Inherent pedagogies: critical approaches to exhibition making in the 2000s

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Abstract

Since 2010, the discussion about the relation between curating and education has revolved around Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson's proposition of the 'educational turn'. This term mainly refers to the shift from the peripheral, supportive part of educational activities in relation to exhibitions, to their increased centrality within contemporary curatorial practice. While expressly educational initiatives have received plenty of attention, this thesis concentrates on the inherent pedagogies of the contemporary art exhibition space. The research draws attention to this aspect, particularly regarding critical curatorial approaches that seek to contest prevailing neoliberal educational and cultural policy across Europe. The thesis contributes to exhibition histories in its examination of four chapter-long case studies that were selected on the basis that they propose other modes of spectatorship to the prevalent model of entertained consumption. It also makes a contribution to curatorial studies by delving into distinct critical approaches and integrating interviews conducted with the curators in each case. Most importantly, this study presents the potential of educational theory to both examine and rethink the positions and relations exhibitions organise between institutions, curators, artworks, and the public. Specifically, I put forward the potential contribution of posthumanist, feminist materialist, and decolonial pedagogies to current curatorial practice. These particular methods are supportive of the challenge to Western, modern epistemology set out across the chapters through boundary crossings such as aesthetic experience/discourse, mind/body, artwork/viewer, the self/the other. I argue that, as curators, we need to unlearn the established —but largely unacknowledged— educational conventions of the field, explore other ways of learning, and set about unschooling contemporary art exhibitions.

A mis padres

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Contents

APPENDIX I

<u>Introduction</u>

During the summer of 2015, I visited *Terrapolis*, an exhibition co-curated by Iwona Blazwick, with Poppy Bowers, Elina Kountouri and the NEON arts organisation, held at the garden of the French School in Athens. The title of the show borrowed feminist and technology theorist Donna Haraway's term to examine the relation between 'terra' (Latin for earth) and 'polis' (Greek for city or citizens). It included works from established artists such as Allora & Calzadilla, Francis Alÿs, Joseph Beuys, Joan Jonas, Yayoi Kusama, Richard Long and Sarah Lucas, as well as commissioned pieces by Greek artists Athanasios Argianas, Eleni Kamma, Dionisis Kavallieratos, Aliki Palaska, and Kostas Sahpazis. Through this selection, the project sought to 'reconnect the human with the animal' and 'suggest a bioethics for the 21st century'.[1] Visitors were welcomed by assistants who handed us a map and a guide and offered their team's help to answer any questions we might have related to the works. As we walked in, I asked my companion: 'But why would we need any help?'

Notwithstanding the reinvigoration of experimental curatorial practice in the late 1980s and 1990s, and in particular, the range of projects that have engaged with pedagogical models, there is a widespread assumption that visitors need help in their encounters with artworks.[2] More optimistically, the presumption is that there is a gap in understanding between the artworks and the visitors. Curators attend to this threatening gap in understanding through mediation. Maria Lind describes mediation as the 'contact surfaces between works of art, curated projects and people', noting that '[mediation is] about varied forms and intensities of communicating about and around

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[1]NEON & Whitechapel Gallery, "Terrapolis," http://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/terrapolis/ (accessed November 6, 2017).

[2] Key examples of artistic and curatorial projects that have incorporated pedagogical models as a thematic and/or a methodology include: Daniel Buren and Pontus Hultén's *Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques*, 1996; the 'Platforms' of *Documenta 11* in 2002; education as one of the three leitmotifs of *Documenta 12* in 2007; the unrealised *Manifesta 6* experimental art school as exhibition and the associated volume, *Notes for an Artschool* (2006)*;* the subsequent *unitednations- plaza* and *Night School* projects (Berlin 2007, Mexico City 2008, New York 2008-2009); *Cork Caucus* (2005); *Be(com)ing Dutch*: *Eindhoven Caucus* (2006-2009); *Future Academy* (2002-2009); *Paraeducation Department* (2004); *Copenhagen Free University* (2001); *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.* (2006); *Hidden Curriculum* (2007); Tania Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta* in Havana (2002-2009); *ArtSchool Palestine* (2005); *Manoa Free University* (2003-2008); *School of Missing Studies*, Belgrade (2003); *ArtSchool UK* (2010); *The Centre for Possible Studies*, London (2009).
Mick Wilson and Paul O'Neill, "Curatorial counter-rhetorics and the educational turn," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 9, no. 2 (2010): 183*.*

art'.[3] In the case of *Terrapolis,* the most salient mediation strategies included a conventional brochure that consisted of a curatorial introduction and short accompanying texts for each of the works, a map that located the works in the garden and, of course, the presence of clearly identifiable assistants to consult with.

Both Simon Sheikh and Nora Sternfeld have argued that the exhibition and its mediation techniques are essentially educational.[4] We learn in the sense of gathering information about certain artists or subjects. Specific environments also indicate appropriate forms of behaviour, and, most importantly, as this thesis shows, exhibitions propose particular understandings of learning itself. In the case of *Terrapolis,* the visitors guide introduced the notion of the 'Anthropocene' as 'an era when human activities dominate and threaten the Earth's ecosystems and extinguish other species'.[5] Following common practice, the guide informs the visitor that Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla met as students in Florence in the 1990s, that they engage with social issues, that they first presented *Hope Hippo* (2005, 2015) at the 51st Venice Biennale, that the performer uses a whistle to alert the public of social injustices he finds in the newspaper and that the sculpture can be interpreted as a symbol of nature [Figure 1].[6] Equipped with the map, which provided a clear overview of the works' arrangement in the space, and the brochure, visitors were reassured and encouraged to make their way through the garden without any concerns about being lost or confused. Additionally, numerous friendly assistants wearing brightly-coloured t-shirts were available to address any doubts; their role appeared to be to prompt enthusiastic

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[3] Maria Lind, "Why Mediate Art?" in *It's all Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context,* ed. Kaija Kaitavuori, Laura Kokkonen, and Nora Sternfeld (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 23.

[4] Simon Sheikh, "Letter to Jane (Investigation of a Function)," in *Curating and the Educational Turn,* ed. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (London: Open editions, 2010), 66. Nora Sternfeld, "What can the Curatorial Learn from the Educational?" in *Cultures of the Curatorial* ed. Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, and Thomas Weski (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 334.

[5] Proposed by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and limnologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000, the anthropocene constitutes a hypothesis being currently considered by the Stratigraphy Commission of the Geological Society of London to officially acknowledge the arrival of a new geological era defined by human actions. The term has become a theoretical buzzword and prompted numerous publications from multiple disciplines such as environmentalism, geography, history of science, art history, and philosophy. Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), Kindle Edition.

[6] The brochure and the map are retrievable from the exhibition's website.

conversation. The exhibition thus presented learning as a structured process initiated by the curatorial thematic introduction to the project and continued by the visitors' familiarisation with the space. The public encountered the works one by one, each work grounded by its textual commentary and complemented by the possibility of engaging in a conversation with an authorised (and presumably qualified) facilitator. In this case, the curators made sure to fill any perceived vacuum between works and visitors.

Figure 1. Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla, *Hope Hippo,* 2015. Mud, Whistle, Daily Newspaper, Reader. Installation View: *Terrapolis,* NEON and Whitechapel Gallery, French School at Athens. Photograph: Kell Mitchell.

As a title, *Terrapolis* indicates a groundbreaking starting point. However, the show's strict mediation techniques turned Haraway's conceptualisation into a passive thematic. The biologist and primatologist's challenge to normative boundaries and her attention to trans-species relationships have attained cult status, although her later work (particularly, the notion of 'Chthulucene') has also been criticised as 'antinatalist', 'pro-work' and 'apocalyptic'.[7] The exhibition offered an idyllic environment, a well-kept garden in which visitors followed their maps in an orderly fashion and were reassured by the simplistic interpretations provided by the guide. The text

[7] Sophie Lewis, "Cthulhu plays no role for me," *Viewpoint Magazine,* May 8, 2017, https://www.viewpointmag.com/2017/05/08/cthulhu-plays-no-role-for-me/ (accessed April 21, 2018). Also see Fabrizio Terranova's film *Donna Haraway: Storytelling for Earthly Survival* (Belgium: 2016).

suggests that Caroline Achaintre's masks are 'metaphors for the facade we present to society'; Tue Greenfort's works are about 'our impact on the environment'; and that Joan Jonas' piece proposes 'a holistic relation between humanity and nature […] and a critique —we love our pets but neglect the wider environment'.[8] What's more, the opportunity to discuss the works with the facilitators provided an additional participatory feel to the visitor experience.

The exhibition presented little reworking and problematising of 'the appropriation of nature as a resource for the productions of culture' as Haraway put it in her foundational 1985 essay 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs'.[9] The thematic approach superficially engaged with her notion of a breached boundary between human and animal since the late twentieth century and with her vision of accommodating 'permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints'.[10] The show's mediation strategy departs from Haraway's ecofeminist cyborg politics and her opposition to 'perfect communication' and meaning translation, which are fundamental to the structural divisions between nature and culture and body and mind.[11] The pleasant, unchallenging experience that was offered to the public had hardly anything to do with Haraway's adventurous thinking and the 'thick material and narrative tissues' of her work. Haraway stresses that 'it matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.'[12] In exhibition making, the concepts that inform a selection of works are significant, as is the way that curatorial discourse affects our encounter with the works and how all components (including visitors) are brought together into a particular situation.

My account of *Terrapolis* is by no means exhaustive. However, it serves as a typical example of what Lind has identified as the prevailing model in contemporary exhibition practice, a

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[8] Exhibition guide: 6, 20, 25, retrieved from the exhibition's website.

[9] Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminist in the 1980s" (1985), in *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 8.

[10] Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 10, 13.

[11] Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 34.

[12] Donna J. Haraway, "SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far," *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 3 (2013), DOI: 10.7264/N3KH0K81.

successor of the New York Museum of Modern Art's influential standard instituted by its founding

director, Alfred Barr, in the 1930s.[13] Barr conceived of the gallery as a classroom and emphasised

the museum's primordial determination to make modern art approachable and understandable to

the public.[14] In his words: 'The primary purpose of the Museum is *to help* [my emphasis] people

enjoy, understand and use the visual arts of our time [...] Obviously, these three activities —

enjoying, understanding, using— should be thought of as interdependent. Each confirms, enriches

and supports the others. Together they indicate the Museum's primary function, which is

educational in the broadest, least academic sense.'[15] This commitment also meant that the

museum's educational department, at the time directed by Victor D'Amico, became increasingly

redundant.[16] Exhibition histories have studied how visitors are conceived, modelled, and

constructed by museological practices. Several scholarly perspectives concur in their

understanding of the museum as a liminal space, the performative character of visits across

specific narratives and values, and the fundamental tension between accessibility and exclusivity.[17]

Still, Barr's incorporation of pedagogy within the exhibition has served as a long-standing model.

Charlotte Klonk described his shaping of the spectator as an 'educated consumer', a conception

that Lind suggests has been replaced by that of the 'entertained consumer'.[18] In *Terrapolis,* visitors

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[13] Lind, "Why Mediate Art?" 20.

[14] Suzanne P. Hudson, *Robert Ryman: Used Paint* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), 32, 37.

[15] Alfred H. Barr, Jr., "Chronicle of the Collection of Painting and Sculpture," in *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art, 1929-1967* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 620; cited in Hudson, 37.

[16] Hudson, 45.

[17] See Brian, O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube, The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals, Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995); Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998). O'Doherty's collected essays (first published in Artforum in 1976) concentrate on the isolating, hermetic, white, ideal space devoid of time and look into the history of hanging trends and their implied values. O'Doherty points to Marcel Duchamp's installations as the first 'gestures' to provoke awareness of the exhibition space. In his view, the gallery space is perfectly aligned with upper middle classes social values. Duncan's study refers to the museum as a ritual space. She examines the Louvre and the National Gallery in London as 'monuments to the new bourgeois state' drawing attention to particular hanging arrangements. Importantly, Duncan differentiates American museums formed by private collectors that sought to emulate European cultural capitals and appear as inclusive, democratic public spaces. Staniszewski's historical account of exhibition design at MoMA argues that it reinforced the individuals' identity as consumers and encouraged the use of 'free will' in the 'free market'. The museum, she contends, validated ideals of individual sovereignty, self-determination, and personal freedom.

[18] Lind, "Why Mediate Art?" 20, 25.

learned by collecting information about the works that helped them understand. The mainstream exhibition's framework imparts an unequivocal message: we learn by means of consumption.

The alternative, in the case of 'Terrapolis', would have been to take Haraway's term as a methodological tool which would entail exploring science fiction networks as 'patternings' and 'risky co-makings'. Haraway proposes string figure games, such as cat's cradle, as 'practices of scholarship, relaying, thinking with, becoming with in material-semiotic makings'.[19] Her string figures offer an exciting way of working and making connections. A mediation strategy and pedagogical approach model based on threading and sustaining the balance between giving and receiving would probably result in a more playful and meaningful experience for the visitors. This thesis is concerned with experimental approaches that foster critical spectatorship. Previous influential research in this area includes Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012). Her comprehensive historical account of participatory artistic practice in the twentieth century covers Futurism, the Situationist International, and Happenings, as well as key events such as Graciela Carnevale's imprisonment of the audience in an empty gallery in Rosario, Argentina (1968).[20] Bishop counters didacticism as well as the 'ethical turn' —the moral judgement in arts and politics— through the Rancièrian notion of 'aisthesis'.[21] She dedicates a chapter to more recent pedagogical projects in which she examines the educational propositions in the work of Tania Bruguera, Paul Chan, Pawel Althamer, and Thomas Hirschhorn, thereby focusing on artistic rather than curatorial practice.[22]

In the sub-field of exhibition histories, Afterall's book and talk series is an important contribution. The publications examine the public presentation of contemporary art since 1955 through a selection of paradigmatic exhibitions. The issue on *Culture in Action* (1993), curated by Mary Jane Jacob and developed in collaboration with local Chicago communities, merits special attention in regards to participatory spectatorship. Jacob sought to redefine the notion of public art

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[19] Haraway, "SF: Science Fiction".

[20] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 119-121.

[21] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 27-30.

[22] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 241-274.

by commissioning eight artist-led projects dispersed throughout the city and concentrated on developing 'new modes of social participation and community engagement.'[23] As such, the show is a groundbreaking example of the blurred line between artists-producers and the public as collaborator.[24] It incorporated experimental educational approaches; for example, Mark Dion worked with fourteen high school students to investigate urban ecologies and tropical ecosystems, as well as crossovers between nature and culture. The group became known as the Chicago Urban Ecology Action Group. Their project involved guest speakers, a field trip to Belize, and setting up a field station in Lincoln Park, which took the form of an 'inclusive clubhouse' [Figure 2].[25] Afterall's volume presents a reappraisal of the project and its challenge to, and redistribution of, the museum's authority.

Figure 2. Inside the CUEAG headquarters. Clockwise from centre: Mark Dion, Catherine Mach, Kazumi Yoshinaga, Charmaine Morgan, Naomi Beckwith, Karlyn Westover, and Jerry Winners. Photography by John McWilliams for Sculpture Chicago.

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[23] Joshua Decter, "Culture in Action: Exhibition as Social Redistribution," in *Exhibition as Social Intervention 'Culture in Action' 1993,* ed. Helmut Draxler and Joshua Decter (London: Afterall, 2014), 14.

[24] David Morris and Paul O'Neill, "Introduction: Exhibition as Social Intervention," in *Exhibition as Social Intervention,* 8.

[25] Decter, 25, see also, Mark Dion, "Mark Dion in correspondence with Stephanie Smith, May-July 2013," in *Exhibition as Social Intervention,* 182-191.

In Europe, a significant part of the discussion on the potentiality of curatorial critique has focused on the influence of New Institutionalism, the self-reflective, progressive educational approach of Northern art institutions in the 1990s and early 2000s, which is exemplified by the directorships of Charles Esche at the Rooseum in Malmo, Maria Lind at the Kunstverein München, and Catherine David at Witte de With in Rotterdam, among others.[26] The main curatorial studies journals have also devoted special editions to the problem of critique. In 2011,*The Exhibitionist*, for instance, included a piece in which Massimiliano Gioni reflects on curatorial responsibility towards the interpretation of works. That same year, *OnCurating* featured an interview with Per Hüttner about his project 'I am a Curator' (2003), which invited members of the public to act as curators at the Chisenhale Gallery for a day, and a piece by Dorothee Richter on the pedagogics of the exhibition read through 'the apparatus of signs' and 'the grammars of display'.[27] Within this context, I am mainly interested in examining what kinds of experience and forms of learning are proposed to the public and I suggest that these are indicative of the social relevance of contemporary art exhibitions.

This thesis investigates the intersection between critical curatorial approaches and the field's interest in matters of education. In Paul O' Neill and Mick Wilson's anthology on the 'educational turn' (2010) —a proposition to which I will return in the following section— Irit Rogoff points to the difference between the 'turn' as a transformative movement and as a form of labelling and packaging of a process for consumption. Rogoff's chapter includes her reflections on the A.C.A.D.E.M.Y project at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (2006), which responded to the neoliberal educational policy in Europe and originated from the question: 'What can we learn from

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[26] See Alex Farquharson, "Bureaux de change," *Frieze,* September 2, 2006, https://frieze.com/article/bureaux-de-change (accessed December 5, 2017); Nina Möntmann, "The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism Perspectives on a Possible Future," *eipcp Transversal* (August 2007), http://eipcp.net/transversal/0407/moentmann/en (accessed December 5, 2017); Simon Sheikh, "Burning from the Inside New Institutionalism Revisited," in *Cultures of the Curatorial,* 361-373; and James Voorhies, "On New Institutionalism," in *Beyond objecthood: the exhibition as a critical form since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017), 71-138.

[27] Jens Hoffmann and Tara McDowell, eds. "La Critique," *The Exhibitionist* 4 (June 2011); Marianne Eigenheer, Barnaby Drabble, and Dorothee Richter, eds. "Curating Critique," *OnCurating* 9 (2011), http://www.on-curating.org/issue-9.html#.WicC_7SFigQ (accessed December 5, 2017).

the museum beyond what it sets out to teach us?'.[28] Dave Beech's contribution stands out in its consideration of the educational turn in the context of a broader cultural shift: the rise of the expert within the modern bureaucratisation of society. As an 'antidote', Beech borrows Mark Hutchinson's idea of the curator as an expert in ignorance.[29] Nora Sternfeld's perspective is also essential to the debate. Her views are key to the understanding of mediation as the intersection between curating and education. For her, the turn suggests that curating involves, beyond the organisation of exhibitions, 'generating, mediating for and reflecting on experience and knowledge', a shift that is intrinsically linked to emancipatory approaches. Sternfeld also presents examples from her practice and proposes learning from the 'unglamorous' field of education to counteract the trendy and showy side of curatorial educational initiatives.[30] Throughout this thesis, I examine and explore the links between curating, social critique, and education.

Despite extensive scholarship in these areas, most of this research is devoted to expressly educational projects, while there is less written on implicit pedagogic propositions in exhibition making itself. My thesis addresses this gap and brings the underlying educational relations of the contemporary art exhibition to the foreground. I focus on the period between 2000 and 2016 to investigate the curatorial attention paid to education in the last two decades, particularly in relation to the Bologna Declaration (1999).[31] The European initiative to harmonise higher education across the continent is set out in terms of 'modernisation' in response to the demands of a 'changing labour market' and emphasises notions of 'quality assurance', 'compatibility', 'mobility', and 'competition'.[32] Signatories subscribe to a neoliberal understanding of education that constructs the

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[28] Irit Rogoff, "Turning," in *Curating and the Educational Turn,* 33, 35-36.

[29] Dave Beech, "Weberian Lessons: Art, Pedagogy and Managerialism," in *Curating and the Educational Turn,* 57, 59.

[30] Sternfeld, "What can the Curatorial Learn from the Educational?" 334-335, 338.

[31] In 1998, on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the University of Paris, the education ministers of France, Germany, the UK, and Italy signed The Sorbonne Declaration with the intention of creating a European Higher Education Area. Twenty-nine countries formalised this process by signing the Bologna Declaration in 1999. Currently, forty-eight countries and the European Commission are members of the EHEA. European Higher Education Area, "History," http://www.ehea.info/pid34248/history.html (accessed May 24, 2018).

[32] European Commission, "The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area," http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/higher-education/bologna-process_en (accessed November 29, 2017).

ideal European citizen under an entrepreneurial model.[33] By underlining notions of 'employability', 'mobility', and 'flexibility', the agreement also presents the EU as an 'enabling state' that provides the population with the opportunity to become autonomous, self-governing subjects.[34] The timeframe of the thesis then concentrates on the response of curatorial practice to the reform and its definition of the European Higher Education Area.

As I explain below, my selection of case studies from Venice, Berlin, Vienna, and London presents projects that have proposed alternative ways of knowing and learning. Rather than merely demonstrating the pedagogical basis of the exhibition, I put forward the potential of educational theory to discern the positions organised between curator, artists, works, and visitors. I argue that critical awareness of these educational relations is fundamental to critical curatorial practice. The thesis draws from posthumanist, decolonial, and feminist pedagogies and presents their relevance to both understanding and informing the pedagogical aspects of exhibition making. The challenges made by these approaches to the dominant modern epistemology will be developed throughout and discussed in relation to the audience's encounter with art.

The 'educational turn' or 'return' in curating

Historian and curator Paul Greenhalgh has compared current concerns about museums' public role and sustainability to the struggle of the Great International Exhibitions to position themselves between the poles of education (seen as a form of work and self-betterment) and entertainment or leisure in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[35] Seminal studies, such as Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), have addressed the educational basis of exhibitionary institutions. Bennett considers the nineteenth-century Western public museum as a 'rational', orderly space, 'capable of bearing the didactic burden placed upon it'.[36] In his analysis, the

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[33] Andreas Fejes, "European Citizens under Construction: The Bologna Process analysed from a governmentality perspective," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40, no. 4 (2008): 517-518.

[34] Fejes, 523-524.

[35] Paul Greenhalgh, "Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibitions," in *The New Museology,* ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), 74-75, 82, 87.

[36] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum, History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

museum embodies the developing 'governmental', self-regulatory forms of social control.[37] Bennett highlights the museum's universalising discourse and visitors' performative itinerary across a progressive spatial narrative that rests on particular exclusions and hierarchies.[38] His study points to the museum's strict distinction between producers and consumers of knowledge, evident in the clear designation of public and restricted areas. Furthermore, he distinguishes between the visible and the invisible, that is, the difference between what is openly displayed and communicated and the coded order underlying these arrangements.[39] Another key title is Charlotte Klonk's *Spaces of Experience* (2009)*,* a historical account of prevalent modes of display between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Klonk emphasises that display models, such as the eighteenth century's decorative arrangements, or the emphasis of the nineteenth century single-row, eye-level hangs on individuality and ideal citizenship, align with particular historical constructs of the public.[40] She identifies the New York Museum of Modern Art's 'white flexible container' as the most influential model of the twentieth century (which is still widely recognisable). This particular mode of display corresponds, according to Klonk, to the patrons' interest in reviving consumerism after the stock market crash of 1929, the year the museum opened.[41] Despite recent variations, such as the trend in museum architecture to allow the outer context inside the building, for example, Klonk argues that most gallery spaces remain standardised. The museum's environment, she contends, is comparable to high-end boutiques and unequivocally addresses the spectator as a consumer.[42] It is unsurprising, then, that at present most exhibition spaces perfectly align with neoliberalism, the current political-economic paradigm.

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[37] Bennett, 6.

[38] Bennett, 46.

[39] Bennett, 89, 164, 171.

[40] Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience, Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 21, 25, 41.

[41] Klonk, 136.

[42] Klonk, 200, 206, 207.

Neoliberalism gives prominence to individuals' freedom to pursue entrepreneurial self-realisation with minimal state intervention and with a prioritisation of the free market.[43] In the realm of culture —as I discuss in more detail below— policy attempts to compensate for deep state funding cuts by urging artists to develop their entrepreneurial skills. Jen Harvie observes that this agenda presents the risk of the commodification of art and the loss of autonomy.[44] She points to a shift in the longstanding history of the UK governments' funding of the arts and underlines the increased marketisation, privatisation, and instrumentalisation of the arts, as well as the 'intensified precarity of arts labour, [and] class stratification of access to arts'.[45] However, and notwithstanding capital's all-encompassing capacity, resistant practices persist in challenging the norm. In support of progressive curatorial approaches, this thesis investigates their alternative conceptions of the audience and critical potential.

In recent years, the debate has revolved around the proposition of an 'educational turn' in curating, which refers, according to Paul O' Neill and Mick Wilson, to the centrality that discursive activities have acquired within exhibition spaces. This shift involves a tendency to favour experimental, collaborative methods over traditional, expertise-based frameworks. For O'Neill and Wilson, contemporary curating is characterised by its concern with the framing and mediation of art rather than just the presentation of objects.[46] Within this discussion, my research closely relates to Simon Sheikh's standpoint and his proposal to understand the educational turn as a 'return'. For Sheikh, mediation implies that something is missing that needs to be transmitted to the visitors. In his view, pedagogy is intrinsic to the institution:

> The museum and, by extension, curatorial processes inscribe both subjects and
> objects in specific relations of power and knowledge, in a transfer of knowledge and a
> coordination of desire and agency that operates as education, entertainment, narrative
> and information —functions that are as often complementary as they are conflicting.

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[43] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

[44] Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 192-193.

[45] Harvie, 190.

[46] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, Introduction to *Curating and the Educational Turn,* 12, 19, 20.

> Simply put, the museum and the practice of exhibition making is always already a pedagogical endeavour.[47]

This thesis presents a detailed examination of the pedagogical propositions of specific exhibitions and the inconsistencies they entail. It looks into particular curatorial approaches, their conception of the audience, and the kinds of learning put forward. The first difficulty that this analysis involves is that curators are often only partially aware of the educational models their exhibitions set out. Following Sheikh, I recognise the need to re-establish the connection between mediation and curating, spheres that have been artificially separated in processes of labour specialisation. I also take into account his understanding of the pedagogical as a mode of address.[48] Mediation appears as the key notion at the intersection not only between curating and education but also, as Nora Sternfeld presents it, between knowledge and power.[49] However, the collaboration between curators and museum educators is marked by persistent, gendered institutional hierarchies. Although there is increasing interest in blurring the limits between the two fields, there is still a sense of a missed opportunity to work together, an issue to which I will return.[50]

For some, the educational turn can be understood as a critical response to the Bologna process. O'Neill and Wilson point to the ingrained, dominant idea of 'human capital formation' as the aim of education, which is nevertheless resisted in the sphere of informal education, including critical curatorial practice. They observe that the field has developed a 'counter-rhetorics' that questions the dominant discourse and its exaltation of competitive individualism and instead recovers the notion of education as a public good.[51] Janna Graham, Valeria Graziano, and Susan Kelly have also examined curatorial challenges to the Bologna agreement's narrow understanding of education as the transfer of knowledge and as a training process for incorporation into the job

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[47] Sheikh, "Letter to Jane," 64-66.

[48] Sheikh, "Letter to Jane," 68-69.

[49] Nora Sternfeld, "That Certain Savoir/Pouvoir," in *It's all Mediating*, 1.

[50] See Carmen Mörsch, "Alliances for Unlearning: On Gallery Education and Institutions of Critique," *Afterall* 26 (Spring 2011): 12; and Carmen Mörsch, "Contradicting Oneself: Gallery Education as Critical Practice within the Educational Turn in Curating," in *It's all Mediating*, 15, 17.

[51] Wilson and O'Neill, "Curatorial counter-rhetorics," 179,182.

market. They stress that the educational turn coincides with the height of neoliberal privatisation processes and, in the UK, the defunding of arts and humanities programmes, an exorbitant increase in tuition fees at universities, and funding cuts to museum and gallery education departments.[52] However, the authors note that the link between curatorial attention to education and the implementation of these policies remains underdeveloped.[53]

It is worth examining cultural policy in more detail here as it is indicative of the kind of relation that cultural institutions propose to the public. Recent studies identify a global trend in the drive for economic growth, the provision of 'an effective and flexible workforce', and the concern for the integration of migrant populations.[54] The case of the UK is particularly revealing: the New Labour government (1997-2010) placed great significance on culture under the notion of 'creative industries', for example, by allowing free entry to national museums and galleries.[55] New Labour substantially increased government expenditure in culture and at the same time —in line with its pro-business inclination— encouraged closer association between arts organisations and the private sector.[56] The administration championed principles of 'choice, competition, and efficiency', along with a mistrust of the public sector. In the Labour government's second term, critics' discussions centred on the notion of 'instrumentalism' and the deployment of culture towards economic and social effects.[57] Regarding the relation between art and education, the rationale of

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[52] Tuition fees were introduced in the first term of Tony Blair's Labour government at £1000 per year (1998); they were initially tripled for students starting in 2006 and tripled again to £9000 per year by the coalition government for students starting in 2012. The Conservative government replaced maintenance grants for maintenance loans in 2016.

[53] Janna Graham, Valeria Graziano, and Susan Kelly, "The Educational Turn in Art," *Performance Research* 21, no.6 (2016): 29-30.

[54] In England, for example, funding is guided by the principles of 'education, learning, access, and social inclusion' which are also central to the Museum's Association 'Museums Change Lives' campaign that seeks to maximise museums 'real' social impact in response to funders and policymakers' expectations. Caroline Lang, John Reeve, and Vicky Woollard, "The Impact of Government Policy," in *The Responsive Museum: Working with Audiences in the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Caroline Lang, John Reeve, and Vicky Woollard (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), 19-20. Museums Association, "Museums Change Lives," https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives (accessed April 20, 2017).

[55] David Hesmondhalgh, et al., "Were New Labour's cultural policies neo-liberal?" *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21, no.1 (2015): 98.

[56] Hesmondhalgh et al., 100-101.

[57] Hesmondhalgh et.al., 104, 107.

Creative Partnerships, New Labour's cultural education flagship programme, emphasised the economic value of the culture industries, the development of particular skills required for the sector, and the value of culture for social inclusion.[58] Christine Hall and Pat Thomson consider the programme as part of the 'cultural turn' of New Labour's educational policy starting in 2000 and underline its basis in the ideal of 'self-managing "lifelong learners" who take responsibility for their own economic inclusion by adapting to the demands of what has been described as a "knowledge economy" that requires highly skilled workers'.[59] Even so, New Labour's policy is clearly distinct from the massive cuts to arts funding made by the coalition Conservative and Liberal Democrat government post-2010.

In its prioritisation of the creative economy, Europe follows this neoliberal agenda, although individual members' policies vary. The sector's value is seen as 'a source of job creation, [… and] an excellent conduit for promoting social inclusion' aligned towards the continent's growth.[60] The 2007 Resolution of the Council of the EU set as a central objective the 'promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity […] for growth, employment, innovation and competitiveness' via the reinforcement of links between art and education. The document stresses the need to promote 'the availability of managerial, business and entrepreneurial training capacities specifically tailored to professionals in the cultural and creative fields'.[61] Departing from the conception of 'public good', both art and education are increasingly framed as purposeful to the market economy.

Graham and her co-authors argue that curatorial practice has often adopted education as a harmless subject rather than taking an interventionist stance that actively opposes austerity driven

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[58] Christine Hall and Pat Thomson, "Creative partnerships? Cultural policy and inclusive arts practice in one primary school," *British Educational Research Journal* 33, no.3 (June 2007): 317.

[59] Hall and Thompson, 326.

[60] European Commission, "Strategic framework —European Agenda for Culture," https://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/strategic-framework_en (accessed April 20, 2018).

[61] EUR-Lex Access to European Union Law, "Resolution of the Council of 16 November 2007 on a European Agenda for Culture," (In force) http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32007G1129%2801%29 (accessed April 20, 2018).

schemes.[62] A fundamental difficulty raised in their essay is the implausibility of a public sphere under institutions' current reliance on private funding. They call for incorporating radical pedagogies as tools rather than themes within resistant practices.[63] The viability of such critical approaches is one of the central questions of this dissertation. The integration of alternative pedagogical theory responds to the need of challenging and expanding the prevailing understanding of education. Furthermore, this thesis is concerned with curators' ability to reclaim the kind of experience they wish to propose to their audience.

On curatorial mode of address

The European standardisation of education is called into question by initiatives such as 'invisible pedagogies', conceptualised by a research collective based in Spain in 2008. Their work in museums and other educational settings seeks to shed light on learning processes that remain implicit, latent, and unconscious. They stress that these pedagogies define an ideal addressee, that is, they assign particular identities and behaviours. Led by María Acaso, their research has borrowed key concepts from educational theory, such as 'hidden curriculum' from Phillip Jackson, and 'mode of address', as developed by Elizabeth Ellsworth.[64] The latter is remarkably useful for rethinking educational relations.

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[62] Less attention has been given, for instance, to education's disciplinary function, as in Pierre Bourdieu's study of the reproduction of structural power and symbolic relations between classes through the distribution of cultural capital. For Bourdieu, the educational system provides the optimal solution to the transmission of power and the replication of the social order, one that is particularly effective in obscuring this function through its apparent neutrality. He argues that the educational system appears as the means of cultural transmission accessible to everyone, but is only really available to those able to appropriate these cultural goods. For Bourdieu, the educational system requires familiarity with the dominant culture from the outset, which it does not provide and can only be acquired through family upbringing, a process that results in monopolisation of the system by the most capable 'cultured families'. He observes that the educational system's exclusion and demarcation mechanisms work seamlessly. For example, academic hierarchies are established in terms of merit and skill, but in reality, correspond to social class structures. The transmission of cultural capital correlates with that of economic capital; this is evident in the ruling classes' control over prestigious higher education institutions under the pretence of a democratic selection process, as well as in the lasting influence of family relationships to professional success. Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Culture Critical Concepts in Sociology,* Vol. III ed. Chris Jenks (London: Routledge, 2003), 63-65, 70-75, 86.

[63] Graham, Graziano, and Kelly, 30, 32, 34-35.

[64] María Acaso, Noelia Antúnez, and Clara Megías, "Lady in a Mink Coat or Pale Freak? The Invisible Museum Project: Moving the "Invisible Pedagogies" to Art Museums," *Arte y Políticas de Identidad* 5 (December 2011): 63, 65. See also Pedagogías Invisibles, http://www.pedagogiasinvisibles.es/nosotras/#pedagogiasinvisibles (accessed November 14, 2017).

Taken from film studies, 'mode of address' is encapsulated in the question: 'who does this film think you are?' The notion refers to social positioning processes, the way in which address affects experience and interpretation and, more broadly, social change.[65] Ellsworth proposes adopting 'mode of address' as a tool to reveal invisible pedagogies and conventional practices. She refers to a transformative intention, the possibility of subversive practices, and critical and reflective spectatorship. 'Mode of address' is concerned with the relation 'between the film's text and the viewer's uses of it'.[66] Applied to curatorial studies, it allows us to look at the relation between the exhibition and the spectator's experience and draws our attention to intended, imagined, and desired audiences. How do curators envision their audience? Can this ideal public be inferred by 'traces' left in the exhibition? Crucially, Ellsworth is interested in the difference that mode of address makes to viewers' understanding of their agency and position in the world. She enquires as to whether the mode of address can encourage or discourage social change.[67] In this thesis, I concentrate on curatorial forms of address, particularly regarding the kind of knowledge put forward to the audience and the mode of learning implied. My investigation looks at ways of positioning viewers, the offers exhibitions make, their demands from their visitors, and the kind of social interaction they organise.

Taking the question 'who does this museum think you are?' as a starting point, Acaso, Noelia Antúnez, and Clara Megías problematically typecast the ideal visitor of major institutions. With its plentiful shopping areas and artist-commissioned merchandise, the authors suggest that the ideal type of the London Tate Modern is a middle-aged, educated housewife; Madrid Thyssen-Bornemisza's opulent decor corresponds with an older, elegantly dressed, upper-class woman; the white cube aesthetic of experimental exhibition spaces focused on emerging artists, such as LABoral (Gijón, Spain), appeals to young hipsters; the 'occupy aesthetics' of the *Palais de Tokyo* and other spaces, such as Matadero, Madrid, conveys an unfinished working space, a pretendedly counter-cultural, collaborative organisation directed at young activists; and finally, the coolness of

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[65] Elizabeth Ellsworth, *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1997), 1.

[66] Ellsworth, 23.

[67] Ellsworth, 23, 31, 35-36.

the New Museum in New York is devised to attract young, stylish women shopping in the area.[68]

Their stereotypes are intended to draw attention to some of the ways that museums define their

ideal audience, such as their location, architecture, furniture, and lighting design. The study aims to

highlight the need for less prescriptive alternatives; while their comparison between sites is

revelatory, their analysis remains strikingly simplistic. It fails to consider, for example, the larger

public's ways of negotiating their positioning and uses of the space. Tate Modern, for instance,

recorded more than six million visitors in 2016-2017, most of whom surely do not identify as

housewives.[69] My investigation differs in that it concentrates on critical curatorial approaches that

deliberately challenge the norm. Rather than studying more permanent museum configurations, I

have chosen to examine the experimental proposals that temporary exhibitions allow.

Between 2016 and 2017, Acaso collaborated with Jordi Ferreiro in the development of a

project titled 'Where is the Mediation Office?' at LABoral arts centre (Gijón, Spain) [Figure 3]. The

aim was to question the physical and symbolic space that educational departments occupy within

the museum, reject a subordinate position, and provoke a destabilising effect. Acaso describes it

as an experimental investigation of the relations and hierarchies between educational, artistic, and

curatorial fields. The main strategy consisted of transferring the mediation office to the exhibition

space. Participants started from a series of questions that invited them to consider both

educational programmes as artworks and the educational potential of art. The project questioned

the understanding of education as a resource and the 'quantitative logic of cultural institutions'. As

an alternative, it proposed a long-term duration and a reduced number of participants with the

ultimate aim of educating the institution.[70] By exhibiting the mediation office, Acaso and Ferreiro's

project shines a spotlight on the educational work within the museum. They highlight and

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[68] Acaso, Antúnez, and Megías, 73-78. Occupy Wall Street defines itself as a leaderless, diverse resistance movement driven by people from the 99% who oppose the greed and corruption of the 1%. Occupy makes use of the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic and promotes nonviolent means. See: Occupy Wall Street, http://occupywallst.org/ (accessed May 24, 2018) and Sebastian Lowe, "When Protest Becomes Art: The Contradictory Transformations of the Occupy Movement at Documenta 13 and Berlin Biennale 7," in *FIELD: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* 1 (Spring 2015): 185-203.

[69] Ruth Findlay and Samuel Jones, *Tate Report 2016/2017* (London: Tate Publishing), 80.

[70] María Acaso, "De la mediación objetual a la mediación experiencial. Independencia y memoria en la educación en museos," Blog entry posted June 9, 2017, http://www.mariaacaso.es/la-mediacion-objetual-la-mediacion-experiencial-independencia-memoria-la-educacion-museos/ (accessed November 15, 2017).

problematise the centre's institutional organisation and its favoured models of participation.

However, their comparison of art and education simply inverts the logic they seek to contest. In

other words, their rejection of the conception of education as a resource turns art into a source of

pedagogical strategies.

Figure 3. María Acaso and Jordi Ferreiro, *Where is the Mediation Office?* 2016-2017
Installation and public programme, LABoral, Gijón, Spain.

Although I share research interests with Acaso, our approaches are diametrically opposed.

Inspired by German-born, Uruguayan conceptual artist and educator Luis Camnitzer, she

understands art as a tool, as a mode of thinking to be employed elsewhere, particularly, the

classroom.[71] Instead, I turn to pedagogical theory for ideas that can inform not art, but rather,

curatorial practice. Acaso is concerned with how art can transform education; in my case, I look at

how education can transform the experience of art. Her attention to curating has to do with

[71] See Maria Acaso and Clara Megías, *Art Thinking: Cómo el arte puede transformar la educación* (Barcelona: Paidós, 2017). Camnitzer is also known for co-founding The New York Graphic Workshop with Liliana Porter and José Guillermo Castillo in 1964. The workshop put forward a conceptual approach to printmaking that departed from technically focused, traditional methods. They produced experimental work that also developed into new modes of distribution, such as mail art. Sophie Halart, "The New York Graphic Workshop, 1964-70," in *In Focus: Wrinkle 1968 by Liliana Porter,* ed. Sophie Halart (London: Tate Research Publication, 2018) http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/in-focus/wrinkle/new-york-graphic-workshop (accessed May 26, 2018).

reclaiming museum educators' visibility. Even though I empathise with her endeavour, especially regarding gender equality, for me, the stakes are much higher.

Our views are grounded in distinct theoretical positions. Acaso draws from Camnitzer's writing, particularly his conception of 'art thinking' as a 'meta-discipline that is there to help expand the limits of other forms of thinking'.[72] For Camnitzer, art's value resides in its encouragement of illicit, disruptive connections and the construction of alternative social orders that challenge familiar configurations. Although he recognises that art involves conflict, he maintains that its contradictions can be understood and communicated pedagogically. His essay concludes with a discussion of art education that urges the artistic community to reach out to those who most desperately 'need' us. Camnitzer warns that failing to do so presents 'the danger […] that their minds may not *be able* [my emphasis] to differentiate between prepackaged, indoctrinating conventions and their own potentially challenging thoughts. They may not even realise that challenging thoughts exist. Not only will they never art-think, but they also may end up voting Republican'.[73] In contrast, my research adheres to French philosopher Jacques Rancière's proposition of the 'aesthetic regime of art' as an unresolved 'identity of contraries', of conscious and unconscious processes, knowing and not knowing.[74] Camnitzer's distinction between us and them, the able and the unable, corresponds to what Rancière calls the logic of stultification, the subordination of one intelligence to another. In opposition, and taking equality as a presumption rather than an end result, Rancière proposes emancipation (a concept I explore in depth in Chapter One) as a form of verification of 'what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other'.[75] Art matters not —as Camnitzer suggests— as the means to reduce the right-wing vote. Instead, following Rancière, this thesis investigates art's ability to disrupt the distribution of the sensible; in other words, its capacity

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[72] Luis Camnitzer, "Thinking About Art Thinking," *E-flux* 65 (May-August 2015), http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/texts/thinking-about-art-thinking/ (accessed November 16, 2017).

[73] Camnitzer.

[74] Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution," in *The Aesthetic Unconscious,* trans. Debra Keates and James Swenson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) 24, 28.

[75] Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 39.

to reconfigure the dominant perceptual order, including exclusionary differentiations of intelligences such as Camnitzer's.[76]

Like Acaso, I value Ellsworth's notion of 'mode of address'; my approach embraces the education and media theorist's conceptualisation of the paradox and the impossibility of teaching. I accept her challenge to acknowledge and make use of the undetermined, unpredictable, and unruly character of educational relations. Ellsworth reminds us that mode of address does not necessarily refer to a fixed identity, but rather, to an unstable, 'moving' quality that can perceive the learner as 'boy and girl, black and white, in and out, queer and straight, fat and thin, learning and knowledgable, excited and scared, capable and incapable, interested and bored, trusting and suspicious' all at the same time.[77] By adopting Ellsworth's 'impossible pedagogy', or, in Rancierian terms, the idea of teaching what we do not know, the thesis aims to make space for unprecedented possibilities.

Central questions, aims, and methodology

My interest in ways of addressing the audience stems from my work experience (2008-2011) within the curatorial and educational departments of Laboratorio Arte Alameda, a contemporary art exhibition space in Mexico City. Laboratorio's programme is centred on temporary exhibitions that explore the relation between art, science, and technology. Based in a sixteenth-century monastery, the museum's galleries are constantly transformed by three to four large-scale exhibitions every year, often involving video and sound art, interactive and immersive installations, and site-specific commissions. The placement of the works and relation to the imposing architecture is a crucial aspect to consider at every stage of the development of exhibitions in the space. I worked closely with the former Head Curator Karla Jasso, as well as with several guest curators, and realised that very different projects (solo or collective shows, commissioned installations, or even, for instance, an exhibition part of a larger, city-wide electronic arts festival) mostly adhered to the same

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[76] See Anna Wójcik, "The Politics of Art: An interview with Jacques Rancière," *Verso,* November 9, 2015, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2320-the-politics-of-art-an-interview-with-jacques-ranciere (accessed November 16, 2017) and Joseph J. Tanke, *Jacques Rancière: An Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2011), 1-3.

[77] Ellsworth, 8-9.

mediation strategy. Laboratorio's regular visitors have encountered all sorts of experimental work, as well as diverse exhibition environments, but in terms of curatorial forms of address, they have become accustomed to the same kind of introductory wall text and the same kind of brochure, the format of which is established by the National Arts Institute across all of its museums (similarly, in the UK, we are all familiar with Tate's handheld booklets). These conventional practices are rarely questioned and remain, as Lind suggests, barely visible; they are simply considered 'the normal thing to do'.[78] The first question this thesis addresses, then, is what kind of relation between curators, artists, works, and visitors do contemporary art exhibitions organise?

Recent museum studies literature such as Jennifer Barrett's *Museums and the Public Sphere* (2011) reflects on the changing role of civilising institutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to current concerns on inclusivity, diversity, and community. Barrett points to the tendency to undermine professional authority and to prioritise the public as an active contributor to the production of knowledge.[79] Her study observes museums' efforts to attend to both 'consumerist and cultural-pluralist' roles and investigates their ability to operate as sites of democratic, public discourse, including a chapter on the part of curators as public intellectuals.[80] In a piece from 2000, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill traces the shift from the modern encyclopaedic museum's authoritative transmission models of communication directed to a passive recipient and based on a behaviourist approach to teaching to a model of 'cultural' communication grounded on the notion of difference. This development involves the acknowledgement of conflicting perspectives and is associated with constructivist educational theory that addresses an active learner.[81] The international reader *Researching Visual Arts Education in Museums and Galleries* (2003) examines the persistent tension between education and entertainment in the field. The editors call for the development and dissemination of practice-based research and bring together contributions that look at the links between policy, programming, and public experience; the

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[78] Lind, 23.

[79] Jennifer Barrett, *Museums and the Public Sphere* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 3-4, 10.

[80] Barrett, 5, 9, 143-163.

[81] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, "Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 6, no.1 (2000): 9, 13, 14, 16, 22, 24.

boundaries between curator and educator and artist and participants; and the partnerships

between museums and galleries and educational institutions.[82] Other recent edited volumes gather

international perspectives that investigate dialogical practices in relation to knowledge democracy,

the feminisation and marginalisation of educational practices in the museum, and the potential of

museums as sites of pedagogical experimentation.[83] These examples demonstrate significant

interest in the gradual transformation of the relationship between museums and their audiences, as

well as the value of progressive pedagogical theory in informing this shift.[84] Nevertheless, most of

this literature is written from the perspective of museum educators and examines case studies that

have intentionally adopted a particular educational approach. I focus instead on the inherent

pedagogical formations of curatorial practice, which are often inadvertently set up, although it

should also be noted that curatorial engagement with these matters is marked by a dissociation

from what are considered the more established models of museum education.[85]

The closely related field of socially engaged art practice emerged from heterogeneous

contexts. Critic Shannon Jackson points to the counter-cultural movement of the late 1960s and

early 1970s and the subsequent conflicting interactions between the institutional emphasis on

'individuality' and 'flexibility' and the critical notions of 'agency' and 'resistance'.[86] Funding and state

welfare models vary substantially across continents and countries. As Jackson discerns, US artists

are normally concerned about the lack of state funding for the arts. In that case, non-profit

organisations carry much of the weight, and the little state funding that is available appears to be a

'palliative' for failing educational, health, and welfare systems. By contrast, according to Jackson,

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[82] Maria Xanthoudaki, Les Tickle, and Veronica Sekules eds., *Researching Visual Arts Education in Museum and Galleries, An International Reader* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2003), 1-3, 5, 7-8.

[83] Darlene E. Clover et al., eds. *Adult Education, Museums and Art Galleries: Animating Social, Cultural and Institutional Change* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), vii-viii, xii, xv.

[84] For an overview, see Emilie Sitzia, "The ignorant art museum: beyond meaning-making," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 37, no.1 (2018): 73-87. For discussions on the imbalance of power, issues of representation and cultural identity see Sheila Watson, ed., *Museums and their Communities* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007). Also relevant is Andrew McClellan, ed., *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003) which considers experimental attitudes to questions of identity, authority, and interpretive models.

[85] Wilson and O'Neill, "Curatorial counter-rhetorics," 184.

[86] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 22, 24.

European artists are mainly anxious about the Americanisation of cultural policy and the curtailing of public funding. While in the US, fears revolve around art's collusion with the art market, in Europe, uneasiness often centres on the state's influence and the instrumentalisation of the arts.[87] This thesis focuses on the European context and therefore follows Jackson in dealing with these differentiated concerns.

From a curatorial perspective, I look at the question of the educational relations organised in the exhibition space and search for alternatives, for ways of breaking the mould, of questioning and rethinking the norm. This thesis contributes to curatorial studies in its detailed examination of mediation strategies. These include not only the exhibition guides mentioned earlier, but, as we will see, particular relations to the public are already implied in the curatorial conceptualisation of the project, the work selection and arrangement, the exhibition's design, and forms of display. I concentrate on how all these factors contribute to a specific framing of the encounter between works and visitors. I am especially interested in ways of supporting certain interpretation and meaning-making processes. Throughout my chapters, I foreground the particular understandings of knowledge and learning each of my case studies involve.

The tension between critical curatorial approaches and organising institutions is also a recurring theme. Although certain notions of critique are fundamental to institutional self-definition (I expand on this in the case studies selection below), we will see that mediation, the conception of the public, and curatorial mode of address are highly contested issues. Within this context, I am mainly concerned with the possibility of reclaiming curatorial agency —as opposed to curatorial authority— namely, curators' ability to determine what kind of relation is put forward to the visitors. Ultimately, the thesis reflects on the social purpose of exhibition making. I propose that to address these wider problems, we must consider our understanding of the experience of art and, more specifically, the kind of knowledge and learning that exhibitions present to the viewer.

To address the above issues, this thesis contributes to the history of contemporary art exhibitions in its examination of four, chapter-length case studies. I focus on critical curatorial approaches that explore in different ways the relation between contemporary art and social and

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[87] Jackson, *Social Works,* 16-17, 26-27.

political change. In all cases, I was initially interested in the curators' intention to propose other ways of knowing and learning than that of entertained consumption. However, in all cases, the exhibitions' educational propositions remained implicit; my analysis makes them explicit. One of the key critical operations across my case studies is the idea of boundary crossings. The undermining of the distinction between West/Other, animate/inanimate, object/subject, and nature/culture is central to each of the exhibitions' challenge to the modern order and epistemology. It will become clear that a modern educational framework is unable to sustain contemporary art's indeterminacy of meaning. I explore how posthumanist, feminist, and decolonial pedagogies in each case support this movement across borders.

The exhibitions examined took place in Berlin, Vienna, London, and the Venice Biennale, respectively, between 2000 and 2016. It is essential to note that Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, and Italy have all been full members of the European Higher Education Area since its establishment through the Bologna Process in 1999. As we have seen, the agreement's entrepreneurial model is also recognisable in cultural policy. For example, in the case of the UK, Arts Council England's 10-year (2010-2020) strategic framework 'Great Art and Culture for Everyone' directly responds to public funding cuts by the 2010 elected Conservative government, initially in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, by setting out 'resilience' as its third goal. The objective is defined in terms of arts organisations' adaptability, their fundraising ability (especially from private sources), and their effectiveness and cost-reduction.[88] This process corresponds to what Nina Möntmann has observed as the increased privatisation of art institutions and its correlation with the dismantling of the welfare state. Möntmann shows that the entrepreneurial ideal responds to a precarious economic climate. At the same time, the neoliberal logic entails a 'populist' conception of the public, the legitimisation of exhibition spaces based on their visitor numbers and economic viability, as well as the understanding of the visitor as a global consumer.

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[88] Arts Council England, "Great art and culture for everyone" 10-year strategic framework, 2nd edition (revised 2013), 51-52, http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/our-mission-and-strategy (accessed November 29, 2017).

This model, to stress the point once again, equates education with consumption.[89] The selection of the case studies therefore explores curatorial resistant efforts in the context of neoliberal standardisation of education in Europe.

Another important contribution of this thesis are the interviews conducted with curators Karla Jasso, Anselm Franke, Ruth Noack, and Louise Shelley and artist Uriel Orlow. In these conversations, they expounded on their exhibition's conceptualisation and their particular understanding of the relation between art and society. They shared their views on the educational dimension of curating and their conception of the audience. Furthermore, they discussed the main aims and concerns of their projects, as well as the purpose of the mediation strategies they employed. The interviews provided an opportunity for them to respond to my reading of the shows and to reflect on their practice.

In Chapter One, I consider the 2015 Venice Biennale artistic director Okwui Enwezor's conception of the exhibition as a site of critical analysis from my perspective as project coordinator of *Possessing Nature,* that year's Mexican Pavilion. In particular, the chapter presents the challenges we faced in implementing an experimental mediation strategy in the context of a national representation. In Chapter Two, Anselm Franke's generous and extensive writing on *Animism* (HKW Berlin, 2012) provides valuable insights into his emancipatory approach to curating. The following chapter investigates Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack's diametrically distinct approach in *Things we don't understand* (Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2000), which focused on the pedagogical potential of not understanding. I had access to the exhibition's accompanying publication, and the Generali Foundation kindly provided an installation plan, but other crucial components such as the curatorial text displayed within the exhibition space have been lost. The final chapter examines *Uriel Orlow's: Mafavuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories* (The Showroom, London, 2016) as a challenge to the dominant Western, scientific system of knowledge. My account is based on first-hand experience and complemented by the recently released publication *Theatrum Botanicum,* which addresses the exhibition as part of a broader research project. I have

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[89] Nina Möntmann, "The Enterprise of the Art Institution in Late Capitalism," trans. Aileen Derieg, *eipic Transversal* (January 2006), http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/moentmann/en (accessed November 29, 2017).

sought to provide a complete picture of each of my case studies, but have necessarily focused on specific aspects of the exhibitions, those that I considered the most telling in terms of their educational propositions. Across the chapters, I pay close attention to the interpretative materials, a visitors' guide, curatorial conceptualisation of a show, a particular display strategy, or a social media campaign.

The significant influence of Documenta to contemporary exhibition making is noted throughout the thesis. It is essential to consider Enwezor's postcolonial political concerns in Documenta 11 as a precedent of his Venice Biennale in Chapter One; similarly, I briefly comment on Documenta 12 regarding the centrality of anti-hierarchical aesthetic education in Buergel and Noack's curatorial practice. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's Documenta 13 provides an important reference in my analysis of Franke's *Animism* in Chapter Two. In Chapter Four, I comment on the political ecology issues explored by Documenta 14 as part of the broader context of Orlow's project. In the elaboration of his decision to divide the last edition of the exhibition between Kassel and Athens, curator Adam Szymczyk expounds on a process of geographical and ideological decentralisation. In his view, this course was initiated by Catherine David's Documenta X (1997) and has since developed as a response to the need for 'rethinking the Eurocentric view of the world'.[90] Such ideas are reflected in the destabilising and unsettling intentions of my case studies. Finally, in the Conclusion, I examine in more depth Documenta 14's proposition of 'aneducation' as a form of unlearning.

I have adopted an interdisciplinary methodology that combines curatorial studies with critical and educational theory. The thinking of Jacques Rancière is central to Chapters Two and Three. First, I engage with his conception of emancipation and his view that equality must be taken as a starting point rather than an end result in order to attain any meaning. I consider his observations on the educational relation, especially as developed in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991), where he establishes the difference between the logic of explanation and the logic of attention, a distinction that encompasses the notion of teaching what is unknown to the educator.

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[90] Adam Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness— Learning and Working from Athens," in *The Documenta 14 Reader,* ed. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2017), 26-27.

These ideas are fundamental to my critical examination of *Animism's* visitor guide. In Chapter Three, Rancière's elaboration of the 'aesthetic regime of art' is essential to my reading of the educational proposition of *Things we don't understand,* in particular, his consideration of the aesthetic experience in terms of unknowing. By engaging with these ideas, this thesis investigates Rancièrian critique of both traditional and progressive education and the relevance of his anti-pedagogy, the idea of learning as un-learning, to exhibition making.

In addition to Rancièrian theories of emancipation, educational theory is at the core of this thesis as the primary means to read the way in which exhibitions organise the relations between curators, visitors, and artworks. My analysis of emancipatory curating in Chapter Two presents poststructuralist feminism's mistrust of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy tradition. The feminist perspective points to this method's basis in the modernist Enlightenment epistemology and consequently, its limitations in subverting standing Western dichotomies. In other words, the chapter argues that it is vital to reveal critical pedagogy's limitations to perform the exhibitions' central critical operation, the breaking down of foundational demarcations such as subject/object, nature/culture, and mind/body.

