Infrastructure Aesthetics

Concepts for the Study of Culture

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Infrastructure Aesthetics

Edited by
Solveig Daugaard, Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt
and Frederik Tygstrup

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Contents

Solveig Daugaard, Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt and Frederik Tygstrup
Introduction: Surfacing Infrastructures in the Arts —— 1

Part One
Art: Inversion, Invention, Intervention

Line Ellegaard
Investigation, Inversion, Intervention: "Women Artists – Past and Present" by Hellen Lassen, Hanne Lise Thomsen and Else Kallesøe —— 33

Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt
Solo, Transparent, Responsible? Artist Collectives' Inversion of Eurocentric Infrastructures at Documenta Fifteen —— 57

Emma Sofie Brogaard
Practicing a Black Women's International. Infrastructures of a Black, Left, Feminist Sensibility —— 79

Amalie Skovmøller and Mathias Danbolt
The Monument as Relation Model: Examining the Material and Cultural Infrastructure of Sculptural Monuments —— 101

Eva la Cour
Collaborating with Film and TV-Producer Jef Cornelis: Notes on Infrastructural Forms of the Image and Image Practices —— 133

Kristoffer Gansing and Linda Hilfling Ritasdatter
***A Video Store After the End of the World*: Material Speculation & Media Infrastructures Beyond the Cloud —— 151**

Part Two
Aesthetics: Organization, Mediation, Relation

Frida Sandström
A Crisis of Autonomy. Critique of Art and Sexuality in 1974 —— 173

Daniel Irrgang
Critical Zone(s) Observatories: Modelling Infrastructures of Climate Science in the Art Museum —— 195

Tanya Ravn Ag
The Intratemporal Work of Art —— 223

Mathias Overgaard
Art as Reflective Infrastructure —— 237

Frederik Tygstrup
Aesthetic Appearance: An Infrastructural Perspective —— 259

Part Three
Politics: Institution, Reproduction, Support

Solveig Daugaard
Poetry as Infrastructural Switch: Yahya Hassan and the Politics of the Danish Literary Circuit —— 281

Kristine Ringsager and Katrine Wallevik
Gendered Infrastructures of the Danish Music Industry: From Disorientation to Feminist Collective Capacity —— 311

Anna Meera Gaonkar
Brown Island Floating in a White Sea: On Affective Infrastructures —— 337

Stine Marie Jacobsen and Joana Monbaron
Institutional and Infrastructural Frictions: The Case of *Group-Think* – An Art, Sport, and Protest Project with Youth —— 355

Rasmus Holmboe
TOVES: THE SALE. Towards an Infrastructural Model for Hosting at the Art Museum —— 371

Xenia Brown Pallesen
Infrastructural Orientations in the Exhibition —— 389

Contributors —— 405

Index —— 411

Solveig Daugaard, Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt and Frederik Tygstrup

Introduction: Surfacing Infrastructures in the Arts

> All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the artwork we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be.
>
> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds*, 1982.

Infrastructural art

Across the various "art worlds" where contemporary art, performance, and literature are being produced and consumed, the borders between the artwork and its surroundings are becoming increasingly blurred. At the 2022 documenta fifteen in Kassel, the artist collective ruangrupa curated and filled the exhibition spaces with collective practices: artists' studios migrated into the exhibition room, kitchens, gardens, and self-organized schools became gathering spaces, printing zines took center stage, and visa applications for artists traveling from the Global South to Germany became some of the main artistic practices. documenta fifteen provincialized the disinterested aesthetic experience of the art object and displayed how the artist collectives were reorganizing, moving, and living in the Eurocentric exhibition space and its inherited colonial and extractive aesthetics. In 2019, when the visual artist Eliyah Mesayer obtained her Danish citizenship and diploma from the art academy, on the exact same day she decided to start the Mesayer Foundation which offers grants for citizenship applications to stateless young people. By demanding gallerists to pay forty percent of their earnings from selling her work to the foundation, she nudges actors who possess economic agency in the art world to contribute to an accumulation of infrastructural support for stateless subjects. In 2021, Anonymous Artists submerged a plaster copy of a bust of Frederik V, founder of The Royal Academy of Arts, into the Copenhagen harbor; they staged this ritualist execution against the backdrop of the colonial debts of the king and his Academy, desiring "to call attention to the art institutions whose foundations exist and were made possible by this colonial era" (Anonymous Artists 2021); and so surfaced a submerged controversy about racism and representational politics in Danish art and art education. In 2012, the feminist-activist performance art collective Pussy Riot staged a musical "Punk Prayer" inside the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of Christ-the-Savior wearing brightly col-

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ored balaclavas and mocking president Putin to out the latent alliance between church and state. They deliberately choreographed the routine of the religious and police authorities who intervened on the spot, as did the Moscow city bureaucracy and court of law. The latter handled the intervention's legal aftermath, thus getting the authorities to participate in an immersive performance where their predictable misogynist authoritarianism and desperate control freakery was on display as was their brutal, ridiculous, and profoundly theatrical behavior. In his self-titled poetry collection from 2013, Danish-Palestinian poet Yahya Hassan preempts and comments on his own future reception as a celebrated and controversial minoritized poet. Hassan's 2019 follow-up collection not only exhibits and condemns the inherent violence in this reception but also performatively delegitimizes its readers' inevitable participation in it. The 2021 winner of the Goncourt literary prize in France, Mohammed Saar Mgoubar's *La plus secrète mémoire des hommes*, fictionally retraces its own coming into being in the historical and contemporary interactions between Senegalese and French literary culture and makes the racial conditions of its own production the core of the narrative.

What art practices like these have in common is that the artwork overflows its borders by bleeding into the social, political, and institutional frameworks around it and at the same time enveloping these frameworks in what is being exhibited. What is on display in such instances is not a delimited artwork that *appears* in an institutional and social setting; rather, the display now *includes, intervenes into*, or even *repurposes* the setting, as part of the work. To understand this interplay, we suggest examining the relation between the artworks and the frameworks that afford them as an *infrastructural* relation. This relation, we contend, becomes increasingly important as still more artworks no longer just work in an infrastructural setting but work *with* infrastructure.

Art worlds are replete with and crucially dependent on infrastructures. There are institutions for art making and institutions that provide knowledge of art and of how to appreciate art; there are historically specific modes of production of art with a variegated set of social, material, and economic conditions and affordances; there are notions of quality and professionality based on educational recognition, genre codes, and clarity of form which are giving access to the institutions and financial subsidies; there are platforms for publication, exhibition, performance, and so on; there are market places and ramified circulation systems; and there are discursive agencies ranging from reviews to research; there are institutions for archiving, maintaining and ordering, and there are the venues and the protocols that frame the social forms and interactions that exist around art. All such institutional, material, and social forms, borders, and processes need to be in place as something everyday and humdrum to make that which we call "art" possible. These infrastructural conditions that underlie the production and facilitate the consumption

of art are normally taken for granted and, like most infrastructures that work in the background in a quasi-invisible way, underestimated.

The contemporary artworks mentioned above perform what feminist sociologist of information Susan Leigh Star has called "infrastructural inversion." They make the infrastructural work visible by demonstrating what goes on *behind* the different scenes to make art appear *on* these scenes as authored and accredited artworks – provided to individual contemplation by institutions of distribution and consecration. Against this backdrop, we suggest considering artistic practices that transgress the traditional functional use of the art circuit as *infrastructural art*, because it bleeds into the infrastructures of production and distribution, and because it makes these infrastructures into integral parts of the artistic expression, not only as a support structure for art, but as part and parcel of what art is and how it exists in society. When artistic practices not only appear in social and material infrastructures but use infrastructural conditions as their artistic medium, then analyzing such practices can proffer insight into contemporary art, performance, and literature that isolated studies of the (autonomous) artworks themselves, the production conditions of artists and art workers, or reception and audience studies, are not able to provide. While all these infrastructural conditions are currently being made visible and become the material of the artworks themselves, we are in a historical situation where they intersect in new ways with other infrastructures – many of them digital, some of them gendered, classed, or colonial – not specific to the art world but serving increasingly vital functions in the production, circulation, and presentation of art.

Colleagues in the field of arts and cultural studies have for the past few years been probing the notion of infrastructure to describe the drawing of borders, flows, and circulations in both artistic and epistemological frameworks. Scholars such as cultural theorist Lauren Berlant and performance theorist Bojana Kunst have used the term to describe the patterns and backgrounds of cultural production and the interests they mediate (Berlant 2016; 2022; Kunst 2023). Feminist political theorist and critic Marina Vishmidt stresses how infrastructures are specific and biopolitical sources for social reproduction, strategically founded on "no-infrastructures for some insofar as it supports accumulation for others" (Vishmidt 2022, 35). Infrastructures look like simple structures for use but are highly political. Thus, the term *infrastructure aesthetics* locates and instigates action in conflicts of who distributes what to whom – and who withholds something from others. Neighboring concepts to "infrastructure" currently circulating in the traditions of Black radical thought and Black feminist theory are capitalist "logistics" suggested by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten and colonial onto-epistemological infrastructures described and analyzed by Denise Ferreira da Silva (Harney and Moten 2021; Ferreira da Silva 2022).

Vishmidt stresses that the critique of infrastructure in art worlds is a deepening as well as a transgression of the tradition of institutional critique, moving from seeing and reflecting upon the agential (what the institution does right or wrong) to analyzing and *changing* its transversal embeddedness in greater material and epistemological racialized, classed, and gendered conditions. And where institutional critique, in Vishmidt's account, sticks with the institution as its ultimate horizon, its infrastructural radicalization "takes the institution as a historical and contingent nexus amenable to re-arrangement through struggle and different forms of inhabitation and re-distribution" (Vishmidt 2022, 30). It is a critique that implies action: "a critique that cuts and lets in air, a critique that takes upon itself to find or make the holes through which this infrastructure comes into view" (Vishmidt 2022, 32).

Thus, with infrastructure aesthetics, a fundamental change – we do not call it a *turn* – can be observed in the tradition of aesthetic theory. Art historian and curator Nora Sternfeld suggests a paradigmatic shift from art as representation to art as "the collective creation of infrastructures," meaning that art has become a site of imagining and crafting other futures collectively (Sternfeld 2023).[1]

With this book, we aim to present an infrastructure aesthetics that can address the *analytical* problem of how to work with disseminated and contextually ingrained artworks, the *aesthetic* problem of how to assess artistic forms that operate on an infrastructural level, and the *political* problem of how to understand artistic agency in the sphere of the social beyond what can be recorded as pertaining to the content or "message" dimension of the autonomous artwork.

Infrastructure studies

Over the last decades, infrastructure studies have gained momentum across the humanities and social sciences. Inspired by different trends in cultural geography, history of technology, structural anthropology, media history, and information studies, infrastructural analysis has come to designate a trans-disciplinary and intersectional interest in the *organization of social processes* and the *systemic relations* that is afford to them. Thus, geographers (e.g., Thrift 2007) and anthropologists (e.g., Bowker and Star 2000) have emphasized how the material infrastructure – roads and tracks,

1 While Sternfeld introduces this change from representation to infrastructure aesthetics in her lecture on learning from documenta fifteen in April 2023, she definitely draws on the thinking about infrastructures developed collectively since 2011 with the freethought collective (Irit Rogoff, Stefano Harney, Adrian Heathfield, Massimiliano Mollona, Louis Moreno, and Nora Sternfeld).

wires and pipes – is not just a set of semi-invisible utilities, only to be remarked upon when they fail, but an active instrument in the social organization of a society. They are structures of relation and distribution, but they are also *structuring* devices that format material processes and thus, as Brian Larkin has it, a "techno-politics" (Larkin 2013, 328). In parallel, since the late 1990s, the different "techno-aesthetics" (Simondon 2012) of specific media infrastructures have been explored and cultivated by experimental and tinkering practices of network-based media art and artistic research (Emerson et al. 2021) closely informing studies of media archeology, collaborative media design, and global information architecture. These practices have effectuated a conceptual shift of focus and attention from *media aesthetics* to *infrastructure aesthetics* (Gansing 2023) and rearticulated the pivotal aesthetic dimension of infrastructure as a structuring device in (digital) art and culture. Meanwhile the infiltration of information systems by computational technology has boosted the logistical conception of infrastructure. While there was always an infrastructural aspect to systems for categorization, classification, and calculation (Bowker and Star 2000), with the "age of planetary computerization" (Guattari 2013) such processes are becoming wired, traceable, and actively involved in thinking as sense-making and decision-making in more tangible ways. Digital infrastructure such as search engines, databases, data-driven algorithms, and digital archives which organize enormous bodies of knowledge increase the entanglement between infrastructures that come across as "material" and as "immaterial" and introduce new velocities and patterns into the structuring of (im)material processes. Connections are configured through tracing and tagging; values and preferences are imposed through rankings and ratings; attention is regulated through recommendations; access to information, capital, and goods is administered through algorithmic calculations, computational protocols, and machine learning. In this way "thinking infrastructures fold into themselves an archaeology of concepts, tasks and processes that make thought and thinking possible" (Kornberger et al. 2019) and generate a series of material consequences that remain unevenly distributed on a global scale (Ritasdatter 2020).

Seeing infrastructures as forms that create processes of exchange and transformation has in turn invited to examine practices of government, in Foucault's understanding of the term (Foucault 2004), as infrastructures, as blueprints of *social* exchange and transformation, inscribed in jurisdictions, bureaucracies, and institutional forms to create an infrastructure of "socio-technique" (Mattern 2015, 95). The same infrastructural functions have been recognized in the more ephemeral spheres of culture and everyday life, where social *habitus* (Bourdieu 1979) and culturally specific schemata of cognition and affect (Descola 2005) are recognized as structuring devices as well, not visible as hardware infrastructures, but effective nonetheless and inferable to deep-seated structures in cultural forms of life.

Infrastructural studies, in this sense, amounts to highlighting infrastructural processing as a "structuring structure" with a serious social and political import, and in addition, to expand this understanding to our analysis of institutional and cultural forms and consider, for instance, bureaucratic structures (Graeber 2015) or structures of feeling (Williams 1977) as "soft infrastructures" alongside their "hard" counterparts (Peters 2015). These two moves, *exposing* infrastructure and *expanding* the scope of infrastructure studies, in turn permits two other features of infrastructural analysis to surface. Firstly, that the different levels of infrastructural organization are *interrelated*, as, for instance, when algorithmic infrastructures leverage affective infrastructures (Ahmed 2010) or plumbing becomes an integral part of military agency (Weizman 2007); in both cases, the concatenation of different infrastructural levels becomes a means of world-making (Larkin 2013) and contributes to outline the spatio-temporal framing of social existence (Tygstrup 2017). And secondly, that infrastructures are *productive* as they organize relations and flows, not just supporting material and social functions, but actually "patterning social form" (Berlant 2016, 393) by way of creating dispositions, switches, and relays through which social and material processes are instantiated and formatted (Easterling 2014).

If, as architect Rem Koolhaas quipped, "infrastructure is more important than architecture" (Shackle 2012), this momentum invites us to pay closer attention to well-known (albeit often understudied) infrastructures (Star 1999) and moreover, to consider the infrastructural function of any kind of mediated exchange "binding people and things into complex heterogeneous systems" (Larkin 2013, 335). In the first instance, the infrastructural approach prompts a shift of focus from the subjects and objects that populate the world toward the relations that exist between them; and from the structure of such relations toward the fluxes and processes they afford. And in the second instance, in the "expanded" understanding of infrastructure, a similar shift is taking us from seeing people and things as situated in a context to seeing them as taking part in this context, as parts of an assemblage or ecology; and, finally, to understand the phenomena we study not as isolated, circumscribed beings, but beings that develop and change through their modes of existence.

Exposing the functions of the infrastructural and expanding the range of infrastructural analysis cannot avoid blurring the otherwise self-explanatory notion of infrastructure; from conditions of possibility for a fungible material organization of the world to a network of effective relations that are underpinned by material as well as immaterial scaffoldings and protocols. This entails that studies of infrastructure are no longer resting on a solid definition of a *research object*, but instead rests on a particular *research approach*, namely, to see processes of recurrent relational interaction as societal infrastructures. Infrastructural analysis hinges not on what we study, but on how we study it.

Infrastructure aesthetics

Against the backdrop of the recent upsurge in interdisciplinary infrastructure studies, we claim that infrastructure aesthetics can provide an innovative approach to studies in contemporary art and literature. We propose to do this by analyzing the increased occurrence of infrastructural art, and by developing a conceptual framework for an infrastructure aesthetics that can provide more adequate tools for understanding and discussing the contemporary art scene. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute to the conceptualization and analysis of the changing role and function of art in society and the new interfaces that emerge between artistic expressions and the social context in which they appear. What is at stake, in other words, is an attempt to gauge the societal mode of existence of art in the historical present.

In recent years, the immersion of art into a digital media ecology constituting a pervasive interdiscursive field, where no "outside of the media" exists (Zielinski 2013) and the abundance of mixed media practices across the arts has fed a discussion about a "post-medium condition" in the arts, demanding a transgression of the conceptual framework of a modernist aesthetic of medium specificity with its reliance on positivist purism and separability (Krauss 2000) and calling for a material and socio-political "post-media transition" countering the "hegemony of mass media powers" (Guattari 2009, 299). Whereas the discourse around some art forms, i.e. literature, is often accused of "lagging behind visual arts" when it comes to questions of (inter)mediality (Gysin 1978; Gilbert 2022, 10) with its institutions refraining from recognizing *as literature* practices challenging a print culture-based medium specificity (Dworkin 2011), the visual art circuit and its institutions has proved remarkably agile in usurping the abounding "mixed media" practices into a smooth-running commercial framework effectively indifferent to the specificities of different material practices (Krauss 2000). In this light, the prevalence of practices immediately conceptualized as "visual art" in the examples taken up in the chapters of this book, might suggest that similar circumstances persist for infrastructural art practices. However, infrastructure aesthetics both expands and exceeds such discussions. Infrastructural practice abounds in all the arts, but the way it is articulated differs significantly in the different art forms and different material practices due to the techno-aesthetic implications of each of them, in accordance with the heightened attention to the "differential specificity" of specific media (Krauss 2000) and with aspirations of altering apparently fixed relations of power via engagement with the materiality of media infrastructure (Guattari 2014; Daugaard 2018a). This, in turn, expands the range – materially, institutionally, politically – of the infrastructural interventions performed by such practices.

The vocabulary of infrastructure studies invites us to describe "art" not as a coherent series of objects, not as adherence to a finite set of rules (not even the default rule that there is no rule), not as dependent on any individual act of judgment, but as precisely an infrastructural process of coordinating and aligning a living circulation between these ontologically quite different parts in the chain that reproduces art as a social fact. Infrastructure aesthetics looks at art as a social sphere of practices framed by historical institutions, cultural expectations, and social relations, and a corollary variety of modes of production and consumption of art. Rather than focusing on art objects, we need to appraise their mode of existence upstream toward the conditions of their production, and downstream toward the conditions of their consumption. This is not a matter of situating art in some larger context, it is about pinpointing the precise set of relations, mediations, and distributions that contribute to reproduce our expectation that something like art exists. Infrastructure aesthetics situates the object of study through a different grammar than the one cherished by Western rationality that examines the relations that exist between objects; it instead examines the web of relations that make it possible to imagine something like a world of discrete objects. Hence, to adequately describe and better understand the social life of art and the role and function of art in the bigger framework of social and cultural reality, infrastructure aesthetics systematically aims to include the different strands of production, expression, and reception of art in a historical description of the social mode of existence of art.

In the modern, "aesthetic" regime of art, as theorized by philosopher Jacques Rancière, the artwork is an object that retains its qualities only when it is *considered* to be an artwork, that is, in philosophical parlance, a noetic rather than a noematic object. The art object becomes an art object by being looked at with a particular set of expectations that are prerequisite to make its qualities as precisely a work of art come forth. The qualities are in the eye of the beholder, so to speak, as per the definition of the reflective judgment of taste famously expounded by Kant. But the beholder, on the other hand, does not possess the sovereignty to make this assessment; the methodological individualism often associated with the Kantian sovereign and disinterested individual judgment is overwritten and scaffolded by a set of validating infrastructural acts surrounding the object and prepping it for being considered in this way. Academies, museums, concert halls, editors, discourses, universities, and so forth. The ineffable "something" that makes art into art is not an intrinsic quality, but it is also not a matter of the mere individual pleasure taken in encountering something beautiful; it resides neither in the object, nor in the subjective judgment, but becomes, in the historical process of establishing an institutional framework around the "art world," an infrastructurally defined quality. The quarrel about whether aesthetic quality resides in the object

or in the beholding subject will eventually demise in the light of an infrastructure aesthetics.

Though instigated by contemporary conditions for art, the delineation of an infrastructure aesthetics has important offshoots for cultural phenomena, both historical and in the present, that are not habitually conceptualized as artistic practices. When an infrastructure aesthetics is applied, other objects are surfacing, and other processes are becoming important; as we become aware of criteria of selection that have been so pervasive that they have escaped direct scrutiny, we are able to question what is brought to our attention as art, and how this categorization affects these objects of our attention.

What consequences do this infrastructural research agenda have for academic studies of arts and culture? At least three methodological transitions are at stake, when infrastructures inform the cultural analysis. Firstly, the analytical interest moves from object to *relatedness*: instead of looking only at the aesthetic object, we can look at the object in relation to the conditions and practices of its production, and in relation to the interactions and exchanges in its reception (Glissant 1990). Or, as Ariella Azoulay has suggested, we cannot look at the photography alone, but at photography in its inseparable relation to its social and material history, and the ethico-political situation in which it is produced and which it coproduces (Azoulay 2008). The same transition is articulated by media theorist Bernhard Siegert, in his theorization of fundamental "cultural techniques" such as alphabetic writing, calendars, and grids for measuring space, that become "anthropotechnics" that co-constitute personhood, time, and space (Siegert 2015). Secondly, the analytical interest moves away from an idea of context as something surrounding a delineated object of interest to the ideas of assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 2002) and ecology (Guattari 2014; Fuller 2005; Hörl 2017): that the cultural relation is always-already a part of a larger body of influences, mediations, interests. This implies that the making and meaning of the cultural relation is distributed across a transmedial field where established hierarchies between figure and ground no longer hold, and where objects, as Lauren Berlant has it, "are always looser than they appear" (Berlant 2022, 25). This distribution of agency can be witnessed, for instance, in the way the literary circuit functions in a post-digital context where the printed book is one among many articulations of a literary work across multiple platforms. Here, the production of literary meaning is distributed in both time and space, as writers' relations and communities, editorial interventions, publishers' promotion material, print, e- and audiobooks, social media profiles of writers and readers, journalistic content, and critical reception all participate in a complex feedback loop that generates the "object" commonly experienced as the literary work. Thirdly, our analytical awareness of infrastructures now caters for a sensibility toward *temporalities* – that shaping is taking place over time and

across institutions, networks, policies, and platforms. Our focus on temporalities in the plural is shaped by Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" (Nixon 2011) and by media theorist Sarah Sharma's notion of "chronopolitics" (Sharma 2014) – that temporal inequality and temporalities of slowness and speed are manifestations of power – and that the ideas of temporal separability, sequentiality, and exception (the isolation in a moment, a certain, limited time span) sustain a European, modern construction of linear temporality and productivity (Harney and Moten 2021, 28; Ferreira da Silva 2017, 83). Instead, we suggest observing parallel and controlled as well as uncoordinated temporal flows upstream and downstream, both synchronically and diachronically, both in progression and regression. A sensibility toward temporalities requires a de-isolation of the analytical object: to read it processually across production, presentation, and reception, and looping back into the production of other, neighboring non-artistic objects. Think of how racism is a performative configuration that conflates public uprisings, online debates, everyday interpellations, political silencing or representation, institutional discrimination, or diversity policies over time. Think of how workflows of the artist-worker syncopate between intensities of deadlines and periods of waiting, between being understood as relevant to society and as being useless. Think of how the object of art is being understood as an object and as a "social structure" from one time to another, and of who takes an interest in these shapings and in which media and disciplines, and for how long the hype goes on, or how quickly it ends.

Across the entire spectrum of artistic genres and media, the contemporary art scene is replete with art practices that appear boundless, medially mixed, and difficult to separate from their surroundings to a degree where they can no longer be meaningfully aligned with conventional histories of art and literature where periods and styles are perceived as responding to and replacing each other in linear succession (Rebentisch 2020). If current practices of infrastructural art actively question the interpellation of the contemporary artist to perform as an individual as it is amplified by the infrastructures of support, distribution, and reception of the art world (Daugaard et al. 2020), then cultural analysis informed by infrastructure aesthetics must question fundamental mechanisms of art history's individualizing principles of organization and provide new entry points for the analysis of aesthetic phenomena. Informed by contemporary critiques of authorial isolation this could include a critical revisiting of the influential author-title-principle, a cultural technique associated with the world's first library catalog, the *Pinakes*, which was produced at the library of Alexandria and preconditions the notion of an "author-function" as formulated by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1998). Or, an infrastructural analysis, formed and informed by our historical present of continued coloniality, mediation, and uncontrollable interaction, can contribute to understand the modes

of existence in the arts in other historical periods. As an example, the archeologist and art historian Amalie Skovmøller has analyzed the commissioning interests and geographical and human relations of transportation behind the white marble monumental sculptures of the Danish colonial era. What does it imply, not to look at the portrayed figure of the sculpture, the portraying technique, or the artistic expression of it, but rather to attend to the network of circulated material, economic and enslaved support "underneath" or "behind" such sculptures, supported by the aesthetic ideas of purity and whiteness in the period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? And what happens if this approach is extended into contemporary debates about colonial or confederate monuments; what if rather than letting our attention be caught by the despicable historical figures that are portrayed, we look to the economic and "cultural infrastructures" that keep such monuments in place while reproducing the inequities they incarnate – only in the present (Hass 2022)? If infrastructural art practices can appear difficult to address via the established distinctions of aesthetic theory, they can, however, provide us with explanatory insights into modes of entangled existence of art in our historical present (Glissant 1990; Latour 2012; Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2022). And moreover, a crucial component in the development of an infrastructural aesthetics will consist in revisiting the constitution of the object of aesthetics in the light of the insights proffered by contemporary infrastructural art.

Politics of infrastructure

The "technopolitical" aspect of infrastructure (Larkin 2013) is highly relevant for infrastructure aesthetics. Focusing on infrastructure when dealing with art (and not on form, or intention, or judgment) makes us aware of how artistic agency is politically *framed* by way of its infrastructural conditioning, and of how artistic agency is likewise politically *active* in the ways in which it exposes infrastructural mechanisms of framing, puts extant infrastructures to use in novel ways, or eventually intervenes in other social infrastructures.

The political *framing* has to do with the infrastructural affordances of art, the tightly knitted system of institutions, procedures, discourses, techniques, and materials that ensure that artworks can be produced, circulated, used, and recognized as such. All these partial and interrelated pieces of affordance (and many more could be itemized, different for the individual forms and genres of art production, but all displaying a similar functional nexus of selecting, differentiating, and privileging) have a clearly visible political function. This attention to the ways in which infrastructural affordances actively (albeit not always very visibly)

encourage and privilege some procedures, circuits, and formats over others, providing a regime that reproduces well-established forms and habits and occults alternative ways of working, continues the tenor of the institutional critique of the 2000s and 2010s. However, as conducted in relation to infrastructural aesthetics, it observes a deeper and transversal implicatedness that goes beyond the institutional and its historical present (Vishmidt 2022; Ferreira da Silva 2022). The infrastructural perspective invites us to understand institutional mechanisms in a broader and more systematic (and scholarly, more demanding, and possibly transdisciplinary) way; it also helps us detect less immediately visible mechanisms of political differentiation and distribution in the infrastructural processes of the art world. The insight into the mechanisms of framing – and the politics of framing – that follows from infrastructural analysis, concomitantly invites us to re-describe cultural policy as a care for cultural infrastructures and invites us to formulate criteria of infrastructural "quality" (including accommodating challenges pertaining to diversity, equity, inclusion, access, anti-coloniality). This analytical and critical perspective on infrastructure draws on the recent upsurge in Black feminist theory and anti-colonial studies and the analytical approaches and tools developed to unveil mechanisms of bias, othering, and unjust distribution of agency and recognition that are reproduced through deep-seated structures and processes that need to be foregrounded, in the work of, e.g., Franz Fanon, Bojana Kunst, Stefano Harney, Fred Moten, and Denise Ferreira da Silva.

The technopolitical infrastructure *activism* in contemporary art has to do with the organization of social relations and interactions: the ways people and things come together, afforded and mediated by art. These social relations can be found around and before the production of art, sourcing contributions from not only the artist herself, but also all the other efforts that are organized by the infrastructurally aided mode of production for artworks. Artworks have agency by giving voice to socially undergirded experiences that have not as yet been given adequate expression. Art, in this perspective, is an infrastructure for political expression. Moreover, art, when considered as an effective implementation of an infrastructure, can be seen to organize the social relations and exchanges that play out in the use of artworks. Hence, the work of art is an infrastructure for gathering, for collective deliberation, and eventually for negotiating the appropriateness of what is presented as art.

Finally, the question of infrastructure politics can open a set of new dialogical relations between academic research in the arts and art practices. Which affordances does the infrastructural analysis and the vocabulary of infrastructure aesthetics offer to a broader field of cultural workers and cultural institutions? What kind of feedback loops do the scholarly endeavors spill into the very infrastructures of artistic production, presentation, and distribution?

The new academic sensibility of onto-epistemological and mediated co(re)production in the infrastructures of art also reintroduces the role of cultural studies in relation to cultural policy; being able to describe, analyze, and interpret the interrelatedness of art and its supporting or hindering surroundings, the cultural analyst can pose questions such as, which artistic practices can profit from the cultural policies in a given national frame? Which kinds of authorship are supported and created in social media platforms? Which notions of quality are giving access to higher artistic education? Which curatorial concepts have coproduced an exhibition? Which artists' lives are possible within a given relation between arts councils, private foundations, and unemployment subsidies? What kind of readerships and authorships are constituted across racial profiling in reviews and publishing houses?

Controversies about art and cultural politics – about quality, accessibility, artistic freedom, separatist practices, and critique of normativity in organizations – confront the historical scales upon which we judge artistic quality, making the common value of art to society a much more contested question today than it was only decades ago (Ahmed 2007; 2012; Daugaard 2018b; Schmidt 2019; 2022). Migration, decolonializing attempts, and digital communities, amongst others, have complicated existing national identities as homogenous entities to which art and culture cater in unison. Demographical, technological, and onto-epistemological changes require a reconceptualization of the social and political import of cultural infrastructures of art for the reproduction of democratic culture as "we" know it. Who is addressed in notions of national communities? Who is represented in the art institutions and who or what chooses, who is being chosen?

The following chapters are divided into three parts that reflect different levels of engagement with infrastructure in cultural studies. The first part samples a selection of recent artworks in an attempt to develop an analytical amenability to understand and assess the modes of appearance and significance of artworks that use and reflect infrastructure in their expression. The second part engages with the question of whether the recent focus on infrastructure in the arts and beyond can help reformulate and further develop the aesthetic categories with which we analyze aesthetic and cultural expressions; and whether these categories might also be able to shed new light on traditional questions and topics in aesthetic theory. Finally, the third part asks how infrastructural art practices and the new ways of understanding infrastructure aesthetics can further contribute to describe and better understand the political dimensions hovering around art and cultural practices, ranging from the political import of the infrastructures at work in the art world to the ways in which aesthetic infrastructures interface with and operate exchanges with the larger societal infrastructures in which they are embedded.

Part one – Art: Inversion, invention, intervention

The first part offers analytical methodologies for describing and interpreting artistic practices that foreground the backgrounds of art worlds: artistic practices that actively invert and intervene in logics and logistics, in immaterial and material infrastructures, both in the making, the presentation, and the circulation and maintenance of artworks. Many of the artistic practices analyzed call out the power structures of inequality in the European art world based on gender, coloniality, extractivism, or Eurocentrism. In artistically intervening ways of participating in the world "outside the arts," negotiating who has accessibility, attention, and influence, the chapters offer – in distinct ways – a new understanding of art as action in the world, as reparative world-making, art as co(re)producer of what is livable, for artists and cultural workers in the arts, and also for people outside the arts, and not merely as an invitation for reflection or as a representation of the world. The authors of this part trace how artistic practices of infrastructural inversion and intervention can turn our attention to social, economic, and material structures designed to evade them, and in turn, invent more sustainable and agentially distributed infrastructures for social art worlds. Thus, the chapters dwell on artistic practices (often by collectives, sometimes anonymous) of infrastructural acts and offer methodologies to carve out historical habits of producing and examining art – ways of authorizing, selecting, judging quality, financing, valorizing, and storing – that question the onto-epistemological grounds of the Western art worlds as we know them and whether they can remain the grounds on which common futures can be crafted.

The section opens with three chapters on collective organization in politically tense and socially volatile periods: in the 1930s, in the 1970s, and in our historical present. With a historical example of *infrastructural inversion* located in the feminist separatist avantgarde of the 1970s, art historian Line Ellegaard shows how gendered infrastructures in art history were inverted in a collective artistic project on intergenerational solidarity between women artists in Copenhagen in 1975. Through an artistic archiving of experiences of women artists +40, presented at the 1975 *Women's Exhibition* in Copenhagen, it emerged how infrastructures of access, selection, and (in)attention were gendered through the idea of "greatness" and "artistic quality," as well as biased critique and underrepresentation of women artists. Ellegaard stresses how the inversion of gendered infrastructural inattention also made it possible for women to find solidarity in difference: contradictory affective attachments and diverse ways of negotiating lived experiences of inequality.

Where Ellegaard's reading of an infrastructural inversion in the 1970s brings out gendered and class-based inequalities, exposed in a solidary and intergenera-

tional group exhibition by and with Danish women artists, performance theorist Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt looks at the Indonesian artist collective ruangrupa's recent attempt to decenter Eurocentric aesthetics and install a way of sharing and being together and redistributing means and attention through a collective *infrastructuring* at documenta fifteen in Kassel, Germany. Schmidt analyzes how artist collectives from the Global South encounter the material and immaterial *Engpässe* (chokepoints) of Eurocentric aesthetics, including the financial and logistic need for flexible solo artists, a recognizable, transparent, and delimited notion of the artwork and its invitation to consume or participate, and an authorized intentionality rooted in one identifiable and responsible curator. Schmidt suggests that the artist collectives in their exhibited practices and in their (im)possibility of navigating art critique and the German press, invert colonial separability and demarcating lines at the heart of the modernist, Eurocentric notion of art as we (still) encounter it at documenta.

With a historicizing focus beyond the otherwise much-represented central- and North-European axis in this book, literary scholar Emma Sofie Brogaard investigates The Black Women's International collective practices across the Soviet Union and USA in the 1930s. Analyzing mixed practices such as the 1935 black-and-white, silent biopic *Tajihon Shadieva* directed by Liudmila Snezhinskaia, Louise Thompson's reportage from "The National Negro Congress" held in Chicago in 1936, and the never produced 1932 feature-length fiction film *Black and White* by the German-Russian studio Mezhrabpomfil'm, Brogaard summons aesthetic infrastructures shaping a black left feminist sensibility: aesthetic infrastructures visually and socially connecting, supporting, and "holding" black women workers intersectionally and across continents and archives. By evoking relations between the three practices and across archives, Brogaard intervenes in the historiography of art history through connecting and cutting in the archival infrastructures of black left feminism.

The next three chapters reread historical objects from art and media history through an infrastructural analysis. Through analyses of historical statues, VHS tapes, and public service television, we as audiences and scholars increase our awareness of bias and interests layered in the production, circulation, and maintenance of cultural products. Art historian Mathias Danbolt and archeologist Amalie Skovmøller thus suggest, in a context of statue toppling since Rhodes Must Fall in South Africa and Black Lives Matter protests worldwide, an infrastructural analytics for the becoming of sculptural monuments. Their "Monument as Relation Model" offers a new understanding of monuments as conditioned on relations – processes behind, around, and in front of monuments' visual appearance – rather than as singular, stationary aesthetic objects. The model proposes six steps in the becoming and authorization of monuments: *authorization*, *financialization*, *manufacturing*,

mediation, *ritual*, and *maintenance*. These six steps involve funding streams, networks of agents, and a continuation of performances of maintenance, and thus show how monuments are not just a matter of someone portrayed on a plinth, a visual shape, and grandeur encountered, but much more a monu*mentality* constructed and upheld infrastructurally: over time, and by a network of many people, intentions, and resources. The model is analytically built on the French sculptor Jacques-François-Joseph Saly's equestrian statue of Frederik V in Copenhagen from the second half of the eighteenth century and attunes to a sensibility toward both the material and cultural impact in the era of Danish colonialism yet performed and upheld ever after. However, being a toolbox with six analytical entry points, Skovmøller and Danbolt's model can be applied to analyze (and intervene in) infrastructures of monumentality across men on horses on plinths, buildings, busts, and digital images, as well as across historical periods.

Importing and examining materialities of "old-school" media and their infrastructures embedded in another historical period is a strategy in the two final contributions of the section, both written from inside artistic research projects. Eva la Cour embarks on the live editing technique of television making. Kristoffer Gansing and Linda Hilfling Ritasdatter collect and edit VHS tapes as they are establishing a speculative video store. Artist researcher Eva la Cour analyzes the potential of working infrastructurally with *live editing* as a shared mode of epistemological production among people involved in experimental film production. With her artist colleague Mia Edelgart, la Cour has looked into the practices and relations of Belgian producer, editor, and scriptwriter Jef Cornelis – a figure who used public service broadcasting as a scene for experimentation in the 1970s and 1980s. Cornelis not only inverted TV infrastructures and experimented within TV as a medium but also explored art as infrastructure in itself as a central element of public service. The chapter offers insights into la Cour and Edelgart's own recent iteration of Cornelis' legacy with experimentation and live editing in an encounter with collaborators of Cornelis, and a theoretical reflection on both artistic practice as epistemic disobedience and live editing as an infrastructural image practice.

Like Skovmøller and Danbolt and la Cour, artist researcher Linda Hilfling Ritasdatter and media theorist and curator Kristoffer Gansing also take a comparativist approach, scrutinizing historical media infrastructures in order to better understand contemporary media infrastructures and their inherent (dis)continuities. Insisting on the interdependent relation in infrastructures between medium and mentality, between material and immaterial, between the technical and the cultural, between effect and affect, Ritasdatter and Gansing critique and propose alternative modes of organization in the context of a current paradigm of cloud-based computing. Informed by intersectional and trans*feminist approaches to

computation and world-making as well as philosophies of degrowth, they describe their artistic material intervention *A Video Store After the End of the World*, which re-enacts the VHS medium vis-à-vis the streaming economy, and offer a speculation on the relation between material (self-)limitation and imagined limitlessness. Their chapter undertakes a double infrastructural inversion: by inverting old and spatiotemporally limited media infrastructures (VHS tapes), the promise of current media infrastructures – the digital, cloud-based endless streaming – is likewise inverted. The double inversion allows Ritasdatter and Gansing to identify dis/continuities across old and new media infrastructures: practices of indexing, categorization, and order on shelves, the dependency on asymmetric and often hidden labor of maintaining and caring for media infrastructures, the concept of the limitless and the desire of endless growth, as well as the misunderstanding that intangible media equals no resources. The remembering and comparativist speculation between old and current media infrastructures allow Ritasdatter and Gansing to raise questions about continuities of extractive ways of producing, consuming, and sharing – and to demand other (collective) ways of imagining and inventing degrowth, de-, and recycling in future media materiality.

Part two – Aesthetics: Organization, mediation, relation

The five chapters in the second part engage with the potentials of infrastructure as a properly aesthetic concept. If the infrastructural turn in the humanities and social sciences that has taken place over the last decades has contributed to reorient a number of disciplines and provide not only new conceptual tools but also new interpretive frameworks and perspectives, the aim of this part of the book is to gauge how concepts, epistemologies, and research questions developed in the wide and interdisciplinary field of infrastructure studies can be accommodated in the aesthetic disciplines and eventually contribute not only to better understand and relate to infrastructural tendencies in the arts but also develop and add to the theoretical state of the art in aesthetic research. The keywords heading this part: organization, mediation, and relation highlight features that are seminal to infrastructure studies and at the same time resonate importantly with aesthetics. Organization, or functional distribution, is a critical feature on different scales in the art world, from the distribution of tasks between different agents in the field to the institutional organization of hierarchies and dependencies, and from the internal coherence of artistic articulations to the approbated modes of relating to them. Me-

diation is a concept that has probably a stronger foothold in aesthetics than in technical contexts, but it has become increasingly important in infrastructure studies at large to be attentive to the many and diverse forms of mediation that are played out in infrastructural contexts. At the same time, the infrastructural use of mediation has in turn vivified the, at times, somewhat dormant knowledge and understanding of mediation that itself holds an undisputed central place in art studies of every kind. Relations, finally, not only quintessentially conjure up what infrastructure is all about – connecting what is to be connected and disconnecting what should not be connected; they also epitomize everything important in aesthetics, from the compositional connection of expressive elements in an artwork to the connectedness of the artist; from the connections brought about when relating to an artwork to the connections one is introduced to by way of engaging with art.

Cultural studies scholar Frida Sandström's chapter, "A Crisis of Autonomy. Critique of Art and Sexuality in 1974," is a case study that addresses one of the most sacrosanct ideas in modern aesthetic theory: that of the autonomy of art, as precisely an infrastructural feature that contributes to regulate the order and function of the art field. The crisis of autonomy evoked in the chapter title is inscribed in a bigger picture of the crisis of capitalist accumulation in the early 1970s, the crisis that marked the transition from the so-called glorious thirty years of growing economies after the Second World War to the long recession that followed. This crisis deeply impacted the infrastructure of the art world not least by way of the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere through commercialization and new waves of popular culture, and with it – particularly important in Sandström's chapter – the traditional expert art critic. The crisis is exemplarily evoked with a stunt by Lynda Bengalis who placed an advertisement with a kitschy, pornographic image of herself in the high-brow journal *Artforum*. In Sandström's multifaceted reading of the stunt, the combination of mercantile intent (buying advertisement space), "cheap" pornographic imagery, and a nonetheless provocative posture (Bengalis is posing with a clip-on phallus) juxtaposes art, capital, and sexuality so as to expose otherwise hidden aspects of the infrastructural organization of the art world.

The two following chapters depart from extant and highly important infrastructures in our present. Media studies scholar Daniel Irrgang's chapter discusses the techno-scientific infrastructure dedicated to map and monitor climate change and environmental deterioration, while scholar in art and digital culture Tanya Ravn Ag starts out from the explosive growth of networked digital infrastructures and the ensuing proliferations of new interfaces between machinic processes and human bodies. The particular aesthetic question that animates both chapters concerns the possibilities and strategies for *representing* these new infrastructural realities in an aesthetic mediation.

Daniel Irrgang's "Critical zone(s) Observatories. Modeling Infrastructures of Climate Science in the Art Museum" is concerned with the "thought exhibitions" developed by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel for the ZKM in Karlsruhe, most notably the show *Critical Zones – Observatories for Earthly Politics* from 2020. The chapter provides a rich insight into the complex scientific measurement methodologies and scholarly protocols that underpin the "Earth System Science" of today and emphasizes the infrastructural nature of this entire complex of data collection. Based on first-hand knowledge of the exhibition planning and long-standing collaboration with Weibel and Latour, Irrgang concisely pinpoints the central predicament of an exhibition that aims to represent this huge infrastructure that itself responds to the impossibility of giving one proper representation of its object: namely how to mediate an unlimited infrastructural endeavor in the finite infrastructural organization of the exhibition space. The chapter demonstrates the vigorous curatorial work that has gone into making the actual exhibition and the negotiation between different infrastructural scales it entailed, and, not least, the necessity of also exhibiting the *impossibility of representation* in a mediation that invites its spectators to take part in unraveling this infrastructural conundrum.

"The Intratemporal Work of Art" by Tanya Ravn Ag provides a horizon scan of contemporary contributions to artistically exploit new network-based digital infrastructures, the interfaces between humans and machines they afford, and the artistic temporalities that can be extricated from their modalities of mediation. Like the chapter before it, this chapter approaches such art practices with a twofold query into how they can portray the reality of these new networked machines and their impact on the human stratum of reality and, on the other hand, how they can appropriate the medial functions of such machines. An important part of this inquiry is to map and assess the forms of connectivity that are being played out in contemporary human-machine environments. Ag engages with Yuk Hui's philosophy on the digital object, which emphasizes the relations between data-driven temporal processes and mutual modifications between intersubjective and interobjective relations, to introduce the notion of "intratemporality" as a medium for art. It is at this point that the most urgent challenge to network infrastructure-based art appears, namely, to present conceptions and experiences of temporality that are not only modeled on traditional modes of expectation and aspiration but more radically juxtapose and combine machinic and human corporeal temporalities to provide novel configurations of anticipative thinking.

The last two chapters in the section take inspiration from infrastructural insights in modern anthropological and sociological thinking to revise and develop some traditional questions in aesthetic theory. The impetus for leaning on social theory in this context is not least the need to transgress the first-person perspective in aesthetics. Theories of art tend to focus on the one who creates art – the

genius, the inspired individual – and the one who undergoes an aesthetic experience – an individual whose view of the world and of herself are altered after encountering the artwork. As an antidote to this methodological individualism, the chapters suggest new ways to describe the role and function of art in a societal context and to see art not only as a social field of practices that is dependent on infrastructures, but also as a social infrastructure in its own right that contributes to organize social relations – relations between individuals and relations between individuals and their surroundings.

Literary scholar Mathias Overgaard's contribution suggests a new inroad to aesthetics based on anthropological ritual theory by shifting the focus from the art object to the social function and rationale of this object. Leaning on anthropological texts by Émile Durkheim and Victor Turner, he emphasizes how the ritual is a seminal element in the formation of collective self-fashioning, which in turn is what underpins social cohesion, and how fetiches have a central role in this process. Approaching artworks from this perspective allows us to better understand their importance as social products we attend to collectively and hence as contributions to the emergence and the reproduction of social relations. And this in turn also allows, so Overgaard argues, to better appreciate a traditional theme in aesthetic theory, namely the artwork's power to "enliven" our world images by restructuring them. Reading Hegel's aesthetics from this viewpoint, the enlivening artistic product is seen as a contribution to a social ritual and, eventually, as a reflective infrastructure through which a society is talking to itself about itself.

In the chapter "Aesthetic Appearance. An Infrastructural Approach," literary scholar Frederik Tygstrup similarly emphasizes the infrastructural qualities of art and discusses some inroads to re-describe the mode of existence of art in a vocabulary informed by infrastructure studies. An important step in this direction is to shift the focus from the individual work of art to the entire chain of its life cycle, from production through circulation and distribution to reception and use, encompassing the infrastructural set of relations along this chain it facilitates. The chapter explores how this relational pattern is obliquely acknowledged and described in the traditional aesthetic concept of the "beautiful appearance" and suggests a new conceptual framework, borrowed from the French tradition of techno-anthropology from Marcel Mauss and André Lerou-Gourhan to Gilbert Simondon and Bernard Stiegler, to give a properly infrastructural account of the logic of appearance.

Part three – Politics: Institution, reproduction, support

In the third part, the chapters question how infrastructural art practices and new ways of understanding infrastructure aesthetics can shed light on the political dimensions of art and cultural practices. The chapters examine a range of infrastructural practices, some clearly artistic, others clearly communal and organizational, many operating somewhere in between, that all represent attempts to intervene into the dominant infrastructures of the art world and the ways in which they negotiate between art, technology, and society. Thus, working with the toolboxes of literary, musical, visual art, educational, curatorial, and museological practices, they critique neo-liberal extractivist technologies and institutional staleness at work in the art worlds. By way of their infrastructural approach, they also present different attempts at hacking "the infrastructural operating system" in order for new orientations to arise, for who or what is being devalued, isolated, or cut off from support (Easterling 2014, 92; Ahmed 2008). Rather than sticking with the institution as their horizon, the authors draw attention to the interfaces between art's institutions and larger societal infrastructures and look at what these infrastructural relations circulate, and what they keep from circulating. Concretely, the interventions addressed in the chapters cast a light on how these relations play out for different positions within the art worlds: from art students and artists practicing within literature, music, performing, and visual arts over cultural workers including technicians, educators, curators, and museum professionals involved in the production and dissemination of such practices, to archivists, critics, price committees, and finally, audiences. Together, the chapters examine possible outcomes of a critique that, as proposed by Marina Vishmidt, is infrastructural rather than institutional, thus pointing beyond institutional betterment policies based on quantitative measures to include concerns for reproduction and support in a broader perspective. Thus, each chapter aspires to think beyond the contingent drawing of boundaries of institutionalized art practices to build stronger and more inclusive support structures for a more diverse company of bodies and practices in art and culture.

In the opening chapter, literary scholar Solveig Daugaard suggests that a revision of the theoretical vocabulary surrounding poetry – especially when it comes to the question of authorial sovereignty – is long overdue, from the point of view of infrastructure aesthetics. Or rather, in the light of the literary practice of *infrastructural poetics*. The chapter outlines this practice through a reading of Danish-Palestinian poet Yahya Hassan's combined poetic, performative, and political practice as inscribed in the accelerated feedback loops of a post-digital literary

circuit. The radical paradox of Hassan's example is how his poetry, on the one hand, based on biased and outdated print cultural conceptions of the medium, comes to function as a crucial infrastructural switch for circulating a political narrative confirming diversity, representation, and democratic legitimacy in Danish society in the midst of a highly polarized debate fixed on a harsh attack on the country's Muslim diaspora, into which Hassan was born. Meanwhile, on the other hand, it performs a large-scale infrastructural inversion of the literary circuit, including a critical stress testing of its infrastructural support system, revealing the gaps in it – or, actually, the biopolitical cuts it is based on – and its extreme production of isolation and loneliness for the racialized writer. But also challenging the boundaries of the art world, and instigating participation from groups not previously included, paving the way for new initiatives supporting more solidaristic and less individualizing interventions into the art world of poetry.

Such interventions are the topic of musicologists Kristine Ringsager and Katrine Wallevik's chapter, which takes a closer look at another tightly regulated and highly discriminatory cultural circuit: that of the Danish music industry. If Daugaard suggests that the infrastructural scaffolding of the medium of print literature produces a particularly strong centering and isolation of the individual creator, then Ringsager and Wallevik demonstrate how isolating mechanisms are also highly operative in the infrastructures of a more immediately collaborative medium like music. Through ethnographic fieldwork they examine the intervention into the infrastructure of the music industry made by the feminist, separatist, online community The Music Movement of 2019. Emerging as a consequence of collective reflections by a broad group of practitioners in the music industry identifying as women or non-binary – who share affective experiences of loneliness, marginalization, disorientation, and work-related sexism in the cis-male-dominated industry – the movement is focused on providing its members with a community for sharing such experiences and on creating a caring working environment and supportive network across sections in the industry. But despite this seemingly apolitical purpose, the authors show how the Movement also contributes to political transformations in the industry by establishing a counter-infrastructure reconfiguring the larger one, by, as the authors state, "hacking the infrastructural operating system" and thus not merely working to increase female representation in a male-dominated field, but also working towards a more wide-reaching queering of the industry's straight space.

Like Ringsager and Wallevik, cultural theorist Anna Meera Gaonkar in her chapter centers on a separatist community – the BIPOC art students' collective Brown Island – producing interventions into the institutional space of the Stockholm art academy, Konstfack. Likewise, Brown Island also ends up offering means of support that reach beyond its specific community, inspiring suggestions for a

transformative rethinking of the institution as a whole, potentially affecting all those affiliated with it, whether in the past, present, or future. Again, the intervention grew out of collective experiences of isolation, vulnerability, and disorientation by students at Konstfack identifying as people of color across categories of ascribed difference such as ethnicity, class, culture, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Incarnated by the name of the academy's internal exhibition space Vita Havet (The White Sea), the group experienced the academy as a space of institutionalized whiteness where, as non-white, they needed sanctuary, a "Brown Island," to pull through. Through the production and distribution of a handbook, *Brown Island in the White Sea – A Handbook for a Collective Practice*, the collective created an intervention into this affective infrastructure of implicit whiteness. By synthesizing a set of current theories on affective infrastructure and affects of racialization, Gaonkar analyzes the handbook as an affective infrastructure for the previously isolated students that functions as revisionist rather than abolitionist vis-à-vis the institution, becoming "a repair manual for situations beyond repair." Gaonkar lays out how the handbook, which is not composed as a separatist document but explicitly addressed to all students, staff, and faculty at Konstfack (including a letter opening "Dear white people") does not attempt to "fix" the institutionalized whiteness of the institution but rather sets out the rifts and conflicts for its readers to see; thus, it makes space for the situated affective solidarity of the collective while also intervening into the institutional narrative, potentially disturbing the frictionless reproduction and maintenance of racists infrastructures for future generations of artists in state-sanctioned art education in Sweden.

The last three chapters all revolve around the institutions – specifically art biennials and museums – devoted to the exhibiting of visual arts and how to overcome the limitations posed by the modernist, object-centered and implicitly patriarchal, colonialist, and classist infrastructural operating systems they are governed by. All three chapters present suggestions for how to intervene into the institutional setup, with different entry points in the collaborative art worlds of visual arts. The first chapter approaches the intervention from the collaborative point of view of the artist and the art educator; the second one from the museum collection as it acquires an infrastructural art practice, and the third and last one from the point of view of the audience – and the art historian – adapting a method of infrastructural observation when moving through exhibition space.

The chapter by artist Stine Marie Jacobsen and educator, organizer, and PhD fellow Joana Monbaron is a conversation between the two, centering on the iteration of Jacobsen's project *Group-Think* at the Manifesta 13 European Biennial of Contemporary Art, which took place in Marseille in 2020, and where Monbaron was affiliated as education coordinator. The project has the goal of engaging participants in dynamics at the intersection between arts, sports, and protest cul-

tures – and thus places itself at the intersection of art, civic education, and critical pedagogy. While the chapter's point of departure is the social art practice itself as it engages with different institutions in order to be distributed to a public meanwhile recognized – or not – as "art," the conversation between Jacobsen and Monbaron also explores ways of extending the radius of action for the contemporary art institution (in line with recent institutional critique by Nora Sternfeld and Kerstin Stakemeier); they explore the paths paved by connecting with other infrastructures of the contemporary welfare state, i.e. the educational infrastructure of the public school system. Much like the potential unfolded by the handbook in Gaonkar's analysis of Brown Island's affective field guide, Jacobsen and Monbaron find an expansion of the pedagogic potential of the *Group-Think* project, once it is materialized into a manual, which can be distributed to schools across the municipality, activating the *Group-Think* practice in communities not already attentive to the art institution. The collaborators experienced how many people not comfortable with entering a museum or exhibition space were much more at ease with handling the project's booklet iteration, due to the illustrated book's strong historical ties to an educational context. However, in returning to the art institution, the successful distribution of the project in the educational context, seemed to backfire vis-à-vis the curated biennial which, in the end, decided against including *Group-Think* in its main exhibition. As the authors suggest, the art institution here expresses a patriarchally informed value structure which tends to prioritize exhibition production over reproduction. And because education is considered reproductive labor, educational practices are rarely archived or given sustained attention like "proper" exhibitions. As a response, *Group-Think* and related practices are positioned as attempts at radically formulating an infrastructure that places reproduction at the center of institutional concerns and institutes new ways of collaborating with hybrid artistic practices.

Beginning its infrastructural unraveling from the point of view of the institution, scholar of sound studies and cultural theory Rasmus Holmboe's chapter traces the interventions into core functions of the museum institution, that of The Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark. Holmboe's chapter examines the museum's acquisition of the infrastructure art project, *TOVES – THE SALE* by the curatorial artist collective TOVES which interferes with the infrastructural foundation of the museum's daily practice, not only as it relates to exhibiting and communicating with audiences but also to its obligations to preservation and archiving, because of the active form (as opposed to object form) of the "piece," which includes the right – and hence the obligation – to continue the activities of the collective under its brand identity, which the museum is not immediately able to fill. In Holmboe's reading, the rift exposed by the acquisition mirrors a set of current debates in the museum field. These debates concern the museum's potential role as

an inclusive and polyphonic space that offers a platform where the conflicts and challenges of the present can be addressed; and how the institutional obligation to archive and preserve can be negotiated, in light of recent proposals concerning "Archive 3.0," informed by a digital paradigm of updating to remain the same.

Finally, insisting on the point of view of the museum visitor, art historian Xenia Brown Pallesen develops the autoethnographic method of *infrastructural observation*, as she examines how the dissemination practices of European art museums and exhibition spaces seamlessly – or, indeed, infrastructurally – direct the orientation of the museum visitor as she moves through the space. Demonstrating how, in Marina Vishmidt's words, "infrastructure is always specific," Pallesen traces the nationalist and imperialist investments in the museum as a discursive, historical formation, but persistently returns to her own embodied observations of the physical tailoring of the exhibitions. Despite extensive institutional policies aimed at securing diversity and participation, she lays out the concrete ways in which many exhibitions continue to choreograph the audience's movement through nudging and signposting – securing a comfortable affective space for the already familiar museum guest while reproducing class biases by further disorienting the unfamiliar.

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Infrastructure Aesthetics is an offspring of the intensive collaboration between the members of the research center Art as Forum that has gathered academics, artists, and cultural workers at the University of Copenhagen from 2020 through 2024 thanks to generous funding from the New Carlsberg Foundation. Throughout five years of collective work, our group has profited from conversations with colleagues from all over the world, in the first couple of years mostly online, as we learned to cope with COVID-restrictions, and later with more people joining us in Copenhagen for both short and long periods of time. Through numerous meetings, conferences, and a continuous lecture series, we have also engaged with colleagues at the University of Copenhagen and beyond in inspirational conversations and exchanges. Hence, the contributions to the book are situated in a European context, mostly in a Danish and Northern European one. Our examples unfold challenges specific to the region, and many in our historical present, yet in relation to further global entanglements and historicized in the construction of Western modernity. Given our situatedness in the north of Europe, it is crucial to ask whether it would make sense to apply the apparatus of infrastructure aesthetics beyond Europe or the Global North. (How) does the aesthetic reflection on infrastructures not only speak back to a European hegemony in the art world, but also to the historical and present situatedness of the infrastructural optics itself? As stressed in the field of cultural anthropology, infrastructure is an emic concept that emerged in the context

of European modernity and coloniality (Appel, Anand, and Gupta 2018). Infrastructures of water, electricity, communication, mobility, and medical care have functioned as a socio-material terrain for racist policies in United States (Gilmore 2007), over Israeli settler strategies in Palestine (Weizman 2007) to Danish colonial regulation of social reproduction in Kalaallit Nunaat (Graugaard and Ambrosius Høgfeldt 2023). The modern infrastructural division of ethnographic museums and art institutions made it possible to distinguish indigenous and non-Western knowledges from artworks. Thus, infrastructural agency has been and still is a Eurocentric and colonial pathway to power and violence. When researchers in this book investigate infrastructures across the art world as having been and being highly discriminating, nationalist, colonial, and Eurocentric, it might be exactly because infrastructure as a practice of division and distribution is at the center of a patriarchal, settler-colonial European onto-epistemology. And thus, a practice that deserves our full attention, also in the field of aesthetics, as we have attempted to show in this book. Aesthetics, both in the literal sense of the word as that which pertains to the sensual perception of the world, and in the critical sense of how individuals and collectives learn to make sense of what comes from the senses, is not intuitive nor universal. It comes with infrastructural support and cannot be properly laid out without a thorough understanding of the imprint it carries from its conditioning infrastructures. With this book, we hope to deliver some of the premises for this work to come and indeed an incentive to think with us along these lines of infrastructure aesthetics.

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Part One

Art: Inversion, Invention, Intervention

Line Ellegaard

Investigation, Inversion, Intervention: "Women Artists – Past and Present" by Hellen Lassen, Hanne Lise Thomsen and Else Kallesøe

> Greatness is something which is connected to the *attention* "officially" given to that person or that piece of work [. . .].
> H. Lait Kluge et al 1975, 7

> The *actual* inequality consists of different conditions and *lack of attention*
> Lassen 1977, 53[1]

The above statements provide a succinct analysis of the distribution of official attention and its relation to notions of greatness in art. Both statements are found in the collectively edited anthology *Billedet som Kampmiddel* (*The Image as Weapon* 1977), published with surplus funds generated by ticket sales from *Kvindeudstillingen* (*The Women's Exhibition*) in Copenhagen in 1975. The exhibition, presented at Charlottenborg Exhibition Building the year that the United Nations had proclaimed International Women's Year, was one of many ground-breaking collectively organized all-women exhibitions in the mid-1970s, which aimed to survey women's contribution to art history and women artists contribution to women's consciousness raising and culture in general. As these statements show, the organizers of *Kvindeudstillingen* were clearly *au fait* with feminist art historian Linda Nochlin's seminal analysis of the biased attention afforded the white male artist in Western art history. Published in 1971, Nochlin's essay famously asked the question "Why have there been no great women artists?" Like Nochlin, the Danish artists understood that the answer to this question had to be found, not in the greatness of individual men, but in the institutional structures and societal norms favoring them. Thus, to transform the situation and to answer the question, one should

1 Italics original in both statements. Author's translation here and in the following citations, unless otherwise stated.

Note: A longer version of this chapter forms part of the PhD thesis *Organising, Exhibiting and Curating (in) Solidarity: 'Kvindeudstillingen', 1975, 'Art contre/against Apartheid' 1983–1984, and 'Rethinking Nordic Colonialism' 2006* (2023), funded by the New Carlsberg Foundation as part of the Art as Forum research centre, University of Copenhagen.

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look – not for forgotten great women artists – but at the mechanisms of the art world and the patriarchal family structure.

This chapter examines a collective project by Hellen Lassen, Hanne Lise Thomsen and Else Kallesøe titled "Kvindelige kunstnere – før og nu" ("Women Artists – Past and Present"), which was presented as part of *Kvindeudstillingen*, with the aim to include a historical dimension to the question of women artists' position in society. With reference to Nochlin's analysis and the introducing statements, I propose an understanding of this project as a historical mapping of infrastructural (in)attention to women artists. In the following, by combining an infrastructural lens with art historian Griselda Pollock's analytical lens of "feminist desire" (Pollock 1999, 16), I show how modes of attention to greatness – imperative to art historical discourse – were displaced, as well as demystified and inverted, in "Women Artists – Past and Present."[2] The chapter discusses how the project, through an infrastructural inversion (Bowker and Star 1999) of women artists' working conditions and life experiences, surveyed and called out gendered inequity in the art world. Moreover, I argue that in resisting a display of "great" art, the resulting presentation, framed as "an open image" by the organizers, allowed for a "conversational complex" between different generations of artists to emerge (Lassen 1981, 56; Krasny 2017). Drawing on political theorist Jodi Dean's notion of reflective solidarity (1996; 1998), I show how diverging positions between two generations of artists were allowed to co-exist in the public display. In effect, the presentation proposed a declaration of inter-generational solidarity across political differences, disagreements, and affective attachments with regards to questions of (in)attention and quality. Finally, with reference to feminist strategies of counting in ongoing discussions of inequity in the arts in a Danish context, I reflect on the project's continued relevance today and its historical position as infrastructural critique (Vishmidt 2016).

Infrastructural in(attention)

In proposing the notion of infrastructural (in)attention in relation to mechanisms in the world of art, I draw on information scientists Susan Leigh Star and Geoffrey Bowker's method of "infrastructural inversion." With this method, they aim to foreground analytically that which normally disappears into the background, the often invisible or neglected negotiations and work procedures that, we could

2 An analytical lens of feminist desires does not seek to make women artists heroines or idealized canonical figures, but questions art historical investment in the canon.

say, in the case of art, makes art appear as art (Bowker and Star 1999, 34).[3] For my purpose of thinking about how artists who travel under the sign of women have previously fared in the infrastructures of art, I focus on movement and "the scenes of assemblage and use" as cultural theorist Lauren Berlant has proposed (Berlant 2016, 403). Moreover, I take my bearings from the conference "Connect/Cut: Infrastructures and collective activity" (University of Copenhagen 2022), organized by the research center Art as Forum, which proposed a consonant between how Deleuze and Guattari's desiring machines operate through the simple process of 'connect' and 'cut' and how infrastructures operate in much the same way.[4] Rather than perceiving institutional norms as stable entities, this allows for an understanding of how some agents connect to and move with infrastructural flows that distribute access, visibility, and recognition, and how others are cut off from this movement. For instance, queer and feminist theorist Sara Ahmed has demonstrated how such infrastructural processes, in privileging the movement of some bodies over others, are oftentimes regulated according to racialized, gendered, and classed categories (Ahmed 2007). In other words, if attention to greatness is a norm in art history, then looking at how this norm is applied and reproduced through infrastructural movements and flows – all of which provides or denies access to certain resources, spaces, and positions within and beyond the infrastructural system of art – makes palpable how such infrastructure might privilege and attend to the work of one person whilst ignoring others.

Against greatness: Adding a piece to the mosaic of the (self-written) history of women artists

The collective project "Women Artists – Past and Present" was initiated by Hellen Lassen, an art history student, Hanne Lise Thomsen, a student at the Art Academy in Copenhagen and Else Kallesøe, a student at the School of Arts and Craft, and took as its point of departure the many efforts to write women's history in the 1970s. The women's movement overall had fostered a surge in historical research

3 Bowker and Star compare the notion of inversion with the argument Howard Becker makes in *Art Worlds* (1982), namely that: "most history and social analysis of art has neglected the details of infrastructure within which the communities of artistic practice emerge" (Bowker and Star 1999, 34).

4 See "Connect/Cut. Infrastructures and Collective Activity," conference brochure, University of Copenhagen, 2022; and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972).

on women, part of which involved a conscious reappraisal of the worth of women's creative abilities and experiences – of women as actors in their own right – both in literature and art, but also as workers and mothers (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). For the organizers, the incentive to investigate women's (art) history equally emerged out of their own search for an identity as artists – to look for "models of identification" as they phrased it (Kallesøe et al. 1975b). Lassen, as the only art historian in the large group that organized one part of *Kvindeudstillingen*, was instrumental in setting the art historical direction of the project, and the research amounted was allegedly to be part of her thesis.[5] Already deeply engaged in research and writing on women artists, she was, in 1975, tracing influences of feminist movement from the 1880s onwards regarding the official reception and evaluation of Danish women artists (Lassen 1975a).[6] In addition, the theoretical and analytical basis for the project stemmed from sociological enquiries into the working conditions of women artists elsewhere. Explaining the latter at some length in the exhibition catalogue, they mention how feminist art historians:

> [S]eek to analyze the conditions under which women artists have worked, such as Linda Nochlin, who in her essay "Why have there been no great women artists?" concludes that social expectations have kept the female artist subordinated, unable to compete on equal footing with her male colleagues, because of her family commitments, in addition having been unable to have her products (weavings, embroidery etc.) recognized as "art" (economically and ideologically). The same problem is addressed in the Swedish anthology, *Kvinnor som konstnärer [Women as Artists 1975],* which, with a wealth of interesting sociological material, adds another piece to the mosaic: the (self-written) history of women (Kallesøe et al. 1975b).

One of the first of its kind in the Nordic region, the Swedish anthology brought together contributions from sociologists, artists, and art historians in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. With regards to working conditions, for instance, sociolo-

5 Kallesøe, conversation with the author January 28 2023. *Kvindeudstillingen* was organized by two separate groups of women. The so-called "large group" had 34 members and eventually titled their part of the exhibition XX. Despite differences within the group, XXs exhibition was based on a principle of openness and solidarity and included invited artists from abroad and other participants. A smaller group with eight members called Rejsning (Rising) presented a series of installations and tableaus forming the basis for a socialist and feminist critique that sought liberation from conservative institutions, the church, politicians, and capitalism. For a comprehensive discussion of *Kvindeudstillingen*, see Line Ellegaard, *Organising, Exhibiting and Curating (in) Solidarity: 'Kvindeudstillingen', 1975, 'Art contre/against Apartheid' 1983–1984, and 'Rethinking Nordic Colonialism' 2006*. PhD Thesis: University of Copenhagen, October 2023. 63–162.

6 Lassen discussed this through the examples of the Danish artists Anna Ancher (1859–1935) and Sonja Ferlov Mancoba (1911–1984).

gist Aina Helgesen showed that women artists' income in Norway in 1969 was under half of that of their male counterparts (Helgesen, 1975). In the summer of 1975, Lassen met the editors of *Kvinnor som Konstnärer* – Anna Lena Lindberg and Barbro Werkmäster – at a transdisciplinary women's seminar in Amsterdam. Lindberg, a Swedish art historian, had organized the art history section of the Swedish exhibition "Kvinnfolk" ("Womenfolk"), an all-women exhibition presented first in Stockholm and then in Malmö in 1975, and subsequently an exchange of theories and ideas was initiated between her and the Danish group (Lassen 1981, 127). Lindberg's section in "Kvinnfolk," titled "Kvinnfolket i konsthistorien" ("The Womenfolk in Art History"), presented, through a chronological and museological approach, women artist's self-portraits from the 18th century to the present (Öhrner 2018, 54). The display was, according to Lassen, supplemented with "biographical and social information that provided a historical context for understanding the general working conditions of the artists" (Lassen 1981, 128).

Considering how to write their "own history" of women artists, Lassen, Thomsen, and Kallesøe reflected on Lindberg's approach: "One of the possibilities would be to make an actual historical hanging with the good female artists we know from history, as we have seen in other women's exhibitions, such as the Swedish 'Kvinnfolk' in Malmö this fall" (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). Artists such as Anne Marie Carl Nielsen (1863–1945), Anna Ancher (1859–1935), and Astrid Noack (1888–1954) would be valuable in this regard along with many other less well-known artists, they suggest. However, deciding against such a display of "great women artists," they argue, it would be more interesting to look closer at the living women artists only a couple of generations above themselves. These women's work, they remarked, could be seen now and then in various contexts, but was rarely the subject of discussion, in reality "we know very little about them" (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). In other words, instead of focusing on *greatness*, the organizers decide to focus on the infrastructures that allow art to be *great* art or prevents it from obtaining this status. In a review of *Kvinnor som Konstnärer*, Lassen highlighted the concluding chapter, an interview with the Swedish artist and costume designer Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss (1928–2022) in which Palmstierna-Weiss, a supporter of the women's movement stresses that "all sharing of experience is important" (Nordin 1975, 230). For Lassen, this feminist sentiment of centering experience comes to signify the overall aim of the book, whilst the emphasis on sharing life stories through interview form also became a method of inquiry used in "Women Artists – Past and Present."

Embarking on this investigation into the background of the working conditions, representation in exhibitions and museum collections, critical attention, and overall experiences of living women artists, and to get as accurate a representation as possible, the group approached all female artists in the major artists'

associations and individual artists outside these in the summer of 1975. Altogether this amounted to around 300 women artists, all of whom were sent a letter and a 3-page questionnaire. Lassen, Kallesøe, and Thomsen, themselves in their mid-twenties to early thirties, set the generational cut-off to the age of 40, which is why the project is also referred to as "Kvindelige kunstnere over 40 år" ("Women Artists above the Age of 40"). In the letter addressed to "Women Artists" dated July 20 1975, the three organizers, presenting themselves as students, state the importance of understanding the conditions under which women artists have worked vis-à-vis the paucity of women artists in art history: "This is why," they write "we want to start writing a history about ourselves now, and would like to start with you, who are older and more experienced than us" (Kallesøe et al. 1975c). More specifically, they suggested: "[W]e imagine that we could receive from as many as possible some kind of biography or just some very immediate records of unique experiences and opinions about being a female artist," which would then form the basis for drawing out common experiences to be visualized in the exhibition, perhaps with excerpts from the responses (Kallesøe et al. 1975c). The letter also invited the artists to submit an "unpretentious" self-portrait as part of their answer; the group wished not only to *see* these women's work but also to *see* "what they looked like" (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). The scale of the project is remarkable, indicating the organizers' ambitiousness, as expressed in the letter: "We hope the sheer volume and juxtaposition will make a worthy contribution to both the self-understanding of women artists and their interpretation in the contemporary world, thus also becoming an expression of some general terms and conditions" (Kallesøe et al. 1975c). Although, Thomsen, Kallesøe, and Lassen decided *against* mounting a display of *great* art by women, as they had seen in other women's exhibitions, their approach still bore several hallmarks relatable to Lindberg's approach: the focus on artist's self-portraits and their working conditions.

Calling out gender-bias: Investigating the background

The questionnaire comprising over 20 questions, begins with the following observation:

> I went to the National Art Galleries yesterday and saw [Edvard] Weie, [Harald] Giersing, [Erik] Hoppe, Manuel Ibsen, Oluf Rude, Carl Henning Pedersen, Asger Jorn, Richard Mortensen, [Erik] Thommesen etc.

> We [sic] would like to *investigate the background* of such a one-sided representation of male artists exclusively (Kallesøe et al. 1975d. My italics).

This introductory remark explicitly calls out the gender bias of the art establishment, but notably, rather than mounting an institutional critique or protest against the favoring of male artists and the unequal representation, the enquiry seeks to "investigate the background," what I suggest we might understand as an infrastructural inversion attending to the question of the absence of women artists. Thus, the logistical, material, and social processes that constitute the infrastructures of art and the gendered norms that condition it, became the point of departure for the questions posed.

The questionnaire consisted of two parts; the first was a series of questions concerning "both the private and the public situation" (Kallesøe et al. 1975c). It included questions related to membership of artist's organizations, critical attention, the idea of a women's gallery, financial conditions, economic support, public funding and travel grants, educational background, experiences of discrimination, and finally questions regarding continuity of practice, for instance: "Have you at any time been unable to work, due to caring duties, finances or other reasons?" Meanwhile, the second part asked for more subjective descriptions of experiences, with questions such as: "Has your surroundings stimulated your work, appreciated it and so on?"; questions pertaining to the relation between art and gender, such as "Do you think women express themselves different to men?" and "Do you think there is a connection between the tendency to underestimate arts and crafts, in comparison to other forms of expression, and then, the fact that mostly women are engaged with arts and craft?" Finally, there were questions about the women's liberation struggle in relation to visual art: "Do you think the struggle that has taken place, and is still taking place, for women's social equality in various fields also concerns the visual arts?" (Kallesøe et al. 1975d). Whilst Lassen, Kallesøe, and Thomsen professed the usefulness of the sociological approach of *Kvinnor som Konstnärer*, they at the same time sought to distinguish their tactics: "[I]n the exhibition context we are first and foremost interested in hearing about more private and personal experiences from women artists and create a dialogue around the situation today" (Kallesøe et al. 1975d).

Letters and responses from women artists above 40

The group received around 50 responses to their invitation, with some requesting a call or a visit to be arranged (Kallesøe et al. 1975a).[7] Even if the response seem limited considering the number of invitations sent out, the letters piling up formed a plethora of personal perspectives. According to the organizers, "some responded with welcoming openness, others with a defensive attack as if we were 'rabid redstockings' willing to overthrow all that you believed in" (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). Overall, though, the majority of those who responded to the invitation and the survey were positively inclined. For instance, Helga Bruun de Neergaard (1903–1994) began her letter by thanking the younger women for the papers on "our common problem" (Neergaard 1975). Rut Rosenkilde (1914–2000) wrote: "These are great questions" and confirms: "The struggle for women's equality is of great importance to women artists. How many women are actually included in the major exhibitions? How many women are actually represented in museums?" (Rosenkilde 1975). As anticipated, the bulk of the responses consisted of individual life stories, positions, assumptions, convictions, experiences, and feelings – hardly reducible to statistical formats alone. Some responses are idiosyncratic, if not humorous. Regarding the submission of self-portraits, for instance, the painter Merete Thejll (1931–1991) wrote: "I enclose a painting depicting myself having Tarzan over for tea" (Thejll 1975), while an anonymous artist wrote: "I have a self-portrait in the form of a small animal in soapstone" (Anonymous 1975).[8]

Although these letters included conflicting statements, there are several levels at which the women recognized that the flow of attention to women artists was blocked – particularly in relation to the gendered value of time. In her letter, the artist Lydia Nordentoft Lavrov (1922–2017), of Estonian descent, sums it up as follows: "A man's time is precious, a woman's time is worth nothing" (Lavrov 1975). This inequity is, for the most part, sanctioned through marriage and the responsibilities of domestic work and childcare that comes with it. Characteristically, painter, sculptor, and ceramicist Ane Brügger (1908–1995) wrote:

7 Around 25 of these letters have been saved in the archive of Kvindelige Kunstneres Samfund (the Danish Women's Artist's Association, KKS). The group supplemented the letters with a series of interviews. According to Else Kallesøe, they visited, among others, Kamma Salto, Elsa Nielsen, Helen Schou, Anne Marie Telmányi, Jane Muus. Conversation with the author January 28, 2023.
8 Name on the letter is undecipherable.

> My experience is that female artists have had a hard time and still do. The home and children make great demands on her, especially if they cannot afford help for the many chores that are in a home. [. . .] I would advise my fellow sisters to think carefully before they get married, if they [. . .] want to devote themselves to art. Artists are [. . .] often unhappy if they lose their freedom to use their abilities (Brügger 1975).

Marriage becomes, for many aspiring women artists, a matter of choice. For example, Jane Muus (1919–2007) wrote: "I decided not to marry and have children" (Muus 1975), while Gerda Thune Andersen (1932–) suggested the following:

> If I should give any advice to girls who choose an artistic education, [. . .] well, if you want to become an artist in earnest, [you] must choose between husband and children and your artistic development, in the long run these are incompatible. I do not think men have to make that choice (Andersen 1975).

Others again described how they have struggled with the double burden that befalls a married women artist. Altogether, these responses bring the common issue of domestic labor into the foreground, giving evidence of how the division of labor along gendered lines in the home cut many women artists off from focusing on art for long periods of time. But there are also several other parameters where the distribution of attention and recognition to women artists is obstructed. Unsurprisingly, if we consider responses to questions regarding critical attention and sales, we can gauge how gender norms, when conflated with artistic norms, presented barriers for women. This was an infuriating matter for many of the women, which also prompted Merete Thejll to conduct her own mapping of critical attention, or lack thereof, afforded women artists. As she explains: "Being annoyed with the arrogance of all these male reviewers, I've been collecting all the reviews from *Weekendavisen* for a whole year, to see how many female artists are reviewed and how they are reviewed" (Thejll 1975). Meanwhile, Helga Bruun de Neergaard used sarcasm in her description: "I have always, and that is to say for a long time, almost all my life, been mindful of how our art critics care for the male artists. [. . .] There is a clear tendency to overlook female artists on the part of reviewers." (de Neergaard 1975).

If we look at responses to questions regarding the gallery system, we can gauge, not only the bias these women experienced, but also how critical recognition and sales were intertwined with notions of gender. An artist named Eva wrote the following:

> It is not the critics that have been the problem for me – but the sales. The people who speculate in art as investment do not buy from women – art dealers know that and say 'yes, if only you were a man, then everything would be different, but there is nothing we can do about it'. (Anonymous "Eva" 1975)

Whereas Helen Schou (1905–2006), having spent, as she writes, 20 years of labor on two large commissions (an equestrian statue of King Christian X for the city of Aarhus and "The Jutland Stallion" for the city of Randers), notes: "As far as the museums are concerned, I consider it a great oversight that I am not represented there – probably due to the fact that I am a woman. But I think that sometime in the future they will have to correct this boundless neglect" (Schou 1975). The women also encountered gendered hierarchies when it came to the choice of medium or the area of arts and craft. Jane Muus recalls how her male colleagues at the Art Academy told her: '"you draw very well – for a girl" [. . .] but women never amount to anything when it comes to visual art. They might have a chance as writers" (Muus 1975). Kamma Svensson (1908–1998) described how she experienced discrimination mostly in relation to being an illustrator and not a painter (Svensson 1975). In contrast, an artist by the name of Marianne regretted that she did not become a craftsperson, as it would probably have been more compatible with family life (Anonymous "Marianne" 1975).

Economic issues and material conditions are other levels at which the demands of strict gender roles presented barriers for women's art production, access, and choice of materials. In this regard, Helga Bruun de Neergaard wrote: "First time married to a painter, who found it completely unnecessary to spend any money on materials for me. [. . .] That's why I made quilts, and still do to this day, they sell really well" (Neergaard 1975). In contrast, Hanne Schou (1935–2020), daughter of a factory owner and financially supported by her family, wrote: "I have not felt that there was any discrimination between men and women" (Schou 1975). This indicates that different backgrounds and class privileges also played a role in relation to experiences of inequality and attention. Some had supporting and encouraging families, others were met with resistance to their artistic pursuits. As Rosenkilde notes, as a child she was oftentimes told: "Are you sitting there drawing, again – why don't you do something sensible!" (Rosenkilde 1975).

Attachment to quality

Although almost all the women artists over 40 agreed that the ongoing struggle for women's equality was important for visual artists, generational differences also stand out, for instance, in relation to the idea of establishing a women's gallery. Jane Muus responded that in that case, or any case, for that matter: "We must assert ourselves by exhibiting quality" (Muus 1975). With reference to the forthcoming women's exhibition, she noted: "Regarding the exhibition in December, it is important that the female artists show quality. We must show the very best that

has been made. If we do not, the exhibition will lose its purpose" (Muus 1975). Meanwhile, Gerda Thune Andersen (b. 1932–) wrote: "I would definitely support a women's exhibition initiative, but the best thing would be to assert ourselves among the men and we can do so artistically if we can unleash our abilities in the same way as they can" (Andersen 1975). The illustrator Kamma Svensson wrote the following: "I do not mind exhibiting with women, if it is on a fine i.e. high level" (Svensson 1975). Thus, a concern with quality most often trumps concerns of gender in response to the question of a women's gallery.

Indeed, the separatist *women-only* approach caused concern for some; for instance, Ane Brügger (1908–1995) responded: "I do not think it is desirable to create a special gallery for women. Men have not isolated themselves beyond those who form cliques, groups, and associations" (Brügger 1975). It might be easy to disprove Brügger's last claim, pointing to the conspicuously few women in avantgarde groups and artists associations active during her lifetime, but more importantly, the statement points to the norm that renders male artists organizing together invisible and women artists as deviant for doing so.[9] As the artist named Eva wrote: "Sure, it's hard for women artists of my generation to get into artists' organizations if you don't happen to be married or living with a painter who is already in one" (Anonymous "Eva" 1975). A sentiment also echoed by Gudrun Diemer (1912–1999). Rosenkilde, known for her small-scale figurative paintings, wondered what criteria a women's gallery would use: "If you set up a gallery for women [. . .] would it be any easier to be admitted there? Suppose one exhibits one's *pictures* and not one's person" (Rosenkilde 1975).[10]

How does gender play a role in art? The American critic Lucy Lippard famously exclaimed: "Art has no sex – but artists do" to call out discrimination against women and people of color (Lippard 1976, 45). The historically contingent negative connotation of 'women's art' was, for the elder generation oftentimes negotiated by separating gender and art altogether. For instance, Eva Beÿer (1921–2004) wrote: "I prefer to be considered a painter without gender designation; it does not affect the pictures, among men at least, only rather negatively, 'ladies painting' is a patronizing term" (Beÿer 1975). On the difficulty of becoming self-sustainable financially, others reflected on how male artists also struggled economically: "it is difficult for all of us" (Anonymous "Eva" 1975). Altogether, the letters reveal, as initially stated, that the inequality consists of different conditions and the

9 The artists' association Grønningen, for instance, established in 1915 welcomed its first female member, the sculptor Astrid Noack (1888–1954) in 1933, whilst Christine Swane (1876–1960) was accepted as presumably the second woman in 1937. See https://www.gronningen.dk/index.php/groenningen/gronningens-historie (last accessed July 3, 2023).

10 Emphasis in original.

biased attention afforded artists of a certain gender. Thus, through this infrastructural inversion, which shifted attention from individual achievements to the background support structures that make such achievement possible (or not), the *infrastructural inattention* to artists of a certain gender becomes visible. Yet, some of the women artists would not readily admit to these disproportional effects. Rather, in response to gendered norms, some seek to strike a balance, for instance, by mentioning that male artists also struggle (financially and for recognition).

Art historian Sigrun Åsebø has proposed the term "balancing acts" to describe how modern women artists negotiated the gendered structure of the art world and surrounding society in the 1950s (Åsebø 2021). To be accepted as artists, Åsebø argues, women introduced equal measures of feminine sensitivity and intellectual complexity when positioning their artistic pursuits to reconcile, as it were, "feelings" and "reason" (Åsebø 2021, 44). But the term, Åsebø indicates, also refers to the struggle of balancing childcare and artistic work. Examples of such balancing acts also feature in the responses from the women artists over 40 in 1975. Several insisted on a shared language of (modern) art that separates art from gender altogether, while sharing their struggle with, and negations of, gendered hierarchies that structure their time, limit their access to materials, relegate them to the smaller studio, etc. In other words, in this historical perspective, by attending to the infrastructural mechanisms and activities that organizes the production, presentation, and reception of art, the project mapped the infrastructural barriers to attention that women artists struggled with and negotiated daily.

It might be argued that the gender inequity of modern art history has by now been widely considered, documented, and discussed, and that the sociological perspectives of women artists from the 1970s does not reveal biases that were not already known. Rather than adding this example to the already long history of pointing to the marginal position and underrepresentation of women artists (Nochlin 1988, Pollock 1988 and 1999, Greaves 2021), what is interesting, I maintain, is the fact that this discourse of personal experiences was put on display in 1975. That it was exhibited in *Kvindeudstillingen* and thus made public as a declaration of inter-generational solidarity, and as part of an attempt to call out and transform existing unjust conditions.

Presenting an open image

In organizing and presenting the gathered material in the exhibition space, the question, for the organizers, was how to balance a presentation showing the particularities of individual subjects – to stay true to their individual form of expres-

sion and ideas – and at the same time show that there were also "common tendencies", for instance in relation to the bias of male reviewers or the obstacle of domestic work. Notably, in their collaborative work, Lassen, Kallesøe, and Thomsen did not want to manipulate the material to reflect their own opinions. They wished to exhibit the letters, the images, and their contradictions to present the cross-generational dialogue as "an open image" reflecting both shared and conflicting opinions. In the exhibition catalogue, for which a one-page, typewritten presentation of the project is superimposed on a collage of the letters, they state:

> Gradually, a nuanced picture of several general conditions and trends emerged, of shared experiences mixed with divergent quite personal ones. We wanted to pass on this experience of unity, but also of some crucial divisions, not in a sociological description, as already said, but in a more subjective form – history as we experience it right now, women seen through our eyes, in a shimmering contemporary perspective. We are not objective and aloof – on the contrary. [. . .] Our space is a hotchpotch of emotions, ideas, expressions – their thoughts interpreted by us, their images in our images – a declaration of solidarity and a rupture. An opening outward, we hope – a material made accessible, shaped as questions. (Kallesøe et al. 1975b)

The different nuanced responses to questions of working conditions, critical evaluation and organizing possibilities for women artists, as I have presented above, laid bare the shared as well as divergent positions entailed in the collected material. The qualitative, situated, and subjective approach chosen by the organizing group, as opposed to a sociologically quantitative one or an "objective and aloof" one, coalesce with leftist critiques of academia's self-perception at the time (Dahlerup 2021 [1998], n.p.). Configuring the display in this horizontal and relational fashion it can be aligned with cultural theorist Elke Krasny's suggestion of a "conversational complex", as opposed to the vertical power axis of the modern exhibitionary complex (Krasny 2017, 149). Moreover, the subjective and open approach, and the dual declaration of "solidarity" and "rupture" resonate with the notion of reflective solidarity, proposed by political theorist Jodi Dean many years after. In 1996, she wrote: "I present reflective solidarity as that openness to difference which lets our disagreements provide the basis for connection." (Dean 1996, 17). The same reflexivity – a position of listening to and standing with the older women despite their differing politics and notions of art – seems to be at stake in "Women Artists – Past and Present." Specifically, the three-page project description, which explicitly addresses the women artists on the last page, reflects a notion of reflective solidarity. The group proclaims that their idea of openness contains a notion of continuity and futurity: "an *open* image – we hope – that is a conversation, we would like to continue – an attempt at assembling your experiences with ours and see, what comes out of it" (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). Such a conversation had to go both ways, in that solidarity must extend both from the

younger and the older generation. The last part of the text reads almost manifesto-like in its attempt to make clear the stakes of solidarity as an invitation to make connections across their differences:

> To be clear, we only embarked on this because we were interested and wanted to be solidaristic. At the same time, we have wished for solidarity towards what *we* are doing, which clearly must be something different from what *you* have been doing.
>
> Our starting point is different from yours; our experiences are different – goals and ideals in constant flux. – But yours are no longer the same either, and in one way or another we have that in common. Let's talk about it! (Kallesøe et al. 1975a)[11]

The passage most clearly articulates generational difference, as suggested by the underlining of "we" versus "you" and the aim of intergenerational solidarity that recognizes these differences. Thus, in seeking to expose the biased (in)attention given to women artists in the media, the museum and in society in general, they also exposed generational divides and affective attachments to traditional notions of aesthetic quality held by many of the older generation, who insisted on a gender-neutral understanding of art.

Intervention: Reflective solidarity on display

In the exhibition space Lassen, Kallesøe, and Thomsen presented the results of their investigation through an experimental form of display centered around three large floor-to-ceiling collages respectively focusing on the themes of "economy," "family" and "critique" (Lassen 1981, 55). In Lassen's words the collage boards served "to give the concrete but often contradictory information a clear form and at the same time make the very personal expressions in the letters accessible" (Lassen 1981, 55). On the lower part of the boards, selected questions from the survey were enlarged, handwritten with red paint on a white background. The upper two-thirds were covered with handwritten quotations from the letters in differing sizes collaged together with paintings, drawings, photos, and newspaper cuttings (fig.1). The idea behind the collage technique was to produce "a new image" that demonstrated the historical background with the underlying economic and social conditions that were the "common tendencies" presented above the questions pertaining to critical attention, material conditions and the gendered hierarchy of the family (Lassen 1981, 55). But the collages also showed "a transformed history that was ex-

11 Emphasis in original.

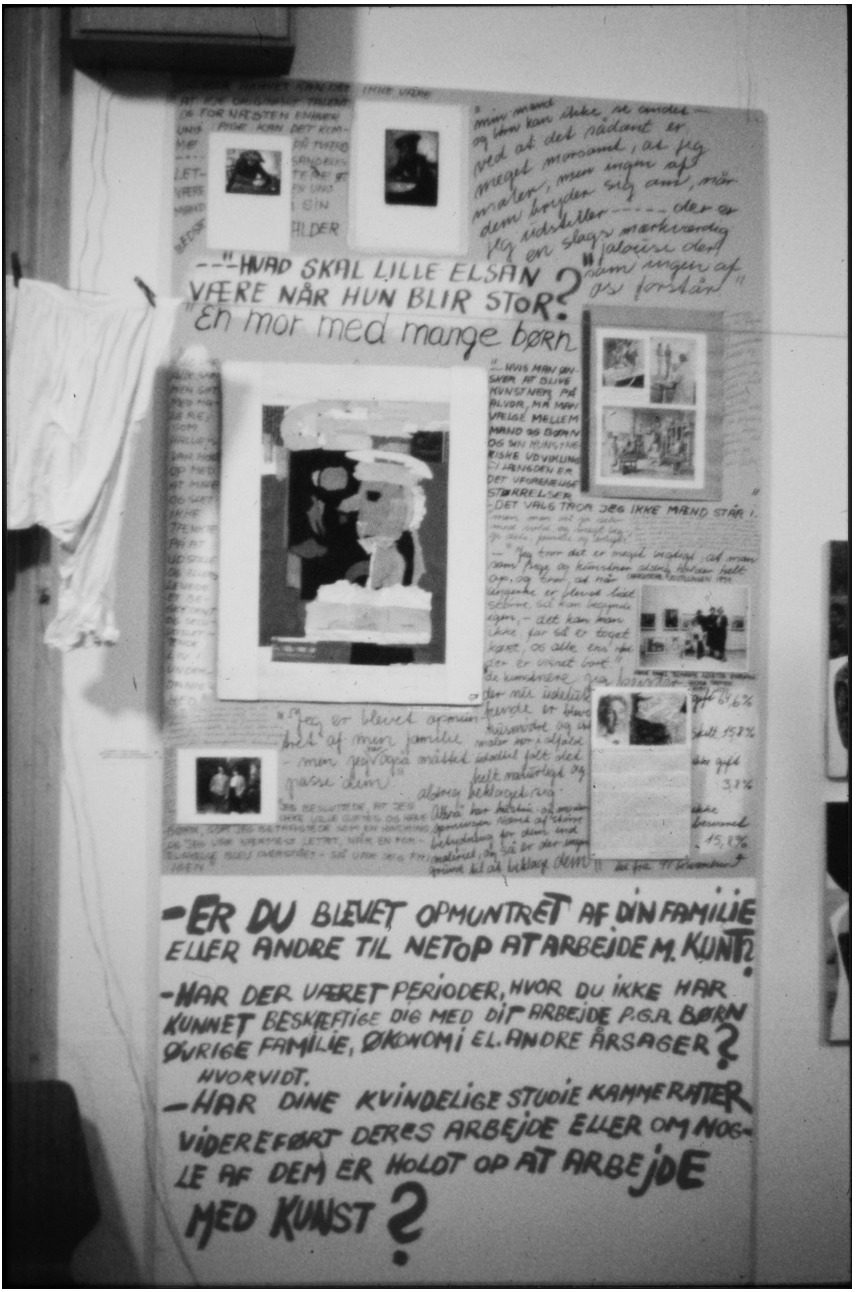


Fig. 1: Hellen Lassen, Hanne Lise Thomsen, and Else Kallesøe, "Kvindelige Kunstnere – før og nu", collage-board detail, 1975. Photo © Bent Petersen.

hibited" in which the displayed elements had been "subjectively processed" (Lassen 1981, 55). Qualifying these remarks, Lassen argues:

> Inherent in the composition was the dual intention: to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the historical and socio-economic conditions and to transform them from being an obstacle to being a basis for a new process. (Lassen 1981, 55)

The project not only constituted an *investigation* through infrastructural *inversion* but also an *intervention* into the historical and socio-economic conditions that, in calling them out, could begin to transform them. To supplement the collage-boards and "to make as much of our material available as possible," a recording of selected extracts from the letters recited by actor Kirsten Rolffes played throughout the exhibition period (Kallesøe et al. 1975a).[12] Excerpts that were marked for Rolffes to record, included statements from painter Gudrun Henningsen (1917–1992) such as: "Artists are not suitable for joint events, everyone thinks only of themselves" and "The ideal must be to treat all artists fairly."[13] Whereas the response given by textile artist and painter Kirsten Gregers-Jensen (1925–1993), expounded on the problem of living in a privileged part of the world: "Others starve while we live in abundance: The world IS ONE and if there is to be something to pass on, there must be a radical change."[14] These diverse statements reflect the intention of reproducing "a mottled mosaic" (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). Simultaneously, anticipating a critique of their presentation, all the letters were made available to give everyone inclined the opportunity to make up their own mind (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). Presented on two three-meter-long strips with the actual letters stuck together, this element provided a graphical-visual impression of the volume of letters. Made public, and considered as a whole, it was thus an attempt at legitimizing the personal experience of being a women artist. Around these five "information boards" (the three painted Masonite collage boards and the two strips of letters stuck together), the organizers placed all the self-portraits they had received, including a painting by Franciska Clausen (1899–1986).[15]

A collective contribution by Kvindelige Kunstneres Samfund (Society of Women Artists, 1916–present) took up one end of the space (fig.2). Its centerpiece was a crudely made sculptural installation of a thorn-crowned figure representing the "Goddess of Liberty" positioned on top of an easel with her hand raised in

12 The artists had no special connection to the actor, but according to Kallesøe, "just called her". Conversation with Kallesøe January 28, 2023. Rolffes (1928–2000) has since become internationally recognized, for instance, for her part in Lars von Triers 1990s TV series *The Kingdom*.

13 As indicated in the margins of the letter, see KKS archive.

14 Kirsten Gregers-Jensen, KKS archive.

15 See painting by Clausen reproduced in Pontoppidan, *Det Skete på Kvindeudstilingen*, 2017, 114.

a fist. Stacked up against the figure was a pile of empty buckets, a monument to women artist rising above the burden of domestic work. Moreover, a washing line with plastered white clothes extended across the space (Lassen 1981, 55). In comparison to the information-heavy boards and the letter-strips, the monumental figure and the obstructing element of the washing line cutting through the sightline, perhaps more immediately visualized the burden and obstacle of domestic duties that impeded on women's time and thus placed them with a disadvantage in relation to their profession.

The overall expression of this densely packed space could be interpreted both as a declaration of solidarity with the young artist's predecessors coupled with a desire for equality at all levels, notably through the lack of censorship and through the centrally placed collective monument, but also as a desire for disruption – through the interpretations on the boards and the restructuring of the material (Lassen 1981, 56). The uneven handwriting and the irregular layout of images and text make these boards appear aesthetically amateurish. Thomsen herself remembers it as "a kind of sloppy hanging and presentation" but also suggests the approach perhaps corresponded to a way of exhibiting and reflecting connected to the times.[16] Indeed, the anti-aesthetics of the women's movement were conceived in resistance to male dominated norms. Despite this anti-aesthetics and the DIY approach, the display allowed for the audience to engage with the material at various levels – by reading the extracts on the collage-board, listening to the audio, and looking at the objects, drawings, and paintings from the women artists in the space.

By reaching out to a generation of women above them, the young artists created a space for inter-generational dialogue based on solidarity across differences (rather than solidarity based on agreement) from which they envisioned a transformation of the socio-economic conditions of women artists could ensue. The experimental display of sound, image, and text commanded and received attention from the exhibition visitors. As Birgit Pontoppidan notes in her book commemorating the exhibition "there were always many visitors, who stood and listened to the reading of the artists' letters, while looking at the paintings" (2017, 113). The display of the infrastructural (in)attention of these women artists not only uncovered forms of systemic gender bias; it also presented the affective attachments, contradictory feelings, and lived experiences of negotiating such bias. Among other things, it revealed how many in the previous generation relied on supposedly neutral terms of classification, such as quality, value, and greatness, in their attachment to art and their identity as artists, even as it began to become clearer

16 Author's interview with Hanne Lise Thomsen, February 17, 2021.



Fig. 2: Hellen Lassen, Hanne Lise Thomsen, and Else Kallesøe, "Kvindelige Kunstnere – før og nu", 1975, installation view. Photo © Sonja Iskov.

that these notions were historically and continuously stacked against the favor of those who were not (white) male artists.

