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The Fringes
Publications on Art: Curatorial Intersections of Practices

PhD Thesis
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Birkbeck, University of London
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Abstract

We encounter a lot of information on art and curatorial projects through a wide variety of publications – from text- and image-heavy printed objects to, more recently, seemingly ephemeral digital formats. Despite publications' ubiquity, their contributions to the fields of art and curating have remained underexplored. This enquiry positions publications on art first and foremost in relation to contemporary curatorial practice and discourse, specifically in relation to ideas of 'the curatorial'. Although defined as a mode of working that relies on processes of collaboration and co-production by a potentially expansive range of actors and agents, in much of the literature the focus has remained on temporal and hierarchical sequences of (inter)actions among artists, curators and audiences.

Taking an Actor-Network-Theory approach, I consider how the enduring perception of publications on art as mainly means of mediation and dissemination of information about art and/or curatorial projects belies their central role in the field. Using a series of examples that I was involved in as an editor, I consider publications as spaces of display, look at persistent singular notions of original and source – via ideas of mediation and translation – and hierarchy – via understandings of collaboration and authorship. Publications on art are here put forward as much more than assemblages of secondary information and are situated as complex manifestations of the convergence of multiple practices – involving human as well as non-human entities – through which something new is articulated collectively. Eventually drawing on ideas from thinkers such as Isabelle Stengers and Karen Barad, I argue that publications on art can help us think through expanded notions of agency in 'the curatorial', and demonstrate how an expanded understanding of 'the curatorial' can help us read publications on art as inclusive constellations that counter persistent ideas around value and hierarchy.

Acknowledgements

Many have accompanied me on the journey of this project. First of all, heartfelt thanks to my supervisors – Patrizia di Bello, Luisa Calè and Ben Cranfield – who signed up to support me from their respective areas of expertise, and offered me a plethora of ideas and directions to explore. I owe greater clarity of what form this enquiry could take to all three of them and I hope my endeavours do their input justice. Most of all I am indebted to Ben Cranfield, who encouraged me to ‘simply submit a proposal’ during one of our many collegial chats at Birkbeck. Despite leaving for the RCA a few years after I started this project in autumn 2015, he never relented in his rigorous and generous guidance and feedback on my focus and my writing, and I look forward to continuing our exchanges in future.

I am very grateful to the School of Art at Birkbeck, University of London, which has supported me undertaking this project by way of a Curatorial Scholarship and allowed me to worry less about doing enough of my usual work. I would like to thank my former colleagues of the MA Arts Policy & Managements and the Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Birkbeck, and specifically Catherine Grant who assessed my upgrade in summer 2018. Thanks to the Corkscrew network, led by Sophie Hope, whose talks and workshops helped me get my head around how to situate and mobilise my practice. Thanks also to Anthony Shepherd, Post Graduate Research Team Leader, whose approach added a breath of fresh air throughout. I would also like to acknowledge the many students – at Birkbeck and elsewhere, most recently the RCA – I have had the pleasure of meeting. They too have helped sharpen my focus as conversation partners in the slow process of my thinking and writing taking shape.

My gratitude of course to all those I have worked with as an editor over the years – not only within the various organisations I have worked for, but also all the artists, curators, writers, designers and many others I encountered in publication projects of some shape or form. I am on purpose not listing individuals here – the content of this thesis offers some explanation as to why not, although quite a few will find themselves duly referenced in the notes. Suffice to say that they have all contributed to me gaining a different understanding of who and what can be considered to matter and how and why. Reflecting in greater depth on several past projects has been a pleasure and a privilege, while all those I have not mentioned have left their mark on the narrative that follows nonetheless. Last, but not least, many thanks to those who have supported me on a personal level (you know who you are), which has been invaluable.

Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Contents	4
Chapter 1: Introduction	6
1.1. Focus of Enquiry	6
1.2. Methods and Methodology	9
1.2.1. Literature: Curating and ‘the Curatorial’, Spaces of Display, Mediation and Translation, Collaboration and Authorship	9
1.2.2. Theory and Practice	12
1.3. Art, Curating and Publications: Three Trajectories and Their Convergences	14
1.3.1. Artists and Publications	14
1.3.2. Publications as Exhibitions.....	19
1.3.3. Towards Contemporary Curating	22
1.3.4. Contemporary Curating and Publishing	27
1.3.5. From Object to Process and Knowledge Event: ‘the Curatorial’	31
1.4. Chapter Outline	36
Chapter 2: Dis- and Reassembling Publications	40
2.1. <i>Ways of Seeing</i>, An Introductory Case Study	40
2.1.1. At First Sight(s).....	41
2.1.2. What Went Before	44
2.1.3. Content and Structure, Words and Images	50
2.1.4. Assembling <i>Ways of Seeing</i>	56
2.2. Reassembling Publications on Art as Knowledge Events	63
2.2.1. Actor-Network-Theory and Knowledge	63
2.2.2. <i>Ways of Seeing</i> as ‘Knowledge Event’	68
Chapter 3: Publications as Spaces of Display	70
3.1. Space and Curatorial Discourse	70
3.2. Publications on Art – Multiple Histories	78
3.3. <i>Black Sun</i> – Inversion and Mashup	85
3.3.1. Traditions and Conventions	85
3.3.2. Presence and Absence, Obscuring and Revealing Actors and Agents	95
3.4. Publications on Art as Spaces of Display	101

Chapter 4: Mediation and Translation in Publications on Art.....	104
4.1. Terms of Difference	104
4.2. Mediating and Curating and Discourse.....	108
4.3. On Mediation and Translation	114
4.3.1. Complicating ‘Work’ and ‘Translation’	114
4.3.2. Practising Translation: Appropriation and Adaptation	121
4.3.3. From Medial Transfer to New Articulation	133
Chapter 5: Collaboration and Authorship in Publications on Art	142
5.1. Another Set of Terms	142
5.2. Collaboration and Authorship in Curatorial Discourse	143
5.3. Producing Collaboratively – Complicating Authorship	157
5.3.1. Forms of Distinction.....	158
5.3.2. Making the Invisible Visible.....	160
5.3.3. Co-opting Collaborators.....	165
5.3.4. Form and Function Back to Front	169
5.4. From Actors and Interactions to Ecology of Practices and Intra-action.....	172
Chapter 6: Conclusion – ‘The Curatorial’ as ‘Intra-active Ecology of Practices’ ...	179
6.1. How Did We Get Here?	179
6.2. Words and Ideas: ‘Ecology of Practices’ and ‘Intra-actions’	182
6.3. Towards a New Terminology: ‘The Curatorial’ as ‘Intra-active Ecology of Practices’.....	190
Bibliography	195

Chapter 1: Introduction

What work goes into the making of things, such that they take form as this or that thing?

—Sarah Ahmed¹

Matter is [...] not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency.

—Karen Barad²

1.1. Focus of Enquiry

In this thesis I reflect on the role and perception of publications on art in curatorial practice and discourse.³ With publications I (mainly) mean those that take the shape of printed objects, and ‘on art’ indicates they relate to art, exhibitions or other kinds of curated projects, or a combination of both. My enquiry is grounded in my own long-standing practice as an editor of such publications, which range from extensively illustrated catalogues to artists’ books, and from complex projects with a wide variety of contributions to single texts. I consider all of these publications to be firmly part of the field of contemporary curating as it has emerged since the late 1960s. Many exhibitions and curated projects are, after all, accompanied by a publication that gives them an ‘afterlife’, yet, with few exceptions, their position in and contribution to the curatorial field and its discourse have received little attention.⁴ Although a wide variety of publications underpin and facilitate contemporary debates – through critical reflection on practice and the development of theory – they are often seen as merely means of dissemination or mediation of information about art or curatorial work.⁵ In short, they seem to operate on the fringes of both areas of practice. The objective of my project is to demonstrate that rather than being static afterlives, publications on art are manifestations in a series of processes in which who and what has agency is complex and fluid.

¹ Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) p. 40.

² Karen Barad, ‘Ma(r)king Time: Material Entanglements and Re-memberings: Cutting Together-Apart 1’, in *How Matter Matters: Objects, Artifacts, and Materiality in Organization Studies*, edited by Paul R. Carlile, Davide Nicolini, Ann Langley and Haridimos Tsoukas (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013) p. 18, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199671533.003.0001.

³ The phrase ‘publications on art’ denotes various modes and formats, including digital ones, and is used throughout.

⁴ The notion of ‘afterlife’, derived from Walter Benjamin, will be expanded on in Chapters 2 and 4.

⁵ Anne Douglas (then University of Aberdeen) argued in a workshop in 2014 that much art-related publications are ‘vanity projects’. This thesis is to some extent an attempt at countering Douglas’s assertion.

In discussions on contemporary curating, the idea of the authorial curator, which came to the fore in the 1990s,⁶ has in the last fifteen years to some extent made way for practices that rely on collaboration and co-creation. In this approach, which has been labelled ‘the curatorial’ and is often situated as distinct from curating, projects are conceived as emergent through interactions rather than oriented towards a specific outcome or output.⁷ As one summative definition states, ‘the curatorial’ can be understood as ‘centred on longer-term, less object-oriented, discursive-educational projects to involve various people as instigators and actors’.⁸ Despite this emphasis on open-endedness and collaborative working – among which publications arguably have become more rather than less important, because they contain often the only tangible remains of processual unfolding – the exhibition as form, the institutional frameworks within which they happen, as well as a few individual positions have stayed at the centre of discussions around curatorial practice. My concern here is that much of current discourse still relies on traditional understandings of agency, attributed to a limited set of human actors, and that the potential that ‘the curatorial’ seems to offer has not been fully worked through. The aim of focusing on publications on art in my enquiry is to consider ‘the curatorial’ beyond the usual formats and frameworks, and in doing so challenge the persistent emphasis on specific positions and hierarchies of value in curatorial discourse at large.

This enquiry is not an attempt to equate my work as editor of publications on art with that of curators – although there are similarities⁹ – or to directly compare the medium of exhibitions or curatorial projects with the medium – or media, if we take the emergence of digital platforms into account – of publications per se. Instead, my aim is to interrogate whose work is valued in the production of these publications, and to consider what other (f)actors contribute and what that may offer to our understanding of contemporary practices in the field. Publications on art are often seen as direct extensions of the work of the artist as creator and/or the curator as mediator – initially made manifest as artwork and as curated project – even though a lot of others’ ideas and labour goes into their making. Ultimately, I want to consider what this interrogation of publications on art can contribute to our understanding of ‘the curatorial’ as a genuine attempt to rethink what and who we value in cultural production.

⁶ See Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak, ‘From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a Singular Position’ [1989], in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 1996) pp. 231-250; for a further tracing of the rise of the authorial curator, see Paul O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating: The Curating of Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

⁷ Curatorial is used as an adjective and in relation to the more recently defined understanding, in which case it is accompanied by quotation marks and often by ‘the’ – i.e. ‘the curatorial’/‘curatorial’.

⁸ tranzit.hu, ‘Curatorial Dictionary: Unpacking the Oxymoron’, in *Curating Research*, edited by Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (London/Amsterdam: Open editions/de Appel, 2015) p. 237.

⁹ The work of curators can be understood to be contingent on that of artists (and others), and editors can be argued to have a similarly contingent practice, relying on a range of other practitioners’ work. As a slight provocation, I call myself a ‘curator of publications’, see <https://gerrieat.work/> (accessed 22 March 2021).

Throughout this thesis I do stay close to publications on art as material objects and consider what they tell us directly, but also explore how they have come about. Based on my experience, this how is dependent on continuously reconfiguring interactions between people, materials and conventions. To make this more concrete: the examples I describe involve contributions by artists and curators, but also writers, editors and graphic designers, as well as photographers, translators, image calibrators and printers, to list some of the actors involved. It is their combined contributions that result in the specific form of these publication projects.¹⁰ These human contributors may seem easy to identify; we can consult the list of names and their roles in the colophon or credit pages. What my enquiry shows is that such attributions are not necessarily reliable, and that they reflect and perpetuate persistent hierarchies in which those who are seen as ‘creators’ are often foregrounded over those who ‘merely’ execute.

What the material objects we encounter don’t reveal is how the negotiations between different interests and positions have played themselves out, while what kinds of agency have been occluded or even suppressed is not apparent either. Whose interests were or are at stake, and whose agenda is being served by these publications is often not that transparent. In addition, the professional conventions and individual – conscious and unconscious – preferences and habits that each human contributor brought to the processes of interaction often remain invisible too. The influence exerted by the frameworks within which these interactions and negotiations unfolded – including the institutions that initiated, produced and through which these publications on art circulate – is often equally difficult to pinpoint. Accepting that there is much more to the making of a publication on art than meets the hand and/or eye in the form of the object, my project engages with the various forces that surround them and situates them as nodes in wider networks of convergence and interaction.

To summarise the concerns outlined above, my enquiry is driven by the following research questions:

- What and whose work is valued in publications on art and in what ways (how is that valuation made manifest)?
- What might different understandings of who, but also of what has agency tell us about the nature and perception of contemporary creative practices involved in publications on art, and their limits and potentialities in the curatorial field?

¹⁰ With ‘form’ I therefore mean not only its physical manifestation, but also the more conceptual concerns that have been brought to bear on it and worked through by the various practitioners who contributed to its production.

- What might a different appreciation of the various contributing (f)actors in publications on art offer us towards understandings of ‘the curatorial’?

In the next section I outline my methodology, which relies on various bodies of literature in relation to several key terms, as well as the use of my own experience and practice, to which I apply an overarching approach rather than a single theoretical position.

1.2. Methods and Methodology

1.2.1. Literature: Curating and ‘the Curatorial’, Spaces of Display, Mediation and Translation, Collaboration and Authorship

From my perspective as editor and educator, the position of publications in the field of curating is one on the edges; not appreciated as fully part of and contributing to contemporary practice, nor fully engaged with and understood in the discourse.¹¹ On the edges of one field, other fields and discourses come into view though, which is why I have positioned my overall title ‘The Fringes’ as a productive metaphor.¹² No field evolves in isolation, and whereas the debates on contemporary curating have largely focused on the shift from the art object to its modes of presentation – and from the persona of the artist to the curator creating different narratives and environments for engagement – my enquiry suggests an exploration of ideas and terminologies that are also relevant in other fields. While other disciplines and even activities in day-to-day life have in recent years appropriated the term ‘curating’,¹³ publications are central to many other disciplines and their discourses too, especially those that work with the potential of the book as space, medium or platform. My proposition is that ideas and understandings from these fields can be fertile for my project and therefore I draw upon them here, which does mean that this thesis is burdened with an excess of footnotes.¹⁴ These citations do, however, not simply fulfil their conventional function as source references, but can be argued to constitute a performative tracing of connections between my own reflections and networks of perspectives and specific positions in the literature.¹⁵

¹¹ Alongside my practice as an editor since the late 1980s, I have engaged with the development of curatorial practice and discourse through teaching at various MA/MFA courses (since the early 2000s), after having been involved with the development and launch of the Curatorial Training Programme at de Appel in Amsterdam in the early 1990s.

¹² Fringes are often seen as purely decorative and of little substance, diffusing the demarcation between what is considered to be internal or external to something, offering the potential for exchange by stealth.

¹³ For an impression of how the term curating has ‘seeped out’ of the field of curating, see David Balzer, *Curatorialism: How curating took over the art world and everything else* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2014).

¹⁴ Johanna Drucker suggests that ‘Notes are always elements of dialogue, as are marginalia and other commentary. They pull apart the obvious and apparent unity of any text and demonstrate its porousness, the incompleteness of boundaries, the impossibility of finitude.’ See Johanna Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing* (Banff: Banff Art Centre, 2013) p. 25.

¹⁵ As Sara Ahmed argues, ‘citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow.’ Sara Ahmed,

Most publications on art rely on processes of transposition – of aspects of and engagement with the work of art and/or curated project – into another space in which artistic and curatorial ideas and practices are somehow (re)presented. I therefore first explore how publications have over time been used as spaces of display, and frame this by outlining how space has been engaged with in curatorial discourse. Situating publications as spaces of display in their own right suggests I consider what is being ‘moved’ or ‘transposed’ from curatorial spaces, which stretches beyond words and purely linguistic meaning and relies on processes of transferral across different media. Such processes cannot but take into account the specificity of the media of ‘original’ artworks and/or curated projects and the characteristics of the media of publications. The (re)presentation of artworks and/or curated projects in publications therefore involves some kind of transformation between spaces and modes, through which a publication is never simply an intermediary between the artist and/or curator and the reader/viewer, between the work and its (re)presentation; something happens in the process of transfer. This raises the question as to what takes priority in these processes of carrying over: is it the representation of just the work or their exhibited state? What about the ideas embedded in works or projects, or the processes of their evolution? And what happens when the works do not manifest in physical form: how can they be represented, or presented within a publication? What is considered to be ‘translatable’ in such cases, and how? In other words, what are the limits to the ‘translatability’ of artworks and curated projects? To approach these questions, I explore ideas of mediation and translation, especially those common in curatorial discourse.

If we accept that processes of mediation and translation are fundamental to the production of publications on art, questions of collaboration and authorship come sharply into focus. If publications not only rely on work by artists and curators, but also on collaborations with and contributions from other practitioners, can they still be attributed to a specific author, understood as ‘creator’? Should we maybe consider a form of ‘collective authorship’ of all of the people listed in the contents pages or colophon instead? But what about those whose contribution does not involve direct creation – of work, of text and/or image – and/or are not listed or credited? And what if we take the material and immaterial aspects that surround them into account, including the organisational frameworks and the fields within which they operate, and the different traditions common in each? What do the conventions that converge in the

Living a Feminist Life (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017) p. 15. The performativity of the notes here is not about establishing a feminist rooting, but their excess helps demonstrate how new thinking can emerge through sustained engagement with complex networks of existing thought, a point that is underlined by both Isabelle Stengers and Karen Barad, whose ideas are introduced in Chapter 5 and elaborated in Chapter 6, allowing for a different perspective on existing curatorial discourse.

space of the book do to the construction of narrative and meaning? What effects do material aspects – such as paper, binding, use of colour – have on ideas of authoring? And what about immaterial (f)actors such as chance and accidents: where does our understanding of authorship start and where does it end or become something else? And, last but not least, where does the recipient – the reader/viewer – sit among all this? What does the always deferred act of reading do to perceptions of collaboration and authoring? Similar to ideas around publications as spaces of display, mediation and translating, I explore ideas of collaboration and authorship – especially those that have filtered through into curatorial discourse. With the focus of part of the discourse having shifted from authorial to more collaborative modes of working, broadening our understanding of collaboration may help us see authorship beyond only specific individuals. Ultimately, the overarching question is how all these considerations related to publications can also contribute to ideas of ‘the curatorial’.

To illustrate how these various concerns come together in this thesis, the diagram below (Fig. 1.1) visualises the interrelationship between the different concepts and ideas I have outlined. My main, generic objects of research are publications on art, which are here situated on the fringes of each specific area of scrutiny – of space and display, of mediation and translation, and collaboration and authorship – but also sit solidly at the centre of my overall research network and within the wider field of curating and ‘the curatorial’.¹⁶ In the next section I introduce how I go about my project in practical terms and outline my methodological approach.