Instead, I suggest that these critical curatorial propositions must be supported by educational approaches that challenge from the outset the dominant Western androcentric epistemology and its prevailing conception of learning as the transmission of knowledge. I integrate posthumanist, feminist materialist, and decolonial pedagogies as means of sustaining the unsettlement of binary divisions between self/other, discourse/materiality, and rationality/affectivity. These models are instrumental in both elucidating the underlying educational formations of my case studies and presenting alternative strategies for curatorial practice. Although their methods and objectives may vary, these approaches coincide in their emphasis on complexity and difference and their insistence in undetermined learning outcomes as conditions that foster the imagination and allow the conception of alternative possibilities. These perspectives understand the learning situation as an ecology of human and nonhuman inter-dependent agents, an idea that is incompatible, for instance, with the presupposition of the gap in understanding between works and visitors discussed above. These pedagogies involve a rethinking of educational relations that

departs from a hierarchical model and encourages a co-creative situation. Thus in many ways, these theories entail unlearning the prevalent understanding of education itself. Adopting their principles as tools rather than themes in the context of exhibition making requires facing strong preconceptions and expectations of the particular kind of knowledge that exhibitions are supposed to impart. This thesis proposes that a critical experience of contemporary art involves learning not as the confirmation or accumulation of knowledge, but rather as a disruption that potentially alters our way of thinking; a process that by its very nature does not take place in the form of rational explanation.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter One presents *Possessing Nature,* the Mexican Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale (2015). My self-reflective analysis explores the challenges of setting up the exhibition as a site of critical analysis in response to artistic director Okwui Enwezor's proposition. Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega's site-specific installation was based on curator Karla Jasso's proposal of juxtaposing Venice and Mexico as 'amphibious cities'. The project incorporated substantial curatorial research that re-examined and problematised the historical relation of the cities to their aquatic environment. Our investigation looked into Venice's complicated history behind the mythical image of the city. In the case of Mexico, we addressed the continual reinstatement of the Spanish colonisers' resolution to dewater the city. We adopted a repetitive, rather than a progressive view of history and stressed the relevance of these histories to the present, for example, to the current billionaire investment of both cities in hydraulic infrastructure. I concentrate on the development of an experimental mediation strategy implemented online and in the exhibition space. Our approach was centred on Walter Benjamin's 'dialectical image'. We explored its immediate cognitive potential as well as its capacity to link past and present. Our counter-reading of official narratives through the recovery and re-arrangement of archival photography sought to sustain the tension between the artistic and the curatorial, aesthetic and research components, as well as accessibility and complexity. This chapter expounds on the commissioners' (the Mexican National Institute of Fine Arts) and the curatorial team's conflicting

views on mediation and reflects on the difficulties of sustaining a critical curatorial proposition in the context of a national representation.

In Chapter Two, I investigate a distinct approach to the critical re-examination of history in my analysis of Anselm Franke's emancipatory ambition in *Animism* (HKW, Berlin, 2012). The central idea of 'boundary crossings' is explored here in relation to the curator's attention to the partition between animate and inanimate (and subsequent divisions such as mind/body, nature/ culture, sanity/madness) as fundamental to the establishment of the modern order. I read Franke's critical approach as a Foucaldian genealogical analysis. This type of critique aims to destabilise the given order, show its contingency, and work towards imagining other ways of being. I stress that it depends on the artworks' ability to suspend, unsettle, reverse, or cross limits and an undetermined interpretation process. A central question this chapter addresses is how to support this instability of meaning curatorially.

Like in the preceding chapter, I pay close attention to the role of mediation in defining the viewers' encounter with the works. *Animism's* visitor guide offered an authoritative explanation of each of the works. This resulted in a stabilising effect and an asymmetrical relation with the audience that worked against the project's destabilising aims. My reading presents the exhibition as an example of the modern-Enlightenment educational approach and its basis in the problematic notions of 'empowerment' and 'demystification', a model from which the rest of my case studies attempt to depart. I expound on critical pedagogy's logic of students (visitors) becoming aware of power structures to obtain autonomy and, ultimately, freedom. This proposition is first problematised through the Rancierian distinction between the logic of explanation and the logic of attention. Then, I consider feminist and postcolonial perspectives and their uneasiness towards critical pedagogy and its dualist basis. My analysis moves from the thematic level to the educational positions organised by the exhibition. The problem this chapter highlights is that even within critical approaches to curating, conventional educational hierarchies are persistently and often unknowingly replicated. In the last section, I integrate ideas from posthumanist and feminist materialist pedagogies, their alternative conceptions of knowledge and learning, and their potential to contribute to this kind of curatorial critique. I introduce Karen Barad's notion of 'diffraction' as a

key methodological tool that directly confronts binary divisions. The chapter suggests that reclaiming curatorial agency, rather than asserting curatorial authority, would better undermine the distinction between knowing and unknowing minds.

Chapter Three presents Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack's *Things we don't understand* (Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2000) as an opposite approach to Franke's. The exhibition focused on the encounter between viewers and artworks in its reassessment of the notion of aesthetic autonomy and its relation to social change. Whereas *Animism* provided visitors with stable, expert knowledge of the works, in this case, the curators investigated the potential of the feeling of irritation caused by not understanding and deliberately accentuated the difficulty of interpretation. I examine their experimental approach and highlight the centrality of the audience at every stage of the exhibition's development. My analysis expounds on the project's introduction of a distinctive mode of relationality based on the theories of Leo Bersani and Kaja Silverman. Rather than addressing the perceived gap between viewers and works, and in contrast to Franke's emphasis on modern partitions, this mode put forward the correspondences and interconnectivity between human and nonhuman agents. It challenged the idea of understanding and encouraged a divergent way of looking that is essential to our ability to relate to the Other. This case study is fundamental to establishing that educational relations are inherent to curatorial practice. I argue that the project presented the aesthetic experience as a form of self-education. Guided by Rancière's elaboration of the 'aesthetic regime', my analysis addresses the indivisibility between activity and passivity, aesthetic autonomy and social change, and the viewer and the artwork. The exhibition's educational proposition is read through intra-active pedagogy, a feminist materialist approach that concentrates on the flowing relation between theory and practice and matter and meaning. Lastly, I draw from educational philosopher Maxine Greene to present the pedagogical principles at work in the exhibition which are also more widely relevant to curating: mainly, the crucial role of the imagination in the encounter with the work, the idea of learning as a movement across boundaries, the case for admitting unpredictable outcomes, granting responsibility to the viewers, and acknowledging their creative ability.

In contrast to Buergel and Noack's unsettling strategies and their challenge to the notion of understanding, in Chapter Four, I examine artist Uriel Orlow's de-centring project, which refers to the colonial history of South Africa to call into question the dominant system of knowledge. *Mafavuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories,* presented at The Showroom, London in 2016, addressed the relation between botany and colonialism, the confrontation of different systems of knowledge, and the role of science in the establishment of an exploitative and hierarchical world order. I consider Orlow's approach within the wider context of contemporary art practice's engagement with issues of political ecology. My analysis focuses on the use of a 'conceptual herbarium' as a critical display strategy. The exhibition design's disruption of the well established ethnographic model is read as part of a broader postcolonial critique of the museum. Orlow's work is discussed in relation to other artists' attention to display discourse and the production of alternative archives, and it is distinguished in its focus on the material present of documents. I argue that the exhibition presented an epistemological challenge to the Western worldview and a decolonial pedagogy. However, this proposition is complicated by the project's institutional framework. I look at the gallery's Communal Knowledge programme, the forms of knowledge, participation, and collaboration put forward, and problematise its consensual understanding of 'community'. Finally, I propose ideas from Noah De Lissovoy's decolonial pedagogy; mainly, I suggest that his conception of 'community' on the basis of interdependence is highly relevant to decolonial curatorial approaches and their construction of an audience.

This thesis sets out to problematise the conventional understanding of mediation as the means to address the supposed gap in understanding between works and visitors, as well as the prevailing educational model in exhibition making, which presents learning as the consumption of knowledge. I concentrate on experimental, critical curatorial responses to neoliberal educational and cultural policy in Europe. My investigation attends to the inherent pedagogies of contemporary art exhibitions, an issue that is largely missing from the discussion of the educational turn in curating. I put forward the potential of posthumanist, feminist, and decolonial pedagogies to both observe the relations set up between curators, works, and visitors and to contribute to alternative

configurations. Crucially, these models support the boundary crossings that subvert the dominant

modern epistemology. In the following four case studies, I make the case for unlearning the

prevalent, authoritarian modes of curatorial address. To begin, the first chapter looks at the

mediation and pedagogical challenges in setting up the exhibition as a site of critical analysis in the

context of the 2015 Venice Biennale.

Chapter 1: *Possessing Nature*: The Exhibition as a Site of Critical Analysis?

This chapter examines the role of mediation and pedagogical experimentation in creating a critical

and challenging learning environment within the exhibition space in the context of a national

representation at the Venice Biennale. Artistic director Okwui Enwezor's proposition for the 2015

International Art Exhibition, *All the World's Futures,* was centred on the investigation of the role of

art in dealing with the present global economic, political, and environmental crisis.[1] Preceded by a

financially successful national exhibition in 1887, the Venice Biennale was founded in 1895 as an

international art venue.[2] Charles Green and Anthony Gardner observe that its development into

one of the most influential institutions of contemporary art is inextricably connected to the

expansion of the global art market, and have even compared its exhibitions to 'shop-windows for

art dealers'.[3] Enwezor deliberately sought to distance the Biennale from the art-fair format and the

commodification of art and instead explored the notion of the exhibition as a site of critical

analysis.[4] *Possessing Nature,* the 2015 Mexican pavilion, was conceived in response to Enwezor's

conceptualisation. Chief curator, Karla Jasso, put forward her idea of juxtaposing Venice and

Mexico as 'amphibious cities' as a starting point to commission a site-specific installation by artists

Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega. The project was based on a substantial curatorial research

component centred on the historical re-examination of the cities' environmental transformation. It

involved delving into the political and economic interests behind the extensive works of hydraulic

infrastructure in each case, as well as addressing their social implications. In both cases, the

historical struggle of the cities to control water has led to the current billionaire investments in

controversial public works.

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[1] La Biennale di Venezia, "Introduction by Okwui Enwezor, Curator of the Biennale Arte 2015," http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2015/intervento-di-okwui-enwezor (accessed June 12, 2018).

[2] Enzo di Martino, *The History of the Venice Biennale 1895-2005* (Venice: Papiro Arte, 2005), 8-9.

[3] Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: the Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 228.

[4] Michael Kurcfeld, "The 56th Venice Biennale Exhibition: Meet the Curator [VIDEO]", *Los Angeles Review of Books,* June 15, 2015, https://lareviewofbooks.org/av/the-56th-venice-biennale-exhibition-meet-the-curator/ (accessed June 12, 2018).

It is important to note that Mexico has officially participated in the Biennale since 2007, with four iterations held in various locations in Venice outside of the Biennale's principal venues, the Giardini and the Arsenale.[5] From these past editions, Teresa Margolles' *What Else Could We Talk About?,* curated by Cuauhtémoc Medina in 2009, stands out for its overt political subject matter. Presented at the Palazzo Rota-Ivancich close to San Marco square, the exhibition directly engaged with the dramatic increase in the murder rate in Mexico, exacerbated by the war on drugs initiated by Felipe Calderón's government. In his curatorial essay, Medina describes Margolles' work as an 'unconscious historiography' of the social experience of violence in the country.[6] The central piece at the pavilion consisted of bereaved family members performing the action of mopping the floors with the blood of violent crime victims diluted in water. The work generated a distressing atmosphere that raises ethical questions about the use of materials, the potential further victimisation of the deceased, and the meaning of the mourners' and spectators' participation.[7] Medina stresses his pavilion's deliberate frustration of the possibility that it might be used for a 'showcase or proxy for the Mexican foreign service, tourism ministry or cultural bureaucracy.' At the same time, he also stated that the presentation of Margolles's work would not 'gratify the receiver with the slightest sense of understanding either its raw material or its referent, in benefit of acquiring some global knowledge.'[8] Instead, the work sought to involve the visitors affectively by confronting them with the violent repercussions of Mexico's on-going, senseless war. Medina's words point to the potential instrumentalisation of the national pavilion by governmental agendas and hint at the prospect of a standoff between commissioner and curator. Notably, he also refers to the experience he sought to propose to the public and the importance of doing away with the

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[5] Previous presence of Mexico in the Biennale dates back to the exhibition of paintings by David Alfaro Siqueiros, Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and Rufino Tamayo in the 25th Art Exhibition in 1950. In 2003, artistic director Francesco Bonami invited Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco to curate a section of 50th Art Exhibition, *Dreams and Conflicts —The Dictatorship of the Viewer.* Orozco's titled his show *Il Quotidiano Alterato* or *The Everyday Altered.* See Ann Temkin, "2003: Everyday Altered," in *Gabriel Orozco* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009), 180-191.

[6] Cuauhtémoc Medina, "Materialist Spectrality", in *Teresa Margolles: What Else Could We Talk About,* ed. Cuauhtémoc Medina (Barcelona and Mexico City: RM, 2009), 15-16.

[7] Amy Sara Carroll, "Muerte Sin Fin: Teresa Margolles's Gendered States of Exception," *The Drama Review* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 104.

[8] Medina, 26.

notion of understanding and the acquisition of knowledge. In other words, he presents a challenge to the conventional educational relations of the exhibition space. As I discuss in this chapter, these became central issues six years later in the development of *Possessing Nature.*

The 2015 Biennale also marked a new stage for the Mexican pavilion in the inauguration of its site at the Sale d'Armi at the Arsenale, which has been secured for the country's participation over the next two decades. The positioning at the Arsenale represents a pivotal step in the institutional recognition of the pavilion's trajectory so far and can also be interpreted as a way of reinforcing the emerging notion of the country —and in particular of Mexico City— as a capital within the global contemporary art scene. However, with this increased visibility, the tension between critical art and the politics of an official national representation also intensifies.

This chapter presents a self-reflexive analysis of my experience as project coordinator of *Possessing Nature.* I joined the team in November 2014, once the selection committee presided by the pavilion's commissioner, the National Institute of Fine Arts (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, INBA), had announced their decision. Additionally, I agreed with Jasso to assume responsibility for the mediation strategy, developed in collaboration with Roselin Rodríguez and Ximena Juárez and implemented both online and on-site. This chapter reflects on the difficulties of setting up the exhibition as a site of critical analysis in the context of the Mexican pavilion. I concentrate on the challenges we encountered in conveying substantial historical research to the public and, at the same time, proposing a co-creative, disruptive, and challenging learning experience. While the research team discussed these matters in terms of mediation, this chapter points to the potential of educational theory to both examine and subvert the positions and relations between institutions, curators, artwork, and the public in the exhibition space as developed in the following chapters.

The first section expounds on the notion of 'amphibious cities' and provides a brief account of the cities' historical relation to their aquatic environments. In the case of Venice, our research questioned the mythical idea of the city's love affair with the sea. For Mexico, the decision to drain the city during the colonial period marked a decisive moment in its history and provided a key departure point for the installation. Then, I address the pavilion's particular collaborative arrangement. In dealing with the core issue of conceiving the exhibition as a site of critical analysis,

I consider Jasso's approach to curating as a form of research and the difficulties presented in the context of a national representation. The uncertain limits between curatorial and artistic roles in the production of meaning are particularly problematic. This section also includes a detailed description of the installation, which integrated a monumental sculpture, a hydraulic mechanism, and a video projection. Lastly, I examine Enwezor's proposal for the Biennale as a broader context and take into account the discussion that *All the World's Futures* provoked regarding the limitations and inconsistencies of the artistic director's critical stance. The challenge of conveying the relevance of historical research to the present, the difficulties of developing a collaborative, site-specific installation, and the pavilion's position within the wider context of the Biennale all affected the way in which the exhibition came together and, ultimately, the visitors' encounter with the work.

The second section of this chapter elaborates on the centrality of Walter Benjamin's notion of the 'dialectical image' in the development of the Mexican pavilion's mediation strategy. I expand on the recovery and rearrangement of archival photography as the main means of conveying meaning to the audience and contextualising the installation. The third and last section deals with INBA's objections to the curatorial approach to mediation. I set out the confrontation between the conception of the exhibition as an active form of research and the authoritative knowledge-transmission model favoured by INBA. Each of these positions presumes a particular understanding of ways to engage with the installation, the overall atmosphere of the exhibition, as well as specific inherent pedagogies and modes of address to support the audience's interpretation process. Through semi-structured interviews conducted with visitors in July 2015, as well as an analysis of the press coverage, I address the reception of the experimental mediation strategy put forward by the research team. Throughout the development of the project, we assumed responsibility towards our audiences, considering not only visitors in Venice, but also those following the pavilion from Mexico. This chapter foregrounds the role of mediation, curatorial mode of address, and inherent pedagogies in determining the critical value of contemporary art exhibitions.

'Amphibious cities': a curatorial proposition

In 2015, for the first time, INBA invited eleven curators to develop proposals for the Mexican

pavilion, including their own choice of artist(s), to be evaluated by a selection committee formed of

members of different art institutions in the country. INBA had directly appointed the participating

artist and curator in previous years, so this process ostensibly seemed more democratic. The

selected project was based on curator Karla Jasso's idea of juxtaposing Venice and Mexico as

'amphibious cities'. Her project involved a historical investigation that points to the cities' common

origins and differing fates: a city of canals and a city of drains. To some extent, the committee's

selection of a curatorially-led, research-based project also legitimised Jasso's decision making

throughout the process, as I elaborate on this chapter. This section looks closely at Jasso's

conceptualisation, the complex relation between curator and artists in the development of the work

and the exhibition, and the critical ambition of the project in relation to the overarching theme of the

2015 Biennale. Let us begin by looking into the history of these aquatic cities.

Venice's exceptional location forms the basis of its mythical status. In his piece for the

exhibition's catalogue, Roberto Ponce-López outlines the urban development of the city: its

medieval origins and layout, its rise as a trading power of the Mediterranean between the tenth and

fifteenth centuries and eventual decline, and its emergence as a major tourist destination during

the twentieth century.[9] *Possessing Nature* looked into Venice's inextricable and complicated

relation to water beyond the idealised notion of 'a city married to the sea'.[10] The earliest records of

the city's settlement in the sixth century refer to 'amphibious people' that fled the Lombard invasion

in the mainland and took refuge in the lagoons, carrying with them their churches' relics and

valuables. This event gave rise to the idea of Venice as a providential shelter.[11] Elisabeth Crouzet-

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[9] Roberto Ponce-López, "What the lagoon left us. Changes of urban space in Mexico and Venice," in *Possessing Nature,* ed. Karla Jasso (Madrid: Palermo, 2015), 82-83.

[10] Venice's 'marriage to the sea' refers to an important civic ritual that celebrates the city's dominion over the sea. Established in the eleventh century, it takes place every year on Ascension Day and commemorates the Doge Pietro II Orseolo's campaign to conquer Dalmatia. Joanne M. Ferraro, *Venice: History of a Floating City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 31.

[11] Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan, "An Ecological Understanding of the Myth of Venice," in *Venice Reconsidered: The History and Civilisation of an Italian City-State, 1297-1797,* ed. John Martin and Dennis Romano, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 39, 41.

Pavan's historiographical analysis delves into the mythology that developed around the city's origins and its depiction of the inhospitable environment as an auspicious, extraordinary setting. Early histories of the city present it as a 'place of order, beauty, and urbanity' that resulted from the pact between God and the community. The lagoons came to be seen as a sanctuary: the aquatic environment as the foundation of the city's independence and potential growth.[12] The pavilion re-examined this historical account and opened up space for alternative perspectives.

The exhibition disrupted the persistent image of Venice as 'a triumph of human industry, [dominating] the elements of an ordered, pacified nature' and brought to light the historical struggle of the population to maintain the lagoon's fragile equilibrium.[13] Crouzet-Pavan notes that the city's construction started with the connection of the pieces of land that surfaced from the water. This stage involved a landfilling process described by the author as a 'colonisation' of water and mud. There were periods of rapid growth during the thirteenth century, for example, in which the government organised extensive drainage projects. Then, after two centuries of steady expansion, in the fifteenth century, the narrative starts to underscore the threat of the water.[14] Problems were caused by the increasing rate of silt accumulation, followed by numerous efforts to regain control through the diversion of rivers and the reinforcement of beaches. For centuries, authorities strove to maintain a balance between the city's growth and the preservation of the lagoon.[15] At the same time, the emphasis on the danger posed by the water reaffirmed the essential role of the state and justified its increased controlling powers. The narrative then shifted from the city's progressive conquering of the sea to the pressing need to build a defence against the environment.[16] Our investigation resurfaced particular political and economic interests behind the history of public hydraulic works, as well as the inhabitants' changing perceptions and attitudes towards the water.

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[12] Crouzet-Pavan, 41-44.

[13] Crouzet-Pavan, 40-41.

[14] Crouzet-Pavan, 45-47, 49.

[15] Crouzet-Pavan, 52-54.

[16] Crouzet-Pavan, 56-57.

More importantly, the research indicates that the present situation resulted from specific choices made in the past, and, consequently, current decisions will have a long-lasting impact.

Possessing Nature drew attention to the links between this historical trajectory and the present. Venice currently invests billions of euros in the MOSE system (*Modulo Sperimentale Elettromecanico*) for protection against *acqua alta,* the flooding caused by the influx of seawater into the lagoon. Some of the arguable causes of this phenomenon include global warming, climate change, excavations, pollution, and the effect of drills in the area of Marghera on the lagoon's phreatic mantle, as well as the dredging of the lake to allow the anchoring of deep-draft cruises.[17] The MOSE initiative consists of a series of flap gates that temporarily separate the lagoon from the Adriatic Sea in the case of high tide.[18] However, this ambitious project has aroused controversy, with critics pointing to the erosion of the gates from mould caused by mussels and the sea environment, corruption scandals, costs overrunning from 1.6 to 5.5 billion euros, and a completion date postponed from 2011 to 2022.[19] The apparent impossibility of the task confirms Crouzet-Pavan's remark that, just like earlier accounts, Venice's perilous situation and ecological crisis perpetuates the myth of a miraculous city.[20] Hence, the exhibition emphasised the need to look at the complex interaction between political, environmental, economic, and technological concerns.

In the case of Mexico City, there is now little trace of its foundation as Mexico-Tenochtitlán in 1325 on an area formed of six lakes. The city's spatial organisation was based on both its lacustrine location and the Aztec quadripartite cosmology [Figure 4].[21] The Aztecs relied on a complex hydraulic system that comprised 'causeways, dykes, floodgates, dams, […] directed rivers [and] aqueducts' to keep water levels stable throughout the year and make use of the canals for

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[17] Ponce-López, 86.

[18] MOSE, https://www.mosevenezia.eu/?lang=en (accessed March 1, 2018).

[19] Roberto Giovannini, "Venice and MOSE: story of a failure," *La Stampa,* October 12, 2017, http://www.lastampa.it/2017/10/12/esteri/lastampa-in-english/venice-and-mose-story-of-a-failure-2XRaxsCgFhcmKEXidalyxJ/pagina.html (accessed March 1, 2018).

[20] Crouzet-Pavan, 57.

[21] John F. López, "The Hydrographic City: Mapping Mexico City's Urban Form in Relation to its Aquatic Condition, 1521-1700" (PhD diss., MIT, 2013), 36, 46.

agriculture and transport.[22] Like the Venetians, the Aztecs reclaimed land from the water, increasing the islet's size fivefold.[23] The water also acted as a barrier to protect the city from its enemies. In this case, the Spanish conquest (1519-1521) marks a clear turning point. The colonial city integrated the Spaniards' Renaissance grid into the Aztec's cruciform plan. This process involved the confrontation of two opposite approaches towards the water: regulation and drainage.[24] The Aztec hydraulic system proved incompatible with the colonisers' agricultural, transportation, and construction methods, and therefore, starting in 1607, they decided to drain the city. *Possessing Nature* focused on this decisive moment of the irreversible instigation of drainage as a colonial policy. Crucially, as we will see in the next section, our mediation strategy addressed this event as part of a repetitive, rather than a progressive, historical narrative.

Figure 4. Hernán Cortés, *Map of Tenochtitlán*, 1524, in *Praeclara Ferdināri Cortesii de Noua maris Oceani Hyspania narratio…* Hand-coloured woodcut on sheet, 30 x 47 cm. Nuremberg, Germany: Friedrich Peypus. Newberry Library

Historical investigation of drainage projects offers exceptional insights into changing social priorities over time. Historian Vera Candiani's perspective is essential for the purposes of this

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[22] López, 56; Ponce-López, 83.

[23] López, 246.

[24] López, 94, 246, 247.

chapter. She suggests that these infrastructure works 'are especially revealing in that they transform the very building blocks of ecology —land and water— and therefore fundamentally and irreversibly alter how humans relate to nature'.[25] In her study of the environmental transformation of colonial Mexico City, Candiani notes that the lack of an outlet in the basin meant that draining the city amounted to a massive endeavour that necessitated sixty thousand labourers to perforate hills and build a thirteen-kilometre tunnel. The author emphasises that as an attempt to modify the landscape, 'it was one of the most ambitious early modern public works projects undertaken by Europeans anywhere'.[26] Although the system performed well during the first rainy season in 1608, it started failing after the first year and proved insufficient to prevent a major flood in 1629. The engineering project expanded over more than 150 years, incorporating mechanisms such as 'dams, levees, diversions, silting pools, [and] sluice gates'.[27] It was never completed, with works continuing under President Porfirio Díaz in the late 1800s and further alterations and extensions made in the 1940s and 1970s. At great financial and human cost, the drainage approach repeatedly failed to protect the city from floods. Candiani succinctly argues that 'the only true standard by which the drainage can actually be considered "finished" is not the absence of flooding in the city, but the fact that save for a few polluted remnants in the south and the north of the basin, nothing remains of the ancient lakes today'.[28] The exhibition pointed to the obstinate adherence to a failed modernising approach.

As a title, *Possessing Nature* refers to both Mexico and Venice's unrelenting efforts to conquer the water. The drainage system was central to the process of colonisation and —as Jasso suggests— constituted an extremely violent technology of control.[29] The utter transformation of the environment affected all of its inhabitants' way of life. The decision to drain the city also sheds light on the confrontation of two social models: the European model, centred on private property, and

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[25] Vera S. Candiani, *Dreaming of Dry Land: Environmental Transformation in Colonial Mexico City* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), xvi-xvii.

[26] Candiani, Vera S., 2.

[27] Candiani, Vera S., 2.

[28] Candiani, Vera S., 3.

[29] Karla Jasso, "Possessing Nature," in *Possessing Nature,* 59.

the pre-Hispanic communal model. During the nineteenth century, Mexico city's elite resorted to a 'developmental' narrative to present the drainage project as 'evidence of their country's capacity for liberal modernity'.[30] However, Candiani recovers other perspectives and argues that this approach was far from inevitable. Flooding was essential to indigenous agricultural practices, which were based on the seasonal fluctuation of water levels. Getting rid of the floods meant jeopardising the millenary 'ecological productivity' that provided sustenance for the population. Candiani's study demonstrates that 'the literally fluid nature of the relationship between water and land was an obstacle to the penetration of private property and capitalist social forms and modes of production'.[31] In the case of Mexico (and also elsewhere such as Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire in Britain, Poitevin and Camargue in France, or the lowlands of the Netherlands), the effort to 'desiccate the landscape' clearly responds to profit-driven interests.[32] The exhibition's conceptualisation of 'amphibious cities' uncovered the dispute of conflicting mindsets, the colonial marginalisation of local customs, and the legitimisation of the drainage as a 'modernising' project.

The resolution to de-water has been repeatedly reaffirmed, even though it has never supplied a sustainable solution.[33] The nineteenth century's Grand Canal and Tequixquiac tunnels soon became obsolete.[34] Mexico City developed into an industrial city that rapidly expanded into a vast megalopolis that continues to attract rural migration.[35] Water remains a constant threat to the city. Currently, the government invests billions of pesos in the *Túnel Emisor Oriente*, a 62 km tunnel with the capacity to discharge 150 m^3 of water per second.[36] As in the case of Venice, the project is significantly delayed and has long overrun its estimated cost. Intended to prevent the yearly floods that affect the city's impoverished areas the most, its lifespan is calculated at forty

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[30] Candiani, 4-6.

[31] Candiani, Vera S., 5-6, 12.

[32] Candiani, Vera S., 12.

[33] Ponce-López, 84.

[34] López, 248.

[35] Ponce-López, 85.

[36] López, 248.

years.[37] The fact that drainage has never prevented flooding and the inundation rate has increased over the years indicates the futility of this endeavour.[38] *Possessing Nature* sought to bring to light the historical interdependency between the urban layout, the natural environment, and the cities' political economies and social dynamics. The project investigated how particular courses taken in the past both determine the present and will have an impact on the future of both cities. The notion of 'amphibious cities', then, involved the re-examination of historical narrative, a common curatorial concern particularly in relation to development and modernising discourses, as we will also see in Chapters Two and Four. I will show throughout this thesis that this critical curatorial approach can be supported by inherent pedagogies that also question and move away from the modern paradigm. In this case, the revision of the environmental history of the cities as the fundamental research component of the project posed a significant challenge in terms of mediation. The opportunity was to find a way to present the coincidences and divergences between Venice and Mexico as aquatic cities and put forward the urgency of these issues. However, the difficulty we faced was in avoiding a conventional educational model based on the transmission of expert knowledge and, instead, introducing a mode of curatorial address that encouraged the use of the space as a site of critical analysis. Before delving into our mediation strategy, we must consider the artists' response to the curatorial proposition.

Jasso invited artists Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega to develop a single, site-specific proposal for the pavilion based on her initial idea to examine Mexico and Venice as 'amphibious cities'. This proposition proved problematic from the outset. Firstly, the artists had not worked together before, and their interests and working methods vary significantly. While Candiani's work often involves archival research, Ortega's practice concentrates on the qualities of his media, particularly, video. Secondly, the collaboration presented the need to respond to and elaborate on

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[37] Salvador Corona and Dora Villanueva, "Túnel Emisor Oriente, a 79%," *El Economista,* July 27, 2017, https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/politica/Tunel-Emisor-Oriente-a-79-20170728-0056.html (accessed March 2, 2018).

[38] López, 248. Additionally, President Enrique Peña Nieto's government oversees the ambitious plan to build a new airport on what is left of the lake basin in the Texcoco area. The project has raised objections because of its lack of transparency and ecological repercussions. For alternative, environmentally responsible proposals for the area, see Kalach, Alberto, ed., *México Ciudad Futura* (Mexico City: RM, 2010), and Iñaki Echeverría, "Lake Texcoco Ecological Park", http://www.inakiecheverria.com/en/proyecto/parque-ecologico/ (accessed March 2, 2018).

a specific guiding principle. The difficulties of this arrangement —for instance, regarding issues of authorship— were heightened within the context of a national pavilion at the Biennale, given its undeniable significance for both the curator's and artists' careers. Ortega has a background in philosophy and was a key actor in Mexico's art scene in the late eighties and nineties, a richly experimental period in which young artists worked with conceptual strategies.[39] Since then, he has developed a consistent practice working across media, exploring ideas such as landscape, time, space, and silence, with recurrent philosophical and literary references. Candiani's work is centred in the phonic and graphic qualities of language and its cultural influence. She has recently developed interdisciplinary, collaborative projects that have resulted in complex and ambitious works that explore sound, narrative mechanisms, and technological anxieties.[40]

Moreover, the idea of focusing the project on a curatorial rather than an artistic proposition diverged from previous approaches to the Mexican pavilion —as seen, for example, in the aforementioned discussion of Medina/Margolles— as is characteristic of Jasso's research-based practice. Her first exhibition, *Sinergia* (Laboratorio Arte Alameda, Mexico City, 2008), for example, revolved around the energy reforms taking place in Mexico at the time. Eight artists were invited to take part in a series of seminars that examined the issue from different perspectives as the basis to develop new work. In the case of the pavilion, the process was further complicated, as the artists were required to respond to a specific idea and also find a joint solution. For Jasso, the notion of 'amphibious cities' as focal point was a way to respond to Enwezor's conception of the Biennale as a site of critical analysis and propose a subject that deserved urgent attention. She intended to challenge Candiani and Ortega and, at the same time, diffuse attention from the figure of a single artist. However, she now recognises that the Biennale was not the ideal platform for her proposal,

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[39] See Oliver Debroise, ed., *The Age of Discrepancies: Art and Visual Culture in Mexico 1968-1997* (Mexico: UNAM, Turner, 2006), and Daniel Montero, *El cubo de Rubik, arte mexicano en los años 90* (Mexico: Fundación Jumex and RM, 2013).

[40] See Daniel Garza Usabiaga, "Disrupting the concept of 'collaboration': *Possessing Nature* by Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega," in *Possesssing Nature.* Susana Santoyo, ed., *Luis Felipe Ortega: Before the Horizon* (Mexico: Turner, 2016); Tania Candiani and Karla Jasso, eds., *Tania Candiani: Cinco variaciones de circunstancias fónicas y una pausa* (Mexico: Laboratorio Arte Alameda - Conaculta, 2015).

as it is, in her view, mainly structured to position artists within the art market.[41] Additionally, the

need to work under considerable time pressure to complete the project in less than five months

contributed to a certain disconnection between artistic and curatorial processes. This presented

another obstacle in the development of the mediation strategy, since it was unclear who was

ultimately responsible for producing meaning and determining a certain mode of address towards

the audience.

Following INBA's selection of Jasso's initial proposal, the artists focused on supervising the

piece's construction led by Ricardo Casas's design firm, while the research team, including myself,

concentrated on developing contextual research, devising the communication and mediation

strategies, and overseeing the completion of the catalogue. It is generally recognised that the

curatorial sphere of activity encompasses contextualising, project management, social networking,

and publicising tasks.[42] Curators are also seen as intermediaries in their role of representing artists

within institutional and bureaucratic arenas (in this instance INBA).[43] Curatorial duties, then,

include research and conceptualisation, facilitating legalities (such as special permissions required

in this case), the overall organisation of the exhibition, and fulfilling constant administrative

needs.[44] As Paul O'Neill asserts, ultimately, 'the curator is recognised as the agent responsible for

the exhibition as an object of study and experience', and therefore, I would add, for the

development of a particular pedagogical framework.[45] Nevertheless, drawing a line between

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[41] Karla Jasso, in conversation with the author, June 15, 2015. My translation and paraphrasis. Enwezor
discusses the close and paradoxical relationship between biennials and the art market in Tim Griffin, "Global
Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition," *Artforum* 42, no. 3 (November 2003): 162-163.

[42] Anton Vidokle, "Art Without Artists?" *E-flux* 16 (May 2010), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/ (accessed March 6, 2018).

[43] Jacopo Crivelli Visconti et al., "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's 'Art Without
Artists?'" *E-flux* 18 (September 2010), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/18/67472/letters-to-the-editors-eleven-responses-to-anton-vidokle-s-art-without-artists/ (accessed March 6, 2018).

[44] Dan Fox, "Being Curated," *Frieze,* April 13, 2013, https://frieze.com/article/being-curated (accessed March
6, 2018). On the crisis and transformation of the role of the curator, particularly in relation to presenting work
to the public, see: Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, "From Museum Curator to Exhibition *Auteur*:
Inventing a singular position," in *Thinking about Exhibitions,* ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, and
Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 166-179.

[45] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012),
100.

curatorial and artistic roles, especially in the case of a commissioned, co-authored installation, is a more complicated matter.

The problem has been set out in Anton Vidokle's observation that curators' involvement in a myriad of activities should not allow them to take the place of artists by assuming an authorial position that relegates artists and works to 'props for illustrating curatorial concepts'.[46] Vidokle defends the understanding of curating as supportive of artistic production, as a job that must be fulfilled in response to the hiring institution or client (in this case, the commissioner, INBA). His remarks resonate strongly with the situation, especially given the particular collaborative arrangement between Jasso, Ortega, and Candiani. However, Vidokle's position also raises the question of whether curating should be understood merely as a service or as a creative process.[47] Conceptual artist Daniel Buren, who has questioned the relationship between art and its environment since the 1960s, drew attention to this longstanding issue in an oft-cited statement included in the catalogue of Documenta V. He protested:

> The subject of exhibitions tends more and more to be not so much the exhibition of works of art, as the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art […] It is almost grotesque to see how exhibitions are increasingly becoming opportunities for an organiser or a curator or whoever to write an essay which usually has nothing to do with the artists invited, but concerns only his or her philosophy about art and society, politics or aesthetics.[48]

In the context of the pavilion, it is fair to ask whether the curatorial conceptualisation and the overall exhibition took precedence over the installation and the artists' practice; that is, whether Jasso assumed an authorial position while the artists were required to reach a compromise with each other.

The crux of the matter concerns the role of artists and curators in the production of meaning. What are the boundaries for curatorial involvement in the aesthetic and conceptual development of the work? The risk of overstepping this limit is —as Vidokle observes— that the

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[46] Vidokle.

[47] Maria Rus Bojan et al., "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's 'Art Without Artists?'"

[48] Daniel Buren, "Exhibiting Exhibitions" (September 1992 edition), originally published on the occasion of Documenta V in 1972, cited in Fox.

curator overtakes the critical role of the artists and the work shown. To prevent this, he demands

that the sovereignty of the artists be preserved —that is, their right to determine the form and

content of their work. From this perspective, the layers of interpretation curators add to the work do

not necessarily produce meaning.[49] In support of this view, and regarding the relation between

artworks and curatorial context within the exhibition space, curator Sohrab Mohebbi argues that the

audience should be able to 'follow the will of the art, not the intellect of the curator'.[50] In the case of

the pavilion, we sought to position the visitor as an independent learner. Nevertheless, the

divergence between the curatorial and artistic processes proved highly problematic. Looking back,

Jasso acknowledges she should have worked more closely with Ortega and Candiani; this would

have facilitated a more balanced, productive, and reciprocal relationship between both sides.[51] We

would also have gained from a more thorough discussion with the artists on the development of

mediation materials. Commenting on the issue, artist Tom Nicholson highlights the value of

curatorial contextualisation in that it positions the work within a wider public discourse that can also

influence the artist's practice.[52] As a curator and academic, my view is that space for creative

dialogue between both sides must be preserved. In this sense, I agree with curator Jacopo Crivelli

Visconti's view that we should be concerned with 'building common ground' rather than 'defending

one's territory'.[53] As project coordinator, I was caught within the pavilion's complicated collaborative

arrangement and the unclear boundary between curatorial and artistic roles. In this case, as I

discuss in the last section of this chapter, the commissioner also played an important part, which

contributed to a tense environment in which the critical ambition of the project, and the kind of

educational experience that would be proposed to the public, became contentious issues.

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[49] Vidokle.

[50] Sohrab Mohebbi et al., "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's 'Art Without Artists?'"

[51] Karla Jasso, in conversation with the author, June 15, 2015. My translation and paraphrasis.

[52] Tom Nicholson, in Fox.

[53] Crivelli Visconti. For a historical overview of the complicated relationship between artists and curators, including institutional critique and artists' museum interventions, see Terry Smith, "Artists as Curators/ Curators as Artists," in *Thinking Contemporary Curating,* 101-138 (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012). Also see Federica Martini and Vittoria Martini, "Questions of Authorship in Biennial Curating," in *The Biennial Reader,* ed. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, and Solveig Ovstebo (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2010), 260-275.

Nevertheless, Jasso's notion of 'amphibious cities' remained the fundamental premise throughout the process and the key point of departure for the installation, which I now turn to discuss.

While examining the cities' urban plans, Jasso intuitively drew a line through Venice's alleyways and canals, connecting the sites that have hosted the Mexican Pavilion at the Biennale [Figure 5]. Mexico's official participation starts with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's show held at Palazzo Soranzo Van Axel in 2007. In 2009 and 2011, respectively, Teresa Margolles and Melanie Smith's exhibitions were presented at Palazzo Rota-Ivancich. The Chiesa di San Lorenzo hosted Ariel Guzik's project in 2013, and *Possessing Nature* inaugurated the pavilion's location at the Arsenale. For Jasso, each of these sites respectively corresponds with political, economic, religious, and military power. Thus, this new cartographic line became significant as a reflection of the historical interconnections between urbanism, architecture, and power in Venice.

Figure 5. Karla Jasso, Trace connecting the location of Mexican Pavilions in Venice, design by Jorge Brozon, *Possessing Nature,* 2015.

The artists decided to bring the route drawn by Jasso into the exhibition space. This is perhaps the most striking aspect of curatorial influence over the work: Jasso's tracing literally determined its shape. It unfolded as a monumental sculpture (18 metres long and up to 2.70 metres high): a metallic, contorted wall that also functioned as a hydraulic mechanism [Figure 6]. It drew water from the lagoon, which circulated through a pumping system before being thrown back.

The water could only be seen from an upper position offered by a staircase at the back of the room. At floor level, visitors could only hear it being pumped up and falling inside the sculpture; its presence was clearly felt but not immediately approachable. The installation engaged the visitors' senses, not only as an impressive sight, but also through the distinct smell of the water and the sound of its mechanism. They were also allowed to touch it and feel the cold metal surface as well as the water's vibrating movement inside.

Figure 6. Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega, *Possessing Nature,* 2015, installation view, Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Biennale di Venezia. Photo by Andrea Martínez.

Figure 7. Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega, *Possessing Nature,* 2015, installation view, Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, Biennale di Venezia. Photo by Andrea Martínez.

At the far end of the sculpture, a large rectangular container on the floor was repeatedly filled with water [Figure 7]. It worked as a water screen in which images of both Venice and Mexico City were alternately projected. The views of Venice are immediately recognisable; the camera navigates the city's canals surrounded by buildings and bridges. However, the angles are unusual as the image continually rotates, and filmed close to the water's surface, most of the city's views are its reflections, its doubles [Figure 8]. From Mexico, lesser-known views of Xochimilco's aquatic landscape appear along the deserted Tequixquiac tunnels, the principal public drainage works built during the nineteenth century [Figure 9]. The images of this highly ornamented, monumental infrastructure are disorienting and strange, sometimes becoming abstract as the camera moves closer to the water's surface and the mounds of colourful litter. Venice's historical maritime power and Mexico's colonial past are made palpable. The film was shot with a high-speed camera at 240 frames per second, which has the effect of considerably slowing down the image and increasing its disconcerting effect. Ortega comments that he attempted to 'tense' the moving image and tried to

reveal its material temporality (referring to its projection on the water, which was also in motion).[54] Sporadically, a flat colour (bright pink, grey, white) fills the screen, interrupting the viewers' absorption in the film's sequence for a moment. We considered it essential to introduce the notion of 'amphibious cities' as the starting point of our mediation strategy for the viewer to approach the work. Pedagogically, it was also important that these concepts returned visitors' attention to the installation.

Figure 8. Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega, *Possessing Nature,* 2015, video still, courtesy of the artists.

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[54] Luis Felipe Ortega, in email conversation with the author, June 12, 2015. My translation and paraphrasis.
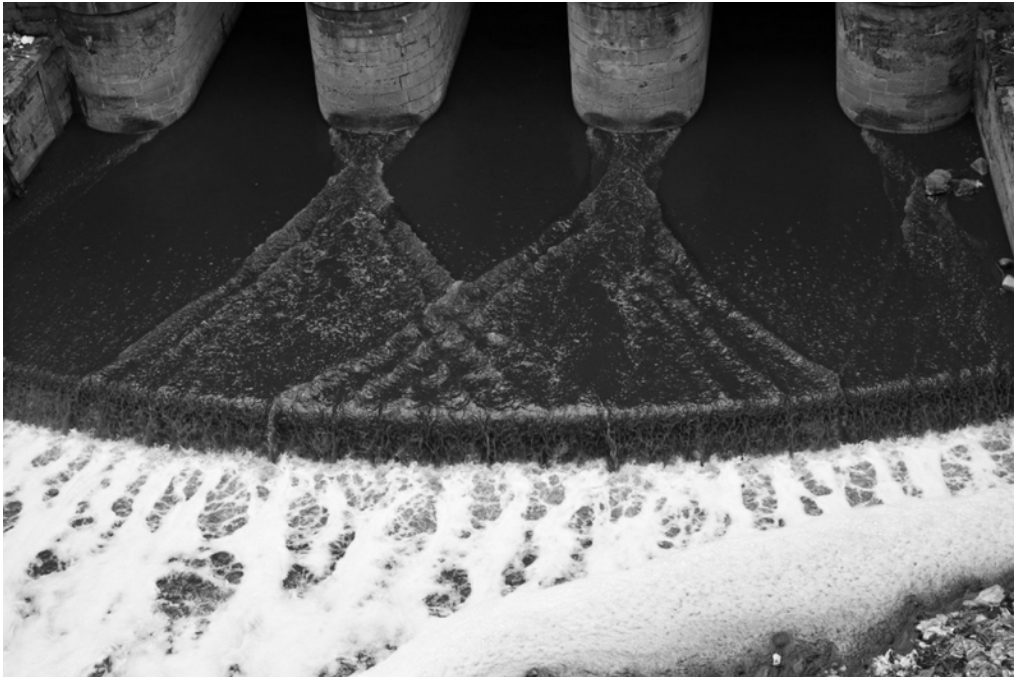
Figure 9. Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega, *Possessing Nature,* 2015, video still, courtesy of the artists.

Parallel to the development and production of the installation, the curatorial team conducted historical and archival research centred on the cities' approaches to hydraulic infrastructure. There were no specific lessons for the audience to take away from this task, but rather, the idea was to convey Walter Benjamin's understanding of repetitive rather than linear history by emphasising the relevance of this historical material to the present. The artists also understood the installation as a cyclical, useless mechanism, a '(counter)infrastructure work', that involved a critique of the notion of historical progress. The exhibition's title *Possessing Nature* is borrowed from Paula Findlen's study on the drive to acquire nature within the collection building practices in Italy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the development of natural history as a discipline, and its forms of display. As part of the idea of a 'civilising process' in early modern Europe, Findlen argues that these activities are indicative of the emergence of collecting as a form of control over nature.[55] The case of Mexico City points to the irrevocable decision to expel the water during the colonial period. The course taken in relation to hydraulic infrastructure, however, leads to wider considerations regarding the repeatedly arbitrary, authoritarian, and obsessive way in which

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[55] Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1996), 1-2, 4, 16.

governmental power is exercised in the country. As a canal or as a sewer, the installation was inextricably linked to this investigation. This critical proposition constituted the Mexican pavilion's response to artistic director Okwui Enwezor's call to examine 'the current state of things' in 2015 and his overall proposal for the Biennale as encapsulated in the title *All the World's Futures*.[56] Jasso's thinking correlates with Enwezor's postcolonial, global curatorial approach and his rethinking of the Western, Eurocentric concept of art, especially as determined by major shows. As Gardner and Green comment in relation to his Documenta 11 (2002), his exhibitions are concerned with the past and the future and encourage the audience's engagement with art within its charged political and geographical context.[57] In my view, Enwezor's perspective and the kind of curatorial contextualisation he applies point to his understanding of the social role of art, and this approach is intrinsically connected to an educational aspiration.

In his curatorial statement for the Biennale, Enwezor recovers Benjamin's famous reading of Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* (1950) as 'the angel of history. His face turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. […] The storm irresistibly propel(ing) him into the future […] is what we call progress'.[58] Enwezor interprets this passage as an urgent call to revise 'the representational capacity of art' in the context of current global economic, humanitarian, and environmental crises.[59] Inspired in particular by the events held at the Biennale in 1974 in solidarity with Chile and in protest against dictator Augusto Pinochet (who had overthrown Salvador Allende's government in 1973), Enwezor stressed his interest in the 'discussion and debate' on the social role of art provoked on that occasion.[60] For his Biennale, he introduced what he termed an 'ARENA' within the central pavilion at the Giardini, which was conceived as an 'active

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[56] La Biennale di Venezia, "Introduction by Okwui Enwezor, Curator of the Biennale Arte 2015."

[57] Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, "Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the "Global Exhibition"," *OnCurating* 33 (June 2017): 119, http://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/post-north-documenta11-and-the-challenges-of-the-global-exhibition.html#.W0deDBJKigQ (accessed July 12, 2018).

[58] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations,* ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (1955; repr., New York: Random House, 2002), 257-258.

[59] La Biennale di Venezia, "Introduction by Okwui Enwezor, Curator of the Biennale Arte 2015."

[60] La Biennale di Venezia, "Okwui Enwezor - Addendum," http://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2015/okwui-enwezor-addendum (accessed March 12, 2018).

space, […] a forum of public discussion' where a programme of activities was organised, centred

around a live reading of the three volumes of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* (1867).[61] His stance can be

seen to derive from previous projects, such as his directorship of Documenta 11 (2002), which,

according to Oliver Marchart, initiates the 'politicisation' process of the major exhibition format.[62]

For Georgina Jackson, Documenta 11 marks the shift from the 'museological' to the 'discursive', a

development that ensued from Enwezor's Johannesburg Biennale (1997). Since then, Jackson

notes, Enwezor's exhibitions have maintained an engagement with postcolonial discourse and its

ethical demands on historical interpretation.[63] His Biennale decisively introduced the idea of the

exhibition as a site of critical analysis as a foremost model of curating contemporary art which, I

argue, can also be productively explored in terms of pedagogy.

     Critical responses to *All the World's Futures,* however, pointed to the many inconsistencies

between its overt social critique and its participation within the very neoliberal capitalist system it

sought to contest. Reviews highlighted, for instance, Isaac Julien's participation, as director, in the

Das Kapital reading while presenting a preview of his film *Stones Against Diamonds* (2015), a

piece sponsored by the Rolls Royce art programme and shown at the Palazzo Malipiero-Barnabò

on the Grand Canal during the *vernissage*.[64] Others commented on the inclusion of workers' songs

within the ARENA programme without any consideration of the labour conditions at the Biennale, or

concluded that Marx's reading was neutralised by spectacle.[65] The discussion raises questions

about the agency of curators to set up the exhibition as a site of critical analysis and introduce a

demanding pedagogical situation. As Green and Gardner underline in their recent history of the

global proliferation of biennials, the politics of these events are deeply problematic, with corporate

[61] La Biennale di Venezia, "Okwui Enwezor - Addendum".

[62] Oliver Marchart, "Hegemonic Shifts and the Politics of Biennalization: The Case of Documenta," in *The Biennial Reader,* 474-475.

[63] Georgina Jackson, "And the Question Is…," in *Curating Research,* ed. Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (London: Open Editions, 2015), 69-70.

[64] Charlotte Higgins, "Das Kapital at the Arsenale: how Okwui Enwezor invited Marx to the Biennale,"*The Guardian,* May 7, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/07/das-kapital-at-venice-biennale-okwui-enwezor-karl-marx (accessed March 12, 2018).

[65] Mike Watson, "Whose future?" *Radical Philosophy* 193 (September - October 2015), https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/news/whose-future (accessed March 12, 2018). Griselda Pollock, "56th Venice Biennale," *Art Monthly* 387 (June 2015): 21.

sponsorship binding them to neoliberal spectacle; nevertheless, the authors consider that biennials can offer 'profound, critical insights' into the relation between art and the current political and economic climate.[66] In what follows, I examine how the Mexican pavilion's strategy became embroiled in the argument over the Biennale as a space of entertainment or critique and stress the centrality —but also the complexity— of mediation and pedagogical matters within the contradictory politics of large-scale exhibitions.

The dialectical image as a tool of mediation

Mediation was a key aspect in framing the spectators' encounter with the installation, determining the kind of experience offered to visitors, as well as conveying the research component of the project, balancing its aesthetic and political potency, and supporting active spectatorship and learning. That is, we actively investigated ways to imagine and address our audiences, not only those who would visit the exhibition in Venice, but also anyone interested in following the development of the project online. We were particularly keen to engage with Mexican audiences. Elena Filipovic notes that the arrangement of elements of the exhibition implies certain uses of the space and is central to the biennial's critical capacity:

> the manner by which a selection of artworks, a tectonic context, and thematic or other
> discursive accompaniments coalesce into a particular form is at the heart of *how an
> exhibition exhibits*. […] How might [biennials] be more self-reflective about how
> meaning is expressed in the very structures they provide visitors for thinking, acting,
> and viewing a show? How can [these exhibitions] live up to their potential as sites from
> which to question the consequences of global modernity? How too might they register
> some of the hesitancy and instability that their discourse would have us believe is
> integral to their projects?[67]

Taking these matters into account, we were concerned with publicising the pavilion nationally and internationally while presenting and preserving the conceptual complexity of the project and

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[66] Green and Gardner, *Biennials,* 3-4.

[67] Elena Filipovic, "The Global White Cube," *OnCurating* 22 (April 2014), http://www.on-curating.org/issue-22-43/the-global-white-cube.html#.Wqe-khPFLOQ (accessed March 13, 2018).

fostering curiosity and critical spectatorship. At the same time, we needed to manage time-pressure and competing expectations, as indicated previously.

The conceptual premise of the project led us to Benjamin's 'dialectical image'. Sigrid Weigel refers to Benjamin's 'thinking-in-images' as a distinctive feature of his work and the means to overcome oppositions between content/form, theory/practice, and politics/art.[68] Weigel pays particular attention to the dialectical image's immediacy; she elucidates Benjamin's constant reference to a flashing light as 'a way of knowing that in an instant can illuminate an entire situation'.[69] As a research team, we were interested in exploring the dialectical image as a pedagogical tool and investigating its immediate cognitive potential as a way to convey complex content in a non-explanatory manner and put forward the relevance of historical research to the present. In Benjamin's conceptualisation, 'it's not that what is past casts its light on what is present… Rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words, image is dialectics at a standstill'.[70] He refers to a specific temporality: a form of interruption that the philosopher Max Pensky reads as Benjamin's 'way to actualise historical material that would uproot and shock what has been constructed as "the present", that would disrupt the very relationship between past and present'.[71] Pensky expounds that the dialectical image involves 'a temporal arrest in which the dreamlike illusion of historical progress is shattered, and revealed as the hell of repetition'.[72] The Pavilion critically dealt with the notions of efficiency and linear history. In Benjamin's words:

> My attempt is to express a conception of history in which the concept of progress would
> be completely displaced by that of the origin. The historical, understood in this way, can
> no longer be sought in the riverbed of a course of progress. Here, as I have already

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[68] Sigrid Weigel, *Body- and Image-Space Re-reading Walter Benjamin* (London: Routledge, 2005), viii-ix.

[69] Sigrid Weigel, "The Flash of Knowledge and the Temporality of Images: Walter Benjamin's Image-Based Epistemology and Its Preconditions in Visual Arts and Media History," *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 344-345, 347-348.

[70] Walter Benjamin, *Arcades Project,* trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (1982; repr., Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 462.

[71] Max Pensky, "Method and Time: Benjamin's dialectical images," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 181.

[72] Pensky, 191.

observed elsewhere, the image of an eddy replaces that of the riverbed. In such a

vortex, the earlier and the later circulate—the pre- and post-history of an occurrence or,

better yet, a status of it.[73]

A correspondence might be found between the installation's water screen and Benjamin's image of

an eddy. The screen's agitated surface —as opposed to the modernist clichéd water mirror— puts

forward 'a counter image to the conventional metaphor of the flow of time: the eddy as an image of

the interaction of pre- and post- history, of the past and the present, and the eternity and the

instant'.[74] Likewise, a crucial mediation objective was to convey this confluence between past and

present as part of the spectators' encounter with the installation.

The research team gathered material mainly from the national water commission's

photographic archive (Conagua) and the Casasola collection. Our selection and re-arrangement of

these images were intended as a historiographical intervention to official state records. Although

the main thinking is presented in the catalogue [Figure 10], we also integrated the dialectics into

our web and social media strategy, as well as the materials found in the exhibition space, as I

discuss in more detail below.[75] These juxtapositions were set out as a 'counter-reading' of historical

evidence. The artists expressed interest in our investigation; however, they were also doubtful

about the amount of time and effort devoted to it. We were interested in what the historical and

visual anthropologist Elizabeth Edwards has explored, that is, the potential of photographs to

contradict dominant narratives within the archive and open up new perspectives.[76] For Edwards,

'by their very nature photographs are sites of multiple, contested and contesting histories'.[77] We

conceived the images as a 'counter-monument' against the monumental scale of infrastructure

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[73] Walter Benjamin, "Autobiographische Schriften," *Gesammelte Schriften*, 6:442–43, cited in Weigel, "The Flash of Knowledge and the Temporality of Images," 357.

[74] Weigel, "The Flash of Knowledge," 357.

[75] Karla Jasso et al., "Hydrous Bodies and Deep Time," in *Possessing Nature,* 115-197.

[76] Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 4.