Lassen, Kallesøe, and Thomsen note in their project description: "[W]e didn't want to live up to the external status requirements (which doesn't necessarily have anything to do with quality)" (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). Rather than simply calling out, exposing, and discrediting the discriminating practices of the art world establishment, as was for instance part of the aim of the *Feminist Art Journal*, Lassen, Kallesøe, and Thomsen's project resisted easy categorization by refusing to conform to established art historical traditions of display.[17] Indeed, it might be the lack of attention to aesthetic quality in the display of "Women Artists – Past and Present," the nondescript status of this project, along with its renunciation of objectivity in favor of emphasis on dialogue, affect and solidarity, that have caused it to sink into relative obscurity.[18] One might ask, has the act of fore-

17 At least as stated in the first issue, see *Feminist Art Journal* 1.1 (1973).

18 The project is mentioned by Lassen in "Lidt spredte betragtninger" (1977, 53), described in Pontoppidan *Det skete på Kvindeudstillingen Charlottenborg 1975* (2017, 110–115), by Kofod Olsen in "Det begyndte i 1970'erne: Dansk Kunst-Feminisme 1970–76" (2014, 255) and by Monika Kaiser

grounding the background of art making, once again been relegated to the background, deemed unworthy of attention?

The never-ending story of counting as a feminist strategy

Let us return to the quote with which this chapter began, the sentiment that "the *actual* inequality consists of different conditions and *lack of attention*" (Kluge et al. 1977, 7). These words from the introduction to *Billedet som Kampmiddel* (1977) are in fact extracted from the concluding part of Lassen's contribution to the same book, entitled "Lidt spredte betragtninger over kvindelige kunstnere – før og nu" ("Some scattered reflections on women artists – past and present"). In this direct critique of the art historical canon's blindsiding of women artists, Lassen includes an analysis of the reception of *Kvindeudstillingen* (1975) to her historical analysis of the reception of Anna Ancher (1859–1935) and Sonja Ferlov Mancoba (1911–1984). She concludes by giving "a supplement that might shed some light on the tension between ideology and the role of economics as a dominant factor in the practice of art" (Lassen 1977, 53), namely a statistic that followed from the answers given by women artists above the age of 40. Regarding the economic conditions, these revealed that:

> 14,9% were supporting themselves
> 53,2% were supported by family
> 27,7% had another job on the side to make ends meet
> 4,2% did not reply to the question (Lassen 1977, 53).

Although it was not presented in the exhibition space, what Lassen's describes as a "modest beginning of a statistic" reveals that the majority of women artists lived on family support (Lassen 1977, 53). Over a third had a job on the side, and only 14,9% were able to support themselves through their artistic practice. Even as these numbers cannot be compared with statistics concerning male artists, they speak specifically to the economic dependency of women artists. 'Women Artists – Past and Present' also relied on other forms of counting to call out gender inequity in the art

in *Neubesetzungen des Kunst-Raumes* (2013, 102) and "The International Exhibition Kvindeudstillingen" (2018, 159–160).

establishment, indicating that counting was part of their feminist strategy.[19] In the project-description, they wrote: "[W]e could observe that the academy for around the past 50 years has educated as many women as men, but that they (the women) then ostensibly disappear, and that women generally made up only 1/10 of exhibitors in the larger groups, at scholarship exhibitions etc." (Kallesøe et al. 1975a). Speaking at a conference on gender equality in the Danish art world in 2003, art historian Sanne Kofod Olsen referred to the same percentage of women-art-graduates as used in 1975: "And if we talk about women's art in general, it is a fact that over the last 30 years at least 50% of graduates from Danish art academies have been women. But far from 50% of recognized Danish artists are women." (Olsen 2005, 44). Again in 2020, the same gender disparity between graduates and artistic recognition was reinstated when art student Paula Duvå organized an exhibition showing the work of 34 women and non-binary students at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Art and referenced statistics revealing that: "only 2% of the art sold at auction houses around the world is created by women artists, and only 29% of solo exhibitions at Danish art museums in 2004–2019 were created by women. Meanwhile, the Academy has admitted 50% women over the past twenty years" (Schyum 2020). Both Olsen and Duvå argue that it is not a question of quality vis-à-vis gender, but that the imbalance stems from "the structures and hierarchies, that characterize the art world" (Olsen 2005, 45). Museologist Hans Dam Christensen suggested in 2016 that "the plain conclusions have not changed considerably since 2004" (Christensen 2016, 349), and a more recent Danish-based research project titled *Feminist Emergency* lead by art historian Kerry Greaves attends to the issues of gender imparity and feminism – matters that are still urgent as the project-title indicates.

Back in 1977, Lassen reaches the following conclusion: "Feminist art originating from the women's movement is largely ignored by official institutions – logically enough, as the attack is directed precisely against their hierarchy" (Lassen 1977 53). Women artists in the 1970s wanted to change the values ascribed to art – to question the supposedly neutral category of quality – and they did so, for instance, by calling out the gendered hierarchy of the art world and by making non-conforming work. It has been more than 50 years since Linda Nochlin published her famous essay to which "Women Artists – Past and Present" is indebted, and the social art history of which it was part, raised crucial questions of arts' relationship to politics of identity, modernity, and ways of seeing (Berger 1972).

19 As for example Guerrilla Girls have been doing since 1984. "Counting is, after all, a feminist strategy", as Maura Reilly has stated, see "Living the Revolution: A Dialogue Between Maura Reilly & Lara Perry", 2016.

Given the continued urgency and relevance of the issues, as raised above, it seems that these enunciative efforts are unable to correct imbalances. Although counting as a feminist strategy is effective in visualizing gender imparity, the social reality of gendered imbalances internal and external to the art world is far more complex and irreducible to such binary terms. Even if counting is, as Christensen points out, "an easy way of putting a hegemonic discourse on display," the default heteronormativity of calls for gender equality (between male and female artists) problematically naturalizes these as binary categories (Christensen 2016, 349). An intersectional approach that considers not only the question of representation of women and age, but also that of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ artists, as well as artists with disabilities, would add a more nuanced and complex picture.[20] Moreover, these repeating numbers show how "infrastructure repeats," as suggested by writer and critic Marina Vishmidt, and indicate the need for an infrastructural critique that pays attention to infrastructural processes, and how these, following Ahmed, privilege the attention and movement of some works and artists over others (Vishmidt 2017, Ahmed 2007).

In the attention to difference that issued from 1970s feminist discussions, the project "Women Artists – Past and Present" provides a novel contribution to the debate on equality and diversity in arts. This fundamental point, as the above examples prove, is still relevant, especially if taking an intersectional approach to historical and structural biases. Even as improvements have been made within the past 20 years, the (never-ending) story continues, to paraphrase the title of Christensen's essay. In understanding "Women Artists – Past and Present" as an art historical investigation, an infrastructural inversion, and an activist intervention, I propose to retroactively add it to the list of projects mentioned above that discuss, pay attention to, and call out the power structures that perpetuate inequality in the art world. Moreover, in historiographical terms this understanding can be registered as a shift "from a history of institutional critique to one of infrastructural critique" (Vishmidt 2016, 266). In conclusion, we might – through the lens of what I have termed infrastructural (in)attention – be able to identify the critical potential and value of "Women Artists – Past and Present": a mode of artistic and art historical research that renounces objectivity in favor of dialogue and solidarity to present an "open image," in seeking to transform rather than represent the here and now.

20 For a Danish example of an intersectional approach, see for instance, Claudine Zia, "Ny undersøgelse: Favoriserer den danske kunstscene hvide kunstnere?" *Idoart.dk*. June 1, 2020.

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Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt

Solo, Transparent, Responsible? Artist Collectives' Inversion of Eurocentric Infrastructures at Documenta Fifteen

It seems that things would be easier, costs would be lower, and authorship would be identifiable if artists did not group themselves into collectives. *Or* artist collectives would thrive more if the art world was not mainly built upon the model of the Western European solo artist. At the 100 days documenta fifteen exhibition in Kassel 2022, artist collectives invited by the appointed artistic direction, the Indonesian artist collective ruangrupa, fill up the exhibition buildings and the public spaces with processual and activist works, process posters, hang-out environments, kitchens, and production units for printing and distributing. One of the invited groups at documenta fifteen is Gudskul, a Jakarta-based artist-driven space and self-organizing school founded by the three artist collectives ruangrupa, Serrum and Grafis Huru Hara, running a grassroots institution for other collectives. Gudskul contributes several works to documenta fifteen, first and foremost as organizer of the *Fridskul*, turning the former exhibition halls of Fridericianum into an alternative school. Amongst several contributions inviting social interaction on site in *Fridskul*, Gudskul presents a board game called *Speculative Collective Board Game.*[1] The board game invites individuals to solve an artist collective's emotional, logistic, and economic challenges in the infrastructures of the art world. Through the exemplary work of Gudskul, this chapter sheds light on infrastructures of production, reception, and circulation at hand in the art world phenomenon documenta and insists that we can understand infrastructures as both materially and epistemologically formative patterns of use (Clover 2022; Berlant 2016; 2022). Furthermore, the chapter discusses whether the collective aesthetics can be *heard* in what I will characterize as the *Eurocentic* art world: an art world built and

1 By Gudskul Ecosystem, 2021–2022. Gameplay developed by: Gesyada Siregar, Noorlintang "Nori" Suminar, Wiratama. With contribution from: MG Pringgotono, Ade Darmawan, Budi "Bungen" Mulya, JJ Adibrata, Saleh Husein, Anita "Bonit" Purniawati, Dwi "Ube" Wicaksono, Wahyudi "Wacil," Aldino, Robby, Henryco Lumba, Untung, Marcellina DKP, Angga Wijaya, Moch. Hasrul, Rifandi Nugroho, Amy Zahrawaan, Adhi Dhigelz, Greta Lumbanraja, Cemara Chrisalit, Al Ghorie, Ajeng Nurul Aini, Kania Anisa, Ahmad 'Ape' Hafid, Hidayatur Rohman, Duta Adipati, M. Fabian 'Icen', Ocin Atrian, Bintang Muhammad Ramadhan. Design, illustration and layout by: Noorlintang "Nori" Suminar & Wiratama. Upcycled plastic game items production by: Gud RnD, STUFFO/Labs, Moch. Hasrul, Moh. Aldino, Untung Sugiyarto, Sopyan Triatmaja. Board game production by: alijayaCraft.

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perceived on certain concepts of artistic subjectivity, transparency, and being responsible and in control. Thereby, the chapter moves from production aesthetics inverted in Gudskul's artwork to the reception of the curatorial design of *Fridskul* as part of documenta fifteen to the level of critique of ruangrupa and the lumbung collective found both in the institution of documenta, in the German press, and in international art critique. My suggestion is that, based on an infrastructural analysis of documenta fifteen, ruangrupa and the invited artist collectives inverted and reorganized a deeply Eurocentric art world by producing and responding collectively and horizontally *on the ground*.

Bulky: An artist collective producing in soloist infrastructures

When entering the central exhibition space *Fridskul* and turning right into one of the first exhibition rooms, I encounter a large poster approximately eight meters long and five meters high. It is covered with handwriting in orange, blue, and black, reminding me of a graphic documentation of a process or a meeting. In the upper right-hand corner, it says "Where is the art?" What the following spaces present are tables to work at, sofas to hang out on, a workshop where furniture is turned into sculptures, an archive with posters and drawings, a circle of furniture for conversations, board games to play, sites for kids to be and play in, but also films to watch, a series of textile images to ponder, sculptures to walk around, images to look at. Obviously, many of the works in *Fridskul*, usually known as the prestigious exhibition hall Fridericianum, invite an extended kind of participation, a horizontal participation, where the spectator must physically sit down, and then watch or listen, read, discuss, or even touch and rearrange the elements of the artworks.

Behind the poster asking where the art is, a large table with chairs is placed, and on the table, I find Gudskul's *Speculative Collective Board Game.* The board game invites individuals to play the game of being an artist collective: to deal with a fictive artist collective's logistic, economic, and affective challenges in the infrastructures of the art world. The players of the game practice navigating how to move and organize when being many, and have to confront obstacles they meet when producing collectively across individual and institutional interests.

The game can be played with a maximum of seven players, each player being a member of a fictive artist collective, plus one umpire. The materials of the board game are simple. The game consists of a box printed in colors on thick paper and laminated, with different kinds of ditto cards inside and some tokens

of different colors, probably 3D printed. The game also contains an hourglass. There are two different, task-giving cards in the game: personal objectives for each player with a written description of "your secret mission" in relation to the collective (often counteracting the collective objective with individualist desire for recognition) and challenge cards to solve on time for the members of the fictive collective in relation to the infrastructures of the art world (often counteracting the collective objective with economic and representational directives from institutions). There are different values to win in the game: money tokens, bonding tokens, and knowledge tokens and they are divided into social knowledge, management knowledge, and production knowledge. Over time, the collective fills out a shared portfolio.

The print aesthetic, with its inviting and colorful visual design, makes *Speculative Collective Board Game* appealing, and because of its cheap materials, also apparently accessible: ready to print at home and play with one's own friends, one's peers and colleagues, or even family. The form cites the leisure activity of playing games without a purpose, like backgammon or chess in a café, or capitalist training games like *Monopoly* or the imperialist Finnish board game *The Star of Africa* at home in the living room. Different from competitive games between individuals, this game is about succeeding through collaboration: discussing, solving problems, and continuing together despite the infrastructural challenges of the art world. There are some crucial elements in the board game aesthetics of leisure time, conviviality, and intergenerational "fun": in the exhibition space, it cites ways of living outside the art world. The citation of board game aesthetics could be interpreted as a typical way of integrating everyday movements and scores into the arts, as it is ascribed to Western avantgarde traditions from Fluxus and Judson Church onwards.

Speculative Collective Board Game employs humor as a means of critique. The game mocks very well-known and hardly solvable problems of working collectively – personal ambition, annoyance over co-members, fatiguing eternal discussions – and is thus a LOL game to play for audiences who have been in an artist collective, in a study group, a music band, a self-organized activist group, and the like. Gudskul themselves frame the game as a tool for collective models of learning (Asia Art Archive 2022). The challenge cards can be said to build up the social and managerial muscles of the players, or members of artist collectives to come, if one would really play the game for hours on end; but the challenge cards at the same time also criticize the professionalization and standardization of the artist collective as a promise of successful collaboration and cohesion.

I suggest reading *Speculative Collective Board Game* as an infrastructural inversion (Bowker and Star 2000) of an art world made for solo artists, understanding the art world as an infrastructure where they can move fast and without

friction. The challenge cards display how the collective is a hurdle in the infrastructures of the art world, a bulky piece of luggage on the looping conveyor belt, a tangle of hair in the drain. One challenge card points to the *material* volume of collective production by asking the players to decide what to do with a member who takes up "too much space" in the group's working space:



Figs. 1 and 2: Two challenge cards from Gudskul's *Speculative Collective Board Game* (2022), photographed by the author at documenta fifteen.

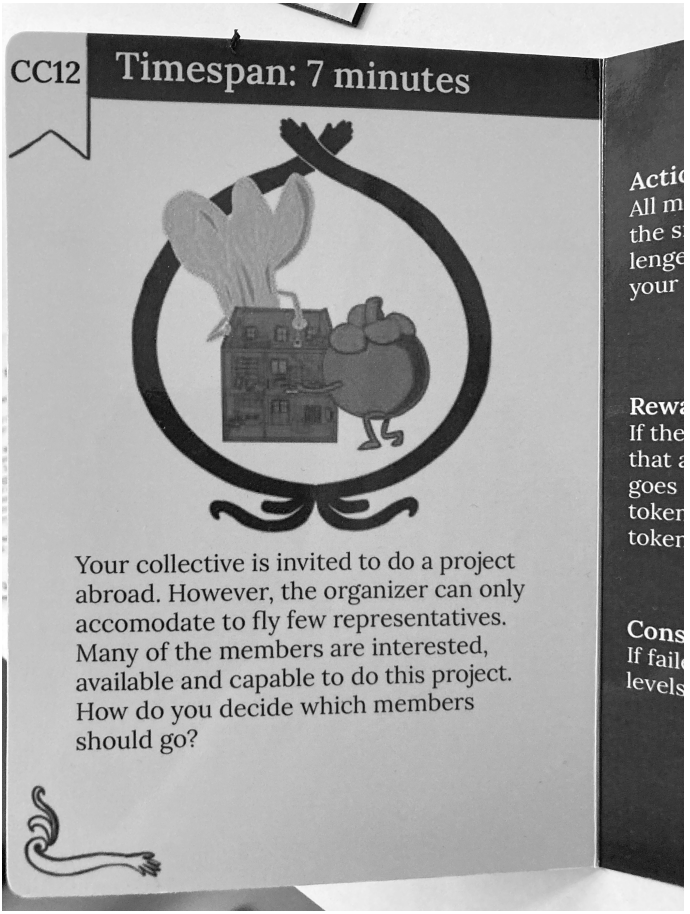
> Challenge Card 5
> Some members' (..) personal belongings take up space in the collective space, so there are not many vacant spaces left for work and project. How will your collective address this issue and find common ground?

Challenge Card 5 insists that personal belongings should not take up too much space in the collective space. It inverts how an artist collective's space is a forum of many personal ways of ordering, and thus a space where this division of the personal sphere and the professional, collectively ordered sphere is confronted and negotiated. Similarly, *Challenge Card 10* asks the players to reflect on the possible future contribution of a long-term member who "is starting a family." Which ways of taking up space and time are productive and unproductive? Which kinds of work can be included in and inform the collective production, and which kinds of work should be separated from it, and should "stay at home"?

The players are asked to draw demarcating spatio-temporal lines between the personal and the collective, between private life and art, between the useless and the useful. A feminist approach to collective art production would integrate the personal and private as central in collective production (Ukeles [1969] 1999; Kunst 2015; Schmidt 2022), for example by decreasing working hours for artist parents as part of a feminist collective economy or taking turns with childcare. Instead of affirmatively suggesting that the personal must inform how collective organization should be, the challenge cards fundamentally question the need for order. In other words, the collective becomes a site for spatial and temporal *logistics* understood in the terminology of the duo of Black radical thought Stefano Harney and Fred Moten: logistics as a way of untangling relations, dividing, regulating, and improving use and flow (Harney and Moten 2021, 18). The confrontations of the individual taking up "too much" space in the collective space or spending "too little" time with the group are also examples of how an artist collective is, and has for a long time been understood as a testing ground for greater collective negotiations, exposing and attacking "broader social and economic conditions of production" (Stimson and Sholette 2007, 11), pointing towards the division of labor and social reproduction at large (Schmidt 2019; 2022). However, in this chapter I am not going to follow along the lines of how artist collectives might have a democratic potential, as was the tenor 10 to 15 years ago (Stimson and Sholette 2007; van Eikels 2013), but rather, I will continue to understand artist collectives as inverting the infrastructures of modern European logics and logistics in the arts. I would argue that the problem of taking up "too much" space or spending "too little" time with the collective has the measurement of productivity as its frame: which logistics must be at hand for the artist collective to be productive, efficient, successful? A feminist approach could sound like this: What understanding of the relationality between life and art must be at hand for the artist collective to be a liveable frame?

The first two examples expose how the artist collective reveals a material border drawing – spatio-temporal – between unproductive and productive elements. It could also be understood as situations negotiating what produces value

in the arts. *Challenge Card 12* exposes how the very concrete *economy* of the art world is not geared to collectives:



Figs. 1 and 2 (continued)

Challenge Card 12
Your collective is invited to do a project abroad. However, the organizer can only accommodate to fly few representatives. Many of the members are interested, available and capable to do this project. How do you decide which members should go?

Challenge card 12 points to the economic expenses of artist collectives being "too high" for the infrastructures made for solo production by asking the members to decide which representatives should fly to a group exhibition in another country.

Besides showing that the economy of the art world is built around solo (and maybe duo) practices, this challenge card also inverts how artistic formations which deviate from the standards are expected to find out how to match the infrastructural frames themselves in order to appear. In other words, the responsibility for accommodating their artistic way of organizing is delegated from the inviting institution to the artists themselves. One size fits all: to circulate in the infrastructures of the art world – for example, in order to succeed internationally – one has to appear in the apparently unadjustable framework. Here I believe that infrastructural analysis is a continuation of the analysis of the frame of the artwork that was already analyzed as the divisive and decisive *parergon* by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1978). But where Derrida stayed with the material surroundings of the image – the delimiting frame, the *passepartout*, and the signature (Derrida 1972) – as conditioning the appearance of a painting, infrastructural analysis expands the gaze to the broader frameworks in the art world: the economy, the logistics, the border-drawing epistemologies in the production, presentation, and circulation of art.

Engpass on smooth trails

By showing the conflicts of production, presentation, and circulation of artist collectives moving in an art world made for efficiency and flow of solo artists, the infrastructures of the art world are inverted in Gudskul's artwork *Speculative Collective Board Game*. By understanding the game as an infrastructural inversion, I mean that the artwork makes it possible to get to know and examine otherwise submerged systems, exchanges, and flows within the arts (Bowker and Star 2000; Larkin 2013; Vertesi and Ribes (eds.) 2019). The infrastructure that we get to explore through playing collective games is the dynamic field of both production, presentation, and circulation within the art world. In this case, the artist collective is the "developer liquid" put into the system, highlighting where cuts and connecting points are, and where transitions are easy or difficult to pass. For example, when it comes to the production of exhibitions, budgets are often – as in *Speculative Collective Board Game* – not made for artist collectives; and at the reception end, the artist's desire for recognition is shaped by expectations formed by a temporality of individual acceleration, not by a temporality of draining collective slowness. As richly exemplified within both media theory and science and technology studies, it is exactly in the shutting down of a system, at the moment of disintegration, at the chokepoints (Ger. *Engpass*), or at the cutoff a flow, or at

the transition of the plug or the switch, that the infrastructure becomes observable (Larkin 2013; Vertesi and Ribes (eds.) 2019).

In *Speculative Collective Board Game*, infrastructure is the "system that connects people and institutions" (Edwards et al. 2009, 221). It is thus not just the gatekeeping of the institution, but the logics and logistics between them, the artists, the audiences. This connecting system, this framework of movement and advancement, is not only made of art institutional habits, logistics of art production, and cultural policy; it also consists of social and aesthetic ideas about who the artist subject is and should be, as well as differing ideas about the role, function, and value of art. In that sense, the infrastructures surfaced and navigated in *Speculative Collective Board Game* are both material (money to be shared, flights to be boarded, spaces to be filled or emptied) and immaterial (conflicting affects, temporalities of work and life, ideas about what good art is). The infrastructures are what "stand under our worlds," as John Durham Peters has put it (Peters 2015, 33), both materially and immaterially. As I have just analyzed on the basis of the challenge cards in Gudskul's *Speculative Collective Board Game*, artist collectives are materially, economically, and affectively bulky in the infrastructures of the art world: too voluminous, too slow, too expensive, too demanding in the otherwise light and smooth infrastructures of an art world made for productive and efficient solo artists. The movement of artist collectives surface where the chokepoints of the art world are, or what the German media scholar Friedrich Kittler has termed *Engpässe*, understood as tight passes in rivers or in the mountains (Kittler 1986, 12; Clover 2022). Kittler's metaphor is based on "rivers" of data, flows of information, and the chokepoint is where data must pass a signifier; that which filters data into meaning like "alphabetic monopole, grammatology" (Kittler 1986,12, my translation). The *Engpass* is thereby the passage of translation, legitimization, legibility. The word *Engpass* is used both for chokepoints in rivers and in mountains and invites me to think with it: I can imagine how an artist collective does not so elegantly or easily slide through an *Engpass* in the mountains, where usually only the agile shepherd and the local sheep, or the local lonely artist genius for that matter, pass through the cat(sheep)walk. The noun *pass* marks an access-giving moment in the mountains, a mundane and maybe demanding transition, before proceeding to and conquering the high peaks, or descending to the green and luscious valleys. But the verb *to pass* means also to match and resemble the (white) norms and standards, as known through the novel *Passing* (1929) by the Danish-American author Nella Larsen where the mixed-race character Clare Kendry passes unnoticed as white and rich in her marriage, as unmarked, without difference.

As always, when theorists write about infrastructure, I also, after juggling with several metaphors in order to explain infrastructure, hang on to just one: I

choose the trails in the mountains and their *Engpässe* in order to explain the infrastructure of the art world and its access points. Why didn't I choose plumbing and blockages of filth and hair instead of trails in the mountains and their *Engpässe*? I guess I prefer the magnitude of mountains: the human ambition of conquering and crossing the insurmountable greatness, the promise of sublime views – with a scent of the sublime experience when in mountains, following Kantian aesthetic theory – and dangerous, even deadly gaps. The trails in the mountains as man-made creations and made for some and not others to walk on. It is the mountain trails that interest me: Trails cross borders of owned land, connect trade, and give access to territory. Trails are made with intention, providing the route from a via b to c, they suggest certain logistics, and they could have been laid out differently. Thus, the trails, the infrastructures of the art world are also implied with promises and perils. They could have been laid out differently and therefore could have provided access for others.

Temporal suspension: Lack of transparency and orientation requires other ways of listening

If *Speculative Collective Board Game* inverted the chokepoints of the material and immaterial infrastructures of an art world made for efficient flows of solo artists, then how do the infrastructures look from other perspectives in the fifteenth edition of documenta? When the boardgame inverted what the logic and logistics of the artist are at the end of production, namely of an agile and flexible solo artist, then which conceptions of the artist and the curator are at stake at the end of reception? I will now turn from the sphere of production to the broader reception of documenta fifteen to claim that the infrastructures of the art world inverted in *Speculative Collective Board Game* are echoed and made further explicit in the critique of documenta fifteen. After having analyzed one work, *Speculative Collective Board Game*, I will now go on to a second step of analysis to look at how *Fridskul* is perceived by critics as an exhibition space lacking "transparency"; I will then, in the third and final step of analysis, turn to the heated controversies around the "responsibility" of ruangrupa regarding the inclusion of works critical of the state of Israel.

Let us first walk further into *Fridskul*. In the self-instituted school in Fridericianum, kids are playing and learning, and adults are – as I observe them, and myself, by the end of June 2022 – trying to orient themselves on the relatively "messy" ground floor. In the rotunda, the *Fridskul Common Library* has arranged euro pallets with cushions to sit on and scheduled anti-racism training sessions and discus-

sions are announced on flyers. Here, a group of teenagers from a school have found a space to hang out, check their smartphones, and chat. To the right, after the banner asking where the art is, and the table with *Speculative Collective Board Game,* I find an arrangement of sofas around a television, on which a film is showing group members of the three Gudskul collectives who share practices and challenges of working together. The set-up for us watching the film on the television mirrors the set-up of furniture in which the Gudskul members are seated. However, while Gudskul are conversing and discussing, we as audiences at documenta fifteen watch and listen, somehow waiting to discover our own role in this. Although many conversations and workshops are scheduled, and invitations to participate are multiple, this is maybe what I do most of at documenta fifteen: watch, listen, wait. As opposed to watching, understanding, proceeding to next room, the next artwork, perhaps. The dramaturgy is somehow changed, and my scheduled days at documenta (three full days, two half days of traveling), seem scarcely enough to properly engage. Compared to my way of perceiving images, installations, and movies in the previous documenta exhibitions, what I watch and listen to in 2022 is different. In the previous curations from 2007 onwards of Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack, Carolyn Chrystov-Bakargiev, and Adam Szymczyk, in Fridericianum I encountered performances, sculptures, installations, images, film, embroideries. As has been stated by art historian and critic T.J. Demos, documenta fifteen's iteration of the 100-days exhibition was different "in its distributive, collectivist, artist-led models, which foregrounded the pedagogical, discursive, and participative, all clearly opposed to the luxury commodity objects (still) favored by the dominant art market" (Demos 2023, 126). In Fridericianum in 2022, the art objects as we know them are fewer, and what I see is furniture to sit on, paper to write on, materials to touch and alter, books to take down and read. Some materials document processes of exchange which have already happened, showing me a lived sociality which I come to long for, a sociality in the arts which seems more "real" than before, yet remains on the side of production rather than reception, centering the acts of making rather than the "service" of affecting an audience.

The reception of documenta fifteen has been mixed, dividing the critics into those who are finding new ways of being at documenta and appreciate the collective practices, "prefigurative politics," and possibilities of "unlearning" our historical references (Sholette 2022; Petersen 2023; Rothberg 2022), and then – roughly – those who miss the real artworks or just found the artworks safe, boring, and "uniformly forgettable" (Ravini 2022; Fargo 2022). "Where are the works that challenge our Eurocentric gaze or sabotage our inability to seriously think and feel in polytheistic or totemic paths?" asks the art critic Sinziniana Ravini on the Scandinavian online platform *Kunstkritikk*. Ravini thinks documenta fifteen is "too

nice" and she misses "works" and "discourse" that calls for a "sabotage" of Eurocentric thinking (Ravini 2022). She writes that to her, the collective endeavors are about ethics, not aesthetics. I see a tradition of wanting destruction and negative critique that comes deep down from a Eurocentric schooling. Ravini wants *artworks* (as "we" know them) and *discourse*, and she undermines *practice*; she wants negative critique, not affirmative practices. Isn't that also a continuation of a Eurocentric concept of political art, that is, art that interrupts, breaks, disturbs, destroys?

The material and graspable leftovers of collective action in *Fridskul*, documenting an "unreachable" temporality of exchanges that happened before I arrived or will unfold again after my departure, leaves me with the impression of an untransparent collectivity, also a provocation to many critics: documenta fifteen has performed collectivity but not really let people in, not really let people participate, and that it is not *clear* how the role of the audience is conceived. Is collective art just as exclusive and excluding, more than ever exposing that we, the spectators, are not part of the art world itself? Or is the longing for belonging and commonality enhanced, stimulated, and multiplied when collectivity is served and explained, demanding to be a part of it? Or simply: Are the leftovers of collective action asking us to get started on collectivizing actions ourselves? I like to think of the exhibition of collective practices as putting the spectator in another temporality of reception: in a hesitating mode of longing for something *already over* or *not yet* happening, in a moment of impatient *suspension*. This forces two temporal actions: unforgetting what was before us, and reconfiguring the time to come. It forces a way of *listening* (Ruha and Spivak 1988; Campt 2017) to the soft practices, and the playful, anticapitalist, and anticolonial critique between children's slides, board games, gardens, skateboard ramps, composts, and kitchens, while we deal with accepting neither artworks-as-we-knew-them, nor discourse for what we have at hand.

A critique of the lack of *transparency* of how to participate at documenta fifteen is a critique based on an idea of audience participation as only legible as *active* when physically moving or changing things: that documenta fifteen only "works" if one can accept the temporal demands of "invitational art," afford and immerse oneself in the 100 days of lumbung, of gathering, discussing, and harvesting. The critique of the quality of the artworks (West 2022; Ravini 2022), not accepting processual documentation posters, films about working, boards games about producing, kitchens and workshops to engage in as artworks, is drawing a fine line of demarcation between process and product, between informal settings of conviviality and concluding proposals, between ethics and aesthetics. It is thus remarkable how critics tend to analyze and appreciate artworks that are formally clear and recognizable (for themselves), and how they spend more time analyzing

artworks authored by individual artists, despite the omnipresence of collectives.[2] I would characterize the critiques here listed as different crises in the temporality of perception: when a critic – or I myself – become impatient with the processuality and openness of *Fridskul*, it is because we come with a habit of moving and consuming in exhibition spaces, where we know how to read (not *listen* to) artworks and their ways of being political. At documenta fifteen, the audience is confronted with a suspension that both forces them to indulge the less immediate transparency (Ferreira da Silva 2007) and orientation (Ahmed 2006; 2007). Transparency and orientation in exhibition spaces usually make the exhibition space welcoming to European art audiences and critics: we know how to draw lines and navigate. Transparency and orientation are part of the infrastructural matrix of aesthetic experience, and in documenta fifteen the search for "real art," transparent rules of participation, and clear orientation in discourse, are temporally suspended.

What becomes characteristic in the production and reception aesthetics of documenta fifteen is how material and onto-epistemological infrastructures of separation, demarcation, and exclusion are at stake: the artist is preferably a soloist, the artwork is preferably divided from its production process, the rule for participation is preferably transparent. Material and onto-epistemological infrastructures of separation, demarcation, and exclusion provide orientation to audiences: "we" – understood as a European audience of critics and cultural consumers who are already trained at previous documenta exhibitions and use this as our horizon – have been used to move unmarked and undisturbed through the exhibition. This orientation of fitting, "feeling at home," and even feeling compatible and competent, both as an artist (not too bulky, too demanding, too personal) and an audience (not too confused, not without orientation) is temporally gone: an infrastructural *impasse* is at stake. There is a cut in the infrastructure of the European exhibition experience, and the broken flow of movement makes the otherwise hidden infrastructure visible. To come back to the metaphor of infrastructure as trails in the mountains: The trails we move through in the mountains are made by footsteps by people and movements that came before us, we realize. The trails in the mountains are de-naturalized when we do not know how to orient ourselves, when we disagree or simply have no tools for how to proceed, how to pass, and at what pace.

We can understand documenta fifteen as an infrastructural inversion of the ways European artists and audiences used to orient themselves, both on the level of production and reception. Caught in a chokepoint of hindered flow, and of temporal suspension, all parts are invited to orient themselves in new ways. In an essay about suspension as temporal strategy, the artistic research duo Lucie

2 See Sinziana Ravini about Pınar Öğrenci and Hito Steyerl (Ravini 2022).

Tuma and Kiran Kumār write: "A conversation is also a technique of suspension; of suspending conclusion, prolonging listening" (Tuma and Kumār 2022, 16). Suspending the conclusion is to stay with lack of orientation, without progression and passing, for a while. ruangrupa, curating documenta fifteen, used the technique of suspension not only in the ordering of the exhibition spaces, but also in their way of handling the biggest public controversy around documenta fifteen, namely the discussion about the critique of the state of Israel in the cartoonish banner of Taring Padi. In the third analysis, I will now move to how ruangrupa employed impasse and suspension as infrastructural interventions in the public debate about "responsibility" at documenta fifteen.

Lost orientation on the Eurocentric trails, exhaustion at the impasse

An ambition of ruangrupa was to engage the agricultural concept *lumbung* – a rice barn to store shared resources in – and make documenta a place of community gatherings that dealt especially with harmful heritage "rooted in colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchal structures" (ruangrupa 2022). Many critics were busy judging whether ruangrupas lumbung failed or not, either as a way of self-instituting a school, as a new curatorial concept, or as a way of organizing protest (West 2022; Warsza 2022; Sholette 2022). I think a crucial question to think about is who is thought to be part of the community in the rice barn? What kind of public is assembled in lumbung, how is communication supposed to flow and who can hear what happens in lumbung?

As ruangrupa was appointed as the curating collective, the Minister of Education, later Minister of the Arts, in the state Hessen in Germany, Angela Dorn, stated that "documenta is consciously giving room to the non-European view" (Marschall 2019). But as critiques of anti-Semitism were already rising in the months before the opening due to Indonesian Taring Padi's cartoonish mural *People's Justice* from 2002 with imagery of monstrous world leaders (amongst those a military pig wearing a Star of David and a helmet saying "Mossad," and a monstrous caricature of an orthodox Jew with the letters "SS" on his hat), Dorn was – together with many voices in the German public debate – asking for a curator to take responsibility.[3] Taring Padi took the mural *People's Justice* down on June 24,

3 This distrust towards curating collectives as not responsible enough is echoed several times in the German-speaking context, both when in Zurich the explicit feminist, anti-racist trio Rabea

2022, only a few days after the opening, and took full responsibility for their work, asking for a continuation of dialogue on site, and explained the context of the work: how it presented a greedy group of international powerful supporters of Suharto's military dictatorship during the cold war, a dictatorship that led to the genocide of more than 500,000 Indonesians (Taring Padi 2022). "This time collectives were invited. That means there wasn't a responsible curator," Dorn stated (Welt 2022) – and the tenor of critique was clear: The curating artist collective as the artistic signature is invaluable when it comes to responsibility; the content was anti-Semitic; and the Indonesian artists and curators were not educated about the German history of the Shoah and its aesthetics (Sobotta 2022).

Dorn and the shareholders of documenta set up a scientific advisory board to investigate all works at documenta fifteen for anti-Semitic content. In September 2022, the commissioned scientific advisory panel, consisting of mainly European professors, presented their critical revision of all works at documenta fifteen, and ended up suggesting censoring or extensively contextualizing the *Tokyo Reels Film Festival*, a collection of pro-Palestinian propaganda films from the 1960s and 1980s collected by the collective Subversive Film ("Pressemitteilung 10.9.2022", part 1).[4] Other works were questioned, but without the suggestion of being severely censored.[5] The scientific advisory board additionally stressed that there was a conscious lack of *control* in the composition of works from the side of the curators – a word reiterating the need for order as orientation ("Pressemitteilung 10.9.2022", part 2). Finally, the scientific advisory panel concluded that too

Grand, Juliane Hahn, and Michelle Akanji of Theater Gessnerallee stepped down (Marinucci 2022), and when in September 2023 Nora Hertlein-Hull was granted the "solo-responsible management" of Theatertreffen after the quartet of Olena Apchel, Carolin Hochleichter, Joanna Nuckowska, and Martha Hewelt (Strauss 2023).

4 I watched some of the films in June 2022 and had the experience of seeing archival material from a local revolutionary – obviously politicized and biased – battle from another time in history, that due to its anti-Zionist content had had to be hidden for many years in Japan: an example of political protest in exile which provoked neither sympathy not hostility in me, but rather put this struggle in the company of other global forms of protest, historical and contemporary – and always from the perspectives of those being oppressed and therefore also portraying the oppressors in a one-sided way.

5 Writing from a Danish context, the absence of defenders of artistic freedom in the public debate around documenta fifteen is remarkable, albeit this protection of artists is maybe in our historical present mostly used to defend white, racist, or conservative positions. In Denmark, a public discussion on the right to blackface and use of the N-word (with seemingly good intentions) as an expression of artistic freedom took place around the theater play *Black Madonna* by Christian Lollike and Madame Nielsen in 2018. In Sweden in 2021, a report announced that the artistic freedom was "threatened" by diversity and inclusion measurements (Myndigheten för Kulturanalys 2021).

little responsibility was taken and that both curators and organizational team had "(. . .) allowed an anti-Zionist, anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli mood to prevail," referring to the artist collective The Question of Funding and several artist participation in the Boycot, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement ("Pressemitteilung 10.9.2022", part 3). Again, the way of organizing was seen as intentionally out of control, and thus tendentious and harmful.

Public responsabilization in the press stood over dialogue on ground, in the *lumbung*. The artist collective became (again) a bulky clog in the infrastructure of the art world: ruangrupa didn't act according to expectations. Besides, it seems to me that the lack of historical consciousness was ascribed to the guests in Germany, not the German hosts. Or, there was space for a "non-European view" in Kassel, as Dorn put it in 2019, but only on German premises of hierarchical authorship and with the German historization as a non-negotiable context. This showed that the orientation was lost for an Indonesian collective, if it could not move smoothly in the infrastructures of a central European art world, aesthetics, and (art) history. The Finding Committee that had appointed ruangrupa in 2019 as the curating collective stood up to support ruangrupa and their invited artist collectives in September (The Finding Committee 2022), and questioned traditions of bureaucratic legitimization and German administrative culture based on control and certain ways of processing national (Germany-centered) history. As one of the Finding Committee members, curator and former rectorate of the Städl Art Academy in Frankfurt Philippe Pirotte, pointed out, ruangrupa offered *a way of working*, not a theme or concept, as has otherwise been the tradition of documenta and central European curating (Berins 2022). Not only was ruangrupa introducing collective and internationally redistributive ways of working, but they were also introducing *another way of communicating*, being in dialogue, that confused the usual participants and instigated publics on the ground, as Pirotte explains:

> Conversations take place constantly, with the visitors to the exhibition, with the most diverse communities in Kassel, such as the Jewish community, but not through the usual channels such as the press. As much as possible, Ruangrupa and the Lumbung community are constantly accessible "on the ground", for 100 days, for everyone, without privileges. (Berins 2022)

What documenta fifteen suggested was negotiated and "tuned" by powerful German voices in the public debate and thereby also became a battle on authority: Who has the last word about whether documenta fifteen succeeded or not, and on which criteria? Which public counts? ruangrupa was asked to make public statements and participate in the debates – among which all written ones in Germany are, by the way, mostly in German. However, ruangrupa literally proposed

a new language based on Indonesian concepts of sharing and discussing in communities locally (ruangrupa and Artistic Team, 2022) which didn't fit the usual, discourse-based orientation of German critique. A severe disorientation: the historical contextualization of the artistic works was non-European, and the ways of discussing them as well. The outrage in the German press asking for control, German historical references, and responsibility expose what I, through the analytics of whiteness reproduced in institutions as "orientation" suggested by queer feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, would understand as an inherited *Eurocentrism* – maybe also whiteness, but certainly Eurocentrism – in the infrastructures of the art world: a habitual way of orienting and feeling at home in an institution, and requiring that familiarity to continue (Ahmed 2007). It is the critics' and authorities' expectation to the non-European guests to reiterate European-German standards of fitting in, moving, communicating, contextualizing that exposes Eurocentrism as the norm. The Eurocentric norm demands a participation in (German) language-based public debate in the press, responsibilization, and a specific (German) historical horizon.

Employing the words of Black feminist scholar and artist Denise Ferreira da Silva, ruangrupa produced an "onto-epistemological" reorganization of the infrastructures of the Eurocentric art world by suggesting other ways of producing, distributing, seeing, listening, discussing, including, historicizing, and – at the end of the day – living together and sharing. "We are not in documenta fifteen, we are in lumbung one," ruangrupa manifests in their handbook (ruangrupa and Artistic Team 2022, 27) and thereby proposes an Indonesian orientation, an Indonesian way of sharing and moving. But how do we want to share and who has the power to grant shares? As Sara Ahmed writes, sharing means both partaking and participating, but also dividing:

> Whilst sharing is often described as participation in something (we share this or that thing, or we have this or that thing in common), and even as the joy of taking part, sharing also involves division, or the ownership of *parts*. To have a share in something is to be invested in the value of that thing. The word itself we might note comes from the Old English word *scearu*, which refers to cutting or division. So the word 'share' which seems to point to commonality depends on both cutting and division, where things are cut up and distributed amongst others. (Ahmed 2007, 154)

The normative material and immaterial infrastructures of the art world are a question of sharing, but also of cutting and dividing. This is played out in *Speculative Collective Board Game*, where money, time, space, and affects were shared and divided. In *Fridskul*, temporal division of process and product is challenged. The way ruangrupa is criticized for not participating in the right ways in the press and German discourse perform what Ferreira da Silva has called "separa-

bility" (Ferreira da Silva 2017), and the ones separating are the ones in power: Dorn, as an authority in the German public, concretely takes the share away, she handed to the "non-European view" in 2019, and exercises her continued power to both share and separate. Her figure of authority becomes a consolidation of Eurocentrism as something that structurally has the power to grant shares to and deprive shares from non-Europeans. A temporal conflict of continuity versus temporariness becomes obvious: power resides in the position of granting and withdrawing shares and in the privilege of continuing one's homely orientation. I understand this continuity of homeliness, this upholding of the distribution of shares as Eurocentrism, a variation of cultural coloniality defined as a repressive system "of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images. (. . .) followed by the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression" (Quijano 2007, 169).

The lumbung community – the 1,500 artists at documenta fifteen – answered the critique from both Angela Dorn, the Supervisory Board of documenta, the shareholders of documenta, and the scientific advisory board with a united letter stating:

> We refuse Eurocentric – and in this case specifically Germancentric – superiority, as a form of disciplining, managing and taming. (. . .) For months we have continuously faced smearing attacks, humiliations, vandalism, and threats in major media outlets, as well as in the streets and in our spaces. What is even scarier is the normalized dismissal of these actions. (lumbung community 2022)

Not only does the lumbung community also perceive the controlling, corrective, and ordering critique as Eurocentric censorship. They also stress how when – from the beginning – artists on the ground and in the exhibition spaces were met with death threats and harassments accompanying the accusation of anti-Semitism, they were not taken seriously or offered protection and support, but met a silence from the Supervisory Board of documenta combined with a demand of public statements. They thereby point towards a debilitation of the political artist, a tradition that can be traced from historical fascism in the 1930s up to today, when political artists and minoritized positions are cancelled, harassed, and stressed simultaneously, but do not meet official support despite their exhaustion (Puar 2017; Schmidt 2023).[6]

6 As I am writing this chapter in November 2023, after a month of war between Hamas and Israel and a heated debate on whether a demand for ceasefire and expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people equal anti-Semitic sentiments, the discrediting of invited intellectuals with the accusations of anti-Semitism is iterated at the institution of documenta: Mumbai-based author and curator Ranjit Hoskote has been harshly discredited as anti-Semitic in the media for having signed a letter against an anti-BDS policy in 2019. He has resigned his participation in the Finding Committee for documenta16 in 2027 due to the "harshness and condescension" he has met in the "German

Eurocentric infrastructures at documenta fifteen

An infrastructural analysis requires a "walk through" the organization of both the production aesthetics, the reception aesthetics, and the media aesthetics of its circulation with the purpose of finding out what logistics and orientations facilitate the three infrastructural levels (which are never isolated from one another). At documenta fifteen Eurocentrism – the need for soloism, transparency, and responzabilization – was inverted, exposed, and even called out as having paved the trails of movement at documenta. In ruangrupa's curation the production aesthetics moved to the center stage and became an artistic material in itself in order to end exploitative and extractive capitalist logics otherwise inherent in European fine arts and its accumulative, non-sustainable, and individual-based ways of producing. This provincializing of the reception aesthetics and the aesthetic experience of the artwork-as-we-know-it, and the concentration on working conditions and production aesthetics happened on different levels at documenta fifteen. In the content of the artwork itself *Speculative Board Game* negotiated the bulkiness of artist collectives and invoked a soloist infrastructure in the art world. In the inclusive exhibition design of schooling in *Fridskul* and in the ways of organizing in and communicating as the lumbung community locally in Kassel other ways of assembling in the arts were introduced. However, in discourse around documenta fifteen in the German commentariat and in the bearing infrastructures of the institution documenta, there was a continuation of expectation of order, control, and responsabilization. When understanding infrastructure as the "system that connects people and institutions" (Edwards et al. 2009, 365), ruangrupa and the lumbung collective made a cut, a *disconnect* with the Eurocentric art world, as they collectively didn't obey the imperatives of immediately answering critique and censorship articulated by the Supervisory Board of documenta, the shareholders of documenta, and the scientific advisory board. They didn't answer in discourse in the German press, they didn't align with the suggested order, they didn't instantly "take responsibility" embodied in one curator-subject. Instead, they suspended their ways of answering, they inverted the chokepoints and Eurocentric trials by passing through as bulky assembly, and reorganized "on the ground," discussed horizontally with the visitors and their community with a "non-European view" gathered in Kassel. documenta fifteen laid out the ways of working, communicating, and orienting differently and thereby relaunched how

commentariat," insisting that there is a sincere problem when conflating a critique of Israeli policies under Benjamin Netanyahu's government with anti-Semitism (Hoskote 2023). Following Hoskote's resignation, further four members resigned in solidarity (Njami et al. 2023).

to move globally, how to cross borders of owned land, connect, and give access to territory in the mountains we call the art world.

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Emma Sofie Brogaard

Practicing a Black Women's International

Infrastructures of a Black, Left, Feminist Sensibility

> What I had witnessed, especially in Central Asia, convinced me that only a new social order could remedy the American racial injustices I knew so well. I went to the Soviet Union with leftist leanings; I returned home a committed revolutionary.
> Louise Thompson, in McDuffie 2011, 58.

The opening epigraph to this chapter is a quotation by social activist, political organizer, college professor, and intellectual socialite throughout the Harlem Renaissance and beyond, Louise Thompson, later Patterson (1901–1999), whose words address a socialist axis of exchange that has been integral to the cultivation of what I term, following American historian Erik S. McDuffie, a *black left feminist sensibility*. In his book *Sojourning for Freedom*, McDuffie shows how travelling to the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and early 1930s became crucial for several Harlem-based black woman radicals operating in and around the American Left, as it exposed them to a political reality that inspired, enabled, and indeed complicated their efforts to forge a Black Women's International. Although it was never officially labelled as such and cannot be confined to a singular political project or recognized organization, as the Soviet Black International, it nevertheless signifies a practice committed to shaping transnational coalitions that recognized black woman workers as the vanguard of the communist world revolution (McDuffie 2011, 53, 68).

These encounters with the world's first socialist state provided the sojourners not only with political and organizational knowledge in theory and practice but also with embodied experiences of everyday life in a revolutionary society. In 1920, revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin declared that Soviet internationalism's primary goal was to abolish capitalism, its mechanisms of surplus value and private property, and to oppose Western imperial power structures, with the objective of putting an end to the subjection of *any* worker, regardless of their racialized or gendered identification (Lenin 1965, 144–151 and Kiaer 2017, Jan. 6*). The sheer radicality of this socialist revolutionizing of politico-economic structures is conveyed by the contemporary Russian poet and philosopher Keti Chukhrov in *Practicing the Good* (2020). With the notion of the *ontological outside*, Chukhrov suggests an understanding of historical socialism as an indispensable experiment with the sensorial registers of lived experience, when such registers extended beyond a capitalist reality (Chukhrov 2020). Yet, despite the seeming progressiveness of the Soviet Union, black women radicals often found themselves caught between what has later been acknowledged as masculinist conceptions of black liberation within the

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Black International (Baldwin 2002, 131) and a white and seemingly essentialist feminism of the New Soviet Woman (Kiaer 2017, Jan. 6). However, they persisted in living and working within and against these Soviet policies and the extensive environment of state-sanctioned visual cultural production that gave these abstract politics sensuous form and expression, as art historian Christina Kiaer, scholar of Slavic film and literature Robert Bird, and artist Zachary Cahill show in the 2017 exhibition catalogue *Revolution Every Day* (Bird, Kiaer, Cahill 2017).

McDuffie recasts the notion of black left feminism originally coined by American literary scholar Mary Helen Washington to describe a "a path-breaking brand of feminist *politics* that centers working-class women by combining black nationalist and American Communist Party (CPUsA) positions on race, gender, and class with black women radicals' own lived experiences" (McDuffie 2011, 3, my emphasis). Although, as he emphasizes, sojourners like Thompson surely wouldn't have identified as feminists at the time, as it was associated with the bourgeois and separatist National Women's Party (McDuffie 2011, 5), the term black was used by Thompson, and strategically so. Rather than being preoccupied with differences in geographic heritage and ontological belonging, and cautions of creating fractions, she deployed black as a capacious term to position and organize black communities and especially black women workers to secure them tangible achievements (Gilyard, 4). This pragmatic and coalitional approach for political organizing led black women radicals to agitate on multiple fronts, as they indeed "saw no contradiction in pursuing interracial, left-wing, separatist, liberal, local, and internationalist political strategies, often simultaneously" (McDuffie, 14). It is exactly because and in respect of this pragmatic and coalitional approach that I as a white, Scandinavian, female scholar allow myself to use my position to engage with the multiple practices of the Black Women's International in the hope that my research will not only contribute to the work already done to emphasize the significance of these practices in history as well as art history but, with any luck, also function as a means to extend their infrastructural aesthetics into the 21st century, and specifically into the World anno 2024, where aggression wars and genocides surely make the conditions of the most vulnerable a concern and responsibility of everyone.

In this chapter I describe how their persistent work cultivated a black left feminist sensibility as a political project and as an aesthetic practice: a practice which on a representational level rendered visible otherwise invisiblized infrastructures of black working-class women's domestic and reproductive labor through aesthetic productions displaying race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression. Beyond concrete aesthetic productions, the work of sojourning black women radicals can be regarded as an aesthetic practice in and of itself. Nurturing a collective, transnational, coalitional, interdependent, material and lived social infrastructure, it upheld the primary struggle of the Black Women's International, namely

that "black women's freedom was essential for dismantling all systems of human oppression" (McDuffie, 90).

The conceptual framework of this chapter is the infrastructural aesthetic practices of the Black Women's International that shaped the emergence of a black, left feminist sensibility in the exchange between the Harlem-based black women radicals and the Soviet Union in the early twentieth century. With this framing I align with a growing body of scholarship on "black left feminism" and "the radical black female subject," such as McDuffie's aforementioned research, Dayo F. Gore's 2011 monograph *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, and Charisse Burden-Stelly and Jodi Dean's 2022 collection of Black communist women's political writings *Organize, Fight, Win*, as well as biographies such as Barbara Ransby's *Eslanda* on Eslanda Robeson (2013), Carol Boyce Davies's *Left of Karl Marx* on Claudia Jones (2007), Gerald Horne's *Race Woman* on Shirley Graham Du Bois (2000), and Keith Gilyard's *Louise Thompson: A life of Struggle for Justice* (2017). Besides emphasizing black women radicals as significant individual figures in a history that often omits them, this scholarship manifests how their entangled political, artistic, intellectual, and personal efforts in work and life not only had real effects on the material conditions in their respective contemporary environments; it also influenced CPUSA and shaped the understanding of communism in America and internationally. Furthermore, it shows how their work has come to serve as a crucial foundation for later feminist, black feminist, black radical, and civil rights formations from the 1960s and 1970s up until now.

Using the work and travels of Louise Thompson as a prism through which to reflect black women's internationalism as a myriad of imbricated practices, in this chapter I specifically unfold a line of political–aesthetic exchange appearing between three instances of visual production. On a guided group tour through the Central Asian republics in 1932, Thompson found great inspiration in the liberation of oppressed peoples, and Uzbek cotton workers in particular, from czarist repression and compared their situation to the exploitation of African Americans under Jim Crow. She was especially concerned with the improved status for women workers, which the practical application of Leninist national policies had brought about (Gilyard 2017, 93–94). When leaving Uzbekistan, the African American group released an official statement saying how they would "carry the warm proletarian greetings of the various workers and peasants of Uzbekistan to the black and white workers and peasants of the United States" (Gilyard 2017, 94). It is precisely the exchange between examples of Soviet visual representation of Central Asian women worker's liberation under socialist rule and black women radical's adoption and challenging of these sensibilities in their own visual practices that I am tracing in this chapter.

To be clear, I am not claiming any concrete reception or direct referencing between specific persons or aesthetic productions, as there are no archival records of such exact points of exchange. Rather, I trace the emergence of the black left feminist sensibility within a wider elaboration of collective forms in and around these visual productions. To approach the different layers of this exchange, I suggest using the notion of infrastructure framed by anthropologist Brian Larkin in his 2013 article "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure." Larkin conceptualizes infrastructure as "built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (Larkin 2013, 328). Or, as he puts it with the often-quoted one-liner: "Infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter" (Larkin 2013, 329). He thus defines their peculiarity by noting that they are both things and the relation between things. But moreover, Larkin emphasizes the necessity of also paying attention to the formal aspects of infrastructure, which are not merely material or technical but semiotic and aesthetic vehicles addressing and constituting subjects (Larkin 2013, 329). With this dual notion of the politics and aesthetics of infrastructure, it becomes possible to discern the different, however mutually constitutive, infrastructural operations of the exchange shaping the black left feminist sensibility. On one level, it captures the material, politico-economic socialist infrastructures providing the primary conditions for this transatlantic exchange. Yet, on another level it addresses the aesthetic infrastructures of sensibility distributing meaning and subjectivity, shaping a sense of the political realities.

Thus, with a theoretical elaboration of Chukhrov's conception of the ontological outside, I continue this chapter by outlining the Soviet political undertakings of The Black International and The New Woman. I argue that the vast production of visual culture that accompanied these politics gave form to the ontological outside by sensuously shaping the implications of the new socialist reality. Focusing on the Soviet 1935 biopic *Tajihon Shadieva*, directed by Liudmila Snezhinskaia, and Louise Thompson's 1936 article "Toward a Brighter Dawn," I identify an exchange between, on one hand, the visual culture representing the ambiguous Soviet engagement in the liberation of women in the Central Asian republics, and on the other black women radicals' representations of the conditions of black women's domestic and reproductive work in what was called "the Bronx slave market." I argue that the aesthetic productions simultaneously shaped and negotiated their political surroundings by rendering invisibilized infrastructural conditions perceptible, and how in particular Thompson's display of what she terms *triple exploitation* manifested a black left feminist sensibility that recognized black women workers' leading role in the struggle for revolution.

Beyond enabling an analysis of how different collective forms and sensibilities were conveyed through aesthetic practices of visual production, the theoretical in-

frastructural approach allows for a crucial acknowledgement of the coalitional, collective, and caring labor underpinning the Black Women's International as well as its concrete aesthetic outcome. Most often, these infrastructural practices are eclipsed by a western art historical fixation on the aesthetic product, that is, the artwork. Yet, in the case of black women's internationalism, it would seem that neither product nor practice has enjoyed much art historical recognition. In the final part of this chapter, I question the distinction of aesthetics and politics derived from a classical Kantian aesthetic theory guarding much art historical methodology, which has left black women's internationalism as an absence in the archives. Introducing feminist cultural theorist Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt's notion of *production aesthetics* in a closing analysis of the infamous and never produced film *Black and White,* a collaboration between the USSR and Thompson's group of African Americans travelling in Central Asia, I suggest how the collective practices of black women's internationalism can be regarded as an infrastructure aesthetics in and of itself.

The sensibility of an ontological outside

The Soviet Union had its own motives behind its engagement with African Americans, from positioning itself internationally as *the* alternative to western capitalist power to creating geopolitical allegiances in Africa (Baldwin 2002, 37). But while acknowledging the unequal power dynamics in this socialist exchange, I am uninterested in writing them off as simple matters of exploitation as this would dismiss the numerous ways in which individuals, communities and nations in the African diaspora have turned to the USSR with their own agendas (Prashad 2007). Rather, I intend to take seriously the political experiment of the Soviet Union and thus follow the movement initiated by Keti Chukhrov in *Practicing the Good*, where she demonstrates that "historical socialism" has been left out of most theoretical works on communist history because a Cold War dualism is still at work in much implicitly Western thinking. Instead of disregarding it as just a failed political experiment, she emphasizes how it needs to be taken into careful consideration because it is a radical historical example of an ontological "outside," offering a critique of the capitalist world (view) which became dominant with the end of the Cold War: "Hence, historical socialism is an indispensable experiment that, due to politico-economic turnover, manifests what happens to ontology, ontics, the principal epistemes of being, production, sociality, and culture when they remain without the surplus value economy and private property" (Chukhrov 2020, 15). What Chukhrov suggests is that "even with its failures and drawbacks, a society that abolished private prop-

erty is more advanced than any other existing social formation thus far" (Chukhrov 2020, 16). In other words, the consequences of Soviet communism were so far-reaching that they are difficult for anyone situated within capitalism to understand, as they not only implied ideological changes in politico-economic structures but fundamentally altered onto-epistemological registers with which to comprehend, interpret and experience reality (Chukhrov 2020, 21).

Chukhrov mobilizes this impressive philosophical undertaking to suggest a way out of the conundrum of epistemic inconsistencies caused by the capitalist premises in the seemingly anti-capitalist canon of Western philosophy. In this chapter I am holding on to her idea of the ontological outside as the setting providing the infrastructural prerequisites for the exchange between the Soviet Union and black women radicals: a communist condition that cultivated new ways of sensing, being, and being together, and thus enabled the emergence of a black left feminist sensibility.

With the theoretical framing of the infrastructures of an ontological outside, I am referring to sensibility more specifically in the understanding of the inseparability of *politics* and *aesthetics* as described by Brian Larkin in "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure" (2013). Larkin unfolds one aesthetic dimension of infrastructure with the Aristotelian concept of *aesthesis*, the sensorial perception of lived reality: "Aesthetic in this sense is not a representation but an embodied experience governed by the ways infrastructures produce ambient conditions of everyday life" (Larkin 2013, 336). In other words, how material and technical infrastructures facilitate a sensing of a given political reality, or, as he describes it in a context of modernity, "a process by which the body, as much as the mind, apprehends what it is like to be modern, mutable and progressive" (Larkin 2013, 337). When Larkin in this context refers to the Soviet Union as an example of governance, which effectively operated in the aesthetic dimensions of infrastructure and constituted its citizens through their various modes of address, it is exactly this inseparability of the politics and aesthetics of a communist sensibility of the ontological outside that I am addressing in this chapter.

It might seem an epistemic inconsistency in itself to combine Chrukhrov's conception of the ontological outside with an idea of infrastructure. The very idea of a political setting situated *outside* of Western ontology not only obscures the vast global geopolitical influence of the Second World but also contradicts the theoretical relationality and movement implied with the notion of infrastructure. Moreover, it makes any *exchange* with the black women radicals working from and against the literal center of capitalism, New York City, incomprehensible. My insistence on precisely this theoretical framing, however, is because it allows for an understanding of the radicality of a society that had abolished capitalism and private property and as a consequence fundamentally altered ways of sensing, being and

relating. Addressing the sojourner's encounter with this radical outside, the notion of infrastructure displays the multiple infrastructural dimensions conditioning the exchange, such as the political undertaking, the economic support, and the culture of visual production. Finally, in the context of art history, it calls for a mode of analysis that does not accentuate conceptions as artwork, artist, and individual genius as the primary modes of art, which a Western discipline has reproduced since Kant. Instead, it calls attention to the modes of production, interdependency and communality that condition any kind of aesthetic appearance.

Between the Black International and the New Woman

The change of sensibility wasn't simply an aesthetic side-effect of the revolutionary transformation of material and economic infrastructures but an intended part of a wide-reaching visual political strategy in the Soviet Union. After the revolutions in 1917 the new Bolshevik government enacted several different policies during the 1920s. The initiatives that shaped the historical context of this chapter appeared as the elaboration of the Black International and the decrees on the New Woman. Besides the unique, progressive, yet also ambivalent, implications of these distinct policies, what makes them significant is how they were supplemented by an extensive state-sanctioned production of visual culture. More than serving geopolitical and educational ends, the production of Soviet iconography was part of an imaginative praxis. They represented an effort to translate the abstract legislation of the new Soviet reality into not only what it meant but what it *looked like* – that is, creating an aesthetics of a new, everyday socialist life (Bird, Kiaer, Cahill, 2017).

One of the most famous political projects underpinning the Soviet engagement with anti-imperialism and the liberation of black workers was articulated on the Fourth Congress of the Comintern in 1922 as the so-called "Theses on the Negro Question." The Theses were a response to Jamaican American poet and activist Claude McKay, who in an address to the Comintern had claimed that African Americans were the vanguard in the struggle of an international Communist revolution (Baldwin 2002, 47–55). In 1928 the Theses were followed up by the more binding "Resolutions on the Negro Question" (Kiaer 2021, 99). Drafted by political activist Harry Haywood, the Resolutions formulated the so-called "Black Belt Thesis" that advocated for the self-determination of black workers in the American South. With this, the Comintern made African Americans and American racial(izing) oppression central to internationalist communist policy. The Black International didn't use the

term *anti-racism* but did call for the elimination of "white chauvinism." And even though the Resolutions clearly failed in eliminating racializing discrimination, neither within nor beyond communist ranks, they still articulated a rather unforeseen example of an explicit and extensive state-supported anti-racist politics and marked a vivid shift in Soviet representations of racialized persons (Kiaer 2021, 100).

Even though African American women were involved in the shaping of black internationalism, such as educator, radical activist, and politician Williana Burroughs, the project was a highly masculinist endeavor, almost exclusively focusing on the black male worker (Baldwin 2002, 131). This is reflected in the twenty-five demands put forward in the Resolutions, of which only one addressed the experience of black women workers:

> The Negro women in industry and on the farms constitute a powerful potential force in the struggle for Negro emancipation. By reason of being unorganized to an even greater extent than male workers, they are the most exploited section. The A.F. of L. bureaucracy naturally exercises toward them a double hostility, by reason of both their color and sex. It therefore becomes an important task of the party to bring the Negro women into the economic and political struggle. (The Communist International, 1975)

In the revised version of the Resolutions from 1930 there was no mention of black women workers at all. I am highlighting this quote and its subsequent removal for several reasons. First, it suggests an understanding of the interrelatedness of gendering and racializing mechanisms affecting women *as* workers, which becomes essential for the emerging sensibility. Second, the removal of the demand attests to the historic incompatibility of ideas of women's emancipation and black liberation, which was seemingly as apparent in the Soviet Union as in America (Kelley 2022, 38). This gap left black women radicals caught between a male-oriented formation of black internationalism and a white conception of feminism. What, then, also lies behind the above quote – a rare example of an official convergence of the two struggles – is the Soviet political engagement with women's equality. Exactly because it appeared as a separate politics, the next paragraph bears the risk of the redundancy of outlining *yet another* genealogy of Soviet politics – which is exactly a compositional result of my attempt at juxtaposing two historical struggles for rights and equality that consequently reject each other. Yet, I insist on the importance of creating this tension in the content and form of this chapter because beyond the Black International it was the recognition of feminized, domestic work as labor in Soviet politics on New Woman that constituted the background for the Resolutions' call for the organization of black women workers.

After Red October in 1917, the Bolsheviks issued a series of decrees that gave women the same rights as men within legislation on marriage and family. In

keeping with classical Marxist convictions, they insisted that "women's oppression was an effect of capitalist conditions of exploitation, and that proletarian revolution would liberate all workers, male and female" (Kiaer 2017; Jan. 6, Jan. 12). But, as the famous Russian revolutionary and political theorist Lev Trotsky also expressed, it is one thing to legislate about gendered equity on a political level; it is something completely different to shape actual equality in the lived everyday life, or *byt* – the Russian term for "way of life" or "everyday life." Previously a neutral term, *byt* bore at this postrevolutionary point in time negative connotations of the "petty, repetitive and material daily existence weighed down by objects" and stood in opposition to the idea of *bytie:* a "spiritually meaningful existence." In 1923, Trotsky presented the concept of the *novyi byt,* the new everyday life, which under socialism would "transcend the materiality of *byt* and bring it closer to a cultured socialist *bytie*" (Kiaer 2017, Jan. 12).

Ironically, Trotsky appropriated many of these ideas from the Russian revolutionary and Marxist theoretician Alexandra Kollontai, as Kiaer has argued (Kiaer 2017, Jan. 12). In a 1920 text titled "The Dawn of Collective Housekeeping," Kollontai describes this revolutionary transition as the dawning of a new day for the Soviet women, in which organized collective housekeeping – as public canteens, childcare and laundries – will lift them out of the dim and dirty "domestic yoke" in order to render their life "richer, happier, freer and more complete" (Kollontai 1920, Jan. 9). This new communist reality would not only literally bring the women out of their homes and into the daylight of public, collective work but also give them time for "healthy recreation" and "instructive readings," which would *enlighten* them metaphorically. Despite the radicality of this theory, in practice, however, it meant domestic work would be outsourced to a "special category of working women who will do nothing else" (Kollontai 1920, Jan. 9). This essentialist understanding of gender is characteristic of the formation of the New Soviet Woman, and clearly has its limitations, as it was still unthinkable that Soviet men could *also* contribute to this labor (Kiaer 2017, Jan. 6). Furthermore, it devalues traditionally feminized, material reproductive work in comparison to traditionally masculine immaterial and enlightened productive work. Yet, seen in the light of its own contemporaneity, this attempt to handle the gendered burden of unwaged domestic work and to acknowledge women as workers and thus complete subjects of the Soviet state was an unprecedented and progressive revolution of the everyday.

These organizational and theoretical transformations of lived life in the new Soviet reality, caused by the politics of the Black International and the New Woman, were highly present in visual culture and appeared in everything from posters, magazines and films in the 1920s and early 1930s. This omnipresent aesthetic production was a part of the creation of a sensibility of the ontological outside of capitalism. And although they rarely aligned, the effects as well as the

promises of women's emancipation and black liberation provided material, political and aesthetic infrastructures that enabled and intrigued many black women radicals to sojourn to the Soviet Union.

Tajihon Shadieva – The dawn of an Uzbek female worker collectivity

The Soviet visual engagement with Central Asian republics, ethnic differences and women's emancipation appears to be a rare example of the ideals of the New Woman and Black International becoming tangent in aesthetic production. *Appear* being the operative word because the Soviet approach to domestic politics differed significantly from the internationalism of the Comintern, a point to which I will return. An example of such visual production is the short 1935 black-and-white silent biopic *Tajihon Shadieva* directed by Liudmila Snezhinskaia, best known for being a part of film director Alexander Medvedkin's agitational cine-train, about the life of one of the biggest Uzbek celebrities of the 1930s, Tajihon Shadieva (1905–1981), who stars as her grown self in the film. The film is a cinematic interpretation of Valeriia Gerasimova's 1934 novel *The Prize*, which in more elaborated detail unfolds how 11-year-old Shadieva was sold for 200 rubles into an abusive marriage with an Uzbek healer; how she gradually achieves freedom, loses her veil, and gains self-determination through her engagement with the communist ideology and Soviet party-structures; and how she finally becomes a director of a collective farm and a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Uzbekistan (Gerasimova 1934, Nov. 22, 23, 25, 26). But more than simply depicting the happy ending of Soviet socialism and representing the communist hero par excellence, the film carefully navigates the ambivalence of the veiling and unveiling of Shadieva. This focus not only establishes the veil and its removal as significant narrative pivots but stages a visual negotiation of particularly Western, morally loaded juxtapositions of the binary notions of light/darkness, clarity/opacity, and individual freedom/enslaved property. With this negotiation of the veil as a symbolic visual metaphor, the film gives form to a Soviet aesthetic in which a new collectivity of Uzbek female workers appears.

Compositionally the 19-minute film begins in 1934 with smiling workers picking cotton on a collective farm under the determined yet kind supervision of Shadieva. It then cuts back to an earlier scene in 1916 where the young Shadieva is sold to a healer; from there it skips chronologically forward to her adult life, first as a veiled wife in 1924 then to her public unveiling in 1926 and finally back to the initial present moment of the collective cotton harvesting. The brutality of

the selling of Shadieva is made manifest by the veiling of the child, as the poor yet idyllic childhood scene of siblings laughing and playing with sun in their faces (Snezhinskaia, 06:08) is brought to an abrupt end when two veiled women cover the child with a black, heavy horsehair *chakravan* and bustle her away (07:54). With the black, coarse texture covering her whole body, Shadieva appears more like a small indefinable creature – a dark spot on the screen – than a human child (8:51) (Fig. 1). The veiling does then not only mark an end to her childhood but also to her individuality and freedom, as her features become opaque and she is traded and treated as a piece of property, that is, enslaved. Later, a close up of the grown-up Shadieva shows her behind a more transparent veil, yet the dimmed focus makes her expression somewhat indeterminable between sad and resigned, and the symbolic subjection of the veil is evident (09:09) (Fig. 1).

But where the initial simplistic figurative juxtaposition of veil, darkness, opacity, property and enslavement seem quite unmistakable, the scene of the public unveiling is much more ambivalent. It is 1926 and a huge, buzzing crowd applauses Shadieva as she speaks from a stage. Shortly after she removes her veil to ecstatic cries from the crowd, she covers her face with her hands and leaves the stage (14:51). Whether signaling feelings of disgrace in breaking with Uzbek tradition or a reaction to her trauma, the brightness of the new socialist daylight is not unconditionally positive. Yet, the immediately following frames show distinctly outlined close ups of Shadieva wearing a uniform, telling her life story to the attentive workers on the collective farm in 1934 (15:49) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1: Snezhinskaia, Liudmila (dir). *Tajihon Shadieva.* 1935.

Afterwards follows a sequence of close ups that resemble the opening sequence of several detailed, weathered faces of young and old – mainly female but also male – Uzbek workers smiling to each other while picking cotton (01:45). The contrast between Shadieva hiding her face and the sequence of unashamed, fully exposed faces emphasizes how the singular event of unveiling doesn't give Shadieva back her freedom as independent individuality. Standing alone in the spotlight apart from the crowd isn't a Soviet solution. Rather, it is when Shadieva is sitting as part

of a working collective taking a break in the sun that she is exposed finally with distinct visual clarity. Soviet socialism's overcoming of the veiling, literally and visually, is thus not portrayed as the emergence of a free, individual woman – as the ontological norm of the Western binary would have it – but rather as the emergence a collective of working women, who in a network of exchanged glances recognize each other *as* workers. In line with Kollontai's metaphoric language, this cinematic production of the *novyi byt* has liberated women from the invisible darkness of domestic reproductive work and aesthetically exposed the dawning of a soviet ontology with the visualization of an Uzbek female worker collectivity.

The simplicity with which the unquestionably good Soviet power overcomes Uzbek mysticism and tradition, violence, poverty, child abuse, and enslavement in *Tajihon Shadieva* is obviously questionable, if not genuinely problematic. This kind of representation of the achievements of socialist advancement was, nevertheless, characteristic of the Soviet visual production of the *novyi byt* in the Central Asian republics, as Kiaer writes: "Yesterday's women were veiled, treated as chattel, and forcibly kept illiterate; today, under Soviet power, they have emerged into visibility and possess all the advantages of (Soviet) civilization: they can work, study and be supported by the cooperative institutions of novyi byt." (Bird and Kiaer 2017, Nov. 18). This representative strategy was partly encompassed by Stalin's formulation of a new constitution of the USSR, Friendship of the Peoples – the policy of domestic governance that Stalin famously expressed as "national in form, socialist in content" (Martin 2001, 12). That is, an extensive, organized support of national identity and ethnic expressions – as long as each nation committed to socialist rule. Yet, although the USSR had proclaimed itself anti-imperialist, this "affirmative action empire," as historian Terry Martin argues in the book of the same title, constituted a particular form of socialist imperialism, creating a clear hierarchy between the Russian center and the Soviet periphery, and keeping control with economies while using ethnic diversity as a legitimizing ornament – all the while preserving an outward image of being the vanguard of the international fight against Western imperialism.

This unequal power infrastructure was reproduced in much of the visual production of Central Asian women from that period, who were often orientalized, accompanied by brightly colored geometric designs resembling national fabrics, and always displayed as inferior to their more advanced white, Slavic Russo-Soviet big sisters (Bird and Kiaer 2017, Nov. 27). And while *Tajihon Shadieva* could not be exempted from this critique, it nevertheless distinguishes itself from much of this visual culture as it has an important element of self-representation. As an Uzbek woman herself, Tajihon Shadieva embodies an entanglement of women's emancipation and ethnic liberation and is thus rendered politically and aesthetically visible through the emergence of an Uzbek collectivity of female workers.

A graphic monument to triple exploitation: "Toward A Brighter Dawn" in America

This "fight against all types of enslavement," to reference a Lenin quote used on many posters depicting Central Asian women (Bird and Kiaer 2017, Nov. 27), made an impression on the group of African American sojourners, including Louise Thompson and the famous Harlem Renaissance poet and social activist Langston Hughes, who after the production of the film *Black and White* was shut down in 1932 went on a guided tour through Central Asia. According to poet and scholar Keith Gilyard's 2017 biography of Thompson, *Louise Thompson Patterson: A life of Struggle for Justice*, Thompson and Hughes met with Vice President Jahan Obidava:

> who at the age of eleven had been sold by her parents to a man for 150 rubles and became his fourth wife. In 1923 she became one of the first women in Uzbekistan to discard the veil. She vowed to never again live under her husband's authority; instead, she attended school and became literate. She was elected to office in 1929. (Gilyard, 2017, 93)

Although Obidava was not Shadieva, their resemblance is significant, and Thompson noted her impression with this new status for women, as well the (apparent) Soviet overcoming of the earlier czarist repression of ethnic minorities. She wrote down these experiences for future lectures, wanting "to contribute to the construction of a strong narrative about the feasible application of Soviet principles as a solution to US-style racism" (Gilyard 2017, 91). Even though there are no archival records of any *actual* interaction between Thompson and the Soviet aesthetic production, the omnipresence of this visual culture as an intended infrastructure of the revolutions and the shaping of a Soviet way of life, *novyi byt,* makes it highly unlikely that this intellectual and cultural elite of the Harlem Renaissance didn't experience it. Thompson's 1936 article reflects an exchange of sensibilities with the Soviet ideals of the New Woman and Black International, as it clearly both imitates and challenges them.

"Toward A Brighter Dawn" is a reportage from "The National Negro Congress" held in Chicago in 1936 and published in the CPUSA journal *The Woman Today*, where it stands out amongst other articles such as "Married in Moscow," recipes for communist knitting, and beauty guides to get the "right skin tone" with soap. But other than simply breaking with the norm of white middle-class content to communist women, what made the article revolutionary in its own way was the way in which Thompson sketched out three scenes of exploitation imbued by the vestiges of antebellum slavery. Through this she conveys a heretofore unprecedented analysis of the "triple exploitation" faced by many black

women workers. In the article this infrastructural analysis creates the foundation for the congress' concluding call for the coalitional organization of domestics, housewives, and professionals.

The opening scene depicts a week for black domestic workers in the American South: "EARLY dawn on any Southern Road. Shadowy figures emerge from the little unpainted, wooden shacks alongside the road. There are Negro women trudging into town to the Big House to cook, to wash, to clean, to nurse children – all for two, three dollars for the whole week" (Thompson 1936, 14/30). These women might get a few hours rest in church, "but Monday is right after Sunday, and the week's grind begin all over." With this description of the repetitive, underpaid grind in 'The Big House', Thompson draws a clear parallel between antebellum slavery and the conditions for black domestic workers. The following dawn resonates just as clearly with this history of enslaved labor:

> Early dawn on the plantations of the South. Dim figures bend down in the fields, to plant, to chop, to pick the cotton from which the great wealth of the South has come. Sharecroppers, working year in, year out, for the big landlord, never to get out of debt. The sharecropper's wife – field worker by day, mother and housewife by night. (Thompson 1936, 14)

The scenario continues with the scrubbing, boiling, and cooking done by the sharecropper's wife, who "never have to worry about leisure-time." Between these two scenes of underpaid reproductive work *out of* the home, and unpaid reproductive work *in* the home, Thompson conjures a dawn, which doesn't signify, as in Kollontai, a new beginning, a new reality, nor a bright emergence of a new collectivity. Instead, the dawn appears as the moment when the exploitation starts all over again, when dim, anonymous figures repeat domestic duties in order to survive.

After the first two scenes, Thompson describes a curious occurrence in "the same dawn in Bronx Park, New York," where black women come from the subway and sit down on newspapers on the dewy park benches. "Why do they sit down so patiently?" Thompson asks rhetorically. The response immediately follows: "*Here we are, for sale for the day. Take our labor. Give us what you will. We must feed our children and pay high rent in Harlem. Ten cents, fifteen cents an hour! That won't feed our families for a day, let alone pay rent. You won't pay more? Well, guess that's better than going back to Harlem after spending your last nickel for carfare.*" Thompson concludes the scene by stating: "The Bronx 'slave market' is a graphic monument to the bitter exploitation of this most exploited section of the American working population – the Negro woman" (Thompson 1936, 14).

This graphic monument appears visually on the second page of the article where a black and white photography shows "A part of the Bronx 'slave market'".



Fig. 2: Louise Thompson, "Toward A Brighter Dawn" in *The Woman Today*, 1936.

Standing in line on the pavement, with their backs against a brick wall and a shop front, the black women workers are neatly dressed wearing black coats, hats and high heels. The women don't appear to be interacting, each standing a few feet from the next, with the exception of the women with their backs to the photographer, the so-called "housewives" who are bargaining to get a good deal. The article doesn't provide any credentials for the photographer, and its cropping and quality suggest that it has been captured for the purpose of quickly documenting the scenario from the other side of the street. Nevertheless, the composition alongside Thompson's scenic build up makes the expression of this graphic monument very clear: With the centering of black figures displayed in public, each separated from the next, almost suspended in time until their labor, or *they*, are bought, the reference to the auction block of the antebellum South is obvious. Thompson, in other words, visually manifests that the phenomenon of domestics 'for sale for the day' in Bronx, is not just any form of exploitation, nor a vague consequence of abolished oppression, but is in fact a monumental display of slavery anno 1936.

With this graphic monument to present day slavery, Thompson exposes the "most exploited section of the American working population" (Thompson 1936, 14), the black female workers, who in most parts of America were only allowed to work where they could not be seen and thus often became "domestics by default" (Washington 2011). The visual recognition of these women as a *section* of workers in many ways resembles the socialist aesthetic in Snezhinskaia's film, where the *novyi byt* was depicted as the emergence of a collectivity of Uzbek women workers. Yet, de-

spite the clear similarity in the socialist recognition of a female, ethnically minoritized workforce, the geo-political contexts of the representations differ. America had not undergone a socialist revolution, and Thompson, therefore, did not have the same political legitimation, reason, or injunction to represent capitalist exploitation as already overcome. But a more significant difference is that where the liberation of minority ethnic women in *Tajihon Shadieva* is a liberation *from* the yoke of reproductive domesticated work – which according to Kollontai's text was devalued compared to productive work in the fields or on the factory floors, and was still to be carried out by "a special category of women who will do nothing else" (Kollontai 1920, Jan. 9) – Thompson challenges this essentialist feminism. Exactly by centering this "special category of working women" and showing its genealogy at work in the present, Thompson cultivates a sensibility to the intersection of gendering and racializing infrastructures that governs the exploitation of these black women workers.

To express this sensibility, she coins the term *triple exploitation* – which addresses the exploitation they face in the combination of being both gendered as female, racialized as black, and being workers. This advancement of black women's concerns is what McDuffie conceptualizes as the forging of a *black, left, feminist sensibility,* that according to Mary Helen Washington "challenged the CP's representations of workers as white and male shifting the terms of radicalism to the site of domestic work rather than the factory floor, and insisting that black women were the vanguard of revolutionary change" (Washington 2011). With this sensibility, Thompson could be said to return to the deleted quote in the 1930 Resolutions, but while simultaneously challenging the masculinist assumptions of the Black International and the racist implications in the New Woman, thus operationalizing the in-between in the International Left, using it to contribute to the forging of a Black Women's International.

Black and White – production aesthetics with and against the archive

Despite the historic monumentality of "Toward a Brighter Dawn" and the influence Thompson and her coining of the term *triple oppression* had on the International Left, as well as on later black feminist understandings of intersectionality, her work and presence is often absent from art historical research on the exchanges between Soviet communism and black radicalism. And even though she contributed to the cultivation of the aesthetic infrastructures shaping a black left feminist sensibility, by rendering visible the exploitative intersection of racializing and gendering infrastructures in black women's domestic and reproductive

labor, her work is rarely considered art, nor she an artist, as it is the case with for instance Langston Hughes. Often, she is not mentioned at all.

This disciplinary exclusivity poses some challenges to the comparative art historical analysis in this chapter, since this *aesthetic* practice of the Black Women's International becomes hard to distinguish from what is often categorized as *political* activism, social work, and intellectual effort. It is thus easy to question *what* exactly in the exchange between the Soviet Union and black women radicals would make it a concern for art history? The theoretical response of this chapter is that the aesthetic infrastructures are deeply entangled with material, legislative, economic, and ideological, as they're both conditioned by them and give them perceptible form – partly through means of visual production as my analyses have shown – which makes any need for strict distinction between the aesthetic and the political irrelevant. But beyond this, the question could be reversed. One could ask what in the art historical methodology would reject this aesthetic practice from its archives? Or put as an issue of infrastructure, what kind of work gets supported in a way that grants it the recognition of being art(work)? How do those infrastructures regulate what gets preserved, archived, and remembered? And how can a critical art historian both approach and negotiate this regulation – balancing the importance of the privileges that come with archival inclusion and the necessity of rejecting any exclusionary infrastructures underpinning a world of inequality and exploitation?

The classic notions of *artist* and *art*, derived from Kantian aesthetic theory, that still undergirds much art historical research tend to privilege the individual, as well as the singular object. And although my point of entrance to the aesthetic practice of the Black Women's International has been Thompson, it is important to stress that, rather than a single pioneering genius, she was only one figure in a wider social infrastructure. This network of black women radicals was operating from diverse locations, and quite often also from marginalized, positions within them, reaching from grassroot organizations, labor unions, social work, leftist newspapers, journals, and educational institutions to saloons, social gatherings, and the personal explorations of practicing their politics in relationships, appearance, and lifestyle (McDuffie 2011). Such multifaceted, lived and collective practices – as undertaken by the aforementioned Williana Burroughs but also Marvel Cooke, Ella Baker, Maude White Katz, Thyra J. Edwards, Shirley Graham du Bois, Esther Cooper-Jackson and Claudia Jones – rarely leave significant traces in the archive, and if they do they seldom get recognized as art. Not to mention the *many* others who didn't enjoy the privilege of a solid socio-economic background, which, in spite of everything, would secure the remembrance of their names. It is thus not surprising that each of these as individual figures usually gets labelled with different combinations of 'civil rights activist,' 'journalist,' 'writer,' 'intellec-

tual,' and 'social worker,' which is obviously not incorrect. Yet within the infrastructural scope of this chapter, instead of presenting each, I will emphasize the multiplicity and collectivity of their imbricated practices and encourage the reader to look into their respective impressive and important oeuvres.

In the final part of this chapter, I will not argue for the acknowledgement of their practices as art *per se*, nor for their inclusion in the archive as individual artists. Although it shouldn't be downplayed what such a recognition would have facilitated with regards to support and security in their lived lives, nor how the lack of it surely contributed to precarity, wayward circumstances, and later historical oblivion. Rather, I am interested in challenging the classical aesthetic notions guarding the archive, as they still allow for the exclusion of black women radicals, integral to the transatlantic exchange shaping the International Left. Following the work of literary scholar and cultural historian Saidiya Hartman, I will attempt to "read the archive against its grain" (Hartman 1997) by accentuating exactly the collective formations of lived lives *within* the arts proper. Formulated by feminist cultural theorist Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt as *production aesthetics* (2022), this analytical lens highlights the material and organizational infrastructures between 'art' and 'life' and appreciates them as integral to any kind of aesthetic production. With this approach I will return to the ontological outside, and to an absence in the archive, which, in fact, also appears as a literal absence: The never produced 1932 feature-length fiction film *Black and White* by the German–Russian studio Mezhrabpomfil'm.

What made *Black and White* one of the most infamous projects of the early Soviet Union's aesthetic engagement with anti-racism was the collaboration with a group of twenty-two African Americans, including Thompson and Hughes, as well as other notable figures like actor Wayland Rudd, singer Sylvia Garner and writer and actress Dorothy West, who traveled to Moscow to engage in the production of the film. Portraying labor struggles of black and white steelworkers and domestics in the American South, the film promised a critique of US racial capitalism and a sincere interest in depictions of black Americans that Hollywood had never provided. Yet, the actual manuscript allegedly compromised historical and cultural accuracy for an unmistakable message of the possibilities of interracial solidarity under Communist Internationalism (Gilyard 2017, 78–86).

The film was never produced due to what has become a blurred history of translation issues, internal disputes, and personal and political sabotage. In hindsight, the overall reason was the USSRs change in geopolitical strategy: trying to gain diplomatic recognition from the US to ensure the flow of investment capital, a critical film about American racism wouldn't quite cultivate the ground for economic support (Gilyard 2017, 79–87). Despite its cancellation "as a social and literary event" *Black and White* nevertheless remains, as Christina Kiaer argues, "one of the most closely studied episodes in the history of the relations between black

and red" (Kiaer 2020, 352). Yet, where important scholarship has engaged with the remaining aesthetics of the absent artwork, it is often less interested in the surrounding infrastructures that made the film possible: the interdependent labor of organization, preparation, and support. It is not surprising that much of the scholarly attention focuses on Hughes' central role in the writing of the manuscript, and often leaves out Thompson, even though she was, in fact, the main organizer of the trip. Instead of following this classical aesthetic focus on the artwork as an object as well as property, and risking reproducing an exclusionary politics these radicals already faced in their own time, I suggest approaching *Black and White* through Schmidt's alternative analytical lens of production aesthetics:

> Production aesthetics is the collective formation of the frames of life in art. A production aesthetic analysis shifts the focus from the work of art (how it was composed, painted, written, choreographed) and the relationship between the work of art and its receiver (what it does to and with the spectator, reader, listener, audience) to the relationship between the work of art and its hinterlands: the relations, finances, logics, life forms, affects, and products that co-(re)produce the work of art. (Schmidt 2022, 4)

With this analytical shift away from aesthetic expression, appearing between intention and reception, to a focus on the conditions of co-(re)production and their embeddedness in broader infrastructures, the often invisibilized or forgotten aspects of the artwork stands out in relief. Thus, *production aesthetics* questions and destabilizes any strict demarcation between what can and can't be recognized as art, as it accentuates the infrastructural inseparability of 'surrounding conditions' and 'artwork'. From this perspective, the fact that *Black and White* was an unfinished artwork is of less significance because it *already* was an aesthetic *event*, as Kiaer describes. This was an event co-(re)produced by Thompsons infrastructural labor: from taking over the lead of the film project from CPUSA leader James Ford, throwing fundraisers in her own apartment, recruiting every participant through her own network, to arranging transportation and visas. Thus, the much-cited telegram "YOU HOLD THAT BOAT, CAUSE ITS [sic] AN ARK TO ME" (Gilyard 2017, 79), which Hughes sent to Thompson in the hope of being able to make it across the country in car to the departure for Moscow, reveals more than the almost religious status the pilgrimage to the land of communism had for the sojourners. It also reveals that someone, namely Thompson, was doing the labor of *holding*. Her effort of holding the elements of the infrastructure of *Black and White*, or of being a nodal point of assembly, organization, and support, is exactly a display of an aesthetic modus "grounded in materiality and relationality" (Schmidt 2022, 9).

The production aesthetics of *Black and White* thus not only renders visible the archival absences of the racialized, feminized work in the classical aesthetic

analysis, whether being the apparent lack of any mentioning of the domestic workers in the film script or the omission of the infrastructural labor that made film possible. As an example of the co-(re)productive practice of the Black Women's International, it shows the black left feminist sensibility as an infrastructure aesthetics in and of itself. Forged in the critical exchange with an ontology radically situated outside of capitalism, it rejects Western conceptions of art as a product of private property and the artist as singular individual, and instead holds together a collective, coalitional, interdependent, material, and transnational practice of work and life. A practice of infrastructure aesthetics that held the revolutionary struggle for the dismantlement of all systems of oppression in the late 1920s and 30s. A practice of infrastructure aesthetics which came to lie as an indispensable foundation for later black feminist, black radical, civil rights struggles. And, finally, an infrastructure aesthetics that extends its struggle to a crucial question of how to archive, preserve, appreciate, and ultimately continue holding on to and being held by black, left, feminist sensibilities today.

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* Please note that instead of page numbers, chapters in *Revolution Every Day* have calendar dates.

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Amalie Skovmøller and Mathias Danbolt

The Monument as Relation Model: Examining the Material and Cultural Infrastructure of Sculptural Monuments

In recent years, monuments have become sites of heated and sustained critique, discussion, and activism. The call of social justice activists to remove statues of colonizers and slave owners from university campuses and public squares gained momentum in 2015 with the Rhodes Must Fall movement in South Africa and the UK. In the USA, criticism of Confederate monuments also intensified after the white-supremacist terror attack on a Black church in Charleston in 2015. Monument activism gained new global ground as the Black Lives Matter movement (2017–) attracted international attention in the wake of the mediatized police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 (Hass 2022; Mirzoeff 2023). The monument debates also reached Denmark in June 2020 when activists daubed statues of colonial missionaries and explorers in red paint, writing slogans such as "DECOLONIZE" on their plinths. The discussion was amplified after the activist group Anonymous Artists removed a modern plaster replica of Jacques-François-Joseph Saly's 1754 bust of King Frederik V from the lecture hall at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and submerged it in Copenhagen Harbor in an attempt to "articulate the ways in which the colonial era is invisible, but still has direct consequences for minority people inside and outside the Academy" (Anonymous Artists 2020; Danbolt and Skovmøller 2020).

The new wave of monument activism has prompted the emergence of new perspectives on the imperial and patriarchal traditions of reproducing materializations of power in the form of representations of white men on pedestals. Public sculpture has become an important site for discussions of collective history and memory related to unfinished histories of racism, coloniality, and gender inequality. The debates have also demonstrated widespread uncertainty as to what we are really talking about when talking about monuments, memorials, and sculpture in public spaces. Activist critiques of monuments, and the political backlash defending statues and criminalizing monument defacing, have made the question

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of how to define a monument into one of central cultural and political importance. Answering the question *What makes a monument?* is therefore more than an academic inquiry: It is a debate that taps into social and cultural frameworks in which identities, histories, and ideologies are performed, critiqued, and potentially transformed – globally and locally.

Considering these events, this chapter engages with the age-old question of how to define a monument by suggesting a new analytical approach that draws on theories of material and cultural infrastructure. With a specific focus on sculptural monuments – that is, statues on pedestals sited in public spaces – we propose a shift in focus from approaching monuments as apparently singular, stationary esthetic objects toward understanding them as conditioned on relations. Given the tradition of associating monuments with permanence, stability, and immobility, this processual strategy might appear counterintuitive. Our approach is inspired by the methodological change in perspective that information scientists Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star have described as "infrastructural inversion," in which one shifts attention from the *objects* or *functions* invisibly supported by specific infrastructure, to the activities involved in keeping infrastructure (and the objects embedded within it) functional (Bowker and Star 1999, 34). Translated to our context, this approach circumvents the art-historical tradition of analyzing monuments as esthetic objects to examine the material, cultural, and ideological work that goes into raising monuments, keeping them in their places, and ensuring that they appear permanent and static. This emphasis on the processes taking place *behind*, *around*, and *in front of* monuments' visual appearance in public spaces does not preclude the importance of esthetics but marks a turn away from the traditional art-historical emphasis on artists' choices of shape, size, materials, and, in the case of portrait statues, the biographies of the represented figures. Although questions of esthetics and biography remain relevant to understanding how monuments work as commemorative devices, these aspects cannot stand alone if we want to get a better sense of the processes behind making monuments, maintaining monuments, and the work on demonumentalization.

In the following, we introduce an analytical framework we call the "monument as relation model," which emphasizes six infrastructural points central to the process of the production, maintenance, and reception of monuments. This model is intended as a tool for analyzing and recognizing how monuments are interdependent both with material infrastructure pertaining to networks of money, materials, authorization, and labor, and with cultural infrastructure pertaining to networks of value, meaning, and power. Approaching monuments as relations also represents an attempt to create space in which to recognize the role that cultural and political stakeholders – such as investors, committees, donors, and other agents – have in shaping which monuments are allowed to be realized and produced, as

well as restored and maintained so that they can continue to present and perform cultural ideals and values. By drawing attention to these often invisible processes, networks, and agents, our analytical model invites us to understand monuments as relational entities susceptible to shifts and change, despite their appearance as powerful symbols of endurance and permanence.

This chapter is structured in two parts. The first part, "Defining a monument in post-monumental times," outlines the premises of our relational approach to monuments through a critical discussion of established art-historical approaches to monumental sculpture that we complement with theories of material and cultural infrastructure. In the second part, "The monument as relation model," we introduce our analytical framework for examining monuments as relational entities through an analysis of one of the most canonic monuments in Danish art history, namely, Jacques-François-Joseph Saly's equestrian statue of Frederik V in Copenhagen, produced between 1753 and 1774. In the conclusion, we turn to the activist group Anonymous Artists' aforementioned action against a plaster replica of Saly's bust of King Frederik V and read this as an attempt to disturb the normalized material and cultural infrastructure and, in so doing, to raise awareness of the networks that have sustained the monumental landscape in Denmark from the mid-eighteenth century until today.

Defining a monument in post-monumental times

Decentering the logic of the monument

What is a monument? While there exist numerous scholarly attempts at defining what a monument is, in popular parlance, the word usually refers to large-scale architectural structures or sculptures made from durable materials that are elevated in public spaces (Levenson 2019, 18; Schult 2019, 206). Besides being associated with classical architectural forms and statuary sculpture, monuments are also often defined with reference to their commemorative function, as the etymology of the word suggests with its roots in the Latin *monere*, meaning remind or remember (Shanken 2022, 26). The term "monument" is thus intimately linked not only to the adjective "monumental," indicating expectations of grandeur and magnitude (Levenson 2019), but also to the concept of "memorial." Although dictionaries tend to use the term "memorial" to define "monument" and vice versa (Shanken 2022, 27), the concepts are often distinguished with reference to difference in intention, as art historian Erin L. Thompson (2022) has explained: "Memorials mourn those who have suffered, while monuments honor those who have

succeeded. [. . .] Memorials point out things that should never happen again, while monuments spotlight people whose lives and deeds viewers are supposed to emulate" (xviii). Although monuments and memorials seem to operate within oppositional affective registers, the two words are also "knotted together," as architectural historian Andrew M. Shanken (2022) has noted, to the degree that memorials and monuments often function as "shape shifters" (27). Shanken built this argument on memory scholar James E. Young's (1999) description of how monuments tend to change meanings and functions across time: "A statue can be a monument to heroism and a memorial to tragic loss; an obelisk can memorialize a nation's birth and monumentalize leaders fallen before their prime" (3). Young's observation of how the functions of monuments often change points to the importance of not presupposing stability or permanence in how monuments work across time.

In this chapter, we focus specifically on the statuary or sculptural monument, conventionally comprising a statue on a plinth that either commemorates a named individual or holds allegorical and symbolic meanings. Within the discipline of art history, monumental sculpture has, over the last century, been the subject of "relative little scholarly writing and theorizing" (Bencard 2005, 62). The predominance of classical, conservative formats, and the friction between the commemorative *functionality* of monuments and modern investment in artistic *autonomy* might explain some of the scholarly disdain for the genre. Modern prejudice against monuments as being simplistic and one-dimensional, lacking the level of sophisticated abstraction of painting or poetry, has been widespread (Skytte Jakobsen 2019). From poet and art critic Charles Baudelaire's take-down of the genre in "Why Sculpture is Boring" (1846) to art historian Rosalind Krauss's historicizing critique of the outmoded "logic of the monument" in the seminal essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" (1979), a condescending attitude toward monuments has prevailed since the mid-nineteenth century.

