

100 Years of  
Now and the  
Temporality  
of Curatorial  
Research

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its structure and content. The project was not intended or communicated as a project on contemporaneity, but it seems fruitful to analyse it in this regard, in order to rethink contemporaneity as a temporality resisting logics of newness and singularity, where reappropriation, continuation and recycling are more important than so-called innovative ideas.

The main conceptual frame of the four-year project could be described as follows: Rather than looking back into history and investigating the historiography of the developments at the beginning of the 20th century, the project “100 Years of Now,” taking place at the HKW in Berlin from 2015–2019, was created as part of a collective curatorial process in order to look at the developments that began at least a hundred years ago but still shape the political, social and cultural processes we are dealing with today. Rather than posing new questions, the project aimed at following up on ongoing issues which have emerged within the project called modernity, such as the interconnectedness of technology, war, migration and selfhood as well as the relation between race, class, gender, capitalism and the nation state. The project tried to escape the expanding temporality of the Now and its “presentism”<sup>2</sup> by rereading and reevaluating paradigmatic viewpoints in the history of criticism of the project of modernity. One of the most important research methods of the project consisted in asking the presumed most relevant researchers and artists what they had been working on and what their references were, in order to discuss the ongoing questions they had been following once more. To give a number of examples: The exhibition and publication project “Wohnungsfrage” (2015), curated by Jesko Fezer, Nikolaus Hirsch, Wilfried Kuehn and Hila Peleg, was based on a rereading of Friedrich Engels’ series of articles “Zur Wohnungsfrage” from 1872/73; the conference “Dangerous Conjectures” (2018), curated by

2. Francois Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences*

*of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

Manuela Bojadzijeve and Katrin Klingan, was a rereading of Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein's book *Race Nation Class—Ambiguous Identities* which first appeared in French in 1988; and "Schools of Tomorrow" (2017–2018), a project curated by Silvia Fehrmann in cooperation with 19 secondary schools, was a rereading of John and Evelyn Dewey's book *Schools of To-morrow* from 1915, which analysed how processes of democracy, technological development, urbanization and migration could be reflected within educational concepts; the music festival "Pop 16 —100 Years of Recorded Music" (2016), curated by Detlef Diederichsen and Florian Sievers, looked at how early 20th century recording technologies shaped musical genres, styles and performance praxes, as well as the division between white and black music until today. Similarly, the curators Anselm Franke, Stephanie Hankey and Marek Tuszynski describe their exhibition "Nervous Systems—Quantified Life and the Social Question" (2016) not as a historical exhibition but as an analysis of the present through the identification of ongoing historical processes. The exhibition, they write in the catalogue, is "less about mapping and understanding the current information-based technological era," but focuses "more on tracing the histories of certain ways of seeing: grand schemes of bureaucratization, governance of the masses, of the self, bound up with ideas of efficiency, insight, and progress,"<sup>3</sup> thereby highlighting the historical dimension of the project which analysed the history of cybernetics, quantification and conceptual art as an entanglement of infrastructures. From such a "contemporary" perspective, things that seemed disconnected at first, at second sight offered insights into structural connections, infrastructures and interwoven histories, which only became visible by analyzing the historical layers, intermedial connections and

3. Anselm Franke, Stephanie Hankey and Marek Tuszynski, "Nervous Systems: An Introduction," in *Nervous Systems*:

*Quantified Life and the Social Question*, ed. Anselm Franke, et al. (Leipzig: Spector Books 2016), 12.

structural analogies between disparate phenomena and by bringing together scholars from different disciplines, artists and practitioners from various fields. “100 Years of Now” did not deal with a specific topic but could be described as a project that explored different contemporary approaches of framing and posing research questions and methodologies of various forms of research.

The introductory essay by Helga Nowotny in the first volume of the accompanying publication series 100 Years of Now Library [Bibliothek 100 Jahre Gegenwart] outlines the temporal quandaries of the present.<sup>4</sup> Faced with an ever-expanding temporality of the Now which is using up all time, past and future, by both being forgetful of history and by using up resources of generations to come, it is not enough to slow down, to pause for a moment or to take some time out. While cultures of mindfulness or deceleration are important, Nowotny states, they do not intervene into structural problems of time but leave temporal structures intact while trying to escape from them.<sup>5</sup> To intervene into the time regime of the Now would mean to take on historically and geographically more complex perspectives and find alternative ways of narrating global history. The project “100 Years of Now” can be described as an investigation into what an institutional curatorial frame for such reticence might look like. How can the same research questions be followed up across a long period of time, allowing for prisms of different perspectives on the same question to deepen an understanding of a topic and to continue a conversation between actors within a given discourse? How can an institution avoid presenting topics as new information, subordinating itself to the regime of the Now while still offering multiple points of access for the audience or participants at any time without being

4. Helga Nowotny, “Eigenzeit: Revisited,” in *Die Zeit der Algorithmen*, ed. Bernd Scherer (Berlin: Matthes&Seitz, 2016).

5. *Ibid.*, 53.

too presuppositional? How can the same be said differently again and again in a productive way and applied to recent phenomena, but still resist the logic of progress, innovation and discovery? How can institutional knowledge that accumulates within different media and people, be cultivated as an archive, establishing a research community and providing resources for it? And how is this interesting for the public? In that sense, “100 Years of Now” was also a polemical title, trying to find ways to escape from an ever-expanding now.

When one looks at the depth, impact and acceleration of the transformations discussed within the discursive frame of the preceding “Anthropocene Project” at HKW, it seems difficult if not futile to attempt to characterize something that might be called “the contemporary condition” —as this book series is entitled. However, a possible line of enquiry emerges: What could contemporary approaches, research methods, criteria or languages be that enable an understanding of, as well as actions within, a contemporary condition? When one tries to understand the contemporary, it seems that there are not only pressing topics such as big data, migration, social injustice, or climate change, but also one encounters a profound methodological problem: Enquiring into the contemporary means conducting research on phenomena that are taking place outside of existing institutions and infrastructures and which cannot be found represented in existing archives and collections that follow the logics of modern taxonomies. That is why it seems that publicly funded cultural and artistic practices are gaining importance for society as a whole within the contemporary condition, because it is in the field of arts and culture that research questions outside of existing disciplinary frames can be experimented with. Here encounters with different social groups can take place, different forms of knowledge can be combined, unusual connections can be drawn, paradigms, categories and taxonomies can be questioned or re-established, and sensual and affective

discursive undercurrents can be explored without having to be evaluated according to established criteria or hierarchies and by established knowledge communities.

However, this is only possible if one avoids the trap of a reductive understanding of “artistic research” in which —by entering the realm of research—art and cultural projects become yet another “operative member of the knowledge society [...] of cognitive capitalism.”<sup>6</sup> While advocating an institutionalization and public funding of artistic and curatorial research, Tom Holert in his essay on the emergence of artistic research and artistic “knowledge production” (such as PhD programs for artists or curators) also voices concerns: When “the artistic must be read no longer as the unproductive and resistant counterpart of Fordist discipline,” art is in danger of being appropriated for a knowledge economy that is based on the accumulation of facts. Artistic and curatorial research in his view should not be evaluated according to “the rules of repeatability and falsifiability”<sup>7</sup> but should be allowed to employ “any form of speculation, reflection, reasoning, and supporting argument that does not comply with the protocols of an alleged value-neutrality of science because it is informed by political and moral projects.”<sup>8</sup> As Holert declares, the goal of the institutionalization of artistic and curatorial research with the help of public funding must be to “avoid contributing to the implementation of a logic that subjects even resistant, de-colonial, or strategically and poetically ‘weak’ approaches to the regimes of controlling, visibility, and representation.”<sup>9</sup> The prerequisite for enabling such processes—which are by no means ‘weak’ in argument or importance but only in the sense that they do not yet have a large lobby—is a wider understanding of knowledge and

6. Tom Holert, “Artistic Research: Anatomy of an Ascent,” *Texte zur Kunst*, no. 82 (June 2011): 48.

7. *Ibid.* Holert is quoting Arjun Appaduari, “Grassroots Globalization and

the Research Imagination,” in *Public Culture*, Vol. 12, no. 1 (2000): 8.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*, 50.

expertise. Knowledge can be gained beyond the frames of academic disciplines, as it comes in artistic, aesthetic, cultural, sensual, subconscious and practical forms as well.

Furthermore, this emerging field of research outside of academia might hold the potential to moderate between partial or vernacular and universal languages. The concept of situated knowledges might prove helpful in this context. To situate knowledge, as Donna Haraway proposed in her 1988 essay, does not mean to create a new localizable universal perspective, but to embed the creation of knowledge in lived realities, and to make one's partial viewpoint transparent.<sup>10</sup> Dealing with such contemporary knowledge in this way could mean to responsibly moderate processes of negotiation and to bring together positions from politics, research, the arts, and other fields. Such moderation would leave room for affective dimensions of knowledge, for invisible anxieties and hopes, or for the anticipation of lost futures. One of the projects that took place under the frame of "100 Years of Now" might explain what such a process could look like.

### The Housing Question

How can the question of housing that Engels posed in his famous polemic "Zur Wohnungsfrage," be updated—not under the conditions of a "new" time we live in, but in a way in which the modern paradigm of newness is broken so that the question can be asked again? With the increasing financialization of living space in the form of privatization of property, globalized real estate speculation and the commodification of affordable apartments into holiday homes or over-renovated rented flats in gentrified areas, and with ecological questions and questions of social inequality, mobility and migration, housing has become an urgent issue for

10. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial

Perspective," in *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14 (1988): 575–599.



everyone. Especially in a city like Berlin, with extremely fast rising rental charges, it is necessary to collect existing knowledge from the struggle against financialization. What are the modes of resistance, how to organize, who are the actors and drivers, and what are the alternatives? Moreover, the housing question has a particularly strong historical dimension: the history of urbanization, capitalism and urban planning and its connection to technologies of administration, the history of settlement development, migration and biopolitics, as well as historical discourses about urban infrastructures and social housing. Furthermore, decisions concerning the housing question strongly impact social developments and how life in both rural and urban areas will be in the future. Temporality in relation to urban development is thus extremely important.

