human history would end with the close of the millennium seems vindicated: with events rapidly proliferating in media, we have lost the possibility of noting significant milestones and seem unable to meter our own position in time."<sup>66</sup> This inability to properly distinguish our temporal existence in relation to what has gone before has led to the rise of a wider understanding that temporality, as we comprehend it, is fractured and displaced for each individual, creating a collision of multiple times converging to create the present we each experience.<sup>67</sup> The convergence of these multiple presents reinforces the idea of the end of human history, showing we have reached a point where communication and experience is too instantaneous and far reaching to be confined by a universal singular shared context.

When contextualized alongside Northern artist-led practice over the course of the past decade, it is as though new practitioners routinely decide to self-organize<sup>68</sup> by cannibalizing models used in the recent past that were considered unviable. Stories abound in towns and cities throughout the North with reference to an ever-increasing list of projects that have fallen by the wayside,<sup>69</sup> in turn pointing towards what could be described as a closed loop of knowledge production caused by the use of

65. Access to the Internet was recently acknowledged as a human right by the United Nations. See Tim Sandle, "UN Thinks Internet Access Is a Human Right," *Business Insider* (July 22, 2016), <http://www.businessinsider.com/un-says-internet-access-is-a-human-right-2016-7?IR=T>.

66. As part of a wider debate on digital technology influencing the art world, see Lauren Cornell, "Down the Line," *frieze*

(2011), <https://frieze.com/article/down-line>.

67. Cox and Lund, *The Contemporary Condition*, 12–16.

68. For generally applicable reasons such as perceived lack of provision, critical response to other projects and/or institutions/organizations, etc., see Herbert Stine and Anne Szefer Karlsen, eds., *Self-Organised* (London: Open Editions, 2013).

previous operational structures. However I would argue that this is not the case. Despite the fact that an intrinsic component of the artist-led is embracing the fleeting and temporary nature of many projects,<sup>70</sup> in this instance it points to a state of temporal crisis. Trapped within a climate of presentism, where the present has, according to Boris Groys, “ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past and future,”<sup>71</sup> the collective condition of Northern artist-led practitioners is one where the embracing of digital communication and knowledge sharing<sup>72</sup> has led to a situation where the present can no longer be clearly defined and interacted with. Coupled with the effects of the recession this has created a different articulation of time through which new practitioners draw upon recent operational models for reference.

Through this regime loops are enacted due to an oversaturation of potential examples, causing the majority of new practitioners to be fixated on models from a period of time that irrevocably shaped the society they inhabit. Given the predisposition for self-organization to constitute much of a practitioner’s early career,<sup>73</sup> the majority of artists seem to become trapped within this cycle of knowledge. However there are those that have already begun to counteract this trend, creating a new temporal dynamic in the process.

69. Examples such as Beechwood Avenue Gallery, 42 New Briggate, ENJOY, Greyspace Galleries, Melbourne Street Studios, and Zu Malen, to name but a few, all came and went within the same city, Leeds, over the course of roughly a four year period within a 5 mile radius of one another.

70. Gavin Murphy, “What Makes Artist-run Spaces Different? (And Why it’s Important to Have Different Art Spaces),” in *Artist-Run Europe: Practice/Projects/Spaces*, ed. Gavin Murphy and Mark Cullen (Eindhoven: Onomatopoe, 2016), 7–8.

71. Boris Groys, “Comrades of Time,” *e-flux journal*, Issue 11, December, 2009,

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/11/61345/comrades-of-time/>.

72. Arguably in an evolution of *The Eternal Network* first posited by Robert Filliou and George Brecht in 1968, linked to the Mail Art movement of the 1950s and 1960s. See Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Cologne: Verlag Gebr. Koenig, 1970), 202–207.

73. This is especially the case in the North of England given a relative lack of commercial galleries, which in turn has created a generally non-commercial arts ecology.



