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Notes on exhibition history in curatorial discourse by Felix Vogel

In 1999 the Clark Institute organized a much-discussed conference entitled *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University*¹, the theme of which was the supposed gap between art history in museum and university contexts respectively. The organizers intended to examine the prejudice that academic art history is interested too much in theory and neglects the object, while the museum is primarily occupied with questions of funding and audiences, creating low expectations of its research. Whether this situation has since improved or intensified is not a question I am able to answer, instead I would like to speak about a related problem that concerns not art history as a whole but which, following the Clark conference, we might refer to as *The Two Exhibition Histories*. What concerns me here is mainly the discourse surrounding the exhibition which has established itself beyond the university, but also largely outside of the museum, and which I will provisionally entitle the 'curatorial discourse of exhibition history'.²

It is striking that the topic of the exhibition—and thus also its history—has only been properly established as a subject of research in the last twenty years, and particularly within the past decade, both within art history and in related fields. Publications, conferences, research projects, university courses and journals testify to this. Since 2011 Central Saint Martins College in London even offers a postgraduate MA course in 'Exhibition Studies'. Each academic year six or seven students study on the program, only a fraction of them with a background in art history, and many from the fields of fine arts, design or curatorial studies.

This extensive interest in the history of exhibitions may, as Bruce Altshuler states,³ certainly in part be due to the interest of the so called 'new' art history in context-specific and socio-historical approaches, although this would indicate a remarkable belatedness. Unquestionably, the increasing visibility and transformation of the exhibition since the 1960s has motivated a deeper engagement with its history. On the one hand this refers to the foundation of new biennials and institutions for the exhibition of contemporary art, the expansion of the art market with its countless gallery shows and art fairs, as well as the increasing temporalization of the museum: besides renovations and extensions built to increase temporary exhibition space—not least due to economic and marketing related factors—a critical or artistic engagement with the collection has become almost a necessity for any museum. While these approaches are always based on the permanent collection, the forms of presentation increasingly resemble those of the temporary exhibition, replacing the supposedly rigid, authoritative and atemporal collection display. On the other hand the exhibition is transforming itself to the extent that we must consider a whole new repertoire of typologies that dissolve the traditional formats of solo, group, and thematic shows. We might mention exhibitions in the category of 'relational aesthetics', which according to Nicolas Bourriaud become an "arena of exchange,"⁴ or the kind of project- or research-based exhibitions that revolve primarily around the production of discourse. In this context we must also

consider the development of artistic practices such as conceptual art or institutional critique, that is, the displacement of the (autonomous) work of art by questions of context and conditions of production, with increased focus on the exhibition itself. Peter Osborne mentions that it is the “exhibition-form” that “fulfils the requirement of providing meaning,” i.e. the exhibition as a “unit of artistic significance, and the object of constructive intent.”⁵ A further and in my view the most important reason is the establishment of curatorial studies programs—since these are conceived as places for practical training as well as theoretical research. The curatorial studies programs on offer sporadically since the late 1980s and early 1990s, but more intensively since the early 2000s, emerged not merely on the foundations of the new and increased function of the exhibition, but also reflected it, in a sense they required a knowledge of their object of study in order to construct it in the first place.⁶ To put it differently: the professionalization and subsequent formalization of the curatorial field presupposed a sense of its own history.⁷ It is thus unsurprising that it is not art history itself that contributed the bulk of publications on the history of exhibitions over the past decade—rather these emerged from the environs of curatorial studies.⁸

If in what follows I will limit myself almost exclusively to the history of exhibitions in curatorial discourse, this is not primarily intended to create a distinction of judgment between this discourse on the one hand, and that of academic art history on the other. Rather, it is a necessary limitation to strengthen and focus my argument. Such a focus can render territorial strategies more visible, which means asking precise questions such as: who defines concepts and terminologies? Who determines the canon and therefore *the* history of exhibitions and in what ways? I also suspect that an exhaustive examination of this discourse on the exhibition provides some clues to the issue of the homogenization of exhibition formats, which also allows us to draw some retrospective conclusions about the supposedly transnational format of the large-scale international exhibition since the end of the 1980s.