Therefore when the HKW decided to open its project “100 Years of Now,” —or in German “100 Jahre Gegenwart,” which literally translates to “100 Years of Contemporaneity” or “100 Years of Present” —with an exhibition called “Wohnungsfrage” [The Housing Question] in the fall of 2015, the intention was to develop a qualitative understanding of living and to create alliances and access to knowledge from the bottom up. The exhibition, which was curated in cooperation with several Berlin-based initiatives concerned with housing, was not going to show a historical account of social housing as an exhibition in a museum of cultural history nor was it going to be an art exhibition related to the politics of housing, but it was itself a research process into the networks, infrastructures, histories and actors that constitute the housing question today, probing strategies of curating as a form of social activism. Together with political housing initiatives from Berlin the most urgent questions from the perspective of the tenants were identified and were then placed in the context of academic research projects and research-based artistic productions to form a gathering of different reflections on the topic.

In “Wohnungsfrage,” Engels addressed the social dimension of the housing question and claimed that it necessarily involved the social question and the exploitation of the worker by the capitalist: “it is not the solution of the housing question which simultaneously solves the social question, but only by the solution of the social question, that is, by the abolition of the capitalist mode of production, is the solution of the housing question made possible.”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the exhibition tried to imagine different modes of production. Four political or self-organized initiatives from the city of Berlin were chosen by the four curators in order to function as representatives of potentially precarious social groups: students, elderly people, immigrants and artists. Each of these groups was asked to act as the commissioner in a dialogue with socially engaged architectural offices, who then developed 1:1 models for the exhibition according to the initiative’s housing needs. One of these groups was the initiative Kotti&Co, a tenant’s initiative protesting against rising rents and marginalization in Berlin-Kreuzberg, which is a strongly gentrified neighborhood in Berlin with extremely expensive new lets and still one of the lowest average incomes within the city. Kotti&Co formed a production team with the architectural office Estudio Teddy Cruz+Forman. The work of Cruz+Forman usually focuses on the living conditions and informal housing practices in the US-Mexican border region, so their discussions with Kotti&Co centred on housing in its broader context of immigration and marginalization. After several workshop sessions however, the group decided that there was no architectural solution to the complexity of the problem. No possible object or architectural structure could represent the political, financial and social processes the group of protesters were addressing within an exhibition context. No reference point was able to represent

11. Friedrich Engels, “Zur Wohnungsfrage” (“The Housing Question”), originally in *Der Volksstaat*

(Leipzig 1972), reprinted (Berlin: Spector Books, 2015), 77.

the complex contemporary infrastructures of the problem. As one of the group members pointed out, implicitly repeating Engels' thesis from over a hundred years ago: "When we talk about housing, we also think about neighbourhoods and the social fabric, which includes economies, political conditions, and so on. However, we probably have not found a properly architectonic solution to the question that is posed here, as the solution for social housing is primarily political."<sup>12</sup> The conclusion seemed to be that an exhibition project was of no use for housing research that followed the perspective of the tenants. Hence, as a compromise and in order to contribute to the exhibition at HKW, instead of an architectural model of a housing unit, the group devised a mobile structure, the so-called "Gecekondu," referring to the already existing Kotti&Co shed which had been set up illegally but tolerated by the municipality on the public square in front of Kottbusser Tor in Kreuzberg since 2012 (see Fig. 2). The Turkish term Gecekondu stands for informal self-built architectures in the favelas of large cities. In its new version for the exhibition, it was designed by Cruz+Forman as an adaptable infrastructure made of retrofitted factory-produced shelving systems from the Mecalux Factory in Tijuana, Mexico (see Fig. 3). The idea was to use it as a mobile forum, a gathering place, where people could meet, debate, distribute information and make their voices heard. By "migrating" into other neighborhoods, the public debate instigated by Kotti&Co and other activists could be carried far beyond the boundaries of Kreuzberg and into other parts of Berlin.

12. Teddy Cruz, Fonna Forman, Ulrike Hamann et al., "A Conversation between San Diego, Tijuana, and Berlin;" in *Wohnungsfrage*, ed. Kotti&Co et al. (Berlin: Spector Books, 2015), 32.



Fig. 2: Gecekondu, Kottbusser Tor, Berlin. ©Courtesy Spector Books and Haus der Kulturen der Welt.



Fig. 3: Architectural model "Retrofit Gecekondu" by Estudio Teddy Cruz + Forman from the exhibition "Wohnungsfrage," HKW, 2015. ©Courtesy Spector Books and Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

What visitors of the “Wohnungsfrage” exhibition at HKW then were able to look at was an adaptable structure, in which in theory all kinds of processes were supposed to be able to take place, even within the exhibition space. Thus the 1:1 model became more what could be called an imaginary for the collective processes and social contexts as well as the usages, actions and thoughts that might be derived from it. As a point of criticism, one has to concede, that the objects that ended up in the exhibition had a representative character so that the exhibition itself did not really arrive at becoming part of the process it was generating. But the combination of objects, artworks, archival material, films and newly commissioned artworks researching the history of the HKW building, and the urban development of Berlin before and after the Second World War, formed resource material, which enabled visitors to conduct their own research and provoked a discourse about housing. There was a documentary film by Angelika Levi in which the work of the Kotti&Co protesters, the discussions among them and the neighborhood in which they were active was portrayed. In addition to that, a publication (one of 12 within the Wohnungsfrage project) documented the production process and the discussion about the Gecekondu. Furthermore the processes that did unfold within the Wohnungsfrage project took place in the form of discussions between the activists and the architects and within the discursive and educational programs accompanying the exhibition. The output of the project was less an object-based exhibition than a discursive contribution in the shape of workshops, debates and publications.

In that sense, it was only an interstation in a continuous political struggle. When after three months the exhibition ended, the project sought out possibilities to continue the discussion and find ongoing use for the architectural models. The model by the architectural group Bow Wow from Tokyo for example was reused in a Kindergarden within

the hangars of the former airport Berlin-Tempelhof. The architectural collective Raumlabor and Atelier Fanela adapted the structure according to fire protection regulations into an open structure and worked together with the refugee accommodation centre Tamaia at Flughafen Tempelhof and with many volunteers to take down the structure at HKW and reconstruct it in Hangar 6 of the former airport.

The wooden construction was adapted into a children's play space (Fig. 4). On the lower level it accommodated a wardrobe, a children's kitchen, storage space and an enclosed group room with pillows and blankets for the children living in the refugee accommodation. A staircase led to the second level with rooms to retreat and allow for concentration. There was also a small library with books, games and toys. When the hangars were no longer able to support the structure, the Berlin-based architectural collective Raumlabor reused it as a bar, kitchen and office space in their "Floating University" project. Opened in May 2018, in a rainwater retention basin in Kreuzberg, this was a collective experimental summer university with a complex lecture, workshop and performance program on the city and urban infrastructures (Fig. 5).

The protests, debates and artistic and architectural engagements the HKW project was involved in, continue inside and outside Berlin, and HKW tries to find ways to engage in them as an ongoing thread of the work of the institution.<sup>13</sup>

13. The insights into the project were kindly offered by Annette Bhagwati, Head of Project of 100 Years of Now.





Fig. 4: Architectural model "Urban Forest" by Kooperatives Labor Studierender + Atelier Bow-Wow from the exhibition "Wohnungsfrage," HKW, 2015, remodeled as a temporary Kindergarten at the refugee asylum at hangar 6 of the former Berlin Tempelhof airport by Raumlabor Berlin and Atelier Fanelisa in cooperation with Tamaia, 2016–2017. © Raumlabor Berlin.



Fig. 5: Architectural model "Urban Forest" by Kooperatives Labor Studierender + Atelier Bow-Wow, remodeled as a registration and seminar building for the Floating University Berlin, 2018. © Raumlabor Berlin.

### Continuous Research

Such a continuous way of working on a topic makes it possible to create a research community and alliances between different actors from civil society, the arts and academia in order to mobilize stronger processes against financialization and monopolization, and to enable artistic and curatorial research projects that otherwise lack funding. Similarly the collaborative research-based exhibitions by Anselm Franke, head of the department for Visual Arts and Film at HKW, can be seen as ongoing research projects, creating an active circle of artists and intellectuals that come back again and again to Franke's exhibition and publication projects and discussion events—to continue working and thinking together in an attempt to gather languages, archival materials and narratives to find approaches to the technological, historical and philosophical implications of current developments and to decolonize and re-frame them. The above-mentioned exhibition “Nervous Systems: Quantified Life and The Social Question” is a continuation and deepening of the questions raised with the exhibition and publication project by Anselm Franke and Diedrich Diederichsen called “The Whole Earth —California and the Disappearance of the Outside” that took place in 2013 at HKW under the frame of the “Anthropocene Project,” which preceded “100 Years of Now” (2012–2015), and investigated how liberal capitalism encountered digital network culture in the Californian hippie culture of the 1960s and created the universalist cybernetic world—the whole earth—we live in today. The exhibition “The Whole Earth” was conceived as “an essay composed of cultural-historical materials and artistic positions that critically address the rise of the image of ‘One Earth’ and the ecological paradigm associated with it.” “Nervous Systems,” another so-called “essay-exhibition,” followed up on this discourse on quantification and cybernetics in the frame of “100 Years of Now” as a



collaborative project between Franke and Stephany Hankey and Marek Tuszynski from the NGO “Tactical Technology Collective” (TTC), who produce educational material and workshop formats to educate the public about big data issues. In that sense “Nervous Systems” was both a historical analysis as well as a collaborative activist project. What was most striking in the case of the exhibition was the way the research material of media scholars also served as the basis for newly commissioned artistic and educational projects. Research processes and educational and activist projects were intertwined. The exhibition focused on the historical emergence of technological innovations, cybernetics, infrastructures, grids and patterns, which condition contemporary life today, correlating technology, social life, individual subjectivities and non-human actors. Similar to the Wohnungsfrage project, the work of this project again consisted of bringing together various actors under one topic. The main contribution of the collective to the exhibition was the educational “white room” (Fig. 6)—an allusion to Apple stores as well as to a historical 1982 CompuServe advertisement (Fig. 7), in which the future appears as a clean, white space with smooth surfaces where nicely dressed white middle-class people with white objects on their shelves wouldn’t have to do any work anymore because technology would do it for them. The white room in the exhibition contradicted this image of smooth a-historical surfaces and presented research on what is going on behind the screens: Visitors were able to educate themselves about questions such as how their data were turned into profit, how their passwords could be hacked, and which apps would not steal their data.