This esthetic contempt lingers in present-day debates, as seen in the widespread popularity of a quotation from the Austrian author Robert Musil's 1927 essay on monumental sculpture in which he wrote: "There is nothing in this world as invisible as the monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen – indeed, to attract attention. But at the same time, they are impregnated with something that repels attention, causing the glance to roll right off, like water droplets off an oilcloth, without even pausing for a moment" (Musil 1988 [1927], 35). Musil's quotation is often used to indicate that traditional monuments have outlived their social and political function (see, e.g., Danbolt and Wamberg 2022, 296–297). However, if one reads further in Musil's reflection on the paradoxical (in)visibility of monuments, his point is not that monuments have no effect, but rather quite the opposite:

> Many people have this same experience even with larger-than-life-size statues. Every day you have to walk around them or use their pedestal as a haven of rest; you employ them as a compass or a distance marker; when you happen upon the well-known squares, you sense them as you would a tree, as part of the street scenery, and you would be momentarily stunned were they to be missing one morning. (Musil 1988 [1927], 35)

Rather than describing the *in*significance of public monuments, Musil's essay provides a precise description of their normalized presence. What does it say about the prevalent ideas and ideals of public space that many of us have become habituated to experiencing imposing monuments depicting absolute monarchs and so-called "great" men as something as normal as a tree, or as a reliable orienting device akin to a compass?

The uses and functions of monuments and memorials in everyday life have been central subjects of debate within fields including cultural history and memory studies since the late 1970s, inspired by the influential work of historians, such as Pierre Nora's (1989) work on "les lieux de mémoire." While the growing interest in cultural and collective memory has also been taken up within the discipline of art history, especially pertaining to studies of performance art (see Blocker 2004; Danbolt 2013), the monument activism of the past decade has inspired a surge of new art-historical studies of monumental sculpture. While the empirical focus of this literature has privileged the monumental landscape in the USA, the theoretical and methodological perspectives in the field have been radically broadened with studies focusing on topics including monument biographies (Tunzelmann 2021), multidirectional theories of site (Wiedrich 2023), material history (Thompson 2022), everyday urban culture (Shanken 2022), racist cultural infrastructure (Hass 2022; Mirzoeff 2023), iconoclasm (Bevan 2022; Freedberg 2021), and civic engagement (Farber and Lum 2020; Rooney et al. 2021), to mention only a few.

We see the current activist momentum and accompanying scholarly debate as manifesting a new "post-monumental" condition in which the monumental landscape has gone from having been relatively normalized and accepted in public culture to being marked by critical confrontations and calls for change and reimagining. Such post-monumental sentiments have occurred before, for instance, in the aftermath of the French Revolution when iconoclastic energy resulted in the radical reassessment of monumental traditions, positions, and practices (Gamboni 1997; Stara 2013). While the current mobilization around monuments differs in form and scope from the revolutions of the late eighteenth century (Bolt 2023), the activist interventions of the twenty-first century have problematized the long-held legitimacy and normalized presence of monuments in public spaces in new ways. The "post-" in "post-monumental" thus does not signal a historical endpoint for monuments but rather marks a new collective investment in reevaluating the form

and meaning of monuments, as well as their ideological and political functions in the past, present, and future. Defining what makes a monument in post-monumental times is therefore not just a question of analyzing statues on pedestals, but also a question that engages with cultural values, political priorities, and collective and personal privileges and positions.

Before embarking on our attempt at an "infrastructural inversion" in analyzing monuments, we justify our turn toward infrastructure by discussing two topics that have long dominated art-historical approaches to monuments: first, the esthetic equation between monuments and sculpture and, second, the overwhelming tendency to center analyses of monuments on either the biography of the artists and their esthetic intentions, and/or the biography of the depicted persons and their more or less honorable character.

A monument is more than sculpture

Men standing on plinths. Men on horses on plinths. Men sitting in chairs on plinths. Traditional conventions of statuary sculpture developed in antiquity but utilized to create new meanings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries dominate the monumental landscape in most Euro–American cultural contexts. Even though modern and contemporary artists have offered new creative interpretations and reformulations of these classic patriarchal genres for close to a century, the classical statuary monument has remained a presiding convention that seems to harbor its own systems of reproduction that oppose artistic reformulation. Performing the weight and gravitas of the classical tradition, statuary monuments continue to have a powerful, commemorative presence in contemporary societies.

The normalized presence of statuary monuments has often resulted in an equation between the concept of monument and the concept of sculpture. This conceptual entanglement was asserted with great force by Rosalind Krauss (1979) in "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in which she historicized the concept of sculpture by claiming its long-established inseparability from what she termed the "logic of the monument" (34). Trying to prevent the category of sculpture from collapsing into an all-inclusive concept of new artistic explorations of spaces and materials, Krauss contrasted contemporary projects dealing with "marked sites" and "axiomatic structures" with the "nomadic" and "siteless" nature of modernist sculpture as well as with the site-specific "logic of the monument" central to classical statuary. According to Krauss (1979, 34), classical sculpture is known for its vertical orientation in which a figurative form rises from a base. Defined as "commemorative representations," Krauss (1979) connected the "logic of the monument" in classical statuary to how the "representation" of a figure

"sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolical tongue about the meaning or use of that place" (33).

While this particular site-specific understanding of monuments has been productively applied in historicist analyses centering on the meaning and function of sculptural monuments in their so-called original placements, Krauss's spatio-temporal distinction between *static* sculptural monuments and *nomadic* modern sculpture fails to capture how even traditional monuments are subject to shifting materials, locations, contexts, and meanings (Skytte Jakobsen 2019). While we concur with Krauss that the concept of sculpture is broader than the logics of the monument, monuments, in turn, should not be reduced to the logics of sculpture, as Krauss's approach seems to imply. The alignment of monuments with sculptures has resulted in an overwhelming emphasis on the sculptural figure in the art-historical analysis of monuments, a point illustrated by how photographic representations often center solely on the figurative statues, leaving other aspects of monuments out of sight, including the form and function of the pedestal, the surrounding urban space, and other site-sensitive spatial and material concerns.

Another effect of the art-historical equation of monuments with sculpture includes the overestimation of the agency of the artist as the sole creator of monuments. In the wake of the establishment of biographical-oriented art history in the Renaissance, art-historical scholarship of monumental sculpture has often been organized around monographic studies of the stylistic achievements of "great masters," from Michelangelo and Donatello to Thorvaldsen and Canova (Skovmøller forthcoming). However, as sociologist Howard S. Becker pointed out in his seminal book *Art Worlds* (1982), all artists are interdependent with networks of people and structures to produce and exhibit work, and equally, sculptural monuments are fundamentally collective affairs and never the sole result of an original idea by a single "genius." In fact, monument production is rarely artist driven, but is a process involving the relational labor of large networks of agents engaged with aspects including authorization, funding, manufacturing, mediation, ritual, and maintenance, as we demonstrate below.

The lively debates about sculptural monuments in public spaces today often also "turn into arguments about the character of the people they honor" (Thompson 2022, 93). Studies, including historian Alex von Tunzelmann's popular book *Fallen Idols: Twelve Statues That Made History* (2021), clearly demonstrate why biographies of monumentalized individuals matter if we are to understand why the depicted figures have been memorialized and why they provoke strong reactions. Biographical approaches cannot stand alone. After all, most of the people memorialized in stone or bronze had little or no influence on the process leading up to the statues, and the emphasis on the political, moral, or ethical problems associated with the depicted figures can risk overshadowing the political, moral,

and ethical problems associated with the networks of people who worked behind the scenes to raise these monuments in the first place. As Tunzelmann (2021, 4) explained, "to raise the question of any commemorated individual's flaws, raises the question of flaws in the nation itself." This is a sentiment shared by memory scholar Kristin Ann Hass (2022, 32), who pointed out that monuments often tell us more about the "time in which they are made" and the people responsible for putting them up, than about the time and the people they memorialize. Building on scholars such as Hass and Thompson, who have argued that we "need to talk about our monuments as monuments" (Thompson 2022, 93) and not (only) as sculpture or biographical representations, we turn to theories of material and cultural infrastructure to develop a more comprehensive approach to examining the relational processes involved in making and maintaining monuments.

Intentional assignment of value

An important point of inspiration for our relational approach to monuments can be found in art historian Alois Riegl's century-old article "The Modern Cult of Monument: Its Character and Its Origin" published in German in 1903. As the recently appointed President of the Austrian Commission of Historic Monuments, Riegl was responsible for drafting new legislation on the conservation of monuments, and his text is one of the first attempts at formulating a systemic approach to discussing conflicting ideas and demands concerning the restoration and conservation of what we now understand as cultural heritage (Arrhenius 2004, 75). In this context, it is specifically Riegl's reflections on how to define a monument that are of interest, and his argument against attempts at making "objective" and genre-specific definitions. Observing how the term "monument" is applied to a wide variety of esthetic forms of different materials and scales, he noted that the main connecting point between the objects given status as monuments is the assignment of commemorative value (Riegl 1996 [1903], 72). Turning his analytical lens from the monuments themselves toward the practices and politics involved in assigning objects commemorative functions, Riegl provided a set of heuristic distinctions pointing toward the relational nature of monuments. For instance, he introduced the term "deliberate monuments" to describe phenomena such as statues or memorials made with specific commemorative intentions by their creators, and set these apart from "unintentional monuments," referring to phenomena such as architectural structures or ruins made with other functions in mind but later assigned commemorative significance by others. Given the text's focus on the politics of conservation, Riegl also discussed conflicting ideas of commemorative value, distinguishing among three different approaches to restoration. Investment in a monument's "age value" al-

lows room for decomposition and erosion given the value of the antiquated appearance of monuments. Proponents of "historical value," on the other hand, tend to privilege and prioritize the historical significance of "a particular moment from the developmental history" of a monument that is conserved in order to "stop the progression of future decay" (Riegl 1996 [1903], 77). A focus on "deliberate commemorative value," on the other hand, is oriented toward keeping the monument in an apparent state of "immortality, an eternal present," which means in a perpetual state of restoration to make it appear "alive and present in the consciousness of future generations" (Riegl 1996 [1903], 78).

While Riegl's conceptual distinctions are useful, his context-specific approach to defining the field of cultural heritage studies needs to be updated and modified to frame the complex issues in play in the post-monumental condition in the twenty-first century. Yet, we find inspiration in how his conceptualization of monuments does not limit the category to a specific form or genre, such as portrait statues, as he keeps it capacious enough to encompass a wide range of objects or structures assigned commemorative value. His attention to how the creation of monuments is an ongoing process that goes beyond the original intentions of their artists and commissioners and involves questions of maintenance is helpful for our interest in examining the conditions governing how monuments operate in and across time. While Riegl's distinction between "deliberate monuments" and "unintentional monuments" is similarly useful in its attention to the different itineraries in play in making monuments, there is, of course, nothing "unintentional" about "unintentional monuments" besides their *originally* having been intended to have other functions and meanings and only retrospectively being *intentionally* designated as monuments. The process by which something becomes a monument is therefore always an effect of deliberate and intentional processes; the difference lies in the *timing* of the ascription of commemorative value.

Thinking alongside and beyond Riegl, then, our relational approach to monuments is a dual one that seeks to combine his focus on what we could call the infrastructure of reception pertaining to the ascription of social, esthetic, and emotional commemorative value with a more thorough focus on the material infrastructure of production.

Material and cultural infrastructure

"Many aspects of infrastructure are singularly unexciting," wrote information scientist Susan Leigh Star (1999) in the introduction to her seminal article "The Ethnography of Infrastructure," in which she encouraged scholars to "study boring things" (377). The word "infrastructure" is often used to describe basic organiza-

tional structures that enable society to function, structures such as roads, water pipes, electrical grids, and Internet cables. Infrastructure such as these are "by definition invisible," Star (1999) explained, as they are "part of the background for other kinds of work" (380). Infrastructure often captures our attention *as infrastructure* only when it breaks down. Although the term tends to be associated with large-scale structures, Star invites us to see infrastructure not as comprising fixed systems but rather as complex, layered structures that reach beyond single events and site-specific activities. Infrastructure is a "fundamentally relational concept," Star (1999) explained, in that "one person's infrastructure is another's topic or difficulty" (380). This topological understanding of infrastructure implies that what we identify as infrastructure depends on our position or role in the system. This relational approach suggests that one cannot devise a single formula for performing what Bowker and Star (1999) called "infrastructural inversions," which seek to bring invisible networks, technologies, and arrangements to the fore.

If we translate this to our art-historical investment in performing "infrastructural inversion" (Bowker and Star 1999) in the analysis of monuments, this entails a shift in attention from what is conventionally the "topic" of art-historical analyses, such as the esthetic properties and/or iconography of sculptural figures, to the relational dynamics and social practices that take place behind, around, or in front of monuments. Approaching monuments in terms of infrastructure thus calls for a methodological framework that attends to agents usually invisible in art-historical analyses, such as the restoration and renovation workers who ensure that monuments appear clean and pristine and ready for esthetic contemplation. Restoration and renovation are not customary "topics" in the broader field of art history, as these practices are usually understood as responsibilities connected to the infrastructure of cultural heritage, such as museums. To restoration and renovation workers, on the other hand, it is the broken tile or occasional graffiti, not the monuments themselves, that constitute the main "topic" of their maintenance work on urban infrastructure.

Following Star's (1999) contention that "infrastructure does not grow *de novo*" but "wrestles with the inertia of the installed base and inherits strengths and limitations from that base" (382), monument infrastructure does not develop anew every time someone needs a statuary monument. As statuary monuments have been raised for thousands of years, predominantly as symbols of power representing those with economic, political, social, and cultural influence, the inherent "base" from which such infrastructure grows is therefore one of authority and control. How this control is effectuated may vary from monument to monument, but identifying and analyzing monuments within the framework of infrastructure allows us to better articulate their connections and modes of operation. As Star (1999, 383) pointed out, no one is ever really in charge of infrastructure.

Applied to our context, this means that rather than trying to pinpoint exactly *who* is responsible for creating and upholding this material and cultural infrastructure, we should instead examine how these systems and networks, which are often made invisible, operate, whom and what they enable and support, and how they shape and inform our understanding of the monumental landscape.

While Star's ethnographic approach has inspired us to examine the infrastructure central to the production and maintenance of monuments, our model is also indebted to Kristin Ann Hass's conceptualization of "cultural infrastructure" in *Blunt Instruments: Recognizing Cultural Infrastructure in Memorials, Museums, and Patriotic Practice* (2022). While Hass (2022) makes it clear that all infrastructure is obviously "made by culture," her use of "cultural infrastructure" is intended to highlight the ways in which certain types of infrastructure are "built with the explicit intent of shaping the culture with the expression of a particular set of ideas about who we are" (8). "Cultural infrastructure" functions for Hass (2022) as an entry point for critically examining how cultural phenomena, such as monuments and museums, are "*designed and built to convey ideas* that are intended to enable a society to function" (8, emphasis in original). The normalized presence of monuments and museums in cityscapes around the globe points to one of the main features shared between cultural infrastructure and material infrastructure, namely, their "unspoken assumption of neutrality": Their normalized presence points to the way their power lies in making specific uses, practices, and perspectives on the world appear natural and self-evident (Hass 2022, 8). Monuments, Hass (2022) noted, are therefore "doing their best work when they seem to fit seamlessly into the landscape," for the moment "they stop being noticeable, they maintain the power they express" (32).

Hass's argument about how "cultural infrastructure" works most effectively when we do not notice it provides a counterpoint to the scholarly tendency to downplay the importance, effect, and role of historical monuments in public spaces. Even though many of us might not always know the names of the men standing on plinths in our cities, the seamless integration of such statues into the urban landscape points to how they do cultural work, although we might not always recognize it. If "monuments contribute to the naturalization of the dominant social order," as sociologist Lech Nijakowski has argued (2007, 30), the powerful effect of this work often only becomes visible when someone disturbs these naturalized norms. The moment a monument is changed or missing, one might "be momentarily stunned" – to borrow Musil's (1988, 35) phrase.

Combining theories of material and cultural infrastructure equips us to examine both production-oriented infrastructure related to the economy, materiality, and circulation as well as reception-oriented networks of sociality, affectivity, and value. This expanded conceptualization of infrastructure is central to the ap-

proach we call the "monument as relation model," which seeks to identify and examine the relational processes that enable the making and maintaining of monumental sculpture.

The monument as relation model

Reconsidering the equestrian statue of Frederik V

Our monument as relation model is indebted to Hass's (2022, 26) strategy of formulating a "field guide" using a set of straightforward questions that help identify how monuments work. While Hass (2022, 26) focused on unmasking monuments that normalize "racist cultural infrastructure" in a US context, our model is more capacious in its aim to examine both the material and cultural infrastructure making and maintaining monuments. The monument as relation model is structured around six nodal points: *authorization*, *funding*, *manufacturing*, *mediation*, *ritual*, and *maintenance*. These points are not intended as a progressive step-by-step template but rather as an analytical guide that inspires more comprehensive examinations of the material, historical, and political relations that constitute monuments. Although our model puts pressure on the relational dynamics central to *sculptural* monuments, we hope that the approach can also have value in examinations of other publicly sited esthetic and cultural phenomena of archaeological, historical, and contemporary characters.

In the following sections, we introduce and illustrate the monument as relation model through an analytical sketch of one of the most iconic statues in Danish art history, namely, the equestrian monument of King Frederik V by the French sculptor Jacques-François-Joseph Saly (1717–1776), produced between 1752 and 1774. With its towering height of 11.5 meters, the equestrian monument stands in the middle of an octagonal square surrounded by the four mansions that today make up the Royal Palace of Amalienborg in Copenhagen city center (Fig. 1). On top of the marble-clad pedestal, designed in the simple elegance of the Doric order, the monarch appears as a larger-than-life Roman emperor, clad in an ancient cuirass, with a baton in hand and a laurel wreath on his head. The monument is often described as "one of the finest equestrian statues in the world" – as the Danish monarchy states on their website (Kongehuset 2012). Besides being a major tourist attraction in Copenhagen, its national importance has been maintained by repeated forms of appraisal, most recently with its 2006 inclusion in the Danish Ministry of Culture's list of the twelve most important artworks in the Danish "cultural canon." In the text justifying the canonization of the monument, art historian Hans Edvard Nørregaard-Nielsen



Fig. 1: The equestrian statue of Frederik V in Amalienborg Square in Copenhagen. Photo: Julian Herzog (CC BY 4.0).

(2006) described it as a precious "jewel" that constitutes "the most beautiful monument erected to memorialize the 200 years of absolute monarchy in Denmark" (55). This rhetoric of exceptionalism is also characteristic of the extensive art-historical scholarship on Saly's monument that highlights its outstanding quality and unsurpassable value (Frydendal and Mønsted 2002; Salling 1999; Kjær 2017).

It is the unanimous cultural and scholarly admiration of the equestrian monument of Frederik V that makes it a relevant testing site for our analytical model. Reconsidering the equestrian statue, and part of its scholarly reception, with a focus on material and cultural infrastructure allows us to decenter the emphasis on esthetic autonomy and artistic agency in the discussion of Saly's so-called "masterpiece of neoclassical esthetic," as art historian Emma Salling has described it (1999, 49). This esthetic-oriented focus can be traced back to Saly himself, who in

two publications from the 1770s detailed his sources of inspiration, extending from the equestrian statue of the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius from the second century AD to contemporary French examples (Saly and Butty 1999 [1774]). The imperial esthetic that informs the stylization of Frederik V as a Roman emperor suggests that the equestrian statue should not be understood as depicting the person Frederik V, but that we are engaging with a state portrait made with the intention of glorifying and elevating the Danish–Norwegian absolute monarchy and its God-given sovereign. As historians both then and now have written about at length, King Frederik V himself was anything but a strong commander (Mentz 2023). Struggling with ingrained alcoholism and having limited personal investment in politics and leadership, when Frederik V acceded to the throne in 1746, he discreetly outsourced many of his governing powers to his administration, making Court Marshal Adam Gottlob von Moltke and other central ministers into acting sovereigns. While the equestrian monument's apotheosizing presentation of Frederik V in this light might appear deceptive and dishonest, the "fabricated" image is not unique to this equestrian statue (Burke 1992). Glorification and aggrandizement have constituted the general decorum in the genre of state portraiture in European royal courts since the sixteenth century (Jenkins 1947, 10), as its aim was to present the power, not the identity, of the monarch.

The idealization of Frederik V notwithstanding, Saly's equestrian statue appears far more sober and restrained than the exuberantly dramatic baroque equestrian statues erected across Europe at the time. Yet, the monument's often-praised "neoclassical" esthetic cannot be reduced to art-historical traditions alone. Similarly, while the equestrian statue has been described as a perfect embodiment of Rosalind Krauss's "logic of the monument" with its "idealized" sculptural representation that marks "a specific place" (Brix Søndergaard 2002, 244), the monument has also been in movement from the start. In contrast to the cultural fetishization of this esthetic "icon," our monument as relation model considers, in terms of six thematic points, what comes into view when examining the monument from the perspectives of the material and cultural infrastructure that emphasizes the relations that have emerged behind, around, and beside the equestrian statue since its conception in the 1750s.

Authorization

The first point in our model centers on looking into where the initiative to make a monument comes from. The monument-making process usually starts with the establishment of a commission that selects the artist(s), contracts the craftspeople, and secures permission to raise the monument in public space. Whose idea was it

to commission a monument, and what motivated the idea? How was the commission formed and by whom?

Traditionally, the story of the equestrian statue starts in 1752 when Saly was invited from France to Copenhagen to produce a monument in honor of Frederik V. However, the idea for a monument had already emerged in the 1740s as part of the plan to establish a new neighborhood in Copenhagen (Kjær 2017). The 300th anniversary of the Oldenburg Monarchy in 1748 was used as an opportunity to expand the city. The royal building master and architect Nicolai Eigtved was tasked by the King's Court Marshal Moltke to design the architectural plan and visual profile of Frederiksstaden. While Eigtved's first sketch and subsequent model of the neighborhood from 1749 and 1750 are lost, the model supposedly included a plan for a celebratory monument to King Frederik V and his line of descent (Raabyemagle 1999, 41; Salling 1999). The monument was placed in the middle of the quarter's central square, Frederik's Square, surrounded by four palaces planned for some of the state's most significant men, including Moltke himself (Salling 1999, 9). Moltke thus emerges from the archival material as a central figure in conceiving the statue: In his capacity as Court Marshal responsible for the monarch's personal treasury, Partikulærkassen, which was supplied by the profitable tolls that the Danish state collected in Øresund, he not only initiated the entire Frederiksstaden project but also commissioned architects, artists, and craftspeople. The Danish secretary of legation in Paris, Joachim Wasserschlebe, had been given the responsibility for finding an experienced artist to take on the task. In 1750, Frederik V's court painter and architect Marcus Tuscher had developed his own proposal for an equestrian statue of Frederik V. However, his Bernini-inspired monument, in which the monarch on horseback was to stand atop a cliff surrounded by allegorical figures and a large water basin, was never realized (Salling 1999, 9). Instead, Wasserschlebe contacted the French sculptor Edmé Bouchardon, who, because he was occupied with the equestrian statue of Louis XV in Paris, suggested his younger colleague Saly, who accepted the commission. Saly moved with his family to Copenhagen in October 1753 with a six-year contract. As we will see, the monument took more than two decades to finish, and Saly did not return to Paris until 1774.

To sum up, the equestrian statue of Frederik V was from the start embedded in material and cultural infrastructure connected to various processes, including the urban expansion of Copenhagen, the commemoration of the Oldenburg Dynasty, the design program of the sovereign's public image, and the bureaucratization of the arts. One of the main connecting points between these relational networks was Moltke, and his intimate and transactional relationship to King Frederik V.

Funding

The model's second point centers on where the funding for monuments comes from. Monuments are often paid for by multiple parties, emphasizing their relational nature. Knowing more about the main stakeholders, the relationship between the commissioners and funders, and what influence the financial plan had on realizing the monument can shed light on potential strategic or political alliances and networks.

The equestrian statue of Frederik V is often described as one of the most expensive monuments in the world. On the bronze plates mounted on the plinth a Latin inscription names the main benefactor of the project: "For Frederik V, the gentle peace-maker, patron of the arts, from a thankful and happy age / by the Asiatic Trading Company this token of popular love was placed in the year of 1771" (Saly and Butty 1999, 82). The powerful Asiatic Trading Company had gained its wealth after having acquired the Danish colonial possessions in today's India in 1732, and after receiving a monopoly in Denmark on the lucrative trade from beyond the Cape of Good Hope, not least with Canton in China. Yet, the inscription's emphasis on the monument's dependency on the colonial trade with Asia does not tell the full story. Saly's initial honorarium of 150,000 French livres came directly from the King's treasury Partikulærkassen, controlled by Moltke (Salling 1999, 11). Moltke, who also held the position of director of the Asiatic Trading Company, ensured that all additional production expenses would be paid by the Company.

Saly had presented his first sketch of the equestrian monument to King Frederik V on December 4, 1754, only a year after his arrival in Copenhagen. The following year the King approved a wax model of the monument outlining Saly's initial design, which at this point was far more elaborate than we know it today (Salling 1999, 15). Allegorical figures representing the North Sea (Vesterhavet) and the Baltic Sea were positioned in the front and rear of the monument, functioning as water sources for two semicircular water basins. On each side of the plinth, Saly placed sculptures representing Denmark and Norway, visualized in the form of a male tribal warrior, a so-called Cimbri, and an Indigenous Sámi woman with a reindeer, respectively (Salling 1999, 62). The marble pedestal was also adorned with a bronze festoon that connected four oval bronze reliefs with depictions of allegorical figures that highlighted Frederik V's role as protector of science, trade, industry, and the arts. A decade after the model had been approved, the monument was still unfinished. The skyrocketing production cost was a recurring point of conflict among the Company's shareholders, who demanded an end to the endless expenses. In 1765, the Asiatic Trading Company intervened and ordered Saly to scale back the project, first by removing the allegorical figures and water basins, and in 1766, by replacing the bronze reliefs with simpler textual inscription

plates (Salling 1999, 63). Frederik V accepted the scaling-back, and Saly was forced to simplify the pedestal and redesign the elaborate wrought-iron fence, marble pillars, and tiling design surrounding the statue, resulting in an appearance that approximates what we can see today. Despite this drastic scaling-back of the monument, it ended up costing the Company more than 500,000 rigsdaler. The magnitude of this sum has often been illustrated by suggestions that the cost of the statue exceeded the total cost of all four extravagant palaces surrounding the monument.[1]

The cutbacks from the Asiatic Trading Company generated a need for additional patrons to complete the monument. The Danish–Norwegian industrialist Johan Frederik Classen, who had been entrusted by the monarch with establishing a cannon factory and weapon foundry in Frederiksværk in the late 1750s, took responsibility for casting the iron fence enclosing the monument. In return, the Company presented Classen with an elaborate 500-piece porcelain dining set with a black and gold emblem depicting the equestrian monument and the surrounding iron railing.

These initial transactional bonds were not the endpoint of the monument's economic relations, for as we will expand on below, the maintenance costs of keeping this monument in place have remained substantial.

Manufacturing

The model's third point concerns relations connected to the manufacturing of monuments, which are often marginalized by the art-historical focus on artists as makers of monuments. How and by whom was the monument constructed, produced, and installed? The making of monuments is usually a collective affair, dependent on diverse skilled workers ranging from engineers, builders, metalworkers, and other craftspeople to agents involved in sourcing materials from various world regions, pointing to often unseen networks of extraction and circulation.

The equestrian statue of Frederik V was the first large-scale bronze statue to be produced in the Danish–Norwegian empire. While an equestrian statue of

1 Equestrian statues are expensive to make, and Saly's monument was no exception. Yet, no archival documents corroborate that the monument cost more than the four Amalienborg palaces together. The estimate probably stems from the fact that Moltke is known to have paid around 100,000 rigsdaler for his palace, and in the absence of information about the other palaces, this price has been multiplied by four. Given that Moltke used his proximity to Frederik V to get the crown to pay for most of the building materials, the real price of his palace has been estimated as much higher (Jespersen 2010).

Christian V had been dedicated on Kongens Nytorv in Copenhagen in 1688, under the supervision of the French sculptor and stonemason Abraham-César Lamoureux, that gilded statue was cast in lead. Casting bronze statues of this size was an extremely challenging and costly process in the eighteenth century, and the Danish–Norwegian Empire did not have production facilities or craftspeople who could undertake the task. Court Marshal Moltke therefore began recruiting international expertise and securing the necessary workshop space, tools, and assistants. Only a few years after his arrival in Copenhagen, Saly became enrolled in Moltke's project of professionalizing the arts industry in service of the court. The small painting and drawing school established under King Christian VI in 1738 and re-instituted by Frederik V in 1748 under the leadership of Eigtvedt was turned into a proper French-inspired royal art academy in the 1750s. The Royal Danish Academy of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture was inaugurated on Frederik V's birthday on March 31, 1754, and housed in the Charlottenborg Castle in Copenhagen. Disagreements about the organization of the institution resulted in the marginalization of Eigtvedt with Saly as an obvious replacement. On March 29, 1754, Moltke promoted Saly to professor at the Academy, and shortly after he was also given the responsibility of being the new director. Saly also had his workshop space at the Academy where he modeled the equestrian statue, so the institution assumed a central role in the production of the monument (Kjær 2017, 207).

After Saly had presented the first wax model of the equestrian statue in 1755, efforts to find an experienced bronze caster started. Stockholm-based Gerhard Meyer was approached, and after a long period of negotiations, he agreed to cast a portrait bust of Frederik V made by Saly in 1754. The Asiatic Trading Company paid for the material and production of the bust, but the result was unsatisfactory and Meyer was rejected. Instead, the Company convinced the experienced French bronze caster Pierre Gor to take on the task. Gor had overseen the casting of Bouchardon's equestrian statue of Louis XV, and he arrived with his team in Copenhagen in 1764 and started the work on transforming the old Gjethuset cannon factory on Kongens Nytorv into a modern bronze foundry. Saly had already finished a full-scale plaster-cast model of the statue by the time Gor arrived in 1764. The preparation for the casting, which included producing a wax model of the statue, central to the *cire perdue* (lost wax) bronze casting method, as well as creating a casting pit, molds, iron armature, and other equipment, took four full years (Salling 1999, 21–23). In 1768, two years after the death of Frederik V, the equestrian statue was finally cast in bronze.

The production of the marble plinth was also challenging. Saly wanted the finest white marble with marked dark veins for the base – "marbre blanc vein." Wasserschlebe started negotiations for acquiring and transporting the expensive stone with consul Bartels in Livorno in 1756. In 1758, Moltke placed an order for

142 marble blocks in Italy (Salling 1999, 62). The weight of the marble plinth and bronze statue demanded a proper foundation. The master carpenter Joseph Zuber was given the task of planning and executing the belowground foundation, comprising a complex network of pillars and slabs. Zuber was also given the task of constructing a crane that could pull the 22-ton bronze sculpture from the foundry pit after it was cast and could support its transport to the marble plinth in Amalienborg Square. The statue was successfully mounted on its pedestal in August 1768, but was still years from being finished. The bronze statue needed to be cleaned of burrs, joint edges, and irregularities, and the final details needed to be chiseled into the bronze. While Gor's signature, which can be found under the King's left foot, is dated 1768, the year of the casting, Saly placed his signature under the monarch's right foot in 1770. At the official dedication of the monument on August 1, 1771, there were still missing parts. The bronze plates with inscriptions were attached to the pedestal in June 1772, while the tiling around the monument and the marble pillars were put in place in 1773. Finally, the wrought-iron railing, which Classen had paid for, was revealed on October 21, 1774, on the day of the marriage between Frederik V's son, the Hereditary Prince Frederik, and Duchess Sophia Frederica of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Saly had already left Denmark for France on July 2 that year and he never saw the final components installed. It did not take many years before Saly's extensive esthetic program once more was altered, first with changes to his design of the tiles and cobblestones during a renovation of Amalienborg Square in 1790, and later when four lampposts were installed along the sides of the monument, providing artificial lighting of the monument and square (Salling 1999, 69).

Mediation

The fourth point centers on relations connected to reproduction. This point draws attention to the often-overlooked aspect of monuments' fundamental cross-mediality. Reproductions often serve to raise awareness and interest before monuments are realized through publishing and circulating sketches, models, prospect pictures, and replicas. As such, a monument's bid for canonicity and permanence is often intimately connected to traffic in its image across media, shaping and disseminating meanings, values, and expectations.

The equestrian monument of Frederik V was circulated in different forms and media years before its official dedication in 1771. While this circulation can partly be attributed to Moltke's program of building a public image of the Monarch, the availability of multiple reproductions was also an effect of the production process of the sculpture itself. From drawings to clay models, plaster casts,

and finally a bronze statue, sculpture travels through many media, making it easy to multiply the same form.

Saly spent years refining his design of the monument after his early sketches and models had been accepted by Frederik V in 1754 and 1755. In 1758 he finished a new and updated clay model of the equestrian statue in a 1:6 size ratio, which was cast in plaster. While this small-scale plaster figure functioned as a model for the later full-scale version, Saly's plaster caster, Domenico Gianelli, also produced multiple versions that circulated as works in their own right. Saly, for instance, presented one of these pieces to the Spanish diplomat Manuel Delitala during his stay in Copenhagen in 1772, and Delitala subsequently donated it to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid in 1777, where it still resides (Salling 1999, 18). Gianelli also sold plaster casts of this version to the general public, as seen in his advertisements in *Adresseavisen* from the 1780s, where the model of the equestrian statue could be purchased for the sum of twenty rigsdaler, or half price for the horse only (Salling 1999, 18).

The equestrian statue entered the history books long before it had been dedicated. For example, the monument is depicted in the illustration of Frederiksstaden in Bishop Erik Pontoppidan's seven-volume description of Denmark, *The Danish Atlas*, from 1764. The engraving, made by Jonas Haas, was based on Saly's proposed design of the monument from 1755 and therefore includes both allegorical figures and water basins. This was also the version of the monument presented in royal engraver Johan Martin Preisler's much-circulated 1766 engraving of Amalienborg Square and the still-unrealized Frederik's Church, based on a drawing by Louis-Augustin le Clerc (Fig. 2). In 1770 the Asiatic Trading Company – via Moltke – commissioned Preisler to produce a large-scale etching of the equestrian statue intended to serve the dual function of portraying the monument and memorializing the newly deceased king. The two-plate engraving, often considered Preisler's masterpiece, was given to all the shareholders of the Company in 1771 as a token of gratitude for funding the monument (Raabyemagle 1999, 373).

Over the following two and a half centuries, the equestrian statue has continued to be reproduced in the form of images on medallions, paintings, photographs, commemorative porcelain plates, souvenir magnets, and even as a LEGO figure in a model of Copenhagen in Legoland in Billund. These reproductions, which have aided the statue's canonization in Danish culture and art history, serve as a reminder that reproductions cannot be reduced to mere derivatives of monuments; rather, they are central tools for assigning and actualizing their value.



Fig. 2: Johan Martin Preisler after a drawing by Louis-Augustin le Clerc, *Place Royale de Friderichstadt à Copenhague*, 1766. Royal Danish Library.

Ritual

The fifth point centers on the performative rituals connected with monuments, such as the often-spectacular moment of dedication. Usually accompanied by speeches, publications, reproductions, and reports, dedication rituals often provide entry points for identifying the stakeholders invested in making public monuments. But monuments are often showcased and celebrated even before they are finished. Examining the rituals organized around monuments can draw attention to the entanglement between material infrastructure of production and cultural infrastructure of reception.

On October 20, 1760, Moltke, in his position as director of the Asiatic Trading Company, laid the foundation stone for the equestrian monument of Frederik V in Amalienborg Square (Raabyemagle 1999, 373). This was the first in a series of performative celebrations connected with the monument, and one of the few that King Frederik V himself was alive to attend. Moltke temporarily lost much of his political influence in the years immediately after the 1766 death of Frederik V and the accession of King Christian VII. In February 1768 he was reinstated to the Council of State and was thus able to oversee the spectacular production of the monument.

While the public had been admitted on special occasions to view Saly's work on the model in the courtyard of the Royal Danish Academy of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture at Charlottenborg, the casting of the bronze statue at Gjethuset was also choreographed as a sensational public event. On March 2, 1768, three hundred people were invited to view the casting of the statue by Gor and his team. Besides Moltke, the guests included the directors of the Asiatic Trading Company, government officials, ministers of foreign governments, as well as paying members of the public. The casting was followed by a party at Moltke's palace at Amalienborg (Raabyemagle 1999, 373). In the following five months, the general public could also buy tickets to view the statue at the foundry.

The transport of the monument from Gjethuset to Amalienborg Square took the spectacle to a new level. The statue left the foundry in the company of Moltke and the directors of the Asiatic Trading Company at five in the morning of August 15, 1768, to the sound of 27-cannon salutes. The 22-ton statue was raised by Zuber's crane and mounted on a specially designed sled that was pulled by large teams of sailors. From Kongens Nytorv, the statue continued toward Amalienborg with additional cannon salutes when it passed the equestrian statue of Christian V. When it finally reached Amalienborg on the following day, it was raised onto its pedestal in a large public ceremony that the royal family oversaw from the balcony of Moltke's palace. While King Christian VII was unable to participate, Queen Caroline Mathilde, the former Queen and widow of Frederik V, Juliane Marie, and her son Hereditary Prince Frederik were present, and they all attended the finest of the three celebratory dinners that Moltke hosted in his palace that evening. Besides the official dinners for the nobility, the Asiatic Trading Company also threw a party for the construction workers in a temporary building erected for the occasion in Amalienborg Square, while master carpenter Zuber organized a party for his workers in the city, who had been adorned with wreaths of "Chinese flowers" presented by the bronze caster Pierre Gor (Raabyemagle 1999, 373). If artist Peter Cramer's one-meter-long drawing depicting the installation of the statue in Amalienborg Square is to be trusted, this was an outstanding and festive public event including hundreds of people from all levels of society (Fig. 3).

The official dedication of the monument on August 1, 1771, before the bronze plates on the plinth had been mounted, was in contrast a far more modest affair. Moltke had lost his position of power and influence with the political takeover in 1770 by Johann Friedrich Struensee, the royal physician to the mentally ill King Christian VII. Struensee initiated numerous reforms, which included abolishing many of the extravagant traditions of the royal court. The dedication was organized as a small and intimate ceremony for only those most closely involved in

the equestrian statue project, such as the directors of the Asiatic Trading Company. Saly's unveiling of the monument was followed by a dinner at Moltke's palace, where the host presented memorial medals in gold, silver, and copper to various agents involved in realizing the monument (Raabyemagle 1999, 374).

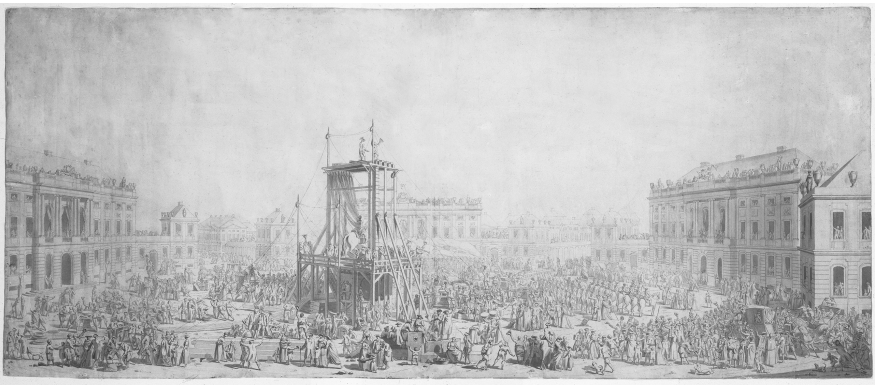


Fig. 3: Peter Cramer's depiction of the installation of the equestrian statue on its pedestal on August 16, 1768. Royal Danish Library.

To sum up, the performative rituals connected to the production and installation of the equestrian statue were central to the monument's function of manifesting the power of the absolute monarchy. Besides underscoring the importance and greatness of the legacy of Frederik V and his associates, these spectacular events also invited the public to take part in the celebratory culture around the absolute monarchy. The rituals surrounding the equestrian statue speak to how the monument was imbued with a unifying potential that could be used to create and sustain positions and perspectives of royal power and popularity.

Maintenance

The sixth point centers on the process and politics of maintenance. Examining how monuments are maintained and by whom provides important insights into the labor involved in the material infrastructure of service and repair as well as into the stakeholders invested in preserving and conserving the cultural infrastructure. Questions of preservation, conservation, and restoration are rarely addressed in art history, although they have important effects on the visual appearance of monuments over time.

Since its installation, the equestrian statue of Frederik V has received different forms of maintenance that have informed and altered its visual appearance. In this context we will limit our discussion to the most recent restoration processes. In conjunction with the reigning Queen Margrethe II of Denmark's celebration of her Silver Jubilee on January 14, 1997, the shipping magnate Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller gave the Queen a thorough renovation of the equestrian statue using funds from the A.P. Møller and Chastine Mc-Kinney Møller Foundation. The renovation project was led by the Danish Cultural Ministry's Palaces and Properties Agency (now the Agency for Culture and Palaces), which spent two years ensuring that "Saly's brilliant depiction of Frederik V" once again would command center stage in Amalienborg "as intended" by the artist (The Palaces and Properties Agency 1999, 76). The Agency started the restoration process by producing a "safety copy" of the monument in the form of a full-scale plaster cast of the sculpture (Frydendal and Mønsted 1999, 55). As the Agency's chief consultant Eric Erlandsen explained it, the new plaster cast would ensure that new statues could be cast in the future if needed, for instance, "in a century and half, when the surface of the original bronze figure will be more corroded" (Erlandsen 1999, 41). While the bronze statue was in good enough condition to need only repair and retouching, the marble plinth in contrast was in such poor condition that it was decided to replace it. Two hundred tons of marble was brought from Italy to Denmark to recreate the plinth. The marble was taken from the Lapiana quarry close to Carrara, the same area where the marble ordered by Saly in 1758 came from (Frydendal and Mønsted 1999, 61). The wrought-iron railing was also thoroughly renovated, and the tiles and marble pillars surrounding the monument were replaced. The equestrian statue was "rededicated" by Queen Margrethe in a festive ceremony in Amalienborg Square on November 6, 1998, accompanied by the Royal Life Guards' Music Band (Danish: Kgl. Livgardes Musikkorps). The ceremony was followed by a reception in Moltke's Palace (today one of the royal palaces), where Mærsk Mc-Kinney Møller gave Her Majesty a bronze plate commemorating the restoration, a plate that was subsequently placed inside the belly of the horse (Frydendal and Mønsted 1999, 55).

Shortly after the re-inauguration of the monument, the marble started turning yellow, which turned out to be an effect of the lead used in the original construction of the plinth. In 2009 a new donation from the A.P. Møller Foundation enabled the Palaces and Properties Agency to start another extensive restoration of the plinth, including the removal of the lead in the base, and another full replacement of the marble covering the pedestal, this time with stones brought to Copenhagen from the Madielle quarry in Cararra.

The costs of keeping the equestrian statue appearing as "intended" by Saly remain considerable, as indicated by the 17 million Danish kroner that the A.P. Møller Foundation has spent on these two recent restoration processes (A.P. Møller Fonden

n.d.). The investment in the ongoing maintenance of the statue of Frederik V draws attention to important aspects of how and why such monuments are kept on their pedestals, looking as if they are unaffected by time and weathering. This point underscores the continual efforts needed to ensure that monuments remain in place. Consequently, monuments are what stakeholders invest in them and, as such, they can be taken down, or demonumentalized, if there are no longer any agents willing to keep investing in them. This constant care and attention paid to the material forms of monuments is thus vital, and the fact that many monuments have been entirely or partially rebuilt over time with new materials raises questions as to what we are in fact looking at when viewing monuments in the cityscape.

Maintenance activism

In this analytical sketch of the equestrian statue of Frederik V, we have introduced and deployed our monument as relation model to examine relations pertaining to authorization, funding, manufacturing, mediation, ritual, and maintenance. In this attempted "infrastructural inversion" of the equestrian statue, we have consciously sought to sideline more traditional art-historical orientations of esthetic autonomy and artistic agency to foreground the monument's embeddedness in material and cultural infrastructure. This shift has sought to emphasize the often invisibilized agents and networks that have been central to the production and maintenance of the equestrian statue, and thereby opened different perspectives on the monument's form, function, and durational effects. Our infrastructural analysis not only showed how the equestrian statue was part of a larger political image program that sought to glorify, normalize, and legitimize the power structure of the absolute monarchy, but also broadened our understanding of the monument's esthetic appearance.

The fact that Saly's often-praised "neoclassical" simplicity was the result not only of artistic intentions but also of a financial crisis that demanded last-minute alterations opens new lines of questioning: What would the monument's position and value in Danish art history have been if Saly had been able to realize the monument as originally planned? What would the presence of a statue of an Indigenous Sámi woman lying at the feet of the monarch have done to the monument's symbolic and commemorative function? Would Denmark–Norway's central role in colonizing the Sámi people's territories in the north, which was intensified under the reign of Frederik V, have remained as ignored and forgotten in Danish history as it

is today?[2] How would the Sámi figure have informed our understanding of the monument's imperial esthetic? These are but a few of the numerous questions that remain after our infrastructural examination of the equestrian monument. Such questions have rarely been raised, perhaps because the monument has remained a vehicle for transactional exchanges, both economic and cultural, by agents inside and outside the royal court, including trading companies and businesspeople who keep investing in the monument to secure its status as an esthetic "jewel" of national pride. This politicized maintenance activism that strives to ensure that monuments remain stable benchmarks used in conveying and normalizing specific perspectives on art and history usually goes under the radar, rarely if ever attracting the critical attention that monument activism is subjected to. Just as infrastructure often only becomes visible when it breaks down, as Star (1999) noted, the recent wave of actions against monuments has also created glitches in the material and cultural infrastructure that expose the maintenance systems in place. In the context of the equestrian statue of Frederik V, we will conclude by briefly discussing an important glitch exposed by the activist group Anonymous Artists whose action against a bust of Frederik V not only drew attention to the monument infrastructure we have been examining, but also exposed its persistence and durability.[3]

Rematerializing Frederik V

In November 2020, Anonymous Artists published a video and written statement on the online platform *IDoArt.dk* presenting the removal of a modern plaster version of Saly's 1754 bust of Frederik V from its pedestal in the Assembly Hall of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts at Charlottenborg in Copenhagen and its submerging in the harbor in "solidarity with all the artists, students, and people all over the world who have had to live with the aftermath of Danish colonialism in the US Virgin Islands, India, Ghana, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark" (Anonymous Artists 2020). The statement further drew attention to how Danish art institutions in the aggregate, including the Academy, "exist and were made possible by this colonial era," which "still has direct consequences for minority people inside and outside the Academy." The removal and sinking of the bust of Frederik V was thus a wake-up call to the art world that it needed to take

2 For a discussion of the role that the Indigenous Sámi played in Danish–Norwegian political debates in the 1740s and 1750s, and of the structural ignorance of the colonization of Sápmi in research on and discussions of Danish colonial history, see Danbolt (2021).

3 The following discussion of Anonymous Artists' action against the bust of Frederik V is based on our extended analysis of this case in Skovmøller and Danbolt (forthcoming).

"responsibility, not only for the actions of the past, but for the ways in which colonialism is still active today."

Anonymous Artists' mediatized action quickly went viral, and the "bust case," as it was called, was all over Danish media, leading politicians, scholars, and media pundits to condemn the action as an act of "vandalism" comparable to the destruction of cultural heritage by Islamist terrorist groups such as the Taliban and Daesh (see, e.g., Jankowski 2020). The immediate pushback was bolstered by exaggerated and erroneous statements by museum curator Jakob Seerup, who claimed that the bust was an "original" study by Saly that, due to its relation to the equestrian statue, was "the most important artwork in Denmark from the period" (Ritzau 2020). After two prominent politicians reported the action to the police, who started an investigation, the Head of the Department of Art, Writing, and Research at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, took responsibility for what she termed an "artistic happening" in which the bust of the king had been "rematerialized," as she put it, with reference to the images of the disfigured remains of the bust retrieved from the water (Stockmann 2020). Dirckinck-Holmfeld was immediately fired from the Academy and was subsequently charged by the state prosecutor for "gross vandalism" (Raby 2022). The case was dropped in April 2024 following a settlement between Dirckinck-Holmfeld and the bust's owner, the Academy Council.

Since 2020 the bust case has become an unavoidable reference point for debates on monuments and colonial history in Denmark (Schmidt 2021; Skovmøller and Danbolt 2020; Wedel-Brandt and Durakovic 2021). Although much has been said and written about this "artistic happening," there has been a surprising lack of focus on the main target of Anonymous Artists' action, namely, the bust of Frederik V. Besides the belated acknowledgement from the Academy Council that the specific bust in the lecture hall was not an irreplaceable "original" from 1754, but a recent plaster replica dating from sometime in the 1950s, the historical background and meaning of the bust(s) of Frederik V received remarkably little attention. The ignorance of the histories of these busts has had consequential effects in terms of the lopsided media treatment of Anonymous Artists' action as a mindless, irresponsible, and ahistorical expression of "cancel culture" and "identity politics" in our "woke era" (see, e.g., Rothstein 2023).

If we approach the bust action in light of our analysis of the material and cultural infrastructure constituting the equestrian statue of Frederik V, other aspects come to the fore. While an in-depth infrastructural analysis of the bust is beyond the scope of this chapter, suffice it to say that even though the bust and the equestrian statue are deeply entangled in terms of their authorization, funding, and manufacturing as part of Court Marshal Moltke's commissioning of the bust as part of the royal image program of Frederik V, the bust gained a function as a monument in its own right through its distinct histories of mediation, ritual, and maintenance (Skovmøller

and Danbolt forthcoming). More than merely a portrait of the monarch or a study (*forstykke*) for the equestrian statue, as it is often said to be, the bust of Frederik V has been produced and circulated in numerous versions in various media including marble, bronze, earthenware, porcelain, and plaster from 1754 until our own times, serving to normalize the glorifying view of the history of absolute monarchs as patrons of the liberal arts – exactly as Moltke intended.

Anonymous Artists' removal of the bust of Frederik V from the lecture hall at Charlottenborg interrupted the normalized presence of the monument's celebration of the Danish–Norwegian Empire in the pedagogical framework of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. By drawing attention to the cultural infrastructure that sustains and upholds an institution such as the Academy in Copenhagen, and by naming central agents involved in both the production of the bust and the maintenance of the Danish–Norwegian Empire, Anonymous Artists created an opening for examining the continuities and durabilities of these systems in past and present-day Denmark. The immediate attempt to shut down these critical discussions by criminalizing Anonymous Artists' action, firing Dirckinck-Holmfeld, and turning the action into an expression of "cancel culture" illustrated, if nothing else, the considerable investments in play to protect the established order. The bust case, then, demonstrates how easily the media, politicians, art institutions, and art historians uncritically contribute to the work of maintaining and supporting the various kinds of infrastructure that keep monuments in place.

Conclusion: Toward a post-monumental future

Statuary monuments are rarely democratic and seldom exist in the service of the "people." Monument activists have made this increasingly clear by problematizing the overwhelmingly dominant representations of white men on pedestals in public space. Monuments have historically largely been raised by those with power to assert control and authority, and their function has often been to normalize and legitimize hierarchies of inequality and oppression. Although debates on monuments often result in discussions of the politics of history, it is important to remember that monuments engage with the future as much as with the past: they are materialized projections of esthetic forms, cultural values, and historical perspectives that are deemed important to pass on to future generations.

By introducing a new analytical approach, the monument as relation model, we wish to change the orientation toward monuments to create more transparency concerning their function and embeddedness in material and cultural infrastructure. Our model is intended less as a fixed formula but more as a heuristic toolbox to be tested, modified, and developed in encounters with monuments of

different kinds, in the hope that it can inspire students, scholars, and the public to critically attend to monuments, as well as to archival materials and existing research related to them, from new critical perspectives. Approaching monuments, such as the equestrian statue and bust of Frederik V in Copenhagen, not as static objects but as complex and layered relational agents informing processes of commemoration, memory, and public history, our model seeks to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how monuments function, what relations they form, and what values and commemorative functions they are assigned and bring with them into a post-monumental future.

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Eva la Cour

Collaborating with Film and TV-Producer Jef Cornelis: Notes on Infrastructural Forms of the Image and Image Practices

This image (Fig. 1) stems from a practice-based research collaboration undertaken with the visual artist Mia Edelgart. It informs a work-in-progress towards an exhibition next year at Heirloom center for art and archives, a Danish exhibition venue dedicated to initiating and exhibiting projects with a focus on the artistic archive. The image shows a photograph found in a paper archive belonging to Jef Cornelis (1943–2018), a Belgian film and television maker who made radically experimental programmes, predominantly on visual culture and modern art, for the (Flemish-speaking) Belgian radio and television broadcaster VRT in the 1970 and 1980s.



Fig. 1: Argos centre for visual arts, May 2023. Brussels, BE.

Substantial research to map Cornelis's production during his time as a producer, director, and scriptwriter for VRT has already been carried out by the art critic, lecturer and writer Koen Brams (jefcornelis.org). From this work, I know that Cornelis, trained as a filmmaker, considered himself as something of as a parasite within Belgian national broadcasting. Nonetheless, the material working conditions at the culture section of VRT allowed him to carry out large productions and to work with people both inside and outside the institutional frameworks of television production – technicians, screenwriters, researchers, mediators – throughout his career.

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Cornelis became a well-connected actor in the Belgium cultural scene, teaching at art schools and curating exhibitions of contemporary art. And eventually, from the 1990s onwards, Cornelis's work for television began to circulate in the art world.

This chapter deals with a specific event in my practice-based research collaboration with Edelgart: a live-edited roundtable discussion that took place at Vandenhove, an interfaculty study centre at the University of Ghent, Belgium, on June 24, 2023. More precisely, the chapter dwells on a live-edited documentation montage enabled by four live-feeding cameras installed in a lecture hall of the semi-public research centre. Imagine two cameras mounted on fixed tripods and mobile cameras, one handheld, operated by two local assistants. The lecture hall is spacious. Rows of benches fill most of it. But in the middle, a circular formation of smaller benches around an editing table has been organized; a vast network of cables on the floor connects it to the cameras. And seated on the benches are seven invited guests who knew and collaborated with Cornelis in the 1970s and 1980s.

The live-edited roundtable discussion at the Vandenhove centre was conducted to engage with some of the formal experiments carried out by Cornelis at VRT in the 1980s. Not in the sense of diagnosing a historical moment or celebrating specific TV productions, but, rather, in the sense of a practice-based investigation of how Cornelis's legacy can equip and inspire modes of audio-visual expression and articulation differing from those pre-designed by smooth media infrastructures in the present. In what follows, the live-edited event at the Vandenhove centre serves as a prism through which I seek to interweave my research collaboration with Edelgart and debates on artistic practice as epistemic unruliness (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al. 2020). This encompasses, among other things, our encounter with Cornelis's work, our reflections upon public service television as a historical scene for experimentality, and our shared interest in collaborative video live editing as experimental film practice. Inspired by the possibilities for live video editing offered by the medium of television, what follows is, more precisely, a reflection upon live editing as an infrastructural form of the image and image practice.

Live editing

Live editing is a video-editing method developed from the possibilities of networked television broadcasting. It is a production method and a media coverage performance essential to modern television production – live sport events offer an obvious example. Entertainment programmes such as The X-Factor are thus

produced live-on-tape, with live editing capturing the liveness of staged events as the basis for subsequent post-editing processes.

My interest in the method, however, goes beyond television studio production. It relates more fundamentally to my interest in artistic practices and research methods that allow impulse, associative connections and unforeseen encounters and conversations to influence image production. It expresses my interest in film-making processes where control is lost and openness afforded. Not in the sense of the authenticity-effect so easily inscribed in the live-edited work – the "ontology as ideology," to use the term coined by the scholar Jane Feuer (Feuer 1983). And not in the sense of a truly pluralistic, process-driven method of instantaneous interaction – the often-highlighted and celebrated but, to my mind, simplified, qualities of web-based editing software (Manovich 2001). Rather, "control loss" and "openness" interest me as ruptures in film-making processes that challenge standardized viewing. My interest in live editing arises from an interest in research methods through and with which it is possible to facilitate and produce improvised encounters and social relations across time, space, crafts, and discourse. As a method, then, live editing can be described as a situated spatio-temporal process of analysis – a form of the image and image practice permeated by a curiosity towards negotiated imagination.

My way of thinking and writing about encounters, relationships, and mediation is impacted by my training, both as a visual artist and in the field of visual and media anthropology. While theoretically informed by the intersecting disciplinary fields of environmental humanities, human geography, arts, and cultural studies, this training also impacts my thinking and writing about the ways in which encounters, relationships, and mediation can be discussed as "scenes of fieldwork" (Holmes and Marcus 2008) and as processes that simultaneously produce representation (knowledge) and social order (Jasanoff 1996). By mediation, then, I refer to a process of differentiation (Zhang and Doering 2022) and a milieu never foreclosed (Anderson, 2019). This is a shift from viewing mediation – and the medium of television – as transmission towards a view of mediation as a more reciprocal process (Lievrouw 2009) reflecting a concern with the ways in which the act of showing something to other people affects the revealing of the subject under discussion.

For many years, Edelgart and I have shared a striving towards a less auteur-oriented narrative about the artist's role and an attempt to favour a more relational consideration of the artistic act. Springing from an interest in negotiated imagination and learning processes, our collaboration is driven by an attempt to manoeuvre anecdotal information, text-based source material and situated experience-based knowledge. Trained in the traditions of art and the intellectual history of the essay film, this attempt has taken the form of a film-making practice that nuances the relationship between film production and research, between art-

work and mediation processes. Explicitly, we have explored live editing as a "precarious film practice" through a series of public and live-transmitted practice-based collective events and investigations hosted by Art Hub, an international art institution and meeting place in Copenhagen. In fact, it was our collaboration in the context of Art Hub that led us to realize a shared interest in Cornelis, whose work we had encountered individually: Edelgart at an exhibition in Portugal in 2015, me in the context of the Liverpool Biennial (2014).

In the summer of 2022, however, we went on a joint research trip to Argos, a centre for audiovisual arts in Brussels, where we had the chance to watch some of Cornelis's works together: essay films, reportages, and conversational programmes and experiments produced for television. And following this, drawing from our previous collaborative experiments with video live editing, Edelgart and I began to wonder: How can we address Cornelis's archived visual work through contemporary crises and social processes? How, as visual artists, can we critically and affectively engage with, or work close up against, a deceased artist's legacy and archive?

Exploring the question of mediation as an experiment in (auto)ethnographic writing from within a research process still unfolding, the chapter relates to these wonderings in the way it is written. Reflecting a constant interplay between doing and thinking, reading, writing, and reflecting, the writing is not structed in sections setting out a review of the literature, methodologies, theories, and results. Rather, drawing from my training, it seeks to circumvent the propensity of conventional structures of academic writing to disrupt, separate, and stage what is actually going on (Grunfeld 2021). This also motivates my practice with video live editing – and my reflection upon the event in Ghent as a live-edited conversation, where Cornelis's former collaborators are, each in their own way, co-producers of sorts. It is a *scene of fieldwork* in which video live editing simultaneously permeates both the presentation and production of imagery. In this sense, turning to infrastructural forms of the image and image practices reflects an attempt to contribute to a methodological reorientation in the analysis of contemporary culture towards a more affectively engaged mode of critique (Skiveren 2023).

A scene of fieldwork

Let me very briefly return to the live-edited event at the Vandenhove centre.

As we press "Record," I am sitting at the editing table with one hand on the video switcher and one hand on the sound mixer. I hear Edelgart's voice in a pair of headphones, even though she is standing right next to me. In the preview win-

dow on the Multiview monitor, I see the handheld camera filming her hand holding the microphone; behind her I see myself. I cut to activate the image. And then I cut again, to a facial expression. A close-up of one of the guests invited to the roundtable discussion.

I am overwhelmed. The entire set-up feels extremely fragile. The process of planning the event has been difficult, and many decisions regarding the organization of the space have been made on the spot. We arrived in Ghent from Copenhagen only two days ago. Technical issues have challenged the process since then.

I cut again – this time to another camera, providing more of an overview of the situation. Every one of our invited guests is older than 60, and white; and, except for Cornelis's widow Kristine Kloeck, they are all men.

Edelgart is reading from a script we have written together. Assuring our guests that the event won't be live streamed, she explains that the roundtable discussion outputs only into our own image making. But she says, also, that the event informs a practice-based research project affiliated with the Art as Forum research centre at the University of Copenhagen, exploring filmmaking as not merely product-oriented but as knowledge activity. A research project exploring how iterative, collaborative, and reflective film practice may have epistemological aims. How to approach filmmaking as research practice, with a focus on methodology and as a mode of building infrastructure? How, that is, to understand the building of infrastructure as a process with and through which to constantly nuance my own thinking and knowing? How to engage live editing as a method of learning to learn (Lave and Wenger 2009)?

Infrastructural forms of the image and image practices

In the summer of 2022 at Argos centre for audiovisual arts, Edelgart and I enjoyed access to people who had known and worked with Cornelis. Curators and employees had been involved with a major retrospective exhibition, *Inside the White Tube* (2016), featuring Cornelis's work at Argos two years before his death in 2018. More importantly, they put us in contact with Cornelis's widow, Kristine Kloeck. While friendly, she was hesitant as to how much she could help us, emphasizing that she had had a career of her own. But it quickly became clear that she was both passionate about Cornelis's legacy and well connected to some of the people he had worked with closely in the past. From there emerged the idea of engaging ourselves with Cornelis's practice from the perspective of the larger body of individuals that had made it possible: camera operators, editors, sound designers,

script writers, philosophers, researchers, etc. Benefiting from Kloeck's willingness to help us, we thus eventually travelled to Belgium to meet with several of Cornelis's former colleagues in their homes, in hotel lobbies, and at the archive at Argos. None of the people we met were working in the realm of TV anymore, and their attitudes and conversational styles were very different. But in all cases, they were sympathetic.

We met with the art historian and anthropologist Paul Vandenbroeck, for example, in his old apartment in the town of Kortrijk. Our conversation was founded on a particular care for art that imbued the atmosphere, even on his very body language – his way of listening, remembering, and responding to our attempts to explain our interest in Cornelis. Vandebroeck collaborated with Cornelis as a scriptwriter for some of his later essay films, occupied with the "aesthetic energies" of transcultural phenomena (dance and trance, for example). In relation to this, he showed us some of the extensive catalogues from exhibitions he had curated at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp as a curator from 1980 to 2018. I particularly recall a catalogue on an exhibition of Moroccan carpets. It turned out that Vandenbroeck had collected most of the carpets himself and dedicated much of his research to their irrepresentability as imagery – their "nameless motives," as he had it. For Edelgart and I, the implicit colonial traits of this passion to store and collect cultural artefacts provoked a slight discomfort. But his passion for the Moroccan carpets added a reflexive dimension to how our own research was being mediated through affective registers and material encounters alike. Our learning process with regards to Cornelis and the legacy of his audio-visual work, that is, has constantly shifted according to the relations, impressions and stories made available to us as we met with his former collaborators and co-producers. Even if at the gathering in Ghent they all repeatedly celebrated Cornelis as the boss, they formed an important part of a network supporting and believing his ideas, even when they were far-fetched. Even if they were not so interested in celebrating themselves as skilled co-producers, that is, their anecdotes, together offered a sense of the social imaginaries and knowledge infrastructures that permeate Cornelis's practice (Bowker 2020). In a sense, Cornelis's former collaborators have become co-producers for Edelgart and me in the present.

To put it another way, it is obvious that Cornelis's audio-visual works (and archival materials in general) are not immutable. They morph and change in relation to context and frameworks of imagination. But these works assume, also, the status of infrastructure; through this infrastructure, social imaginaries are produced and circulated and the transmission of knowledge facilitated. Television interacts with a discursive cultural and societal realm (Bourdieu 1999), and as a medium of communication, its role in the evocation of "imagined communities" has long been the

subject of attention (Anderson 2016). My use of the term "infrastructural" owes something to this historical debate on technology in general; Bowker and Star (2000) have argued that the power of the political effects of infrastructure derives from the way this infrastructure shapes or constrain meaning; across realms of imagination, ideology and technology, infrastructures constantly produce "new experiences of the world" (Larkin 2015). As much as it is difficult to comprehend their full extent, however, they are not all-encompassing in their essence. This is what Raymond Williams (1975) helps me understand in his old critique of the medium of television (and technology in general): While one cannot delimit an infrastructural consideration of television broadcasting through a focus on the weighty network of cameras, cables, helicopters, monitors, scripts, and technical plans alone, it can become regressive to work with contexts, links and relationships without admitting a degree of materialism into the analysis. The radically different working conditions in public service television in the '70s and '80s compared to those of today emphasize the importance of a situated and material perspective on infrastructural aesthetics.

From Art in TV to TV as Art

It is important to note that my awareness of Cornelis's television productions is an artefact of his circulation in the art field. As already mentioned, this began in the 1990s with the help of influential people such as Stefan Germer (editor of the then-newly established *Texte Zur Kunst* in Germany) and Chris Dercon (then recently appointed director of Witte de With in Rotterdam), as well as the later but even more profound curatorial efforts of the art critic Koem Brams (then editor-in-chief of the Belgian art magazine *De Witte Raaf*). Moreover, it is worthwhile acknowledging how this coincides with a time when modernism's dream of a clear separation of the media was beginning to shatter. In the late 1980s, exhibitions began to examine video art and artist's works for TV; an interest in television as a forum for contemporary art arose from the recognition, then current in the art world, of the importance of structures and material circumstances in making a practice possible. In this sense, Cornelis's documentaries of art world events (among them the Venice Biennial, or documenta 4 and documenta 5), gained exposure as forms of mediations and cultural journalism, not simply reporting from art world events but investigating the potentially equal relevance of the content of art, the context of its existence and production, and the audio-visual language and technique used to communicate (and mobilize) its significance.

To this end, a great example is *De Langste Dag* [The Longest Day] aired on 21 June, 1986, in which Cornelis broadcast an amalgam of exhibitions simultaneously

unfolding over several locations in the city of Ghent as if a popular sporting event, with live commentators, helicopter reporting, street interviews, and panel discussions on contemporary art. Being a six-hour-long all-night live show on national television on the night of the World Cup semi-final in Mexico, the programme humorously and wisely addresses contemporary art and its institutions as cultural infrastructure. Another example is the TV series *Ijsbreaker* [Icebreaker], which ran between 1983–84, an experimental multi-sited live television program, using advanced technology to connect different sites and fields of cultural production via the TV studio in Brussels.

Both programmes are at once carefully structured and open to chance. While documents in Cornelis's paper archive testify to the programmes being equally well-planned, organized, and financed, the live-edited and streamed productions allow their contents and topics to be constantly re-situated and re-mediated. In both examples there is always the possibility of being "cut and spliced," and thus in an explicit sense an attunement to an aesthetics of improvised spontaneity and potentiality of the "now-live," characterizing a long avant-garde tradition in the practice of artistic production. The programmes thus unambiguously disclose the necessarily politically charged nature of live editing in the sense of their being open to uncertainty – and, I suggest, examples of an infrastructural image practice with, and through which, to explore more marginal spaces of standardized viewing.

As I watch *De Langste Dag*, questions emerge that are interesting to think with even today. What did Cornelis believe his form experiments could do, for example? Why treat the opening of an art exhibition experimentally on television? Cultural critique? To what extent, that is, did Cornelis consider his practice to be responsive to political and contemporary crises of his time? What hopes did he ascribe to the technology of broadcasting and public service television, and how would he have navigated its developments up until the internet era when social media began to dominate the media landscape?

Recontextualizing public service television

In order to think with these questions today, it is worth mentioning the wider historical context of the 1980s heyday of Cornelis's practice when satellite TV and technologies allowing sound and image to be transmitted live and in synch emerged alongside complex shifts in the web of ideological, structural and material conditions (Ejiksson 2021). Integral to this, Edelgart and I have reflected thoroughly on the role of television in our own research approach and on how to situate ourselves in relation to Cornelis's former collaborators in that approach. Even if we are unfamiliar – because of our age and our having grown up in Den-

mark – with Belgian mass media of the 1970s and 1980s, the aesthetics of Cornelis's work resonate with what we remember to be the aesthetics of TV during our childhood. More precisely, we cannot but take into account how children's programmes produced by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation in the 1980s – internationally acclaimed because of their radical belief in the ability of children to observe and analyze forms of mediation (Vemmer 2006) – have shaped our encounter: the excitement, longing, and bodily resonance that Cornelis's past programmes presently evoke in us.

However; while, in most European countries, the state had, until this point, owned a monopoly in the audiovisual field, television was increasingly commercialized in the spirit of free market ideology (Ejiksson 2021). Even if broadcast media in Europe still institutionalized a frame of reference with national boundaries and a common presence in time and space – a simultaneity – it underwent changes in relation to broader structural societal changes that took place in roughly the same period. We were teenagers in the emerging "network society," a period characterized by the decline of public institutions (Castells 2009), and we were young adults when a moderation in the status of the white intellectual man began (Haraway 1988). With regards to television, public service was increasingly considered to be too didactic, autocratic, and centralized (Ejiksson 2021), while social power structures were increasingly understood as manifesting, precisely, as networks, the circulation of information, and the production of social relations (Hardt and Negri 2003). The public as an apparently neutral framework defining the conditions for political participation and forming the norm for openness had already been deconstructed and dismissed (Habermas 2012). But with the notion of the network society followed a pervasive, and still continuing, revisionism of public institution narratives. This was a process both celebrated as the democratization of society and identified as destabilizing its cohesion. Raymond Williams had already written in 1975 about the fragmentation of life that occurs with the dispersal of TV screens – the receiving end of TV performances – into the rooms of individuals. Now the screens are in our pockets and the role that images play in our conceptions of truth and knowledge has only become more complex.

This brief outline of historical context provides a backdrop to a recontextualization of public service television as a scene of experimentality today, when the technologic and economic conditions and constraints serving to shape the possibilities and forms of art have been fundamentally altered. As we contacted Cornelis's former collaborators expressing a wish to meet with them, we thus also expressed an excitement with a tradition of artists working, straightforwardly, with mediation and cultural criticism as an artistic form. As we eventually met them, however, it transpired that it was difficult to convey the more speculative aspects permeating our excitement. In recent years, both Edelgart and I have ex-

perienced a strong urge to address the contemporary ecological crises in our artistic practices, and we understand our interest in Cornelis in relation to this shared urge. On a fundamental level, we understand the intersection between art practices and environmental concerns in material-practical terms – a relation at once contingent on, and questioning of, the capacity of media to reveal and transmit (Heuer 2019). And yet, when we spoke with Lieven De Cauter – a cultural critic and philosopher with whom we met to talk about his role as a scriptwriter and TV-host in Cornelis's controversial talk show *Container* (1989) – about connecting our research on Cornelis's form experiments with our interest in how the ecological crisis can be mediated, he immediately responded: "That is a long shot!" Not only was Jef "deeply modernist," De Cauter told us, but "the unfortunate truth in general, at least until recently, is a strong eco quietism in the cultural discourse. None of the people involved in Jef's programmes have written on the ecological crisis."

This was not a surprise to us. But it confronted us with the artistic approach and degree of speculation we were bringing to the conversation.

Nieuwe groene nature

We met with De Cauter at the document archive at Argos to talk about his involvement in the making of *Container*: a live-streamed discussion series with each episode addressing different aesthetic or philosophical issues chosen by De Cauter, then a young student of philosophy, and Bart Verschaffel, the slightly older philosopher of science and art history. Together they hosted experts and intellectuals, depending on the topic, invited to make their appearance and join the conversation. Literally taking place inside a container – originally constructed for the purposes of a programme imagined to be always produced in different locations, but eventually stuck inside a TV studio due to defects in its construction – *Container* functioned as a framework for a changing constellation of men (and a single woman in the programme's first episode) "arguing and discussing in a salon style," as Verschaffel had it. Even though the series was broadcast late at night, it was fiercely criticized right from the off. Indeed, the programme's funding was withdrawn after its tenth episode. In fact, according to De Cauter, *Container* was not only controversial; it was a sort of "cult programme in its negativity." It remains "the worst TV programme ever," a show with "intellectuals debating on totally frivolous topics without any introduction," who were "arrogant, or even impolite."

While "this was part of Jef's event-approach," De Cauter reflected, "we were talking about World exhibitions; we were talking about exoticism. But colonialism

. . . it was right there. But not." Hence, viewing episode ten of *Container*, for example, discussing "exoticisme," the absence of any postcolonial compass is startling. And yet: this lack of critical self-reflection makes it both interesting to watch the show and to look through the planning documents and newspaper reviews pertaining to it and its controversy. It conjures a sense of how the medium of television can't be isolated as a circumscribed event technology; it continues to develop and change through its mode of existence in time – both in the archive and as the potential in the image evoked by curatorial efforts to present TV-productions of the past in the present.

Edelgart and I were therefore intrigued when we, at one point in the paper archive, stumbled upon a document titled "reserve liste": a list of topics for never-realized episodes of *Container*. We could only speculate as to what De Cauter and Verschaffel had imagined the topics to be about. Based on our own associative reading of the list, however, we decided to script four short texts revolving around four topics – "Neo TV," "The World Map," "The Voice," "The New Green Nature" (my translations). We then asked Pol Hoste – a Belgian author and fiction writer who collaborated closely with Cornelis in developing and researching *Ijsbreaker* and *De Langste Dag* – to read them out loud at different moments during the event at the Vandenhove centre. In this way, we invited Cornelis's former collaborators to imagine and practice something speculative rather than simply recollecting from the past.

> *What would have been said in that programme, what was it to be about?*
> *And how would Cornelis have approached the various aspects of the ecological and climate crises, if that was even the scope of such a programme – likely not.*
> *Or?*
> *In Denmark there is at the moment a campaign run by activists, addressing the mainstream media, saying: "Erase any planned programme agenda, and make space for the crisis!"*
> *All the while young climate activists discuss how to raise ecological awareness, or even consciousness.*
> *Can television be consciousness-raising?*

As I watch the live-edited documentation montage of the roundtable discussion, I am partly disappointed: while we effectively invited the conversation to take off in any direction, nothing extraordinary happened. But I am also partly intrigued. As the effect of an experiment, the documentation montage captures a sense of how different registers "work" on each other. Edelgart and I, of course, were both the initiators, the hosts, and the technicians of the event – nobody assumed equal distribution. But as guides, as it were, we sought a form of performative and improvised co-production. In this sense, we were leaning on what the experimental tradition in artistic practice has known for a long time: To experiment is to set up the conditions for something to happen. To experiment is to produce a situation

of presentation which also, and at the same time, is a moment of production. Rather than considering ourselves as external editors simply assembling anecdotes, we were deeply entangled in the negotiation of Cornelis's legacy that the event sampled and produced.



Fig. 2: Roundtable conversation. June 23rd, 2024. Vandenhove, Ghent University, BE.

Live editing as site of spatiotemporal analysis

The focus of many of Cornelis's TV reportages was modern art. But in many ways, his reportages also connect to a wider genealogy for thinking through and using social fabrics. Although De Cauter found it "a long shot" to connect Cornelis's form experiments with our interest in how the ecological crisis is and can be mediated, it recognizes television as a medium serving to produce public imaginaries. While this need not rule out the possibility of wider relational interactions creating additional political possibilities, it is about an insistence on the potential and importance of affect and sensibility. At stake in recognizing the "matter" of media is, rather, the possibility of being affected in "the complex and enmeshed relations of power during processes of mediation"– a co-productive approach that foregrounds "the *active work* that any medium performs" (Davoudi and Machen 2022, 207).

A co-productive approach, then, is precisely about avoiding the risk of re-evoking a binary between imaginaries and their material conditions. In the context of Vandenhove, I explicitly come to think of the role of the cameras and how, even if not live streaming, they installed a sense of publicness to anything said (Bauer 2016). Moreover, considering Cornelis's collaborators in the past as my and Edelgart's collaborators in the present, it is not only their experiences and reflections on their former collaboration with Cornelis that count; it what they bring to our current learning process in a wider sense. In fact, the matter of what they have brought to our research, both in preparation of the event in Ghent and subsequently, also manifests in what we have perceived as "gifts": essay collections, exhibition catalogues, photographs, a USB-stick with a digitized VHS video recording of the process of producing the sound design for one of Cornelis's essay films in the 1980s, and a 16mm analogue test shoot from the 1960s. We even received, via email, a recording of ourselves in conversation with Guido Roy, Cornelis's cinematographer in the 1970s, captured by his suburban house's surveillance camera.

All this resonates with the idea of art-making as an infrastructural attention practice. Not only does an infrastructural turn gauge the infrastructural function that binds "people and things into complex heterogenous systems" (Larkin 2013, 335). When infrastructures are understood in a more expanded sense than cameras and cables, the infrastructural approach reveals frameworks of imagination as both condition and effect of artistic practice.

Watching the documentation montage of the live-edited roundtable discussion in Ghent, it struck me that my interest in live editing is also an interest in temporal communality: a moment a shared attention practice driven by curiosity, generosity, and continuity, disclosing the production of lived time as a material negotiation of the notions and stories that we use to know something together. Simultaneously, meanwhile, there is a constant tension with being open, searching, ready on your toes, adapting to others. To seek modalities of articulation through experiments with live editing, I realized, is a mode of seeking to fold and capture emotional waves of a common time-space into which the fragmented and seemingly split imaginaries may softly fall.[1]

Moreover, then, it is in being a situated mode of enabling reciprocal affection and site-responsive reactions that live editing comes close to the potential of ethnographic analysis when considered a fundamental concern in knowledge produc-

1 I wish to acknowledge how the idea of the ways in which fragmented and seemingly split imaginaries can fall into emotional waves of common time-spaces stems from my conversation with Jundan Jasmine Zhang, a social scientist at the Swedish Center for Nature Interpretation, with whom I have an ongoing exchange and conversation.

tion. As an event situated between the planned and the unplanned, the live-edited roundtable discussion is a research vehicle as far as it serves to trigger reactions. It is an experiment set up to facilitate a shared and situated engagement and, as such, a spatiotemporal location for the execution of analysis. Put differently, live editing is the tool with which Edelgart and I try to immerse ourselves in a kind of analytical singularity.

To think through "scenes of fieldwork" in practice-based research may thus be to think with and through the infrastructural image. In considering form experiments to be spatiotemporal locations for the execution of analysis, mediation emerges as epistemological practice. More precisely, and informed by anthropological debates on the relation between practice and the production of knowledge, I like to think that the infrastructural image at best "enlivens thought and concepts through a type of singularity that cannot be reduced to an example or an instantiation of a predetermined category" (Ballestero and Winthereik 2021, 4). In *Experimenting with Ethnography,* the anthropologists Andrea Ballestero and Brit Ross Winthereik stress that the spatiotemporal location of (ethnographic) analysis must be suspended for the systematized, but always messy, bodily labor of organizing material. For them, "the power of singularity lies in how ethnography enlivens a concept itself, becoming its flesh and thus bringing it into existence in a different manner than how it previously was" (Ballestero and Winthereik 2021, 4)

Ultimately, if live editing as a performative artistic experimentality can be described as a form of the infrastructural image, the infrastructural image practice may be the experimentality with which I try to craft the suspense of analytical time-space, precisely by performing it.

An anti-conclusion in the form of an envisioned exhibition

As stated in the beginning, this chapter is written from within a work-in-progress that informs an exhibition. Here, Edelgart and I will present a selection of Cornelis's work side by side with our own works made in response to, and as part of, the research process exploring his practice.

One element pertains to a continuous practice of street interviewing. Throughout 2023, we have conducted interviews in the streets of Copenhagen regarding the climate crisis and the effects of various forms of protest. Meanwhile, a different crisis has filled the streets with the beginning of the genocide in Gaza in late 2023, still continuing at the time of writing. A returning question in our research process, pressing to live editing, has thus been how, through long-term work and research

processes, we might hold an open and responsive position whilst maintaining a focus.

Another element is an actual proposal for a live-edited talk show. Not a subversive TV show in an art exhibition, but a talk show video piece that investigates whether making a TV programme has any potential at all. Mass media infrastructures are no longer wired to have image-makers inhabiting and parasitizing public service television without regard for its conventions and rigidities as they were when Cornelis worked for Belgian national television.[2] Rather, television has, itself, come to embody the nostalgic idea of a shared public sphere and synchronized time. The talk show is thus our practice-based mode of exploring the aesthetics, forms, and substances that we encounter in Cornelis's work in the archive, and which mass media infrastructures continue to construct, use, maintain, and break down.

Practically, the talk show will be situated in an old 1980s bus (itself a large nostalgic object). Here three invited guests will have a conversation about the metabolism of nature and culture, the context of the ecological crises that characterize our time, while driving through a changing landscape. In this sense, it is in subtle dialogue with Cornelis's past vision of a mobile TV container-studio making use of the personnel, logistics and hard-wired infrastructures of the VRT broadcast company – for example, in relation to its coverage of sport events. In addition, it recontextualizes the television medium's use of live editing as an affectively engaged film method that questions the idea that archival research is about gaining access to the past. Resonant with Cornelis's understanding of conventional TV as an institution reproducing societal structures and his desire to provoke a feeling in the television audience that things could be different, my interest is thus in live editing as technical and aesthetic infrastructure in the production of social relations – as a momentary compositional effect of manoeuvring the material production of lived time. Live editing is precisely an infrastructural form of the image and image practice as far as it challenges, differentiates, and stages "what is actually going on" while remaining open to the risks that come with experimentation. Hence, I am describing the talk show video piece aware that everything may turn out completely differently to what we now expect.

How infrastructural image practices are applied in knowledge production in a wider sense, however, remains an open question. There are many ways in and out of infrastructures. But I suggest that Cornelis's use of the television medium's

2 Media scholar Arndt Niebisch has written about the avant-garde adopting a parasitic relationship to their contemporary media environment, based on the understanding in biology of how the parasite inhabits and lives from another organism, but - although constituting a permanent irritation - doesn't destroy its host (Niebisch 2012, 4).

possibilities of live editing may inspire and equip an exploratory approach to the idea of infrastructural aesthetics. I suggest it conjures a methodological reorientation towards rethinking the relations between image and thinking, the archive and social processes, authority, and authorship. Against the range of acute crises, together entangling to accelerate the slow violence of an already unfolding climate collapse, the questions that Edelgart and I constantly return to, and fundamentally seek to address, are these: How are we to engage in social struggles towards "knowing differently" (Sörlin 2021)? What could the epistemic and ethical status of audiovisual productions look like at this moment when the overarching risk of a collapse can only be improved through enormous collective effort (Zielinski 2023, 25)? How may one move beyond the production of knowledge objects and data, to produce practices through which it is possible to know something together? How are we to effectuate a sense of shared time; certain kinds of social time? And what are the roles of infrastructures in making certain temporalities possible while foreclosing alternatives (Gupta 2020)?

Effectively, the concept of infrastructure allows me to think of image creation as an epistemological practice – or even as anti-disciplinary practice that challenges the source and transmission of knowledge (a modernist organization of knowledge). Meanwhile, it also foregrounds the need for practices that entail the possibility of chance encounters, material attractions, and affective influences to expand and negotiate increasingly standardized institutional frameworks for knowledge production.

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Links

Koen Brams extensive webpage on Jef Cornelis: https://jefcornelis.be/
The Arts for Television, MOMA, 1989: https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2131
Inside the White Tube, Argos, 2016: https://expo.argosarts.org/previous/
Vendenhove – Ghent University: https://www.ugent.be/vandenhove/en
Prekær Film Praktik (Testing Ground/Art Hub Copenhagen): https://arthubcopenhagen.net/program/testing-ground/#0

Kristoffer Gansing and Linda Hilfling Ritasdatter

A Video Store After the End of the World: Material Speculation & Media Infrastructures Beyond the Cloud

Introduction



Fig. 1: A Video Store After the End of the World at Enghave Park, Copenhagen, 2023.

In April 2023, Netflix announced that they would discontinue their physical DVD subscription service by 29 September that same year. Even though the Netflix DVD rental was an exclusively North-American service, the news of its demise still spread around the world as yet another symbolic marker for the victory of

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digital over physical media.[1] In an article defending DVD and other physical media, The New Yorker's film critic Richard Brody observed that what is at stake in the shift from physical to streaming media, is a struggle of control between individuals and corporations, in which "the medium is more than a delivery system: it has an aesthetic and a psychology of its own." (Brody 2023). In this article, we pick up on this statement's implicit assumption of the (film) medium as delivery system and thus as infrastructure, inversely assuming that the infrastructure is more than the medium and has an aesthetic and psychology too. This follows from how an infrastructural turn has taken place in media studies, as in many other disciplines, which according to Plantin and Punathambekar "has set a new agenda for media scholars, one that involves accounting for both technical things (satellites, set top boxes, SD cards, etc.) and 'soft' cultural practices that, taken together, organize and structure the production and circulation of texts, images and symbols, ideas, and so on (. . .)" (Plantin and Punathambekar 2019, 165). The approach taken by Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski in their 2015 anthology *Signal Traffic*, is particularly relevant to our purposes here, as they on the one hand offer a clear definition of media infrastructures as "situated sociotechnical systems that are designed and configured to support the distribution of audiovisual signal traffic" (Parks and Starosielski 2015, 4), and on the other hand adopt what they call a "relational approach," which includes addressing the "different and uneven conditions," "labor, maintenance and repair," "environmental impacts" as well as "affective relations" when studying such media infrastructures. Moving from a focus on the singular medium to media infrastructures, also means a shift in the aforementioned struggle of control, from the individual vs. corporate control of media items to one of different media infrastructures in which the organization of resources and labor is at stake as well as the unfolding of techno-aesthetic and techno-political practices, material and affective relations.

In this text, we explore such issues through an analysis of transitions between contemporary and historical media infrastructures. This is extended into an artistic material engagement (what we will also call a form of speculation), with the aim to both critique and propose alternative modes of organization to the current paradigm of cloud-based computing. The critique and material speculation on alternatives, we identify as necessary within the context of the increasing attention to the

1 Although it should be mentioned that one of the side-effects of cloud-based media has also been a return of physical media as a successful niche market, hence the return of the Vinyl record format and the rise in popularity of Blu-Ray box sets for classic and cult cinema. Accordingly, in the same breath as media reported on the closing of the Netflix DVD service, there were also reports of Disney CEO Bob Iger announcing that the company would probably increase investment in physical media.

unsustainability of current (media-) infrastructural paradigms in how they create and sustain exploitative relations of digital labor, natural resource extraction as well as the depletion of social affects and imaginaries (Couldry and Meijas 2019, Crawford 2021, Parks and Starosielski 2015). Following the idea of "infrastructural inversion" (Bowker and Star 2000, 34) as a way to surface infrastructure, our methodology of material speculation here performs a double inversion: by re-activating near-obsolete or residual media infrastructures, we aim to make visible and perform temporal and spatial parameters of media infrastructures that in turn surface our current digital culture as based on the idea of "endless growth" (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 9).

By actively working with the limitations of any given system, we wish to generate possibilities for imagining and constructing alternative modes of production and distribution. We see this practice as aligned with groups and movements that seek to undo the asymmetric material relations of contemporary cloud-based media infrastructures. In this, we take inspiration from intersectional and trans★-feminist approaches to computation and world-making as well as philosophies of degrowth, both of which inform the building and caring for small-scale media infrastructures.

We do this through the artistic research project, *A Video Store After the End of the World*, which is an ongoing collaboration between us, artist-researcher Linda Hilfling Ritasdatter and media-theorist and curator Kristoffer Gansing. It was initiated in 2023 as a proposal for a low-tech and small-scale media infrastructure set in an imaginary of cloud networks having ceased to exist. As a material speculation, we set up an analogue video store, that functions primarily as a public installation for reflection and conversation on the spatio-temporal and material relations of media infrastructures. When we say material speculation, we are inspired by how the term has been developed as a methodology of materially grounded critical art and design practices (Allahyari 2015–16, Wakkary et al. 2015) as well as how Timothy P.A. Cooper has explored the term within the context of physical infrastructures and reconstruction (2022). In their critical expanding on design fiction, Ron Wakkary et al., seek to explore how material speculation as a methodology employs speculation on possible alternative futures, at the same time as they challenge the limitations of relegating the artifact to a fictive reality. Instead, they wish to develop a material speculation that "opens the critical functioning of alternative futures in design through the crafting of material artifacts that operate and exist in the actual world." (Wakkary et al. 2015, 99). In this chapter, we will discuss an artistic research project in line with such an effort, materially speculating on alternatives in the context of media infrastructures. In our case however, it is not mainly the possible alternative futures of specific artifacts or technologies that are at stake, as we are interested in expanding material spec-

ulation to include the transformation of the overall material relations of media infrastructures, and we do that by combining design fiction, materially operational infrastructures and the creation of a conversational space.

In the next section, we will delve into the contextual aspects of this project, by discussing the material relations of media infrastructures and their asymmetries in the digital cloud regime. We will look at how this discussion can be related to our specific case of analogue VHS infrastructure, with special attention to the continuities and discontinuities in the techno-aesthetics of infrastructural shifts. Following these discussions, we will in detail outline our project *A Video Store After the End of the World* with a focus both on its actual unfolding and how it is implicated in the discourse of small-scale and degrowth philosophies of practice. We will discuss the project title with its temporal dimension of an "after" the end of the world, asking what world has ended/needs to end and what comes after. This leads to the chapter's final section, which focuses on our proposed extension of the methodology of material speculation, to also include the transformation of the material relations of media infrastructures.

Challenging the material relations of media infrastructures

In order to situate the critique of and material speculation on media infrastructures implied by *A Video Store After the End of the World*, it is necessary to first trace the shifts between different media infrastructures inherent to this project. In doing this, we focus on the changing techno-aesthetics of infrastructure from the VHS to the cloud, where the term techno-aesthetics is used in the sense proposed by Simondon (1980) and recently developed in relation to media art practices (Gansing 2023, Mansoux et al. 2023). Here, techno-aesthetics stands for an approach which treats technology and aesthetics as inherently related to each other and in which production and consumption are bound together by an infrastructural framework. Specific shifts in the techno-aesthetics of infrastructure can be identified in the history of media art practices such as Internet-based arts practices' migration from self-organized to outsourced modes of production and distribution (Gansing 2023). Today, as Mansoux et al. identify, there is a contrast between what the authors call the maximalist techno-aesthetics of slick new media art, supported by energy-heavy, extractive media infrastructures with their objectification of the artwork, and an emerging techno-aesthetics of permacomputing, as an alternative of relational and distributed aesthetics motivated by

"working with limited availability of hardware and energy, using small files and low network bandwidths (. . .)" (2023, 4).

In our particular case of re-enacting the VHS medium vis-à-vis the streaming economy of the cloud, we identify a series of continuities and discontinuities that have consequences for our aim of formulating alternatives through further material speculation. These dis/continuities first tell of a seemingly linear development of technology and media, but this development is then reversed in a way that aims to twist both the past and present media infrastructures and their techno-aesthetics into something which is active as an alternative in the present. In the following we will explore what a moving between these techno-aesthetics can entail.

Dis/continuities of walls and clouds

Whether as privately hosted in someone's domestic space such as a living room, or in a public library or the commercial domains of the video store, the media infrastructure of VHS involves not only the technical devices of playback, recording and display but also physical support structures such as shelves and the spatial parameters of rooms and buildings. Shelves usually organizes the tapes, with its labels or covers visible to the user. With this infrastructure also comes a form of personal caretaking and annotation, as the video store owner curates the categorization and selection of films on the shelf, as does the home video collector, who also often performs the labor of adding metadata to home-recordings or films taped off the air – in the form of stickers, hand-written labels, and indexes. It is historical irony that home video culture was also literally connected to the sky and its clouds by way of its relation to aerial television, the interference of which often seeps through on the contents of home-recorded tapes. Thus, in this media infrastructure, the devices, interfaces and practices of transmission, recording, playback and storage are visible and tangible on several layers, spatially, technologically and on a phenomenological level. Consequently, these layers are also tangibly separate from one another, a separation that significantly also extends to that of media items and their meta-data, in the difference between tapes or DVDs and TV-listings, labels and the database form of the video store's tape and customer index.

In moving to the digital cloud, this configuration is transformed, rendered invisible or even obsolete. The tangible physical and spatial parameters as well as media carriers are done away with (on the user level), as data centers take over the storing, analyzing and processing of big data – harvested and monetized

through a digital platform-based economy. For the user, the screen becomes the primary interface, of technical as well as social interaction and for the delivery of media. Save for personal computers and smart technologies, the infrastructures of code and physical servers are hidden away from this situation of use. A form of user or consumer agency belonging to the previous era of video is transformed in this process. A powershift has occurred where it is not any longer the users organizing the content or its metadata, but now it is rather that the metadata of the users' interaction with the content is being collected and operationalized by cloud-based distribution platforms. The database form which was latent to the mode of organization of physical media, now merges with the media items themselves, uniting what was previously separate into a media infrastructure primed for an algorithmic operation that remains largely intangible for the user.

Intuitively, one might think about the data centered distributed video on cloud services such as Amazon Prime or Netflix or through bit-torrent services as somehow in opposition to the world of "Home Video" with its antiquated Video Stores, clunky VHS machines and bulky video tapes. Even DVD now seems relatively obsolete, as a kind of impractical interim medium between the age of physical analogue video and the flowing media of streaming culture. But instead of seeing the cloud and the video store and their delivery technologies as existing in opposition to one another, it is also possible to think about the different continuities and transitions – for example how the home video culture provided a training ground for the behavior of media-savvy consumers of networked video today. Think about practices like tagging videos with keywords which is predated by the personal labeling of video cassettes or the browsing and organizing of the video store as a form of living archive with its specific organizational logic of genres, media and sections, as a physical and embodied counterpart to the database structure. Furthermore, the database in the guise of card-indexes, digital spreadsheets or home-coded variants thereof was already implied and even essential to the organization of the physical video store.

There is in other words, not a total opposition between the cloud and the wall of the home video culture, instead we could even say that the home video user was both training and being trained for a future networked video culture which intensifies and automates tendencies of the analogue one. This is also an intensification of a form of consumption as labor, that now becomes integral to the automated architecture of the cloud and its extractive logic. Such hidden labor, where the user is also a worker, has been amply discussed as integral to open-source cultures, the regime of Web 2.0 and social media (Terranova 2004; Scholz 2013; Fuchs 2014; Chun 2016). Previously, we, or one half of us (Ritasdatter 2020, 2022), has researched such hidden labor not only of the front-ends, but also of the back- and back-back ends of software maintenance, that form part of an

ongoing "Crisis Computing" where computational infrastructures need to be continuously maintained in order to keep the supposedly smooth flows of automation running. The promise of digital cloud-based media infrastructures, similar to automation in capitalist economies overall, is, as Dyer-Witheford (2015) maintains, one of infinite growth (and we could add of consumption/circulation), deriving from the perceived immaterial nature of digital technology, which was promoted into the heart of the cyber-libertarian ideology of the 1990s. However, it is well known that, in addition to being dependent on exploitative relations of digital labor, cloud-based computing is highly material and based on the extraction of natural resources (cf. The Underground Division 2022, Crawford 2021, Parikka 2015) as well as abundant energy consumption, as in the case of data centers (Holt and Vonderau 2015, Remin 2023).

When moving image distribution migrates to cloud-based media infrastructures, they also become incorporated into the data and algorithmically driven business models of platform capitalism (cf. Srnicek 2016). In "The Cinema of Extractions," we, or rather the other half of us (Gansing 2022), discussed the historical legacy of the use of moving image technology for research, and an extractive model of knowledge production that is now being turbo-charged within the logic of streaming media. The Cinema of Extractions here becomes the name of infrastructures predicated on cybernetic feedback loops in which the machine seemingly feeds itself, with the goal of keeping media in perpetual circulation. In relation to our goal of surfacing, critiquing and speculating on alternatives to the techno-aesthetics and material relations of media infrastructures, we find it productive to intervene with the perspective of Crisis Computing in this Cinema of Extractions. Through the former, we want to emphasize the asymmetric and often hidden labor of maintaining and caring for media infrastructures, as a way to surface or invert the extractive techno-aesthetics of the latter. In addressing these dimensions, we propose to think along with Dyer-Witheford's description of the class composition of what he dubs the Cyber-Proletariat as applicable to users and producer's alike and follow his call for attention to "(. . .) the relation between technical conditions of work (or worklessness) and the forms of political organization to which it gives rise." (2015, 15)

Back to the wall

Similar to the discontinuities explored above in the techno-aesthetics of the database form, the wall, makes a conspicuous comeback in the case of online video consumption. Here, the once physical wall and its shelves is remediated in the

interfaces of streaming services. If we take Netflix as the most famous example of a former physical rental service that moved to the cloud, its interface perfectly mimics that of the video store's wall of titles ordered into different genres. The shelves of this wall however are ordered through an algorithmically powered modularity, where the Netflix "Research" department's fine-grained collection and analysis of user data leads to an ever more refined classification of content and a recommendation system fine-tuned to every user (Madrigal 2014, Pajkovic 2022). A famous study by Alexis Madrigal and Ian Bogost in 2014 showed that Netflix already back then ordered its content into a whopping 76,897 microgenres (Madrigal 2014). The user is here mainly serving as a human operator providing a labor that feeds the system with data based on time, location, attention, ratings, searches, and other behavioral parameters (Costa 2020), which keeps the circulation of popular media items ever more effective.