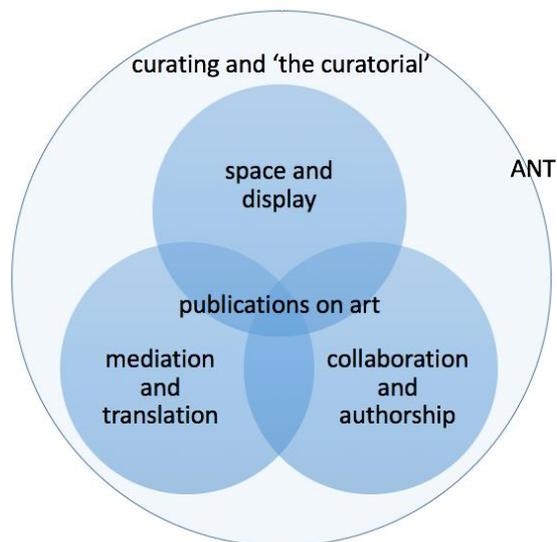


Figure 1.1: research diagram ‘The Fringes’

¹⁶ Network is here understood as outlined in Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) developed by Bruno Latour and expanded on and applied by many others. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

1.2.2. Theory and Practice

Before addressing how I explore publications as spaces of display, ideas of mediation and translation, and of collaboration and authorship as identified in the diagram above, I briefly introduce Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which I have chosen as my approach (the large circle in Fig. 1.1).¹⁷ Whereas Visual Culture engages with the role of images and what can be gleaned through their analysis, and Material Culture considers what literal matter can tell us, ANT presents itself as a useful methodology for my enquiry because its key concern revolves around notions of 'agency'. Agency, or lack thereof, is generally thought of as being exerted by individuals or groups of people. Bruno Latour, one of ANT's most well-known proponents, takes issue with the fact that agency tends to be attributed to 'the social', understood as the amalgamation of human behaviour and interactions. In his view, 'the social' does not explain anything, but needs to be explained itself, and for him can only be considered through 'a very particular movement of re-association and reassembling'.¹⁸ To come to a different understanding, ANT takes into account the agency of all entities – human as well as non-human – including those that have no 'figuration' yet, such as conventions and traditions, which Latour calls 'actants'.¹⁹ All of these non-human entities can, when they bring about a change of some kind and in doing so become 'actors' or 'actants', play a role similar to human actors who generate an effect on a situation or process.²⁰ Using an ANT approach involves the tracing of influences of all actors and actants at play, through which the object of study emerges as part of a network of associations. Through this what Latour calls 'reassembling' of the agencies involved, we end up with an understanding of 'the social' as entirely enmeshed in our object of study, rather than as an external given.

As an approach, ANT thus consists of following the trajectories of influence of both human and non-human actors and actants that converge.²¹ This tracing manifests itself through descriptions, in which the researcher takes on a what Latour calls 'controversial authorial agency'.²² Because my enquiry is not about publications on art as static end products, but focuses on what they can add to our understanding of agency within curatorial discourse, ANT offers a way of getting to grips with their complexity as material nodes in networks of various

¹⁷ John Law provides a clear summary of the development of ANT, its terminologies and relationships with other ideas. He attributes the coining of the term Actor-Network to Michael Callon, in 1982. See John Law, 'Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics', 2007, p. 3. The text is available at <http://www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2007ANTandMaterialSemiotics.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2017).

¹⁸ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁰ Latour uses the term 'actants' specifically for entities that have no figuration – some physical form, i.e. they are immaterial – but that are considered capable of 'acting'.

²¹ Latour and others don't situate ANT as a theory.

²² Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 138

influences. Instead of purely focusing on their visual and material characteristics, by considering what the determining (f)actors have been/are in the processes of their making, ANT requires me to consider relationships and lineages beyond those of only some individual humans in processes of decision-making and production. Thus, rather than leaving publications as concrete objects behind, I mobilise them as focus points in networks of production and circulation in order to challenge the emphasis on only a few specific positions in the discourse.

For my enquiry, I have opted for a critical reflection on already published examples I was involved in.²³ A key reason is that critical reflection on agency, on how it manifests itself and is valued (or not), only becomes possible with hindsight, which requires distance in time, and possibly also space, being removed from the specific context in which it was produced.²⁴ The distance in time and space afforded by looking at past projects enables a rereading of their material and visual characteristics, but crucially also allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the range of agencies involved – both human and non-human. My aim in all this is not to expose the processes of publishing as such, but rather to use these material objects to unpack key aspects of publications' potential and to outline their critical role within the field of curating in relation to specific ideas in the discourse.

The use of examples from my own practice does raise certain concerns: how to ensure I take (enough) critical distance in my descriptions? To clarify, the use of these publication projects here is not an attempt to present them as exemplary. On the contrary, they are deployed to raise questions, challenge theoretical concepts and common understandings and consider how 'the curatorial' can be thought through further by way of ideas of space and display, mediation and translation, and collaboration and authorship. In addition, using examples from my own practice requires me to acknowledge and question my own agency in the projects I describe, where I explicitly do not use ethnography or auto-ethnography. Initially I had also planned to conduct interviews with artists, curators, designers and others I collaborated with in the examples selected to get their views on the processes of development, collaboration and decision-making. However, as writing progressed, the emphasis shifted and my project became less about verifying my own (re-)reading of publications I had been an active agent in, and more about testing the questions the examples helped raise against prevalent views in curatorial discourse. No interview material has therefore been used. In using my 'controversial authorial agency', as author of this text, I am of course doubly invested, and critically so – as practitioner

²³ My submission is a combination of a practice-led/by publication/fully written approach. In the course of the process, it became clear that the intersecting ideas I explore and my engagement with existing literature was better served by a fully written thesis rather than a practice-based exploration.

²⁴ Distance is one of the (f)actors that facilitates the tracing of networks. See Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 128.

and researcher.²⁵ As an editor, I do also often hold a privileged observational position: I ‘oversee’ many, and sometimes all aspects of publications’ production, and manage the relations among a people and forces in the processes that result in the object. Using examples of publications that I have helped bring into existence therefore has the benefit of access: I am a key witness to and active participant in bringing them to fruition and can therefore draw on exchanges, email and other documents, from my own and others’ archives. In all of this tracing, I stay close to publications as manifestations of the interactions between a range of practices, ensuring an ongoing engagement with notions of value and agency.

Having outlined my key questions and areas of concern, my approach, and the use of my own practice in relation to specific sets of concepts, in the following section I outline several sequences of development that are relevant for my project. I start with a brief outline of the increase and expansion of the use of publications as artistic medium, followed by a summary of experiments with publications as curatorial platforms.

1.3. Art, Curating and Publications: Three Trajectories and Their Convergences

1.3.1. Artists and Publications

A rich body of literature on the book as medium for artistic practice – in which the artwork takes the form of a publication – has developed since the late 1960s and early 1970s.²⁶ A key early protagonist in the development of and discourse around artists’ books was Ulises Carrión. An artist, artist’s book maker and founder of a bookshop dedicated to the medium, Carrión wrote the manifesto ‘The New Art of Making Books’ (1975).²⁷ Contemplating its potential as container of much more than linguistic content, he argued that ‘[a] book is a sequence of spaces. Each of these spaces is perceived at a different moment – a book is also a sequence of moments.’²⁸ Carrión’s essay was an invitation, a provocation even, to his contemporaries to start to inhabit these spaces and these moments differently, summarised by his observation that

²⁵ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 138.

²⁶ Key texts include: Germano Celant, *The Book as Artwork 1960-1972* (London: Nigel Greenwood, 1972); Joan Lyons (ed.) *Artists’ Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1987); Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists’ Books* (New York, NY: Granary Books, 2004 [1994]); Cornelia Lauf and Clive Phillpot (eds.) *Artist/Author: Contemporary Artists’ Books* (New York, NY: DAP, 1998); and Clive Phillpot, *Booktrek: Selected Essays on Artists’ Books (1972-2010)* (Zürich and Dijon: JRP|Ringier and les presses du réel, 2013). An example that also considers the advent of the digital is Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay (eds.) *A Book of the Book: Some Works and Projections About the Book and Writing* (New York, NY: Granary Books, 2000).

²⁷ Ulises Carrión, ‘The New Art of Making Books’, *Kontexts*, Nos. 6-7, 1975; see also Guy Schraenen, *Ulises Carrión: We have won! Haven’t we?* (Amsterdam: Museum Fodor, 1992); and Guy Schraenen (ed.) *Ulises Carrión: Dear Reader. Don’t Read* (Madrid and Mexico City: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and Fundación Jumex, 2016).

²⁸ ‘The New Art of Making Books’, reprinted in Ulises Carrión, *SECOND THOUGHTS* (Amsterdam: Void, 1980), available at <https://monoskop.org/log/?p=14521> (accessed 18 April 2018) p. 7.

'[t]o make a book is to actualize its ideal space-time sequence by means of the creation of a parallel sequence of signs, be it linguistic or other.'²⁹ Carrión here underlines the specific order provided through the individual sections and pages that follow one after the other when we leaf through them – and what takes place through the use of text and/or image on each – between a book's covers.³⁰ It is how these spaces are used that for Carrión can turn a book into a 'new art'. He also considered the effect of using a book's spaces for the creation of an artwork for the reader, stating that '[t]o read a book, is to perceive sequentially its structure', positing this as an inclusive potential, concluding that '[t]he new art appeals to the ability every man [sic] possesses for understanding and creating signs and systems of signs'.³¹ The essay provides much more detailed suggestions for artists on how they can approach the book and its inherent sequentiality, and Carrión's call to arms draws attention to the potential of the medium to be used more fully, while also situating the book as an always deferred site of exchange.

Johanna Drucker's is another key voice in outlining how the book has been used by artists. In *The Century of Artists' Books* (1994) she explores the wide variety of ways in which they have explored it as 'a dynamic interface, a structured set of codes for using and accessing information and navigating the experience of a work.'³² Drucker's concerns are similar to Carrión's, both moving away from the book as a material object that simply carries a message, instead considering it as a medium that can be used like any other. Starting her survey with predecessors of the artist's book, including late-nineteenth-century examples such as the *livre d'artiste*,³³ Drucker eventually arrives at a general description of 'the concept of the book', arguing that 'every book is a metaphor, an object of associations and history, cultural meanings and production values, spiritual possibilities and poetic spaces.'³⁴ Concluding her historical trajectory, Drucker confesses that providing a clear definition of the artist's book is impossible, but observes that the common denominator is their makers' conscious engagement with what a book *is* and *can do*, with its ontological characteristics and their possible effects.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ The notion of a book's sequentiality applies to Western and non-Western books and their conventions in terms of what is considered front or back, the points at which we are culturally conditioned to start and/or finish.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³² Drucker, *The Century*, p. vii. Drucker has also written on the space of the page, the impact of shifts to the digital and on the visual as a mode of presentation of knowledge. See Johanna Drucker, 'The Virtual Codex from Page Space to E-space', in *A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, edited by Ray Siemens and Susan Schreibman (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2007) chapter 11; Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing*; and Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

³³ The *livre d'artiste* is different from what artists' books are now (= mainly mass produced): they contain hand-made prints produced by/under direct supervision of the artist, and thus originals in editions, rather than reproductions after other originals. Often they are accompanied by text, but the emphasis is on the visual prints, instigated by artists' gallerists, they were more 'accessible', i.e. less expensive, than unique artworks.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

For Drucker, artists who choose to work with the medium cannot but be self-reflexive in the process, because an artist's book 'examine[s] itself as a proposition – one loaded with specific ideas about the way a book can embody an idea through its manifestation'.³⁵ She argues therefore that 'when a book calls attention to the conceits and conventions by which it normally effaces its identity [...] it performs a *theoretical* operation.'³⁶ Although we may perceive the book as a finished material object, considering its potential can relate to 'conventions of the page', and the page can in turn be explored in relation to both literary and visual and material traditions 'of form, layout, and illusion'. It is this conceptual engagement and possible theoretical operation that is relevant for my own enquiry, especially in relation to ideas around 'the curatorial', which is why I expand on Drucker's observations here. Throughout her descriptions of an impressive array of case studies and their specific characteristics, Drucker summarises that they can 'function as a dynamic whole through linked sequential movement or action', again aligning herself closely with Carrión.³⁷ For Drucker the book can 'be examined as a whole, as an entity, and an object', as well as an object 'whose structural features are its subject', but an artist's book also calls 'attention to the external factors which determine its structure'.³⁸

It is the tension between the 'seeming simplicity of that conventional form and the unlimited complexity produced through the relation of elements to each other in a finite arrangement', implying wider networks of possible influence, that for Drucker makes artists' books so interesting.³⁹ In a conceptual sense, 'a page can subdivide infinitely; in [a] metaphoric[al] sense, the process of looking and reading leads us into the labyrinthine web of associations'.⁴⁰ This weaving of a web of associations by the reader/viewer happens internally, among elements that are not literally (visually/spatially) juxtaposed, between which we as readers draw our own connections across a book's sequence of spaces. In addition, we also make connections with what lies beyond the page and the space of the book in hand. In the process, we generate our individual versions, so that each publication serves 'the vision and function of its new author, a form in which we all participate, reshaping its identity'.⁴¹ Emphasising the many ways in which artists have engaged with books' material aspects, with their 'bookness', Drucker sees each artist's book as a proposition that individual readers read in their own, unique way.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³⁶ *Ibid.* My italics.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 359.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 364. This resonates with Roland Barthes's ideas of the 'writerly text', in which the perceived meaning is constructed, and the process of writing completed through the act of reading. See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1975 [1973]).

In the wake of Drucker's comprehensive overview of the development and diversity among artists working with the book as medium, many more critical reflections have followed, which in turn has resulted in books providing overviews of the growing body of literature on artists' books.⁴² In addition, archives of artists' books have gained recognition and become worthy of exhibitions as well as research projects.⁴³ A key example of an exhibition focusing on artists' books is the 'Kiosk' project (2001-08), initiated by Christoph Keller, which 'contain[ed] more than 7,000 publications by approximately 500 independent art publishing projects' and that toured among international exhibition venues, followed by a publication that reflected on the project and its trajectory.⁴⁴ What is significant in 'Kiosk' is that while the artist's book remained the focus, how that manifests itself was opened up to other forms. The project description mentions that the exhibition included 'magazines, fanzines, newspapers, journals, audio- and video-labels, corporate and institutional publishing, etc.', but also underlines 'independent publishing' as the common characteristic within the 'whole bandwidth of publishing possibilities, the motivations and strategies of the people "behind the scenes," the editors, publishers, designers, multipliers'.⁴⁵ In other words, the artist's book has by the twenty-first century become a diverse phenomenon that is no longer limited to the book as form that ends up in special collections in art libraries,⁴⁶ but circulates within the wider art sector in a variety of manners and modes.

What projects such as 'Kiosk' also highlight is that while narratives around artists' books have been shaped by artists such as Carrión and Drucker, in more recent years others – including

⁴² See, for instance, Stefan Klima, *Artists Books. A Critical Survey of the Literature* (New York, NY: Granary Books, 1998); Fraser Muggeridge and Sara de Bondt (eds.) *The Form of the Book* (London: Occasional papers, 2009); Michael Hampton, *The Artists Book: A New History* (London: Banner Repeater, 2011); Arnaud Desjardin, *The Book on Books on Artists Books* (London: The Everyday Press, 2013); Emmanuelle Wäckerle and Richard Sawdon Smith, *The Book is A__ Live!* (Sheffield: RGAP, 2013); Charlotte Cheetham (ed.) *The Catalogue and its Mongrels* (Paris: association Catalyst, 2013); Corinn Gerber and Benjamin Thorel (eds.) *A Book About What's More to Life Than Books* (Paris: Paraguay Press, 2014); John Herschend and Will Rogan (eds.), *The Thing: A monument to the book as object* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2014); Michael Hampton, *Unshelfmarked: Reconceiving the artist's book* (Axminster: Uniformbooks, 2015); and Castillo/Corrales, *The Social Life of the Book* (Paris: Paraguay Press, 2013-16).

⁴³ Tate, for instance, has an extensive collection of artists' books (6,500, from the 1960s onwards). In 2012, Tate, together with The British Library, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the University of the Arts London, took part in 'Transforming Artist Books', a research project exploring digital transformations in their creation and reception. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/22735> (accessed 15 April 2018).

⁴⁴ The exhibition was exhibited 27 times worldwide, in institutions and biennales. See http://www.jrp-ringier.com/pages/index.php?id_r=4&id_t=&id_p=15&id_b=1612 (accessed 26 April 2018). The project was followed by the exhibition 'Beyond Kiosk – Modes of Multiplication', at the Centre d'Art Contemporain in Geneva, before becoming a live archive at the State Library in Berlin in 2008. See Christoph Keller and M. Laibach (eds.) *Kiosk – Modes of Multiplication: A Sourcebook on Independent Art Publishing 1999-2009* (Zürich and Berlin: JRP|Ringier and Kunstbibliothek Staatliche Museen Berlin, 2009).

⁴⁵ See http://www.jrp-ringier.com/pages/index.php?id_r=4&id_t=&id_p=15&id_b=1612 (accessed 26 April 2018). NB: Johanna Drucker curated several exhibitions on artists' books in the 1990s, following examples in the early 1970s, most notably 'book as artwork 1960/1972', curated by Germano Celant at the Nigel Greenwood Gallery, London, in 1972. The scale and scope of 'Kiosk', as well as its touring and reception were unprecedented though.

⁴⁶ As was the case at the Museum of Modern Art in New York when Clive Phillpot started collecting artists' books when he was director of the Library in the late 1970s. See Phillpot, *Booktrek*.

editors, graphic designers, librarians, publishers, archivists and curators – have started to contribute.⁴⁷ This enhanced visibility of the diverse practices that participate in the networks around publications as art and their discourses was also underlined by the exhibition ‘Publishing as an Artistic Toolbox: 1989-2017’, which no longer simply referenced the book as object and medium, but posited publishing as literally a ‘toolbox’.⁴⁸ The exhibition followed the publication of *Publishing as Artistic Practice* (2016), in which a range of contributors co-opt the activities involved in publishing into artistic practice.⁴⁹ This expansion of publications as medium and as locus for a diverse range of (creative) work, going beyond Carrión’s and Drucker’s respective foci and explorations, extends to how publications circulate – mirroring the shift from object to process in creative practices. A more recent example is an exhibition called ‘Editorial Thinking’, which was situated as a process-based ‘way to approach the world through multiple temporalities and focus, navigating through formats and collaborating with many agents.’⁵⁰ All publishers/artists in the show ‘work with sequences and temporalities of editorial making, producing and organizing; thus serialising, revisiting and recontextualizing’, all of which resonates with key concerns of my enquiry here.⁵¹ Anna-Sophie Springer’s K-Verlag, in turn, explicitly explores publishing (and libraries) as also a curatorial rather than just artistic environment.⁵² For Springer, ‘the premise [...] is to interrogate the polymorphic relationships between artistic, curatorial, and editorial agencies’, specifically looking at the networks that come together in publications on art.⁵³ Projects like these provide a direct link between recent developments around the artist’s book with the trajectory I outline next – publications as spaces for curatorial work – that have their own genealogy.

⁴⁷ ‘Kiosk’s Christoph Keller wore all these hats. In the UK, Sara de Bondt and Fraser Muggeridge are both graphic designers and publishers contributing to the discourse as it develops. Book Works (founded 1984) are still a key artist’s book publisher, while Banner Repeater (founded 2010), a shop-cum-exhibition space at Hackney Downs station, have recently instigated the Digital Archive of Artists’ Publishing (DAAP, launched 2020), available at <https://daap.network/> (accessed 12 January 2021).

⁴⁸ The project (Kunsthalle Wien, 2017-18) posed relevant questions: ‘What is the role of art publishing today? How have artists adapted modes of publishing as a tool for their practice? How has the notion of artists’ publishing activity changed, given the ever-increasing amount of fairs and an ever-evolving number of book-related collections in contemporary art museums?’ Casting the net wider, it ‘explore[s] the potentials of publishing – in the form of books, magazines, journals, artistic interventions, websites – as a particular medium and context both to circulate information, knowledge – and to produce art.’ See <http://www.kunsthallewien.at/#/en/exhibitions/publishing-artistic-toolbox> (accessed 26 April 2018).

⁴⁹ Annette Gilbert (ed.) *Publishing as Artistic Practice* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016). A second edition was printed within a year, indicative of the growing interest.