Fig. 6: Tactical Technology Collective, "The White Room," as part of the exhibition "Nervous Systems: Quantified Life and the Social Question," Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2016. Photo: Laura Fiorio. © Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

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Fig. 7: CompuServe Ad, "Welcome to Someday," 1982. © CompuServe.

The second layer of the exhibition consisted of historical works of art, which were chosen so that they would not just visualize data, as if data were an external object, but address the entanglements and the immersive power of the human-machine interactions as a grid of patterns, perceptions, desires, technologies and financial business. A special focus lay on conceptual art from the 1960s and 70s which was reread under the frame of cybernetic tracking and quantification. The notation of dates in On Kawara's series of telegrams and postcards with texts like "I got up" or "I went" (1968–1979), or "I am still alive" (beginning in 1970), were exhibited as documentation of the artist's own trajectory of tracking. Douglas Huebler's "Variable Piece No. 4" (1969) was shown as an example of the "common ideological ground between conceptual art's preoccupation with logical systems and propositional formulae, and the emergence of data processing and cybernetics as motivating force in business, government, and science," as the exhibition catalogue explains.<sup>14</sup> These artworks were positioned in spatial proximity to a third thread of the exhibition, which the curators called "triangulations" on the history of science and technology (Fig. 8). These triangular installations with historical imagery and texts were based on research contributed by media historians and writers. The term triangulation refers to a technique in land surveying or cartography, where the distance of two positions to each other is measured according to the distance to a third point. These installations, on the one hand drew connections between historically and spatially disconnected events or phenomena, and on the other they were situated in proximity to other contemporary artworks in the exhibition space, illuminating them historically and aesthetically. This interplay of proximities in the exhibition

14. *Nervous Systems: Quantified Life and the Social Question*, ed. Anselm

Franke, et al. (Leipzig: Spector Books 2016), 76ff.



Fig. 8: Installation “Triangulations,” from the exhibition “Nervous Systems — Quantified Life and the Social Question,” HKW, 2016. Photo: Laura Fiorio, © Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

mirrored the idea of the nervous system as a digital grid of data and the infrastructure of different actors, connecting moods, tensions and crises of industrial and technologized culture, where the human nerves serve as mere extensions of technologies. In one of the triangulations called "Patterns of Life," the media theorist Grégoire Chamayou collaged different historical references to understand a contemporary phenomenon. His point of departure was the analysis of a new phenomenon called "Activity-Based Intelligence," which was introduced in 2010 by the highest authorities of the U.S. Intelligence community as a militarized rhythm-analysis, based on computer programs that fuse and visualize geospatial, temporal and intelligence data to three-dimensional time-geography diagrams. These models, based on data mining applied to trajectories of movement, are used to detect anomalies from learned behavioural trends, for instance in order to be able to carry out pre-emptive drone strikes in warfare. In order to understand this phenomenon, however, Chamayou did not present research on the history of military technology development, but looked deeper and broader into the history of science. One of the triangulatory exhibits which Chamayou chose in order to illuminate this contemporary phenomenon, was an experiment from the end of the 19th century by the film pioneer Georges Demeny, assistant to the physiologist and chronophotographer Étienne Jules Marey, in which they attached lightbulbs to the bodies of people with pathological movement disorders. They took long-exposure photographs of them while moving in the dark and were thus able to graphically follow the movement of the limbs. A second reference, which Chamayou chose, was one from the first decade of the 20th century, when Lillian and Frank B. Gilbreth developed a similar method, but in this case, they used it not in order to work with medical patients, but to optimize the movement of manual workers. Using an apparatus they invented called the "chronocyclegraph," and

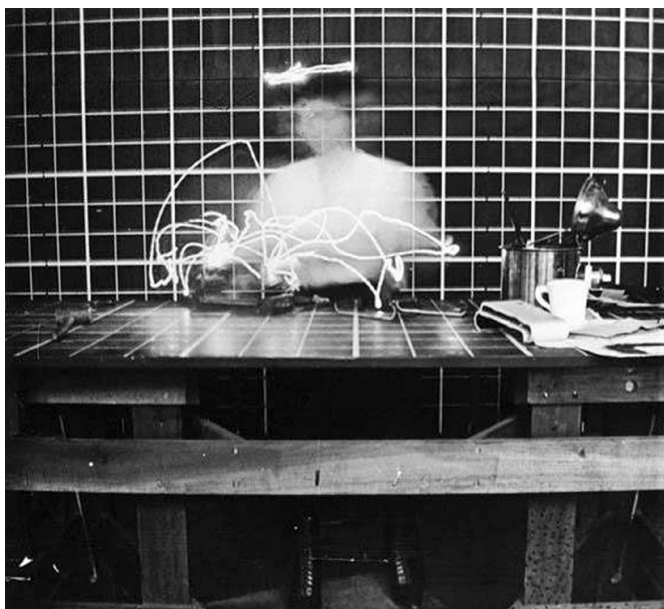


Fig. 9: Lillian and Frank B. Gilbreth used chronophotography to study micromotion in order to simplify and optimize worker's movements, c.1914.  
© National Museum of American History.



Fig. 10: Julien Prévieux, "Patterns of Life," 2015.  
© Courtesy Galerie Jousse Entreprise, Paris.

by fixing small electrical bulbs on a worker's hand, they, too, took long-exposure photographs of the worker's movements (Fig. 9). They then analysed the trajectories of the gestures in order to simplify them, eliminating useless detours to make the worker's production processes more efficient—an image cited in a video piece developed between Chamayou and the filmmaker Julien Prévieux. This newly produced film dealt with that same history of the technological capture of human movement that Chamayou researched, but turned it into a dance movie. Together with dancers from the Paris Opera, Prévieux developed five different pieces based on different experiments, studies, or technologies, aiming at extracting objectifiable patterns from bodies in motion, and the way this data can be applied to reorganize, control, and encapsulate individual and group movement and behavior (Fig. 10). From Chamayou's rather different starting point, Prévieux's film looked at was a much broader analysis of how technologies are inscribed into bodies. The question the film posed was: "Can our inner thoughts be transmitted by our eye movements? Can our future actions be predicted by our current behaviour?" While Prévieux was commissioned to work together with a media scholar, he pursued his own artistic research question and not merely illustrated a curatorial hypothesis. Moreover both the triangulation and the dance film are again embedded in a semantic grid within the exhibition, without which they would not have the same meaning. The relation between the phenomena is a speculative rather than a genealogical one: not one of linear historical genealogy or influence, nor one of visual resemblance or historical appropriation, but rather about inherent and mostly invisible structural, aesthetic, narratological and even poetic connections between different historical techniques and technologies. As the editors of this book series rightly call it, such constellations work as "relational machines" with multiple "recombinatory



possibilities.”<sup>15</sup> What each of the references and artworks in the grid of the exhibition share, is that they can be enumerated within several coherent stories or narratives, crossing the boundaries of medicine, economy and warfare.

In that sense, the exhibition and the accompanying publication offered insights into ongoing research without attempting to give a comprehensive representation or narrative on the topic of quantification and technology. What the exhibition showed were approaches, and research questions, rather than information, instructions or educational material. It was an anti-didactic project that invited visitors to do research themselves within an archival space rather than to be presented with outcomes or findings as such. In that sense the exhibition also presented itself as just one iteration within a broad field of research. Rather than providing a representation or an encyclopaedic overview, it established a grid of references and relations which one might follow into the past and the future. Hence its temporality is not one of a linear narrative of progress or regression, but one of backdoors and hidden tracks through the history of technology.

### Contemporary Re-Semantization

A third sub-project within the frame of “100 Years of Now” might serve as an example for the attempt within the project to capture and develop a rhetoric or poetics of an altered contemporary temporality. This mode of speaking or writing would consist of a re-evaluation of concepts and terms of modernity without declaring them as overcome or obsolete, but by tracing their relational networks and situating them in very specific contexts, thereby criticizing their universal

15. Geoff Cox and Jacob Lund, *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity & Contemporary Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press

2016), 18–23. [https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p\\_\\_128503.php](https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/veranstaltung/p__128503.php).



temporal structure. The series “Dictionary of Now,” curated by Scherer, Stefan Aue and the author, as part of “100 Years of Now,” worked as an Anti-Dictionary in the sense that it did not provide definitions or encyclopaedically map discourses or their histories, and nor did it offer examples for the use and application of a term or its etymological heritage. Instead, the “Dictionary of Now” functioned as a counter-dictionary, demonstrating very specific strategies and constructions of argument in the attempt to counter certain mainstream discourses. In the case of the term “Justice” for instance, philosopher of law and former judge Christoph Möllers suggested that while justice was an inaccessible concept, it seemed a lot more fruitful to conduct research on social injustice, whenever a concern about it was voiced. The media scholar Sarah Sharma from the Marshall McLuhan Centre in Toronto confirmed his approach by countering the concept of the so-called “social justice warrior” in her portrayal of what she called the figure of the white male “social injustice warrior,” fighting leftists from his mother’s basement and creating the myth of the prerogative notion of a social justice warrior who was doing too much good. In another “Dictionary of Now” event, the concept of “Truth” was debated with Wole Soyinka and Manthia Diawara in the context of strategic essentialism in post-colonial movements such as Négritude. Another event in this lecture series, which might be worth looking at in greater detail, was dedicated to the term “Thing” and took place at the Dahlem-depots of the ethnographic collections of the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation in Berlin in October 2016.<sup>16</sup> The anthropologists Arjun Appadurai and Tony Bennett and the museum theorist Sharon MacDonald were invited to look at the situation of the more than 550,000 museum objects in

