

## **Exhibition as the Artistic Medium, Curator of Contemporary Art as the Artist: The Changing Statuses of the Exhibition and the Curator in the Field of Contemporary Art**

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### **Abstracts and biographies of the lecturers**

**1. Alfred H. Barr, Jr.** was one of the founders and long time Director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In recent years he has become associated with the Museum of American Art in Berlin and gave several public presentations on the origins of the history of modern art.

**Cabinet and the Modern Art Narrative** is a slide show about the first museum exhibit dedicated to Abstract Art. It is a result of the collaboration between the Soviet avant-garde artist El Lissitzky and Alexander Dorner, the Director of the Landesmuseum in Hannover. Until its destruction in 1936, the Abstract Cabinet was "probably the most famous single room with twentieth-century art in the world".

**2. Martin Beck** is a New York based artist whose exhibitions and projects engage questions of historicity and display and they often draw from the fields of design, architecture and popular culture. Exhibitions include *Panel 2 – "Nothing better than a touch of ecology and catastrophe to unite the social classes. . ."* (Arthur Ross Gallery, Columbia University, New York 2009 and Gasworks, London, 2008); *The details are not the details* (Orchard Gallery, New York, 2007); *an Exhibit viewed played populated* (Grazer Kunstverein, Graz, 2003); *Half modern, half something else* (Vienna: Montage 2003) and *About the Relative Size of Things in the Universe* (London/ Utrecht: Four Corners Books/ Casco, 2007).

Beck also collaborates with the artist Julie Ault. Together they create exhibitions and art works: *No-Stop City High Rise* at the 2010 Sao Paulo Biennale; *Installation* (Secession, Vienna, 2006); *Information* (Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York, 2006), and *Outdoor Systems, Indoor Distribution* (Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin, 2000). They also produce exhibition designs and have written the book *Critical Condition: Selected Texts in Dialogue* (Essen: Kokerei Zollverein | Zeitgenössische Kunst und Kritik, 2003).

### **The Band Members and the Band**

Recent debates on exhibitions often focus on the notion of authorship. The idea of artists becoming curators and curators becoming artists tends to dominate these debates and sometimes this tends to stand in the way of the investigation of how this medium is embedded into and negotiates the complex matrix of form production. "The Band Members and the Band" discusses the exhibition medium by looking closely at the relationships between artworks, artefacts and a larger (spatial or symbolic) totality by investigating the relationship between "individuals" and "the group". Special emphasis will be given to how these relationships are in themselves form producing.

**3. Beatrice von Bismarck** (Leipzig, Berlin) is a professor of art history and visual culture at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig. Between 1989 and 1993 she worked as a curator at the department of 20<sup>th</sup> Century art at Städelschen Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt/Main and until 1999 she lectured at Lüneburg University, where she also became a co-founder and director of the project-space Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg. She is also the program director of the Leipzig Academy's gallery, co-founder of the project-space /D/O/C/K-Projektbereich and initiator of the M.A. Program Cultures of the Curatorial which started in autumn 2009. Current research areas: modes of cultural production connecting theory and practice; curatorial practice; effects of neo-liberalism and globalization on the cultural field; postmodern concepts of the "artist".

She published numerous publications, among others: *Interarchive. Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field*, Cologne, 2002 (ed. with Hans-Peter Feldmann, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Diethelm Stoller, Ulf Wuggenig); *Grenzbespielungen. Visuelle Politik in der Übergangszone (Performing the Border. Visual Politics in Zones of Transgression)*, (ed.), Cologne, 2005; *Globalisierung/Hierarchisierung. Kulturelle Dominanzen in Kunst und Kunstgeschichte (Globalization/Hierarchization. Cultural Dominances in Art and Art History)*, Marburg, 2005 (ed. with Irene Below); *Beyond Education. Kunst, Ausbildung, Arbeit und Ökonomie (beyond education. Art, Education, Work and Economy)*, Frankfurt a. M., 2005 (ed. with Alexander Koch); *Nach Bourdieu: Visualität, Kunst, Politik (After Bourdieu. Visuality, Art, Politics)*, Vienna, 2008 (ed. with Therese Kaufmann, Ulf Wuggenig); *Auftritt als Künstler (Performance as Artist)*, Cologne, 2010.