Utilizing digital technology, increasingly projects are being generated or reformatted in order to circumvent these problems, moving notably toward redefined communal, roving and digitally-based organizational models and exhibitionary forms. Examples such as Tžžžž, <sup>74</sup> Caustic Coastal, <sup>75</sup> Mexico, <sup>76</sup> Serf, <sup>77</sup> and i o u a e <sup>78</sup> all work in this way, morphing <sup>79</sup> between online and offline spaces. This ongoing shift from the cyclical repetition of previous models points toward a conscious interaction with pre-recession models whilst thinking of future ones outside of the established conditions. Through these spatio-temporal forms this new wave of artist-led practice can be seen to have developed a reflexive relationship to artist-led knowledge production, one in which their projects display attributes of research in much the same way as “research exhibitions” do. <sup>80</sup>

It is this ever-expanding category of artist-led activity with its ability to adapt that I believe marks a significant transition, a rupture from presentism. The focus can demonstrate how artist-led practice can occupy the same cultural space as established institutions whilst remaining a collectively critical alternative voice to the established art world and wider socio-political issues, freed from the cyclical repetition of the recent past.

74. Tžžžž formed in Liverpool as a nomadic curatorial project focused on sustaining relationships with emerging artists through research, <http://tzuzjj.com/>.

75. Caustic Coastal formed as an “art label” in Salford based on how music labels generally operate under the same moniker in different physical/digital spaces, <http://www.causticcoastal.biz/>.

76. Mexico first formed as a curatorial group in Leeds that now acts nomadically to curate projects with its directors across the North to show and support contemporary art, <http://m-e-x-i-c-o.co.uk/>.

77. Serf is a cooperative artist-led community, studios and project space based in Leeds, <http://serfleeds.co.uk/programme/>.

78. i o u a e formed in Newcastle as a digitally-based organization for early career artists, recent graduates and students, operating both digitally and physically in order to provide opportunities for collaboration, development, networking and commissioning new works, <http://iouae.format.com/>.

79. See Kevin Hunt, “People Like Us,” *a-n The Artists Information Company* (2017), <https://static.a-n.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/People-like-us.pdf>, 2–3.

80. See Simon Sheikh, “Towards the Exhibition as Research,” in *Curating Research*, ed. Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (London: Open Editions, 2015).

## EVIDENCE THREE

I bought my daughter a pack of cigarettes. I had just won four euros in the lottery and we went to the kiosk because she wanted to buy cigarettes, so I paid with my lottery ticket and seventy cents. I told her not to tell her father. The last time I bought her cigarettes was nine years ago. She was fifteen then, and just returned from the boarding school her father decided to put her in. He was always harsh on her. As if she was a boy. But she's a girl, sensitive and rebellious. I never saw her habits as a problem. I went to pick her up at night, when she started to go out. I came outside with her, when she wanted to smoke in the evening. I am her mother, and there is no way of talking her out of her ideas anyway. Today she will leave again; she's always on the run. She doesn't live with us since she started studying. She's the only child, so I miss her a lot. I decided to learn how to trade stocks. I needed to do something. I couldn't stand sitting in the patisserie with the ladies every Friday, listening to gossip. Before I left, as the perestroika crashed upon us, I was in the process of defending my PhD. What is left from a five-year long research process: a paper with archaic findings from the era of the first computers. I was studying aeronautical weapon technology in Moscow, and writing a program to calculate the trajectory of the atomic missile. Naturally, my faculty was closed before I could defend my dissertation.

*Space — in relation to storytelling refers to temporality and location. A story can describe a specific date and place. The story can/has the intention to share this space with the audience. Autobiographical storytelling can bring the audience closer to a space, because of its honest and shameless format. The audience might thus experience political realities far removed from its own understanding of reality.*

*Evidence—Apart from creating real evidence of socio-political conditions, autobiography shares the story of a human: painful or funny, monotonous or dramatic. It is not fiction; it happened, it was a moment in time, it was reality. That moment was contemporaneity for the subject at the very time the work was created. The artistic work thus becomes a container, a capsule for a moment of contemporaneity that can be put in relation to its future and future public.*

## THE MUSEUM

Being an art museum is a relatively stable thing. It is a much safer space than so much else in today's pluralistic art world. The museum has a collection, its reason for existence, and is therefore not as easy to shut down as, for instance, the contemporary art space. It can therefore afford to be self-critical and self-reflective. It can open up fractures and disjunctions, and it can open up its collection to new ways of seeing and new forms of interpretation.