⁵⁰ See <http://indexfoundation.se/exhibitions/editorial-thinking> (accessed 22 February 2021).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² See Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin (eds.) *Fantasies of the Library* (Berlin: K-Verlag, 2015); and Anna-Sophie Springer, ‘Volumes: The Book as Exhibition’, *C-Magazine*, No. 116, Winter 2012, pp. 36-44; see also Rachel Simkover, ‘Book Hook: K-Verlag’, 28 November 2012, available at <http://bpigs.com/diaries/book-hook/book-hook-k-verlag> (accessed 20 May 2016).

⁵³ Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin, ‘Reading *Fantasies* & Other Fantasies of Reading’, available at <http://ccva.fas.harvard.edu/april-2016?platform=hootsuite> (accessed 20 May 2016).

1.3.2. Publications as Exhibitions

The second strand, linked to projects initiated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, connects the development of contemporary curating with publications. In the course of the 1960s, some artists considered how making art could escape traditional material manifestation; as a result, much of their work remained conceptual and ephemeral.⁵⁴ With degrees of ephemerality becoming more widespread and with artworks no longer always visually, physically or spatially anchored, how such work can be shown became a key question: what happens in such cases to the notion of exhibiting and display?⁵⁵ Several people engaged with exactly that question and saw the potential of the catalogue as the 'site' for the display of ideas and artworks.⁵⁶ Challenging existing frameworks of making, presenting and selling art, Seth Siegelauub instigated a range of projects that explored the merging of the 'life' of the work of art in its exhibited form with its 'afterlife', most notably the so-called *Xerox Book* (1968).⁵⁷ Conflating exhibition space and catalogue, the artists who contributed to the project were all given 25 pages to make and display their work.⁵⁸ Each did so differently, using their individual 'space' within the book, which together construed an 'exhibition'.⁵⁹ In line with other projects initiated by Siegelauub, *Xerox Book*⁶⁰ was 'an attempt to consciously standardize, in terms of an exhibition, book, or project, the conditions of production underlying the exhibition process.'⁶¹ By simultaneously using the publication as space for making the work and making it public, the exhibition took place somewhere else than in a three-dimensional physical space, displacing and reframing how and where a viewer encountered each work and the exhibition as a whole.

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive essay on this period, see Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, Vol. 55, Winter 1990, pp. 105-143.

⁵⁵ One could rephrase this by asking what happens to the work's 'exhibitability', a term derived from Walter Benjamin. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility' (1935), translated by Michael W. Jennings, *Grey Room*, No. 39, Spring 2010, pp. 11-37, relevant sections 17-19.

⁵⁶ I expand on the history of the catalogue as a specific type in Chapter 3.

⁵⁷ The full title of the book is *Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Lawrence Weiner* (New York, NY: Siegelauub/Wendler, 1968). The book was reprinted in 2015, just before the exhibition 'Seth Siegelauub, Beyond Conceptual Art' at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 2016.

⁵⁸ Drucker calls the project 'a record and site of the conceptual undertaking'. Drucker, *The Century*, p. 321. Jack Wendler, the book's co-publisher, reflects on its production in an interview, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85wsUOaqCN8&t=173s> (accessed 15 September 2015).

⁵⁹ Lucy Lippard labels Siegelauub the 'co-inventor of conceptual art'. See Lucy Lippard, 'What to Say About Seth?', *Artforum*, 11 February 2014, available at <https://www.artforum.com/passages/lucy-r-lippard-on-seth-siegelauub-1941-2013-45178> (accessed 18 January 2016).

⁶⁰ The book and its contributions were the subject of an exhibition at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York in 2015, in which the book and several contributions were exhibited individually, inverting the conflation of the catalogue as exhibition space. See Tiernan Morgan, '7 Artists, 25 Pages Each, 1 Half-Century Later: Revisiting the Xerox Book', *Hyperallergic*, 22 October 2015, available at <https://hyperallergic.com/240038/7-artists-25-pages-each-1-half-century-later-revisiting-the-xerox-book/> (accessed 18 January 2016).

⁶¹ See 'A Conversation: between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Seth Siegelauub', *Trans*, No. 6, 1999, pp. 51-63; reprinted in Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich and Dijon: JRP|Ringier and Les presses du réel, 2008) pp. 145-163. Siegelauub's (and Lippard's) inclusion in *A Brief History* underlines the importance of their projects for the development of contemporary curating.

Another of Siegelau's projects that challenged the tension between live encounter and afterlife was *July, August, September 1969*.⁶² Dispersed across eleven locations in North America and Europe, the project effectively extended the exhibition 'space' across two continents. Consequently, for most people access was only possible through the publication, thus also conflating the experience of the exhibition and its afterlife by means of the catalogue, but differently than in *Xerox Book*.⁶³ The idea of afterlife was pushed further, or inverted, in a project conceived for a university campus in Canada, where people only became aware of the exhibition having happened afterwards, when the catalogue came out.⁶⁴ Its literal title, *The Catalogue for the Exhibition*, challenges the usual temporal order of both and the hierarchical perception of the relationship of each for the viewer/visitor/reader. Other projects engaged in similar explorations, including *March 1969*, in which a calendar functioned as exhibition space,⁶⁵ and an issue of *Studio International* (1969), for which Siegelau invited six critics who were given eight pages each to occupy as they saw fit, in the latter case Siegelau sharing his role of commissioner/curator/editor.⁶⁶ The projects described here have over the years inspired many others to explore the relationship between artwork, exhibition and catalogue, and continue to do so, thus generating and becoming part of a specific historicised narrative themselves.⁶⁷

Another key figure in the development of curatorial practice and publishing and the discourse surrounding their connection is Lucy Lippard. Similar to Siegelau, Lippard explored how exhibitions and artworks are made and disseminated, and by extension the distinction between artist and, in her case, critic.⁶⁸ Characterising the attitude of those questioning the need for art to manifest as object – with its inherent saleability – and exploring different approaches to making art, Lippard has summarised the late 1960s/early 1970s as a period of '[s]cattering, spattering, puddling and pulverising, it opened up new ways for the artist to identify actively with what he or she was making', describing many projects as 'ephemeral rebellions against

⁶² Artists/locations included were Carl Andre (The Hague), Robert Barry (Baltimore), Daniel Buren (Paris), Jan Dibbets (Amsterdam), Douglas Huebler (Los Angeles), Joseph Kosuth (New Mexico), Sol LeWitt (Düsseldorf), Richard Long (Bristol), N.E. Ting Co (Vancouver), Robert Smithson (Yucatan) and Lawrence Weiner (Niagara Falls).

⁶³ Seth Siegelau (ed.) *July, August, September 1969. Juillet, Aout, Septembre 1969. Juli, August, September 1969* (New York, NY: Seth Siegelau, 1969).

⁶⁴ The title of the exhibition was 'Untitled'. Seth Siegelau (ed.) *The Catalogue for the Exhibition* (Burnaby, BC: Centre for Communication and the Arts Simon Fraser University, 1969).

⁶⁵ Seth Siegelau (ed.) *March 1969 [One Month]* (New York, NY: Seth Siegelau, 1969).

⁶⁶ Siegelau was invited by Peter Townsend, the editor of *Studio International*. The project took up pp. 1-48 of Vol. 180, No. 3, 1969. Between them, the critics invited 37 artists. The insert was subsequently published as a book. Seth Siegelau (ed.) *July/August Exhibition Book* (London and New York, NY: Studio International and Seth Siegelau, 1969).

⁶⁷ See for an overview, for instance, Michalis Pilcher (ed.) *Books and Ideas After Seth Siegelau* (New York, NY, and Berlin: The Center for Book Art and Sternberg Press, 2016).

⁶⁸ Lippard has never called herself a curator, stating 'I began to see curating as simply a physical extension of criticism'. See Lucy Lippard, 'Curating by Numbers', *Tate Papers*, Issue 12, 2009, available online at <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/curating-by-numbers> (accessed 10 January 2016).

what was then called the “precious object syndrome”.⁶⁹ In 1969, Lippard organised the first of what would become known as the ‘Numbers Shows’, of which she called herself a ‘compiler’ rather than a curator.⁷⁰ The ‘557,087’ show in Seattle (1969), and the following ‘955,000’ in Vancouver (1970), comprised contributions in many formats and mediums, some of which were executed by Lippard following the artists’ instructions.⁷¹ Because these shows were spatially dispersed, similar to some of Siegelau’s, the catalogues of these ‘Numbers Shows’ were the only way through which most people could engage with them comprehensively. In this case, the catalogues consisted of loose index cards, including Lippard’s introductory text, which could be arranged and read in any order, opening up the potential to disregard or subvert the sequentiality of the medium of the book that Carrión described not long after.

In addition, Lippard’s text for the catalogue comprised a set of questions that interrogated the traditional distinctions between artwork, exhibition and publication, and between artist and curator. She captured these developments and conundrums around practices falling between traditional figurations succinctly in the book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973).⁷² Reflecting on these developments, she asked: ‘Is Seth Siegelau an artist when he formulates a new framework within which artists can show their work without reference to theme, gallery, institution, even place or time? Is he an author because his framework is books? Am I an artist when I ask artists to work within or respond to a given situation?’⁷³ These are pertinent questions about the specific roles and responsibilities of artists and curators – explicitly bringing in the idea of ‘author’ and a direct connection with the medium of the book – that are still worth asking.⁷⁴ This blurring and merging of positions and of what becomes manifest, where and how are intrinsically linked in Lippard’s own approach. With artist Sol LeWitt, she established Printed Matter as a space dedicated to printed material related to artistic practices in 1975.⁷⁵ Rather than an artist’s book bookshop, Hans Ulrich Obrist

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ The numbers in the titles of these shows relate to the number of residents in each city at the time and reflect the exhibitions’ physical dispersion. The title ‘Numbers Shows’ relates to a series, the first of which took place at Paula Cooper Gallery, called ‘Number 7’. See Cornelia Butler et al., *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard’s Number Shows 1969-74* (London: Afterall, 2012).

⁷² Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object 1966-1972* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1997 [1973]). Similar to the inversion of the *Xerox Book* (see note 57) at Paula Cooper Gallery, an exhibition that took Lippard’s book as its starting point took place at the Brooklyn Museum (2012). See Catherine Morris and Vincent Bonin (eds.) *Materializing Six Years: Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012). In her introduction, Lippard comments: “The book *Six Years* has sometimes been seen as a “curatorial” project on a par with the “numbers shows” and their “card catalogues”, providing a succinct link between the narratives of the development of curating and publications.

⁷³ Lippard, *Six Years*, p. 40. NB: Siegelau and Lippard lived together at the time. See her interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist (conducted in 2007), in *A Brief History*, p. 254.

⁷⁴ See for a critical take, Anton Vidokle, ‘Art Without Artists?’, *e-flux Journal*, # 16, May 2010, available at <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/> (accessed 5 May 2018).

⁷⁵ NB: Ulises Carrión founded his bookshop And Other Books and So in Amsterdam in the same year.

has called Printed Matter a curatorial project that ‘has given visibility to the very under-rated art form of the artist’s book’, identifying the shop as a space of display for the medium.⁷⁶

What is crucial in these various exhibition-cum-catalogue projects is that they not only provided ‘a new context’, but also ‘a way for artists to bypass the institutions, the art world’s rites of passage – group show, solo gallery show, reviews, collectors, museum shows, fame’, as Lippard described Siegelau’s endeavours more recently.⁷⁷ What Siegelau and Lippard both explored was how publications could be used conceptually in ways ‘normally served by a real space of performance of exhibition’,⁷⁸ and where the artwork and the exhibition manifested itself in printed form, ‘as their record and embodiment’ as Drucker describes it.⁷⁹ These projects are relevant for my own enquiry precisely because of their engagement with conventions of the book as form and its potential to *represent* after the event, but also to *present* in the moment of encounter for a reader/viewer, blurring the distinctions between the artwork, its display, and our encounter via an afterlife. The shifting of tasks and roles between individuals involved – between artists and curators, editors and publishers – is where the question of who is considered to have agency also becomes more complex. Having schematically introduced key developments and concerns around the book as medium and platform for artists and several experiments of publications as space of display, in the next section I focus on developments in curatorial practice and discourse, the third trajectory relevant for my exploration.

1.3.3. Towards Contemporary Curating

Following the emergence of the practice of contemporary curating since the late 1960s, many attempts at outlining comprehensive definitions and developments have been published.⁸⁰ Contemporary curating tends to be situated as distinct from ‘traditional’ curating, in which the English word ‘curate’ – derived from the Latin ‘curare’ or ‘taking care’ – evolved from that of ‘caretaker’ and ‘guardian’ to ‘overseer’.⁸¹ The role of a traditional curator in a museum/ collection can be summarised as that of the carer of objects and their presentation, but also as

⁷⁶ Obrist, *A Brief History*, p. 284. NB: Obrist’s description foregrounds the artist and the book as medium rather than also embracing publications as a curatorial space or platform.

⁷⁷ Lippard, ‘What to Say about Seth?’ See also Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).

⁷⁸ Drucker, *The Century*, p. 309.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

⁸⁰ My concern here is with an approach towards curating, rather than the contemporariness of what is being curated, be it art or other ‘material’. For an in-depth philosophical exploration of the contemporary see Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All* (London: Verso, 2013).

⁸¹ A very concise overview of the shifts in what curating is understood to involve over time can be found in Kate Fowle, ‘Who Cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today’, in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (New York, NY: Apexart, 2007) pp. 10-19.

that of their gatekeeper – literally keeping them safe, while simultaneously controlling how they are accessed and information, and thus knowledge, about them is constructed and disseminated. If we compare contemporary curating with that traditional set of functions, we can see several significant changes, including a shift in focus from the art object that was kept and cared for to the mode of display of these objects, and thus a shift in attention from the figure of the artist as creator of the artwork, to the persona of the curator as creator of the framework of display.⁸² Kate Fowle, however, argues that even in traditional curating, it was ‘as much about the administration and governing of culture as about a concern for its preservation and presentation’.⁸³ What she means is that because curating is about making something public, it is by definition also about power and control. By extension, narratives that outline what contemporary curating entails are about power and control too; by focusing on certain individuals and their work, the relatively short history of contemporary curating is about who selects and presents what, when and, not least, how. What is striking is that publications do not feature much in these narratives, if at all, even though their constructed (his)stories are themselves dependent on publications as their carriers. In what follows I discuss examples that demonstrate these shifts and that start to historicise curating as a contemporary practice.

One of the first books to engage with the emergence of the contemporary ‘exhibitionary paradigm’ is *L’Exposition imaginaire: The art of exhibiting in the eighties* (1989).⁸⁴ The title demonstrates a departure from the emphasis on the museum or collection as site and context for display, to the exhibition as *medium*. Comprising views of professionals who ‘converge in the exhibition’, with contributors ranging from traditional art historians and artists to museum directors, curators and theorists, the book presents the exhibition as the locus of a complex gathering, as the centre of a network.⁸⁵ The shift from thinking and writing about objects in collections towards the exhibition as the medium through which contemporary art encounters a public, is also exemplified by the anthology *Thinking About Exhibitions* (1996).⁸⁶ In their introduction, the book’s editors observe that ‘[a]rt exhibitions and anthologies have become the epitome of recent intellectual and cultural manifestations.’⁸⁷ By drawing a comparison between

⁸² The notion of ‘display’ derives from Middle English and means ‘to unfurl’ or ‘to unfold’. The word in turn derives from the Old French word *despleier*, from Latin *displicare* ‘to scatter, disperse’, or in mediaeval Latin ‘unfold’. See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/display> (accessed 15 April 2018).

⁸³ Fowle, ‘Who Cares?’, p. 10. NB: Fowle draws on texts by Michel Foucault, who stated ‘[p]ower must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization.’ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York, NY: Pantheon 1979 [1976]) p. 92; and Michel Foucault, ‘The Subject and Power’, *Critical Enquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 4, summer 1982, pp. 777-795.

⁸⁴ Riet de Leeuw and Evelyn Beer, *L’Exposition imaginaire: The art of exhibiting in the eighties* (The Hague: Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, 1989). The project was originally conceived as an exhibition but materialised as a book.

⁸⁵ De Leeuw and Beer, *L’Exposition imaginaire*, p. 12. Contributors include Ernst Gombrich, Daniel Buren, Harald Szeemann, Jean-Christophe Ammann, Rudi Fuchs, Marcia Tucker and Jean-François Lyotard.

⁸⁶ Greenberg, Ferguson, Nairne, *Thinking About Exhibitions*.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

exhibitions and anthologies as specific forms, the authors acknowledge the direct connection between thinking and doing, and the fact that each are contingent on developments in other areas of cultural activity and thought.⁸⁸

The (initial) separation of the exhibition as medium of display from the collecting museum as the main site is embodied in the emergence of the figure of the independent curator, who explores different ways of working with artists and their practices in other contexts.⁸⁹ In the narrative of the development of contemporary curating, Swiss curator Harald Szeemann often personifies this shift, with the exhibition 'Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information' (1969), at the Kunsthalle Bern, cited as the symbolic start of several developments that were to unfold in parallel.⁹⁰ As the full title of the exhibition indicates, rather than selecting and juxtaposing objects, Szeemann invited artists to come together to each make work in situ, extending the artists' studios into the exhibition space.⁹¹ Szeemann thus changed the focus from creating an exhibition through selecting finished objects to a process that played itself out 'live', where the presence of others and their ways of working could influence what each created individually.⁹²

Instead of curator, however, Szeemann called himself *Ausstellungsmacher*, or 'exhibition maker',⁹³ a role that for him encompassed being an 'administrator, amateur, author of introductions, librarian, manager and accountant, animator, conservator, financier, and diplomat.'⁹⁴ Like the label 'exhibition maker', the combination of all these (some of which very practical) terms positions the making of exhibitions as a craft reliant on a range of skillsets rather than exclusively being the (creative) work of selection and juxtaposition. One could argue that with Szeemann and his own description of his way of working, the very concept of 'curator' and what the work of curating entails fundamentally changed. Szeemann also underlined that

⁸⁸ The emergence of the critical anthology in the 1980s is often referenced as a development connecting practice and theory. Examples include Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1983); Brian Wallis, *Art After Modernism* (New York, NY: New Museum, 1984); and Brian Wallis, *Blasted Allegories* (New York, NY: New Museum, 1985). As these anthologies focus on critical texts, I don't discuss them here.

⁸⁹ That is not to say that spaces without collections exhibiting contemporary did not already exist, the Kunsthalle, for instance, was well-established, but the discourse had been dominated by the museum.

⁹⁰ Many others, including Lippard and Siegelau, have been credited with significant contributions to the development of contemporary curating. All three worked with conceptual artists, who questioned how art could manifest itself other than as objects, and generated new platforms for such explorations in roughly the same period.

⁹¹ Fowle, 'Who Cares?', p. 14.

⁹² The catalogue of the exhibition, both 'directed' by Harald Szeemann, the term a nod to his background in theatre, is available at https://ubutext.memoryoftheworld.org/Szeemann-Harald_Live-In-Your-Head_When-Attitudes-Become-Form_1969.pdf (accessed 28 May 2018). Organised by artist's name, using alphabetic tabs, the catalogue comes with a bibliography that lists *Xerox Book* as its first entry, followed by a list of works.

⁹³ See, for instance, Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Mind over Matter', *Artforum*, February 1996; reprinted in Hans Ulrich Obrist *Interviews Volume 1* (Milan: Charta, 2003) pp. 80-100; and Obrist, *A Brief History*, pp. 99-127. This 'recycling' of the same interview is indicative of how curatorial discourse has developed and continues to do so.