### Hosting

The notion of "hosting" has recently been put forward as an adequate description of the curatorial practice, implying that the curator invites guests, offers a situation of hospitality and acts along the lines of generosity. While the latter appears as a desirable, almost ideal quality of a curatorial constellation, it raises issues not only as to its status of the generated situation and the specific work involved in putting it up but also as to the dependencies among the various participating groups. Furthermore, the analogy between a dinner invitation and an exhibition points towards the connections between desire, discourse and consumption. Taking into account the latent debate as regards the dominant role of the curator – particularly in relation to artists – the talk will follow these threads under the perspective of their social and political implications for the curatorial practice.

**4. Michael Fehr** is a professor and director of the Institute for Art in Context at the University of Fine Arts, Berlin. Between 1987 and 2005 he was the director of the Karl Ernst Osthaus-Museum of the City of Hagen, Germany. Prior to that he was an assistant professor at the Bergische Universität Wuppertal (1981–1986), and deputy director at the Art Museum of the City of Bochum (1974–1981). He wrote a dissertation on early medieval art. He has curated numerous exhibitions on contemporary art, cultural history and city planning, and, starting in the mid-seventies and for almost a decade, he created and organized the Kemnade International, a cultural festival for foreign workers and their families in Bochum, Germany. Since 2003 Michael Fehr is the head of the board at the Werkbund-Archive e.V. - Museum der Dinge, Berlin. He has published numerous texts on contemporary art and the theory of museums. For more details see [www.aesthetischepraxis.de](http://www.aesthetischepraxis.de)

### Curating the Museum as a Collective Artwork

Within the last decades, many public art-museums in Germany have been mentally, or in fact, more or less openly submitted to the imperatives of the art-market, and this lead to the

increase in my interest for preserving and developing the public art-museum as an independent place in which the aesthetic reflection of social-political issues would be made possible. Following this goal, I tried to set up the museum in which I worked as an “epistemological construction-site” that – on the base of a number of permanently installed artworks more or less custom made for the museum – would have the capability to respond to the relevant questions individually, in a many-voiced chorus, and from different points of view.

**5. Bogdan Ghiu** is a Romanian poet, essayist, cultural theoretician and critic, translator. He is a former student of Jacques Derrida, and the author of some sixteen books. He has also translated more than 60 texts by Bataille, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, Bergson, Ricoeur, Veyne, Rorty, Baudelaire, Artaud, Duras, etc. Ghiu received the Writers’ Union Prize and the Bucharest Writers’ Association Prize. He is one of the editors of the *Idea art + society* magazine, and a columnist for the literary magazine *Lucefarul* and the cultural portal [www.liternet.ro](http://www.liternet.ro). He has held numerous international lectures at numerous conferences.

### **Curator or Producer? The Exhibition as the Production of Meaning**

“Curator”, and “to curate” are significant elements that cannot be dropped from any contemporary practice of the artistic production of meaning. However, it is hard to individually divide them: we cannot *not* be curators and we cannot not be *only* curators.

At the same time, the significance of curatorship has to be extended, generalized as a paradigm, and specified. The world itself has to be “curated”. A good policy is a successful curatorial act. We act as curators in our most simple and common gestures that produce meaning.

Although they continue to be *shows*, contemporary art exhibitions increasingly transform into places of the production of meaning. We can no longer specifically refer to an “exhibition”, in its proper sense, because exhibitions have made a transfer within their meaning, towards the idea of *production*. This is why the curator becomes the *producer*, and the exhibition transforms and dissolves: through social dissemination, it becomes a place for the artistic production of meaning. The dissemination of the “exhibition” in society will be – and is already – the work of the curator. He is the one who makes the step forward, from a traditional understanding of the “exhibition” to the process of socially “metamorphosing” the exhibition. It is when the artist is also the curator that he manages to direct the exhibition as a *show* oriented towards the social processes in the production of meaning.

**6. Søren Grammel** (\*1971) has curated numerous exhibitions in contemporary art spaces. Since 2005, he has held the post of artistic director at the *Grazer Kunstverein* (Art Association Graz, Austria). In 2007 the magazine *frieze* listed his show *Die Blaue Blume* as one of the *best thematic shows*. In 2009 and 2010 he also worked as a curator-in-residence at the *Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien* (Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna). In 2005 he published the theoretical book *Ausstellungsautorschaft. Die Konstruktion der auktorialen Position des Ausstellungsmachers*, which continues to have an important impact on curatorial research. His latest book *Der symbolische Auftraggeber / The symbolic commissioner* (Revolver Publishing, Berlin) will be published in October 2010. In the book he defends the idea of the curatorial form as a practice that should constantly operate with the awareness that *truth* is artificial and temporary – thus emphasizing the synthetic nature of all concepts.