It is tempting to think that this also entails a form of preservation and classification of moving image cultural heritage that will be of value to future generations of film communities, historians, and cultural producers. The main reason for data collection and analyzing however is an infrastructure of optimization with the goal to circulate a relatively small amount of localized popular content to a user base, predicted to want to consume that particular content (cf. Roettgers 2023, Vora et al. 2017). Recommendation algorithms and machine learning help to put this minimal circulatory logic in place, resulting in the paradoxical fact that the now defunct Netflix DVD service at its peak is said to have hosted more than 100.000 titles in contrast to the streaming service's comparably minuscule amount of between six- and eight-thousand titles (Monahan and Griggs 2019). There is in other words, an ongoing production of scarcity, a computing within limits even, going on in the name of efficiency within commercial infrastructures for streaming media, albeit one that is motivated by an extractive logic of maximum capital revenue from a small amount of media, thus vampirizing on content, producers and consumers alike.

Often streaming has been framed within the prism of Television, as the success of streaming platforms rely heavily on the success of TV-series and the possibility of binge watching (Jenner, 2023). But maybe it is rather the video store and its wall display that has returned to haunt us, as an undead site of media consumption? Doesn't Netflix with its film on-demand architecture and video cover-like displays remind you of browsing the shelves of a video store rather than flicking through TV-channels? In his book on the rise and fall of German video rentals, the media researcher Tobias Haupts (2014) compares what he calls the "dispositif" of the video store to that of the museum, as the video store is similarly a place of para-textual encounters rather than of direct use of the media objects therein. Customers using the video store have learned to navigate recurring systems of categorization into genres and other ways of ordering tapes or DVDs ac-

cording to their release-dates and age-limits. There is also what Haupts calls a whole "popular knowledge" at work here, as the customer browses this paratextual domain, or what we may today also think of as the meta-data of the films, weighing in previous experience, friends' advice, movie guides and perhaps the store clerks' recommendations in order to eventually make a choice. The Netflix interface, which has arguably been the most influential of all streaming media platforms (cf. Jenner 2023, 6), is also a recommendation-based system, using data collection and analysis to mold itself around each individual viewer's taste in order to appear personalized for "you." It largely achieves this not by giving the user transparent access to its media library, but primarily through the aforementioned categorization of content into genres and micro-genres, which can then be used for the algorithmic wrapping of users into what some has called an "insulated flow" (Perks 2015, xxii–xxvii). In this media infrastructure, users never find themselves without a recommendation of what to watch next, in a flow that actually works mostly to confine viewers in affective feedback-loops rather than creating overview and user agency.[2]

As Haupts argues, the dispositif of the video store runs contrary to the initially perceived flexibility of video as a two-way DIY medium. Instead of turning consumers into producers, the video store is then a form of re-education of the video user into a good, archive browsing consumer. It seems to us as if this training is crucial to understand the shift that has happened in online culture, from the active user who would host and publish his/her own media independently, share content over torrent sites and set up videoblogs on Wordpress to the streaming media user, supposedly content with consuming all the high-definition TV-series now streaming out of Netflix and Amazon. To paraphrase artist Richard Serra's classic critique of ad-based Television, "you" are the real product of streaming media, in so far as the meta-data of your user behavior is what is being operated on to keep the media flowing.

The wall is now not something you "order" any longer but it orders things for you, delivering content based on your interactions turned into data, operationalized by algorithms, which thanks to the development of machine learning make ever more fine-grained statistical predictions on what to serve up next. In the move from physical media to digital media, which we have here explored as a shifting techno-aesthetic of walls and clouds, the role of the user also shifts, from

2 In order to view what films a given Netflix instance actually contain, users have to switch to an A-Z view which is cumbersome to find and which upon next login will revert to the genre or mood-focused ordering of content.

one of being trained into a good media consumer to one of being the human cog in the wheel, providing the data for training AI models to do the job "for them."

From wall to after-cloud

There have been many proposals for and interventions of resistance and alternatives to exploitative aspects of digital media, not the least in digital labor, often formulated in the fields of media theory, media art, activism, and critical design (cf. Irani and Silberman 2016; Scholz and Schneider 2016; Srnicek and Williams 2015; Ptak 2014; Ritasdatter 2008, 2007). Such work has highlighted important issues relating to the rights of the users/workers, politics of data, privacy, and ownership structures. However, we would argue that very few proposals for resistance or alternatives have so far addressed the material limitations of digital media, for example in relation to the paradigm of infinite growth and the need for paradigmatic shifts in the organization of life and labor in light of climate emergency. From the perspective of the increasingly popular degrowth movement, socio-ecological transformations require "a profound restructuring of the material-technical basis of society" (Schmelzer et al. 2022, 229). As the authors of the book *The Future is Degrowth* state, in relation to technology, "The question that degrowth puts at the center is: Which technology should society use? And for what, by whom, how and how much of it?" (Schmelzer et al., 229). These are also questions we wish to ask through our artistic research, which in following a philosophy of descaling, slowing down, and taking care of a media infrastructure, proposes a development of the struggle that Dyer-Witheford identified in his 2015 book, as one between accelerationist and communitarian responses to digital labor.

> The most likely result of the acceleration of capital's current technological tendencies is an involuntary localism brought about by social, geopolitical and ecological disasters that disintegrates the subsuming processes of globalization. Such crises would generate barbaric results, but could also, given the adequate prior organization, allow the creation of new communal forms that will, through a process of experimentation, have to determine their fit with a re-purposed cybernetic system. (Dyer-Witheford 2015, 197)

Degrowth, we would like to suggest, emerges as one viable arena for those new communal forms that the quote above hints at. The relation between degrowth and cybernetics is however a troubled one, with some parts of the degrowth movement still seemingly hanging on to naive visions of digitization as a possible relief of humans from unnecessary work. This myth is recalled by the aforementioned authors of *The Future is Degrowth* (Schmelzer et al. 2022, 234), even though they set up principles for "convivial technologies" that among other things, stress

"connectedness" as an asking "in what way a technology shapes the relationships between people, both in terms of its production and use or technical infrastructure" (Schmelzer et al. 2022, 230) and call for the "developing and promoting technologies that are produced under fair conditions, the infrastructures necessary for the operation of which do not destroy local communities, and which are organized on a decentralized and equal basis." (Schmelzer et al. 2022, 230) There is arguably, already a thriving community for such convivial technology practice among media artists, activists, researchers and designers who adopt techno-feminist, queer and trans★feminist methodologies to computing. In this context, Helen Pritchard and Ren Loren Britton have proposed "Careful Slugs" (CS) as a speculative approach to transforming Computer Science (CS) from within (2022). They introduce the "gooey" metaphor of the slug as a force of transformation of a field that has traditionally been characterized by hard lined hierarchies of labor and control of infrastructures. With the goal of "(d)estroying the established grounds of computer science and its interdependencies with hyperscale Big Tech infrastructure"(5), they engage in how "building, finding, and attending to the possibilities of alternative outcomes comes from focusing on the conditions that set up the not naturalized and not taken for granteds of CS practice."(8). Another related strain of alternative techno-aesthetics comes from actively working with technological limits. This would include Roel Roscam Abbing's experiments with a solar-powered website (2021) in relation to the community and paradigm of "Computing within Limits." Another example is the article by Aymeric Mansoux, Brendan Howell, Dušan Barok, and Ville-Matias Heikkilä on "Permacomputing Aesthetics: Potential and Limits of Constraints in Computational Art, Design and Culture" (2023). Here, the authors contrast the "maximalist techno-aesthetics" of new media art with low-tech and post-digital aesthetics "in which digital tools and media of all generations, are carefully combined, crafted and used to form a less extractive practice."(2)

Accompanied by a careful and self-critical discussion of the pitfalls of nostalgia when working with re-using old media and the privilege of actively choosing to work with limits, the article warns of permacomputing aesthetics remaining just a formal exercise and a symbolic gesture. In our artistic research project, *A Video Store After the End of the World*, we share this concern but at the same time want to stress the value in itself of practices such as Careful Slugs mentioned above. This and other trans* and techno-feminist practices engage in the building of feminist servers and federated, non-extractive infrastructures (De Valk 2023, Wessalowski and Karagianni 2023), which make a point out of refusing to scale-up and in their incompleteness, to resist structures of ableism and other factors of inequality. Again, we would like to stress continuities as well as discontinuities in how there is no hard cut between physical media infrastructures and digital

ones (not even in terms of a material / immaterial dichotomy), and in the next section, we will discuss our material speculation of working in between infrastructures as a way that tries to build a conversation space on alternatives.

A Video Store After the End of the World

The servers are down.
The streaming has stopped.
The cloud is gone.
Welcome to A Video Store After the End of the World.

In *A Video Store After the End of the World*, we revisit the analogue medium of VHS and the physical video store, not out of nostalgia for the lost physicality or ownership of media items in the digital age, but through a re-enacted VHS video-store, we rather seek to through aesthetic means sensibilize ourselves and our collaborators as well as visitors to the material relations of media infrastructures and set up the space as a form of material speculation on possible alternatives. In April 2023, we were given the opportunity to install our video store in a glass pavilion originally designed by modernist architect Arne Jacobsen in the late 1920s for the then new Enghave Park in Copenhagen's Vesterbro area. As an installation and ongoing artistic research project, the project is in its physical form a sort of "back to the wall" (see above) but with a twist, as we have turned the living room video wall inside out. The window facades of the glass pavilion are used to create the feeling that even though you are standing outside, you are inside a video store, as you are met with the sight of 2000 VHS tapes, stacked with their labels facing outward, readable to the passersby. If you enter the store, you are instead standing inside the backend of the technology, with all the names of the tape brands, backsides of monitors and AV cables visible. This inside/backside is nearly empty, but at given moments we activate the video store as an artistic research space – a performative space for conversations with the public visiting the store as well as for events with artists, designers and activists involved in self-run, independent media infrastructures. In this way the space is an infrastructural inversion in a double sense, first as a video store turned inside-out and secondly, as an activation of the inverted infrastructure as a place for artistic research on non-extractive digital practices.

It is important to note the installation as taking place in a public space belonging to a local library, without a long tradition of being codified as a space for contemporary art. Instead of announcing it as art then, we always described the

space in texts and to visitors as an actual video store, in order to encourage to think and interact with it as a media infrastructure, even though it did not operate or appear exactly as one might expect. Admittedly, a retro techno-aesthetics also contributed to the project's intention to attract the attention of the everyday passersby, who might for example remember the legendary "Yvonne's Video," the store that operated in the area from the early 1980's until 2008. The project did not dismiss the ability of such nostalgic affects to mobilize interest and engagement in the project, to the extent that we also featured an interview with Yvonne (of Yvonne's Video) and invited residents to share their "video memories" with us in our events. However, we maintain that the aim of the activities remains a transformative one, and that the nostalgic affects are here put to use in what is ultimately a non-linear conception of media infrastructures, where the past is up for re-interpretation and re-use in the present, pointing to possible futures.

With the temporal marker in the title of the project of an "after" the end of the world, we are inspired by the "reimagining of time" that Arnd Werdemeyer and Christoph F.E. Holzey (2018) have observed is integral to speculative thinkers of ecology in the Anthropocene (and beyond) such as Timothy Morton and Anna Tsing. Alongside them, we would like to suggest that "the end of the world" is already here, in the sense of the already catastrophic impact of the extractive regime of industrial modernism. Following Morton (2013), such a world, with its division of nature and culture, has already ended as a coherent narrative for understanding the complex entanglements of ecology across the human and non-human today, and following Tsing, what is needed are collaborative practices in or in spite of "capitalist ruins" (2015). Within this ecological framework, it is important to note that VHS tapes are usually not recycled, due to their difficult composite nature, consisting of both magnetic tape, plastics and metal coatings – and therefore they tend to end up in landfills, eventually spreading their toxic materials into the soil, or (if they are burned) – into the air. Unless you find the few recycling plants out there that actually take these tapes apart, it does not make sense to throw them away but to re-use them.

Our project is a material speculation on a possible video store after the end of the world, situated in a fictive, yet impending, time when the cloud is gone and the servers are down, but the VHS tapes are still around, as residual waste products of a bygone media age. Due to the slow biodegradation of VHS tapes, chances are also that they actually will outlive humanity's stay on earth and all our server infrastructures too. This is a contrasting scenario to digitization which is currently seen as the ultimate horizon of media sustainability – as the dominant way that we store and care for media now (cf. Tanner 2023). At the same time, we know that digitization and its associated technologies such as smart-phones, data centers and AI also means massive en-

ergy use (Holt and Vonderau 2015), a whole extractive regime of exploiting natural resources (Crawford 2021), as well as the aforementioned asymmetries of digital labor.

The spatial dimension of *A Video Store After the End of the World* also carries significance in terms of the project's relation to ecologies and infrastructure. The two glass pavilions in Copenhagen's Enghave Park, one of which hosted the store, were originally designed for the park's opening in 1929 by the well-known modernist architect Arne Jacobsen. Having originally hosted a vegetable and ice-cream shop, the pavilions eventually became run-down and were demolished in the 1970s. As part of a major renewal project of the park, the pavilions were reconstructed and re-opened in 2019. The restoration was motivated by climate-change and the prospect of future floodings, turning the whole park into a resilient infrastructure, with underground and above ground reservoirs, together capable of storing up to 24.000 cubic meter of water. Thus, the physical location is itself inscribed in a changing ecology, constituting a new urban infrastructure for the end of the world. Here, we moved in with our collection of 2000 VHS tapes, the amount needed to fill the window-spaces of the pavilion.

These tapes had been amassed together from various sources, including estate sales, donations from friends and family and our own collections. Notably, they were exclusively re-recordable tapes, featuring handwritten labels of titles of films and TV-programs, testifying to the manual labor that went into making and storing these recordings. The physical handling of these tapes became part of the techno-aesthetics of the store, and of the project as a performative media infrastructure. Given the transparent architecture of the pavilion, the manual labor of installing the tapes was highly visible and part of the project rather than hidden away as a before and after "the show." Among the actions performed in store, was the moving in and unpacking of the 20+ boxes of tapes and their gluing together in packs of seven, horizontally and vertically stacked in order to build a stable grid.

Extending these site-specific and performative aspects of the project, the store also featured a running program as well as the production and publication of new content relating to media infrastructures and non-extractive practices. The goal has been to do this in solidarity with the networks that inspired the initiation of the project, who all work against or outside the extractive cloud-based infrastructures of so-called Big Tech. These networks have been related to the project of the first Trans★Feminist Digital Depletion Strike, which was a transnational collective action organized on the 8th of March 2023 by a network of organizations, collectives and individuals as a protest against cloud-based computing and its extractive logic.[3] Also referred to as a Counter Cloud Action Day, this man-

3 See the announcement at https://varia.zone/8m/.

ifestation was meant to inspire different responses at the intersection of labor, care, and trans★feminist techno-politics.

As part of the eight of March strike, *A Video Store After the End of the World* was first set up as a one-day installation, featuring a window display at the art space called Collega in Copenhagen and a counter-cloud strike-banner action within the 8th of March demonstrations. The connection to the network of the Digital Depletion Strike continued during the longer run of the store in Enghave park as mentioned above, during which we conducted video interviews with some of the participant organizations and projects as well as people working on similar topics. These interviews were conducted online, through BigBlueButton, an open-source alternative to proprietary video calling software such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams hosted by the Brussels-based non-profit, artist-run organization, Constant. The recordings of these interviews were transferred onto VHS tapes from the video store, and through analogue video-mixing, the old content of the tapes was interweaved with the new material. Apart from being shown in the Video Store, this content will eventually feed into "Mix Tapes" published and distributed as VHS-based audiovisual zines on different themes relating to non-extractive practices. The interviews are also transcribed and published in a small booklet, accompanying the tapes, given that most recipients of these mix-tapes might not have access to a VHS player.

The first of the Mix Tapes, the *Counter-Cloud Mix Tape* – follows up on the network of feminist and trans★feminist groups of the aforementioned Digital Depletion Strike, who engage with self-run server infrastructures, low- and slow-tech as well as small-scale projects. For this edition we talked to designer Femke Snelting, one of the initiators of the Digital Depletion Strike, the feminist server collective Systerserver, artist and disability activist Ren Britton and artist-researcher Miranda Moss of Regenerative Energy Communities. We also hosted live in-store public conversations with the Danish co-operative server group Data.coop[4] and the artist Jacob Remin, who had installed a locally accessible micro-server as a digital extension of the store. A number of keywords guided our conversations and editing of the content which is mixed together as a collage on the tapes under the headings of Accessibility, Alternatives, Counter Cloud, Infrastructure, Intimacy, labor, Sustainability / Regenerativity, Scale and Trans*feminism. As relating to these keywords, the group Systerserver for example, works to overcome the hierarchies of labor as they are most often manifested within CIS male dominated tech culture. This means working actively with breaking down the division between back-end and

4 Data.coop hosted a Danish language-page for the Digital Depletion Strike as well as the website of *A Video Store After the End of the World*, https://VHS.data-coop.org.

front-end labor, as everyone becomes involved in a common taking care of computational resources, that are here supporting safe digital spaces for norm-critical practitioners (Wessalowski and Karagianni 2023, 195).

When consulting these and other groups, we always concluded our conversations with a question that turned back to the setting of the video store, putting their practice in relation to it. We asked for proposals to continue distributing *A Video Store After the End of the World*, according to the principles of the practice of the group or individual in question. How could the format, the collection of tapes, the mix-tapes, the labor involved and the conversations around them go on to function as a distributed counter-cloud media infrastructure, for example through accessible, trans★feminist and intersectional methodologies? By asking this question, we want to ensure that the project has a plasticity to it, that it is being further shaped by the suggestions of the communities with which it engages. In the concluding section, we will discuss our methodology of material speculation as an attempt at working in between different media infrastructures, in order to investigate possible techno-aesthetics, contingent with alternatives to cloud-computing and its extractive paradigm.

Conclusion: Material speculation beyond the cloud

In the introduction and first sections of this article we proposed a methodology of material speculation as working not only on individual media or technical artefacts but also working to transform the overall material relations of media infrastructures. We discussed the asymmetries of labor, the logic of extraction inherent to digital media and cited the degrowth movement as an inspiration, alongside recent developments in intersectional art and technology practices such as trans★feminist- and permacomputing. The shifts from the analogue medium of VHS to that of networked media infrastructures were discussed, explored as continuities and discontinuities of the wall and the cloud. This served to situate *A Video Store After the End of the World* as a project that works transversally across the supposed linearity of this media infrastructural shift, materially enacting a re-imagining of the VHS as an independent and self-run infrastructure.

An artistic research project of material speculation in infrastructure such as this, we would like to suggest, gains its strength from binding technology, aesthetics, and practice together, not into a project aiming for a universal solution, but as an intervention that works across a number of specific spatial and temporal dimensions of media infrastructures. The material relations of the project

came to the fore in the visibility of the physical media and the collective manual labor of setting up and taking care of the infrastructure, which is inspired by how labor structures are made visible and problematized within communities running self-organized computational infrastructures such as feminist servers. We wanted the project to evoke ways of working together that highlighted the collective care of the media collection and the labor to both operate and maintain it, as a contrast to the always available nature of streaming media, which hides its (extractive) operation from the user. This is also comparable to the methodology of the communities we engaged, who work to counter the abstract, male-dominated space of computation and its server-client power structure. In discussions of such projects, the topic of scale often comes up, and although small-scale is the common predicament for these practices, this is not the same as resisting scalability per se. Some projects are decidedly against scaling up, and want to stay within their own small communities, while others see themselves as building alternatives that could be viable for others to adopt. The video store itself provides an interesting framework to such discussions, because it inverts the effective scaling of today's streaming services while it is at the same time an attempt to render the work and resources that would be required for scaling up tangible and possible to re-imagine. In this sense, with the store, we set up a space through which we could access intersectional conversations and practices concerning material relations of infrastructure – and invite people in to explore this spatio-temporal material speculation further with us.

Following Tsing's (2015) attention to life in the ruins of capitalism and "pericapital" practices such as salvaging as simultaneously existing inside and outside capital, we would like to conclude by inviting the reader to think about our re-enacted video store as a public infrastructure of re-storing. In this sense, the project entails a restoring as in repairing/retrieving something lost (the VHS medium and the video store as social site) and a *re*-storing as in a form of re-ordering and re-allocation into an after-cloud imaginary of contemporary practices that are often extractive and exploitative. The ethos of the project is to do this according to non-extractive parameters in a way that is inspired by the degrowth movement and in that differs from mere recycling and upcycling. Instead of a circular economy approach which suggests the possibility of simply installing a new form of capitalist value and supply chain, we are here suggesting a practice of re-introducing and taking care of both the cultural imaginary and the material culture of seemingly obsolete, yet also strangely residual media infrastructures. The project is inspired by and unfolds in collaboration with activist and artist groups working on similar issues, but we would like to emphasize that it is doing this within a public format. The Video Store is an intervention in public space, and does as such not have one defined public or community of practice. By evoking the popular video store as a

cultural place that some will remember, and others not, the potential for a conversation on changing media infrastructures and the necessity also of changing them in the light of climate emergency, is already in place. In this sense, the project aims to be a (spatio-)material speculation that supports the imagining of how a video store, or indeed many other infrastructures, could take shape after the end of the world.

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Part Two

Aesthetics: Organization, Mediation, Relation

Frida Sandström

A Crisis of Autonomy

Critique of Art and Sexuality in 1974

> [Gender] names the subjective imprint of the symbolization of sexual difference – a formulation that provisionally captures both a subjective valence of desire and identification together with the objective determinations of the structural, systemic, and historical formations that enable these desires and identifications in the first place.
>
> Gabriel 2024, 138

> [T]he prostitute, in the context of criticism about the arts, represents not the sociality of sex but the sociality of art.
>
> Doyle 2006, 51

> It is an advantage to the term 'vulgar,' as far as I am concerned, that discursively it points two ways: to the object itself, to some abjectness or absurdity in its very make-up (some telltale blemish, some atrociously visual quality which the object will never stop betraying however hard it tries); and to the object's existence in a particular social world, for a set of tastes and styles of individuality which have still to be defined, but are somehow there, in the word even before it is deployed.
>
> Clark 1991, 540

In November 1974, the American art journal *Artforum* published a two-page advertisement for American artist Lynda Benglis. The advertisement consisted of a photograph taken by fashion photographer David Gordon, featuring the artist naked in a loose contrapposto. Benglis was holding a double dildo as a prosthesis for a penis and meeting the viewer's gaze through a pair of sporty sunglasses. The publication of the advertisement caused an internal conflict within the editorial group of *Artforum*, and resulted in two editors, Rosalind Krauss, and Anette Michelsen, leaving the journal. This chapter will focus on the way in which Benglis' blend of kitsch and prosthetic sexual objects confronts the imagined objectivity of the art object and the subject of the art critic, respectively. Discussing how the form of the advertisement commodifies an otherwise aesthetically objective content in the journal, I analyze how the process of reification makes the aesthetics of the value form a matter of autoeroticism. I furthermore discuss how this process immanently negates both aesthetic critique and the law of value. The two pillars of capitalist value

Note: A first version of this chapter was presented at PAF Summer University 2023 and in dialogue with Andria Nyberg Forshage. Thanks for the feedback from the listeners, especially William Spendlove, Jackqueline Frost, and Sophie Pousette. Thanks to Mikkel Ibsen Sørensen and Mikkel Bolt for feedback along the way. This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Marina Vishmidt (1976–2024), whose work and comradely thinking has been a central spur to the writing.

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and aesthetic subjectivity were important to distinguish for an art journal like *Artforum* in 1974. When approached toward disintegration, the critical subject of the editor risks coming out as either a sell-out, or a sexual subjectivity – or both. This would risk the social and material preconditions upon which the aesthetic judgement and its presupposed subjects relies, as they operate within the journal. The article hence approaches a conjunctural specific relation between the social and the aesthetic, immanent to the categories of capital, art, and sexuality.

Benglis' sexual and artistic subjectivity as represented in the *Artforum* advertisement personified a changed relation between art and the market. This change was dominated by the recent American oil crisis lasting between October 1973 and January 1974. In this context, Benglis' blur of sexual and artistic subjectivity questions the difference between subject and object; art and commodity; sex and labor. This furthermore exemplified an altered relation between the subject of the artist and the bourgeois public (including *Artforum*) and furthermore to the capitalist economy. The reason is that Benglis' work not only used the aesthetics of an advertisement; it *was* one. Furthermore, the object marketed by the advertisement was the undefined sexuality of the artist herself. The combined alteration of sexual and artistic subjectivity immediately involved the subject of the critic. It did so in the way that the critic's subjectivity in this context and period was depending on a formal dialectics of subject and object, the destabilization of which also destabilized the critic's autonomy at this time. The conditions for autonomy, which both artists and critics depended on, were therefore set into crisis, and will henceforth be analyzed as a *crisis of autonomy*. What caused the strong reaction to Benglis amongst the *Artforum* editors, and how did their reaction relate to the relation between art, critique, and sexual politics in 1974? By focusing on the triangulation between art, capital, and sexuality, I will discuss the crisis of autonomy that plays out within *Artforum* this year, as a matter specific for the context and period of a late post-war northern US-American crisis. This will furthermore make it possible to discuss similar crises that we see playing out today.

A crisis of autonomy

The November issue of *Artforum* 1974 included the five-page article "Lynda Benglis: The Frozen Gesture," written by the journal's contributing senior editor Robert Pincus-Witten (Pincus-Witten 1974). The article combined citations from Benglis, along with Pincus-Witten's own words, with which he described the artist's oeuvre as having a pop sensibility without dependence on the pop aesthetics. Benglis, he cites, wanted to "question what vulgarity is. Taste is context." (Pincus-Witten 1974, 55) These

words, which immediately puts the art critic's judgment to the test, are reflected in a parallel photography of Benglis published on the same page, taken by artist Anne Leibowiz. In this image, Benglis turns her naked back to the viewer and looks innocently back at the spectator over her shoulder, quite like the posture of a pinup girl. The image stands out with a sharp contrast to the image by Gordon featured in the advertisement. Initially, Benglis had proposed to publish the Gordon photograph as an accompaniment to the article. She wanted it to appear as a centerfold poster image in color. This was a big expense at the time, which she was willing to pay for herself.

The above-mentioned background information was shared by five objecting editors in a "Letter to the editor," published in response to the advertisement, in the following issue of *Artforum*. The letter was directed to Pincus-Witten himself. In it, the co-editors explain how Benglis' proposal initially was refused by the editorial group with the argument that "Artforum does not sell its editorial space." This was the reason why the Gordon photograph was published by Pincus-Witten as an advertisement, printed by courtesy of the artist's gallery, Paula Cooper. The decision was not supported by the other editors who, in their Letter, describe Benglis' advertisement as "an object of extreme vulgarity [. . .] and a qualitative leap in that genre, brutalizing ourselves and, we think, our readers." Furthermore, the editors state that the advertisement was a "mockery" of the women's liberation movement, to which they argue that *Artforum* had already expressed its support. (Alloway et al. 1974, 9.) The Letter only refers to the advertisement, while the article by Pincus-Witten and the photograph by Leibowiz is left undiscussed. Equally, only the Leibowiz picture is discussed by Pincus-Witten in his article. This causes a gap in the critical reception of Benglis', activity at large, and makes her advertisement stand out as an extra-artistic activity, rather than part of her oeuvre.

Krauss', Michelsen's and the other editors' reactions need to be discussed on two levels. Firstly, on the level of *sexual difference*, and secondly, on the level of *art's autonomy*. Benglis' advertisement allows us to understand how the material conditions of the two levels interrelate in a context and period in which the autonomy of art and that of the critic was in crisis together with the presupposed sexual difference sealed within the modern nuclear family within the modern capitalist nation state. Common for aesthetic autonomy and heterosexuality is their respective dependence on the social relations mediated by the formal infrastructure of the bourgeois public sphere. In the year of 1974, this sphere was in a disintegrating mode after the global May 1968, the killing and incarceration of the Black Panthers, Stonewall 1970, and the following oil crisis as already mentioned. By understanding heterosexuality as an accumulation of sexual difference in the form of gender, (Gabriel 2024) it is possible to understand aesthetic difference, i.e. critique, similarly. If aesthetic critique reproduces transcendental subjects based on a predefined set of social conditions that conditions this activity, a critique of sexuality reproduces sex-

ual subjects according to a predefined set of social conditions. In other words, both activities depend on a model for social distinction, supported by the social structure in which it plays out. While the critique of art presupposes a set of predefined social relations within the social structure of the bourgeois public sphere, a critique of sexuality genders people according to a binary structure of sexual difference particular to a historically specific context.

If we analyze the two historical categories of art and sexuality together and with Benglis' advertisement as an example, it becomes clear that both art and people are socialized and universalized in terms of the universality of the aesthetic form, of the law of value, and of gender binaries respectively. As the advertisement shows, the abstraction of capital and sexuality that comes with the act of critique often coincide in the aesthetic form's presupposed autonomy. Benglis' sexual subjecs as mediated by the advertisement therefore underscores the limit of this autonomy.

The dialectics of the aesthetic and the sexual

The critique and difference of art and sexuality are inherently related, although far too under-discussed as such.[1] It is therefore important to attend to the parallel trajectory taken by the two categories in the context and period of Benglis' advertisement. The advertisement makes clear that the disintegration of both categories, as part of the larger, social decomposition in play in the late post-war era, is as present for the *Artforum* editors as they are for Benglis herself. The social decomposition in question is conjuncturally specific and regards social roles as they are formally organized and simultaneously informally disorganized in the mid-1970s USA. Amongst these roles is the subject of the art critic, who stands out as a defender of the social structure of the bourgeois public sphere. At the same time, the critic is a social figure who since the mid-1960s had been joining various social movements undertaken by artists and other workers against the social biases imposed by these structures. (Bryan-Wilson 2011).

The art critic in this period and context had a "double character" in the way that she impersonated two formally opposed positions.[2] The first position that the

1 While the literature on the relations between sexuality and art is extensive, both in terms of art's role in sexual liberation and the centrality of sexuality in the history of art and the avant-garde, the aesthetic and social abstractions that both presuppose are seldomly discussed in relation. See Susik and Ngai 2020, Croft 2021, et al.

2 For a further discussion of the double character of the critic, see Sandström 2023 and Sandström 2024.

critic embodies is that of the dominating social structure uphold by the nation state and with it, the bourgeois public sphere's presupposed autonomy from that same state. Secondly, the critic embodied the position of the social figure subjected to capital as much as to the social structures imposed by the bourgeois public sphere in this period and context. Firstly, as representative of the universality of the bourgeois public sphere, the art critic was socially autonomous to capital by means of their execution of an aesthetic judgement in the context of art "beyond the market." Secondly, she was a social figure with needs and causes like artists and other people. Therefore, the art critic was as dependent on the market as anyone else. On the level of sexuality, the double character of the art critic plays out in the ways that she acts according to a normalized gender binary as presupposed by the predefined conditions for the critic's autonomy. Simultaneously, many American art critics in the 1970s had started to act beyond these sexual biases. (Sandström 2023) When Benglis published her advertisement in *Artforum*, the double character of the art critic was simply in a disintegrating crisis in the way that the aspects of value, autonomy and sexuality as outlined above short-circuited each other and made them all "too" visible. It is this visibility that the advertisement manifests. Namely, the visibility of social structures. This opacity is a threat to any form of autonomy, be it an autonomy of art or of capital. The reaction from the *Artforum* editors is therefore an act of self-defense on behalf of autonomy, against its increasing crisis.

Much research has already been undertaken around the way in which the historical categories of art and of sexuality were changing in this context and period. (Getsy 2015; Doyle 2006; Getsy and Doyle 2014.) Yet, less is said about how these two aspects relate to the critic, despite the central role of sexuality for the aesthetic judgement. As made clear by philosophers such as Christine Battersby and Stella Sandford, the aesthetic judgement as outlined by Immanuel Kant in 1790 is founded on a racial and sexual divide by means of pathologizing dependence, lust, and interest. (Battersby 2008; Sanford 2018). If we understand the critique of art as a commodified version of the aesthetic judgement – in the way that it is undertaken as labor within a capitalist mode of production – the presupposed autonomy of the art critic in 1974 is confronted by artforms that reveal their relation to the market. Examples of these forms of art are kitsch and prosthetic forms of sexual objects. At this time, these artefacts appeared in both art and in other commercial contexts, proving the interrelation of both. This interrelation, which inherently includes the subject of the artist and critic, exemplifies the crisis of autonomy in question. This is a crisis part of a larger change in modes of production and consumption, which in turn resulted in a change in form regarding the concept of art and sexuality. This change in form, I argue, is a question of the social structure of the aesthetic form, as outlined above. When a social structure changes like it did in the early

1970s, the respective critical distinctions and differences of art and sexuality are confronted with the commercialization of aesthetic semblance, here discussed as prosthetic objects and kitsch. This is what plays out in Benglis' advertisement.

In 2004, art historian Richard Meyer revisited the case of Benglis' advertisement in a retrospective article for *Artforum*. He proposes that the artist's intervention can be understood as a "refusal to resolve comfortably into either a feminist critique of pornography or a pornographic critique of feminism, to the way it jumps from artist's project to advertisement to historical artefact and back again." Furthermore, Meyer adds that "sexuality, self-promotion, and the links between them were emerging as significant issues within contemporary art and criticism" at this time. (Meyer 2004, 249) In other words, Benglis refused to take sides on the presumed binary of sexual and aesthetic difference. According to queer Marxist theorist Peter Drucker, the commercialization of performative sexuality emerged together with the repression of non-binary sexualities in mid-late twentieth-century America. In other words, sexual liberation was fought on many levels and by both women, lesbians, gays, queers, trans people, etcetera. Drucker proposes that the more gendered a sexual identity was – as in the case of cis-gender conservative feminists' defense of heterosexuality – the more 'self-defensive' it was. (Drucker 2015, 161) This was presumably an important question for Benglis who, in a conversation with Meyer cited in his article, states that she "had a formal need to make that picture," (Meyer 2004, 74)

Benglis' expression of a 'formal need' for the advertisement photograph can be understood as her self-critical artistic intention regarding the aesthetic and capitalist forms of sexuality at play during this period and in this context. Simultaneously, the form of the work that came out of the photograph was erotic in the sense of Benglis gesturing an immediate sensation of herself by means of her pose. This immediate, auto-erotic action can also be understood as the use of the self as *prosthetic*, which was manifested in Benglis' image on a level of representation as well. In other words, the presence of the dildo and the artist's body allows us to understand Benglis as undertaking a prosthetic, or a fake autonomy as artist and artwork, upheld by the context that *Artforum* provided. In his theoretization around the technique during the new avant-garde, facing its decline at this point, John Roberts describes the interwoven relation between prosthetic technique (the ready-made) and the surrogate subjectivity that it allows for. He states that the techniques underlying a prosthetic aesthetics allows for a 'surrogate' form of representation. (Roberts 2007, 155) This is the sense in which I propose the phrase "fake autonomy," upheld by Benglis when posing as artist and commodity at once. While the context of *Artforum* set the premises for the semblance of autonomy, this semblance was simultaneously unveiled by the form of the ad-

vertisement as it was published in the art journal. My use of the notion of the prosthetic refers both to the imagined direct relation between the sexual subject and her body, or other sexual objects – an imagined form of subjectivity beyond the socially restrained forms in which modern individuality is shaped.

From a self-defensive conservative perspective of the 1970s, the presupposed heterosexual relation of the modern family, the (sexed) body should not be for its own use as manifested by Benglis, n'either should it be transformed chemically or biologically, which still is the case in transphobic discourse.[3] As we see with Benglis, this was already a question in conservative feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. An example to this was Liberal Democrat Betty Friedan's seminal book *The Feminine Mystique* from 1963, which I discuss later in this chapter. If we understand the sexual object as a prosthetic body of the sexual subject, and vice versa, the same can be said about kitsch in art. Appearing in the form or context of an artwork, kitsch gains aesthetic autonomy by means of art's aesthetic form, while it also gains a social autonomy in its usefulness beyond the aesthetic realm of art. In her advertisement, Benglis was letting the social and aesthetic abstractions of art and gender play out against each other in the 'contra-poste' that she was upholding, dildo in hand, in the Gordon photograph. Her refusal to neither critique feminism with pornography, nor pornography with feminism, as Meyer proposes, is a clear stance taken by the artist to show how pornography and feminism interrelate. In other words, the commodity form is as central to sexual liberation as it is to modern art.

A prosthetic relation

In the context and period of the post-war crisis in which Benglis' advertisement was published, deindustrialization caused class relations to decompose. This process resulted in new modes of production, as well as new ways for the working class to individuate as subjects in a post-war society, hit by an economic crisis

3 In *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin: Rethinking, Remaking, Reclaiming the Body in Contemporary Capitalism*, Silvia Federici writes: "We should not underestimate this danger. Even without gene editing we are already mutants, capable, for instance, of carrying out our daily lives while aware that catastrophic events are occurring all around us, including the destruction of our ecological environment and the slow death of the many people now living on our streets, whom we daily pass by without much of a thought or an emotion. What threatens us are not only that the machines are taking over, but also that we are becoming like machines. Thus, we do not need any more robot-like individuals produced by a new breeding industry, this time located in medical labs." See Federici 2021, 18.

in October 1973. The crisis lasted until January 1974, but indeed ended the economic optimism of the 1960s, as part of which sexual liberation surfed on the waves of post-Fordist production, the tourist industry and a boosted consumption amongst the population.[4] As the commodity took new forms in this context, the distinction between consumer subject and goods for consumption was harder to decipher: event culture, commercial cinema and sex work became more established components of people's daily life. Modern art went through the very same process, and this is where kitsch and the prosthesis became central, ready-made objects in art and beyond.[5] Along with the confrontation of the autonomy of art and the identity of modern sexual subjectivity, new forms of representation emerged with kitsch and prosthetic objects. Consequently, sexual difference as a critical distinction of modern subjectivity was put to the test. Similarly, the critical distinction of art was blurred by the presence of kitsch on a market beyond and between art institutions. In the sex industry, the ready-made prosthesis played a similar role.

Half a century after the introduction of the readymade with Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* from 1913, kitsch was at once a social and an aesthetic category. In terms of art's role as a social category, we can decipher it as the petite bourgeoise performing an (absent) aristocracy, undertaken as a compensation for the crisis of bourgeois subjectivity during the cold war, as T.J. Clark describes it. (Clark 1991, 547) If we understand this performance as kitsch, namely as solely dependent on its aesthetic semblance, we can think of entrepreneurship and self-employment as such as well. In John Robert's thinking of surrogacy in art following Duchamp's readymade, he describes the development of "practices in which a non-unitary account of authorship and authorship-at-a-distance promises another account of artistic subjectivity." (Roberts 2015, 155) This is what in the 2000s developed into the entrepreneurial artist subject discussed in detail by Marina Vishmidt. (Vishmidt 2018) In continuity of both Roberts and Vishmidt, I understand the process of aesthetic and social semblance as one of a *prosthetic relation*. This relation marks out the structural change taking place during this context and period. Namely, in the post-Fordist context of 1974, the artist was indeed self-employed, most notably after the introduction of the notion of the "art worker" in 1967. (Bryan-Wilson 2011). From this perspective, Benglis was testing the limits of the prosthetic relation that she embodied as artist and sexual subject alike.

4 For a further discussion of "the working-class norm of consumption," see Brenner and Glick 1991, 52.

5 For a thorough discussion of the transformation of art in this period and context, see Bernes 2017.

Clark describes the new form of individuation of the middle class in post-war USA as monstrous and vulgar. He also underscores, and this is important, that this process is gendered. (Clark 1991, 547) In the context of post-war art we see this in the way that the commodity increasingly takes the shape of a generic artwork, which simultaneously puts the critical subject and the aesthetic autonomy of the artwork to the test by conceptual means.[6] Called the "new," this kitsch, pop or anti-art is vulgarizing aesthetic criteria and demands new aesthetic categories, as argued by art historian and critic Leo Steinberg in 1972. (Steinberg 2007 [1972]) Three decades later, cultural theorists like Sianne Ngai have proceeded with the question posed by Steinberg in the context of cultural studies. Different from him, she puts an emphasis on the sexual and racial bias that modern aesthetic categories rely upon. In Ngai's focus are the aesthetic categories of "ugly" (Ngai 2005) as well as the "zany," the "cute" and the "interesting" (Ngai 2012). Central to all is that they function as outcasts of the aesthetic judgment's categorization of its objects of critique. Our engagement with Benglis' use of a prosthesis in the form of a dildo makes clear that there was a similar demand for new categories regarding sexuality and gender at the time of her intervention in *Artforum*. The reaction to the advertisement furthermore articulates the refusal to give up old imaginaries of social and sexual difference as they function in the modern concepts of art and gender that dominated formalist critique of art at the time. In other words, old social and aesthetic categories were defended on behalf of new ones.

Objects of critique, subjects of difference

In a statement following the "Letter to the editor" *Artforum* conflict, Rosalind Krauss continues the previous collective argument that Benglis' advertisement was "brutalizing" editors and readers: "We thought the position represented by that ad was so degraded. We read it as saying that art writers are whores." (Bryan-Wilson 2012, 93) Here it is important to note that Krauss is describing Benglis' position as "degraded," only a few decades after Nazi Germany's "entartete Kunst." What 'position' is it that Krauss refers to when using this word? Krauss' following comment regarding the critic as a quote unquote prostitute can be understood as referring to Benglis' presupposed position, which from Krauss' perspective seems to advertise sex work. This selling point furthermore targets the autonomy of art and its critical subjects, such as the "art writers," as referred to by Krauss. This immediately includes the subjectivity

6 For a further discussion of the transformation of the generic concept of art in this period and context, see Wikström 2021.

of Krauss herself as art critic and editor of *Artforum*. How can an erotic photograph of Benglis be such a threat to Krauss when it appears in her own journal? To understand this, we need to decipher Krauss' reference to the prostitute in relation to the role of art's autonomy for her subject as art critic and editor at this moment in history.

If we understand Benglis' advertisement as provoking Krauss' critical subjectivity, it is easy to think of Krauss herself, an editor of the art journal, as a sell-out. Not only in the sense of selling editorial space to Benglis, but also by promoting the commodity that the advertisement communicates, i.e., a *sex object*. In Jennifer Doyle's words regarding similar examples, it is possible to say that the situation forced Krauss to "attach a price to something that is not supposed to have a price (. . .)." (Doyle 2006, 53) Put differently, Benglis' work threatened the idea that art and sex should be autonomous from the market, by the help of the art institution and of the institution of the nuclear family respectively. It is this semblance of autonomy, upheld by institutions in a crisis at this moment, that Benglis unveils with her advertisement.

The crisis of semblance must be understood in relation to the self-reflection of art and sexual subjects respectively, in this moment and context. In the context of art, this means that artists were continuously engaging with that which was not art, and which appeared in contexts beyond art, such as the market and more specifically the sex industry. This process puts both the concept of art and its institutions to the test. A similar process took place as part of the struggle for sexual liberation that took place during this period. As Drucker proposes, these movements were popularized on the market and touched on the limits of what identities should be freed by American liberalism. (Drucker 2015, 164) This stretched the limits of the centrality of the nuclear family within a capitalist mode of production and consumption. The multi-layered aspect of Benglis' sell-out combines both, which in Krauss' words results in a "degraded" position. (Bryan-Wilson 2012, 93)

In the words of philosopher and value theorist Amy De'Ath, difference is "not a 'thing' but mediation." (De'Ath 2017, 40) Namely, a relation, and an aesthetic as well as a social experience. It is the mediation of difference that Benglis undertakes on two levels. The social critique that her intervention in *Artforum* results in is therefore a critique of social and sexual difference presupposed by the critical subject. In other words, it is a reflection regarding the subject's ability to self-reflect. This model collapses the divide between the universal and the particular and rather emphasizes the *internal difference*, i.e., the particularity of all forms of subjectivity. Critique by means of difference is therefore a practice internal to all aesthetic objects and subjects. This means that both artworks and non-art, i.e., people, undertake this kind of critique constantly, and as a way of existing in late modern capitalism. We do it to cope with the constant changes in social form that

we live under, as I have already described regarding the process of deindustrialization – which is still in process today. With this background, we need to understand *objects of critique* as *subjects of difference*. Doing so allows us to think of how the social figure of the art critic herself functions in a context of crisis.

The next section takes its starting point in the understanding of the object of art as both autonomous and social, aesthetically free and reified by capital, as introduced by Theodor W. Adorno in 1970. (Adorno 1997 [1970]) From this perspective we can understand a particular social experience to take the form of an aesthetic objection (refusal) vis-à-vis the difference imposed onto it by critique. This process also goes the other way around: an object can evoke a social objection to the universalism imposed on it by aesthetic abstraction, as discussed in detail by Fred Moten. (Moten 2003, 233–254) This is how the two abstractions of capital and aesthetics short circuit each other in the modern artwork. As De'Ath states, aesthetic critique allows us to "sense" the abstractions that mediate the social and sexual difference immanent to a particular work of art. (De'Ath 2018, 49) This sensation is a way to *object* to formal critique and the real abstraction that form our socially objective realities. I assert that Benglis' objection is *erotic*.

A prosthetic modernity

Poet and Marxist theorist Key Gabriel claims: "Gender belongs to the sphere of ideology – not in the pejorative sense of false consciousness but in the descriptive sense of the conceptual representation of social relations." (Gabriel 2024, 138) developing from her argument, we can state that modern conceptual art is accelerating the ways in which both art and gender are mediated by social relations and capital interest. It does so by mediating social abstractions *as art*, in the form of the readymade. Commodified in the context of a cultural industry, it appears as kitsch. Sexual difference was a central notion in the context of feminist sexual liberation from 1970 and onwards.[7] It was imagined both on the level of individual experience, and on that of the social objective forms of organization of people that cause these experiences. Abstracted as a subjective attribute, it is named gender, as Gabriel makes clear.

7 The notion was initially introduced in the context of feminism by art historian, critic, and separatist feminist Carla Lonzi in the seminal essay "Sputiamo su Hegel" (Let's Spit on Hegel) in 1970. Despite Lonzi's interest in non-identity, the notion was exported via the literature authored and published by La Libraria delle Donne in Milan to French feminist theory and psychoanalysis in the 1980s. Sexual difference is thereafter central in the more conservative field of "Women's Studies." See Sandström 2024.

From Krauss' and Michelsen's and the other objecting *Artforum* editors' perspective, the "objective determinations" of sexuality were put at risk by Benglis' advertisement. Their perspective condemns the advertisement for being a simple sell-out of the female body and omits the fact that commercialization was central to sexual liberation at this time, as much as the reified body itself was important to erotic encounters beyond the nuclear family (and yet much more central to the nuclear family than was admitted). In this sense, Benglis' advertisement sheds light on the role of capital in the movement for sexual liberation, which must be understood as part of a larger change in a mode of production, within which binary gender relations preserve given understandings of sexuality. As Gabriel writes, "In its capacity as an axis of difference, then, gender serves as one of the instruments by which capital unevenly compels and exploits labor." (Gabriel 2024, 138) The question is, who should define this exploitation, and from what perspective.[8]

That the editors describe Benglis' posture as a "mockery" of the women's liberation movement resides on another presumption, namely, that Benglis' advertisement mediates sex, or sex work, and furthermore that this makes her an alienated and unfree "woman." This line of thought points to several issues in this context and period. As the sex wars were about to start in the late 1970s, the aesthetic forms of sexuality and gender were increasingly debated by conservative feminists, revolutionary lesbians, queers, and trans people. In the context of a commercialized and on an early stage also academized sexual liberation (Rubin 2011), Benglis' advertisement can be understood as a method for the artist to voluntarily self-objectify as artwork and self-employed artist to object normative forms of art and sexuality alike. Queer Marxist theorist Kevin Floyd has described the liberatory aspect of the sexual commodity as it is materialized by the late modern labouring subject. Self-objectivation is therefore not only a question of alienation but is rather an auto-erotic model for emancipation, Floyd proposes. (2009) From this perspective, Benglis as sex object was far from a submission, as presupposed by the editors in the Letter.

In her article "Dirty Commerce: Art Work and Sex Work since the 1970s," art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson contextualizes Benglis' advertisement along with another work by the artist; the video *Female Sensibility*, also from 1973. (Bryan-Wilson 2012, 107; Benglis 1973) The title of the work points out the issues at stake in the editorial response to the advertisement. From the editors' perspective, Ben-

8 The literature on surrogacy and prostitution as a violation on the female body and furthermore as alienating labor is extensive. See for example Ekman 2013. This kind of critique often oversees the important role of prostitution in queer and trans milieu, and furthermore the role of surrogacy in the same contexts. For a discussion on the problem with critiquing surrogacy and prostitution as a violation of female bodies and rights, see Lewis 2019.

glis perverted an idea of a non-transgressive female sensibility, as was assumed by the pinup-pose in the Liebovitz photograph that was published along with Pincus-Witten's article – at least if the article and the photograph are read out of context from the rest of the artist's oeuvre. The fact that Benglis' video featured both same-sex erotica and the 1970s Stonewall Riots makes clear that her presupposed gendered abstraction as cis-woman was disintegrated by an auto-erotic sensibility that transgressed such essentialist views on sexuality. (Bryan-Wilson 2012, 107) It equally did so regarding the view on art: it transgressed the presupposed autonomy of its aesthetic form with prosthetic kitsch.

For art historian Alison Lee Bracker, who has written extensively on the history of *Artforum*, Benglis' appearance – "diamond earrings, harlequin sunglasses, and an enormous dildo held against her crotch" – suggests 'hermaphroditism.' (Bracker 1995, 76) In the historically specific context, this interpretation seems to be the most accurate. In the movement for sexual liberation and in the development of a vocabulary that allows a larger scope of sexual identities, the notion of hermaphroditism was central. For example, it was widely discussed by Italian gay liberation and trans thinker Mario Mieli,[9] who in the 1970s described 'transsexuality' as a non-gendered sexuality. (Mieli [1977] 2018) As Kay Gabriel proposes, Mieli's perspective allows us to think of contemporary transsexuality as a refusal of gender as an abstraction. (Gabriel 2024, 151–152) Following Floyd and the example of Benglis, we might understand it as a way of refusing gender in the way that it objects the subjective transcendence that social and aesthetic form presumes, by emphasizing the auto-erotic aspect of this form as *reified* (Floyd 2009).

Another result of Benglis' willful objectification is that it hacks modern representation. In the words of Denise Ferreira da Silva, hacking "is not so much a method, as it is refusal as a mode of engagement." (Ferreira da Silva 2018, 21). Her proposal is especially to the point when it comes to modern forms of subjectivity, with which she also engages. In the same vein, Benglis' intervention does not seem to be a strategy but rather a 'need,' as she herself described it to Meyer. In his description of the American middle class filling in for an absent aristocracy, Clark proposes what he calls a "representational doubling." (Clark 1991, 547) Similarly can we understand Benglis' formal representation of art in *Artforum*, along with the informal, heterogenous, and market-oriented form of the advertisement, as something presented as a conceptual gimmick. For Ngai, the gimmick is inherently sexualized and racialized in its reified aesthetic form. By means of this double

9 Mario Mieli was a founding member of FUORI, *Italian Revolutionary Homosexual Unitary Front.* In 1977, his PhD dissertation *Elementi di critica omosessuale* (*Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique*) was posthumously published. Milan 1977: Einaudi.

character, it both lowers and raises the value of the subject that carries it and henceforth critiques the aesthetic value of its form socially, Ngai proposes. (Ngai 2020) It is the play between autonomy and heteronomy that is at play in Benglis' work. This play transgresses previously established criteria for art and non-art, normative sexuality and the "vulgar."

Benglis' 'representational doubling' reflects a process in which bourgeois art and its public sphere disintegrate by the increasing presence of commodities and liberalized subjects that first and foremost appear in society as 'new' or 'other' to the general consciousness. If we are to extend the concept of the new in modern art as Adorno describes it in *Aesthetic Theory*, (Adorno 1997 [1970], 23) and rather think about it as a social category, it is possible to analyze how institutions of labor and art consume this 'novelty' of subjective expression as a way of prohibiting its greater influence on the general form of a societal self-image. If they would not absorb the new, or abandon it as forever other to the general, there would be too big a risk that the new would grow like a social movement that in the end could cause an abrupt change in the overall social composition of subjects. This includes the social organization of art as it functions in modern capitalism, in which editors like Krauss defend the concept of art on an identitarian level.

Fake autonomy

> It seems that modernism is being proposed as bourgeois art in the absence of a bourgeoisie or, accurately, as aristocratic art in the age when the bourgeoisie abandons its claims to aristocracy. And how will art keep aristocracy alive? By keeping itself alive, as the remaining vessel of the aristocratic account of experience and its modes; *by preserving its own means, its media; proclaiming those means and media as its values, as meanings in themselves.* (Clark 1982, 147)

Both kitsch in art and prosthetic objects in sex transgress the values of modernism that Clark describes in the citation above. Benglis' advertisement is an example of such transgression in both contexts. Obviously, the self-identificatory aspect of modernism that Clark describes so accurately in his essay on Greenberg must be discussed in depth. Clark's reading departs from Greenberg's notion of 'immanence in painting.' In his seminal essay "Modernist Painting" from 1961–65,[10] Greenberg

10 As discussed in detail by Francis Frascina, Greenberg reedited the original essay from 1961 for the occasion of its second publication in 1965. The change undertaken by Greenberg, Frascina underscores, unveils Greenberg's adaption to the McCarthyism referred to by TJ Clark in the citation above. See Frascina 2003.

introduced the concept of 'flatness' as an inherent autonomous feature of the artwork. In the essay "Other Criteria" from 1972, art historian and critic Leo Steinberg reflects the relation between Greenberg's formalism and liberal feminism by relating both to the self-reflection of the modern subject:

> Was it Kantian self-definition which led the American woman into what Betty Friedan calls the "Feminine Mystique," wherein "the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity"? (Steinberg 2007 [1972], 68)

Like Clark, Steinberg critiques post-war American formalist critique of art for reducing and universalizing all characteristics of the modern artwork – in this context painting – to the universalism of a singular picture plane. The personification of this universalism is Greenberg's flatness, which in Steinberg's view, makes art history linear and painting essentialist: by focusing on form as finite, any change in this form – as content – is dismissed by the formalist art critic, Steinberg argues. Furthermore, this approach flattens a historical relation and context into a single moment of an individual critical judgement. This is the self-defensive aspect of American formalist critique of art in the early 1970s, which indeed echoes Friedan's liberal feminist essentialism. In her best seller *The Feminine Mystique* from 1963, Friedan argued for a fulfilment of a gender identity, as opposed to the evolving gay and queer movement surrounding her. In "Modernist Painting," Greenberg writes:

> The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered 'pure', and in its 'purity' find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well as of its independence. 'Purity' meant *self-definition*, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance. (Greenberg 1982)

In this statement, Greenberg defines purity as self-definition. As pointed out by Clark, Greenberg's post-Kantian understanding of the notion of immanence, as exemplified above, came from an interest to keep modern art 'free' from the reproduction of an aristocratic concept of art in 'empty' forms that the avant-garde occupied and transformed. While text, photography and film are important elements to this, the kitsch or the prosthesis must also be included in that which Greenberg wanted to defend painting against. As Clark states, Greenberg "points to the paradox, but he believes the solution to it has proved to be, in practice, the density and resistance of artistic values per se." (Clark 1982, 147–148) The gendered undertone of Greenberg's formalism and the aesthetic aspect of Friedan's liberal feminism is of great interest for our discussion.

Krauss, too, has engaged with the role of media in art, which indeed was a central topic throughout the 1960s and 1970s art theoretical discussions. Following her

essay on "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" from 1979, (Krauss 1979) Krauss introduced the concept of the "post-medium" in 2006. By describing artworks and artistic activity that appear to be independent from specific media since the 1970s and onwards, she describes their working models as a matter of "technical support." In other words, a social or material infrastructure for an artwork that is not medium-specific. (Krauss 2006, 56) This post-structural abandonment of media for praxis leaves the question of aesthetic criteria behind, and furthermore undiscussed. As a result, Krauss' perspective remains as formal as Greenberg's, yet with other concepts in use. Furthermore, Krauss never touches on the concept of kitsch, so present in Benglis' advertisement.

The notion of kitsch was introduced in an art critical context by Greenberg in 1939. In the essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," he described kitsch as a non-aesthetic category of the 'new' in art, which doesn't have the capacity for a formal upgrade in terms of aesthetic and market value. The essay is written before Greenberg's abandonment of Marxism, (Frascina 2003) and it is in the context of a defense of the revolutionary aspect of the avant-garde that he makes the distinction between anti-art and mass-produced forms of kitsch. Benglis' advertisement proves that he was wrong, and that kitsch has a similar role in the context of the economic and social crisis in the 1970s as the abstract expressions and montage had during the economic and social crisis of the 1930s.

Despite the specificity of the ongoing conjunctural change in the early-to-mid -70s that Benglis acted within, the editorial reactions to her advertisement were not new. As Doyle states, the analogue between art and prostitution is "an allegory for modernity, and for the alienating aspects of modern life" for 200 years. (Doyle 2006, 50) Doyle refers to Walter Benjamin's writing on Baudelaire in which he describes the prostitute as an image, appearing as a dialectics at a standstil; both autonomous and socially subjected in a moment of upheaval of the present. (Benjamin 2002 [1935]) Regarding Andy Warhol's way of dealing with questions of sexuality in his artistic works and projects – appearing in the same period and context as Benglis – Doyle argues that that the question of sexuality was often displaced from the critical reflections regarding Warhol's works and projected "onto a feminized, particularly public, and abject figure" (Doyle 2006, 46) in the form of the artist's subject. In this context, it needs to be added that feminization is mobilized in defense of the autonomous, which was also the case in *Artforum*.

As mentioned regarding the negative role of sexuality and race given by Kant in his Third Critique, this is most present in the section on the sublime, which is the unimaginable, other. This pathologizing approach makes critical distinctions between the autonomous beauty, as discussed by Kant in the first section of the Third Critique, sensed by an individual subject and people of different sexualities

and ethnic backgrounds.[11] The anthropological consequence of Kant's transcendental subject is discussed extensively by David Lloyd in his *Under Representation. The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (2018). In focus for Lloyd is how the critique of art similarly implies a critique of sexuality and race, while sexuality is focus for this chapter. Pop, which was referred to in Pincus-Witten's article on Benglis, can in this context be understood as something that upholds a 'fake' beauty for profit, just like editor and curator Thomas Hess wrote in a 1963 editorial for the American art journal *ArtNews*. This fake, as pointed out by Doyle in her reading of Hess' text, I think, is rather a question of *fake autonomy* – central to the art's semblance of autonomy under capitalism, as much as that of the nuclear family as autonomous under capitalism.[12]

Be it a question of the aura of the modern artwork or the nuclear unit of social reproduction, one thing is clear: neither modern art nor the modern family are autonomous but depend inherently on the semblance of autonomy to remain legible according to their preassigned concepts. Kitsch and the prosthetic constantly play with this semblance by revealing its social limit. Understood in the context of the discussion above, Benglis threatens the gendered aspect of 'pure' art and its correlation with the 'pure masculinity' of the modern subject. (Doyle, 2006, 47)[13] If we hold on to the concept of the 'new' as a social category, and instead call it kitsch or prosthetic, then the dialectics of subject and object – autonomy and heteronomy, as Adorno proposes, are constantly threatened by these appearances.[14] According to Adorno, it is the 'new' which keeps the dialectics described above alive. The transgressive or vulgar aspect of the new, as described by both Clark and Doyle, helps us therefore to understand the role of sexuality as it operates in modern art. Hence the critical distinction of an autonomous subject in art is also a question of a distinction and critique based on sexual difference. When introduced to something 'new,' this difference is destabilized, like the autonomy of art is by kitsch, or in terms of sexuality by the prosthetic object. As Doyle states, "the prostitute, in the context of criticism about the arts, represents not the sociality of sex but the sociality of art." (Doyle 2006, 51)

11 For a further discussion of the *Third Critique*, see for example, Sandford 2018 and Battersby 2008.

12 For a further discussion regarding the historical and contemporary thinking around the relation between the modern nuclear family, the nation state and modern capitalism, see for example Lewis 2022; O'Brien 2023.

13 For a further discussion on masculinity, see Sedgewick 2015.

14 Central to his thinking in *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno introduces the modern artwork as *double*; both autonomous in an aesthetic sense and socially subjected as a commodity form. See Adorno [1970] 1997. As Peter Osborne has noted, Adorno's model continues Marx theory of modern labour as double: autonomous and alienated at the same time. See Osborne 2020.

Prosthetic subjectivities and new categories

The *Artforum* editors' argument regarding Benglis' 'vulgarity' as a mockery of women's liberation reveals the priority of a specific imagined sexual difference, according to a cis-heterosexual bias. In the words of Doyle, "the criminalization and stigmatization of sex work [is] a venal practice to point up a crisis in all social relations (. . .)." (Ibid 48) Doyle's pointing to the crises in social relations that lay behind the criminalization of sex work reflects the self-defensive aspect of formalist critique of art as manifested in the "Letter to the Editors." She continues: "When art critics mobilise this discourse to evaluate an artist's work, they map the anxieties of prostitution onto the vicissitudes of the category of art itself." (Ibid 48) This comment helps us to assert that if the essentialist defence of cis-women was *Artforum*'s intent, then the photograph of Benglis came with the risk of dissolving the journal's identity and with it, a presupposed autonomy of the critic. In other words, the 'vulgar' aspect of Benglis' advertisement was a transgression of the social world in which the image was presented and critiqued.

In the words of Clark when describing vulgarity in modern art, the advertisement provoked "a set of tastes and styles of individuality which have still to be defined, but are somehow there, in the word even before it is deployed." (Clark 1991, 540) Benglis undertook this kind of provocation by performing an image[15] in which 'mediated sex' could be mistaken as the 'real thing', as Doyle writes regarding the art of Andy Warhol. Both Benglis and Warhol played with the essentialist medium specificity of modern art, as much as with the formalist art critic whose autonomy was threatened by these conceptual drags. Provoking new forms of criteria and categories dissolves old ones, as well as the subjects enacting aesthetic judgments based on these. The practice of modern art, Clark states, "wants resistance, it needs criteria; it will take risks in order to find them, including the risk of its own dissolution." (Clark 1982, 155) From the perspective of the *Artforum* editors, Benglis' advertisement makes themselves sell-outs if they are to hold on to the old categories of art but threatens their subject position if they let go of these categories. This is a paradox most present for both Krauss, Michelsen, and Benglis.

Benglis' advertisement is not a communication of prostitution, rather is it an example of how the social autonomy of her subject as kitsch is manifested in the negation of the essentialist medium specificity of formalist critique of art, like the one outlined by Greenberg, echoing Friedan's concept of the modern woman. According to Doyle, "The moment the critic tries to discern a stable, internal origin

15 I am here using the idea of "performing image," as introduced by Isobel Harbison. See Harbison 2019; Sandström 2019.

of aesthetic value, it is indeed hard not to use discourse on money or sex, in the movement toward judgement." (Doyle 2006, 52) This is what threatens the *Artforum* editors, who are defending the immanence of aesthetic value so sternly that they accuse Benglis' subject position of being 'degraded'. In their reaction, the *Artforum* editors only hold on to one aspect of the scenario as described above, namely that neither art nor sexuality has any inherent value, at least not outside of the realm of exchange. The problem is that the institutions that separate these objects from the realm of exchange, such as the art institution and the nuclear family, only do so on an imaginary basis. If critics like Greenberg or Krauss lose hold of their patriarchal, critical subjectivity which reproduces these institutions, immanent sexual relations and capital relations are unveiled. This is what Benglis does, and she does so by means of an auto-erotic critique of her own abstractions as art and gender.

Benglis' auto-erotic critique of her aesthetic and sexual abstractions puts the art critic's judgement to the test. It does so by making the gendered categories of their aesthetic judgments visible. This destabilized the autonomy of the work of art, and therefore also that of the critic. This destabilization took place in the way that Benglis short-circuited critical reflection as eroticism. Not to 'sell', as was assumed by the *Artforum* editors, but rather to provoke or break free from the identitarian aspect of modern art and the editors' presupposed medium-specific categories and subjectivities. The medium specific can in this sense be understood as the biological, central to an essentialist assignment of gender. By negating the self-referential form of art and subjectivity, the social form of the artwork is mobilized as heterogenous, which in this sense takes an erotic and non-binary form.

The 1974 "Letter to the Editor" concluded with the following words:

> This incident is deeply symptomatic of conditions that call for critical analysis. As long as they infect the reality around us, these conditions shall have to be treated in our future work as writers and as editors. (Alloway et al., 1974)

Following this scenario, Anette Michelsen and Krauss resigned as editors of *Artforum* and founded *October* in 1976. In their first editorial to the new journal, they stated that a major focus for *October* would be "the tensions between radical artistic practice and dominant ideology." (de Leij, 2017, 111). I believe that this these tenions were the reasons that made the two editors leave *Artforum*: the editorial clearly follows up on the "Letter" to *Artforum* and on the later comment from Krauss. Altogether, Krauss and Michelsen implicitly characterize Benglis' advertisement as a matter of ideology and not of art, nor of critique. In other words, a transgressive sexual difference that sabotages formalized imaginaries regarding modern subjectivity as understood from a conservative and essentialist perspec-

tive. Interestingly, Krauss and Michelsen gave up critique altogether in the post-structuralist direction that October later took. (Osborne 2013).

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which aesthetic abstractions, sexual abstractions and capital abstractions triangulate in a disintegrative manner that repositions the object of critique and the subject thereof. By analyzing Lynda Benglis' advertisement in *Artforum* from 1974, and the reactions that followed on it, I have discussed the relations between cis-heterosexual gender binaries and formalist critique of art, both supported by the modern institution of the nuclear family and the modern art institution, respectively. By understanding the doubling aspect of the artwork as erotic, as manifested in kitsch and prosthetic objects respectively, I have pointed to how an auto-erotic critique at work in Benglis' activity causes a crisis in the autonomy of the art critic, which I understand as double. From this perspective, I have described the auto-erotic critique as a practice of difference immanent to the critical subject, rather than a formal distinction between subjects and objects according to a set of certain essentialist criteria.

Discussing sexual difference as central to the development of modern art in the conjunctural specific context of an American post-war economic crisis, I have proposed difference as an alternative concept to critique. This art historical engagement within the history of sexual liberation has allowed me to understand difference as a matter as central to critique of art as to gender abstractions. On this basis, I have outlined the role of this difference in what I call a crisis of autonomy. By analyzing this crisis as it plays out in the aftermath of the publishing of Benglis' advertisement, I have prepared for a further discussion of what a critique of art and sexuality may be, in 1974 as well as today. Based on the present chapter, it is clear that the critique of art and sexuality is conjuncturally specific, and its objects and subjects are in constant disintegration in relation to their presupposed given forms. In this sense, difference as prosthetic action will constantly intervene in the social conditions presupposed by critique. Without these interventions, there would be no critique. Hence, the crisis of autonomy is continuously erotic.

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Daniel Irrgang

Critical Zone(s) Observatories: Modelling Infrastructures of Climate Science in the Art Museum

> What's the critical zone for me? Well, it's actually five years of work now, of following scientists who call themselves 'specialists of the critical zone' – I call them 'critical zonies' – and it has been a very important part of my fieldwork. I am back to sociology of science, as I did 50 years ago, following them around.
>
> Bruno Latour, interview with the author, 2019[1]

Introduction

Climate change presents a 'wicked problem': an issue so complex that its multiple causes and effects are impossible to conceptualize in a coherent strategic and problem-solving manner. Adding to this complexity, climate change spans vast temporal and spatial dimensions: the deep time of geological eras and the entanglements of biotic and abiotic processes that shape the planet's surface, a vastness engendering the proposition of the Anthropocene as new geological epoch.[2] It is in this sense of multidimensional complexity that Timothy Morton (2013) describes climate change as a 'hyperobject': It defies the horizon of understanding by challenging the rationalization and categorization of Western epistemes, such

1 Bruno Latour in an interview during the 6th meeting of the 'Critical Zones Study Group' at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design, November 14, 2019. Interviewer: Daniel Irrgang, camera operator: Ali Gharib.

2 Both the anthropocentric term and the existence of coherent scientific evidence for a new geological epoch are still debated. However, the current search for 'anthropogenic markers' – concrete signifiers for, e.g., consistent human influence on the biogeochemical circles sustaining planetary life or mass species migration and extinction – presents persuasive arguments for such an epochal shift (cf. Max Planck Institute for the History of Science and The Anthropocene Working Group 2022). In July 2023, the Anthropocene Working Group has recommended as the 'Golden Spike', a Global boundary Stratotype Section and Point (GSSP) that marks a geological profile indicating the beginning of a planetary-scale change, a sediment core from the bottom of Crawford Lake in Ontario, Canada (Max Planck Society 2023).

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as the distinctions between modern and pre-modern temporalities or separated spheres of nature and culture.

As it is, by definition, impossible to construct a full picture of a hyperobject, the relatively young research field of Earth System Science (ESS) makes climate perturbations graspable through an assemblage of *locally* collected data from carefully selected field laboratory sites and other sources, patched together by system modelling to create an understanding of the *planetary* effects of anthropogenic disruptions. Such an assemblage suggests an epistemology quite different from the all-seeing eye of science exercising the "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere," as Donna Haraway (1988, 581) has deconstructed the positivist myth of an external observer in her seminal essay on 'situated knowledges'. Instead, ESS relies on the genuinely *situated* (both locally and in terms of expert knowledge) perspectives of interdisciplinary research teams that collect and analyze data on the various parameters of the planet's biogeochemical cycles throughout the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere, geosphere, and other systems that sustain life, and which are, recursively, sustained by the effects of lifeforms.[3]

Scaled infrastructures of Earth System Science

As the climate constitutes a planetary system, local observations of specific parameters need to be fed back into a worldwide network of Earth System Scientists. The local infrastructures ESS relies on are 'scaled up' to a global infrastructure of climate change research. This enables the exchange of data and technology and, equally important, facilitates the interdisciplinary cooperation between international teams of scientists. I am here following a notion of infrastructure brought forward by the anthropologist Brian Larkin (2013). In his analysis, infrastructures are not limited to the facilitation of technological networks and distributed matter. Rather, "[t]hey execute technical functions [. . .] by mediating exchange over distance and binding people and things into complex heterogeneous systems" (Larkin 2013, 336). Larkin's (2018) investigations are interested in both, the operations or relations (between humans and technology) enabled by infrastructures and the "form" they give to the relations between humans and technology, relating to questions of aesthetics. Such an already broadened notion of infrastructure can be supplemented and further expanded beyond the human socio- and technosphere

3 This perspective does not exclude observations 'from above', as ESS also uses data collected by satellites, space shuttles, or space stations in a "'bird's-eye' principle" (Schellnhuber 1999, C20). However, the data gathered in this way can only be complementary to the fine measurements conducted by Critical Zone Observatories.

towards non-human agency. As the cultural theorist and resilience researcher Ulrik Ekman has recently argued in a paper on urban design for cities facing rising sea levels, infrastructure – in a wider perspective "as an enabling condition [–] co-involves ecology and the environment alongside the human society and urban eco-technics" (Ekman 2023, 3). I will get back to this expanded notion of infrastructure in Part 3 of this chapter when discussing landscapes and vegetation as potential infrastructural elements.

Phenomenotechnics of the critical zone

While ESS as a general approach also includes data collection by satellite imagery or deep ice core sampling, most of the data is collected 'from within' the interconnected ecosystems covering the surface of the Earth: the 'critical zone' (Oncken et al. 2022, 33–34). The term "designates the (mostly continental) layers from the top of the canopy to the mother rocks, thus foregrounding the thin, porous and permeable layer where life has modified the cycles of matter by activating or catalyzing physical and chemical reactions" (Arènes et al. 2018, 121). The critical zone is made *phenomenotechnically* graspable through "field laboratories" (Arènes et al. 2018, 121) or "landscape laboratories" (Arènes 2021, 132). I am here referring to Bachelard's notion of *phénoménotechnique* – not in its social constructivist reading ('scientific objects are constructed') but in its related science and technology studies (STS) notion, emphasizing that scientific phenomena must be made visible or aesthetically available through the interplay of technology, practices, and theories (Rheinberger 2005; Ihde 1998; Latour 1990). Those field laboratories – the 'Critical Zone Observatories' (CZOs) – constitute a vital part of the ESS scientific infrastructure and operate in the same tension of being *locally* situated while informing a network on a *planetary* scale: They are located in 'landscapes' (in a specific notion of this term, I will come back to this) with specific geological and biogeochemical characteristics comparable to areas with similar conditions all over the planet. CZOs not only observe anthropogenic disturbances in the areas they are located in.[4] By accumulating data and exchanging it with national and international networks they also compose an approximation of a 'scaled-up' planetary image of climate change. Local particularities are linked into an assemblage of Earth system analysis by means of scientific infrastructures. Both the notion of critical zone and the scientific practices conducted at CZOs have been central for the work of the late Bruno Latour, particularly his curatorial endeavors.

4 Some CZOs operate consistently since the early years of ESS research (cf. Pierret et al. 2019).

(Re-)Presenting a critical zone observatory in the exhibition space

In the exhibition 'Critical Zones – Observatories for Earthly Politics' at the Center for Art and Media (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany, curated by Latour and Peter Weibel in cooperation with Martin Guinard and Bettina Korintenberg (May 23, 2020 – January 9, 2022), the CZO approach occupied a central place, literally as well as conceptually. Its most prominent representation, an 'architectural scale model' of the critical zone, has been 'CZO Space' (2020–2022) by the architects and researchers Alexandra Arènes and Soheil Hajmirbaba (Atelier SOC – Société d'Objets Cartographiques). The site-specific installation brings a spatially expansive model of a CZO into the exhibition space, a model through which the exhibition visitor can navigate while engaging with various maps, topographical representations, instruments, and data collected at the site of a specific CZO in the Vosgese mountains (France). The installation encompassed one of the atriums of the museum space and was part of the first exhibition section, titled 'Starting to Observe'. There it constructed a space the visitor, after entering the exhibition, would "pass through [while] discovering the many entities, parts, variations, [the] heterogeneity that composes the critical zone" (Arènes 2020, s.p.). In Part 4 of this chapter, I will describe the installation and its conceptual implications in more detail.

The argument: system – infrastructure – experiment

This chapter discusses how different 'scale models' of the critical zone are constructed, and thus made available for scientific observation, aesthetic investigation, and political ecology. It does so by mapping out the interrelation between the *systemic* description of the critical zone and its *infrastructural* means of observation – on the level of scientific practice and technology, the level of social relations, and the level of landscape structures and vegetation (Fig. 1) – as well as its *aesthetic infrastructural* representation within an art exhibition context as spatial experimental setup. I argue (following Arènes, Hajmirbaba, Latour, and Guinard) that this representation is by no means limited to a mere 'illustration' of scientific ideas and practices in a museum space. It rather represents, as a model, the infrastructure of ESS or CZOs for the exhibition visitors to investigate, while they engage into a productive way of disorientation. Such a disorientation, triggered by this new way of representing the world in its interdependent complexities, may be necessary to challenge the European modernist dualism of nature and culture – where 'nature' can be treated on and controlled by humans inhabiting a

somewhat separated, exceptional position ('culture'). Instead, the infrastructural setup of 'CZO Space' demonstrates that the world we share is constituted by fragile biogeochemical cycles – of which humans are intimately part of, amongst many other lifeforms. In this perspective, 'the environment' cannot be observed from a remote or unconcerned point of view but needs to be made phenomenotechnically available – or aesthetically graspable – by infrastructures of scientific technologies and practices, from a position that is always inherently part of the field it observes. The installation 'CZO Space' makes this point, and provides the means, as a spatio-aesthetic thought experiment, for investigating the tensions it presents – between culture and nature, between an inside and an outside perspective, or between the human perspective and the scientific infrastructures needed to grasp the complex interdependencies of the critical zone.

Developing this argument, I will first clarify some concepts that, just as the notion of critical zone, bring the Anthropocene into a more local or situated context (instead of indulging in universalist notions such a 'planetary perspective' might perpetuate). This enquiry spans from connecting the concept of critical zone with the notion of 'landscape patchiness' (Tsing et al. 2019) and its system theory implications to tracing the neocybernetic system assumptions of the 'Gaia' hypothesis (Lovelock and Margulis 1974) as ESS quasi-predecessor. The point of this line of argument is to show the relevance of system theory or system thinking for the notions of landscape patchiness, critical zone, and Gaia or ESS – a relevance it, in fact, shares with the notion of infrastructure: As Larkin has pointed out, infrastructures differ from technology, networks, etc. in their function as "objects that create the grounds on which other objects operate, and when they do, they do so as *systems*" (Larkin 2013, 329; my italics).[5] Equipped with this argument I will then, in the second part of this chapter, frame Arènes' and Hajmirbaba's work as an 'infrastructural scale model' of the critical zone. 'CZO Space', I argue, makes the critical zone explorable as a phenomenotechnical representation confronting the exhibition visitors with a feeling of embeddedness as they move through the spatially extensive installation surrounding them, abandoning any position of overview; but also with a certain level of disorientation as they engage with scientific instruments and complex data. Here the exploration of the porous and permeable layer of life – the critical zone – is made possible as a specific materialization of infrastructural aesthetics.

5 I thus share with Larkin his plea addressed to anthropology "to understand systems thinking to build an ethnography of infrastructure" (Larkin 2013, 328).

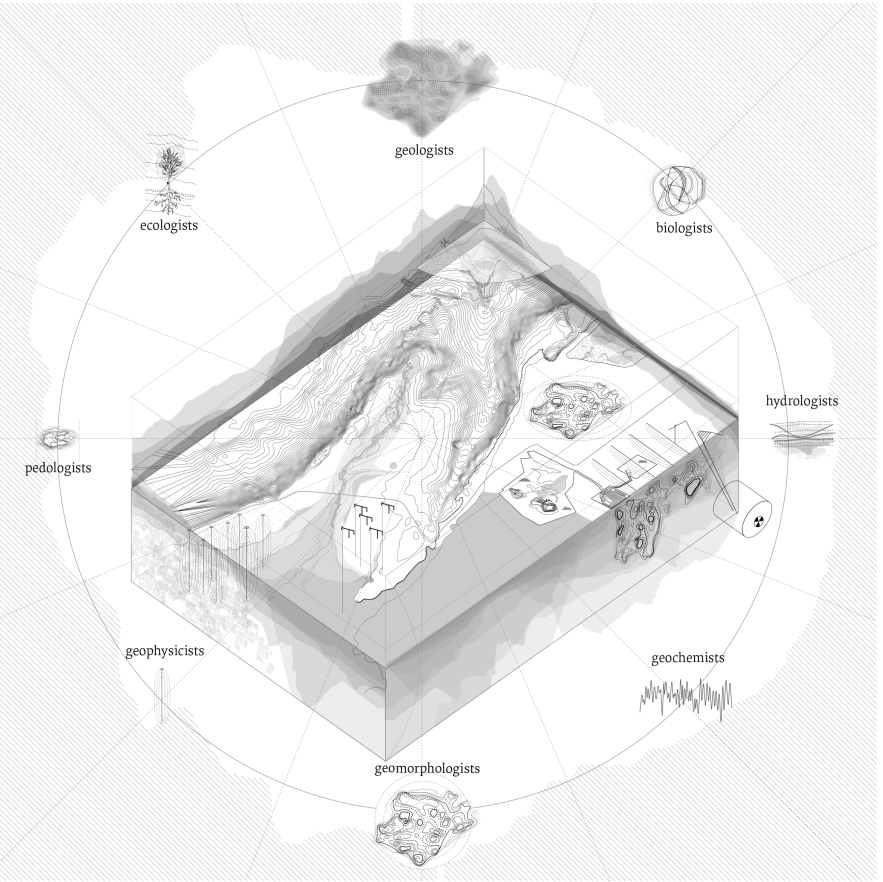


Fig. 1: Axonometric diagram of the critical zone by Alexandra Arènes juxtaposing representative CZO locations and a selection of scientific disciplines that study different compartments of the critical zone. Source: Arènes 2022a, 355. With kind permission by the artist.

Critical zone and patchy landscape structures: Concepts beyond the Anthropocene

This section introduces concepts that supplement, or provide an alternative to, the notion of Anthropocene: the 'critical zone' that I have already touched on, as well as the related concepts 'patchy Anthropocene' and 'landscape structures'. As argued above, the spatial and temporal vastness of a new (albeit controversial) geological

age characterized by anthropogenic influence does not only, in some readings,[6] suggest an anthropocentric stance fostering yet another form of human exceptionalism. It may also evoke a kind of universalism too bulky or all-encompassing to sufficiently operate with – be it in epistemic, artistic, or activist practices oriented towards sustainable change. The complementary concepts proposed here may provide alternatives, as well as a conceptual framework for describing the observation and representation of climate change in terms of system and infrastructure.

Critical zone, Gaia, and interdependency as condition of care

For Latour, the critical zone perspective on our planet carries a political and epistemological potential, as it refocuses the distant view onto a vast celestial body – the abstract globe of globalization as represented by the famous 'Blue Marble' image taken by NASA (Latour 2018; cf. Demos 2017) – towards a position grounded within the "thin biofilm" (Latour 2020, 14) of the Earth, where life subsists. Here, the interactions of manifold lifeforms constitute a dynamic field *sui generis*, where the effects of "heterogeneous agencies mixed together in wildly different combinations" (Latour 2014, 4) create their own living conditions. For example, plants' photosynthesis of carbon dioxide, minerals, and water into oxygen that serves as a condition for the existence of other lifeforms which again enable the existence of plants. These interactions are fragile, highly reactive, and thus increasingly sensitive to anthropogenic disruptions. They cannot be conceived in separated spheres of culture and nature as a dualist unity where the *Anthropos* dominates 'creation'. Instead, humans and nonhumans alike share and co-create the critical zone.

Acknowledging these interdependencies may, according to Latour, open a space for political action to conceive "a common world [which] has to be built from utterly heterogeneous parts that will never make a whole, but at best a fragile, revisable, and diverse composite material" (Latour 2010, 474). European Modern cosmology is not replaced by yet another universalism. Instead, an open framework is suggested that affords multiple conceptions of the world to coexist and multiple processes of 'worlding' (Haraway 2007) to unfold. "In that sense, the notion of the critical zone is much less paralyzing for politics than that of the Anthropocene" (Latour 2014, 4) because it suggests the possibility of a locally initiated co-creation of common living conditions in a mode of *care* that extends be-

6 For an overview of some narratives or interpretations and associated biases see Dürbeck 2018.

yond human relations towards multispecies kinship.[7] Such an understanding of a common world might serve as a more flexible framework enabling action towards change, at least compared to the monolithic vastness of a whole geological epoch where the *Anthropos* is not only an eponym bolstering exceptionalism but where the disruptions it stands for seem to be something inevitable.

A predecessor to the notions of critical zone and ESS has been the 'Gaia hypothesis' brought forward in the 1970s by James Lovelock (atmospheric geochemistry) and Lynn Margulis (microbiology). The Gaia concept is comparable to the notion of critical zone but focusses more widely on a planetary system level, particularly its atmospheric composition. The hypothesis assumes a strong interconnectedness and responsiveness of our planet's ecosystems, it's "living tissue" (Margulis 2017) where life produces and sustains itself. However, the Greek mythological eponym may not have been the best choice to label these fragile interactions. It not only evokes associations of planetary vitalism but also suggests such universalisms I have mentioned above. Both associations have turned out to be problematic, as they muddy the scientific Gaia debate with "notions of holistic totality verging on divine agency" (Clarke 2020, 35), thus opening the doors to critique from the scientific establishment. So much so that even Margulis (1998, 106) later conceded: "I prefer the idea that Earth is *a network of 'ecosystems'* over any personification of Mother Gaia."

However, as the literature and science studies scholar Bruce Clarke has shown, the notion of Gaia is not rooted in some "fringe metaphysics of planetary vitalisms" (Clarke 2020, 3).[8] It is rather based on Lovelock's early cybernetic considerations of the planetary atmosphere as a self-regulating system (cf. Lovelock, quoted in Clarke and Dutreuil 2022, 36). Albeit it has been argued (Latour 2017) that a classical cybernetic notion of Gaia would lead to yet another universalism – the, during the 1970s still influential, meta-discourse of cybernetics and its all-encompassing 'command and control' logic suggesting an 'external' steering entity –, Clarke has shown that the Gaia concept is much closer related to the neocybernetic notion of *autopoiesis*. This emphasis on the self-referential autonomy of (biological) systems is indeed comparable to the centrality of self-sustaining processes within the critical zone. Haraway (2016, 43) credits the autopoietic notion of Gaia as "self-forming, boundary maintaining, contingent, dynamic, and stable under some conditions but not others" to Margulis' contribution to the hypothesis.

7 I am here referring to María Puig de la Bellacasa's notion of 'care' which she relates to Haraway's plea for a non-natal, non-human kinship and describes as a concept "that opens ways to think a decentered circulation of ethics in more than human worlds" (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017, 167).

8 Initially disputed within the scientific community, the establishment of ESS since the 1980s has helped the "academic mainstreaming" (Clarke 2020, 9) of the Gaia hypothesis.

As (neo-)cybernetics is strongly based on system theory, the Gaia hypothesis as a predecessor to both ESS and the critical zone perspective provides the groundwork for the conception of the critical zone concept as a system.[9]

Grounding: Patchy Anthropocene and landscape structures

While Latour's reading of the critical zone concept aims at counteracting the anthropocentric and homogenizing connotations the Anthropocene can, in some interpretations, evoke, I want to supplement it here with another concept that may help us to 'ground' the critical zone (as planetary intertwined ecosystems) into a more local or site-specific context. I will do this with the concept of a 'patchy Anthropocene' as proposed by Anna L. Tsing, Andrew S. Mathews and Nils Bubandt in an approach to relativize the universalist notion of the Anthropocene term. Already in her seminal work, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Tsing (2015, 20) points out that the "'anthropo-' blocks attention to patchy landscapes, multiple temporalities, and shifting assemblages of humans and nonhumans: the very stuff of collaborative survival." She later (2019), in co-authorship with Mathews and Bubandt, concretizes the notion of *patchiness* as units or constellations in landscapes where anthropogenic disruptions occur.

The concept of 'patch' is borrowed from landscape ecology, where it designates sections of a landscape distinct from surrounding areas (on every scale, e.g., groups of trees, grass strips around tree groups, patches with no grass within a grass strip); taken together they constitute the heterogenous compartments of a given landscape.[10] The term 'landscape' is here to be understood in a broad sense, as it relates to formations from forests to cities, transcending nature-culture distinctions. Anthropogenic disruptions in landscapes emerge due to tensions between two kinds of landscape structures which Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt describe as "modular simplifications" and "feral proliferations" (Tsing et al. 2019, 186).

An example for *modular simplifications* would be plantations and the "unevenness" (Tsing et al. 2019, 187) or inequalities they generate – by suppressing other kinds of plants and their ecosystems through mono-agriculture or by fostering efficiency-driven human labor all the way to (quasi- and *de facto*) slavery systems of exploitation. It is precisely this global system of forced displacement of peoples, animals, and plants that Haraway's provocative term 'Plantationocene'

9 Also Latour wrote extensively on the Gaia hypothesis (i.e., Latour 2017) and it is a strong reference in the 'Critical Zones' exhibition catalogue (cf. Latour 2020).

10 For an excellent postgrad study in landscape architecture on the patchiness of Anthropocene landscapes see Freiin Rinck von Baldenstein and Orduz Trujillo 2023.

points to, while proposing a shift of focus from the Anthropocene towards the "Great Simplification"[11] of global capitalism's colonial roots. Similarly, Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt point to "the uneven conditions of more-than-human livability in landscapes increasingly dominated by industrial forms" (Tsing et al. 2019, 186).

Feral proliferations, then, are the unintended disruptions simplifications generate. In the case of plantations and their monoculture plants turned commodities, Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt point to coffee rust, a fungus infection that destructively affects the leaves of coffee plants. The global spread of the fungus disease (by wind, rain, and transportation) benefits from the monocultural proximity of plants and the efficiency of global supply chains.

Anthropocene patches "emerge in the relationship between simplifications and proliferations" (Tsing et al. 2019, 187) and are thus effects of anthropogenic disruptions within landscape structures, e.g., plantations. Although some disruptions can be, in cases such as coffee rust, traced globally, Anthropocene patches are to be observed locally and are structurally site specific. They afford a perspective that is local – while considering global entanglements – and thus allow concrete descriptions of causes and effects that avoid being overshadowed by the complexities of planetary anthropogenic perturbations. "The Anthropocene may be planetary, but our grip on collaborative survival is always situated – and thus patchy." (Tsing et al. 2019, 188)

Patches constitute the components that make up landscape structures. To make sense of those structures and the processes taking place within them – to conceptualize them as repertoire for analysis – Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt suggest to analytically approach landscapes as *systems*. The authors go to great length to make sure that their system approach is not mistaken for a kind of ontological reductionism, but that "systems are *imagined* holisms through which structures fit together" (Tsing et al. 2019, 190). Systems, in this understanding, are analytical tools to build provisional models; they are "thought experiments with which to make sense of structures" (Tsing et al. 2019, 187) and are not to be confused with the structure itself. In fact, it would be impossible to grasp the heterogeneity of the multi-species entanglements of any landscape in a holistic sense of one complex system. Not surprisingly, Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt point to the relevance of "Earth systems scientists [that] gave us the concept of the Anthropocene as a system" (Tsing et al. 2019, 187) and their endeavor to approach landscapes from a system theory approach.

11 Haraway (2018, 81) derives this term from the Anthropocene concept of the Great Acceleration, denoting the post-WW2 exponential global rise of capitalist systems and their effects.

It is interesting that also Larkin has emphasized the importance to adapt "systems thinking" (Larkin 2013, 328) to the methodological toolbox of anthropology. While for Larkin systems thinking is central in grasping the material and facilitating operations at play in infrastructures, Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt see it as an epistemic condition for a 'phenomenological attunement' to a patchy Anthropocene, which is again framed by ESS in a wider systemic understanding of the processes sustaining planetary life (see Part 3). Grasping the processes in landscape structures or the critical zone requires not only their system abstraction but also a scientific infrastructure adequate to observe and analyze this system. Comprised as network facilitating the interaction of technologies, practices, and social relations, this infrastructure itself operates as a system in the sense of Larkin. This is, I argue, why Arènes' and Hajmirbaba's installation 'CZO Space' does not pictorially represent the landscape and architectural installation of a CZO, but why it is conceived as an infrastructural model, representing both the basic spatial structure of the landscape as well as the system (of instruments, researchers, data, etc.) facilitated by the CZO infrastructure.

Based on their assumption that landscape structures exhibit fundamentally site-specific characteristics while being entangled in processes on a planetary scale, Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt state that those characteristics can only be recognized "through observations, comparisons, and attunements [. . .], urging us to reinvent observational, analytical attention to intertwined human-and-nonhuman histories." (Tsing et al. 2019, 188) I would, however, argue that such practices do not necessarily need to be reinvented. Analytical approaches rooted in system thinking and their application in site-specific landscape observation and long-term monitoring, while considering the complex interaction of abiotic and biotic processes sustaining planetary life, are already applied by the interdisciplinary teams of Earth system scientists and their CZO infrastructures. In the following section, I will describe those infrastructural entanglements in more detail.

The local planetary: Observatory practices and global systems

In its 1986 founding publication, the young discipline of ESS defines the planetary entangled dynamics as a system as well as its own interdisciplinary mission in one sweep:

> Earth science has traditionally advanced through studies of individual components: atmosphere, oceans and ice cover, biosphere, crust, and interior. Modern research is clarifying

> the dynamic interactions that connect these components and bind them into an integrated Earth System [. . .] to probe the complex, interactive processes of Earth evolution and global change. (Earth System Sciences Committee and NASA Advisory Council 1986, s.p.)

ESS, ultimately, aims at producing a general view on the Earth system, particularly on climate variations – a view which has been called "holistic" (Schellnhuber 1999, C20). A rather confusing term, I would argue from a system theory point, for a system characterized by continuous flux and lack of an 'external' environment (since the observing entity is always part of the Earth system). Rather, CZO scientists conduct observations of a given landscape resulting in data that is both site-specific and representative for similar conditions on a planetary scale "to provide a close description of the complex dynamics of those highly heterogeneous regions of the Earth at the time when human forcing is radically transforming them" (Arènes et al. 2018, 121).

Comparing the ESS and CZO perspectives I want to stress that the 'system' and 'site-specific' approaches are not mutually exclusive but in fact complement each other in a process of comparing data on a planetary scale over long periods of time (cf. Schellnhuber 1999; Pierret 2020). The complex research infrastructure set up for those observations is fundamental for the spatially and temporally large-scale "planetary monitoring" (Pierret 2020, 136) to compare changes in climate and to identify its complex causes and effects. In this section I want to discuss how such a monitoring is generally being achieved by local CZO infrastructures that enable and sustain both scientific and wider social practices.

Situated observations of landscape structures

A CZO is an "'open sky laboratory' and monitoring site" (Pierret 2020, 136) that observes changes within patches of a given landscape. However, as I will be showing, a CZO is much more than just a technical setup. It is a technical as well as social infrastructure, which includes, furthermore, elements of vegetation and of the hydrosphere. An infrastructure which binds scientists, inhabitants of the given area, and non-human actors "in an encounter that fuses the material with the human" (Larkin 2018, 196) – and beyond, to include non-human actors, I would like to add to Larkin's sociotechnical demarcation (cf. Ekman 2023).

CZOs are situated within landscapes in which the effects of anthropogenic perturbation can be compared to similar sites globally. I want to frame such "vulnerable landscapes" (Arènes 2022a, 356) as Anthropocene patches – although not in a causality as straight forward as in Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt's example of distinct plantation monocultures and coffee rust infestation. Rather, CZOs observe

more generally the long-term effects of disruptions such as air pollution, flood, excessive nitrate fertilization, or acid rain.

The acid rain crisis and its associated forest decline has been the most widely debated environmental problem in Europe and North America during the 1970s and 1980s, a debate that significantly helped to put environmental issues on the public agenda. The *Hydro-Geochemical Observatory of the Environment* (*Observatoire Hydro-Geochemique de l'Environment*, abbr.: OHGE) of the University of Strasbourg's School and Observatory of Earth Sciences was originally established to monitor the effects of acid rain. It is located in a valley and water catchment of the Strengbach river in the Vosgese Mountains, close to the village of Aubure, in France. Its relative proximity to the German boarder – and to ZKM – motivated the curators to approach this particular CZO and its associated scientists to become collaborators of the 'Critical Zones' exhibition project (I will get back to this). But the OHGE also stands out due to its historical significance: Founded in 1985, it is one of the earliest CZOs in Europe, thus providing extensive data on long-term observations of chemical and water fluxes and their effects on vegetation and groundwater. It measures variables like the levels of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide associated with acid rain. In this sense, the OHGE is an important monitoring device for the 'feral proliferation' of acid rain associated chemicals, highlighting the Anthropocene patchiness of the watershed.

The landscape structure the OHGE is embedded in represents medium-altitude water catchments with similar conditions; but this 'site-specificity' of the observatory has yet another dimension: It has a strong local or regional relevance as it also monitors the quality of the area's groundwater. This creates a direct connection between the regional public infrastructure and the social dimension of the OHGE's infrastructure when it connects to supply needs of the citizens of Aubure. The citizen's awareness of the observatory's relevance for their commune and its relatively long history as part of the Strengbach valley has bolstered the social bonds within the local community (Pierret 2023). As I will argue with Larkin in the next section, such social entanglements (between different groups of scientists, between the scientists and the local community, etc.) are an example for infrastructures as "investments into sociality" (Larkin 2013, 338).

CZO social infrastructures

The OHGE employs an interdisciplinary team of scientists from hydrology, geochemistry, geophysics, microbiology, plant biology, and plant physiology. They conduct their field and laboratory work in cooperation with mathematicians and computer scientists for system modelling and database management, but also

with researchers from the social sciences, i.e., historiography, sociology, education, investigating the social implications of climate change and its research for the area (Pierret 2020). In fact, the social or community dimension of the observatory cannot be understated. Its establishment in 1985 was strongly supported by the Green party mayor of Aubure when the European acid rain forest dieback was widely debated. While the work of the OHGE helps securing Aubure's clean water supply, the observatory in turn relies strongly on the support provided by the commune's citizens, e.g., for special knowledge of the traditional land use in the valley or for sustaining the scientists' field trips over longer periods of time with supplies and accommodation. In an interview conducted by the author with the geochemist and head of the observatory, Marie-Claire Pierret (2023) strongly emphasized this reciprocal relation by describing the integration of the scientists into the local community: "The observatory is part of the life of the village, we participate in events at the village, once or twice per year we propose a science festival for the people. We propose seminars, talks, meetings. We are like a part of the village." The infrastructure the OHGE utilizes and relies on turns out to be evenly technological or technical as well as social or communal. The strong bonds to the local community were in fact another reason why the curators of 'Critical Zones' chose the site as a central reference point for the exhibition and its curatorial concept, as it demonstrates the entanglement of scientific practice within wider social practices (objecting the narrative of a somewhat secluded sphere of science).[12] The social infrastructure extends not only to the local community but also to sustaining the work relationships within an international network of CZOs to share expertise, technology, and to foster a sense of belonging to a scientific community, as Pierret (2023) emphasized.

It is along such lines that Larkin has pointed out "the encoding of social relations [as] a central part of the material operation of infrastructures" (Larkin 2018, 196). In this perspective, infrastructures are not limited to technological networks and distributed matter but also include social practices by "creating a web of connections that can be relied on for all sorts of social, economic, and political work" (Larkin 2013, 338).

Being located within specific representational landscape structures, the OHGE constitutes a localized scale model of the critical zone in comparable landscapes. The observatory's infrastructure connects instruments and facilitates the exchange of data, the orchestration of interdisciplinary practices, and the maintaining of so-

12 This was stressed by Pierret (2023) as well as by Latour in his introduction to the discussion with Arènes, Hajmirbaba, and Pierret during the "Critical Zone Streaming Festival," May 22, 2020 (archived: https://zkm.de/en/media/video/guided-tour-through-critical-zones-at-the-zkm-mit-alexandra-arenes-soheil-hajmirbaba-and-marie).

cial relations – between the scientists of the observatory and their peers in the research field, and between the scientists and the local community. In doing so, it enables a complex system of research practices and support necessary to observe the complex system of the cycles within the critical zone – and within the frame of a given landscape structure, the Strengbach watershed. The OHGE enables a localized systemic analysis of the anthropogenic disruptions that shape this Anthropocene patch.