Where, then, does this discourse of exhibition history become manifest? In what publications and in what ways was exhibition history practiced in curatorial discourse? In the past few years for example a series of exhaustive studies on Harald Szeemann have been published.⁹ Such publications, one part archival material, one part biography—sometimes resembling hagiography—of a single curator have now appeared not just for *über*-curator Szeemann but also for other comparable figures. A large chunk of the discourse is shaped by collections of interviews, such as Hans-Ulrich Obrist’s eleven interviews with important curators¹⁰ published in 2008 as *A Brief History of Curating*¹¹, which is now in its fifth edition and constitutes the single bestselling publication of publishers JRP Ringier. In its preface and afterword, as well as in individual interviews, this publication presents itself as a decisive contribution to the history of exhibition making. A further example is the journal *The Exhibitionist*, which has appeared bi-annually since spring 2010. The journal claims to be the first¹² explicitly dedicated to the theme of curating, and in large parts its topic is the history of exhibitions.¹³ Further there appeared a multitude of anthologies (mostly with rather generic titles such as *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, *Curating Subjects* or *Everything you always wanted to know about curating: but were afraid to ask*) that are dedicated to the curatorial field, as well as lectures, conferences, podiums with curators about (their own) exhibitions. In what follows I will attempt to outline this phenomenon more precisely and investigate what conception of exhibition history underpins this discourse.

A first shared feature of the above mentioned publications are the speaker position from which exhibitions are discussed and the forms of speech used to do

so. It is almost exclusively curators themselves that appear in positions of authorship, leading to a situation where the curator speaks of and for the object that he/she has produced. Even when curators do not speak about their own exhibitions, they nevertheless speak from a position that is not that of a supposedly objective outsider. This is one reason why the interview—which is usually understood, or at least wants to be read, as a form of oral history—is such a popular format.¹⁴ In Obrist's book as well as in other anthologies of interviews¹⁵ the curator becomes the chief protagonist of a discourse about the exhibition, and within its historiography he/she is both subject and object. *A Brief History of Curating* is less about the history of curating suggested in the title, than it is a story by and about curators told in first person perspective. The form of the interview, as a seemingly unmediated form of speech, underlines the supposed authenticity of statements and constructs a form of authority that in turn legitimates the curator as author of the exhibition. Such gestures of authenticity are less about the documentary truth of a speaker, and more about a kind of justification, an emphasis on authority in order to legitimate speech acts.¹⁶ The tone of such interviews is casual, harmonious and strictly affirmative. People know each other, cite each other, and criticism is perceived as inappropriate. The interviews at least implicitly assume that the curator him- or herself is the best interpreter of his/her work. Following Isabelle Graw's comment on the artist interview, we might describe this as "faith in intention."¹⁷ To exaggerate somewhat, this means that curators' statements themselves are already considered to constitute a history.¹⁸ It is therefore less the statement itself that is problematic than the way it is framed.¹⁹

A similar speaker position is found in the journal *The Exhibitionist*.²⁰ Its editor, Jens Hoffmann, the editorial board²¹ and the authors are recruited from the 'Who's Who' of the international curating scene, which is why the journal may stand exemplarily for curatorial discourse. It does not contain interviews, but in the section 'Rear Mirror' curators write about their own, often quite recent exhibitions, while another section aptly entitled 'Curator's Favorites' is dedicated to the analysis of historical exhibitions, once again by curators. While the texts about curators' own exhibitions in the best cases can expand on the contexts of a show, clear up possible misunderstandings, and describe the exhibition in the context of its reception, we should not forget that the speaker position is tied to concrete intentions. The statements made here may oscillate between self-critical castigation and unabashed self-praise, but they reveal more about the speaker than about exhibition history. The section 'Curator's Favorites' also does not manage to achieve any in-depth analysis, and certainly this is not its intention in any case. Here, too, we find out more about the speaker and his or her investment in a particular history than about the object under investigation. That curators are both the speakers as well as objects of their own analysis is both symptom and cause of curatorial discourse.