**An Autobiographical Exhibition. On “Grandfather – A Pioneer Like Us”, 1974, curated by Harald Szeemann**

The lecture will focus on the process of creating an authorial position in the field of curatorial practice. It will concentrate on the exhibition *Grandfather – A Pioneer Like Us*, which was curated in 1974 by the Swiss exhibition-maker Harald Szeemann in a Bern flat. This project is a key exhibition that has not been taken into consideration in curatorial discourse to the extent it deserves, presumably because of its lack of size and publicity and the sparse documentation (no catalogue). However, it is not only the first (auto-) biographical exhibition, but also the first exhibition ever organized in a flat (by a curator). A further curatorial innovation was that Szeemann worked neither with artists nor with their works; he set up an environment consisting of furniture, objects and mementos from the estate of his grandfather, who died in 1971.

Based on the critical investigation of the various terms that Szeemann selected or invented for his work and adaptations of cultural studies, theorems and figures (such as that of the “Wild Thinker”, for example), the new (in the field of curatorial practice) self-understanding of the exhibition-maker Szeemann is also analyzed.

Aside from the polemic debates as regards the rights and wrongs of the shifts and openings that take place within the working and competence of the curator, there is still very little material that would focus on the special features of the curatorial *coup*. In my opinion, it is only on this basis that the new type of cultural actor or producer and his functions and potentials can be described and understood. This method will be used in the lecture. Further, I will try to re-think the possible quality of the position Szeemann introduced through *Grandfather – A Pioneer Like Us* against the (necessary!) backdrop of the critical debate surrounding the reconstruction of the quasi-mythical model of the artist in curating.

**7. Dr. Paul O'Neill** is a Bristol based curator, artist and writer. He is a Great Western Research Alliance (GWR) research fellow in Commissioning Contemporary Art with Situations at the University of the West of England, Bristol. O'Neill has curated or co-curated over 50 exhibitions. His writing has been published in many books, catalogues, journals and magazines and he is a regular contributor to *Art Monthly*, as well as a reviewer and editor for *Art and the Public Sphere* and he is also on the editorial board of *The Exhibitionist*. He was the editor of the curatorial anthology *Curating Subjects* (Amsterdam & London, de Appel and Open Editions, 2007), and co-editor of *Curating and the Educational Turn* with Mick Wilson (Amsterdam & London, de Appel and Open Editions, March, 2010). He is currently working on an authored book with MIT Press *The Culture of Curating, Curating Culture(s)*, to be published in 2011.

### **Co-productive Exhibition-Making and Three Principal Categories of Organisation: the Background, the Central-ground and the Foreground**

Group exhibitions have become the primary site for curatorial experimentation and, as such, they represent a new discursive space surrounding the artistic practice. The following text describes how a cumulative and expanding exhibition-form can constitute an investigation into how the curatorial role is made manifest, through collaborative and collective exhibition-making structures applied in close collaboration with artists in all stages of the exhibition production. This lecture will look at how an exhibition creates spatial relations between the different planes of interaction, and how the three spatial categories can be represented in the final exhibition-form of group exhibitions.

**8. Kerstin Stakemeier** lives and works in Berlin (G) and Maastricht (NL). She received a Dipl.rer Pol. from FU Berlin and an M.A. in History of Art from University College London, where she is currently completing her PhD on "Entkünstung of Art". She has worked for a

number of institutions, including the Kunstverein in Hamburg and the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel. In 2007/2008 she and Nina Köller initiated the Space for Actualization in Hamburg. She is currently writing for *Texte zur Kunst*, *Afterall*, and *Phase 2* and is a researcher at the Jan van Eyck Academie, where she is working on a project on *Realism in contemporary art*.

### **Against Curating – historical and contemporary disintegrations of art**

The historical narration of curating as an authorial function, ordering individual artworks in accordance to either a national canon or that of a social entity endowed with other insignia of officially registered cultural distinction still persists. However, its fundament has been challenged relentlessly: for one, the singularity of the works of art, their uncontested status as products of high culture (the relation of which towards the objects of the more popular strands of culture is dictated by their sheer superiority) has been significantly disturbed by the changes in production and distribution as well as the commercialisation of art.