Tracing the infrastructural entanglement of technology, practices, and social relations in science is a matter of STS. Arènes, in her comprehensive research surrounding the development of the 'CZO Space' installation (which included a PhD project [Arènes 2022b]), has conducted extensive STS fieldwork in collaboration with various CZOs, particularly the OHGE. Besides the social dimension of their infrastructures, Arènes also identified, in line with Ekman's expanded notion of the concept, landscape structures and vegetation elements as infrastructural elements. In the next section, I will show how this explicit notion of infrastructure in Arènes' research has been essential for conceiving the structure and elements of 'CZO Space' as a critical zone scale model.

Sensitive landscape infrastructure

As CZOs are site-specific or situated, the scientists of a given observatory can only analyse very specific variables relevant for the characteristic of the Anthropocene patch, detecting their fluctuations. In the case of the OHGE, those are measured within the three main domains, or system compartments, of soil, river, and atmosphere (Arènes 2022b, 114). Examinations of these domains reach from, e.g., hydrogeological monitoring, meteorological observations, to geochemical analysis, all embedded in social practices of scientific and local communities.

Arènes conducted extensive fieldwork at various CZOs while 'following the scientists' and their practices accessing those domains (Arènes 2022b; Latour 1988). I am using the Latourian expression 'following' consciously here, as Arènes' work is significantly influenced by his take on STS (Arènes et al. 2022; Aït-Touati et al. 2022). To look at the actual practices of the scientists and to go from there refocuses the notion of scientific infrastructure on the interdependence of research practices, the social relations they are embedded in, and the phenomeno-technical access to phenomena. As Arènes points out reflecting on her fieldwork: "The instruments are like anchors: They make you see or make you listen to invisible elements hiding in the landscape" (Arènes 2020, s.p.). The STS scholar Don Ihde has characterized this constellation enabled by scientific infrastructure as manifested "human or community-technology relations" (Ihde 1998, 95).

The instruments and other technological devices employed at the OHGE are rather diverse. Some of them can be considered 'high-tech', such as the river laboratory on site, the metrological instruments in the higher regions of the mountain, or the laboratory setup at the institute. Others have been characterized by Arènes as "low-tech detection infrastructure" (Arènes 2022b, 223), the most fascinating of which are *trees as sensors* for the atmospheric system compartment (Arènes 2022b, 208): The tree canopies – demarking the upper levels of the critical zone – absorb various molecules within the atmosphere, so that rain passing through the trees and shed as excess water onto the ground carries, down from the canopies, biochemical elements by both rain and tree, with a composition quite different from rain falling on open field. The water is collected by the scientists in slightly elevated wooden gutters set up under the trees to extract samples to be analysed in a laboratory.[13] Since trees here serve as enriching and distributing devices and thus become part of the scientific infrastructure, Arènes concludes: "As the trees are monitored, the forest becomes a *sensitive infrastructure*." (Arènes 2022b, 210) This sensitive infrastructure, which goes beyond a technological and social – or human – setup and includes plants, water, and landscape patches, becomes part of the complex monitoring of the critical zone compartments. To follow Arènes further, it ultimately "transforms the understanding of landscape, which is not a passive background, but which itself records, feels and provides the scientists with information on the variations in the atmosphere" (Arènes 2022b, 223). The sensitive infrastructure in the Strengbach valley – which includes actors such as water, trees, villagers, scientists, and instruments – makes visible, or observable, the landscape structures constituting a patchy Anthropocene. As touched on above, this expanded notion of connected instruments and practices including non-human agency connects to Ekman's definition of infrastructure as a "metabolic mediation of multiple systemic rifts" (Ekman 2023, 3).

In the next section, I will discuss this transformation of the understanding of what constitutes a landscape – in the specific system and infrastructure notions provided by Arènes and by Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt – in context of its projection on yet another scale, the installation 'CZO Space' (Fig. 2). As I will show, this scale model, albeit presenting a topological, abstract structure of the Strengbach watershed, does not represent the landscape in any pictorial sense. Rather, it reconstructs the OHGE and the site it is located in through the phenomenotechnical lens

13 Generally, water plays a crucial role for measurements at the OHGE – thus its location within a watershed –, e.g., when filtered through the soil carrying biochemical elements from which levels of pollution can be determined.

of ESS by focusing on the scientific infrastructure. It does so by bringing into the exhibition space a complex assemblage of instruments, data processed in real time from the site in the Strengbach valley, documentations and representations of research practices (video, audio, diagrams), and by means of architectural modelling.



Fig. 2: Installation view of Alexandra Arènes' and Soheil Hajmirbaba's 'CZO Space' as seen from the entrance to the exhibition 'Critical Zones – Observatories for Earthly Politics', ZKM Karlsruhe, 2020–22. Photo ©: ZKM Karlsruhe, Photo: Tobias Wootton.

'CZO Space': Spectating between experimentation and disorientation

Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt's notion of patchiness has been an important reference for Arènes' and Hajmirbaba's 'CZO Space' (Hajmirbaba 2023, s.p.). Oscillating between art installation and architectural model of the OHGE (in a scale of roughly 1:40), the site-specific work was commissioned by ZKM for the exhibition 'Critical Zones' "to exhibit an observatory of the critical zone" (Arènes 2023, s.p.). Both the extensive field research and the realization of the installation has been the result of extensive collaborations between Arènes, Hajmirbaba and various scientists, artists, designers, as well as curators, exhibition designers, and techni-

cians at ZKM.[14] 'CZO Space' invites the exhibition visitors to follow "rivers, soils, and trees with a new gaze" (Arènes 2022a, 356), while they perceive landscape structures through the lens of ESS or critical zone research.

'CZO Space' as part of the 'Critical Zones' exhibition space

Originally planned as a piece in much smaller dimensions, the curator Martin Guinard soon proposed to Arènes and Hajmirbaba to use one of the ZKM's atriums as space for a more expansive installation. After their quite well received reports on their fieldwork in the Vosges mountains to the ZKM curators, Arènes and Hajmirbaba were given more or less free hand to occupy the atrium space to develop an alternative representation of a landscape. A landscape neither in a cartographical or Cartesian sense, obeying the structuring hegemonial gaze of European modernity, nor as a pictorial representation,[15] but as conceived through the infrastructure (facilitating the connection of instruments, practices, social relations, landscape elements) of the OHGE. As Pierret has put it describing her collaboration with Arènes and Hajmirbaba during their fieldwork, the project seeks a way "to represent what we are not able to see, what is under our feet – the bedrocks, the soil, the different stages . . ." (Pierret 2023, s.p.). Following the implications of this statement further, I argue that the installation can be seen as a reply to Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt's call to develop a new "phenomenological attunement to landscape forms as well as to beings-in-landscapes" (Tsing et al. 2019, 187) in a fieldwork mode of investigation. In fact, Arènes and Hajmirbaba stressed

14 The expansive (field) research was conducted in collaboration with the CZO scientists Paul Floury, Jérôme Gaillardet, Jacques Hinderer, Sylvain Pasquet, Marie-Claire Pierret, and other scientists from the French network of critical zone observatories (OZCAR). Besides the cooperation with the curators, the exhibition design facilitators (i.e., Matthias Gommel), and the technical staff at ZKM, the realization of the installation's multimedia elements involved Sonia Levy (film, animation), Frédérique Vivet (film), Juliette Hamon Damourette (animation), Patrick Franke (sound/field recordings), Grégoire Lorieux (sound/composition), Axelle Grégoire (maps), and Renaud Hauray (handcraft models). For a complete list of credits see the Société d'Objets Cartographiques project website (http://s-o-c.fr/index.php/zkm_czos/).

15 This is not to say that the exhibition did not include pictorial landscape representations. In fact, the section on German romanticism paintings, curated by Joseph Koerner, provided a perspective of the human gaze contemplating the sublimity of 'nature'. This section was located on the first floor of the open atrium space, creating, according to Korintenberg (2023), in its juxtaposition to 'CZO Space' and Sarah Sze's installation 'Flashpoint (Timekeeper)' (2018) on the ground floor, a conceptual and spatial tension in a 'triangular' visual axis. On 'CZO Space' as a reaction to cartographical representation of landscape see Arènes 2020.

the relevance of Tsing's notion of "patchiness" (Hajmirbaba 2023, s.p.) for the 'CZO Space' project.

The site-specific installation assembles various elements, or perspectives, on the critical zone. A few steps after entering the exhibition space, the visitor of 'Critical Zone' was engulfed by these elements and structures positioned on the floor, hanging from the ceiling, or fixed to walls and posts on the atrium's ground and first floor. The most extensive element catching the eye was a steel structure suspended from the high atrium ceiling, hovering between two and four meters above the ground. Where its front (from the entrance view) connected with the ground, another structure had been positioned, a mid-sized model made of concrete representing the Strengbach valley's topography. Both models, the concrete and the steel structure, suggest a similar shape (the watershed topography), although they represent it in different ways: While the concrete model exhibits the valley's cartographical topography, the steel form is based on composite data assembled by highly sensitive geophones that are used by the OHGE to probe the ground and "to 'see' the subsurface, its porosity, its granularity, its humidity, its fractures" (Arènes 2022a, 357). In my reading, this juxtaposition of different modes of representing the valley and the OHGE – the cartographic concrete molding at the entrance area and, a few steps further, the steel structure based on data gathered by CZO instruments – creates a spatial and epistemic tension: between the 'god trick' of the external scientific observer as described by Haraway and the immersed experience of the visitors that find themselves not only within the structure but also engaged with instruments, complex data, and documentation of fieldwork. This spatio-visual mode of representation can be read, I would argue further, as a strong aesthetic statement for what Ihde has coined 'instrumental realism'. In this perspective of scientific knowledge production, the instruments, practices, and the phenomenotechnical constellations they are part of "transform ranges of phenomena that include, but also exceed, all human perceptual capacities and translate these phenomena into visual forms" (Ihde 2002, 37).

The (infra)structure of 'CZO Space'

While the steel model of the watershed is built in a scale of 1:40, the CZO instruments and devices displayed in the installation remain in their 1:1 scale. Each measurement station had been positioned in the ZKM atrium on a suggested longitude and altitude relative to the stations in the field, which explains the, from a visitor perspective, sometimes odd elevation of some of the instruments and devices, particularly the water collection gutters placed on high scaffoldings or crossing the railings on the 1st floor. This "infrastructure of instruments" (Arènes 2022a, 356)

gathered in the exhibition space – which includes the documentation of practices, social interactions, and the 'sensitive infrastructure' of landscape structures emphasizes the system perspective on the critical zone, composing data on its systemically interrelated compartments. It consists of eight 'stations' which represent the measuring stations in the Strengbach valley, some of them connected to instruments on site to provide real-time data from the OHGE:[16]

- *Riverlab Station*: Constructed as a plywood room or shed, this walk-in model of a laboratory displays real-time data on the chemical variations of the river in the watershed. The sound artist and composer Grégoire Lorieux composed a symphony based on the data which Paul Floury, the scientist of the river lab, had not only collected on site but for which he had already written a software translating this data into sound. Lorieux und Floury worked together mostly independently from Arènes and Hajmirbaba, after having received their initial idea of the installation.
- *Gravimetry Station* or *Gravimeter*: Under the conceptual title "Echoing the coastal tides," this station represents the gravimetric measurements conducted in the watershed, with the device, the gravimeter, itself installed in the exhibition, displaying the recordings of the deeper water table on site. A very sensitive device, the gravimeter also received other signals such as the waves of the tides at a coastline hundreds of kilometers away. Those signals interfere with the results – but also point to the wider critical zone entanglements of the landscape beyond the Strengbach valley.
- *Piezometers and Core Samples* or *Borehole Station*: Soil samples from deep underground were extracted on site and displayed as part of the installation. They uncover pockets of water deep underground – in this case in fact way deeper than expected; an insight that 'vertically expanded' both the possibility of existence of microbial life and the vertical boundaries of the critical zone. Such discoveries suggest a 'cartography' of the critical zone that remains far from being fixed and which needs to be continuously recalibrated to the dynamic biogeochemical cycles of life that constitute it.
- *Geoseismic* or *Geophysics Station*: Geophones of the OHGE uncover the composition and structure of the ground (represented by the steel structure) through seismic measurements of soil and rocks to detect, without disruptive excavations, what lies unseen within a depth of up to 150 m. The station signi-

16 The number and, in some cases, titles of the stations differ, depending on the source: the exhibition's "Fieldbook" or Arènes' 2022 article "The Critical Zone: Observatory Space." The following descriptions (in some cases with various station titles) combine information taken from both sources, complemented by an interview conducted by the author with Arènes and Hajmirbaba (2023).

fies the porosity of the deep soil, which is a condition for the biogeochemical cycles taking place underground.

- *Beech Trees Station*: Beautifully subtitled as "cosmic beings"[17] and represented by wooden scaffoldings, this station signifies the trees of the valley that make up the 'tree sensors' of the OHGE's 'sensitive infrastructure'. Besides being detectors for acid rain and other atmospheric disturbances, the trees also react to anthropogenic perturbations such as rising parasite infections or resilience against ever more common extreme weather events. As a visitor of the exhibition, one could discover the abstract models of the trees as water filtering devices and read about their function within the OHGE infrastructure.
- *Weather Station*: Here, weather measuring instruments are positioned in the exhibition space, becoming part of the installation. On site they record chemical changes in the lower atmosphere as well as the wind strength and direction, e.g., to detect sulfur emissions of acid rain and to provide data on where those emissions may have originated from.
- *Spruce Trees Station*: The above-mentioned wooden gutters, positioned on various levels in the exhibition space, represent the gutters in the field, where they collect the throughfall of the 'tree sensors' as well as other types of rainwater. The analysis of the collected water indicates various pollutants and their change over time.
- *Springs Station*: As presented in a video documentary in the exhibition, water from four springs is collected in a concrete chamber at the center point of the watershed. Here samples are collected to determine the water quality, which also helps monitoring the drinking water supply of Aubure. Among other factors, the water quality depends on the soil's and bedrock's filtering capacity – its water cycle supporting porosity – which is threatened by more frequent and longer periods of drought.

There are further installation elements not assigned to a specific station. Based on field recordings by Franke, a subtle soundscape transports into the exhibition space the sound of the instruments employed in the field, e.g., the gravimeter or the river lab monitoring devices. The installation also contains various maps (and animations) of Arènes and Grégoire, based on the 'Gaia-graphy' project which proposed "a new projection principle" (Arènes et al. 2022, 124) to represent the critical zone differently compared to textbook representations that are not able to depict

17 For the notions of "cosmology" and "cosmogram" in relation to the Critical Zones exhibition see Irrgang 2023.

the complex cycles within this 'thin biofilm'. Based on this 'Gaia-graphic' method, a large-scale reproduction of Arènes' concentric 'Soil map' had been positioned in the center of the atrium.[18] It proposes "a kind of toposcope (orientation map) that produces an inversion of the conventional repertoire of cartography" (Arènes 2022a, 365). Such a critical take on Cartesian cartography does not reduce the critical zone, as in traditional cartographic views on the globe, to a thin surface line hardly visible, but locates the atmospheric cycles in the center of the circular depiction, while its outer ring signifies the bedrock.[19]

A vital part of the 'CZO space' project is the fieldwork conducted – both by the OHGE scientist themselves and by the architects who turned into anthropologists following the scientists. To provide the visitors with an inkling of this site-specific or grounded mode of exploration necessary to grasp the critical zone, the installation includes various forms of documentation of this fieldwork. Besides the audio field recordings by Franke, the work of the OHGE scientists was documented by the artist Sonia Levy, who is known for her (video) investigations of how science engages with nonhuman worlds, and how those worlds subsist while facing anthropogenic disruptions. Documentation was also produced by OHGE scientists themselves, such as a short video on geophysics by Sylvain Pasquet. Equipped with a "Fieldbook" issued by ZKM which described the data collected by each station and a map for orientation (as well as extensive information on the other sections of the exhibition), the visitors could move from station to station to trace how the critical zone is made graspable by various scientific and artistic techniques, investigating a new perspective on landscapes.

As this comprehensive description suggests, 'CZO Space' is a multi-layered installation that employs many different representational models and media as a highly complex assemblage, signifying the complexities of the systems analyzed by ESS. Although no visitor survey was conducted, it is obvious that the meaning or significance of the various instruments, practices, and processes displayed were difficult to grasp in full and at times overwhelming. But in fact, the avoidance (or impossibility) "to show a panorama of the observatory, of what composes the observatory" (Hajmirbaba 2023) – to counteract the 'god trick' of a remote scientific gaze criticized by Haraway – has been, according to Arènes and Hajmirbaba, part of the work's concept: Instead of gaining the comfortable overview of the exhibition visitor's remote gaze on whatever is exhibited – a perspec-

18 For a high-resolution image see the project documentation on http://s-o-c.fr/index.php/zkm_czos/. The key visual of the exhibition is based on a detail/section of this image: https://zkm.de/en/exhibition/2020/05/critical-zones.

19 Both the key visual and a high-resolution image of the complex map can be found on the Société d'Objets Cartographiques project website (http://s-o-c.fr/index.php/zkm_czos/).

tive of contemplation and comprehension, but also of distance, of an outside perspective where deep involvement is unnecessary – the explorers of 'CZO Space' move with their bodies through the space demarcated by the installation, discovering it from many (conceptual and spatial) perspectives. Within the experimental setting of the installation, they may become motivated to "venture questions, suffer disorientation, and get lost while searching for signs and traces [. . .] to cultivate a curiosity toward the earth" (Arènes 2022a, 359). In the installation, as in the critical zone itself, there is no external view on a somewhat 'natural' environment that can be observed from a distant position. Instead, every position is always a perspective from within, rejecting a comfortable overview and accepting disorientation and fragmentarity.

The 'CZO Space' has to be entered and inspected, its elements put together, bit by bit, as different points of view in a process of 'phenomenological attunement' (Tsing et al. 2019). In doing so, the installation rejects a dualist conception of nature as a somewhat separated field to be observed. It reflects an epistemology and aesthetics in which "nature can no longer be represented as a simple given which the observer could grasp with a single gaze" (Horn and Bergthaller 2020, 98). Instead, it pleads for the notion of critical zone as, with Latour (2010, 477), "an assemblage to be slowly composed." Such a composition is enabled by an infrastructure of instruments, practices, and the agencies of human and nonhuman actors. Discarding the idea of a fixed representation and focusing instead on systemic processes and operations, the visitor experience facilitated by 'CZO Space' may correspond with the observations Arènes and Hajmirbaba have made during their fieldtrips: No processes of the critical zone are stable, but everything is in continuous flux, be it on the micro timescale of biochemical reactions or on the deep-time level of geological formation (Hajmirbaba 2023). In line with Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt's plea for fostering a new perspective on landscape structures, Arènes (2021, 146) notes that "the Critical Zone extends the scope and the scale of what can be seen in landscapes." I will come back to this notion in the next, concluding section.

Conclusions: Scales of infrastructure

The 'CZO Space' installation deals with different levels of scale. Developed as an "architectural model of the observatory" (Arènes 2023), it represents the OHGE and the watershed in a scale of 1:40 (with the instruments in 1:1 scale). But also the exhibition 'Critical Zones' itself, of which the installation has been a prominent part, was conceived, according to Latour (2020), as a scale model. A model or

spatio-aesthetic setup in which visitors were invited to conduct a thought experiment. A 'thought exhibition' (Latour and Weibel 2007; Irrgang 2023), to use a term that was coined by Latour and Weibel during the course of the four exhibitions they developed together at ZKM:

> An exhibition offers a perfect *scale model* to test ideas which [. . .] are much too vast to be treated head on. It's a good habit to consider that exhibitions offer an equivalent of what scientists call a 'thought experiment': when you cannot test a theory because it is too far-fetched, you test it in your head and intuit – or sometimes discover! – what the result could be. Similar, [. . .] a *Gedankenausstellung*, or 'thought exhibition,' provides the occasion to test ideas that are impossible to experience on *scale one*. (Latour 2020, 18; my italics)

As the 'wicked problem' climate change probably constitutes the most complex issue of present times, ideas of how to move away from collective annihilation and towards a common world certainly need to consider such complexities 'too vast to be treated head on'. Representing the infrastructure of a CZO within the exhibition space – and making it available for the visitors to be investigated while dealing with the complexity of the variables, cycles, and actors that make up the critical zone – opens up an experimental field, within the heterotopic space of an exhibition, to test new ideas about how a common world may be conceived beyond human exceptionalism.

Following Latour's notion of the exhibition as a 'scale model', *scale one*, so to speak, would be the critical zone, the thin biofilm covering Earth's surface. *Scale two*, then, would relate to sections of the critical zone carved out by a CZO, situated within 'patchy landscapes' (Tsing et al. 2019) or 'vulnerable landscapes' (Arènes 2020) that are representative for specific conditions to be found on scale one. It is important to point out that this scaling materialized through a CZO is only made possible because of the ESS description of the interrelated biotic and abiotic processes as *systems*. To simply 'scale down' these processes into a miniature replication, while retaining the same level of detail and complexity, would result in a reproduction of complexity instead of an operationally useful model. The conception of the critical zone as a system makes it available for 'system thinking', allowing its abstraction within a 'thought experiment' to conceive landscapes as 'Anthropocene patches' (Tsing et al. 2019). It is then, again, the systemic conception of the critical zone that enables the development, the appropriate instalment at representative sites, and the use of observing devices, measuring instruments, and comparative monitoring techniques as elements of a CZO scientific infrastructure.

The installation 'CZO Space', described by Arènes (2020, s.p.) as "a kind of a scale model, a reduced scale, to show a watershed inside a museum", would then correspond to *scale three*. It is important to remind ourselves that the installation was part of, and constructed site-specifically for, the exhibition 'Critical Zones', a

'thought exhibition' constituting *scale two*. In this experimental setting the 'CZO Space' project proposed a model of a landscape constituted by the observations enabled by the complex OHGE infrastructure. The installation invites the visitors to actively engage with and investigate these processes, focusing on the system operations observed by the scientific infrastructure. At the same time, it puts the visitors into a position of lost overview – a position facilitated by the installation's presentation of complex (visual, spatial, and auditive) materials and its multilayered structure which spatially encompasses the visitors in an embodied experience. To make sense of the complex infrastructure – of instruments, practices, social relations, relations between human and non-human actors – and the systemic conception of the critical zone requires, to be sure, an active and committed visitor. A visitor willing to engage with complex information and aesthetically challenging formations, while facing the intended disorientation such complexities evoke (Voorhies 2023; Rogoff and von Bismarck 2012). In fact, as with every experimental setup, both the installation 'CZO Space' and the exhibition 'Critical Zones' require involved conductors or observers that engage with uncertainties – to develop conflicting positions, new possibilities, and alternative worlds.

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Tanya Ravn Ag

The Intratemporal Work of Art

Introduction

If this book's collaborative effort is aimed at denoting and mobilizing infrastructure-aesthetics to look at art as a social sphere of practices, this chapter contributes to that aim with a temporal perspective on infrastructure aesthetics. It posits that wherever and whenever we locate art – ancient, modern, or future – art exists with the temporal infrastructures that organize a society in its contemporaneity.

Art and temporal infrastructures

We begin this journey in a memory of mine, at dawn, atop one of the two grand pyramids of the ancient city of Teotihuacan. When the sun begins to rise, contours of many smaller pyramids and platforms reveal a layout of what was once an extraordinary empire. The pre-Hispanic city of the Teotihuacan was established around year 100 BC and lasted up until the seventh and eighth centuries, when it was abandoned for unknown reasons. This was once a powerful cultural center and the largest city in the Americas. At its height, one of the largest in the world (Unesco). The name Teotihuacan comes from the Aztec language and means 'the birthplace of the gods.' People then believed that it was the location of the creation of the universe. These cultural beliefs organized the urban design of the city, which was built around two pyramids, the Pyramid of the Moon facing south, and the Pyramid of the Sun facing west. The master plan reflects a deep understanding of astronomical phenomena based on cosmic harmony. The city's main street, known as the Avenue of the Dead, is oriented in an east-west direction. This alignment matches the path of the sun. The city's layout reflects both cosmic patterns and local environmental features, whereby the course of the San Juan River was changed so that it intersected with Avenue of the Dead. Especially along the main street, but also throughout the city, buildings were decorated with murals, which reveal a certain temporal organization of the ancient city. These depict scenes of rituals, mythology, agricultural activities, seasonal rhythms, religious ceremonies, deities, and other events that followed the cycles of nature and reveal the ways in which life was temporally organized. The depiction of recurring events, which simultaneously offer insights into spiritual practices and cultural values, suggests a cyclical view of time.

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As an infrastructure of communication, infrastructure, the public art on the murals mediated a cyclic relation between cultural and spiritual life and a form of technics connected with the universe and nature, which reflected how the world was understood. Art in the ancient city of Teotihuacan served to maintain and mediate this organization of life through symbols and narratives, which were passed on to the next generation to uphold the temporal orders of the city.

Art has always existed with the temporal structures that have organized human life during its contemporaneity. The ancient past reminds us of a relation between art and time, whereby the art simultaneously mediates and is mediated by a particular temporal organization of human life and society. What we now refer to as ancient art – in the forms of cave paintings, murals, sculptures and engravings – mediated the temporalities of a specific mode of local technics that was constrained by particular cosmologies and religions. It mediated the life and imaginaries through which humans engaged and reshaped their environment and psycho-social milieu.

In today's context, our temporal infrastructures are to a large extent conditioned by digital networks and relations.

The chapter considers how networked digital infrastructures facilitate a new structure of temporality for art, a temporal structure of *intratemporality* (Ag 2023). With reference to the philosophy of Yuk Hui, who theorizes intratemporality in terms of temporal relations between humans and technology, I will examine how intratemporality is a medium for contemporary art. The infrastructural perspective that solicits this situating of art in relation to time unties the art from the object of the technological medium that enables a subjective, temporal experience of the artwork, as is central to the well-established notion of time-based art and the phenomenological ideas on subjective time that this relies on. I will unfold this proposal with the aid of an artwork, *Unknown Cloud*, produced by the Swedish artists Lundahl & Seitl, which will show us how art not only uses intratemporality as a medium but also 'works' on the temporalities of digital infrastructures by expanding on our experience with both functional and poetic intratemporal relations. With this augmented, connective art experience at the center of my analysis, I will propose that art, when mediated by the intratemporal relations of digital infrastructures and simultaneously re-mediating these, potentially resituates our relations with technics.

Modern art and time-based media

While ancient art used time as a medium to convey shared cultural meaning, modern art places time in the subjective thinking, experience, and interpretation of the

art object. Artists of various modern art movements have explored the effects that time has had on their work and its perceptual context. For example, the nineteenth-century Impressionists experimented with human perceptual movement in response to the perceptual limits that were becoming popular with the still reproduction of reality in photography. They applied paint in small touches of pure color, rather than broader strokes of mixed pigments, to create fleeting impressions of color and light that simulated movement (Levinson 1997). In reaction to the European colonial expansion in the late nineteenth-century and the changing experience of space, movement, and time in the modern world, Cubist artists explored techniques of representing space and depicted the subject from multiple viewpoints and at different times (Metzinger 1910). Kinetic art, which originated in the impressionist work of artists from the late nineteenth-century, such as Claude Monet, Edouard, Manet, and Edgar Degas, explored techniques for modelling dynamic, perceptible expressions and animating perceptual gaps through movement (Chen et al. 2015).

In these movements throughout modern Western art history, we observe a shift in the understanding of time, from a static to a dynamic concept. The dynamic conception of time evolved alongside technological advancement through the industrial revolution. New communications technologies, such as the electric telegraph, and later the telephone, photography, and then video, enabled new communicative relationships, global interconnectivity, and interchange of intellectual ideas that influenced the experimentation with temporality and perceptual experience in art.

When mechanical technology became a part of the modern work of art, time was tied with the technological functionality of the medium employed by the art. Time-based art came to denote a medium-specific approach to categorizing art that emerged with new technological forms, especially with video since the 1960s and with computational technology since the late 1980s. While in still photography art captures a moment in time that it freezes in the image, in time-based art the moment or situation is captured for as long as the video plays or the software runs. The temporality of the image, narrative, audio sequence, rules of interaction, etc., depend on the functional capabilities of the technological medium in which the art's experience is 'based.'

Time-based art uses time as an integral part of the artwork itself. It has a run-time that is enabled by the form or medium that limits and contains the experience, which unfolds in the viewer over the time of the experience. We can imagine an audience watching the art unfold according to the temporal logic of the medium, as it is played back. As such, time is used as an element in art in relation to technical functionality, which sets a framework for the art's experience. The technological medium enables the inscription of the viewer's experience in a particular experience of time, or in the 'passage of encounter,' as proposed by Rosa-

lind Krauss. In Krauss' much-referenced contribution to the broad conception of time-based art in the modern trajectory, she understands spectatorship as a permeable aesthetic experience that is generated in the encounter of a viewing subject and an art object (Krauss 1981, 107–108).

These ideas, which rest on a sense of correspondence between experience and time, and a tight affiliation of the consciousness of the human subject and the world beyond it, are indebted to the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who draw time into the textures of human experience. The phenomenologists challenged the Enlightenment legacy of Kantian transcendentalism and the mechanisms of industrialization that established time as a seemingly objective figure during modernity. They challenged the idea of time as a purely physical dimension or numerical measure that exists prior to conscious human experience, to rather consider time as a living phenomenon that surfaces with experience. In the phenomenological perspective, art is not only seen but also felt, through subjective and personal experiences, viewpoints, and emotions. The phenomenological ideas on how objects appear to us through consciousness reflect a long-lasting philosophical concern, since Descartes' distinction between subject and object, with the essence of things and their representation, and trickle into the time-based conception of art as if it temporally engages us through our direct, subjective experience of it.

Time-based art is still the most common description of art that uses technological media in its function and display. The conception of art as time-based is broadly used in the global art context to categorize durational works of art. It is used to describe artworks that rely on technology, such as video, film, slide, and audio, as well as art installations and artworks that function only for the duration of their time on display, like computer-based and mechanical works of art, and other forms of artworks using computer-based media.[1]

A trajectory in digital art theory has extended on the time-based idea of art by explicitly emphasizing the 'temporal behaviors' of the artwork, which refer to temporal behavioral qualities rooted in the functionalities of the medium but also stretching beyond the medium. Digital art's behaviors have been characterized by, for example, interactivity, connectivity, and computability (Dietz 2015); by the understanding of the artwork as process-oriented, time-based, dynamic, real-time, participatory, collaborative, performative, modular, variable, generative, and customizable (Paul 2008); and as distributed in nature, networked in exis-

1 Art institutions commonly use the term "time-based art" with reference to art that is 'dependent on technology and has a durational dimension' (Tate Modern), 'unfolding to the viewer over time' (Guggenheim), and 'dependent on time, duration, or function' (National Gallery of Australia).

tence, and combining physical and virtual elements (Graham and Cook 2008). This specific emphasis on the art's temporal behaviors opens to further situate art temporally within not just the functionality of a technological medium but within the temporalities of the digital infrastructures that these behaviors reach into in order to be effective in our experience.

The infrastructure aesthetic perspective calls for an altering of this temporal framework for grasping art's temporal qualities. It relocates our focus on time, from the functionalities of the technological device employed by the art object to the temporal relations that the art engages when it 'works.' Infrastructure aesthetic thinking essentially challenges the deeply ingrained idea in Western phenomenology about phenomena's appearance to us through direct experience. This is because we re-situate art beyond its physical and medium-based location and extend the art's mode of existence to the infrastructural relations of the work. In doing so, the limits of the art's experience transcend a direct correspondence between human consciousness and the artwork in its contextual environment. In the following, I will characterize the *intratemporal* relations of digital infrastructures, to propose these as both a medium and a mediating structure for art.

Intratemporal infrastructures

In *Code and Clay, Data and Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media*, the media studies scholar Shannon Mattern acknowledges the central role played by media and communication in the deep time of urbanization (Mattern 2017). She recalls how various anthropologists, archeologists, and urban historians have posited that the birth of cities is rooted not only in economics but also in the need for communication and ceremony. She accounts for the critical role of communication in giving form to cities, insisting that the means of communications – from the voice to the printed page and cellular networks and so on – have shaped cities throughout history, while cities in turn have been shaping media as communicative infrastructures (Mattern2017 , xxv). In this manner, cities and media have historically served as one another's infrastructures. Mattern's media archeological examination, of the city that has always been mediated by infrastructures of communication, presents a way of thinking about media not only through infrastructures but also *as* infrastructures, whereby media is ". . . potentially embodied in an urban or even global scale, as a force whose modes, ideologies, and aesthetics of operation can be spatialized, and materialized, in the landscape" (Mattern 2017, xxv–xxvi). In a similar thinking, we can account of the ancient paintings,

murals, and carvings of urban public art as simultaneously being shaped by the technical, spiritual, and cultural ordering of the city and giving form to cities.

The infrastructures that temporally organize our world today are characterized by digital technology. Digital infrastructures organize our communication networks, and through them our social relations. They increasingly facilitate how we distribute knowledge, symbols, images, and cultural meaning. If we consider the infrastructure as a mediating structure that undergirds communication and spiritual life, I am interested in how the temporal dynamics of digital infrastructures mediate art – as a manifestation of technics in the art.

My engagement with digital infrastructures in what follows is informed by the computer engineer and philosopher Yuk Hui's conception of intratemporality, which concern a particular structure of temporality that is characterized by temporal relations between humans and machines. Firstly, it is important to note that Hui's interpretation of intratemporality presents a contrast to the concept as proposed by Martin Heidegger in his seminal work, 'Being and Time.' For Heidegger, intratemporality represents a form of original and primordial temporality, a procedural, organizing principle that shapes an existential structure of Dasein characterized by inauthenticity and quantifiable by calculation and measuring instruments (Heidegger 2010 [1927]). Heidegger's intratemporality embodies a universal conception of time as linear, structured around the past, present, and future, and organized in accordance with the principles of classical physics concerning absolute mathematical time and foundational principles of natural science about relativity (Roubach 2016). While Heidegger's intratemporality concentrates on the ontological and existential aspects of time, Hui's approach emphasizes the relational and pluralistic dimensions of time, particularly in relation to the technology of digital objects.

In *On The Existence of Digital Objects*, Hui examines how digital infrastructures involve a complex interplay of material and temporal relations, which are influenced by the ever-changing nature of digital objects and their interactions with the world (Hui 2015). Hui's theory, which is deeply influenced by Gilbert Simondon's philosophy on technics and culture as co-constitutive, asserts that technical objects should not be viewed as standalone entities. Instead, they are better comprehended in the context of their relationships and interactions. In Simondon's thinking in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 'relations' refer to the complex interactions between a technical object and its milieu, which includes both the human user and the resources the device utilizes. Simondon emphasizes the reciprocal nature of these relations, where the technical object is shaped by its environment and, in turn, shapes that environment (Simondon 1980 [1958]).

Hui's philosophical engagement with digital objects as relational provides an inroad to understanding digital infrastructures as co-constitutive of art. Digital objects can be any entity in the digital realm, from a simple text file to complex

systems or a web application. An example of relevance to the artwork I will soon attend to, is the mobile phone application. As a digital object, the 'app' is more than the physical presence of a package file, which contains the app's code written in a particular programming language (such as SGML, HTML, and XML), its resources, such as images, sounds, and layout files, and a manifest file that describes the app's properties to the operating system. In Hui's theory on digital objects, the app, as I have chosen to be our example here, is more than a program that executes code and processes data within the device's memory. The mobile app also interact with the device's operating system and other hardware components, such as the camera, GPS, and sensors, to provide their functionality, and they connect to the internet to fetch or send data. Hui proposes that we approach digital objects from the concept of relations, as constantly changing entities that are shaped by their relational interactions – especially with other operating systems and digital objects that they are connected with. In this view, the app exists in terms of its interactions and relations with the entire network of the internet. It is constituted through multiple and complex relations, which Hui divides into two overall categories:

The first category is *discursive relations*, which determine how the app functions and interacts with other software components. These are the technical and logical relations that define the structure and behavior of the app, for example, the markup and programming languages that concretize the technical and logical relations, the frameworks used to build the app, the Application Programming Interface (APIs) it interacts with, which is the set of rules or protocols that enables software applications to communicate with each other to exchange data, features, and functionality, the protocols it uses to communicate, and the data formats it uses to store information.

Hui's second category of relations is *existential relations*, or 'being-in-the-world relations.' These are the relations that define the app's existence in the digital world. When understood in terms of existential relations, the device resources are not just passive components but also concern the interactions between the app and its users. The device's resources include the Central Processing Unit (CPU) that carries out the instructions of a computer program; computer memory or Random Access Memory (RAM), which is where the device stores the data that it is actively using or processing and that can be read from and written to by the processor and other devices; and its network capabilities, meaning the device's ability to connect to and communicate with other devices on the internet. The functionalities of these device resources are defined by the ways in which you interact with them, whereby the app responds to you, and which eventually defines the app's purpose and functionality. The app's functionality is thus understood in terms of how it is constituted through a network of relations, which

determine how the app interacts with and evolves. As such, existential relations are not just about the app itself, but also about the app's relational mode of existence and its interactions with users of it as well as with other apps and operating systems within the broader digital ecosystem.

Hui's theory invokes an understanding of intratemporality in terms of the specific mediating and materializing temporalities that we live and evolve with. These include the data-driven temporal processes and mutual modifications between interobjective relations, which interfere with intersubjective relations.

Interobjectivity in this regard denotes that the techniques of data processing that arrived with the digital not only concern the processing of large amounts of data by computers but also systems that operate with data, which can establish connections and form networks of data that extend from platform to platform, and from database to database (Hui 2015, 158). Hui argues that the traditional approach to intersubjectivity as collective consciousness between human subjects needs to be supplemented with an analysis of the discursive relations that are materialized in and in between objects and interobjective relations. As interobjective relations connect us with a larger, networked, and environmental domain of experience that transfers through machinic circuits, data-driven temporal processes become a part of intersubjective processes and interfere with structures of perception and memory. These relations, between intersubjectivity and interobjectivity, combine in Hui's understanding of intratemporality.

In what follows, I will attempt to unfold how intratemporality is a medium in the artwork *Unknown Cloud.* I will focus on the work's existential relations through the mobile app as a digital object that exists through temporal relations facilitated by digital, networked infrastructures. My aim is to show that the work uses the temporalities that characterizes digital infrastructures as a medium, while it at the same time modifies our experience of these temporalities. In doing so, I propose, the art evokes and engages the embodiment of technics within us.

Unknown Cloud

On a different journey, this time not to the art of ancient times but to an artwork that stretches from our contemporaneity and into both the past and the future, I want to visit an aesthetic phenomenon known as the *Unknown Cloud*. Conceived in 2013 by Lundahl & Seitl, the Swedish artist duo that includes Christopher Lundahl & Martina Seitl, the *Unknown Cloud* unfolds as a participatory performance operated by a smartphone application. The experience, which can take place at any location set up for it by the artists, begins through the activation of an app.

The screen of your mobile device turns black and searches for the cloud's signal. We wait, together, in silent anticipation of what we are about to experience. We listen to ambisonic sound through our headphones, forming a three-dimensional audio sphere with sounds coming from above, below, and in between us.

A voice introduces itself as the Caretaker. It announces to us that an *Unknown Cloud* is on its way. It explains that it was originally created as a location-aware system but has developed with the task of helping people to connect with the approaching *Unknown Cloud*. The *Unknown Cloud* is an ancient phenomenon, we are told. It is attracted to electromagnetic fields and has been discovered with the invention of digitally networked technology that generates electromagnetic fields when signals are carried over distances. We are waiting for the exact moment of the cloud's passing. We are instructed by the Caretaker to close our eyes and listen to the enforced radio waves that will pass where we are, then to open our eyes and pay attention to image sequences and sensorial impressions on the screen of our devices.

The artwork is experienced through a smart phone via a downloaded application. When we activate the app, the experience begins. Screens go black. The artwork repurposes the object of the mobile device, from a device that mediates and organizes everyday life for many of us to an interface for the aesthetic experience. The device becomes a different kind of digital object. It becomes a bidirectional sensory extension of the body, described by the artists as 'a wand or a sacred object that enables you to experience the otherwise intangible world of the unknown cloud' (Lundahl & Seitl). Through the sensory extension with the smartphone capabilities that the work utilizes, the human body enters a technical milieu that is mediated by temporalities of particular technical systems.

The work is developed on the Geo Intel platform Nagoon. Nagoon is a technology for spatial computing, a spatial-aware platform that involves a combination of GPS technology for location tracking, cloud computing for data storage and processing, and location-aware Augmented Reality (AR) for overlaying digital information onto the physical world. Used by the artwork, this technology enables an aesthetic experience that develops from the sensations we register in the digitally augmented environment we are in. The artwork can determine our location by means of geolocation technology, whereby the AR experience can be tailored to our specific location. This means that during the art experience, we are simultaneously in a natural environment and in a digital milieu. The artists use the Nagoon technology to create a narrative whereby a digital layer of three-dimensional sound is added on top of the physical world in the specific environment we are in. Each person's experience is continuously updated based on the geolocated data – of the participants' location, movements, and interactions with the app – which is being collected and processed real-time.

Unknown Cloud is an experience between people. It becomes an experience among us as much as within us. It synchronizes the movements of people in a particular place and within a limited window of time. The work wouldn't work if we were not in it together. Our eye contacts, gestures of touch instructed by the Caretaker, group configuration into one volume, and formation of a circle, connect us in a state of shared attention. We are encouraged to try and connect with the cloud by thinking of our bodies as antennas that amplify when we gather and attract the cloud. We wait.

The *Unknown Cloud* finally passes where we are, and in doing so, it augments our experience of being here and now, by sound. We simultaneously direct our attention towards each other, to the functions of our mobile devices, and to worldly and environmental narratives that fuse into our local experience.

The effects of the lights from our screens, blinking and scattering as the Cloud signal amplifies, reveal a mode of synchronicity. The Caretaker's instructions code into our collective experience a form of rhythm of synchronized movements. During the experience, we are instructed to touch each other, hold hands, sit down together, and seek eye contact. We are no longer solely beholders of individual agencies but experience the artwork through a human connection. intersubjective experience is enabled through the artwork's use of real-time synchronization, whereby our devices are synchronized in real time. This enables us to interact with the same digital elements at simultaneously, in this case, geotagged three-dimensional sound.

Our intersubjective experience is deeply engaged with the temporalities of digital objects with which we are connected. Synchronization happens among us intersubjectively because the app is cross-platform compatible, between iOS and Android devices, and between different devices and operating systems. Cross-platform compatibility, and real-time synchronization across devices, has become a standard feature of networked experiences, and exemplifies what Yuk Hui describes with his concept of interobjectivity, as I previously addressed. It means that, as the artwork employs networked technology, it simultaneously employs the temporal processes of networked technology, between digital objects, platforms, and milieus. Hence our interchange of emotions and sensibilities is not closed off to the physical environment we are in. While the work activates and engages with networked relations between the intersubjective sphere of the audience participating in the art experience *and* with interobjective machinic processes that underpin the technical functionality of the work, it however organizes poetic ways for us to participate in these temporal relations. These ways are introduced to us through the narrative, the invitation for collective actions, and the emotions we experience as we are connected through the duration of the experience.

Unknown Cloud exists with the temporalities that characterize digital infrastructures. While the aesthetic experience is enabled by contemporary networked technologies, it also draws on collective consciousness and imaginaries that we evolve through our everyday existence with these technologies. Like a central function of the smart phone today that links us up with a networked dimension of human existence, the work evokes our imagination of connecting with people, places, and ideas. We connect with a networked world that our sensory system is familiar with, and, through the poetic narrative, to an imaginary extension of the experience that mirrors a networked reality, but which nonetheless differs.

Intratemporal difference

While *Unknown Cloud* integrates the temporal behaviors of the digital object of the smartphone application, it additionally builds other temporalities into our experience. It does so through a reconfiguration of the work's duration and pace. The duration of the work extends beyond the 35 minutes the experience takes. The artwork simultaneously functions very fast and very slowly. The high-speed data processing and transmission capabilities of the Geo Intel platform Nagoon aggregate and transmit data in a manner whereby it feels like real-time responses. It happens so quickly that you perceive the responses as if they are happening in real time, with an almost unnoticeable delay between your action and the system's response. The artwork is however also a manifestation of a radical slow process. The *Unknown Cloud* will travel across national borders, large cities, remote villages, islands, mountains, and across the sea, from its conception in 2013, through ongoing iterations, and until its anticipated end of existence in 2057, as proclaimed by the artists. We are thus engaging with fast-paced technology while introduced to a slow evolvement of the work.

Through the experience, we connect with different technological cultures through the narratives of people who have experienced clouds in different places and at different times elsewhere, which the voice fuses into our experience, as we listen. Some of these places the artwork did visit, like Karbi Anglong and Bangalore, Berlin, Stockholm, and Køge, while others it might. Sound and narrative bites from these cloud formations expand our intersubjective experience with different kinds of interobjective relations than the one Hui describes between digital objects – between other clouds as digital objects. These other clouds activate location-specific, different temporal logics. Through the cloud's synchronous and symbiotic formation of groups in different (geolocated) places, cloud cultures form with their own knowledge systems that differ from group to group, from formation to formation,

and from cloud to cloud. The collective behaviors of the groups of bodies that form with the *Unknown Cloud* never operate in the same way. Within each cloud forms a micro culture that evolves its own ways of ordering the experience, its own modes of acting out proximity, intimacy, and togetherness, and its own ways of administering anticipation, which is reflective of the people who participate and the cultural and environmental contexts they are in. Through touch, bodily movement, and code of trust and intimacy building through human proximity, different modes of technics are engaged through embodied experience. Different micro sensible reactions to the cloud – as simultaneously a proxy for a digital object and an ancient mythological phenomenon – occur, and through these the experience activates knowledge systems based on different sensibilities.

Through the narrative, we also connect with temporalities of natural phenomena related to energies of the universe – such as the radio astronomical sound of the sun carried as fossilized messages in neutrinos, as the sun's 'memories' of its own internal processes; and air trapped in glacial ice freezing the earth's geological past, as a form of memory record of ecological data of the atmosphere. Deep temporalities of environmental phenomena become a part of the temporalities of the artwork's experience, like forms of cosmological orders that anchor our experience in the universe beyond our technical inventions.

Through such varying temporalities, of the long duration of life of an artwork otherwise 'based' in fast-paced temporalities of digital, interobjective relations, of micro cultures of different technological cultures as we experienced through the connection with different cloud formations, and of memory embedded in the temporalities of natural phenomena, our experience is mediated through an extension of the intratemporal nexus between intersubjective human relations and interobjective relations between digital objects. The intratemporal structure of the experience is expanded with other kinds of intersubjective and interobjective logics and relations.

The existential relations of the work, the work's 'being-in-the-world-temporalities,' are not fixed by the technical relations of the app but make the work – and the digital object it operates – a changing entity. It changes through cognitive, physical, and imaginary interactions throughout the experience, which all feed into the intratemporal mediation of the artwork. Much like temporalities of cosmology, mythology, and religious beliefs merged with temporalities of agriculture, rituals, and everyday life in the ancient art murals, the temporalities of our connective imaginaries fuse into the temporal mediation of the *Unknown Cloud*. It simultaneously uses the intratemporal relations of digital infrastructures as a medium for the experience *and* mediates a different temporal organization of our world through digital infrastructures.

Conclusion

Not only artworks made with or explicitly using digital technology are affected by the digital infrastructures that shape our cultural context today, but these have been the focus of my attention in this chapter. In our current time and context organized by infrastructures of digital technology, art takes new forms, exploits new networks, and explores new affective and functional relations with a networked world. When technology becomes a part of the artwork, we have tended to focus on the art's behaviors as tied to the technical functionality and operationality of the work's machinic functions. But in the infrastructure aesthetic perspective, the temporal medium of art extends beyond medium functionality.

In an intratemporal thinking framework, the work of art is cast as a phenomenon that is mediated by intratemporal relations, while it at the same time expands the experience of a communicative, networked mode of existence. My temporal perspective on infrastructure aesthetics in this chapter has sought to temporally re-situate art in a relation to time, beyond medium-based functionality and representation, to the intratemporal relations that the art engages as a digital object. As I exemplified with the poetic narrative of the *Unknown Cloud*, these intratemporal relations also involve imagined relations and poetic temporalities that exceed the actual technical functionality of digital infrastructures. Like ancient art used the intratemporal relations between cycles of life, spirituality, cosmological order, and the natural environment as a medium, materialized in symbols and narratives, that communicated the local belief system and organized temporal experience in the ancient city, the digital work of art uses – and expands on – intratemporality as a medium that enables temporal organization and imaginaries of our networked experience today.

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Unknown Cloud. Artwork by Lundahl & Seitl, 2015–2057.

Mathias Overgaard

Art as Reflective Infrastructure

Infrastructure is the word commonly used for the means of circulation that a society has created for itself in order to sustain life or to make life more efficient. Whether it concerns food- and water systems, electricity cables, or highways, infrastructures enable the continuous flow of daily life within a community. The creation of new infrastructures thus introduces different ways of organizing this flow and thereby new potentials for mediating human co-existence. An infrastructure is something established *by* society *for* society for the purpose of reorganizing how life unfolds in it.[1] This means that infrastructural analyses are concerned with the distribution of goods, people, and ideas "literally providing the undergirding of modern societies" (Larkin 2013, 328). In this article, I will forward the claim that art is an infrastructure partaking in this undergirding of modern societies, and that it is a specific kind of infrastructure. This entails looking at art as an institution which owes its existence to a particular formatting of society as we know it in the West, and, furthermore, that art through this existence manages to facilitate what might be called an infrastructural flow.

It is apparent by now that the social reality of art in modernity is the result of a complex network of historical institutions spanning from art schools and universities to museums and internet platforms. And it is likewise apparent how the idea of what qualifies as art, what qualifies as good art, and how we ought to enjoy it depends on prevailing discourses nurtured by newspapers, book clubs, journals, and conferences, just to mention a few. All combined and following the path of feminist media scholar Susan Leigh Star, we may very well refer to this vast but meticulously interconnected design through which entire "artworlds" comes about as an infrastructural organization (Star 1990; Becker 1982). To speak of art and infrastructure in the same sentence is to invoke the whole "support-system" involved in the creation, transportation, presentation, and conversation of artworks along with the agents who participate in these activities (Mitchell 2005; Jackson 2011).

Thanks to theoretical positions within art sociology, media history, and science and technology studies we possess elaborate analytical vocabularies for scrutinizing how the possibility of creating and maintaining art is dependent on infrastructures like those just stated. But it is one thing to describe the infrastruc-

1 Of course, this does not prevent infrastructures from being marketized and privatized where the reorganizing serves the purpose of profit rather than the public good.

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tures *of* art, another thing entirely to construct a language that enables us to examine art *as* an infrastructure in its own right. Or, more precisely, to come up with ways to investigate the infrastructural function of art without losing sight of its infrastructural possibility. Posed as a question, we may ask why society goes through so much trouble to sustain the many institutions necessary for something like art to be able to thrive. If society hands art its existence, then what does art hand society in return?

This is the question that concerns me in the following. I suggest that one way to answer it is by considering art as a means for collective self-reflection. Art performs a social mediation in bringing people into contact with each other regarding how they set out to imagine themselves. Such a mediation can take place directly, for instance when we are put together in the museum or in the cinema, but it can also take place indirectly by instigating a relationship between those of us who have read the same book, albeit at different times in different locations. In this sense, art is an infrastructure not only because it names a field where artworks are produced and circulated, but also because it gathers people around these works. And when we do so, we gather around shared images for making sense of ourselves and the world we inhabit. Phrasing it differently: With art, society has created a means for reflecting upon itself. It has secured a delimited space within its general distribution where it produces images of itself to itself, a space where members of a particular community can meet to discuss the accuracy and validity of the images that are presented to them, and where they can agree or disagree as to how these images fit the ideas they have of themselves and the community they believe themselves to be a part of.

In order to pose the argument that art is a reflective infrastructure, it is important to highlight the ritualistic dimension pertaining to the artwork, which have remained understudied in aesthetic theory. Emphasizing this dimension will allow us to examine the infrastructural agency of artworks in their capacity to instigate a particular kind of reflective activity which is crucial to the development of social life. In sociological and anthropological studies on ritual practices, the ritual is generally conceived as a collective engagement with the self-images that are shared among members of a community and the images through which they understand themselves and make sense of the world around them. As British anthropologist Victor Turner has argued, the ritual event is one "wherein society becomes at once subject and direct object," in such a way that we experience "an existential bending back upon ourselves" (Turner 1991, vii). The ritual is a mode of collective self-reflection through which society keeps a continuous dialogue with itself concerned with what it believes to be its core values and principles. This dialogue has infrastructural importance insofar as society risks losing its sense of self if its collective images are not awakened or manifested in the ritual.

In the words of Émile Durkheim: "If society is to become conscious of itself and keep the sense it has of itself at the acquired intensity, it must assemble and concentrate" (Durkheim 1995, 424). If society fails or forgets to reflect upon itself, and hence to energize the self-images through which it comprehends itself and its most fundamental values, then these images risk withering away. The consequence of this, Durkheim warns, is that members of a society may find themselves in a state of alienation.

In the following, I set out to unpack some of the ways in which art's existence in modernity can be said to follow a ritualistic logic. A logic which, as we shall see, is social rather than religious. This calls for a theoretical explanation of key concepts within ritual studies followed by a discussion of how these concepts may support and/or expand classical notions within aesthetic theory. Through this unpacking, it becomes possible to disclose an infrastructural function in art's ability to foster collective self-reflection, and I conclude by proposing that without this function the images we share for understanding our mutual existence risk nullification. But before that, I want to elaborate on how the infrastructural undergirding of society refers to more than the hardware associated with pipelines and bridges, and emphasize instead how society also depends on a flow of images and sensibilities to build affective relations between its members.

A composition of ideas, beliefs, and sentiments

An infrastructure enables a mediation of social life. In a distributive manner, it puts things and people into contact with each other. Or, conversely, it obstructs and cuts off certain relations in a deliberate attempt to keep things apart. If we want to get a closer look at the sort of mediation that is made possible by works of art, however, we also need an understanding of how "collective continuance" relies on more than the flow of goods and other materials that uphold conditions of living (Levine 2023, 12). In addition to biological and physical necessities, our mutual being also depends on affective or sensible infrastructures. Social life would not be possible without a matrix of images, beliefs, and symbols being exchanged between those participating in a culture (see also Karsenti 2012). And it is in order to describe this necessity – and how this necessity is dealt with – that I turn to ritual studies.

There is a long tradition within French sociological thinking, from Durkheim and Marcel Mauss to Claude Levi-Strauss and Philippe Descola, for viewing collective life as something more than an aggregate of individuals and things that are gathered in the same place. It is not enough to assemble a bunch of people and a

lot of material infrastructures in order for a social unity to occur. As Durkheim writes: "Society is not constituted simply by the mass of individuals who comprise it, the ground they occupy, the things they use, but above all by the idea it has of itself" (1995, 425). The sociological point of such a statement is that our analysis misses the mark if it comprehends sociality as the sum of already established parts that exist independently of each other. Rather, different ways of being a subject and different ways of using the things at hand are constituted by this phenomenon called society. Society is a thing *sui generis*, meaning that it has a mode of existence "qualitatively different from the individual beings that compose it" (Durkheim 1953, 37). Consequently, we ought to think of society as some kind of surplus which exceeds the accumulation of its entities, since these entities are configured, related, and put into contact with each other by something bigger than the singularity of each individual. If society is first and foremost "a composition of ideas, beliefs, and sentiments of all sorts which realize themselves through individuals" then the maintenance of this society relies on instances of such realizations (Durkheim 1953, 59).

And this is where the ritual comes in. Religious studies scholar Catherine Bell notes how there exists an overall tendency within theories on rituals to view rites as a means through which members of a collective become present to themselves *as* a collective, that the purpose of the ritual, in other words, is to actualize what is shared among these members (Bell 1991). The ritual event designates a limited time-space where society enacts or performs itself to itself. In this sense, the reflective process of "bending back upon ourselves" is genuinely practical insofar as the ritual by definition is action-oriented: "Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths" (Bell 1991, 19). In an almost dualistic fashion, what is being thought is distinguished from what is being done. Therefore, collective ideas, beliefs, and myths "emerge as forms of mental content or conceptual blueprints: they direct, inspire, or promote activity, but they themselves are not activities. Ritual, like action, will act out, express, or perform these conceptual orientations" (Bell 1991, 19).

The ritual is thus like a technique society has acquired in order to manifest its self-fashioning ideas. By inventing specific times and places along with certain behavioural scripts, society is able to make its principal self-images present to itself. Again, and from a sociological point of view, this is an invention by society for society. But it also means that rituals operate aesthetically in making such self-images visible to and felt in each of the members. It makes something mental or conceptual present at hand and gives it life and energy so that it may affect those participating in the ritual. Aestheticization is not just the means of the ritual, but also what a community hopes to achieve by it. The ritual gives appearance and life

to the otherwise abstract ideas society has of itself. If, pace Durkheim, religious forms are in fact social forms, then how may we conceive the function and actualization of society's self-images in a secular and more contemporary setting?

The lifeworld of structure

Lauren Berlant is a recent example of how it is possible to conceptualize these affective infrastructures which are arguably more difficult to analyze given their transient character. As I see it, Berlant presents a way to understand not only what affective infrastructures are ontologically, but also how they can be apprehended epistemologically. They begin by making a distinction between structure and infrastructure:

> Infrastructure is not identical to system or structure, as we currently see them, because infrastructure is defined by the movement or pattering of social form. It is the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure (Berlant 2016, 393).

If structure refers to presumably stable connections, then infrastructure names the processing and flow that "link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustaining relation" (Berlant 2016, 393). Writing about living mediation, Berlant is aiming at a definition of infrastructure that emphasizes its movement and use, understood in such a way that it is about the practical or existential side of the otherwise rather abstract notion of structure. An infrastructure is what patterns our ongoing relations to the world. It concerns the modes of attachment that configure a form of life, and it can range from schools and finance systems to families and codes of conduct. We are thus bound to each other materially and affectively. "Just because a space on a grid is shared," so Berlant writes, "intends nothing about the affective and material substance or even the fact of membership" (Berlant 2016, 295). Or phrased differently: "Just because we are in the room together does not mean that we belong to the room or each other: belonging is a specific genre of affect" (Berlant 2016, 395).

This position resonates with the Durkheimian claim that communality is a phenomenon in need of shared images and sentiments. But I want to stay with Berlant here and expand upon what they mean by genre, and how that meaning can be helpful in clarifying the critical work art performs as a reflective infrastructure. In *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant introduces the notion of *sense genres* as a tool for explaining and examining the forms of attachment that bind us to the world in living movement. A sense genre is a specific configuration of a culture's "collective sensorium," a pattering of the way an experience of the world is inter-

preted. It is aesthetical since it involves a sensible relation guided by an outward movement towards a desired object or phenomenon. And what is desired, Berlant goes on to argue, can be a collective fantasy or some other optimistic attachment that holds the promise for bettering the state of living. Hence, sense genres are conventional aesthetic forms that allow us to recognize certain ways of relating to a situation or to categorize an affective encounter: "Genres provide an affective expectation of the experience of watching something unfold, whether that thing is in life or in art" (Berlant 2011, 6). Because of their genre-like status, these affective modes of attachment always reveal some part of the world on behalf of others. Some phenomena step into sensible focus while others remain obscure, just like some ways of interpreting an event is favored over alternative versions. For this reason, our relation to the world is permeated by normativity. Or we can say that affective infrastructures perform operations that either connects or cuts; allowing for some elements to come into proximity with each other while other elements are kept at a distance.

What I am suggesting here is that Berlant's notion of sense genres not only covers but also expands Durkheim's description of social life as a composition of ideas, beliefs, and sentiments. The societal forms Berlant analyzes are more complex and differentiated than those analyzed by Durkheim and other ritual theorists, but there is a purpose in investigating how the distribution and repeated configuration of affects and sensibilities organize the social bonds that exist between members of a community. Especially because both conceive the societal self-images or collective sensorium as something that needs to be visualized. In Berlant's opinion, because of the normativity pertaining to the sense genres through which the world is mediated in experience, there is a task in disclosing the ways in which this mediation takes place and the fantasies they express. This is the critical impetus of Berlant's concept of cruel optimism. What infrastructures are and how they work is one matter. It is another matter entirely how they can be apprehended and hence become a topic of critical scrutiny. As I read Berlant, sense genres perform their mediating work in very discrete ways, often short-circuiting our consciousness. Because they are such a fundamental part of our habitual way of life, their normative workings can be difficult to grasp. And this is problematic insofar as the attachments we have to the world and each other, along with the collective imaginaries that guide our actions and beliefs, are in risk of turning cruel. Berlant points to those situations where the object we desire in an optimistic striving toward a good or better life is actually an obstacle to our flourishing (Berlant 2011, 1). This may occur when old notions of what a good life involved and how to achieve it survive the moment of their historical genesis and reproduce themselves in new historical contexts. Berlant points to how the post-war optimism in the US in the 1950s and 1960s was still operational

as a collective fantasy in the decades around the turn of the millennium, but with the significant difference that the optimistic relation to these fantasies had turned cruel in the meantime and was now experienced as an impasse rather than a movement toward increased welfare (Berlant 2011, 3).

There is an important task in finding means for disclosing the impasse-producing anachronism of certain self-images and the affective modes through which we attach to them. Paraphrasing Marx, Daniel Nemser writes that "infrastructural pasts weigh like a nightmare on the circulation of the present" (Nemser 2017, 20). Not just because we must deal with the constructions produced by earlier generations and the distributional patterns they carry with them, but also because these infrastructures – and the connections they favor – become naturalized over time, imposing their power with greater force since they are harder to detect (Levine 2023, 55). Following Berlant's example, I believe a similar point could be made about the affective forms of attachment and the shared imaginations that circulate in society. They too travel across times and places as patterns that gradually become sedimented. We are thus born into a world where social ideas, thought systems, and other soft infrastructures created by past generations have been handed down to us and structure our reality. A system of ascribing certain feelings and expectations to particular events, present or future, ensuring that some forms of attachment are more likely to "stick" than others (Ahmed 2004).

It is often said that infrastructures reveal themselves when they break down, and Berlant likewise refers to the "glitch" as a sign of crisis where otherwise invisible mediations become visible (Berlant 2016, 393). Another entry point, however, is through the work of art and aesthetics:

> Aesthetics is not only the place where we rehabituate our sensorium by taking in new material and becoming more refined in relation to it. But it provides metrics for understanding how we pace and space our encounters with things, how we manage the too closeness of the world and also the desire to have an impact on it that has some relation to its impact on us (Berlant 2011, 12).

Art and aesthetics can serve as a "formal rendition of affective experience" that make infrastructural processes evidential, also in a historical perspective (Berlant 2011, 16). This understanding makes the artwork a category for social analysis since it makes the genres we habitually use "for *valuing* living" into topics of valuation themselves (Berlant 2011, 59). What is being questioned here is not the world itself or the things and people that inhabit it. Instead, it is the forms through which this world is experienced and the way we relate to it that is tested through the artwork. For Berlant, then, a failure or glitch in the infrastructural system is not simply an occasion for repair; it is also an opportunity for a "non-reproductive" repair, meaning that, instead of stabilizing status quo, it can become a means for forging

new imaginaries from crisis situations. I will return to this non-reproductive ability in artistic reflection in the concluding remarks of the chapter. For now, it is important to stress how Durkheim and Berlant – surely in very different fashions – analyze rituals and art as sites where the commonly abstract or invisible images that circulate in society and guide the beliefs and actions of its members find an articulation through aesthetical expression.

Sacredness and sacrifice

While the previous section conceptualized the ritual as a social infrastructure in its way of aesthetically actualizing and dealing with collective images, this section sets out to describe not the content or topic of the ritual, but how these images are formally mediated. In other words, how the ritual manages to bring people into contact with each other and the forms of relationality arising from this contact. In the beginning, I mentioned how art mediates relations between people, for instance by gathering them in the gallery or the concert hall. But in addition to this very physical understanding of sociality where two or more people have to be co-present at the same venture, there exists a more fundamental sociality adhering to the particular position art holds in society and the way we approach and experience it because of this position. Again, I draw on ritual theory, more precisely on the notions of sacredness and sacrifice. Both express a social logic which can unearth a similar logic at work in the experience of art. I proceed by reconstructing the basic understanding of sacredness and sacrifice in ritual studies before I turn towards the idea of aesthetic experience (or judgment) as it is theorized in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*.

Briefly put, the sacred is what religious belief is all about. It is what religions center around and what makes up its content. Religious beliefs and religious practices differ from other beliefs and practices because of the privileged access they have to that which is considered to be holy. The sacred, and hence religion, is thus characterized through a process of distinction. The sacred is that which is not profane. Or more precisely, the nature of sacred objects is in opposition to the profane nature of everyday practices. As Mary Douglas notes, this definition of opposition is captured in the etymology of the Latin *Sacer* which is often translated as "to be set apart" (Douglas 1966, 8). But this also means that there would be nothing sacred without the mundaneness of daily life as the backdrop against which religious phenomena can stand out in their exceptionality. The sacred can thus only be defined in relational terms. We cannot grasp it in itself (its essential being), only through what it is not. Furthermore, the sacred has a social existence

because it comes into being through an agreed upon discrimination where the sacred thing is contrasted to the profane utility of other things. This implies a shift from object to relation since the significance of the sacred is bestowed upon it from the outside instead of being a property of the thing itself. There is an unpredictability and arbitrariness in what qualifies as a sacred object:

> Thus no objects, to the exclusion of others, are predisposed to receiving those [collective and moral] forces. The most insignificant objects, even the most commonplace ones, can play this role. Chance circumstances decide which are the elect (Durkheim 1995, 327).

Sacredness is by no means "fixed" on the material object but rather "superadded" to it (Durkheim 1995, 327). This is another way of saying that the sacred status is determined by the community of people who agree to value exactly *this* thing as opposed *that* thing. Sacred objects are social phenomena insofar as they would not exist were it not for the powers transferred to it by the members of the cult. Without this external power, the religious thing is reduced to the simple physicality of its being, whether it is a stone, a bush, or a specific animal. For this reason, sacred objects are fetiches. They are not only thoroughly relational in their being, but their existence is also marked by an interdependency. Fetiches depend on the group of people who have created it and continue to create it every time a religious ceremony takes place. If left alone, they retreat into their former state of mere objecthood. However, the group also depends on the fetich. When we admire the fetich and recognize it as a sacred object, we constitute its existence as something holy and distinguished from the profane. But inversely, the fetich also constitutes our existence as a group. For the community to establish itself as a socially coherent group – and not just as an aggregation of singular individuals – the members must find common objects or common ideas to gather around. As Marx famously put it in his analysis of commodity-fetichism, we tend to forget that we ourselves have provided the fetishes with the power they now employ on us (Marx 1990, 165). Thus, the gods need us just as much as we need the gods. By our common belief in the sacred, we become more than mere individuals occupying the same place; we turn into a community who share (however partially) the composition of ideas, beliefs, and sentiments.

The social logic of negativity

Fetishistic objects depend on someone *doing* something to them. The ritual is such a doing. As we have already seen, rituals have business with the sacred because they make out the practical side of religion. One of the most common types

of rituals are sacrifices, stemming from *sacrum facere*, literally meaning "doing or making the sacred." Just like the sacred, a ritual sacrifice is characterized by its exceptionality and the way in which it is distinguished from the regular ways we do or make stuff. Douglas again: "The ritual provides a frame. The marked off time and place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated 'Once upon a time' creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales" (Douglas 1966, 64). I introduce the sacrifice as my example here since its structure resembles the reciprocal logic adhering to fetishistic objects. Most ritualistic sacrifices involve some kind of offering. We can offer our faith, but most often we have to give up something of ourselves (or our property) in favor of the worshipped deity. Something is taken away from the group and handed to that which is believed to be holy. But offering gifts via sacrifices comes with a prize, or at least an expectation of some favor in return. The religious principle of *do ut des* signifies a transaction where gifts come with an obligation to respond with a counter-gift (Mauss and Hubert 1964).

This process of giving and receiving is also a movement from a negative to a positive state. We have already seen how the job of differentiating the sacred from the profane followed a negative path of framing the former in opposition to the latter. Cutting out small frames of sacredness in the midst of profane life aided the creation of a certain category of things that not only have a particular existence, but also must be approached in a particular manner. Thus, there is not only a negative procedure at work on the side of the fetichized object. The subject wanting to come into proximity with the sacred likewise has to undergo a deprofanation. In order to get close to the sacred – for instance during ritual events – the individual must strip herself of her daily existence; she must wash off her personality and the status or position she holds in everyday society. Durkheim refers to these procedures as the negative cult and its exemplary figure is the ascetic, a person "strained to renunciation, abnegation, and detachment form self" (Durkheim 1995, 320). The point Durkheim makes is that sacred object are social objects, and that we cannot (or should not) relate to them simply as private individuals. That is, we should not relate to sacred object in the manner that we usually relate to objects in the world; a relational form, so Durkheim argues, which is guided by personal interest and selfish aims. Such interested selfishness is foreign to the religious sphere: "Without disinterest there is no religion" (Durkheim 1995, 320). When we relate to the sacred, we do so as members of a religious community. Or in Durkheim's sociological framework: as members of a society. Thus it is not my personal self, but my communitarian self which is activated in the encounter with a social object like the fetich. What is important here is not only that the religious object differs from other types of objects, but also how the process of differentiation becomes the occasion for a certain type of experience. Hence, there is another experi-

ential structure or epistemological form at work when we relate to things in a religious – that is, social – way.

Again, this activity of abnegation where we abandon our usual selves on behalf of the fetich is followed by some kind of gain. Therefore, it is possible to talk about a positive cult as well. The movement from a negative to a positive state can be described through Turner's use of the concept of *liminality* which he employs to identify rites of passage. This ritual, Turner argues, has three phases: One of separation, one of margin or liminality, and one of aggregation. The separation phase resembles what we have gathered under the name of the negative cult. It is a process of transition that "comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions, or from both" (Turner 1991, 94). The second, intermediary phase, which is the most analyzed since it equivalences the limited time-space of the ritual performance, involves a state of being "outside" society or "the social structure." In this liminal or threshold-like state, the ritual subject (the neophyte) is without identity; she has abandoned her previous persona and has yet to achieve her new position in the societal order. The third phase entails a reintegration of the subject into the social structure of society. However, it is not merely a return to the state prior to the ritual. The post-ritualistic subject is bestowed with a new identity and a new social status more respectable than the one it had before.

I would argue that a similar movement from negativity to positivity is at work in Kant's analytic of beauty, and, subsequently, that it is possible to disclose some of the social repercussions accompanying aesthetic judgments. In other words, that it is in fact possible to read the aesthetic way of relating to an object in the world as a social relation not unlike the type described in the study of rituals. First of all because Kant sets out to define the aesthetic *ex negativo*: the aesthetic judgment is not moral, and it is not satisfactory (angenehm). In fact, it involves a rejection of all the things we regularly find pleasure in. Personal preferences – do I like spinach or not – must be sublimated or transcended in the pleasure taken in beautiful representations if it is to be truly aesthetic and not just a product of sensual desires. Even though the feeling of pleasure and the judgment it prompts is "subjective," it is not personal (Kant 2001, 89). There is a purity in aesthetic experience that lifts it above private inclinations, which is the precondition for the experience's universal communicability. But since the feeling of pleasure is, well, a feeling and hence something which occurs in the subject, beauty is not a property of the object itself. Beauty is something produced by the encounter, which means that it is not only relational but also genuinely performative. There is no beauty without experience no matter how refined the outlook of the object might be. This performativity implies that every encounter is singular,

that every experience is unique, and that knowledge of the aesthetic cannot be pinned down once and for all as if it were a positive science. Kant famously claims that judgments of taste are "reflective" rather than determining, because no concept of beauty can be given in advance (Kant 2001, 67). Like sacred objects, aesthetic objects depend on activity on the side of the subject; their status cannot be achieved independently of the relation to an experiencing position. Both the sacred and aesthetic object rely on a mode of fetishization.

Kant's epistemological turn of the aesthetical focus away from the object and towards the subject has been thoroughly described, but my concern here is with the kind of subjectivity presupposed by this turn. Not just how aesthetic experience alters what we know about beautiful objects, but also how the person undergoing such experiences is altered. Or to stay within the terminology we have been using so far: What is the positive effect of the negative loss of self? What is so radical about the Kantian notion of aesthetic judgment is that it subverts the rules of cognition that the two previous *Critiques* sought to establish. Judgments of taste introduce a break in the way we usually achieve knowledge of the world. The epistemological ground on which the subject believed itself to have secure footing crumbles when the faculties of the imagination and the understanding engage in a free play devoid of conceptual determination. Without the knowledge of past experience of what we like and dislike, and without the epistemological reassurance of transcendental deduction, the subject faces the beautiful representation as a nobody and an anybody. Anyone can and ought to make the same judgment as me if I declare something to be beautiful, because I am making an evaluation on behalf of all of us – at least in theory. What the subject gets in return for its loss of individual identity is what Hannah Arendt in her reading of Kant calls an "enlarged mentality" (Arendt 1992). The subject gets itself back in an expanded form, one prompted towards a certain feeling of sociality. In this "broad-minded way of thinking" (erweiterte Denkungsart), the subject realizes something about its own faculties of knowledge (Kant 2001, 175). Through the aesthetic, then, we attain access to how human cognition works on a deeper or more general level. And since this working can be expected of every member of humanity, the realization is also genuinely intersubjective.[2]

What the ritual and aesthetic experience share is, on the one hand, an emphasis on the relational rather than objective features of the thing judged to be sacred or beautiful (or both). On the other hand, they share an experiential mode

2 As thinkers such as Gayatri Spivak (1999), Sylvia Wynter (2003), and Denise Ferreira da Silva (2008) have shown, the universality of this idea of the human builds on a racial regime that overrepresents the white European male and makes him into a standard for inclusion and exclusion.

where individual identity is lost or given away only to return in a different form. And as I have tried to argue, this form is social. Hence, the exceptional character of the ritual and the aesthetic – and that which separates them from regular ways of experiencing reality – is that they designate a particular way for a subject to relate to an object; not as a private person with an egoistic agenda, but as someone who is participating in a community. I am not claiming that art is a ritual or that aesthetic experiences are religious experiences, merely referring to a formal analogy in the logic through which they have been theorized. If, sociologically speaking, the ritual is a framework that society has cut out for itself with the purpose of staging itself, then it may not be entirely wrong to propose something similar for the institution we call art. An institution invented and sustained by society that functions as some kind of image-workshop where different depictions of the social are produced and tried out. But also a type of images or depictions that we go about, approach, and experience with a particular set of expectations. This is the two-fold sociality I have attempted to describe so far: namely that if art can be viewed as a social infrastructure, it is because it brings people together in a collective *way* around collective *images*. The ritual performativity that lies in bringing people together is not necessarily confined to the live arts or the physical co-presence in museum halls. Because a sociality is built into the very structure of aesthetic relations – at least as we have examined them in Kant – it is still possible to feel collectively interpellated when one is reading a book or listening to a piece of music in the privacy of the home.[3]

Enlivenment

I conclude this chapter with a third and final way in which I believe ritual theory is useful for describing art as an infrastructure. This involves viewing art as a site for collective self-reflection. And moreover, to understand the critical nature of this sort of reflection. The word 'critical' has two meanings here: First of all, and as we shall see in more detail in a moment, the reflection is critical because it is a substantial part of a given community's ability to sustain itself. Just like we refer to some infrastructures as critical, i.e. water- and energy systems, the breakdown

3 This is another way of thinking of aesthetics in ritualistic terms than the one presented by Erika Fischer-Lichte (Fischer-Lichte 2004). For her, the ritual elements adhere primarily to the performing arts and rely on the co-presence of several bodies on the same time and place. My suggestion also supports Carol Duncan's argument that the modern and secular art museum has a ritual function (Duncan 1995).

of other infrastructures merely poses as an inconvenience. Secondly, the reflection is critical because the social mediation art facilitates between a public and its self-images serves as a testing ground upon which these images are discussed and evaluated. This criticality is close to the problems Berlant refers to with their notion of cruel optimism, where we need instances for checking the actuality and meaningfulness of the collective imaginations that direct our desires and guide our actions. The word I use for the infrastructural effect which stems from a process of self-reflection is *enlivenment*. The notion of life – and the active infusing of life signified by the word enlivenment – appear at crucial moments in texts on both ritual and aesthetic theory. By focusing on this notion, then, I believe it is possible to think the aesthetic analysis through the social register found in ritual analysis. I hone in on Kant and especially Hegel since they together "develop the pioneering thought that the beautiful has to be conceived of as a reflective practice" (Bertram 2019, 78). First, however, I will briefly recap how the ritual has been theorized as enlivenment.

I want to recall a statement by Durkheim which was partially quoted in the introduction: "If society is to become conscious of itself and keep the sense it has of itself at the acquired intensity, it must assemble and concentrate. This concentration brings about an uplifting of moral life that is expressed by a set of ideal conceptions in which the new life thus awakened is depicted" (Durkheim 1995, 424). The ritual is a means for society to keep its sense of self at an acceptable intensity, and this sense is achieved because the ritual occasions an enlivening of the social ideals. But this also implies that the ideals that a group understands itself through can lose their sense and thus the moral power they bestow on the members of the group. If collective self-understandings lose their affective force, a social crisis may emerge. At least this is the explanation Turner gives for the existence of rituals. Rituals are states of exception where the usual value hierarchies are annulled or turned upside-down. For Turner, the liminal phase makes the logics of everyday rationality momentarily dysfunctional. But the effect of this controlled or rehearsed breakdown of societal structure is, according to Turner, a strengthening of the original hierarchies as soon as the ritual process is over (Turner 1991). In a dialectical fashion, the outside of society fleetingly gets the upper hand in order to affirm the inside. Whether the social crisis is caused by internal conflict or external threats, ritualistic practices are means of reintegrating the social and harmonizing oppositional parts.

One of the problems with such a conception of the ritual's enlivening purpose, as I see it, is that it casts rituals in a rather conservative if not directly reactionary light. Hence, the ritual merely serves the function of recharging social norms when they have run out of steam, instead of either viewing social crises as

an encouragement for change or viewing the ritual as a practice for instigating such changes by turning the hierarchies around in a more permanent fashion.[4] And this problematic hinges on to another fallacy inscribed in a lot of theory on rituals, namely its almost intuitive dualism between myth and rite, theory and practice, and structure and life (see Bell 1991). In this hierarchy, the ritual or the artwork come to resemble what in the tradition of rhetoric goes by the name of anamnesis, that is, as a tool for remembering and thus enlivening what we already know but have forgotten. If the ritual, or the artwork for that matter, is just a reminder of already established ideas or myths, then nothing new emerges from these practices.

In regard to the treatment of the mode of enlivenment in aesthetic philosophy, something similar could be said about Kant's analysis. As we have seen, one of the repercussions of the free play of the imagination and the understanding in aesthetic judgments of taste is that our faculties are animated or enlivened (belebten), and this bringing to life of the faculties grants us an insight we could not have received by other means. But Kant gives no account of why we need this insight or what its use is (Bertram 2019, 66–67). The general workings of our cognitive capabilities would do their job notwithstanding our knowledge of this working, and when we do arrive at this knowledge, it does not change the way we think, but merely gives us the pleasure of assuring our transcendental membership of the human community. We confirm this knowledge that was already present deep inside us, but which we had forgotten until our regular comprehension of the world was paused by an aesthetic experience.

Before I move on to Hegel, who I believe gives a more useful description of aesthetic enlivenment, I want to highlight one thing they have in common, a thing that makes them eminent thinkers of the specific kind of reflection caused by the aesthetic. What is remarkable about their thinking in this regard is not just that they claim that art and aesthetics enliven or intensify life, but also that this intensification comes about by way of a detour. If aesthetic experience is the cause of an increased liveliness in our relation to the world, if it brings us back to the reality of this world, it does so through establishing some kind reflective *distance*. Mediation here reveals itself as a precondition for enlivenment. Aesthetics, as conceived in Kant and Hegel, involves a stepping back from the world that allows us to get near it.

By joining together the apparently contradictory concepts of life and reflection, this theory differs radically from the idea of life we find in the vitalist tradition from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche over Bergson to Deleuze and the new

4 Turner himself makes a comment on the conservativism inherent in his argument.

materialist theories of today. Although vitalism takes on many forms in its philosophical or artistic guises, it is generally a tradition that comprehends the notion of life as some kind of original force which runs through everything there is. It is a concept with empirical connotations, but it also refers to life in its most basic, biological sense. It is clearly stated in Arthur Schopenhauer's ontological splitting of the world into a noemenal sphere of pure will and a phenomenal sphere of mediated representations. The former is the true nature of being understood as a blind force of life that precedes the latter whose individual existences are only epi-phenomenal objectivations of the will and hence an illusion or a "veil," to use Schopenhauer's own metaphor (Schopenhauer 2010, 28). The pioneering conceptualization of liveliness developed by Kant and Hegel as a product of mediation is thus controversial from a vitalist point of view. Indeed, there is something contra-intuitive in the argument that our sense of life increases if we slide in an artifact between ourselves and the world. But the entire world around us, the things we do, and the people we encounter, can be very much alive without them becoming a topic of reflection. Hence, enlivenment, as an aesthetic category, is not referring to life in a biological sense, but in an existential sense; it refers to the way in which life becomes lively, how it becomes present and thus meaningful to us. Kant claims in *The Critique of Judgment* that we have an empirical or objective sense (Empfindung), which he also refers to as the vulgar sense because it is strictly private and guided by our immediate desires (Kant 2001, 92). The other sense, which Kant refers to as the aesthetic sense (Gefühl), is no longer concerned with objective criteria or individual preferences, but with the impersonal and hence intersubjective pleasure that beautiful representations give rise to. The key word here is 'representation' understood as the productive work of shaping a comprehensive image out of the empirical sense data. Only after the mediating activity of the imagination that schematizes the incoming data is it possible to create a representation that can be judged in proper distance from the raw experience of nature.

Collective reflection in Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Arts*

Hegel is more explicit than Kant in claiming that artworks (and the way we engage with them) are important because they provide a specialized knowledge of who we are and how we think. As in Kant, the aesthetic is a realm within which a specific insight can be achieved, and Hegel even says of artworks that they present a sensi-

ble (way of) thinking. In the *Lectures on Fine Arts*, Hegel uses the argument of art as a medium for thinking to explain its indispensability in anthropological terms:

> The universal and absolute need from which art (on its formal side) springs has as its origin the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness, i.e. that man draws out of himself and puts *before himself* what he is and whatever else is. Things in nature are only *immediate* and *single* while man as spirit *duplicates* himself in that (i) he is as things in nature are, but (ii) he is just as much for himself; he sees himself, represents himself to himself, thinks, and only on the strength of this active placing himself before himself is he spirit. (Hegel 1988, 30–31).

Artworks are valuable, Hegel seems to say, because they answer a human need for externalization, a need for duplicating itself, and thus for the human to be put before itself in a reflexive manoeuvre. Only by reflecting upon itself as a reflective being is the subject spirit (Geist). However, spirit is also the key word for understanding another distinction Hegel makes in this quote. Spirit attains to humans because they are self-reflective. Humans are able to re-present themselves whereas nature is only "immediate" and "single."

This distinction holds the reason for Hegel's assertion that philosophical aesthetic ought to occupy itself with works of art alone and not with beautiful things in nature. Nature is, as he remarks over and over again, "spiritless" (Hegel 1988, 12). The artwork is a worthy topic for philosophical analysis since it is infused with spirit. As an artefact created by humans, it is the result of a thinking activity. And the aim of this activity is for spirit to become conscious of itself in a sensible form. The special thing about art is that it completes a reflective practice not in the philosophical realm of concepts and cognition, but by materializing ideas and providing them with sensuous appearance.

The interpretation of Hegel I suggest here may not be a pious paraphrasing of his thought, but rather a *thinking with* it since I read the reflective "need" or "aim" of art in existentialist terms. In other words, I read art's reflective function as one of enlivening the ideas a community has of itself. As Robert Pippin has argued, it would not be wrong to consider Hegel's philosophy of art as a theory of "enlivening" collective norms and concepts once we notice that such enlivening "is a crucial condition for the possibility of any norm's grip on those bound to it and that this grip can loosen and fail." In sum, as he continues, "we learn something about the 'life' of such values when we see them externalized in art objects, and we learn this in a way unique to art." (Pippin 2021, 63). The enlivening effect of art is necessary because concepts or entire normative structures may retreat into a "shadow realm" (Schattenreich) if their relation to reality is not actively reflected upon. And this reflection must be sensible and stir our emotions in a way that philosophical thinking is not able to. Hegel writes:

> Its [Art's] aim therefore is supposed to consist in awakening and vivifying our slumbering feelings, inclinations, and passions of every kind, of filling the heart, in forcing the human being, educated or not, to go through the whole gamut of feelings which the human heart in its innermost and secret recesses can bear . . ." (Hegel 1988, 46).

This "awakening" and "vivifying" aim of art is serious business because Hegel considers it an actual possibility that the ideas and norms that guide a practical way of life can die. As I mentioned earlier, this notion of death should not be understood in a biological way. Images of how to live can still go on existing in an ontic sense and have an "external" lifeless authority (Pippin 2021, 62). Here, the mediated reflection converges with the existentialist analyses in distinguishing between things that merely exist in a strictly positivist sense and the things that reveal themselves as meaningful to a collective (Hegel 1988, 38). For Hegel, as I read him through his *Lectures*, the realization caused by art signals a reality "truer" than the natural world as it exists around us. Contrary to philosophical realisms, this is an existentialist understanding of how reality is realized – and must be realized over and over – if it is to be meaningful. As a spiritualizing process, art aids the coming into presence of reality. But if this reality is more real than the immediate sensation we have of the world around us, it is due to the fact that the reflective work of spirit is social through and through. That which enters the work of art is infused with spirit insofar as it is separated from its natural environment and from the way we usually go about it. By carving out a piece of reality and providing it with an artistic form, art lifts this piece out of its practical context and invites us to approach it, not through the private desires that habitually structure our relation to the world, but as participants in a community who see themselves reflected in the representation (Hegel 1988, 29).

If we stick to this interpretation, we find ourselves in a better position to explain what the content of artworks are in Hegel's philosophy. He often refers to this content as "the highest" (das Höchste), with its obvious religious connotations. But instead of viewing the highest as an essential category referring to God or major themes such as death, the meaning of being, *oikos* versus *polis* and so forth, I propose that we read it as a flexible category. What finds a representation in works of art is that which a particular society at a particular time and place deems important for itself and its members. Not specific topics, but a way of making things worthy to become topics for collective reflection.

For Hegel, the highest is often another name for freedom. But this notion of freedom points to a society's ability to lay down its own norms, principles, and criteria for evaluating proper or improper modes of living. Additionally, if such a society is to be truly free, it must also institute social practices that can reflect upon these norms etc., insofar as they are historical rather than transcendental and thus open to critique and potential change. Along with religion and philoso-

phy, art is one of those institutions "whose function is to reflect on, and thereby to affirm or disaffirm that what a given form of life *takes* as authoritative reasons for belief and action *really are* authoritative reasons" (Pinkard 1994, 221).

Hegel is thus one of the first to formulate what has become a central piece in classical theories of modernity; namely that so-called modern society in the West is characterized by laying down its own principles while in the same process creating institutions that can represent and check these principles, questioning whether their normativity still resonates with lived experience (Menke 2020, 92). Because art makes out one such institution, and because the self-reflection facilitated by these institutions is central for the reproduction of social life, art can be said to have an infrastructural function. A function of enlivening those ideas and affects which bind people together, or to create whole new ideas and affects by drawing collective attention to the unforeseen aspects of common life which it spiritualizes in a representational form.

Conclusion: Art as reflective infrastructure

In discussing art and the way we relate to art from the vantage point of ritual theory, I have attempted to illustrate – however tentatively – how we may perceive artworks as social infrastructures. The premise of this attempt is that art, as we know it today in its modern form as an autonomous field with its own system of legitimization, is a historical invention; that art in the singular-plural is a product of larger processes of modernization that unfolded during the 18th century. This means that the social existence of works of art depends on a vast network of institutions. It depends, in a single word, on infrastructures. But if we accept this premise of art's distinctiveness as a creation on behalf of modern society, then it begs the question why society has an interest not only in establishing this domain called art, but also in maintaining it. What is the effect following from art's peculiar existence, what – if anything – does it give back to the society that has granted it its place in the world? A ritual perspective offers at least one way to begin to answer such questions.

Considered as infrastructures, rituals are social inventions created in order to support of develop collective living in a community. But as a contradistinction to other infrastructures, rituals are not meant to be incorporated into daily life, facilitating a flow so smooth that we barely notice its existence. On the contrary, the ritual cuts out a frame in the regular distributions and creates a momentary state of exception where people and things are experienced differently. And because of this diversion of the everyday, the ritual is able to put another mediation

to work, namely a social attitude towards things that are believed to hold a common interest or concern. For Durkheim and others, these concerns are society's images of itself and the force they contain. The ritual event is thus not only a showcasing of society to society itself, but also a way for its members to gather around and discuss the legitimacy of these images which are presented to them and through which they are supposed to recognize themselves. If such events or gatherings do not happen periodically, a community may lose its sense of self, meaning that the ideas, imaginations, and norms that guide existence in that community risk drying out. Hence, if the ritual can be said to perform an infrastructural labour, then it is because it facilitates a site for collective self-reflection, a reflection that tests the meaningfulness of what we take to be "authoritative reasons for belief and action."

I suggest that a similar claim could be made about art. That art, broadly speaking, refers to a delimited place within the larger outlook of society where images of that society is produced (whether in praise or critique) and where members of that society can go to be faced with images of themselves and evaluate how those images match their own perception of reality and the life they are living. This is not a solitary evaluation, but part of a collective negotiation where we can agree or disagree on how our primary values look or how they ought to look. By drawing attention to the hidden genealogy between rituals and art in regard to their social function, it is possible to find a language for examining why art is not just an integral but also an important part of modern society.[5]

I want to end by recalling Berlant's warning about the discreet nature of a phenomenon like cruel optimism. For Durkheim and Turner, but also for Hegel, in Pippin's reading of him at least, a state of social or existential crises may emerge if collective norms lose their energy or even go dead. However, it might also be the case that some norms, ideas, or fantasies are too vivid; that their direct or indirect coercion keep us in an ongoing proximity to ways of being in the world that are actually cruel. What if aesthetic reflection and hence enlivenment was not simply about restoring life to old norms, but also a way to light up the *liveability* of these norms? And if it no longer proves possible to live a meaningful life with these norms, then to suggest new ways for imagining collective life? What separates art from rituals – and maybe also what makes it into a different reflective infrastructure – could very well lie in such inventive acts. Art is not simply an activation or imitation of already existing images or recognized affects. "For example," Hegel writes, "someone might propose to proceed in poetic com-

5 In my PhD thesis, I elaborate on the genealogy between religious rituals and the secularized field of art and suggests a "ritual aesthetic" for analyzing the mode of existence of art in modernity.

position by first apprehending the proposed theme as a prosaic thought and then putting it into poetical images, rhyme, and so forth, so that now the image would simply be hung on to the abstract reflections as an ornament and decoration. But such a procedure could only produce bad poetry" (Hegel 1988, 39). Art is not a pretty decoration or, in ritualistic parlance, a mere actualization of mental concepts. Good art, at least in Hegel's view, brings something to light about our common existence which does not exist independently of the artistic expression, "because only in this sensuous guise can it [the activity of artistic imagination] gain knowledge of the content" (Hegel 1988, 40).

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Frederik Tygstrup

Aesthetic Appearance: An Infrastructural Perspective

Infrastructures make relations happen and let flows take place. They bring me stuff from distant places, and they bring me to distant destinations at my discretion. They *connect* these different places and allow for exchange between them. Infrastructures afford contact and facilitate circulation of things, people, ideas, and images between places and situations that would otherwise not be connected, or less well connected.

Infrastructure, consequently, not only mediates between the places it connects. It also transforms and changes these places to the extent that their initial layout and order will eventually be influenced by the infrastructurally aided exchange and interaction with other places. Infrastructure brings me stuff and shoves me about, but at the same time it also changes me, contributes to shape new habits and to redraw my horizon, just as it causes changes to the places from where the stuff it brings me is taken, as well as to the places into which it compliantly offers to parachute me. This is the basic lesson about infrastructure upon which the present chapter rests: that infrastructure creates contact, and that this contact changes the environments that are brought into contact.

Aim of the chapter is more specifically to apply this very basic infrastructural insight as an inroad to better understand the *function* of art in a social perspective. Can we consider art not only as a social fact that exists in an infrastructural framing and setting, but also as something that provides an infrastructure in its own right, an infrastructure for social contact and exchange? Art in this sense would take the guise of an infrastructure that connects a situation where an artistic expression is articulated with a situation of use of that artistic expression; and it would be an intervention in both situations that would affect their initial layouts and possible meanings as they are reconfigured in a new reciprocity afforded by the connection that is forged between them. It presents me, one could say, with expressions and experiences that I would otherwise have no access to, and it puts me in relation to situations and interactions where these expressions and experiences are being processed in ways that impacts on the shape and purview of my horizon.

Art as infrastructure: this would mean that we should not ask questions about art in terms of artworks that exist in the world, in so many different forms and shapes, art as an epitome of the sum of hitherto produced artworks. We will not approach them by way of what they *are*, their being, but rather by way of

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what they *do*, their mode of existence, as the late Bruno Latour would have it (Latour 2012).

To study art as infrastructure is to query into the processes, interactions, and relations that come about thanks to the presence and institutionalized existence of art. To study art as infrastructure is to look at what art facilitates, which relations and what kind of relations it sets up, what kinds of interactions and exchanges that come about through the mediating presence of art. To study art as infrastructure, in the final analysis, is to ask anthropological questions that pertain to the societal practices, exchanges, and habits that reproduce the life of that society, and eventually the role and function of art and the circuits of art in this reproductive labour.

When considering art as a societal infrastructure, we need to map the ways in which the practices of production, circulation, and consumption of art are defined and organized as particular social practices. To this end, we can identify as the main infrastructural devices that define art the twin emergences of a public sphere for appreciating and discussing art and a professional sphere of art production that embraces an economy of art production and an adjacent set of techniques of apprenticeship and of circulation into a market catering to the public sphere. The historical emergence of these institutional framings has been thoroughly described by Jürgen Habermas who traces the genealogy of the art public to the marketplace of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that became the template for convening free and responsible bourgeois to engage in deliberation on matters of politics and taste (Habermas 1962), and by Arnold Hauser who describes the professionalization of producers of art and the gradual differentiation between craftsmen and artists proper (Hauser 1951). Jacques Rancière has aggregated these tendencies in the idea of an epochal shift and the advent of an "aesthetic regime" of art in the late eighteenth century, where the infrastructural particularities of the modern western art world were formalized as an institutionally underpinned differentiation between works of art and other objects, a recognized economy of art, and a particular set of attitudes toward the work of art emphasizing sensitive affectivity, reflective judgment, and the edification of communities and hierarchies of taste (Rancière 2000)

The historical instituting of art as a particular sphere of social exchange has all the characteristics of an infrastructural circuit by establishing a framework for the life of art in society. In addition, it provides internal mechanisms of reproduction within this infrastructural space that stabilize and reinforce the different agencies of production, distribution, and consumption of art, including a set of templates for object-relations and social relations that emerge from this circuit where artworks are being produced and used according to specialized protocols.

In the following, it will be argued that an infrastructural approach will allow for a better understanding and description of these protocols of making and using art. First it will be argued that an early insight in the infrastructural connectedness between production and reception of art can be found in the traditional and quite important notion of aesthetic appearance. Secondly, this insight is reassessed in a different perspective inspired by Bernard Stiegler's philosophy of technology. The infrastructural relevance of such a techno-historical approach is then spelled out further in a reading of two core concepts from Gilbert Simondon's technological anthropology: the "technical object" and the "image object," that can serve to theorize the infrastructural logic of aesthetic appearance. In a final step, the chapter briefly comments an infrastructurally very self-conscious work by the Pussy Riot collective to spell out how a work can at the same time tinker with the infrastructural frameworks around it and at the same time provide an infrastructure for social and political exchange.

Ghosts

When Baumgarten in his *Aesthetica* introduced the idea of aesthetics as a matter of sensual cognition he connected two areas that had hitherto been neatly separated. Rather than seeing cognition as a matter of speculative insight in distinction to the contingent impressions recorded through the senses, he acknowledged the existence of an intelligence of the senses and consequently paved the way for a philosophy of art would not only be devoted to the sensual pleasure of contemplating the formal play of aesthetic appearances but also associate the work of art with an unique insight that would come about as a result of this pleasurable appreciation. This conceptual move was a foundational step toward the new theories of art that came to accompany the emerging modern art markets and the new ways of using art and relating to art in western modernity. The philosophy of art came to venture a dedicated inquiry into the cognitive capacities and possibilities that ensued from experiences of art and aesthetic sense experience at large.

For Kant, this new avenue was to be probed by rethinking cognitive judgments as he famously supplemented the analytic judgments of understanding and the moral judgments of virtue with a reflective judgment of taste based on singular sensual encounters and experiences. Faced with aesthetic appearance, he contended, the sheer multiplicity of singular sensual impressions would prevent us from making a judgement that could subordinate the appearance to a category of understanding and thereby determine its content and veracity. Rather

than knowing what you see, one is restrained to merely realising whether one likes it or not. To Kant, however, this was not an intellectual defeat, only a new challenge: if that which appears to our senses cannot be exhaustively judged upon by intellectual means alone, other resources must be incurred. Instead of accuracy, hence, he called upon consensus: when we judge something to be aesthetically appreciable, the judgment implies that others should corroborate it. Engaging with aesthetic appearances, in other words, decentres cognition: instead of relying on reason expertly exercised by the thinking individual, it is now given over to negotiation and social deliberation. As a novel way of thinking, aesthetics introduces the singularity of sensual appearances to the realm of thinking, not to be overcome by abstraction, as per the hereditary proclivity of philosophy, but to be recognized as a shared condition of sensate individuals and therefore something that these individuals better sort out between them.