This self-criticality is not a question of feeling guilty—which is often used as a counter argument for how the West has governed its wealth and power—but how to come to terms with what a culture can produce and has produced over the centuries: thereby trying to gain knowledge, but also as a way to un-learn or re-learn as Nora Sternfeld puts it in her description of her concept of the Para-museum. She describes this as “a practice that operates simultaneously in the museum—amid the sediments of its history of Enlightenment and attendant violence and revolution—and beyond the museum, as a space of unlearning and (re-)appropriation in which to renegotiate our understanding of ‘the world,’ ‘art,’ ‘history,’ and ‘the future’ from a postcolonial and far-reaching perspective.”<sup>81</sup>

Today there is a need to open up for counter-knowledge, for differences and for negotiation. The subjects, therefore, are how to expand, question, and decolonize the museum. And how is it possible to make the museum a common space, a space to learn, a space for conflicts and a space to meet different voices, perspectives and views of how life can be lived through the artifacts, objects, and artworks within it?

81. Nora Sternfeld, “Deprovincialising the Museum—What Would a Museum Be If It Were Not a Western Concept?,” in *Body*

*Luggage: Migration of Gestures*, ed. Zasha Colah (Berlin: Archive Books, 2016), 159.

Art museums in the Global North have for years now, especially since the end of World War II, been strongly influenced by an international wave advancing from a tradition that often used local and/or national collections to one where the strong influence of international art is apparent. However, this influence has a strong bias towards Western interpretations of international art; a kind of unwritten canon resulting in largely homogenous collections which feature in art museums today. It is a standardization of art and its traditions. The result of this is that you often cannot tell where you are: Stockholm, Paris, or London. Let's go against this paradigm and instead ask for a local awareness of its base, so the museums retain the diversity of their individual cultural histories. Let's be provincial in the sense that we belong to a certain locality.

But let's also be pluralistic in our horizon and way of understanding the world. Writer and critic Elsa Gress created a form of artistic collective in an old mansion in the countryside of Denmark and called it Decenter, which existed for twelve years, from 1972 to 1984. With Decenter she wished to create a space for free thinking, a room for uncompromised thought and activity. Decenter was an opportunity to bring people together to speak and work across all kinds of borders.<sup>82</sup> Inherent in the idea of Decenter is a wish to move away from a mainstream and instrumentalized way of thinking. There is a potential in what has not yet been defined, positioned or organized. Is it possible to use the concept of Decenter to be more curious? And is it possible to be part of global art worlds, and not just part of an international art world — which seems a little provincial to me — and contribute with a local awareness, where we also find room for unfolding

82. See Bettina Camilla H. Vestergaard's artist book and art project on Elsa Gress. Bettina Camilla H., Vestergaard, *Som jeg*

*går gennem parken* [As I Wander Through the Park] (Copenhagen: Space Poetry, 2016).



the perspectives of other histories?<sup>83</sup> Is it possible in any way to be both global and local? And how do we become that?

83. Hans Belting, "The Plurality of Art Worlds and the New Museum," in *Facing Forward: Art and Theory from a Future*

*Perspective*, ed. Hendrick Fokertset et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

## TIME-SHARING

The notion of time-sharing is commonly associated with a timeshare apartment, a holiday home. Time-sharing in this sense is, however, not a question of sharing the same space-time, but rather of sharing the same space at different times. This kind of time-sharing can double as a curatorial format. “The Timeshare Project,” which took place at Kunsthall Aarhus (Aarhus, Denmark) in the spring of 2017, invited five international art organizations and collectives; The Real DMZ Project (Seoul/Yangji-ri, South Korea), *Starship Magazine* (Berlin, Germany), Oda Projesi & SALT (Istanbul, Turkey), Rond-Point Projects (Marseilles, France), and Eastside Projects (Birmingham, UK) to spend a week at Kunsthall Aarhus. Each taking turns, they occupied one of the galleries (an octagonal space with a separate entrance) for a week and presented programs in the form of talks, performances, screenings, workshops, exhibitions, reading groups, and editorial meetings—even including a David Bowie karaoke performance night.