16. Françoise Vergès, “A Museum Without Objects,” in *The Postcolonial Museum — The Art of Memory and the*

*Pressures of History*, ed. Iain Chambers, et al. (London: Routledge, 2014), 25.

the depots of the soon to be closed ethnological museum. While only around 5% of them were prepared for eventual display at the Humboldt Forum and were already wrapped up to be transported there, the rest would have an invisible future in the depots. The aim of the Dictionary event was not to contribute another theoretical position to the theory of things but rather to provide a complex case study in which the modern notion of “the thing” could be re-imagined by assembling different actors and cultural practices in regard to a very specific current debate about the recontextualization of colonial museum objects in the newly built Humboldt Forum. In museums, objects are often embedded in fixed classification and sign systems that situate them in narratives of specific regional and temporal origins. It feels as if there is no way out of the categories and mechanisms, in which the institutions hold their things captured. Thus, in this edition of the “Dictionary of Now,” the question was: How can the thing speak as actor within its contemporary collectivity, as one historical reference point in a net of relations between colonizer and colonized, between museum and visitor, and between people today and the historical time the object was made, shipped and classified in? In his talk on “mutable immutable mobiles,” Bennett showed that museum “things” are always in a state of transition. They can be seen as active agents in processes that set time and historical categories in motion if one tries to find ways to let them tell their own stories. The object from the collection of the Berlin Ethnological Museum that Bennett chose to talk about at the event was a cloak made of woven bark, purchased in 1819 by the Royal Prussian Art Chamber when Captain James Cook’s collections were auctioned off (Fig. 11). The cloak had been retrieved by Cook from Vancouver Island in 1788. From this collected item in the Berlin Museum, Bennett then drew a connection to the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, who worked as Assistant Curator of Ethnology and

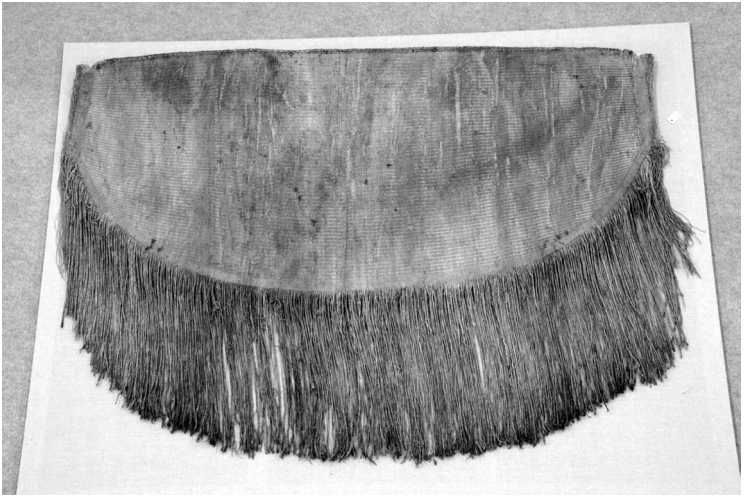


Fig. 11: A cloak made of woven bark from Vancouver Island, acquired by the Royal Prussian Art Chamber in 1819 when Captain James Cook's collections were auctioned.  
Photo: Dana Freyberg. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum.

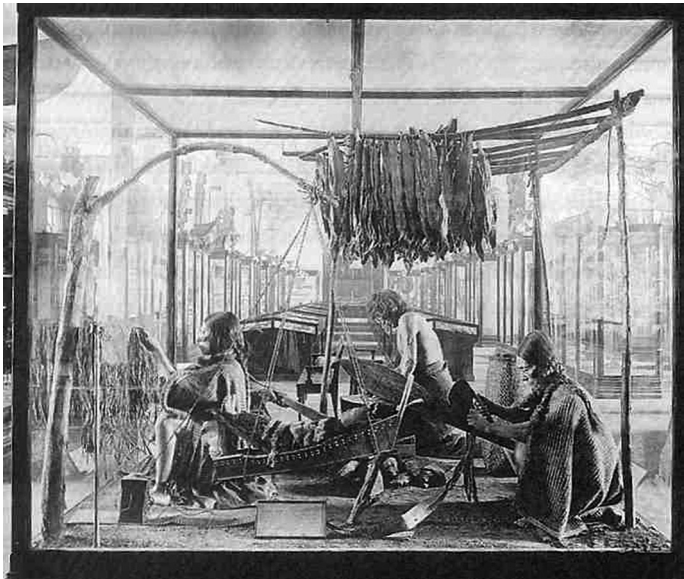


Fig. 12: Life-group display of so-called North West Coast Indians at the American Museum of Natural History, c. 1902. © American Museum of Natural History Library.

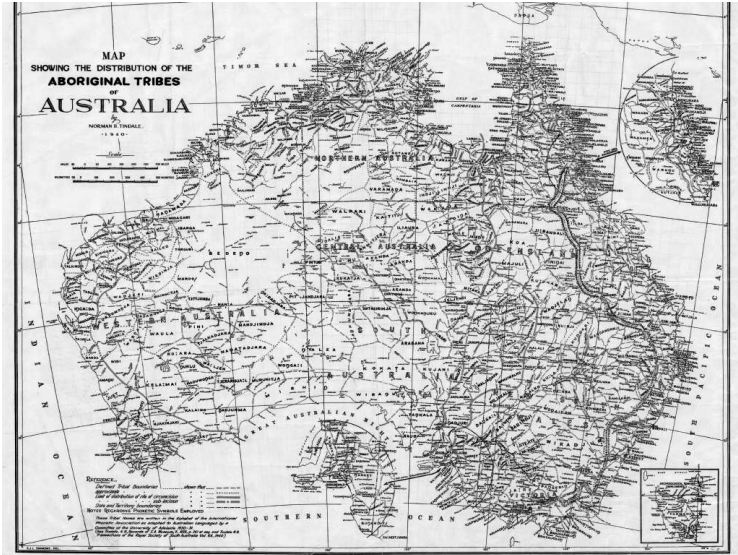


Fig. 13: Map showing “the distribution of the Aboriginal tribes of Australia” by the anthropologist Norman B. Tindale, 1940. © National Library of Australia.



Fig. 14: Spears in the depots of the Ethnological Museum Berlin in Berlin-Dahlem, 2016. © Laura Fiorio /HKW.

Somatology at the American Museum of Natural History from 1896 to 1900, where he included similar cloaks in his life-group diorama of North West Coast Indians (Fig. 12). Here, the cloaks were integrated into a depiction of a territorially grounded way of life, organized around the processes of weaving red cedar bark into clothing. Boas did not invent these kind of displays, but he supported them as a critique of the earlier typological method in which artefacts (tools, weapons, works of art) were displayed as universal selections of anthropological craftwork, disconnected from their originating social contexts. Boas's displays sought to evoke the distinctive qualities of ways of life that were specific to particular cultural areas. However, it is precisely this concept of cultural areas which produced the notion of ethnic groups mapped out for instance as the original aboriginal tribes in Australia in a map from 1940 (Fig. 13), which for a long time prevented the objects from telling their stories of migration, economic exchange and encounter and reduced them to representations of historically and spatially distinct cultures.

The "Dictionary of Now" entry on the term "Thing" thus tried to investigate alternative perspectives in order to find out about the stories these things might tell. As witnesses of historical events, they can tell stories of cultural encounters between those who bought or stole them, and those who owned them before. This becomes especially poignant in the example of spears in the depots of the Dahlem Ethnological Collection used to defend local communities against the colonial intruders (Fig. 14). Rather than serving as representations of specimen of human armory, talked about in light of the history of their acquisition, the spears become resistant actors within a history of colonial violence. These objects can no longer be regarded as traces of authentic indigenous cultures but are clearly actors in modern conflicts about market areas and object accumulation. Looking at such ethnographic objects from a contemporary perspective

thus means to see them as part of the inventory of Western capitalist societies, in which such “accumulation of objects destined to celebrate the wealth of a nation belong(s) to an economy of predation, looking at defeated peoples or exploiting the riches of others.”<sup>17</sup> The contemporary condition which becomes apparent from such contemporary curatorial approaches to museum things is then one of capitalist expansion, domination and exploitation, where living space, knowledge production, technologies and discursive languages become more and more contested and monopolized. On the other hand, what also emerges is a contemporary condition of cultural encounters, creolizations and the production of other languages and practices. The languages developed within the “Dictionary of Now” project are not theories about contemporary phenomena, but archaeologies of historical terms and rhetoric and poetic strategies for addressing things as part of historical discursive textures. The practical side of the project was to try out contexts and encounters of objects, people and sites and see whether certain modes of speaking are still suitable or need to be reformulated. Thus the “Dictionary of Now” was not a project informed by theoretical reflections which are then turned into curatorial practices, but to look at theoretical discourses from the perspective of a practical project and attempts to understand their role as actors that create historical dynamics and value systems.

17. Françoise Vergès, “A Museum Without Objects,” in *The Postcolonial Museum—The Art of Memory and the*

*Pressures of History*, ed. Iain Chambers, et al. (London: Routledge, 2014), 25.



## The Practice of Theory: The Coming Together of Different Temporalities

How can such contemporary conceptual research projects as those that took place in the frame of “100 Years of Now” contribute to, or criticize and reevaluate, the project of a theory of contemporaneity? And how can theories of the contemporary be organized like a cultural or curatorial research project in order to allow for the same long-term continuous reflection, the same polyphony of voices and the same multitude of media, materialities and temporalities? Do books that seem to detain knowledge in one particular moment, have to become collages or blogs or—like this one—part of an ongoing book series? In the following paragraphs, this question is pursued by looking at recent theoretical texts on the phenomenon of contemporaneity which were organized like curated projects and discussing them in relation to practical curatorial projects which produced theoretical reflections. The hypothesis is that boundaries between theory and practice seem to blur in a contemporary condition, and curatorial projects can help to reorganize the canon of current academic disciplines and contemporary art.