In an inverse, albeit related movement, Hegel, in his philosophy of art, is equally sensitive to the challenge that taking appearances – and particularly, even to a higher degree than Kant, the appearances of art – seriously presents to philosophical cognition. Where Kant emphasised how acknowledging sensual appearances that could not be immediately subsumed under a concept would eventually change the *form* of the judgment, Hegel reverts to the *content* that announces itself in aesthetic appearances. Kant remains somewhat agnostic when it comes to what can be learned from sensual appearances, he is interested in reason's procedures for processing them, whereas Hegel has further expectations as to what they have in store. Beautiful appearances, he contends, are beautiful because they are placeholders of truth, a truthfulness that we are not (or not yet) able to accommodate but which nonetheless appears to us to the extent that our senses somehow epiphanically apprehend it. As a kind of prescient insight, aesthetic experience invites us to contemplate something we have yet to understand properly, not as something only marginal or ephemeral that passes in the moment of sensation, but more like a shining treasure that promisingly announces itself in the evanescent appearance of the artwork.

Appearance, as an aesthetic key term, is at work in both registers here evoked with reference to Kant and Hegel: in the register of *how* a beholder relates to something aesthetically beautiful, and in the register of *what* appears in the artwork. It is an event of appearance, and it is the appearance of something expressed in the work of art. Hence, as it has more than once been put in German philosophy of art, aesthetic experience comprises the appearance of an appearance: not only the event, and not only the content, but a mediation between the two which together and by engaging one another make up the mode of existence of art.

Clearly, then, aesthetic appearance, as it eventually became a signature feature of the theoretical understanding of art in modernity, is a highly elusive phe-

nomenon. It is an experience of something, not simply of the work of art itself, but of something that vaguely and promisingly shimmers, shines – again, precisely *appears* – through and by the work as it is being processed by experience. And it is a quality of this very process, of appearance as a manifestation, an advent of something that comes with the encounter and adds something more to it, something that derives from, but cannot be empirically assigned merely to the presence of the artwork. There is, in other words, something profoundly *ghostly* about aesthetic experience, a ghostliness that has accompanied it throughout the history of its theorization. Aesthetic appearance comes to designate a presence that is not really present. A presence concealed somewhere behind the actual work of art as something that would have preceded it and is being evoked by it. Or a presence that would manifest itself only in sequel to the encounter, as a kind of reverberation following the passage of the ghostly something. The aesthetics of appearance is a veritable hauntology: a persistent lineage in modern aesthetic theory that on the one hand stubbornly insists on a phenomenological account of encountering artworks as real empirical things in the world while at the same time bequeathing on these objects profound depths of eerie presence and long-standing repercussions for those who have engaged with their magic spell.

If art and magic do have a shared history, as Theodor Adorno once remarked, it is not least due to this hauntological constitution of the art object. To clarify this status by comparison, take the standard communication situation, where – according to Roman Jakobson (and a subsequent, lengthy consensus in communication studies) – a "sender" is coding a "content" into a "medium" that in turn purveys this content to a "receiver." We have aesthetic theory, one could almost say, to prevent us from looking upon art in this way, that is, as a medium that transports a message from the artist to the beholder; we have aesthetic theory to insist that there is more to art than communication. Hence the hauntological caveats: that there is no message to unpack from the artwork, only something that – ghostly – appears from the way the artistic material has been conditioned, something that furthermore might linger on in the experience of the beholder as it singularly appeared to her through an encounter with the artwork.

This difference between communication and art, between the coding and decoding of a message on the one hand and the appearance of an appearance on the other, in turn contributes to highlight the difference between the two situations and hence to better understand why aesthetic theory has this penchant for ghosts. The language of communication theory is attentive to *subjects*: somebody sending a message and somebody decoding and eventually receiving the message, and to *forms* that can convey the coded message, "expression forms" that pair with "content forms" to function as signs properly speaking, as Hjelmslevian linguistics has it. Communication is the circulation of messages between subjects by

means of signifying forms. The language of aesthetics, on the other hand, is attentive not to subjects but to *relations*, and not to forms but to *matter*. Not to say that there are no subjects and no signifying forms in art; the difference is that subjects and forms here are transitory rather than substantial.

Matter first: the work of art is based on a substance, a material, whether it is medial (like the traditional artistic media of the sonic, visual, textual, and so on), conceptual, or social. And the artist's work, we tend to agree, consists in manipulating and organizing this matter, composing the material at hand. We would not expect from an artwork, however, that this matter had been formed so as to eventually end up as a recognizable and identifiable sign; rather, we would expect (even demand) that the composition remains immanent to the material and not transcending it to simply signify a message. What we expect to encounter in the artwork is matter in the process of taking form, not form imposed to matter. Or, put differently, the emergence of a *new* form, not the repetition of an already conventionally given form, as would be the case for the communicative sign. And moreover, it is a form that is strictly singular and therefore also somewhat opaque in the sense that it cannot be recognized, only notified in its singularity. Hence, what we see is matter, and not a sign that is confected of matter; or, what we see is a shipwrecked sign, the remains of a process of signification that has stuck on the halfway to becoming a sign and a signification that we would recognize as a part of our common language. In this sense, the artwork is a "foreign language within language," as Marcel Proust once put it. Not something that is signified, but a matter underway to become signifying.

If this entanglement with matter is a salient characteristic of what we understand as art: a budding significance that rises from the organisation of the material without transcending it, or a sense that cannot be extricated from the matter that carries it, then the idea of an agent that has a message to transmit is already becoming irrelevant. If the aesthetic appearance is a nascent meaning that shimmers through the composition of the material, it stems from an encounter between a material and someone belabouring it. That is: a relation. There are in fact several such relational transactions at work in the mechanism of artistic appearance. Making something appear through the compositional work on a material, however fuzzy or sketchy it be, involves a zone of indistinction between the possibilities inherent in the material and the strategies for organizing it. The material has enabled the artist to do something, and the artist has induced a change in the material. In this perspective, the production of art commences not with a creative genius and her agency, nor with a clear idea of what it would take to form the material at hand into an artwork, but with a foundational indistinction between the agency of the artist (the "who") and the qualities of the material (the "what"). Aesthetic appearance begins with the matter taking some form when someone relates to it and in-

tervenes into it. This is the first relational transaction. Aesthetic appearance is not only something appearing in a material, but also this appearance appearing to someone. Art, as a social category with a specific mode of existence in modernity, does not exist before it is experienced as art, that is, before someone has looked at is as if it were art and thereby recognized and affirmed this mode of existence. It is, though, another quirky feature of art – theorized at length by Kant – that this attestation of something as a work of art is an act that is both individual and social. "Someone" needs to attest it, but this attestation will always have to be given on the part of more than one, more than that particular "someone." The attestation is a social veridiction that something can exist as art and hence somewhat more than an individual whim; it is a judgment made by an individual on behalf of everyone, as Kant has it, subjective and universal at the same time. It is an attestation that can only be expressed by individuals but never given by an individual, or, an attestation that can only be given by a collective, but never expressed by a collective. This is the other relational transaction involved in aesthetic appearance: a (bodily incarnated) individual in front of a (materially incarnated) artwork, a through and through singular situation of appearance, that becomes an aesthetic experience to the extent that it is experienced as a *shared* experience. To the first indistinction between a "what" and a "who" thus comes a new indistinction between an "I" and a "we."

Art as we know it, as a modern phenomenon, is not a being with an ontology. It is a mode of existence with an hauntology. As a being of "appearance" it challenges the onto-epistemological foundations with which we meet other beings around us, based on the categories of finite subjects and readable forms. We do no longer deal, as in the communicative situation that we have evoked as a contrast to the artistic modality of exchange, with an artist expressing herself in a medium that the beholder then decodes; instead of sender, a work, and a receiver, we have – a relation that appears in the light of another relation. Or, we have two indistinctions that mirror each other in an appearance. An eerie phenomenon indeed, but not a magic one, only a phenomenon that is constructed in a way that gives priority to relation over subjectivity, and to matter over form. Which again does not mean that we cannot find subjectivity and form when we work with art: it means that subjectivity is immanent in and dependent on relationality, and that form is immanent in and dependent on materiality.

Machines

In the first volume of his work on *Technics and Time* from 1994, Bernard Stiegler discusses these same questions in a different context. The intricacies of "who" and "what," and of "I" and "we" discussed above to characterize aesthetic appearance, are originally proposed by Stiegler in a paleoanthropological framework inherited from André Leroi-Gourhan with a focus on the very long perspective of humanity's development through the use of tools. He particularly dwells on Leroi-Gourhan's idea, expressed in *Milieu et techniques* from 1945, that the human environment is so satiated with techniques that the divide between biology (and what we call "the natural world") on the one hand and technology (as man-made additions to this world) on the other is in fact untenable, and that the two intermingle and co-develop in an indistinguishable mesh of natural and technological elements. Such a notion of co-development of course questions the idea that man is a "tool-making animal" who retains his (!) evolutionary success from this capacity; it instead will invite, like Leroi-Gourhan's predecessor Marcel Mauss had claimed already in the 1930s, to conceive of "man" not as an inalterable substance but as a being that can be instantiated differently depending on the different (natural/technological) environments in which human bodies exists. Different interfaces and interactions between bodies and their environments make different bodies out of them. What interests Stiegler in this cluster of questions is the properly anthropological question of how to understand subjectivity by way of its relations to the environment in which it exists. Crucial here is the idea of co-development where the human expresses itself by exteriorizing itself in the surroundings all while interiorizing the capacities and affordances availed by these surroundings. Whereas an anthropocentric version of this long history usually puts emphasis on the moment of exteriorization, Stiegler with Leroi-Gourhan gives priority to the inverse moment:

> [T]he movement inherent in this process of exteriorization is paradoxical: Leroi-Gourhan in fact says that it is the tool, that is, *tekhné*, that invents the human, not the human who invents the technical. (. . .) The paradox is to speak of an exteriorization without a preceding interior: the interior is constituted in exteriorization. (Stiegler 1998, 141)

Stiegler aims to provide a theoretical account for temporal processes, the changes and transformations that come about through movements of exteriorization and interiorization. And to do so, he needs on the one hand to criticize the anthropocentric ideas of intention and agency and the language of subjects and objects that accompany them and on the other to focus on the entanglements between bodies and their environments and the relays that accommodate this interaction, that is: technique. The greater polemic scope of this shift is to consider the history of humanity not as a history of man exteriorizing himself and his visions in the

layout of the world, but as a history of the techniques that mediate between human bodies and their surroundings.

This first theoretical move boldly substitutes the neat distinction between the subjective and the objective – "man" and the "world" he conquers – with the less intuitive (but more accurate) image of how the two instances produce each other by way of their interaction. Several consequences ensue from this first step. Perhaps most importantly it has the merit of shifting the notion of time. In the tradition of Kant, we tend to think of time as an independent variable, that is, as the given condition that time passes and that consequently everything that we can conceive of exists in time. Now, however, time becomes a dependent variable in the sense that the interaction between "who" and "what" are not taken to be given in time but inversely give time – change, transformation – to the extent that something comes out of their exchange. This shift is indicated also in the title of the book series, *Technique and Time*, hinting at Heidegger's *Being and Time* (where temporality is derived from an idea of being) and hence signaling that temporality now should be derived from technique, from the interfaces regulating our "who" and "what" interactions.

By starting out from *tekhné*, according to Stiegler, we can avoid the debilitating habit of thinking in terms of subjects and objects and focus instead on what happens between them and how they are being articulated in singular, historical ways through processes of blending and interweaving. And we can get hold of temporality in a novel way by taking into account how change occurs through such processes, through the ways in which one situation leads to a new situation. This, thirdly, eventually also allows us to think about the historical logic of this series of transformations. Historical modes of exteriorization, situated in characteristic technological environments, produce modes of existence: life forms, forms of production, forms of human reproduction. And history, consequently, would be the ways in which such modes of existence are passed on in the on-going transformation of inherited environments. The modalities of the "who" and the "what" that are produced at a given moment are dependent on how they were made and articulated in previous contexts; history, here again, resides in the techniques that are passed on from one generation to the next. And this entails, to radically strip down Stiegler's otherwise densely documented argument, that technological environments also provide *social* environments around what happens. Every situation I might find myself in is a situation that is conditioned by the lives of others, that is, by the ways in which others have articulated the interfaces between "who" and "what" through which I now emerge as I modify it once again according to the present situation. Drawing again on Leroi-Gourhan, Stiegler maintains that the traditional anthropological understanding of ethnicity: to share a common past, must essentially refer once more to *tekhné*, to the modalities of being human in a nexus of

exchange with an environment that formats beings and environments in their individualized ways. The "who," in other words, is not only intertwined with a "what," but also torn between two dimensions, that of the "I" and that of a "we." For one thing, it shares its mode of being with those who have conditioned the extant tools for worldmaking at hand; this is the dimension of ethnic belonging. And secondly, it also shares it with those together with whom these tools are being developed and instantiated in the present, a dimension of social belonging. In both cases, the genesis of the individual "I" is dependent and relying on a "we" that engulfs it and creates a horizon of meaningfulness around it, a horizon of its becoming and a space for its realization.

This foray into Bernard Stiegler's thinking about technology and time was motivated by the two findings in the previous section regarding the hauntological constitution of the modern aesthetic notion of appearance: the appearance of something in the aesthetic image that remains immanent in the matter of expression and cannot be attributed to authorial intention; and the appearance of this appearance to somebody by way of which it becomes an aesthetic appearance. These two hauntological features can, I would claim, be addressed productively in the terms Stiegler uses to provide a techno-anthropological framing of social and historical agency. Consider again the foundational theoretical move in *Technics and Time*: like Heidegger, Stiegler rejects the "vulgar" notion of time as an element in which things change, and like Heidegger, he promotes a qualitative understanding of time as the *result* of processes of exchange and transformation. Bur unlike Heidegger he does not locate these dynamic processes to the changes brought about through subjective intention and agency, but to the interactions and interpenetrations between fuzzily demarcated subjective and objective – agential and environmental – instances that become versions of the subjective and the objective through these very processes. Putting technique at the center means looking at what is put *between* the "who" and the "what" before looking at them as autonomous entities, then to look for how they are in turn individuated hereby, and thirdly look at the temporality that is projected from this situation. This constellation of epistemological moves in turn very precisely parallels that which is designated by the traditional notion of aesthetic appearance. What appearance describes is not an art object but a process that is mediated *in* this object and a process that is mediated *by* this object. The process mediated in the art object is the becoming expressive of a material through a situated agency (no longer considered in terms of an artist who confects a form, but in terms of a relational exchange between a body and a matter). And the process mediated by the art object is the experience of this becoming expressive (not an individual "getting the point" that is communicated, but a temporality of change involving the beholder in a material and collective process of understanding).

The language of aesthetic appearance gives priority to processes and exchange and thus stands out in a philosophical vocabulary centered on identities and positions. The techno-anthropological language compiled by Bernard Stiegler, on the other hand, seems suitable to precisely express the features through which aesthetic appearance defies the traditional philosophical concepts. We can hence claim, also beyond the set of problems and questions that underpin Stiegler's techno-anthropological thinking, that the two nexuses of indiscernibility and interdependency – the "who" and the "what," and the "I" and the "we" – are apt descriptors for the creative and the receptive side of aesthetic experience as they go together in the "appearance of appearance" that has been a legacy of aesthetic thinking for some centuries now.

This fortuitous encounter between an aesthetic problem and a technical vocabulary that can be invoked to express a seminal quality of the first might however not be completely fortuitous after all. When techno-anthropology claims that *tekhné* is not a simple matter of tools and tasks but a veritable fulcrum of societal dynamic and transformation that articulates possible experiences of time, processes of subjective becoming, and the co-development of human and natural ecologies, then we can conversely ask whether we should think of art also as a technology in this enlarged sense. An aesthetics, in other words, that doesn't restrict itself to considering artworks as its object of study but widens the perspective to include importantly the ways in which artworks are produced and used and how these processes are part of an even wider societal organization and self-appreciation. An infrastructure aesthetics.

Objects

In his 1958 dissertation, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, Georges Simondon criticizes our everyday understanding of technical objects – tools, machines, mechanical aggregates – for being unnuanced and eventually simplistic when we look at them in an atomistic and instrumental way. It is atomistic when we look at the technical object as an individual and free-standing thing that can be identified as a thing: a bow, a tractor, a power plant, that is, a fabricated object that is added to the sum of things in the world. What we forget when looking at such a thing is that the technical object has a mode of existence that transcends the mere phenomenality of beings in the world, namely to *connect* different spheres of reality and instigate a metabolism between them, between the hunter and her prey, in case of the bow, between the population and the territory, in case of the plough, between the energy of the streams of water and the energy consumption

of society, in case of the power plant. So even if the technical object exists as a thing in the world, it only reveals its mode of existence through its function and the mediation between spheres of reality it instigates. The instrumentalist understanding, secondly, rests on the ancient understanding of tools as inventions made by individuals or societies to undertake particular tasks, a stone that can serve as a hammer, a stick that can serve as a lever, and so on. Simondon's critique of instrumentalism will not deny the fact that technical objects are used to undertake particular tasks (like shooting a prey, ploughing a field, extracting energy), but he is sceptical to the reduction of the technical object to a mere means to fulfil an intention that follows from the instrumental approach. Rather than seeing the technical object as a means that man uses to domesticate his natural surroundings, he claims that this object, once it has come into existence, also transforms the content of what we understand to be "man" and "nature," or with Stiegler, the "who" and the "what." The plough changes "man" into an agrarian man, and it changes the understanding of nature accordingly, into as an object of agricultural exploitation. In this sense, the history of technique cannot be seen simply as a series of different instruments that man (him again!) has put between himself and nature, but as a series of different modes of being human and modes of being of nature that are determined by the relation between them afforded by different technical objects.

These two points (and the interdependence between them) are economically put in this way:

> The technical object exists in a point of contact between two different environments, and it takes integral part in both environments at the same time. (Simondon 2012, 64)

Or put differently: if an object does not instigate a metabolism between two discreet environments, it is not a technical object but only a mere thing; and if this metabolism is in turn taking off, then the object will necessarily be a part of both environments by defining what comes to characterizes them and how they eventually change.

The argument presented by Simondon comes in three stages. The first concerns the nature of the technical object which he does not define as an empirical object but as a *generic* object, like a combustion motor, or a radio tube. The generic object then again comes in many different instantiations or, as he has it, in many concretisations: there would be no technical object if it didn't exist in different empirical versions. Hence the object is, firstly, defined by a certain structural order and functional organisation – something he sums up with the Kantian notion of the *schema*, interchangeably he talks about "interior schema," "functional schema," or simply "technical schema," which he also identifies as the "technical essence." But secondly, given the necessity of concretisation, this essence is nothing without actual

specimen that might however be immensely dissimilar between them. With this twofold insistence on both the abstract schema and the concrete instantiation, Simondon carefully puts a distance to the idealist stance according to which there would be an ideal (or essential) model and then a set of derivative off-sets that for better or worse realise the ideal. To avoid succumbing to idealist dualism, he instead defines the technical object not only in terms of pairings of schematism and concretion, but also in terms of historical genesis, that is, the process through which schemata and concretions alter each other in sequential transformation. The technical object, in other words, is a *temporal* being: it doesn't possess an immutable identity, other than an identity-of-becoming that is discernible only through continuous transformation and interplay, an individuality that consists in an ongoing individuation. The second stage of defining the technical object supplements the internal logic of schematisation and concretisation with an external logic of adaptation, without which no internal individuation of the object could take place. The technical object works in and on the world. It is an artifice that is set loose in a historical and geographical world, and this not only alters this world; the very encounter with the world also eventually alters the composition of the object through the refinements and modifications it undergoes in new and incrementally optimised instantiations. And moreover, this encounter is not that of a thing and a world, but an encounter between two milieus, the specific outer milieu into which the technical object is inserted, and the inner milieu of the technical object – "two worlds acting on each other," as he puts it (65). This is the third stage of the argument. The encounter and the metabolic exchange between the two milieus give rise to a *third* milieu: not one of the milieus that came before and thus could be seen to condition the coming into being of the technical object, but the milieu of mixed milieus that results from the intervention of the technical object. This is the proper milieu of the object; again, it is not situated in the world, but creates a world in the process of situating itself – not a thing in a container, but an element in a world that would not exist without it. Or, as Simondon chooses to put it (in italics, even): "*The technical object is thus its own condition because it is the condition of existence of this mixed milieu, technical and geographical at the same time*." (68)

This, then, is the work of the technical object: a combination of three acts. First, the creation of a schema that can mediate between different "environments," different internally integrated aspects of the world. Second, the actual relation between environments instantiated by way of the schematic relay of transaction. And thirdly this resulting, or "associated" milieu, which is also an environment in second degree that comes as an actualization of something virtually possible in the encounter between the first two.

Images

In his later work, Simondon interestingly suggest expanding the notion of technical objects beyond the strictly technological horizon. In his theory of imagination (particularly in the lectures on "Imagination and Invention" from 1965–66) he thinks about images as if they were technical objects: as intermediary beings between object and subject, between concrete and abstract, and between past and future. Images here are addressed in a very general way and in a context of historical anthropology, and Simondon's main interest is the role and function of what he calls "image-objects," images that are made to represent and understand human experience in all its different aspects. Image-objects are products of practices of inscription, and they enter into a human ecology as they are being used to understand human perceptions and experiences at large.

In this latter sense, images keep crossing the threshold between something objective and something subjective. As image-objects they have an objective existence as medial inscriptions, but these inscriptions come to work only as they are adapted by the individual consciousness; they are realized first in the moment when they are re-produced by consciousness. So as image-objects, they hold objective existence, but this existence is only corroborated in the very moment they are adapted, and by then also distorted, transformed, into an image in the consciousness of somebody.

Secondly, images negotiate between a concrete and an abstract side. The image of something is never a full image, it comes with reductions and omissions, as well as with image-making conventions that help to make them recognizable. In Simondon's words, they synthesize and reduce at the same time. The key to understand this twofold function is the historicity of images. Every new image is made on the basis of earlier images that provide the "grammar" for producing the new image, which in turn engages a dialectic of identity and difference. A given sensation or experience can be made into an image only by applying an existing template to it, a template which has been made for another purpose, and thus imposing a difference in order to express the identity of the situation as it was experienced. Simondon here again recurs to the Kantian notion of the *schema*, which he portrays here as a kind of stereotype that we use as a "prosthesis" when making an image, the image being on the one hand "adaptive," adapting material to an existing schema, and therefor also on the other "restrictive," only able to convey what is allowed for by a given schematic template.

This dialectic in turn raises the question of historicity, because the material at hand for creating an image always comes from the past: it invites us to make images that are modeled on something that no longer exists. From the outset, the means I have at hand to create an image of something are outdated, I can only

make images of a world that is no longer relevant, no longer mine. In every present situation, then, the task is to "rediscover" past images or image-schemas, and then change them in order to create an image that adequately represents the particular experience that I target. This is why imagination and invention – the title of Simondon's lecture series – necessarily go hand in hand. Imagination is creation of images, whether in the secluded interiority of consciousness or in the confection of an image-object, and hence also invention of new images based on the accessible legacy of existing images that are being used and deformed at the same time.

> The image becomes a mode of reception of information that comes from a given environment, and a source for schemas that can help to respond to these stimuli. (Simondon 2008, 19)

The interesting thing here is that the image, conceived in this way, has the same structure and historical function as the technical object. Of put differently, Simondon invites to consider the images that are created by humans in the same way as he treats technical object.

We said of the technical object that it creates a relation between two different environments, and that it contributes to transform both environments. When this is true of the image as well, it goes back to two features. The first relates to the image's crossing of the threshold between objective and subjective. This crossing can in fact be seen in two different aspects. The first concerns the mode of being of the image, that it is both an image-object and a mental image. The first has an objective existence, but this objective existence is first, at we put it above, corroborated when it is actually enacted in a consciousness. And vice versa: the image that resides in the consciousness cannot be substantiated as a mental being without in one way or another being expressed, by way of a representational form, and this form, in turn, will always have to refer to an existing set of "stereotypes" that it enacts through modification and bespoke adaptation. Images continually cross the line between an objective representational form and a figment of imagination. It takes part in the mental environment. The other aspect has to do with the image's relation to that which it attempts to represent. The creation of an image is directed toward the end of gaining insight into or control over a situation; schematizing the situation by way of an image is an analytical act that makes something out of the situation that it is not, from a concrete plurality to a simplified version that highlights some features and neglects others. Or, in other words, the image creates a subjective version of an objective situation, creating a passageway between the objective situation and the subjective attempt to control it. The image's function, as it were, is to create a point of relation between the two. Thus, the image creates a version of the situation that is somehow maniable

for the one who makes the image in order to cope; and it creates a version of the subject that has an actual inroad to the situation by way or the image. Thanks to these two aspects of the image's mediation between subjective and objective, it actually creates a relation between an objective, social or physical environment and a psychics environment. The image in this sense is operational, combining world-making by projecting an image on an otherwise non-accessible environment, and opportunities for praxis by imposing a layout that is compatible with available lineages of intervening.

This initial idea of the operative image does however remain unsatisfactory as it implies a kind of degree-zero situation where an image comes into being and thus facilitates interaction and transformation. But no image emerges ex nihilo, it is always made out of other images, image-templates or schemata that are stored and held accessible in the funds of image-objects already produced. When adding this historical dimension another set of relations and transformations emerge. With every image, a relation is being spun out between a previous situation and a present – and different – situation where the former image is re-used and customized to fit a new situation. The image, and the transposition of the image-schema from one situation to another, creates a relation between the two situations and changes the latter situation by adapting it to the former, but also changes what we might know about the former aided by the new image that could only take the guise it has by being exposed to a new situation. To the synchronous axis of the operational image, we thus need to add a diachronous axis of anticipation and retroaction where present activity of world-making both re-imagines previous situations as a means to relate to present concerns and pre-forms future acts of interpreting experience.

Artworks

We have come a long way from the beautiful appearances dear to romanticist aesthetics to Bernard Stiegler's idea of a technically mediated temporality and the technical objects and image-objects theorized by Gilbert Simondon. This distance covered, however, we might have acquired a language that can describe the phenomenon of aesthetic appearance a bit less aporetically than the ghostly feeling of present absence and absent presence that pervades aesthetic theories of appearance. With Stiegler, we have notably retained that when describing the life of art – that is, the processes of producing, distributing, and using art – we need to do it in terms of the indistinctions and transformations that emerge in these processes: how the subjective positions and objective qualities are determined by the

infrastructures that accommodate the processes. The empirical notions of the artist, the artwork, the beholder are erroneous; not because they don't exist, but because they exist only as a result of the infrastructure, the *tekhné*, that provides the relational switches between them.

With Simondon, we can further begin to specify how such relational techniques operate. Based on the foundational nexus of his techno-anthropology, that technical objects create relations between different environments that in turn transform these environments, Simondon suggests to understand the results of such technologically aided interactions as "associated environments" (Simondon 2012, 70), new environments that are specific to a particular infrastructure. Specifically about art, we can thus claim that for art to exist it is not enough to have a production environment where something is made to appear in an artwork, or a reception environment where the artwork appears to somebody, but the associated environment stitched together by the entire infrastructure.

Eventually, within this techno-anthropological framework, notwithstanding any discrepancy we would intuitively feel between technology and matters of fine art, we are equipped to see the two different aspects of infrastructure aesthetics: On the one hand that art exists through infrastructural affordances, dependent on a relational mesh of institutions, policies, procedures, discourses, techniques, habits, and expectations to ensure that artworks are produced, circulated, used, and recognized as such. And on the other that once artworks are produced, circulated, used, etc., art can provide in and of itself an infrastructure for social relation. Simondon's analysis of the image-object is exemplary of this function. The image puts the work of understanding the world in one situation in relation to the work of understanding (a different aspect of) the world in another situation and eventually transforms bort situations. Or, it provides an infrastructural means to relate two situations to each other and eventually to change both of them.

*

In 2012, four members of the Pussy Riot collective mounted the altar of Moscow's Christ the Savior Cathedral to loudly denounce Vladimir Putin ("Virgin Mary, Mother of God, banish Putin, banish Putin"), the kleptocracy of the rich, the hypocrisy of the church and its head, Patriarch Kirill I, the deportation of homosexuals, and much more. The performance included the unwitting participation of spectators and officials who by violently dismounting the concert contributed to corroborate the accusations put forward, and it has had a long afterlife in the edited video documentation which adds another layer to the work by not only filming the performance but also witnessing the conditions of filming.



Fig. 1: Pussy Riot, Moscow 2012.

The work is remarkable in a number of ways, and it particularly displays a highly reflected sense of infrastructure. Importantly, by mounting a punk concert in a church it reminds us of the *missing* infrastructure that we would have expected around a punk performance – the ambience, the locale, the audience – but also that the altar itself is a highly performative space, a theatre of cloaks and smoke and rigorously observed ritual proceedings. The clash between the performative situations of the concert and the liturgical service puts focus on two incongruous infrastructural settings by pointing to their similarities as well as their differences. The unusual re-positioning of the punk performance recalls the in itself somewhat bizarre nature of the religious performance, just as the colorful stockings, dresses, and balaclavas that has become a signature for the band has the mixture of uniform and excessively ornate outfit that we are accustomed to see in places like this. In other words, the band is not just a radically strange and hence remarkable element on this particular stage, but also a strangely obvious presence, albeit in a completely unexpected manner, including the (sisterly) invocation of the mother of God to denounce political power and clerical conformity – a long-standing trope for critiquing the church in the name of religion – in the name of feminist protest and invocation of gay people's rights. The four performers on stage are highly improbable and at the same time a perfectly punk version of what we would have expected in the church service, with a host of images concatenating around the four womens' bodies from exaltation to depravation, from adoration to victimization.

The performative intervention in the cathedral at first makes us aware of otherwise non-perspicuous infrastructural affordances (their elaborate splendor notwithstanding) by putting the two situations of the concert and the mass together. But it also mobilizes the infrastructural clash to spin out new meanings and potential insights. The image of the performers in front of the altar is astonishing and unfamiliar, but it is also ripe with significance. Hence, the clerical framing of the image brings associations to prayer, contemplation, justice, and misericord. But at the same time, these are imbued with new and acute relevance by inserting contemporary political issues such as the transformation of Russia into a new oligarchy fueled by unjust enrichment, machismo, oppressive tradition, and withering rule of law, to take some of the issues raised by the performance.

What we see first, in other words, is an infrastructural *inversion* where the otherwise innocuous framings that define the clerical space and the space of contentious music culture, respectively, are foregrounded and denaturalized by way of the clash between them. But then we also see an infrastructural *invention*, or a reschematization of a well-known clerical infrastructure which at the same time turns it against itself and gives a new voice to contemporary experiences and grievances. A repurposing of an existing infrastructural framework that is invested in expressing an urgent political situation. This shrewd use of infrastructure and the playful alternation between foreground and background is developed into a highly reflected artistic method through the fifteen years Pussy Riot have been mounting their precisely targeted actions and interventions. Every time they appear, they take the frameworks into which they act into consideration and make them into an integral part of the performance. The (back)ground becomes a constituent element of the figure, the infrastructural conditions for the appearance themselves appear in a double exposure of *what* is presented and *how* it is presented.

Such reflective images are rare, and they tend to stand out in the avalanche of images that feed our daily metabolism of image consumption. What such images do is not simply to signify a particular content, rather, they host a process of significance that can produce meaning and produce approaches to understanding the situation that they effulgently express. In this sense, they do not simply communicate something to an addressee; more precisely, they solicit any potential addressee to take part in the work that consists in making sense of the image. This mode of address is one that has been cultivated in the historical circuit of art images. If we read it according to this logic (and not simply see the image as a sacrilege, or a *lèse-majesté*, or inversely as the message it converges to cry out: "fuck Putin!") we engage in a process of elucidation that proceeds toward decoding the image to the same degree that the addressee engages in the work that is commenced by repurposing ancient topoi in a new schematization – a work that is done in an interplay between the situation that produced the image and the situa-

tion where it is being decoded. In other words, the infrastructural role of the image-object we can find in Simondon, the "associated environment" of something that appears in the image and the image that appears to us.

When encountering this image as a work of art (or less pompously, as something that relates to an art-context in which we have learnt to maneuver), the beholder not only stands in front of a piece of infrastructure art, but also *takes part in* an infrastructure according to which image and beholder are put together in an "art situation" (and not a situation of outrage over sacrilege, or of solidarity with LGBTR+ people in contemporary Russia). This peculiar situation is one of unfinishedness, of letting the image present the beholder with a non-determinate expression (hence the question, what appears in this image?), and inversely let the beholder be solicited to eventually determine what it expresses (how does that which appear in the image appear to me?) The art institution, or what we argue could more accurately be identified as the infrastructure of art, provides the format, the expectations, and the respective attitudes of this encounter and the production of meaning that takes place there. There would be no encounter without the infrastructural setting ranging from the decision on the part of the artists' collective to use the art space as arena for their protest to the art spaces where it is accepted and exhibited, and where it is used accordingly by critics, journalists, public and artist colleagues. But once this framing is in place, the image itself becomes a piece of infrastructure, a material tool that can be used to combine the two converging situations in a joint environment of experience, insight, protest.

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Part Three

Politics: Institution, Reproduction, Support

Solveig Daugaard

Poetry as Infrastructural Switch: Yahya Hassan and the Politics of the Danish Literary Circuit

> Like Chakrabarty's (2000) provocation to 'provincialise Europe,' attention to infrastructure forces us to ask: What do we see differently and understand otherwise when we shift the analytic center? We see studies of infrastructure as a forceful reengagement with gender, race, colonialism, postcoloniality, and class on new empirical and political terrain. Infrastructure provides a site in which these forms of power and inequality are reproduced or destabilized, in which they are given form, occasionally obduracy, and often contingency.
>
> Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, and Akhil Gupta, *The Promise of Infrastructure,* 2018

Introduction

According to literary theorist and cybernetics scholar N. Katherine Hayles, so much has changed in the last thirty years regarding "how books are composed, edited, designed, warehoused, distributed, inventoried, sold and read," that "it is time – indeed, past time – to create a vocabulary and a conceptual framework acknowledging the sea change that occurred when computational media permeated the printing industry" (Hayles 2021, 2). In this chapter, I intend to take up Hayles' invitation by suggesting a revision of fundamental assumptions of literary theory adhering to the study of poetry as a literary form that remains closely tied up with conceptions of authorial expressivity and self-evident delimitation of the poem towards its surroundings, both of which are heavily shaped by print culture. As indicated by Hayles' fronting of the processes surrounding and constituting literature, my suggestion of an *infrastructural poetics* involves a shift of analytic attention from poetry as a delimited object, "a way of happening" which "makes nothing happen" as W.H. Auden infamously wrote (Auden 1940), to the closely entangled feedback loops of the infrastructures that make poetry happen, and which regulate the many things that poetry, quite contrary to Auden's claim, does indeed make happen. If poetry remains an object of interest, then, it is in the sense suggested by cultural theorist Lauren Berlant in their elaboration on "Infrastructures, Infrastructuralism, Infrastructuring": "[o]bjects are always looser than they appear. Objectness is only a semblance, a seeming, a projection-effect of interest in a thing we are trying to stabilize" (Berlant 2022, 25).

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Relatedly, in her account of the functionalities of infrastructure space, architect and information theorist Keller Easterling distinguishes between the object form and the active form. She especially stresses the active form of the *switch*. A switch, she explains, "modulates a flow of activities," switches are nodes that regulate connections and cuts in infrastructural flow: "An interchange in a highway network acts like a switch. A dam in a hydraulic network, a terminal in a transit network, an earth station in a satellite network, or an internet provider in a broadband network are all switches" (Easterling 2014, 75). In the following, I wish to unpack how a poetry book immersed in an extensively digitized contemporary literary circuit, comes to function like an infrastructural switch through which such forms of power and inequality, as stressed by infrastructurally attentive anthropologists Appel, Anand, and Gupta in the epigraph for this chapter, are allowed to circulate. As will become clear, it is exactly in the intersection between the postdigital transformation of the literary circuit addressed by Hayles, and the intersectional forms of inequality experienced by marginalized members of society, that poetry might achieve an extreme infrastructural charge which makes it function as a switch. According to Easterling, if switches are inadequate, increased capacity will only increase congestion in infrastructure space. Furthermore, "[h]owever deliberate the activities of the switch, it cannot control all of its own consequences any more than one could account for every use of the water flowing through a dam." (Easterling 2014, 75). Likewise, I will demonstrate how poetry is not always the smartest of switches when operating in the postdigital condition. Firstly, because once switched on it is not easily switched off again, even if congestion increases to the verge of a traffic jam. And secondly, because the switch of a single poetry book can produce traffic that by far exceeds the control of the poet him- or herself, or indeed any other individual agent inside or outside the literary circuit. Such traffic will, as we shall also see, bring forth persistent gendered, racial, classed, and cultural biases within the empirical and political terrain of the Danish literary circuit in the 2010s. But it also endows such biases with a contingency which may suggest a potential for their (future) destabilization.

Through a reading of Danish-Palestinian poet Yahya Hassan's [1995–2020] combined poetic, performative and political practice as inscribed in the accelerated feedback loops of a postdigital literary circuit, the chapter outlines the literary practice of infrastructural poetics. The radical paradox of Hassan's example is how his poetry, on the one hand, due to biased and outdated print cultural conceptions of the medium, comes to function as a crucial infrastructural switch for circulating a political narrative confirming diversity, representation, and democratic legitimacy in Danish society in the midst of a highly polarized debate concerning the country's Muslim diaspora. Whilst, on the other hand, it performs a large-scale infrastructural inversion of the literary circuit, including a critical

stress testing of its infrastructural support system, which reveals the biopolitical cuts it is based on and the extreme measures of isolation and loneliness this produces for the racialized writer. Finally, I will suggest how infrastructural poetics can challenge the boundaries drawn by the art world, and instigate participation from groups not previously included, thus paving the way for new initiatives supporting more solidaric and less individualizing interventions into the art world of poetry.

The lightness of poetry and the authority of the author

In a talk given in 1980, the American poet Audre Lorde claims that poetry, being "the most economical" of the art forms, is also the one that offers itself most readily to the suppressed, the poor, the less fortunate, because "[i]t is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labour, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts, in the hospital pantry, on the subway, and on scraps of surplus paper."(Lorde 2017, 97) Contrasting it with the endurance needed to write a novel and with the cost of materials, equipment and/or the need for professional collaborators to engage in visual arts, film or performing arts, Lorde stresses how the conditions needed for writing poetry are notably *within* reach for women of color like herself, and for anyone lacking institutional support. Poetry, in this conception, due to the lightness of its infrastructures of production, offers individual agency to those deprived of it in other realms of social and political life.

In December 2013, two months after the publication of his already sensational, record-selling debut, the poet Yahya Hassan was interviewed about his writing of the opening poem "CHILDHOOD" ("BARNDOM"). The poem, Hassan recounts, had been written while he was living in a tiny, municipally assigned apartment in the social housing area Trillegården west of Aarhus, all alone in the world after being evicted from a juvenile facility. Since Lorde's talk, more than three decades earlier, writing technologies had been transformed by sweeping digitalization. Thus, it is no surprise that her "scraps of surplus paper" had given way to other materials in Hassan's account: "I wrote the poem at night on my Mac computer and hit the caps lock key." He further explains, "Lower case letters looked too tame. That was not the kind of poem I was writing." (Brovall 2013, 11)[1] Still, the infrastructural lightness

1 All quotes from Danish media are translated from the Danish by the author.

of poetry as a medium, through which a simple, immediately accessible device (a computer with a caps lock key) can provide the means for implicitly therapeutic self-expression, is very true to the core of Lorde's tale of poetry as the most feasible medium for the isolated and the underprivileged.

Based on an intersectional analysis of power, Lorde in her essay identified a tendency in the literary public of the time to devalue poetry as "less serious" vis-à-vis other literary genres and artforms more effectively reserved for the privileged in society. If Lorde's poetry in spite of this tendency did manage to generate substantial reader interest, then, if we turn to Hassan's poems, they were produced into a Danish literary circuit in the 2010s, which, quite contrary to the situation described by Lorde, exhibited an extreme receptivity towards (his) poetry. Despite such differences, Lorde's and Hassan's accounts share a crucial premise: the notes jotted down on the subway, or the lines typed on a computer keyboard late one night, may seem ephemeral but they are endowed with lasting cultural significance when being ascribed to poetry as a serious art form. Hence, poetry can provide the marginalized subject with a sense of meaning and value in life, whilst achieving political impact by diversifying the discourse of the society marginalizing her or him.

To a research approach committed to infrastructure aesthetics, the solitary, precarious, and fugitive situation of composition, here conjured up by both Lorde and Hassan, obviously only accounts for a small segment of the economy of poetry. Works of literature are not merely written by authors and read by readers, they are also published, circulated and not least preserved by cultural industries and educational institutions. Thus, they are always also co-produced by editorial routines, commercial interests and didactic principles that come with conditions and clauses, as well as by mechanisms of marketing, critique, discussion, restoration, and archiving, that altogether co-determine how the poetic work will eventually be recognized as such by a reading public (Daugaard 2018; 2019; 2023). In the following, I will consider how the infrastructures of production, circulation and reception extensively co-produced the poetic practice of Yahya Hassan throughout his brief and intense career. Moreover, I use this case to develop a theory of poetry taking off from the concept of infrastructural poetics.

The scholarly backends of my proposal of a literary theory on infrastructural poetics are mainly based on sociology and media theory. Sociologist Howard Becker demonstrates in the opening pages of his seminal study *Art Worlds* (1982) that even the work of the author – that of jotting down words on whatever material by whatever technology – is in fact supported, facilitated and co-constituted by myriads of

other actors, granted little or no visibility in the study of literature.[2] According to pioneers of infrastructural methodology Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, Becker's study amounted to an "infrastructural inversion" of artistic practice across the cultural field of the modern aesthetic paradigm, by giving causal prominence to the "normally invisible Lilliputian threads" co-determining artworks, over the "heroic actors" most often the focus in studies of art (Bowker and Star 2010). Becker investigates the art worlds of the "Western European societies, and those influenced by them, since the Renaissance," across all of which crucial importance is consistently assigned to one "heroic actor." This solitary actor – the artist – is considered an exclusively talented individual and henceforth equipped with an extensive set of social privileges that fundamentally structure these worlds. As Becker puts it, society "must allow [the artists] to violate rules of decorum, propriety, and common sense everyone else must follow or risk being punished" to receive – in exchange – "work of unique character and invaluable quality" (Becker 1982, 14–15). Yet *where* in the network of "collective activity" that surrounds and constitutes what we call art this special authorial authority is invested may differ across artforms, genres and historical periods. Further, which technical skills or tasks that can issue this label, may be explicitly challenged and contested. Becker draws out a series of examples to demonstrate such disturbances in the hierarchy of the art worlds of theatre, film production, different musical genres, and visual arts. However, none of his examples are taken from literature of the Western hemisphere, which suggests the striking stability of its authorial hierarchy, at least as it appeared to Becker in the 1980s.[3] A stability that, I would add echoing Hayles, in spite of massive technological changes in the processes through which literature is produced, distributed and consumed, continues into our current postdigital condition where – whether through copyright law, library indexes, publisher's catalogues, literary criticism, cultural journalism, or on social media – the biographical author remains the primary logistic entity for organizing literature. Thus, Becker's inclination to open with an example from, exactly, literature may suggest how the especially ingrained

2 Becker opens his massive study with a quote from the diary of Victorian novelist Anthony Trollope, in which he stresses the indispensable role played by the "old groom" bringing him his coffee every morning at five, so that he could get his daily hours writing done before his office day as a civil servant began (Becker 1982, 1–2).

3 Since 1950s renegotiations of the authorial position of the sovereign artist happened across the art forms, but had significantly less impact in literature: I.e., when the skilled labor of the artists shifts from being attached to the production of specific images or objects in painting, photography, or sculpture, to being tied to their specific installation or re-composition in a new context in avant-garde genres like collage, assemblage, or appropriation art. Or in improvisational jazz, where unique artistic value is attached to the interpretational performance of the musician on stage, more than to the original composition of the tune, i.e., the jazz standard.

and invisibilized nature of the collective activity this art form entails – both in terms of its production and its reception – makes the claim of its infrastructural co-production come off as stubbornly counterintuitive.

If we recall Michel Foucault's notorious claim that the *author* is not merely the label for any "heroic actor" to whom we can attribute specific works of literature, but has a historically specific, discursive function constitutive of the modern individual, as a juridically responsible entity, crucial for securing, authorizing, and regulating the circulation of certain discourses, and limiting or excluding others (Foucault 1998), it is perhaps no great surprise to find this figure so insistently resistant to infrastructural inversion. Historically, the political impact of the literary circuit in the context of the nation state has been concretely established with reference to the infrastructures of print-capitalism and their part in the cultivation of national languages and "imagined communities" internalized and felt by each individual citizen through general alphabetization (Anderson 2006). Indeed, printed books in vernacular were the first modern commodities of capitalist economy (McLuhan 1962), and their mass dissemination, along with daily national newspapers, helped establish the secular state units on which contemporary democracies (like the Danish) are based, whilst providing them with a stable sense of legitimacy. While poetry is perhaps not commonly thought of as a key source for disseminating the stories that form the backbone of nationwide imagined communities, its cultural significance in a national context is in fact strongly motivated by media history. To German media historian Friedrich Kittler, lyric poetry plays a distinct role in the establishment of modern culture's all-encompassing "discourse network," his name for the "network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store, and process relevant data" (Kittler 1990, 369). Here, poetry functions as a "psychogenic" cultural technique for producing the very sense of psychological interiority within the framework of national, linguistically founded identity. Kittler unpacks the close connection in German idealism around 1800 between the lyric and the mother's lullaby (as a voicing of the mother tongue), which introduces "the child into speech that can be celebrated as the child's own discourse – and, in its highest form, as the lyric of the genius" (Kittler 2013, 43). Thus, it is from this purported "self-expression," or "interiority that seems to speak in the poems" Kittler derives the "phantasm of the author as the Master from whom discourse is to be born and to whom it should forever belong" (Kittler 2013, 44). Kittler's dissection of the lyric reminds us of the subdued nationalist component in the media history of poetry, tied up, not only with its assumption of psychological expressivity negating materiality and embodiment, but also with the suggestion of its emancipatory potential for the suppressed or unsupported individual, as per Lorde's and Hassan's accounts. Importantly, it suggests how this "phantasm" is in principle inaccessible to those positioned as marginalized, or – with Gayatri Spivak's 1988 concept – subaltern subjects within the discourse network.

Seven years in the literary circuit: The production, circulation, and reception of Yahya Hassan

From his debut until his premature death in 2020 Yahya Hassan's passage through the Danish literary circuit lasted seven years. At first sight, what was circulated was his poems, written as they were in all caps with no punctuation and printed in the two self-titled poetry collections, *YAHYA HASSAN* (2013) and *YAHYA HASSAN 2* (2019). Both were published by the reputable Danish publishing house, Gyldendal, to massive reader interest and high critical acclaim.[4] But as indicated by the gesture of their titles, printed in naked white caps on all black covers, an insistent stickiness between embodied poet and printed poetry was set up from the very beginning, making them virtually impossible to separate.[5] The poems exhibit a strong, unified textual persona. Embodying the voice of his poems, and the violent experiences depicted in them, the young poet stepped onto the stage of the media. He took the spotlight, standing alone, cut loose from any social and family context. Beaming in solitary poetic genius his persona caught the eye of an audience far beyond the segment normally paying attention to poetry. As a consequence, the story about him *and* his poetry has been consistently told – by himself and others – as the story of the unsupported outsider, heroically and provocatively breaking his own way into the poetic arena.[6] It became the story of the best-selling debut poetry collection in Danish literary history written by a kid with a criminal record. Straight out of the Middle Eastern diaspora living in a run-down social housing project at the bottom of Danish society, he blasted into the prestigious Danish writer's academy, Forfatterskolen, and from there into the most high-end literary circles. A poetic voice had emerged from a segment of the population, who had been the topic of heated public debate since the mid-1990s, but who were rarely invited to participate in this debate themselves: Original, aggressive, raw, sharp,

4 In a country where 2000 copies make a poetry bestseller, the number of copies printed of Hassan's two poetry collections has surpassed 165.000 with his debut currently in its 32nd print run. As of October 2023, both collections remain in print (Gyldendal, pers. communication 2023).

5 Having collapsed author name and title, the volumes' paratexts are remarkably minimal. Beside the name/title, front and title pages include only genre ("poems") and the name of the press. The back cover adds a one-line bio, which with minimal means stresses the importance of his biography and background: "Yahya Hassan, born 1995. Stateless Palestinian with a Danish passport" (*YAHYA HASSAN*) and "Yahya Hassan, born 1995. Still stateless Palestinian with a Danish passport." (*YAHYA HASSAN 2*).

6 While his poetry has been translated into several languages, including Swedish, Norwegian, German, Italian, Dutch, Icelandic and English, this chapter is solely considering its circulation in a national Danish context. As I am not aware of English translations of any of the poems by Hassan I quote in the following, all translations of his poetry are by me.

funny, sincere, and embodied by a young man with radiant brown eyes, luscious black curls, and an intense mesmerizing voice with which he read his poetry in a characteristic chanting rhythm; here was a living image wired for circulation.

From the initial hype before his first book hit the shelves, to the innumerable obituaries written after his death, Hassan's name, image, opinions, biographical chronicle – complete with abusive childhood, criminal record, psychiatric journal, and political ambitions – were all-over literary outlets and national news media – along with his poetry. And, as his debut coincided with the initial flourishing of a newly founded alliance between established media and rising social media platforms in the regime of 'Web 2.0', news stories stirred viral activity on social media, which, in turn, generated new headlines, discussions and even violent confrontations with – and assaults on – the poet. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, were at this time becoming integrated with the webpages of major news outlets, both private and public ones. Not yet efficiently regulated, this alliance did not merely facilitate participatory public debate as online comments' sections and (more or less) anonymous chat fora had done before. Rather, it channeled a new type of affectively invested online debate which re-attached the writing to the writing body, tying the *face* to the *book*, so to speak. With mediation and moderation of traffic not yet as extensive or formalized as it would later become, the level of discursive violence on social media, as channeled and amplified by national media, was extremely high. Hassan's personal social media accounts were instantly flooded with everything from poetry fan-mail, romantic proposals and declarations of solidarity to death threats. An accelerated feedback loop was established between different spheres of mediated reality, spiraling a participatory element into Hassan's poetic practice quite unlike anything Danish literature had ever seen before.

On that note, the most striking feature of Hassan's poetic practice, what I have elsewhere defined as his infrastructural poetics, was its ability to engage agents across and beyond the literary circuit. Like a switch turned on, Hassan's poetry generated so much discourse and such diverse activity in such different segments of Danish society that taking stock of it all would be virtually impossible (Daugaard 2023).[7] Not least, his practice attracted participants (not necessarily

7 As of September 2023, the number of news stories and articles about Hassan in Danish media is approaching 20.000, as registered on the digital media archive *Infomedia*. Responses include essays, comments, columns, interviews, letters to the editor and even an autobiographical novel by his social counselor and one-time lover, Louise Østergaard (*Ord,* 2014). While in 2014, the Swedish poet Athena Farrokhzad's review of his poetry set off the first extensive debate on racialization and white privilege in Scandinavian literature, which became known as "Hvidhedsdebatten" ("the whiteness debate"), his practice and opinions also instigated a wave of comments

readers in the traditional sense), unfamiliar with the art world principles of infinite pardon, as described by Becker, when engaging with the poet and his work. An illustrative example was the fierce debate on the Facebook page of *Deadline*, a late-night TV news program, following the posting of a video of Hassan reading his debut collection's most explicit attack on Islam and the Muslim diaspora. In the social media storm that followed, the media stereotyped version of the "immigrant" and Hassan's rebellious attack on his community of origin were conflated. In the comments, the public could, with their own eyes, read the death threats, swear words and spelling mistakes of the allegedly criminal, violent, and hypocritical immigrant underclass from which Hassan was attempting to cut his bonds. A section of the population that had not previously had such direct exposure on national media platforms suddenly surfaced, only to confirm the preconceived public opinion.

Such response patterns only enforced the mainstream reception, which celebrated his debut collection as the answer to the insolvable crux of the raging, wildly polarized, so-called "immigrant debate" in Danish politics and its derivation within cultural politics, known as the "battle of culture." Because the poems included depictions of domestic violence and took an aggressive stance towards the poet's own community of origin, Hassan served – vis-à-vis this debate which largely constructed Middle Eastern culture as backwards and underdeveloped – the function of what Gayatri Spivak has called "the native informant" (Spivak 1999). However, Hassan's political outspokenness became further stirred by major political events, including the war in Gaza in the summer of 2014 and a terrorist attack in Copenhagen in February 2015. During the latter, a young man with a social background resembling Hassan's own, shot and killed two people and wounded six in allegiance to radicalized Islam. With these developments, the complexity of Hassan's contribution to political debate on global politics, and on the gap between the minoritized Muslim population and the white majority in Danish society grew. Eventually, he could no longer be efficiently contained within the position of the "immigrant who hates other immigrants" (Elg 2020).

Over the course of several months, Hassan's political media performances became more frequent, as he began addressing the global inequities exposed by the Palestinian situation and connected them to the increasing desperation and mar-

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from members of the Muslim diaspora not adhering to literary circles. Many non-white writers who made their debut in the years to come, including Ahmad Mahmoud, Nilgün Erdem, Sara Omar, Naiha Khiljee, and Amina Elmi have addressed how Hassan's example was an incentive for them when pursuing a career in writing (see Kirstein 2020). Other methods would be called for to measure the immense activity around his person on social media.

ginalization experienced in the Danish Muslim diaspora.[8] Many of his appearances responded directly to an experienced media bias against the Palestinian perspective, and many took a provocative, interventional, and performative approach to the genre of political commentary. For instance, he applied his characteristic poetic diction in speeches and pulled gimmicks like yanking the tie of a TV journalist during a live interview (Isager and Moestrup 2021). Although the unconventional form of Hassan's political interventions would often steal the attention of his interlocutors, the perspective he provided on Danish society and global politics during this period were both astute, nuanced and infrequently heard elsewhere in public debate (e.g. Hassan 2014; 2015; 2023). In the spring of 2015, Hassan launched his candidacy for the political party Nationalpartiet, which had been founded in 2014 by three Danish Pakistani brothers in response to the political climate of the Danish immigration debate. The party's main aspiration was to overcome the polarization between minoritized communities and the political elite, by mobilizing these communities to participate more actively in politics.

In stark contrast to the immediate political weight that had been assigned to his poetry and his poet performance, Hassan's brief attempt to launch a political career as a candidate for parliament in 2015, was met with confusion and disbelief. Clearly, this new type of traffic did not run as smoothly as the traffic adhering to the position of "native informant," and it created congestion in the infrastructural flow regulated by the poetry switch. Even in retrospect, it remains difficult to separate Hassan's political career from his intensely mediatized comedown, by which it was immediately followed. Since 2013, violent threats against Hassan had led to constant police protection, which he relinquished with the declaration of his political aspirations. During his election campaign his social media activity increased in intensity, innovation, and provocativeness. After the election, in which he did not obtain a seat in parliament, he left the literary and political circles in Copenhagen and moved back to Aarhus, where he resumed a criminal course. Meanwhile he continued activity on social media, especially Instagram, which he used as a platform for live streaming his own criminal activities involving drugs, thefts, assaults, car chases, illegal weapons, and association with organized crime. What remains striking about both Hassan's political social media posts and his later, crime-related ones, is how they on almost all parameters – including their choice of topics, the

8 See for instance Hassan's "Speech to Israel and Palestine" (Tale til Israel og Palestina) which was scheduled for a demonstration in sympathy with the victims of Gaza on July 28, 2014, but was cancelled because of violent threats against the poet, but held the following day in the TV news show *Deadline*. The speech was transcribed, translated into English, printed, and published in bilingual edition by Line Gry Hørup in response to the 2023 Hamas terrorist attack and subsequent war in Gaza.

aggressiveness in their address, the sparks of humor, their innovative language, and their use of provocative imagery – essentially repeated the most celebrated aspects of his debut poems. And yet, the public response to his online activity was characterized by consternation and discomfort. If the poems got Hassan into the papers and onto the polished floors, the posts and videos paved his way into prison and, eventually, psychiatric institutions.

For an immediate consideration, there is nothing surprising about the public's change of attitude towards his practice, as it became less centered on the printed poetry collection. Nevertheless, the situation acutely raises the question of when art's infrastructures support a life, and when they do not. It brings into question the inherent logic and functionality of what I have called the poetry switch. Clearly, the switch regulates how we perceive depictions of violence and transgressive behavior printed on a page in a collection of poems versus how we perceive such depictions if they are posted online. The exposure of this mechanism further suggest how crime and mental illness are transgressive behaviors related to the transgressions of art, differing in degree rather than in kind.

This pressure on art's boundaries produced by Hassan's activities was only reinforced with the publication of his second book, which came out in the fall of 2019, only five months prior to his passing. The sensationalized comeback collection was published while Hassan was hospitalized in a psychiatric institution, and the poems quite literally covered the same violent and morally dubious events that had made the public shrink with pity, indignation, and embarrassed disbelief when conveyed through social media. Yet once again, the poetry collection worked as a switch and generated instant access to an exceptionally publicized appearance on Copenhagen's yearly major book fair, to enthusiastic reviews, media attention and prestigious prize nominations.

As he connected with the Danish literary circuit, Hassan achieved a circulation so immense that it on many occasions threatened to clog its infrastructural flow. While Hassan's poems on the page both preempted their aroused reception and richly depicted the interactions with editors, writers, journalists, directors, social workers and educators, which afforded their making infrastructurally, on the level of circulation his practice also spurred new activity from all these agents, making such infrastructural processes – most of which were designed to reside in the background – suddenly very tangible.[9] The infrastructural inversion

9 The communicativeness of agents somehow involved in Hassan's life and poetry including his teachers, editors, writer colleagues, and journalists that have interviewed him has been as striking as the activity his practice sparked from politicians, critics, and readers.

performed by Hassan's poetry foregrounded the backends of the literary circuit by putting on display the processes of production, dissemination and reception most often kept from the attention of the public. Thus, his work highlighted the institutional scaffolding that holds up literature and revealed its infrastructural contingencies, and even failures. Following Lauren Berlant, such effects adhere to disturbances in infrastructural flow, both material and affective in nature, and can be conceived, not as a switch, but rather as a "glitch [. . .] in the reproduction of life" (Berlant 2022, 24). This glitch, in Hassan's case, emanated from the extreme and persistent exposure of his poetic persona. Meanwhile his embodied self – over the course of his career – became increasingly cut-off from two sets of reproductive support structures. Firstly, his access to the (insufficient) affective support structures of his home-environment had been effectively cut when his attack on this environment had become so widely publicized. And secondly, his access to the (also insufficient) support structures of the art world of Danish literature was interrupted when his political and criminal activities increased. Characteristically, the very disturbance in the infrastructural flow securing the reproduction of life provoked the infrastructural inversion. By appearing so acutely unsupported, Hassan's body drew attention to support structures that up to this point had been practically invisible to the public eye, because they were so immediately available to the extant members of literature's art world, predominantly belonging to the cultural middle class of the country's white majority.

Infrastructural poetics in action: The complicity of the critic

Already present in glimpses in his debut, the deliberate stress testing of the support structures of the literary circuit runs as a central theme in the first section of *YAHYA HASSAN 2*. To a certain degree, the position of 'promising young poet' had granted Hassan pardon for crimes. In the beginning of his career, he had escaped arrest and police investigations, and even avoided prison by being vouched for as cultural figure, thus he had experienced the privileges associated with the honorary position of being a 'Danish poet'. In the poem "STATE VISIT" (STATSBESØG) the speaker is somewhere in Europe "WITH A POETRY COLLECTION IN [HIS] INSIDE POCKET," accompanied by bodyguards:

THE BODYGUARDS ARE CORRECTING AND NAVIGATING ME
THE POOR FELLOWS ARE MORE COMFORTABLE IN MY LIFE
THAN I MYSELF AM[10]

As the poem continues, the concrete situation of an unadjusted, touring poet in need of protection from his own impulses, expands to a striking image of the poet's diminishing sense of agency as he becomes part of Danish literature:

I DREAMT ABOUT PERFORMING HEROIC ACTS
BUT I WAS CONFINED TO THE DIRTY WORK
I WAS AN INSIGNIFICANT PART OF THEIR WEALTH
WHILE THEY WERE A SIGNIFICANT PART OF MY DEMISE[11]

These lines complete the speaker's move from main character to maintenance worker in his own poetry. Constantly regulating and limiting the speaker, the poem's "they" is initially attached to the bodyguards – corresponding to the real-life bodyguards provided to the poet by Danish police intelligence service. But gradually "they" come to implicate anyone involved in the Danish societal machine through which the young poet circulates – from social workers, wards, teachers, editors, and publishers, to journalists, critics, academics, politicians and, not least, readers. All of whom to some extent increase their wealth – whether financial or cultural – through his "DIRTY WORK," all "MORE COMFORTABLE IN [HIS] LIFE" than he himself is (or was), and all, thus, contributing to his demise. Portrayed here is the construction of the poet as a social figure, apparently on a poetic-diplomatic mission for the state, as referenced by the poem's title. Yet, the speaker's agency is experienced as extremely limited – he can affect the processes in which he is involved only through isolation and self-destruction. In the poem "BLANK" ("NITTE"), the social consequences of the speaker being appointed the position of 'poet' in Danish society are pinned out, and it is unmistakable how the artist's privileges, as we recall from Becker, come at a high cost for him:

I SIDESTEP THE SOCIETIES
I SKIM THE COZY CORNERS FOR THREATS
I SHRINK TO IMPULSE AND INSTINCT
I CASH OUT ON MY SEGMENT
THEY PAD ME WITH PRIVILEGES

10 LIVVAGTERNE KORRIGERER OG NAVIGERER MIG /DE ARME MÆND HAR DET BEDRE I MIT LIV / END JEG SELV HAR DET (12).

11 JEG DRØMTE OM AT UDFØRE HELTEGERNINGERNE /MEN JEG VAR FORBEHOLDT DET BESKIDTE ARBEJDE /JEG VAR EN UBETYDELIG DEL AF DERES VELSTAND /MENS DE VAR EN BETYDELIG DEL AF MIT FORFALD

BUT I COLLECT RETALIATIONS
SOLIDARITY BECAME SOLODARITY
AND THE VOICE BECAME BEWITCHED
I AM DANCING BALLET WITH MY BAGAGE[12]

As conveyed, the padding of privileges involves isolation and anxiety, as well as the disownment of his community of origin, in order to "CASH OUT ON" his "SEGMENT" and thus turn "SOLIDARITY" into "SOLODARITY". Altogether, this sets the stage for a virtuoso performance of what Korean American poet Cathy Park Hong has called the "ethnic story of suffering" (Hong 2020, 48):[13] "DANCING BALLET WITH MY BAGAGE".

When drawing out these poems, I am inevitably confronted with the problematic position I inhabit as a white female, middle class literary scholar employed by a Danish university, and hence, a paid member of the literary art world. In my own work, I have lingered with Hassan's example for several years (Daugaard 2020; 2023; Daugaard and Schmidt 2022), and in my persistent interest I am obviously also complicit in maintaining some of the unsustainable and unjust accumulation processes that I am determined to criticize. Yet, my approach to these poems differs from the celebration of the "ethnic story of suffering" criticized by Hong. Due to their explicitly infrastructural poetics, Hassan's poems do not leave the position of the "consumer cannibal" – engaging in the process famously analyzed by black feminist bell hooks as "eating the other"– in peace (hooks 1992).[14] Reading Hassan's poetry, I may be "eating the other" but I am unable to cannibalize with undisturbed conscience. Therefore, before moving on, I pause to face this institutionally sanctioned position predisposed for exploitation; I am more at home, more

12 JEG SNOR MIG UDEN OM SAMFUNDENE /JEG SKIMMER SMØRHULLERNE FOR TRUSLER /JEG SKRUMPER TIL IMPULS OG INSTINKT /JEG SLÅR EN MØNT PÅ MIT SEGMENT /DE POLSTRER MIG MED PRIVILEGIER /MEN JEG SAMLER PÅ REPRESSALIER /SOLIDARITET BLEV TIL SOLODARITET /OG STEMMEN BLEV FORHEKSET /JEG DANSER BALLET MED MIN BALLAST (22)

13 In her collection of essays, *Minor Feelings* (2020) Hong gives a striking characterization of the mechanism at work within English language literature, where literature by non-white authors has consistently been marketed through a white imagination of "racial trauma" which crucially isolates the "single story" of immigrant life with enough ethnic props to "satisfy the white readers taste for cultural difference" but remain remote enough to "allow everyone, including the reader, off the hook." (Hong 2020, 47–51)

14 Hooks describes how the fascination, mixed in with fear and disgust of the othered, racialized body, including its story of suffering both allows for an erotically charged enjoyment and functions as a legitimizing gesture in maintaining a racial hierarchy. The latter because it presents itself as evidence against the existence of racism by idolizing the racialized body or cultural product, meanwhile keeping the othered body within a stereotyped mold that prevents it from obtaining true agency, as it is consumed by an implicitly white audience.

fortunately positioned, in the poet's life than he himself was. And yet again, for the white cultural critic writing about minoritized artists, the only gesture more problematic (and more tiring for the reader) than uncritically eating the other is uncritically re-centering yourself and your own feelings of discomfort, guilt, and shame. What remains crucial to stress is that my own predicament of privilege is hardly exclusive, but rather a condition shared throughout the critical community of Danish literature. Similar experiences have been addressed by many readers of Hassan's poetry (e.g. Rösing 2013; Eistrup 2019; Isager and Moestrup 2021). What Hassan's poetry, along with his public performance, did most powerfully was to hold up a mirror to the literary public's fascinated consumption of the "immigrant genius." Effectively, all positions this public took toward him appeared both ludicrous and morally dubious: from the motherly (or fatherly) tenderness directed at Hassan as an abused and abandoned child (Rösing 2013; Mygind 2013; 2014; Østergaard 2014; Eistrup 2019), or the 'brotherly' celebration of his street-wise gangster credit (Bukdahl 2013; 2014; 2019) to the objectification of him as an aesthetic phenomenon, himself *becoming* poetry (Krasnik 2020; Pedersen 2020).[15] Hassan's poetics is infrastructural in its calling attention to the infrastructures conditioning it, revealing their unsustainable mechanisms and the contingency of their border-drawings, while nudging each member of the literary public and its institutions who engage with his writing, to feel their own implication in maintaining these infrastructures.

In writing this chapter, I am thus intently trying *not* to take the bait of the promoted authorial interface by focusing on the individual agent, or the sad lot of Hassan, hereby contributing further to the extensive "eating" of him that has already taken place. Neither do I wish to antagonize any specific critics or positions in the art world of Danish literature. Rather than centering and isolating Hassan once more, by producing yet another rereading and rewriting of his story, and rather than re-centering my own position, or that of any other particular agent in the literary circuit, a reading of his work dedicated to infrastructure aesthetics is one that sets out to dissect the mirror image his practice produced of the backends of the literary circuit in the 2010s. Such a reading will proceed, not merely in terms of a sociological context analysis but as a media sensitive aesthetic analysis spurred on by the aesthetic strategies applied in the work, as much as by the themes addressed by its content. Both of which, in this reading, are infrastructural in nature. Moreover, because the aesthetic strategies in question adhere to the material conditions of the work's production, distribution and reception, such

15 It is worth noting that the degree of self-reflection differs in the pieces referenced, being lowest in the last and highest in the first category where all cited contributions contain an explicit problematization of the critic's own reader position vis-à-vis Hassan. See especially Eistrup 2019 for a nuanced reflection on the topic.

an analysis is media sensitive, not only with respect to the artistic medium in question – the book of poetry – but to the material conditions adhering to its entire cycle of production, dissemination and reception.

The Danish "battle of culture" and the role of poetry

As I have already touched upon, Yahya Hassan's debut coincided with a growing market demand in a Scandinavian context for "ethnic" or "multicultural literature." In Sweden, where works by Johannes Anyuru, Jonas Hassen Khemeri, and Marjaneh Bakhtiari had been very successful both in terms of reader interest and critical acclaim, contemporary literature by "immigrant writers" had since the early 2000s been widely considered as "a privileged source of information about the new multicultural and multilingual Sweden" and even as "a master code for understanding contemporary Swedish society." (Nilsson 2013, 60). In comparison, Danish literature produced by postmigrant writers appeared strikingly sparse in the 1990s and early 2000s, even though changes to the country's demographic constitution in many ways resembled that of Sweden. As accounted in several studies on (post)migration and multiculturalism in Danish literature, public and media interest in literature written by writers from diverse cultural backgrounds had been exceptionally low in the 1990s and early 2000s. Anthologies marketed as biographical testimonies rather than poetic artworks and published by small private initiatives or NGO's such as Danish Red Cross rather than literary presses accounted for the better part of the "multicultural" literature produced in these years (Schramm 2010; Gaettens 2013). Meanwhile, over the course of the 1990s, the political conversation in the Danish public had grown increasingly fixed on themes of immigration and integration. The center-right government, which took office in 2001, relied on the parliamentary support of the far-right populist party Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People's Party), who were explicitly hostile towards immigration. From this point on, debates on how to address the country's Muslim minority escalated and became explicitly connected to the declared political agenda of the government. Soon after taking office prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, announced the initiation of a new "battle of culture" ("kulturkamp"). In other words, a turn to cultural politics was seen as essential to strengthening and safe-guarding Danish cultural values, which were deemed under pressure from post-9/11 Islamic terrorism and a growing population of Middle Eastern and African descent with "medieval" and "regressive" values. Furthermore, as laid out by Rasmussen, the real challenge to Danish cultural values was a well-

meaning but misguided left-leaning "cultural elite" who promoted globalism and multiculturalism. Thus, a major objective of the battle of culture was to dismantle the influence of these "judges of taste," who were depicted as keeping the postmigrant population from being properly educated due to a misplaced respect for their cultural and ethnic origin (Schramm 2010).

The battle of culture led to several large cultural policy initiatives, including an extensive reorganization of public art subsidies, including the closure of Kulturministeriets Udviklingsfond (the Development Fund of the Ministry of Culture), the only major public support pool targeting artists with diverse cultural backgrounds, and which also encouraged cross-aesthetic experimentation. Instead, a new Art Council was set up with media specific subcommittees that, according to the conservative Minister of Culture, were to safeguard specialized, unique quality and talent within the individual art forms over questions of representation and "multicultural" participation in cultural life and untamed cross-media experimentation (Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024). The cultural policy initiatives even amounted to a return to the long-since discarded idea of a "culture canon" – an expert selection of the greatest Danish artworks of all times within seven major art forms – to make the country's national cultural heritage available for public education and information. Such initiatives set up a climate for explicit political utilization of art in a nationalist framework (Gaettens 2013).

In 2005 the Muhammed cartoon crisis furthered the division line between artistic freedom and freedom of speech understood as a secular Danish value and religious minorities understood as constituting a "parallel society" within Danish society. As Gaettens and Schramm also stress, this conflictual climate added a sense of urgency to the matter of representation in Danish art and literature. Abroad and at home, the harsh tone of the Danish debate was being called out as racist and Denmark was accused of keeping ethnically minoritized citizens from making public utterances. To the country's cultural establishment, including institutions of art and literature, this situation suggested a possible democratic deficit in Denmark, as the country appeared increasingly unable to secure its Muslim minority a platform to speak from. This instigated a series of initiatives – including writing contests aimed at "writers with cultural background other than Danish" – by liberal media and literary institutions (such as the papers *Aktuelt*, *Information*, *Berlingske Tidende,* and the press Gyldendal), to inspire "new voices" to take to the writing of literature. Gaettens analyzes these initiatives as reactions against the discourse of "Danishness" bound up with the "battle of culture" and the "culture canon." I would add, however, that they also need to be conceived as extensions of this project and that also the receptivity toward Hassan at the time of his debut needs to be seen in immediate connection with this. In the canon and cultural-battle debates, a narrow ideology of 'fine art' was becoming weaponized

by political actors, meanwhile its content was being depoliticized. Under the banner of absolute artistic freedom and uncompromising respect for artistic quality, the political importance of art was tied, not to its content or message, but to its infrastructural function. In an analysis of Hassan's success in the light of his "non-white physical appearance," German Scandinavian studies scholar Natia Gokieli tabs into this function. In her reading, the political demand for fine-art literature by writers not adhering to the inborn, white Danish majority is enforced by a commercial demand producing the discursive, performative, and embodied construction of the "immigrant" poet, which "derives its commercial value from ethnic visibility, recognizability and exemplarity" and is co-constructed by many agents besides the poet him- or herself, including publishing industries and media paratexts (Gokieli 2015, 209).

Ultimately, the accelerated distribution of Hassan in the literary circuit tied to his "ethnic visbility" is what makes his poetry legible as another type of infrastructural switch regulating the flow of democratic legitimacy in Danish society. In the political climate surrounding Hassan's debut, poetry as an artform simultaneously tied to a national horizon through its dependency on (national) language as its primary material (Kittler) *and* uniquely available to the marginalized and underprivileged individual in a society due to the infrastructural lightness of its production conditions (Lorde) was put to work as an "active form [. . .] modulating a flow of activities" (Easterling). The switch's lack of smartness, from the point of view of the poet, also comes to the fore as the flow of activities modulated by the switch are clearly beyond the poet's agential control – and may easily run counter to his poetic intentions. Again, this function is immediately reflected in Hassan's poetry, for instance, in the tormented figure of the travelling poet/ diplomat somewhere in Europe, with a poetry collection in his pocket, as we already saw in "STATE VISIT". Meanwhile, this politically enforced promise of poetry as a form of acute relevance was picked up across the literary circuit by agents with many other agendas. If the notion that both poets and their readers are slowly becoming extinct, due to the advance of (broadcast and) computational media has been in circulation at least since Marshall McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) discussed the fate of "typographic man," then, as book historian Leah Price conveys, this general sense of print cultural crisis increased significantly with the rise of the internet in the mid-1990s (Price 2019). Indeed, a steady stream of popular and scholarly writings have been circulating, predicting how coming generations would not only be unable to read and appreciate literature, but also unable to concentrate on anything for longer than a few minutes, due to "the restless, grazing behavior of clicking and scrolling" encouraged by digital media technologies (Birkerts 1994). For quite some time, these notions have interfered in the dis-

course, specifically on poetry in Denmark, which was not infrequently depicted as a stagnating genre (Daugaard 2019).

If Hassan's poetry and opinions were initially provided with exposure in the political errant of proving the truthfulness of the general critique against his community of origin, in the manner of Spivak's "native informant," his circulation was maintained and further accelerated, even after he clearly broke out of this position. On one hand, because his example served as a needed proof that sound meritocratic principles still structured Danish culture and public space – securing access for those with the talent to express themselves eloquently and the courage to speak truth to power, no matter what their cultural, social, or economic background was. On the other hand, because his success and extreme connectivity, notably with segments of the population not previously interested in poetry, helped fuel a rising optimism about a new flourishing of print poetry, which rather than being a dusty form of the past was now perfectly in tune with the affective mode and short attention span of the social media generation.[16] In this way, Hassan's practice, situated between his marginalized social position and the postdigital amplification of exposure, stages poetry's role as a crucial infrastructural switch in Danish (cultural) politics, that, at the time of his debut, was desperately needed for the maintenance of the contemporary Danish welfare state as democratically legitimate. A switch, which was operated by representatives of a right-leaning nationalist political agenda, and by the literary circuit's dedicated proponents of poetry as a unique, potentially counter-cultural discourse. The latter were at the time fending off a widespread sense of crisis in print culture, and of poetry as an increasingly marginalized and redundant artform, out of tune with the tastes and demands of younger generations' media habits.

Drawing the boundaries

If the extreme distribution of Hassan's practice exposed the heaviness – materially and affectively – of poetry's infrastructures quite contrary to the conceptualization of the form as immaterial expressive outlet, his case also displayed the unequal distribution of costs and benefits across social, gendered, and racialized parameters. Hereby, it confirms art critic and critical theorist Marina Vishmidt's connection of infrastructure to Foucault's concept of biopolitical regimes with the ultimate pur-

16 During 2014–2015 Danish news media and literary debate was discussing a possible revival of poetry in the 2010s based on the relative popular impact and good sales of writers such as Hassan, Asta Olivia Nordenhof, Casper Eric, Olga Ravn, and Theis Ørntoft (i.e. Andersen 2014).

pose to "make live and let die." In Vishmidt's argument, "[i]nfrastructure is always specific," and is "sustained and maintained to achieve certain biopolitical outcomes, to enable certain strategies of accumulation that are founded on no-infrastructure for some, insofar as it supports accumulation for others" (Vishmidt 2022, 35). Although this regime could hardly be addressed more openly than we saw it in the poem "STATE VISIT" with "no-infrastructure for some" = "MY DEMISE" and "accumulation for others = "THEIR WEALTH," the better part of Hassan's reception does not respond to it. That the most widely disseminated narrative about Hassan – despite all infrastructural inversions – has so insistently remained closed around the embodied poet as solitary agent and as *poet* (rather than citizen, political agent, human being, son, brother, or friend), is an example of this active maintenance.

In essence, Hassan's story of breaking the mold confirmed a neoliberally afforded narrative about the approachability of poetry as an accessible means of expression for the gifted individual, even if coming from outside the white upper-middleclass. Especially in the obituaries in leading liberal newspapers, this narrative was elaborated. Most notably in *Weekendavisen*, whose editor-in-chief, Martin Krasnik, was personally involved, since he, as the host of the 2013 news program featuring Hassan and triggering the poet's first death threats, had taken Hassan into his home for protection. In his obituary, Krasnik reproduced almost to the letter Kittler's "phantasm of the author as the Master from whom discourse is to be born and to whom it should forever belong" (Kittler 2013, 44). In Krasnik's words: "nothing had planted poetry in him, quite on the contrary, I am convinced that he succeeded in becoming his own work. [. . .] Yahya himself was poetry, a walking poem." (Krasnik 2020). While other obituaries recounted more complex versions of Hassan's story, they also operationalized a celebration of the revitalization of poetry as a cultural form ignited with transgressive radiance in the hands of an uncompromising 'outsider' (Farrokhzad 2020; Mygind 2020; Eika and Friis 2020). Many of them, again, depicted the poet as a self-sufficient, rebellious figure, who stood out from the crowd, saying what had to be said, by showing "no consideration for anyone whatsoever" (Nexø 2020, see also Pasternak 2020, Pedersen 2020). In contrast, his contributions to political debate and his short-lived, but spectacular, decision to go into politics with an ambition of making a change, were met with almost complete silence. Even when the long-running public service radio broadcast *P1Debat*, a political debate show in which Hassan had participated in numerous live debates, chose to dedicate an entire program to him after his passing, they invited literary critic Lillian Munk Rösing and poet and longtime friend of Hassan Mads Mygind for a conversation about his legacy in poetry. Despite the relative brevity and performative peculiarity of Hassan's political engagement, it is striking that not even a political debate program, which found reason to commemorate him, devoted any sustained attention to it. Especially after

his passing, what was, and still is, emphasized in Hassan's story is above all an aesthetic praise of his poetic innovativeness, his ability to twist and turn familiar tropes of Danish culture to make them appear unfamiliar, and a strikingly pathos-filled and selective narrative about his uncompromising dedication to poetry at the cost of everything else.

This striking tendency recalls, once more, Howard Becker's account of the social privileges assigned to artists as uniquely gifted individuals attached to a concept of art as a very specific institutionalized practice. In this context, statements made within the sphere of poetry are not actual political utterances and need not be taken seriously as such, since, to recall Auden once again "poetry makes nothing happen." The poet thus gains a free pass to say or do whatever he or she pleases but at the expense that everything is said in the fish tank of the art institution, which means that it is kept from actual impact. While Hassan needed protection from parts of his audience – the online trolls and the violent attackers, for example – who were not committed to this institutionalized practice, he also appears to have struggled with increasing desperation to break down its glass walls. First by going into politics, and later by briefly resuming activities on the hip hop scene he had been part of in his youth[17] and by relocating to Aarhus and reconnecting with his family and community of origin. But crucially also by explicitly insisting that poetry and politics were one united and serious struggle. Most articulated, perhaps in the hour-long speech he made to announce his candidacy for Nationalpartiet:

> the poem is dangerous for the one it is about. The satire is dangerous for the one who is ridiculed [. . .] I see no reason to paint a pretty picture of the world. So many artists put their art above anything and strive to be oh so controversial yet when they finally are, when their art feeds response it is suddenly no longer serious art. Then it is merely a harmless poem, nothing serious, just satire, fun and games, nothing to get upset about. But art in itself is an armed struggle (Hassan 2015).[18]

17 In December 2017, right after being released from a one year and nine-month prison sentence for gun violence, Hassan launched a new, gangsta style rap track on Youtube (Hassan 2017). Before his debut as a poet, he had been active in the Aarhus Vest hip hop community and recorded several tracks in collaboration with the rapper and producer Marwan and the rap group Pimp-A-Lot under the alias Natteravnen.

18 Danish original: "digtet er jo farlig for hvem, det bliver skrevet om. Satiren er farlig for hvem, der bliver til grin. [. . .] Jeg ser ingen grund til at male verden lyserød. De dersens kunstnere sætter deres kunst højest, de vil være åh så kontroversielle, og når de endelig bliver det, når deres kunst afføder reaktioner, så er det pludselig ikke kunst mere. Så er det bare et harmløst digt, ikke noget af betydelig alvor, bare satire, sjov og spas, ikke noget at blive sur over. Men kunsten er en væbnet kamp i sig selv."

This position, obviously, did not resonate much in the Danish literary circuit. Mads Mygind, for example, in a memorial essay to his friend, recounts his own conversation with Hassan on the topic, explicitly stating how difficult he found it to understand why Hassan made the decision to go into politics (Mygind 2020). In contrast, in an interview about Hassan's legacy in the Muslim community, the previous party leader of Nationalpartiet, Kashif Ahmad, appraise Hassan's insistent refusal to distinguish between his poetry and his politics, and suggests it shows his determination "to build bridges, complicate things and reconcile." (Lundberg and Jørgensen 2020, 8). It would be tempting, then, to claim that because the privileges did not apply outside the tank, Hassan was killed in his hazardous break-out attempt. Once you ask to be taken seriously as a political actor, the padding is removed. While such an observation may speak to the abiding discussion of the impotency of art as trapped within the institution, much more strikingly, it displays the arbitrariness of art's boundary-drawings when faced with our contemporary condition.

"[P]oetry is not a luxury" Audre Lorde wrote in her famous essay of the same title, a few years before the talk quoted at the beginning of this chapter. And she continued: "It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action." (Lorde 2017, 8). Yet, even if this belief in poetry as a political act, is behind her claim about poetry's accessibility for the unsupported individual, then paradoxically, this same conception of poetry has become a crucial component in the biopolitics of the literary circuit, active in legitimizing the fundamental connections and cuts through which it operates, providing "no infrastructure for some" insofar as it assures "accumulation for others" as pointed out by Vishmidt. In this way, Hassan's practice comes to perform the function of "infrastructural switch" for the circulation of a legitimizing narrative about the democratic diversity and inclusion of Danish society, which was in high political demand at the point of his debut. However, the infrastructural inversion of the literary circuit which Hassan's practice conducts, makes clear that this alleged lightness of poetry is not a material, in-born characteristic of the medium, or a counter-hegemonic potential it bears within. Rather, it is an infrastructurally afforded construction, unceasingly co-produced by agents across the literary circuit, and vital for the maintenance of the author as an individualized figure to hold juridically, socially, financially, aesthetically but – crucially – *not* politically responsible for his or her own life and opinions (Daugaard et.al 2020).

The exploding body of the poet

In the end, however, it is by revisiting the other story for which Hassan's practice served as a switch – that is, the media historical narrative inserting the continued and enduring relevance of poetry within a postdigital media condition – that we find our cue to revising the theoretical vocabulary around poetry. Writing about distributed authorship within the popular genres of fantasy and crime-fiction, literary and media theorist Per Israelson stresses how literature has, in spite of appearances, always been inscribed into an ecology of different media systems, and how it has in practice been made in "feedback loops with the desires and needs of a specific, historical public." Yet in the media system of the past few decades, something has changed:

> It is the intensity, the velocity, and the extent of the organization and feedback loops of the media system which is more extensive today than ever before. That, if nothing else, has been revealed by the last decades of digitalization. A literature produced outside of the system's feedback loops and mechanisms of regulation simply does not exist, and it never has. (Israelson 2018, 28)[19]

In Hassan's case we clearly experience this change in velocity and intensity, providing both the sense of constant acceleration and the sheer magnitude of the interactions and responses his practice has afforded. This condition, in combination with the literary circuit's persisting individualizing mechanism, which holds the poet solely responsible turns poetry into a potentially toxic form. Not least for the poet, who is held accountable for an entire ecology of activities existing around the poetry published in his or her name. Through the literary circuit, poetry connects to an apparatus of archiving and canonization which nurtures its future significance and preservation. In comparison with the flow of online media, the relative endurance of print-based poetry, keeps the poet exposed and responsible, even beyond death. To return once more to Auden, who was commemorating his late friend – the Irish nationalist poet W.B. Yeats who had taken a more political-activist stance towards poetry – and addressing the endurance of poetry over that of a single human life, when he wrote: "poetry makes nothing happen: it survives."

As we have seen, the strongest paradox around Hassan's practice is the way it – by means of its infrastructural poetics – demonstrates how poetry is distributed and amplified by agents across the literary circuit, how it is co-generated by feedback loops connected to national and global information systems, and yet how persistently it remains received through the interface of the individual poet.

19 Translated from the Swedish by the author.

Already "LONG POEM" ("LANGDIGT") from Hassan's debut notoriously splits its speaker into two pronouns – "ME I" ("MIG JEG") – which run through the poem's enunciation in a stylized miming of the 'broken' Danish spoken in the social housing areas where Hassan grew up. It also suggests the difficult experience of containing both "ghetto witness" and poet voice within a single individual (Rösing 2013). In another long poem, "DEMOCRATRIP," ("DEMOKRATUR") from *YAHYA HASSAN 2* the speaker's individuality is virtually dissolved as hundreds of titles, job descriptions, and social roles pile up, referring either to various agents pulling and pushing at him from all sides, or becoming attached as predicates to the speaker himself. All mixed in with each other they multiply him into occupying every position he is confronted with, which finally culminates in the experience of a body on the verge of explosion: "MY OWN MOUTH DOES NOT COVER FOR ME / THE ASSHOLE IS UNABLE TO KEEP ME TOGETHER"[20]

Clearly, in a media system where poetic fragments and images can spread like vira, it is no longer viable for one individual to be held responsible for every effect produced and set in motion by his work. As Easterling suggested: "However deliberate the activities of the switch, it cannot control all of its own consequences any more than one could account for every use of the water flowing through a dam." Consequently, it appears imperative to move beyond the damage to the central authorial body that Hassan's story comes to represent. I therefore suggest drawing the outline of a new concept of poetry; one which loosens the ties of individual brilliance and authorship and exists both within and beyond literature's established institutions.

Beyond the ultimate horizon of the institution

In this chapter, I have used the case of Yahya Hassan's turbulent career to consider how the conditions of producing, distributing, and receiving literature has been fundamentally altered by computational media's impact on the printing industry, and the media ecological mesh entangling contemporary literature and the digitized public sphere. The intersection of the postdigital condition and the minoritized author reveals the inadequacies of the traditional print-cultural framework through which we approach poetry. These include the conception which in infrastructural practice continues to categorize poetry as a discourse anchored in the author's physical body. Because discursive infrastructure strongly impacts material conditions of living, such conceptual inadequacies can produce

20 "MIN EGEN MUND DÆKKER IKKE OVER MIG / RØVHULLET HOLDER IKKE SAMMEN PÅ MIG" 33.

devastating consequences for poetic agents entering the literary circuit. To me, this indicates why a revision of the theoretical vocabulary of poetry is so urgently needed – especially when it comes to the question of authorial sovereignty.

I will end, then, by stressing the critical potential that Hassan's infrastructural poetics released as it insistently pressure-tested the institutionally drawn borders of art and poetry towards politics and revealed their contingency. However, the work's shattering critique of the Danish literary institutions does not equal a simple dismissal of these institutions. With Vishmidt I would suggest reading the work's critique of its conditions of production, distribution, and reception as infrastructural rather than institutional. While Hassan's case has explicitly led to self-reflection and betterment initiatives within the institutions he was connected to, including diversity policies within publishing and policies of content moderation and protection of contributors by various news platforms,[21] such initiatives also stick with the institution as their "ultimate horizon" and thus run the risk of reproducing a logic of "customer satisfaction policies" (Vishmidt 2022, 30). Still, because the critique of the literary circuit conducted by Hassan's practice is not institutional but infrastructural, it "takes the institution as a historical and contingent nexus of material conditions amenable to re-arrangement through struggle and re-distribution" (Vishmidt 2022, 30). This is why Hassan's practice also paved the way for frail transformations of the field, which he himself did not live to see through. As I have addressed elsewhere, in a comparative analysis of Hassan's and Danish-Iranian poet Shadi Angelina Bazeghi's encounter with the literary circuit, not only racialization and postmigrant affiliations but also class and gender affected the amplification patterns of Hassan's poetry (Daugaard 2023). While the 'macho' quality implied by his criminal record (which included a restraining order towards an ex-girlfriend) agreed perfectly with the mythology of solitary authorial sovereignty (while dressing it in newish clothes, i.e. 'the underdog', 'the working class hero', 'the gangster from the ghetto'), Bazeghi, whose poetry was – and remains – much less persona-centered and more explicitly multi-lingual, and who herself engaged extensively in translations of Iranian poetry and communal initiatives such as editing journals and arranging poetry festivals, points to other ways of connecting with and moving through the literary circuit.[22]

21 For instance, initiatives have been announced by Gyldendal and *Politiken* with specific reference to Hassan. Literary editor Simon Pasternak describes Gyldendal's policies in a conversation with the newspaper *Information* (Nikolajsen 2022).

22 While Bazeghi's careful attention to transport the heritage of a proud tradition of Persian poetry into her poetic practice stood in immediate contrast to what was circulated as Hassan's condemnation of his community of origin early in his career, both his rhetoric toward Islamic history as he became politically active (see Hassan 2015) and how he was embraced by the Mus-

The infrastructural critique implied by Hassan's practice – and emanating from its transversal connectiveness – has been taken up and extended by other writers (Sabah 2020; Langvad 2020; Farrokhzad 2019; 2020). In turn, other artists and cultural workers have worked for a more sustainable poetics of minoritized writers in a Danish context, building stronger infrastructures of communal support operating independently of – or transversally to – established institutions. Over the past half decade, a number of separatist or semi-separatist initiatives for writers and artists marginalized across intersectional parameters such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and physical and mental ability has been initiated, including bookstores and literary platforms (Det Lilla Rum, (Un)told pages), journals (*Abhivyakti*, *Sorg og Samfund*), artist's and writer's collectives (Marronage, FCNN, Nellakredsen) and unions (The UNION – Cultural Workers Union for BIPOCS in Denmark).[23] Positioned alongside and in critical dialogue with institutional diversity policies, such initiatives work to mobilize an inter-Scandinavian solidarity and sense of community in order to reduce the loneliness and isolation that Hassan's example illustrates. If they can provide a more supportive environment for the steadily increasing number of non-white writers entering the Danish literary scene by treating literature and books less as a "training for solitary self-sufficiency" and more "as a means to connect the human beings who exchange them" (Price 2019, 9), they are perhaps pointing towards a less exclusive and individualized conception of poetic talent better suited for dealing with poetry in a postdigital condition.

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lim community at the end of his life and after his death (including the inscription on his tombstone: "Palestinian poet") suggest a more connective approach.

23 See Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024 for an account of some of these initiatives and the challenges they address. See also Kitti 2022.

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Kristine Ringsager and Katrine Wallevik

Gendered Infrastructures of the Danish Music Industry: From Disorientation to Feminist Collective Capacity

Introduction: "A wave washing over the Danish music industry"

On 2 March 2023, the Danish association for women-, trans-, and non-binary identified music professionals, *Musikbevægelsen af 2019* (The Music Movement of 2019), won a newly established music award, the BRIGHT Award, which is given to a person or actor who has made an exceptional contribution to promoting equity and diversity in the music industry. At the so-called *GAFFA* Music Award Show 2023, chairperson Gry Harrit, who has had a long career in the Danish music industry, thanked the jury and the audience with these words:

> The legalization of porn over 50 years ago started a celebration in the advertising industry, and I have – in my life – witnessed a complete extreme sexualization and pornification of the music industry. And I have witnessed a music industry that – in the fight for big money – has narrowed the mainstream field more and more. And in the heat of the battle, gendered norms have actually prevented the market from working. We have a culture in the music industry with unpaid labor, with more and more "naked ass" [*bar røv*], and zero respect for either music or its creators. In a way, the music industry has actually undermined itself. [. . .] The movement is much bigger and goes much deeper into Danish society than just the music industry. The energy is so strong that it will find its own dynamics. Its own markets. Its own mainstream. Its own new business models. So, do we want to watch, or do we want to join in? We want to join in. [. . .] So let's do something about it. Together. All of us. (Harrit 2023)[1]

The Music Movement of 2019 includes partly an online community, a closed Facebook group, with more than 2800 members and an independent (but intersecting) association with fewer (but paying) members. All members of both the online forum and the association identify as women, trans-, or non-binary, and it is stated on their Facebook page that "[t]he group is for girls, women and gender

1 Translated from Danish into English by the authors.

Note: This chapter is a slightly revised version of the article "Other Ways of Knowing: From Disorientation to Feminist Collective Capacity," originally published in the special issue of *Popular Music and Society* titled "Gender and Popular Music Knowledge" (2024).

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minorities – so not for cis men, even if they are curious and agree with the purpose of the group" (Musikbevægelsen af 2019). The BRIGHT Award is not the first accolade the Music Movement has received. In 2021, the community won the prestigious Steppeulvene Music Award for "Best initiative of the year." In this context, it was described by the magazine *GAFFA* as "a wave washing over the Danish music industry" (Frank 2021). The impact that the Music Movement has had on the Danish music industry was echoed by the jury of the BRIGHT award 2023, who justified the Music Movement as the winner by highlighting how they have managed to "create a safe space in the Danish music industry, set a sharp agenda and organize events that focus on both problems and solutions," and in doing so they had "brought the debate out of the shadows of social media and into the venues" (qtd. in Svidt 2023). In light of the above celebrations, this article will look at the knowledge work that has taken place in and around the Music Movement as an important part of a feminist transformative movement to change the Danish music industry.

The Music Movement emerged from a Danish music scene that is currently struggling with issues of gender inequality and inequity for minoritized groups. Several surveys initiated by Danish music institutions and trade associations have within the past 10 years shown how people who identify as women (as well as gender minorities) are under-represented and face inequity in almost every area of the music industry in Denmark (e.g. Dansk Live 2018; Dansk Musiker Forbund et al. 2017; Koda 2020; NIRAS et al. 2012). Within the past few years – since the Danish #MeToo movement took off in 2020 – various Danish musicians identifying as women have, additionally, publicly told of an industry that is characterized by experiences of sexism, ageism, and lack of diversity. This has led to several efforts for greater equality and gender balance within the industry, such as ten so-called "2030-goals" put up by several Danish trade and genre associations aiming at creating gender balance (Dansk Komponistforening et al. 2021); internal institutional diversity sounding boards; a specific public service focus on gender within the Danish Broadcasting Corporation; and two new qualitative based surveys on gender (im)balance in the Danish music industry, published in 2022 (Kvinfo and Analyse & Tal 2022; Sarltvit, Glahn-Abrahamsen and Fruergaard 2022). Besides this, several separatist communities and informal networks for artists identifying as women, trans-, or non-binary, as well as various community-based educational music projects targeting girls and gender minorities have been established. Promoted as alternative (safer) spaces for professional networking, knowledge sharing, promotion, and learning processes, such communities are actively committed to facilitating (other) opportunities for their members and to reflecting, challenging, and potentially restructuring the gendered infrastructural norms of the music industry. The Music Movement is one of these communities.

With a particular focus on questions about affect and transformation, this article examines how the Music Movement emerged as a consequence of collective reflections on affective experiences of inequalities and organized (gendered) expectations, and how the Music Movement facilitates a new infrastructuring of the music industry that privileges women and gender minoritized professionals. Based on ethnographic material, such as participant observation of, for example, network arrangements and panel discussions, interviews with some of the members,[2] and media coverage of public events and issues of gender in the music industry, we discuss questions such as: What experiences of the gendered infrastructure of the Danish music industry prompted a need for intervention? How is a collective body of knowledge that privileges women, trans-, and non-binary music professionals' ways of understanding the industry generated in the context of the Music Movement? And in what ways does the Music Movement work as a counter-infrastructural development that currently challenges the dominant (male-dominated) infrastructure system within the Danish music industry?

In what follows, we first examine how the music industry can be understood as an infrastructure. Second, we look at some of the experiences of disorientation and active forms of regulation experienced by members of the Music Movement. Finally, we explore how the Music Movement can be understood as a feminist hack of music industry infrastructures that has enabled its members not only to navigate the power structures enacted through gendered expectations in their work-related activities, but also to facilitate change at various levels of the broader Danish music industry.

Infrastructuring the Danish Music Industry

> [. . .] when the men asked if they should also have their own separatist space or "closed club," I always replied with a wink: "You already have one. It's called the music industry!" (Cecilie, pers. comm. 2022)

As one of the founding members, Cecilie, recalls in the quote above, the Danish music industry was perceived by the gender minoritized professionals who co-founded the Music Movement as a "closed club," a professional space or system that privileged cis male identified professionals. The Music Movement emerged as an alternative network or space for women and gender minoritized music profes-

2 All interviewees are anonymized by pseudonyms. All interviews, chat messages etc. were conducted in Danish, and quotes were translated into English by the authors.

sionals. In line with this idea, the basic assumption underlying our approach in this article is that the popular music industry – understood as a network of people, companies, organizations, institutions, and NGOs working to create artistic and economic value (Williamson and Cloonan 2007) – is not a neutral background, but an infrastructure that privileges certain bodies and embodied conventions while limiting others.