Time-sharing, in this sense, became a hosting structure that enabled the participants to present new or existing projects, or to develop future ones. The participants of “The Timeshare Project” were also invited to produce publications, constituting another mode of time-sharing. Unlike the timeshare holiday home, a publication renders possible time-sharing across time. By transporting the reader back to recent, distant or virtual pasts—or into the future—a publication effectively serves as a time machine that grants us access to other moments. In addition to enabling readers to share geopolitically differentiated constructions of historical times that the participants bring to the table, the publications also extend the time of “The Timeshare Project” into the future.

## INVITING

Inviting is a common curatorial gesture designating, according to *OED*, an act of asking someone kindly to come to a place or proceeding that the invitee is presumed to be pleased or willing to attend.<sup>84</sup> While the nature of the attendance generally is quite open, it is most often conditioned by a number of restrictions with regards to budget and practical realization. The Latin root, *invitatio*,<sup>85</sup> means incitement or challenge and this inherent prospect of a dare is likely to be associated with the invitation's restrained openness.

Anne Dufourmantelle introduces yet another understanding of inviting in her response to Jacques Derrida's seminars on hospitality by proposing that inviting is equivalent to "making time" in Hebrew, linking the invitation to a shared production of time and to the future.<sup>86</sup> The relation that Dufourmantelle identifies between inviting and "making time" also seems viable outside the specific context of her argument, because in order to meet an invitation the invitee has to find time in a possibly busy schedule. Making time is, however, not merely a matter of carving out time from the existing complex of times. Dufourmantelle specifically links it to a joint production of time, which — as I understand it — could designate not only a future beyond the present moment but also a future beyond the imaginary permanence that our contemporary condition instills.<sup>87</sup> I may be over-exaggerating the meaning of the act of

84. *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/99146#eid11342>.

85. *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (New York: American Book Company, 1890), <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=invitatio&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1994.04.0060>.

86. Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 76.

87. Peter Osborne, "Every Other Year Is Always This Year — Contemporaneity and the Biennale Form," in *Making Biennials in Contemporary Times: Essays from the World Biennial Forum n° 2*, ed. Galit Eilat et al. (Amsterdam: Biennial Foundation, 2015), 25.

inviting here, but if this speculative line of reasoning holds, if it offers a way to restore a link to the future, it also reinscribes a political horizon. As it happens, the invitation just might enable asynchronicity in these exceedingly synchronous times.

## (PRACTICE-BASED) RESEARCH

To define what research is today is not entirely straightforward. According to Arjun Appadurai research “is virtually synonymous with our sense of what it means to be scholars and members of the academy, and thus it has the invisibility of the obvious.”<sup>88</sup> Of course, the point here is not that scholarly practice has become redundant, but rather that the proliferation of scholarly research has rendered it conventional and hence indiscernible. The same cannot be said about practice-based research. Even though it has become institutionalized on account of education reforms,<sup>89</sup> practice-based research remains discernible and to some extent unconventional both within and beyond academia. It turns the exhibition space into a research lab and asks what kind of questioning the exhibition space and the curatorial practice enable us to produce that cannot surface on paper alone. While research in the exhibition space is by no means unprecedented,<sup>90</sup> practice-based research does not merely present research results, it also sets out to prove or disprove a thesis, produce an argument or advance a proposition in the exhibition space.<sup>91</sup> Such endeavors can be exacting to a general art audience, and as a practice-based researcher one might feel the need to simplify in the exhibition space and complicate at the academy. Either way, these practical endeavors certainly produce knowledge, but it is not necessarily distinguishable as it unfolds. Or, some aspects might be, while others need to be developed and scrutinized

88. Arjun Appadurai, “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination,” in *Globalization*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 10.

89. Significantly, *The Bologna Process, see European Higher Education Area, European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process*, accessed November 16, 2017, <https://www.ehea.info>.

90. According to Heinrich and Pollak research is among the core tasks of the traditional museum curator. See Nathalie Heinrich and Michael Pollak, “From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur,” in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg et al. (London: Routledge, 1996), 235.