⁹⁴ Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Walter Hopps, Hopps, Hopps', *Artforum*, February 1996; reprinted in Obrist, *A Brief History*, pp. 10-40, where this description attributed to Szeemann appears on p. 11.

the ‘curator has to be flexible. Sometimes he [sic] is the servant, sometimes the assistant’, implying the potential for the relationship between artist and curator to be subject to change.⁹⁵ Although this statement highlights the need to be able to work in non-predetermined ways, it emphasises that the ultimate aim focused on bringing the artist’s work to fruition, through which the work of artist and curator became intertwined, interdependent even.⁹⁶

Although Szeemann described his working relationship with artists as flexible, with fluctuating power dynamics, in the discourse on curating from the 1990s onwards, his career has often been held up as a key example of the emergence of the ‘authorial’ or ‘star’ curator, whereby the persona of the curator and their creation, the exhibition, started to overshadow that of the artist and their artwork. The seemingly growing emphasis on the curator’s importance, as someone who is more than a mediator because they develop the conceptual frameworks for art’s exhibition, became a key focus point. That is not to say that the figure of the artist and attention for their work disappeared: it would be more accurate to see the emergence of this phenomenon in practice, and subsequently discourse, as a multiplication. Artists and their work remained at the forefront of exhibitions and their work retained a discourse around it – not least through monographic and group exhibitions and ever-expanding range of publications – but an additional topic for discussion emerged alongside it, and thus a new narrative with its own body of publications began to be constructed too. The key aspect that changed around Szeemann in the late 1960s was how curators worked with artists within the institution; by bringing them together in the exhibition space to create work there, rather than ship finished works from their studios. He helped shift things further when, after being heavily criticised for ‘When Attitudes...’ by the board of Kunsthalle Bern, Szeemann resigned and set himself up as an independent exhibition maker via his *Agentur für Geistige Arbeit* (Agency for Intellectual Guest Labour) in October 1969.⁹⁷ Extricating himself from an institutional framework, and finding opportunities in other contexts and platforms, brought about other changes.⁹⁸

If a curator is no longer by definition considered to be working in museums, or permanently

⁹⁵ Obrist, ‘Mind over Matter’. For a summary of Szeemann’s work and legacy see Florence Derieux (ed.) *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology* (Zürich and Lyon: JRP Ringier and Le Magasin, 2007).

⁹⁶ Many artists in the course of the twentieth century initiated curatorial projects, but the contemporary artist/curator emerged more recently. See, for two different kinds of overview, Elena Filipovic (ed.) *The Artist as Curator: An Anthology* (Milan: Mousse Publishing, 2017); and Alison Green, *When Artists Curate: Contemporary Art and the Exhibition as Medium* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018).

⁹⁷ For more information, see Fabien Pinaroli, ‘The Agency for Intellectual Guest Labour’, in Derieux, *Harald Szeemann*, pp. 63-71. The English translation slightly distorts the original meaning: ‘Geistige Arbeit’ literally means intellectual labour, acknowledging the mental aspect, whereas ‘Guest Labour’ is close to ‘Gastarbeiter’, which means migrant labour. In Szeemann’s case, the expansion denotes the fact that he did his ‘Geistige Arbeit’ for others as ‘guest’.

⁹⁸ That is not to say that no other curators operated outside museums, see Siegeleaub’s publication as exhibition projects, such as *Xerox Book*, and also Lippard’s work in the ‘Numbers Shows’.

linked to one institution, what does the severance of such ties enable and how does that deflect the power dynamic between artist and curator? A range of social, technological, political and economic developments, some unfolding in specific local or national contexts, some global, are often described as contributing (f)actors. These include the emergence of the Internet, the effects of globalisation, the establishment of dedicated funding streams, as well as the proliferation of new platforms of presentation – which are all widely acknowledged to be interconnected.⁹⁹ Internationally, the proliferation of biennales across the globe – a phenomenon that gained pace in the 1990s and accelerated in the 2000s and is often referred to as ‘biennialification’ – has significantly contributed to the growth and diversification of where and how contemporary curating happens.¹⁰⁰ Szeemann’s own involvement in the fifth edition of the quinquennial exhibition Documenta in Kassel, Germany (1972),¹⁰¹ is often referred to as the moment when the curator takes the limelight away from the artists they work with.¹⁰² Following, and subsequently in parallel with these developments, new education programmes were established in the late 1980s and early 1990s, providing various forms of ‘training’ for those wanting to become curators. The Whitney (New York) integrated a critical strand in its Independent Study Program (start 1968) in the early 1970s; European programmes were established in Grenoble (1987, Le Magasin), Prato (Italy, 1988/89, only lasting a few years), RCA in London (1992), de Appel in Amsterdam (1994) and Goldsmiths, London (1996), while Viktor Misiano ran workshops in Moscow in the early 1990s.¹⁰³ The establishment of these courses was itself a symptom of the growth of the phenomenon of the contemporary curator as

⁹⁹ Developments include the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; access to the same information irrespective of location; the increase of international travel through cheap airlines from the late 1990s onwards; globalisation and similar products being available across the globe, etc. Individual countries launched initiatives that specifically impacted the art sector, such as Germany’s wave of museum buildings in the 1980s; the establishment of regional collections of contemporary art in France (FRACS), initiated in 1982 by then Minister for Culture Jacques Lang; the founding of the National Lottery and the Grants for the Arts funding stream managed by Arts Council England (1995) in the UK.

¹⁰⁰ The first biennale, an exhibition that happens every two years, was founded in Venice in 1893, the first iteration in 1895. Other biennales were initiated in due course, and their proliferation in recent decades has led to critical reflection on the phenomenon. See, for instance, *Manifesta Journal*, No. 2, winter 2003/04, edited by Viktor Misiano and Igor Zabel. See also Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal, Solveig Øvsteø (eds.) *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Biennial Conference, 2010); and Elena Filipovic (ed.) *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Peter Osborne considers the notion of ‘biennialification’ in *The Postconceptual Condition* (London: Verso, 2018). See also the Biennial Foundation – a ‘platform for dialogue, networking, and knowledge sharing’, whose website provides a worldwide timeline and map, available at <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/about/> (accessed 3 April 2017).

¹⁰¹ Although Documenta is not a biennale, it is considered to be part of their historical lineage and development. The first Documenta took place in 1955, with the primary aim to reconnect Germany with the international art world, but it is still seen as one of, if not *the* most prestigious project curators can undertake.

¹⁰² A photograph of Szeemann on a ‘throne’ taken on the last night of the exhibition’s 100-day run is often used to illustrate the curator ‘overtaking’ the artist. See http://www.getty.edu/visit/cal/events/ev_450.html (accessed 3 April 2018). Some views counter this narrative. See Federica Martini and Vittoria Martini, ‘Questions of Authorship in Biennale Curating’, in *The Biennial Reader*. Szeemann describes his role as ‘Secretary General with the widest range of authority and a team of 5-7 executors in a d5 working group’ within which there were ‘no votes, no playing games [...], but seven people who are responsible and reach the final decisions, together with the secretary general’. Quote in Hans Joachim Mueller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006) p. 157.

¹⁰³ Many programmes have been launched since, either entirely dedicated to curating, or as a strand in a wider programme: the curating pathways (MA Arts Policy & Management, BA History of Art) at Birkbeck, University of London, both of which I taught on, are good examples of the latter.

a distinct role in the expanding art ecosystem, and demonstrated an increased awareness that different skillsets and knowledge bases beyond those of art history – the grounding of traditional curators – might be useful. The foundation of these courses in turn amplified the need to trace the development of contemporary exhibitions as a medium,¹⁰⁴ where reflection on what the requirements of curatorial education eventually became a topic for publications too.¹⁰⁵

1.3.4. Contemporary Curating and Publishing

So where do publications sit among the proliferation of platforms for curatorial activity, and the construction of narratives about the development of curating as a contemporary practice?

Despite, or maybe because of its occurrence only once every five years, publications that accompany iterations of Documenta provide an insight. Since the inaugural edition in 1955, each exhibition has had a catalogue, the label catalogue implying a homogeneity that belies a plurality of formats and modes that not only mirror shifts in curatorial practice and thinking, but also in technological advances and their impact on artistic and curatorial approaches and publishing itself. The second edition of 1960, for instance, comprises three separate volumes – one for sculpture, one for painting and one for graphic work – reflecting then prevalent art forms and classifications.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, the catalogue for Documenta 5 (1972) is gathered in a loose-leaf binder, with tabs separating the thematically organised, rather than medium-specific sections of the exhibition, reflecting its narrative framing.¹⁰⁷ Other editions capture the emergence of new(er) media, with the catalogue of Documenta 6 (1977) comprising three volumes – one dedicated to ‘photography, film and video’, a second to ‘hand-drawing, utopian design and books’, and a third to ‘painting, sculpture and performance’. The inclusion of books in this iteration of the exhibition and the catalogue is no doubt a reflection of the increased use by artists (and curators) of the medium as it had developed in the late 1960s and 1970s, as discussed above. In contrast, the catalogue for Documenta 7 (1982) separates contextualising essays and artists’ biographies from a volume that shows images of artists’ work in the

¹⁰⁴ Bruce Altshuler is credited with being instrumental in this. See his *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1994); *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History, Vol. 1, 1863-1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008); *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962-2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013); and ‘A Canon of Exhibitions’, *Manifesta Journal*, No. 11, winter 2010-11.

¹⁰⁵ See *Manifesta Journal*, # 4, autumn/winter 2004, on ‘Teaching Curatorship’; and *The Shadowfiles* # 3, on ‘Curatorial Education’ (Amsterdam: de Appel, 2012); and Paul O’Neill, Mick Wilson, Lucy Steeds (eds.) *The Curatorial Conundrum. What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ The Documenta archive website provides an overview of the different modes of publishing over time, with images of covers and double-page spreads, see <https://www.documenta.de/en/publications> (accessed 28 May 2018).

¹⁰⁷ Titled ‘Questioning Reality – Pictorial worlds today’, Szeemann worked with Jean-Christophe Ammann and Arnold Bode (initiator and responsible for the first four editions), ‘assisted by’ Bazon Brock, Ingolf Bauer, Johannes Cladders, Klaus Honnef, Eberhard Roters, Kasper König, and others as freelance consultants. The loose-leaf form of the catalogue and the use of tab sheets is similar to the *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) catalogue. Themes range from medium (film) to science-fiction (‘today as seen from yesterday’) and utopia (‘the future as seen from today’).

exhibition, accompanied by basic captions; covering entire pages and spreads, the latter can be seen as an additional display of the artworks on display. While this separation in different volumes demonstrates the increase in attention for the curatorial premise that surrounds the work, reflecting the importance of the voice of the curator and the narrative they construct, attention for the (re)presentation of individual artworks' presentation is enhanced too.

From Documenta X (1997) onwards, there is no longer 'just' a catalogue in book form, but there are multiple modes of publishing. In addition to this edition's large 'book on Documenta', which comprises essays as well as spreads on all participating artists, there is a CD with several new media works, a 'short guide', and a series of so-called 'documents' – magazine-like issues published prior to the exhibition opening – in which a variety of topics addressed in the exhibition are explored in lengthy theoretical essays.¹⁰⁸ Both the large book and the documents, published at different moments, can be interpreted as manifestations of a growing interest in a longer-term and more discursive approach – literally involving more text, in contrast to the more visually oriented earlier catalogues – in and alongside the exhibition. The subsequent Documenta 11 (2002) was preceded by transdisciplinary so-called 'platforms' organised on four different continents, showing a global outlook, challenging the past emphasis on the West. Working with the premise that 'art is the production of knowledge', this edition was accompanied by an unprecedented range of publications, including five readers related to the transdisciplinary 'platforms',¹⁰⁹ followed by two books dedicated to the exhibition itself.¹¹⁰

Documenta 12 (2007) shows another approach again, with a chronologically organised catalogue, a purely visual catalogue (*Bilderbuch*) of all works on show, three thematic magazines and a separate catalogue related to the film programme.¹¹¹ In this case, some of the organisation of the material seems to regress to a more traditional mode, including placing work in a historical trajectory and reemphasising the visual representation of artworks. In contrast, the Documenta 13 (2012) exhibition was preceded by 100 short essays, published individually as notebooks, subsequently gathered in *The Book of Books*, volume 1/3 of the three-

¹⁰⁸ The 'documents' comprise in-depth essays related to topics that stretch beyond art: the first includes a conversation between Catherine David, that edition's curator, and French philosopher Paul Virilio, titled 'The Dark Spot of Art'; the second a text by Giorgio Agamben, titled 'Repetition and Stoppage' etc. David explicitly broadened the scope beyond the West by paying specific attention to art and artists from the Middle East.

¹⁰⁹ This Documenta was the first iteration in which the fact that there was a team, led by Enwezor, was made very explicit. To mirror this, the readers are attributed to either an individual editor or the whole team. NB: a new digital 'platform 6' was recently launched (in commemoration of Enwezor's passing in 2019). See <https://www.documenta-platform6.de/> (accessed 3 May 2021).

¹¹⁰ The first provides an overview of the individual artists and their work presented, the second, titled 'Exhibition venues', provides installation shots of all the different contexts in which the art was exhibited.

¹¹¹ The themes of the magazines include Modernity?, Life! and Education.

part catalogue.¹¹² There is also a *Guidebook* (part 3/3), and the *Logbook* (part 2/3) that ‘traces the making of dOCUMENTA) 13 from 2009-2012 through images, correspondence, and interviews’, providing the project’s own historicisation. The most recent edition, Documenta 14 (2017), continued with the proliferation of formats: the journal *South as a State of Mind* ‘hosted’ four Documenta issues,¹¹³ there is a *documenta 14: Reader*,¹¹⁴ and a *documenta 14: Daybook*, devoted to all artists commissioned. What was new in this iteration is that all publications were edited by a single editor who featured prominently in publicity around the large team responsible for this edition.¹¹⁵ While this overview of formats and modes of publications for Documenta may come across as a long abstract list, it shows how publishing in relation to exhibition/curatorial projects mirrors shifts in curatorial practice.¹¹⁶ Different forms were introduced over time – in addition to catalogues there are readers, documents, magazines, journals, guides and notebooks, as well as several digital formats, and now also an extensive digital archive.¹¹⁷

Although sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Howard Becker had described culture and the art world as complex systems in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the narratives around contemporary curating were initially, and largely continue to be, constructed by curators themselves.¹¹⁸ As a result, it is nigh unavoidable that they continue to focus on the persona of the curator. Hans Ulrich Obrist is a key proponent of this phenomenon, not least through the vast amount of published interviews with other curators he has generated since the mid-1990s.¹¹⁹ His interview with Szeemann for *Artforum* (1996) is a case in point: the conversation about the curator’s career reads like an outline of apparently defining moments for the emergence of the contemporary curator in a specific but also generic sense, as we move from Documenta to a biennale, and then to another and another again. The first-person account, drawing on the memory of someone ‘who was there’, told from their perspective, lends the narrative a sense of authenticity and authority. Such interviews initially appeared in art

¹¹² *The Book of Books* (Kassel and Ostfildern: Documenta and Hatje Cantz, 2012). The collection is framed by essays by artistic director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the edition’s main curator, and ‘Agent’ Chus Martinez, member of that year’s curatorial team. It comes in at 568 pages.

¹¹³ All four issues, three of which published prior to the exhibition, the last one during, can also be accessed online, see <http://www.documenta14.de/en/south/> (accessed 28 May 2018).

¹¹⁴ This volume is a critical anthology exploring ‘issues of economy, language, and the coloniality of power’.

¹¹⁵ The editor-at-large of all publications was writer and critic Quinn Latimer. The size of the curatorial team of this edition superseded that of all previous editions, with around 40 people with some reference to curator or curatorial in their job title.

¹¹⁶ I have chosen not to include images here, so as not to seem to focus on literal form.

¹¹⁷ For the Documenta archive, see <https://www.documenta-archiv.de/en/> (accessed 12 January 2021).

¹¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984 [1979]); Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

¹¹⁹ Two hefty volumes of his *Interviews* have been compiled, and *A Brief History* constructs a history through the personal accounts of curators who are considered influential for the development of the field. They include Walter Hopps, and, as mentioned earlier, Siegelau and Lippard as well as Szeemann.

magazines such as *Artforum*, but new journals dedicated to the practice and theory around curating were launched in due course, including *On Curating*,¹²⁰ *The Exhibitionist*,¹²¹ *Red Hook*,¹²² the *Journal for Curatorial Studies*,¹²³ and platforms such as *Cura*,¹²⁴ and *Curatography*.¹²⁵ These journals sit alongside a growing body of literature that traces the history of exhibitions, such as those published by Afterall/Central Saint Martins, London,¹²⁶ series of anthologies that describe so-called ‘turns’ in curating,¹²⁷ and tomes published following conferences about curating, all of which in turn become sources for the proliferating curating courses mentioned earlier.¹²⁸

To refer to Szeemann once more: following initial attempts to capture his career via biographical approaches similar to those applied to artists and their bodies of work, there is now a catalogue raisonné of his exhibition projects,¹²⁹ and ‘When Attitudes Become Form...’ was ‘restaged’ as an exhibition in 2013, accompanied by another hefty catalogue.¹³⁰ Subsequently, an exhibition based on Szeemann’s archive toured in the US and Europe in 2018-19, accompanied by several tomes.¹³¹ The increase of exhibitions and other curatorial formats and events has led to an explosion of narratives, spawned archives and, in the case of someone like Szeemann, led to new events and publications, creating a generative cycle of production, collection and reflection.¹³² Personal and professional archives are not only full of material traces and

¹²⁰ *OnCurating*, since 2008 published by Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), is affiliated with the postgraduate programme on curating at the Institute for Cultural Studies in the Arts (ICS), led by Dorothee Richter.

¹²¹ *The Exhibitionist* was founded by Jens Hoffmann in 2010, when in charge of CCS Wattis at CalArts. After the publication of a compendium that includes all issues of the first six years, it ceased publication.

¹²² Published by the Center for Curatorial Studies, CCS Bard, initially edited by Tirdad Zolghadr, who at its launch in 2012 argued that ‘curatorial conventions and prerogatives need to be rendered more tangible and contestable’.

¹²³ *The Journal for Curatorial Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal that ‘explores the cultural functioning of curating and its relation to exhibitions, institutions, audiences, aesthetics and display culture’.

¹²⁴ Founded in 2009, *Cura* is ‘a magazine, a publishing house, and an exhibition program that works [...] in collaboration with museums, foundations...’ See <https://curamagazine.com/> (accessed 12 January 2021).

¹²⁵ See <https://curatography.org/> (accessed 12 January 2021), founded in Taiwan in 2019, reflecting the increase of interest, professionalisation and range of practices beyond the former West.

¹²⁶ The ‘Exhibition Histories’ series of books is published by Afterall, based at Central Saint Martins, London, which also offers an MRes in Exhibition Studies. Each book critically analyses an influential historical exhibition.

¹²⁷ See, for instance, Paul O’Neill (ed.) *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007); Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.) *Curating and the Educational Turn* (Amsterdam and London: de Appel and Open Editions, 2010); Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.) *Curating Research* (Amsterdam and London: de Appel and Open Editions, 2014).

¹²⁸ Examples are *The Curatorial Conundrum* and *How Institutions Think. Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse?*, following conferences in 2015 and 2016, with a third, titled *Curating After the Global. Roadmaps for the Present* (2019) after a 2017 conference. All edited by Paul O’Neill, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson, and Simon Sheikh joining in the last. For transparency: I was managing editor of all three volumes. Of course there are many more.

¹²⁹ See Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmayer, *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite: Catalogue of All exhibitions 1957-2005* (Zürich: Voldemeer, 2007).

¹³⁰ The exhibition was restaged at the Fondazione Prada in Venice. See Germano Celant (ed.) *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969-Venice 2013* (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2013).

¹³¹ Organised by Glenn Phillips and Phillip Kaiser, the exhibition was titled ‘Harald Szeemann: Museum of Obsessions’. The exhibition was accompanied by a restaging of a 1957 exhibition by Szeemann, a catalogue and a book with a selection of Szeemann’s writing.