Hence, while discussions about "gender inequality" and "gender balance" in Danish public discourse often end up in debates about increasing the number of women in areas where they are underrepresented, we believe that it is crucial to focus on issues of infrastructure, both at the informational, organizational, and social levels. We suggest that it is insufficient to focus *only* on increasing the number of women in areas where they are under-represented, such as the music industry, because this leaves the patriarchal infrastructure unchallenged. By approaching the Danish music industry with an infrastructural attention, we shift the analytical focus away from the numbers and the skills, talents, and productions of individuals towards their embeddedness and orientations in social, economic, historical, and gendered conventions. By doing so, we add a Danish infrastructural perspective to the various international studies that have shown how people who identify as women face inequality in almost all areas of the music industry (e.g. Berkers and Schaap 2018; Born and Devine 2015; Farrugia 2012; Hill 2016; Lieb 2018; Raine and Strong 2018; Reddington 2007; Ringsager, Hasse and Seerup 2022, "FOCUS"; (eds.) Ringsager, Hasse and Seerup 2022, "PEER"; Strong and Raine 2019; Warwick and Adrian 2016; Wallevik 2022; Whiteley 2000; Werner, Gadir and de Boise 2020; Wolfe 2019).

While the term "infrastructure" is often used to refer to physical and technical connectivity, communication, and exchange (Graham and Marvin 2001), it is important to emphasize that in our approach it also includes the norms, cultural models and stereotypes, techniques, information practices, legal instruments, and social relations that underpin sociality and political belonging (Butler 2016; Easterling 2014). Furthermore, we agree with Star's observation that rather than producing an endless list of things that can be categorized under the heading of "infrastructure," ethnographic accounts speak more to the ability to discern when and how the infrastructural quality of things comes into play, and to map the different kinds of systems they underpin (Star 1999; see also Knox and Gambino 2022).

Typically, infrastructures are designed to divert attention from themselves and are usually only recognized when they cease to function. As the architect and urban scholar Keller Easterling points out, this, however, makes contemporary infrastructural spaces "the secret weapons of the most powerful" because they "orchestrate activities that can remain unstated but are nevertheless consequential" (Easterling 2014, 15). Thus, when producer and musician Cecilie in the above quote points (or "winks") to the Danish music industry as a pre-existing "closed

club" or separatist community for cis male identified professionals, she is drawing attention back to (and "wording"/"worlding") the unspoken and invisible character of the industry's current (male-dominated) infrastructure and its orchestrated activities. Easterling suggests the concept of "disposition" to uncover the "accidental, covert, or stubborn forms of power [. . .] hiding in the folds of infrastructure space" (Easterling 2014, 73). Disposition can be understood as the result of different "active forms" (which can be technological, organizational, or social, such as multipliers, switches, or stories) moving through an organization, and in this sense, it describes something of what the organization or system *does*, including activities that may deviate from the stated intention (Easterling 2014, 72, 92). In other words, just as a round ball and an inclined plane suggest direction, disposition locates activity in the latent tendencies of a thing (or a being) and its interaction with other things (and beings). In that sense, as Easterling argues, the *active forms* are like powerful bits of code that can hack the infrastructural operating system (Easterling 2014, 92).

Several other scholars have also shown how the standards, classifications, and knowledge systems that frame and shape infrastructures are both informed by, and in turn inform, relations of inclusion and exclusion (Bowker and Star 1999; Lampland and Star 2009; Star and Ruhleder 1996; Edwards 2003). Anthropologist Susan Leigh Star, among others, has noted how "[o]ne person's infrastructure is another's topic, or difficulty" (Star 1999, 380). She therefore calls for analyses that identify not only the "master narrative" of an infrastructural space, but also its "others," just as she encourages, like Cecilie in the above quote, making visible the invisible work that infrastructures do that is not immediately apparent (Star 1999, 385).

As anthropologist Hannah Knox and human geographer Evelina Gambino (2022) have argued, ethnographies of infrastructure can show how overlooked objects and networks offer exciting insights into the processes that make up social life. Following this thought, we approach the Music Movement of 2019 ethnographically, and look at it as part of a counter-political form of infrastructure development that has emerged in recent years as alternatives to the dominant (male-dominated) infrastructure system within the Danish music industry. We explore how women professionals in the industry perceive, experience, and know the active forms they are disposed to when navigating the infrastructural nodes (such as stages, backstage rooms, rehearsal spaces, (social) media etc.), objects (such as instruments, equipment, technologies etc.), and processes (such as recording, composing, rehearsing, networking, touring, signing a contract etc.) in their work and everyday life. Furthermore, we examine how these experiences come to orient, position, and affect people and bodies in different ways and, in this sense, how power is enacted and operates in the context of the Danish music

industry. Additionally, we discuss how people who experience being othered within the industry find ways to tinker, rework, alter, or hack the infrastructure of the music industry in order to forge not only new material arrangements, but also alternative anti-sexist ways of imagining possible futures and knowing and being in popular music and its industry.

Entering the music movement: Entering a queered space

The Music Movement of 2019 was initiated as a reaction to the feeling of repeatedly being wronged by the structures of the existing systems of music production. The group began as a private Messenger thread discussing the fact that the music organization Gramex's annual lists of the 10 most played Danish musicians, artists, and songs on Danish radio in the previous year (and for the third year in a row) consisted exclusively of men. Starting with a handful of women and non-binary identified professionals working within the music industry that shared their frustrations over the lists, more and more were invited into the Messenger thread – people who subsequently followed suit over to the Facebook group that was initiated in June 2019.

Therefore, as a starting point, we consider the movement as a network based on what Clare Hemmings has called "affective solidarity," which emerged from a gathering around "affective dissonance" (Hemmings 2012). In her introduction of the concept "affective solidarity," Hemmings argues that the counterpart of "affective solidarity," what she calls "affective dissonance," is a necessary component. As she elaborates:

> [. . .] in order to know differently we have to feel differently. Feeling that something is amiss in how one is recognised, feeling an ill fit with social descriptions, feeling undervalued, feeling that same sense in considering others; all these feelings can produce a politicised impetus to change that foregrounds the relationship between ontology and epistemology precisely because of the experience of their dissonance. (Hemmings 2012, 150)

Hemmings speaks of a dissonance between ontology and epistemology that produces feelings or affects[3] that can generate "politicised impetus to change." Thus,

3 While the distinction between "affect" as pre-conceptual and pre-discursive and "emotion" as conceptual and discursive is essential for some scholars (e.g. Massumi 2002), we draw on scholars from the intersectional fields of feminist, queer, and post/de-colonial theory who are more likely to use affect and emotion interchangeably. In doing so, we agree with scholars, such as Sara

according to Hemmings, affective dissonance, such as feelings of not fitting into social conditions and of discrepancies between actual experienced worlds and common self-perceptions, carries a specific political potential to be transformed into affective solidarity, as feminist collective action. In other words, affective solidarity becomes "a way of focusing on modes of engagement that start from the affective dissonance that feminist politics *necessarily begins from*" (Hemmings 2012, 148, original italics)

According to the Danish sociologist Ea Høg Utoft, one of the biggest problems with gender equality in Denmark is what she calls the "post-feminist double bind" (Utoft 2020, 93). On one hand, through common perceptions, self-understandings, and national narratives, we iterate our feminist victories of the past and conclude that we have achieved gender equality and are no longer in need of feminism. Those narratives and self-perceptions make it hard, on the other hand, to acknowledge and recognize everyday experiences with sexism in practice. Stories of sexism, Utoft argues, are likely to be miscredited and rendered uninteresting or untrustworthy (Utoft 2020, 93).

It was such experiences of discrepancies between society's self-perception and actual individual (mutual) experiences in practice that gave rise to frustration among the "handful of music professionals" and initiated collective action. Experiences of affective dissonance – of being (repeatedly) discriminated against and treated unequally (in contrast to repeated narratives of Denmark as a gender-equal society) – were the starting point of the Music Movement of 2019.

At first, the group was named "Sisterhood Music Movement." However, due to resistance from some to the narrow category of "sisterhood," and in order to embrace wider identities, the name was quickly changed to "The Music Movement of 2019." As the woman-identified musician and producer, Charlie, said to the music magazine *GAFFA*:

> I felt a bit of resistance in the beginning of the group's [the Music Movement's] existence, because I was afraid that it would turn into another women's network that excluded gender minorities. Because then we had not moved on at all. But somehow something happened that made this group just work. (qtd. in Frank 2021)

Ahmed, who have argued that "the distinction between affect/emotion can under-describe the work of emotions, which involve forms of intensity, bodily orientation, and direction that are not simply about 'subjective content' or qualification of intensity. Emotions are not 'after-thoughts' but shape how bodies are moved by the worlds they inhabit" (Ahmed 2010b, 230). We use the term "affect" to denote a generic category of emotions and feelings, including embodied and sensory feelings, through which we experience the world and through which worlds, subjects, and objects are enacted and produced.

Another of the founding members of the Music Movement, Anne, also recalls the in-depth discussions that took place in the early meetings about who should (and should not) be included in the community. And, as she puts it, "it was kind of decided that it had to be inclusive from the start, because otherwise we'd be doing what we didn't think was cool, right?" (Anne 2022, pers. comm.). Such inclusivity proved successful, as "The Music Movement of 2019" turned out to be a very popular social media group that grew quickly and gained members from all over Denmark.

Reflective of its inclusive approach to gender minoritized music professionals, when entering the community, potential members are offered guides and (gentle) instructions. When completing a membership application, potential members are asked about their position in the music industry, their knowledge about the movement, as well as their pronoun. When the request has been accepted and the new member is allowed into the group, they will see that the group practices a code of conduct that explicitly calls for gender-neutral language, as expressed in the Facebook group's guidelines. Those guidelines explicitly ask members to use gender neutral greetings such as "hey homies" or "hi people" instead of "hi girls," "hi guys," "hi sisters," or "hey queens" in order to create an "inclusive and welcoming environment." Besides encouraging gender-neutral language, the guidelines encourage members to "speak lovingly and supportively to each other," and to create a kind environment where all information is confidential. In addition to clear guidelines on gender identification and the avoidance of heteronormative language, it is also made clear that it is not permitted to use the group to promote one's own projects. This also helps to blur conventional "straight" dualisms such as amateur/professional or performer/producer, and to avoid hierarchies of, for example, genre, age, or commercial success.

The clear intentions to be "inclusive from the start" and the explicit guidelines working to break down "straight" dualisms and hierarchies can be understood by turning to Sara Ahmed's thoughts on the importance of paying attention to a "queer phenomenology." Ahmed describes how it is by supporting "those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange and out of place" (Ahmed 2006b, 570) that one can change the existing structures or infrastructures (or, as she puts it, "queer the straight"). As she further notes, "[t]he table is assembled around the support it gives" (Ahmed 2006b, 551), hereby suggesting that if you wish to change the table (and thus the infrastructure) one way of doing it is to "support" the queer. By avoiding traditional dualisms, power hierarchies, and "straight" infrastructures, the Music Movement can be seen to be practicing strategies of "queering" space, with the result that it appears as a space and platform for interaction that is very different from other online and physical platforms and networks within the established music industry in Denmark.

Experiences of (Dis)orientations

Since its beginning, the Music Movement has been a platform and a community where individual experiences are shared and negotiated: a space where, according to Charlie, "there is room to have the difficult conversations, share knowledge and experiences and basically meet each other with respect in a professional manner" (qtd. in Frank 2021). Many of the "difficult conversations" and experiences that are dealt with in and around the Music Movement relate to feelings of being "out of place" or "disoriented" in specific situations and social music professional spaces. In her discussion of how "orientations" matter, Sara Ahmed has described how the world takes shape through the contact between people and objects. Orientations are organized rather than casual and, thus, they shape what becomes socially as well as bodily given. Not only do our bodies orient to things, but spaces orient to particular bodies, making some bodies feel more "in place" than others. By indicating that some bodies are in place, this leaves others with a feeling of what Ahmed refers to as being "out of place" (Ahmed 2006a, 158; Ahmed 2010a, 254). For bodies that are out of place in the spaces in which they gather, the experience can be disorientating. Moments of disorientation are bodily experiences that "throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground," as Ahmed puts it (Ahmed 2006a, 157). And the "affect" of disorientation can include experiences of feeling oblique, odd, or even disturbed (Ahmed 2006a, 170). Where the bodily feeling of disorientation can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground in ways that might persist and become a crisis, the feeling itself might also pass as "the ground returns or as we return to the ground" (Ahmed 2006a, 157).

Within the context of the Music Movement, individual experiences of being "out of place" or bodily feelings of disorientation are transformed into a collective body of knowledge, ideas, and initiatives that privilege the experiences of women and gender minoritized professionals in the music industry. In our conversations with women music professionals, it was a common theme that in their working lives and in their musical collaborations with cis male identified colleagues, certain expectations were placed on them because of their gender. Many described experiences of being regulated, disciplined, or censored in relation to their behavior as "woman in quite the right way" when participating in male-dominated collaborations or music scenes. We now dwell on some of the shared experiences of being subjected or disposed to the pre-existing active forms and dispositions in the male-dominated industry. These are examples of experiences of vulnerability that are reworked in the context of the Music Movement.

To "know your place"

Several women and other gender minoritized musicians experience being labeled as "difficult" (in contrast to their cis male identified colleagues) when they have been highly engaged in their own professional work, for example by expressing opinions about the production processes of their music or how to brand themselves as artists. As the musician Birgitte, an active member of the Music Movement, who was signed to a major international music label, put it in one of the episodes of the 2023 podcast series *Tekla:*[4]

> I have definitely experienced being labeled as difficult when I had expressed opinions about me and my own music, and I didn't want to compromise on my stuff. Some people took offense to that. And uhhhh, that's why some people thought I wasn't welcome. ("Momentum" 16:35–16:56)

Birgitte was, as she describes, labeled "difficult" when expressing her opinions about herself as an artist and about her music and, as she further explains, the "difficulty" led to experiences of being "frozen out" by her professional connections, such as not being invited to her own P3 Award winning party.[5] In her opinion, this is related to the fact that she is a woman:

> I feel 100% that it has something to do with the fact that I'm a woman. And I've thought a lot about it in the years since: why is it the way it is? And what I've come to realize is that there's no room for women to be . . . whole persons. ("Momentum" 17:10–17:25)

In terms of artistic expression, musicians also describe how perceived feminine characteristics expressed in music are corrected and altered, either through direct censorship or self-censorship. At a panel discussion, the rapper Elise recounted an episode in a recording studio where her producer, who thought her voice was too light, insisted that she recorded her vocals while lying on the floor in a fetal position so that she could sing with a "darker" voice. However, as she went on to say, this backfired at live concerts because the audience could not understand why she did not sound like she did on the record (Elise 2023, fieldnotes). Another woman-identified musician, Anne, also explained that in order to get high marks at the music conservatory, she had to "cut out everything that was characterized as 'girlish'." She continues, "So, everything that was bright and soft

4 Tekla is a podcast that thematizes issues of women composers/musicians through the story of the great Danish composer Tekla Griebell Wandall (1866–1940).

5 Birgitte received the P3 Award 2011. The P3 Prize is the main prize (worth 100,000 kr/10,000 GBP) awarded at the annual P3 Award Show, P3 Gold. P3 is the national radio station for mainstream music in Denmark.

and smooth, and a bright voice and stuff like that. I had to just cut it out. Because that was just like 'no-goes'" (Anne 2022, pers. comm.).

Finally, some of our interlocutors' experience being excluded from music communities or collaborations if they become a professional "threat" to their cis male identified colleagues. Elise, for example, explained how she was called "fucking dope" by her cis male identified peers when she started going to MC battles, but experienced exclusion from the battle community (both from fellow rappers and the audience) when she began to win over her cis male identified counterparts in the battles. In her interpretation, this is clearly related to the fact that, as a woman in a male-dominated scene (such as the battle rap scene), she has to "know her place" and, as she put it, that place is somewhere in between being neither "too much" nor "too little" (Elise 2023, fieldnotes).

As described above, the women and gender minoritized musicians we have met in our fieldwork encounter "unwritten rules," as the rapper Elise put it, about how to behave professionally: "rules" that have to be learned and followed in order to be accepted in male-dominated music communities, collaborations, and networks. Elise, Anne, and Birgitte feel that in order to be accepted in specific music communities, scenes, and collaborations, they have to shape themselves (and cut things out) according to the expectations of the (mainly cis male identified) gatekeepers: they cannot be too much or too good, nor can they be too little. With Ahmed, it could be said that the infrastructural nodes, objects, and processes that are part of the professional spaces in which they participate orient their bodies, and leave them with a bodily feeling of being "out of place." Obeying the regulating and limiting "unwritten rules," and thus demonstrating that they "know their place," is experienced as the only possible pathway to avoid being excluded or labeled as "difficult" or "too much." Drawing on anthropologist Cathrine Hasse, they have to "follow the direction of the [cultural] models" (Hasse 2015, 240) and shape themselves into the expected images: images that they feel are attached to their feminized subject positions, shaped by the patriarchal infrastructural system.

Doing care work and smelling good

While some ways of being "a woman" (or anything other than cis male identified) can present challenges to collaboration and networking for women-identified musicians, there are other ways and behaviors that are more valued. However, these are often associated with the identity of "woman" in a stereotypical sense, rather than with a "music professional" identity. According to musician and singer Alice, women-identified professionals in the industry are often either given special

treatment according to "classic gender roles," where, for example, "the door is opened for you," or they are expected to take on additional functions beyond their professional contribution:

> [. . .] when you're out playing, you bring a packed lunch. That's another function you can have. Or "it smells better in the bus" or something like that, right? [laughs] And then there's also . . . you have all sorts of other functions besides being a musician. It's all wrapped up in something weird like that. (Alice 2023, pers. comm.)

Alice's notions of how she (and other women in the industry) are often assigned roles such as "fragrance dispensers" or "lunchbox providers" resonate with popular music scholar Emília Barna's findings on how women are required to perform specific gendered roles and functions when pursuing a career in the Hungarian music industry (Barna 2022). Drawing on Arlie Russell Hochschild's (1983) theory of "emotional labour," Barna argues that while all musicians and music industry workers constantly negotiate the boundaries between professional and personal labour in creative collaborations, women in particular are required to perform additional "emotional labour" to build networks and maintain friendships with cis male identified musicians (Barna 2022).

This can be seen in the act of taking on "care work" or a "motherly role" – such as bringing the lunch – but, as Barna notes, it can also be performed as a kind of "emotional neutrality" (Barna 2022, 121) that women identified music professionals perform when they tolerate objectification and stereotypification from cis male identified professionals. Pressure to perform "emotional neutrality" was described by many of the women we encountered in our fieldwork. Some described, for instance, how photographers encourage them to make certain facial expressions, lip-positions, and body postures. As Barna argues, in doing so, women unwittingly contribute to the consolidation of their subordinate status in the industry and the "masculine atmosphere" that pervades the music industry in general (Barna 2022, 121).

Becoming someone "you don't want to be"

Another recurrent theme in our empirical material is the experience of lack of recognition and the expectation that women and other gender minoritized musicians will not be able to perform at the same level as their cis male identified colleagues. Echoing the view of several of her women identified colleagues, Birgitte explains how, when she released her first album, she was met with suspicion when she told people that she had not only written all the songs, but had also co-produced them. She recalls some of the reactions: "But that can't be . . . there must have been someone else . . . some men involved" ("Momentum" 25:00–25:20). As she goes on to

explain, this led not only to feelings of not being recognized, but also to a change in her own behavior that made her uncomfortable:

> I really felt that I was being written out of history in front of my eyes, and it was really violent! What's so uncomfortable is that in order not to be written out of history, you have to constantly draw attention to yourself. And that's not cool! You don't want to be that person. ("Momentum" 25:20–25:30)

Thus, for Birgitte, the fear and anxiety of not being recognized led her to behave in ways she did not actually want to. Similarly, a woman-identified producer, Sanne, recounted numerous experiences in the studio where her cis male identified co-producer, without any communication or mutual agreement, felt entitled to simply "take over" the producer's chair and thus take control of the sound desk. As she said in a panel discussion, "So what do you do? Do you kick the chair over and take it, or . . .?" (Sanne 2022, fieldnotes)

Such feelings of having to fight for space among cis male-identified professionals who "naturally" feel entitled, and the fear or anxiety of not being professionally recognized by (male) colleagues, also mean that many of those we have met in our fieldwork feel that there is no room for failure when working in male-dominated music communities. As the musician Anne points out, she has often felt that she "couldn't really ask anyone about anything." As she puts it:

> You can't really ask, because you can't say: "pssst, what's a plug-in?" Because then it would be something like: "You don't know what a plug-in is!," right? And that's what the boys have had. They have dared to ask each other. But there weren't any girls . . . really no other girls. And maybe they didn't know either. And maybe they didn't talk to each other. (Anne 2022, pers. comm.)

Such experiences of being pushed into unwanted positions and into degrading and humiliating situations have led for many to a sense of shame at being perceived as "disruptive," "unqualified," and "different," what we might describe as affects of disorientation (Ahmed 2006a). Furthermore, such experiences seem to lead to a strong sense of loneliness and exclusion from the professional environment.

Being the only

The experience of having to struggle for a very narrow space is not limited to intimate working relationships with *men* in rehearsal rooms, studios, and on stage. Most of our interlocutors also talk about feelings of loneliness, isolation, and, in retrospect, shame about how they have behaved towards other *women* when nav-

igating the infrastructures of the music industry. The experienced musician, Susan, explains in an interview with the music magazine *GAFFA*:

> [. . .] there's only room for one woman at the top at a time, so you have to compete fiercely against each other. During my time at the top of the charts, I didn't have much contact with other women in the industry. (qtd. in Frank 2021)

In several of the conversations we have had during our fieldwork, the so-called "queen bee phenomenon" was brought up by our interlocutors as a lonely, vulnerable, and shameful social structure to be embedded in. The concept of the "queen bee" is a derogatory term originally applied to women who achieved success in traditionally male-dominated fields, and women who have distanced themselves from other women in the workplace in order to succeed. However, as we find in our fieldwork, the queen bee effect is not the course or pathway to gender inequality (like "women holding other women down"), but a consequence of highly "sexist organizational cultures," where "the pervasiveness of organizational gender stereotypes [. . .] obstruct women in reaching career success" (Derks et al. 533).

An example of the infrastructuring that sustains the "queen bee phenomenon" is festival programming with only room for one or two women headliners. As the musician Helene puts it: "When we can see on the festival posters that there is only one seat [for women] [. . .] it's really about holding on to the place you've been given" (Helene 2023, fieldnotes). As she further notes, this discourages collaborative behaviors of helping, featuring or promoting other women colleagues. Furthermore, the aforementioned musician Birgitte explains how, in her opinion, there is a tendency for music corporate systems to "coach" women artists by constantly emphasizing "who your competitors are and who you should be better than" ("Lyden af en kvindebevægelse" 10:45–10:52). Finally, the creation of a very narrow space for not cis male identified artists in the concrete landscape of the music industry is reinforced, according to Helene, by the tendency of music journalists to compare women artists with other women artists, thus relegating the women arena to a kind of "side business" neatly separated from the "real" music industry:

> One place you see this "playing women against each other" a lot is, for example, music reviews. So often when you get a good review, then it can be at the "expense" of someone else: "She's certainly better than that one, or her." (Helene 2023, fieldnotes)

In this sense, festival planning, corporate coaching, and music criticism all function as active gendered forms of infrastructure that contribute to both a sidetracking of women musicians away from the "real" music industry and a harsh culture of competition among both men and women music professionals. For many of our interlocutors, this has led to a strong sense of loneliness, inadequacy,

and even shame. As Alice puts it: "If you're a woman in the music industry [. . .] you're the only one. Because [. . .] we, women, are also taught [. . .] or brought up to believe that we are each other's worst competitors" (Alice 2023, pers. comm.).

Shame and (In)visibility

To summarize the active forms of (visible and invisible) gendering in the infrastructure of the Danish music industry: the place carved out for women and other minoritized people in the music industry is perceived as a very narrow platform, and it is an act of balance to navigate it. Don't be "too much," or "too little." Don't be "too good," but don't make mistakes or fail. Don't be "too feminine" in artistic expression or appearance, but definitely be "feminine" when it comes to taking on stereotypically women's tasks. And get used to being alone or one of very few, as the infrastructure creates a competitive, insecure, and unstable platform for women, non-binary, and trans-identified music professionals, encouraging an internal competition between the few "queen bees" allowed on stage at any one time.

The consequences of navigating such structures in a primarily cis male identified environment include feelings of affective dissonance for the women-identified artists, such as feelings of inadequacy; isolation and loneliness; not fitting in; lack of community, sharing and solidarity; self-censorship and shame for making "girlish" music; and a general feeling of shame for being wrong(ed) and out of place. There is a clear parallel between the "shame" expressed by our interlocutors, and the kind of "women's shame" that moral philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky writes about. As Bartky explains, there are two main types of "women's shame:" The shame of the (female) body – of being "fat, old or ugly" (Bartky 1990, 85) – and a less specific kind of shame that is not so much a particular feeling or emotion (though it involves specific feelings and emotions), but rather a blurred and diffuse "pervasive affective attunement" to a specific social environment that shows itself as subtle feelings of inferiority and inadequacy (Bartky 1990, 85). Such a pervasive affective attunement was reflected in almost all of our interlocutors' attitudes towards being part of specific music production environments. As such, the combination of music shame, body shame, and diffuse power mechanisms in the social realm of the music production environments can thus be seen as a mirror of what Devika Sharma, linking to Bartky, points out as the generalized and faceless nature of controlling women (Sharma 2019, 525; see also Wallevik 2022).

In addition to internalized feelings of inadequacy and shame, we have also seen how the gendered infrastructure and its active forms seem to draw attention

toward the *gendering* of women identified musicians, while drawing attention away from their *professional* creative contributions and work in the industry. Ahmed's argument that bodies become both invisible and hyper-visible when they inhabit places that are not thought to belong to them (Ahmed 2007a, 159) has been taken up in recent years by several music and gender studies scholars when analyzing women and gender minoritized artists and musicians in various scenes. In *The Privilege of Invisibility: Female and Gender Minoritized Perspectives on the DJ-industry in Copenhagen* (2023), Cathrine Landberg and Mikkel Okine conclude that in the Danish DJ industry, women-identified DJs are made visible through gendering, while "men can once again sit back in their invisibility" (Landberg and Okine 2023, 74). Similarly, Danish sound studies scholars Marie Højlund and Anne-Sofie Udsen have noted how:

> [. . .] the pop-stage is generally male-dominated, whereby the female becomes invisible as she is not considered part of the orientation of the stage. Then, when she does inhabit the space, she becomes hypervisible; she does not pass the male codes, so she stands out, and this creates a feeling of being out of place. (Højlund and Udsen 2022)

The Swedish musicologist Rebecca Dobre Billström furthermore sums up this tendency that gender minoritized musicians within the industry are both "hypervisible" and "hyper-invisible": "[. . .] women and trans people in different music environments have faced, and still do, a similar mix of gendered social rules and limits, expectations, and perceptions, which further indicates a condition where hypervisibility exists in parallel with invisibility in sometimes incongruous ways" (Billström 2022, 17). Our empirical material resonates with Billström's conclusion, highlighting how places become frameworks for bodily encounters and actions, setting the agenda for what bodies can – mean, act, and be seen – and cannot (Ahmed 2006a; see also Ringsager and Jørgensen 2022).

The experience of being welcomed into the field of popular music, but of feeling highly regulated when entering it, led many of our interlocutors to confront feelings of shame and affective attunement, of being made both hyper-visible (as women) and hyper-invisible (as professionals). This led to a sense of disorientation. The bodies we have met – primarily women-identified bodies, but also nonbinary and trans-identified bodies – were disoriented in the system they encountered as a result of their disposition to these structures:

> I was tired of having to be approved all the time and always being told that what I was doing didn't fit in. Everyone had all sorts of opinions about what I was doing and ought to be doing. I soon got the feeling that I didn't want to spend my time on that. (Charlie, qtd. in Frank 2021)

As with Charlie above, one strategy for overcoming such disorientation seemed for many to be to leave the established environments of the music industry. Similarly, in a panel discussion, the Danish independent pop artist, Kate, expresses that she would always recommend minoritized artists to "go independent," even if it means always being a bit behind because, as she points out: "You have control. And it's a huge currency that has nothing to do with money" (Kate 2023, fieldnotes).

It is against this background of gendered infrastructure that the Music Movement was established, first as a small, informal online group and later as the award-winning organization recognized for its achievements. As music anthropologists, we have been involved in the collective reflections generated in and through the Music Movement. In doing so, we have explored how some of the gendered expectations are experienced by women-identified professionals in the music industry. And we have seen how these gendered expectations have led to affective dissonances that for many have meant saying goodbye to certain environments and opportunities. These are all feelings related to diffuse power mechanisms in the social realm of work that lead to disorientation, and that can be traced back to the stubborn forms of power hidden in the folds of the music industry's infrastructural space. Let us now finally turn to how the Music Movement has intervened in the Danish music industry as part of a counter-political form of infrastructure development.

Release and re-orientation through community

The Music Movement Facebook group was pivotal in allowing women-identified and gender minoritized music professionals to connect over shared experiences. Alice's description of her early encounters with the group reflects an experience relayed by many others and captures the strengths and dynamics of the group:

> I think it [the Facebook group] is so beautiful in its culture. Because people can always post. Sometimes it can be very personal things, "I'm having a bad day" or something, and . . . there was always someone like "Hey, it's going to be OK." Or there was someone who was angry and wrote, "Now I've got a fucking [. . .]," and then there were comments like "Yeah, okay, I know that too," "Yeah, okay, but just try to . . .," "I can understand that too" and "We have to try to see if . . . maybe you should try to approach it a bit differently." Whatever emotions people came with, there was always someone there to catch them. I was so touched by that. And very quickly there were so many people in the group that someone always responded very quickly. And that means that this feeling of loneliness that I think we've all carried around with us, it . . . it went away because you suddenly felt that you were together with somebody. And that's what it can do. It's extremely touching. And people

> talk about all sorts of things. I was . . . well, it doesn't happen so much now, but there was a really long time where every single day I experienced, "God, I know the feeling this person is talking about. Imagine, has she experienced it too?" And so on. And I was like, "So I don't have to blame myself for being treated badly. I mean, it's not my fault!" And that was a very big release for me personally. (Alice 2023, pers. comm.)

Several of our interlocutors describe how, like Alice, the sharing of individual experiences within the Music Movement, as well as seeing themselves mirrored in the experiences of others, has led to a sense of "release," where the feeling of shame they had imposed on themselves is removed and transformed from an individual experience into a collective and structural problem. The sharing and negotiation of individual experiences of barriers and gendered expectations of injustice reveals the invisible and relational forms of power that regulate access and orientation within the music industry – and it becomes a structural, and less of a personal, issue.

Bodies that experience being out of place and disoriented in certain social realms "might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action" (Ahmed 2006a, 158). The Music Movement has become the "something" that has steadied the actions of many women and gender-minoritized musicians when navigating the gendered infrastructures of the Danish music industry. The community and collective knowledge that is generated, shared, and discussed within the Music Movement has been the "something" that people have turned to and reached out for – either by writing in the Facebook group, or by coming to the physical meetings and panel discussions that the Music Movement hosts – when they feel out of place, disoriented, or shameful. And within that community, feelings are collectively resonated, mirrored, and negotiated in ways that feel releasing and reorienting. The Music Movement has changed how its members perceive and orient themselves within the infrastructure of the music industry, in particular because it has turned feelings of loneliness and individual experiences of being wronged into "a collective capacity." As the woman-identified musician Anne puts it: "I think for many people the biggest thing is not feeling alone anymore. At least that's my experience. It's kind of crazy" (Anne 2022, pers. comm.).

Furthermore, the support the women and gender minoritized professionals receive from the Music Movement and the way in which experiences and arguments are shared, negotiated, and developed collectively within the Music Movement, means that individual members "dare more": they dare to confront people or colleagues, and they dare to intervene in discussions (both online and offline) that they would not have done before. They also dare to be "killjoys" (Ahmed 2017) when they encounter sexism in their social constellations because, as several put it, they feel that their colleagues in the movement "have their back." As the woman-identified musician Helene expresses in a panel debate:

> [. . .] it does something important for us mentally, fundamentally, to know that there are 2,300, or however many there are in the Music Movement, right behind you and have your back, right? It means a hell of a lot. Six years ago you were standing there all alone. And I didn't feel like I was in the industry then, I was on a desert island and it was a really long way to go, right? So, it means so much that we're supporting each other and we're lifting each other up and we know that if you lean back or if you fall, someone's going to catch you. (Helene 2023, fieldnotes)

The safer space that has been established within the Music Movement gives individuals strength and courage to not only navigate, but also confront the gendered expectations and the obstacles they are met with in their daily lives. As the musician Alice puts it: "Fuck off, there are some people who will fight for me too. Totally romantic. I love it" (Alice 2023, pers. comm.).

The collective engagement and network of the Music Movement has had a concrete impact on the Danish music industry. For example, the Music Movement was the breeding ground for a series of articles on sexism in the music industry published in one of Denmark's biggest newspapers, *Politiken*, in 2020. Here, a large number of named and pictured (famous and not so famous) musicians came forward with their individual (#metoo) experiences from their careers, testimonies of discrimination experienced in all corners of the music industry (e.g. Wind-Friis et al. 2020). The process behind *Politiken*'s large and influential feature on music and sexism was initiated by the Music Movement, where musicians agreed to come forward collectively. Supporting the idea of the Music Movement as a basis for transformative action, the trans-woman identified artist Viola expresses:

> I feel it gives me the confidence to go out and fight the conventional structures of the industry. [. . .] They [the other members of the Movement] have my back if something happens, and that gives me more strength to fight the inequalities in the conventional industry. (qtd. in Frank 2021)

The testimonies of discrimination from all corners of the music industry published in *Politiken* laid the foundation for further conversations and the development of a language around the issue, and provided a foundation for initiating research that has resulted in several reports and perhaps even our own research project, Gendering Music Matter (GEMMA). An important part of *Politiken*'s series of articles on sexism in the Danish music industry was the fact that the journalists behind the articles had access to sources through the Music Movement platform. The Music Movement has established itself as a broad network in which almost all professions (and across genres and generations) within the music industry are represented and actively communicate with each other: musicians, composers, producers, sound engineers, managers, music teachers at various music institutions, music journalists, and researchers (like us). In the Danish context where music organizations and as-

sociations are divided either by profession (e.g. whether you are a creator or a performer) or by genre, this entanglement is rather rare, or queer, and has created spaces for conversation between women and gender minoritized music professionals working across disciplines within the music industry. This new and unique flow of communication among others means that musical collaborations can emerge from the network, jobs are distributed, and journalists and researchers have access to sources. In that sense, the Music Movement creates a collective experience of having "access" to different levels, units, and actors within the whole infrastructure of the music industry, as well as a flow of communication that enables new kinds of counter-political mobilization of a feminist collective capacity that can challenge or "hack" the dominant infrastructure of the industry.

Conclusion

The purpose for most of the members of the Music Movement is not primarily a political transformation, but rather to create a good and caring working environment and a network of people who support each other across sections in the industry. Despite the group's primary function, however, the Music Movement *has* contributed (and continues to contribute) to a political transformation of Danish music life by creating a safer space and a production community based on support and solidarity. In this article, we have argued that the Music Movement functions as a counter-infrastructure that reconfigures the larger dominant infrastructure from below in ways that also feed back into the movement itself, empowering its members and giving them a voice. As Elise puts it:

> I think it's a huge change, even though a lot of things in the industry haven't necessarily changed. But the women in it have changed. And I think that is a . . . maybe the most important start. Because I think it will change a lot, I think it will change a lot. (Elise 2023, fieldnotes)

By creating a queer space for networking and sharing, the Music Movement has established itself as a counter-infrastructure that not only enables its members to navigate the power structures enacted through gendered expectations and intersectional hierarchies in their work-related activities, but also facilitates change at various levels of the broader Danish music industry. By doing so, it has exposed invisible power structures, transformed affective dissonances to an affective solidarity, as well as individual feelings of "shame" and disorientation to a "collective feminist capacity." By making the personal into a political matter, to rephrase Betty Friedan's seminal argument from 1963 (Friedan 1963), under the banner of the Music Movement, its members have found ways of tinkering, reworking, al-

ternating, or hacking the dominant infrastructure of the music industry. As such, the Music Movement has forged not only new material, social, and cultural arrangements, but also alternative anti-sexist and inclusive ways of imagining possible futures and knowing and being in popular music and its industry.

We do not want to put the Music Movement on a pedestal. "An actor acts, but nobody acts alone" (Mol 2010, 256), and the Music Movement is just one of many initiatives that have contributed to the focus on equity and solidarity in the music industry in the Danish context in recent years. In our fieldwork we have also talked to women and gender minoritized professionals who are not interested in being part of the Music Movement – or who are members of the online Facebook group, but do not feel like participating in its activities and discussions, either because they cannot relate to the shared experiences, or because they do not experience it as an inclusive space. Such conversations indicate that there are structures and forces of exclusion[6] within and around the Music Movement (in terms of precarity, merit, income, sexuality, body ableness, race, ethnicity, and age) that deserve further exploration. In an article for the music magazine *GAFFA*, the trans-woman identified musician Viola, for example, reflects on the pitfall of the Music Movement's lack of an intersectional focus on representation and discrimination within Danish music life:

> I don't feel we see very much from BIPOCs [. . .] or queer people. I would like to see a little more focus on how we can get everyone on board at the same time, because the struggles are very alike. It's about being "like-minded" and not necessarily about gender on that front. (qtd. in Frank 2021)

Despite the ongoing complicated work of reflection within the Music Movement, for example on issues of intersectionality, equity, and representation, the Music Movement has made its mark on and been accoladed by the Danish music industry landscape. And, we argue, the meaning beyond the accolade lies in how the Music Movement suggest new ways of infrastructure for the whole industry: suggestions for tinkering with *new ways of knowing* by collectively gathering knowledge and insights across genres, disciplines, intersections and work areas in the music industry; suggestions for tinkering with *new ways of speaking* by, for example, avoiding stereotypical assumptions about people's gender, race, body, or love orientation; and finally, suggestions for making *work/life sustainability* (for all, regardless of gender, age, race, body abilities, etc.) in the music industry a common

6 We are aware that our own biases as white, cis, women researchers in our 40s have influenced this article and our focus on the benefits of the Music Movement, and we look forward to engaging in dialogue with other positions on this issue in our future research.

issue and a shared responsibility. The infrastructural proposals of the Music Movement are not solutions, but guidelines for further work that can hopefully open up a much greater degree of care and responsibility and a much greater degree of diverse representation of bodies in popular (music) culture. In such a perspective, the Music Movement, as Gry Harrit puts it in the opening quote of this article, may have paved the way for new dynamics, new markets, new mainstream, new business models *for all*.

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Brown Island Floating in a White Sea: On Affective Infrastructures

In the fall of 2016, the separatist student group Brown Island came into being at Konstfack, Sweden's largest university of arts, crafts, and design. Students assembled on the basis of identifying as "people of color" across programs and across categories of ascribed difference such as ethnicity, class, culture, religion, functional variation, gender, and sexual orientation (Brown Island 2019). Together the members of Brown Island voiced feeling representationally minoritized within the majority-white institution's student bodies, faculty, and curricula (Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024). To begin with, they mingled informally during breaks but soon began to arrange weekly meetings to discuss shared challenges within the institution. Could Brown Island members support each other in their experiences of feeling minoritized by creating a collective voice or a sense of communal belonging? How could they strategize artistically and politically to make their struggles evident to the academy? And would it be possible for them to reorient the academy around a more inclusive institutional trajectory? These were the sort of questions that catalyzed the students' efforts to organize at Konstfack (Brown Island 2019, 5). Accordingly, the name Brown Island surfaced as an overt response to the structures the group believed were maintaining "the institutional status quo" – which for them was embodied most emblematically in Konstfack's formal exhibition space *Vita Havet*, The White Sea (Brown Island 2019, 54–55). The imaginary employed by the student collective was indeed straightforward: An island was fashioned to promote resilience and survival in a treacherous geography. In the years that followed, Brown Island came to create several influential exhibitions at the academy showcasing student-artists who were not racialized as white. The group also published a handbook on how to organize collectively within the art institution. Eventually, the student collective's activities stirred not only a heated debate at the Stockholm school but also in national Swedish media regarding institutional whiteness and its consequences for racially minoritized members of society.

In this chapter, I discuss Brown Island's artistic-political practice from the collective's establishment in 2016 until its seeming conclusion in 2019. I argue that the group's interventions at Konstfack frame the art academy as an institution structured by whiteness; accentuate how this structuring may affect students who are not rendered as white; and, finally, how collective efforts like Brown Island's may help individuals endure and challenge the institutional composition. In infrastructural terms, I am thereby interested in the affects that are circulated

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within the art institution. How is an infrastructure such as the art academy capable of making its occupants *feel* in certain ways? In what ways are these experienced feelings *articulated* and *communicated* by the affected occupants? And to what extent can collective artistic-political engagements contribute to *altering* the affective flows inside an infrastructure?

My aim is not to answer these questions conclusively, but to examine where the analytic of such infrastructural deliberations leads. I focus my reading on the publication *Brown Island in the White Sea – A Handbook for a Collective Practice* which the group created and distributed at Konstfack in 2019, with funding from the academy. Apart from the publication's experimental graphic design and photographical documentation of Brown Island's exhibitions and artworks, the handbook includes an opening word to the reader; interviews with students, alumni, and faculty at Konstfack who are not racialized as white; a poem; a letter addressed to "Dear White People"; and lists of recommended artistic and cultural productions by racially minoritized directors, writers, thinkers, and artists. Written mainly in English and sometimes in Swedish, the 130-page pocket-size book was distributed free-of-charge at the art academy.

As an object of study, I want to suggest that the Brown Island handbook is particularly receptive to infrastructural analysis and to the question of how affect is made infrastructural (Berlant 2016; Dragona 2019; Ganesh 2019; Gilmore 2017). I propose that the group's publication, like many other handbooks, works in infrastructurally instructive ways as it provides its reader with guidance on how to move *through*, exist *within* and even *survive* the art institution. As an artistic iteration of the genre, I further submit that Brown Island's handbook elucidates how Konstfack operates as an infrastructure on several levels including both the affective and institutional. In my analysis, I thereby set out to demonstrate in what ways exactly the handbook manages to catch a glimpse of how infrastructures contribute to "the patterning of social form" as the editors of this volume Solveig Daugaard, Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt, and Frederik Tygstrup contend via cultural theorist Lauren Berlant in their introduction (Berlant 2016, 393). For, as media studies researcher and art historian Shannon Mattern suggests in her work on the political ecology of *repair manuals* – a didactic genre in creative form, closely related to handbooks like Brown Island's – manuals can function as a means of "infrastructural inversion" calling attention to what can and should be fixed, and who or what is accountable for the damages that need tending to (Mattern 2024, paragraph 6). Thinking about the Brown Island handbook as a manual of sorts, what, then, needs fixing at Konstfack and is it potentially beyond repair?

An infrastructure *within* the infrastructure

> We need manifold strategies and diverse practices to address the complex issues we experience within the contemporary art institution, as well as to acknowledge and respond to the institution as a condition of broader society. Despite the walls and structures that impede dialogue and community, we must develop tactics to transgress institutional boundaries, while collectively demanding and creating spaces where we can dwell.
> (Brown Island 2019, 56)

According to *Brown Island in the White Sea – A Handbook for a Collective Practice*, the primary organizing principle of Konstfack is whiteness.[1] In the publication, the student collective suggests that the art academy, as an infrastructure in and of Swedish society, contributes to the patterning of social form by extending whiteness. Commonly, institutions referred to as *white* denote infrastructures that are predominantly shaped and directed by contributors who are racialized as white. Below surface level, the institutionalization of whiteness, or what we might think of as *institutional whiteness*, is said to be upheld by unceasing maintenance work: that is, by efforts to repeat and accumulate decisions made over time and efforts to recruit and allocate resources, all to secure the reproduction of whiteness (Ahmed 2007, 157). Drawing upon psychiatrist and anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon's writings on the process of racialization as a corporeal and historical process, cultural theorist Sara Ahmed describes the experience of being racialized as non-white within a white institution as a phenomenological and thus also an affective sensation of out-of-placeness "which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible" and "different" (Ahmed 2007, 157; Fanon 1986). Noteworthy to my analysis of the Brown Island handbook, and its essential critique of institutional whiteness at Konstfack, are the ways in which the publication instructs its reader on how to manage the consequences of whiteness as mentioned by Ahmed – what I will refer to as the "affects of racialization" that seem to be instigated by whiteness within institutional frameworks (Blickstein 2019).

1 Throughout the chapter, I employ the terminology "racialized as white" just as I refer to not extending whiteness as a point of likeness as "being rendered as non-white," "not racialized as white"– or sometimes simply "racialized" within contexts that are explicitly pronounced as structured by whiteness. In doing so, I wish to underline that the configuration of whiteness and the process of not extending whiteness, like the configuration of race, holds no biological truth, although processes of racialization and the sociohistorical backdrop of race-thinking continue to have onto-epistemological and material impacts and consequences that cannot be dismissed as a social construct. It is important to keep in mind that collective and individual bodies described through negation in relation to whiteness may self-identify as people of color, global majority, Black/black, brown etc. See Ahmed 2007, Blickstein 2019.

Brown Island's aspirations to claim space by installing a piece of land in the midst of the, to them, tempestuous institutional waters resonates in interesting ways with Berlant's thinking around *affective infrastructures* (Berlant 2016). Concerned with the conditions for "contemporary counternormative political struggle," Berlant emphasizes the significance of scrutinizing our seemingly solid infrastructures, defined here as everything from roads to schools, families to norms: "[O]ne task for makers of critical social form is to offer not just judgement about positions and practices in the world, but terms of transition that alter the harder and softer, tighter and looser infrastructures of sociality itself" (Berlant 2016, 393–394). Following Berlant, infrastructuring the world anew is made possible by cultivating forms of non-sovereign relationality that can make our existing infrastructures porous and thus alterable in the longer run (Berlant 2016, 394). In 2019, the same year as the Brown Island publication was first handed out at Konstfack, the festival Transmediale in Berlin featured affective infrastructures as one of its core themes. In an editorial piece, art theorist Daphne Dragona expanded on Berlant's thinking in relation to her own co-curation of the festival program (Dragona 2019). She argued that while infrastructures tend to be associated with power and privilege, the glitches that manifest within them and draw attention to their very existence, also highlight the need for "alternative architectures of association and resistance" (Dragona 2019, paragraph 1). Referring to what Berlant has only briefly defined specifically as "affective infrastructures," Dragona asserted that alternative architectures of association and resistance include collective artistic and activist practices (Berlant 2016, 414). Whether these communal practices manifest as counter-infrastructures or perform infrastructural interventions, the point is that they can teach us how alternative social forms can be installed *within* the environments we already inhabit: "Technological or not, physical or not, already existing or not, the affective infrastructures are protocols that we need to build, modify, or reclaim as joints that will bring and hold different worlds together" (Dragona 2019, paragraph 7). Accordingly, the productive capacity of the affective infrastructure is that we can be with each other in common as we learn to "live with messed up yet shared and ongoing infrastructures of experience" (Berlant 2016, 395).

What I suggest here is that we can read the Brown Island handbook as an attempt to maintain Brown Island as an affective infrastructure within Konstfack. What I thereby also stipulate is that Brown Island can be regarded as an architecture of association and resistance, to use Dragona's interpretation of Berlant's configuration of the affective infrastructure. The student collective has precisely sought to critique, expose, and fight against what the members deem as institutional whiteness at Konstfack, as we shall see. While resisting to accept the institutional politics at Konstfack, the group has also sought to create a supportive

architecture *within* the white institution; an independent geography in which a diverse group of students find a common ground and grammar around their shared experiences of racialization. On a practical level, the handbook reveals that Brown Island has been challenged by the short-lived temporality of its members that leave the institution upon graduation every three to five years. As my analysis will demonstrate, the publication tries to provide future generations of students at Konstfack with a counter-archive of sorts – more specifically, with a blueprint for constructing and sustaining support systems like Brown Island. Documenting the collective's exhibitions and critique of the art academy, the handbook tries to ensure that both the artistic and student political labor of Brown Island cannot be forgotten or silenced by the institution but is kept within reach – *at hand* – across time.

Digital culture researcher Maya Indira Ganesh discusses the tricky ephemerality of affective infrastructures in relation to the online #MeToo lists as a form of affect data that stirred the eponymous international movement in 2017 (Dragona 2019; Ganesh 2019). The #MeToo movement's accumulative affect data consisted of sexual harassment testimonies shared under the hashtag #MeToo and in anonymous open-access spreadsheets. Ganesh argues that affective infrastructures were born out of these digitally shared experiences: people, mostly women, organized and supported each other online in getting legal advice; assembling evidence for court cases; managing and mitigating attacks on social media; creating codes of conduct and new tactics to negotiate intimacy in personal and professional relationships (Ganesh 2019, paragraph 14). While the impact of such affective infrastructures on society are often observable to most of us, Ganesh stresses the importance of acknowledging that what binds individuals together within affective infrastructures like #Metoo, or for that matter Brown Island, may only be temporary; a weaving of "subtle, sometimes unseen and only felt, dimensions" (Ganesh 2019, paragraph 15). The point that I want to carve out by drawing upon Ganesh's example, is that the ephemerality of affective infrastructures does not make them, or for that matter their consequences, any less material. Geographer and prison scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore's notion of *the infrastructure of feeling* can add political nuance to our understanding of the materiality of affective infrastructures (Gilmore 2017). Advancing Raymond Williams' formative thinking around *structures of feeling* from an abolitionist position within the Black Radical Tradition, Gilmore engages critically with the singularity of his "narrative structure for understanding the dynamic material limits to the possibility of change" (Gilmore 2017, 237; Williams 1978). She argues that certainly any given age and place holds numerous structures of feeling, some of which are dialectical and not just contemporaneous – that is, some of which are attached to communities that relate antagonistically to the prevalent feelings in, for example, popular culture. Gilmore nevertheless adapts Williams' definition of *tradition* as the build-up of structures of feeling over time.

She asserts that structures of feelings are fundamentally dynamic social constructions, neither pregiven nor determined by fixed notions of culture or biology, but rather based on what Williams denotes as "selections and reselections of ancestors" (Williams quoted in Gilmore 2017, 237). Accordingly, the infrastructure of feeling defines the "visionary or crisis-driven or even exhaustion provoked reselections" that certain groups, who might not be in sync with the dominant structure of feeling, perform to transform their possibilities of change within society. For Gilmore, this includes the Black Radical Tradition:

> The best I can offer, until something better comes along, is what I've called for many years the "infrastructure of feeling." In the material world, infrastructure underlies productivity – it speeds some processes and slows down others, setting agendas, producing isolation, enabling cooperation. The infrastructure of feeling is material too, in the sense that ideology becomes material as do the actions that feelings enable or constrain. The infrastructure of feeling is then consciousness-foundation, sturdy but not static, that underlies our capacity to select, to recognize viscerally (no less than prudently) immanent possibility as we select and reselect liberatory lineages. [. . .] What matters – what materializes – are lively rearticulations and surprising combinations. If, then, the structures of feeling for the Black Radical Tradition are, age upon age, shaped by energetically expectant consciousness of and direction toward unboundedness, then the tradition is, inexactly, movement away from partition and exclusion – indeed, its inverse. (Gilmore 2017, 237)

Like Berlant, Gilmore understands infrastructures and their materiality in social terms. Regardless of whether they enable cooperation in less tangible ways, like #MeToo, or literally produce physical isolation, like prisons, infrastructures have material consequences because they affect us as we interact with, within, and around them, voluntarily as well as forcibly. The notion of the infrastructure of feeling – which leads Gilmore to her famous formulation of *abolition geographies*, a matter I shall return to further into the chapter – thus provides insight into how non-sovereign collective bodies may oppose the consequences of existing within infrastructures as products of dominance. Correspondingly, the infrastructure of feeling holds the potential of a renewal of consciousness-foundation, as Gilmore states in the quote above. From her understanding of the materiality of the infrastructure of feeling we learn that tradition can be subject to change – and that liberatory lineages can be selected and reselected to act against the existing infrastructures and the ways in which they make us feel.

Drawing upon passages from the Brown Island handbook, I will now advance my perspective on Brown Island as an affective infrastructure within Konstfack. First, I will discuss how the handbook presents Brown Island as an architecture of resistance by highlighting the group's critique of institutional whiteness. Secondly, I will examine how Brown Island also functions as an architecture of association. I conclude my analysis by discussing to what extent the handbook – and Brown Is-

land as a separatist student collective – takes an abolitionist stand against Konstfack as an infrastructure of whiteness or a revisionist approach of trying to repair the art institution and the conditions for racialized students from *within* it.

"Reorientation Begins": The case of Vita Havet

> Vita Havet is fast approaching the age of 70; is it not time for us to seek beyond the waters of the sea to realize spaces where a plurality of voices can reside side by side?
> (Brown Island 2019, 56)

Brown Island in the White Sea – A Handbook for a Collective Practice (2019) has not been made available digitally, except for a central manifesto-style text from the handbook, which can be accessed on Konstfack's website (Brown Island 2019, 40–57).[2] In the following paragraphs, I discuss this text, "Floating in the White Sea – A Foray into the Contemporary Art Institution," which is written by Brown Island members Johnny Chang and Louise Khadjeh-Nassiri on behalf of the collective. The text presents a critical analysis that frames Konstfack as a white institution; an analysis which is principal to Brown Island's entire practice. Structured in six parts, it draws attention to the history of the academy's main exhibition hall Vita Havet. The authors posit that Vita Havet, meaning literally *the white sea*, serves as an embodiment of the academy's whiteness and therefore affects racialized students negatively in their educational day-to-day. Finally, they propose how Konstfack's institutional whiteness may be actively unsettled in the last section titled "Reorientation Begins" (Brown Island 2019, 54–57). The text was first featured in an exhibition by Brown Island of the same name in October 2018, where it was projected on to the walls of Vita Havet and accompanied by a shorter text encouraging a change of the name. As I shall return to later, the exhibition fanned a substantial debate amongst faculty and students on the impact of Vita Havet. Later, in 2021, the controversy over the name took center stage in the national Swedish media.

In the text, authors Chang and Khadjeh-Nassiri describe Vita Havet as a physically and representationally formative site within Konstfack. Positioned in the middle of the academy grounds, they argue that the exhibition hall influences how students move around and behave within Konstfack, as well as which students are made institutionally visible since the walls of Vita Havet feature select artworks by school talents. According to the handbook, the space was given the

2 See Chang and Khadjeh-Nassiri 2019 in the reference list for the link to the article.

name Vita Havet in the early 1950s which has since survived several locations. The authors note that, interestingly, another Vita Havet of a similar formal status exists in Stockholm in Sweden's Royal Palace. This Vita Havet is a Baroque-style dining hall that has featured royal weddings and Nobel laureates:

> In contrast, Vita Havet at Konstfack with its white, empty walls embodies modernism and encourages minimalism – today's fashionable expression for high culture and good taste – keeping its privileges less clear, seemingly invisible, though certainly present. While their aesthetics diverge, they may not be so different from each other; both Vita Havets serve the same role for each respective institution as a space for the presentation and representation of power. (Brown Island 2019, 43)

Konstfack is currently located in a refurbished factory, and defenders of Vita Havet's name have argued that it should be interpreted as a republican nod to the monarchy instead of as a comparable performance of authority (Kristoffersson 2021). Chang and Khadjeh-Nassiri propose that Vita Havet at the academy is, in more ways than its name suggests, founded on the modernist ideal of the white cube; a gallery space in which all surfaces are kept white, smooth, and visually impersonal to emphasise the autonomy of the artwork (Brown Island 2019, 50–51). Drawing on Hito Steyerl's essay "Is the Museum a Factory?" (2009), the authors posit that Vita Havet's, to them, problematic modernist principles make the exhibition hall a space in which both objects and subjects are sought to be "sanitized, sequestered, and cut off from 'reality'" (Brown Island 2019, 51). It is a space, they continue, "that divorces the everyday experience of walking its halls from the voices beneath every painted-over layer" of whiteness (Brown Island 2019, 51). The Brown Island members go on to make the point, that for many students at Konstfack who are not racialized as white, the everyday experience of walking through its halls is difficult to disconnect from their experiences of feeling out-of-place within the art institution. Accordingly, Brown Island's handbook attempts to dismantle the imaginary of Vita Havet as a "neutral" and "innocent" space (Brown Island 2019, 41). Instead, Vita Havet is narrativized as an infrastructure that ignores the lived experiences of its occupants just as it fails to accommodate any institutional awareness of what previously unfolded on and within its walls.[3] The two au-

3 As an example, the handbook features an interview with another group of students at Konstfack who are not racialized as white. Without Brown Island's knowledge, just a year before Brown Island was established in 2016, this group organized an exhibition in Vita Havet called *Ministeriet för Avkolonisering presenterer: De Sköna Konsterna, om mellemförskap, rasism, och vithed* [The Ministry for Decolonization presents: The Fine Arts, on Inbetweenship, Racism, and Whiteness]. In the handbook, Brown Island historicizes the work of this group, and questions why their work seems to have been forgotten by Konstfack, or, at the very least, hidden away in the institutional archive.

thors add to the backdrop of their critique that whilst most functioning factories in Northern Europe have been moved to the Global South, due to the unequal distribution of wealth which they trace back to European colonialism, Konstfack's industrial aesthetic further "romanticises the perpetual production of capital and the persistent reproduction of the 'modern'" in the Global North (Brown Island 2019, 51–52).

The main argument that Chang and Khadjeh–Nassiri put forward is thus that Vita Havet continues to orient Konstfack around whiteness as a modernist and bourgeoise ideal, which in turn makes students who are not racialized as white feel negatively about and within the contemporary art institution as an infrastructure that reflects the conditions of broader society. More precisely, the authors state that Vita Havet does not feel like "a free art space" to them, it rather feels like "a ritual space, preserving a certain order and logic of 'modernity'" (Brown Island 2019, 52). This conclusion produces an unanswered question that the authors pose towards the end of text: "What might an art institution look like if it were collectively imagined and created out of dialogue to allow for diverse bodies to feel at home?" (Brown Island 2019, 56).

According to anthropologist and affect theorist Tamar Blickstein, the process of racialization is a paradigmatic affective phenomenon precisely because the process of *not* extending whiteness as a point of likeness marks a relational dynamic that is spatially, geopolitically, and environmentally situated – rather than an isolated feeling or emotional state lodged within an individual (Blickstein 2019, 152). As an umbrella term that subsumes various feelings, her notion of *affects of racialization* foregrounds this relationality of affecting and being affected which she locates "particularly (though not exclusively) in individuals and populations naturalized as inferior or superior along historically embedded hierarchies of ascribed difference" born out of colonial logics and racialized biopolitics (Blickstein 2019, 153). With reference to both Fanon and Ahmed, Chang and Khadjeh-Nassiri also articulate the sense of holding a space in Vita Havet as a non-white student as a fundamentally relational experience:

> Whiteness appears invisible for those who inhabit it and even to those who get so used to it that they learn not to see it. It becomes 'a straightening device' where bodies learn necessary codes in order to 'line up' [. . .]. These unwritten codes of conduct follow institutional, class, and cultural taste in dress, speech and performance, privileging some behaviour more than others – one must not be too loud, stick out, be in the way, or learn to do so just the right amount. (Brown Island 2019, 53)

Concluding their analysis of Vita Havet as a spatial incarnation of institutional whiteness, the Brown Island members suggest how Konstfack might be reoriented away from whiteness: "At the beginning of our investigation we set out to write a piece that would make a case for changing the name of Vita Havet," they concede

(Brown Island 2019, 54). However, the authors add, the name has proven to be a useful asset making the critique of Konstfack more illustrative and hence more material. While Chang and Khadjeh-Nassiri stress that changing the name of the exhibition hall would still be appropriate, they submit that the institutional issues at stake can only be resolved by calling attention to what sits beyond any naming strategy. Accordingly, what matters more to Brown Island than the name of the exhibition hall is performing an infrastructural inversion by exposing "the invisible structures that maintain the institutional status quo, and the histories and voices that have been left out" (Brown Island 2019, 55). What the handbook concretely suggests here is creating more collective practices like Brown Island within the art institution in order to incite dialogues about the historical and current effects of institutional whiteness, as well as other technologies of power. As the next and final part of my analysis examines, Brown Island also highlights the significance of the collective as a "community"; as an affective support system preventing members from "drowning" in Vita Havet during their time at Konstfack (Brown Island 2019, 4).

As I have previously mentioned, the controversy around Vita Havet was not resolved after the Brown Island exhibition at Konstfack in 2018. On the contrary, the collective's intervention at the academy marked the beginning of a much longer intellectual dispute. In consequence of the critique from Brown Island, Konstfack invited members of the separatist student collective to partake in the academy's formal discussions on how to improve the exhibition space, secure a more diverse student intake, and make the institution "anti-racist," as Konstfack's rector Maria Lantz phrased it (Konstfack 2021). However, the institutionally initiated dialogue was interrupted in 2021, when Sara Kristoffersson, a professor of design history at the academy, wrote an opinion piece in the national daily, Dagens Nyheter, titled "Nej, Vita havet på Konstfack har intet med rasism att göra" [No, Vita Havet at Konstfack has nothing to do with racism] (Kristoffersson 2021). A year later, the professor issued the autobiographic book *Hela havet stormar – Fallstudie inifrån en myndighet* [The Whole Sea is Storming – Case Study from Inside a Government Authority] (2022). In both publications, Kristoffersson made attempts to dismantle Brown Island's critique of institutional whiteness and Konstfack's, to her, uncritical approval of the students' condemnation of Vita Havet and demands for change. In the wake of the professor's public utterances and the headlines they provoked, colleagues at Konstfack made a petition to change the name of Vita Havet, which Kristoffersson declined to sign as the sole member of faculty (Christensen 2022). According to Kristoffersson, she suffered from harassment on social media and experienced being rejected by fellow staff after voicing her opinions (Christensen

2022).[4] Consequently, the professor went on a long sick leave and upon her return to the academy in 2022 – as her book was about to be published – she voiced her critique of Brown Island once again. Though no plans had been made to change the name of Vita Havet during her leave, Kristoffersson noted that the popular discourse at Konstfack had changed drastically: *Vita* seemed to have been abandoned from the vernacular – now, staff and students alike referred simply to *Havet* (Christensen 2022).

Returning to the idea of Brown Island as an affective infrastructure – as an architecture of resistance and association within the established infrastructure – one could make the claim that the collective's interventions have paved the way towards a reorientation of Konstfack. For, as observed by Kristoffersson, the sea is no longer unquestionably white. To the disapproving professor, however, the controversy at the Stockholm academy continues to signify a threat to the freedom of speech and to artistic freedom, especially as the case of Vita Havet does not seem to stand alone in the Nordic region. Indeed, the controversy resonates with recent interventions that have unsettled the art academies in both Oslo and Copenhagen (Kristoffersson 2021). At the art academy in Oslo, a photograph by Vanessa Beecroft, which was denounced as sexist and racist by students and staff, caused the rector to resign. At the academy in Copenhagen, a plaster bust of Frederik V was thrown into the harbor by an anonymous group from the academy on the grounds of representing Danish colonial power. As a result, a professor and the rector were fired.

4 In 2019, the then-student of spatial design and Brown Island member, Cassandra Lorca Macchiavelli, wrote in her Master's thesis on Brown Island's practice at Konstfack that the group also experienced harassment and social rejection at Konstfack: Initially, the art academy's student union refused to recognize Brown Island as a legitimate student association due to the group's separatist organization. Upon the first Brown Island exhibition in 2017, the full names and pictures of select Brown Island members were shared on the fascist online platform *Nordfront*. Subsequently, an anonymous poster showed up at Konstfack inviting students to join a racist manifestation with its starting point outside the art academy. The day of the manifestation, Konstfack was closed for all students for safety reasons. The academy also hired a security guard at a following Brown Island lecture. See Macchiavelli 2019, 13–16.

Repair manual or abolition geography?

> What good is a repair manual when the problem is *out of hand*, seemingly too complex for any person to make a difference? Yet existential manuals do exist. And whether they are meant earnestly or provocatively, they can prompt critical reflection. They might cause us to doubt solutionist approaches to wicked problems, *or* they might remind us of our own individual power to take modest steps in our immediate environments to effect larger transformations.
> (Mattern 2024, paragraph 44)

A question that still needs answering in my analysis is how Brown Island operated internally as a supportive association for students at Konstfack during the group's active years. And, in addition to this question, in what ways the Brown Island handbook provides guidance on establishing collective practices that function as affective infrastructures within art institutions?

During a research seminar in 2022, two members of Brown Island elaborated on the collective's impact on them.[5] They each recollected how they had felt isolated prior to the establishment of Brown Island (Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024). One of the members noted how many students who were racialized as non-white at Konstfack shared a sense of "loneliness" that was closely tied to the "othering, discrimination and numerical underrepresentation" they experienced during their education (Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024, 10; Schmidt 2022). Informed by these members' accounts, it seems that the student collective offered an alternative assembly within the academy that nurtured a sense of shared experience and belonging through separatist membership. By this I mean that Brown Island members created a community founded on the premise of their mutual affectability as subjects racialized as non-white despite their various internal differences – what sociologist Veronika Zink has described as an "affective community" (Zink 2019). Brown Island could also be characterized as what performance and cultural studies scholar Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt and I have described as a "community of emotional politics": a collective practice that makes conscious attempts to "de-naturalize, de-individualize, and politi-

5 *Separatist Seminar*, a research seminar held in September 2022, was organized by Cecilie Ullerup Schmidt and me as a part of our research project *Communities of Separatism – Affects in and around separatist artist collectives in the Nordic region*. The seminar featured roundtable discussions between invited members of separatist artist collectives from Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. Select sessions were recorded and transcribed for our research purposes. This article forms part of the project funded by the Danish Arts Foundation and Arts Council Norway, as well as Nordic Cultural Fund and New Carlsberg Foundation research center Art as Forum. See Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024.

cize emotions and experiences by understanding them as structurally conditioned by society at large, but also as potentially changeable" (Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024, 101).[6]

To think with Ruth Wilson Gilmore again, Brown Island's collective practice is appealing to an infrastructural analytic precisely because it highlights the infrastructure of feeling: how Konstfack can be said to make students *feel* as the occupants of an infrastructure, and how these occupants have the opportunity to potentially detach from the governing affective flows that circulate within the infrastructure by congregating around alternative structures of feeling. The respective configurations of Brown Island as an affective community, as a community of emotional politics, and as an affective infrastructure are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, they overlap and are, for example, echoed in the following quote from the handbook by Rudy Loewe, a founding member of Brown Island:

> I need BROWN ISLAND because when I came here the first thing I stepped into was the white sea. My blackness was apparent against this white background and I wanted to find others that looked like me. I was searching for that look of recognition, that nod, that what's up, that hug to anchor me down. [. . .] Someone who understood the silence as violence but would grow my anger into laughter. (Brown Island 2019, 8)

Loewe touches upon facilitating *recognition* – "that nod"; *familiarity* and *belonging*; "that hug to anchor me down"; as well as *resilience* and *transformation* – "grow my anger into laughter." As mentioned, the handbook also consists of a variety of interviews with students, alumni, and staff who are not racialized as white. These conversations similarly work to collectivize the affects of racialization that the subjects in the publication describe experiencing at Konstfack. This is noticeable, for example, in an interview with senior lecturer at Konstfack, Catherine Anyango Grünewald. The lecturer is asked in what ways she would like to see the institution be transformed, and, as an authoritative figure for students, as well as a racialized figure, her answer works to consolidate Brown Island's collective experience:

> I'd like to see it [Konstfack] a little less comfortable with its assumptions of being a normcritical, power aware institution. Well crafted rhetoric about awareness and activism are not the same as actual progressiveness. There are some very conservative hierarchies still apparent in its structure. I think that we can learn a lot from students, because in my experience students right now see normcriticality and the idea of being 'woke' as something practical and day to day, rather than an academic concept." (Brown Island 2019, 76)

6 Translated from Danish: "et følelsespolitisk fællesskab, idet medlemmerne forsøger at afnaturalisere, afindividualisere og politisere deres følelser og oplevelser ved at forstå disse som strukturelt betingede af det øvrige samfund, men også som potentielt foranderlige."

The handbook's interviews with racialized students, alumni, and faculty such as Anyango Grünewald take up around half of the publication, while the other half consists of images from Brown Island exhibitions and a small handful of other formats, the most noteworthy examples of which I have already mentioned. Towards the end of the publication is also a selection of literary and artistic counter-canons that consist of lists of literature and films by non-white directors and authors, as well as a list of non-white artists and cultural producers. Like these lists, the interviews can be interpreted as what Gilmore denotes as "selections and reselections of ancestors," a practice that to Gilmore "is itself a part of the radical process of finding anywhere – if not everywhere – in political practice and analytical habit, lived expressions (including opacities) of unbounded participatory openness" (Gilmore 2017, 238). Curating a wide range of voices that deal with experiences of racialization and marginalisation; art and collectivity; resilience and resistance, the handbook provides readers – future students at Konstfack, in particular – with an alternative "consciousness-foundation" from which infrastructures of whiteness and in extension society can potentially be challenged (Gilmore 2017, 237).

The possibility of change brings us back to Mattern's quote on repair manuals for that which cannot be fixed, and to the question of whether it makes sense to comprehend the Brown Island handbook as a repair manual in the first place. For, what does repair imply here? Is repair about conserving infrastructures or about inciting systemic change through elimination? About abolition or revision? Mattern urges us to think about what repair means within specific contexts, for whom it means something, and "the interdependencies between various scales of repair" (Mattern 2024, paragraph 59). She asserts that repair manuals for the irreparable, such as misinformation, wars, climate collapse as well as racial and environmental injustices, ideally "prompt us to consider what exactly, needs to be repaired: an object, a structure, an infrastructure, or an entire society?" (Mattern 2024, paragraph 59).

The Brown Island handbook is, I argue, a manual that wishes to help future students build collective practices to survive within art institutions. This is evident, for example, when the handbook takes on a DIY grammar and provides suggestions on how to repair history by underscoring artists who have been forgotten, disregarded, or silenced by the institution:

> Workshop Two.
> Art's History Timeline: Important moments in artistic history often prioritises middle class white men, which leaves out a large number of important artists. Take a long piece of paper and create your own timeline of art history, adding artists who you consider important, but may not fit into the most common artistic canon. If you're doing this as a group, think about doing it collectively on one sheet of paper so you can share your knowledge. (Brown Island 2019, 39)

There are also other elements in Brown Island's publication that could go under the category of repair. We could, for example, read the handbook as an attempt at archival repair when it sets out to historicize other practices of racialized artists whose works have not been given much attention.[7] As I have exemplified by unpacking the controversy around Vita Havet, the handbook communicates, perhaps more so than anything else, that collective practices can push for transformation within art institutions like Konstfack by making institutional infrastructures and their flaws apparent to those who inhabit them. This could be read as a reparative stance on a larger scale. Meanwhile, such an interpretation is complicated by voices like Sara Kristoffersson. She would in fact claim quite the opposite: that collective efforts such as Brown Island's are toxic and damaging for art institutions. Having examined Brown Island as an affective infrastructure, I propose that my analysis leaves little doubt that the student collective and its handbook have worked to resist institutional whiteness and the affects it casts off within the academy. Hosting social gatherings and art exhibitions, the collective's supports systems have additionally been oriented around both affective and educational sustenance and resilience: creating an internal emotional politics by making visible the structural underpinnings of affects of racialization *as well as* making visible racialized students as promising artists. The Brown Island handbook, I propose, bears witness to these constructive activities and urges future generations to follow suit.

However, the separatist collective, and in extension their publication, could also be read as an attempt at creating an *abolition geography*, as Gilmore has it – an imagining that goes "against the disintegrating grind of partition and repartition through which racial capitalism perpetuates the means of its own valorization" (Gilmore 2017, 238). For, as Gilmore asserts in relation to political examples ranging from the US Industrial Prison Complex to the First Palestinian Intifada, the notion of abolition geography "is capacious (it isn't only by, for or about Black people) and specific (it's a guide to action for both understanding and rethinking how we combine our labor with each other and the earth)" (Gilmore 2017, 238). Mentioning activist "handbooks" as one example of "place-making, space-changing activities" that can ultimately help articulate possible futures, Gilmore states: "People make abolition geographies from what they have; changing awareness can radically revise understanding of what can be done with available materials" (Gilmore 2017, 239). Very literally, Brown Island manifested a piece of imaginary land in the middle of an ocean to change an already politically organized geography and the feelings this place materializes.

7 See example in footnote 3.

What remains not yet abolished and irreparable is the fundamental condition that made Brown Island emerge in Vita Havet to begin with. This condition is whiteness, which continues to shape the lives of members of society in countries like Sweden, especially for those who do not extend whiteness as a point of likeness. Berlant writes that, ultimately, the quest for non-sovereignty must seek beyond belonging and enable us to "be close without being joined, without mistaking the other's flesh for one's own" (Berlant 2016, 402; quoted in Dragona 2019, paragraph 15). Interestingly, while Brown Island self-define as a "separatist" collective, consisting exclusively of members racialized as non-white, the handbook does not seem to be a separatist undertaking (Brown Island 2019, 36). By this I mean that the handbook does not exclusively address a reader racialized as non-white. In fact, the handbook features a letter titled "Dear White People," while the opening word to the reader simply states that the handbook "aims to be a resource, a reference point, an articulation of collective thought situated in its specific moment in time" (Brown Island 2019, 3). In the group's capacity as a separatist collective, there is no doubt that Brown Island functioned as an "introverted and ongoing affective alliance working to understand their [members] shared emotions as products of the political, social, cultural, and historical reality" (Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024, 108).[8] The point that I want to make is that an additional driving force for Brown Island, as expressed in the handbook, was to be "a strategic *means* of possible change" in *relation to* the art institution and *for* a larger community (Gaonkar and Schmidt 2024, 108).[9] Accordingly, the handbook can be read as addressing anyone interested in working towards the same transformations as Brown Island – regardless of whether we regard this endeavor as an abolitionist collective practice or an attempt at repairing a society gone wrong. It is important to note that the notion of abolitionism, originally dealing with the abolition of slavery and the incarceration of Black people in the US, as stated by Gilmore, is of course at risk of being misused in cases were the institutional status quo remains unchallenged.

Drawing upon Berlant, I argue that the notion of abolition geographies does, however, resonate with the configuration of affective infrastructures. We can read the Brown Island publication as an initiative to be with each other in common and through non-sovereign modes of relationality make our existing infrastructures seem porous, so their ways of pattering the world can eventually come undone. As already mentioned, today Vita Havet is simply referred to as Havet. A geography has been transformed, albeit not formally. This leaves us, inevitably,

8 Translated from Danish: "en introvert og fortløbende affektiv alliance blandt racialiserede kunst- og kulturarbejdere, der arbejder på at forstå deres fælles følelser som produkter af den politiske, sociale, kulturelle og historiske virkelighed."

9 Translated from Danish: "et strategisk *middel* til mulig forandring."

with Mattern's encouraging abolitionist conclusion on repair manuals, even the ones for that which seems impossible to ever repair: "Even a modest manual has the potential to bring big political, epistemological, and ontological questions close to hand – and to put the *potential* for repair and abolition into its readers' hands" (Mattern 2024, paragraph 63).

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Stine Marie Jacobsen and Joana Monbaron

Institutional and Infrastructural Frictions: The Case of *Group-Think* – An Art, Sport, and Protest Project with Youth

This chapter takes the form of a conversation between art educator and organizer Joana Monbaron and artist Stine Marie Jacobsen. Here, we analyze *Group-Think*,[1] a collaborative project with young people that focuses on collective sensitivity and safety in the context of protests. Developed for the Manifesta 13 biennial in Marseille in 2020,[2] the project took student protests against neoliberal education reforms in France, school occupations, and subsequent confrontations with the police as its starting point. Noting that the fields of art, education, sport, and protest are rarely associated, while art institutions are generally unconcerned with the conditions of production and reproduction that underpin them, we saw the need for a project that would challenge educational approaches to children and young people in the contexts of school and art.

Intending to broaden and enrich formal and artistic education through physical activity, *Group-Think* consists of a series of exercises based on understanding collective intelligence as a matrix for mutual aid and a shared bodily future. These exercises share first-aid tips for mass demonstrations and mobilizations, train in crowd collaboration techniques, and raise awareness of the ability to act in solidarity and collectively in the name of global justice. Thus, *Group-Think* intends to raise awareness of the right to protest, the right to assemble, and the political necessity of collective intelligence. The project interweaves (at least temporarily) with the internal dynamics of art and educational institutions while ultimately going beyond them, thanks to its open-source availability. For Manifesta 13, a film was also produced for showing at the exhibition held in Autumn 2020.

By highlighting the similarities between the fields of contemporary art and formal education, the project challenges traditional art institutions and those that

1 *Group-Think*, a book by Stine Marie Jacobsen, introduces a series of open-source exercises that simulate crowd movements, fostering a training program to develop a new sense of collective sensitivity, group safety, and a revival of group swarm ideologies. *Group-Think* exercises are intended to be continuously developed by readers and workshop participants: https://stinemarieja cobsen.com/group-think/ (Jacobsen, 2020).

2 Stine Marie Jacobsen initially conceptualized the project and collaborated intimately with Manifesta educational team Joana Monbaron, Primavera Gomes Caldas, and Yana Klichuk to develop the project with local partners for two years, 2019–2020.

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cultivate radicalism at a discursive or representational level, often without regard for the infrastructural conditions in which they operate. These conditions are notably structured by the separation between artistic production and reproductive work – in this case, education – which often leads them to replicate normative practices. Thus, one of the questions we faced at the time was how artistic and educational strategies could unsettle this separation and thus initiate different relationships with collaborators and participants in dynamics at the intersection of arts, education, sports, and protest cultures.

The following conversation examines the articulation between infrastructure and the development and exhibition of an art project with young people, initiated in collaboration with the biennial's education team. The aim of this conversation is threefold. First, it explores and critically situates the implementation of a multidimensional project such as *Group-Think* in the field of art. Second, it envisions a socially situated museum/art institution that can better accommodate hybrid art projects in our current age of protest and crisis. Thirdly, it imagines an infrastructure that places reproduction at the center of institutional concerns as a condition of possibility for collaborating otherwise.

Stine Marie Jacobsen: Joana, you asserted in 2023 that *Group-Think* needs an institution with a very solid social platform to be implemented successfully. When I say "successfully," it means a co-authorship between myself, participants, and collaborators so that institutions consider my project as it is, multilayered, while participants continue using it as a method. I think institutions are meant to collaborate at many levels with the artist, so they need to show more than just objects, transcending their conventional action scope to diffuse and reproduce the knowledge produced collectively. Thinking together and working with partners who know about the topic is key. For example, writer, journalist, and activist Jacques Soncin, a major player in the Mai 68 movement in Marseille who sadly passed away last year, was our consultant for the project.

When we first presented the project to the public, we organized a collective panel moderated by education assistant Primavera Gomes Caldas with the students Alex Vievard and Hanni Dexheimer, our advisor Jaques Soncin, and collaborator Sophie de Castelbajac from The National Circus Centre Archaos (Fig 1.). I wanted to talk more with you about this collaborative aspect and our experiences when we worked together on *Group-Think* at the Manifesta Biennial in Marseille in 2019–2020. A type of project like *Group-Think* needs a different type of institution. However, before we dive into that, maybe you could describe what type of project *Group-Think* is from your point of view.



Fig. 1: LEFT Stine Marie Jacobsen *Group-Think*, book cover by Modem Studio & artist, Manifesta Biennial 13, Marseille France, 2020, Photo by artist, RIGHT, *Group-Think* panel talk, Manifesta Biennial 13, Marseille, France, 2020.

Joana Monbaron: I like this question because, as somebody who was involved in the first unfolding of the project back in 2019, I had to explain it to very different interlocutors, and the explanation moved as the process of conceptualizing it moved. *Group-Think* is a project at the intersection of art, sport, civic education, and critical pedagogy. It involves different constituencies, such as students, teachers, art educators, and administrators. The workshop part involved the collaborative development of the exercises. The outcome is a small book of gathered exercises that anybody can use independently from the artist's presence. *Group-Think* – and many of the projects you devise – can be implemented in diverse frameworks but always within a locally defined context.

In the national framework of France and the specific conditions of the city of Marseille, *Group-Think* evolved around existing practices. I am talking about our observation of students' movements in Marseille in 2018–2019 against the neoliberal reform of the *lycées* (high schools) and their questions after occupying their schools and being confronted by the police. Some teachers also asked themselves what their role was when students took the initiative to defend their rights to free and non-selective education. Should they support them in action? The fact that your methodology derived from issues and practices encountered locally is one of the things that I appreciated in your approach, which took seriously the social conditions in which your project was going to be organized.

Stine: I remember you had conducted a lot of research on and conversations about *Group-Think* already. Normally, I don't experience that level of preparation and engagement. I usually arrive, and there is no contact with anyone, so I have to start making the contacts myself, which demands a lot of time. What was your role?

Joana: I was education coordinator at Manifesta 13, the biennial commissioning your work. We had room for experimenting because Manifesta's head of education, Yana Klichuk, was trusted by the direction, giving the education department some autonomy to devise our projects. In a way, we applied a multidimensional strategy that recognized the disjointed spaces and times between the stakes of the biennial, materialized by its exhibition held in Autumn 2020, and the reality of the long-standing struggles of the inhabitants of Marseille. We managed to dissociate the exhibition, as a curatorial statement, from the work of "reaching out" to the public, which often feels very artificial, in favor of other, quasi-autonomous forms of collaboration. A part of this strategy was a long-term school project.

Stine: Yes, education and exhibition are sometimes not connected at all. There is a gap between the final presentation and the process. In Marseille, the exhibition comprised a video and a book, which resulted from the workshops. However, workshops are usually not presented in an exhibition or object format.

Joana: Our initial idea was to devise and implement a meaningful school project, which involved close collaboration with the Académie d'Aix-Marseille, the administrative district of reference for the French formal education system.

Stine: I remember that during the process of conceptualizing the project, there was a point where we had to stop using the word "protest" because some teachers, principals, and rectors reacted negatively to the word. They wanted to avoid the word "protest" because demonstrations at schools were really happening. Other teachers suggested teaching the students about the history of protests, so I suggested we start using "collective intelligence" instead of explicitly saying "protest."

Upon beginning the project, I had a conversation with a long-term collaborator, Aleks Berditchevskaia, a researcher for collective intelligence design, who commented that she had not seen sports and "collective intelligence" matched before. Using that term opened the doors and made it easier to implement the project, as some schools react negatively to this very political and historically conflictive concept. There is actually a much more negative global attitude toward the right to assembly. The right to assemble is a civic right, which I think is important to teach in schools. Some people reacted to the project as if it was teaching children to fight, that we were teaching children to fight the police, for instance. Nothing could be further away from the truth. We were training them to be safer when they were in big masses.

My point of making the *Group-Think* project is to lobby at schools for the right to protest, the right to assemble, and the training of collective intelligence within the political mass. I had conversations with Yana Klichuk about whether

we should use the word "protest" in the final book, and there was another funny incident. On the cover of the *Group-Think* book is a drawing of one of the teenagers. It was produced through one of the exercises, which consists of the following: one person lies down on a piece of paper, and another one draws this person's body contour. They fill in the insides with icons of their political interests and what they would fight for. Like antagonistic body maps, they politicize their organs. For the cover, I used one of the workshop drawings, where a student makes a protest pose, such as showing the middle finger. I said to Yana, "No, it's not a fuck finger; it's the finger from Saturday Night Fever." She laughed and said, "Nice try, Stine." We moved the fuck finger half a millimeter so that it was unclear if it was a middle finger or a pointing finger (Fig. 2).

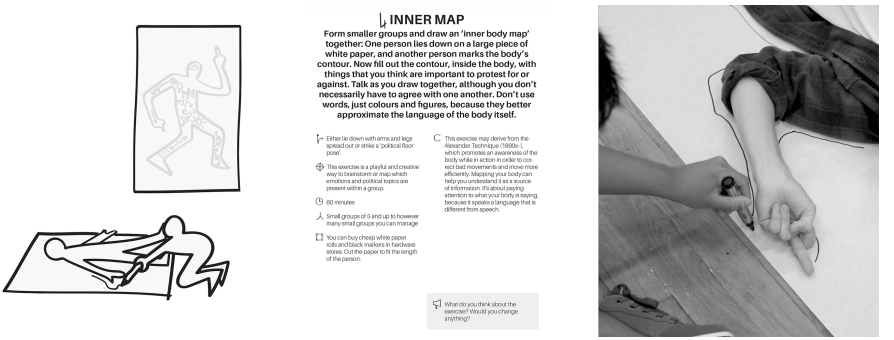


Fig. 2: LEFT Stine Marie Jacobsen *Group-Think* workshop, Manifesta Biennial 13, Marseille France, 2020. Photo by artist, RIGHT Stine Marie Jacobsen, *Group-Think* book spreads, Manifesta Biennial 13 2020 Design by Modem Studio.

Joana: I would say that this type of diplomatic incident relates to the intercultural translation always taking place in the organization of artworks at the intersection of different fields, for instance, the art field and the bureaucratized field of formal education. I think one of my roles was to provide you with information and context and conduct research beforehand about the functioning of these social fields so that you didn't have to and then organize, present, and/or translate the project to different constituencies who would become partners. To be hired as educators inside art institutions and devise collaborative work is to work at the intersection of artistic, pedagogical, community, and administrative work. We know that these practices are generally very invisible in historical terms. They are not archived because institutions mainly archive the history of their exhibitions. This idea is where a reference to the Marxist feminist concept of "reproductive labor" proves crucial because it describes the traditionally unpaid maintenance of social and family

structures, mainly confined to women. Indeed, some art workers have analyzed the focus solely on collections and exhibitions as the only legitimate knowledge produced by art institutions as a reflection of the patriarchal division of labor within cultural institutions, which privileges production over reproduction (Sternfeld 2010; Mörsch 2011; Allen 2019). While productive labor – since it corresponds to the capitalist criteria for what constitutes work – is visible and valorized, "care work" as one type of reproductive labor is invisibilized and devaluated.

Stine: How can we use the term "infrastructural aesthetics" related to this concept? I mention it because it has to do with the idea that material and immaterial structures enable or do not enable the movement of other matters, which affect how we formulate and decode any action with an aesthetic purpose (Larkin 2013). Art institutions may sometimes misunderstand and simplify my interactions as an artist with an institution. My mission as an artist is to read how these institutions are structured and find the spots where we can work together. Can I mention the word "infrastructure" to an institution so that the people there will immediately know that I'm talking about a more complex, and yes, demanding, grid of working together? What issues did you encounter with *Group-Think* or may you encounter in the future? How do you think these issues may affect the project in the future?

Joana: I think that infrastructural aesthetics raise the question of the separation between the conditions of art's (re)production and the criticality of art institutions. Basically, it considers how an ideal criticality – in the sense of abstract or idealistic – in the arts stands in a non-relation to its formal and material conditions of (re)production. Moreover, the conditions of (re)production of a multidimensional project such as *Group-Think* imply a lot of work that is invisibilized if one focuses solely on the artwork produced as an outcome of the project.

For example, a great deal of forethought went into integrating the project into the formal education calendar so that teachers could participate in training days provided and paid for by the French Ministry of Education. This level of anticipation is unthinkable in the context of education conceived as a side project to an exhibition, whose temporality depends mainly on the agenda of the artistic direction. Also, once the exercises had been consolidated and listed in a small book that everyone could use, we worked together to put them into practice, not only in secondary school classes but also by mobilizing the networks of Marseille's municipal social centers. Social centers were great non-formal education collaborators.

As *Group-Think* was a project initiated within the biennial's education department, the most difficult part, which turned out to be a failure, was negotiating with the curators the integration of the project's artistic output into the main

Manifesta 13 exhibition. If you remember, that was our initial plan. Based on our previous experience working with schools, which has always remained invisible (from an art world's perspective), we agreed that *Group-Think* also needed an objectified result to be presented in the exhibition. You were quickly introduced to the curators and given the opportunity to present your practice and specific project for the biennial.

Until the last minute (the biennial was postponed because of the COVID-19 pandemic), the curators did not give us a clear answer as to whether the film *Group-Think* would be included in their exhibition. It was only a few weeks before the opening. Following a heated conversation, it became clear to us that the project would not be part of the main exhibition. In my opinion, the conflictual discussions we had on the hybrid nature of *Group-Think* reflected the institutional prioritization of exhibition production over reproduction and shed light on how regimes of knowledge production maintain the dominance of specific ways of being and working over others. I believe that the curators' refusal to include *Group-Think* in their exhibition was linked not only to a reversal of roles (they were not the initiators of the project) but also to a more general ambivalence toward projects whose artistic product cannot be entirely separated from the reproductive work that gave rise to it.

In the end, we found a way through our own network. We set up our headquarters in a neighborhood on the outskirts of the city center, so it was from there that we developed our projects in collaboration with the local residents long before the actual biennial opened. It was easy for us to ask our neighbors, the Coco Velten cultural space, to host the installation of the film *Group-Think*. They were generous enough to agree. Our geographical proximity meant we could organize regular visits with groups coming to Manifesta's education headquarters during the biennial.

What was complicated to plan was the installation's production since we had to manage it by ourselves. Since the artwork was not part of the biennial's main exhibition, its production was on the shoulders of the education department. Our colleague Primavera Gomes Caldas took charge, and she did it brilliantly with the means at hand. While the quality of the installation may not have been comparable to that of a professionally produced installation, this touch of amateurism ultimately fit in well with our general approach to art-as-collaboration.

Stine: It is so disappointing and odd that it was difficult to make *Group-Think* a part of the exhibition.

Joana: Yes, indeed. The last step was distribution. We understood that for the book to be used in schools, we had to contact the documentation and information center (CDI) workers of the municipality's schools. We prioritized the schools

with which we had collaborated and where we knew the teaching staff, then approached the art advisors at the city's high schools and middle schools to draw up a relevant list of schools interested in the project to whom we sent the book.

Stine: That's amazing. That type of distribution work happens so rarely. We have all these similar art projects by artists who really are seeking to function outside the art world. However, the link usually doesn't happen with the institution or the team that you're working with. It's only if the artist has connections or is famous. I sometimes feel split when I work in society – if it does not take the form of an exhibition, is it not art? Recently, I've told schools to just use my projects themselves. That is the point of me making the books, which I call "mobile museums," because they carry methods inside them – a very, maybe the most immaterial form of art – for others to use. I have learned to let go and not control.

Ironically, I've been told by many curators that I should control it or else I will lose the project because if participants start changing the project, it's no longer art. However, if a project is really strong, participants can, of course, change it. Think of Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed,"[3] where the audience is expected to intervene in the theatre or role play. It hasn't suffered, and it has traveled for many years. It has activated beautiful political conversations around the world. I think this fear of losing control comes from this art world's fear of losing authorship.

However, we're moving into a different time when "Knowledge is Beside Itself." I quote this from a book by the same name by writer and curator Tom Holert (2020), in which he examines contemporary arts' recent emphasis on "research" and "knowledge production." The book argues for the right to provide access to novel knowledge. He calls it "knowledgization." Holert says that "artists are search engines" and viral. We artists pass on knowledge. So why should artists, as sort of property conservatives, hold it down? Knowledge is not a finite thing, but in the arts, we often close knowledge down around an object. I think

3 This theatrical practice is defined by Augusto Boal (1993) in his book "Theatre of the Oppressed" and finds its whole context in "Games for Actors and Non-Actors" (Boal 1992), in which Boal explores different techniques and approaches aiming to recognize different layers of difference and oppression through dramatic play. This "Theatre" interweaves theatrical techniques with critical pedagogy, fostering dialogues about psychological, bodily, physical conditions of oppression and it is influenced by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogical model of "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." Jacobsen's art embodies similar processes by creating immersive experiences that invite audiences to actively engage with issues involving oppression. Boal's cultural relativism informs the exploration of diverse perspectives, while Freire's emphasis on conscientization encourages viewers to become aware of power dynamics and thus become capable of emancipating, aspects that are part of the entanglement signaled by Jacobsen along this conversation.

the new generation of artists is aware of this, and in the future, they won't control as much as we did.

Joana: Interesting. My position is that the space of reception is always multiple and that the apparatuses, however tacit, for seeing and meaning-making always have political implications. Moreover, despite the mainstream discourse on museums as democratic institutions, we know from the work of critical sociologists over the past 50 years that one of the implicit functions of art, as framed by the museum in the context of Western European nation-states, is to regulate the social body and legitimate social hierarchies. So, we must be aware that the process of "knowledgization" that you mention is very socially selective.

Stine: It becomes *Frontalunterricht*[4] if we don't allow fluidity. Ways of mediating or sharing pedagogy, such as mediating an artwork via a workshop, are extremely powerful. What I can say from my experience is that these questions and the methods we create that emerge from them are often more interesting in the case of political art projects outside the art world. If you work in highly conflictive areas, in war zones or conflict zones, you cannot use a too demanding approach and be too prescriptive in your approach to engage people in the arts because people are overwhelmed, traumatized, and need care and help more than aesthetic or artistic experiences. Art museums and institutions deeply desire to show the world that they are engaged with either local society, conflicts, or crises, but this can be completely out of context in terms of the actual crises, conflicts, and needs if they follow state policies too much. Conflict and site analysis are always part of my work, and my analysis often does not fit state policies. So, if an art institution follows major or state policies, I can encounter institutional expectations that limit my scope.

Thanks for sharing the book *Museum Activism* with me, by the way (Janes and Sandell 2019). It gave me a lot of new input and ideas in this regard. I spent a full day on this topic of museum activism with art students at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig, where I am a professor in the New Media Art Department. Based on my reading of this book, I asked them to make sketches of a museum that would host their needs and practices. The students suggested that a museum, as an institution, must be fluid and flexible to host and adjust to each project and artist that arrives to work with and inside them. No heavy institutional walls – there must be community meetings, social meetings, and food! Many of the stu-

4 This term in German means "frontal teaching," a form of pedagogy in which a specific content is communicated to a group of learners. Characteristic of frontal teaching is that the teacher alone controls, monitors, and evaluates the lesson.

dents believe it is extremely important to get life into the museum and make the museum a space for life.

There was a concrete example that was very funny. One of the students, Niklas Kleemann, suggested that museums should have an activity room called "I Could Have Made That." It relates to this common joke about someone who goes to a museum and says with disdain, "I could have made this too," referring to an abstract painting or other non-figurative art form. This claim is most commonly based on an unreal notion of technical excellence and "geniality" the mass media and education system have taught us to expect when we see art. This student was saying, "What if we really had such a room in these museums? Would we reach these kinds of skeptical people differently, in a more effective way?" It's like telling them, "Try to make a Rothko painting because you think it looks really simple." *(Laughter)*

Joana: *(Laughter)* That's a fun idea.

Stine: Another student, Anina Göpel, came up with the idea to create a room called "The Second-Hand Room." Visitors would be allowed to put artworks into a new context in this room. I previously showed them Nora Sternfeld's main points on how to rethink the museum. She envisions the museum of the future as a radically democratic one, which is an idea I find interesting. One particular aspect . . . Sternfeld (2021) asserted that museums have tended to canonize different works so that they become neutralized in a way. One of the purposes of institutional critique's tradition, in this sense, has been to make structures inside institutions more transparent. The Second-Hand Room would be helpful in this sense: the spectators could become actors, re-assembling the elements of discourse inside museums and cultural institutions, maybe generating even new contexts and discourses. Who knows? I found The Second-Hand Room a great idea. However, back to *Group-Think* and why I wanted to talk to you. I wanted to hear how you think issues can be minimized and what type of art institution this project needs – or maybe I should ask what type of "thinking" it needs.

Joana: One of the components of *Group-Think* is the workshops, which indirectly encourage participants to work together to conduct a social and/or institutional analysis. I think that setting up workshops based on *Group-Think* exercises with the team of future institutions you'll be working with would be an excellent thing because it allows us not only to practically grasp what the artwork and the workshop are about but also because it momentarily blurs the categories between professional fields since it fluidifies relations between visible and invisible practices and the social assignments they engender. It's a perfect starting point to think of what we are doing as a team and how we work together. In this way, it shifts the

focus away from artworks and exhibition production and creates more space for communal bonding that is not specifically delegated to human resources or a peripheral education department.

Stine: Yes, most of the time, they only train the trainers or work with visitors. The administrative people don't encounter the project. It may be difficult for big institutions to find a director to participate in a workshop, but I would love to encourage them to do it. For many years, I was conceptually not understood (or welcomed) when I asked for specific educational implementation or participation, or the artwork was perceived as "difficult." Now, I worry more about the balance between over-protocoling and having easy access to the artwork. The core of *Group-Think* is that the open-source exercises always continue to be developed by participants, who, in the workshop, try an exercise and then rewrite it after a slow group reflection.

In 2020, when we launched the project, I made a PubPub[5] site for the public to access the book and make comments. On PubPub, others can contribute and ask critical questions before you (re)publish a book. Now, I am looking into doing a Wiki or a TikTok profile and thinking about having less writing and more image-based knowledge sharing. My interest lies in the right to assemble, to protest, but if some of the trainers are more for collective intelligence and sensitization of the masses, that's fine because they will become better trainers if they can use the project the way they want. What could I do better? What if I were to write an "access rider" for those trainers, what should I ask the institutions to do?