In connection with the position of the speaker and forms of speech we can also determine the object of exhibition history in curatorial discourse. Primarily it centers on the curator him/herself and not on the material exhibition itself, although the latter is determined by multiple human and non-human actors; in accordance with actor-network theory we might consider not merely the exhibited work but also, to name just a few randomly picked from an endlessly extendable list: plinths, the unpaid interns, the art handler. We might continue this line of argument by reflecting on the concept of work—something that goes unmentioned in *The Exhibitionist* as well as the monographs and anthologies mentioned above, although it has been the subject of investigation in other areas of curatorial discourse. What is required, then, is an examination of work that would situate the

activity of the curator within a discussion of immaterial labor²², or respectively as part of a 'project-based polity'²³, and which would therefore necessarily include the production of a self-reflexive discourse. This must by no means exclude the creative, artistic or authorial part of curatorial work, but should situate it within a critique of the political economy of the culture industry.

The authorship-function of the curator and its possible relationship to anachronistic concepts of genius is an issue I cannot consider here.²⁴ It is also unproductive to pit the position of the artist against that of the curator.²⁵ What is important for now is to simply establish the centrality of the figure of the curator for this discourse of exhibition history.

The intensive interest in the pivotal place of the curator for the exhibition is further underscored by the establishment of concepts and pseudo-theories such as 'the curatorial'—a phrase that in some places has come to replace 'the exhibition'. The implications of the rather young verb 'to curate' itself are telling, since it refers to an activity by a curator that contrasts with the formerly distanced relationship to the artistic process. Maria Lind defines the concept of the curatorial, which she develops following Chantal Mouffe's differentiation between politics and the political, as "a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas and so forth, a presence that strives to create fiction and push new ideas."²⁶ Compared to the 'curatorial' 'curating', for Lind, is only the technical aspect, the mere organization and administration of an exhibition. Although Lind constantly speaks of exchanges and relations as the essence of the curatorial, there is a hierarchical order in place, dominated by the curator and reinforced through Lind's choice of vocabulary.

Apart from this focus on the figure of the curator there is a notable tendency to present exhibitions as singularities. Of course this problem also occurs in academic exhibition histories, and it does not mean that there is no analysis of the local, political or social contexts of exhibitions. By 'singularity' I mean that there is very little analysis of exhibitions in connection with other exhibitions, although such synchronic comparison would make sense for several reasons. We could analyze not just similar exhibitions, such as *When Attitudes Become Form* and *Op Losse Schroeven* in Christian Rattemeyer's excellent study *Exhibiting the New Art*²⁷, but also include other exhibitions taking place at the same time, such as *Tucuman Arde* in Buenos Aires and Lucy Lippards *Numbers* exhibitions, thus creating an understanding of the ambivalence of conceptual art. Or we could include Konrad Fischer's exhibition *Konzeption - Conception* in Leverkusen, which included many of the same artists as the shows in Bern and Amsterdam, with very different results, and which is also of relevance to the emergence of the art market.

We can also observe an increasing „phobia of artworks,"²⁸ to use Julian Myers' rather self-critical expression, in the discourse of exhibition history. This phobia in turn implies a particular concept of the work of art developed in and through exhibitions, which is however rarely understood and framed as such.²⁹ There is also a lack of description and analysis of the curatorial notion of production and more generally no typology of exhibition formats. Probably the most difficult task the exhibition presents to us is how to approach its ephemerality. Even if we have photographic and video documentation as well as floor plans, which enable us to know in part which art works were exhibited, in what relation to each other, and how they were staged, this can only provide the background for a necessary in-depth analysis and interpretation—for which we lack definitive terminologies and concepts. Instead of addressing these shortcomings and searching for ways to

overcome them, which would imply undertaking a theorization³⁰ of the object 'exhibition', the authors of curatorial discourse retreat to platitudes, positivist description of art works and a use of curatorial concepts to guide their reading of exhibitions. As a result the actual development and concrete manifestation of an exhibition appears as a natural and unchangeable imperative. Rather infuriatingly that there is no engagement here with corresponding efforts in the fields of art history and museum studies as well as institutional critique, which have developed more critical approaches to museums and comparable institutions. Of course exhibitions are by no means identical with museums, however this very differentiation could be the work of an emerging body of theory.