91. Simon Sheikh, “Towards the Exhibition as Research,” 40.

further, or even reinvented and actualized in writing. It goes without saying that the written component cannot replace what transpired in the exhibition space, but these different modes of knowledge production can influence each other. The task at hand may just be to work the intensities and pursue the potentialities of these encounters, or as Mieke Bal paraphrases Appadurai's new research ethic, "to develop a dialogic sensibility that makes it possible to learn mutually from contact with different modes of doing research."<sup>92</sup>

92. Mieke Bal, "Research Practice: New Words on Cold Cases," in *What Is Research in the Visual Arts? Obsession,*

*Archive, Encounter*, ed. Michael Ann Holly and Marquard Smith (Williamstown: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2008), 209.

## VISUAL CURATORIAL RESEARCH

Let us look more closely at the connection between knowledge production and curatorial practice, and some of the complications that occur between them in the contemporary condition. The challenge of being contemporary is amongst others a challenge of knowledge production.

Critical approaches from theorists and curators such as Irit Rogoff, Beatrice von Bismarck, and Maria Lind attempt to situate curatorial praxis in the broader field of the cultural knowledge production through the concept of the curatorial. Thus, the curatorial has been defined as “forms of practice operating away from, alongside or supplementary to main work of curating-as-exhibition making”<sup>93</sup> to create a meeting ground between the creative practices, the theoretical and the political. Those relationships evolve through a state of constant renegotiation to give birth to aesthetic and political transformation. The curatorial as such is a research methodology in the sense that it creates a space to inhabit the issue rather than analyzing it.<sup>94</sup> The research question to be answered is shaped by bringing together knowledge and experience operating self-reflexively with regard to the social, political, and cultural conditions by which it is formed. The shift here is from the analytical to the performative function of observation and participation, where meaning is not excavated for, but rather takes place in, the present.<sup>95</sup> Rogoff has been instrumental in unfolding the concept taking under consideration the current disintegration of the traditional divisive logic of practice and theory.<sup>96</sup> For her the curatorial embodies the dynamic character of criticality, which is there to

93. O'Neill and Wilson, *Curating Research*, 12.

94. Irit Rogoff, “From Criticism to Critique to Criticality,” *Transversal* (January 2003), <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/rogoff1/en>.

95. Sheikh, *Towards the Exhibition as Research*, 40.

96. Rogoff, “From Criticism to Critique to Criticality.”

raise questions regarding socio-political urgencies rather than being an end in itself. With an emphasis on critical process she places artistic and curatorial praxis in the realm of knowledge production rather than that of mere material production. In this way, contrary to the traditional academic research methodologies, instead of looking for definite answers to a research inquiry, what if we accept that the curatorial is a transitional space where questions are posed and materials are exhibited as a response to contemporary urgencies?

This notion of urgency, manifested in the curatorial space can offer the possibility of perceiving critical issues, polyphonies, and different positions of an uncertain contemporary condition. Let us call this visual curatorial research.



## NOMENCLATURE

The following notes on nomenclature aim to determine a trajectory towards the definition of contemporaneity through its formation process based on the need of mediators (gallerists, dealers, curators, and historians) to legitimize art production. Legitimization is reached when its artistic value can be proved. The contemporary exhibition system, with biennials and fairs now at two oppositional points, started in the 1970s and from this time to the present were able to create, sustain and diffuse the notion and value of *contemporaneity*.

*Value* is a key point for contemporaneity since it makes things present, contemporaneous, and honorable. Value is an uncountable name used for the measurable importance of a quality, an attitude or monetary worth. Value can be produced, gained and won but its source is dimmed, it is somehow an indirect power. The most appreciated value of contemporaneity lies in its symbolic value, which can be understood as—but not immediately transformed into—monetary value. The artwork's value is made by a combination of exchange value and symbolic value. The two appear to be independent but are in reality part of the same system. Symbolic value is gained through moments of states of exception. Perpetuation of exception makes value rise and endure. As contemporary art history becomes more dependent on the market, exchange value (e.g. raised through auction houses) is increasingly important. The ranking of artworks in exhibitions, fairs, media, and institutions indirectly builds the artwork's value.