¹³² In Szeemann’s case, this is largely the result of the donation of his extensive archive to the Getty Foundation in 2011. For reflections on the process of opening up the archive see <http://blogs.getty.edu/iris/tags/harald-szeemann/> (accessed 15 March 2018). Similar to artists’ archives, what material in relation to curatorial practice is preserved and by whom raises questions too. For a critical reflection, see Jeannine Tang, ‘On the Case of Curatorial History’, in *The Curatorial Conundrum*, pp. 95-103.

records,¹³³ they have started to give rise to new archives in the form of publications, which rather than offering a definitive account are of course selective in nature themselves.¹³⁴

1.3.5. From Object to Process and Knowledge Event: 'the Curatorial'

As contemporary curators explored ever more opportunities and contexts in which to enact their practice, artists' modes of working expanded too. In the course of the 1990s and 2000s some of their practices became relational, (socially) engaged, performative, participatory and collaborative, all of which provide challenges to the exhibition as form and the notion of display.¹³⁵ As a result, curating started to shift and projects became durational, more discursive, and events, gatherings and exchanges all became part of curatorial modes of practice.¹³⁶ Kate Fowle summarises the effects of all these shifts and argues that '[i]n working between theory and practice, the curator is simultaneously initiating, supporting, disseminating and evaluating projects. This differs from the production of meaning that has developed around art, which is mostly generated by schools of art history and critical theory that exist alongside art practice.'¹³⁷ Drawing a parallel with Rosalind Krauss's ideas of sculpture's expanded field, Fowle suggests that we therefore need to start thinking of an expanded field of curating.¹³⁸ Her proposition is possibly in part inspired by the uptake of the term curating in wider society, beyond art and its institutions.¹³⁹ While this 'hijacking' hinges on ideas of selection and juxtaposition – DJs now curate their playlists, musicians curate festivals, coffee shops curate their coffee, academics curate information and knowledge,¹⁴⁰ and politicians even 'curate the future'¹⁴¹ – thinking about what an expanded field of curating of art may comprise has evolved specifically in the last decade. In addition to embracing modes other than the exhibition, a more

¹³³ The Curating Degree Zero archive was brought together following a conference in 1998, organised by Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter. It travelled as an exhibition (2003-2008) to 18 venues, accompanied by live events and discussions. Richter and Drabble reflect on its history in *On Curating*, Issue 26, October 2015, available at http://www.on-curating.org/issue-26.html#.Wvrs9_krKUK (accessed 5 May 2018). The archive is now at the Zurich University of the Arts. See <https://www.zhdk.ch/en/curating-degree-zero-archive-1822> (accessed 5 May 2018).

¹³⁴ Sas Mays argues 'A book, whether printed or digital [...] is at once an ordered collection of accounts, witnessings [...] and a witness that must also open itself to further connections, developments, disagreements'. See Sas Mays, 'Witnessing the Archive: Art, Capitalism and Memory', in *All This Stuff*, edited by Judy Vaknin, Karin Stuckey and Victoria Lane (Faringdon: Libri Publishing, 2013) pp. 141-156.

¹³⁵ On the nuanced diversification in artistic practices and their terminologies, see Maria Lind, 'Complications; On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art', *Public*, Issue 39, 2009, pp. 52-79.

¹³⁶ For a historical exploration of curatorial projects in which objects are no longer the focus, see James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as Critical Form since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).

¹³⁷ Fowle, 'Who Cares?', p. 14.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18. Fowle refers to Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field', *October*, No. 8, spring 1979, pp. 30-44.

¹³⁹ See Balzer, *Curatorialism*.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Ernesto Prieto's tweet 'Tagging/interlinking as interpretive, editorial and curatorial practice = creative practice', <https://twitter.com/ernestopriego/status/986995131898310657?s=03> (accessed 19 April 2018).

¹⁴¹ George Monbiot describes politician Jeremy Corbyn as 'curator of the future', see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/18/jeremy-corbyn-rivals-chase-impossible-dream> (accessed 15 April 2018).

intense engagement with the kinds of narratives curators construct and their impact,¹⁴² as well as a greater emphasis on issue-based approaches,¹⁴³ more specific concerns about what actually happens in the processes involved in curating have started to be formulated.¹⁴⁴ This expanded field can be seen to manifest itself in a glut of publications that reflect on contemporary practices and projects, identifying specific turns and trends referred to earlier. In addition, a sharpening of the question what contemporary curating can be, especially when so much art no longer comfortably fits within the exhibition as form, has emerged.¹⁴⁵

In a short text titled 'The Curatorial' (2009), Maria Lind poses a seemingly simple, but fundamental question that pushes Fowle's proposition further. She asks: 'can we speak of "the curatorial" beyond "curating in the expanded field": as a multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education, and fundraising?'¹⁴⁶ Referencing aspects that are not entirely dissimilar to some listed by Szeemann when he described the range of roles he fulfilled as *Austellungsmacher*, Lind proposes a mode of working 'as a way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space'.¹⁴⁷ Foregrounding connections, resonating with the idea of people 'converging' around the medium of the exhibition, Lind's proposition also goes beyond that: no longer is it necessarily about the exhibition, rather Lind classifies curating as a 'technical modality' of making art public – although she does seem to want to hold on to the idea of gathering in a real, physical space¹⁴⁸ – that is no longer about just the curator's role and persona. Suggesting that 'rather than being the product of curators per se, curating is the result of a network of agents' labor' that can include 'a curator, an editor, an educator, a communications person, and so on',¹⁴⁹ Lind outlines a wider network of practices, in which 'the curatorial can be employed, or performed, by people in a number of different capacities within

¹⁴² Paco Barragán proposes exhibitions as semiotic systems and metanarratives. Paco Barragán, 'Push to Flush: Curating as Metanarrative (On the Metatextual Nature of Curating)', in *Artpulse Magazine*, August 2014, available at <http://artpulsomagazine.com/push-to-flush-curating-as-metanarrative-on-the-metatextual-nature-of-curating> (accessed 15 September 2016).

¹⁴³ Concerns about the environment and climate change became pervasive in the last decade, initially reflected in the amount of projects with 'Anthropocene' in their title. Other concerns include the effects of colonial histories and foregrounding of Western narratives in collections and curatorial projects, hence a wide interest in the so-called 'decolonisation' of art institutions and the art world. See for an example *Decolonising Museums* (l'Internationale, 2015), available at http://www.internationaleonline.org/bookshelves/decolonising_museums (accessed 15 April 2018).

¹⁴⁴ See, for instance, Natasha Hoare (ed.) *The New Curator* (London: Laurence King, 2016), which lists as tasks 'researcher, commissioner, keeper, interpreter, producer, collaborator'.

¹⁴⁵ See for the development of curatorial discourse Felix Vogel, 'Notes on exhibition history in curatorial discourse', *OnCurating*, # 21, December 2013, available at <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-21-reader/notes-on-exhibition-history-in-curatorial-discourse.html#.WtSCnvrKUK> (accessed 15 September 2017). His text follows a similar trajectory to the one I have outlined here, also expanding into the commercial sector.

¹⁴⁶ Lind, 'The Curatorial', *Artforum*, October 2009; reprinted in *Maria Lind: Selected Writing*, edited by Brian Kuan Wood (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010) pp. 57-66.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

the ecosystem of art.¹⁵⁰ Therefore ‘the curatorial’ goes ‘beyond “roles” and takes the shape of a function and a method, and a methodology.’¹⁵¹ For Lind that methodology utilises the ‘principles of montage, [...] within a particular time and space-related framework’, which ‘takes art as its starting point but then situates it in relation to specific contexts, times, and questions’.¹⁵²

Whereas Lind does not separate curating and ‘the curatorial’ per se, in others’ descriptions ‘the curatorial’ is defined as distinct from curating.¹⁵³ In a 2012 conversation with Beatrice von Bismarck, Irit Rogoff outlines curating as ‘first and foremost a set of skills and abilities’ that generate an end product, which most commonly takes the form of an exhibition.¹⁵⁴ In contrast, in a 2006 essay Rogoff already outlines “‘the curatorial’ [as] thought and critical thought at that, that does not rush [...] to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict’.¹⁵⁵ For Rogoff, ‘the curatorial’ is therefore an ‘epistemic structure’ that occurs when ‘a series of knowledges come together momentarily to produce [...] an] event of knowledge: a moment in which different knowledges interacting with one another produce something that transcends their position as knowledge’.¹⁵⁶ Working with ‘the curatorial’ as approach, one cannot but reflect on the system(s) within which the ‘knowledge event’ unfolds. In all of this, the notion of ‘singularity’, which ‘characterizes the new, relational mode of the subject’ is important, and in ‘the curatorial’ that ‘singularity gets produced and these objects re-singularize themselves in relation to other new objects’.¹⁵⁷ While not excluding exhibitions as starting points or environments for ‘knowledge events’ to occur, more important for Rogoff is ‘making provocative proposals toward the field of knowledge [...] to re-singularize itself to have different interfaces with publics’, underlining the suggestion to turn away from the exhibition as dominant form.¹⁵⁸

Both Rogoff and Lind thus see ‘the curatorial’ as a process, or series of processes, where no matter how it manifests itself, something is set in motion. If how ‘the curatorial’ manifests is

¹⁵⁰ Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind, ‘To Show or not to Show’, *Mousse Magazine*, No. 31, December 2011, available at <http://moussemagazine.it/jens-hoffmann-maria-lind-2011/> (accessed 26 January 2021).

¹⁵¹ Maria Lind, ‘Performing the Curatorial. An Introduction’, in *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, edited by Maria Lind (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012) p. 12.

¹⁵² Hoffmann and Lind, ‘To Show or not to Show’.

¹⁵³ See also Jean-Paul Martinon, *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). The book seems a clear candidate for careful analysis here, but quite a few texts, Martinon’s especially, are rather abstract. I consider the references quoted here as more useful because they are directly linked to practice.

¹⁵⁴ Irit Rogoff, ‘Curating/Curatorial: A Conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck’, in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, edited by Beatrice von Bismarck, Joern Schaffaff, Thomas Wheski (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012) pp. 22-23.

¹⁵⁵ Irit Rogoff, ‘Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality’ (2006), available at <http://transform.eipcp.net> (accessed 20 June 2018).

¹⁵⁶ Rogoff, ‘Curating/Curatorial’, p. 23.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

indeed 'far more slippery, far less material',¹⁵⁹ as Rogoff argues, the question whether publications can be considered as more, rather than less important becomes a valid one. That is not to take the reference to 'editing' by Lind as a particular mode of 'curatorial' practice too literally, but rather taking up the suggestion that producing publications can be mobilised to help articulate what emerges in the processes of 'the curatorial' and the 'knowledge event'. Rogoff also concedes that the language we use to describe what happens is 'evacuated of all meaning because [...] it operates in so many different modalities that we can no longer insist on a singular meaning, and therefore [we] need another vocabulary.'¹⁶⁰ If the language of current curatorial discourse is inadequate for this different mode of practising, compared to and distinct from curating, scrutinising the terminology we use, and possibly embracing another, or several others, becomes something to seriously explore.

Taking a slightly different angle, Paul O'Neill sees 'the curatorial' as a mode of resistance against 'the narrative-oriented authorial model of curation'¹⁶¹ and where a 'notable punctuated shift away from the "single-author" curatorial model [...] towards more collaborative, discursive and collective models' has 'demonstrated the advantage of pooling knowledge, resources, networks and opinions'.¹⁶² Summarising the essence of this approach, and positing that 'the curatorial at its most productive prioritizes a type of working with others that allows for a temporary space of cooperation, coproduction, and discursivity to emerge in the process of doing and speaking together',¹⁶³ he argues that the discursive aspect of curatorial work 'should be given parity with – rather than being perceived as contingent upon – the main event of staging exhibitions'.¹⁶⁴ In this description O'Neill holds on to the exhibition as form, not dissimilar to how Lind in 'the curatorial' maintains a connection to gathering in physical space, but also challenges the perceived hierarchy between different forms of curatorial work. For O'Neill '[t]he function of the curatorial proposition is to create situations of potential agency for the co-productive processes initiated by the artist, or curator, as post-autonomous producer'.¹⁶⁵ Rather than being considered as an end product, whatever emerges is to be seen as a proposition – where Rogoff looks for provocative ones – that requires an active engagement from all those involved, and where the 'making public' takes on a format that is specific for each occasion.¹⁶⁶ My suggestion

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35

¹⁶¹ Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox', *The Exhibitionist*, No. 6, 2012, pp. 56; reprinted in *The Exhibitionist – Journal on Exhibition Making: The First Six Years*, edited by Jens Hoffman, p. 436. I use the latter version here.

¹⁶² Paul O'Neill, 'Beyond Group Practice', *Manifesta Journal*, # 8, 2009-10, p. 42.

¹⁶³ O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation', p. 437.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* His inclusion of 'speaking' alongside doing, points once again at publications as possibly crucial platforms.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

is that publications can be situated as crucial modes of manifestation for 'the curatorial', with many taking part in a convergence of 'post-autonomous producers' that O'Neill refers to.

For Anthony Huberman, in turn, the logical consequence of these different understandings of contemporary curatorial work is the articulation of 'a new ethic of behavior and a new code of conduct'.¹⁶⁷ Rather than dismissing or turning away from the exhibition as form, he argues for a return to it, suggesting that its 'logic and structure... could be called into question', and instead of seeing it as an end point he suggests that an exhibition could 'mark the beginning of a curatorial idea', in which rather than preparing explanations in advance – like the traditional curator did – we should follow 'the life of an idea, in public, with others'.¹⁶⁸ Rather than assuming a position of established knowledge, Huberman suggests we explore not knowing, conducting research through what unfolds, publicly, and in doing so work with self-selecting and already engaged audiences, rather than trying to reach 'everyone' like many institutions do. In such an approach, learning would replace teaching, effectively absolving, or at least sidestepping, the traditional authority of the curator.¹⁶⁹ Huberman here adds another nuance to understandings of 'the curatorial' that provides an indication of what the expanded field of curating might look like, and where making public can also comprise talks, screenings, discussions and, of course, publications.

In all of the above I have indicated how publications have on the one hand been part and parcel of the development of the field, but at the same time remained more or less a blind spot in what is reflected on. What these intertwined trajectories also demonstrate is that who is considered to have agency has remained linked to individuals – to the artist as creator and the curator as mediator, where in some cases the boundaries between their respective positions and agencies have blurred. Although all of the above underlines that publications are an intrinsic part of the development of and the construction of the history of contemporary curating, how they can contribute to a different understanding of who and what has agency, specifically in relation to the more recently developed notion of 'the curatorial', remains to be explored further.

¹⁶⁷ Anthony Huberman, 'Take Care', in *Circular Facts*, edited by Mai Abu ElDahab, Binna Choi, Emily Pethick (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011). Huberman sees the potential for such a shift in smaller rather than larger institutions.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, n.p. The text also circulates as a loose PDF, available at http://www.theshowroom.org/system/files/062015/55842f3817f49e6da50001b8/original/Take_Care.pdf?1506568407 (accessed 18 April 2018).

¹⁶⁹ Following the 'New Institutionalism' of the 2000s, which tried to come up with alternative models of instituting to counter traditional institutional (i.e. larger museum) practices, several smaller organisations have in recent years 'handed themselves over' as platforms to provide other voices, practices and histories. See, for example, Pip Day, 'When the Colonizer Comes to Stay', in *How Institutions Think*, pp. 86-99; see also Emily Pethick, 'Come in and Make a Place for Yourself: Instituting along Lines of Self-Determination and Interdependency', same volume, pp. 181-190.

To summarise my overall objective here: I consider how publications on art can embody as well as challenge persistent ideas in contemporary curatorial discourse, specifically in relation to ideas of ‘the curatorial’. One of my overarching questions is who and what is considered to have agency and how that agency is valued – and how validation is made manifest. Although people like Lind, Rogoff, O’Neill and others have started to unravel and reassemble how contemporary practices differ from those that focus on the exhibition as form, this work is by no means carried through in detail. Building on their embrace of the potential of process over product, my project focuses on similar aspects in and around publications. With many discussions on curating liberally using terms such as space and site, mediation and translation, and collaboration and authorship, my (re)engagement with such apparently generally accepted concepts has as primary aim to come to a different understanding of agency as embodied in publications on art, and consider how they possibly also apply to the wider curatorial field and its discourse.

1.4. Chapter Outline

As indicated earlier, I deploy examples from my own practice that have already been published as starting points to explore the limitations of traditional understandings of the space of publications, notions of mediation and translation and ideas around collaboration and authorship. To demonstrate that approaching publications as visual and material objects only gets us so far in terms of what they can contribute to debates around curating and in relation to ideas of ‘the curatorial’, I start my exploration with an external case study. Using such an example not only offers the required distance in time and place; because I have no stake in it – neither professional, nor personal – it enables me to question my own, seemingly stable, assumptions and knowledge built up over years of working as an editor of publications on art. To this end I have chosen *Ways of Seeing*, published in 1972 following the eponymous television programme, which I discuss in Chapter 2, titled ‘Dis- and Reassembling *Ways of Seeing*’.¹⁷⁰

Ways of Seeing is in many ways an extraordinary project that introduced new ways of thinking about images and positioned itself as part of a New Art History, which no longer looked at art in isolation, but situated artworks as embodiments of systems of power and dissemination. As a book it is considered innovative because of the then unusual treatment of images and text, in which rather than the former being mere illustrations, they construct essays in their own right that ‘speak’ to the same topics discussed in chapters in which image and text are combined.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Although I had been aware of both television programme and book *Ways of Seeing* since the 1980s, I had never seen or read either until I started this project. The notion of distance therefore applies on multiple levels.

¹⁷¹ This is outlined in the ‘Note to the reader’ that opens the book, but also already on the cover, which shows a painting by René Magritte embedded in text.

The book starts with ideas of mediation, and what happens in the process to both original and reproduction, and also engages with transformations that occurred in the transfer of the narrative between television and book. In doing so it considers the systems and frameworks in which it operates and in which we encounter information on art. Tracing who and what converge in the book, it appears the object to some extent fools us: there is much more to its making than what the cover literally tells us – it is not just a book ‘by’ John Berger. My exploration of *Ways of Seeing* ends with revisiting ANT to consider how it can help disentangle processes involved in its production. Using this approach also draws out connections with terminologies specific to curating, and particularly ideas of ‘the curatorial’, and brings key issues that *Ways of Seeing* explores and that are relevant to my own enquiry to the fore: publications as spaces of display, mediation and translation, and collaboration and authorship.

Chapter 3, titled ‘Spaces of Display’ explores different forms publications as a space and medium in relation to art and curatorial projects have taken over time. I outline several historical trajectories of development of various types – specifically the ‘catalogue’, expanding on developments outlined in this introductory chapter – and more contemporary interpretations. The example I subsequently explore is *Black Sun* (2013), a book that defies easy classification, containing catalogue-like sections and also characteristics of an artist’s book, and that was intended to function independently from the exhibition it relates to by design, situating itself as a mishmash of typologies.¹⁷² By way of detailed explorations of various elements, I consider the various human contributors and their interactions with materials and conventions, and the frameworks in which the book was produced – published by a publisher in collaboration with two exhibition spaces – and how this complex configuration of actors helped determine the content as well as the form of the book, but also raising further questions about and challenging dominant ideas about the relation between art, exhibitions and publications.

In Chapter 4, titled ‘Mediation and Translation’, I use *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon* (1999) to focus on notions of mediation and translation of artworks and curatorial projects into publications.¹⁷³ I describe how *Feature Film* is a cinematic adaptation of another film, Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, which itself has several precursors, and how *Feature Film: a book by...* extends that adaptation by deconstructing its components – sound and image – further. The example offers multiple starting points to explore understandings of mediation and translation from artwork and/or its exhibition to publications, including Bruce Mau/Chris Marker’s *La*

¹⁷² Shezad Dawood, Gerrie van Noord, Camilla Palestra (eds.) *Black Sun* (London: Ridinghouse, 2013).