The question of the object of exhibition history also includes that of its canon, which we will touch on only briefly here. The exhibition canon of curatorial discourse is different to that of academic art history, meaning that here too we must speak of a plurality of canons. For exhibitions too, the criteria for integration in the canon are that they must on the one hand stand out above other exhibitions of their particular time and place while at the same time achieving universal significance.³¹ One problem with curatorial discourse is that it focuses almost exclusively on exhibitions from the 1960s onwards. This limitation shows on the one hand that the concept of the exhibition in curatorial discourse is tied to the curator, while it distances itself from exhibitions in traditional museum contexts, or those founded on collections. On the other hand it points to a denial of the historicity of the exhibition. Although there have been radical innovations in the field of exhibition making since the 1960s—both as a result of the appearance of curators as well as due to the new challenges posed by the ('dematerialized') work of art—these innovations are only recognized as such when situated in and delimited by a larger tradition beginning at the latest in the 18th century. I would therefore plead for a *longue durée* of exhibition history committed to working through its various continuities and ruptures. By contrast the question of who is admitted to the canon and whether to establish a counter-canon seems of little interest to me. It is much more important to analyze who has the right to write the canon, what position this happens from and what objects or practices the canon is attempting to legitimize.³²

This relates to our next point, about the strategic function of exhibition history in curatorial discourse. Hardly surprisingly I would argue that this function can be described as a kind of legitimation or self-legitimation, which finally seems to imply a genealogical model. Fittingly, Daniel Birnbaum's afterword to Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating* describes the curators gathered in the book as Obrist's 'parents' and 'grandparents'.³³ The curatorial discourse of exhibition history thus constructs a tradition that determines the practice of its authors, while that practice in turn determines historical precedents and the objects that constitute a history of exhibitions. Exhibition history here means the establishment, in a first step, of a supposed tradition, only to inscribe oneself within that tradition in a second step. Simultaneously commitments are established that imply a kind of standardization for students of curatorial studies, and though they do not necessarily lead to imitation, they do nevertheless make engagement with certain ideas, exhibitions and practices a prerequisite.³⁴ We must thus always ask, who speaks, and from what strategic position of power these speech acts are performed. Further we must reflect on what they covertly suggest, including those things that remain unsaid.

By way of conclusion I would like to include a few thoughts on the standardization and homogenization of exhibition formats. The curatorial discourse of exhibition history as sketched above conceives of its object, the exhibition, explic-

itly as global, transnational and transcultural, thus claiming a universalist model of the exhibition. Although it is acknowledged that exhibitions can contain and operate with value judgments and contribute to the establishment of hierarchies—MoMA's *Primitivism* exhibition of 1984 is a prominent example for this—the exhibition itself is viewed as a neutral form. The format of the biennial³⁵ and other large-scale exhibitions are considered the paradigmatic manifestation of this model and the transnational curator as its principal actor. When conventions are constructed by an exhibition history that considers itself transcultural, these conventions in turn are defining of and have a normative effect on this supposedly global form of exhibition making. This feedback loop happens quite directly, since the authors of curatorial discourse are themselves important decision- and exhibition-makers.

The claim to universalism of global and transnational exhibitions is problematic in at least two ways. Firstly the implicit claim is hardly realized even on a superficial level. Obrist for example interviews exclusively white and western curators, of whom only two are women, and of the exhibitions discussed in *The Exhibitionist* almost all took place in the United States and Europe. On the other hand the notion of a transnational discourse implies not only that exhibitions in, say, Dakar or Berlin are comparable, but supposes their complete commensurability. Just as with the neoliberal idea of globalization, inequalities and hegemonial dominances are simply disregarded. How can we deal with this problem? I would go further than even the critics of exhibitions like *Magiciens de la Terre*, who recognize the positive intention of making an exhibition with a global concept of contemporary art, but interpret it as a failure because, as Christian Kravagna expresses it, the exhibition “only moved from modernist primitivism to the neo-exoticism of post-modernity.”³⁶ A statement such as this requires an in-depth theorization of the exhibition, which goes beyond examining the construction of alterity or equality through the exhibition to an analysis of how the exhibition *as such* is a hegemonial form. In the face of contemporary demands for a global art history we should question not only the ideological—that is, political, economic and cultural (essentially colonial)—foundations on which the idea of the ‘global’ rests,³⁷ but in the same context produce an ideological critique of the form of the exhibition and the discourse of exhibition history.