*Contemporary art history* can seem an oxymoron. Undergraduate students attending a contemporary art class would probably expect the professor to talk about art nowadays, living artists, biennials, and globalization, maybe dropping back a little to 2000 but not later than the 1990s.

A professor, instead, would probably start his or her lessons from around 1945 but not later than the 1970s. Both will be looking at what is contemporaneous to them. For the professor maybe artworks from sixty years ago are still able to travel in time, be contemporary to him/her and contribute to explaining the current artistic context. For a student it might be more difficult to feel the vivid life of artworks created many years before they were born. The threshold of the beginning of the contemporaneity of contemporary art can shift on the basis of the singular individual. Somehow, contemporary art history is at its core relational.<sup>97</sup> If contemporary art history is more about “what is up-to-date” there are two main consequences. Art history overlaps with art criticism and the historian does not need to rely on the judgment of time or to reach the post-mortem condition<sup>98</sup> to oversee artistic production. Secondly, the contemporary art historian produces value alongside the artist or the curator, together taking part in the production of discourse, culture and meaning.

*The exhibitionary complex.*<sup>99</sup> If exhibitions are the medium through which contemporary art becomes known,<sup>100</sup> which ones in particular? Exhibitions in museums and biennials undeniably have a pivotal role<sup>101</sup> but we also need to include another kind of temporal exhibition: the art fair. This typology is usually neglected in exhibition studies even if curator Daniel Birnbaum<sup>102</sup> already reported to a conference at the Venice Art Biennale in 2005 how art fairs were taking over.

97. Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

98. *Ibid.*

99. Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” in *New Formations*, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 73–102.

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

101. Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).

102. Robert Storr, ed., *Where the Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon* (Venice: Marsilio, 2007).

The art fair's history has developed in tandem with the affirmation of temporary art exhibitions and has continued to develop since the first "modern" times. In the nineteenth century the world fair evolved, or Expo, a large-scale international exhibition devoted to showing the achievements of countries. Artworks were sold in this scenario.<sup>103</sup> The world fair has been widely recognized to be the precursor of biennials. Thus in the first contemporary art biennial to be conceived, the Venice Art Biennale of 1895, exhibited artworks were on sale. In the 1970s biennials and fairs became two distinct exhibition typologies, with different functions but still part of the art circulation system. The first (contemporary) art fair to be conceived was ART COLOGNE in 1967 and was shortly followed by Art Basel in 1969, FIAC in Paris, and ARTE FIERA in Italy, in 1974. The main drive behind the birth of the art fair, which inherited numerous business practices, was the need for galleries and dealers to develop a peer-to-peer structure of commerce.<sup>104</sup> Crucial to its development was the need for a relational network. More important to the contemporary condition is the choice of fairs to be an exhibition-type event, which emphasizes its state of exception and its call for attention.