¹⁷³ Gerrie van Noord and Jane Rolo (eds.) *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon* (London: Artangel and Book Works, in association with agnès b, 1999).

Jetée: Ciné-Roman that was influential for the book's development. The case study is preceded by an exploration of ideas of mediation as they feature in curatorial discourse. Via engaging with ideas on the specificity of characteristics of different media, and how they impact on the emergence of new media by way of the idea of remediation as outlined by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, I turn to notions of translation.¹⁷⁴ Referencing key texts – including Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'¹⁷⁵ – I argue how notions of source or original can be seen to always already be unstable, in language as well as art and curating, and that rather than perceiving publications as static mediating objects, they can be positioned as new articulations that emerge through interactions of a variety of actors and agents.

In Chapter 5, titled 'Collaboration and Authorship', I consider notions of collaboration as they have been adopted in artistic and curatorial discourse, including understandings derived from ideas formulated by Walter Benjamin,¹⁷⁶ Roland Barthes¹⁷⁷ and Michel Foucault.¹⁷⁸ Starting with and emphasising ideas of collaboration rather than authorship allows me to demonstrate how collaboration is, or rather isn't expanded on in ideas of curating and 'the curatorial' and how this lack of working through what working with others entails has resulted in a rather generic referencing of ideas on authorship. Following a brief revisit of an external example, *The Book of Books* (2012), I bring in several examples from my own practice in a lighter manner than in previous chapters, including two digital projects. I discuss *The Invisible Generation* (2011),¹⁷⁹ published following an exhibition and performative events; the project 'The Failure of Participation' (2018),¹⁸⁰ a single text written by an artist and published as a blog; and a website that (re)presents Olivia Plender's entire practice (launch late summer 2021). Across these examples, the mechanisms and affordances of the publishing medium or platform become more involved – with ever-more intricate interactions between human actors as well as between human and non-human actors and agents. To get to grips with this increasing complexity, I introduce ideas formulated by Isabelle Stengers and Karen Barad to (re)consider the 'how' of actors and agents coming together and working together, and what that may mean for our understanding of collaboration and authorship in publications on art.

¹⁷⁴ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

¹⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator' [1923], in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken, 2007 [1968]) pp. 69-82.

¹⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Understanding Brecht*, translated by Anna Bostock, introduction by Stanley Mitchell (London, New York: Verso, 1987 [1934]) pp. 85-103.

¹⁷⁷ Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), including 'The Photographic Message' [1961], 'The Death of the Author' [1967], 'From Work to Text' [1971]. Also relevant is *The Pleasure of the Text* [1973].

¹⁷⁸ Michael Foucault, 'What is an Author?' [1972], in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, Vol. 2 of *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, edited by James D. Faubion (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998).

¹⁷⁹ Gerrie van Noord (ed.) *The Invisible Generation* (Linskooping: Vision Forum, 2011). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Invisible_Generation (accessed 15 April 2018).

¹⁸⁰ The project went live in March 2018 as 'The Failure of Participation', <https://wordpress.com/view/the-failure-of-participation.com> (accessed 15 April 2018). NB: the site has since been adapted for a series of workshops.

In the last, concluding chapter, Chapter 6, I elaborate on how Stengers's and Barad's ideas can help us think beyond the focus on a specific set of individuals – something that remains prevalent in curatorial discourse – and how thinking through such notions as 'ecology of practices' and 'intra-actions' and 'entanglement' in relation to publications on art can help us approach and understand the 'how' in 'the curatorial' without necessarily needing to describe or understand each individual interaction in intricate detail. At the same time, outlining this expanded understanding of 'the curatorial' can help us read publications on art as complex convergences of practices that are integral to the contemporary curatorial field through which notions of hierarchy and value can be rethought too, precisely because they help us think through how we can approach ideas of agency differently.

Chapter 2: Dis- and Reassembling Publications

The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.

—John Berger¹⁸¹

2.1. *Ways of Seeing*, An Introductory Case Study

Following my outline of relevant trajectories in the previous chapter, it might seem to make sense to start here with a formative example in the history of the exhibition catalogue, or in which the publication is specifically used as a space for curatorial work. However, such an approach would possibly affirm the assumed direct hierarchical relation of the publication to the exhibition as dominant form, or underline that what renders a publication a curatorial project belongs to a specific lineage of curatorial practice. Taking up Irit Rogoff's suggestion of looking for the potential to generate new knowledge by provocations beyond dominant forms, I start with another entry point to my exploration; one that unfolds key issues in relation to questions of agency, and explores publications' form and function in a way that can be situated within an expanded notion of 'the curatorial'. *Ways of Seeing* (1972) provides such an example.¹⁸²

Although published at a time when artists and curators started to explore the potential of publications for their respective work, *Ways of Seeing* does not engage with (then) contemporary practices.¹⁸³ Its proposition is that rather than looking at art in isolation and focusing on formal changes over time, notions of power and agency are reflected in what is depicted, and in how these depictions circulate by way of reproductions of images and the narratives they become part of. In doing so it became a foundational text for Visual Culture as well as part of a New Art History. It is exactly the exploration of form and content of the book in the (re)presentation of art that makes *Ways of Seeing* a very fruitful example for my enquiry.

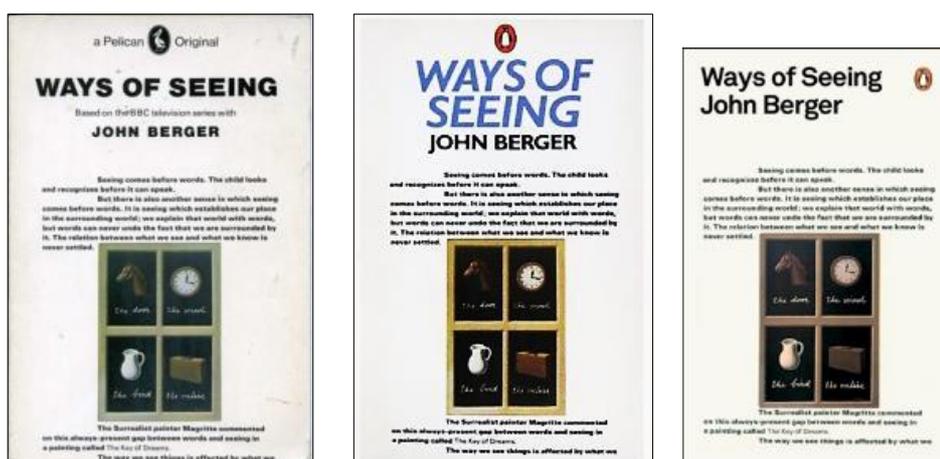
¹⁸¹ Quote from front cover of John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb and Richard Hollis, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin, 1972). Although I argue that *Ways of Seeing* is the result of a complex of collaborations, including non-human (f)actors, the quote can be attributed to Berger because he did indeed write the text.

¹⁸² I presented an early outline of my ideas about *Ways of Seeing* at the conference 'John Berger Now' at Canterbury Christ Church University in September 2017.

¹⁸³ Using an outlier such as *Ways of Seeing*, which is not related to contemporary art or curating, allows questions about expectations and conventions to come to the fore. ANT suggests looking at examples that are seemingly unusual or bring about change, which certainly applies to *Ways of Seeing*.

Generally known as a book *by* John Berger,¹⁸⁴ *Ways of Seeing* was published following the eponymous four-part television programme also presented by him, broadcast in January 1972.¹⁸⁵ Raising awareness of the effect of its own linear sequentiality, and comprising images and text in various configurations, *Ways of Seeing* demonstrates how similar issues can be addressed by both, while acknowledging the wider network of actors and agents involved. What emerges in the following sections is that situating it as a singularly authored mediating object belies the fact that it is a complex, collectively constructed proposition that asks critical questions about art and mediation. As this chapter's epigraph indicates, *Ways of Seeing* considers the gap between seeing and knowing, a concern that can be argued to chime with definitions of 'the curatorial'.

2.1.1. At First Sight(s)



From left to right – Figure 2.1: the cover design of 1972; Figure 2.2: the second edition of 1995; Figure 2.3: the 2008 edition¹⁸⁶

Ways of Seeing has over time been published with slightly different dimensions and changes on its cover that are subtle but also telling. Figs. 2.1-2.3 show the three iterations: the 1972 first edition, the 1995 second, and the 2008 reissue.¹⁸⁷ While the first two editions use capitals for the title and Berger's name (WAYS OF SEEING and JOHN BERGER), the 2008 version uses title capitals (the first letters of 'Ways' and 'Seeing' and 'John' and 'Berger'), both in the same font

¹⁸⁴ *Ways of Seeing* is part of what could be called a 'family of books' in Berger's oeuvre, in which images are integral to and literally integrated in the written narrative.

¹⁸⁵ The programme's director, Michael Dibb, has elaborated on the process of commissioning, production and editing, and the book, in an interview with him and graphic designer Richard Hollis, which I refer to throughout this chapter. See Juliette Kristensen, 'Making *Ways of Seeing*: A conversation with Michael Dibb and Richard Hollis', in *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2012, pp. 181-195. NB: this whole journal issue is dedicated to *Ways of Seeing*.

¹⁸⁶ Figures 2.1-3 are not to scale, but do show that the third edition is smaller. NB: these are all UK editions.

¹⁸⁷ The word 'edition' here denotes a specific version of the design, each version having numerous print editions.

size. In contrast, the title on the 1995 cover has a larger font size and a different colour (blue) compared to Berger's name (black), and is set in italic rather than roman type.¹⁸⁸ In the original edition, title and name are both black, but the latter is distinctly smaller than the former. In short, glancing from left to right across the images above, 'John Berger' becomes more prominent from one edition to the next, situating him as the book's author as convention has it, and *Ways of Seeing* becoming effectively synonymous with Berger's name.

In contrast, the book's credit page acknowledges contributions by others (Fig. 2.4, all editions). The statement 'A book made by John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox, Michael Dibb, Richard Hollis' – all in the same font size, in almost alphabetical order – situates everyone's name at the same level as Berger's, the seemingly egalitarian approach contradicting the authorial attribution on the cover. Without a description of the nature of each of their contributions, we can assume Berger is foregrounded on the cover because he wrote the text and was by then well-known as a writer.¹⁸⁹ Text is not the book's only content though, so the positioning of Berger's name on the cover can also be argued to prioritise the written word over the visual content, which creates a tension with what the book itself explores, as I discuss below. Because the book appeared after the television series presented by him was broadcast, putting only his name on the cover was no doubt intended to help sell the book.

A book made by
**John Berger, Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox,
 Michael Dibb, Richard Hollis**

Figure 2.4: the text on the credit page, all editions

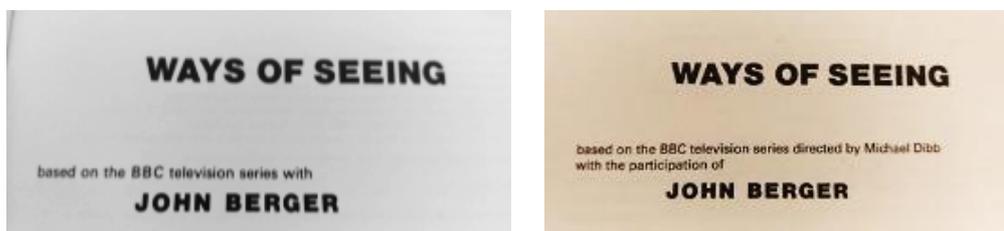
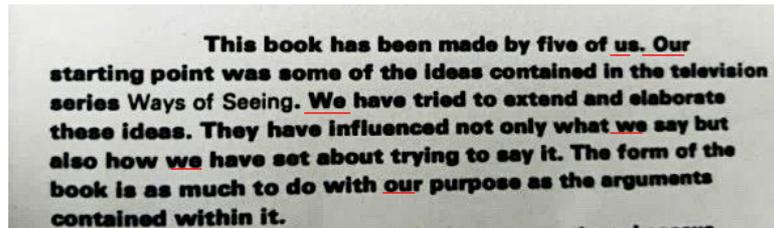


Figure 2.5: title page 1st / 2nd editions (1972 and 1995); Figure 2.6: title page 3rd edition (2008)

¹⁸⁸ I am ignoring the spine here, as the small amount of space there tends to lead to a slightly different text treatment. While the first and second editions state 'JOHN BERGER WAYS OF SEEING' in capitals, the third inverts the order and states 'Ways of Seeing, John Berger', with a comma added between the title and the name.

¹⁸⁹ The novel *G.*, for which John Berger won the Booker prize, came out in 1972. Prior to *G.* he had published a range of other books and essay collections: *A Painter of Our Time* (1957), *Permanent Red* (1960), *Corker's Freedom* (1964), *The Success and Failure of Picasso* (1965) and *A Fortunate Man*, with Jean Mohr (1967).

The phrase 'A book made by' on the credit page underlines the nature of the book's medium, whereas the relationship with the television programme is referred to on the title page. The two earlier editions state 'based on the BBC television series' (Fig. 2.5), which is in the 2008 edition amended with 'directed by Michael Dibb' (Fig. 2.6). In other words, Dibb's role in the programmes is clarified and the nature of the relationship to Berger hinted at by 'with the participation of'. But, because Berger's name is printed in a bigger font size, his importance is amplified,¹⁹⁰ and 'participation' simultaneously makes Berger's contribution more ambiguous.



This book has been made by five of us. Our starting point was some of the ideas contained in the television series Ways of Seeing. We have tried to extend and elaborate these ideas. They have influenced not only what we say but also how we have set about trying to say it. The form of the book is as much to do with our purpose as the arguments contained within it.

Figure 2.7: the opening paragraph of 'Note to the reader' (all editions)

The 'Note to the reader' that follows the title page complicates things even more: the opening line reads 'This book has been made by five of us' (Fig. 2.7), contradicting the impression of the cover once again. That these five were part of a team is underlined by the 'us', 'our' and 'we' in the remainder of the paragraph. The next one informs us that 'The book consists of seven numbered essays. They can be read in any order.' (Fig. 2.8) Although formulated in a passive way – 'can be read' – readers are explicitly attributed an active role in choosing where to dive in and construct, or de- and re-construct the narrative of the book as a whole. The phrase, 'are intended to raise as many questions', implies an awareness that we may have certain expectations – about where to begin and end, for instance. The concluding line – 'Our principal aim has been to start a process of questioning' – draws our attention to those involved in the construction of the book again, the 'we', but the first person plural now seems to implicate us readers in this process of questioning. In the end, 'we' are given the opportunity to carry on via the book's final sentence on a blank page – 'To be continued by the reader...' (p. 166) – followed by several more blank pages, which underline the intent of an open-ended exploration.

¹⁹⁰ The cover of the 2008 edition, which is a reissue in the Penguin Design Series 2008, was designed by 'YES based on the original design by Richard Hollis'. Hollis has commented rather disparagingly on this interpretation. See Lucy Sisman, 'Ways of Seeing: Richard Hollis's revolutionary design for the revolutionary book of revolutionary show', *wwwword*, n.d., available at <http://wwwword.com/2387/style/on-design/ways-of-seeing/> (accessed 15 October 2016).

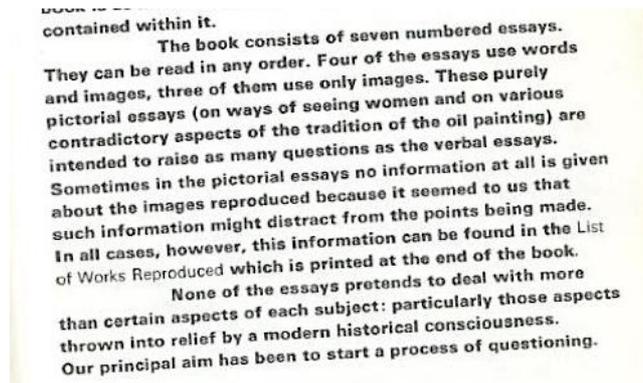


Figure 2.8: second and third paragraph of 'Note to the reader'

The reference to 'ideas' and how they take shape in this book – which has 'as much to do with our purpose as the arguments contained within it' (Fig. 2.7) and is set 'into relief by a modern historical consciousness' – extends the idea of influence beyond that of people. The suggestion here is also that we cannot consider either form or content separately; they are both the result of their interrelationship, or in other words, image and text are attributed some form of agency in their own joint appearance. What is more, the 'Note' informs us that what the book explores is related to ideas that precede book and television programme. The form they are given results from a clear sense of purpose – coming out of a 'modern historical consciousness' – and the need to convince us of the validity of the argument laid out. All of this references a relationship between book and television programme, but also complicates what has possibly impacted on what we may encounter after the 'Note', outlining a spectrum of influences. In the next section I start tracing what (f)actors may have played a role in the book's formation.

2.1.2. What Went Before

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the UK's public service broadcaster, commissioned and produced the television series *Ways of Seeing* in 1971, showing all four episodes on BBC2 in January 1972. In its reception, the programme is often described as a response to *Civilisation* (1969), presented by art historian Kenneth Clark. The comparison is made not least because their approach was so different.¹⁹¹ Clark is generally considered one of the first to bring art to a

¹⁹¹ The 13-episode series – full title *Civilisation, A Personal View by Kenneth Clark* – first aired on BBC2 in 1969 (repeated on BBC1 in 1971), was commissioned by David Attenborough, then controller of BBC 2. For an in-depth analysis see Jonathan Conlon, *Civilisation* (London/Basingstoke: BFI Classics/Palgrave, 2009).

mass audience via television in the UK,¹⁹² fronting *Civilisation* as an authority.¹⁹³ With worldviews shifting, the programme has over time been criticised for its focus on Western art,¹⁹⁴ and the broad-sweeping generalisations and ‘great man’ approach that Clark espoused.¹⁹⁵ In contrast to the stylistic characteristics of artworks and artists’ significance discussed in *Civilisation*, *Ways of Seeing* explores that how we encounter and look at artworks is not neutral, but highly conditioned by social power dynamics. *Ways of Seeing* also explores how many artworks and images are inflected by a gendered gaze that not only determines what is being depicted, but also how it is depicted. In short, *Ways of Seeing* questions ‘assumptions’ about ‘beauty, truth, genius, civilisation, form, status, taste’.¹⁹⁶ The inclusion of ‘assumptions’ implicates ideas that informed the narrative of the programme, including the fact that most people know about art through mediation via reproductions and other means, such as television broadcasts.¹⁹⁷



Figure 2.9: screengrab of the opening scene of the first episode of *Ways of Seeing*¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Prior to the BBC series, Clark had presented quite a few shorter programmes on art. In one, titled *Should Every Picture Tell a Story* (1958) produced by ATV, John Berger talks about Picasso’s *Guernica* (1937), with Clark questioning whether ‘the common man’ would ever be able to understand the work. Available at <https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-should-every-picture-tell-a-story-1958-online> (accessed 5 March 2018).

¹⁹³ Clark’s status as expert was evidenced by the fact he had been appointed as director of the National Gallery age 29 in 1933, and was Chair of the Arts Council and the Independent Television Authority after World War II. His position as an expert arguably makes the programme strapline ‘A Personal View by’, underline his gravitas.

¹⁹⁴ The BBC has revisited *Civilisation* and tried to address its Eurocentric, white male and upper-class inflection with a new series entitled *Civilisations* (2018, plural s) presented by Simon Schama, Mary Beard and David Olusoga.

¹⁹⁵ The first episode references Ruskin’s ‘great nation’ approach to which Clark subscribed, which relies on the idea of the ‘genius’ of individual artists. See John Ruskin, *St. Mark’s Rest* (Sunnyside: George Allen, 1877).

¹⁹⁶ These assumptions are alluded to in the first television episode but listed on p. 11 of the book (all editions).