This text is a slightly reworked version of a paper which was delivered in summer 2013 at the 2. *Schweizerischer Kongress für Kunstgeschichte* (Second Swiss Congress of Art History) in Lausanne, in the section *Handling Exhibitions – Konvergenzen zwischen Praxis und Theorie*. Many thanks to the numerous respondents to the paper as well as to Felicity Grobien and Samuel Korn for important pointers.

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Notes

1 The conference proceedings are published as: Charles W. Haxthausen ed., *The two art histories: The museum and the university*, Yale University Press, Yale 2002.

2 To speak of only 'two' exhibition histories is doubly presumptuous. Firstly, there is never a history, histories are always plural and the two fields mentioned—academic art history and curatorial studies—are each internally heterogeneous, and they frequently overlap both with each other and adjacent fields. Still I would argue that certain disciplinary tendencies can be grouped together. Secondly, an exhibition history divided into only two spheres is also deficient. We might look at artists' engagement with historical exhibitions and display formats (starting with artists of so-called institutional critique right up to contemporary positions such as Martin Beck, Walter Benjamin or Joseph Dabernig), as well as reconstructions of exhibitions (e.g. *When Attitudes Become Form. Bern 1969/ Venice 2013*, 2013 at Fondazione Prada in Venice), as artistic or 'material' forms of exhibition history.

3 See Bruce Altshuler, "A Canon of Exhibitions," *Manifesta Journal* No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 5.

4 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Les presses du réel, Dijon, 2002, p. 18.

5 Peter Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not At All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London, 2013, p. 167.

6 An analysis of the intentions, the objects, the (teaching-) methods, the political implications and the way knowledge is produced in and through these programs would be a worthwhile independent study.

7 See Simon Sheikh, "On the Standard of Standards, or, Curating and Canonization," *Manifesta Journal*, No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 15.

8 That is not to say that there are not excellent publications and ambitious research projects on these questions within academic art history. We might mention the following examples: Mary Anne Staniszewski's, *The Power of Display. A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1998; Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, Abrams, New York, 1994; I.d., *Exhibitions That Made Art History, Vol. 1: Salon to Biennial 1863-1959, Vol. 2: Biennials and beyond 1962-2022*, Phaidon, London, 2008 and 2013. Also the series *Exhibition Histories* published by Afterall on exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form*, *Magiciens de la Terre* or Lucy Lippard's *Numbers* exhibitions. Another example is the extensive study, directed by Beat Wyss, on the

Venice Biennial at the Swiss Institute for Art Research in Zurich.

9 Hans-Joachim Müller, *Harald Szeemann: Ausstellungsmacher*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern-Ruit, 2006; François Aubart and Florence Derieux eds., *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2007; Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeier, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite: Catalogue of All Exhibitions 1957-2005*, Voldemeer, Zurich, 2007.

10 Anne d'Harnoncourt, Werner Hofman, Jean Leering, Franz Meyer, Seth Siegel, Walter Zanini, Johannes Cladders, Lucy Lippard, Walter Hopps, Pontus Hultén and Harald Szeemann.

11 Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, JRP Ringier, Zurich, 2011.

12 This is not quite accurate however; earlier examples include *Manifesta Journal* (since 2003), *Displayer* (2006-2012) or *ONCURATING.org* (since 2008). Further curatorial journals founded after *The Exhibitionist* include: *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, *Red-Hook* und *Well-Connected* (all since 2012).