Besides, the institutional authority (entailed by curatorial actions) has been diversified alongside the art institutions and has developed into a strand of self-critical practice in its own right. Thus to defy curatorship today, arguing that it endangers the individual – the dignity – of the artwork, simply plays out one nostalgic cultural assets of bourgeois culture (the idea of curatorial distinction, of the educational or somehow superior message to be conveyed) against another (that of the artist as a genius, the works of whom carry an educational or somehow superior dignity). Curatorship (similar to artisanship) has become a troubled social figure, characterised by excessive social, cultural and economic demands.

In his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor W. Adorno identifies the tendency of art towards what he terms “Entkunstung” (deartification), i.e. the immanent disintegration of modern art. For Adorno the economization of culture, the threat of art becoming kitsch, its spin towards the cultural industry, as well as art's consequent dematerialisation and formalisation mark the inescapable social forms of *Entkunstung*, i.e. the self-destruction of art as a reaction to the excessive demands. Using Adorno's concept of *Entkunstung* as a productive starting point of following up artistic and curatorial potentials to engage with boths' involvements in the world outside of art, one might ask: how does one elaborate the understanding of artistic and curatorial practices which potentially reaches beyond art?

**9. Mary Anne Staniszewski** investigates art, media, and culture in relation to political and social issues. Her work takes the form of writing, editing, and collaborative curatorial projects. Her books include: *Believing Is Seeing: Creating the Culture of Art* (Penguin USA, 1995; Korean editions, Hyunsil Cultural Studies, Hyun Sil Moon Hwayonju, 2000 and 2007) and *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (The MIT Press, 1998; paperback 2001; Korean translation, designLocus, 2007).

Staniszewski is an associate professor at the Department of Arts at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York as well as the director of the Curatorial Incubator at Exit Art, New York, which provides young and emerging curators, artists, and scholars with the opportunities to produce exhibitions that deal with critical issues that are not adequately addressed by the mainstream art world.

Staniszewski is currently working on a multi-volume work, which is an analysis of the historical and contemporary sense of self in the United States, featuring three key themes: race; sex (gender); and life and death. She has completed the first volume on race and is currently working with Exit Art on an exhibition and conference that will deal with contemporary slavery.

## **A Curation Declaration!**

Exhibitions can be as creative and as powerful as works of art.

Curation, like art creation, can be a catalyst for cultural and social change.

Curatorial acts can transform those who experience them.

Exhibitions can be more than commodities, entertainment, or mere "fuel" for the art and market systems.

The challenge for curators is to strive to achieve these goals.

This talk will review selected moments of creative curation during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The exhibitions will be linked to some of the current curatorial and cultural practices and issues. Recent projects, focusing on those at New York's Exit Art, will be discussed as examples in which the goals of this declaration have been realized.

**10. Philip Ursprung**, born in Baltimore, Maryland, 1963, is a professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the University of Zürich, Switzerland. His main interests lie in contemporary art and architecture and the history and theory of the cultural industry. He studied history of art, history and German literature in Geneva, Vienna and Berlin. He lectured at the Universität der Künste Berlin, the ETH architecture school in Zürich and Columbia University in New York. He has curated exhibitions on contemporary art and architecture in Basel, Montreal and New York. He is the editor of *Herzog & de Meuron: Natural History* (Baden, Lars Müller, 2002); *Studio Olafur Eliasson: An Encyclopedia* (Cologne, Taschen, 2008); the author of *Grenzen der Kunst: Allan Kaprow und das Happening, Robert Smithson und die Land Art* (Munich, Silke Schreiber, 2003) and *Kunst der Gegenwart* (Munich, Beck, 2010).

### **The world as museum: Harald Szeemann**

For three decades, Harald Szeemann embodied the independent curator as a key figure in the art world. Although he declared his exhibitions as an alternative to the realm of the museum, I would argue that he stood at the forefront of its transformation. Do his exhibitions prefigure what Fredric Jameson defined as the culturalisation of reality, in other words, the seemingly endless expansion of culture and thus the gradual transformation of the world into a museum?