¹⁹⁷ Berger himself described the aims as follows: ‘The show argued three new things. First, that the availability of visual art had changed; people could now see images at home [in books], not just in galleries. The second was about the view of women. [...] We said things about the male gaze that just weren’t said on the BBC, though I wouldn’t claim we were the first to think of them. The third, the most prophetic [...] the way art and religion are used to encourage the buying of commodities.’ See Kate Abbott, ‘How we made: John Berger and Michael Dibb on *Ways of Seeing*’, *The Guardian*, 2 April 2012, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/apr/02/how-we-made-ways-seeing> (accessed 1 March 2018).

¹⁹⁸ The screengrab was taken from YouTube, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk&t=1s (accessed 1 March 2018).

The difference between *Civilisation* and *Ways of Seeing* is reflected in how they were produced. Instead of travelling around Europe for three years to film works of art in situ, like Clark and his crew did, *Ways of Seeing* was produced within six months in a studio in west London, using reproductions.¹⁹⁹ The opening scene – in which Berger cuts out the face of a female figure from what quickly becomes clear is a reproduction of Botticelli's *Venus and Mars* (Fig. 2.9) – demonstrates that understanding the image is largely influenced by how our encounter is framed. Given that not everyone is able to visit museums or collections in which artworks are held and put on display, publications – which were starting to become more richly illustrated, with greater quality of the images due to technological advances in print production at the time – are key, allowing us 'access' to originals via reproductions. The opening scenes also show series of the same portrait being printed on postcards, underlining the importance of mediation.²⁰⁰

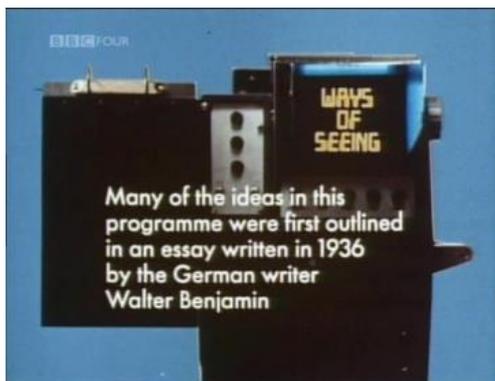
Rather than conveying information and presenting it as fact, like Clark does in *Civilisation*, Berger appears to attempt to enter into conversation with the viewer. By peering intently into the camera lens, he looks directly at us, regularly pointing and gesturing and inviting us to think with him, but also urging us to question what he says. Despite his authoritative mode of address – certainly to contemporary ears – he repeatedly asks us to consider *how* we see works of art, rather than what we see. While we may not gain much (art)historical information about the works Berger shows us via reproductions, we do end up with the awareness that what we think we see is a construct, and how we encounter works of art is shown to rely on a network that impacts on what we think we see, influenced by myriad (f)actors that determine our perception. The programme abandons the single presenter mode twice: the first episode features a conversation between Berger and a group of primary school children discussing what they think they see in several reproductions of artworks. The second episode ends with a discussion between Berger and a group of women about the female figure in art and their views of themselves.²⁰¹ Both conversations address how our gaze is conditioned by what we know and what surrounds what we see, deviating from Clark's 'great man' narrative.

¹⁹⁹ Berger states about the process: 'We couldn't afford a studio; we were in what looked like a Nissen hut in Ealing. There was no sound-proofing and it was near a road, so if a lorry passed when we were filming, we had to stop, wait and retake.' See Abbott, 'How we made'.

²⁰⁰ Dibb admits that many of the original ideas specific to the medium of television – including the use of the blue screen to generate visual collages by 'cutting in' other images – never came to fruition as the technology then was cumbersome and expensive. See Abbott, 'How we made'; and Kristensen, 'Making *Ways of Seeing*'.

²⁰¹ These were no 'ordinary' women though: they included artist Carola Moon; publisher, scholar and activist Jane Kenrik; Barbara Niven, art critic of the *Daily Worker*; Eva Figes, who had recently published *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* (1970); and Anya Berger (Berger's then wife), a translator. See Tom Overton, 'Life in the Margins', *frieze*, 27 February 2017, available at <https://frieze.com/article/life-margins> (accessed 28 February 2017). Overton implies that Berger's awareness of feminist ideas and the female gaze were heavily informed and nurtured by Anya.

Rather than assuming a direct relation between a precursor of sorts – *Civilisation* – within the BBC, the subject matter and approach taken in *Ways of Seeing* suggest it is worth exploring wider circles of possible influence that may have impacted on how the programme, and subsequently the book, came into being. According to director Michael Dibb, the television series was explicitly allowed to take a different direction than other projects that went before.²⁰² Because he was still relatively young at the time, Dibb believes he ‘was given the freedom via John’, and ‘John was given the space [...] as the author of the series’, Berger’s fame apparently facilitating that greater freedom.²⁰³ After the programme was commissioned by the BBC’s John Drummond, ‘there was very little strict supervision [...] It was a time of enormous trust’, Dibb emphasises.²⁰⁴ Although he lists other factors – adding ‘[t]here was no real interference in the making of it at all’ – Dibb implies that it was Berger’s involvement that provided both of them with the opportunity to do things differently. Labelling Berger the ‘author’, Dibb also situates him as the writer of the narrative that he presented.



Many of the ideas in the preceding essay have been taken from another, written over forty years ago by the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin.



His essay was entitled *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. This essay is available in English in a collection called *Illuminations* (Cape, London 1970).

Figure 2.10: the reference to Benjamin in the television programme; Figure 2.11: reference in the book

Whereas the potential influence of *Civilisation* and other television programmes on *Ways of Seeing* remains implicit,²⁰⁵ the indebtedness to Walter Benjamin’s essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of its Mechanical Reproduction’ (1936/39) is made very explicit.²⁰⁶ Benjamin is credited at the end of the first episode of the television series; the statement ‘Many of the ideas in this programme were first outlined in an essay by the German writer Walter Benjamin’ appears on

²⁰² NB: in the credits for television Dibb is referred to as ‘producer’, whereas in the book he is labelled ‘director’.

²⁰³ Kristensen, ‘Making *Ways of Seeing*’, p. 184. NB: prior to *Ways of Seeing* Berger had appeared on BBC radio and television numerous times since the early 1950s. The BBC’s genome project lists all occurrences as they appeared in the *Radio Times*, see <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/> (accessed 1 June 2017). Dibb had joined the BBC’s Arts and Music department in 1967, and between 1967 and 1971 worked on several series on artists and artworks. See <https://mikedibb.co.uk/films.php> (accessed 1 June 2017).

²⁰⁴ According to Dibb ‘it was John [Drummond, later head of BBC Radio 3 and the BBC Proms] who brought John [Berger] and me together; he was the presiding authority figure.’ Kristensen, ‘Making *Ways of Seeing*’, p. 184.

²⁰⁵ That said, Clark’s position as authority is referenced and challenged. His interpretation of a painting by Gainsborough – in one of his books, rather than *Civilisation* – is directly questioned on page 160 of *Ways of Seeing*.

²⁰⁶ Benjamin’s text was originally written in 1936, altered and edited into a final version in 1939, and first published in German in his collected writings, in 1955.

the screen before the end credits.²⁰⁷ This stand-alone mention elevates Benjamin to a different level than others credited subsequently. The end of the first chapter of the book has a separate attribution page too, which states: 'Many of the ideas in the preceding essay have been taken from another, written over forty years ago by the German critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin.'²⁰⁸ Rather than appearing in a note, or in the back with other credits, the statement, accompanied by a small portrait, also highlights the importance of Benjamin's ideas for the book.

In the text in question, Benjamin claims that notions of 'creativity' and 'genius', 'eternal value' and 'mystery', are 'outmoded' and contends that photography has shifted the focus from the skill of depiction from the hand to the eye, eventually allowing encounters with real works of art to be displaced by their mediation through reproduction.²⁰⁹ What this mediation lacks is the authenticity of the 'real' art object,²¹⁰ but, despite the lack of experience of the real work, the photograph, the 'technical reproduction', reactivates what it depicts for the viewer.²¹¹ Benjamin concisely summarises what both iterations of *Ways of Seeing* explore, including the impact of the emergence of new media on mediation itself: 'The directives which the captions give to those looking at pictures in illustrated magazines soon become even more explicit and more imperative in the film where the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones.'²¹² Benjamin thus attributes agency to various elements in the context in which we encounter images – in published form as well as moving image – where it is not the work in isolation, but the work surrounded by other works, images or texts, or a combination thereof in a certain sequence that determines what we 'read' and how.

Knowing that Benjamin's ideas were the starting point for the television programme and the book *Ways of Seeing*, the question is why this particular text resonated at that moment in time, decades after it was first published. Considering how ideas travel, the explanation here is a simple one: the literal translation of Benjamin's essay from its original language, German, had extended its geographical and cultural reach because the collection in which it featured had been published in English for the first time – in 1968 in the US, and 1970 in the UK.²¹³ Despite

²⁰⁷ At 26 min. 26 sec. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pDE4VX_9Kk (accessed 20 January 2017).

²⁰⁸ The attribution appears on page 34 in all three editions of the book.

²⁰⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936/39), in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited and with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (New York, NY: Schocken, 2007 [1968]) p. 218.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²¹³ These specific circumstances are highlighted in the book, but not in the television programme. The book literally states: 'His essay was entitled *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. This essay is available in English in a collection called *Illuminations* (Cape, London 1970).' See also Mark Sinclair, 'When Looking Became Seeing', *Creative Review*, n.p., 2012, available at <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/when-looking-became-seeing/> (accessed 16 September 2016).

the fact that Benjamin's writing only belatedly became more widely accessible through a range of processes and decisions that had nothing to do with *Ways of Seeing*, we can safely assume it was their translation that allowed it to be read by those involved in the development of the television programme and the book and thus exert its influence. According to Tom Overton though, Berger had been exposed to Benjamin's ideas via his then wife Anya 'far earlier than this'.²¹⁴ As a translator of work by central-European Marxist thinkers, she had direct access to these ideas long before their publication in English. First-hand access for all others, however, became possible only because of the recent translation. One could argue that providing Benjamin's work with the 'afterlife' he himself describes as a key function and effect of translation, the importance of his text for *Ways of Seeing* also demonstrates how the possibility of reproduction gives ideas agency at another moment in time and place.

The difference between the two modes of mediation engaged in *Ways of Seeing* is to some extent implied by the cover and title page of the book, which highlight the connection while also acknowledging the difference between both.²¹⁵ The phrase 'based on' is vague though: it indicates a relationship, but not the exact nature, other than a sequential order in time. The fact that there are seven chapters whereas the television programme only has four episodes makes one wonder what was translated from one to the other, and more importantly, how. In addition, we could ask what the affordances of the medium of television does to our understanding of the artworks shown, and similarly what the medium of book does to our perception in that context. The 'Note to the reader' states '[w]e have tried to extend and elaborate these ideas' (Fig. 2.7), which makes one curious about what these extensions and elaborations entail.

As the 'Note' indicates, we find the same topics in the books, but not necessarily treated in the same way and in the same order as in the television programme. Whereas the episodes of the television programme don't have individual titles, the chapters in the book have numbers. Comparing the opening sequence of the first programme and the first pages of the book reveals that a careful editing process of both text and images was undertaken, altering the order and structure of the narrative. For instance, we meet Botticelli's *Venus* in the opening scene of the television series, but only encounter her on page 26 of the book (see Fig. 2.13). To consider the impact that the specificity of each medium of mediation has on a similar narrative, but extended and expanded in the book, in the next section I look at the book's content in greater detail.

²¹⁴ Overton, 'Life in the Margins'. Anya met Berger in the 1950s. They sometimes translated work together, which no doubt heightened the potential influence of the texts translated on his own thinking and activity as a writer.

²¹⁵ This applies to all three editions of the book.

2.1.3. Content and Structure, Words and Images

Although the book *Ways of Seeing* was initiated by the BBC, its publishing partner was Penguin. Penguin has a well-documented history of its publishing focus and design, including its covers, of which Richard Hollis, *Ways of Seeing's* graphic designer, was very aware.²¹⁶ Penguin had started using photographs of artefacts from the time the books were originally written on covers in the 1960s, a strategy of which Hollis argues 'the document [= image...] makes the point'.²¹⁷ The front cover of *Ways of Seeing* also contains such a document, in this case embedded in paragraphs of running text, which are the first paragraphs of the first chapter. The following quotation refers directly to the relationship between images and words that is played with and tested throughout the book: 'It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world: we explain the world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it. The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.'²¹⁸ This passage assigns to words the role of explaining, while questioning the relationship between seeing and knowing and highlighting the latter's instability. Words and images are both offered to be 'read', but the gap between words and seeing is acknowledged.²¹⁹

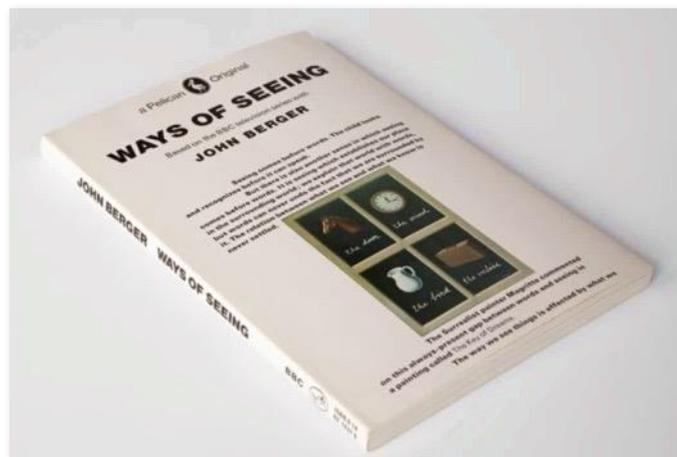


Figure 2.12: the front cover of the 1972 edition of *Ways of Seeing*

The image on the cover literally speaks of that gap (Fig. 2.12); it is a colour reproduction of a painting by René Magritte, titled *The Key of Dreams* (1930), in which a windowframe looks out

²¹⁶ See Richard Hollis, 'Penguin Book Covers', in *About Graphic Design* (London: Occasional papers, 2012 [1990]) pp. 29-32. Hollis has a solid knowledge of Penguin's design approach and was particularly impressed with the work of Germano Facetti, who in the 1960s initiated new text grid systems and introduced this approach for the covers. In addition, for a while 'Penguin books [...] made art affordable to the masses not as cheap reproductions, but as intellectual packages wrapping visual pleasure and aesthetic understanding into each other', as Patrizia di Bello summarises in 'Sculpture, Photograph, Book: The Sculptures of Picasso (1949)', in *The Photobook: From Talbot to Ruscha and Beyond*, edited by Patrizia di Bello, Colette Wilson and Shamoon Zamir (London: IB Taurus, 2012) e-book.

²¹⁷ Hollis cited in Christopher Wilson, *Richard Hollis: Designs for the Whitechapel* (London: Hyphenpress, 2017) p. 56; see also Phil Baines, *Penguin by Design: A Cover Story 1935-2005* (London: Penguin, 2005).

²¹⁸ Cover of *Ways of Seeing* and page 7, the first page of the first chapter (all three editions).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

onto four smaller images, each with their own caption.²²⁰ Three of the four captions fail to ‘say’ what the image shows though, only one making sense in literally saying what we see – ‘the valise’ underneath the image of a suitcase. We know a horse is not ‘the door’, a clock is not ‘the wind’, a jug is not ‘the bird’. Although we are aware of several mismatches between words and images – the signifiers do not tally with what we are told they signify – the image of the painting as a whole also tells us something else: it makes us realise that knowledge is indeed not only constructed by what we read, but also by what we see. The disjunction between three of the images and the words underneath them in the reproduction of Magritte’s work shows that the relationship between seeing, reading and knowing is not fixed, and can be manipulated and disrupted.²²¹ The demonstration of the issue by the image and a description without the latter directly referring to the former exemplify the interplay of different modes of telling in the book. The same topics are talked about in words and images, without one directly referring to the other; the image ‘makes the point’ that words make too, but does so by different means.



Figure 2.13: pp. 25-26 from chapter 1, with the detail of the face that Berger cuts out in episode 1 of the television programme; Figure 2.14: bottom right the reproduction of the corn field without caption

In the television programme the ‘telling’ through and with images relies heavily on the affordances of the medium, with image and sound working together. What we see includes panning shots across image planes, zooming in and out on details in the reproductions of artworks and advertisements, with the narrative unfolding through the literal moving from one image to the next alongside spoken word and music. In the essay that both iterations of the project are based on, Benjamin discusses the idea of a final film being composed of characteristics specific to the camera, the editing process and the notion of montage.²²² In the

²²⁰ The painting also directly relates to Benjamin’s comment about captions in the essay that informed the first chapter, which was written several years prior to Magritte making his work.
²²¹ In his book *Foucault* (1986), Gilles Deleuze offers an interesting connection in relation to the use of Magritte’s work on the cover of *Ways of Seeing* when he states: ‘As Magritte says in a letter to Foucault, thought is what sees and can be described visibly’, p. 59.
²²² Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art’, p. 228 and p. 230.

end, the images we see on screen take on specific meanings and significance through the sequences in which they are presented to us. In *Ways of Seeing* they are accompanied by what Berger tells us and how: certain words are emphasised, sometimes he accelerates or slows down, hesitates or repeats things slightly rephrased. How has this interaction of sound, text and images in the television programme been translated and rearticulated in the book? As discussed earlier, the 'Note to the reader' warns us that '[t]hese purely pictorial essays [...] are intended to raise as many questions as the verbal essays' (see Fig. 2.8). We also know that issues have been 'extended' and expanded' in the book. Hollis tells us that '[m]any of [the images] were not in the original film but supplied by the contributors'.²²³ Among the seven chapters in the book, three contain just images, without text to guide us as readers, while in others the images are part of the narrative as it unfolds on the page, rather than separate illustrations – as was then still common. How are these image essays, and the narrative constructed by both image and text to be read? Again, the book itself offers an illuminating demonstration.

The first chapter comprises a combination of text and images of mainly reproductions of artworks, or reproductions of reproductions, such as a girl wearing a T-shirt with an image of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. It also contains the following passage: 'a landscape of a cornfield with birds flying out of it' (Fig. 2.14), followed by the image underneath it on a right-hand page, as well as a direct request to the reader: 'Look at it for a moment. Then turn the page.'²²⁴ The passage underlines the role of mediation through reproduction of an original, but also makes us aware of the mechanics of the space of the page and the book; we tend to read in one direction from cover to cover, where the repeated act of turning a page makes the narrative unfold in a seemingly prescriptive linearity, while also interrupting it, possibly slowing us down. It relies on our hands following our eyes, on how quickly we read, pause on details or move on to the next spread. On the subsequent left-hand page, the same image of the cornfield appears again, this time with a handwritten line underneath that states 'This is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself'. Here we are invited to enact physical and mental moves, with the effect that '[t]he meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what comes immediately after it' on the next page.²²⁵ This passage – and us acting on the invitation – emphasises the interconnection of form and content by using the affordances of the book as mediating platform. The montage possibilities inherent to the moving image – where one frame can literally show us a different image than the previous frame, or an image of

²²³ Kristensen, 'The Making of *Ways of Seeing*', p. 193. One of the contributors was Posy Simmonds, whom Hollis married in 1974, but she is not credited in the book.

²²⁴ The images and phrases appear on p. 27 in all editions. The second reproduction of Van Gogh's painting can be found on page 28. Both have a caption, turned 90 degrees: 'Wheatfield with Crows by Van Gogh 1853-1890'.

²²⁵ *Ways of Seeing*, p. 29 in all editions.

the same object but from a different angle, accompanied by the spoken narrative – are mimicked in the space of the book, but they play out differently here.²²⁶ How we read the image changes through the additional written information, and how this change manifests itself happens by us literally turning the page after having read the instruction to look at the first image, and then ‘rereading’ the image with the text, requiring our active participation.