13 *The Exhibitionist* appears in an edition of 3000—by comparison, *October* has a total circulation of 1650—but it is only rarely found in library catalogues and is seldom cited. In the first instance this may be down to the short existence of the magazine, however, *The Exhibitionist* is also not intended for reception in academic circles. The aim, as the first editorial states, is to make a journal "by curators for curators" (see Jens Hoffmann, "Overture," in *The Exhibitionist*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 3-4, p. 3), which suggests a separation of the discipline of curating from that of art history.

14 The problem of oral history and the various implications of the interview format cannot be dealt with in this context. See Dora Imhof and Sybille Omlin eds., *Interviews. Oral History in Kunstwissenschaft und Kunst*, Verlag Silke Schreiber, München, 2010; Michael Diers, Lars Blunck and Hans Ulrich Obrist eds., *Das Interview. Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*, Philo Fine Arts, Hamburg, 2013.

15 E.g. Carolee Thea ed., *Foci: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, Apex Art, New York, 2001; I.d. ed., *On Curating: Interview with Ten International Curators*, D.A.P., New York, 2009; In Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating But Were Afraid to Ask*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2011, Obrist is himself interviewed about 'his' story by over a dozen other curators, authors, artists and architects.

16 See Michael Wetzel, "Artefaktualitäten: Zum Verhältnis von Authentizität und Autorschaft," in Susanne Knaller and Harro Müller eds., *Authentizität. Diskussion eines ästhetischen Begriffs*, Fink, Munich, 2003, pp. 37-54.

17 Isabelle Graw, "Reden bis zum Umfallen. Das Kunstgespräch im Zeichen des Kommunikationsimperativs," in Michael Diers, Lars Blunck and Hans Ulrich Obrist eds., *Das Interview. Formen und Foren des Künstlergesprächs*, Philo Fine Arts, Hamburg, 2013, p. 298.

18 An further analysis, which we cannot attempt here, should compare statements by curators, the type of questions asked and the construction of subject positions with artist interviews or artist biographies—one would find obvious parallels and even borrowings between the two forms of self-presentation.

19 See also an essay by Julia Gelshorn, who examines this issue with regard to artist interviews and their use in art history. Julia Gelshorn, "Der Produzent als Autor. Künstlerische Theorie als kunsthistorische Herausforderung," in Verena Krieger ed., *Kunstgeschichte und Gegenwartskunst. Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Zeitgenossenschaft*, Cologne, 2008, pp. 193-211.

20 I want to emphasize that *The Exhibitionist* is not an art journal and I would not regard mere exhibition reviews primarily as part of exhibition history. The *Exhibitionist* never attempts critical judgments in this sense; rather the exhibitions discussed there are relevant grounds for curatorial practice.

21 Christov-Bakargiev, Okwui Enwezor, Kate Fowle, Mary Jane Jacob, Constance Lewallen, Maria Lind, Chus Martínez, Jessica Morgan, Julian Myers, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Paul O'Neill, Adriano Pedrosa, Dieter Roelstraete and Dorothea von Hantelmann.

22 The beginnings of such an approach are found in Magda Tyzlik-Carver, *Interfacing the Commons: Curatorial System as a Form of Production on the Edge*, <http://darc.imv.au.dk/publicinterfaces/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Tyzlik-Carver.pdf>, Accessed 07.11.2013; *oncurating.org* No. 16, 2013, <http://oncurating-journal.de/index.php/issue-16.html#UmUYSJQ2y3w>, Accessed 07.11.2013, as well as the research and event project *Projekt Europa* (Kunstverein München, 2004). Many thanks to Sabeth Buchmann for the reference to Tyzlik-Carver.

23 Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, London, 2007, particularly pp. 147-210. Oliver Marchart refers to the above in his analysis of the curatorial subject, see Oliver Marchart "The Curatorial Subject. The figure of the curator between individuality and collectivity" in *Texte zur Kunst*, No. 86, (22) 2012, pp. 29-41.

24 For more detailed analysis see Felix Vogel, "Autorschaft als Legitimation. Der Kurator als Autor und die Inszenierung von Autorschaft in 'The Exhibi-

tionist'" in Sabine Kyora ed., *Subjektform Autor? Autorschaftsinszenierungen als Praktiken der Subjektivierung*, transcript, Bielefeld, 2014 (forthcoming February 2014).