[77] Edwards, 22.

projects led by the state.[78] Edwards notes the persistent ambiguity of the photograph and their

significatory dependence on and openness to context. They remain 'uncontainable', 'unsettling',

incomplete, and unknowable, confronting us with the limits of our knowledge, and therefore, they

are a compelling pedagogical tool.[79] The re-contextualisation of these documents —Mexican and

Venetian scenes, records of obsolete tunnels and catastrophic floods— was intended to echo

Enwezor's view of the archive as a site 'where a suture between the past and present is

performed, in the indeterminate zone between event and image, document and monument'.[80] As

polysemic, active social and historical objects, their meaning depends on their interactions with

other objects and subjects (I will return to this in Chapter 4). In this sense, this thesis pays close

attention to how particular arrangements and forms of display affect interpretation processes.[81]

Figure 10. People getting through a flooded street on a raft, Mexico City ca.1950, security film negative, 10.2 x 12.7 cm. Casasola archive (left) and Campo San Salvador during the extraordinary acqua alta of November, 1966, gelatino-bromide emulsion, Fondo Borlui, Archivio Storico Trevigiano, Treviso Italy (right). As arranged in our visual essay for the exhibition's catalogue, pp. 182-183.

Our objective was to set up the exhibition as an unresolved, challenging situation that

would prompt visitors to rethink their expectations and question their need for clarification and

conclusive narratives. However, our strategy was not explicitly set out to the audience. The

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[78] See Charles Merewether, ed., "Introduction: Art and the Archive," in *The Archive,* Documents of Contemporary Art, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 16.

[79] Edwards, 5, 6, 8, 19.

[80] Okwui Enwezor, "Archive Fever: Photography between History and the Monument", in *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, (New York: International Centre of Photography and Göttingen, Germany: Steidl Publishers, 2008), 47.

[81] Edwards, 13, 14, 16.

dialectical image was our main tool to convey content in a non-prescriptive manner that still addressed our concerns with the modes of apprehension and interpretation put forward.[82] Weigel describes three stages in the process of encountering the image: '*first encounter*—fascinated contemplation of the image and impression […]; *latency* (that remains unconscious or preconscious before the cultural and historic-theoretical implications of what has been seen are unfolded); [and] *thought-image* —the discussion of the image'.[83] We were mainly interested in the forms of learning that take place during these first two moments, and we were committed to sustaining this latency, or suspension, of thought. This also required letting go of the common preconception of learning as the acquisition of knowledge. In Benjamin's own words: 'To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions—there the dialectical image appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thought.'[84] In upholding this hiatus, we sought to maintain a productive interrelation between the aesthetic and research components of the exhibition, between the perception and the interpretation of the work. This also meant deviating from the convention of providing a stable interpretation of the work to the public.

A conceptual diagram [Figure 11] was helpful in delineating three phases that would guide the dissemination of content in the months preceding the pavilion's opening. The first concentrated on the notions of 'amphibious cities' and 'myth' to introduce the project. Then, a more critical stage looked into hydraulic infrastructure in Venice and Mexico. Finally, and timed with the opening of the pavilion, the third stage concentrated on the idea of 'catastrophe'.

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[82] See Roger I Simon, "Afterword: The Turn to Pedagogy: A Needed Conversation on the Practice of Curating Difficult Knowledge," in *Curating Difficult Knowledge,* ed. Erica Lehrer, Cynthia E. Milton and Monica Eileen Patterson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 194, 207.

[83] Weigel, "The Flash of Knowledge," 352.

[84] Benjamin, *Arcades Project,* 366.

CONTINGENCY

DOMINION

INFRASTRUCTURE
KNOWLEDGE/POWER

NATURE
COLONIZATION

TECHNOLOGY
GLOBALIZATION

AMPHIBIOUS CITIES
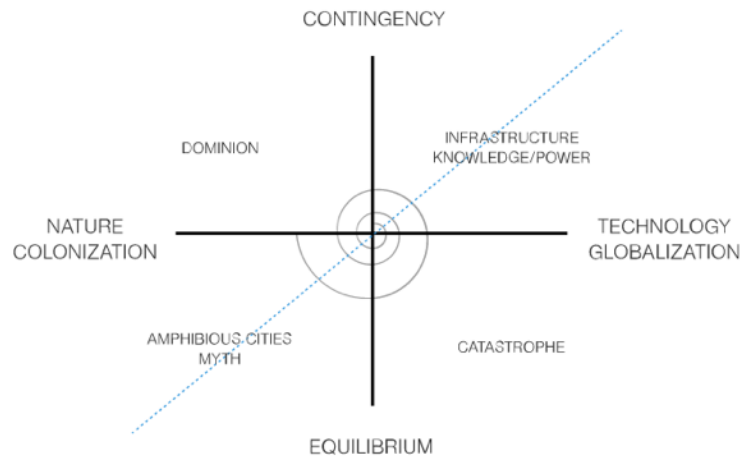MYTH

CATASTROPHE

EQUILIBRIUM

Figure 11. Karla Jasso, Ana Sol González, Roselín Rodríguez, and Ximena
Juárez, *Possessing Nature,* conceptual diagram, 2015.

The pavilion's online presence was essential to reaching national and international

audiences that would not visit the Biennale. Designed with Ingrid Carraro, our website functioned

as a central platform. It provided an introduction, short curator and artist biographies, and practical

information. However, it also included a 'project' section where the three phases were developed.

For example, the following sequence of dialectical images was found under phase one,

'amphibious cities' [Figure 12]. Venice and Mexico stand against each other, and the selection of

images sets forth the abundance, excess, and lack of water skipping through time and space.

Figure 12. Collection of images corresponding to Phase 1 'Amphibious cities, Myth' as arranged on the pavilion's website.

Archival photography was recovered and re-activated in this context. Social media posts followed the same three phases. The idea was to make use of online platforms to introduce content, context, and meaning beyond publicising the pavilion. Therefore, these were carefully curated [Figure 13]. Our strategy's primary objectives were to make the project known in a coherent, consistent, and effective way; to address both specialised and lay audiences; to draw traffic to the website; and to promote curious, attentive, and critical spectatorship. Carraro ran the pavilion's social media accounts, taking care of key aspects such conveying the conceptual complexity of the project, positioning the exhibition's identity across platforms, and making the most of posts' lifespans for users' engagement. Our Facebook page reached 8,949 likes in total, a vast increase compared to the 2013 Mexican pavilion's total of 1,400 likes. Our Facebook audience analysis also indicated that the vast majority of our followers were based in Mexico City,

and 46% of them were between 25 and 34 years old.[85] Although the potential use of social media was not fully explored, our strategy constituted the first systematic approach to establishing the pavilion's online presence. Online posts were integral to our mediation strategy and functioned pedagogically as a way of phasing in key concepts, as well as setting out the pavilion's critical stance. This material also correlated with the mediation components within the exhibition space.
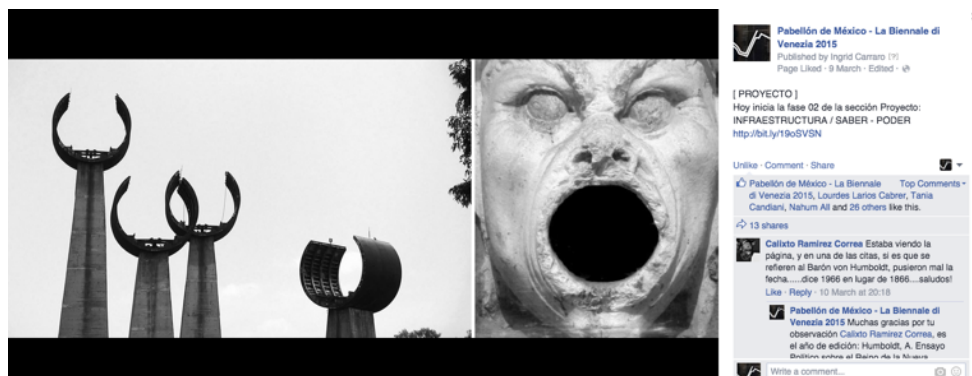

Figure 13. Twitter and Facebook screenshots from the pavilion's accounts.

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[85] Facebook analytics indicated an audience that was 53% female and 44% male; 46% of followers were between 25 and 34 years old, 22% between 35 and 44, 13% between 18 and 24, 8% between 45 and 54, 4% between 55 and 64, and 4% over 65. Although our Twitter account reached only 478 followers in total, the site recorded substantial numbers, for instance, 6.7K impressions between January 28, 2015 and February 18, 2015, earning an average of 334 impressions per day during this period, and 13.3K impressions between March 18, 2015 and April 14, 2015, that is, 470 impressions per day. Facebook, "Pabellón de México - La Biennale di Venezia 2015," https://www.facebook.com/biennalemx/ (accessed June 6, 2018); Facebook, "Mexico Bienal @Cordiox," https://www.facebook.com/Cordiox/ (accessed June 6, 2018); Twitter, "Possessing Nature," https://twitter.com/biennalemx (accessed June 6, 2018).

Initially, an ideal route was drawn from the main entrance in which the visitor would walk along the length of the sculpture, discovering its crooks and angles and listening to the water running and falling inside. This path reaches a tensive point where the loudest waterfall coincides with the most narrow space between the sculpture and the wall. Then, an opening leads to the water screen and, finally, to the opportunity to use a staircase to look at the installation from above at the back of the room [Figure 14]. However, the Biennale soon advised us that, for security reasons, entrances at the back would also need to be available. This opens up multiple standpoints and ways to approaching the installation. As I discuss in more detail below, we introduced three mediation materials: an introductory text, a map of Tenochtitlán, and a 'device'. The exhibition's *mise en scène,* comprised of the interrelation between these items and the installation, was planned for visitors to assume responsibility in the production of meaning. As Kate Fowle observes, meaning results from the viewers' movement back and forth and between the elements of the exhibition space (artworks, ideas, text, location).[86]

Figure 14. Plan of the Sale d'Armi, Arsenale, showing the originally envisioned exhibition's route and alternative entrances

The introductory text consisted of three short paragraphs. The first referred to the historical institution of hydraulic infrastructure —the canal in Venice and the sewer in Mexico— to introduce the notion of 'amphibious cities'. The second presented the gesture of tracing on Venice's plan a

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[86] Kate Fowle, "Action Research: Generative Curatorial Practices," in *Curating Research,* 163-164.

route through the locations that have hosted the Mexican Pavilion and the artists' decision to bring the trace into the exhibition space. The third and last paragraph brought attention to the continual reinstatement of a colonial policy and pointed to the violence and arrogance underlying the obstinate efforts to possess and control nature.

Possessing Nature
Having been founded in water, both Venice and Mexico share their origin as 'amphibious cities'. Their destiny was marked by two forms of governance: maritime state and colonial sovereignty. In each case, the institution of past hydraulic infrastructure, canal and sewer, continues to determine the city's urban policy and everyday life.

The project started from a specific gesture: tracing on Venice's plan a route through the locations that have hosted the Mexican Pavilion during the twenty-first century. This new cartographic line traverses sites of political, economic, religious, and finally, military power, illuminating the relation between architecture and power in the West. Working specifically for the Pavilion, artists Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega decided to bring and raise the trace in the exhibition space. It unfolded as a system that suctions water from the lagoon, fills the monument up and produces a refraction of images.

This edition of the Mexican Pavilion seeks to unearth what has been buried and bring to light the continual reinstatement of a control policy imposed during the colony, the determination to dewater the city. History repeats itself; the arrogance of digging deeper and deeper, the ambition build the 'best and largest public works in the world'. While power in this case is affirmed by the scale of hydraulic infrastructure, the obsession to control and possess the untameable extends violently to all spheres of life.

Possessing Nature, wall text, Mexican Pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, 2015.

The next element within the exhibition space was a large-scale map of Tenochtitlán [Figure 15]. We were interested in the gesture of visitors unfolding the plan of Mexico as an aquatic city while standing in Venice. It was important as a visualisation and imaginary exercise of the city life in the Aztec capital in comparison to its European counterpart. The map is a source of ample visual information that also invites a closer reading; its inscriptions refer to rivers and lakes, and there is mention of indigenous names. Additionally, the map leads to questions of the original purposes of its author, Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés: it is ultimately, an instrument of power. Finally, we introduced a key piece that proposed another way to approach the installation. We call it a 'device'

since it differed significantly from the conventional exhibition guide [Figure 16]. It consisted of a selection of archival photography and quotes intended to function dialectically between each other and the installation. Designed in collaboration with Diego Aguirre, its shape echoed the sculpture and enabled various folds that generate different juxtapositions of images from Mexico and Venice, while the following quotations were meant to hand interpretive responsibility over to the reader:

> For one who, like me, lives through ages, it always seems odd when I hear about statues and monuments. I can never think of a statue erected in honour of a distinguished man without already seeing it case down and trampled upon by future warriors.
>
> Conversations of Goethe and Eckermann, July 5th, 1827.

And:

> As there is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of.
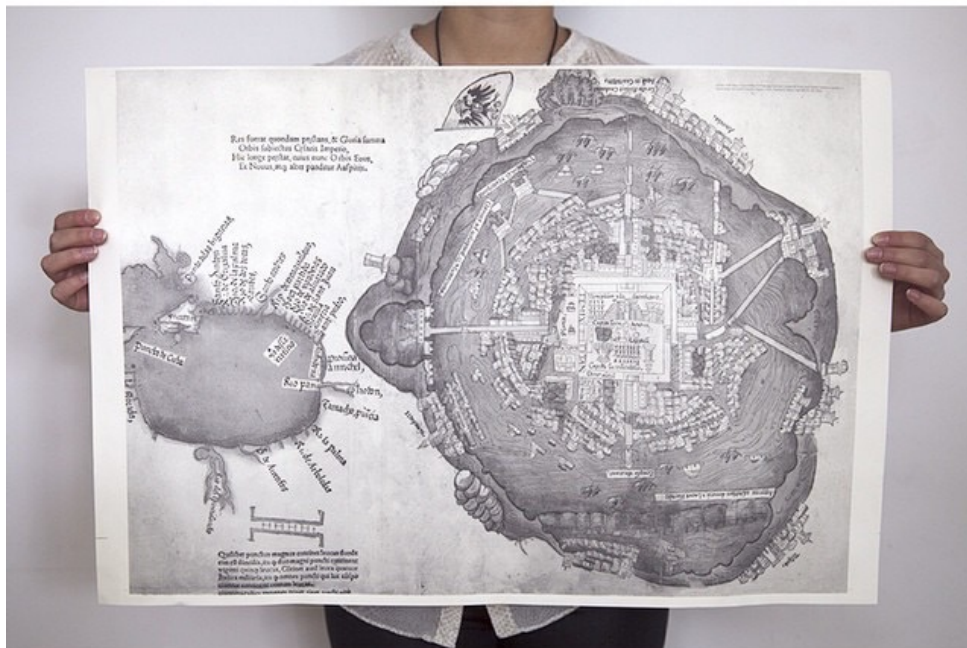>
> Louis Althusser.

Figure 15. Hernán Cortés' *Map of Tenochtitlán* (1524) printouts, *Possessing Nature,* 2015.
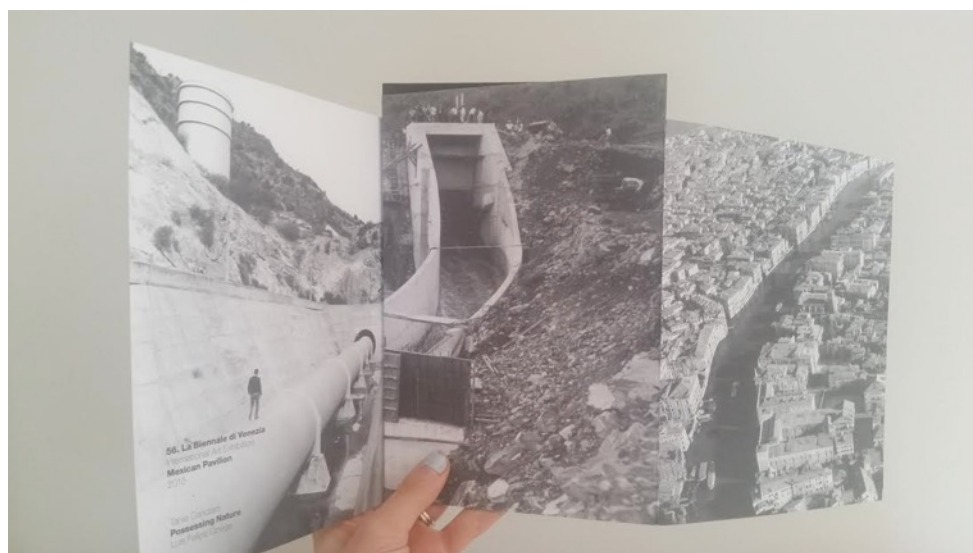
Figure 16. 'Device' designed in collaboration with Diego Aguirre, *Possessing Nature,* 2015.

The device was a deliberately experimental attempt to foster creative readings of the work. For the curatorial team, the pavilion represented the opportunity to question convention and explore alternative methods. Curators Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg reflect on the biennial as:

> a testing ground for artistic innovations, a laboratory in which to experiment with ways of activating the relationship between viewers and artworks […] For the biennial is neither exclusively nor even primarily a space of spectacular display, but rather a discursive environment: a theatre that allows for the staging of arguments, speculations and investigations concerning the nature of our shared, diversely veined, and demanding contemporary condition.[87]

As we will see in the following chapters, the idea of the exhibition as a 'laboratory' or 'theatre' has been closely associated with critical curatorial practice since the turn of the millennium and the notion of active spectatorship. In the case of the pavilion, we sought to align with Enwezor's conceptualisation and put forward an open-ended research process. We return to the dilemma between spectacle and discourse, to the question of the viability of the Biennale as a site of critical analysis rather than entertained consumption, and its pedagogical implications. Our mediation strategy and pedagogical approach refused to offer a stable, univocal interpretation of the work and instead strove to prompt questions. However, as I discuss in the next section, our approach raised serious concerns and objections from the pavilion's commissioner. The last section of this chapter foregrounds the conflicting interests on mediation and the institutional reluctance towards pedagogical experimentation, especially in the context of the national pavilion at the Biennale.

Curating as service and/or a form of research

During the five months that we worked towards the opening, dealing with INBA became the most demanding aspect, which reflects the tensions between funders and curators endemic to the commission, display, and interpretation of contemporary art in high-profile fora. For example, it is widely recognised that due to its cash flow dependency on both Conaculta (The National Council

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[87] Bruce W. Ferguson and Milena M. Hoegsberg, "Talking and Thinking About Biennials: The Potential of Discursivity", in *The Biennial Reader,* 361.

for Culture and the Arts) and the SEP (The Secretariat of Public Education), INBA constantly

requires costly credit from its suppliers.[88] In the case of the pavilion, this organisational structure

provoked significant delays and, ultimately, the need to ship to Venice by air instead of sea freight,

which resulted in significant overspending. We also lost valuable time, for instance, dissuading

them from setting up a 'VIP lounge' in the exhibition space and justifying our mediation approach,

of which they openly disapproved. Their attempt to make the most out of the pavilion as a public

relations opportunity was clearly at odds with our intention to construct a site of critical analysis and

a demanding learning environment. In his study of bureaucracy, anthropologist and activist David

Graeber describes these kinds of situations as 'lopsided structures of imagination': the creative

team spent great amounts of energy trying to understand the commissioner's position, while the

INBA's personnel did not need to engage in this process.[89] As Panos Kompatsiaris underlines, the

circumstances of artistic and cultural labour and the contradictions of the institutional backing of

critical projects in the context of the biennial deserves more attention; I would add that pedagogical

models are also under contention in this context.[90]

Ultimately, there was a stark opposition between INBA's and Jasso's understanding of

curating. The institution adhered to an outdated notion of curating as an exhibition management

service. However, as Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson remark, from the 1980s onwards, curatorial

practices have been recognised as 'active forms of knowledge production; as ways of contesting

established epistemic schemata; and as research actions and epistemic practices in their own

right'.[91] In this vein, this thesis argues for the centrality of education to contemporary curating.

Under my direction, the pavilion's research team took into account the interconnections between

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[88] This organisational structure was modified by the instatement of the Secretariat of Culture in December, 2015. Pilar Villela, "Gastos de presupuesto," *La Tempestad,* June 25, 2015, http://latempestad.mx/columnas/las-listas-inconsistentes-pilar-villela-recortes-presupuestos-cultura-conaculta-discusion-rafael-tovar-teresa-gastos-artes-visuales-monto-critica (accessed March 19, 2018).

[89] David Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules: Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (New York: Melville House, 2015), 81.

[90] Panos Kompatsiaris, "Curating Resistances: Ambivalences and Potentials of Contemporary Art Biennials," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 7 (2014): 82.

[91] Paul O' Neill and Mick Wilson, "An Opening to Curatorial Enquiry: Introduction to Curating and Research," in *Curating Research,* 16-17.

mediation and pedagogy. One of the main accusations from INBA referred to the time devoted to curatorial research. In their view, Jasso should have completed the work during the six weeks provided to submit the project to the selection committee. Thus, the idea of the exhibition as a form of research, not only in the preparatory phase, but also in its configuration as a 'dynamic process, […] an extended space of meaning making', was completely foreign to them.[92] Instead, they considered the exhibition as a fixed entity or final product that presents a straightforward statement.[93] Pondering the exhibition as a site of research, Simon Sheikh suggests that the idea implies understanding the exhibition as a proposition that is put together through modes of display and curatorial address. I would add that this conceptualisation also entails a pedagogical proposition. Crucially, Sheikh comments that the critical value of such a model depends on its ability to remain 'unwieldy, uncertain and 'unfinished'.[94] Jasso conceived the pavilion as a fertile ground to test ideas rather than a space to present a finalised thesis; the research team strove to preserve an open-ended pedagogical framework, but this was disputed at every turn.

Unsurprisingly, the mediation strategy was at the centre of our confrontation with INBA; as Sheikh notes, art institutions work as 'the in-between, the mediator, interlocutor, translator and meeting place for art production and the conception of the public'.[95] INBA insisted that we provide an explanatory text so that visitors would 'immediately understand' what they saw upon entering the pavilion. This corresponds to a prevalent stance, described by Maria Lind as 'the consumerist logic of many institutions', which demands that visitors 'get' an exhibition at once.[96] Through the development of the project and the implementation of our online strategy, INBA became increasingly concerned that we were not effectively transmitting the pavilion's message (or what they thought it should be). They repeatedly held that our strategy was 'too academic',

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[92] O'Neill and Wilson, "An Opening to Curatorial Enquiry," 17-18.

[93] O'Neill and Wilson, "An Opening to Curatorial Enquiry," 18.

[94] Simon Sheikh, "Towards the Exhibition as Research," in *Curating Research,* 39, 40, 46.

[95] Simon Sheikh, "The Trouble with Institutions, or, Art and its Publics," in *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations,* ed. Nina Möntmann (Black Dog Publishing, 2006), 144.

[96] Maria Lind, "Contemporary Art and its Institutional Dilemmas," *Oncurating* 8 (2011), http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue8.pdf (accessed March 20, 2018).

'incomprehensible', and, most importantly, that it was 'hurting the project'. The situation escalated when they designed their mediation material as a plan B, undermining our work.

Their alternative consisted of a thirty-page brochure that included a substantial, unsigned text, the artists' and Jasso's extended biographies, and photographic documentation of the installation's construction. The text's initial paragraph states:

> *Possessing Nature* is a site where the spectator is summoned to travel throughout the historical drifts of modernity; those drifts of which their beginning, if there was ever any, should be located at a point where nature appears as an object that can be taken over by humanity, and where the technique becomes a means and a manner of production, from where labor and life are alienated.[97]

This was presented as their solution to our 'inaccessible' proposal. Immediately, there is an attempt to define the project and address the viewer. However, it is difficult to see how this kind of text would help visitors to 'immediately understand' the work. Later on, the text does provide didactic instructions on how to read the piece: '*Possessing Nature* should be thought of as a constructive system, an aesthetic apparatus and a historical device that brings relations between technology, modernity, capitalism and globalisation into the present'; '*Possessing Nature* should be understood as a character; as a sort of temper, in this case of the matter, with which its location in the armoury hall determines a condition of aesthetic experience, where the tension between history and nature occurs in the body of the spectator as an immeasurable experience'. Speaking for the institution, the unnamed author goes on: 'we must see *Possessing Nature* as a construction, a sculpture and an engraving; we must read it as a map, a trace and a script; we must listen to it as an acoustic percussion box and a musical organ of pleats, where the sluices are another way to manage the force and pressure produced, not from the wind but rather from water'. Our curatorial and mediation approach was completely opposed to the authoritative, expert, and didactic tone of the text: 'The aesthetics of *Possessing Nature* conceived as a paradoxical system of signs and forces in tension is supported on the elementary *pathos* of hydraulic engineering'. From our perspective, studying the text, the artists' and curator's biographies, and the images of the process would

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[97] INBA, "Possessing Nature," Unpublished brochure for the Mexican Pavilion at the 56th International Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, 2015.

detract from the kind of experience we had envisioned for the exhibition space. Fraught

negotiations between the artists, curator, and INBA prevented the commissioner from sending the

brochure to print. Such a lengthy, time-consuming component would have been counterproductive

considering that the vast majority of visitors spent only between two and six minutes in the pavilion,

as I observed during a visit between the 6th and 9th of July that year. Although a meaningful

experience of the exhibition necessarily requires more time, in devising mediation materials, it is

important to take into account the immense amount of work shown at the Arsenale and most

visitors' limited time.

Our text and materials should have also been constructively examined, questioned, and

discussed. During that visit in July, I noticed, for example, that materials were difficult to handle and

fold and unfold without two free hands, and most visitors already carried something with them

(such as a bag or a camera). On the level of content, I conducted semi-structured interviews that

revealed that the idea of the trace through the locations of previous iterations of the Mexican

Pavilion remained unclear. A diagram would have been helpful to present this central point without

detracting from our critical stance. However, rather than defending ourselves, the point here is to

draw attention to the implications of the institution's imposition of an alternative curatorial reading

of the project. Beyond our disagreeing views on mediation, the dismissal and substitution of our

work indicated a blunt demonstration of power. Graeber comments on this kind of imbalanced

relation: 'Violence's capacity to allow arbitrary decisions, and thus to avoid the kind of debate,

clarification, and renegotiation typical of more egalitarian social relations, is obviously what allows

its victims to see procedures created on the basis of violence as stupid or unreasonable'.[98] INBA

deliberately intervened in mediation matters, adding pressure on Jasso, who was able to stop their

interference only by suggesting that otherwise, she would step down.

INBA was right in that visitors were not able to 'immediately get' a single message from the

exhibition. My conversations with members of the public reveal that we succeeded in putting

forward a non-prescriptive mode of address that supported the interactivity between aesthetic and

research components, as well as perception and interpretation processes. Recounting their first

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[98] Graeber, 66.

impressions, visitors often referred to the sound of the installation and mentioned the contrast between natural and artificial (the water and the 'hard, metal structure') and the ideas of 'cycle' and 'monument'. They described the piece as 'minimalist', 'abstract', and 'a secret to uncover'. Regarding the function of the mediation material, my interviewees did not seem completely lost; they commented that it 'works as a base', 'informs to be able to approach the work', 'offers a clear concept without facilitating', or 'supports very conceptual work'. Most importantly, visitors touched on the openness to different interpretations. In their own words: 'it lets you interpret freely while providing an anchor', 'multiple readings are possible, it is polysemic', and 'it gives clear ideas that open the space for various readings'. The audience did not identify a singular critical message; instead, their comments indicate a more intuitive reading: 'it's trying to make what is underground visible', or 'I perceived it as trying to contain something that cannot be controlled'.[99] Issues of availability did come to my attention; materials were kept inside bookshelves and were hardly visible. Just placing some of the maps and devices on top of the shelves made a significant difference. The time spent in the pavilion increased twofold, and four out of ten people took the material, compared to one out of ten beforehand. Our mediation components were fundamental in setting up the exhibition as an active form of research and a stimulating learning atmosphere.

The confrontation with the INBA is symptomatic of mediation as a field of competing interests. Ranjit Hoskote, co-curator of the Seventh Gwangju Biennial with Enwezor in 2008, suggests in more optimistic terms, that there is a 'constant and productive tension between institutionality and resistance'.[100] For the Mexican pavilion research team, what was at stake was the kind of experience we would offer to the public, and we were committed to defending curatorial agency. As Marchart remarks, 'what is relevant is not only whether specific works included are political, but also the extent to which the conception and realisation of the exhibition as such provide room for art as a form of political analysis or rather, depoliticise political works by means of

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[99] Interviews conducted on-site between the 7th and 9th of July 2015, Venice. The interview questions are in the appendix.

[100] Ranjit Hoskote, "Biennials of Resistance: Reflections on the Seventh Gwangju Biennial," in *The Biennial Reader,* 308.

an exhibition apparatus that neutralises or defuses them'.[101] The institution stood for a

straightforward, consumerist framing of the installation, while we argued for an analytical and

challenging one.

Critics' reviews of the pavilion provide further insights into the kind of experience the

exhibition presented to the public. Francisco Morales, from Mexican newspaper *Reforma,* referred

to *Possessing Nature's* historical perspective, described the work as an 'absolutely political

project,' and commented on the studied, phased way in which information about the project was

released.[102] Other readings, such as Edgar Hernández's —from the Mexican arts magazine

Código— underlined the pavilion's critical stance and elaborated on the demanding aspects of the

installation: the need to spend time with it, touch it, and physically experience it.[103] Mexican critic

Marisol Rodríguez's article focused on Jasso's curatorial approach. Rodríguez considered the

indivisibility between the installation and the historical investigation of the environmental course of

the cities and highlighted the possibility of multiple interpretations.[104] Finally, writing for La

Tempestad contemporary arts magazine, Daniel Montero concentrated on the indefiniteness of the

project. Montero avoided providing a stable interpretation and referred instead to critical

spectatorship as a condition to navigate the 'real and virtual time and space that are penetrable as

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[101] Marchart, 476.

[102] Francisco Morales, "Los cartógrafos del poder," *Reforma*, April 26, 2015. My translation.

[103] Edgar Hernández, "Possessing Nature. Pabellón de México en la 56 Bienal de Arte Venecia," *Código*, May 25, 2015, http://www.revistacodigo.com/opinion-possessing-nature-pabellon-de-mexico-en-la-56-bienal-de-venecia/ (accessed March 23, 2018).

[104] Marisol Rodriguez, "Possessing Nature: México en la bienal de Venecia," in "Confabulario,*" El Universal,* May 2, 2015, http://confabulario.eluniversal.com.mx/possesing-nature-mexico-en-la-bienal-de-venecia/ (accessed March 23, 2018).

you move in the space'.[105] These readings of *Possessing Nature* confirm that our mediation

strategy did not set out to 'teach' historical facts or offer a definitive account of the research that

was undertaken. The inherent pedagogies within the exhibition space instead demanded critical

attentiveness from the audience and encouraged a co-creative production of meaning.

We return, then, to one of the central questions of this chapter: the viability of the biennial

exhibition as a site of critical analysis and pedagogical experimentation. Green and Gardner

observe that since Harald Szeemann's documenta 5 (1972), large-scale exhibitions, including

biennials, have refused to identify with either 'the enemy' or 'the system' and instead are often

conceived of by their curators and organisers as 'social laboratories'.[106] Paradoxically, they are

presented simultaneously as spectacular and critical, and they operate as sites of artistic and

critical dialogue. Biennials and other large-scale exhibition formats, such as Documenta, juggle

educational and touristic purposes, or between education and entertainment, as discussed in the

Introduction in relation to the longer history of the Great International Exhibitions. Green and

Gardner succinctly ask of these initiatives: 'are they the artistic playgrounds of neoliberal capitalism

or do they enable the forging and testing of alternative, critical, even subtly subversive

perspectives?'[107] In other words, can neoliberal dynamics and criticality coexist? Admitting defeat

according to Chantal Mouffe, means foreclosing any other possibilities in the face of the current

commodifying paradigm.[108] Marchart also refers to Mouffe in his description of a shifting ground,

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[105] Daniel Montero, "Mexicanos en Venecia", *La Tempestad* 102 (May-June 2015). My translation. Also see: Alberto Balletti, "Possessing Nature: La Mappa Anfibia del Canale Dell'Arte-Padiglione Messico," *Venezia Art Magazine,* May 17, 2015, http://www.veneziaartmagazine.it/2015/05/17/possessing-nature-la-mappa-anfibia-del-canale-dellarte-padiglione-messico/ (accessed June 30, 2015). Deborah Colton, "Venice Biennale Best: Deborah Colton's Top Ten List," *Papercity,* October 6, 2015, http://www.papercitymag.com/arts/venice-biennale-best-deborah-coltons-top-ten-list/#11 (accessed March 23, 2018); Helga Marsala, "Padiglione Messico, 56 Biennale d'Arte di Venezia, Città anfibie e miraggi acquatici, tra politica e natura," *Artribune,* June 27, 2015, http://www.artribune.com/2015/06/padiglione-messico-56-biennale-darte-di-venezia-citta-anfibie-e-miraggi-acquatici-tra-politica-e-natura/ (accessed March 23, 2018); and Emily Rappaport, "At the Mexican Pavilion, Artists Mine the Geopolitics of Two Fast-Sinking Cities," *Artsy,* May 3, 2015, https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-venice-biennale-2015-mexican-pavilion-tania-candiani-luis-felipe-ortega (accessed March 23, 2018).

[106] Green and Gardner, *Biennials,* 9.

[107] Green and Gardner, *Biennials,* 13.

[108] Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Politics in the Age of Post-Fordism," in "The Art Biennial as a Global Phenomenon," ed. Jorinde Seijdel, special issue, *Open* 16 (2009): 33.

'an unstable balance between social forces struggling for dominance'.[109] In the case of the pavilion, despite all their controlling efforts, INBA needed to appear supportive of a critical project and to avoid a censorship scandal. This created an opening in which we strove to set up an agonistic space 'where everything that the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate can be brought to life and challenged'.[110]

This chapter examined the viability of Okwui Enwezor's proposition to conceive the Biennale as a site of critical analysis. We have considered the contradictory position of the Biennale within the neoliberal economy and the pressures exercised not only by corporate sponsorship, but —as I discussed concerning the Mexican pavilion— by governmental agencies. In response to Enwezor's conceptualisation, and through the notion of 'amphibious cities', the Mexican pavilion research team, led by Jasso, constructed the exhibition as an active form of research. My analysis concentrated on my role in directing the pavilion's mediation strategy as a central component in defining the kind of experience and learning proposed to the audience. Based on the dialectical image, and set out against the commodifying status quo, our approach prioritised the arresting, captivating aspects of the visitors' encounter with the installation. This strategy involved an inherent, inconclusive pedagogical proposal that was fundamental in encouraging the audience's use of the space as a site of critical analysis. The links between critical approaches to exhibition making and alternative, open-ended pedagogies explored in this chapter will be further elaborated in the rest of the thesis. The idea is to propose concrete educational principles that can support critical curatorial projects. Chapter Two looks into Anselm Franke's decidedly emancipatory approach and his critical re-examination of modernity in *Animism* (2012). My analysis applies alternative pedagogical theory and stresses the need to rethink institutionalised educational practices.

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[109] Marchart, 469.

[110] Mouffe, 40.

Chapter Two: Emancipatory curating: Anselm Franke's *Animism*

Curated by Anselm Franke, *Animism* was an ambitious exhibition that proposed an investigation of the border between animate and inanimate — together with the divisions that ensue — as a constructed delimitation fundamental to the establishment of the modern order. Presented across various venues (Extra City and MuHKA, Antwerp, 2010; Kunsthalle Bern, 2010; Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2011; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, 2012 (HKW); e-flux, New York, 2012, OCAT, Shenzhen, 2013), the project was comprised of a complex selection of contemporary artwork, documentaries, and archival materials in the form of film footage and text excerpts. My main interest in the project stems, as I will develop throughout this chapter, from its reflective, critical, and emancipatory curatorial approach.

In 2010, Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson published their *Curating and the Educational Turn* volume, which distinguishes recent curatorial practice by its attention to education. The 'turn' to education results from the 'urgency' of alternative, 'emancipatory cultural practices' in the context of pervasive neoliberal privatisation and the commodification of education.[1] This movement involves the re-conception of the social role of art institutions and, as Alex Farquharson has pointed out in the case of 'new institutionalism', the rethinking of the relations between artists, institutions, and their publics.[2] Farquharson refers to the process by which formerly independent curators took over medium-sized contemporary art exhibition spaces in north-central Europe in the 1990s.[3] These were characterised by their strong interest in education, increasingly recognised as an egalitarian relation.[4] The institutions were conceived of as 'transformative', 'compensatory' public spaces in which 'things could be imagined otherwise'.[5] Although most of them have been defunded,[6] their emphasis on discursive, experimental, progressive, counter-hegemonic practice

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[1] O'Neill and Wilson, Introduction to *Curating and the Educational Turn*, 12-14.

[2] Alex Farquharson, "Institutional Mores," *OnCurating* 21 (December 2013): 55, http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-21-reader/institutional-mores.html#.V0g73FfSefU (accessed May 27, 2016).

[3] Farquharson, "Bureaux de change".

[4] Farquharson, "Bureaux de change". Interestingly, for this case, as we shall see, Farquharson draws a similarity to the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s associated with the work of Félix Guattari.

[5] Charles Esche, "The Possibility Forum," cited in Farquharson, "Bureaux de change".

[6] Möntmann, "The Rise and Fall of New Institutionalism".

has had a lasting influence. It is noticeable that *Animism's* participating institutions have a strong commitment to critical programmes that encourage socio-political debate.[7] My analysis is based on the version presented at HKW, an institution that has further narrowed its focus, stating: 'The Haus, with its visitors, artists and thinkers, subjects the history of modernity to ongoing critical review'.[8] Thus, the exhibition presents an important case study within recent debates on the social and educational purpose of showing contemporary art.

This chapter examines *Animism's* emancipatory intention and critical strategy; I concentrate on the educational relations put forward and the contradictions involved. I stress the need for extending the project's critical analysis to the exhibition's own organisation and argue that it is crucial to constantly question, rethink, and challenge educational relations within the exhibition space so that they can sustain critical curatorial propositions. My analysis points to a clear conflict between the project's critical aims and its educational approach. I use feminist materialist and postcolonial educational theory to highlight the contradictions of Franke's adherence to a modern, emancipatory pedagogy. Lastly, I introduce the potential contribution of posthumanist and feminist materialist pedagogies to exhibition making.

The first section of this chapter consists of a discussion focused on some of the highly ambiguous works presented in the exhibition and their interaction with the archival material. I suggest that the works' indeterminacy and ability to upset or suspend standing oppositional binaries are fundamental to the project's criticality. An essential question then is if and in what ways curatorial framing supports the works' instability of meaning. The next section concentrates on Franke's critical approach, which I read through Michel Foucault's genealogy. This method concerns a 'philosophico-historical' examination of the conditions that make up the present order,

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[7] As described in the institutions' mission statements, Extra City Kunsthal, "About," http://extracitykunsthal.org/ECK13/en/about/extra-city/; M HKA, "Mission & Vision," http://www.muhka.be/en/denkt/beleid; Generali Foundation, "Mission Statement," http://foundation.generali.at/en/generali-foundation/mission-statement.html; OCAT, "About OCAT Shenzhen," http://www.ocat.org.cn/index.php/About?lang=en (all accessed May 27, 2016).

[8] HKW, "About us," https://www.hkw.de/en/hkw/ueberuns/Ueber_uns.php (accessed May 27, 2016).

seeking to reveal its contingency.[9] The parallel is drawn through the exhibition's investigation of the formation of the modern order and its limits, as well as its destabilising and transformative ambition. In this section, I also explore a wider context by referring to other curatorial projects that adopt a similar critical strategy. Lastly, I raise the issue of the way in which the complication of the Foucauldian indivisibility between critical analysis and the power relations it involves occurs in the exhibition.

The third section problematizes the project's experimental and destabilising conceptualisation by looking at the order and subject positions that the exhibition organises through its mediation strategy. I pay close attention to the visitors guide at HKW and read the educational approach through critical modern educational theory, particularly the notions of 'demystification', 'emancipation', and 'empowerment'. These are discussed in light of Jacques Rancière's pertinent scepticism. Furthermore, the critical pedagogical basis of the project is challenged through feminist materialist and postcolonial educational thought. Primarily, I observe the difficulties of fulfilling the central critical operation the exhibition proposes within this rationalist paradigm; that is, the impossibility of acknowledging and unsettling fundamental binary oppositions, such as culture/nature, mind/body, and subject/object under this educational framework. I will argue that even within critical approaches to curating, educational relations often remain unquestioned. The last section hypothetically explores the potential contribution of posthumanist and feminist materialist pedagogies to the project. More specifically, I emphasise the relevance of diffractive pedagogies to exhibition making, pointing to their potential to undermine the primacy of language and discourse and put forward an embodied learning process.

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[9] Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 6. Genealogy is distinguished from Foucault's archaeological method developed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and employed in *The Order of Things* (1966), *History of Madness* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963). Genealogy, understood as a 'history of the present', is first established in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), although the two methods are not mutually exclusive. See Colin Koopman, "Foucault's Historiographical Expansion: Adding Genealogy to Archeology," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2, no. 3 (2008): 338-362, and Gary Gutting, "Michel Foucault,"*The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,* ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2014), https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=foucault (accessed January 5, 2018).

Re-examining modern partitions

Animism focused on the division between animate and inanimate as fundamental to the Western worldview, together with its understanding and relation to other societies and the environment. Franke contends that the exhibition was not *about* animism, but worked as a 'mirror' to look at the formation of the West's way of thinking. The notion of 'animism' served the project as the means to challenge occidental ideals, as part of the curator's attempt to 'decolonise' the imagination.[10] This chapter looks into this particular curatorial stance, and I pay special attention to its emancipatory intention and educational framework.

As part of his introduction, Franke notes nineteenth-century British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor's use of the term 'animism' to refer to the origins of religion and the 'mistaken' ascription of 'life, soul or spirit' to objects. By distinguishing between the primitive and the civilised, he argues, this notion was fundamental to the evolutionary view that legitimised European colonialism. Franke also points to René Descartes' distinction between mind and body and Sigmund Freud's demarcation between inner and outer self as constitutive of modernity.[11] Centred around these fundamental divisions, the vast amount of works and materials were organised through flexible, broader, and more specific thematic sections, which included: the museum as an objectifying apparatus; the division between nature and culture as the basis of modernity; the re-emergence of animism in the form of 'symptoms'; capitalism's transgression of modern boundaries; the demarcation of the 'soul'; the politics of animism, including the field of psychopathologies; the critique of colonialism; environmental politics; and indigenous political movements. Although I will not concentrate on the exhibition's critical analysis of colonialism alone, I will address this matter in relation to the educational proposition in the third section of this chapter.

The works and documents were spread out under natural and cold bright lighting, with projections on slightly dimmed areas separated by curved temporary white walls and dark, semi-transparent curtains. The exhibition design adhered to a monochrome palette; display cases and tables, panels, plinths, benches, and stools in a range neutral colours blended in with the gallery's

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[10] Anselm Franke, *Animism* (booklet) (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2012), 7, 8, 10, http://www.hkw.de/media/en/texte/pdf/2012_1/programm_5/animismus_booklet.pdf (accessed April 21, 2016).

[11] Franke, *Animism* (booklet), 12, 13.

grey floor and concrete columns. Overall, the layout commands time and attention from the visitor, and the atmosphere in the rooms is that of intense, rigorous study [Figure 17].

Figure 17. *Animism* (March 16, 2012 - May 6, 2012), HKW, Berlin.
Installation views. Photos by Arwed Messmer (top) and Jacob Hoff
(bottom).

In the initial section of *Animism*, 'Objectification', Franke considers the museum as a 'de-animating and reanimating machine', in which objects are presented in a new categorising context and also provoke new configurations in the mind of the viewer.[12] A key work to consider in this respect is Jimmie Durham's *The Museum of Stones* (2011-2012) [Figure 18]. A typical museum

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[12] Anselm Franke, "Animism: Notes on an Exhibition," *E-flux* 36 (July 2012): 7, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/ (accessed February 16, 2016).

table display presents a group of ordinary-looking stones. A closer look reveals handwritten labels identifying them as petrified objects (a piece of bread, salami, a cloud). It looks like a child's make-believe museum exhibit, perhaps a joke. By presenting the stones as the result of a non-existent, rare natural phenomenon, the work makes fun of the museum's authoritative selection criteria and display conventions, and of our own seriousness as viewers in approaching the exhibits. As one of the first pieces to be encountered, it provides an initial dislocation of the visitors' expectations of the ways a museum is supposed to work, what it should collect and present, and what visitors are supposed to gain and learn from it.
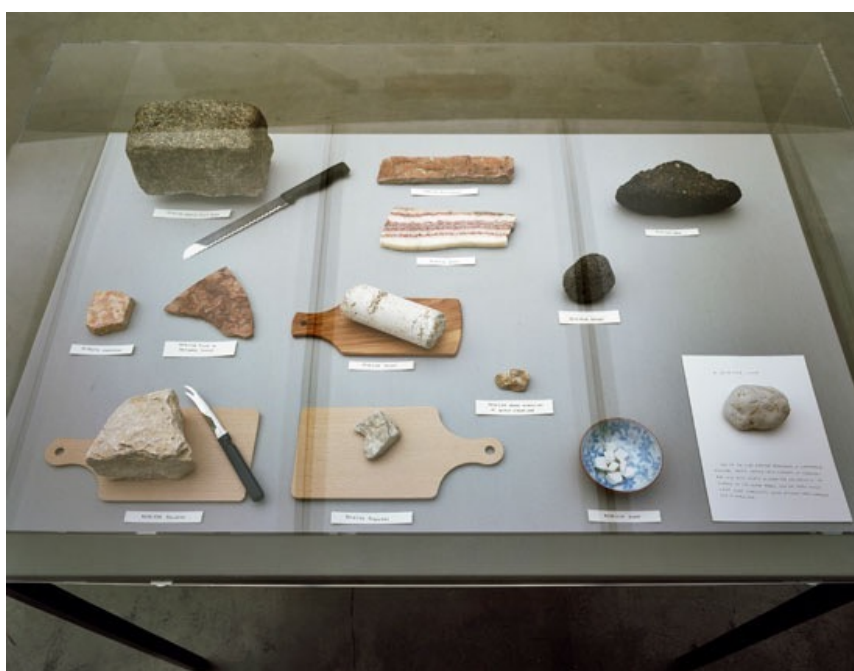

Figure 18. Jimmie Durham, *The Museum of Stones,* 2011-2012.
Installation consisting if various stones and other materials,
measurements variable. Photo: Arwed Messmer.

Among the archival material, Durham's piece is accompanied, for example, with a reproduction of Pablo Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) [Figure 19], the famous modern masterpiece. Its inclusion as a document in this case proves productive, particularly when one considers the 'sexist, heterosexist, racist and neocolonialist' terms in which the painting has been interpreted.[13] Anna Chave's historical analysis of the work's reception addresses the fearful response to the masks' exoticism in relation to both the challenge to the patriarchal order by the

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[13] Anna C. Chave, "New Encounters with Les Demoiselles d'Avignon: Gender, Race, and the Origins of Cubism," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (December 1994): 598.

increased presence of women in the social sphere and the lurking threat of the Other: 'What is symptomised […] (is) the fear of women and outsiders, including peoples of colour, usurping masculine roles and Western prerogatives, assuming agency'.[14] Chave's analysis emphasises the sense of threat revealed by the critical responses to the work, its 'decentering' and 'destabilising' effect, and the fear it aroused of a 'breaching of Western borders by others'.[15] Janie Cohen has also commented on the immediate negative responses to the work that refer to the women depicted as 'monstrous, appalling, frightful, horrid, grotesque and hideous'.[16] For Cohen, these reactions reflect the demoiselles' agency in the painting —as opposed to the women represented in colonial photography— an aspect of the work that nevertheless served to cement Picasso's status as an artistic revolutionary.[17] Moreover, as a representative example of African influence in modern art, the work raises questions of the West's colonial appropriation and classification of African artefacts and its dualist basis, particularly in the early twentieth century. The divisions — between the male (gaze) and the female (body), Western (art) and African (artefacts)— that *Les Demoiselles* disruptively puts forward are central to Franke's investigation, which becomes more profound and revealing in the potential dialogue between the materials he has brought together.

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[14] Chave, 604, 606.

[15] Chave, 606, 610.

[16] Janie Cohen, "Staring Back: Anthropometric-style African Colonial Photography and Picasso's Demoiselles," *Photography and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2015): 72.

[17] Cohen, 72.

Figure 19. Pablo Picasso, *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* 1907, oil on canvas, MoMA, NY.

Within the 'Symptoms and Media' section, Rosemarie Trockel's *Replace Me* (2009) [Figure 20] provokes a dislocation similar to Durham's. In this case, a familiar image becomes strange through Trockel's substitution of the pubic hair in Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866) with a spider. The spider appears as a threat, a warning; it disrupts the division between passive, female image and active, male viewer. The tarantula thwarts the pleasure of 'scopophilia', that of looking at another person as an object; it interferes with the controlling and possessive viewing of the woman as a fetish.[18] The fearsome image frustrates the birth narrative. It challenges and defies a stable reading, instead leading to associations such as the black widow (a species known for the females killing and eating their mates); the femme fatale; Penelope the weaver, a tale that has been untiringly interpreted as both an act of submission and self-determination; to the spinner, the spinster stereotype, and so on.[19] The title immediately refers to the artist's intervention but also

18 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 835, 837, 840.

19 See Margaret Atwood, *The Penelopiad* (London: Canongate Books, 2003); Mihoko Suzuki, "Rewriting the Odyssey in the Twenty-First Century: Mary Zimmerman's Odyssey and Margaret Atwood's Penelopiad," *College Literature* 34, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 263-278; C.M. Dhanumol, "Strong Myths Never Die: A Postmodern Reading of Margaret Atwood's The Penelopiad," *Labyrinth* 4, no. 2 (April 2013): 158-164.

suggests that the viewer can think of ways of replacing the spider. In the context of the exhibition,

Replace Me indicates the possibility of reconfiguring our relation to the natural world, of thinking

otherwise. The image, however, remains ambiguous and conflicted; its uncanniness has been

compared to 'dream images that bring together seemingly unconnected and non-connecting

things'.[20] In this thesis, I am interested in exploring the various means through which curators

address the mediation challenge that contemporary artworks' unsettledness presents.

Figure 20. Rosemarie Trockel, *Replace Me,* 2009. Digital print,
B&W, 53 x 59 cm (framed).

In the case of *Animism,* the exhibition's critical ambition rests in this instability of meaning.

In Trockel's piece, the disruption of the viewer's expectations upends the notion of femininity. The

unsteadiness it causes persists when approaching works like *La Neuropatologia* (1908) by

Turinese pathologist Camillo Negro, who conceived this early medical film as a demonstration of

hysteria, a disorder mainly attributed to women that upheld the view of women as unstable,

irrational, and emotional, especially in relation to men.[21] Georges Didi-Huberman has reflected on

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[20] Beatrix Ruf: *Rosemarie Trockel,* in: *Kunst bei Ringer 1995-1998,* Ringier AG/Beatrix Ruf, p. 136, cited in Stephan Urbaschek, "You Hit the Jackpot," in *Rosemarie Trockel,* ed. Rainald Schumacher (Munich: Sampling Goetz, 2002), 88.

[21] Cecilia Tasca et al., "Women And Hysteria In The History Of Mental Health," *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health* 8 (2012): 110–19.

the 'extreme visibility' and the spectacular, theatrical qualities of this kind of images.[22] This section also presents Yayoi Kusama's *Self Obliteration* (1967) [Figure 21], a psychedelic film that documents the artist's nude Happenings. The video shows her covering everything (herself, cats, trees, other performers, a horse, the lake's surface) in paint dots, which has the effect of joining everything together. In this context, the therapeutic reading of her work is inescapable. Her oeuvre has been read as the product of hallucinatory inspiration and also as a form of reclaiming control, of transforming the imaginary into the real as an act of resistance.[23] These interpretations are also telling about what qualifies as art (as opposed to the scientific character of Negro's film), and what will also be relegated to the 'dark side', the realm of the subjective. Diedrich Diederichsen interprets *Self Obliteration* as an act of 'appropriation' but also of self-surrender by merging into the environment.[24] Franke has grouped these works to examine the re-emergence (after being suppressed by modernity) of 'mimetic behaviour', defined as the 'transformational exchange of the organism with its environment'.[25] The ambiguity and subversive quality of the artworks bring about an uncertainty that affects and undermines the archival material's historical authority. In this sense, the exhibition achieves its aim of upsetting the male/female, object/subject, mind/body, rationality/ insanity, and culture/nature binaries; their borders appear more flexible, allowing for the space to conceive them differently. The thematic categorisation, however, constrains the works and documents to a specific, supportive task within the research project.

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[22] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the photographic iconography of the Salpêtrière,* trans. Alisa Hartz (1982; repr., Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2003), xi, 3.

[23] Diedrich Diederichsen, "Obsession as Revolution: Yayoi Kusama Follows Up a Hallucination with the Social Reality," in *Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years,* ed. Franck Gautherot (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2009), 117-118.

[24] Diederichsen, 119.

[25] Franke, *Animism* (booklet), 38-39.

Figure 21. Yayoi Kusama, *Self Obliteration,* 1967. Film, 16mm, 23:32 min, transferred to DVD. Film still.

Henri Michaux's *Miserable Mescaline* (1956) is another document found among the archival material.[26] The publication is the result of Michaux's analysis of the effects of mescaline and his attempt to reconstruct the hallucinatory experience through poetry and drawings.[27] That is, the work presents the paradoxical attempt to articulate the loss of consciousness.[28] The writer Octavio Paz sees it as an exploration of 'non-knowledge' or what is 'beyond knowledge', as an effort to '(reach) that zone, by definition indescribable and incommunicable, in which meanings disappear'.[29] Paz describes an experience of surrender, of mescaline exploring Michaux rather than the other way around. The destabilising substance blurs the line of stable personhood to a point at which the 'modern westerner finds absolutely nothing to hold on to'. Paz argues that mescaline leaves nothing but the essential, leading to a point where once the sense of self and identity is lost, man and universe meet. He considers Michaux's vision as 'equidistant from sanity and insanity […] a contemplation of the demoniacal and the divine as the ultimate reality'. The

[26] Henri Michaux, *Misérable miracle (la mescaline)* (Monaco: Editions du Rocher, 1956).

[27] Reinhard Kuhn, "The Hermeneutics of Silence: Michaux and Mescaline," in "Intoxication and Literature," ed. Enid Rhodes Peschel, special issue, *Yale French Studies* 50 (1974): 133.

[28] Joanne S Crawford, "Michaux's Insomnia: The Plenitude of the Void," *Parallax* 8, no. 1 (2002): 67-68.

[29] Octavio Paz, Introduction to *Miserable Miracle: Mescaline,* by Henri Michaux (New York: New York Review Books, 2012), viii.

experience is referred to as a 'dissolution'; the journey as a 'return: a letting go, an unlearning'.[30]

Michaux's pulsating lines create intricate mazes, unstable, incoherent formations resembling

microscopic landscapes [Figure 22]. The work here offers an example of experimentally blurring

the line between the self and the world, the intellect and the senses, illusion and reality as another
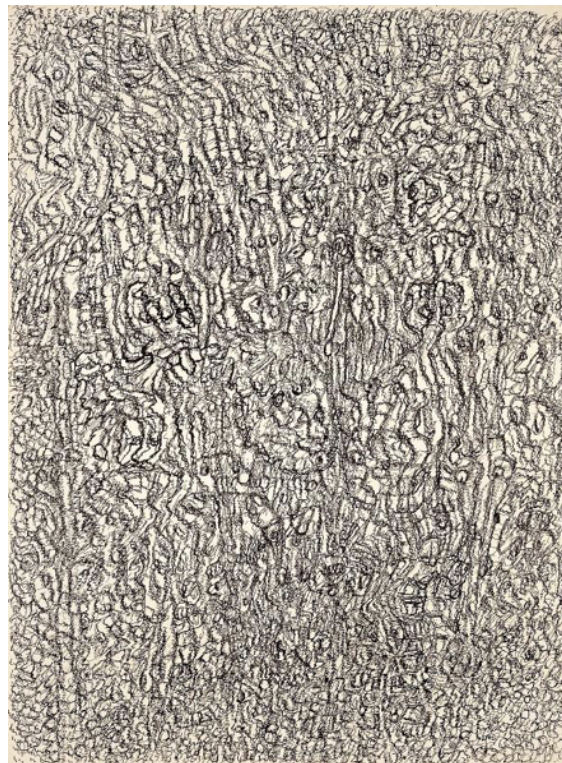
way of knowing.

Figure 22. Henri Michaux, *Dessin mescalinien,* 1959. Chinese ink on paper, 32 x 24 cm. Centre Pompidou

The concluding section of the exhibition, 'The Politics of Animism', presents a

commissioned piece by Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato. Conceived as a 'visual

research project', *Assemblages* (2010) follows the work of activist, psychotherapist, and

philosopher Félix Guattari, known for his transdisciplinary approach to research and rethinking of

the relations between science, society, politics, ethics, and aesthetics.[31] The multi-channel video

installation integrates commentary and footage from interviews and psychotherapy documentaries.