Many theoretical reflections or accounts of contemporaneity, while addressing questions of temporality, implicitly also address questions of exclusion and inclusion of intellectual positions within processes of knowledge production. The anthropologist Paul Rabinow does not see contemporaneity as merely a temporal category in the sense that something is happening or somebody is living at the same time as somebody else (i.e. “Cicero was the contemporary of Caesar just as Thelonious Monk was the contemporary of John Coltrane or Gerhard Richter is the contemporary of Gerhard Schroeder”<sup>18</sup>). Instead, the adjective contemporary describes a qualitative feature. Furthermore, it describes a specific way

18. Paul Rabinow, *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary*

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1.



of looking at phenomena: Looking from multiple perspectives; looking at phenomena “adjacent” to the ones one is looking at; setting multilayered historical frames; conducting a network analysis when describing an event or process and thus developing a new “ethics” of the contemporary.<sup>19</sup> It seems that the notion of contemporaneity questions the idea of theory as something abstracted from temporal structures, as the texts dedicated to contemporaneity at times present themselves less as theses on the condition of their time, but as collages and gatherings of contemporary positions, embedding themselves within a plurality of temporalities rather than assuming a universal perspective on a designated period of time with a linear history. Lionel Ruffel in his book *Brouhaha — Worlds of the Contemporary*, for example, organizes archival material around the history of contemporaneity as if within a multi-layered exhibition: The chapters are entitled “exhibitions,” “media,” “publications,” “controversies,” “institutions,” and “archaeologies,” presenting a gathering of references rather than developing a theory of contemporaneity or telling its history.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Rabinow in his book *Marking Time*, tries to arrive at “methods of inquiry” and “modes of production,” describing the “messy ethical problems” of the contemporary, “its diverse forms of knowledge, its pedagogical and political challenges,”<sup>21</sup> rather than giving an account of a contemporary condition he sees himself in. In an assemblage of four case studies, Rabinow demonstrates how his contemporary method might be conducted. He looks at four phenomena as diverse as: firstly, the so-called “discovery” of the human genome; secondly, the problem of anthropological fieldwork in Morocco, thirdly, the question of what and who enabled a new “love of the poor” in the Roman Empire; and, fourthly,

19. Lionel Ruffel, *Brouhaha — Worlds of the Contemporary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 193.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Paul Rabinow, *Marking Time*, VIII.

the problem of biotechnology in the works of Paul Klee and Edward Steichen. One might say the four chapters are reflections on knowledge production, asking: What is an object of inquiry in a contemporary perspective? How do I know where it begins and ends, what to include and what to exclude? Who speaks about whom? And, what is a comparison? In that sense, the book works like a curatorial research project, assembling material to inquire into the infrastructures and historical materials that produce contemporaneity.

In his famous book *Time and the Other*, Johannes Fabian showed that in classical ethnography, the culture described is always denied the same historical time as the culture the ethnographer resides in. Fabian calls this the denial of “coevalness,” where especially indigenous cultures are described as “pre-modern,” even “primitive,” at least “authentic,” or “original.”<sup>22</sup> Taking on the frame of the contemporary according to critics such as Fabian thus means to pose questions such as: Who is sharing the same contemporary time? Who is the con-temporary of whom? And how to organize an inquiry accordingly? Talking about the coming together of different times hence really means talking about the coming together of different positions and phenomena from inside and outside of academia, or in and outside the art world, as contributions to theory or knowledge. In this light, theories of the contemporary could maybe stop being theories on something and become practices of writing or curating that assemble differing positions. They could create gatherings that make it possible to imagine alternative forms of collectivity or collective knowledge and thought. Rather than referring to people of the same historical, political, religious, ethnic, national or interest group as collectives, in theories of the contemporary, collectivity could and is often produced in relation, in the sense of

22. Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other—How Anthropology Makes Its*

*Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 35.

Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, in which he states that "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other."<sup>23</sup> How alliances are possible even if such relations are asymmetrical might then be considered the essential question of contemporary investigations, especially in a situation of a long common history of actors, often described in binary oppositions of colonizers and colonized, of upper and lower classes, of masters and servants, of men and women. Glissant looks at the history of colonization and tries to overcome the concept of identity by stating that each position is linked "to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures," and "is produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation."<sup>24</sup> Moreover such a relational perspective might be called contemporary—given however that one is aware of the fact that often enough contemporaneity is attributed to very exclusive and elitist phenomena such as contemporary art. What, however, are these other critical perspectives on the temporality of contemporaneity? What can ideally be imagined with the term as a counter-concept to the linear notion of modernism preceding postmodernity? The question this essay is trying to follow is: which formats of curating or writing might enable such a relational perspective on different phenomena?

The theorist of contemporaneity, Boris Groys, outlined—with reference to the German word "Zeitgenossenschaft" which literally means "comradeship of time,"—that "to be con-temporary—zeitgenössisch—can be understood as being a 'comrade of time'—as collaborating with time, helping time when it has problems, when it has difficulties,"<sup>25</sup> and thus be a comrade of everything that resides within time together with oneself and show solidarity with it. Furthermore, when

23. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11.

24. *Ibid.*, 144.

25. Boris Groys, "Comrades of Time," in *What Is Contemporary Art? e-flux journal*, ed. Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle (Berlin: Sternberg 2010), 32.

time is not understood as a linear line, but as a set of layers and relations, this solidarity can hold true for people from remote, past and future times. For Groys, the analysis of phenomena entangled in global infrastructures and manifold layers of temporality makes it harder to decide who is part of this contemporary perspective. If one attempts to make an argument of historical complexity and frames a question with respect to humanity as a whole, everybody is a possible contemporary, even those who are already dead—as becomes most apparent in Groys' recent exhibition on Russian Cosmism, "Art Without Death" (2017)—which was also on show in the frame of "100 Years of Now" and which he curated together with Anton Vidokle. The 1920s Russian Avant-Garde movement of the Cosmists that the exhibition was dedicated to, wanted to revive the dead, and abolish death as a consequence of their egalitarian socialist vision. They believed that "private property cannot truly be eliminated if every human being owns a private piece of time." Thus "time will be collectivized."<sup>26</sup> Before the Cosmists were going to be able to realize this vision with biotechnological means, it was important for them to at first establish modes of *thinking* history and humankind as sharing the same time. The Cosmism movement can hence be considered a radically contemporary movement because it developed models to think the co-evalness of all humankind, where every person who has ever lived can be considered the contemporary of every person to come. Contemporaneity in this radical form becomes a utopian vision of equality and diversity. Even if this biotechnological vision has not come true, the exhibition suggests that such a perspective might prove fruitful for establishing historical frames and rethinking the idea of humanity as a multitude of relations.

26. Boris Groys, "Becoming Cosmic,"  
Lecture held at the conference "Art  
Without Death: Russian Cosmism" at

HKW on September 1st, 2017. Online at:  
[https://www.hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/  
audio/60840](https://www.hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/audio/60840).

Death and the survival of a possible death, according to the philosopher of contemporary time Peter Osborne, also played an important role in the actual first historical appearance of the word contemporary as a qualitative property designating artistic styles. “Perhaps it was the collective sense of survival in the aftermath of war,” Osborne points out, “that had opened up social experience beyond national frontiers that produced in Europe the association of a new historical period with the temporal quality of the shared present itself.”<sup>27</sup> Again, the philosophy of temporality here becomes a theory of a new sense of collectivity. The First and Second World Wars, and more so the Cold War with its nuclear threat scenarios, proliferated a trans-national recognition of one’s contemporaries far and near—whether they were considered allies or enemies. A contemporary style was then not necessarily a style that had been produced recently, but one that fostered a certain relationality, demonstrating an awareness of global trends and fashions and a relation to other contemporary events worldwide. Osborne’s theory would explain why both art and design were for the first time widely described as “contemporary” in the English language around the two World Wars in the beginning of the 20th century. In the 1920s and 30s, the first histories and theories of contemporary art appeared in Germany and France and Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret designed a “Musée des artistes vivants” for Paris in 1931. In 1946 the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) was founded in London and the discourse on contemporary art spread widely.<sup>28</sup> However, this was predominantly a discourse on living artists and art produced most recently rather than one on a different temporal logic. This notion of contemporaneity as a different

27. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere Or Not At All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 15.

28. *Ibid.*, 16.

spatial temporality—both with respect to the space of the disciplines of academia or the dissolution of genre categories in the arts—only emerged more recently and was strongly fostered not only by theoretical texts in books or magazines but by new kind of institution.

### Contemporary Institutions

As Ruffel writes in his archaeology of the contemporary, it is a very specific kind of collectivity produced by such a culture of contemporary recognition of others as sharing the same time, bringing forth specific kinds of subjects and specific kinds of collectives and institutions that are constituted not by community (in the sense of an identifiable designated group) but by relationality: “Contemporaneity doesn’t only constitute the subject; just as profoundly, it constitutes the collective; it establishes the collective through the relation that it institutes. The form of contemporaneity coproduces a type of collective and therefore a political community.”<sup>29</sup> In this context, Ruffel looks at the worldwide emergence of the first centers for contemporary art in the 1990s that often were localized outside of the main cultural centers as, for instance, the Centro de Expresiones Contemporáneas (CEC) in Rosario, Argentina. Such centers for contemporary art—Center for Contemporary Art (CCA), Singapore; basis voor actuele kunst (BAK), Utrecht; Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (WDW), Rotterdam; or Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille—are not museums of art produced in the present time but, similarly as HKW does now, they invented new strategies to bring together different layers of historical and present times, different disciplines, formats and genres into one building.