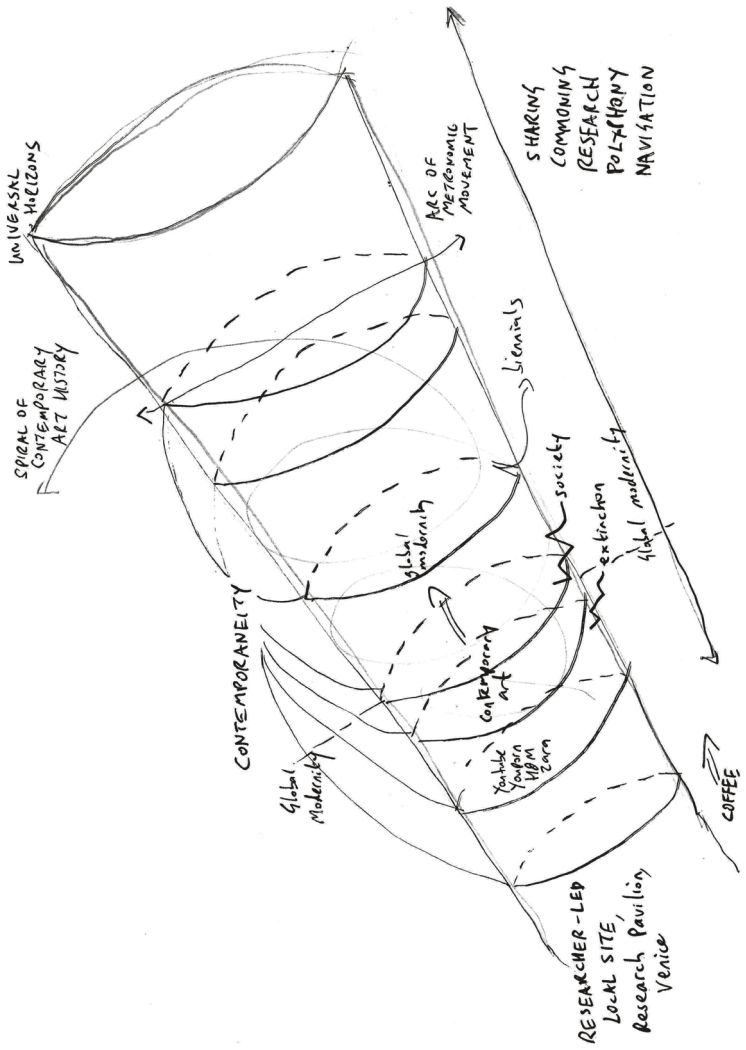
The contemporary art fair is an independent platform for the art market. Nevertheless it actively interacts with artistic production, discursive thinking, and curatorial propositions to the extent we can talk of a new hybridization of fairs and biennials in a situation similar to that of the nineteenth century but in a different guise, where the two different exhibition typologies feed each other.

103. Caroline Jones, *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials and the Aesthetic of Experience* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016).

104. Christian Morgner, "The Evolution of the Art Fair," *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 39, no. 3 (149), Special Issue: "Terrorism, Gender, and History. State of Research, Concepts, Case Studies" (2014): 318–336.

The *NOW* is the discrete instant of the contemporary condition of the now. Now after now it is always now. Now is the standpoint from which we look. Now is a unit that is at-the-same time of myself and can only be at-the-same-time when recognized by another self.

NOW is made of *nows* of recognition, of personal *nows* disconnected by horizontal time. NOW is the unexpressed need of *vertical time* and the only threshold of existence. Now is part of the contemporary vocabulary of time made of *befores*, *afters*, and *nows*. Each person is a now moving on their personal time trajectory. The sacredness of past, present and future is gone leaving the human being with its bare life.



Cone of Contemporaneity

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PEN = 0, 1, 1, 0, WEIGHT = 70, SLANT = 0, SUPERNESNESS = 0.71, SERIFS = true

The typeface used to set this series is called Meta-The-Difference-Between-The-Two-Font (MTDBT2F), designed by Dexter Sinister in 2010 after MetaFont, a digital typography system originally programmed by computer scientist Donald Kunth in 1979.

Unlike more common digital outline fonts formats such as TrueType or Postscript, a MetaFont is constructed of strokes drawn with set-width pens. Instead of describing each of the individual shapes that make up a family of related characters, a MetaFont file describes only the basic pen path or *\*skeleton\** letter. Perhaps better imagined as the ghost that comes in advance of a particular letterform, a MetaFont character is defined only by a set of equations. It is then possible to tweak various parameters such as weight, slant, and superness (more or less bold, Italic, and a form of chutzpah) in order to generate endless variations on the same bare bones.

Meta-The-Difference-Between-The-Two-Font is essentially the same as MetaFont, abiding the obvious fact that it swallows its predecessor. Although the result may look the same, it clearly can't be, because in addition to the software, the new version embeds its own backstory. In this sense, MTDBT2F is not only a tool to generate countless PostScript fonts, but *\*at least equally\** a tool to think about and around MetaFont. Mathematician Douglas Hofstadter once noted that one of the best things MetaFont might do is inspire readers to chase after the intelligence of an alphabet, and "yield new insights into the elusive 'spirits' that flit about so tantalizingly behind those lovely shapes we call 'letters.'"

For instance, each volume in *The Contemporary Condition* is set in a new MTDBT2F, generated at the time of publication, which is to say *\*now.\**

Dexter Sinister, 02/06/18, 14:30 PM