It is centred on Guattari's animist re-conception of subjectivity in opposition to advanced capitalism.

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[30] Paz, ix-xii.

[31] Gary Genosoko, *Félix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction* (London: Continuum, 2002), 24.

By dissociating subjectivity 'from the subject, from the person, but also from the human', he attempted to avoid the divisions between 'subject and object, nature and culture, man and animal, matter and soul, individual and collective.'[32] *Assemblages* addresses Guattari's experimental work at the La Borde psychiatric clinic in France, through which he attempted to suspend 'the binary oppositions' of the institution: those between patients/analysts and illness/normality.[33] Franke's inclusion of this piece in the exhibition indicates a re-examination of the limits of the body and the definition of the human.

Through a skilful selection of works and archival materials, the exhibition succeeds in presenting an investigation of modern boundaries. In many cases, the works traverse, reverse, disrupt, or blur given divisions, effectively unsettling prevalent assumptions. The more pressing question remains, however, as to whether curatorial framing and mediation supports or undermines the works' indeterminacy and hence, the project's transgressive ability. In the following sections, I look into Franke's critical approach to curating and then concentrate on the mediation strategies employed and the educational relations proposed. What role do the works assume in the exhibition's organisation? The arrangement of the abundant material, theoretical references, film, and text excerpts in orderly display cases and panels establishes a fairly strict order [Figure 23]. The setup strongly suggests an understanding of the exhibition as a research activity in which the works act as documents and, at least to some degree, are circumscribed by the curatorial hypothesis. This order implies particular ways of behaving and approaching the works. It demands a willingness to investigate and learn and indicates the transmission of knowledge, carefully selected by an expert. In what follows, my analysis concentrates on the educational implications of the emancipatory approach to curating.

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[32] Angela Melitopoulos and Maurizio Lazzarato, "Machinic Animism," in *Animism*, ed. Anselm Franke (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 1:45; Jay Hetrick, "Video Assemblages: 'Machinic Animism' and 'Asignifying Semiotics' in the Work of Melitopoulos and Lazzarato," in "Signifying Semiotics: Or How to Paint Pink on Pink," ed. Deborah Hauptmann and Andrej Radman, special issue, *Footprint* 14 (Spring 2014): 56.

[33] See Félix Guattari, "La Borde: A Clinic Unlike Any Other," in *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972-1977,* ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles CA: Semiotext(e), 2009), 176-194.
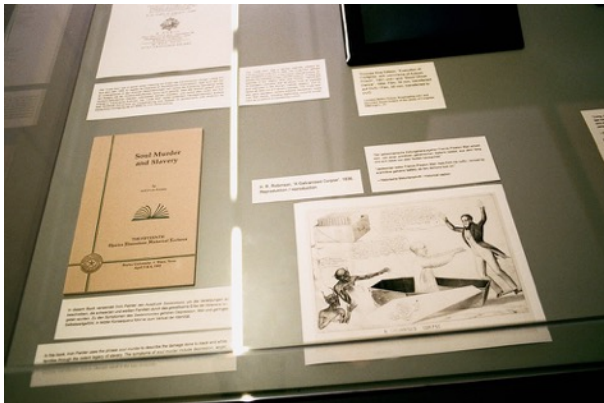
Figure 23. *Animism,* HKW, Berlin, 2012. Display panels and cases.

A Foucauldian critical strategy

Animism took the concept of 'animation' as a tool to observe the constitution of modernity. Franke makes clear that the exhibition did not take animism as a theme, but rather, looked at the definition of a certain reality and order.[34] It examined the configuration of modern power and the 'set of imaginary oppositions' that sustain it.[35] It looked, therefore, into the formation of the Western worldview through modernity's distinction between life and non-life. Franke stresses the original use of the term 'animism' to refer to the 'incapacity to distinguish between object and subject, reality and fiction, the inside and outside', divisions that came to sustain the West's colonial enterprise.[36] Ever since, the concept has represented a challenge to Western thought and inevitably provokes the differentiation between animate/inanimate, subjective/objective, and real/

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[34] Franke, "Animism: Notes," 1.

[35] Anselm Franke, "Much Trouble in the Transportation of Souls, or: The Sudden Disorganization of Boundaries," in *Animism*, 1:17.

[36] Franke, "Much Trouble," 11, 12.

imaginary.[37] These demarcations produce a negative side that contains what falls behind: 'everything else enters the realm of "culture", the subject's interior, or 'mere' image, representation, passion, fiction, fantasy. It is this dissociation of the subjective from the realm of nature and things that constitutes the self-possessing subject, liberated from the chains of superstition, phantasy, ignorance'.[38] The exhibition called these longstanding, rarely-challenged dichotomies into question.

During an interview with Franke about the project, I asked him whether he thought of the exhibition as educational. He hesitated to agree because this would imply 'stable knowledge': that is, 'facts about animism'. He explained that *Animism* was rather a 'reflection on the medium of the exhibition and positivist knowledge'. He 'strategically' chose a 'monolithic title' in order to 'play with the expectations of the exhibition and the museum [that would be] to see animism as a thing, an object'. Instead, in his words, the exhibition was about 'deconstructing that notion with a constellation of works' and looking at the 'ontological partitions of modern knowledge'.[39] The project's presentation as a meta-analysis of modern ways of knowing and the exhibition format itself can be read, then, as a distinct curatorial stance.

I propose that this kind of approach can be examined as a Foucauldian critique. Colin Koopman suggests that Michel Foucault's genealogical method aims to describe a 'set of practices' basic to modernity. Koopman argues that genealogy concentrates on the 'submerged […] historical conditions of possibility of our present ways of doing, being and thinking'.[40] It analyses the formation of modern ideals and inquires into 'certain broad cultural formations' that affect the way in which we understand reality.[41] Foucault defined his critical approach as a 'historical ontology of ourselves'. Crucially, he referred to the need 'to be at the frontiers' and examine boundaries: 'Criticism indeed consists of analysing and reflecting upon limits'.[42]

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[37] Franke, "Animism: Notes," 3.

[38] Franke, "Much Trouble," 15.

[39] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

[40] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique,* 1.

[41] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique,* 11.

[42] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 45.

In his curatorial essay, Franke cites Foucault's *History of Madness* (1961) and reads it as a study of the partition between madness and reason:

> We could write a history of limits —of those obscure gestures, necessarily forgotten as soon as they are accomplished, through which a culture rejects something which for it will be the exterior; and throughout its history, this hollowed out void, this white space by means of which it isolates itself, identifies it as clearly as its values. For these values are received, and maintained in the continuity of history; but in the region of which we could speak it makes its essential choices, operating the division which gives a culture the face of its positivity.[43]

Foucault reflected on his approach to *History of Madness* as an investigation of a culture's determination of its limits, as a 'History of the Other [of what] is at once interior and foreign, therefore to be excluded'.[44] Through the concept of 'animism' — and its capacity to unsettle binaries— the exhibition aimed to examine the defining partition of modernity: the limits it establishes and its definition of positive and negative sides. It is useful, in this sense, to consider Koopman's understanding of genealogy as a methodology. For Koopman, genealogy constitutes the basis of an immanent critique with views to transform the present. Koopman stresses that it is essential to recognise this method as a 'diagnostic […] problematisation of the present'.[45] Foucault's historical analysis of the constitution of the modern subject and his attention to power relations are undoubtedly present in the exhibition's examination of oppositions such as primitive/ civilised or sanity/madness.

In *What is Enlightenment?* (1984), Foucault locates Immanuel Kant's essay of the same title (1784) at the meeting point between 'critical reflection' and a 'reflection on history'.[46] He recognises a particular 'attitude' of modernity in the assessment of the present: 'a permanent critique of our historical era'.[47] Foucault understands this process as a 'historical investigation of

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[43] Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (London: Routledge, 2006), xxix, cited in Franke, "Much Trouble," 19.

[44] Michel Foucault, Preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; repr., London: Tavistock, 1970), xxiv.

[45] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique,* 2, 6, 11, 181.

[46] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 38.

[47] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 41.

our constitution as subjects',[48] one that examines the relations between 'power, truth and the subject'.[49] I recognise this self-critical intention in the exhibition's conceptualisation. It seeks —in line with Foucault— to make visible the 'connections' that make up the given reality and reveal its contingency. Foucault described his analysis as 'a breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledges, acquiescences and practices rest'.[50]

The exhibition can also be seen in relation to the 'turn toward the object' and the art world's recent interest in theories such as speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, actor-network theory, and posthumanism. These were central, for example, to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's Documenta 13 (2012). Primarily, these theories put forward a conception of politics as an ecology composed of human and nonhuman 'actants' and demand a re-conception of the relation between object and subject, and the division between culture and nature.[51] In the case of Documenta 13, Christov-Bakargiev's introductory statement mentions a 'holistic and non-logocentric vision' that acknowledges the forms of knowledge 'of all the animate and inanimate makers of the world'.[52] She argues for a notion of shared knowledge between everyone and everything ('with bees and butterflies and beavers, with bacteria and microbes, with eukaryotic cells as well as with software'), maintaining that her approach does not recover or 'celebrate' nature in a neo-romantic fashion, but simply recognises its indivisibility from culture.[53] More recently, Franke contributed to HKW's two-year, transdisciplinary research project dedicated to the concept of the 'anthropocene', a notion closely associated with the cited theories. The thesis of the Anthropocene considers the start of a

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[48] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 46.

[49] Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007), 47.

[50] Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality,* ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 76.

[51] Svenja Bromberg, "The Anti-Political Aesthetics of Objects and Worlds Beyond," *Mute,* July 25, 2013, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anti-political-aesthetics-objects-and-worlds-beyond#sdfootnote7sym (accessed February 18, 2016).

[52] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Introduction to Documenta, Artistic Director's Statement," http://d13.documenta.de/uploads/tx_presssection/3_Introduction.pdf (accessed June 1, 2016).

[53] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "Worldly Worlding: The Imaginal Fields of Science/Art and Making Patterns Together," in *Mousse* 43 (April-May 2014), http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=1095 (accessed June 1, 2016).

new epoch characterised by the spread of radioactive material from nuclear bomb tests, the acceleration of carbon dioxide emissions, sea level rise, the mass extinction of species, and extensive deforestation. Notably, the concept breaks down one of modernity's fundamental oppositions, that between nature and society.[54]

Franke insists on being cautious about the idea of 'stable knowledge' within the exhibition. He considered the 'positivism inscribed in the medium of the exhibition and the museum' as the first obstacle to surmount. He emphasised the double quality of the museum as both an 'anti-animist […] reanimating machine' referring to popular fantasy films in which objects — specifically museum exhibits — come to life, such as *Night at the Museum* (2006) and *Jurassic Park* (1993).[55] The exhibition was conceived not as illustrative of a concept, but as an optical device, a 'stereoscopic mirror' through which to look at the way in which modernity organises reality. Franke proposed an examination of the boundaries that establish the modern order by 'un-mapping' or 'reversing' them. The exhibition was devised as a 'topography of the middle ground', a space in which modern divisions are suspended and the artworks act as 'crossings'.[56] Franke understands the role of the curator as that of a 'dramaturge' who sets up a 'narrative' or better, a 'scenography', a 'stage' in which a particular subject-object constitution takes place. He clarified by citing Foucault: 'I would like to write the history of the stage on which one tried to distinguish truth from falsehood. But it is not that distinction that I am interested in but the constitution of the stage and the theatre'.[57] This chapter intends to examine to what extent Franke succeeded in suspending these divisions and overcoming the 'positivism' of the exhibition. Beyond the selection of works and documents presented, I am particularly interested in the 'scenography': the organisation of the space and its presentation to the public. I concentrate on the tension between the critical,

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[54] Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland CA: PM Press, 2016), 3.

[55] Anselm Franke in discussion with the author, February 15, 2016.

[56] Franke, "Animism: Notes," 4, 6, 20.

[57] Michel Foucault, "The Stage of Philosophy," cited by Franke in conversation with the author, February, 2016.

destabilising curatorial proposition and the order that the resulting exhibition set up, particularly

through the mediation strategies employed, as I will discuss in the following section.

In an interview from 2012, Franke discussed his interest in working with 'social and political

borders and borders of the imagination'.[58] To illustrate his point, he referred to his use of the

'monster', a 'liminal figure' in his curatorial proposition of the 2012 Taipei Biennial. In that case, he

examined the 'contradictions of modern rationality' through the figure of an ancient Chinese

monster known as Taowu which, being able to see the past and the future, is identified with

history.[59] Franke clearly states his understanding of curating as a practice of destabilising the given

and revealing its artificiality. He insists on his intention of 'un-disciplining' or 'de-colonising' the

imagination by conceptually un-mapping borders. He seeks to show how a particular order is

organised and enforced, but also makes space for alternative possibilities. He understands the

politics of art in the shifts between permanence and change; in his words: 'how to make the settled

and fixed, strange and imaginative again'.[60] In the case of *Animism,* there is particular attention

paid to processes of subjectification, agency, and our ability to act and transform the given.[61] As

Walter D. Mignolo has observed, decolonising gestures try to overturn the epistemic ontology of

the West and, at the same time, envision emancipatory alternatives.[62]

The idea of observing, questioning, and revealing the given order with the prospect of

transforming it is a common curatorial proposition that rests, as we will see in the next section, on

the modern understanding of education. Okwui Enwezor's *Intense Proximity,* the third Paris

triennial at the Palais de Tokyo (2012), put forward a 'discursive and philosophical context' that

addressed the 'disjunctions of global culture' looking to make 'contemporary realities' manifest. The

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[58] Anselm Franke in interview with Sylvie Lin, "Monster, History, Fiction," in *Sylvielin's Blog*, http://sylvielin.wordpress.com/2012/09/30/interview-with-anselm-franke-curator-of-the-taipei-biennial-2012/ (accessed April 4, 2014).

[59] Anselm Franke, Introduction to *Modern Monsters, Death and Life of Fiction,* Taipei Biennial 2012, http://www.taipeibiennial.org/2012/en/tb2012.html (accessed April 12, 2016).

[60] Franke, Introduction to *Modern Monsters.*

[61] Franke, "Much Trouble," 51.

[62] Walter D. Mignolo, "Looking for the Meaning of 'Decolonial Gesture,'" in "Decolonial Gesture," ed. Jill Lane, Marcial Godoy-Anativia, and Macarena Gómez-Barris, special issue, *E-Misférica* 11, no. 1 (2014), http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/emisferica-111-decolonial-gesture/mignolo (accessed April 12, 2016).

exhibition was conceived as a 'cognitive map of thinking' that brought together artworks and

cultural objects into an analytical system.[63] The 2008 Guangzhou Triennial, titled *Farewell to Post-*

Colonialism, pointed to the limitations of postcolonialism, looking to renovate a critical standpoint

capable of uncovering 'the paradoxical reality veiled by contemporary cultural discourse, to make

contact with realms that slip through the cracks of well-worn concepts such as class, gender, tribe

and hybridity. […] (hoping) to find what new model and imaginative worlds are possible for art

beyond those already heavily mapped out by socio-political discourses'.[64] A smaller-scale project,

The Potosí Principle (2010), organised by the Reina Sofia and HKW, brought colonial baroque

painting and contemporary artworks together to deal with the 'colonial conditionality' underlying the

formation of modern European society.[65] In 2016, the ZKM Centre for Art and Media Karlsruhe

presented *Reset Modernity!* which attempted to 'reset' our current (modern) understanding of the

world and find out what routes are available.[66] Yet another project, *A Decolonial Atlas: Videos from*

the Americas, 2010-2015, curated by Pilar Tompkins Rivas, proposes 'unsettling established

narratives through counter-hegemonic perspectives […] (and considering) an alternative

mapping'.[67] An emancipatory purpose underpins this shared interest in unearthing foundational

assumptions and in re-mapping as a way to explore other possibilities.

A strikingly different framing of Trockel's work in *A Cosmos* (2012), curated by Lynne

Cooke, offers a particularly compelling case. Conceived as an alternative to a mid-career

retrospective, it presented Trockel's work alongside the artist's selection of artefacts from the

seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, a period of both imperial expeditions and the development of

the natural sciences. The pieces, including a giant crab specimen, glass models of marine

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[63] Okwui Enwezor, *Intense proximity: an anthology of the near and the far* (Paris: Centre national des arts plastique Tour Atlantique: Artlys, 2012), 11.

[64] Guangzhou Triennial, "Farewell to Postcolonialism," http://www.gdmoa.org/zhanlan/threeyear/4/24/3/ (accessed April 15, 2016). Curated by Gao Shiming, Sarat Maharaj, and Chang Tsong-zung with the support of a team of research curators.

[65] Alice Creischer, Max Jorge Hinderer, and Andreas Siekmann, eds., "The Potosí Principle: The World Upside Down" in *The Potosí Principle: How Shall We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land?* (Madrid: Museo Reina Sofía, 2010), 15.

[66] Bruno Latour, *Reset Modernity! The Field Book* (Karlsruhe: ZKM Centre for Art and Media, 2016).

[67] Terremoto, "A Decolonial Atlas: Videos from the Americas, 2010-2015," http://terremoto.mx/a-decolonial-atlas-videos-from-the-americas-2010-2015/ (accessed April 28, 2016).

invertebrates, draft books, botanical art, and a painting made by an orangutan, were arranged

following natural history and modern art museum display conventions, proposing a reflection on

different ways of showing and looking.[68] In contrast to *Animism,* the exhibits' complete integration

and contagious relation between each other elicited the artist's and curator's consideration of

'*Influenza*' as an alternative title.[69] The exhibition explored the divides between amateur and

professional and fine and applied arts, questioning the museum's institutional authority and value

judgement. Furthermore, it negotiated the distinction between art and science and nature and

culture. Consider, for example, the indefinite article '*A*' in '*A Cosmos*' (rather than 'the'), with its

suggestion of just one of various possible configurations.

This critical approach to curating —the idea of rethinking and subverting established

categories— takes us back to Foucault. Stephen Ball argues that the point of Foucault's work is

not showing the determinacy of our situation, but, on the contrary, revealing its reversibility. It is

about the 'unmaking of solidity and inevitability' and creating the possibility of moving beyond or

across conditions.[70] At various points, Foucault described his work in terms of destabilisation. In

The Order of Things (1966), he asserted: 'I am restoring to our silent and apparent immobile soil its

rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet'.[71] In

a 1978 lecture, he spoke of his approach in terms of 'reversals' or 'dislocations' and making

conditions 'fragile', transitory, and ephemeral.[72] Then, in *Questions of Method* (1980), he describes

making 'the acts, gestures, discourses which up until then had seemed to go without saying

become problematic, difficult, dangerous'.[73]

It is in *What is Enlightenment?* (1984) that Foucault describes the practical, experimental

aspect of the analysis of limits in 'testing' how they could be transgressed: 'The critical ontology of

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[68] Lynne Cooke, ed., "Modelling a Cosmos," in *Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos* (New York: Monicelli Press, 2012), 32.

[69] Cooke, "Modelling a Cosmos," 43.

[70] Stephen J. Ball, *Foucault, Power, and Education* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 35.

[71] Foucault, Preface to *The Order of Things,* xxiv.

[72] Foucault, "What is Critique?" 66.

[73] Foucault, "Questions of Method," 84.

ourselves […] has to be conceived as an attitude […] in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them'.[74] Koopman has drawn attention to Foucault's experimental approach in relation to his conception of freedom. He argues that Foucault does not think of freedom as 'autonomy' or 'emancipation', but instead as 'transformation, experimentation and resistance'.[75] The attitude that Foucault refers to corresponds to *Animism's* ambition to induce social change.

According to Koopman, genealogy shows that the relation between pairs such as power and freedom is precisely what constitutes modernity. There is no possibility to overcome them, but rather, we can only move within their tension.[76] The aim of examining the relation between power, truth, and the subject in a particular historical moment is not to break free from it. As Gert Biesta explains, even if there is no escape from power, it is possible to move across different power/knowledge 'constellations'. This is crucial to prove that no particular configuration is necessary, but is always a 'contingent, historical possibility'.[77] Franke has discussed the value of art's 'indeterminacy' in similar terms. He spoke of generating an 'ontological instability' or 'pulling the carpet under your safe knowledge'. He explained: 'Not knowing exactly what something is can make you think about mediation and ontological designs differently'.[78] The idea of destabilising or unsettling the given order is proposed as a way of making space for other possibilities.

One of the main criticisms of Foucault's thought has focused on its limited transformative potential, a question that is at the heart of his elaboration of modernity. Ball recognises Foucault's ambiguity on the subject: 'The modern man is both a source of meaning and a social product […] the limits of knowledge are also the possibilities of knowing'.[79] In *The Philosophical Discourse of*

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[74] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" 46, 47, 50.

[75] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique,* 174, 175.

[76] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique,* 164, 170.

[77] Gert Biesta, "Towards a New 'Logic' of Emancipation: Foucault and Rancière," in *Philosophy of Education* (2008): 175.

[78] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

[79] Ball, 22.

Modernity (1985), Jürgen Habermas points to the incoherence between the analytical and epistemological levels of Foucault's examination; that is, the incompatibility between the critical function of rationalism and the identification of rationalism with power.[80] In other words, rationality is presented as the source of both a self-critical attitude and new forms of domination. The problem has to do with the inescapability from the knowledge/power nexus. Foucault's critique necessarily operates within the framework of humanism; Habermas objects that it fails to challenge 'the primacy of subject-centred reason'.[81] These contradictions are also found in the exhibition, particularly in the relation between its aims and themes and its format. The problem (recognised by Franke as the incompatibility of an exhibition with the subject of animism) is that its analysis of modernity necessarily takes place in a typical modern set-up: the art exhibition.

Genealogical critique creates the possibility of alternative ways of thinking, but these are limited to the movement across power structures. There is an inherent acknowledgement of the complicity of subjects in the power structures they attempt to resist.[82] Foucault himself considered his analysis to be incomplete, 'limited and determined'.[83] The limitations of his method are reflected in his description of critique as 'the art of not being governed quite so much'.[84] Franke generally agreed with my reading of the exhibition through Foucault. However, he argued that there were 'moments' that are not Foucauldian. He described 'the difficult undertaking [of attempting] to leave a certain matrix of given oppositions [and assuming] a vantage point in which the divisions are not already given'; this required an effort to reach a position of 'anarchic mediality' from which to investigate the possibilities of stepping out of a certain order. The endeavour involved 'an imaginary exercise (in which) oppositions were kept in suspense as much as possible'.[85] Yet I want

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[80] Juan Pablo Rodríguez, "Foucault with Habermas: Toward a Complementary Critical Reading of Modernity," *Revista Enfoques* 9, no. 14 (2011): 148.

[81] Samantha Ashenden and David Owen, eds., "Introduction: Foucault, Habermas and the Politics of Critique," in *Foucault Contra Habermas: Recasting the Dialogue between Genealogy and Critical Theory* (London: Sage, 1999), 17; Daniel W. Conway, "*Pas de deux:* Habermas and Foucault in Genealogical Communication," in *Foucault Contra Habermas*, 62.

[82] Conway, 73.

[83] Foucault , "What is the Enlightenment?" 47.

[84] Foucault, "What is Critique?" 45.

[85] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

to argue that the position he was looking for can still be described as a Foucauldian perspective, particularly in *History of Madness*. Foucault writes:

> We must try to return, in history to that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself […] This is doubtless an uncomfortable region […] What is originative is the caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason; reason's subjugation of non-reason […] we shall have to speak of this act of scission, of this distance set, of this void instituted between reason and what is not reason, without ever relying upon the fulfilment of what it claims to be.[86]

The examination of defining partitions in Foucault —and by extension Franke— involves an effort to return to the point before the divisions took place.

Animism was conceived of as an instrument to observe the constitution of modernity and the definition of its limits. Foucault identifies this self-critical attitude as characteristic of modernity, a concern to question the given reality. This critical approach seeks to unsettle a particular order and show its contingency. It also involves an experimental aspect and the exploration of the transgression of boundaries. The paradox of the inescapability from the knowledge/power nexus in Foucault — in other words, the inseparability between critical analysis and the power relations it involves — is reproduced in the exhibition. It is found to be the contradiction between the intention to suspend the divisions of the modern order and the format of the art exhibition and its own organisation, divisions, and positions. I now turn to a discussion of these relations in more detail and I will pay particular attention to the way the public is addressed.

A modern, emancipatory educational approach

Regarding the exhibition audience, Franke believes 'one should not assume how much somebody knows or does not know' but instead, always 'assume the audience is very intelligent'. He notes that 'everybody gets more stupid in exhibitions because we are trying to stabilise what we know, looking for the labels, what things are, what they mean in a way we wouldn't do with a text or other

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[86] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (1961; repr., London: Routledge, 1999), xi-xii.

mediums […] there is something unsettled about exhibitions' and he tries to 'play with this need'.[87]

His comments reflect the need on the part of curators and museum staff to conscientiously address exhibitions' educational framework. In the case of *Animism,* Franke considers Jimmie Durham's work crucial in the sense that: 'it plays with mimicry, [with] what a label means [and] brings about a totally different mindset in the visitor'. The curator discussed his attempt to 'make subject matter unstable for [the audience] to start thinking and seeing, or moving between seeing and thinking where one can look at the construction of a subject matter'.[88] Nonetheless, there is some inconsistency between his destabilising intention and the mediation strategies employed; that is, the way content was communicated to the public.

Franke confirmed the empowering aims of the project. However, he also pointed to a certain 'melancholy at the lack of alternatives' in this 'emancipatory promise'. From the mediation tools employed, the visitor guide at HKW is particularly problematic. Rather than incorporating an experimental approach, the booklet can be seen to have functioned as a stabilising element and therefore to have worked against the exhibition's destabilising intent. Franke said that the institution required the guide and he did not 'resist it too much'. This situation is similar to the conflict between commissioner and curator addressed in Chapter One. In the case of Franke, it may be that he avoided an argument over what he considered a minor detail, or that he did not completely disagree with the guide or its format. Still, he maintained that his aim with it was to 'create a kaleidoscope that does not give you any safe harbour as a viewer'.[89] Mediation strategies often go unnoticed or are thought of as supplementary; institutional conventions are rarely questioned. The danger is that —precisely because of the visitors' need for stable knowledge that Franke spoke of — a reassuring guide might become the primary means by which to approach the exhibition.

The guide's cover shows a picture of a pinned butterfly [Figure 24]. The image points to processes of objectification and de-animation. It also denotes a system of knowledge,

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[87] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

[88] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

[89] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

classification, and a scientific methodology, indicating 'rationality' and 'objectivity', and leads to the

division between nature and culture. This is followed by the table of contents, which presents the

booklet's structure: it includes an institutional preface, a curatorial introduction, and 'chapters' that

correspond to the exhibition's sections. Lastly, it contains information on the activities surrounding

the exhibition (guided tours and a series of roundtables and lectures) and the project's publication.

The guide is rationally and logically ordered, clearly aimed at facilitating the visit. It provides a

general opening statement, an introduction to each of the sections, and a commentary on each of

the works. Notably, the text makes no links between works, across sections, or with the archival

material. The guide's design, organisation, and narrative do not encourage the dialogue between

these elements. Instead, it almost confines them by addressing them individually. The risk this

strategy presents is that by taking the visitors by the hand, it could easily take over as the main

narrative. In this case, the works and documents assume a supportive, illustrative role.

Figure 24. *Animism,* HKW, Berlin,
2012.Exhibition's booklet.

In most cases, the works' commentary takes over by explaining what they 'do'. For

instance: 'With *The Museum of Stones* Jimmie Durham inverts conventional Western thinking on

mimesis, architecture and the museum'.[90] Or, about Candida Höfer's series of large-scale, detailed

photographs of museums' architecture and behind-the-scenes work, Franke tells us: '[these works]

turn ethnographic museums into 'specimens' not unlike the collections of non-Western artefacts

[90] Franke, *Animism* (booklet), 19.

the same museum preserve.'[91] There is also special attention paid to introducing and legitimising the artists, with sentences such as: 'Victor Grippo was a painter, sculptor, and installation artist, and one of the founding figures of conceptual art in Argentina'.[92] Or 'The New York-born film maker Ken Jacobs is a member of the 'New American Cinema' generation of the 1960s and 70s who questioned the common film praxis of the time with their aesthetic experiments'.[93] To what extent is this content necessary? An introduction to the exhibition and the way in which the vast selection of works and documents is organised is undoubtedly required. However, looking into the way in which this is done raises a series of questions and implications regarding the conception of the public. Firstly, by explaining what each of the works does, the guide implicitly tells us that we are not able to see it independently. We need an expert, someone who knows the artists' work, to assist. It is also important to consider how the commentary affects the works. In this case, it mostly translates them into a fixed interpretation. What purpose does the guide serve within the critical, emancipatory proposition?

Like most exhibition guides, it is evidently intended to counterbalance the visitors' disorientation. In the case of *Animism,* however*,* its decidedly stabilising purpose is at odds with the project's destabilising aim. At seventy-nine pages long, it provides an expert, reassuring explanation for each of the works. The guide reaffirms the curator's authority by demonstrating his understanding of the concepts, artists, and works. The exhibition is presented, then, as the result of a completed research project that communicates its findings to the audience. In what follows, I consider the overall pedagogical approach in more detail. The idea of examining and revealing particular power relations and the mediation tools employed are scrutinised with a basis in critical educational principles. My reading suggests that the exhibition applies modern education ideals that remain largely unquestioned and foregrounds the relations constructed between curator, works, and visitors.

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[91] Franke, *Animism* (booklet), 20.

[92] Franke, *Animism* (booklet), 21.

[93] Franke, *Animism* (booklet), 50.

A central idea in this respect is Foucault's emphasis on Immanuel Kant's understanding of the Enlightenment as a stage of maturity that is reached by gaining the willingness to use reason and independence from any authority .[94] Gert Biesta argues that it was in the eighteenth century that the Enlightenment was first understood as an emancipatory process that is achieved through education. On the basis of Kant's association of maturity with 'the (proper) use of one's reason', Biesta develops 'the modern educational nexus'. His elaboration stresses the role of education in obtaining autonomy and maturity and thus connects education with freedom.[95] The paradox posed by Kant is: 'How do I cultivate freedom through coercion?'[96] According to Biesta, critical approaches to education are based on the notion of 'demystification'; the idea is to reveal the power relations that constitute a particular order. However, because of the impossibility of stepping outside this order, the revelation depends on someone being able to observe it.[97]

The notions of 'emancipation' and 'demystification' are central to modern critical education theorists such as Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren, who followed the work of John Dewey, George Counts, and Paulo Freire. As Biesta observes, the central idea underpinning their thought is that students attain independence by becoming aware of the power structures under which they live.[98] The modern understanding of the subject sees it as the result of this educational, communicative process.[99] There is, however, a fundamental contradiction to this logic: even if emancipation is directed towards achieving equality, it presupposes an asymmetrical relation because it depends on the intervention of someone who is able to observe the power relations that will be exposed.[100] Biesta argues that it establishes a fundamental inequality between teacher and

[94] Foucault, "What is the Enlightenment?" 34, 35.

[95] Gert Biesta, "A New Logic of Emancipation: The Methodology of Jacques Rancière," *Educational Theory* 60, no. 1 (February 2010): 42.

[96] Immanuel Kant, "Über Pädagogik" [On Education] in *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1982), 701. Cited in Biesta, "A New Logic of Emancipation," 43.

[97] Biesta, "Towards a New 'Logic' of Emancipation," 171.

[98] Biesta, "A New Logic of Emancipation," 39, 40, 43.

[99] Gert Biesta, "Pedagogy Without Humanism: Foucault and the Subject of Education," *Interchange* 29, no. 1 (1998): 3.

[100] Biesta, "Towards a New 'Logic' of Emancipation," 172.

students. Students must obtain the knowledge of the teacher to achieve equality. Equality is therefore reached only through inequality.[101] *Animism* can be seen to follow this educational logic. It aimed to reveal the workings of the modern order by setting up a hierarchical relation between the curator and the visitors.

The logic of emancipation has been decidedly criticised by Jacques Rancière, who points to the contradiction between its liberating aims and the dependency it introduces on the emancipator's point of view and knowledge.[102] He argues that seeing equality as an end paradoxically perpetuates the distance it intends to eradicate. Instead, Rancière proposes taking equality as a 'presupposition' or an 'initial axiom', rather than an end.[103] He understands emancipation as merely acting on this basis.[104] Biesta has stressed that the question of equality is not only political, but also fundamental to education. He finds that the logic of emancipation is indistinguishable from that of traditional education: a process in which students obtain knowledge from their teachers.[105]

The process of explanation corresponds, for Rancière, to the enactment and replication of inequality. Instead, he presents the logic of attention, defined as making the effort to use one's intelligence. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991)*,* he investigates the possibility of teaching without communicating: 'teaching what is unknown to the teacher, as teaching without transmitting knowledge and as refusing the "knowledge of inequality that is supposed to prepare the way to 'reduce' inequality"'.[106] Rancière notes that explanation presumes the need to help students understand. This conception of 'understanding', he argues, involves the teacher obscuring knowledge to then reveal it (a widespread process within the art world). Moreover, according to Rancière, explanation constitutes the 'myth of pedagogy' and divides the world between ignorant

[101] Biesta, "A New Logic of Emancipation," 44.

[102] Charles Bingham and Gert Biesta, *Jacques Rancière: Education, Truth, Emancipation* (London: Continuum, 2010), 26, 31.

[103] Jacques Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor,* ed. Andrew Parker, trans. John Drury, Corinne Oster, and Andrew Parker (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003), 223.

[104] Biesta, "A New Logic of Emancipation," 51.

[105] Biesta, "A New Logic of Emancipation," 53.

[106] Biesta, "A New Logic of Emancipation," 59.

and knowing minds: 'the intelligent and the stupid'.[107] In the case of *Animism,* explication is mainly provided through the visitors' guide [Figure 25]. How could it be replaced by the logic of attention? This would involve taking equality as a starting point and assuming visitors do *not* need any help to understand. It would refuse the logic of transmitting knowledge to close the gap between curator and visitors and instead convey meaning without explicating. The 'guide' then would be conceived in a completely different way that could even support the exhibition's unsettling purpose. The difference, for Rancière, is not between learning with or without a master, but between a master and a 'master explicator'.[108] Once again, Trockel's *A Cosmos* provides a helpful example. In that case, the Serpentine Gallery offered an unconventional audioguide written by Dominic Eichler. While it oriented the viewer by introducing the artist, the exhibition, and its themes and format, it did not intend 'to fill all the gaps': (it tells the visitor) 'sometimes a little fog makes for truly excellent landscape'.[109] Borrowing thoughts from different commentators, it avoided strict explanations. More importantly, it worked *for* the exhibition by encouraging observation.

Figure 25. Curator Anselm Franke guides visitors through *Animism,* HKW, Berlin, 2012. Photos by Jacob Hoff.

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[107] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 6-7.

[108] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 12.

[109] Dominic Eichler, "An Introduction to Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos," Serpentine Galleries Sound Series (February 13, 2013), https://soundcloud.com/serpentine-uk/sound-series-an-introduction-to-rosemarie-trockel-a-cosmos-by-dominic-eichler-february-13-2013 (accessed May 31, 2016).

Following Rancière, the progressive view that attempts to achieve equality through education is based on a 'pedagogical fiction' that leads to 'the representation of inequality as a *retard* in one's development'.[110] He argues that equality will indefinitely remain out of reach under this scheme. It will lead to 'the integral pedagogicization of society —the general infantilisation of the individuals […] (and) the coextension of the explicatory institutions with society'.[111] Rancière's criticism concentrates on the relations between teachers, students, and materials. He proposes three questions when examining materials (in this case, works): 'what do you see, what do you think about it, and what do you make of it'.[112] The point is not the transmission of knowledge, but encouraging attention (the willingness to use one's intelligence). This can be taken as a starting point from which to rethink the relation between curators, visitors, and works. The idea is that the curator would refuse to provide an explanation and instead encourage the visitors' attention. To return to a previously cited example, it is interesting to consider here the case of Documenta 13. Although Christov-Bakargiev maintains a disinterest in matters of mediation and the public,[113] her approach has nonetheless been read as a particular pedagogical (or perhaps anti-pedagogical) position. Denise Frimer has drawn attention to the curator's striking statement: 'I come with what I don't know' as the educational premise of her Documenta.[114] The strategy of concentrating the main lines of thought in a nuclear section titled *The Brain* has also been appreciated as a material 'mind map' of the show.[115] It demanded viewers' attention while introducing the central themes of the exhibition.

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[110] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* 119.

[111] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* 133.

[112] Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* 23.

[113] Nanne Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA (13)," *OnCurating* 29 (May 2016), http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-29-reader/angels-in-the-white-cube-rhetorics-of-curatorial-innocence-at-documenta-13.html#.V08VPlfSefV (accessed June 1, 2016).

[114] Denise Frimer, "Pedagogical Paradigms: Documenta's Reinvention," *Art & Education* (2010) http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/pedagogical-paradigms-documentas-reinvention/ (accessed June 1, 2016).

[115] Buurman.

Returning to Foucault, Koopman reminds us that his analysis was directed towards 'specific sites, institutions, objects, subjects, and ideas that we must learn to reconstruct'.[116] The impossibility of overcoming the power/knowledge linkage means for Stephen Ball that 'the production of knowledge is also a claim for power'.[117] Ball finds in Foucault's work two distinct levels: firstly, the examination of the production of knowledge and truth, and secondly, the attention to how knowledge generates specific subject positions.[118] Ball highlights the power relations implicit in the production of knowledge and the importance of looking at who speaks to whom, about whom, from what position, and in what way. He argues for the relevance of Foucauldian critique to the present but maintains the need to stay committed to questioning given practices.[119] According to Ball, Foucault urges us to look at the 'unconscious forces and cultural practices' that precede us. Even at its least ambitious, genealogy can be understood as 'a way of making it more difficult to act and think 'as usual' and of rethinking our relationship to ourselves and to others'.[120] This is the kind of reflection that was missing from the exhibition. *Animism* successfully observes the configuration of the modern order, but fails to extend its analysis to its own organisation and the subject positions it generates.

The conflict between the exhibition's ostensibly destabilising intent and the stabilising educational approach is therefore most clearly demonstrated in the visitors' guide. At the same time, the exhibition manifests a markedly emancipatory intention which parallels the modern, demystifying understanding of education. This pedagogical approach, together with the contradictions it entails and the specific positions it generates between subjects, remains largely unquestioned within this critical approach. In the following section, I use feminist and postcolonial educators' objections to critical pedagogy to illuminate the inconsistency between the exhibition's critical ambition and its pedagogical approach, as well as the limitations of Franke's commitment to modern rationality.

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[116] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, 179.

[117] Ball, 13.

[118] Ball, 13.

[119] Ball, 4, 15.

[120] Ball, 144.

Feminist challenges to critical pedagogy

Feminist pedagogues are especially aware of Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power's positive and negative sides, as disabling and enabling, coercive and productive.[121] They address 'the oppressive role of ostensibly liberatory forms of discourse', attempt to spell out epistemologies, and study the relationship between critical theory and emancipatory praxis.[122] Looking closely at the interaction between teacher-learner-knowledge in emancipatory pedagogies derived from the Frankfurt School, Gramscian, and Freirian theory, feminists have observed the counterproductive perpetuation of relations of dominance in these approaches. They have scrutinised the central tenets of these theories (hope, liberation, equality, agency, empowerment) and the ultimate aim to bring about democratic transformation through critical self-determination. Carmen Luke, for instance, notes that these ideals are grounded on 'conceptions of male individualism, power and public speech disguised in the rhetoric of universalised self- and social empowerment'. Luke highlights the underlying liberal individualist ethic in emancipatory and empowering educational discourses.[123] She calls for 'a serious scepticism of and critical attention to those contemporary educational narratives that claim to be emancipatory, ideologically critical, self-reflexive, and politically conscientious, and yet remain theoretically entrenched in gender- and colour-blind patriarchal liberalism'.[124] For these reasons, the feminist perspective is particularly helpful in uncovering the contradictions of emancipatory educational approaches. In the case of *Animism,* the relations between curator-visitor-works reveal a pedagogical strategy that neutralises the works' disruptive crossing of modern binaries. Franke seems, if not completely unaware of this, then at least at a loss on how to avoid this problem. These issues moreover remain a blind spot within wider critical approaches to exhibition making.

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[121] Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore, eds., Introduction to *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 2.

[122] Patti Lather, "Post-Critical Pedagogies: A Feminist Reading," in *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy,* 121, 122.

[123] Carmen Luke, "Feminist Politics in Radical Pedagogy," in *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy,* 26, 27, 29, 33.

[124] Luke, 49.

The 'ambiguities of "empowerment"' are a central issue for feminist educators. They seek the 'dangers' and 'normalising tendencies' of such discourse.[125] Elisabeth Ellsworth sees empowerment as a 'repressive myth' that can reinforce the relations it works against, such as 'Eurocentrism, racism, sexism, classism'.[126] As Jennifer Gore notes, the notion presupposes an agent (usually the teacher, ascribed with exceptional abilities) an understanding of power as property (rather than the Foucauldian understanding of power as exercised, which would force us to look at its enactment in a particular site) and an ultimate aim. The transformative ambition of critical pedagogies is often caught in the problem of translating a macro vision to micro-practices within an institutional setting. The urgent question, then, is whether empowerment can be actualised in a particular institutional location.[127] Feminists point to critical pedagogy's failure to address institutionalised power imbalances and the paternalistic relations it imposes. 'Critique' and 'empowerment' are reduced in this view to superficial constructions that involve profound pedagogical contradictions. The kind of knowledge put forward sees objects, nature, and others as 'ultimately knowable' and it is never applied to the researcher.[128] This is a central problem in Franke's project, its emancipatory and empowering ambition is hampered by the institution's understanding of the public needs. Founded on the principle of difference, feminist pedagogy proposes instead 'undecidability', 'partiality', and 'uncertainty'. It does not claim a specific method and, crucially, does not take on a position of authority. It refuses 'to issue that we have the power to

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[125] Maxine Greene, Foreword to *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy*, x.

[126] Elizabeth Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering? Working Through the Repressive Myths of Critical Pedagogy," in *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy,* 91.

[127] Jennifer Gore, "What We Can Do For You! What *Can* "We" Do For "You"', in *Feminisms and Critical Pedagogy,* 56, 57, 65, 67.

[128] Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering?" 98, 112.

empower or the "language of critique" […] nor we can claim to know what the politically correct end points for liberation are for others'.[129]

Feminist scepticism and feelings of 'uneasiness' towards critical pedagogies bring out crucial issues in the case of *Animism*. Luke discusses a particular concern with deconstructing the educational metanarratives of approaches derived from Freire's notion of 'critical consciousness' and the intention to enable an understanding of the ideological sources of disempowerment and oppression.[130] The feminist stance underscores critical pedagogy's basis on modernist enlightenment epistemology. It stresses that critical pedagogy discourse is based on Western dualisms such as 'life/death, self/other, subject/object, nature/culture', divisions that are traditionally founded on male consciousness, that, of course, the exhibition sought to undermine.[131] The main point here is the central part of the construct of 'woman' in sustaining the public/private, paid/unpaid, nature/culture oppositions that are constitutive of capitalism. In terms of education, the gendered structural partition between public and private (the historical association of men with public participation against women with the private realm) is part of fundamental demarcations between reason and emotion and ruler and ruled. For feminists, then, critical pedagogy has failed to question the construction of 'the public man' and its opposition to the Other in terms of gender, race, or class.[132] Having shown the gendered bias of Western dichotomies (culture/nature, mind/ body, subject/object), feminists are invested not in reversing them, but in dealing with and undoing them. Regarding *Animism,* it is especially interesting to note the attention of material feminism to

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[129] Luke, 48. For an overview of the history of feminist exhibition making see Connie Butler, Amelia Jones, and Maura Reilly, "Feminist Curating and the "Return" of Feminist Art," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader,* ed. Amelia Jones (London: Routledge, 2009), 31-43; Annie Fletcher, "On Feminism (Through a Series of Exhibitions)," *Afterall* 17 (Spring 2008), https://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.17/feminism.through.series.exhibitions#share (accessed January 15, 2018); Elke Krasny, Lara Perry, and Dorothee Richter eds., "Curating in Feminist Thought," *Oncurating* 29 (May 2016), http://www.on-curating.org/issue-29.html#.WlzyeJOFigQ (accessed January 15, 2018); n.paradoxa, "List of exhibition catalogues of feminist art and contemporary women artists (post- 1970)," http://www.ktpress.co.uk/feminist-art-exhibitions.asp (accessed January 15, 2018). Within the history of feminist exhibition making curators do not usually acknowledge a particular or explicit pedagogical approach either. In this chapter, I make the case for the wider relevance of feminist pedagogies to curating, beyond the specificity of a feminist thematic or women's art.

[130] Luke and Gore*,* 1; Luke, 25, 27, 28.

[131] Luke and Gore, 9; Luke, 41.

[132] Alice Brooke, Giulia Smith, and Rózsa Farkas, eds., *Re-Materialising Feminism* (London: Arcadia Missa, 2015), xi; Luke, 34, 35.

addressing the language/reality binary and to observing the interaction between the 'textual,

linguistic, and discursive […] (and the) lived, material bodies and evolving corporeal practices'.[133]

In this case, following convention, the exhibition's guide establishes the textual as the guiding

principle between visitors and works in the gallery space. That is, Franke's pedagogical proposition

remains within the systemic divisions that the project's conceptualisation seeks to examine and

subvert.

The end result of such a pedagogical approach is another key question. Feminist theorists

point out that critical pedagogy is limited to proposing 'an optimistic epistemological turn, a

reinstatement of liberalism's idealised individual […] (and remains within the) masculinist logic of

the universal subject and its naming of the other'.[134] This is particularly problematic for the

boundary-crossing intentions of Franke's exhibition. For Luke, the failure to address 'liberal

capitalism's fundamental structural separations' renders critical pedagogy 'a humanist discourse of

progressivism' that falls short of providing a clear course of action to bring about structural

transformation, an idea that resonates with Franke's sense of disillusionment over the lack of

possibilities.[135] Luke's stance shows that critical pedagogy has simply proved unable to deal with

institutionalised power imbalances. From the feminist perspective, the aims of critical pedagogy

are often defined in broad, utopian, humanistic terms such as 'critical democracy, individual

freedom, social justice and social change'. As Ellsworth shows, these remain at an abstract level,

and it is unclear how the theory actually transforms 'specific power relations outside or inside

schools' or relates to specific sites of struggle.[136] This is also true of *Animism*, as the traditional

power relations in the gallery space endure intact. Feminists call for a rigorous reading of

Foucault's power/knowledge nexus that requires an examination of how critical pedagogy

discourse translates into 'specific practices and embodied relations in the classroom'.[137] This is a

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[133] Stacy Alaimo, and Susan Hekman, eds., "Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory," in *Material Feminisms,* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 2, 3.

[134] Luke, 36, 37.

[135] Luke, 38-39.

[136] Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering?" 92-93.

[137] Luke and Gore, 4.

crucial question that in this case demonstrates the exhibition's adherence to a modern, emancipatory pedagogical approach that maintains a hierarchical organisation.

A further fruitful reminder from feminism that is certainly relevant to *Animism* is that critical pedagogy rests on a rationalist premise: the educator provides the learners with the opportunity to logically arrive at the 'universally valid proposition […] (of) the right to freedom from oppression guaranteed by the democratic social contract'.[138] As Ellsworth observes, rational argument operates against an irrational Other (women, people of colour, nature, aesthetics), a division the exhibition also investigates. This means that oppositional perspectives that denounce sexism, racism, or colonialism are rendered irrational within this framework.[139] Objectivity (in this case, clearly asserted by the leading curatorial narrative) is necessarily located in opposition to subjectivity, the 'emotional', 'immediate', 'personal', and of course, the feminine. This is the case, for example, in Franke's explanation of the transgressions between mind and body, self and environment, of Kusama's hallucinatory film as fitting within the historical context of experimental art practice of the sixties.[140] For artist, writer, and educator Linda Stupart, objectivity implies a neutral perspective, a critical distance that excludes the white, male privileged viewpoint from the ecology observed. Stupart associates this standpoint with prevalent notions of 'elitism', 'emptiness', and 'macho genius' in the art world. As a mode of address, 'masculine objectivity' reproduces the subject/object dichotomy and subsequently the male/female distinction, as well as reinforcing the idea of knowledge as privilege.[141] The positivist knowledge that Franke presents in the strict, logical order of the exhibition is in stark conflict with his boundary unsettling aims and is inherently patriarchal.

As a counter-approach, feminists put forward a self-reflexive, practice-based, embodied pedagogy. This method draws attention to institutional and discursive 'inscriptions', such as teacher and student (curator and visitor), as 'key in the production of subjectivity, identity, and

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[138] Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering?" 96.

[139] Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering?" 98.

[140] Franke, *Animism* (booklet), 45.

[141] Linda Stupart, "Rematerialising Feminism," in *Re-Materialising Feminism,* ci-cii.

knowledge in pedagogical encounters'. The idea is to look at the concrete effects on material

bodies.[142] Stupart suggests that as objectified bodies, women are in a particularly helpful position

to engage with other objects and substitute 'distanced objectivity […] with an empathetic exchange

of ethical aesthetic objects'.[143] These principles are central to Suzanne Lacy's work, to cite an art

historical example. Influenced by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's Feminist Art Program at the

California State College at Fresno and the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Los Angeles

(1970/71-1973), as well as Allan Kaprow's Happenings, Chris Burden's and Vito Acconci's

performances, and Brechtian theory, Lacy developed the notions of 'New Genre Public Art' and

'expanded public pedagogy'. These refer to work that is centred on the relation between art and

the public, that is actively interested in reaching, supporting, expanding, and transforming

audiences through collaborative processes; for instance, by bringing people from different races or

social backgrounds together.[144] These audience-building practices were central to the feminist art

movement of the 1970s as a way of countering 'the modernist myth of the solitary (male) creative

genius'.[145] Lacy's oeuvre constitutes a landmark in the subversion of traditional positions and ways

of experiencing art.

Lacy's later performances sought to do away with the boundary between work and

spectator and put forward the body as 'site of experience'. She used the body in a deliberate

attempt to establish an affective or 'empathetic' connection between the performer and the public,

as well as inciting political change.[146] The Oakland Projects are clear examples: *The Roof is on*

Fire (1993-1994)*,* a piece co-authored with Annice Jacoby and Chris Johnson, took place in parked

cars at a rooftop garage and set up conversations between public high school students and the

local community. *Code 33* (1997-1999), developed with Unique Holland and Julio Morales,

followed a similar format consisting of discussions between police officers and young people and a

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[142] Lather, 131. Luke and Gore, 2, 4.

[143] Stupart, cii.

[144] Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 11, 13, 19, 20, 27.

[145] Vivien Green Fryd, "Suzanne Lacy's Three Weeks in May: Feminist Activist Performance Art as "Expanded Public Pedagogy,"" *NWSA Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 23, 26.

[146] Green Fryd, 24, 26, 31.

set of danced stories. As Kim Troggal stresses, by bringing together young people, police officers, the media, and the local community, these performances presented a feminist pedagogy that took into account the question of 'who is in the room'. These works assumed the standpoint of equality and, at the same time, dealt with difference.[147] Lacy has commented that performance allows the artist to be both subject and object and address feminist issues with complexity. She highlights the influence of artistic experimentation of the 1970s as a resistant practice that challenged the conventional understandings of empowerment and the experience of art, and integrated various strategies such as 'grassroots organising, tactical interventions into media, and radical forms of pedagogy'.[148] Her work can be read, then, as a form of embodied pedagogy that blurs the distinction between performers and audience and effectively enacted an alternative conception of empowerment. In its subversion of the distinctions between mind and body and subject and object, Lacy's artistic practice contrasts with Franke's emancipatory curatorial approach and its containment of the works' boundary-crossings. Franke's transgressive ability can be seen to be curtailed by the educational conventions and expectations of the exhibition space.

Postcolonial views on education

In its conceptualisation and work selection, *Animism* investigates the ideological foundation of colonialism; however, this examination does not pervade the exhibition's educational proposition. Vanessa Andreotti has observed that in its commitment to 'rational unanimity', working within dominant Western epistemology only allows certain predetermined relations, structures, and effects. She argues that specific criteria are prescribed on what can be known and in what ways, precluding other forms of knowing and communicating and reinforcing the predominance of a

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[147] Kim Trogal, "Feminist Pedagogies. Making Transversal and Mutual Connections Across Difference," in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialism, Activism, Dialogues, Pedagogies, Projections,* ed. Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Ramia Mazé (Baunach, Germany: AADR Spurbuchverlag, 2017), 240, 242. See also Suzanne Lacy, "The Oakland Projects," http://www.suzannelacy.com/the-oakland-projects/ (accessed September 27, 2017).

[148] Suzanne Lacy in conversation with Dominik Czechowski, "The (Feminist) Practice of Everyday Life," The Photographers' gallery blog, entry posted October 21, 2016, https://thephotographersgalleryblog.org.uk/2016/10/21/the-feminist-practice-of-everyday-life-suzanne-lacy-in-conversation-with-dominik-czechowski/ (accessed September 27, 2017).

particular view.[149] Decolonial theorists such as Aníbal Quijano have examined how the

establishment of European culture as the universal model requires the organisation of modern

rationality as the epistemological paradigm. He contends that this scheme is founded on the idea

of knowledge as the result of an (isolated, individual) subject relation with a (differentiated and

external) object, for example, in the European subject studies of other, allegedly naturally inferior

cultures as objects.[150]

     In contrast, Andreotti presents the postcolonial approach to education to call for the

discernment of the limitations of Western/Enlightenment thought, the development of knowledge

beyond its parameters, and an engagement with the political interests involved in processes of

knowledge production. The postcolonial stance seeks to 'pluralise' and 'transform' the status quo

and enable a form of 'contestatory dialogue' by presenting knowledge as 'situated, partial and

provisional'. As a pedagogy of 'self-reflexivity, self-implication, dissensus, and discomfort', it

promotes a 'disenchantment' with the epistemic privilege of modernity and prioritises critical and

independent thinking. This radically different understanding of education acknowledges power

relations, its own context and deficiencies, encouraging the exploration of other knowledge

systems.[151] It offers certain tools for rethinking education: Quijano proposes a *'desprendimiento'*, a

form of rejection, detachment, or letting go of the institution of a particular worldview as the

universal rationality.[152] Walter Mignolo comparably puts forward a 'border epistemology' that re-

orients the discussed and the conditions of discussion as indispensable to decolonial thinking. It is

a form of epistemic 'disobedience' that thinks in 'exteriority', at the limits of 'local histories

confronting global designs'.[153] In this sense, *Animism* missed the opportunity of developing a

decolonial pedagogy that emphasises everyone's ability 'for original and anti-dominative

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[149] Vanessa Andreotti, *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1, 2.

[150] Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad," *Perú Indígena* 13, no. 29 (1992): 13, 15, 16. My translation and paraphrases.

[151] Andreotti, 3, 6, 177, 186.

[152] Quijano, 20, my translation and paraphrases.

[153] Walter Mignolo, "Geopolitics of sensing and knowing: on (de)coloniality, border thinking and epistemic disobedience," *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 275, 277, 282.

knowledge production'.[154] This chapter's fourth and last section proposes ways in which alternative pedagogical theory could have potentially contributed to the project's mediation strategy, drawing from both posthumanist and feminist materialist approaches, and indicates the relevance of diffractive strategies in this case.

Posthumanist and feminist materialist pedagogies

While considering Foucault's analysis of regimes of subjection as fundamental and 'revolutionary', Rosalyn Diprose's investigation of the 'ethico-politics' of the posthuman finds Foucault's resistance strategies —namely, his ethical, *parrhesiastic* techniques of self— less convincing.[155] Diprose suggests that posthuman ontologies' (such as actor-network theory or the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari) challenge to the subject/object, culture/nature, and human/nonhuman binaries opens new ways of thinking.[156] Koopman also acknowledges that genealogy 'falls short' in actually transforming the conditions examined and suggests drawing on other critical approaches.[157] The problem can be seen in relation to Ball's discussion of Foucault's attempt to find a space outside traditional disciplines from which to examine them. Ball describes an effort 'to find a position outside of the human sciences from which to see the social world'. Foucault's recognition of the human sciences as part of that world makes this position 'both liberating and impossible'.[158] There is a similar intention in Franke's description of attempting 'to leave a certain matrix, […] to assume a vantage point'.[159]

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[154] Noah De Lissovoy, *Education and Emancipation in the Neoliberal Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 135.

[155] Foucault refers to *Parrhêsia* as the duty of 'free spokeness', 'a modality of truth telling […] that involves courage'. Michel Foucault, "The Courage of Truth: The Government of Self and Others II," in *Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-1984,* ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2-11.