25 See Anton Vidokle, "Art Without Artists?" in *e-flux Journal* No. 15, May 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/136>, Accessed 04.11.2013; "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's 'Art Without Artists?'," in *e-flux Journal*, No. 18, September 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/172>. Accessed 04.11.2013.

26 Maria Lind, "The Curatorial," in Brian Kuon Wood ed., *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2010, p. 64.

27 Christian Rattemeyer, *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969*, König, Cologne 2010.

28 Julian Myers, "On the Value of a History of Exhibitions," in *The Exhibitionist* No. 4, 2011, p. 27.

29 That exhibitions are composed of material objects (in art exhibitions usually works of art) sounds more obvious than it appears in exhibition history. We might ask questions for example about the effects of an exhibition concept on the work of art, on the relations with other works and the respective shifts in reception and interpretation. Peter Osborne comments that „such works are intrinsically double-coded: they have their own [...] significations and modes of experience, and they have the more fully 'post-autonomous' meanings that accrue to them as a result of their place within the overall [...] logic of construction of the exhibition. This is a logic that is itself contradictory: divided between the presentation of the collective exhibition-value of the works and their putative use-values as models within a speculative program of social construction. Such programs are uneasy amalgams of art, economics and politics." Peter Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not At All. Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, Verso, London, 2013, p. 162.

30 "Theories become functions of science, because the sciences work through the problem of the inadequacy of the world with the help of theory—in positive and concrete terms, because the sciences delegate the task of securing their objects to theories that pose the central questions.[.] [...] The surprising effect is that such theories pretend to find the object, while they actually constitute it as an object in the first place. Concisely put: theories deliver the objects of science!" Oliver Jahraus, „Theorietheorie," in Mario Grizelj and Oliver Jahraus eds., *Theorietheorie. Wider die Theoriemüdigkeit in den Geisteswissenschaften*, Fink, Munich, 2011, p. 29. (Translators note: own translation, the German term Wissenschaft has been

replaced with 'science' and is understood to include forms of knowledge production beyond the natural sciences.) Attempts at a 'theory of the exhibition' are found for example in Ludger Schwarte, "Politik des Ausstellens," in Karen van den Berg and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht eds., *Politik des Zeigens*, Fink, Munich 2010, pp. 129-141.

31 See Simon Sheikh, "On the Standard of Standards, or, Curating and Canonization," *Manifesta Journal*, No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 14.

32 See Luisa Ziaja, "Ausstellungsgeschichten. Ansätze der Historisierung im Kunstfeld," in ARGE schnittpunkt ed., *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis*, Cologne et al., 2013, pp. 23-34, p. 31.

33 Daniel Birnbaum, "The Archeology of Things to Come," in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, JRP Ringier, Zürich, 2008, p. 293.

34 See Simon Sheikh, "On the Standard of Standards, or, Curating and Canonization," *Manifesta Journal*, No. 11, 2010/2012, p. 15.

35 The term 'biennial' is here less associated with the Venice Biennial and the system of national pavilions, than with large-scale periodic exhibitions in general. Today's biennials are less oriented towards Venice; their genealogy is more accurately traced to the first documenta (Kassel 1955) or the first documenta with an artistic director (1972), as well as the increasing globalization of this format for example after the second and third Havana Biennial (1984, 1989).

36 Christian Kravagna, "Postkoloniale Ausstellungen im Kunstfeld," in ARGE schnittpunkt ed., *Handbuch Ausstellungstheorie und -praxis*, Böhlau, Cologne, 2013, p. 52.

37 See Chika Okeke-Agulu, "Art History and Globalization," in James Elkins ed., *Is Art History Global?*, Routledge, New York and London, 2007, pp. 202-207.

Exhibition studies, exhibiting histories, curatorial histories – however we want to call the study of past exhibitions and curatorship, there seems to be a persistent fear that a new discipline is in development, ready to entrench yet another canon and to confirm the hagiography of the curator. But disciplines need firm foundations, something that exhibitions and curatorship rarely offer.