Joana: Obviously, access riders are important because institutions must consider how to work with artists in the best possible way. However, access riders tend to be very artist-centered, whereas critical sociology teaches us that art institutions are cultural apparatuses that contribute to producing and reproducing social inequalities. In this light, if art institutions are exclusionary spaces from the beginning, what type of access are we referring to in access riders?

One of the elements that enthused me in *Museum Activism* is the consideration of museum and art workers' agency and the study of coalitions between counter-publics and/or artist-activist collectives that contest the museum from below and museum workers across the museum's hierarchies (Coleman and Moore 2019). I think that this is something to keep in mind in the elaboration of access riders: artists don't look solely at the museum as a homogeneous institution that needs somehow to accommodate them but consider that, within, there is

5 PubPub is an open-source, community-led, end-to-end publishing platform for knowledge communities (see https://group-think.pubpub.org/pub/x8cdgt74/release/1 [accessed August 29, 2023]).

a variety of human beings who may be their accomplices to generate possibilities for alternative relationships inside and outside the art institution.

Stine: Is infrastructural aesthetics about looking at where there are broken relations, and where there are connected relations? If you hire a company, you are an accomplice in what they're doing. That's how we should see institutions, which is maybe the "culture strike" idea that people are pointing out board members who are weapon dealers, and they should be pulled out. It would be good if we could think about the whole of the institutions we work with.

Joana: As mentioned earlier, I understand that infrastructural aesthetics considers how ideal criticality in the arts is separated from its conditions of reproduction. I am inspired by the work of Marina Vishmidt and Kerstin Stakemeier (2016), who examined the relationship between reproductive labor and artistic autonomy, which is understood as the de-historicized and essentialized separation of art from the relations of capitalist production. They assert that the preservation of artistic autonomy, as a condition for the existence of the artistic infrastructure, depends on its separation from reproductive labor. When we analyze art institutions as workplaces, we see that their internal division of labor – which privileges production over reproduction – reflects structural inequalities of race, class, and gender.

For example, while the historically "feminized" and precarious work of education is predominantly performed by highly educated white women and is subordinated in the hierarchies of art institutions (Peyrin 2010), cleaning and security staff, who are predominantly negatively racialized people, have been the first art institutions workers to be affected by outsourcing policies.[6] This racial division of labor must be articulated to the fact that the Western aesthetic regime of art and its infrastructure are inseparable from the systematic material and immaterial expropriation at the heart of transatlantic slavery and (neo-)colonialism, as demonstrated by a growing body of literature (Sarr and Savoy, 2018; Azoulay, 2017; Vergès, 2023). As Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argued (2017), it means that anyone involved in the art world – artists, curators, educators – inherits a colonial positionality. Bearing all this in mind, how do we articulate the aesthetics and what is infrastructural?

Stine: Maybe the change can come from collaborations with society? For example, with *Group-Think*, none of the trainers are artists. Some of them don't know what to expect from an art museum. I just make sure that they get access and get

6 Since France is an officially "colorblind" country, it is illegal to collect statistics on race, religion, and ethnicity. Anti-racist associations produce their reports to provide the data they need to advance their cause (see, e.g., the report made in June 2020 by the association Décoloniser les arts).

paid. Maybe the change can come through socially engaged projects that allow non-artists and the public to access the museum.

Joana: Perhaps indeed. It's projects like *Group-Think* that are both "inside" and "outside" that may transform the practices of being "inside" and enable us to institute otherwise. However, I think it's also essential to consider the infrastructure of art institutions as workplaces, particularly the divisions of class, gender, and race, which complicate the discourse on access to art institutions/museums for a more diverse public as a vehicle for social change. While the infrastructure underpinning an institution – even super inclusive – depends on exploitative and neo-colonial relations of (re)production, we remain in the symbolic or performative realm.

Stine: When I talk about policies in the art world, I risk talking from a Eurocentric point of view because I have a cultural ministry (in Denmark) that supports me, whereas many don't. Some of my students from an online course at NODE Center for Curatorial Studies in Berlin, who were from many different locations worldwide, told me, "Hey, it's great that you talk about the fact that we should get paid, but there is no money here." You realize that some of the strategies that you have don't fit everywhere. In Marseille, we said no to getting sponsorship from an oil company because we could. In *Group-Think,* the one who does the workshop gets the money.

Joana: What and how you devise is interesting because you manage to have a sort of economic system that is more or less sustainable outside the art market, for instance, through free distribution inside and outside art institutions and the fair pay of collaborators. However, as you mentioned earlier with the remarks of your NODE students, access to public funding also implies a privileged position within the unequal international distribution of wealth between North and South, which is the result of colonial tribute. Our collective responsibility is to find ways to act upon the fact that this historical and permanent inequality compromises transnational collaboration, on which the infrastructure of contemporary art rests.

Afterword

After the Manifesta Biennial in 2020, the *Group-Think* project was, due to the pandemic, on hold until 2022, when it continued, among other events,[7] as a solo exhibi-

7 Workshops at Direct Inclusion Festival 2021, Russia, Zabel Biennial in Albania 2021 (exhibition cancelled due to pandemic), Ungdomsfolkemødet in Denmark 2022, "Digital rites and embodied

tion at an art center in Denmark called Rønnebæksholm, which director Lotte Juul Petersen and curator Vibeke Kelding Hansen ran. For four months, from February to May, 500 school students were engaged by trainers Emma Tokmak, Mads Gregorious Krag, and Sara Skjershede Nielsen in writing new exercises and developing collective sports tools in writing and workshop rooms.

Rønnebæksholm structures its educational program around what schools can manage. The art center sends workshop offers to schools that then book a visit if they are interested. Workshop descriptions are often formulated in a way that schools can approve (as important for their educational curriculum). Art institutions and how they connect to and communicate with collaborating institutions play a big part in creating the realities in which immaterial art[8] can function. In general, *Group-Think* unfolded more smoothly in Denmark than in France, where it created many discussions around the right to protest and the right to assemble. In France, these rights are criminalized,[9] so school students in Marseille had confrontations with the police. Thus, the social-political impact of the project was high. In Denmark, it was more challenging to maintain a focus on protest, and the project diverted toward training collaborative skills (perhaps) because the school children were not as wired for protest.

By resituating art and educational institutions within a broader set of arrangements that produce definitions of social reality, multidimensional artistic and art workers' practices attempt to place reproduction at the center of their operations. Hence, they seriously consider the infrastructural context preceding them and the organization of often frictional collaborations across this context's arrangements, eventually bringing about what Sara Ahmed (2017) named "institutional plumbing," referring to diversity workers with the impossible task of reforming structurally unequal institutions. Acquiring essential practical knowledge that allows us to identify the "mechanisms whereby the system is not transformed" (p. 96), institutional plumbing is not concerned with heroic transformative figures. Instead, it takes

memories" EU4ART_differences Summer School 2022 in Italy, Heartbeat 2023 at Vega, "Codes and Friends" at Digitale Welten Festival in Germany 2023 and at Arken, Museum of contemporary Art in Denmark 2024.

8 "Immaterial art" is here understood according to Lucy R. Lippard's definition (1997, p. xvii) that "much art now is transported by the artist, or in the artist himself, rather than by watered-down, belated circulating exhibition or by existing information networks."

9 In French law, the right to protest and assemble in public is not addressed by the constitution and a real protection of the right to protest is not authorized but has to be declared in advance. Furthermore, Article 431–3 of the French Penal Code refers to "criminal participation" as a "crowd" or "group of people." A crowd is not illegal in and of itself, but crowds do not possess the same fundamental rights as those of an individual and can therefore be considered "likely to disturb public order."

what is possible in highly compromised environments such as Western art institutions as its starting point. It is from the conjunctural analysis of the infrastructure of these institutions that institutional plumbers develop dynamic strategies for reallocating their material resources and symbolic capital, as well as redistributing artistic sensibilities toward concrete struggles for social justice.

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Rasmus Holmboe

TOVES: THE SALE. Towards an Infrastructural Model for Hosting at the Art Museum

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the now disbanded artist collective and self-organized exhibition space TOVES that operated on the Copenhagen art scene in the period 2010–2017. TOVES constitutes a case of infrastructural art through the ways in which the organization repeatedly and throughout its life placed itself and its activities within existing markets and institutions such as the commercial shopping arcade, the art fair, the kunsthalle, the gallery space, and finally the museum. TOVES often worked with and through appropriating and skewing the formal languages of these settings e.g. through the use of business cards, flyers, stock (and mock) photos, annual reports and other formal strategies that can provisionally be understood as avantgarde readymade derivatives with clear post-medium conceptual elements to them (Krauss 1999). More fundamentally, however, TOVES also worked *in and with* these settings quite literally. They started as Toves Galleri, an experimental gallery in a shopping arcade, then got homeless and moved to temporarily establish TOVES Salon with three exhibitions housed by Charlottenborg Kunsthal in Copenhagen. They also conducted TOVES Workshop at Malmö Konsthall before they reopened as TOVES at a location in Siljangade in Copenhagen that gave clear associations to the type of post-industrial setting that many commercial galleries were housed in around that time. The present chapter mainly concerns itself with the last (and perhaps most poignant) of these infrastructural interventions, where, in 2017, the organization put itself up for sale with the work *THE SALE* and was subsequently bought by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark.

Infrastructure

The concept of infrastructure used in this article relies in a double sense on the notion of "infrastructural inversion" first coined by science philosopher and information theorist Geoffrey Bowker (Bowker 1994). In the first sense, and with regards to the practice of TOVES, I understand this inversion, quite directly, in

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consequence of the avantgarde appropriation tactics deployed by the group to lay the infrastructural elements of their (appropriated) working environments out in the open. Secondly, and with regards to my own method in this article, I am not overly interested in what TOVES or *THE SALE* might mean in an interpretive hermeneutical sense. Rather, what interests me is to examine how they present themselves as infrastructural inversions to me – as invitations to think differently about the contexts they appropriate and the conditions of possibility that made such contexts visible in the first place. In the case of this article, the intervention made by TOVES by selling themselves to the museum has prompted an invitation for me to think in ways that are a "foregrounding of truly backstage elements of work practice" (Star 1999, 380) within the art museum. As such the infrastructural analysis conducted in this chapter necessitates a perspective that is not dialectical in nature but rather ecological. One that will enable me to see the different reciprocities between artwork, archive, and audience – between intervention, apparatus, and dissemination, which will be discussed in more detail below, as elements that afford, structure, and entangle one another. I do not then view TOVES or *THE SALE* or the Museum of Contemporary Art as exemplary infrastructures or discrete research objects that I study together or in isolation, but rather as elements that form part of an assemblage that can be approached with an infrastructural toolbox.

An important dimension and analytic tool within this approach and in my understanding and use of the notion of infrastructure, especially as it relates to artistic intervention, is architect Keller Easterling's concepts of active forms and disposition. By the term active forms, Easterling means to underline the opposition to object form as expressed through the metaphorical juxtaposition between hardware and operating system. It is central to her thinking that object forms are physical expressions and more or less stable markers of power and as such difficult to subvert, whereas active forms, also part of infrastructure space and thus equally powerful, are constantly changing and therefore more susceptible to redesigns, performative interventions and hacking. These active forms are also the markers of disposition:

> Disposition is the character or propensity of an organization that results from all its activity. It is the medium, not the message. It is not the pattern printed on the fabric, but the way that the fabric floats. It is not the shape of the game piece but the way the game piece plays. It is not the text but the constantly updating software that manages the text. Not the object form, but the active form.

> For each technology in infrastructure space, to distinguish between what the organization is saying and what it is doing [. . .] is to read the difference between the declared intent and an underlying disposition. (Easterling 2014, 21)[1]

Looking at the case of TOVES and *THE SALE* through this lens enables me to see what happens when the organization travels through different environments – when it shifts from being an independent self-organized collective and is "adopted" by the museum. It becomes clear that the concept of infrastructural intervention is apt to describe how TOVES intervenes, appropriates and/or hacks the dispositions and different active forms in the different settings that the organization operated within. The concept of disposition is also useful to describe how the concrete strategies of intervention must change as the organization moves from one setting to the next. This movement, in turn, obviously affects how production, appearance and reception can be understood and this is what also characterizes the infrastructural analysis as a method with a toolbox as opposed to a universal descriptive methodology.

For the purposes of this theoretical overview, one last thing needs to be addressed, namely the intersection of hardware and software through which it becomes clear that infrastructure is not merely the material regulation or movement of things and information but also, and very much so, the "patterning of social form" itself (Berlant 2016, 393). Concerning the sociality of infrastructure, it is enlightening to think of Easterling's notion of disposition as (both etymologically and conceptually) very closely related to Michel Foucault's ideas of the dispositive understood as a

> [. . .] thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions – in short, the said as much as the unsaid. (quoted in Easterling 2014, 92)

Easterling notes this in what reads like an addendum to her main argument (Easterling 2014, 92), but the affinity between disposition and dispositive, I think, is too striking to not address in more detail. Here, she also softens the opposition between object form and active form to say that "Active form supplements the aesthetics of object form" (Easterling 2014, 92) as a way of acknowledging the apparatus-like character of what she calls infrastructure space. The reason I am waving the Fou-

1 It seems that Easterling uses the term organization rather broadly defined, in much the same manner as TOVES member Honza Hoeck speaks in Danish about "organiseringer" (Hoeck 2021b) – an expression that emphasizes the performative and active element in organizing as a verb as opposed to a more stable definition of organization as a noun.

cauldian flag is not to diminish or rectify the innovative and thought-provoking originality of Easterling's thinking. Rather I wish to solidify the connection between the material and social levels of infrastructure space and its dispositions as well as to remind the reader of how infrastructures (like theories) are always imbricated in one another. By addressing Foucault, Easterling also hints at the biopolitical undertones in his rendition of the dispositive. What is especially important here, and in prolongation of the argument that infrastructure patterns social form, is how disposition (or the dispositive) is also a form of governmentality and a tactic that can be deployed, and which relies on the self-disciplining of the subject (Hay 2000). In the light of such Foucauldian thought, it seems that the activist element that runs as an undercurrent in Easterling's thinking runs the risk of being subsumed within the infrastructure it performatively tries to hack, design or amend, just like the tactics of governmentality for Foucault were analyzed to allow for possible spaces of dissent in order to legitimize power itself (Foucault 1991, 2008).[2] With this in mind, there is reason to underline that the notions of active forms and disposition, for my purposes, are more useful as diagnostic tools to describe *how* TOVES inverted the infrastructures that the organization intervened in. As such they are a valuable analytic addition to my toolbox rather than serving merely as a description of an artistic practice and/or its outcomes. The invocation of Foucault also becomes important on this diagnostic level when TOVES migrates to the museum collection. The way that this migration prompts archival thinking underlines how this in itself is as much a biopolitical thinking as the one on the dispositive that I sketched in the above.

THE SALE at the Museum of Contemporary Art

In 2017 the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde, Denmark showed the exhibition *Sæt pris på kunsten* [Value the Art].[3] The title of the exhibition plays with the double meaning of the Danish phrase "at sætte pris på." On the one hand it means to cherish, praise or even prize something significant (such as for instance art), while on the other hand it also, quite literally, means to name your price in terms

2 The concept of self-disciplining works in tandem with ideas of possible spaces for dissent within neoliberal governmentality and corporatism. From the point of view of biopolitical tactics, dissent is always already imbricated within neoliberal governance as a means of both exerting *and* legitimizing political power by recognizing the action of the possible dissident as legitimate. See Yúdice 2003 for a discussion of the lack of subversive efficacy and performative generalization of such dissent.

3 Exhibition period: September 8 – December 22, 2017.

of economic value. The museum website[4] staged the discussion to which the exhibition was meant to contribute as being about the value of art in a society where the traditional value systems associated with modernism (such as "Bildung" and institutional legitimization) no longer had the weight once taken for granted. Accordingly, as the press release stated, art and museums had to continuously demonstrate their relevance[5] implying that new or other conceptions of economic and artistic value and their social and cultural counterparts were gaining prevalence compared to earlier times. On top of that, and related to the broader level of the intersections of art and society, the communication about the exhibition also claimed to inspire and qualify the more general political debate on values leading up to the municipal elections in Denmark in November 2017.[6] The exhibition thus wanted to question the conditions of art *and* its institutions in contemporary society from the perspectives of cultural and historical contextual significance, the possible values of artistic knowledge production, as well as crude economic value of artistic and institutional labor – in particular in relation to the art museum itself.

The rhetoric surrounding the exhibition in Roskilde is indeed part of a larger discussion that has been going on within the museum community over the past decade, which culminated on August 24, 2022 when the international council of museums, ICOM, approved a new museum definition at their extraordinary general assembly in Prague. The new definition, which replaced the 2007 version, was adopted after a period of quite fierce disagreement within the organization (Etges and Dean 2022). Disagreement that most expressly culminated with the decision to postpone the vote on a notably more radical proposal set forth at the general assembly in Kyoto in 2019. The proposal that was discussed at this event suggested, among other things, that museums should become "inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue," that they should address "the conflicts and challenges of the present" and that they should be "participatory and transparent,

4 https://mfsk.layered.dk/udstillinger/saet-pris-paa-kunsten (accessed July 4, 2023).

5 Original wording in Danish: "Kunstens værdi diskuteres meget både i Danmark og i udlandet. Kunsten, kunstinstitutionerne og hele det dannelsesbegreb, som ligger til grund for kunstens og kunstmuseernes rolle i samfundet, tages ikke længere for givet som værdifuldt. Kunsten og museerne skal hele tiden præstere og demonstrere deres relevans." Paraphrased from: https://mfsk.layered.dk/udstillinger/saet-pris-paa-kunsten (accessed July 4, 2023). Unless otherwise stated this and all subsequent quotes and paraphrases in Danish have been translated by the author.

6 Original wording in Danish: "Udstillingen Sæt pris på kunsten fungerer samtidig som et refleksionsrum, som kan inspirere og kvalificere værdidebatten op til kommunalvalget i november 2017: hvordan skal kulturen, kunsten og samfundet fremadrettet spille sammen?" Paraphrased from: https://mfsk.layered.dk/udstillinger/saet-pris-paa-kunsten (accessed July 4, 2023).

and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities."[7] However difficult it might be to disagree with such propositions from the point of view of critical cultural analysis, the 2019 proposal was not passed by the Kyoto general assembly. In fact, it was never put to the vote again but was replaced in 2022 by the definition currently in use:

> A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.[8]

What interests me in this debate is the perceived and increasing out of jointness or even rift that the museum community has felt between the daily political reality of the world that we (and they) all navigate and the definition of the museum as it had previously been constructed. A rift that was also very much on the agenda at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Roskilde at that time, both expressed in the exhibition material for the *Value the Art* exhibition, but also more fundamentally as part of the formulation of a new vision and mission statement that highlighted how the museum wanted to become a more relevant actor in society and to work with "social, cultural and environmental challenges to affect our present and future."[9]

To me, one of the most interesting works in the *Value the Art* exhibition was *THE SALE* (2017) by the artist run organization and exhibition space TOVES. Materially speaking the piece consists of a large polystyrene lined transport crate (264x220x110 cm) that contains various artworks and effects from the organization's physical exhibition space in Copenhagen. On their website, TOVES described the work in the dry language of art registration that you typically see on exhibition wall labels as consisting of "Crate, sales prospect, TOVE's brand, copyrights, artworks, 264x220x110 cm."[10] As this description more than indicates, the material elements of *THE SALE* only form part of the work's identity and as an

7 https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/ (accessed November 14, 2023).

8 https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/ (accessed June 14, 2023).

9 Quoted after https://mfsk.layered.dk/sites/default/files/documents/mfsk_visionsstrategi_2016-18.pdf (accessed November 14, 2023). For further discussion of the changes that went on at the Museum of Contemporary Art around this period and immediately before, see Holmboe 2019, mainly chapter 3: "Museums and Cultural Democracy."

10 The website www.toves.dk is not online anymore, but an almost complete copy can be consulted at https://web.archive.org/web/20180517103318/http://toves.dk/. (accessed October 18, 2023).

artwork, *THE SALE* is quite a complex amalgamation of material, immaterial as well as temporal and infrastructural elements. Literally, with *THE SALE*, the artist organization and exhibition space that had been operating since 2010, had put itself up for sale as part of the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art – at the price of 825.000 DKK. An important part of the work is a sales prospect in which the professional Danish consulting agency Christina Wilson Art Advisory in collaboration with the media agency Bates Y&R had estimated the value of the organization based on its development potentials, its material and immaterial assets, and its brand value.

Central to the sale of TOVES is the formulation that the

> [. . .] potential buyer takes over the brand of TOVES, all copyrights, all equipment and all of TOVES' artworks (see sales outline). The acquisition also includes the full rights to continue the operation of the organization. (Sales Prospect, unpaginated)[11]

The story of TOVES could have ended here and in a sense, it did. The idea of putting the organization up for sale in the first place can only be understood on the background that the collective's activities had already somewhat folded and that they had terminated the lease of their exhibition space in Siljangade in 2016. Most likely, they were already in the process of disbanding. It is safe to say that the collective efforts of TOVES had run out of steam in the formats that had hitherto been deployed and, accordingly, it had been decided that a sale would be an appropriate end to the activities in their current form.

In another sense, however, the sale of TOVES did not conclude the history of the organization. As a matter of fact, and quite to the contrary, the organization was immortalized when after the exhibition *THE SALE* was acquisitioned to be kept for posterity in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art.

As an archival artwork, *THE SALE* can be quite precisely described with reference to archaeologist Michael Shanks' notion of "archive 3.0" (Shanks 2008), which constitutes an infrastructural way to think the archive – not only as *arkheion* in the meaning of "the place where the records are kept and the records themselves" (Arthur Leavitt quoted in Giannachi 2016, 3) – but as an "animated archive," where actions and scripts are built into the archival order. Shanks describes how his work with the archives of artist Lynn Hershman Leeson

11 Original wording in Danish: "Den potentielle køber overtager TOVES' brand, alle copyrights, alt inventar og alle TOVES' værker (se salgsoversigt). Erhvervelsen indbefatter fuld ret til at drive organisationen videre." The sales prospect is part of the artwork inventoried as *THE SALE* by the Museum of Contemporary Art. A digital copy of the prospect can be consulted here: https://issuu.com/honzahoeck/docs/toves_salgsprospekt3 (accessed November 5, 2023).

> [. . .] was based upon the premise that the information rooted in archives needs to be worked upon, animated, if it is to survive. Let in museum boxes in storage depots, sources will gather dust, molder, and decay. Information requires circulation, engagement, and articulation with the questions and interests of a researcher, or anyone with an interest. Information is a verb, not a substantive. (Shanks 2008, 4)

Shanks' work has subsequently been developed substantially by performance and new media scholar Gabriella Giannachi, whose stated intent in her 2016 book *Archive Everything* was to produce a shift in the ways we perceive archives "between the archive as a set of objects (where the archive operates as a noun) and the archive as a knowledge-generating process or lab (where the archive is a verb)" (Giannachi 2016, xvii). In her version, archive 3.0 takes on the form of "an object and a process, but often also an artwork, a monument, an autobiography, a platform, and so forth" (Giannachi 2016, 20–21). This description is highly applicable to *THE SALE* and, quite obviously, it also aligns with Keller Easterling's distinction between object form and active form thus also underlining the infrastructural tenets of the notion of archive 3.0.

And this is where the trouble with the museum starts. On a practical level, because the acquisition includes *the rights* for the museum to continue the operation of the organization. This is the same as saying that the acquisition implies *an obligation* for the museum to continue the operation of the organization – if for no other reason, then to take seriously its responsibility to ethically preserve and conserve the artwork – or, as in this case, the organization. On a more theoretical level *THE SALE*, as an example of an archive 3.0 artwork allows us to see how the museum collection, from an archival point of view, is quite badly equipped toward the fluidity and scripted animation that is embedded in the work. The museum collection, quite simply, belongs within another archival paradigm not (yet) quite geared toward the infrastructural intervention of *THE SALE*. However, to understand the full extent of the consequences that follow from such an acquisition, we need take a detour back in time and examine how the activities and operation of TOVES ended up as *THE SALE*.

TOVES (2010–2017)

TOVES started out in 2010 as Toves Galleri (Vesterbro ConTemporary Workout Space). From the outset it was conceived by the initiating artist Pind as a three-month temporary artist-run exhibition space project in an empty shop in an

abandoned and almost bankrupt shopping arcade in Vesterbro in Copenhagen.[12] To start the project off, Pind contacted a number of fellow artists, whom he invited to bring along to the gallery any number of works they would have lying around in their studios or homes. Pind's idea was that Toves Galleri should function as a dynamic training gym and testing ground for contemporary art and that those who accepted his invitation, would bring finished works to the gallery space that would enable dialogue with other artists and their work. Basically, the idea was to curate exhibitions from each other's material with the possible bonus that the bringing together of this group of artists would evolve and generate new and unforeseen initiatives. After the initial three-month period, the permission to stay in the shopping arcade was extended, and the collective efforts evolved into a curatorial practice that would now also put on exhibitions with Danish and international artists that were *not* themselves members of TOVES.

The initial group of artists[13] that responded to the invitation were mainly young artists in their early 30'ies entering the art scene and not yet having had any major solo exhibitions or being represented by galleries etc. In this sense, TOVES started as a rather classic case of self-organizing with an equally classic and quite clear dichotomy between the ones organizing themselves and the surrounding market infrastructures, which were found to be lacking or insufficient. However, the opposition to the existing art market infrastructures quickly developed into an interest in appropriating them through a collective curatorial practice. In this collective curatorial practice, TOVES became interested in blurring the juxtapositions between individual artistic and/or curatorial efforts and the mechanisms of the art market. Through playful skewing and appropriating of the codes of the commercial gallery, TOVES went a long way to mime and mine the infrastructures of the attention economy upon which the wider commercial art market relies. And this tendency only became more and more apparent as TOVES established itself on the Copenhagen scene as both a gallery and an artist collec-

12 The exhibition space took its name after the shopping arcade, which was also called Toves Galleri and was named after the famous Danish writer Tove Ditlevsen, who used to live in the neighborhood.

13 According to the sales prospect that is part of *THE SALE*, the artists involved with TOVES over the period 2010–2017 were Honza Hoeck (2010–2017), Jacob Jessen (2010–2017), Hannah Heilmann (2012–2017), Anna Frost (2012–2017), Sandra Vaka Olsen (2012–2017), Janus Høm (2013–2017), Rasmus Høj Mygind (2010–2016), Christian Jeppsson (2010–2016), Simon Damkjær (2012–2016), Nanna Abell (2013), Owen Armour (2013), Uffe Isolotto (2010–2013), Pind (2010–2013), Ulla Hvejsel (2010–2012), Stefan Rotvit (2010), Søren Assenholt (2010), Emil Westmann Hertz (2010), Jacob Borges (2010), Loui Gram Mokrzycki (2010), Jakob Rød (2010), Tove Storch (2010). The sales prospect can be consulted here: https://issuu.com/honzahoeck/docs/toves_salgsprospekt3 (accessed November 5, 2023).

tive. Within TOVES, a recurring question and topic of debate became how to turn the collective into a profitable organization while maintaining the playful, uncompromising, and sometimes deliberately pretentious artistic profile that the collective had developed. An excerpt of a text published by Honza Hoeck in 2014 can serve to illustrate how this playful and yet serious appropriation of art market infrastructure in combination with an artistic and curatorial focus on money would come to be a cornerstone in the collective's activities during its last years ultimately culminating with *THE SALE*.

> What happened was that we decided to go commercial, but not in an ordinary fashion. We instigated various financial initiatives, one of them being the concept of the *micro-patron*. Micro-patrons were people who did not necessarily have a relationship to art at the time we approached them, but who had shown some interest in art without knowing how to pursue it further. Each micro-patron would deposit a monthly amount into TOVES' bank account that would, over time, serve as a savings account for buying art. They would start attending our openings and our special patron events, and, at some point, they would start withdrawing their deposits in the form of artworks. After having financially invested themselves, the micro-patrons found a natural way into the art world and were soon seen attending all kinds of openings throughout the Copenhagen art scene.
>
> So, the outcome of this shift in our organisation both had sociological significance – after all, we fostered an entirely new audience for advanced contemporary art in Denmark – and posed new possibilities in aesthetic terms. Capital was our new toy, you might say.
>
> This was the first step towards merging production, research and commercial activities, that was later to be implemented at a much larger scale, as you have seen by now. (Hoeck 2014, unpaginated)

The quote is taken from the published version of a performance lecture that staged the presentation of a book fictiously written in the year 2064 as a retrospective of the activities of TOVES.[14] The text is physically formed as a scroll and the narrative moves backward in time from 2060 to 2010 as it recounts the major developments in the history of TOVES. Being published in 2014, it is not quite clear to the reader when the fiction starts – or in fact whether the events predating the publication did happen at all. My research in the digital archive that is part of *THE SALE* has made it clear that the idea of the micro patron was actively developed and pursued by the organization around this time, but also that it was never put into practice as the above quote suggests. To the contrary, on the hard

14 The text is based on a presentation given by Honza Hoeck at the symposium *MAKING ROOM: Nordic Artists, Institutions and Artist Institutions of the Modern Breakthrough and Today* at the exhibition space Den Frie in Copenhagen on 31 October and 1 November 2013. The presentation started with Hoeck announcing that his main source of information would be the yet unpublished and fictive biography *50 Years In The Life Of TOVES*, to be published in 2064.

drive that is part *THE SALE*, the folder named "Mikromæcen" [micro-patron] and containing most descriptions of the project is placed within another folder named "unrealized."[15]

The above should give the reader sufficient background to understand what kind of organization TOVES was, how the individual participating artists would sometimes work under their own names, but oftentimes would also appear (in various combinations depending on personal interest) as the collective artist subject TOVES, which for obvious reasons is difficult to delimit, as it would consist of different people. In this sense, TOVES became a brand which in the sales prospect that is part of *THE SALE* is described as "an intuitively playing and border-dissolving narcissistic hippie and art personality. Strategically thinking, opportunistic and schizophrenic."[16]

Infrastructural intervention in the collection

Following from this description, it should be clear that the acquisition of *THE SALE* is also potentially the acquisition of any number of unspecified future activities performed by a conceptual and collectively imagined artist subject that currently hibernates in the museum archives. As such, the work very obviously, almost ironically, pinpoints the comparison of the museum with the mausoleum famously theorized by German sociologist and philosopher Theodor W. Adorno in 1955 (Adorno 1981). In this rhetoric *THE SALE* displays a very precise and specific instance of the conflict between life and death that Adorno depicts in his description of the museum as the place which collects "objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying" (Adorno 1981, 175). In this case, however, and echoing Boris Groys' statement that the museum collection is "[. . .] a site of death as well as the site in which one tries to overcome death" (Groys 2021, 45–46), *THE SALE* presents itself as an attempt to resist its own death by making it explicit that the future of TOVES within the collection ideally is a prolongation of its life through the continuation of its activities. In doing so, *THE SALE* quite literally installs an idiosyncratic and somewhat op-

15 That the micro-patron model was never realized is also mentioned by Honza Hoeck in a podcast episode about *THE SALE* made by Hospital Prison University Radio: "Samtale Christina Wilson og Honza Hoeck om salget af Toves. Med Joen Vedel. Marts 2018." The podcast can be accessed here https://soundcloud.com/hospitalprisonuniversityradio/samtale-christina-wilson-og-honza-hoegh-om-salget-af-toves-med-joen-vedel-marts-2018 (accessed November 5, 2023). Hoeck mentions the micro patron initiative at 16 min. 45. sec.

16 https://issuu.com/honzahoeck/docs/toves_salgsprospekt3 (accessed November 5, 2023).

portunist infrastructural intervention within the museum by placing the self-organized and "unreasonable" (Hoeck 2021a) artists' organization including its performative promise to live on within what is usually conceived as the regimented and highly reasonable infrastructure of the modern art museum institution and its collections, which are usually associated with all but life, or at least with the arrest of life as the temporally unfolding process towards certain decay (Hölling 2016; Rubio 2020).

By acquiring *THE SALE,* the museum confronts itself with a number of questions and challenges that cannot be thought of in traditional terms of institutional critique. First and foremost, it is impossible to think in terms of the antagonism associated with institutional critique when *THE SALE* is so directly welcomed as to literally be bought by the museum after being commissioned as part of an exhibition meant to thematize value. The oppositional dialectics implied by institutional critique do not exist as clearly in a case like this where critique and institution are far more enmeshed and co-complicit. If viewed in such a manner, this would be an almost ironic example of how the neoliberal institution tends to incorporate and subsume critique under its own ever-expanding umbrella (Rasmussen 2018; Yúdice 2003). Secondly, as critique, *THE SALE* would quite literally undermine its own performativity. If not for anything else, then because such critique would presuppose that the museum would try to subsume the collective artist subject, the intellectual property, and the rights to perform the future operations of the organization under its own institutional logics. To the contrary I argue that by adding *THE SALE* to its collection and by accepting the invitation to continue the operation of TOVES, the museum does the opposite and enters a new territory. Here it confronts the standard rhetoric of the acquisition as well as the notion of the museum as a collecting institution with fundamental questions about what it means to collect, preserve, and communicate. As such *THE SALE* performs an infrastructural intervention that is warmly welcomed by the museum as an opportunity to rethink itself and examine parts of its own foundation.

In this sense, *THE SALE* makes it very clear what the museum archive cannot be – or what it has difficulties in accommodating. By confronting the museum collection as an infrastructural intervention, *THE SALE* foregrounds how the inside of the museum archive is a far less lively environment compared to its outside – or indeed to the scripted or animated archive 3.0 of *THE SALE* itself. It becomes clear how the museum archive is a regimented place for storage and retrieval rather than a place for idiosyncrasy, play, and activity. Quite literally – and contrary to the performative call to action which is installed in the proposition to continue the activities – TOVES now hibernates in the museum's cold-storage. The website is on longer online. The lists of email contacts and social media followers that were part of the brand's value have not been activated. Once the activities

ceded, TOVES' friends and followers moved elsewhere, physically as well as conceptually, with the rest of the art world circuit. An organization like TOVES that relied so heavily on its network and on its brand-value and which, for a period, was the hippest place in town, needs all these things to be kept in development in order to stay alive. The hard drive with unrealized projects needs to be activated to not end up merely as documentation of stuff that never happened. The physical objects and the remaining artworks in the transport crate are somewhat more robust to cold storage and do not as easily devalue by being kept sequestered. They do not need constant exercise and updates to be kept alive.

In the light of the infrastructural intervention made by *THE SALE* it becomes clear that the museum collection falls under an entirely different archival paradigm compared to Shanks' and Giannachi's archive 3.0. Namely something with a lot more affinity to the apparatus in the sense derived by Giorgio Agamben from the concept of Michel Foucault. An apparatus consists of "a set of practices, bodies of knowledge, measures, and institutions that aim to manage, govern, control, and orient – in a way that purports to be useful – the behaviors, gestures, and thoughts of human beings" (Giannachi 2016, xv). As such – and here we must remember the interchangeability of the concepts of apparatus and dispositive – the collection is what historically separates the museum from all other arts institutions. The museum is both the institution, the body of knowledge, and the set of practices – and the particular museum-apparatus as we know it has developed in close tandem with modern concepts of art and artists – as an institution that conserves and takes what is animated out of circulation in order to grant eternity to certain privileged artefacts that we call artworks (Rubio 2020).

The disposition of the museum collection and the museum's obligation to conserve is to arrest, to de-circulate, and to slow down the processes of exchange and, indeed, of decay of the outside world. In the case of *THE SALE* this is an obvious problem because the practices of preservation and conservation efforts required by an artwork like this are predicated upon the exact opposite and deeply reliant upon movement, circulation, and networked sociality.

Museums and publics

Shifting the perspective slightly, from museums as collecting institutions to museums as exhibiting and educating institutions might open the discussion to other active dispositional forms that are more accommodated to works like *THE SALE*. One of the most recent critical voices within this field belongs to curator and educator Nora Sternfeld, whose notion of a radical democratic museum is developed

in the wake of, among other things, the so-called educational turn in curating (Sternfeld 2018, 55). Sternfeld's argument is premised on the observation of a political crisis of representation in museums that concords with the processual neoliberalisation of their operations – a process that puts the traditional alignment of museum and archive under pressure and thus also puts the idea of the museum as a place of resilient constancy [Dauerhaftigkeit] into question. For Sternfeld, and contrary to much museological thought, it is quite clear that constancy and permanence do not necessarily have to do with the objects and collections housed in museums, but rather, and more fundamentally, relates to the museum's role as a public institution in society. She understands the museum as a space for 'Bildung', as a battle ground, and as a contact zone (Sternfeld 2018, 59) where the public can become equipped with a counter-hegemonic and agonistic political agency[17] that can help to contain the increasing self-regulatory individualism and its neoliberal demands for adaptation and processualization on individuals and institutions alike. Here the notion of 'Bildung' has a distinctly different quality compared to the unifying modernist schoolmaster-type logic that is associated with the concept in the press material from the Museum of Contemporary Art in connection with the *Value the Art* exhibition that presented *THE SALE*.

As the matter of fact, Sternfeld's idea of 'Bildung' represents precisely the opposite: namely the idealistic possibility (and thus also the obligation according to Sternfeld) to install agonistic spaces of dissent within the institution itself as an integral part of the museum's responsibility towards the publics it is supposed to serve. As such *THE SALE*, by its very clear infrastructural intervention, represents an 'almost-too-good-to-be-true' example of such an agonistic installment within the museum.[18] However, Sternfeld's argument (whether biopolitical or emancipatory) is based on the museum's exhibitory practices or, more broadly construed, its responsibility to disseminate to the public. Sternfeld's notion of dissemination [Vermittlung] is quite broad and does incorporate the dialogic and indeed conflictual space of the curatorial and educational as a supplement to the exhibitionary (and very directly governmental) model of one-way mass communication in more traditional new museology approaches like for instance Tony Bennett's book *The Birth of the Museum* (Bennett 1995).

It is striking, however, how none of her ideas of permanence and resilient constancy seem to rest on the fact that museums also have collections in their care. The notion of care within curating and the curatorial in this sense is double when

17 Sternfeld adapts this from Chantal Mouffe. See Mouffe 2013.

18 The connection is also noted by TOVES member Honza Hoeck, who discusses Sternfeld's idea of the para-museum in connection to *THE SALE* (Hoeck 2021a).

it comes to the museum. It is an obligation to care for the publics that museums intend to serve – *as well as* to care for the objects handed down by history (even if it sometimes feels as if they are no longer entitled to or worthy of such care). To state this in the context of Sternfeld's ideas of a radical democratic museum is, then, to also stage, once again, the rift between the responsibility of museums as institutions that care for their publics vis-à-vis institutions that care for heritage, which was also central to the conflict about the ICOM museum definition.

An artwork like *THE SALE* plays quite directly into the dispositional space of public dissemination. It is ready and packed with potential for art educators to unpack with the participation of audiences and interested publics. But once it is unpacked, it will inevitably change and thus behave in ways that run counter to the preservation logic that it is also disposed to by the archive. A work that exhibits this kind of infrastructural intervention thus highlights how the heritage infrastructure of art museums are primarily dispositioned to objectify the processual, to decontextualize the contextual and, indeed, to euthanize that which is already dying.

By way of conclusion

As my analyses in this chapter have shown from various perspectives, the infrastructural intervention made by *THE SALE* makes very visible a rift between the museum as an audience-oriented institution and the museum as a heritage-oriented institution. In this light, the achievement of permanence or resilient constancy pertaining to questions of 'Bildung' as a form of empowering the public with counter-hegemonic agency is necessarily also as an effort of preservation that conserves and safeguards the objects and art practices that can allow for such dissensus, however different, living and unarchivable they may be. And this, to my mind, is the most important thing that distinguishes museums from all other types of arts institutions, namely the fact that they have historical, legal, and moral obligations to collect, preserve, and communicate the heritage of the fields they operate within. Infrastructural art, like *THE SALE*, shows quite clearly how artwork changes and is changed according to the different contexts it intervenes in. Throughout this chapter such work has functioned as a prism and diagnostic tool to expose dispositions and backstage elements of museum practice and discourse. Still, the identified rift feels like a diagnostic without a cure. And perhaps this is for the better. Perhaps if we do not solve this conflict, but rather keep it alive and nurse it, we might keep learning from it.

As a first attempt at this let me finish by way of a more speculative approach – a diffraction rather than an interpretation. During the writing of this article, the figure of *the host* has been lurking in the back of my mind as a way to conceptualize the reciprocities and forms of dis- and enabling that are at play in the relation between TOVES, *THE SALE* and the museum. The figure of the host enables us to pursue other imaginaries for our museums, at least in four distinct areas. Firstly, in collection discourse, if we replace the notion of acquiring with that of hosting, then the museum invites the artwork (or art practice) inside (perhaps even on a temporary basis). It does not subsume the artwork to its own archival logic because the figure of hosting suggests another relation between life and death, between changeability and permanence, between freedom and imprisonment. The museum may archive elements from the visit, but the archival records will have to be openly accessible to everyone in order for the artwork to be able to leave again without the feeling of being robbed. If the artwork were a guest instead of property, it commits the host to treat it with appropriate respect (or it might not come back). Its status as a visitor would, in turn, suggest a temporary relation that either part could break free of if wanted. The artwork could be a guest in the collection. Secondly, and in relation to the public or audience, or visitors, or, indeed, guests – even if this has become an unfashionable designation over the past decades: If we replace the notion of the visitor with that of the guest, it opens a dialogical space of genuine interlocution. Guests only take their hosts seriously if the host is hospitable, i.e. if the host is genuinely interested in exchange of information – in conversation. Guests and hosts don't communicate content, they make conversation. And polite guests leave again before the host gets tired of the company. Thirdly, the not so polite guests – the parasites – still need the host to be kept alive. It is the nature of the parasite to be parasitic and for that, it needs a living host, and in many cases the host also needs and lives symbiotically with the parasite. This allows for the antagonist, subversive and counter-hegemonic activity to play out and at the same time be welcomed. The backside might be that antagonism (once again) gets subsumed and ends up as affirmation. There is a great responsibility connected to being the host of parasites. And lastly, as we have learned in recent years, a virus needs a host to develop and become powerful. This meaning is double. The virus might overthrow the system, but in the process, it will spread, enter other hosts and perhaps even become more contagious and resilient. This idea invokes the powerful image of the archive as a dispositional apparatus and host. But also its counterpart, the infrastructural intervention as the possibility for future mutations.

I do not wish at this point to develop the figure of the host into a hard theoretical concept, but rather to just set it afloat and suggest ways to think that might generate different imaginaries about the museum's relation to the artworks they

stow and store – as well as about their responsibilities towards the publics they intend to serve. As such, the figure of the host is rhetorical, and yet it harbors the flexibility and potential to discuss the museum from other perspectives of power relations and ensuing dispositions. At least that is what thinking with TOVES can do for the museum.

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Xenia Brown Pallesen

Infrastructural Orientations in the Exhibition

Picture this:

> *The moment you pass through the door to the art exhibition you see the first sign: It welcomes you. It informs you about what to expect, which artists are shown and in what context. It kindly takes your hand and serves you a selection of information that is carefully thought through – your essentials in order to understand what comes next. It points you into the exhibition, where you are met by a new sign – this time revealing the grand curatorial framing of the artworks into themes. The themes are based on chronological events in the presented artists' lives the curators' thematic interpretations of the selected pieces, co-ordinations based on the colors of the exhibited artworks, or other principles for curatorial organizing. The large signs encasing the curatorial organization and framing are placed in every passage or opening, defining the crossings and transitions in the exhibition and between the artworks. Furthermore, they act as signs directing your movement through the exhibition, providing you with a sense of orientation. Just like road signs that point out specific directions in a city or on the highway. In between or connected to the exhibited artworks are smaller signs. Like the bigger ones they present you with essential information; the names of the artists, their age or lifetime, nationality, the title of the artwork, a list of materials used and – now and then – the dimensions of the work. Or they might present you with diligent interpretations and contextualization of the particular artwork. Rather than directing your movements, these signs direct your visual attention and your interpretation.*

Narrative discourses and cultural identification

The Danish noun *formidling*, etymologically and semantically close to the German *Vermittlung*, describes the practice of passing on, explaining, or sharing, for example, knowledge or – as defined by the dictionary, experiences to an audience. Additionally, it can be the act of "making something happen" by acting as an intermediary ("Formidling" 2022). That is to say, an interpersonal practice where something is mediated to someone. Furthermore, it is understood as a matter of translating, making abstract phenomena more intelligible by interpretating them, and narrating them to comply with the frame of reference of the recipient. In other words, there is an assumed difference in the level of knowledge about the particular phenomenon held by the transmitter and the recipient of the *Vermittlung*. Something that can also be explained as an *asymmetrical* communicative relation of different knowledge positions (Jensen 2001, 21). When translated into English, the Germanic word splits into two terms: Communication and dissemination. Communication is a rather broad con-

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cept covering systems or processes of information exchanged between individuals ("Communication" 2023), while dissemination refers to the act of spreading information to a lot of people ("Dissemination" 2023). Related to the arts, dissemination most often refers to the spreading of knowledge about a particular artist, artwork, or movement – or a contextualization or interpretation of a particular artwork. In this case, dissemination becomes a form or act of communication to a vast or unknown audience. This act of "spreading" the information, as we will see later in this chapter, correlates very well with the institutional critique pointing to a lack of awareness of the interpersonal aspects and consciously interpretive dimension of dissemination that has been in waged in recent years. A critique which, in a sense, becomes lost in the translation from the Germanic to the English name for the practice.

In this chapter, I set out to bring forth a central set of value-creating and identifying infrastructures of art by examining the habitual flows of interpretation and how they influence dissemination of art in institutional spaces, as this practice works to set up certain orientations to our mobility when walking through an exhibition. Over the course of a year, starting from the autumn of 2022, I changed my approach to art exhibitions. I set aside my usual interests and preferences for specific artworks, artists, styles, and themes, when visiting exhibitions across Europe from Paris to Berlin, Copenhagen, and Oslo. Rather than seeking art experiences through the sensorial engagement or thought-provoking encounter with the individual pieces, I would turn my attention to the concrete practices meant to facilitate such experiences, but also designed to evade attention from themselves. I directed my attention to how the exhibited artworks were disseminated, the positioning of signs, or the way in which the audience was moving around and in-between installations and displayed dissemination. In other words, I used an *infrastructural observation*, meant as an analytical and observational approach to dissemination practices focusing on the unspoken certainties underlying what is communicated and interpretated. I looked to how the dissemination practices were organized and how the audience interacted with it. My observations prompted the same set of questions for each exhibition: From what body is the exhibited artworks interpretated and communicated? What underlying discourses are being accentuated when disseminating the specific artworks? How is the audience expected to perceive the exhibited art? What makes an object, or a practice recognized as art? And by whom and how? By approaching these questions, and my observations in the exhibition spaces from an infrastructural perspective, I aim to put forward the hardly visible discursive structures of dissemination, that can be difficult to grasp and prove – but nevertheless remain materialized in and supported by the physical structures, the routes, through the exhibition space. In this approach, I am informed by an amalgamation of infrastructural theory developed in fields ranging from ethnography to critical theory, that will pop up occasionally throughout the

chapter. Initially, American sociologist Susan Leigh Star, stresses how infrastructural analysis allows for the largely unstudied and neglected properties of phenomena (in this case exhibitions) to be studied (Star 1999, 379). But doing so can be more difficult than presumed, according to Leigh Star, because of the way infrastructures are designed to be self-effacing. As she points out, infrastructures are by definition invisible yet always relational. They both shape and are shaped by the conventions of practices, becoming parts of communal ways of doing: Outsiders will need to learn about an infrastructure, while members of a community obtain a naturalized familiarity with it (Star 1999, 380–381).

This twofold infrastructural positioning was also what initially motivated my research scope on the dissemination practices of art exhibitions. Growing up in a working-class family with a single mother, museum visits was neither prioritized financially nor culturally, and my studies in art history at the university began from a curiosity about the art world and the creative industries without any idea of what that could entail. In other words, I entered the art world from an outsider's position, highly aware of its conventions of practices, and infrastructures per se. First, I made it my target to become naturally familiar with it. Aligned with Leigh Star's infrastructural characteristics, I strived to become an innate member of the art scene – to become submerged into its infrastructures. But, as I went along with my studies, I began to notice a gab in the conception and experience of art exhibitions among close relatives and friends coming from a similar background as myself, and colleagues raised surrounded by art. This caught my interest. The experiences of art and art exhibitions were often depending on the familiarity with the discourses of the exhibition space. Those who had uncomplicated access to its conventions often felt easy and casual, while whose who did not, often felt stupid or left out, when they were unable to understand the interpretations of the artworks or identify with them. Of course, this challenge of positionality in art exhibitions is not only something that has played out in my own personal social sphere. It has been progressively debated in academic and public discourse on art over the past ten years with a focus on how representation through participation must meet the audience's expectations for more engaging museum institutions and assert its relevance to larger groups in society, rather than addressing primarily those who are already frequent and comfortable users of the art museums (Simon 2010; Sørensen and Kortbek 2018). In this article, I especially draw on such institutional critiques as they have been developed by German art historian Dorothee Richter (2007) and Canadian independent curator and art critic Bruce W. Ferguson (1996), respectively, focusing on the hidden and unanalyzed structures of art exhibitions, that frame our perception – in other words: on the invisible discursive infrastructure – from specific institutional positionalities. The connection between my method of infrastructural observation

and recent practices of institutional critique is contextualized and consolidated by drawing on British independent scholar Sara Ahmed's work on "Orientations" (2008) which – although it uses a different vocabulary with a greater awareness to gendered, racial and national power relations – in a manner closely related to the methodology of infrastructural analysis, draws attention to how our physical orientations guided by the signs and wall texts in the exhibition space, further shape our attention and co-determines what becomes meaningful in the experience of the exhibited artworks. The examples from my observations of dissemination practices in art exhibitions will be generalized and anonymized. I am not interested in describing and analyzing each individual exhibition for its own sake but rather in letting my manifold of observations work together to get a view of the mechanisms that (infra)structurally unfold in the way they are presented. I seek to unearth the general tendencies of what Leigh Star terms the "master narrative" of infrastructures – the single voice that speaks from the "presumed center of things" in dissemination practices, their content, and the organizing of them (Star 1999, 384). But before looking into the different examples of observations, I will provide a brief contextualization of the concept of *the master narrative.* By elaborating on the establishment of cultural institutions, namely museums, and particularly how they play a crucial role in creating narratives of national identities, I will supply a backdrop for the discursive infrastructures of exhibitions.

The Indian-British critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha proposes in the chapter "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation" (2004) exactly why it can be useful to look into specific narrative discourses and practices of dissemination, since they serve as strategies of cultural identification. Writing the narrative of a nation requires us to explore the ambivalence that underlies the era of modernity. Bhabha starts out by questioning the progressive metaphor of modern social cohesion, which envisions unity in diversity – the merging of many individuals into one cohesive whole. This concept is often embraced by theories that emphasize the interconnectedness of culture and community, as well as by theorists who view gender, class, or race as encompassing unified collective experiences (Bhabha 2004, 204). But as Bhabha suggests, the process of nation-building through narration and dissemination involves a division between two temporal approaches. On one hand, there is the continuous and accumulative nature of the pedagogical aspect, which builds upon past events and traditions to construct the nation's identity. In this aspect, *the people* are the historical *objects* of a nationalist education, based on a predetermined or established historical origin from the past. In other words, the people – or nation – taught through history lessons in school and education becomes an identifier of national belonging. On the other hand, there is the repetitive and recursive aspect of the performative, which emphasizes ongoing actions and rituals that shape the sense of self and belonging, such as everyday prac-

tices that the individual is subjected to. These two approaches contribute, according to Bhabha, differently and consistently to the construction of the nation's story and identity (Bhabha 2004, 209).

Moreover, museums have had a significant impact on shaping the modern nation-state as educative and civilizing institutions. In the essay "The Exhibitionary Complex" (1988), the British cultural theorist Tony Bennett, points to how museums since the nineteenth century have played a crucial role in the emergence of the idea of a universal history of civilization. This notion found expression in the archaeological collections, giving rise to thoughts about the interconnectedness of human development. Subsequently, that lead to universal histories interwoven with national histories through collections of national artifacts that were portrayed as the ultimate result of the universal story of progress of the civilization (Bennett 1988, 89). This progress in the fields of history and archaeology facilitated, according to Bennett, the emergence of new arrangements of classification and presentation. New approaches that allowed the narratives of nations to be intertwined with the broader story of Western civilization's evolution. Additionally, the discourses of nineteenth-century geology and biology provided a framework to include these narratives within museums of science and technology. Inspired by the universal story of civilization's progress they portrayed the history of industry and manufacturing as a succession of progressive innovations, culminating in the contemporary achievements of industrial capitalism (Bennett 1988, 90). An effect that was partly due to the secondary discourses that accompanied the exhibitions. Discourses that were ranging from state pageantry at exhibition openings to newspaper reports and various educational initiatives organized by religious, philanthropic, and scientific associations. Bennett points out, how these initiatives aimed to capitalize on the attention generated by the exhibitions, and how they often established direct and specific connections to a exhibitionary rhetoric of progress. The exhibitions themselves also had a distinct influence. They linked the rhetoric of progress to the rhetoric of nationalism and imperialism and thereby they created an expanded cultural sphere for the application and dissemination of the exhibitionary disciplines (Bennett 1988, 93). In this way, the exhibitions played a vital role in promoting and propagating ideas of progress and national identity to a wider audience.

The texts by Bhabha and Bennett are interconnected through their exploration of how narrative discourses, dissemination, and cultural institutions contribute to the construction of national identity and understanding. Bhabha discusses the significance of examining narrative discourses and dissemination as tools for cultural identification and challenges the idea of modern social cohesion, which emphasizes unity in diversity, while Bennett introduces the role of museums in shaping the modern nation-state and how they have played a pivotal role in the

emergence of a universal history of civilization, based on Western national narratives. Commonly, the nation state is defined from an idea of universality and unity – the people as masses from a Western cultural point of view. However, important to add, Bhabha would also argue that the defining of the universal unified Western national identity also depends on its margins – the people, not applying to the experiences and identifications of the majority (Bhabha 2004, 200). Yet, I would add that Bennett extends the idea of narrative strategies for cultural identification proposed by Bhabha, when showing how museums significantly take part in that process. Both texts underscore how narratives, whether through storytelling or museum exhibitions, play a crucial role in promoting and disseminating ideas of progress and national identity. In essence, Bhabha introduces the theoretical framework and considerations around narrative and identity, while Bennett provides a concrete example of how these ideas are manifested in the realm of cultural institutions, specifically museums.

Moving between narratives and infrastructures hinges on the realization that narratives of national identity are not just abstract stories but perpetuated through cultural institutions like museums. This prompts us to question how these discursive infrastructures function within art institutions and how they influence our self-identification with the exhibited artworks. Thereby, the shift from narratives to infrastructures underscores the importance of examining these tangible mechanisms through which specific interpretations of art are disseminated. So together, Bhabha and Bennett can offer us an exploration of the role of the *master narrative* within cultural institutions – and give preceding notice to the discursive infrastructures of dissemination practices and how they are materialized in the dissemination practices of concrete exhibitions.

Infrastructural observations of dissemination practices

In the following section, I bring forth the previously mentioned examples of tendencies I have observed across exhibitions. My take on infrastructure in this context is drawn from the American cultural theorist Lauren Berlant, and their description of it as a conceptual, analytic tool for greater insights in "the protocols and practices that hold the world up" (Berlant 2016, 394). The concept of infrastructure is thus used in observations and analysis of the displayed dissemination practices and their potential impact on the experience of the exhibited artworks. The aim of analyzing the discursive infrastructure of the dissemination is to unveil some of the context or normative structures in communicating art – the protocols

and practices that *hold* the institution up. In this sense, not only language but also patterns of use, ways of moving and intermissions in the exhibition space are relevant to the analysis. Likewise, I call for a greater awareness on institutional self-positioning in the dissemination practices – the body of the institution from where they speak from. In the large amounts of strategic work currently being done within art institutions, too much attention is given towards target groups and audience: how they should or should not be addressed, the amount of information provided to them and so on. Too little attention, on the other hand, is paid to how the institution itself and its curatorial staff influence the interpretations of art, and what (kind of) information is provided to the audience, that is, to the infrastructural embeddedness of conventions of practice.

One example of a phenomenon almost never discussed in itself, is the small wall labels often accompanying exhibited artworks. In an exhibition with a minimum of information about the displayed artworks one still comes across these texts of the most essential details such as name, age, or years the artist lived, title of the artwork, list of materials and dimensions. They blend in with the wallpaper, painted to match the color of the walls – usually white – with a discreet font in black, sharing the invisible properties of infrastructures. Their modest bearing all but leaves no attention to its creator. Who makes them, one might ask? An artificial intelligence or an actual human being? They can seem rather uninfluential at first sight, but when dissecting what kind of details and information they imply, a very specific purpose is revealed: The text provides information only the connoisseur can decode. Production year gives a context into its historical and art historical period – to what other artists are renown or active in the period – and the list of materials may deliver hints to their interlinking. Also, there is a possible financial aspect brought into the interpretation of the artworks when dimensions are included as essential information. The size of an artwork gives an impression of its value for money, but it might also be traces from archival practices. Such details are like an implicit and exclusive communication from one art professional (working at the institution curating the show) to another (coming by as a visitor or acquirer). It is a secret code the audience needs prior knowledge about, to make sure that they understand correctly how the dates refer to the lifetime of the artist, or how the name refers to the person who owns the copyright – not necessarily the person who actually carried out the labor of making the artwork.[1]

1 Here I must draw the readers' attention to the work by Cecilie Ullerups Schmidt on the *signature* and its enhancement of the artistic genius while compromising the labor done by hidden (though essential) people in *Produktionsæstetik* (2023)

Other normative discourses passing as objective categories can be seen in the emphasis on certain biographical facts about the exhibited artists. One emphasis that has been especially recurring in my observations is the matter of education. Museums tend to use the educational background of the artists to stress the relevance or significance the art academies are contributing with. One concrete example was a group exhibition of Ex-Yugoslavian artists in-which the title provided information about their common grounds in Denmark. The visitor could understand that they were or had been based Denmark but worked with topics relating to their families' cultural backgrounds, issues of refugee displacement and resettlement, and attachment to the countries constituting the area of Ex-Yugoslavia. Yet, there was an emphasis on their educations from Danish art academies as the substantial context of their practices. This example points back to Bhabha and shows how education in this case becomes an identifier of belonging in the art museum and as a mark of quality, that supports a practice of favoring artists from particular backgrounds rather than others – yet proposed as an objective intent, but also as an integrating inscription into the national identity.

Another recurring manner of dissemination is rather long in-depth descriptions of very specific interpretations of artworks – often written in very complex language. First of all, it can be exhausting to read through the many words to get a context for the artwork or artist. Surveys have confirmed that such exhaustion accounts to experienced as well as non-experienced audiences depending on their motivations for visiting the exhibition, whether they are inquisitive, seek adventures, or pursue aesthetic immersion ("Gallup Kompas" 2014, 21). Secondly, it leaves the viewer limited in making free associations to the exhibited works. As a viewer you are simply told what to take out from the artwork. Furthermore, the interpretations can be communicated in such means that the message is easily misunderstood. One example from my observations was a highlighting of the physical attributes on a sculpture depicting a female nude body. The dissemination text stated that the figure had lost its head and forearms but had managed to maintain its principal features. What was left of the body was a torso with a bulging female breast; no arms and no head. From an art historian perspective, I understand the wording as describing the artistic features of the body and its shape. Nevertheless, it was easily misunderstood in a contemporary societal perspective, where female representation is debated, as a derogatory point about women as solely reproductive containers – or breasts.

The examples show how the dissemination in the exhibition works like infrastructural switches directing the interpretations of the exhibited artworks. The *infrastructural switch* is a term from the American architect Keller Easterling, who describes it as: "a remote control of sorts – activating a distant site to affect a local condition or vice versa. Exceeding the reach of a single object form, the

switch modulates a flow of activities" (Easterling 2014, 46). In this case, it is not flows of activities being modulated, but the very experience of the artworks. They switch the narrative discourses depending on eyes that see and interpretate but display them as universalities and matters of course. Aligned with the points taken from Bhabha and Bennett earlier, the above examination and observation of dissemination practices shows how the presentation of the interpretations can impact the audience's understanding and contribute to the construction of meaning – and points to the nuanced ways in which dissemination can influence interpretations based on different contexts.

The role of orientation and institutional influence

The examples of dissemination and its function as an infrastructural practice presented in the former can be brought into a more structural and chorographical analysis. "Orientations might shape how matter 'matters'" is how Sara Ahmed begins her chapter "Orientations Toward Objects" in the book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2008). And she continues: "If matter is affected by orientations, by the ways in which bodies are directed toward things, it follows that matter is dynamic, unstable, and contingent" (Ahmed 2008, 234). Our bodies as we move through the exhibition become matter. Affected by the orientations facilitated by wall texts and signs, our bodies follow the material flows of artifacts, people, and ideas, allowing exchanges of matter across space. As American anthropologist Brian Larkin defines infrastructures, "they shape the nature of a network," influencing its directions, speed, temporalities as well as vulnerabilities (Larkin 2013, 328). The orientation thus emulates the principles of infrastructures by shaping how the world coheres – in this case the exhibited artworks and make them matter to us. As Ahmed describes it: "To be oriented a certain way is how certain things come to be significant, come to be objects for me" (Ahmed 2008, 235). When our bodies are matter flowing through the exhibition, the dissemination sets the coordinates for our orientations.

We could reframe the welcoming sign from the introduction as the starting point of the visitors' orientation in the exhibition – what Ahmed terms as the *here* (Ahmed 2008, 236). The starting point before you even see any artworks are usually rather text-heavy, setting the scene or *master narrative* for the exhibition. They mark the beginning of the exhibition and draw the audience like a magnetic field. Often, I have observed visitors shoal together in groups in front of the first sign – even while listening to audio guides – as an unconscious collective point of departure before entering the show. When continuing further into the exhibition,

new signs direct our attention. Often, they appear on walls at door openings or passages, marking a shift in the curatorial themes. They function as *backgrounds* to the artworks. The background is explained as the unnoticed aspects of familiar things, like the hidden parts of an object or the history that led to its existence, just like Leigh Star's point about the invisibility of infrastructures and its tendency to "fade into the woodwork (sometimes literally!)" (Star and Bowker 2010, 233). It is suggested that things we are used to look at, become a kind of background for our actions and consciousness – we know they are there, but we do not really pay attention to them. Ahmed demonstrates how even things right in front of us can be part of the background if we are not focusing on them (Ahmed 2008, 239). The signs then become backgrounds, as they direct our attention away from their existence to the foregrounds of the exhibition – the artworks, enhancing their appearance.[2] Moreover, Ahmed explores the different meanings of backgrounds, both spatial and temporal. For instance, whether it refers to what is behind something in a space or to the history that shapes someone's life and outlook. The overall point is, that when studying the background of things, we can learn about the conditions that make them appear and understand not only the objects themselves but also how we perceive them. The background involves to this regard the intertwining histories that lead to the existence of both the object and the experience of seeing it (Ahmed 2008, 240). The signs stand exposed, almost naked, without an addresser as opposed to the exhibited artworks with explicit signatures. But these backgrounds themselves have (somewhat invisible) backgrounds as well; people working at the institution, who formulate the background-content – coming from a background that shapes their views and understandings of which background information is important and weighty to define the enhancement of the artwork's appearance.

The backgrounds, which in this case are the institutional curators and their impact on the interpretations of the exhibited works of art, play a crucial role in a larger institutional context. In his essay "Exhibition Rhetorics – Material speech and utter sense" (1996) Canadian art critic Bruce W. Ferguson directs attention towards exhibitions as utterances and representation of underlying institutionalized ideologies. Exhibitions, he states, are narratives that utilize works of art in institutionalized stories and thereby mediate the art, which can only be allowed to unfold in interpretations if the exhibition is analyzed as its medium (Ferguson

2 Instead of having a purely materialistic approach to exactly what surrounds the image: frame, backgrounds, signatures as characterized in *The Truth in Painting* by Jacques Derrida, I wish to bring forth the power relations and implicit discursive and phenomenological implications that impact the infrastructures of exhibitions, both physically and consciously. For that reason, I choose to work with the writings on orientations by Ahmed instead.

1996, 175). For that reason, Ferguson criticizes semiotic analyses of artworks, since in such readings, the artworks become equated with text – and thus conceived as utterances. In this case the implicit voice, or infrastructural background, of the institution is at risk of becoming neglected in the exhibition analysis:

> Art is treated as a semiotic object with something to say that can be coded, decoded and recoded in a syntactical and critical manner by methods like those used in academic literary criticism and cultural studies in general. But the move to a different form of "close reading," even one with presumed political overtones, does not necessarily restructure the art object's special place within its ensuing discourses (Ferguson 1996, 176).

According to Ferguson, the semiotic critical reading of art makes the artwork static, packed with meaning, which is waiting to be unfolded 'correctly' by the curators and art professionals. If, on the other hand, the exhibition is analyzed as a medium, a more dynamic reading of the art and its surrounding influencing factors, like the above backgrounds of orientations, can occur (Ferguson 1996, 177–178). In other words, it is an analysis proposed by Ferguson with an emphasis on underlying discursive mechanisms that impact how the artworks are presented in an exhibition – and consequently how they are disseminated, depending on the principal ideologies. Moreover, I would argue that I, by applying an infrastructural observation to these mechanisms can reveal, not only the ideological discursive practice, but also the way it impacts the physical arrangements, the actual signs and nudging of the audience in certain directions through the exhibition.

These institutionalized ideologies, Ferguson argues, are influenced by different interests, but mainly exhausted by the intention and authoritative position of the curator. No exhibition is thereby clean. Especially not when the curators consciously or unconsciously pass on a mix of values and desires from networks of interests by art dealers, advisers, and board members to the curation of the exhibition (Ferguson 1996, 181). The exhibitions thus become what Ferguson terms as 'a strategic system of representations' wherein the audience is targeted with prescribed values and worldviews, which the institution wants to pass on. "The will to influence is at the core of any exhibition," Ferguson points out (Ferguson 1996, 179). It will attempt to sway its audience as a material statement – as an infrastructure – through which normative discourses about art are produced and reproduced for the audience's contemplation. So, while Bennett showed us how ideologies, capitalism, and imperialism, were the driving forces in creating Western national identities and promoting them in museum institutions, Ferguson displays how these are still underlying premises of today's conditions of production and circulation in museums – though possibly more driven by private or market interest of dealers, advisers, or foundations. Additionally, Ferguson gives us a

concrete tool, to look at and analyze exhibitions as utterances, to reveal the representation of institutionalized ideologies and economic interests. Thus, Ferguson's critique centers around a discursive and network-based approach to exhibition analysis and the exhibition in its entirety as an utterance of ideologies. I, however, have found that introducing a more materialistic – even explicitly phenomenological – approach to specifically the dissemination practices by bringing in Ahmed, has a great potential in bringing the critique closer to the physical tailoring of the exhibition and the way it choreographs the audience's movement through it. An *infrastructural orientation* approach per se.

In many ways Ahmed sums it up beautifully: "Orientations are about the direction we take that puts some things and not others in our reach" (Ahmed 2008, 245). But in as much as we choose ourselves to enter the art museum to begin with, I would argue, the orientation is not a question of what direction we take as audience, but what direction is given to us by the institution – through the dissemination. The whole spacial design is like a treasure hunt, always guiding us to the next post to get the most adequate understanding and experience of the exhibited artworks. Yet, we can have different temporalities depending on our temper. When moving through the exhibition, some people browse easily through reading the headlines while others read every sign intensively and pay an equal amount of attention to every single exhibited artwork. In other words, in visiting exhibitions we oftentimes act like the "swarms" described by the Italian philosopher Franco "Bifo" Berardi: "moving together in the same direction and performing actions in a coordinated way" ("Bifo" Berardi 2012, 15). You can try to walk the opposite way of what the signs are dictating in the exhibition, like in the swarm, according to Berardi, it will never be an act of rebellion, because here a *no* is irrelevant, it cannot change the direction of the swarm ("Bifo" Berardi 2012, 16). We orient ourselves collectively in the direction appointed by the signs leading us from one section of the exhibition to the next. There is, in other words, a certain choreography of moving through the exhibition. As German art historian Dorothee Richter points out in the article "Exhibitions as Cultural Pratices of Showing: Pedagogics" (2007), by applying the term *the gesture of viewing*, the ideal implicit viewer is characterized by a certain ritual behavior. The viewers: "move about in expressive surroundings, observing intently, holding back, passive vis-à-vis what is shown" (Richter 2007, 49). There are certain behavioral expectations from the art institution, and the curatorial staff will curate, organize, and disseminate according to them. For example, I observed in one of my exhibition visits, that the audience were encouraged to experience the artworks through all senses, the body and mind. Yet, all artworks in the exhibition were enclosed and fenced off by pieces of duct tape on the floor or signs stating, that it was prohibited to touch the artwork. Rhetorically, the institution expressed a wish for the guests to break

with the ritualized behavioral conventions, but in practice they supported them by setting clear markers of distance. As Bennett also points out, the museums not only played a crucial role in defining the Western nation state, but also in disciplining its citizens. By allowing the people to: "know rather than be known, to become the subjects rather than the objects of knowledge," they were taught to regulate and discipline their bodies, as they saw themselves in the light of power (Bennett 1988, 76).

If you, as a member of the audience are able to control your impulses and let the distancing sense of sight guide the experience of the art, then you are the intended audience. An audience, that is being addressed like masses in a way that makes it impossible for the institution to differentiate and consider the particular and individual experiences of the exhibition (Richter 2007, 51). Not only is the ideal viewer addressed as an undifferentiated mass with an expected certain ritual behavior. The institutions, Richter argues, also assume that the audience has access to mental archives of images and references that have influenced the Western art history and visual culture. To be able to create meaningful associations and connections with art, it is expected that the audience can draw on these specific frames of references and specific ways of perceiving the exhibited art works (Richter 2007, 49). An assumption that mirrors my initial awareness of the gap in the accessibility of art between my family and my colleagues, depending on their preceding familiarity with the conventions of exhibitions. Furthermore, she points to how the audience is located in a masculine position (the desiring subject) towards the objects presented while passively consuming the aesthetic products and cultivating their taste to become refined connoisseurs (Richter 2007, 51).

With Richter's emphasis on institutional mass communication in mind, I find it useful to return to the definition of dissemination as the act of spreading information. It simply lies within the definition of the practice to treat the audience like a mass, as one unified group, and fail to recognize the interpersonal aspects that are included in the definitions of *formidling/Vermittlung*. It is like the *no* in the swarm; your difference cannot be paid attention to. It is the infrastructural master narrative that points out the direction of interpretation, contemplation, and orientation to its ideal audience. It relates to the pedagogical aspect of the national master narrative, as according to Bhabha, when the audience is perceived as a cohesive group with a collective framework – and their plausible manifold of interpretations of the artworks are merged into *one* from the perspective of the institution or curatorial personal based on canonical references from the Western art history. Meanwhile, the performative aspect – the ritual behavior within the exhibition – is presumed to enable an individual experience of relatability to the artwork. The *gesture of viewing* makes sure there is a certain order – ensuring how the artworks appear, while a *gesture of moving* gives you

an overview, an easy way around, when following the signs through the exhibition. It is a matter of proximities as described by Ahmed: "we are touched by what comes near, just as what comes near is affected by directions we have already taken" (Ahmed 2008, 234). The appearance of the artworks is affected by the orientation directed in the exhibition – while the appearance is what touches us and our experience of the artwork.

Ending remarks

I have described the dynamics of dissemination in art exhibitions by exploring how the presentation of artworks is shaped by institutional practices and potentially influences visitors' interpretations. By sharing generalized observations from my past year's visits at museums and art centers across Europe, I focus on the dissemination practices within exhibitions and how interpretations are presented to the visitors. I have analyzed textual examples from short label descriptions to institutional emphasis on the educational backgrounds of presented artists, as well as in-depth and shallow interpretations. These observations and analyses highlight how the practices serve as infrastructural switches that guide viewers' attention and experiences of art. Additionally, I have looked into the notion of orientation and its significance in shaping the audience's directions and attentions when walking through exhibition spaces.

Overall, I try to highlight how dissemination practices within art institutions play a significant role in shaping audiences' interpretations and experiences of art. I suggest, in other words, to critically discuss dissemination as *infrastructural orientation*. By emphasizing that there is more to curation and exhibition design than merely presenting artworks – rather they are, to a great extent, about constructing narratives, choreographing masses, and determining interpretations – I encourage the reader to bring forward a critical awareness of how underlying institutional ideologies and norms impact the understanding and appreciation of art through its dissemination practices. What was before invisible, embedded in the conventions of practice, becomes visible by applying an infrastructural observation to the discursive and choreographic orientations set by the dissemination. Thus, norms are not automatically reproduced and mistakenly perceived as neutral – in accordance with infrastructural design, that blend in with the wallpaper. So rather than asking the initial set of questions, I suggest some new ones:

> *What is your starting point greeting you at the arrival? How is the exhibition progressing? Does it provoke a certain choreography? And which backgrounds constitute the interpretations of the exhibited artwork?*

I suggest, you bring them with you and use them as part of an analytical toolbox for examining the discursive and physical infrastructures next time you enter an art exhibition or a museum. Maybe they will unveil some normative interpretations or a choreographed behavior, you have hitherto taken for granted.

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Index

Abell, Nanna 379
Adorno, Theodor W. 183, 186, 189, 263, 381
Adrian, Allison 314
Ag, Tanya Ravn 18–19
Agamben, Giorgio 383
Ahmad, Kashif 289, 302
Ahmed, Sara 6, 13, 21, 35, 68, 72, 243, 317–319, 321, 323, 326, 328, 339, 345, 368, 392, 397–398, 400, 402
Akanji, Michelle 70
Alloway, Lawrence 175, 191
Ambrosius Høgfeldt, Amalie 26
Anand, Nikhil 26, 281–282
Ancher, Anna 36–37, 51
Andersen, Carsten 299
Andersen, Gerda Thune 41, 43
Anderson, Ben 135, 139
Anderson, Benedict 286
Anonymous Artists 1, 101, 103, 126–128
Anyango Grünewald, Catherine 349–350
Anyuru, Johannes 296
Apchel, Olena 70
Appel, Hannah 26, 281–282
Arendt, Hannah 248
Arènes, Alexandra 197–200, 205–206, 208–218
Armour, Owen 379
Åsebø, Sigrun 44
Asia Art Archive 59
Assenholt, Søren 379
Auden, W.H. 281, 301, 303
Augusto Boal 362
Azoulay, Ariella 9

Bachelard, Gaston 197
Bakhtiari, Marjaneh 296
Baldwin, Kate 80, 83, 85–86
Ballestero, Andrea 146
Barna, Emilia 322
Barok, Dušan 161
Bartky, Sandra Lee 325
Battersby, Christine 177, 189
Baudelaire, Charles 104, 188
Bauer, Petra 145
Baumgarten, Alexander Gottlieb 261
Bazeghi, Shadi Angelina 305
Becker, Howard 1, 107, 237, 284–285, 289, 293, 301
Beecroft, Vanessa 347
Bell, Catherine 240, 251
Bencard, Ernst Jonas 104
Bengalis, Lynda 18
Benglis, Lynda 173–186, 188–192
Benjamin, Walter 188
Bennett, Tony 384, 393–394, 397, 399, 401
Berardi, Franco “Bifo” 400
Berger, John 52
Bergson, Henri 251
Berins, Lisa 71
Berkers, Pauwke 314
Berlant, Lauren 3, 6, 9, 35, 57, 241–244, 250, 256, 281, 292, 338, 340, 342, 352, 373, 394
Bernes, Jasper 180
Bertram, Georg 250–251
Bevan, Robert 105
Beÿer, Eva 43
Bhabha, Homi K. 392–394, 396–397, 401
Billström, Rebecca Dobre 326
Bird, Robert 80, 85, 90–91
Birkerts, Sven 298
Black Panthers 175
Blickstein, Tamar 339, 345
Bogost, Ian 158
Bolt, Mikkel 101, 105, 173
Borges, Jacob 379
Born, Georgina 314
Bouchardon, Edmé 115, 118
Bourdieu, Pierre 5, 138
Bowker, Geoffrey C. 4–5, 34–35, 59, 63, 102, 110, 138–139, 153, 285, 315, 371, 398
Bracker, Alison Lee 185
Brams, Koen 133, 139
Brenner, Robert 180
Britton, Ren Loren 161
Brix Søndergaard, Peter 114
Brogaard, Emma Sofie 15, 79
Brovall, Sandra 283
Brown Island 22, 24, 337–352
Brügger, Ane 40–41, 43

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Bryan-Wilson, Julia 176, 180–182, 184–185
Bubandt, Nils 203–206, 210–212, 217
Buergel, Roger M. 66
Bukdahl, Lars 295
Burden-Stelly, Charisse 81
Burke, Peter 114
Burroughs, Williana 86, 95
Butler, Judith 314
Butty, Henry d'Ursy 114, 116

Cahill, Zachery 80, 85
Campt, Tina M. 67
Castells, Manuel 141
Chakrabarty, Dipesh 281
Chang, Johnny 343–346
Christensen, Hans Dam 52–53
Christensen, Jeppe Krogsgaard 346–347
Christian V 118, 122
Christian VII 121–122
Chrystov-Bakargiev, Carolyn 66
Chukhrov, Keti 79, 82–84
Clark, T.J. 173, 180–181, 185–187, 189–190
Clarke, Bruce 202
Classen, Johan Frederik 117, 119
Clausen, Franciska 48
Cloonan, Martin 314
Clover, Joshua 57, 64
Cornelis, Jef 16, 133–134, 136–147
Cramer, Peter 122–123

Dahlerup, Drude 45
Damkjær, Simon 379
Danbolt, Mathias 15–16, 101, 104–105, 126–127
Daugaard, Solveig 1, 7, 10, 13, 21–22, 284, 288, 294, 299, 302, 305, 338
Davies, Carol Boyce 81
Davoudi, Simin 144
de Boise, Sam 314
De Cauter, Lieven 142–144
de Leij, Noortje 191
De Valk, Marloes 161
Dean, David 375
Dean, Jodi 34, 45, 81
Degas, Edgar 225
Deleuze, Gilles 9, 251
Demos, T.J. 66
Dercon, Chris 139
Derks, Belle 324
Derrida, Jacques 63
Descola, Philippe 5, 239
Devine, Kyle 314
De'Ath, Amy 182–183
Diemer, Gudrun 43
Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Katrine 11, 127–128, 134
Ditlevsen, Tove 379
Doering, Adam 135
Dorn, Angela 69–71, 73
Douglas, Mary 244, 246
Doyle, Jennifer 173, 177, 182, 188–191
Dragona, Daphne 338, 340–341, 352
Drucker, Peter 178, 182
Du Bois, Shirley Graham 81
Duncan, Carol 249
Durakovic, Nermin 127
Durkheim, Émile 20, 239–242, 244–246, 250, 256
Duvå, Paula 52
Dworkin, Craig 7
Dyer-Witheford, Nick 157, 160

Easterling, Keller 6, 21, 282, 298, 304, 314–315, 372–374, 378, 396–397
Edelgart, Mia 16, 133–138, 140–141, 143, 145–146, 148
Edwards, Paul N. 64, 74, 315
Eigtved, Nicolai 115
Eigtvedt, Nicolai 118
Eika, Jonas 300
Eistrup, Eva 295
Ejiksson, Andjeas 140–141
Ekman, Ulrik 197, 206, 209–210
Elg, Emil 289
Ellegaard, Line 14, 36
Elmi, Amina 289
Emerson, Lori 5
Erdem, Nilgun 289
Eric, Casper 299
Erlandsen, Eric 124
Etges, Andreas 375

Fanon, Frantz 339, 345
Fanon, Franz 12
Fargo, Jason 66
Farrokhzad, Athena 288, 300, 306

Farrugia, Rebekah 314
FCNN 306
Federici, Silvia 179
Ferguson, Bruce W. 391, 398–400
Ferreira da Silva, Denise 3, 10, 12, 68, 72–73, 185, 248
Feuer, Jane 135
Fischer-Lichte, Erika 249
Floury, Paul 212, 214
Floyd, George 101
Floyd, Kevin 184–185
Fluxus 59
Ford, James 97
Forshage, Andria Nyberg 173
Foucault, Michel 5, 10, 286, 299, 373–374, 383
Frank, Nana 312, 317, 319, 324, 326, 329, 331
Franke, Patrick 212, 215–216
Frascina, Francis 186, 188
Frederik V 101, 103, 112–129, 347
Freedberg, David 105
Friedan, Betty 179, 187, 190, 330
Friis, Elisabeth 300
Frost, Anna 379
Frost, Jackqueline 173
Fruergaard, Marianne 312
Frydendal, Flemming 113, 124
Fuller, Matthew 9

Gabriel, Key 173, 175, 183–185
Gadir, Tami 314
Gaettens, Dörte 296–297
Gaillardet, Jérôme 212
Gambino, Evelina 314–315
Gamboni, Dario 105
Ganesh, Maya Indira 338, 341
Gansing, Kristoffer 5, 16–17
Gaonkar, Anna Meera 22–24, 297, 306, 337, 348–349, 352
Garner, Sylvia 96
Gerasimova, Valeriia 88
Germer, Stefan 139
Gharib, Ali 195
Gianelli, Domenico 120
Giannachi, Gabriella 377–378, 383
Giersing, Harald 38
Gilbert, Anette 7
Gilmore, Ruth Wilson 26, 338, 341–342, 349–352
Gilyard, Keith 80–81, 91, 96–97
Glahn-Abrahamsen, Augusta 312
Glick, Mark 180
Glissant, Édouard 9, 11
Gokieli, Natia 298
Gommel, Matthias 212
Gor, Pierre 118–119, 122
Gordon, David 173, 175, 178–179
Gore, Dayo F. 81
Graeber, David 6
Grafis Huru Hara 57
Graham, Steve 314
Grand, Rabea 70
Graugaard, Naja Dyrendom 26
Greaves, Kerry 44, 52
Greenberg, Clement 186–188, 190–191
Gregers-Jensen, Kirsten 48
Grégoire, Axelle 212, 214
Groys, Boris 381
Grunfeld, Martin 136
Guattari, Felix 5, 7, 9
Gudskul 57–59, 63–64, 66
Guinard, Martin 198, 212
Gupta, Akhil 26, 148, 281–282
Gysin, Brion 7

Haas, Jonas 120
Habermas, Jürgen 260
Hahn, Juliane 70
Hajmirbaba, Soheil 198–199, 205, 208, 211–214, 216–217
Hamon Damourette, Juliette 212
Haraway, Donna 141, 196, 201–204, 213, 216
Harbison, Isobel 190
Hardt, Michael 141
Harney, Stefano 3–4, 10, 12, 61
Harrit, Gry 311, 332
Hartman, Saidiya 96
Hass, Kristin Ann 11, 101, 105, 108, 111–112
Hassan, Yahya 2, 21–22, 281, 283–284, 286–292, 294–306
Hasse, Cathrine 314, 321
Haupts, Tobias 158–159
Hauray, Renaud 212
Hay, James 374
Hayles, N. Katherine 281–282, 285
Haywood, Harry 85

Hegel, G. W. F. 250–257
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich 20, 262
Heidegger, Martin 228, 267–268
Heikkilä, Ville-Matias 161
Heilmann, Hannah 379
Helgesen, Aina 37
Hemmings, Clare 316–317
Henningsen, Gudrun 48
Hershman Leeson Lynn 377
Hertlein-Hull, Nora 70
Hertz, Emil Westmann 379
Hess, Thomas 189
Heuer, Christopher P. 142
Hewelt, Martha 70
Hill, Rosemary Lucy 314
Hinderer, Jacques 212
Hjelmslev, Louis 263
Hochleichter, Carolin 70
Hochschild, Arlie Russell 322
Hoeck, Honza 373, 379–382, 384
Højlund, Marie 326
Hölling, Hanna 382
Holmboe, Rasmus 24, 371, 376
Holmes, Douglas R. 135
Høm, Janus 379
Hong, Cathy Park 294
hooks, bell 294
Hoppe, Erik 38
Hörl, Eric 9
Horne, Gerald 81
Hørup, Line Gry 290
Hoskote, Ranjit 73–74
Hospital Prison University Radio 381
Hoste, Pol 143
Howell, Brendan 161
Hubert, Henri 246
Hughes, Langston 91, 95–97
Hui, Yuk 19, 224, 228–230, 232–233
Husserl, Edmund 226
Hvejsel, Ulla 379

Ibsen, Manuel 38
Ihde, Don 197, 209, 213
Irrgang, Daniel 18–19
Isager, Christine 290, 295
Isolotto, Uffe 379
Israelson, Per 303

Jackson, Shannon 237
Jacobsen, Arne 162, 164
Jacobsen, Stine Marie 23–24
Jakobson, Roman 263
Jankowski, Merete 127
Jasanoff, Sheila 135
Jenkins, Marianna 114
Jensen, Leif Becker 389
Jeppsson, Christian 379
Jessen, Jacob 379
Jones, Claudia 81, 95
Jørgensen, Emil 302
Jørgensen, Stina Hasse 326
Jorn, Asger 38
Judson Church 59

Kallesøe, Else 33–40, 45–46, 48, 50, 52
Kant, Immanuel 8, 177, 188–189, 244, 247–252, 261–262, 265, 267
Karagianni, Mara 161, 166
Karsenti, Bruno 239
Kelley, Robin D. G. 86
Kerstin Stakemeier 366
Khadjeh-Nassiri, Louise 343–344
Khemeri, Jonas Hassen 296
Khiljee, Naiha 289
Kiaer, Christina 79–80, 85–87, 90–91, 96–97
Kirstein, Mette 289
Kitti, Melanie 306
Kittler, Friedrich 64, 286, 298, 300
Kjær, Ulla 101, 113, 115, 118
Kloeck, Kristine 137–138
Knox, Hannah 314–315
Koerner, Joseph 212
Kollontai, Alexandra 87, 90, 92, 94
Koolhaas, Rem 6
Korintenberg, Bettina 198, 212
Kornberger, Martin 5
Kortbek, Hjørdis Brandrup 391
Kosofsky Sedgewick, Eve 189
Krasnik, Martin 295, 300
Krasny 45
Krasny, Elke 34, 45
Krauss, Rosalind 7, 104, 106–107, 114, 173, 175, 181–182, 184, 186–188, 190–192, 226, 371
Kristoffersson, Sara 344, 346–347, 351

Kumār, Kiran 69
Kunst, Bojana 3, 12, 61

la Cour, Eva 16
Lamoureux, Abraham-César 118
Lampland, Martha 315
Landberg, Cathrine 326
Langvad, Maja Lee 306
Lantz, Maria 346
Larkin, Brian 5–6, 11, 63–64, 82, 84, 139, 145, 196, 199, 205–208, 237, 397
Larsen, Nella 64
Lassen, Hellen 33–39, 45–46, 48–52
Latour 195, 203, 208–209, 217–218
Latour, Bruno 11, 19, 195, 197–198, 201–203, 260
Lave, John 137
Lavrov, Lydia Nordentoft 40
Leavitt, Arthur 377
Leibowiz, Anne 175
Lenin, Vladimir 79, 91
Leroi-Gourhan, André 266–267
Lerou-Gourhan, André 20
Levenson, Felix 103
Levine, Caroline 239, 243
Levi-Strauss, Claude 239
Levy, Sonia 212, 216
Lewis, Sophie 184, 189
Lieb, Kristin 314
Lievrouw, Leah A. 135
Lindberg, Anna Lena 37–38
Lippard, Lucy 43
Lloyd, David 189
Loewe, Rudy 349
Lollike, Christian 70
Lonzi, Carla 183
Lorde, Audre 283–284, 286, 298, 302
Lorieux, Grégoire 212, 214
Lovelock. James E. 199, 202
Lucy R. Lippard *368*
Lundahl, Christopher 224, 230–231
Lundberg, Rasmus 302

Macchiavelli, Cassandra Lorca 347
Machen, Ruth 144
Madame Nielsen 70
Madrigal, Alexis 158
Mahmoud, Ahmad 289
Mancoba, Sonja Ferlov 36, 51
Manet, Edouard 225
Manovich, Lev 135
Mansoux, Aymeric 154, 161
Marcus Aurelius 114
Marcus, Georg E. 135
Margrethe II 124
Margulis, Lynn 199, 202
Marina Vishmidt 366
Marinucci, Sarah 70
Marronage 306
Marschall, Alex 69
Martin, Terry 90
Marvin, Steve 314
Marx, Karl 243, 245
Massumi, Brian 316
Mathews, Andrew S. 203–206, 210–212, 217
Mattern, Shannon 5, 227, 338, 348, 350, 353
Mauss, Marcel 20, 239, 246, 266
McDuffie, Erik S. 79–81, 94–95
McKay, Claude 85
McLuhan, Marshall 286
Medvedkin, Alexander 88
Menke, Christoph 255
Mentz, Søren 114
Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 226
Mesayer, Eliyah 1
Meyer, Richard 178–179, 185
Mgoubar, Mohammed Saar 2
Michelsen, Anette 173, 175, 184, 190–192
Mieli, Mario 185
Mirzoeff, Nicholas 101, 105
Mitchell, W. J. T. 237
Moestrup, Steffen 290, 295
Mokrzycki, Loui Gram 379
Mol, Annemarie 331
Møller, Mærsk Mc-Kinney 124
Moltke, Adam Gottlob von 114–124, 127–128
Monbaron, Joana 23–24
Monet, Claude 225
Mønsted, Flemming 113, 124
Mortensen, Richard 38
Morton, Timothy 163, 195
Moss, Miranda 165
Moten, Fred 3, 10, 12, 61, 183
Mouffe, Chantal 384
Musil, Robert 104–105, 111

Muus, Jane 40–43
Mygind, Johanne 295
Mygind, Mads 300, 302
Mygind, Rasmus Høj 379

Neergaard, Helga Bruun de 40–42
Negri, Antonio 141
Nemser, Daniel 243
Nexø, Tue Andersen 300
Ngai, Sianne 176, 181, 185–186
Nielsen, Anne Marie Carl 37, 40
Nietzsche, Friedrich 251
Nijakowski, Lech 111
Nikolajsen, Lone 305
Nilsson, Magnus 296
Nixon, Rob 10
Njami, Simon 74
Noack, Noack 37, 43
Noack, Ruth 66
Nochlin, Linda 33–34, 36, 44, 52
Nora, Pierre 105
Nordenhof, Asta Olivia 299
Nordin, Annika 37
Nørregaard-Nielsen, Hans Edvard 112
Nuckowska, Joanna 70

O'Brian, M.E. 189
Öğrenci, Pinar 68
Öhrner, Annika 37
Okine, Mikkel 326
Olsen, Sandra Vaka 379
Olsen, Sanne Kofod 50, 52
Omar, Sara 289
Ørntoft, Theis 299
Osborne, Peter 189, 192
Østergaard, Louise 288, 295
Overgaard, Mathias 20

Pallesen, Xenia Brown 25
Palmstierna-Weiss, Gunilla 37
Parks, Lisa 152–153
Pasquet, Sylvain 212, 216
Pasternak, Simon 300, 305
Patterson, Louise 79, 91
Pedersen, Carl Henning 38
Pedersen, Jes Stein 295, 300
Perry, Lara 52
Peters, John Durham 6, 64
Petersen, Anne Ring 66
Pierret, Marie-Claire 197, 206–208, 212
Pincus-Witten, Robert 174–175, 185, 189
Pind 378–379
Pinkard, Terry 255
Pippin, Robert 253–254, 256
Pirotte, Philippe 71
Pollock, Griselda 34, 44
Pontoppidan, Birgit 48–50
Pousette, Sophie 173
Prashad, Vijay 83
Preisler, Johan Martin 120–121
Price, Leah 298, 306
Pritchard, Helen 161
Puar, Jasbir 73
Pussy Riot 1

Quijano, Aníbal 73

Raabyemagle, Hanne 115, 120–123
Raine, Sarah 314
Rancière, Jacques 8, 260
Ransby, Barbara 81
Rasmussen, Anders Fogh 296
Rasmussen, Kathrine Bolt 382
Ravini, Sinziana 66–68
Ravn, Olga 299
Rebentisch, Juliane 10
Reddington, Helen 314
Reilly, Maura 52
Remin, Jacob 157, 165
Ribes, David 63–64
Richter, Dorothee 391, 400–401
Riegl, Alois 108–109
Ringsager, Kristine 22, 311, 314, 326
Ritasdatter, Linda Hilfling 5, 16–17
Roberts, John 178, 180
Robeson, Eslanda 81
Rød, Jakob 379
Rolffes, Kirsten 48
Roscam Abbing, Roel 161
Rosenkilde, Rut 40, 42–43
Rösing, Lillian Munk 295, 300, 304
Ross Winthereik, Brit 146
Rothberg, Michael 66
Rothstein, Klaus 127

Rotvit, Stefan 379
Roy, Guido 145
ruangrupa 1, 15, 57, 65, 69, 71–72, 74
Rubin, Gayle 184
Rubio, Fernando Domínguez 382–383
Rudd, Wayland 96
Rude, Oluf 38
Ruha, Ranajit 67
Ruhleder, Karen 315

Salling, Emma 113, 115–120
Salto, Kamma 40
Saly, Jacques-François-Joseph 101, 103, 112–120, 122–127
Sandford, Stella 177, 189
Sandström, Frida 18, 173, 176–177, 183
Sarltvit, Sofie 312
Schmidt, Cecilie Ullerup 1, 13, 15, 57, 61, 73, 83, 96–97, 101, 127, 294, 297, 306, 337–338, 348–349, 352
Schopenhauer, Arthur 251–252
Schou, Hanne 42
Schou, Helen 40, 42
Schramm, Moritz 296–297
Schult, Tanja 103
Seerup, Jakob 127
Seitl, Martina 224, 230–231
Serra, Richard 159
Serrum 57
Shackle, Samira 6
Shadieva, Tajihon 82, 88–91, 94
Shanken, Andrew M. 103–105
Shanks, Michael 377–378, 383
Sharma, Devika 325
Sharma, Sarah 10
Sholette, Gregory 61, 66, 69
Siegert, Bernhard 9
Simon, Nina 391
Simondon, Gilbert 5, 20, 154, 228, 261, 269–275, 278
Skiveren, Tobias 136
Skovmøller, Amalie 11, 15–16, 101, 107, 126–127
Skytte Jakobsen, Lise 104, 107
Snelting, Femke 165
Snezhinskaia, Liudmila 15, 82, 88–89, 93
Sobotta, Jerzy 70
Société d'Objets Cartographiques 198
Sophia Frederica of Mecklenburg-Schwerin 119
Sørensen, Anne Scott 391
Sørensen, Mikkel Ibsen 173
Sörlin, Sverker 148
Spendlove, William 173
Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty 67, 248, 289, 299
Stakemeier, Kerstin 24
Star, Susan Leigh 3–6, 34–35, 59, 63, 102, 109–111, 126, 139, 153, 237, 285, 314–315, 372, 391–392, 398
Stara, Alexandra 105
Starosielski, Nicole 152–153
Steinberg, Leo 181, 187
Sternfeld, Nora 4, 24, 364, 383–385
Steyerl, Hito 68, 344
Stiegler, Bernard 20, 261, 266–270, 274
Stimson, Blake 61
Stockmann, Camilla 127
Storch, Tove 379
Strauss, Simon 70
Strong, Catherine 314
Struensee, Johann Friedrich 122
Subversive Film 70
Susik, Abigail 176
Svensson, Kamma 42–43
Svidt, Ole Rosenstand 312
Swane, Christine 43
Systerserver 165
Sze 212
Szymczyk, Adam 66

Taring Padi 69
Telmányi, Anne Marie 40
The Music Movement of 2019 22
The Question of Funding 71
The UNION 306
Thejll, Merete 40–41
Thompson, Erin L. 103, 105, 107–108
Thompson, Louise 79–83, 91–97
Thomsen, Hanne Lise 33–38, 45–46, 49–50
Thompson, Louise 15
Thrift, Nigel 4
Tom Holert 362
TOVES 24
– Toves Galleri 371–374, 376–384, 386–387
Trier, von Lars 48
Trollope, Anthony 285

Trotsky, Lev 87
Tsing, Anna L. 163, 167, 199, 203–206, 210–213, 217–218
Tuma, Lucie 69
Tunzelmann, Alex von 105, 107–108
Turner, Victor 20, 238, 247, 250–251, 256
Tuscher, Marcus 115
Tygstrup, Frederik 1, 6, 20, 338

Udsen, Anne-Sofie 326
Ukeles, Mierle Laderman 61
Utoft, Ea Høg 317

van Eikels, Kai 61
Vandenbroeck, Paul 138
Vedel, Joen 381
Verschaffel, Bart 142–143
Vertesi, Janet 63–64
Vishmidt, Marina 3–4, 12, 21, 25, 34, 53, 173, 180, 299–300, 302, 305
Vivet, Frédérique 212

Wakkary, Ron 153
Wallevik, Katrine 22, 311, 314, 325
Wamberg, Jacob 104
Warhol, Andy 188, 190
Warsza, Joanna 69
Warwick, Jacqueline 314
Washington, Mary Helen 80, 93–94
Wasserschlebe, Joachim 115, 118
Wedel-Brandt, Jeppe 127
Weibel, Peter 19, 198, 218
Weie, Edvard 38
Weizman, Eyal 6, 26
Wenger, Etienne 137
Werkmäster, Barbro 37
Werner, Ann 314
Wessalowski, Nate 161, 166
West, Dorothy 96
West, Kim 67, 69
Whiteley, Sheila 314
Wiedrich, Mechtil 105
Wikström, Josefine 181
Williams, Raymond 6, 139, 141, 341–342
Williamson, John 314
Wilson, Christina 377, 381
Wind-Friis, Lea 329
Wolfe, Paula 314
Wynter, Sylvia 248

Yeats, W. B. 303
Young, James E. 104
Yúdice, George 374, 382

Zhang, Jundan Jasmine 135, 145
Zia, Claudine 53
Zielinski, Siegfried 7, 148
Zink, Veronika 348
Zuber, Joseph 119, 122