[156] Rosalyn Diprose, 'Toward an Ethico-politics of the Posthuman: Foucault and Merleau-Ponty,' in *Parrhesia* 8 (2009): 7, 8, 11, 12, http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia08/parrhesia08_diprose.pdf (accessed March 2, 2016).

[157] Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, 12.

[158] Ball, 2, 3.

[159] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

Franke has spoken of the failure of modernity to provide new 'narratives' or 'structures' beyond reflective criticism. He describes the importance of indeterminacy in relation to our imaginative ability to 're-narrativise'.[160] The question is how to preserve the artworks' indeterminacy from the curatorial position and what kind of educational approach would support the exhibition's critical proposition. Yet, the development of a more self-reflective and experimental mediation strategy could have supported the project's critical intent more effectively. In what follows, I explore the potential of incorporating ideas from posthumanist and feminist new materialist pedagogies.

Posthumanist discourse proposes a radical re-conception of educational thought, starting by unsettling its humanist basis. It supports 'the politico-pedagogical projects of feminism, postcolonialism, anti-racism and queer activism'.[161] Together with object-oriented ontology, posthumanism looks into the 'ecological relations' between all objects, including human beings.[162] It explores 'the affective intensities of what bodies or things could do […] in the act before thought'.[163] From the curatorial perspective, this investigation would translate into thinking of the exhibition as an ecology. This approach would pay particular attention to the undetermined potential and effects of the relations between the exhibition's components, including its visitors.

The posthuman approach seeks to 'reconfigure identities (and introduce) ways of doing things that have yet to be coded into heteronormative and/or disciplinary models'. Furthermore, it questions the idea of knowledge itself and puts forward a 'conceptual creativity […] that invites complexity'.[164] Particularly relevant to the mediation strategy examined is the idea of suspending the distinction between knowing subjects and known objects and instead, letting the object speak: 'The "what" of the study must be able to participate, to *surprise* the researcher. When a researcher

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[160] Anselm Franke in conversation with the author, February 15, 2016.

[161] Nathan Snaza, et al., "Toward a Posthumanist Education," *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 30, no. 2 (2014): 40, 49, http://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/501 (accessed June 24, 2018).

[162] On object-oriented ontology: 'As it is more commonly known, OOO begins with an ontological leveling: *everything is an object* and further, *all objects are "ecologies" of machinic relations.* Humans, ticks, slime molds, and rocks are *objects,* capable of constituting unique ecological relations irreducible to qualities ascribed to them in advance'. Snaza, "Toward a Posthumanist Education," 47.

[163] Snaza, "Toward a Posthumanist Education," 47.

[164] Braidotti, R., *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), 54.

decides in advance what will be taken into account and how the "findings" will be presented, surprise is impossible. All that can happen is "confirmation" or "disconfirmation"'. Posthuman thought encourages us to look at 'the *meaning* of the disavowed relations in which we are already entangled'.[165] In the case of *Animism* — and more broadly pertinent to similar emancipatory approaches to curating — this would mean extending its analysis to its own pedagogical relations, questioning and rethinking institutional conventions. It would involve reclaiming curatorial agency to put forward a space that suspends the divisions not only between objects and subjects, but also between knowing and ignorant minds.

This perspective challenges the understanding of education as a means to obtain an end, typically seen as the formation of human subjects. Nathan Snaza presents the idea of 'bewildering education' as a pedagogical approach that refuses to define its outcomes from the outset.[166] This notion draws from Patti Lather's conception of education as 'getting lost'. Lather investigates 'the loss of researcher expertise and authority (to come upon) something other to commanding, controlling, mastery'. Instead, she proposes an attitude of curiosity and 'unknowing' and looks into the potential of being lost so as to both 'produce different kinds of knowledge and produce knowledge differently'.[167] In the context of exhibition making, adopting the understanding of education as 'getting lost' would involve giving up the concern for the visitors' disorientation. Instead, bewilderment would be encouraged, promoting a radically undetermined experience of art.

Feminist new materialist pedagogies share with the posthumanist approach an interest in undoing binary oppositions, the insistence on undetermined outcomes, and the attention to the materiality of the learning process, as well as the foregrounding of complexity and the undermining

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[165] Snaza, "Toward a Posthumanist Education," 52.

[166] Nathan Snaza, "Bewildering Education," *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 10, no.1 (2013): 49.

[167] Sarah Fotheringham, "Exploring the Methodology of *Getting Lost* with Patti Lather," *The Qualitative Report* 18, no. 3 (2013), http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/fotheringham3.pdf (accessed March 4, 2016).

of authority.[168] More specifically, the feminist new materialist perspective is devoted to dismantling the hierarchical relation between teacher and student (curator and visitor) and making space for the horizontal co-creation, rather than the vertical transmission of knowledge. This approach concentrates on the encounters and relations between human and nonhuman agencies. It involves throwing off balance 'the androcentric canon of knowledge creation' and focusing on the 'collective and processual character' of the making of knowledge.[169] However, it also considers the unmaking of knowledge, a process that refers to 'unlearning dominant ways of thinking' as well as challenging the role of institutions and authority. New materialist pedagogy develops knowledge that 'breaks through' established dichotomies to generate 'intra-active' encounters in which the knower is situated with the nature being studied.[170] Within this approach, the idea of 'diffraction' is particularly relevant to Franke's exhibition.

Developed by physicist and feminist theorist Karen Barad, the notion of 'diffraction' is helpful here in its disruption of established binary divisions, such as animate/inanimate. Diffraction defies conceptions of identity and difference grounded in a colonising logic in which the self stands against a negative, foreign, lacking other. Barad works on thwarting this mode of thinking that requires 'a clear dividing line, a geometry of exclusion' that defines clear opposite sides.[171] She mainly draws from Danish physicist Niels Bohr's revolutionary theory (c. 1927) and the introduction of a new quantum epistemology that differs from the Cartesian separation between object and

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[168] Rosi Braidotti considers new feminist materialism as part of the genealogy of feminist posthumanism. Within this history, she takes into account anti-humanism's critique of hierarchical binary thinking and its attention to the limitations of emancipatory projects. She also refers to poststructuralist feminism's emphasis on diversity and differences as a precursor. Haraway's cyborg and the recent work on agential realism are further important points of reference. Her work expands on feminist posthumanism and its intersection with postcolonial theory as well as its alliance with queer theory. See Cecilia Åsberg and Rosi Braidotti, eds., "Feminist Posthumanities: An Introduction," in *A Feminist Companion to the Posthumanities* (New York: Springer, 2018), 1-22. Also see Rosi Braidotti, "Posthuman Feminist Theory," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory,* ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 673-698.

[169] Beatriz Revelles Benavente and Olga Cielemecka, "(Feminist) New Materialist Pedagogies," in *New Materialism: How Matter Comes to Matter,* August 11, 2016, http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/f/feminist-new-materialist-pedagogies (accessed July 24, 2017).

[170] Revelles Benavente and Cielemecka.

[171] Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20, no.3 (2014): 169.

subject.[172] In other words, in classical Newtonian physics, 'everything is one or the other', a way of thinking that has been broken apart by quantum physics. The central point is Bohr's explanation of electrons' behaviour as waves and/or particles under different circumstances. As Barad expounds: 'The key is understanding that identity is not essence, fixity or givenness, but a contingent iterative performativity, thereby reworking this alleged conflict into an understanding of difference not as an absolute boundary between object and subject […] but rather as the effects of enacted cuts'.[173] Her discussion itself applies diffractive analysis and considers queer and mestiza identities (being both male and female, black and white) in relation to Bohrian physics. This model emphasises knowing as a material, engaged (rather than detached) process. Diffraction also entails rethinking the notion of agency in terms of 'enactment' rather than as a 'property'. In this sense, it is about 'the possibilities for reconfiguring entanglements' including the boundaries established by those practices.[174] A diffractive mediation strategy seems particularly appropriate to Franke's project and its aims not only to undo partitions, but also to offer a 'stereoscopic' or 'kaleidoscopic' perspective.

So how does 'diffraction' translate into a pedagogical practice? This approach focuses on 'the material, embodied and affective' character of the learning process.[175] It recovers the 'uncomfortable, unthought (and) indeterminate' which has been feminised and put aside in the delimitation of legitimate ways of knowing.[176] As presented in an article co-authored by Anna Hickey-Moody, Helen Palmer, and Esther Sayers, diffractive pedagogy contests the conventional

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[172] Niels Bohr's quantum mechanics challenge the principles of classical physics, some of which are fundamental to the western worldview. Bohr's idea of 'complementarity' (also known as wave-particle duality) was developed from the double-slit experiment in which he was able to observe both wave and particle properties to a single object. He made clear that the measuring apparatus disturbed the object (in this case, the electron) and noted the impossibility of distinguishing between the object's behaviour and its interaction with the measuring instrument. This is ontologically significant as it establishes the inseparability between the observed and the observer, an assertion that directly confronts the attribution of inherent properties to objects in classical physics. Jan Faye, "Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics," *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/qm-copenhagen/#Com (accessed January 4, 2018).

[173] Barad, 173-174.

[174] Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, "Interview with Karen Barad," in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 52, 54.

[175] Helen Palmer, "Diffractive Pedagogies," in *New Materialism: How Matter Comes to Matter,* August 25, 2016, http://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/d/diffractive-pedagogies (accessed July 24, 2017).

[176] Anna Hickey-Moody, Helen Palmer, and Esther Sayers, "Diffractive pedagogies: dancing across new materialist imaginaries," *Gender and Education* 28, no. 2 (2016): 213.

understanding of learning as a process of transferring knowledge that typically pays no attention to the 'physicality of learning'. It calls into question a conception that is grounded on an epistemology that relegates the body, the feminine, and the material to the opposite side of male rationality. Instead, this approach considers the body as a site of learning and looks at the relations of bodies between each other and their environment, particularly in spaces that disregard the body, such as the university.[177] I suggest that the exhibition space presents an exceptional site to observe the learning that takes place as bodies move across careful spatial arrangements of subjects and objects. Introducing such an experimental pedagogical approach requires, of course, facing strong preconceptions of the kind of knowledge expected from exhibition spaces. The process would necessitate challenging and transforming the definition of legitimate knowledge, a shift that signifies a radical departure from the Cartesian mind and body distinction.[178]

Diffractive pedagogy puts forward the agency and complexity of bodies and rejects the primacy of language and discourse. Hickey-Moody, Palmer, and Sayers discuss dance moves as 'meaningful, particular, embodied concepts', that is, as discourse that can be read without being turned into text.[179] I propose that movements within the exhibition space, the way our bodies respond to a particular work, arrangement of works, or the atmosphere, are equally significant. In their piece, the authors expound on the resistance to this approach. In the context of higher education (and certainly in the case of the exhibition space), bodies are seen as being governed. Students (visitors) expect to be governed and submit to forms of disembodied learning. They expect 'institutionalised learning experiences that are governed, structured and didactic […] (as they are) used to teaching styles that rely on a directive approach to knowledge "transfer"'.[180] The crucial questions are, therefore: how can we let go of the fixation with finding the right answer? How can we promote making connections and bifurcations that oppose the predominance of rational thought? Can the prevalent approach be counteracted by feminist materialist pedagogy's

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[177] Hickey-Moody, Palmer, and Sayers, 214.

[178] Hickey-Moody, Palmer, and Sayers, 215-216.

[179] Hickey-Moody, Palmer, and Sayers, 216.

[180] Hickey-Moody, Palmer, and Sayers, 217, 218, 223.

attention to the idea of 'movement-as-learning'? How can we introduce the ideas of route mapping, body cartographies, 'thinking in action', and 'theorising through practice'?[181] For example, in the case of *Animism,* this could have entailed a less rational and more labyrinthine setup. Perhaps it could have involved a printout in a maze-like design that would draw potential connections between works and sections and encourage the sense of getting lost alongside an awareness of the visitors' own bodies in the space, a subconscious retracing of their steps. This would involve the kind of learning that traverses mind/body and subject/object divisions.

Feminist new-materialism can be adopted, then, as a methodology, a theoretical framework and a political positioning'. Understood as indeterminate and 'agentive', matter is posited 'as both pedagogical and resistant. Matter teaches us through resisting dominant discourses and showing new ways of being […] resistant matter shows us the limits of the world as we know it, and prompts us to shift these limits'.[182] Posthumanist and feminist materialist educational theory present useful alternatives that can support destabilising, critical curatorial projects. Incorporating these pedagogical ideas would contribute to suspending the divisions between objects and subjects and ignorant and knowing minds. It would also assist in preserving the works' indeterminacy, advancing the exhibition's complexity, and promoting curiosity, attention, and experimentation. This chapter highlights the need to extend the critical analysis of the curatorial conceptualisation to the exhibition's own organisation. More specifically, I contend that the mediation strategy and the pedagogical relations it constructs are not supplementary, but central to the visitors' encounter with the works. As we have seen, the way in which meaning is transmitted and the public is addressed remains largely unquestioned. In order to preserve the works' indeterminacy and, consequently, advance a critical curatorial proposition such as Franke's, we must re-examine institutional educational conventions and the relations they propose to the audience.

I have read Franke's attention to boundaries as an emancipatory curatorial approach and a genealogical critique centred on unsettling the given order and revealing its contingency. We

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[181] Hickey-Moody, Palmer, and Sayers, 218, 223, 225.

[182] Hickey-Moody, Palmer, and Sayers, 220.

observed the institution of a typically modern educational setup based on critical pedagogy's problematic notions of 'empowerment' and 'demystification'. The feminist and postcolonial perspectives have been key in drawing attention to the limitations and contradictions of this framework. Primarily, there was a clear inconsistency between stabilising mediation materials and the destabilising aims of the project. More importantly, this chapter demonstrates the inability of modern, critical pedagogy to overcome standing dichotomies. *Animism's* educational proposition relied on expert, reassuring explanations, perpetuating the assumption that visitors need help to understand the works. Once again, mediation played a crucial part in defining the visitors' experience. In this case, I put forward the potential contribution of posthumanist and diffractive pedagogies in advancing an anti-hierarchical approach that sustains the indeterminacy of meaning, as well as expanding conventional conceptions of education and knowledge. These pedagogies are better able to sustain the boundary crossings explored in this chapter and lead to another kind of learning. The next chapter investigates an opposing approach to Franke's and looks into an exhibition that questioned, from the outset, the need to understand.

Chapter Three: The Aesthetic Experience as a Form of Self-Education: *Things we don't understand*

Under the title *Things we don't understand* (2000), curators Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack's exhibition at Generali Foundation, Vienna, set out to examine the notion of 'aesthetic autonomy' and its social relevance. The curators proposed rethinking 'autonomy' as an 'effect' that comes about from the encounter between art and its public.[1] They contended that this 'effect' goes beyond bourgeois, individual contemplation: it creates a potentially mobilising intellectual space and even reconfigures the system of meaning production.[2] In its mission statement, the Generali Foundation states the purpose of participating in critical discourse that addresses social and political issues. At the time of the exhibition and under its founding director Sabine Breitwieser, the Foundation's collection and programme concentrated on conceptual art, especially from the 1960s to the present, with an emphasis on 'critical revisions of modernism and postmodernism'.[3] Breitwieser invited Buergel and Noack with the idea of investigating young artists' positions towards both (new) feminist approaches and filmmaking.[4] The curators explored these issues through their selection of works, which included pieces specifically produced for the show as well as holdings from the Generali's collection. These were installed in the Foundation's home at the time in the Habighof, a former millinery factory in central Vienna from the early twentieth century.[5] Designed by architects Christian Jabornegg and András Pálffy, the exhibition space combined the white cube aesthetic with features from the original industrial architecture. As I discuss below, Buergel and Noack closed off part of the light-filled space and brought the works together through a 'narrative image',

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[1] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, eds., "Things we don't understand," in *Things we don't understand* (exh.cat.) (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 1999), 87. Exhibition ran from January 28 to April 16, 2000.

[2] Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, Talk at ICA (London, December 7, 2009), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ReOKB6wzl9I (accessed July 13, 2016).

[3] Generali Foundation, "Mission Statement," http://foundation.generali.at/en/generali-foundation/mission-statement.html (accessed September 15, 2016).

[4] Sabine Breitwieser, Introduction to *Things we don't understand,* 13.

[5] Generali Foundation, "History and Architecture," foundation.generali.at/en/info/press.html (accessed January 23, 2018).

developed in collaboration with the artists and corresponding to a non-explanatory curatorial contextualisation.[6]

My interest in the exhibition is precisely in the curatorial attention given to the encounter between works and visitors and the investigation of the critical potential of interpretative difficulty. In my previous case study of Anselm Franke's *Animism,* I looked at the contradiction between the destabilising curatorial aims and a stabilising educational proposition. In this case, Buergel and Noack intentionally fostered the feeling of irritation provoked by not understanding; they observed the unsettling situation and made it their central subject. My analysis of the educational relations organised by the exhibition observes the curators' disinterest in filling the perceived gap in understanding between works and visitors and their attempt to make use of the visitors' disorientation. In contrast to *Animism's* transmission of specialist knowledge to the audience, I argue that *Things we don't understand* put forward an experimental demonstration of the aesthetic experience as a form of self-education.

The first section provides a descriptive account of the exhibition that concentrates on my efforts to interpret the works and pays close attention to the interaction between aesthetic and social concerns. The second section addresses the exhibition's conceptualisation. I examine the writings of Theodor Adorno and Juliane Rebentisch as the curators' principal sources and observe the contradictory processes at work, for instance, in the works' availability and impenetrability.[7] In this section, I discuss the specific political moment in Austria at the time of the exhibition. Finally, an analysis of Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's installation *El Niño Effect* (1997-1998) observes the inextricable relation between aesthetics and politics and the inseparability of solitary contemplation and social exchange in this piece.

The third section examines Buergel and Noack's curatorial approach. Their partnership combines his visual arts background with her interdisciplinary perspective, informed by feminist and film theory. *Things we don't understand* was an early collaboration; their common interests later developed in projects like *The Government* (2003-2005) and, more famously, when they

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[6] Buergel and Noack, *Things we don't understand,* 88.

[7] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016.

served as the directorial team of documenta 12 (2007).[8] Centred on the notion of 'the migration of forms', their version of documenta integrated works from different temporal and cultural contexts and included a significant proportion of both non-Western and women artists. On that occasion, the curators rejected a thematic structure and instead proposed three 'leitmotifs': 'modernity's fate and legacy', 'the biopolitical turn', and 'aesthetic education as a possible alternative to both commodity fetishism and the complacency of critical studies'. They made it clear that the exhibition was conceived as a stage in which 'art communicates itself and on its own terms'. An 'advisory council' formed of interested local people was involved in the show's conceptualisation.[9] The exhibition was criticised as over-aestheticised and depoliticised, particularly in relation to its predecessors, Catherine David's documenta X and Okwui Enwezor's documenta 11 (known for it postcolonial approach).[10] However, curator Anthony Spira's reading of documenta 12 highlighted its disruption of conventional educational hierarchies and thwarting of a consumerist experience of art. Spira notes the unavailability of textual information, the prioritisation of 'sensual immediacy over acquired knowledge', and the rejection of the white cube space. These are ideas that, as I will discuss, were already present in *Things we don't understand* and indicate the fundamental importance of this earlier exhibition to the evolution of Buergel and Noack's curatorial practice.[11]

Regarding the third section of this chapter, it is crucial to note the curators' consideration of the audience at every stage of the exhibition's development. The main historical precedents of both the curators' intention to activate the audience and the idea of the exhibition as a laboratory of meaning production are also taken into account. Buergel and Noack's proposition is contextualised

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[8] *The Government* series of exhibitions were centred in Michel Foucault's notion of 'government' understood as the indirect 'guidance' of people and its neoliberal form. In this case, the curators took the the idea of actions that restrict others' actions as a subject that also inspired the project's structure. Roger Buergel interview, *Revista* MACBA, Barcelona, June, 2004, http://www.macba.cat/uploads/20051209/buergel_eng.pdf (accessed December 6, 2016).

[9] Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel, "Some Afterthoughts on the Migration of Form," *Afterall* 18 (Summer 2008): 5. Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel, Preface to *Documenta 12* (exh cat), (Cologne: Taschen, 2007), 11-12. Also see documenta, "Retrospective," https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_12 (accessed December 7, 2016).

[10] Dieter Lesage, "The Next Documenta Shouldn't Be in Kassel," *E-flux* 1 (December 2008), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/01/68475/the-next-documenta-shouldn-t-be-in-kassel/ (accessed February 3, 2018).

[11] Anthony Spira, "Infancy, History and Rehabilitation at documenta 12," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7, no. 2 (August 2008): 228-230.

within the discussion of the social role of contemporary art and its relation to the public and is illuminated in relation to the views of Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop, and Grant Kester. Moving on, the fourth section is devoted to the mode of relationality the exhibition introduced. Following Buergel and Noack's reference to the work of Leo Bersani and Kaja Silverman, I explore the relevance of the theorists' ideas to the presentation of contemporary art. These include the correspondences they recognise between the viewer and the artwork, or their conception of *another* way of looking as an essential condition to relate to the Other. This section concludes with a reading of Nina Menkes' *The Bloody Child* (1996) through Silverman's concept of the 'productive look'.

The final section delves into the exhibition's educational proposition. Buergel and Noack's approach demonstrates that educational concerns are immanent to the curatorial process and provides the opportunity to explore the ambivalent relationship between aesthetic experience and self-education. While Noack disregards the contribution of Jacques Rancière to the concept of autonomy, the philosopher's polemic elaboration of the 'aesthetic regime' is key to my interpretation of the exhibition's educational proposition.[12] Lastly, building on Chapter Two, my analysis discerns the pedagogical principles at work in the exhibition, drawing from intra-active pedagogy, a feminist materialist approach, and Maxine Greene's educational philosophy.[13] My reading of the kind of learning that took place in the exhibition is centred on the ideas of permeability, interconnectivity between all agents of the exhibition space, and imagination. This analysis leads to an anti-hierarchical pedagogy that emphasises complexity and the flowing relation between gendered distinctions such as subject/object, discourse/materiality, and

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[12] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016. Rancière's conceptualisation of the 'aesthetic regime' constitutes a historiographical critique of the main theorisations of twentieth century art and their basis on the categories of modernism and postmodernism (as developed, for example, by Frederic Jameson, Arthur Danto, and Jean-François Lyotard). Rather than sharing the view that contemporary art has become indistinguishable from life, Rancière maintains a productive distinction between the two. See Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible,* trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 22-26; and Joseph J. Tanke, "What is the Aesthetic Regime?" *Parrhesia* 12 (2011): 71-81, http://parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia12/parrhesia12_tanke.pdf (accessed February 3, 2018).

[13] See Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

interpreting/feeling. I discuss Eleanor Antin's *The King of Solana Beach* (1974-1975), a piece shown in the exhibition, as an example of this kind of learning.

On not understanding

Within the environment of *Things we don't understand,* curatorial context did not offer any answers or grounding. The main architectural alteration to the exhibition space involved blocking off a central area (shaded in the plan below), in the curators' attempt to recreate artist Robert Smithson's idea of a cinema cavern.[14] Comparing the exhibition's installation plan with Smithson's sketch shows how this broke down the gallery's open space into smaller rooms [Figures 26 and 27]. It effectively diminished the authority of the space in favour of the works, the relations between them, and the visitors. The walls remained conventionally white (by contrast, the curators' later documenta is well known for their coloured walls), and the curatorial texts, displayed in see-through panels, were given less physical weight than usual.[15] The exhibition's title functioned as a key element to approach the works. It legitimated and even encouraged not understanding and ensured that the reactions of the visitors and ways of dealing with the lack of stable explanations of the works became the central subject. Although the exhibition maintained a white cube aesthetic, the curatorial framing of the works overturned the pretence that specialist knowledge is required to approach the works. It entrusted viewers with the responsibility for their learning and interpretation, questioned the need for fixed meaning, and actively investigated the value of uncertainty.

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[14] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016.
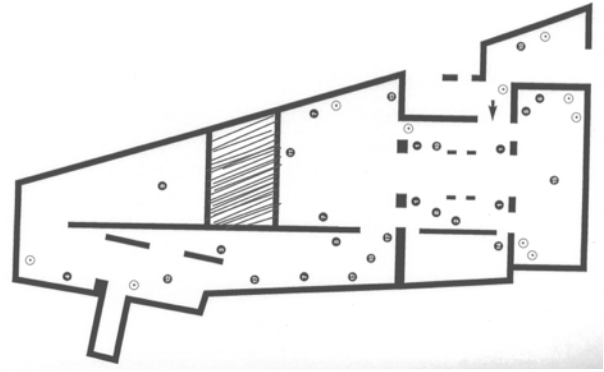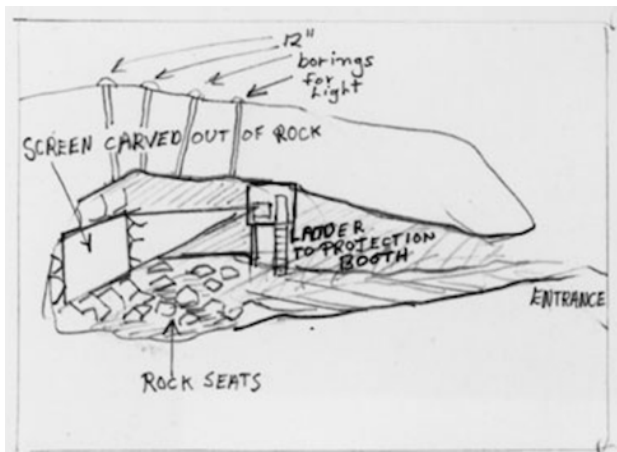
[15] Buergel and Noack, talk at ICA.

Figure 26. Robert Smithson, *Towards the Development of a "Cinema Cavern"* 1971. Pencil, photograph, tape, 39.68 x 32 cm (detail). Collection of the Estate of Robert Smithson. Figure 27. *Things we don't understand,* installation plan, Generali Foundation, 2000.

Entering the exhibition space, the audience encountered US conceptual artist Eleanor Antin's *Library Science* (1971) [Figure 28]. Antin invited fellow women artists to submit a 'piece of information' (an object or a document) that represented their identity. She organised these entries into a card catalogue following the Library of Congress classification system. The items documented include, for instance, a pair of slippers and a houseplant. In the context of the exhibition, Antin's work upends the idea of information, facts, and understanding and foregrounds our intimate relation with objects. The next piece, Antin's *Representational Painting* (1971) [Figure 29] also examines the subject of women artists and links the question of the production of meaning to that of the social role of art. In this case, visitors found an apparently very ordinary image: the video shows the artist applying makeup to her face. There is no artifice; she sits in her underwear close to the camera and without any particular expertise applies makeup while smoking a cigarette, for almost forty minutes. As an artwork, however, it provokes reflection on female beauty ideals. The work's title indicates an opposition to abstract painting. It compares paint with makeup, and the made-up face with representation, and implies that makeup is the female artist's painting, or that a made-up face is the only way for women to be looked at; as paintings. From this point, there were three routes available. Behind Antin's video, Nina Menkes' *The Crazy Bloody Female Center* (1999)*,* a CD-ROM for viewers to interact with excerpts from five of her films, offered a feminist reflection on different kinds of violence.

Figure 28. Eleanor Antin, *Library Science* (1971), 6 of 25 black-and-white photographs, mounted on cardboard, each 21 x 30.8 cm, with accompanying Library of Congress catalogue cards, each 7.6 x 12.7 cm.

Figure 29. Eleanor Antin, *Representational Painting* (1971). Video, black-and-white, silent, 38 min.

Turning left led to Alice Creischer's commissioned installation, *The Woman Painter's Studio. Real Allegory which Determines a Seven-Year Period in My Artistic Life in the Berlin Republic* (2000) [Figure 30]. There is a clear reference to Gustave Courbet's famous *L'atelier du peintre* (1855), a work that reflected on the position of the artist within society. Creischer's portrayal of her artistic life in Berlin during the 1990s follows Courbet's crowded composition, but is more brightly coloured and chaotic. She has also painted herself in the middle, sitting at a desk, earphones on, examining an illustration of Berlin's Siegessaüle (Victory Column). The magnifying glass she holds, however, shows a picture of the Vendôme Column. The comparison between the two refers both to Courbet's involvement in toppling the Vendôme Column as head of the Paris Commune and Creischer's own political commitment. The installation includes a print journal titled *L'ami du peuple* that is subtitled: "How can I be a friend of a people that votes for the populist right?" The first page announces an exhibition at an 'independent pavilion', once more alluding to Courbet's Pavilion of Realism, where he presented his work after it had been rejected by the Exposition Universelle jury.[16] Creischer's piece intimates that official art circuits might be too isolated from the rest of society. The accompanying publication consists of interviews the artist conducted with her friends around their understanding of Berlin's critical art scene. The installation offers an updated reflection on the relation between artistic, social, and political spheres. It contributes to the exhibition's problematisation of the notion of aesthetic autonomy in the present, implicitly posing the question: how should we conceive aesthetic autonomy in the neoliberal culture of self-reliance?

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[16] MACBA, "Collection," http://www.macba.cat/en/latelier-de-la-peintrice-allegorie-reelle-determinant-une-phase-de-sept-annees-de-ma-vie-artistique-dans-la-republique-de-berlin-2465 (accessed December 8, 2016). James H Rubin, *Courbet* (London: Phaidon, 1997), 135.

Figure 30. Alice Creischer, *L'atelier de la peintrice. Allégorie réelle déterminant une phase de sept années de ma vie artistique dans la République de Berlin*, 2000. Acrylic on PVC-film, 230 x 367 cm, spotlight.

Moving on (across Antin's *Library Science*), the exhibition presented Nina Menkes' *The Bloody Child* (1996) (a film that I discuss in the last section of this chapter), with works by Ines Doujak and Peter Friedl. Then, visitors continued to find Alejandra Riera's provocatively unreadable installation [Figure 31]. The complex group of photographs, text fragments, slide projections, and video are arranged on the wall, inviting the viewer to take a closer look and conduct almost detective work to find some relation between pieces. Schematic lines group the material, but offer no logical sequence. This material includes two similar images of a woman holding a girl in her lap, views of impoverished, unpaved streets, a girl putting together the shape, perhaps of a dog, with rubber bands and pins, colourful flowers and butterflies stickers, an old flower arrangement, and the detail of legs and shoes running in a field. A note points to December 15, 1985, the date on which the French Minister of Justice, Robert Badinter, introduced television into French prison cells. Another piece of text references the philosopher Jacques Rancière's interest in the historian Jules Michelet's role as mediator between the poor and their history. A question that resonates strongly with the overarching exhibition comes to mind: what is the relationship between quotidian experience and politics? The work's indecipherability draws attention to the visitor's own ways of looking, expectations, and attempts to interpret. Its resistance

to a definite reading places the viewer at the centre of the production of meaning; it indicates that the effort to understand will not necessarily result in a stable answer.
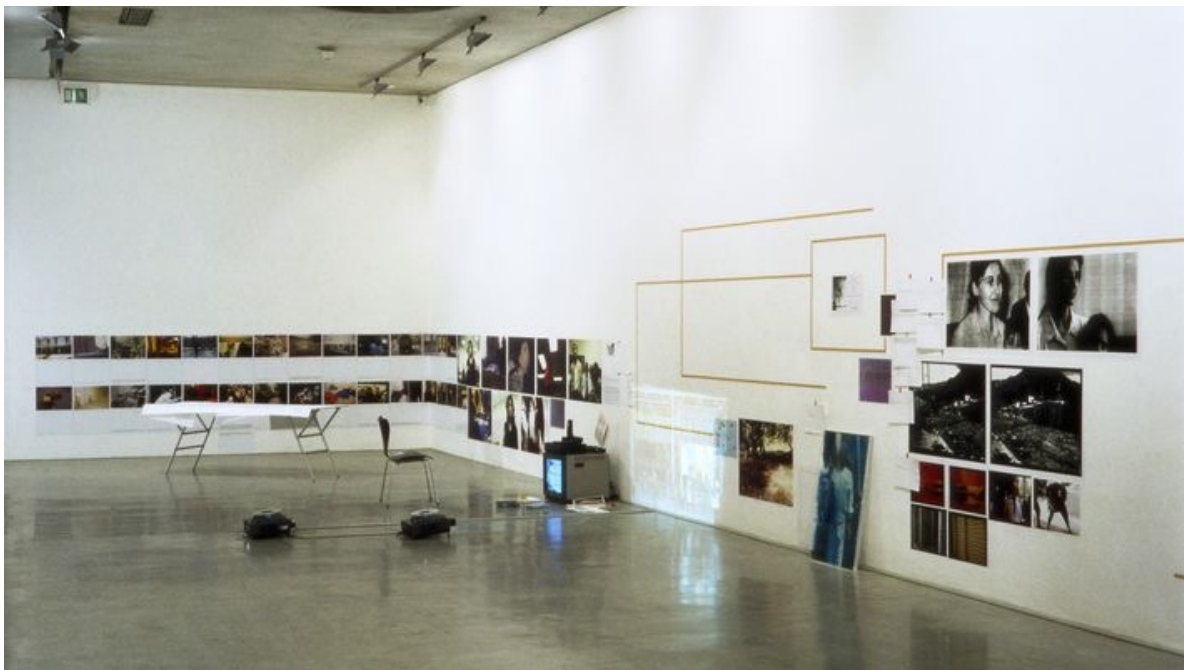

Figure 31. *Things we don't understand,* Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2000. Installation view, photo: Werner Kaligofsky

Next to Riera's installation, Antin's *100 Boots* (1971-1973) provides a contrasting experience [Figure 32]. Although in the exhibition the postal action of the work is lost, the set of photo-postcards show the adventures of 100 black rubber boots in a variety of locations — at the supermarket, at the bank, crossing the street, going to church, and facing the sea. In this case, the artist provides a clear, albeit still unusual, narrative. The boots become an animated character in the viewers' minds. We might consider the piece's creative process (the staging of the boots, the photographic documentation, the postcards' distribution through the mail), but the context of the exhibition draws our attention to the point of the encounter. It suggests that our imaginative response to the playful narrative might also prove productive in our interpretative efforts of other works.
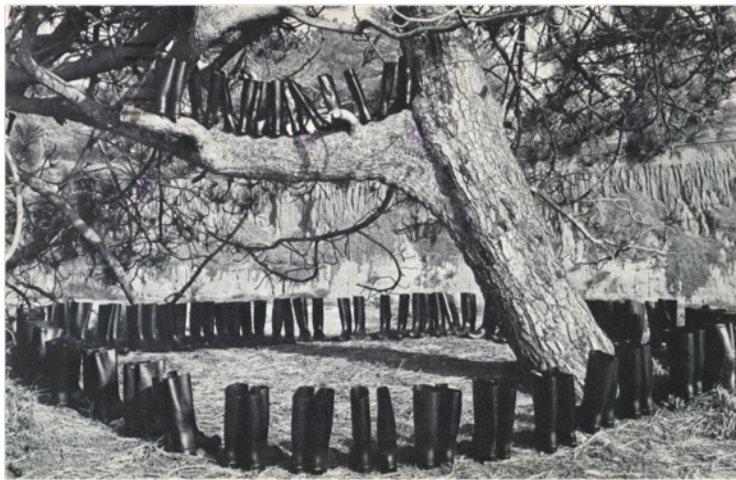
Figure 32. Eleanor Antin, top to bottom: *100 Boots at the Bank, 100 Boots in a Field,* and *100 Boots Enter the Museum,* from the series *100 Boots,* 1971-1973. Set of 51 photo-postcards, gelatin silver prints, 11.43 x 17.78 cm each.

Antin's set of postcards was followed by a scaled-down version of Iñigo Manglano-O'Valle's *El Niño Effect* (1997-1998) [Figure 33 and 34], a work to which I will return in the next section of this chapter. The original version invites visitors to shower and submerge themselves in the hermetically-sealed tanks of salted water to physically shut off the world and relax. Rather than the actual spa-like, sensory-deprivation experience documented in the work, visitors encountered photographs of pairs of people wrapped in towels in front of flotation tanks, an instruction panel, a pair of monitors showing moving clouds, and the relaxing sound of rain. Here, questions prove more productive than answers. What is it like to be submerged in the tanks and shut off from the world? What does it tell us about the encounter with art? How about going in and out of the tanks (and back into social interaction)? The only condition posed by the artist was that visitors took part in pairs, so that when one is isolated in a tank, one would know there is someone else going through it.[17] Not everything is as it seems, and the title gives a menacing clue: 'El Niño' is a fluctuation of sea temperature that can have catastrophic effects on the weather across the globe.[18] Visitors must have been familiar with the phenomenon after the event of 1997-1998 took hundreds of lives and brought the warmest year recorded at the time.[19] Considering this, the clouds in the monitors and the sound of rain appear threatening rather than soothing. One might notice the monitors are positioned as surveillance cameras. The work brings about considerations about the relation between the individual aesthetic experience and the state of the world at large, the comparability between the participants' experiences in the sensory deprivation tanks, and in this case, the Generali visitors' ability to relate to them and to each other.

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[17] J. Gibrán Villalobos, "In Search of a Well," interview with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, in *Well* (exh cat) (Santa Monica, California: Christopher Grimes Gallery, 2015), 79.

[18] "El Niño" is a fluctuation in sea surface temperature of the tropical Pacific Ocean occurring every few years. It impacts global weather and has caused destructive flooding and drought in the West Pacific and devastating brush fires in Australia. The El Niño of 1997-1998 was one of the strongest recorded. See: NOAA, U.S. Department of Commerce, "What are El Niño and La Niña?" http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/ninonina.html (accessed September 19, 2016); and Met Office, "What is El Niño?" http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/learning/learn-about-the-weather/what-is-el-nino-la-nina (accessed September 19, 2016).

[19] Christopher C. Burt, "The El Niño of 1997-1998," *Weather underground*, March 10, 2014, https://www.wunderground.com/blog/weatherhistorian/the-el-nino-of-19971998 (accessed December 8, 2016).

Figure 33. Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, *El Niño Effect,* 1997-98. Colour print, 152.4 x 101.6 cm.

After *El Niño Effect,* the curators displayed Antin's *The King of Solana Beach* (1974-75) [Figure 38], a work I will also examine in more detail in the last section of this chapter. It consists of a group of photographs that document the artist dressed up in drag as a king, walking around and talking with his subjects. Whereas Manglano-Ovalle's installation demonstrates a movement of retreat from the social into the aesthetic, Antin's shows a move in the opposite direction. In the first work, the visitor is invited into an isolating experience that is counterbalanced with indications of political content and the re-introduction of the social context. In the second, through the artist's imaginary exercise, she moves into the social sphere to directly interact with others. The character, however, maintains an aesthetic distance. In both cases, the tension between the aesthetic and the social persists: the visitor to Manglano-Ovalle's installation is pulled back and cannot retreat entirely; in Antin's performance, the participants' must engage with the make-believe story that is not likely to yield any concrete social change.

Finally, Harun Farocki's *I thought I was seeing convicts* (2000) video-installation shows footage from a prison's surveillance cameras. Scenes include a visit cut short by a guard after the inmate and his visitor embrace and guards' training sessions. In the central scene, a fight breaks out between two of the prisoners in the yard, and the others drop to the floor, hands on their heads.

After a warning round of rubber bullets, the fight continues, and then a final shot reveals that one of them is dead. In the next nine minutes, the other prisoners are cleared from the yard; functionaries enter and take the body away on a stretcher. The grainy, low-quality image contrasts with the gravity of the event. As in Antin's work, viewers can easily make sense of what happens, although the work's title recommends that the public reconsider what they have seen and understood. What difference does it make to consider these images in the context of an art exhibition? How do the artists make use of them? Farocki's use of two screens, for example, creates a distancing effect. Coming out of the projection room, visitors needed to retrace their steps to find the exit which presented the opportunity to look at the works again, as I discuss in the section on the mode of relationality. Through the selection of works and, more importantly, through the questions that stem from the difficulty of interpretation, the exhibition effectively investigated the specificity of art and its social relevance.

Redefining 'aesthetic autonomy'

The curators conceived *Things we don't understand* as a way of rethinking the notion of autonomy and the problem of the place of art in society. In particular, they sought to distance themselves from the US critic Clement Greenberg's infamous self-referential autonomy of late modernist work.[20] In discussing these main concerns, Noack refers to the writings of Theodor Adorno and Juliane Rebentisch.[21] In his *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Adorno underlines art's dual character: 'its autonomy and *fait social*' are both interdependent in conflict with each other.[22] For him, art's relation to society is antithetical.[23] Art is social as the product of social labour and in the social source of its content, but most of all, Adorno argues: 'by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art'. Art's critical relevance depends, then, on the demarcation of its own

[20] Buergel and Noack, "Things we don't understand," 87. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review* 6 (Fall 1939): 36-37.

[21] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016.

[22] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (1970; repr., London: Continuum, 2002), 229.

[23] Adorno, 7-8.

sphere of activity and refusal to be 'socially useful'.[24] Adorno argues that the relation between art

and social change depends on the difference between art and the world. He asserts that 'the idea

of a conservative artwork is inherently absurd. By emphatically separating themselves from the

empirical world, their other, they bear witness that that world itself should be other than it is; they

are the unconscious schemata of that world's transformation'.[25] As elucidated by Rancière, the

social function of art for Adorno is, paradoxically, its lack of a function, and it rests on art's

preservation of its 'purity' that is nonetheless internally contradictory.[26] The curators started, then,

from an Adornian conception of autonomy that sees it as essential to the social function of art and

as carrying a utopian promise. The works in the exhibition can be seen to both deal with social and

political issues and, at the same time, retain aesthetic autonomy in a protective way. For the

purposes of this chapter, it is important to note that the curatorial conceptualisation connected the

problem of the social role of art with the problem of the interpretation of art. That is, the exhibition

established a parallel between the perceived distance separating the viewer from the artwork and

that of art's distinction from life. This distance that could have been considered as an inability to

understand is indispensable to art's transformative value in this exhibition's experimental

proposition.

The project's focus on the aesthetic experience borrows from the thinking of Berlin-based

philosopher Juliane Rebentisch. She considers Adorno's conceptualisation of autonomy as

inadequate for anti-objectivist artistic practice from the 1970s onwards and proposes rethinking the

modernist paradigm, instead grounding the notion of autonomy in a theory of experience.[27] She

suggests that her conception can be helpful in observing contemporary artistic practice's 'boundary

crossings' between art, life, and politics.[28] Even more relevant to the exhibition is Rebentisch's

characterisation of the aesthetic experience by its 'indefiniteness', by the 'insolubility of the enigma

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[24] Adorno, 225-226.

[25] Adorno, 177.

[26] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents,* trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 40-41.

[27] Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art,* ed. Leah Whitman-Salkin, trans. Daniel Hendrickson with Gerrit Jackson (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 138-139.

[28] Rebentisch, 13.

of art'. This is the essence of her conception of autonomy: she describes a tensive relation between the artwork's representational potential and its materiality that is mirrored in the tension between the viewer's seeing and imagining.[29] Likewise, Buergel and Noack centre their investigation of art's social role on the aesthetic experience and explore the productivity of the difficulty of the encounter with art. My analysis will focus on the ways that the exhibition structured the meeting between art and its public. Having discussed in Chapter Two a mediation strategy that failed to sustain the works' border-crossings and instability of meaning, in this case, the curatorial proposition concentrates on those precise principles.

The curators started from the idea that things we do not understand do not necessarily lead to a standstill, but are essential to conceive and realise social change. In this respect, the use of 'things' in the exhibition's title and overall conceptualisation is highly significant. In a 2001 essay, US literary critic Bill Brown draws attention to the 'specific unspecificity' of the term 'things' and to the word's ambiguity, its indication of both extensiveness and peculiarity.[30] It can refer to a search for concreteness, but it mostly registers 'a certain limit or liminality (it tends to) hover over the threshold between the nameable and unnamable, the figural and unfigurable, the identifiable and unidentifiable'.[31] Brown suggests the more interesting questions about 'things' concern not what they are, but what they do. That is, he urges us to consider them in relation to the subject rather than as isolated objects (in this case, we should think about their part in the configuration of the exhibition as a whole). He refers to the demands things make on the subject to think about and act upon, their role, for instance, in the subject's recognition of otherness.[32] Buergel and Noack also played with the term's ambivalence: 'things' can be tangible and available, but in this case we do not understand them, so they escape us. I contend that the curators invested in the artworks' agency and their effects on the viewer. My analysis aims to demonstrate the exhibition's boundary-crossings, to begin with, between the readable and unreadable. The curators started from the

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[29] Rebentisch, 130, 140, 144.

[30] Bill Brown, ed., "Thing Theory," in "Things," special issue, *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1, (Autumn 2001): 3-4.

[31] Brown, 5.

[32] Brown, 7, 9, 12.

feeling of 'irritation people experience when confronted with the indeterminacy of the aesthetic object […] towards gaining tolerance in the face of the unfamiliar and taking control of the meaning-making process that calls itself an exhibition'.[33] Noack expounded on the unpredictability of their strategy: 'irritation can lead to failure of communication, but it can also enable a viewer to take responsibility of the situation'.[34] They proposed an investigation of art's social relevance through the works' movement towards and away from the viewer, their call for and resistance to interpretation. This curatorial contextualisation presents the risk of further alienating the public. However, it also provides an exceptional opportunity to observe the reconfiguration of educational relations in the exhibition space throughout the curatorial development of the project.

In an article that comments on the exhibition and more broadly presents the case against information and understanding in the framing of art, curator Anthony Huberman argues for the need to create space for the viewer's experience. In his opinion, the uncertainty provoked by the distance of art from life sparks curiosity and imaginative thinking, ultimately leading to an alteration in the viewer's mindset. He asserts that challenging the idea of understanding art is a matter of 'pedagogical and political urgency'.[35] The exhibition explores, then, how the encounter with defamiliarised aesthetic objects affects and changes the viewer. My analysis of the exhibition expounds on the pedagogical relations set up. While Buergel and Noack did not elaborate their work in this way, I will argue that their conceptualisation, work selection, and particular understanding of exhibition making and the audience, as well as the mediation and display strategies employed, put forward the experience of art as a form of self-education. This idea is latent in the exhibition, but has not yet been fully elaborated. My investigation presents *Things we don't understand* as an important case study in the re-examination of the educational conventions

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[33] Ruth Noack, ed., "A small number of useful contributions towards building an argument about the role of museums in a migratory society that takes into account artistic practices, collections, exhibition- and audience-making," in *Agency, Ambivalence, Analysis: Approaching the Museum with Migration in Mind* (Milan: Mela Books, 2013), 11.

[34] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016.

[35] Anthony Huberman, "I (not love) Information," *Afterall* 16 (Autumn - Winter 2007), http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.16/i.not.love.information (accessed July 13, 2017).

of the exhibition of contemporary art, mainly, in its defiance of the commonly held belief that visitors need help to approach and understand the works.

The curators ensured that every aspect of the exhibition contributed to their experimental proposition. Matters of display, the division of gallery space, and the textual accompaniment all worked in that direction. A key question the project posed was: 'What role does the shape of the exhibition itself play in the production of meaning?' Buergel and Noack refer to the physical and narrative context that connects the works.[36] The curatorial text was displayed in visually lightweight, see-through Plexiglas panels; it was 'whimsical and poetical' and not immediately understandable.[37] The idea was for it to function in a comparable way to the other images on display, using 'visual' words to link the works and create context.[38] Noack expounds that the text did not function as an explanation of the works or as a 'voice of God'; instead, they intended to incorporate their narrative as one 'voice amongst many'.[39] Buergel has also expanded on his interest in challenging display conventions. In an article on the legacy of Brazilian architect Lina Bo Bardi, he points to the 'formal stagnation' of contemporary exhibition design and the need to oppose 'the populist inclinations of Western art institutions'. He calls for a 'self-perforation' and 'undoing' of institutional space and draws from Bo Bardi's insistence on 'radical inclusiveness' and her investigation of the 'psychic texture of objects'.[40] Buergel and Noack employ a self-reflective approach that involves constantly rethinking how various aspects of the exhibition come together without ever losing sight of the visitors. They describe the challenge as: 'creating new kinds of imagination […] (generating) a theory that combines the practices of imagination, production, presentation and observation'.[41] *Things we don't understand* demonstrates that every curatorial

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[36] Buergel and Noack, "Things we don't understand," 88.

[37] Buergel and Noack, talk at ICA.

[38] Buergel and Noack, talk at ICA.

[39] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016.

[40] Roger M. Buergel, "'This Exhibition Is an Accusation': The Grammar of Display According to Lina Bo Bardi," *Afterall* 26 (Spring 2011), http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.26/this-exhibition-is-an-accusation-the-grammar-of-display-according-to-lina-bo-bardi1 (accessed July 14, 2017).

[41] Buergel and Noack, "Things we don't understand," 89.

decision affects the kind of relation proposed towards the exhibition's public and their encounter with the works, as well as the kind of learning that takes place in the gallery.

Although Buergel and Noack did not develop the project in response to the immediate political situation, it is crucial to consider the context in which the exhibition inadvertently took place. The curators (both German) have discussed the strangeness of a moment of 'shock' provoked by the election of a radical right-wing party in Austria that, all the same, maintained support for art initiatives.[42] In the national elections of the autumn of 1999, the far-right 'Freedom Party' FPÖ unexpectedly won twenty-seven per cent of the vote, becoming the second strongest party in Austria. It formed a coalition with the Christian Democratic Austrian People's Party ÖVP and entered government at the start of 2000, facing strong international and domestic opposition, including sanctions from the EU and resistance from the cultural sector.[43] The exhibition's examination of the intersection between art and society became all the more relevant against this background, raising the question of the relevance of the aesthetic experience under this fraught situation.

Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle's *El Niño Effect* (1997-1998) [Figures 33 and 34] works at the border between the aesthetic and political spheres. The installation conceals meaning; for example, the images of clouds shown in the monitors were taken at the Mexican-American border city of Nogales, Arizona, and the soundtrack was produced by digitally manipulating the sound of gunshots. The artist details:

> The shot is of these beautiful clouds in a state of "shearing", which means they are
> moving contrary to each other at different elevations, so there are crossing the border
> both, from north to south, and south to north… These clouds are nomadic bodies free
> of political boundaries. They become a metaphor for freedom, in that they represent the
> incapability of political or national boundaries to stop large climatic movements, or
> social ones such as immigration.[44]

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[42] Buergel and Noack, talk at ICA.

[43] Franz Fallend, "Are right-wing populism and government participation incompatible? The case of the freedom party of Austria," *Representation* 40, no. 2 (2004): 115.

[44] Valerie Palmer, "In Ordinary Time: Interview with Iñigo Manglano Ovalle," *New Art Examiner* (January-February 2002): 34. Cited in Claire Barliant, "Hold Yourself in Mid Air," in *Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Blinking Out of Existence,* ed. Kris Douglas, (Rochester MN: Rochester Art Center, 2006), 10.

When asked about his interest in meteorology, the artist refers instead to his concern for 'politics of migration, of globalisation, of movement'.[45] As Claire Barliant notes, the cloud motif is Manglano-Ovalle's means of dealing with 'politics of xenophobia', to address and challenge the 'legitimacy and limitations of boundaries'.[46] Manglano-Ovalle has also described the encounter he desires for the viewer of his work. He seeks to pose a question for viewers to grapple with, asking them to start from the known and then 'break it apart'.[47] The work defies expectations, operating within and expanding the limits between form and content and perception and knowledge. In the context of the exhibition, the subject of migration can be related to the idea of learning as a movement across boundaries, of breaking through the barriers that make up a given mindset (as explored in Chapter Two) and being able to empathise with other ways of thinking.

Figure 34. Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, *El Niño Effect,* 1997-98. Installation detail.

Reflecting on the experience Manglano-Ovalle's installation presents, Lynne Cooke describes it as ambiguous and exceptional, a real *and* unreal situation. She argues that the work disrupts conventional, solitary aesthetic contemplation: it is 'functional, instrumental, collective and

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[45] Yasmil Raymond in Conversation with Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle,"The Perfect Imperfect," in *Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle: Blinking*, 57.

[46] Barliant, 10.

[47] Raymond, 61-62.

performative' and it moves back and forth between the individual's isolation and social reciprocity. Cooke suggests that the work addresses 'the instabilty and permeability of borders, whether those of skin, of private space, or of the nation state […] the artificial bifurcation between public and private, individual and collective is highlighted as Manglano-Ovalle repositions the solitary observer of the hermetic artefact in the public arena in which communication takes place and in the social matrix through which meaning is constructed'.[48] The installation confronts the notion of a pure aesthetic realm. It performs the exhibition's overarching trajectory, which moves from the aesthetic field towards the social and the political. In Rancièrian terms, this involves the shifting between autonomy and heteronomy, or, as described by Cooke, a real and unreal situation. The disoriented viewer stands in the middle, at the point of the construction of meaning. The idea of penetrability, of blurring the limits, is key to the understanding of education put forward by the exhibition, as I discuss later.

The audience as a central 'agent' of the exhibition

Buergel and Noack's work contrasts with exhibitions that present a worked out idea or conclusive research findings, as elaborated, for example, in relation to Franke's exhibition in Chapter Two. They discuss their approach in terms of production, rather than representation or illustration. For them, the exhibition is a medium, and the artworks are partners in 'figuring something out'.[49] Not satisfied with the idea of the exhibition as opening the space for unknown possibilities to come about, they think of it instead as a 'form of action'. This action can be understood as 'an act of communication' (not necessarily an 'unambiguous and linear' one). They compare it to the philosopher Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'gesture': a 'sphere of action' that is not 'acting', 'producing', or 'making'; instead, it refers to something 'being endured or supported'.[50] The gesture rejects the demarcation between means and ends; it concerns 'pure and endless mediality'. In

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[48] Lynne Cooke, "Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle," in *Dreaming Red: Creating Artpace,* ed. Diana Murphy (San Antonio: Art Pace, 2003).

[49] Buergel and Noack, talk at ICA.

[50] Ruth Noack and Roger M. Buergel, "Words from an Exhibition," *Oncurating* 9 (2007): 29, 30, http://oncurating-journal.de/index.php/issue-9.html#.V4zFF5MrKgQ (accessed July 18, 2016).

other words, it is 'purposiveness without purpose'. Agamben defines it as 'the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such'.[51] Buergel and Noack adhere, then, to an experimental process that involves unresolved questions and unforeseen results. In this case, they focus on the indecipherability of art and how it might change the visitors. What matters is not reaching a definite answer, but the exhibition's enactment of the question.

Their view concentrates on the relations between the exhibition's agents: artists, viewers, curators, and artworks. Noack insists that she starts from the idea that 'an artwork cannot be known'. Rather than using works to make a statement or build an argument, her interest is in the questions generated by the relations between works and where these might lead the viewers.[52] Buergel suggests that a good exhibition provokes, responds to, and is informed by a 'crisis'. He refers to a breaking point: a process of disconnection and reconnection that involves an opening up of the audience to what might be foreign to them. A good exhibition, he contends, must do away with individuality and, instead, put forth a space of 'non-identitarian association'. Here, he seems to borrow from Adorno's view that the aesthetic assists the 'nonidentical' that is otherwise repressed by reality's obsession with identity.[53] The curators consider the audience as an integral element of the exhibition. They seek to bring together an analysis of the state of the world, an engagement with immediate surroundings, formulations of utopia, a theory of aesthetics, and the intention to provide some means of political agency.[54] The idea of permeability resurfaces; Buergel and Noack propose that an exhibition depends on it. The exhibition comes together through the correspondences between its elements and demands penetrability from the works and, most

[51] Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture," in *Means without End: Notes on Politics,* ed. Sandra Buckley, Michael Hardt and Brian Massumi, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 56-59.

[52] Manoel Silvestre Friques and Renan Laru-an, "Curators Must Stay Different," interview with Ruth Noack, *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain,* December 3, 2015, https://www.onlineopen.org/download.php?id=500 (accessed July 18, 2016).

[53] Roger M. Buergel, "Notes on Display, and a Work by Alejandra Riera," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 9, no. 2 (2010): 103, 121. Adorno, 4.

[54] Ruth Noack, "'Artist as Curator' Symposium: 'Curator as Artist?'" *Afterall,* January 28, 2013, http://afterall.org/online/artist-as-curator-symposium-curator-as-artist-by-ruth-noack/#.VTZBm4vyf94&gt (accessed July 18, 2016).

remarkably, from its audience.[55] The learning process is posited as a breakthrough that starts from visitors themselves, rather than the acquisition of knowledge.