The question seems to become which kind of spaces, which institutions, which actors are capable of facilitating and coordinating relationality as a mode of discourse

29. Ruffel, *Brouhaha*, 54.

—surely not the monopolized digital network cultures, creating a current buzz of connectivity outside of democratic processes. Relationality for Glissant, is certainly not the same as connectivity. In de-centralized networks of “intensive milieus”<sup>30</sup> shared by “intra-actions”<sup>31</sup> of humans and technology, each individual subject is strengthened by being able to publish a subjective perspective—on a blog, in a social network, in messages and public forms of protest and activism. But whether this strengthens the sense of relationality or even community, is in doubt: “If it is true,” Ruffel asked in the announcement of his conference “The Publishing Sphere—Ecosystems of Contemporary Literatures” in June 2017 at HKW, “that the imaginary of modern literature is constitutive of the fantasy of a ‘good’ public sphere of democracy, then we must find out what kind of societies are emerging from the publishing sphere we are faced with today.”<sup>32</sup> In his view, in an atomized and highly technologized milieu of isolated narcissistic subjects, although everybody is connected, relationality or even collectivity is not increasing. If the contemporary is to serve as temporal space of relation, one has to ask what the space of such contemporary relationality might be and how it might work as a public space of democracy.

There are several projects which tried to theorize the contemporary precisely as such a new form of public space: Ruffel’s “Publishing Spheres,” Maria Hlavajova and Ranjit

30. Marie-Luise Angerer, “Ecology of Affect: Intensive Milieus and Contingent Encounters”, published online in 2017 by meson press, Lüneburg as an extended version of the inaugural lecture Angerer delivered as the incoming Chair of Media Studies and Media Theory in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Potsdam on May 11, 2016. Online at [www.meson.press](http://www.meson.press).

31. Adam Kleinmann, “Intra-actions,” (Interview with Karen Barad) in

*Mousse Magazine*, (Summer 2012).

32. Lionel Ruffel, in his announcement text to *The Publishing Sphere—Ecosystems of Contemporary Literature*, [http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2017/internationaler\\_literaturpreis\\_2017/publishing\\_sphere\\_1/publishing\\_sphere.php](http://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2017/internationaler_literaturpreis_2017/publishing_sphere_1/publishing_sphere.php), is referring to Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962).

Hoskoté's "Future Publics," and Kai Van Eikels' "The Art of Collectivity" are just a selection of them. All of them are also experiments with public space and the public. "Future Publics (The Rest Can and Should Be Done by the People)" which took place at BAK—basis voor actuele kunst, in Utrecht, in 2015, and was curated by Hlavajova and Hoskote, was dedicated to the changing notion of the public in art today: "Who really is the public, the addressee, in these overlapping circuits of art and the world under the current condition?"<sup>33</sup> the editors of the accompanying publication asked. This question seems more and more pressing as artistic strategies have been appropriated not only by the creative industries of the post-fordist era, but also by political activists, NGOs, protest movements or revolutionaries, blurring the boundaries between artistic and non-artistic production processes, where artists and cultural institutions are no longer autonomous outsiders of society but economic and political players in the midst of it. In the field of knowledge production, author and recipient are no longer distinguishable, and both inhabit a shared publishing sphere. The editors of the BAK publication observed that in contemporary discourse one does not speak of the "viewer" anymore, but of the "participant," "citizen," "emancipated spectator," or "co-producer."<sup>34</sup> Thus gallery spaces and art institutions dedicated to contemporaneity can no longer hand down expert knowledge and present objects from the world of science, history and artistic mastery to an audience who somehow knows less than the institution, but, as Brian Holmes demands in the same volume, they have to find ways to "become effective sites of social integration, beyond the mere display of exotic signifiers."<sup>35</sup>

33. Maria Hlavajova and Ranjit Hoskote (ed.), *Future Publics (The Rest Can and Should Be Done by the People): A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 9.

34. *Ibid.*, 11.

35. Brian Holmes, "Art and the Paradoxical Citizen," in *Future Publics (The Rest Can and Should Be Done by the People): A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 190.



In addition to pointing out infrastructures of relationality, the main task of contemporary cultural institutions and curatorial projects hence seems to be the production of forms and formations of different public spheres and new kinds of collectivity which would allow for a diverse coming together of different times rather than merging voices into one collective. But what could such an encounter of different “arts of collectivity” look like? Kai Van Eikels in his study *The Art of Collectivity* warns that institutions for art and culture cannot become places for political gatherings, test out models of direct democracies and revive the feeling of being part of a democratic parliament of the people. While he concedes that one can observe a “return of the political” in the arts since around 2000, when art itself has become political action—which might especially hold true after documenta 14 in 2017—he points out that these new forms of politics in art are not reconstructing assemblies which our parliaments might no longer be able to represent. For him, the collectivity produced in art in the past decade is one that takes place not in gatherings but in separation and dispersion. In a decentralized public sphere, he points out, the new experience of collectivity does not demand an actual physical collective or a designated interest group of individuals showing solidarity like a movement, a group, a party, a block or closed ranks: “I do not have to decide whether I want to act collectively or alone; I can decide, which direction I want to give collective dynamics with my actions.”<sup>36</sup> Van Eikels thus establishes a notion of collectivity that comes close to Ruffel’s theory of a contemporary “Brouhaha” of contemporaries that are not bound together by a feeling of solidarity, togetherness or shared interests, but by themselves being entangled in shared infrastructures, impacting each other with every

36. Kai Van Eikels, *Die Kunst des Kollektiven. Performance zwischen Theater, Politik und Sozio-Ökonomie*

(Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013), 11. Translation from German by the author.

action and decision. To act in a collective sense within such a contemporary condition means finding ways of “dealing with the separations, distributions, segmentations and dispersions without seeking shelter in new illusions of liability in esoterism or new-age but also without falling prey to cultural pessimism, which attempts to bond with institutions of aesthetic experience as oases of gatherings, deceleration and real presence.”<sup>37</sup> Finding such ways to deal with these structural developments within the sphere of art and culture requires to understand which knowledge system or which shared reality one wants to make reference to in specific public spheres. And it is in the space of arts and culture that different layers, magnitudes and multitudes present in a particular position can be negotiated, by gathering different contemporary media and positions and places of encounter, drawing on established (modern) modes of thinking —and especially those which have never been modern —and confronting them with current practices from research and the arts. If “100 Years of Now” was a contemporary project or a project that investigated a contemporary condition, it seems that it did so by facilitating precisely such public gatherings in which different actors try out ways of dealing with each other and become aware of how what they say and do impact others. Through audio and video live streams, through short articles in the format of the online “100 Years of Now Journal” and through formats of cultural education such as the above mentioned “Schools of Tomorrow,” the project did not so much represent topics but create a public sphere in which processes could be facilitated through which the search for the most pressing topics could be enabled, simply by asking people what they were concerned with, asking artists and scholars what they were working on, and asking pupils and students about how they imagined their futures.

37. Ibid, 13. Translation by the author.

### The Shift from Representation to Process

If contemporaneity is characterized as the coming together of different notions of temporality, it also abolishes the idea of stable temporal objects as a set of reference points. History in a contemporary perspective can thus not be represented in objects, but only be negotiated in processes. Similar observations are also made in the field of theory of contemporary art. “100 Years of Now” in that sense could also be described as a project following strategies and approaches derived from contemporary art. Nevertheless, the canon of contemporary art, even if regarded as a history of processes rather than art objects, poses political problems that were also addressed: the problem of who the driver of such processes is; who conceives, conceptualizes, initiates, curates, moderates, governs these processes?

What proves very helpful in describing these approaches and artistic strategies is Juliane Rebentisch’s attempt to formulate a “normative” understanding of contemporary art.<sup>38</sup> She characterizes contemporary art, or “Gegenwartskunst,” as an art of “a modernity that has to be thought as critically self-transforming and therefore essentially incomplete.”<sup>39</sup> The aim of her book is to “gather fragments for a normative understanding of contemporary art” in order to “develop an understanding of art in the light of its best possibilities.”<sup>40</sup> By gathering examples from the history of art in the twentieth century, such as social art, concept art, the readymade, institutional critique, global art and land art, she characterizes contemporary art as something possessing one or more of the following features: openness, processuality, ephemerality, intermediality, polychronicity, polycentricity, transnationality, speculativity, collectivity. What Rebentisch describes as

38. Juliane Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst—Zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius 2013).

39. Ibid, 20. This and all following quotes translated from German by the author.

40. Ibid, 21.

contemporary art can be regarded as practical research methods: An example is the “gesture” of the readymade.<sup>41</sup> She introduces the technique of the readymade as exemplified in Marcel Duchamp’s urinal as the “scandal” of contemporary art contained in the revelation that a work of art does not necessarily have to be distinguishable from a normal everyday object, no matter how profane it might be. The achievement of the readymade is to have “transfigured art into the state of consciousness of itself.”<sup>42</sup> The readymade thus fulfils the criteria for being a contemporary piece of art as Rebentisch defines it, because it is an “artistic operation aiming at a specific experience, which is reflexive to the experiences in the respective spheres of life that the contemporary piece of art is intervening in or referring to.”<sup>43</sup> In the case of Duchamp’s urinal—which he submitted to an exhibition by the Society of Independent Artists in 1917, and which was rejected and thus never displayed,—this sphere is the standardized industrial mass production of commodities as well as the logic of structural exclusion within the art world, even the independent one. Arthur Danto, whom Rebentisch is paraphrasing in her chapter on the readymade, is therefore praising the readymade for no longer promoting a notion of art which is defined by the production of an object but establishing the idea of art as an “experience,” thereby reaching a kind of “purity of purely ideal existence,” bordering on the praxis of philosophy.<sup>44</sup> In that sense art that becomes theory that becomes reflection might also be what a project such as “100 Years of Now” is pursuing. When art becomes self-reflexive, it does not, however, have to become entirely self-referential. In a symposium at HKW in the frame of “100 Years of Now,” entitled “The Readymade Century”

41. Dieter Daniels in his introduction to the two day symposium, “The Readymade Century,” October 12–13 2017, Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Online at: <https://voicerepublic.com/talks>

/readymade-after-the-readymade.

42. Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst—Zur Einführung*, 123.

43. *Ibid.*, 118.

44. *Ibid.*, 123.