**11. Jelena Vesić** is an independent curator, art historian, critic and editor who lives and works in Belgrade. She is also a co-editor of the *Prelom* journal and member of the Prelom kolektiv. Her work is dedicated to examining the politics of representation in art and visual culture. Her curatorial projects experiment with frameworks, methodologies, contextual and collaborative aspects of art presentation. Her recent curatorial projects include: *Political Practices of (post-)Yugoslav Art: RETROSPECTIVE 01* (Museum 25<sup>th</sup> May, Belgrade, 2009); *No More Reality: Crowd and Performance* (Depo, Istanbul, 2009); *No More Reality- step 3: Documentation Centre* (De Appel Institute for Contemporary Art, Amsterdam, 2008); *The Case of the Student Cultural Centre in the 1970s* (shown in ŠKUC (Ljubljana), Galerija Nova (Zagreb), Salon of the Museum of Contemporary Art (Belgrade), Badischer Kunstverein (Karlsruhe), Performance Studies International – PSI (Zagreb) and Labor (Budapest), 2008/2009); *Back to the Future* (Borderline video festival, Beijing, 2007); *Breaking Step: Displacement, Compassion and Humour in Recent Art from Britain* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade, 2007).

### **PPYUart – Collective curating and struggles through history**

I would like to discuss the exhibition methodology, language and infrastructure of the project

*Political Practices of (Post-)Yugoslav Art: RETROSPECTIVE 01* (<http://www.pp-yu-art.net/en>) that I co-curated together with independent collectives, individuals and groups of curators, theorists, researchers, artists and activists at the end of last year for the Museum of Yugoslav History – 25<sup>th</sup> May in Belgrade.

The exhibition presents a cluster of independent researches that deal with the cultural heritage of socialist Yugoslavia through specific examples and concrete analyses of art practices within the institutional, political and social contexts in which they were shaped. The common starting point of the exhibition – as a collective endeavour – is the counter-position *vis-à-vis* dominant historical representations of Yugoslav art and culture, as well as the socialist socio-political system in general.

The exhibition was not composed from individual artworks but through a montage of images, texts, documents, witnesses and art objects. I will focus on the language and politics of display that intervene in the exhibition canon in which curating exists merely in the "curating art" syntagm. I will discuss curating as a possible form of intervention into the dominant politics of historization. I will also discuss curatorial authorship as an expression of self-organized collectivity.

**12. Beti Žerovc** is an art historian and theoretician; she holds a Ph.D. from the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Her fields of research are visual art and the art system from the late nineteenth century to the present and, in particular, their role in society. She works extensively with various institutions (Modern Gallery Ljubljana, National Gallery of Slovenia, Academy of Fine Arts and Design Ljubljana etc.) as a consultant, lecturer and editor. She is the author of a number of articles published in various printed media, such as *Maska*, *Život Umjetnosti*, *Springerin*, *SITE*, *Manifesta Journal* etc., as well as two books: *Rihard Jakopič – Artist and Strategist* (cf\*, 2002) and *The Curator and Contemporary Art: Conversations* (Maska, 2008), both in Slovene.

### **Exhibition as an art medium, curator as an artist – comparison with theatre**

The lecture focuses on the notions of the exhibition as art and the curator as an artist (and not merely an undefined 'author'). This is performed through the search of the chosen parallels between curating and exhibitions of contemporary art and phenomena perceived as similar in theatre. The main focus is placed on the following three aspects:

- The similarity of the historic development of the professional profiles of the curator and theatre director, at which the later has experienced a potentially similarly transformation from a non-artistic position into an artistic one not long ago, in the 19th and 20th centuries.

- The similarities of the two mediums – i.e. plays and exhibitions:

Even though the mediums of the exhibition and play should not be considered to be the same, this contribution deals with the idea that a curated, especially a group exhibition, can be very similar to a theatre play, for both are composed, precisely planned and directed events, in which the mediation of a certain content, narration, experience or message takes place through dramaturgically guiding the attention of the viewer. The similarity of the two mediums becomes even more obvious once we look at the process of unifying the means of expression and strategies that used to be specific to the individual field but are today at the disposal of the directors as well as curators.

- The similarity of the work processes and means of expression of the curator and theatre director:

I was encouraged to write this text once I noticed the following phenomenon in Slovenia. Theatre directors do not merely appear as curators of exhibitions and similar

projects, but they often even stage exhibitions as plays, i.e. as their explicit art production. My contribution presents the research findings as to why are the directors' interested in the medium of exhibitions to the extent in which they research and perform it, even though the exhibition itself does not (yet) have an accepted status of an art medium in the field of fine art.