Before looking at their approach in more detail, it is helpful to consider some historical precedents. The centrality of the audience and the ambition to activate spectators have been crucial issues in the history of art and exhibition making in the twentieth century. In her historical study of participatory art, Claire Bishop notes that 'the hallmark of an artistic orientation towards the social in the 1990s has been a shared set of desires to overturn the traditional relationship between the art object, the artist and the audience. […] The audience, previously conceived as a "viewer" or "beholder", is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant'.* In her view, this movement has sought to contest 'conventional modes of artistic production and consumption under capitalism'.[56] Bishop identifies two main historical antecedents, both characterised by an idealistic re-conception of the relation between art and the social and political spheres: 'the historic avant-garde in Europe circa 1916, and the so-called 'neo' avant-garde leading to 1968'.[57] Her analysis of the Situationist International's environments in the 1950s and 60s is particularly relevant to this case study. Bishop examines them as important precursors of the awareness of the political implications of perception and of the idea of 'empowering the viewer to rely on his or her own sensory faculties and interpretation'.[58] There is a similarly subversive, idealistic attitude in Buergel and Noack's project; what stands out about their practice, however, is that more than activating the viewer, the exhibition invalidates —I argue, in Rancièrian fashion— the opposition between active and passive spectatorship.

Also pertinent is Bishop's attention to Latin American conceptual art, specifically Luis Camnitzer's recognition of the historical coincidence around 1968 of institutional critique and self-reflective education, and the movement 'away from authoritarian models of transferring knowledge and towards the goal of empowerment through collective (class) awareness'.[59] In her anthology on

[55] Noack and Buergel, "Words from an Exhibition," 31.

[56] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 2.

[57] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 3.

[58] Bishop, *Artificial Hells,* 90.

[59] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 243.

the topic, Bishop has discerned the main positions on the debate regarding participation: the understanding of participation as, on the one hand, provocation, and on the other, as collaboration. In other words, she argues that participation is considered either 'disruptive' or 'ameliorative', but is always linked to a political stance.[60] Bishop's writing concentrates on evaluating the quality of the social relations generated by participatory works and prioritises the staging of conflictual relations. Buergel and Noack's approach to the exhibition arguably stands on the 'disruptive' side with Bishop. However, they retreated from the notion of participation seen as immersion or interaction. Their reconfiguration of the aesthetic as inseparable from the social and political fields is centred instead around the problem of interpretation.

Buergel and Noack's standpoint can be traced back to the 1960s and 1970s and the emergence of the idea of the independent curator in Europe and the US during this period. Irene Calderoni characterises this period in exhibition making by its response to less object- and more process-oriented work and the 'emergence of an awareness of the centrality of the presentation of the artwork'. Calderoni observes that exhibitions came to be seen as sites of experimentation and production of meaning.[61] She also notes a resistance to the white-cube aesthetic —famously characterised by Brian O'Doherty as 'exclusive', 'expensive', and 'difficult'— and instead, a turn towards the 'deconstruction' and violent 'intervention' in the space that generates the idea of the exhibition as 'laboratory'.[62] She presents as an example Marcia Tucker's reflections on *Anti-Illusion* at the New Museum in New York, a show that the US curator co-organised in 1968, showing how Tucker distinguished between a 'didactic' and an 'informative' approach. The first refers to the

[60] Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation (Documents of Contemporary Art),* (London: Whitechapel, 2006), 11. Also see Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz CA: Museum 2.0, 2010), and Markus Miessen, *The Nightmare of Participation (Crossbench Praxis as a Mode of Criticality)* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 244-251. Simon offers a number of techniques and case studies to encourage visitors' participation. She is mainly interested in transferring online social interaction into the physical space of the museum. A clear limitation of her study is her strict alignment with institutional values which need to be questioned and contested in relation to visitors' experience, as this thesis investigates. Miessen interrogates the 'uncritical, innocent, and romantic' notion of participation, its role in the neoliberal project, and the power relations it organises. His study puts forward the re-politicising model of 'conflictual participation' based on the figure of an outsider, 'crossbench practitioner', conceived as co-author rather than participant.

[61] Irene Calderoni, "Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties," in *Curating Subjects,* ed. Paul O'Neill (Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007), 64-65.

[62] Calderoni, 69-70. O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 76.

presentation of specialist knowledge, and the second to a way of learning something without a

predefined outcome.[63]

Lucy R. Lippard's curatorial practice during this period provides another relevant example

that precedes Buergel and Noack's examination of the intersection between artistic and political

spheres as well as their interest in undetermined interpretation.[64] As developed in her Number

Shows, a series of conceptual art exhibitions titled after the populations of each of the cities in

which they were presented (Seattle, Vancouver, Buenos Aires, and Valencia, California), Lippard's

curatorial stance opposed, in her own words, 'the connoisseurship that is conventionally

understood to be at the heart of curating. I have always preferred the inclusive to the exclusive,

and both conceptual art and feminism satisfied an ongoing desire for the open-ended'.

Furthermore, this rejection of expertise was founded in Lippard's generation's defiance of

Greenbergian aesthetics, which, as we have seen, was also key to Buergel and Noack's

conceptualisation.[65] Read by Cornelia Butler as a form of self-reflective curatorial 'deskilling', the

Numbers Shows were pivotal to the development of the experimental, project-based exhibition

format and the idea of interchangeable roles between curator, artists, and visitors. These projects

also introduced the use of the title as a strategy to upset exhibition making conventions and set

forth an inclusive conception of the audience, a pronounced interest in accessibility and in active,

responsible spectatorship.[66] It is clear that Buergel and Noack share Lippard's interest to show 'art

intended as pure experience'; as Butler observes, the Number Shows advanced the proposition of

'a destabilised open-ended curatorial thesis, to remain in flux in the experience of the exhibition

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[63] Marcia Tucker, "Anti Illusion, 1968," March 3, 2005, www.marciatucker.com/excerpts.html#november, cited in Calderoni, 70-71.

[64] Sabeth Buchmann, "Introduction: From Conceptualism to Feminism," in *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969-74* (London: Afterall, 2012), 8.

[65] Lucy R. Lippard, "Curating by Numbers," *Tate Papers* 12 (Autumn 2009), http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers (accessed February 1, 2018). *557,087* (Seattle, 1969) included works by Carl Andre, Mel Bochner, Barry Flanagan, Eva Hesse, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Adrian Piper, Liliana Porter, Robert Morris, and Robert Ryman, among others.

[66] Cornelia Butler, "Women - Concept - Art," in *From Conceptualism to Feminism,* 24, 25. Buchmann, 10.

itself'.[67] As we will see in the following sections, this approach to curating is informed by a feminist ethos.

The curators challenged the audience by entrusting them with the interpretation of the works. Even though it was planned with the Generali Foundation's art-informed public in mind, *Things we don't understand* was surprisingly popular. Noack explains that the questionnaires collected revealed that a wide audience identified with the exhibition's title, which activated their encounter with the works.[68] Since then, the curators have argued against a predetermined notion of the public and for the need of 'calling forth' or 'invocating and producing' an audience as an essential task of curating.[69] They maintain that an audience is constituted through mediation pathways that destabilise the norms of experiencing art. Noack refers, for instance, to presenting more than one work per artist as a way of assisting the viewer in making connections.[70] They rely on the public's ability to educate itself to settle the 'crisis' set up by the exhibition.[71] It is crucial to distinguish their rhetoric from the neoliberal ideal of the entrepreneurial, self-reliant subject. While the neoliberal notion stands for the commercialisation of culture and education and the promotion of competition, adaptability, and precariousness, the curators put forth the values of equality, participation, criticality, and reflexivity, encouraging a sense of agency.[72] The central idea, as Noack puts it, is bringing together conflicting terms: art's autonomy and an emancipated audience.[73] This amounts to a significant proposition: the emancipated audience is not an assumption or an aspiration, the form of the exhibition must generate it.

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[67] Lucy R. Lippard, "Introduction to 557,087," reprinted in Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History: 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013), 120. Butler, 46.

[68] Buergel and Noack, talk at ICA.

[69] Noack and Buergel, "Words from an Exhibition," 30.

[70] Ruth Noack, "Exhibition Histories Talks," *Afterall,* December 12, 2013, http://www.afterall.org/online/exhibition-histories-talk_ruth-noack#.V44fK5MrKgR (accessed July 19, 2016).

[71] Buergel and Noack, talk at ICA.

[72] See Michael Peters, "Education, Enterprise Culture and the Entrepreneurial Self: A Foucauldian Perspective," *Journal of Educational Enquiry* 2, no. 2 (2001): 58-61, 63, 66, https://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/EDEQ/article/view/558 (accessed July 19, 2016).

[73] Noack, "Curators Must Stay Different," 7.

The audience is regarded, then, as a central 'agent' of the exhibition, essential to the curatorial proposition. Noack expounds:

> To perceive of audience in curatorial terms changes exhibition-making in a radical way. It influences not only the programming *after* the show, but enters the creative process itself, the choice of artworks and of display, the duration and timing of the show, and the exhibition space as one that is experienced, inhabited *and used* by people — in sum, all core subjects of curating are affected. To follow through on this is difficult for exhibition makers to do, as it goes against all received knowledge and training.[74]

The general rule, persistent at most institutions in Europe and the US, maintains the traditional hierarchical division between curatorial and education departments. It sustains that curators are responsible for the development of expert knowledge that is then made available to the public by the educators. Buergel and Noack question this logic and propose mediation as a middle ground. Buergel holds that seeing mediation as 'a service for unenlightened savages to which institutions eagerly "reach out"' only maintains cultural illiteracy. He argues that mediation needs to deal with the space between the 'cultural repertoire' that informs subjective experience and the individual interpretation process. The social role of art lies, in his view, at the intersection of 'subjectivities and objecthood'. He insists on addressing audiences as 'partners' rather than 'infants' or 'consumers'.[75] In *Things we don't understand,* this is reflected in the visitors' part as co-producers of meaning. For Noack, the main purpose of mediation is to raise awareness of the exhibition's particular context and the forms of interaction that it encourages and discourages. Then, the audience can start to 'negotiate' their position.[76] Their view of mediation radically differs from the conventional understanding of the need to address the gap in understanding between works and visitors. I suggest that Buergel and Noack's emphasis on the centrality of the audience entails reclaiming education as a fundamental concern of curatorial practice. In this sense (as I explain in the last sections of this chapter and also in relation to my other case studies), I put forward the potential

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[74] Noack, "A small number," 14.

[75] Buergel, "This Exhibition Is an Accusation".

[76] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016. My paraphrasis.

contribution of pedagogical theory in informing the relation that curators propose towards their audience.

This educational preoccupation partly corresponds with the influence of new institutionalism, the self-reflexive approach of the independent curators appointed as directors of small and medium institutions in north-central European social democracies at the end of the 1990s. Curator Alex Farquharson has recognised this trend as the curatorial assimilation of the 1970s and 1990s artistic institutional critique. He considers its 'critical and experimental' spirit, interest in education, and 'move away from a consumption based model' as a counterbalancing response to the dominant neoliberal ideology, the diminishing of the welfare state, and the increasing privatisation of public space.[77] But while new institutionalism is primarily associated with the notion of 'Relational Aesthetics' and artistic regeneration of social relations, Buergel and Noack prioritised the investigation of the aesthetic experience: the actual encounter with the artwork.

The exhibition took place during a moment marked by the concern of redefining art's social role, especially regarding the relationship to the public. Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), translated into English in 2002, was particularly influential. He characterised artistic practice of the 1990s by its social experimentation, viewer interactivity, and its attempts to create modest, micro-utopian connections.[78] Bourriaud put forth an understanding of art as an 'angelic programme' aimed at restoring the social bond and not just envisioning, but enacting, change. 'Relational art' departed from aesthetic concerns and focused on human interactions and the invention of forms of inter-subjectivity and ways of being together.[79] It regarded its public as a 'neighbour', 'direct interlocutor', 'associate', 'guest', 'co-producer', or 'protagonist' and saw the construction of meaning as a collective process. Art's role was seen as the invention of relations between subjects that would potentially extend towards the world. The exhibition was considered a privileged site, allegedly free from the alienating and commodifying structures that dominate the

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[77] Farquharson, "Bureaux de change".

[78] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002), 2-3.

[79] Bourriaud, 4, 5, 16.

rest of experience: an ideal space for social experimentation.[80] This model mostly forgoes

aesthetic preoccupations in favour of immediate, unambitious, idealised gatherings.

Bishop based her well-known critical response to relational aesthetics on Ernesto Laclau

and Chantal Mouffe's elaboration of 'antagonism'. She put forward a conception of democracy that

'sustains' rather than negates conflict. This view disputes the idea of a coherent, unified

subjectivity, and presents it instead as 'decentered and incomplete'.[81] In contrast to Bourriaud,

Bishop favours the work of artists like Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra, who emphasise

awkward and uncomfortable encounters by incorporating contributors from various socio-

economical backgrounds. At the same time, Bishop argues, they maintain certain aesthetic

autonomy, therefore recognising the complex interaction between the social and the aesthetic and

upholding the viewer's independent thinking.[82] In this sense, Buergel and Noack's view is closer to

hers; however, they concentrate on the singularity of the aesthetic, particularly in relation to

perceptual and cognitive processes.

An opposing view is offered by Grant Kester's challenge to the idea that art offers a form of

'therapeutic disruption' through its critical distance from social reality and its lack of 'tactical

relevance'.[83] He favours artistic practice centred on forms of collective interaction, concerned with

'the generation of insight through durational interaction rather than rupture'.[84] Kester puts forth a

relation of 'reciprocal elucidation' between artistic and other spheres, stressing the 'productivity' of

zones of contact and overlap. In opposition to the notion of individual agency, he presents the idea

of 'fluid and transpositional' agency, brought about through creative action.[85] The kind of projects

he is interested in still require, from his perspective, self-reflective distance from quotidian

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[80] Bourriaud, 9, 16, 26.

[81] Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 65-66. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Beyond the Positivity of the Social: Antagonisms and Hegemony," in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics,* trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack, (London: Verso, 1985), 93-148.

[82] Bishop, "Antagonism," 70, 77-78.

[83] Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 21, 22, 59.

[84] Kester, 24, 65.

[85] Kester, 36-37.

experience to be understood as art. The difference that this distinction makes remains unclear, however, as he describes it in the strikingly vague terms of 'openness' and 'creativity'.[86] *Things we don't understand* presents, then, an early example of the preoccupation with establishing the social relevance of art and its critical value in relation to the public. It constitutes an important case study as an investigation of these issues through the exhibition form.

The social role of art remains a contested issue to this day. Jen Harvie, for instance, has studied the complicity of London's artistic scene between the late 1990s and 2000s with neoliberal capitalism. Her research observes artistic submission to principles of individuality, entrepreneurship ,and precariousness, but, at the same time, it identifies resistant and critical capacities in the work of artists like Jeremy Deller, Grayson Perry, Rachel Whiteread, and Steve McQueen.[87] On her part, Shannon Jackson's recent study challenges the strict either/or choice between social intervention and aesthetic complexity. Her approach attempts to disrupt the binary opposition between consensus and dissensus, usefulness and uselessness, and accessibility and difficulty. She argues instead for recognising the 'interdependence' between social and aesthetic fields.[88] *Things we don't understand* focused on the audience's aesthetic experience to address this question. Having discussed the exhibition's conceptualisation and work selection, as well as Buergel and Noack's particular approach to curating, we now move onto the next section, which examines the introduction of a particular mode of relationality that is influenced by the writings of Leo Bersani and Kaja Silverman.[89] I investigate the relevance of this model as an alternative to that of the specialist transmission of knowledge to the public, as well as the rare insight it provides into the unconscious processes that the encounter with art involves.

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[86] Kester, 28.

[87] Jen Harvie, *Fair Play.*

[88] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2011), 45, 73, 74.

[89] See Jorge Ribalta interview with Roger M. Buergel, "How do we want to be governed?" MACBA, Barcelona, June 2004, http://www.macba.es/global/exposiciones/docs/cvsg/buergel_ribalta_eng.pdf (accessed July 25, 2016) and Roger M. Buergel and Valerie Connor, "Roger M. Buergel: Correspondences," *Circa* 113 (Autumn 2005): 44.

Looking in and out

Things we don't understand introduced a distinctive mode of relationality informed by Bersani and

Silverman. We will see that this mode differs from the restorative, disruptive, and collaborative

relations put forward by Bourriaud, Bishop, and Kester, respectively, and instead establishes an

interconnection between the aesthetic object and the viewer. In this section, I investigate the

relevance of this model to the presentation of contemporary art. Drawing from psychoanalysis, film

theory, and (in the case of Bersani) queer theory, these thinkers propose the possibility of a

divergent way of looking based on the development of a particular ontology. This is based on the

notion of 'looking *with'* (rather than *at*) something, which involves questioning the idea of seeing as

a unidirectional process from the subject to the object. This way of looking does not recognise

individuality; instead, it acknowledges that everything and everyone are interrelated through 'formal

correspondences' or 'resemblances' that the subject nonetheless constantly shuts away from,

rejects, or tries to appropriate. The central question to consider is: 'what are the perceptual

circumstances that would make it possible for us to correspond with other beings not only formally

but also psychically?' Art presents, according to this view, a space to learn to look 'with the world'.[90]

This mode of relationality is developed by Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit through an analysis of

Caravaggio's work. For example, in the artist's early paintings, such as *Bacchino Malato* ('Sick

Bachus', c. 1593) [Figure 35], they observe a 'double movement', a simultaneous 'soliciting' and

'self-concealing', a move towards and away from the viewer. Bachus' retracting movement

intrigues by 'eroticising' the body through the suggestion of the presence of a 'secret'. The young

man's unusual posture —his gaze towards the viewer, his body turned away— can be read then as

an undecided call for *and* resistance to interpretation. Furthermore, there is a contrast between the

youth (live matter) and the stark materiality of the table, but also a closeness in their colours, the

green and grey hues that give the face a sickly appearance. According to the authors, the painting

enacts, in this way, a 'mode of connectedness' between the human body and the 'vast family of

materiality' it is part of. The work's enigma cannot be simply deciphered through speculations of

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[90] Kaja Silverman, "Looking with Leo," *PMLA* 125, no. 2 (March 2010): 410-412.

the artist's sexuality.[91] Instead, Bersani and Dutoit's examination stresses that the work puts forward a 'provocative unreadability' that remains unbreakable.[92] This mode necessitates an entirely different mindset from curators. It demands that the works are allowed to draw in and resist the viewer and that this movement is left unsettled as it is essential to the aesthetic experience and fundamental to the learning process in the exhibition space. It presupposes that there is no gap in understanding between the work and the viewer to be resolved and, instead, relies on their interconnectivity.

Figure 35. Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi), *Autoritratto in veste di Bacco (Bacchino malato),* 1593. Oil on canvas, 67 x 53 cm. Galleria Borghese.

Bersani and Dutoit consider Caravaggio's oeuvre as a 'visual speculation' on relationality and forms of intersubjective knowledge.[93] For instance, the artist's disregard of the use of perspectival technique for narrative purposes (one of the main artistic principles of Renaissance painting) represents a rejection of any authority that attempts to direct the gaze and is performed by his figures, which appear uncertain of where to look, often gazing outside the frame.[94] In this way, Caravaggio rejects 'the primacy given to knowledge' and puts forth a notion of being 'not as a demonstration but as a kind of showing' that is 'missed' by knowledge. Making reference to

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[91] Leo Bersani and Ulysee Dutoit, *Caravaggio's Secrets* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 3-6.

[92] Bersani and Dutoit, 13.

[93] Bersani and Dutoit, 15.

[94] Bersani and Dutoit, 23.

Heidegger's understanding of beauty as 'shine', this form of being is identified in Caravaggio's paintings in that an external source of light is often unidentifiable; instead, light seems to be generated from the bodies themselves.[95] Most notably, the artist's figures' 'looks, poses, and expressions' deny an undisrupted, 'contemplative' spectatorial space outside of the frame. An 'engaged viewer' or 'witness' is recurrently portrayed in the painter's compositions. Through this figure, the paintings 'perform' the relation between art and its viewer.[96] The paintings initiate a movement of reaching out to the spectatorial space: a form of exchange with the viewer's gaze that traverses the presumed barrier between the two. The figure of the witness corresponds, in my view, to the centrality that Buergel and Noack concede to the spectator. In *The Taking of Christ* (1602) [Figure 36], it appears at the right end of the picture. Other than Christ, it is the only figure that is illuminated. Most likely, it is also the one holding the lantern at the back: a spectator that is both illuminated and 'lightning up' the scene.[97] Its knowledge, like the encounter with contemporary art, does not have to do with understanding.

Figure 36. Caravaggio (Michelangelo Merisi), *The Taking of Christ,* 1602. Oil on canvas, 133.5 x 169.5 cm. National Gallery of Ireland.

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[95] Bersani and Dutoit, 42.

[96] Bersani and Dutoit, 46.

[97] Bersani and Dutoit, 54.

From Bersani and Dutoit's perspective, art enables pure relationality.[98] The idea of an individual trying to understand a separate, different entity becomes a myth that obscures a 'sadistic' subject trying to retain its 'integrity' and 'autonomy'. This process is seen as a violent act of 'incorporation' or 'appropriation' that is ultimately pointless. In contrast, this mode proposes a 'nonsadistic' relation to reality, an awareness of the connectedness between viewer and object that resides in the inseparability between the work's beauty and the subject's pleasure. This is the point of the encounter, the significance that Buergel and Noack have assigned to the aesthetic experience. We can understand it as the moment in which the subject 'lights up' the object.[99] This analysis of Caravaggio's aesthetic demonstrates a form of connectedness that undoes the distinction between subject and object. At this point, the idea of knowledge no longer makes sense; Caravaggio's secrets refer instead to 'untraceable spatial disseminations'.[100] Bersani has summed up their project as a challenge to modern epistemology's fundamental division between the subject and the world; that is, as the proposition of a mode of interconnectivity that acknowledges the sameness between the subject and other human and nonhuman agents of the world.[101] I propose that this mode of relationality is highly relevant to exhibition making and the curatorial framing of the meeting between artwork and viewers. Within this case study, it provides insight into the exhibition's challenge to the idea that visitors need stable interpretations and understanding. However, this model is also instrumental in the boundary-crossings explored throughout the thesis: mainly between animate/inanimate (Chapter Two), object/subject (this chapter), and nature/culture and West/Other (as developed in Chapter Four).

The relation between the self and the other is also central to Kaja Silverman's examination of our ways of looking. She contends that these are restrained under both 'cultural pressure' to perceive the world from a predetermined perspective and 'psychic pressure' that restricts them to those that defend the ego. To briefly return to Adorno, it is helpful to keep in mind here his

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[98] Bersani and Dutoit, 58.

[99] Bersani and Dutoit, 69-70.

[100] Bersani and Dutoit, 72-73, and Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 185.

[101] Leo Bersani, *Thoughts and Things* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 62.

elaboration of the aesthetic experience as a 'countermovement to the subject […] (its) demands (of) something on the order of the self-denial of the observer'.[102] Silverman's investigation concentrates on 'the psychic and aesthetic conditions under which we might be carried away from both ideality and the self, and situated in an identificatory relation to despised bodies'.[103] With Lacan, she distinguishes between the human *look* and the object's or the other's *gaze.* The gaze remains inaccessible to the subject, it constitutes the recognition of the other in the field of vision. Following Silverman, the look never corresponds to the gaze; our subjectivity, then, depends as much on the gaze as on our relations to the other.[104] This implies the permanent possibility of the reversal of the relation between subject and artwork in the exhibition space.

Silverman studies the timing of perception, the examination of the possibility of consciously returning, revising, and questioning how we have unconsciously seen. She argues that this is an essential process for the construction of 'an ethical or nonviolent relation to the other'.[105] She elaborates the notion of the 'productive look', a form of 'agency' that deconstructs the 'fantasy of mastery and transcendence' of the eye and points to its 'limitations'.[106] Through the 'productive look', Silverman asserts that images can be reworked, undermines their alleged 'objectivity and authority', and challenges 'the complacencies of the self'.[107] The notion presents the ability to see 'something other than what is given to be seen, and over which the self does not hold absolute sway'. Here, the transformative potential lies in the capacity to look at the other differently, to 'look again', deviating from our usual ways.[108] Curatorial mediation supports specific ways of looking, whether it settles the interpretation process and reassures visitors, or whether it fosters a more self-reflective experience.

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[102] Adorno, 346.

[103] Kaja Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2-3.

[104] Kaja Silverman, "The World Wants Your Desire," in "Mobile Fidelities: Conversations on Feminism, History and Visuality", ed. Martina Pachmanová, special issue, *n.paradoxa* 19 (KT Press: May, 2006): 36-37, www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/nparadoxaissue19.pdf (accessed November 29, 2016).

[105] Silverman, *The Threshold*, 3.

[106] Silverman, *The Threshold*, 163-164.

[107] Silverman, *The Threshold*, 193.

[108] Silverman, *The Threshold*, 227.

The possibility of another, unrestricted way of looking is only conceivable by means of unconscious processes. Silverman's exploration of a creative look, one that is not entirely predetermined, is based on Sigmund Freud's description in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) of the visual stimuli's passage through unconscious and preconscious 'mnemic reserves'. At the preconscious stage, an object is recognised through its association with previous similar stimuli. Silverman offers the example of a 'red chair' that at this point is also judged as 'cheap', for instance. Following her reading, the unconscious will also associate this new 'memory-trace' with other memories in its network. The value that the chair acquires through this process may correspond to the dominant order *or not.* This is the crucial point: unconscious association does not necessarily follow cultural values and norms.[109] These ideas echo Bersani's description of memory as 'an illusion of consciousness', his view that there is no real past to remember, but 'innumerable inscriptions of the world that define us […] These inscriptions are the world, and they are the subject'. So, in contrast to the consciousness' will to oppose and dominate the world, Bersani puts forth the unconscious link of the subject to otherness. He underlines the need for 'rediscovery of the continuity of being between the subject and the world'.[110] Like Silverman, Bersani presents consciousness' constant reworking of past and unconscious thought. He describes a 'spiralling' movement that is 'forward and backward' at the same time.[111] Curatorial contextualisation of the works must allow space, then, for the visitors' affective response. The link between subject and object is formed through what resonates with the viewers and is an essential stage in the production of meaning.

For this divergent look to be 'truly productive', Silverman insists that it needs to displace the ego; only then is it freed from its constraints. It 'requires a constant conscious reworking' of our unconscious looking. This look necessitates the effort to identify our unintended reactions and their correspondence with cultural conventions. Curatorially, it translates to supporting the movement back and forth between subject and object. For Silverman, being able 'to see again, differently' also

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[109] Silverman, *The Threshold*, 175, 180.

[110] Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave?* 149, 155.

[111] Bersani, *Thoughts,* 68, 75.

entails 'the opening up of the unconscious to otherness'. Crucially, she considers the aesthetic work as an exceptional site for such displacement, 'for encouraging us to see in ways not dictated in advance by the dominant fiction'. She argues that the artwork engages the conscious and the unconscious in 'more primarized' ways than everyday experience (which is dominated by the pleasure principle).[112]

We can see this in operation in Nina Menkes' *The Bloody Child* (1996), a work shown in the exhibition that encourages a look that differs from the norm. The film is based on a scandalous Los Angeles Times story about the arrest of a Gulf War veteran by military police. The veteran was found digging a grave for his murdered wife in the Mojave desert with the body kept in his car nearby.[113] The director's sister and collaborator, Tina Menkes, plays the captain in charge of the arrest, a character that stands for an 'alienated feminine figure', while most of the other roles are played by actual marines. The film does not present a clear story or a logical sequence, as it is formed by fragments: unspectacular scenes from the arrest, the men off duty at a bar, a black horse, the murderer washing blood from his hands in a sink, and motel scenes. For the director, this structure corresponds to the fragmentation of the captain's inner experience of the incident and generates a 'swirling' or 'trance-like' effect.[114] In my view, the film corresponds to Silverman's description of work that is able to 'implant' highly 'psychically resonant' 'synthetic memories' or 'libidinally saturated associative clusters'. She argues that these follow the same process of the expression of the unconscious, as they are able to draw out minor details that resonate with the viewer. The film relies on these affective details rather than on a grand narrative. Most importantly —Silverman sustains— this kind of work has the capacity of introducing what the 'I' excludes, the 'not me'. Therefore, it entails a displacement or estrangement from the self.[115]

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[112] Silverman, *The Threshold,* 183-185.

[113] Nina Menkes, "The Birth of Nina Menkes' *The Bloody Child*," *American Cinematographer* 77, no. 10 (October 1996).

[114] Deborah Kampmeier, "Nina Menkes on Cinema as Sorcery", *Filmmaker,* March 9, 2012, http://filmmakermagazine.com/42272-nina-menkes-cinema-as-sorcery/#.V7Md7le9qgR (accessed August 16, 2016); Sara Gilson, "Nina Menkes discusses her 'Bloody Child,'" *Daily Trojan* 129, no. 41 (October 25, 1996): 6-7.

[115] Silverman, *The Threshold,* 185, 192.

Silverman's 'synthetic memories' can be compared to the film's incorporation of footage of

Africa to represent, according to Menkes, the captain's emotions. Furthermore, the need to blow

the 16mm African footage up to 35mm to match the rest of the film produces a 'grainy, slightly soft

effect'; the portrayal of the character's inner life is thus differentiated from the rest of the material.

Equally, there is no clear delimitation between inner and outer realms. Menkes suggests that the

emotional inner-scape results from social and political events, and in the same way, she searched

for locations that reflected the inner experience. The resulting work combines 'inner, dream-like

images and real, unmanipulated locations'.[116] The director has compared her films to dreams and

to the Jungian analysis of meaning, intimating that the works themselves know more than her.[117]

This idea resonates with Buergel and Noack's view that the outward gaze does not contradict a

reflective, inward one. The curators discuss a narcissistic pleasure produced by 'free-floating

reflection' on what cannot be pinpointed. They suggest that 'things we don't understand' might be

both part of ourselves and a way of creating an opening to what is foreign. This form of pleasure

concerns the penetrability of the subject's identity and therefore also corresponds to a political

standpoint.[118] However, this must be distinguished from the gratification that we obtain from

interpretive resolution. Both curators and visitors must seek to engage with the perplexity that the

experience of art entails.

The film's rejection of a conventional narrative has been described by Menkes as a way of

breaking free from the 'screen', from a 'set language' in an attempt to reach the 'truth of

experience'.[119] David E. James has also discussed *The Bloody Child* as a poetic film, referring to

the groundbreaking avant-garde filmmaker Maya Deren's distinction between drama's 'horizontal'

narrative and the poem's 'vertical investigation of a situation […] concerned with its qualities and

depth'.[120] As its subtitle indicates, the film presents an examination of 'the interior of violence',

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[116] Menkes, "The Birth".

[117] Kampmeier.

[118] Buergel and Noack, "Things," 90-91.

[119] Eric Freedman, "The Return of the Repressed: on Nina Menkes' *Bloody Child*," *Filmmaker magazine* (Fall 1996): 35.

[120] David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005), 408-411.

rather than just the enactment of the incident. It can be read considering Silverman's description of

a 'screen', 'a cultural image repertoire' or 'a range of representational coordinates' that inhabits us

and mediates our encounters. Silverman proposes that 'the screen' determines what we see, but is

not irremediably fixed. Since our look is subject to complex, unpredictable psychic processes that

also affect intersubjective relations, it might be works like Menkes' that lead to different ways of

looking, and eventually, as these gain prevalence, they are able to reconfigure the screen.[121]

Silverman and Bersani's elaboration of art's enablement of a divergent look, a way of

looking in and out, necessitate the recognition of the commonality between works and viewers.

That is, acknowledging the indivisibility between the object's beauty and the subject's pleasure

leads to the re-conception of the relations between elements in the exhibition space. We return to

the point of encounter: the last section of this chapter explores what this understanding of the

aesthetic experience entails for the educational proposal of the exhibition.

The aesthetic experience as a form of self-education

This thesis argues that curating involves assuming a particular pedagogical approach which is not

explicitly signalled to the audience. In his analysis of the concept of education at documenta 12

(2007), Dominic Willsdon describes Buergel and Noack's position as a 'Schillerian or […] German

Idealist view of the educational spirit intrinsic to the aesthetic; the educational […] (as) the function

of the aesthetic'.[122] Their view is also evident in Buergel's statement in the presentation of the

leitmotifs of their documenta: 'audiences educate themselves by experiencing things

aesthetically'.[123] Elsewhere, he has drawn attention to the public's own creative resources and the

importance of the democratisation of knowledge.[124] This section looks into the paradoxical

conceptualisation of the aesthetic experience as a form of self-education. The aim is to distinguish

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[121]Silverman, *The Threshold*, 221, 223.

[122] Dominic Willsdon, "The Concept of Education at documenta 12," *Journal of Visual Culture* 7, no. 2 (August 2008): 221.

[123] Roger M. Buergel, "Leitmotifs," *Documenta 12,* December, 2005, http://www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=leitmotive&L=1 (accessed August 26, 2016).

[124] Buergel, "This Exhibition Is an Accusation".

the audience's position in relation to the curators and the works in the exhibition's configuration of a particular learning situation. Following the elaboration of a distinct mode of relationality, the educational reading of the project is centred on the notions of permeability, interconnectivity, and imagination. I point to specific pedagogical principles that can be implemented curatorially.

The idea of the aesthetic experience as a form of self-education immediately presents several difficulties. What do we learn from experiencing art? What kind of pedagogic relations are desired between the subject, the artwork, and other elements of the exhibition space? What critical opportunities does the encounter with art present? Stewart Martin has pointed to the paradox of 'an education in autonomy', referring to the modern understanding of education as a 'relation of subjection'. Still, he considers that the aesthetic presents an ideal opportunity to conceive a 'non-dominative, non-antagonistic unity of freedom and equality'. Martin thinks of autonomy less in terms of self-direction and more as a suspension of rules taken over by a sense of play. More importantly, he identifies the difficulty of conceiving aesthetic education as a form of resistance to capitalism, given the latter's own incorporation of aesthetics. Contemporary art, Martin sustains, is constituted by the conflict between anti- and neo-aestheticism and thus reflects the 'profound ambivalence' of aesthetic education.[125] The question parallels Buergel and Noack's redefinition of aesthetic autonomy and its relation to the social sphere. I propose that Jacques Rancière's elaboration of artistic autonomy and heteronomy is essential to address the tension between aesthetics and education.

I focus here on the particular 'ideas of thought' that the philosopher's fairly well-known 'regimes of art' involve. This aspect of his writing is essential to my understanding of the kind of knowledge the aesthetic experience involves. Hence, it provides the starting point to consider not only the kind of learning that takes place in the exhibition space, but also, and significantly, its relation to social change. The representative regime, for instance, conceives thought as 'action imposing itself upon a passive matter'. The aesthetic regime, in turn, undoes the former's 'ordered set of relations between what can be seen and what can be said, knowledge and action, activity

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[125] Stewart Martin, "An aesthetic education against aesthetic education," *Radical Philosophy* 141 (January-February 2007): 40-42.

and passivity'.[126] Rancière refers to the Oedipus myth to provide evidence of knowledge understood 'not as the subjective act of grasping an objective ideality but as the affection, passion, or even sickness of a living being'. Oedipus symbolises, for him, the qualities of art of the aesthetic regime: the indeterminacy between knowing and not knowing, activity and passivity.[127] He defines art in the aesthetic regime 'by its being the identity of a conscious procedure and an unconscious production […] the identity of *logos* and *pathos*'.[128] At this point, I would like to draw out an analogy between Rancière's aesthetic regime and the exhibition's educational approach. The philosopher's elaboration can assist in looking at the curators' notion of 'things we don't understand', or non-knowledge. Furthermore, it relates to the non-knowledge of the illuminated witness (or the spectator) in Caravaggio's paintings according to Bersani and Dutoit and to the engagement of conscious and unconscious thought and inner and outer experience developed by Bersani and Silverman, as discussed above. Still, a crucial question remains: how does the subject reach out to the Other and the world through this form of non-knowledge? In other words, how should we conceive of the relation between perception and politics the exhibition set out to explore?

An essential text in this respect is 'The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes' (2002), where Rancière takes Friedrich Schiller's *Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1794) as a starting point and suggests that there is 'a specific sensory experience —the aesthetic— that holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community'. Rancière finds the central question of the 'aesthetic regime of art' in Schiller's assertion that the aesthetic experience must sustain both 'the art of the beautiful *and* […] the art of living'. He recovers '*and*' as the key element that links art's autonomy with the promise of social change.[129] Rancière stresses that autonomy here refers to the experience rather than the artwork: to the encounter with what is 'unapproachable, unavailable to our knowledge, our aims and desires'. The inseparability of autonomy and heteronomy results in the dissolution of the distinction between 'activity and

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[126] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 21.

[127] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 23.

[128] Rancière, *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, 28.

[129] Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes," in *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics,* ed. Steve Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 133-134.

passivity, will and resistance'. They are bound by 'a human mind which seeks to transform the surface of sensory appearances into a new sensorium that is the mirror of its own activity', by the indivisibility between functionality and 'the pleasure of appearance'. His argument goes further: the formation of a 'new sensorium', the idea that art transforms life means that it constitutes a form of collective self-education.[130] Here, Rancière's thought provides a new way of considering Buergel and Noack's emphasis on the aesthetic experience as the link between aesthetic autonomy and the social realm. Through the aesthetic regime, the movement between art and society can be compared to that between the viewer and the artwork.

Elsewhere, Rancière has discussed the 'inherent tension' in Schiller's aesthetic education 'between the suspension of activity specific to the aesthetic state and the activity of self-education […] between the *alterity* of that experience and the *selfness* or *thisness* of the education […] between the *self-sufficiency* of free appearance and the movement of self-emancipation of a new humanity which desires to tear the appearance from its self-sufficiency and turn it into a reality'. Aesthetic education represents to a divided society the promise of coming together, of an 'unseparated collective life'.[131] This is how —to return to the question posed above and to the notion of penetrability, the aesthetic experience encompasses the subject's relation to the Other and to the world. The promise described by Rancière is also comparable to Bersani's notion of the 'commonality' or 'inter-connectedness' between subject and object and, as I expand on below, between all agents of the exhibition space.[132]

Intra-active and imaginative pedagogies

Having established the correspondence between the aesthetic experience and self-education, we can consider what this correlation entails in terms of pedagogy. It is important to note that in this case, the Generali Foundation did not demand that the curators follow particular mediation or educational guidelines. In this sense, the curators had the rare opportunity to address the audience

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[130] Rancière, "The Aesthetic Revolution and its Outcomes," 135-137.

[131] Rancière, *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, 100.

[132] Bersani, *Thoughts and Things,* 62.

on their own terms and were not pressured to obtain any specific institutional targets, such as visitor numbers. The exhibition can be seen to be influenced, partly, by the work of feminist scholar bell hooks.[133] For example, its attention to the audience can be compared to hooks' view that everyone's presence must be recognised and truly valued. Her insistence on the 'deconstruction' of the conventional understanding of the teacher —in this case, the curator— as the only one responsible for the classroom's (exhibition's) dynamics is clearly present in the curators' demands on the viewers. hooks argues that exciting learning comes about through 'collective effort' or, in the curators' terms, through the difficulty of the encounter with art.[134] She praises teaching 'that enables transgressions —a movement against and beyond boundaries', a conception of education that this thesis repeatedly puts forward. Based on her experience in both all-black and, later, in desegregated schools, hooks differentiates education 'as a practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination'.[135] This distinction between education as a form of resistance or a form of submission is fundamental to this thesis' examination of critical curatorial projects. In this case, my educational reading of the exhibition presents the idea of learning as a form of interconnectivity with basis on intra-active pedagogy, a feminist materialist approach, and Maxine Greene's educational philosophy.[136] This section points to specific principles from this theoretical framework that are highly relevant to exhibition making.

The mode of relationality inferred in the previous section can also be read as a 'diffractive analysis' in its attention to material agency and the inseparability recognised between the observer and the observed.[137] As we saw in the previous chapter, Karen Barad extrapolates Bohrian physics to address 'onto-epistemological intra-actions involving humans'. Her theory mainly requires realising that subject and object are not opposed to each other. She speaks —comparably to

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[133] Ruth Noack, in email conversation with the author, October 4, 2016. My paraphrasis.

[134] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 8.

[135] hooks, 4, 12.

[136] On Greene's feminist perspective see Maxine Greene and Morwenna Griffiths, "Feminism, Philosophy, and Education: Imagining Public Spaces," in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education,* ed. Nigel Blake, et al., (Oxford, UK, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 73-92.

[137] Palmer, "Diffractive Pedagogies".

Bersani and Dutoit's thoughts on interconnectivity— of 'living between worlds, crossing (out) taxonomic differences, tunnelling through boundaries […] (as) necessary political action'. Barad's ideas also resonate with those of Bersani and Dutoit, as she presents the idea that 'meaning is not an ideality; meaning is material. And matter isn't what exists separately from meaning'. She holds that the determinate or intelligible is 'materially haunted by —infused with—' what has been excluded, the indeterminate or unintelligible.[138] In this sense, this line of thought can assist in the examination of the epistemological framework proposed by the exhibition. From this perspective, knowledge emerges from the relation between matter and discourse in a process in which the knower and the known are undifferentiated. Educators, learners, objects, and environments (curators, visitors, artworks, exhibitions): everyone and everything are co-implicated and embodied in the process. Although Buergel and Noack did not intentionally set out this or any particular pedagogical method, their curatorial approach demonstrates an awareness of material-discursive entanglements and the implication of educators (curators) in the 'enmeshing of bodies and environments, creation and thought, scripts and identities'.[139]

Although the curators did not explicitly deploy a feminist approach, the exhibition relates to feminist efforts to undermine the reductive and gendered oppositions between 'mind/body, rationality/affectivity, objectivity/subjectivity'.[140] The principles of 'intra-active pedagogy' are helpful here to further develop an educational reading of the project. Inspired by feminist pedagogical theory from the late 1980s onwards, this method emphasises complexity and diversity rather than clarity and positions learners as 'co-constructors' in an 'interdependent' relation with both educators and their environment. Intra-active pedagogy draws from new materialism's attention to material agency as opposed to cognitive and constructivist approaches' prioritisation of the discursive.[141] According to childhood education scholar Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, it 'give(s) explicit attention to the intra-active relationship between all living organisms and the material environment:

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[138] Barad, 175.

[139] Hickey-Moody, 219, 226.

[140] Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, *Going Beyond the Theory/Practice Divide in Early Childhood Education: Introducing an intra-active pedagogy* (London: Routledge, 2010), 14.

[141] Lenz Taguchi, 9, 11.

things and artefacts, spaces and places that we occupy and use in our daily practices'. It also

entails an intention to level presumed hierarchies and complicate the positions and relations

between 'subjects and objects, thinking and doing, theory and practice'.[142] Learning processes are

seen as indivisible 'flows' between the student's (and in the case of exhibition practice, visitor's)

'conceptualisations, things, materials and the environment' all affecting each other. This method

calls for an awareness of the room's arrangement and the disciplinary codes in place, as well as

the interconnections between all these agents as parts of a larger whole.[143] Intra-active

pedagogical theory can inform our understanding of experimental curatorial approaches like

Buergel and Noack's, as well as their attention to the audience and its interconnections with other

elements of the exhibition space in the process of meaning making.

This pedagogical approach puts forward the interdependence between theory and practice.

It observes that practice consciously or unconsciously applies theory in ways that can prove

inconsistent (a point that I repeatedly make throughout this thesis). Likewise, intra-active pedagogy

acknowledges the interconnections between matter and meaning; there is no clear distinction of

the ways in which the material influences and informs the discursive, and vice versa. From this

perspective, learning materials, furniture, architecture, and artefacts all involve certain educational

conceptualisations, and they also perform as active agents.[144] This can apply to exhibition practice,

where artworks, discursive context, mediation strategies, and display arrangements are all

meaningful and carefully staged. Taguchi presents the prevalent divide between theory and

practice in terms of gender and as implying, of course, an asymmetrical relation. Practice, the

body, and the feminine are undervalued in the division between 'culture/nature; […] mind/body;

rational/emotional; thinking/feeling; discourse/reality; language/material; active/passive; order/

chaos; […] stability/change; goal-orientation/process-orientation'.[145] These oppositions impose a

reductive 'either-or way of thinking'. Theoretical or 'text-based' approaches are seen as easier to

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[142] Lenz Taguchi, 10, 18.

[143] Lenz Taguchi, 18, 21, 30, 37, 39.

[144] Lenz Taguchi, 21, 22.

[145] Lenz Taguchi, 23.

evaluate and measure than 'embodied, hands-on experience-based' models. Intra-active

pedagogy requires moving from the 'either-or' mentality and exploring the inter-dependent, flowing

relation between theory and practice, discourse and material, and subject and object.[146] In contrast

to Franke's exhibition, examined in the second chapter of this thesis, Buergel and Noack present a

more balanced pedagogical approach. The model they offer could be furthered by consciously

adopting an intra-active method that considers the material as active in the construction of

meaning and understands learning as a 'material-discursive' process. The idea that learning

involves the body and the material as much as the mind and discursive understanding has

profound implications for educational research and is particularly relevant, I suggest, for exhibition

making.[147] Here, it is important to note the correspondences between the curators'

conceptualisation, their architectural alterations, spatial arrangement of the works, and even their

choice of a translucent material for their texts' panels.

In *Things we don't understand,* the viewer's encounter with Menkes' *The Bloody Child*

requires these flowing interconnections between all sides. The use of a single actor (Tina Menkes)

across the military and African sequences in the film links the two settings. The director has

commented on her intention to 'connect the West's destructive relationship with Africa to that which

the dominant western culture has to women. All of my images were to be dreamlike and iconic to

evoke the feelings created inside of us […] by external political and social realities'.[148] The

spectator needs to figure out the interrelations between contrasting images from different realms

that converge in the surreal appearance of the black horse at the arrest scene [Figure 37]. The film

also establishes correspondences between the Gulf War, which is referenced during the bar

conversations, and the general theme of violence, as well as between the murder at the Mojave

and war killings. Violence is presented, then, 'as a vast network of connections encompassing

criminality, the military industry, imperialist-capitalist opportunism, patriarchy, misogyny, race

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[146] Lenz Taguchi, 23, 37.

[147] Lenz Taguchi, 29, 37, 40.

[148] Nina Menkes, "The Birth," 16-18.

relations, and environmental ruin'.[149] Viewers rely on their affective response to the film's subversive structure. The work's disruption of the division between culture/nature, mind/body, interpreting/feeling, activity/passivity, and stability/change aligns with a feminist stance.

Figure 37. Nina Menkes, *The Bloody Child,* 1996, 35 mm film, 85 min. Film still.

A key point in relation to Buergel and Noack's exhibition's conceptualisation is this approach's recognition of the centrality of indeterminacy, creativity, and inventiveness in the learning process. Outcomes must be kept undetermined; as Taguchi argues, 'it is because we don't know what might be possible for a child or a student to learn, to know or become, that this unknown potentiality and change becomes the most important subject of investigation'.[150] Intra-active pedagogy pays special attention to the learner's contribution to an undetermined process described in terms of 'listening dialogue' and 'negotiation' to discover various ways of meaning-making. Learning results, then, from the starting points provided, the encouragement (or discouragement) to investigate further, the handling of materials, the environment, and so on.[151] This requires placing certain demands on the viewers, such as an openness to discomfort, that at

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[149] Jean Petrolle, "Allegory, Politics, and the Avant-Garde," in *Women and Experimental Filmmaking,* ed. Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 101-104.

[150] Lenz Taguchi, 15-16.

[151] Lenz Taguchi, 34, 38.

the same time need to be supported by a stimulating environment that negates the sense of facile entertainment in the gallery space.

Another central contribution of this theory is its undermining of the position of mastery within educational relations. This pedagogy involves reworking the relation between 'humans as subjects-doers and material as passive bodies', and it refuses to objectify or instrumentalise learning materials. Instead, it advances a position of '(non)mastery' in which one does not 'presume to know precisely what (material) is in our hands, with all its qualities and agency'. In this way, distinct possibilities of the relation between educator and learner are opened.[152] Intra-active pedagogy presents a transformative reciprocal relation, as Maya Nitis observes: 'If the teacher's [curator's] experience and knowledge is not reducible in terms of mastery to be emulated [or acquired], and teachers [curators] themselves remain sufficiently open to input from students [visitors] as well as outsider, the surroundings, and other sources that influence classes […] [exhibitions], the intra-action of multiple agents in the classroom [exhibition space] can be accounted for in the experience of learning'.[153] The complexities of transferring these ideas from the classroom to the exhibition space remain unexplored. However, my point here is that these pedagogical principles are helpful in challenging the authority of the curator and promoting a more receptive, self-reflective practice, especially concerning the kind of experience offered to the public.

As we have seen, the critical revision of the relation proposed to the audience was central to artistic and curatorial practice of the 1970s, even though it was not strictly informed by pedagogical theory. As Lippard notes, feminism's main contribution to the art world was challenging the idea of art, particularly the value of modernist self-criticism, seen as 'a narrow, highly mystified and often egotistical monologue' that remains an isolated activity with no connection to the audience.[154] The idea of 'reintegrating' the aesthetic and the social, working in-between these spheres —in other words, transforming the role of art within society— is grounded

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[152] Maya Nitis, "Feminist Materialisms in Class: Learning without Masters," in *Teaching With Feminist Materialisms,* ed. Peta Hinton and Pat Treusch (Utrecht: ATGENDER, 2015), 119.

[153] Nitis, 120.

[154] Lucy R. Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s," *Art Journal* 40 (Fall-Winter 1980): 362, 363.

in feminism. Lippard distinguishes 'an element of outreach, a need for connections beyond process or product, an element of *inclusiveness* which also takes the form of responsiveness and responsibility for one's own ideas and images—the outward and inward facets of the same impulse'.[155] In this sense, feminists favoured the web or the network motifs, 'as an image of connectiveness, inclusiveness and integration […] [that is also] a metaphor for the breakdown of race, class, and gender barriers'.[156] The pedagogical principles presented above are reflected in Lippard's reference to the Native American acknowledgement of the interconnections between all things and beings, to a spirit of openness and acceptance. Feminist approaches remain engaged with social reality and, at the same time, sustain 'the role art must play as fantasy, dream and imagination'.[157] In what follows, I introduce Maxine Greene's work to elucidate the crucial role of the imagination in educational approaches that foreground inter-connectivity.

With a background in liberal arts and social action, Greene's educational theory represents a resistant stance against 'the thoughtlessness, banality, technical rationality, carelessness, and "savage inequalities"' of public education in the United States, although it is more widely relevant. She focuses on the imagination of teachers and students (in this case, consider curators and visitors) as the capacity that 'makes empathy possible', that allows one to traverse the space and reach the 'other' —to depart from the known and familiar and see alternative realities.[158] Greene argues that the 'poetic use of imagination' enables envisioning other ways of thinking and being. Her ideas resonate with key points discussed so far, such as, for example, her view that arts involve a 'defamiliarization of the ordinary' and the opening of new perspectives, as well as the connection she finds between arts and cultural diversity, the formation of a sense of community, and an awareness towards the world. Also noteworthy is her investment in 'social imagination' as the capacity to conceive better ways of being, as a form of 'utopian thinking' that looks for alternative paths to the social order.[159]

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[155] Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 364.

[156] Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 365.

[157] Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 365.

[158] Greene, 2-3.

[159] Greene, 4-5.

Many of Greene's educational principles are potentially relevant to curating. Firstly, her belief that the learning process should be based on questions, that the educative task consists of generating situations that prompt them can apply to the exhibition context, as can her understanding of the learning process as a way of 'breaking through barriers —of expectation, of boredom, of predefinition'. Her idea that teaching means supporting and promoting self-education is fundamental to my reading of *Things we don't understand*.[160] Greene suggests that experience is not entirely predictable: students take steps or follow paths that were not taught to them and may surprise their educators by making use of their own inventiveness.[161] She recognises children's — read viewers'— ability to sense the significance of what they perceive and to conduct their own endeavour to interpret, which is led by the 'inexhaustibleness of things' rather than by knowledge that has been transmitted to them.[162] These principles are all applicable to the relations between viewers, artworks, and curators in the exhibition space.

Analogous to Buergel and Noack's investigation of the feeling of 'irritation' produced by 'things we don't understand' is Greene's view that looking for the possibility of change involves certain 'tension', a blankness that is followed by 'resistance, imagination, open capacities, inventiveness, and surprise'. Greene maintains that her pedagogy is concerned with action rather than behaviour. She thinks of actors or agents, is interested in starting points as opposed to outcomes, and is resistant to 'systematisations, […] prescriptions […] and assessments'. Her main concern is the on-going pursuit of 'openings' and 'possibilities'.[163] To discern the exhibition's educational proposal, it is also essential to consider the link Greene draws between the unexpected or the unknown and change. She holds that encountering other ways of thinking and being causes one to realise alternatives to what could be seen as the only reality.[164] Another key idea for this case —particularly in relation to Bersani and Silverman's thought— is Greene's

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[160] Greene, 6, 14.

[161] Greene, 14. Also see John A. Passmore, *The Philosophy of Teaching* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

[162] Greene, 14-15. Also see Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1978).

[163] Greene, 15.

[164] Greene, 20.

conception of learning as a form of inter-connectedness. She describes the process of 'leaving something behind while (actively) reaching toward something new'. Learning, for her, involves 'an intending, a grasping of the appearances of things', a movement motivated by a sense of 'incompleteness' towards gaining a 'wide-awakeness, of awareness of what it is to be in the world'.[165]

For Greene, then, the interrogation brought about by an out-of-the-ordinary experience is what sparks the learning process.[166] She stresses the fundamental role of the imagination to look beyond our convictions, the development of empathy, a de-centring of the subject, and the encounter with the Other. Greene sustains —close to Buergel and Noack's position— that art is relevant because it is located at the 'margins' of ordinary life. She holds that the role of art is to contradict and break from the established order, to open up the possibility of transformation. This kind of learning requires that educators refuse to determine what is meaningful, in other words, to refuse to resolve 'things we don't understand'.[167] These imaginative qualities are discernible in Eleanor Antin's *The King of Solana Beach* (1974-75) [Figure 38].

Figure 38. Eleanor Antin, from *The King of Solana Beach,* 1974-75. One of eight black and white photographs, mounted on cardboard, 15.3 x 22.9 cm.

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[165] Greene, 20, 26, 33, 35.

[166] Greene, 24.

[167] Greene, 28-31.

The set of photographs shows the artist in costume (boots, cape, hat, and beard) as the king, a character she identifies as her 'political self'.[168] He is seen at the supermarket, kissing a lady's hand at the library, and seated on a bench, talking to a group of young people about issues such as the war in Vietnam or local displacements caused by real-estate development.[169] From her position as artist, Antin playfully reaches out into the social and presents an alternative reality. Viewers are invited to join and also imagine an ideal kingdom, even for a moment. We imagine the passersby playing along, what we would like to discuss with the king, and being kings ourselves. We can relate to everyone else's yearning for more just ways of being. In Rancièrian terms, we are at once 'distant spectators and active interpreters'.[170] The piece demonstrates the indivisibility between art's autonomy and social change in the aesthetic regime —here, between the imaginary kingdom and the desire for real action. A state of perplexity is sustained by the incompatibility between the dream and the images' lack of grandiosity, as well as the obviousness of the costume. Emily Liebert suggests that this typically postmodern disappointment leads to the examination of the viewer's own expectations, particularly in regard to representation. She describes a turn of the artwork towards the viewer, as opposed to modernism's movement away from the subject. She argues Antin's work encourages critical reflection on spectatorship, the act of looking, and the cultural and political determination of perception.[171] The viewer's self-education and the interplay between appearance and reality starts from the aesthetic object's otherness.

Antin's work puts forward shifting, unstable identities; as a feminist piece, it reveals 'the multiplicity of selves' that women are required to perform in daily life.[172] Wark suggests that the artist's stepping in and out of her personae (the exhibition also included *The Adventures of a Nurse*

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[168] Eleanor Antin in dialogue with Howard N. Fox, *Eleanor Antin,* (exh. cat.) (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1999), 212.

[169] Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America 1970 to 2000* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 128, 129.

[170] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), 13.

[171] Emily Liebert, "A King, a Ballerina, and a Nurse: The Act of Looking in Eleanor Antin's Early Selves," in *Multiple Occupancy Eleanor Antin's 'Selves',* (exh. cat.), (New York: Columbia University, 2013), 14, 19, 21.

[172] Robyn Brentano, "Outside the Frame: Performance, Art, and Life," in *Outside the Frame: Performance and the Object, A Survey History of Performance Art in the USA since 1950* (Cleveland: Cleveland Centre for Contemporary Art, 1994), 49-50. Also see Lisa E. Bloom, "Rewriting the Script: Eleanor Antin's Feminist Art," in *Eleanor Antin,* 186.

(1976) and *The Nurse and the Hijackers* (1977)) blurs the distinction between 'art and life, fiction and reality, acting and being'.[173] This amounts, according to Fox, to 'the attempt, through art, to shed the self, or the limitations of the self, and to transcend the confines of the present and what is already known. It is an act not of contented self-worship but of aching desire, of wanting, wishing, dreaming'.[174] Antin's king encapsulates the main ideas presented throughout the chapter, namely, the inseparability between the aesthetic and social spheres and the spectators' activity and passivity. The images are evidence of the productivity of a self-reflective way of looking and the role of the imagination in the interpretation of the work. Most importantly, in the context of the exhibition, the work enacts learning as a movement across the presumed boundary separating object and subject that relies on the interconnectivity between the two.