(2017), curated by Dieter Daniels and Annette Bhagwati, the Duchampian readymade was reinvestigated with regard to contemporary artistic practices. Each panel was introduced by a number of artists, among them Sadane Afif, Simon Denny, Olaf Nicolai, and Kader Attia, who, although normally not explicitly referring to the readymade as a historical practice in their work, were for the moment testing the category to see whether it would prove useful to address the phenomena they are working on. Because the readymade is not bound to a specific object, as an approach it can be reactivated and recontextualized. Following this line of thought, Attia suggested to think of the ethnographic objects in the collections of Western ethnological museums as readymades, pushing the boundaries of the by now long established art-historical term by transferring it from mass-produced to hand-crafted objects. In a gesture similar to Duchamp's appropriation of the industrially designed and manufactured porcelain urinal, Attia, in his piece "Injury Reappropriated," suggests to look at re-appropriations of ready-to-use objects such as colonial French coins used to make jewellery by Moroccan Berbers in the late 19th and early 20th century as readymades (Fig. 15).<sup>45</sup> Attia described them as readymades in the sense that they were objects "that could not have been developed in a different society. They are the symptom of it,"<sup>46</sup> thereby reflecting on the conditions of their production. This reconsideration and re-appropriation of a historical term such as "readymade" and the act of relating it to modes of production from different historical times could also be described as a contemporary approach of the kind that

45. Kader Attia's collage "Injury Reappropriated" is printed in *Sacrifice and Harmony*, ed. Susanne Gaensheimer and Klaus Görner (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2016) 214.

46. Kader Attia in the panel "Readymade Transcultural" as part of the two day symposium, "The Readymade Century," October 12–13, 2017, Haus der Kulturen der Welt. Online at: <https://voicerepublic.com/talks/readymade-transcultural>.

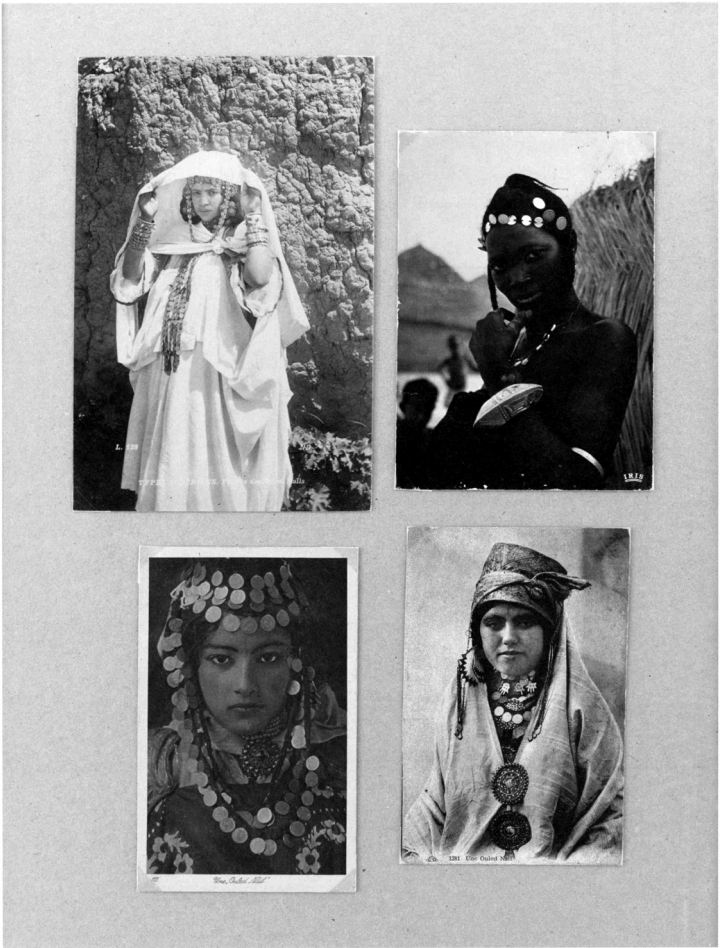


Fig. 15: Kader Attia, *Injury Reappropriated*, 2014. © Courtesy the Artist.

HKW was trying to pursue with “100 Years of Now.” The projects tried to find precisely such “gestures” through which a reflection on the modes of production of contemporaneity would become possible. In a sense, the historical terms in the “Dictionary of Now” projects were treated as readymades and so were the architectural models in the Wohnungsfrage exhibition in the sense that they were objects that were developed out of a certain mode of common production in order to make these processes visible or tangible.

One of the most prominent art critics who observed that in contemporary art social processes became more and more important, is Claire Bishop. Her book *Artificial Hells* plays an important role in trying to understand how developing strategies and research methods for social processes became so important in artistic and curatorial practices. She looks at the social context of art and shifts the perspective from comparing artworks as “finite, portable, commodifiable product(s)” to looking at the production of art as a “politicised working process.”<sup>47</sup> From the early 20th century European Avant-Garde movements up to global post-1989 approaches of project-based, often educational art, she analyses what she calls the “social practice” of art. Based on the legacy of the European Avant-Garde, she writes, such artworks often manifest themselves not in “discrete objects” but in an “ongoing or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end.”<sup>48</sup> That’s why she calls it process art—which also leads to process-oriented approaches on the side of curating. But not only the object is dissolved into a process, also the distinction between production and reception, between artist and audience, is blurred: “The audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant.”<sup>49</sup> The collectivity produced in these processes

47. Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 2.

48. *ibid.*

49. *ibid.*

is thus in her view again a contemporary one, being produced out of relational interaction rather than shared interests. However it seems that praising relationality can also blur power structures. An important question that was attached to the question of processuality, in the context of “100 Years of Now” was how to decolonize the narrative around processes of contemporaneity.

### De-Colonizing the Contemporary

When objects are dissolved into processes, the question arises who the driver of such processes might be. Who turned objects into processes? Was it really the European Avant-Gardes, as Bishop suggests? Or was it perhaps rather anti-colonial and anti-hegemonial political and social struggles, in which some of the Avant-Garde movements, such as Dada and Surrealism, had taken a strong interest? “Kanon-Fragen” is an important project directed by Franke that runs parallel to “100 Years of Now” at HKW and which from 2016–2019 has tried to rewrite art history from the perspective of the colonized and to counter the common narrative of contemporary art as something that spread from Europe and the U.S. to the colonies. From the reconstruction of the 1978 International Art Exhibition for Palestine in Beirut in the exhibition project “Past Disquiet” curated by Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti at HKW in 2016, to the exhibition “Misfits — Pages from a Loose-Leaf Modernity” curated by David Teh in collaboration with Yun Ker, Merv Espina and Mary Pansanga, presenting the three hitherto unknown Asian artists Tang Chang, Roy Lee and Bagyo Aung Soe to the canon of modernity, all projects within “Kanonfragen” were dedicated to the question of how outsider figures in modern art can question the framing narratives of art history—the bounds of national narratives as much as those that organize global contemporary art.



Bishop still describes contemporary collaborative art as a movement that set out in Europe in the early 20th century and spread into the world after what she calls the “fall of communism” in 1989. For Bishop, the dates 1917, 1968 and 1989 “form a narrative of the triumph, heroic last stand and collapse of a collectivist vision of society.”<sup>50</sup> She goes on to explain, that although she will “occasionally refer to contemporary examples from non-Western contexts, the core of her study is the rise of this practice in Europe, and its connection to the changing political imaginary of that region.”<sup>51</sup> This geographical frame is all the more striking since Bishop introduces her study with examples of artistic productions from Caracas, Johannesburg, Chinese provinces, Liverpool and Rotterdam alike, thus conceding that she is describing a global phenomenon. But she still insists that this development derived out of a European tradition of Avant-Gardes, social utopias and public art funding. Rasha Salti, David The, Anselm Franke, Christian Kravagna and many others on the contrary try to rewrite the history of contemporary art from a de-colonial perspective, developing a notion of contemporaneity that emerges out of an anti-colonial struggle.<sup>52</sup> To be acknowledged as part of the same contemporary time, as part of the history of modernity, can be seen as part of this ongoing fight against marginalization, which also means to oppose specific kinds of historical narratives.

The debates about the historical narratives around the year 1989 are a good example to address the question of politics within theories of the contemporary, as it is the reference point of a debate about the global

50. *ibid.*

51. *ibid.*

52. Christian Kravagna, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume...: Some Problems

in Transcultural Curating,” in *Art Planet: A Global View of Art Criticism Vol. 1 no. 0*, ed. International Association of Art Critics AICA (Paris: AICA Press, 1999).

contemporary.<sup>53</sup> In his essay “Contemporary Art as Global Art” the art historian Hans Belting declared that what had until 1989 been called “world art” in the sense of exotic art from outside Europe should now be called “global contemporary art” in a gesture that seems to suggest that art from outside of Europe should be lifted up to the level of Western contemporary art. Belting names the Havana Biennial in 1984 as the beginning of such global art, because there, he states, artists from Latin America positioned themselves against the Western hegemony of art, which in his view had become possible due to the new liberal openness of the West after the end of the Cold War. They were quickly followed by artists from Africa and Asia. Belting states, that “Contemporary art [...] assumed an entirely new meaning when art production, following the turn of world politics and world trade in 1989, expanded across the globe” —his idea presumably being that art production expanded from the West to Non-Western countries. This new global art, in his view, “is by definition contemporary, not just in a chronological but also [...] in a symbolic or even ideological sense.”<sup>54</sup> In the *Globalism* edition of the magazine *Texte zur Kunst*, which appeared in September 2013, Kravagna strongly criticized Belting’s art-historical narrative for underestimating the active role of anticolonial resistance in creating what can be regarded today as global contemporary art. He opposes Belting’s viewpoint by outlining a post-colonial art history of contact and by claiming that his notion of global art was still defined by the dichotomy between Western vs. non-European art histories: “Fixated on the global reorganization of the art world that supposedly happened in 1989, Hans

53. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (London: Routledge, 1994); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1993).

54. Hans Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art—A Critical Estimate,” in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 39.