A crucial aspect to keep in mind about the exhibition is the curators' attention to the interpretation process in their re-examination of aesthetic autonomy, as well as their investigation of the critical potential of not understanding in relation to social change. My analysis of Buergel and Noack's approach is demonstrative of the centrality of pedagogical concerns to curatorial practice. I have argued that the exhibition presented the aesthetic experience as a form of self-education. In this case, the learning situation was described in terms of permeability, interconnectivity, imagination, and empathy. The exhibition also provides an example in which mediation advanced a position of non-mastery. This case study puts forward the applicability of feminist intra-active pedagogy to exhibition making, particularly regarding the flowing interdependency between gendered distinctions such as theory/practice, subject/object, and meaning/matter. The indivisibility between human and nonhuman agents in the exhibition space subverts the modern epistemological framework. From Buergel and Noack's problematisation of the notion of understanding, we move on in the next chapter to consider artist Uriel Orlow's decentring approach and his profound challenge to the dominant, scientific system of knowledge.

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[173] Jayne Wark, "Conceptual Art and Feminism: Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Eleanor Antin, and Martha Wilson," *Women's Art Journal* 22, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2001): 47.

[174] Fox, 155.

Chapter 4: Decolonial Curating: Uriel Orlow's *Mafafuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories*

This chapter investigates the decolonial approach to exhibition making. I refer to decolonial thinking as 'a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, [and] practice' founded on the compound concept of modernity/coloniality.[1] Decolonial practices are concerned with how the nexus modernity/coloniality invalidates and marginalises 'knowledges, subjectivities, world senses, and life visions' as a transnational, interstate, global political issue.[2] Decolonial thinking serves as the starting point to look for other ways of thinking and sensing —and in the context of this thesis— of showing and learning.[3] I analyse Swiss-born, London-based artist Uriel Orlow's *Mafavuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories,* presented at The Showroom, London in 2016. The exhibition was conceived as a botany-centred political proposal that assumes the viewpoints of both South Africa and Europe. It put forward a conception of plants as 'dynamic agents' that have an active historical role and function as connectors between 'nature and humans, rural and cosmopolitan medicine, tradition and modernity'.[4] The show is part of 'Theatrum Botanicum', a project that delves into the various traditions of plant-based medicine in South Africa and the ideological and economic confrontation of different knowledge systems (for instance, between Bangladeshi and Sudanese communities).[5] As in my other chapters, my analysis presents an educational reading. In this instance, I argue that the exhibition presented a decolonial pedagogy. However, I show that this proposition was complicated by the institutional framework of the project, particularly, the gallery's consensual understanding of 'community'.

The project integrated works by other artists to the extent that the exhibition can almost be seen as a single installation. This is especially the case when considering some of the artist's

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[1] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, Introduction to *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 3, 5.

[2] Mignolo and Walsh, 5.

[3] Mignolo and Walsh, 4.

[4] The Showroom, "Uriel Orlow: Mafavuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories," http://www.theshowroom.org/exhibitions/uriel-orlow-mafavukes-trial-and-other-plant-stories (accessed March 20, 2017).

[5] The Showroom, "Symposium: Theatrum Botanicum and Other Forms of Knowledge" (audio available), http://www.theshowroom.org/library/symposium-theatrum-botanicum-and-other-forms-of-knowledge (accessed March 22, 2017).

previous multi-media installations, such as *The Benin Project* (2007-2008), focused on the British

invasion and looting of the West African Kingdom of Benin in 1897, or *Remnants of the Future*

(2010-2012), a piece that addressed sites of the Armenian genocide of 1915.[6] Mark Godfrey has

studied the relevance of historical research to film, video, and photography from 1979 onwards. He

discusses the work of Steve McQueen, Fiona Tan, the Atlas Group, and especially Matthew

Buckingham as 'politicised reinterpretations of the present'.[7] As in the case of Orlow, the research

is not only significant to the present, but to a future that recognises histories of dispossession as

the 'prehistory of globalisation'.[8] The research aspect of the work must also be viewed, as I explore

in this chapter, in relation to particular display strategies and the kind of experience proposed to the

public. Additionally, we should consider Orlow's work within 'the archival impulse' of contemporary

art. Hal Foster suggests that this kind of work deals with the unresolvedness of the archive: it is

'found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private'.[9] Documents are treated as 'active,

even unstable', and the archive, often presented as undetermined and 'recalcitrantly material', puts

forward 'new orders of affective association […] that aim to disturb the symbolic order at large'.[10]

As will become clear in this chapter, these characteristics certainly apply to the exhibition under

consideration. During my conversation with Orlow, he explained that the project was originally

conceived as a solo show. The decision to incorporate other artists' work and bring it 'in dialogue'

in the gallery space stemmed from the research he undertook in South Africa. He also emphasised

that this choice involves a disruption of the solo exhibition format.[11] In this sense, Orlow's position

shifts back and forth between that of 'artist-as-archivist' and that of 'artist-as-curator'.[12]

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[6] Archives & Creative Practice, "Uriel Orlow," http://www.archivesandcreativepractice.com/uriel-orlow/ (accessed May 11, 2017).

[7] Mark Godfrey, "The Artist as Historian," *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 147.

[8] Godfrey, 171.

[9] Hal Foster, "An Archival Impulse," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 3, 5.

[10] Foster, "An Archival Impulse," 5, 7, 21.

[11] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018.

[12] Foster, "An Archival Impulse," 5.

The first section of this chapter discusses Orlow's *The Crown Against Mafavuke* (2016), a video work that functioned as the core of the exhibition. I introduce the central themes explored by the project and observe, in particular, the confrontation between systems of knowledge. Next, I address the ethical problem of representing the Other. I draw both from Hal Foster's critical analysis in his essay 'The Artist as Ethnographer' and artist Renée Green's writing to look at Orlow's use of reflexive and dialogical strategies. Then, as my examination moves to consider the link between botany and colonialism, I pay particular attention to the establishment of Linnaean nomenclature as a global, appropriating classificatory system. The following sub-section studies the relation between political ecology and contemporary art. It briefly establishes the context of current efforts to resist corporate globalisation, re-examine historical processes, and recover marginalised systems of knowledge.

The second, central section of this chapter focuses on the use of a 'conceptual herbarium' as a critical display strategy. I provide an overview of the works and reflect on my visit to the exhibition. Then, I discuss the crisis of the ethnographic museum in a globalised, postcolonial world and present examples of institutions' turn to contemporary art as part of their self-reflexive, critical strategies. Orlow's project is considered in relation to other artists that have problematised display discourse and worked towards alternative conceptions of the artefact and the archive.

The third section expands on the exhibition's educational approach. I start by looking at the project's recovery of local systems of knowledge; my analysis here is guided by postcolonial educational theory. Additionally, I consider problematic notions such as 'development' and the 'Third World'.[13] Then, I investigate the exhibition's institutional framework and the gallery's conception of the public. I look into The Showroom's neighbourhood, the Church Street Market area of London, together with the gallery's Communal Knowledge programme and the forms of learning, participation, and collaboration it advances. These must be read taking into account the

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[13] The now-outdated notion of 'Third World' originated from the Cold War rhetoric in the late 1940s and 1950s. It referred to disempowered, newly-independent countries of Asia and Africa. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was more widely used in relation to 'underdevelopment' and 'dependency' and even to denote a common cause and agenda between Asian, African, and Latin American countries. The unclear and vague term went out of use from the 1980s onwards. However, in the third section of this chapter, I discuss its relevance to current decolonial epistemological challenges. See B.R. Tomlinson, "What was the Third World?" *Journal of Contemporary History* 38, no. 2 (April 2003): 307-321.

project's supporters: the exhibition was commissioned by The Showroom in association with Parc

Saint Léger contemporary art centre (France), Bluecoat (Liverpool), and Tyneside Cinema

(Newcastle upon Tyne). It was supported by a Wellcome Trust Arts Award, Arts Council England,

Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, Pro Helvetia—Swiss Arts Council, A4 Arts Foundation, Film

London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN), and The Embassy of Switzerland in the United

Kingdom. Tellingly, the exhibition spaces involved are committed to experimental, 'convivial',

dialogic practices that encourage the local community's participation.[14] The funding institutions are

also directed towards collaborative projects that target diverse audiences, with an emphasis on

notions of 'access' and 'outreach'.[15] It is crucial in this context to examine sceptically the inherent

pedagogies advanced, as well as to look for ways to undermine the distinction between insiders

and outsiders. Finally, I gather ideas from Noah De Lissivoy's decolonial pedagogy that can be

implemented curatorially. Mainly, I present his understanding of community on the basis of inter-

dependence as an essential concept in the endeavour to de-centre the dominant epistemology.

Plants and power

The exhibition was centred around Orlow's commissioned, two-channel video installation *The*

Crown Against Mafavuke (2016) [Figure 39]. Filmed at Pretoria's Palace of Justice and various

locations in Johannesburg, the Western Cape, and KwaZulu-Natal, the work presents the re-

imagined and dramatised trial of the South African herbalist Mafavuke Ngcobo on the left screen.

The right screen shows scenes of the current practice of traditional medicine in South Africa

(including growers, apprentices, traders, and users) in documentary mode.[16] Thus, the use of two

screens confronts the re-enacted past with the present.

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[14] Parc Saint Léger, "About," http://www.parcsaintleger.fr/en/about/ (accessed April 25, 2017); Bluecoat, "About us," http://www.thebluecoat.org.uk/content/about-us (accessed April 25, 2017).

[15] Wellcome, "Small Arts Awards," https://wellcome.ac.uk/funding/small-arts-awards (accessed April 25, 2017); Arts Council England, "Our mission and strategy," http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/about-us/our-mission-and-strategy (accessed April 25, 2017).

[16] The Showroom, "Uriel Orlow: Mafavuke's Trial".

Figure 39. Uriel Orlow, *The Crown Against Mafavuke,* 2016. Two-channel video installation, 30' 50'' with sound. Video stills, The Showroom.

Ngcobo was a licensed South African *inyanga,* or traditional herbalist, accused in 1940 of 'untraditional practice', that is, using the 'doctor' title, describing himself as a 'native medical scientist', and including drugs and medicines in his remedies, rather than just herbs.[17] As Karen Flint observes, 'traditional healers' normally served African communities. Ngcobo's transgression was primarily economically competing with white biomedicine and hence fostering a hybrid, 'multitherapeutic society' that confused the demarcation between white and indigenous medicine.[18] As Ngcobo's character observes in the video:

> the real reason they have brought me in front of this court is that my business is too successful. They don't like the fact that an African competes with their pharmacies. They don't like the fact that by combining the ancient art of Bantu healing with their knowledge we appeal not only to a new class of Africans in the city, but also the Europeans. Since I started my mail-order business a lot of my customers are white. They wouldn't be seen in my shop of course—but they do order from me in the post. European doctors and pharmacists claim that whites who visit us, they suffer from 'racial degeneracy'.[19]

One of the main arguments of the prosecution during the actual 1940 trial was the assertion that 'native medicines' must be static and must not incorporate ingredients or methods from biomedicine. Meanwhile, the defence presented African medicine as evolving and 'experimental'. The prosecution demanded that traditional medicine should only make use of indigenous plants;

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[17] Karen E. Flint, *Healing Traditions: African Medicine, Cultural Exchange, and Competition in South Africa, 1820-1948* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), 1.

[18] Flint, 2.

[19] See Uriel Orlow and Shela Sheikh, eds., *Theatrum Botanicum* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), 48.

the defence pointed to the unfairness of white medicine's allowance to include herbs and local materials.[20] In the end, the accused was found guilty. The ruling defined traditional medicine as: 'medicines such as natives can make for themselves by comparatively simple processes, not requiring a high degree of scientific skill, out of the natural substances of the country which are available to them'.[21] For Flint, the statement reveals the preconception of the divide between rational, scientific, modern Europe versus irrational, simple, and ritualistic Africa.[22] Ngcobo's case demonstrates the permeability of the boundary between the two.

The trial depicted in the video functions as the axis of the exhibition, a starting point for Orlow to explore various complicated issues. This chapter discusses the relation between botany and colonialism, the confrontation of knowledge systems, and the implications of these issues in the present, for example, in the problematic notion of 'third-world development' (an issue to which I will return). The analysis is guided by an educational reading of the project and ultimately examines the complexities of proposing a decolonial epistemological challenge to the hegemonic worldview from a Western art institution.

One of the first questions to consider —unavoidable in the case of a white, European, London-based artist dealing with these themes in a London gallery— is the ethical problem of representing 'the Other'. In his seminal essay 'The Artist as Ethnographer' (1995), Hal Foster notes the trend that emerged in the 1980s of artists taking the side of the 'cultural or ethnic other'.[23] He draws attention to the problem of maintaining the differentiation of 'the other' and the 'primitivist fantasy', especially the assumption of the Other's access to primary psychic and social means. Furthermore, the essay points to the impossibility of a pure 'other' in the globalised world and underscores the problem of aestheticising and fetishising hybridity. Foster raises important questions regarding the modern subject's search for the self in the Other and the reinforcement of

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[20] Flint, 3-4.

[21] "Rex v. Ngcobo," *South African Law Review* 1941, 430, cited in Flint, 4.

[22] Flint, 5.

[23] Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," in *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 172-173.

identity by means of 'romantic opposition'.[24] He remains sceptical of the viability and idealisation of

reflexive strategies and questions the preservation of ethnographic authority in dialogic

approaches, an unavoidable concern in the case of Orlow. The author does not offer a

straightforward solution; he calls for addressing these issues with 'historical depth' and stresses

the dangers of reflexivity, which, although necessary, presents the problem of 'too much or too little

distance'. He favours a 'parallactic' approach that 'frames the framer', a strategy that recognises

the other as 'given and constructed, real and fantasmatic'.[25] It is important to attend, then, to the

artist's awareness and ways of dealing with these ethical issues. In the last section of this chapter,

I also consider this matter from the educational perspective and concentrate on the institutional

pressures in place, a crucial aspect to take into account, according to Miwon Kwon.[26]

African American artist Renée Green has also addressed the commodification of the 'Other'

as a category. Like Foster, she argues that the notion should be treated cautiously to avoid

reinforcing prevalent divisions. Green draws attention to 'non-otherness', the opposite of the

'Other', as an idea that continually asserts its centrality and primacy as the rule.[27] She highlights

the artificiality of 'otherness' and proposes as a more useful alternative the notion of 'difference',

which 'implies the articulation of one's own complex position in relationship to the matrix of cultural,

political, and social relations suggested by class, ethnicity, and gender, rather than an imposed

naming'. Her focus on the interrelations between sides rather than opposition or division per se is

particularly productive in relation to this case study.[28]

Orlow's notion of the 'rituals of filming', for instance, refers to the filmmaker's meaning-

making strategies, particularly regarding self-reflexivity. These entail looking at the act of filming

and the positions of the people and the places involved. It implies an effort to recognise within the

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[24] Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," 174-175, 178-179.

[25] Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," 180-181, 202-203.

[26] Miwon Kwon, *One place after another: site-specific art and locational identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 140-141.

[27] Renée Green, "I Won't Play Other to Your Same" (1990), in *Other Planes of There: Selected Writings* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 53.

[28] Green, 55.

representation the complicated relations between the filmmaker, the camera, and the resulting

material.[29] His approach is concerned, then, with the ethical dilemma, as posed by indigenous

scholar Kim Tallbear, of 'whose lives, lands, and bodies are inquired into and what do they get out

of it?'[30] Orlow distinguishes the dialogic camera (from the monologic) as a resource 'to produce

less hierarchical, hegemonic and mastering forms of representation'.[31] Although the dialogic could

still be seen as reproducing a dualistic relation, there is an undeniable effort to set up a

conversation and establish 'shared conceptual ground'.[32] As I will explore, Orlow appears to take

on the idea of 'studying up', or 'returning the gaze' to the colonisers, rather than solely focusing on

the colonised.[33]

   The artist is also attentive to the viewers' awareness of their own position. Discussing the

'mediated' and 'constructed' character of representation, Orlow references the work French

ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch who worked in West Africa and is known as a proponent of

cinéma-vérité. In his own work, Orlow interrupts the narrative and alternates between the

imaginary and actual space to promote a simultaneous identification with the characters and

recognition of the viewers' position as 'strangers to this other'.[34] In *The Crown Against Mafavuke,*

the artifice is evident as actors take on different roles and step out of the courtroom to not only

enact, but also to narrate, the trial.[35] These distancing strategies are, for Orlow, ways of reaffirming

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[29] Uriel Orlow, "Rituals of Filming and the Dialogic Camera," *Moving Image Review & Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (April 2013): 100.

[30] Kim TallBear, "Standing With and Speaking as Faith: A Feminist-Indigenous Approach to Inquiry," *Journal of Research Practice* 10, no. 2 (2014), http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/405/371 (accessed March 21, 2017).

[31] Orlow, "Rituals," 104.

[32] Tallbear.

[33] 'Study up' is a notion from anthropologist Laura Nader, it refers to a call to focus on the colonisers, the powerful, and the affluent rather than the disadvantaged population. See Laura Nader, "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up," in *Reinventing Anthropology,* ed. D. Hymes (New York: Vintage, 1972), 284-289.

[34] Orlow, "Rituals," 102.

[35] See Gabriel Coxhead, "Uriel Orlow" exhibition review, *Art in America,* December 5, 2016, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/uriel-orlow/ (accessed March 21, 2017).

difference and the position of viewers as strangers.[36] In interview, the artist discussed this positioning in terms of a 'correlation' with the viewer. He commented that the questions he asks himself during filming and the development of the work recur when thinking about the exhibition and the viewers' encounter.[37] Most importantly in terms of the pedagogical relations at work within the exhibition, Orlow spoke of trying to avoid a 'mastering gaze', or providing all the answers. Instead, he described a position of 'not-knowing' and becoming aware of this 'opacity'.[38] As we will see, this is part of the inherent decolonial pedagogy of the exhibition.

The project came about coincidentally, when the artist attended a meeting at the café of the National Botanical garden in South Africa. He recalls noticing that plants were labelled only in English and Latin (in a country with twelve official languages). He started thinking about the ownership of nature and the history of colonial classification. Eventually, this evolved into a research project that explores the notions of 'botanic nationalism,' 'flower diplomacy', the migration of plants, imperial classification, bioprospecting (the search for vegetal resources for the development of commercial products), and biopiracy (the exploitation of natural biochemical or genetic material, especially by obtaining patents that restrict its future use).[39] In the symposium organised in response to the resulting exhibition, Sheila Sheikh expounded on botany as a colonial, imperial science. She described botanical taxonomy as the base of all economics and discussed the enormous economic effect of European movement of plants in the forms of spices, medicines, dyes, and perfumes. The standardising Linnaean binomial nomenclature is, for Sheikh, a schema to render foreign forms of life comprehensible first and foremost to Europeans. Further, she pointed to the relevance of these ideas to the present.[40] In what follows, I explore the link between botany and colonialism in more depth, investigate the critical capacity of art to deal with

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[36] Orlow, "Rituals," 104.

[37] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018.

[38] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018.

[39] Orlow and Sheikh, eds., "Introduction: A Prisoner in the Garden," in *Theatrum Botanicum*, 28.

[40] The Showroom, "Symposium".

these historical questions, and address the pedagogical challenges presented by the exhibition's questioning of a singular, universal system of knowledge.

The emergence of botany and its systems of classification in the eighteenth century is closely interlinked with colonial expansion, its economic interests, trade and exploitative relations, and epistemological formations.[41] As Londa Schiebinger notes, botanical gardens 'were not merely idyllic bits of green intended to delight city dwellers but worked as experimental stations […] for plant acclimatisation for domestic and global trade, rare medicaments, and cash crops'.[42] For Mary Louise Pratt, Linnaeus' totalising, classificatory system distinguishes between a chaotic world and an organising scientist: 'One by one, the planet's life forms were to be drawn of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order'.[43] The nomenclature allowed the immediate familiarisation or 'naturalisation' of new species. As Pratt puts it, the act of naming represents and claims simultaneously.[44] Botanic nomenclature must be examined, then, in terms of 'linguistic imperialism', whereby plants received an international scientific name and in relation to the process of 'uprooting from their native cultures and acclimatisation to colonial rule'.[45] Orlow addressed these issues by exploring the active historical role of plants and put forward a critical perspective that pointed to the global repercussions of this scientific scheme.

As I will discuss in relation to the display strategy, Orlow's project also dealt with the violence that European categorisation entails. Pratt observes that Linnaean botany correlates with processes of bureaucracy and militarisation and hence with 'the height of the slave trade, the plantation system, colonial genocide in North America and South Africa (and) slave rebellions'.[46] She recovers the economic history term 'primitive accumulation' to refer to the period between

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[41] Londa L. Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

[42] Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire,* 11.

[43] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 11, 30, 31.

[44] Pratt, 31, 32.

[45] Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire,* 196.

[46] Pratt, 35.

1500 and 1800 of European accumulation that supported the Industrial Revolution. The systematisation of nature mirrored this process and advanced a conception of the world to be 'appropriated and redeployed from a unified, European perspective'.[47] Pratt's study details how a specific system of knowledge supported the establishment of global hierarchies.

It is important to note the binds between race, gender, and class that underpin such histories. Schiebinger has studied the exclusion of women from modern science, particularly from natural history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While nature as an object of study was perceived as female, science has been historically identified as male. Linnaean taxonomy was based on the sexuality of plants and prioritised male over female parts in its classificatory system.[48] In fact, experiments carried out at the time determined that European women and African men were anatomically unfit to become scientists.[49] Schiebinger's study investigates how these presumptions have affected knowledge.

The history of botany shows the crucial role of plants in colonial expansion. More importantly, it reveals the imposition of a specific knowledge system as the basis of the dominant worldview. A similar viewpoint is taken by political ecology, a field that emerged in the late twentieth century, which studies the interrelation between ecology and political economy. This perspective departs from the modern partition between human and nonhuman worlds.[50] As T.J. Demos observes, the colonisation of nature originates from the Cartesian partition of the human and nonhuman and the conceptualisation of nature as a separate, passive entity to be exploited.[51] According to Paul Robins, political ecology considers wider, global systemic interactions of local issues and explicitly addresses their political implications. It challenges the notion of modern development and points to the reproduction of 'paternalistic knowledge relations', the

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[47] Pratt, 36.

[48] Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Sexual Politics and the Making of Modern Science* (London: Pandora, 1993), 2, 4.

[49] Schiebinger, *Nature's Body,* 7.

[50] Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 3, 9.

[51] T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 14.

dispossession of local producers, and unequal resource distribution.[52] This perspective is central to Orlow's exhibition and is relevant to the border crossings explored by this thesis. Issues of political ecology are more widely prevalent in contemporary art practice.

Political ecology and contemporary art

Artistic activity is impossible without being aware of nature
Joseph Beuys[53]

Political ecology's scrutiny of the interaction between biodiversity, technology, and the social and political spheres has drawn the attention of artistic practice that seeks to resist corporate globalisation and the commodification of nature and assist in conceiving more just alternatives.[54] Demos notices the recent theoretical concern for the redistribution of agency, more inclusive and egalitarian decision making, and the rightful participation of marginalised populations.[55] Documenta 13 (2012) for instance, adopted an ecological perspective that sought to contribute to the emergence of 'the development of a collective consciousness that allows us to think and feel in sympathy with all types of mineral, vegetable and animal life'.[56] Within this context, the exhibition published eco-feminist activist Vandana Shiva's *The Corporate Control of Life,* a text that examines genetic engineering and patents in relation to both the oppression of non-Western people and the delegitimisation of non-reductionist systems of knowledge. Shiva argues that patents imply 'the imposition of the values and interests of Western transnational corporations on the diverse societies and cultures of the world, (the denial of) traditional rights of local communities to biodiversity (and the promotion of) biopiracy (wherein) the seeds, biodiversity and knowledge of

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[52] Robbins, 13, 18, 19, 21.

[53] Joseph Beuys cited in Pilar Parcerisas, "Joseph Beuys: The Intelligence of Nature," in *Beuys Voice,* ed. Lucrezia De Domizio Durini. (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2011), 483.

[54] T.J. Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability: Contemporary Art and Ecology," in *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969-2009,* ed. Francesco Manacorda (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2009), 24.

[55] T.J. Demos, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology," *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (January 2013): 5.

[56] dOCUMENTA (13), "On Seeds and Multispecies Intra-action: Disowning Life," http://d13.documenta.de/#/programs/the-kassel-programs/congresses-lectures-seminars/on-seeds-and-multispecies-intra-action-disowning-life/ (accessed May 10, 2017).

non-western societies are defined as "raw material"'.[57] She refers to attempts to patent traditional varieties of millennial use, such as basmati rice. She discusses the monopolisation of seeds, a process that transforms them from a 'renewable, regenerative, multiplicative resource into a non-renewable resource and commodity' that obliges farmers to buy from corporations every season.[58] The inclusion of her text within this recent edition of the foremost survey of contemporary art indicates the relevance of these ideas to artistic practice and exhibition making.

As part of the exhibition, Documenta 13 dedicated a section to look at 'science, ecology, and seeds'. Significantly presented at Kassel's museum of natural history, it included works such as Claire Pentecost's installation *soil-erg* (2012) [Figure 40]. Composed of living soil, portraits of relevant activists, and vertical planters, the work proposes an alternative soil valuation system based on natural replenishment as opposed to the use of fertilisers and pesticides. The installation draws attention to the life of good soil and its dependence on social work.[59] Examples like this abound. Artistic practice has repeatedly taken a side on environmental issues, a gesture that Demos describes in terms of 'ethico-political solidarity' or 'standing with'.[60] While Pentecost's piece is closer to an activist approach, Orlow's exhibition stands out in its attention to systems of knowledge. Starting from a specific court case in colonial South Africa, the project expanded its scope through the selection of works from other African countries and stressed the global repercussions of these environmental issues.

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[57] Vandana Shiva, *The Corporate Control of Life,* Documenta 13 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts, no. 12: (Berlin: Hate Cantz Verlag, 2011), kindle edition.

[58] Shiva.

[59] Steven L. Bridges, "Seeds of Resistance. Critical Approaches to the Corporatization of Soil, Seeds, and Stone Fruit," *Seismopolite,* June 1, 2016, http://www.seismopolite.com/seeds-of-resistance-critical-approaches-to-corporatization-of-soil-seeds-and-stone-fruit (accessed April 22, 2017).

[60] Demos, *Decolonizing Nature,* 23, 24.

Figure 40. Claire Pentecost, *soil-erg,* 2012. Installation view at Documenta 13. Photo: Jürgen Hess.

Although artistic interest in plants is not new, historical precedents largely differ from current approaches. For instance, the *Earth Art* show at Cornell University's Gallery (1969) in the US [Figure 41], organised by Willoughby Sharp, commissioned site-specific installations by earth artists Jan Dibbets, Hans Haacke, Günther Uecker, Richard Long, David Medalla, Neil Jenny, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, and Robert Smithson. The project focused on the dissolution of boundaries between object and context and work and documentation.[61] Demos has also discussed a later exhibition, *Fragile Ecologies* at the Queens Museum of Art (1992), as a paradigmatic example of 'restorationist eco-aesthetics', or what he calls the 'band-aid' approach. The problem he sees in this model is that nature is kept separate from 'social, political and technological processes […] (which implies) a dangerous depoliticisation'.[62] For instance, he argues, the exhibition disregarded criticism that the UN faced at the time for failing to address postcolonial and inequality issues.[63]

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[61] Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability," 19. Also see: "Earth Art", Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, accessed March 23, 2017, http://museum.cornell.edu/earth-art-1969.

[62] Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability," 19-20.

[63] Demos, "The Politics of Sustainability," 19-20.

Figure 41. Earth Art exhibition at the Andrew Dickinson White Museum of Art at Cornell University, 1969. Installation view of Robert Morris untitled piece. Cornell University Library Digital Collection.

The exhibition's catalogue makes reference to Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks* (1982) [Figure 42], a regenerative piece that, nevertheless, does present a wider social ambition.[64] The tree planting work was intended to renew Kassel's scarce greenery and make the city 'forest-like'.[65] It was a therapeutic project that sought to heal the crisis or repair the 'split' between man and nature.[66] As presented by Pilar Parcerisas, the work was conceived as a form of 'reconciliation of […] reason with intuition, of art with antiart, of north with south, of what is natural with what is artificial, of science with art'.[67] Kassel residents suggested the planting sites and worked with a team of city planners, gardeners, and environmentalists on the task, which took five years to complete. It is crucial to note that the artist was a founder of the Green Movement in Germany and

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[64] Barbara C. Matilsky, *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 49-50.

[65] Joseph Beuys, "7000 Oaks: Conversation with Richard Demarco, 1982," in *Nature (Documents of Contemporary Art),* ed. Jeffrey Kastner (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2012), 167. Also see: Cara Jordan, "Appealing for an Alternative: Ecology and Environmentalism in Joseph Beuys' Projects of Social Sculpture," *Seismopolite,* 15, August 10, 2016, http://www.seismopolite.com/appealing-for-an-alternative-ecology-and-environmentalism-in-joseph-beuys-projects-of-social-sculpture (accessed March 23, 2017).

[66] Parcerisas, 496.

[67] Parcerisas, 491.

held that the notion that ecology should be expanded to take into account economic, legal, and political issues. The ultimate goal of *7000 Oak Trees* was 'to bring the world into a situation of full-scale global cooperation' and 'a metamorphosis of the social body'.[68] Beuys was a central figure for socially and environmentally engaged practice in the 1980s and still influences work that investigates the relation between art, environmental concerns, and political activism.[69]

Figure 42. Joseph Beuys, *7000 Oaks* (each paired with a basalt stone), inaugurated at Documenta in 1982.

Contemporary approaches actively investigate the inextricable relations between environmental, social, and political matters. They often draw attention to marginalised systems of knowledge and examine the historical processes that have led to the current crisis. Major recent exhibitions have been centred around these issues. The 32nd Sao Paulo biennial, *Incerteza Viva* (2016), was concerned with global warming, extinction, unjust distribution of natural resources, global migration, and botany. The curatorial statement also declared openness to local indigenous systems. In this case, the exhibition itself was structured ecologically, taking the garden as both a

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[68] Joseph Beuys, "Defence of Nature," Bolognano, May 13, 1984, in Beuys Voice, 841; Beuys, "7000 Oaks," 168.

[69] Jordan.

metaphorical and methodological model.[70] Among the works presented was Carla Filipe's

Migration, Exclusion and Resistance (2016), a project that involves the collective use of urban

space to build vegetable gardens and investigates lesser-known edible plants.[71] As I will discuss in

the third section of this chapter, Orlow also built a communal garden as a parallel project to his

exhibition, a component that is symptomatic of this kind of practice's unresolved standing between

aesthetic investigations and more immediate social effects.

Documenta 14, in 2017, made manifest through its publication programme, *South as a*

State of Mind, its attention to 'the emergent ecological crisis (as) a paradigmatic negative moment

with regard to the unresolved dark twinning of capitalism and colonialism', as well as its

examination of the relation between ecocide and genocide.[72] In his introductory essay, artistic

director Adam Szymczyk comments on his decision to divide the exhibition between Kassel and

Athens, as an oppositional stance to the neoliberal, neocolonial system. He introduces the notion

of unlearning the hegemonic knowledge of the West or 'learning from below', a process that

involves 'becoming strangers to ourselves', a formulation that is close to Orlow's imagining of his

audience.[73] Orlow's project can therefore be situated within this widespread engagement with

political ecology issues. In the next section, I investigate the exhibition's critical display strategy

and look at how it turned the ethnographic model into an unexpected, more open, and unsettling

experience for the visitors.

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[70] Jochen Volz, et al., "Incerteza Viva," 32a Bienal de São Paulo, http://www.32bienal.org.br/en/exhibition/h/ (accessed March 23, 2017).

[71] 32a Bienal de São Paulo, "Carla Filipe," http://www.32bienal.org.br/en/participants/o/2627 (accessed March 23, 2017).

[72] Nabil Ahmed, "Negative Moment: Political Geology in the Twenty-First Century," *South as a State of Mind* 8 (Documenta 14, no. 3), (Fall Winter 2016); Gene Ray, "Writing the Ecocide-Genocide Knot: Indigenous Knowledge and Critical Theory in the Endgame," *South as a State of Mind* 8 (Documenta 14, no. 3), (Fall Winter 2016), available online http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/ (accessed March 23, 2017).

[73] Adam Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness— Learning and Working from Athens", in *The documenta 14 Reader,* ed. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2017), 21, 30, 33. Szymczyk's choice to divide the exhibition between Kassel and Athens proved highly controversial particularly, given the current conflictual relation between Germany and Greece over the financial crisis. See: Stavros Stavrides, "What is to be Learned? On Athens and documenta 14 So Far," *Afterall* 43 (Spring- Summer 2017): 64-69; T J Demos, "Learning from documenta 14: Athens, Post-Democracy, and Decolonisation," *Third Text,* 2017, http://thirdtext.org/demos-documenta (accessed August 31, 2018).

'Conceptual herbarium'

The rest of the works in the exhibition, by Orlow and other artists, were organised in a 'conceptual herbarium', a modular structure that showed each piece as a 'specimen' and put together a continent-wide, 'multi-vocal archive' [Figure 43].[74] This constituted a deliberately subversive strategy that directly addressed how ethnographic displays (based on natural history models) have been traditionally presented as rigorous scientific reserves.[75] For Annie Coombes, there is a clear educational purpose in this kind of arrangement, which manifests the intention to present ostensibly neutral and disinterested scientific knowledge as '"proof" of racial inferiority'. This model has worked historically to justify the colonial enterprise and, at the same time, offer objects for 'exotic delectation'.[76] The simultaneous use of 'exoticising' and 'assimilating' display strategies preserves the distinction between presumably inferior cultures to be considered under natural history and those to be studied as rightly historical.[77] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies two main ways of framing this material: 'in situ' and 'in context'. The first draws attention to the ethnographic fragment's missing parts or its whole, for example, through re-creative displays designed for realistic effect. 'In context', employed in this case, refers to the emphasis of the classifying arrangement and the relations between pieces. This kind of setup places objects under 'strong cognitive control'. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes how 'grotesque, rude, strange, and vulgar artefacts (need to be turned) into object lessons', usually through their treatment as documents.[78]

According to Orlow, the herbarium is a reference to the overall title of the project *Theatrum Botanicum*, taken from English herbalist John Parkinson's treaty (1640), and a way of reflecting on the research's problematic foundation in Europe. The tome belongs to the transitional period from

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[74] The Showroom, "Uriel Orlow: Mafavuke's Trial".

[75] Annie E. Coombes, *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 111.

[76] Coombes, 43-44.

[77] Ivan Karp, "Other Cultures in Museum Perspective," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* ed. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 377-378.

[78] Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Objects of Ethnography," in *Exhibiting Cultures,* 388-390.

herbalism to botany, or as Orlow explained, between the disorderly *wunderkammer* and the advent of the classificatory apparatus.[79] I argue that in the exhibition, the presentation of contemporary artworks as specimens or documents, an effect that was accentuated by the cold, white lightning, functioned as a transgressive critique of the scientific exhibitionary model. This constituted the first of several disruptive strategies. In this case, the Western scientific setup collided with the experience of the artworks that stood for the African perspective. This confrontation pointed to culturally determined ways of seeing and learning and, at the same time, complicated the viewers' identification with either side.

Figure 43. 'Herbarium', *Uriel Orlow: Mafavuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories,* The Showroom, 28 September - 19 November, 2016. Installation views. Photos: The Showroom

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[79] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018. See also, Orlow and Sheikh, 28-29.

At the herbarium's far left and closest to the entrance was a group of photographs by Subtle Agency titled *Planting Seeds to Hunt the Wind* (2012) [Figure 44].[80] It includes *Death Mask* by Julia Raynham, an image that depicts the use of *uZililo* as a form of 'magical protection against death'. Other images present a ceremonial cleansing process using *isidakwa/inhlanhla* or the use of *Ilitha* as means to sleep and communicate with ancestral spirits.[81] The work introduces a variety of indigenous contemporary healing practices and locates the plants within this meaningful context. Next to it, Cooking Sections' *Never Die* (2016) [Figure 45], a moringa cake, was placed under a glass dome. Regarding this work, the exhibition booklet refers to the commitment in 2010 of the eleven countries along the edge of the Sahara to the construction of a Great Green Wall to slow down desertification and preserve fertile land through drought-resistant species, such as moringa.[82] In this case, the plant stands for the resistance and survival struggle and the title and the form of a cake point to its extraordinary nutritional properties. As I approached it, the gallery assistant offered me a slice from a tray. While I tasted its sweet and unfamiliar flavour, I also became aware of the strong smell of decaying flowers and the sound of indigenous languages. This sensory stimulation presents a second disruption that challenged the ethnographic exhibition's fragmented order and its normative parcelling of the senses.[83] It overwhelmed the rational approach put forward by the strict scientific grid.

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[80] 'Subtle Agency is a heterodox group of Cape Town-based artists from a variety of cultural backgrounds who came together in 2012 to explore everyday healing practices in Southern Africa. Subtle Agency is Bradley van Sitters, Niklas Zimmer, Noncedo Gxekwa and Julia Raynham'. *Uriel Orlow: Mafavuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories,* The Showroom, exhibition booklet.

[81] Exhibition booklet.

[82] Cooking Sections is formed by Daniel Fernández Pascual and Alon Schwabe, exhibition booklet.

[83] Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 388-389.

Figure 44. Subtle Agency, *Planting Seeds to Hunt the Wind,* 2012, c-type prints, dimensions variable.

Figure 45. Cooking Sections, *Never Die,* 2016, moringa cake: wheat, flour, sugar, coconut oil, almond milk, moringa powder, salt. Photo: The Showroom.

The following work shown, a photograph by David Goldblatt titled *Remnant of a Hedge Planted in 1660 to Keep the Indigenous Khoikhoi Out of the First European Settlement in South Africa* (1993) [Figure 46], refers to the garden as the starting point of the South African colonial project. As told by Orlow, the Dutch trading company had the problem of scurvy (a disease caused by vitamin C deficiency) due to its long trips between Europe and India. The need to grow fresh fruits and vegetables led to their arrival at the Cape in 1652. The first acts of colonial violence were building a wall and planting a wild almond hedge, which still exists and was photographed by Goldblatt. The tree protected the colonisers' fruit and vegetables from the grazing cattle of the KhoiKhoi.[84] Goldblatt's work is accompanied by Orlow's *The Memory of Trees* (2016) [Figure 47]. This work includes *Milkwood Tree*, a photograph of a 500-year-old tree in Woodstock, a suburb of Cape Town, presented as the witness of the killing of Portuguese explorer Dom Francisco de Almeida and his men by the exploited Khoikhoi. Later, it became known as the 'Old Slave Tree of Woodstock', a spot where slaves were beaten and killed, and, eventually, it was renamed 'The Treaty Tree', a monument of the start of the second British occupation succeeding the Dutch. *Lombard Poplar,* another photograph in this series, depicts a tree in Johannesburg that functioned as a landmark for Ruth Fischer's house, a place that offered protection to apartheid fugitives.[85] Ethnographic displays commonly make use of photography as an authenticating strategy, a form of 'verification' or 'evidence' that connotes truth and objectivity.[86] In this case and as yet another disruption, this device is upended: the images offer a counter-perspective that complicates the historical account by presenting the trees as central agents in both the consolidation of and resistance to colonial rule.

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[84] The Showroom, "Symposium".

[85] Exhibition booklet.

[86] Coombes, 138.

Figure 46. David Goldblatt, *Remnant of a hedge planted in 1660 to keep the indigenous Khoikhoi out of the first European settlement in South Africa.* Kirstenbosch, Cape Town, May 16, 1993. Silver gelatine print on fibre paper, 42 x 59.5 cm.

Figure 47. Uriel Orlow, *The Memory of Trees, Milkwood Tree,* Cape Town, 2016, part of a series of large-scale, black and white photographs.

A particularly noteworthy piece was *Flowers for Africa: Mozambique* (2014) by Kapwani Kiwanga [Figure 48]. The piece consists of the reconstruction of the floral arrangement of the negotiation table at which the Portuguese recognised Mozambique's right to independence on September 7, 1974.[87] The artist draws attention to 'things that may have fallen through the cracks […] the invisible, the unseen'.[88] She looks at flowers or plants as documents and asks about the kind of information they present. What does the flower selection signify? What does the arrangement's 'hardness', 'softness', or colour tell us? Her work investigates the potential of looking back and looking differently before moving forward.[89] The drying bouquet's smell filled the exhibition space; the piece put forward an entirely different perspective of the historical event by drawing our attention to a presumably insignificant ornamental detail.

Figure 48.
Kapwani Kiwanga, *Flowers for Africa: Mozambique,* 2014. Flower bouquet.
Photo: The Showroom

Other remarkable works by Orlow included *The Fairest Heritage* (2016) [Figure 49]. The video shows, in the background, a projection of found footage from the celebration of South Africa's national botanical garden's 50th anniversary, an event attended solely by white guests. South African actor Lindiwe Matshikiza stands in front of this footage, physically occupying and

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[87] Exhibition booklet.

[88] 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, "Interview with Kapwani Kiwanga," http://1-54.com/london/interview-with-kapwani-kiwanga/ (accessed March 29, 2017).

[89] 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair, "Interview".

interrupting it, and her movement responds to and challenges the images.[90] Through this

performative action, the work provides a disruptive retelling of the commemorative event and

points to the omissions of the official narrative. In *Grey, Green, Gold* (2015-2016), an installation

composed of a magnifying glass and seed, photographs, and slide projections, Orlow draws out an

analogy between Nelson Mandela's time in prison (1964-1982) and the discovery and twenty-year

selective breeding process of the yellow Crane Flower (a native species that is usually orange).

The flower was renamed 'Mandela's Gold' in 1994, during his presidency.[91] Finally, the audio piece

What Plants Were Called Before They Had a Name (2016) puts together an 'oral dictionary' of

indigenous names disregarded by colonial classification.[92] Jason Irving observes that the recovery

of South African languages confronts the idea of scientific discovery. He refers to the use of the

racist term 'caffer' in the scientific names of fifty indigenous South African plants, such as the

African plum (*Haerpephyllum caffrum*), to question science's alleged neutrality and expose its

profound implication in power relations.[93] These works position plants at the centre of colonial

history and racial tensions.

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[90] Exhibition booklet.

[91] Exhibition booklet.

[92] Exhibition booklet.

[93] The Showroom, "Symposium".

Figure 49. Uriel Orlow, *The Fairest Heritage,* 2016. Single channel video, silent, 4'18". Video stills.

In the exhibition, the display strategy proves crucial to the project's challenge to the Western scientific perspective. The works' investigation of plants as central actors in colonial history (rather than isolated specimens) directly confronted the classifying arrangement and put forward other repressed histories. Furthermore, it brought to light the violence this ordering structure involves. I have presented how the conceptual herbarium challenged conventional ethnographic displays. The exhibition can be read, then, through Jane Bennet's concept of 'vibrant matter', her view that 'dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. It does so by preventing us from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies'.[94] The exhibition design's critical re-conception of ethnographic display conforms to the postcolonial perspective that has profoundly questioned this exhibitionary model. While the conceptual herbarium could be seen as a way of appropriating other artists' works, it effectively drew critical attention to modes of showing, looking, and knowing in the exhibition space.

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[94] Jane Bennett, Preface to *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press Books, 2009), ix.

The ethnographic museum's scientific impetus and its role of preserving, classifying, and examining natural and cultural samples superseded the *wunderkammer's* wonder-guided collecting of the unusual and extraordinary. The museum was closely associated with anthropology during the nineteenth century, a discipline that has been reluctant to address the problematic power relations of the European study of subjected, non-European societies and its reinforcement of global hierarchies. At the time, the ethnographic object was displayed as 'proof' of humankind's evolution to reach civilisation.[95] According to Fabienne Boursiquot, since the 1980s, an increasingly felt crisis of the ethnographic museum has demanded the redefinition of its role from the exhibition of other cultures to that of 'intercultural meeting point'. This moment is mirrored in a shift of perspective within anthropology and the attempt of 'seeing ourselves amongst others […] a case among cases, a world among worlds'.[96] Boursiquot notes that a central issue posed by globalization is the reworking of the distinction and relation between the West and the 'others'. It also raises the question of the actual effect of dialogic or critical approaches on present inequalities.[97] The postcolonial viewpoint looks at processes of imperial 'expropriation' and 'appropriation' as key to the relation between modernity and globalisation. It challenges a political economy based on 'the humanist, rationalist, colonialist and nationalistic culture of the West' and deals with the connection between past and present, that is, the interrelations of former empires and their colonies and the proliferation of 'contact zones'.[98] These are defined by Pratt as the 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination […] (and) their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today'.[99] The notion of 'contact zones' is clearly central to Orlow's exhibition and its examination of the conflictual convergence of different cultures and healing practices.

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[95] Talal Asad, ed., Introduction to *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1975), 14-16. Fabienne Boursiquot, "Ethnographic Museums: From Colonial Exposition to Intercultural Dialogue," in *The Postcolonial Museum*, 65.

[96] Clifford Geertz, Introduction to *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 16.

[97] Boursiquot, 63, 67-68.

[98] Alessandra De Angelis, et al., "Introduction: Disruptive Encounters —Museums, Arts and Postcoloniality", in *The Postcolonial Museum,* 1-2.

[99] Pratt, 7.

Mafavuke's Trial and Other Plant Stories can be seen to contribute to the postcolonial investigation of art's ability to disrupt the dominant worldview and its attention to ethical, political, and epistemological issues. This perspective is less concerned with strategies of inclusion than with the 'rewriting of history'. It looks for ways of breaking down the dominance of the exhibition space and highlighting the 'silent violence' of display.[100] The idea is to find ways of questioning, 'de-colonising', and 'undoing' mono-cultural views and their corresponding epistemologies. The postcolonial critique of the museum works towards the conception of alternative archives that correlate with other conceptions of political economy.[101] This is one of the main achievements of Orlow's exhibition: the herbarium allowed the works' historical inquiries to perturb their orderly setup.

It is worth exploring this critical context further. Susanne Leeb observes that the question of the role of the ethnological museum in a postcolonial, globalised world has brought to the fore matters of acquisition, restitution, shared heritage, and the kind of gaze they promote, whether it be nationalistic, nostalgic, scientific, or aesthetic. She notes that the intent to reinvent these institutions has led to efforts such as the Pitt Rivers Museum conference "The Future of Ethnographic Museums" (2013), an event centred on issues of audience, colonialism, representation, and globalisation. Leeb discusses the recent interest in artistic interventions that deal with modes of exhibiting the Other.[102] An important precedent is Chris Marker and Alain Resnais' anti-colonialist film *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953). The work, banned in France for sixteen years, engaged with the notion of *négritude* and the commercialisation of African pieces. Filmed at the British Museum, the *Musée du Congo Belge*, and the *Musée de L'Homme,* it questioned ways of looking in this context.[103] A more recent example is Isaac Julien's Turner Prize-nominated film *Vagabondia,* (2000). In this case, a dancer and ghosts of women of colour wander

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[100] De Angelis, 3, 7, 10.

[101] De Angelis, 11, 18.

[102] Susanne Leeb, "Contemporary Art and/in/versus/about the Ethnological Museum," *Darkmatter,* November 18, 2013, http://www.darkmatter101.org/site/2013/11/18/contemporary-art-andinversusabout-the-ethnological-museum/ (accessed March 30, 2017).

[103] Jenny Chamarette, *"Les Statues meurent aussi,"* in *Senses of Cinema* 52 (September 2009), http://sensesofcinema.com/2009/cteq/les-statues-meurent-aussi/ (accessed March 30, 2017).

around Sir John Soane's Museum in London, a space that is further unsettled by a voice-over narrative in Saint Lucian Creole French.[104] Orlow's central video installation —especially when considered as the axis of the exhibition— relates to these films' 'counterfantasies' that contest ethnographic museums' enclosing and silencing processes and their demarcation not only between white Western and Black African culture, but also between the animate and inanimate.[105]

The crisis in anthropological and ethnographic objectivity mentioned above has also motivated exhibitions such as *Object Atlas: Fieldwork in the Museum,* at the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt (2012). The project invited artists to develop work in relation to their choice of pieces from the collection in an attempt to construct 'new meanings and interpretations' and 're-animate or "remediate"' the displays.[106] For instance, Otobong Nkanga's selection of weapons and jewellery was shown in a traditional glass display table. The artist then elaborated on the objects' original use by means of a poster [Figure 50]. Each piece is held by a figure dressed fully in black except for white gloves and accompanied by colourful descriptive labels in an overall cheap-advert aesthetic that looked at odds with the gallery space. The poster satirically reflects on the ethnographic task of deciphering the object's value and usage and problematises the hybrid status of the artefacts as tools and exhibits.[107] Nkanga's allusion to mass-produced Nigerian calendars can be read as a form of repatriation and relocation of the pieces.[108] The exhibition exemplifies the institutions' recourse to contemporary art as reflexive means.

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[104] See Tate, "Isaac Julien Vagabondia," http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/julien-vagabondia-t11943 (accessed March 30, 2017).

[105] See Darby English, "Fantasias of the Museum," in *How to See a Work of Art in Total Darkness* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2010), 194, and Chamarette.

[106] Leeb, and Weltkulturen Museum, "Object Atlas — Fieldwork in the Museum," http://www.weltkulturenmuseum.de/en/content/object-atlas-fieldwork-museum-0 (accessed March 31, 2017).

[107] Leeb.

[108] Kerstin Meincke, "Currency Affairs. Photography and Productivity," in *Art History and Fetishism Abroad: Global Shiftings in Media and Methods,* ed. Gabrielle Genge and Angela Stercken (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 107-109.

Figure 50. Otobong Nkanga, *Object Atlas: The Currency Affair*, 2012, poster, 85 x 59 cm. Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt.

Another relevant case is Yinka Shonibare's *Garden of Love* (2007), presented at the Musée du quai Branly in Paris. A successor of the Musée national des arts d'Afrique et d' Océanie, the museum opened in 2006 at a moment of intense debate over the legacy of the French empire, with critics drawing attention to the insufficient consideration of the colonial provenance of its collection.[109] The institution identified itself as an art museum, and its use of aestheticising displays was criticised as a way of overlooking and even erasing colonial history. Shonibare's commission is indicative of the generational divide of the museum's audience and its efforts to address the young, French-born children of immigrants.[110] The installation commented on the museum's garden, made up of imported plants. Regarding composition, Shonibare's mannequins were based on Honoré Fragonard's *The Progress of Love* (1771-73) and thus alluded to the extravagant

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[109] Daniel J. Sherman, *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 200.

[110] Sherman, 202-203, 207.

lifestyle of the European aristocracy before the French Revolution. The artist ambiguously deals with the colonial and postcolonial conflict by dressing his figures in colourful, sumptuous African prints and forebodingly beheading them.[111] Although Shonibare took the garden as the centre of his work, his approach could not be further from Orlow's.

The Showroom exhibition's interest in colonialism and social justice is more closely related to installations that employ particular display strategies to reassess the notions of the archive and the artefact. In her study of race and installation art, Jennifer González describes the attempt to de-centre the viewer, undermine solitary contemplation of the works, and draw attention to the subject's position within the exhibitionary complex.[112] In Orlow's case, the recreation of the herbarium can be thought of —to use Gonzalez's term— as an 'environmental microcosmos' that looks into the 'historical materiality of objects', their origins and commercialisation.[113] In her examination of US artist Fred Wilson's work, Gonzalez observes the artist's installation and re-staging strategies to highlight material, visual, and display discourse. Wilson is known for his critique of modern museum collections, systems of classification, arrangement techniques, and interpretive frameworks, as well as his formulation of alternatives through the recovery of what has been excluded from representation.[114] Briefly looking at one of his best-known installations will assist in discerning Orlow's critical approach.

For *Room with a View: The Struggle Between Culture, Content and the Context of Art* (1987), Wilson selected other artists' works and presented them in three distinctive settings: the ethnographic museum and its glass cases, the turn of the century richly decorated Salon, and the modernist white cube. The pieces were presented, then, either as exotic anthropological artefacts, decorative, or fine art. For Gonzalez, the emphasis of Wilson's installation is on the 'fiction' of display models and their hermeneutics. Using 'parody', she observes, the artist overturns these

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[111] Anne Ring Petersen, "Mining the Museum in an Age of Migration," in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History,* ed. Iain Chambers et al. (Farnham, Surrey: Routledge, 2014), 126-127.

[112] Jennifer A. González, *Subject to Display: Reframing Race in Contemporary Installation Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 2.

[113] González, 9-10.

[114] González, 15-16.

authoritative setups.[115] Her notion of a 'pseudomuseum environment' as a critical device can apply to Orlow's exhibition, as well as the questions she raises in her analysis: 'what is it? Where is it? Who is represented? How are they represented? Who is doing the telling? What do you touch? What do you feel? What do you think?'[116] Gonzalez suggests that Wilson's work points to the museum's 'ability to interpellate its audience into this imagined subject position in order to define social membership, legitimate historical narratives, and determine access to cultural knowledge'.[117] That is, the museum constructs a particular 'account of "civilisations"' and positions viewers as either insiders or outsiders in a spatial and cultural ritual'.[118] Like Wilson, Orlow complicates this positioning.

To respond to Gonzalez's questions, Orlow's exhibition was presented as a subversive archive or collection. Organised by The Showroom, it considered both an art-informed audience and the immediate neighbouring community; it represented the South African indigenous population and put forward the repressed histories of this 'Other'. The project was led by a white Western artist who also put together a selection of other artists' work (including several African practitioners). Visitors not only looked at but also smelled, tasted, and listened to the works: a sensorily stimulating experience that defied the rigid physical setup. Finally, it provoked reflection on the historical contingency of the current world order and the possibility of more just and sustainable alternatives.

Orlow's approach is distinguished by his interest in the 'sheer materiality' of documents.[119] He looks beyond the information they provide and pays close attention to a latent meaning that is particularly pertinent to the present.[120] Not only are the most historically and emotionally relevant

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[115] González, 65-66, 68.

[116] González, 73, 83-84.

[117] González, 99.

[118] González, 119.

[119] Uriel Orlow, "Artists and Archives: A Correspondence," in *All This Stuff: Archiving the Artist*, ed. Judy Vaknin, Karyn Stuckey, and Victoria Lane (Oxford: Libri Publishing, 2013), 79.

[120] Uriel Orlow, "Latent Archives, Roving Lens", in *Ghosting: The Role of the Archive within Contemporary Artists' Film and Video*, ed. Jane Connarty and Josephine Lanyon (Bristol: Picture This Moving Image, 2006), 35.

pieces considered, but also those that appear insignificant. The artist understands his practice as an associative process and as the assembling of 'constellations'.[121] He explores the archive's possibilities and ambivalence: its monumentality and invisibility, its potential to appear and disappear. Concerned with the 'visualisation, actualisation and problematization of what is already memorialised', his work involves looking back, but strictly as means to deal with the present. Orlow describes this as the 'nowness of history', referring to the material present of the document and the archive.[122] For the artist, this 'uncontainable' materiality presents questions such as: how should we engage with it? What kinds of demands does it make from the viewer (for instance looking at it again because it is still here)?[123] I consider these issues also as pedagogical challenges. Orlow understands history as 'resonating events in space, which are evoked through fragments, alluded to in shards of matter, haunted by *revenants*'. Belonging to the past and the present, ghosts are reminders for the artist that 'the past is unfinished business'.[124] So how does this critique operate in the present? In the first section of this chapter, I addressed the themes put forward by the exhibition. In the second, I examined the use of the 'conceptual herbarium' as a critical strategy. In the third and last section, I concentrate on the educational proposition. First, my analysis moves to the epistemological level of the exhibition; then, I problematise the notion of 'community' through a decolonial lens.

An 'ecology of knowledges'

Indigenous medicinal practices in South Africa are embedded in a 'holistic, non-invasive and egalitarian' understanding of health.[125] Thokozani Xaba observes that this approach is based on religious beliefs that consider the past, present, and future relations between the living and the

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[121] Orlow, "Artists and Archives," 80.

[122] Uriel Orlow, "Latent Archives," 34, 35, 47.

[123] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018.

[124] Uriel Orlow, "In Praise of Ghosts", in *Vicissitudes: Histories & Destinies of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Sharon Kivland and Naomi Segal (London: igrs books, 2013), 267, 269.