Belting and Peter Weibel paint a picture of history in which the events of 1989 were what first rendered the non-Western world capable of articulating its cultural and political diversity.”<sup>55</sup> Kravagna argues that labelling global art as something that emerged “after 1989” implied that it was Western exhibitions such as *Magiciens de la Terre* in Paris in 1989 that helped acknowledge non-Western positions to be part of a global art historical canon of artistic encounters. What he instead assembles in his essay are examples from the “many decades of anticolonial movements and the contested history of non-Western modernities and modernisms”<sup>56</sup> that led to the “global phase” of art. Thus, in his view, the notion of transculturality that constitutes the new understanding of the contemporary comes from W.E.B. Du Bois’s “double consciousness,” from Tagore’s “cultural inclusiveness,” Nardal’s “afro-latinité” and from the aforementioned Glissant’s notion of “composite” cultures of “one world in relation,” rather than from the inclusion of non-Western positions into a Western canon by Westerners that presumably started in 1989. While in Belting’s view the global contemporary commences in 1989 enabled by a change in Western politics and by an export of freedom, in Kravagna’s view it has its outset in 1885, when in Berlin the so-called “Congo Conference” took place, which created today’s political landscape for Africa by dividing it up between the European colonial powers—a moment that in his view marks the beginning of the anti-colonial resistance movement of the African Diaspora and the emergence of pan-Africanism.

To see the contemporary as a de-colonial frame thus also implies a shifting notion of what is considered Western time and what is considered the time of the Other. The HKW, with its “Kanon-Fragen” exhibitions and other programs,

55. Christian Kravagna, “Toward a Postcolonial Art History of Contact,” in *Texte zur Kunst* no. 92 (September 2013): 112.

56. *ibid.*

is able to build on a history of exhibitions showing non-Western art such as the exhibition series “Künstler der Welt” [Artists of the World] from 1990 onwards, “China Avantgarde” curated by Hans von Dijk, Andreas Schmidt and Jochen Noth (1993), and exhibitions curated by post-colonial thinkers such as Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (2004), or Okwui Enwezor’s “Meeting Points 6 —Contemporary Art Festival from the Arab World” (2012).

Projects such as “100 Years of Now,” “Kanonfragen,” and others try to establish working structures in which such a re-narration of history can be pursued in an ongoing process, rather than just be claimed in a gesture of novelty. Threads that are followed and references that are drawn to previous projects enable long-term perspectives and different temporalities of research. The “100 Years of Now” exhibition project “2 or 3 Tigers” (2017), for instance, can be seen as a case study in response to the theoretical reflections that commenced in the “Animism” project curated by Franke in 2012. The questions asked within the frame of that exhibition was how different cultures distinguish between animated subjects and inanimate objects and how these distinctions mirror colonial hierarchies. In “2 or 3 Tigers,” the mythology of the tiger served as an image which can be read both as an enemy of Western civilization as well as a driver of it, thereby complicating distinctions between subject and object, colonizer and colonized. The exhibition “Neolithic Childhood” (2018) on Carl Einstein was similarly dedicated to the subject-object relation and to the impact of non-European art on the European Avant-Gardes.

However, art history written from a de-colonial perspective is not just a matter of changing narratives but also of changing archives and collections, of changing institutions and positions and of an overall process of academic, artistic, social and cultural diversification which is by no means advancing in

the contemporary condition we are facing today. Thus, it takes a very long time and is a lot of work.

### Curating as a Theoretical Practice<sup>57</sup>

It seems that when the word contemporaneity is used, the idea of curating and especially curatorial research is also not far away. The question arises whether there is a connection between the two and what their relation looks like. Can curating be seen as the suitable practice to engage with contemporary processes with the idea that they need guidance, management, organization, or, to say it in the terms of Groys, that they need “comrades”? The term curating has been criticized widely and certainly sometimes rightly so, due to its inflationary use, its lack of qualitative features and its commercialization in the sphere of the art market. The politics of contemporaneity as outlined above in that sense also needs to be addressed in relation to the politics of curating: Who curates contemporary processes, who is in a position to govern them, and who within institutions working on contemporary phenomena is called a curator? As Thomas Frank remarks in his article “The Revolution Will Not Be Curated”: “Everyone wants to curate things these days—to choose what to welcome and what to exclude—whether they work for an art gallery or not.”<sup>58</sup> Stefan Heidenreich recently wrote an article “Against Curating,” in which he states that even if the function of curators as caretakers for national collections from around 1800 cannot be revived, their exclusive right to establish a frame is undemocratic. He demands that social media and democratically organized art associations should revive the critical power of art and end the era of thematic exhibitions where a single curator decides which kind of art

57. This chapter has been developed out of a conversation with my colleagues Annette Bhagwati and Stefan Aue.

58. Thomas Frank, “The Revolution Will Not Be Curated: Making Sense Of Curatoriality,” in *The Baffler* no. 34 (March 2017).

and which kinds of objects are suitable for a given theme.<sup>59</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that when exhibitions or curatorial projects explore one thematic realm in a selection of objects and do not manage to constitute themselves as open research processes, the curator or the curatorial team has a lot of power and the danger of self-promotion is extremely high. Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja similarly point to the fact, that in the development of representational critique, “the exhibition space replaced (re-)presentation by *experience*”<sup>60</sup> merely created by the curatorial idea. Hal Foster also warned about this danger of self-promotion or institutional over-reflection in 1996 in his essay *The Return of the Real* when he stated: “The institution may overshadow the work that it otherwise highlights, it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star.”<sup>61</sup> In many projects in recent years however, it seems increasingly difficult to try to identify the boundaries between archaeological and archival research, curatorial selection and artistic production, and to regard them as successive isolated processes. When a curatorial team talks to artists, and researches objects from private or museum collections, and the stories behind them, it is difficult to speak of a curatorial authorship that is implemented into artistic commissions or into a selection of objects. Rather to identify a topic and to establish a frame, in some contemporary curatorial projects resembles the acts of researching, interviewing, asking artists what they work on, what they are interested in, and mediating between artists and institutions or collections. It is a process of editing or gathering positions, much as different positions come together within this book series.

59. Stefan Heidenreich, “A Curating Platform” (June 23, 2017).

60. Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, “What Comes After the Show?” in *On Curating*, no. 14 (2012), 22. Originally published in *Dilemmas of Curatorial Practices, World of Art*

*Antologija* Barbara Bori and Saa Nabergoj. Ljubljana, 2012, 62–64. My emphasis.

61. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 198.

Groys stated in his essay "Multiple Authorship"<sup>62</sup> that since Duchamp the functions of artists and curators can no longer be clearly distinguished. The dissolution of this distinction between different roles, functions and professions between artists and curators has evolved in the context of conceptual and installation art. According to Groys, the large number of production, decision-making and selection processes of a multitude of heterogeneous actors participating in curatorial projects ultimately determine the form that a project takes. In this respect, there is no authorial autonomy of the artist or the curator since s/he is always involved in collaborative and institutional contexts. Assuming that curating is the practice that emerges in a relational field of contemporaneity and from which the idea of the contemporary as a coming together of different times, which have to be negotiated in order to arrive at situated knowledges of a shared reality, is deduced, curating could be characterized as moderating collaborative processes and creating settings in which contemporary approaches can be employed. Rather than representing results from science or academic research and making them accessible for a wider audience or putting on "core programs, such as education,"<sup>63</sup> curatorial research could mean to organize and moderate "open" processes in which people with different approaches who would normally not encounter each other because of their disciplinary boundaries or because of their opposed perspectives are brought into contact so that new relations of knowledge can be produced. The task of the curatorial team then lies in creating spaces in which things can happen rather than be shown, in which they can be researched rather than being represented.

62. Boris Groys, "Multiple Authorship," in *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Exhibitions and Biennials*, ed. Barbara Vanderlinden et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 93–99.

63. Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: ICI, 2012).

Curating in that sense would not be understood as an act of choosing or selecting but rather as a process of moderation between people from academia, the arts and political activism who work with similar approaches on different questions relating to each other but from various angles. Within such a curatorial process, taking into account asymmetrical relationships between the actors, protagonists and participants, and mediating the processes among all collaborators then could be the most crucial task. This would mean on the one hand to be aware of power relations and asymmetrical alliances, contradictions and conflicts within a given constellation as well as on the other hand to reflect one's own curatorial agency.<sup>64</sup> The insights gained from this exchange could then be employed as the basis for an aesthetic practice or could be made available as knowledge to aesthetic and scientific discourses. Such approaches to curating are very similar to the concepts of contemporary artistic practices described above in the sense that they do not depict and consolidate knowledge but rather produce it in the process.

Beatrice von Bismarck has played an important role in establishing what might be described as a contemporary approach to curating with her theory of "Curating and the Curatorial" in which the field of the curatorial becomes the starting point of reflection. For Bismarck, assembling diverse objects in exhibitions by creating "a fit between a thematic and a series of works that function as the representation of that thematic" must be regarded as somewhat outdated.<sup>65</sup> What she calls "the curatorial" is regarded as a "dynamic constellational field where the activities of curating are embedded rather than opposed," emphasizing "ongoing, active

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

65. Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, "Curating/Curatorial,"

in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck et al. (Berlin: Sternberg, 2010), 22.



work” instead of an “isolated end product.”<sup>66</sup> The curatorial in that sense is understood as a field in which curatorial practices can intervene. Such practices then go beyond the mere organization of exhibitions and develop their own modes of production, mediation and reflection of experience and knowledge and thereby abandon the logic of representation. The more complex the questions, the greater the need to go beyond the format of the exhibition of art and artefacts, and to include other forms of knowledge in the curatorial process and to reflect upon one’s own position. This holds especially true for projects that deal with postcolonial problems, questions of privilege, or processes of exclusion or minority rights, because there is no autonomous perspective outside of these problems: “you’re part of it, you’re deeply implicated in it [...]. In a narrative sense, we are living out the postcolonial, all of us, across the world.”<sup>67</sup> To assume a situated position within such open processes thus would mean to assume a strategic position in deciding whose history based on which material is to be told instead of claiming a universalist standpoint. The process of selection would not be avoided, but made transparent and debated in a forum such as the one that the HKW is trying to facilitate with projects like those taking place under the frame “100 Years of Now.”

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid, 33.

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PEN = 0,1,1,0, WEIGHT=130, SLANT= 0.1, SUPERNESS = 0.7

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

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

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

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

Dexter Sinister, 24/05/18, 13:54 PM