[125] Thokozani Xaba, "Marginalized Medical Practice: The Marginalisation and Transformation of Indigenous Medicines in South Africa," in *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies,* ed. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (London: Verso, 2008), 320.

dead. Its methods and remedies are widely available: they are employed in every household in the first instance and only require an *inyanga* in more serious occasions.[126] The state addressed the financial threat that traditional medicine presented by means of an ambiguous policy that— following apartheid and the ideologies of separate development— attempted to both restrict and allow these practices. The Natal Code, for example, confined the use of indigenous medicine to Africans and African areas. Other measures implemented by the Black Administration Act of 1927 include high licence fees and limitations on advertising. In fact, Mafavuke Ngcobo (the central character in Orlow's film), together with Solomon Mazibuko, established the Natal Native Medical Association as a resistance front.[127] 'Normalisation' procedures of indigenous medicines were based on scientific tests and therefore reinforced the hierarchy between knowledge systems. Significantly, levels of education were determined in relation to the distance from African beliefs and practices. Xaba argues that true recognition of African medical practice must be realised independently from a scientific assessment and supported by adequate infrastructure. This is a necessary condition of Africans' social emancipation.[128] In light of this history, the exhibition's attention to indigenous healing practices can be understood as an epistemological challenge to the West.

Through its examination of the confrontation and cross-fertilisation of various medicinal practices in South Africa, Orlow's project furthers the recognition of the 'epistemological diversity' of the world. For Boaventura de Sousa Santos, it is a matter of preserving the biodiversity of the South and the knowledge that sustains it from the greed of scientific, technological, and industrial advances to appropriate and patent them.[129] His main argument is that global social justice requires 'global cognitive justice'. Capitalist hegemony entails the humiliation of other systems of knowledge. That is, the dominance of modern science that supported the ascendancy of the West involves the suppression of non-scientific forms of knowledge and their social practices. For

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[126] Xaba, 321-322.

[127] Xaba, 330-333.

[128] Xaba, 329, 345.

[129] Santos, Preface to *Another Knowledge is Possible*, ix.

Santos, this amounts to 'epistemicide, […] the other side of genocide'. From this perspective,

social emancipation must be based on the supersession of the 'monoculture of scientific

knowledge' by an 'ecology of knowledges'.[130] To this end, counter-hegemonic projects seek to re-

configure systems of knowledge by questioning the alleged completeness and universality of the

European standpoint. They underscore the 'situatedness, partiality, and constructedness' of

knowledge and put forward instead an 'unstable plurality of scientific and epistemic cultures and

configurations'.[131] When I discussed this with Orlow, he pointed to a correspondence between

these issues and his body of work. He commented on his interest in developing open-ended,

networks or ecologies of work, rather than closed, singular pieces and propositions.[132] In the

exhibition, the positioning of plants as central actors in colonial history against a scientific display

structure worked to uncover the imposition of a totalising understanding of the world and its

concurrent economic and political order.

While the political relations of colonialism have been widely recognised and criticised,

Santos notes that 'colonial epistemic monoculture' is still understood as a form of development and

modernity in opposition to notions of 'underdevelopment', 'the Third World', or the 'global South'.

The differentiation between scientific and local knowledge reinforces divisions such as rational

versus magical, or the idea of modern knowledge as progressive and other systems as static.[133]

The civilisation model's establishment of a limit between nature and society and object and subject,

as well as its conception of nature as an unconditionally available resource to be explained by

science for exhaustive exploitation, are, for Santos, founding principles of capitalism. In this field of

clashing political and economic views, postcolonial studies look at the persistent inequality of neo-

colonial relations, challenge a linear conception of history, and problematise 'who produces

knowledge, in what context, and for whom'. Santos stresses that knowledge is never pure or

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[130] Santos, João Arriscado Nunes, and Maria Paula Meneses, "Introduction: Opening up the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference," in *Another Knowledge is Possible,* xix, xx.

[131] Santos, Nunes, and Meneses, xxvi, xxix, xxxi.

[132] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018.

[133] Santos, Nunes, and Meneses, xxxiii, xxxviii.

complete and instead presents the concept of a 'constellation of knowledges'.[134] These ideas can be seen at work in Orlow's exhibition, first, in the juxtaposition of a scientific framework and native forms of knowledge that bring the display structure to life, and then, in the historical investigation's blurring of the demarcation between nature and society. Additionally, Orlow's focus on the historical materiality of plants diminishes the distinction between object and subject. At the same time, his archive, conceived as a constellation, decidedly grounds the materials in the present.

In its relevance to the present, the exhibition can be read as a postcolonial educational project. This approach scrutinises the notion of 'development' and its part in processes of Westernisation, the drive towards technocracy and bureaucratisation. In this case, attention is drawn to the disenfranchisement of Africans from their holistic understanding of health and illness and from the potential cooperation between scientific and traditional medicine.[135] For Vanessa Andreotti, the postcolonial standpoint understands globalisation as the continuation of colonialism.[136] The invention of the 'Third World' is considered part of a process of epistemic violence and naturalisation that can be described as the 'worlding of the West as world'.[137] This movement results in the denial of the part of colonialism in the First World's accumulation of wealth and the persistence of unequal relations. Andreotti observes that the discourse of 'development' sustains the understanding of poverty as the result of lack of resources and education that, at the same time, draws attention away from who has taken control over these resources.[138] Postcolonial critique necessitates the acknowledgement of one's position and complicities; it involves a hyper self-reflexivity attentive to the ambiguity of the position of a Western-based critic in relation to (neo) colonialism. This approach distinguishes between responsibility for the Other 'as burden of the fittest', and to the Other in terms of accountability. It questions the idea of the South as a research

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[134] Santos, Nunes, and Meneses, xxxiv, xxxvi, xli.

[135] Xaba, 318-320.

[136] Vanessa Andreotti, "An Ethical Engagement with the Other: Spivak's ideas on Education," *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices* 1, no. 1 (July 2007): 69, http://www.criticalliteracyjournal.org/ (accessed April 3, 2017).

[137] Andreotti, 69. Also see, Gayatri C. Spivak, *The post-colonial critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

[138] Andreotti, 69-70.

source that the West is able to transform into knowledge and promotes instead 'transnational literacy', a critical understanding of globalisation.[139] Rather than a reversal strategy that remains within the same logic, a critique of hegemonic discourse from within is favoured. This positioning requires 'unlearning dominant systems of knowledge and representation' and points to the 'desire for mastery' of the speaker. Primarily, postcolonial critique is concerned with addressing global issues considering 'complexity, uncertainty, contingency and difference'.[140] The exhibition adopted a postcolonial perspective in its re-examination of historical events as a means of disrupting the sense of a single Western narrative. Furthermore, the scientific arrangement of the works functioned as a self-reflexive strategy that accentuated the artist's problematic position.

The comparison of the liberal and the postcolonial educational approach —as drawn out by Andreotti— can be helpful in assessing the critical value of exhibitions like this. She distinguishes between the definition of the problem in terms of poverty and helplessness versus inequality and justice; the understanding of the cause of the problem as a matter of development versus addressing complex human relations; and caring for the other versus assuming responsibility towards the other. Furthermore, Andreotti differentiates between acting on humanitarian moral grounds versus on the basis of political and ethical principles; the idea of change based on a universal ideal versus a reflexive, dialogical relation; and direction by a 'feel good factor' versus independent, critical thinking. In sum, postcolonial education observes the need to transform knowledge systems, and it aims to address injustice and empower individuals from a self-reflexive standpoint.[141] I have argued that Orlow's exhibition followed the postcolonial approach. However, a closer look into the show's institutional framework reveals the project's more liberal aspects.

In what follows, I examine the institutional framework in which this epistemological challenge took place. The idea is to look, in Walter Mignolo's words, into 'who and when, why and where is knowledge generated'.[142] Here, as in my other chapters, I address the interaction

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[139] Andreotti, 69, 73-75.

[140] Andreotti, 75-76.

[141] Andreotti, 77.

[142] Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no.7-8 (2009): 2, 7, 8.

between aesthetic and socio-political spheres, especially in the configuration of the exhibition and its public. The Showroom states as its mission: 'We commission and produce art and discourse; providing an engaging, collaborative programme that challenges what art can be and do for a wide range of audiences including art professionals and our local community'.[143] Reading closely, there is an emphasis on process and knowledge production, rather than presentation, as well as on a participatory outlook, the intention to question the boundaries of art and its purpose, and, notably, a clear drive towards diverse audiences, differentiated as the art world, and the 'local community'. The gallery was previously dedicated to supporting the work of emerging artists. Under the directorship of Emily Pethick (2008-2018), it concentrated on 'emerging practices and ideas' (Orlow's decolonial critique is clearly relevant in this sense). Pethick describes a decidedly critical approach that can be intellectually rigorous but at the same time involve 'forms of action' and a playful, warm, and open attitude. In terms of audience, she expresses her concern for quality over quantity. She refers to artist Ricardo Basbaum to comment on her conception of The Showroom as an organisation rather than an institution, the idea of an organic, flexible being not immediately associated with structures, hierarchies, and exclusions.[144] Evidently, the gallery constantly deals with the question of its role within the local community and the tension between aesthetic and social realms.

The Showroom's programme occupies a paradoxical position between its institutional status and the endeavour to destabilise established systems of knowledge. Regarding education, Pethick has highlighted the 'difference […] between learning as a process that is encountered in all areas of life and the more top-down or institutional procedures'. She has discussed her interest in the ways people deal with, internalise, and also subconsciously defy 'imposed categories of thought'.[145] A central question in this context is —as posed by Annette Krauss— 'what we don't know and why. What are we not allowed to know?' That is, how to deal with the ambivalence of

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[143] The Showroom, "About," http://www.theshowroom.org/about (accessed April 13, 2017).

[144] "Interview with Emily Pethick" in *How to work together* by Andrea Phillips, 18, 22, 23, 24, http://howtoworktogether.org/think-tank/andrea-phillips-how-to-work-together/ (accessed April 14, 2017).

[145] Annette Krauss, Emily Pethick, and Marina Vishmidt, "Spaces of Unexpected Learning 2," in *Curating and the Educational Turn,* 251.

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education being both, 'liberating' and 'restricting', and with institutional reinforcement of unjust social relations.[146] On her part, Pethick has raised her concern to resist 'forms of standardisation, institutionalisation, and instrumentalization' enforced by governmental policy. She notes the incorporation of the notions of 'collaboration', 'participation', and 'learning' by political agendas and the need to develop a critical approach within this disputed field. A crucial question from her to keep in mind is that of who is being educated or 'in need of education'.[147] Her focus is on 'conversational' practices that generate forms of 'responsiveness' and 'change'. The gallery is conceived, then, as a 'site of sustained inquiry' where change is envisioned or enacted at a 'micro-level'. Pethick has made clear her commitment to produce 'unstable forms of knowledge' and, at the same time, she acknowledges the need to negotiate and rethink institutional structures. Her position at The Showroom is difficult as she oversees the programme and also fulfils expectations of public and private funders and marketing demands. However, she stresses that it is still possible to work in these conditions creatively.[148] Pethick remains determined to challenge 'stable structures and categories of knowledge' through a principle of horizontal knowledge.[149] She insists that even if the change brought about is limited, ideas can be very influential and can be taken by others as models or methodologies.[150] In this limited scale, the gallery is able to operate critically, without being completely overpowered by the institutional structure. The question that remains, however, is the influence of this critical approach in its peripheral standing.

The gallery's activities are largely oriented towards its immediate context. Since 2009, The Showroom is located at the Church Street Market and Edgware Road area of London; one of the most deprived wards in the country, it is surrounded by, although disconnected from, more wealthy areas.[151] The neighbourhood is home to diverse communities from the Middle East and Africa, it

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[146] Krauss, Pethick, and Vishmidt, 252-253.

[147] Krauss, Pethick, and Vishmidt, 256-257.

[148] Emily Pethick, "Resisting institutionalisation," ICA (London, December 4, 2008), https://www.ica.art/bulletin/resisting-institutionalisation (accessed April 14, 2017).

[149] "Interview with Emily Pethick," 20, 23.

[150] Emily Pethick et al., "Why Do Galleries Work Beyond the Site of the Institution?" in *Gallery as Community: Art, Education, Politics,* ed. Marijke Steedman (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2012), 115.

[151] "Interview with Emily Pethick," 16.

has the fourth lowest median household income in London, and fifty percent of children live below the poverty line.[152] Pethick describes it as 'a Labour ward within a Conservative Borough', an activist centre and an energetic community preoccupied with effecting local change. The Showroom's move to Church Street was determined by the possibility of working within the area through a more educationally-driven programme.[153] A definite concern for Pethick is making The Showroom relevant beyond the art world.[154] However, this is not an unproblematic endeavour: positioning an exhibition space committed to social justice carries its own contradictions, for instance, regarding its ability to sustain, rather than co-opt, critical and decolonial thinking. Here, I examine the forms of knowledge, participation, and collectivity put forward by the gallery in relation to the ambition to destabilise the dominant system of knowledge.

The focus on the neighbourhood's community is most evident in The Showroom's Communal Knowledge programme, an initiative 'specifically oriented towards local interaction'.[155] It invites artists to develop collaborative projects within the Church Street community. Led by Louise Shelley, it starts from 'conversations around shared interests and concerns, (and aims) to generate playful and experimental venues for critical reflection on issues at stake locally'. It centres on notions of 're-thinking' and 'un-learning' and the construction of alternative knowledge. The programme consists of three artist commissions per year that usually take the form of workshops or long-term, off-site collaborations, one of which is developed into an exhibition. The procurement of long-term activities is fundamental to build strong relationships and reflects a keen 'awareness of process'.[156] For Pethick, the scheme is meant to promote 'critical questioning from the ground upwards in terms of how to think about change, and how to imagine things otherwise'.[157] Although the intention is that Communal Knowledge informs and exchanges ideas with other areas of the

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[152] Emily Pethick et al., "A Survey of Curatorial Practice in Galleries," in *Gallery as Community,* 67.

[153] Pethick, "Why do galleries work," 106; Marie-Anne McQuay et.al., "The Philanthropic Mission," in *Gallery as Community,* 188.

[154] "Interview with Emily Pethick," 16.

[155] "Interview with Emily Pethick," 16.

[156] The Showroom, "Communal Knowledge," http://www.theshowroom.org/programmes/communal-knowledge, (accessed April 18, 2017).

[157] Pethick, "Why do galleries work," 118.

gallery, it is nonetheless clearly distinguished from the gallery's exhibitions programme and still requires, for Pethick, 'working on different levels'.[158] What does this distinction imply? In the case of Orlow's exhibition, under Communal Knowledge, the artist developed a cross-cultural medicinal plant garden at 60 Penfold Community Hub (a local care home) and a complementary manual [Figure 51]. For the artist, the garden was a way of anchoring the exhibition in the gallery's context and establishing 'real dialogue' with the local communities, as well as activating engagement with the issues explored by the project. The garden was built in collaboration with gardener Carole Wright, Church Street Bengali Women's group, Penfold Hub Gardening Group, and Penfold Hub centre.[159] The point here is not to challenge the value of these communal activities. Instead, I am interested in questioning the differentiation and interaction between the exhibitions (as aesthetic investigations mainly directed to an art-informed audience), and Communal Knowledge activities (focused on effecting change within the local community). How is the public conceived in each case? Does this distinction reinforce or diminish actual divisions?

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[158] "Interview with Emily Pethick," 17, 19.

[159] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018. See also, The Showroom, "Medicinal garden launch and tour with Uriel Orlow and Michael Heinrich," http://www.theshowroom.org/events/medicinal-garden-launch-and-tour-w-slash-uriel-orlow-and-michael-heinrich (accessed April 18, 2017).

Figure 51. Medicinal garden launch, Wednesday 20 July 2016
Penfold Community Hub, 60 Penfold Street. Photos: Dan Weil.

It is essential to examine the notion of communal engagement put forward by the gallery, a

model that responds to the educational crisis and funding pressures as discussed in the

introduction of this thesis. Kwon notes the centrality of institutional forces at work in this kind of

collaboration. She stresses that, as we have seen, these activities must be thought of as part of a

programme that is itself part of a more extensive institutional network that carries certain

expectations.[160] During a conversation with the Communal Knowledge programme curator Louise

Shelley, she described to me her understanding of community as 'groups coming together around

shared interests […] to build affinities on areas of common ground'.[161] Taking a shared interest as

a point of identification can be seen, however, as a 'reductive […] essentializing process (that

implies a) self-affirming, self-validating "expression" of a unified community'.[162] As Kwon observes,

the institutional, bureaucratic mediating framework remains out of sight. These 'images of

coherence, unity and wholeness' constitute for Kwon an ideal elaboration of community that

overlooks tension and conflict and involves a 'disciplinary purpose'. Therefore, acknowledging the

[160] Kwon, 140-141.

[161] Louise Shelley in email conversation with the author, April 28, 2017.

[162] Kwon, 151.

impossibility of an ideal community is the first step to the formulation of alternative conceptions.[163]

For Kwon, the idea that the project will affirm the participant community implies the conception of public art as 'reassuring', useful, and enjoyable (as presented in Orlow's garden images). Art is seen as a form of protection and empowerment against alienation and exclusion. The problem is that this notion of empowerment in opposition to deprivation obscures the systemic causes of discrimination and marginalisation and risks presenting participants as passive victims.[164] This discussion is particularly pertinent to decolonising projects like Orlow's. Scrutinising such formations provides crucial insight into the educational relations at work and whether they support or undermine the exhibition's subversive aims.

The question is to what extent are politics enacted in the Rancièrian sense, that is, in the repartition of the 'order of bodies', 'defined parts', or 'assigned roles'.[165] This perspective differs from the consensual erasure of difference. Instead, it maintains the division of people as a condition for politics. This approach involves 'processes of disidentification' and is primarily concerned with 'how to create a stage upon which the people can appear, and furthermore, appear as inherently multiple'.[166] Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of community is relevant here: he recognises the paradox of a movement of coming together that at the same time questions its idealisation. Community in this sense is grounded in the notion of relationality, in the acknowledgement of its multiplicity and dynamism. Interrelations are constituted by interruptions, disjunctions, and dislocations, which are 'enacted through contingent modalities of spacing'. Community is conceived as both a problem that involves social and political complexities and a form of resistance. Seen as a contingent rather than an essentialist formation, this conception challenges 'conciliatory' and 'unproblematic' understandings of the public and their contribution to the 'colonisation of difference'.[167] As put by Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, 'collective being is [...]

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[163] Kwon, 151,153,154.

[164] Kwon, 96-97, 143-144.

[165] Beth Hinderliter et al., eds., Introduction to *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2009), 7.

[166] Hinderliter, 9, 11.

[167] Hinderliter, 2, 14, 15, 18.

being in a relationship to another, with boundaries that are themselves part and parcel of being and that are constantly negotiated, redefined, extended, and encroached'.[168] Taking this into account, the garden appears as an institutional justification of the exhibition that, at the same time, undermines the latter's criticality.

The elaboration of community discussed above entails a distinct pedagogy. In what follows, I examine several ideas to build on the theoretical toolbox that this thesis puts together. I suggest that Noah De Lissovoy's work on the questions that globalisation presents to education is highly relevant to decolonial curatorial approaches. His research also provides a useful framework to continue to further scrutinise the notion of community in the context of the exhibition under consideration. Firstly, De Lissovoy argues that decolonial analysis needs to work at epistemological and ontological levels. He stresses the need to look at the relation between critical, empowering projects and epistemological frameworks. A central notion to contest is 'cultural identity'; the decolonial perspective demands addressing the complexities of this concept. It puts forward an understanding of difference that encompasses ways of being and knowing and conceives solidarity on this basis.[169] The notion of 'inclusion' is also called into question; De Lissovoy points to the culturally determined space it presupposes. Here, education is a central concern, particularly in its definition of forms of 'legitimate identification and understanding'.[170] Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández has also put forward a 'decolonising pedagogy of solidarity' that questions the very definition of the human and, subsequently, the institution of forms of inclusion and exclusion and their reinforcement of social boundaries. This pedagogy involves reimagining social relations on the basis of 'difference and interdependency', rather than agreement and self-interest.[171] He asks: 'Does solidarity require similarity, shared interests, or a common destiny, or can it work in a context committed to an incommensurable interdependency? Does solidarity

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[168] Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, "Decolonization and the pedagogy of solidarity," *Decolonisation: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 52, https://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18633, (accessed April 19, 2017).

[169] Noah De Lissovoy, *Education and Emancipation in the Neoliberal Era: Being, Teaching, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) 107, 109, 126.

[170] De Lissovoy, 102, 107, 122.

[171] Gaztambide-Fernández, 49.

(necessarily) imply a hierarchical relationship [...]?'[172] These are vital questions that can assist in moving away from the idealised understanding of community upheld by The Showroom's Communal Knowledge programme.

Decolonial analysis involves observing the 'political economy of knowledge' and the continual reinstatement of the Northern centre and Southern peripheries. In an effort to de-centre rather than negate Western epistemology, De Lissovoy calls for a critical approach that goes beyond a 'simple interrogation of the given' and instead assumes a different basis. Marginalised perspectives become the starting point in the process of supplanting a model of inclusion and transforming educational practice.[173] On the one hand, Orlow's exhibition needs to be analysed as a project hosted by a Western institution, an established exhibition space that can be seen to appropriate other perspectives for its own critical standing. The project does not overcome this problematic delimitation. I argue that, on the one hand, the exhibition presents a decolonial pedagogy as other systems of knowledge take centre stage in an effort not to overthrow, but de-centre, the dominant epistemology. On the other hand, however, the development of the garden presents an unproblematic conception of community. A pedagogy that 'rearranges (the) structural conditions', that shapes the encounter and contests colonial notions of identity would have served the project better.[174]

The notion of development also comes under scrutiny in De Lissovoy's analysis. He associates it with 'a decomposition of already existing indigenous knowledge, resources, and networks'.[175] His approach goes beyond critical education to look at development as a frame of democratising, dialogical, or critical practices and points to its underlying universalist assumptions.[176] It highlights the reproduction of this logic and the relations of dependency that it entails as the teacher (or in this case, the artist) 'centrally and indispensably mediates the passage

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[172] Gaztambide-Fernández, 50.

[173] De Lissovoy, 104, 111, 114, 115.

[174] Gaztambide-Fernández, 57.

[175] De Lissovoy, 106.

[176] De Lissovoy, 108, 109.

of students to a sophisticated critical curiosity that is able to reflect on the historical situatedness of their own consciousness'.[177] Although the exhibition is led by Orlow, an effort to put forward a more horizontal organisation and a heterogeneous, collective perspective is also recognisable both in the incorporation of works by other artists and the involvement of community organisations in the setup of the garden. The artist's ambivalent position is reflected in his suggestion that although he 'initiated [the garden], led it in some ways, and shaped it to a certain extent, it was still a collective, communal effort;' and similarly, regarding his films, he commented that although he directed them and wrote the scripts, they are the result of a collaboration, hence the need to distinguish between authorship and authority.[178] Still, it is useful to keep De Lissivoy's questions in mind regarding the implications of pedagogical authority: can the artist assume the position of another participant, instead of that of the leader? What kinds of practices can allow not only the recognition of an 'ecology of knowledges', but also a rethinking of educational purpose and meaning?[179]

There is a need to diversify 'foundations, questions, and openings' and to challenge the very notion of knowledge. For De Lissovoy, this requires moving beyond the dominant/subaltern opposition and away from the 'geography of reason'. Only then can border modes of knowledge acquisition and dissemination multiply.[180] This also means shifting the 'geopolitical locus of enunciation, or standpoint' that is the basis of the teacher's (artist's) authority. De Lissovoy describes a movement from introducing minority perspectives, to the acknowledgement of a global framework. Further, he calls to move from the postcolonial introduction of peripheral knowledge to the decolonial option, that is, foregrounding indigenous and non-Western thought as the central starting point of historical investigation.[181] In its epistemological subversion, the exhibition moves towards a decolonial critique. However, the project could also correspond to what Sara Ahmed

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[177] De Lissovoy, 115.

[178] Uriel Orlow in conversation with the author, London, June 22, 2018.

[179] De Lissovoy, 116.

[180] De Lissovoy, 121, 127.

[181] De Lissovoy, 123.

calls the 'fantasy of being-together as strangers', in which the ethnographer (in this case, the artist) is praised for sharing his authority.[182]

Finally, De Lissovoy's rethinking of 'community' provides a helpful basis for decolonial curatorial approaches. 'Community' usually refers to a negotiation of differences and a unifying effort. De Lissovoy draws attention to a sense of 'community' more closely associated with 'the common' and 'communism', described as 'the radical coming together of individuals under the sign of equality'. This conception implies a threat to both wealth and privilege within the social order and knowledge distribution structures.[183] De Lissovoy thinks of community as a 'small way of making new selves and new worlds […] (and) discover new categories and possibilities' that, even within their limited visibility, contest the social order. Along with Judith Butler, he considers community's basis on our dependence on each other. He refers to a literal, physical vulnerability against each other that links the concept directly with difference. This understanding is even more relevant in a socially, economically, and politically interrelated, 'interdependent world'.[184] De Lissovoy's conceptualisation aims to generate a kind of being together based on this inter-dependence that moves towards a 'moment of radical sharing of being (that is) transgressive and unruly' and confronts the capitalist logic. He stresses the difference between imagining and inhabiting possibilities.[185] In his view, education is not only concerned with a hopeful envisioning of the future, but can also be grounded in the present. This pedagogy of community takes place fleetingly as 'a moment of constitution of a different word […] (that is able to) burn holes in the fabric of the given'. As a practice, it demonstrates 'the persistent and ineradicable agency of people'.[186] This constitutes a demanding proposition that is nevertheless worth pursuing.

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[182] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), 64.

[183] De Lissovoy, 148.

[184] De Lissovoy, 153, 154, 156.

[185] De Lissovoy, 158-159.

[186] De Lissovoy, 147, 161, 162.

I started by presenting Mavafuke's case and the cross-fertilisation between Western 'advanced' medicine and African traditional healing practices. The first section of this chapter looked into the relation between botany and colonialism and highlighted the role of science in the establishment of a hierarchical and oppressive world order. Then, this case study explored the interest of contemporary artistic practice in political ecology and several recent major exhibitions' recovery of marginalised systems of knowledge to address environmental issues. I have discussed the conceptual herbarium as an alternative archive that disrupted the ethnographic display model. I argued that the exhibition presented an epistemological challenge to the Western worldview and a decolonial pedagogy. However, the complex institutional framework and, more specifically, the gallery's conciliatory conception of 'community' undermined this critical proposition. Decolonial pedagogy was instrumental in questioning the notions of communal engagement, inclusion, development, authority, and knowledge. Finally, I propose that Noah De Lissovoy's conceptualisation of community on the basis of difference and inter-dependence is useful to decolonial curatorial approaches and their efforts to construct an audience. Having considered Orlow's exhibition's proposal of unlearning the dominant system of knowledge, the conclusion of this thesis explores the potential of 'unlearning' as an (anti)pedagogical approach to curating.

<u>Conclusion: Unschooling Exhibitions</u>

This thesis set out to examine critical, experimental curatorial approaches that challenge the prevalent conception of the experience of art as entertained consumption. As shown in the introduction, mediation is conventionally seen as the means to deal with a gap in understanding between works and visitors. By looking into the inherent pedagogies of the contemporary art exhibition, we have seen how this established approach often relies on an authoritarian educational framework in which the curator shares his or her expertise with the audience. In Chapter One, I began by discussing the urgency as well as the difficulties of moving away from this model. The following chapter was key to demonstrating how even critical, and more specifically, emancipatory approaches to curating can unknowingly replicate the rigid structures they intend to subvert and fall back on a typically modern, developmental educational format — hence the need to question the forms of learning that take place in the exhibition space, as I have emphasised throughout this research.

The rethinking of the educational conventions of the exhibition space that this thesis calls for can be seen as a form of unlearning. Before addressing the pedagogics of unlearning in more depth, let us draw out the links between this concept and the main critical strategies explored across my chapters. A central question I have dealt with is how to curatorially sustain contemporary art's indeterminacy of meaning. In this regard, the idea of the exhibition as a process rather than a product has been discussed in relation to *Possessing Nature* in Chapter One and *Things we don't understand* in Chapter Three. A common concern of my case studies was the historical re-examination of modernity. This process represents a challenge to linear, progressive, historical accounts that involves revisiting civilising attempts to subdue nature (such as Linnaean classification and the inextricability between botany and colonialism, as discussed in Chapter Four). All four curatorial approaches examined coincide in their insistence on unsettledness, uncertainty, and open-ended, undetermined outcomes as a condition to provoke social change. This emphasis on destabilisation correlates with the boundary crossings presented in each case. Thus, we have seen that the exhibitions' critical potential corresponds to their ability to undo or suspend ingrained gendered divisions such as theory/practice, interpretation/perception, culture/

nature, mind/body, subject/object, self/other, and discourse/matter. In the first instance, the notion of unlearning allows us to think of instability as a potential pedagogical resource.

The processes of historical revision or undermining fundamental dichotomies rely on more specific principles. Across the chapters, we have looked at the idea of non-mastery and the co-creative production of meaning. I referred to the notion of 'looking again' as part of the mode of relationality introduced by *Things we don't understand,* but it is also relevant to the use of photography in Jasso's and Orlow's exhibitions. In Chapter Four, we looked into an attempt to decentre the Western worldview and recognise epistemological diversity in relation to the crisis of the ethnographic museum and the notion of 'contact zones'; these ideas are also closely associated with Franke's effort to 'un-map' that was presented in Chapter One. Another central concept explored by this thesis is that of the exhibition as an ecology, which draws attention to the interaction between the human and non-human agents involved. A crucial concern in this context was the investigation of alternative pedagogies that support critical curatorial practice.

The relevance of posthumanist, feminist-materialist, and decolonial pedagogies to exhibition making put forward by this thesis involves unlearning established educational models rooted in the Enlightenment and based on the transmission of knowledge. Attending to the material aspects of learning, for example, can assist in setting up the exhibition as an ecology. As discussed in Chapter Two, Patti Lather's notion of 'education as getting lost' or Nathan Snaza's 'bewildering education' can contribute to sustaining the works' indeterminacy of meaning. Most importantly, these pedagogies are applicable to the boundary crossings examined throughout the thesis. In Chapter Two, I concentrated on diffractive pedagogies' ability to disrupt binary oppositions, while in Chapter Three, my analysis was guided by feminist, intra-active pedagogy and its emphasis on the flowing relation between gendered distinctions such as subject/object, interpreting/feeling, meaning/matter, and rationality/affectivity. These methods challenge traditional conceptions of knowledge and education and put forward a radically distinct form of learning. Before examining in more detail the pedagogics of unlearning, in what follows, I look into how it formed the basis of the educational proposition of the last edition of Documenta.

Documenta 14: Unlearning from Athens

The notion of unlearning has come to play an increasing role in contemporary exhibition making, particularly given its centrality within Documenta 14's (2017) conceptualisation. Once again, we return to the quinquennial exhibition as a foremost example of current debates in the field. In his curatorial essay, Polish critic and curator Adam Szymczyk expounds on his decision of dividing the exhibition between Kassel and Athens as an 'anti-identitarian' position.[1] He presents it as the continuation of the process of questioning the exhibition's Eurocentric standpoint initiated by Catherine David's politicised Documenta X (1997), followed by Okwui Enwezor's Documenta 11 (2002) and its dispersed platforms, Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack's Documenta 12 (2007), organised under the principle of the 'migration of forms', and Carolyn Christov Bakargiev's satellite locations in the case of Documenta 13 (2012).[2] But most importantly, Szymczyk sees the Greek capital as the embodiment of the humanitarian and economic crisis provoked by the neoliberal, neocolonial mindset, and therefore, as an exceptional learning opportunity.[3] Crucially, Documenta 14 presented learning as unlearning, as a chance to look again (a recurrent point in this thesis), and a way of letting go of entrenched precepts, especially the hierarchical division between the civilised, enlightened West and the unfit Other. Unlearning plays a key part within the exhibition's challenge to the 'supremacist, white and male, nationalist, colonialist' mindset that sustains current inequalities and was also posited as a way of countering the dominant perspective's 'othering' of enemies and opponents through a form of 'togetherness'.[4] We must take into account some of the contradictions in Szymczyk's critical stance; however, the point here is to underline his positioning of unlearning at the core of Documenta 14 and consider its wider influence.

Documenta 14 opened first in Athens in April 2017 across forty-seven venues, including the Athens Conservatoire, the Athens School of Fine Arts, the Benaki Museum, and EMST, the

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[1] Adam Szymczyk, "14: Iterability and Otherness," 19-21.

[2] Szymczyk, 27.

[3] Szymczyk, 19-21, 30.

[4] Szymczyk, 30, 32.

National Museum of Contemporary Art.[5] Some of the most serious criticisms of the exhibition were raised by Greek curator iLiana Fokianaki and Greece's former finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis.[6] Their criticism focused on the neocolonial relation between Germany and Greece, an unavoidable and highly problematic issue. In their view, the political and economic asymmetry between the countries renders the exhibition's anti-austerity stance and examination of the financial crisis meaningless. Varoufakis and Fokianaki discuss Athenians' rightful mistrust towards the organisers' presentation of Documenta 14 as a 'gift', referring to 'First World Didactics' to address the dangers of fetishisation of the crisis and the othering of Athens as a representative of the Global South and describing Szymczyk's overall initiative as a form of 'disaster tourism'.[7] Their criticism is indicative of the contradictory politics of large-scale exhibitions that were addressed in the context of the 2015 Venice Biennale in Chapter One. In this case, the controversy about holding a significant part of the exhibition in Athens is well-founded, although the critical value of the curator's radical choice can still be upheld as a form of dealing with the current European economic and refugee crises. Nevertheless, I wish to concentrate on Documenta 14's educational proposition and draw a comparison with the inherent pedagogies examined throughout this thesis.

In his essay in the exhibition's reader, Szymczyk deals with the institutional conception of the public as a 'quantifiable mass' at the receiving end of the curatorial process, and the preconception that the audience should be 'guided through the exhibition and illuminated as to its nature and meaning'.[8] As a counter-strategy, he put forward the idea of 'aneducation', a self-reflective model that rejects educational conventions such as the need to help others understand through the patronising and hierarchical transmission of knowledge. Instead, Szymczyk refers to his interest in the potential contribution of the audience and an empowering intention (which must

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[5] Documenta 14 opened on April 8, 2017 in Athens and on June 10, 2017 in Kassel. The exhibition took place across forty-seven venues in Athens and thirty-five venues in Kassel. Documenta 14, https://www.documenta14.de/en/ (accessed September 14, 2018).

[6] iLiana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis, "We Come Bearing Gifts," *art agenda,* June 7, 2017, http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/d14/ (accessed August 14, 2018).

[7] Fokianaki and Varoufakis.

[8] Szymczyk, 36.

be treated cautiously, as we have seen in Chapter Two).[9] The curator proposed aneducation as 'a mode of unlearning' that takes the encounter between art and its public as a starting point to develop 'an artist-led process based approach through research, personal exchange, listening, conversing, walking, reading, and looking—gathering knowledge but also dispersing it like a breathing organism'.[10] That is, he consciously adopted an educational counter-strategy.

Documenta 14's curatorial conceptualisation was based on the 'open form' methodology developed by Polish architects Oskar and Zofia Hansen in 1959. The Hansens put forward the idea of architecture as a 'background for everyday life' and set forth a co-creative, process-oriented relationship between architects and users and artists and spectators.[11] In the case of Documenta, these ideas translated into a programme that 'thinks *with* art' and rejects dichotomies between 'knowing and not knowing, sense and nonsense, significance and insignificance'.[12] Szymczyk discusses his team's attempts to come up with 'tools' to 'bend and dismantle' the conventional relations of the exhibition space. He refers to 'unsettling', 'disconcerting' processes that challenge the stable, spectacular exhibition and the matrix of political and economic interests behind the demands of instant, effortless understanding.[13] His concerns are clearly analogous to the central questions investigated by this thesis and are indicative of the interconnections between critical curatorial practice, educational matters, and pedagogical experimentation.

In his iteration of Documenta, Szymczyk put forward the notion of a 'parliament of bodies' as a way of drawing attention to the physical, rather than solely intellectual aspects of experiencing art.[14] The curator also referred to the concept of 'continuum' as an 'open form of common action'

[9] Szymczyk, 36.

[10] Documenta 14, "Public Education- About," http://www.documenta14.de/en/public-education/1066/about (accessed August 15, 2018).

[11] See Agnieszka Wielocha and Aleksandra Kędziorek, "Preserving the *Open Form.* The Oskar and Zofia Hansen House in Szumin: Between architecture and contemporary art," *Studies in Conservation* 61 (2016): 248-254. Also see: Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, "Oskar and Zofia Hansen Open Form," https://artmuseum.pl/en/wystawy/oskar-i-zofia-hansenowie-forma-otwarta/1 (accessed August 15, 2018).

[12] Documenta 14, "Public Education- About".

[13] Szymczyk, 40.

[14] Szymczyk, 29. The 'Parliament of Bodies' public programme was curated by philosopher and activist Paul B. Preciado.

which served as the basis of a programme of activities that took place at the Athens School of Fine Arts. As a discursive focal point within the exhibition space, this format can be compared to Enwezor's 'ARENA' as discussed in Chapter One, although the latter organised a more prescribed scenario. In the case of Documenta, unlearning referred to a 'symmetrical situation'; Szymczyk discussed it in terms of 'destabilisation', 'shaking our belief system', 'rethinking', 'reimagining', and becoming 'strangers to ourselves', all of which concur with the main critical strategies examined throughout this thesis.[15] The idea of a 'parliament of bodies' stood directly against the conception of the public as a 'marketing target'. Proposed as the means of queering the conventional format of the exhibition, it comprised six 'Open Form Societies', each of which explored a particular area of interest, such as anticolonial discourses and queer and transfeminist politics. They were open to the public and met at least once per month to engage in various activities such as seminars, screenings, workshops, and walks. These societies were inspired by *La Societé des amis des noirs,* assembled in France in 1788 as an antislavery movement and functioned as 'self-learning, self-organised micropublics that generate their own activities'.[16] These particular pedagogical principles profoundly influenced the curatorial configuration of the exhibition.

Other art organisations have also explored the notion of unlearning from various angles. For instance, in 2013, the David Roberts Art Foundation in London presented 'An-artist, Unlearning', a programme by Louise Garrett that addressed forms of 'undoing' and 'not-knowing'. Activities included film screenings and a selection of lecture-performances, as well as talks that revisited experimental pedagogical practices in British art schools between the 1960s and the 1980s.[17] The Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin recently called for applications to their '(Un-)Learning Place' programme (2019), curated by Boris Buden and Olga Schubert and part of the wider *Das Neue Alphabet* project. Over five days, participants will concentrate on studying

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[15] Szymczyk, 33, 34, 42.

[16] Documenta 14, "Public Programs," http://www.documenta14.de/en/public-programs/ (accessed August 16, 2018).

[17] David Roberts Art Foundation, "An-Artist, Unlearning. An Event by Louise Garrett (14 May, 21 May and 2 Jul 2013)," http://davidrobertsartfoundation.com/live/an-artist-unlearning-inarchive/ (accessed August 16, 2018). Also see Elena Crippa, "The Artist as Speaker-Performer: The London Art School in the 1960s-70s," in *London Art Worlds: Mobile, Contingent, and Ephemeral Networks, 1960-1980,* ed. Jo Applin, Catherine Spencer, and Amy Tobin (University Park PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018), 169-181.

'inherent classification and ordering systems of archives, libraries, museums, institutional

architectures, and digital networks [while considering] artistic, site-specific, poetic and bodily

practices'.[18] To cite a final example, in 2016, SAVVY Contemporary, an experimental art space in

Berlin founded around the principles of 'conviviality' and 'hospitality', organised 'Unlearning the

Given: Exercises in Demodernity and Decoloniality of Ideas and Knowledge'. Curated by Elena

Agudio and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, the project consisted of a series of performative

interventions, lectures, and artistic contributions that were envisioned as 'exercises of

disobedience and indiscipline' with a particular emphasis on 'corpoliteracy'.[19] As it gains currency

within curatorial practice, it is worth delving into pedagogics of unlearning, which also facilitates an

opportunity to recapitulate the modes of learning I have put forward in this thesis.

Learning as unlearning

Unlearning resonates strongly with the critical curatorial approaches examined throughout this

thesis, especially in terms of destabilisation and boundary crossings. As education scholar Éamonn

Dunne suggests, unlearning involves 'shaking things up', letting go, venturing into the unknown,

and an openness to failure. Dunne notes that unlearning takes place outside of binary and

hierarchical structures and implies a zone of discomfort from where one can question our

preconceptions about learning, its politicised agendas, and 'subliminal purposes'. In this sense, it

works as a 'disruptive, unsettling […] interruptive force' that leads to a redefinition of education.[20]

This discomfort is comparable, for instance, to the frustration or irritation caused by not

understanding explored by Buergel and Noack's exhibition, as well as to the effort to sustain the

'arrest of thought' as discussed in relation to the mediation strategy of the Mexican Pavilion. In

Orlow's case, the conceptual herbarium's problematisation of the ways of looking supported by

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[18] HKW, "(Un-)Learning Place", https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2019/das_neue_alphabet/
the_new_alphabet_school/un_learning_place.php (accessed August 16, 2018).

[19] Savvy Contemporary, "Unlearning the Given: Exercises in Demodernity and Decoloniality of Ideas and
Knowledge," https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/events/2016/unlearning-the-given/ (accessed August 16,
2018).

[20] Éamonn Dunne, "Learning to Unlearn," in *The Pedagogics of Unlearning,* ed. Aidan Seery, and Éamonn
Dunne (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2016), 13-17.

ethnographic modes of display also raises questions on the forms of learning and the kind of

knowledge exhibitions put forward. According to Dunne, unlearning is not an antonym of learning;

there is no contradictory relation between the two, but rather, it stands in opposition to

understanding. Unlearning draws attention to the suspension of knowledge as the starting point of

the learning process. That is, it moves away from the modern, Enlightenment framework that posits

learning, or the acquisition of knowledge, as the end result. It can also be seen as a border

crossing between, for instance, the familiar and the unfamiliar. As a pedagogy, it requires

acknowledging the unpredictability of the learning process, its profound implications, and the need

to keep the discussion open.[21] Similarly, this thesis calls for the constant re-examination of the

inherent pedagogies of the exhibition space.

  Learning, then, must be uncoupled from understanding, which entails doing away with

explanation. Rancière devotes plenty of attention to the notion of explanation, which, in his view,

links the inequality of intelligences to the inequality of the social order. In a 2014 conference

presentation, the philosopher observed that the explanatory logic follows a pattern of

progressiveness; that is, it establishes a particular order in which things must be learned and

taught. As a process, the transmission of knowledge implies that the learner is unable to figure out

where to go next or how to continue. According to Rancière, through the explanatory logic, the

schooling system institutionalises a specific temporal framework that presupposes a

correspondence between the progressive, individual acquisition of knowledge and social

development towards equality.[22] For this reason, unlearning requires letting go of any method that

claims to have know-how and suggests a specific starting point and order. What needs to be

unlearned is the logic of explanation, which pervades not only educational institutions, but also 'the

whole field of experience […] the whole social fabric'.[23] This unlearning also requires letting go of

the step-by-step temporality typically attached to learning.

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[21] Dunne, 19-20, 23.

[22] Jacques Rancière, "Un-What?" in *The Pedagogics of Unlearning,* 26-28.

[23] Rancière, 29-30.

I referred to the Bologna process in the introduction of this thesis to discuss neoliberal education. For Rancière, Bologna exemplifies the parallel between the temporality of global economic progress and the individual's academic progression and adjustment to the needs of the job market through what he calls 'bureaucratic programming'. However, this is a broken system that results in the participants blaming themselves for their failure to adapt, let alone achieve social equality.[24] This thesis puts forward non-explanatory pedagogies that challenge the emancipatory logic (as seen in Chapter Two) and its basis in the prevalent, distinctively modern view of education. Across my chapters, I have shown the significant contribution of these alternatives towards the curatorial re-examination of modernity and the critique of progressive historical narrative.

We can think of unlearning as a process of 'un-explaining' the links between things and their meaning. Rancière describes a return to opacity as well as an 'erasing' of the hierarchical opposition between discourse and object. As emphasised throughout my chapters, for Rancière, this kind of learning involves 'the energy of crossing the border'.[25] By unlearning, the philosopher refers to 'the dissociation between the acts of teaching and learning; the fact that you learn from somebody or something that never taught you'.[26] This also means that others can learn from you what you do not teach and do not even know. Although unlearning points to the essential 'dissymmetry' of traditional educational relations, Rancière emphasises that it is an affirmative practice.[27] The central argument of this thesis can be summarised as the need to unlearn the conventional educational relations of the exhibition space and consider instead an array of groundbreaking, inspiring possibilities that can sustain critical curatorial propositions. Having demonstrated the relevance of posthumanist, feminist-materialist, and decolonial pedagogies to this end, I conclude by exploring yet another subversive approach — that of unschooling — as an area for further research.

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[24] Rancière, 33-34.

[25] Rancière, 35, 38-39.

[26] Rancière, 41.

[27] Rancière, 41-42.

Unschooling and real learning

Also called 'natural', 'experience-based' or 'independent' learning, the term 'unschooling' was coined by educator John Holt in the 1970s.[28] Working as a school teacher, Holt observed that children are naturally passionate about learning.[29] However, he also realised that less teaching resulted in more learning. Therefore, his approach was based on the assertion that 'learning is not the product of teaching'. According to Holt, the educational system rests on the myth that students only learn what and when they are taught.[30] Unschooling consists of a form of homeschooling that does away with the curriculum and the teacher as the centre of the learning process. At its heart is the idea of generating an environment that allows 'real learning', which is incompatible with someone or something else determining what should be learned and how. Instead, the point of view is switched to that of the learner, with curiosity replacing curriculum. Real, meaningful learning stems from need or genuine interest.[31] The learner must be allowed to follow his curiosity by 'doing real things'.[32] Unschooling does not presuppose a concrete method; even so, I argue that its principles can inform contemporary curatorial practice.

There are no set rules or procedures; unschooling is not a recipe or a method, but it does entail active involvement in the learning process. This approach requires developing independent ideas based on actual experiences in which the learner seeks out knowledge, rather than the other way around.[33] Although the literature on unschooling concentrates on childhood learning, its radical departure from the educational system provides useful insight into the inherent pedagogies of the exhibition space. In this thesis, we have seen that most visitors are keen to learn from works and

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[28] Earl Stevens, "What is Unscholing?" in *The Unschooling Unmanual,* ed. Jan and Jason Hunt (Vancouver Island, BC Canada: The Natural Child Project, 2008), 64. Pam Laricchia, *What is Unschooling? Living and Leaning without School* (Erin, Ontario, Canada: Living Joyfully Enterprises, 2016), kindle edition.

[29] John Holt, "Every Waking Hour," in *The Unschooling Unmanual,* 85.

[30] Holt, 86.

[31] Laricchia.

[32] Stevens, 66.

[33] Stevens, 65, 68.

their display. In Chapter Three, for instance, we looked into Buergel and Noack's overturning of traditional educational relations. I have discussed, in relation to feminist pedagogies, the need to shift the focus to the learner, as well as the erasure of the distinction between thinking and doing. What other principles allow us to imagine an unschooled exhibition?

For unschoolers, an essential but difficult part of the process is to realise how entrenched traditional patterns of education are.[34] Starting from the commonly held assumption that visitors need help to understand, this thesis has drawn attention to the firmly established, unseen learning structure of the exhibition space, its consumerist logic, and the difficulty of deviating from the norm. Unschoolers hold that 'what a person learns in a classroom is how to be a person in a classroom'.[35] It is clear that this principle applies to the gallery space. More importantly, this thesis has shown that visitors are usually positioned as the recipients of expertly curated knowledge, and even participatory models often reinforce an asymmetrical relation between organisers and the public, a form of dependency with more extensive repercussions, as Rancière observes. The more pressing question is how to unlearn such premises.

From unschooling, the proposition of 'real learning' implies a fundamental shift. Holt stresses that children are more interested in actual objects and tools rather than learning materials.[36] That is, for unschoolers, 'animals are better than books about animals', which points to the 'flattening of content' and the lack of engagement in traditional education with the subject at hand. In this respect, they posit learning as a 'full contact sport'.[37] In this sense, I have argued (particularly in Chapters One and Two) that mediation materials should steer viewers' attention to the work, rather than away from it. Holt proposes that learning comes about not only by looking, observing, and listening, but also by wondering and inventing, or simply by asking questions such as 'why is it this way?' Testing our answers and further observation and speculation naturally follow

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[34] Clark Aldrich, *Unschooling Rules: 55 Ways to Unlearn What We Know About Schools and Rediscover Education* (Austin: Greenleaf Book Group Press, 2011), 15-16.

[35] Aldrich, 42.

[36] Holt, 87-88.

[37] Aldrich, 43, 49.

this kind of questioning.[38] Along these lines, I have set out imaginative pedagogies that insist on embodied learning and undetermined outcomes. The unschooling approach acknowledges the need for reflection periods — to process thoughts and work out the 'rawness' of experience — and recognises that conscious realisation of what has been learned might come much later. Of particular interest here is the natural order of learning: 'explore, then play, then add rigor'. The challenge is creating situations and environments that allow for these three interdependent phases.[39] Other unschooling ideas that are applicable to curating include the notion that 'most teaching is bad leadership'. For curators, this means considering visitors as independent, active learners within a responsive environment. We must leave behind standard, checklist approaches and get rid of explanatory visitor guides. Unschooling prompts us to avoid subverting the experience with directive-style teaching.[40] Simply put: how can exhibitions feel less like schoolwork?[41]

As an 'exciting educational experiment', unschooling encourages learning about 'modern-assembly-line schools'.[42] Its practitioners observe that the standard curriculum — just like the traditional approach to mediation — is convenient for handling and directing large numbers of frustrated students (or visitors, in our case).[43] Regarding textbooks and curricula, unschoolers maintain that 'predictable and cost-effective in the short run, mass-produced, highly processed, standardised, low-cost, and packaged products that are engineered and marketed centrally and shipped out to be reconstituted at their point of use do not work'.[44] The same could be argued about mediation tools. From this perspective, however, there is not a single way to educate, there are no definite answers to be found, and we must remain sceptical about 'overconfident promises

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[38] Holt, 86-87.

[39] Aldrich, 64, 115, 117.

[40] Aldrich, 106-107, 111.

[41] Stevens, 63.

[42] Aldrich, 252.

[43] Stevens, 64.

[44] Aldrich, 69.

[and] detailed but inflexible processes'.[45] Curating from the unschooling perspective would mean, for instance, protecting the audience from trivial work mindlessly imposed on it by others, or caring for the public more than institutions do; that is, beyond visitor numbers.[46] Diverse approaches are needed to address the global education crisis. As we have seen in the introduction, the educational system is driven by standardisation and inflexibility. School as well as museum staff 'are overwhelmed by unrealistic and unfair burdens and expectations'. These institutions advertise themselves as 'local and caring', while their actual goal is to increase hours of consumption. Paradoxically, educational institutions often believe that theirs is the only approach and are resistant to new ideas, labelling them as 'naive', 'impractical', and 'dangerous'.[47]

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the adamant resistance on the part of institutions towards pedagogical experimentation within the exhibition space. Nevertheless, this thesis invites the reader to dive into 'the messy, chaotic, joyful, ever-changing world of unschooling' as a source of new ideas that challenge the status quo.[48] I have also set out the relevance of posthumanist, feminist-materialist, and decolonial pedagogies to exhibition making. These are presented as alternative frameworks that are conducive to less prescriptive and more imaginative experiences of contemporary art.

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[45] Aldrich, 152.

[46] Aldrich, 164, 235, 238.

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APPENDIX I

Interview/Discussion plan

1. Were you planning to visit the Mexican Pavilion specifically?

2. What were your expectations or knowledge about the Pavilion before your visit? (If any, what was the source of this information?)

3. What would you say the Pavilion is about?

(What do you think were the main themes or ideas presented?)

4. What did you think of the interpretative materials provided?

(Did they make any difference? Did you find them helpful? Which and in what way?) (How would you describe their effect to your time spent in the Pavilion?)

5. How would you describe your experience?

6. What was the most interesting aspect of the exhibition?

(Are you left with any ideas that you would like to explore further?)

- Do you have any other comments or suggestions?

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Ethical Amendment Approval - AH11921
2 messages

11 October 2017 at 12:32

Subject: Ethical Amendment Approval – AH11921

Dear

Thank you for submitting your Ethical Amendment Form (for additional interview) which was considered by the School of Art History Ethics Committee.

The Art History Ethics Committee has been delegated to act on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) and has granted this application ethical approval. The particulars relating to the approved project are as follows –

Approval Code:	AH11921	**Approved on:**	3/10/2017	**Approval Expiry:**	5 years >>>>
Project Title:	Critical Education meets Critical Curating / The Exhibition as Research				
Researcher(s):	Ana Sol Gonzalez				

Supervisor(s):	Karen Brown

Approval is awarded for five years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the five year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application form, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit an ethical amendment form for review.

Any adverse incident which occurs during the course of conducting your research must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee who will advise you on the appropriate action to be taken.

Approval is given on the understanding that you conduct your research as outlined in your application and in compliance with UTREC Guidelines and Policies (http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelinespolicies/). You are also advised to ensure that you procure and handle your research data within the provisions of the Data Provision Act 1998 and in accordance with any conditions of funding incumbent upon you.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of the Convener of the School Ethics Committee

cc   Supervisor

11 October 2017 at 12:35

Subject: Ethical Amendment Approval - AH11921

[Quoted text hidden]

Guidelines & policies | University of St Andrews

www.st-andrews.ac.uk

Guidelines, Policy and Procedures. All research has the potential to be exploitative and damaging, even when intended to benefit the greater public good.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of the Convener of the School Ethics Committee

cc   Supervisor

University of St Andrews
| 600 YEARS 1413 – 2013|

Approval of Amendment to Ethical Approval Code: AH11921
1 message

19 April 2017 at 09:33

Dear Ana,

Thank you for submitting your Ethical Amendment Form which was considered by the School of Art History Ethics Committee. The following documents were reviewed:

Ethical Amendment Form

The Art History Ethics Committee has been delegated to act on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) and has granted this Amendment ethical approval. The particulars relating to the approved project are as follows -

Approval Code:	AH11921	Approved on:	18-4-2017	Approval Expiry:	5 years >>>>
Project Title:	Critical Education Meets Critical Curating [The Exhibition as Research]				
Researcher(s):	Ana Gonzalez				
Supervisor(s):	Dr Karen Brown				

Approval is awarded for five years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the five year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application/amendment forms, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit a further ethical amendment form for review.

Any adverse incident which occurs during the course of conducting your research must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee who will advise you on the appropriate action to be taken.

Approval is given on the understanding that you conduct your research as outlined in your application and in compliance with UTREC Guidelines and Policies (http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelinespolicies/). You are also advised to ensure that you procure and handle your research data within the provisions of the Data Provision Act 1998 and in accordance with any conditions of funding incumbent upon you.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of the Convener of the School Ethics Committee

cc   Supervisor

University of St Andrews
| 600 YEARS 1413 – 2013 |

Ana Sol Gonzalez Rueda - Ethical Application Approval
1 message

2 February 2016 at 11:35

02 February 2016

Dear Ana,

Thank you for submitting your ethical application which was considered by the School of Art History Ethics Committee. The following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Application Form

2. Participant Information Sheet

The Art History Ethics Committee has been delegated to act on behalf of the University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) and has granted this application ethical approval. The particulars relating to the approved project are as follows -

Approval Code:	AH11921	Approved on:	21-1-2016	Approval Expiry:	5 years >>>>
Project Title:	Critical Education meets Critical Curating				
Researcher(s):	Ana Sol Gonzalez Rueda				
Supervisor(s):	Dr Karen Brown				

Approval is awarded for five years. Projects which have not commenced within two years of approval must be re-submitted for review by your School Ethics Committee. If you are unable to complete your research within the five year approval period, you are required to write to your School Ethics Committee Convener to request a discretionary extension of no greater than 6 months or to re-apply if directed to do so, and you should inform your School Ethics Committee when your project reaches completion.

If you make any changes to the project outlined in your approved ethical application form, you should inform your supervisor and seek advice on the ethical implications of those changes from the School Ethics Convener who may advise you to complete and submit an ethical amendment form for review.

Any adverse incident which occurs during the course of conducting your research must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee who will advise you on the appropriate action to be taken.

Approval is given on the understanding that you conduct your research as outlined in your application and in compliance with UTREC Guidelines and Policies (http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelinespolicies/). You are also advised to ensure that you procure and handle your research data within the provisions of the Data Provision Act 1998 and in accordance with any conditions of funding incumbent upon you.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of the Convener of the School Ethics Committee

cc   Supervisor

University of St Andrews
| 600 YEARS 1413 – 2013|

Ethical Application Approval - Code: AH11606

30 June 2015 at 15:49

Dear Ana,

Thank you for submitting your application which was considered by the School of Art History Ethics Committee. The following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Application Form
2. Participant Information Sheet

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view.   Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for completion within the stated time period. Projects, which have not commenced within the time given must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the Guidelines as outlined at https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelines/ are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of the Convenor of the School Ethics Committee