Figure 2.15: spread from chapter 2; Figure 2.16: spread from chapter 3

This is the only instance where we see the same image twice. We don't see any details alongside full images either, other than on p. 26, with the isolated head of Botticelli's Venus underneath the full picture. The subsequent chapters do, however, test the premise of the relationship between image and text and the influence on how we engage with the book as object on how we 'read' things, further. The second chapter has no text at all and contains a combination of reproductions of artworks and images from advertising. The subject matter in all of these images is the female body, sometimes alone, sometimes in relation to men, sometimes naked, sometimes dressed, but always the subject of a gaze, depicted as also always apparently always aware of and responsive to that gaze. The third chapter comprises a combination of images and text and elaborates on how women present themselves in wider society and how they have been depicted through the ages, in artworks as well as advertising. Sometimes the images have factual captions alongside them, turned at a 90-degree angle. The topic of the second episode of the television programme is the gendered gaze, both Chapters 2 and 3 in the book engage with similar subject matter, each using a different approach. The inconsistency of the use of captions is clearly one of the 'extensions' of Benjamin's ideas in the first chapter.²²⁷ The lack in some cases and presence in others suggests we question what we think we see, and why.

²²⁶ The montage of the television programme shows glaring discontinuities: although John Berger wears the same shirt throughout all four episodes, his hair varies in length within individual episodes.

²²⁷ Considering the impact of advances in photography, Walter Benjamin himself asked 'Will not the caption become the most important component of the shot?' Walter Benjamin, 'A short history of photography', *Screen*, Vol. 13, No. 1,

The fourth chapter is once again a purely pictorial essay, starting off with a series of Madonnas, with factual captions listing artists' names and works' titles, followed by still lifes, a sequence of mythical paintings – including of Venus and Mars – ending with a series of portraits of mainly men, all in ornate, formal dress. The fifth chapter also contains a combination of images and text that explores what different genres of painting may signal in symbolic terms, neatly summarised by the sentence 'If you buy a painting you buy also the look of the thing it represents.'²²⁸ Similar to how the second episode of the television programme was apparently translated into two book chapters, the third episode, which focuses on value, status and image, has in the book been addressed in two different modes of 'telling' in Chapters 4 and 5. In the chapter that comprises just images, we 'read' the narrative through visual juxtapositions, without a guiding text explaining what they may mean. The fifth chapter does a similar job through text and images, but if we read the book in linear sequence – even though we are invited to read 'in any order' – how we read Chapter 5 is informed by Chapter 4. And, vice versa: having read the former, we may go back and read the image essay inflected by the next.

Chapter 6 comprises images of works across a variety of genres and eras, with only a few captions that give the slightest description. The addition of this different kind of information, about what the image shows rather than the name of the artist and the title of the work, again changes how we may read individual images and the combination of them all. The last chapter comprises images that people might encounter in their day-to-day surroundings, with now and again a painting juxtaposed with an advert, suggesting that what is being mediated in both is the representation of a lifestyle. The last television programme therefore apparently relates most directly to the last two chapters, which are followed by a 'List of Illustrations' that names the collections in which the artworks reproduced reside, with the odd photo credit for photographs.

Because so many of the images are photographic reproductions of artworks, it is tempting to consider the book as part of a lineage of projects that explore what we can know about works of art by using reproductions. Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-1929 unfinished) and André Malraux's *Le Musée Imaginaire* (1947/51) are obvious examples. Warburg's *Atlas* comprises a series of large panels with reproductions of images of artefacts from antiquity to the Renaissance. The aim of his image compositions on these panels was to aid the construction of an associative narrative in the viewer's imagination, thus generating an imaginary 'afterlife' – and memory – of the original works that a viewer would unlikely ever see in real life. The notion

spring 1972 [1931], p. 25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/13.1.5>. The various kinds of information provided across the chapter can be argued to play with this idea.

²²⁸ *Ways of Seeing*, p. 85.

of memory is here based on the premise of a direct relation between an original and its representation through a reproduction.²²⁹ In *Le Musée Imaginaire* ('the imaginary museum', freely translated as 'museum without walls') Malraux claims that mediation through photographic images is exactly what allows us to 'know' artworks we are not able to visit, by shaping individual mental 'collections' instead.²³⁰ Although neither Warburg's nor Malraux's project are referenced in *Ways of Seeing*,²³¹ the diverse use of images appears at first impression similar; all three examples use, after all, reproductions of works of art. However, whereas the main aim of the image selections in both Warburg's and Malraux's work is to encounter originals by way of (photographic) reproductions, *Ways of Seeing* does something else. Here the emphasis is not on stylistic similarities, artistic merit or iconographic content, but on what larger story can be 'told' through juxtaposition and framing, and the focus is on the narratives that are constructed through what Benjamin refers to as 'montage'. The artworks presented through photographic reproductions are not meant to acquaint us with the originals per se, but make us aware of the gap between knowing and seeing referred to on the book's cover.

Because of the lack of a standard approach to how images and text interrelate in *Ways of Seeing*, the book challenges us to think about the wider context in which images are created and presented and how that influences how we read what is being depicted. We are made aware that what surrounds an image influences how we interpret the narrative embedded within it, but also across the chapters and book as a whole, if not by direct juxtaposition then via association. In short, *Ways of Seeing* tries to make us read beyond what we see at first glance – beyond the literal image or word, as exemplified by the Magritte painting on the cover. The book leaves the door open to the multiplicity of its readers 'writing' their individual version, explicitly giving us agency too.²³²

²²⁹ Warburg's main concern was the 'afterlife of antiquity', the panels facilitating the comparative study of objects displayed via reproduction through direct juxtaposition. For readings of individual panels, see <https://warburg.library.cornell.edu> (accessed 15 March 2018). The atlas has been reconstructed in its entirety and was subject of an exhibition as Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, titled 'Aby Warburg: Bilderatlas Mnemosyne' (2020). See, including a virtual walk-through (because of Covid-19 travel / access restrictions), https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2020/aby_warburg/bilderatlas_mnemosyne_start.php (accessed 13 January 2021).

²³⁰ The text was originally published as an essay in 1947, and as first chapter of *Les Voix du silence* in 1951. It was first published in English as *Voices of Silence* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1954). See Rosalind Krauss, 'Postmodernism's Museum without Walls' [1986], reprinted in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, pp. 341-348.

²³¹ For a summary, and critique of certain understandings of the relationship and similarities in Benjamin's and Warburg's thinking, see, for instance, Matthew Rampley, 'The Influence of Walter Benjamin on Aby Warburg', paper presented at 'Warburg, Benjamin and *Kulturwissenschaft*', available at <https://youtube.com/watch?v=X719QWghq4> (accessed 15 March 2018). The link between Malraux and Benjamin is less clear. *Das Passagenwerk*, which focuses on the power of the fragment, was first published in edited form in German in 1982. The English translation, *Arcades Project*, is based on this edited version and appeared in 1999.

²³² Krauss underlines the option for each viewer to 'write' their own 'fiction' in her analysis of Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire*. Krauss, 'Postmodernism's Museum without Walls', p. 345.

2.1.4. Assembling *Ways of Seeing*

So far I have mainly focused on what the book *Ways of Seeing* 'tells us', but not engaged with why and how and by who or what it came about in greater detail. The 'Note to the reader' starts with stating it was 'made by five of us', but also mentions 'initially with a team of five'.²³³ 'Team' implies a parity among members, similar to the egalitarian list on the credits page, but 'initially' indicates that its composition changed in the process.²³⁴ Although we know that the team comprised three others in addition to Berger and Dibb – Sven Blomberg, Chris Fox and Richard Hollis – the nature of their contributions is not specified in the book. From Hollis we also know of additional contributors, one of whom was Posy Simmonds, Hollis's future wife. Like Berger's wife Anya, who contributed to one of the television programmes and likely acquainted Berger with Benjamin's work, Posy is not mentioned in the book.²³⁵ In the context of a work in which what we see and know is called into question, and the gendered gaze is part of what is being questioned, the lack of reference to these contributions seems strangely at odds from our contemporary perspective.²³⁶



Figure 2.17: one of Sven Blomberg's montages during the process of making the book²³⁷

²³³ Richard Hollis website, available at <http://www.richardhollis.com/book-design/ways-of-seeing> (accessed 15 September 2016).

²³⁴ Although *A Seventh Man* is not about art, there are similarities in how credits are attributed. The title page state 'John Berger, Jean Mohr', with the strapline 'with the collaboration of/ Sven Blomberg'. All names are in the same font size. The following spread states: 'This book was made by/ Sven Blomberg, painter/ Richard Hollis, designer/ Jean Mohr, photographer/ John Berger, writer', different from *Ways of Seeing*, specifying each contributor's role.

²³⁵ See Hollis's website. Simmonds is well-known as a cartoonist.

²³⁶ Anya is named in the credits of the first television programme, as one of the women taking part in the discussion at the end. I raise the issue of gender in relation to the (lack of) acknowledgements, even though it is not a key concern in my overall thesis.

²³⁷ Screenshot from a 2013 talk by Stuart Bailey on Richard Hollis: Hollis had found some 35 mm slides of the time when the 'team of five' was working on *Ways of Seeing*, and Bailey worked with Hollis for a while as his assistant. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRIA-eNfe9Q> (accessed 18 September 2017). Bailey stresses the influence of other collaborations on Hollis, such as Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore's *The Medium is the Massage* (1967).

What about the other three of the team? Chris Fox also contributed to the television series; he is listed in the credits at the end of each episode as ‘research’, and Dibb refers to him as a ‘script consultant’.²³⁸ Sven Blomberg was an artist and friend of Berger’s, who was brought in to work with the images. His contribution was considered to bring something ‘fresh’, but this freshness was not straightforward, because Dibb calls ‘the[se] litte visual essays of various things’ that he composed ‘a confusion’.²³⁹ These rather throwaway comments imply Fox’s and Blomberg’s contributions to the book were limited, at the same time acknowledging that the ‘script’ and the ‘montages’ did play a role and had effect on the final publication. Dibb’s rather dismissive mentions also indicate that the ‘team of five’ possibly had different understandings of whose contribution mattered, Dibb personally valuing some more than others, underlined by his remark that ‘[a]fter the two weeks [...] it was Richard who had the hard job of [...] making it fit as a book’,²⁴⁰ attributing to Hollis a much greater hand than to Blomberg and Fox, destabilising the idea of equality within the ‘team of five’.

Dibb adds nuance when he states that ‘[Berger] often comes up with an idea you think isn’t quite right, but it knocks out *your* original idea. [...] by arguing it through you come to *another* idea which is better than the one either of you first thought of’.²⁴¹ This observation emphasises that no idea is necessarily ‘final’ when formulated, and develops and changes through conversation and collaboration. Calling Berger an ‘un-dogmatic collaborator’, Dibb adds ‘I don’t think we could have got from the text he first wrote to the final thing [the television programme...] without quite a lot of discussion and argument about what would work and what wouldn’t work.’²⁴² ‘Discussion’ and ‘argument’ denote modes of exchange in which other voices and opinions can be heard and weighed up too, drawing on dialogue, and possibly disagreement as a productive force. Dibb’s comments open up to the idea of writing being understood as a process *with* others rather than a solitary act, and by extension authorship as something that is not necessarily singular. We also know that some of the collaborations within the team preceded the book, and even the television programme: Hollis encountered Berger in the mid-1960s when designing the magazine *New Society*, to which Berger was a regular contributor, and shortly before *Ways of Seeing* had designed Berger’s novel *G*.²⁴³ Before filming for *Ways of Seeing* began, Berger instructed Dibb and others involved – including Blomberg and

²³⁸ Kristensen, ‘The Making of’, p. 185.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 193. My italics.

²⁴² *Ibid.* See also Hollis’s website.

²⁴³ Apparently ‘originally [Berger] intended to illustrate [*G*] in the style of surrealist chief André Breton’s novel *Nadja*, which married text and images to form a composite portrait of a Parisian woman.’ See Stuart Bailey, ‘Works in Progress: Form as a Way of Thinking’, PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2014, p. 387. Although *G* never came to fruition as envisaged, conversations about it led to Hollis eventually doing the graphic design for *Ways of Seeing*.

Fox – ‘to read the original essay’ of Benjamin’s text.²⁴⁴ So, even though they had varying roles that were valued differently by individual members, and not all worked on the television programme, there were already established relationships and shared points of reference for this collaborative project, feeding into the book being ‘made by five of us’.

We also know that, alongside Benjamin’s ideas, the first episode of the television programme was partly based on ‘bits and pieces’ from *G.*, the book for which Berger won the 1972 Booker prize.²⁴⁵ Rather confusingly though, Hollis describes the text for *Ways of Seeing* as being ‘preset’, implying an order – the words being laid out before the images²⁴⁶ – which, if the script for the television programmes had been used in its entirety and laid out to the dimensions of the book, makes sense.²⁴⁷ But before work on the book started, Berger had already done some ‘doctoring’ for *The Listener*, the weekly magazine that summarised scripts of BBC broadcasts.²⁴⁸ One could argue that *G.* and the publications in the BBC’s *The Listener* are part of the wider network involved in the evolution of the book. Hollis contradicts himself somewhat when he calls Berger ‘the rare sort of writer who would be happy to cut or extend his text to fit a paragraph or page’, highlighting that he was not precious, relativising the text being final when describing it as ‘preset’.²⁴⁹ A note accompanying the second draft of the script for the television programme sent to Dibb demonstrates Berger’s flexibility; it states ‘[c]riticise, improvise, change, improve, cancel out as much as you want or see how to, or we can even begin again. All I would stand by is the essential idea.’²⁵⁰ That ideas could be contested and shift again through discussion, and through interaction with the image montages within the space of the book, as Dibb’s and Hollis’s comments underline, calls the apparent certainty of even that assertion into question.

Considering the influence that the frameworks the ‘team of five’ operated within had on what the book became, the title page lists ‘British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books’ as publishers. On several occasions Hollis indicates that someone at the BBC suggested a book be produced.²⁵¹ Although it wasn’t the first publication on art based on a television programme,²⁵²

²⁴⁴ Referring to the translation of *Illuminations* including this text. See Sinclair, ‘When Looking Became Seeing’.

²⁴⁵ Dibb in Kristensen, ‘The Making of’, p. 182.

²⁴⁶ Hollis in *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁴⁷ See also Susan Pui Sau Lok, ‘Making Ways’, *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 196-204, which uses the script for the television programme and intercuts it with other material.

²⁴⁸ Kristensen, ‘The Making of’, p. 187. *The Listener* was published every Thursday before the following week; broadcast dates *Ways of Seeing* were 8, 15, 22 and 29 January 1972.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ See Michael Dibb, ‘On Documentary: Re-Seeing *Ways of Seeing*’, in *Here is Where We Meet*, edited by Gareth Evans (London: Art Events, 2005) p. 28.

²⁵¹ According to Hollis it was Peter Campbell, ‘who did a lot of the designs and other things for the BBC [who] suggested the book be produced’. See Kristensen, ‘The Making of’, p. 187.

²⁵² Kenneth Clark wrote the script for the *Civilisation* series, which appeared in full in the book published in 1969 by the BBC and John Murray Publishers. The first paperback edition was published in 2005 and is still in print.

what is rather surprising is that the co-publisher was Penguin rather than a dedicated art book publisher.²⁵³ Given the company's focus on accessible books – cheap exactly because of their standardised format – it is tempting to assume that the company greatly steered the form *Ways of Seeing* took, as books were their territory after all. As discussed, the book shows a range of variations and explicitly diverges from a standardised approach; in fact, there is no consistency across the seven chapters. And although the book is a paperback and was published in the Penguin Pelican series (a non-fiction strand),²⁵⁴ Hollis suggests that 'Penguin would never have let us design the book like this'.²⁵⁵ Apparently the approach was so different from how Penguin would have done it that '[w]hen [it] arrived on [Schmoller's] desk, he threw it down the corridor, explaining "I want this nowhere near me"'.²⁵⁶ Despite the book appearing in one of Penguin's series,²⁵⁷ it seems Hollis was given a freedom similar to the one granted to Dibb as director of the television programme referred to earlier.²⁵⁸ So how does this 'liberty' manifest itself, and what does that tell us about the transfer of content from television programme to book, and how we as readers can engage with it?

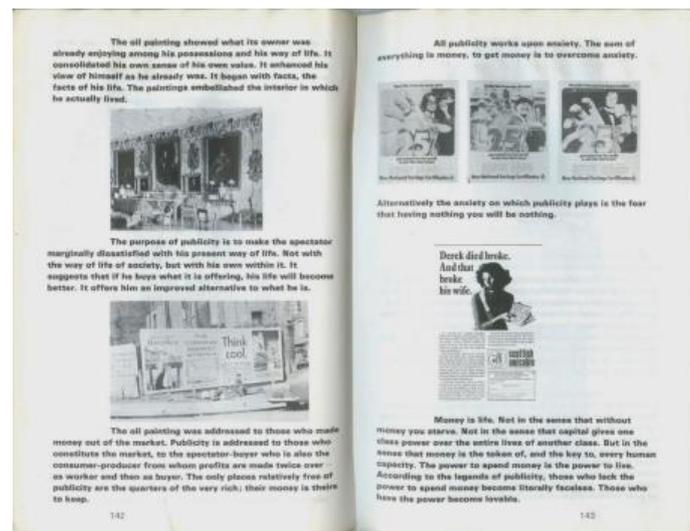


Figure 2.18: spread from chapter 7, showing images aligned along the left margin or indent

²⁵³ The landscape of art book publishing in the UK was at the time dominated by two publishing houses: Thames & Hudson and Phaidon. For a biographical overview of their founders, who had fled central Europe just before World War II, and a comparison of their respective histories (and Adprint's) as they developed in the UK, see Anny Nyburg, *Émigrés: The Transformation of Art Publishing in Britain* (London: Phaidon, 2014).

²⁵⁴ The Pelican series started in 1937, two years after Penguin was founded, with the aim of 'introducing serious non-fiction material to the working layman'. See <https://penguinchecklist.wordpress.com/pelican-books/pelican-main-series/> (accessed 17 March 2017). Although Penguin experimented with different formats in its earlier years, including launching a short-lived artists' monograph series – the paperback, produced as a cheap and therefore more accessible format – was its overarching mode of publishing by the early 1970s.

²⁵⁵ Kristensen, 'The Making of', p. 190.

²⁵⁶ Schmoller was Penguin's production manager, in charge of typography. See Sisman, 'Ways of Seeing'.

²⁵⁷ The catalogue to the Penguin archive, held at the University of Bristol, does not mention *Ways of Seeing*. The holdings on the Pelican series in which the book appeared are limited, and no editorial notes are listed. This could be interpreted as meaning that editorial decisions were indeed made elsewhere, in this case by the 'team of five'.

²⁵⁸ Penguin's then commissioning editor was Nikos Stangos. Several obituaries published in 2004 hail him as the 'midwife' to *Ways of Seeing*, I have not found a reference to his role in its conception. By allowing Hollis to stray from Penguin's design conventions one could argue that Stangos influenced the book's form and look nonetheless.

One way in which Hollis took 'liberty' is his choice of typeface for the main text in the book. The use of serif typefaces had long been the standard convention for text, while the bold sans-serif in *Ways of Seeing* visually emphasises the words alongside and among the images: rather than being modest streams of verbal information, the text now has an unusual presence on the page, including the cover. Throughout, paragraphs are left-justified and unhyphenated, the bold letters forming a distinct straight line on the left and showing an irregular edge on the right. Rather than being clustered in illustration sections, images are inserted where they are referred to, left-aligned with the margin or the indent (Fig. 2.18). The indents in the first line of each paragraph are particularly striking because of their depth – 'as wide as a thumb'.²⁵⁹ The individual size of each image is determined by the typographical layout – i.e. the width of the text, the amount of images on a page and the relative width/height ratio, allowing a general impression of what is depicted, but reducing legibility of details. As a result, the size of the images also bears no discernible relation to the dimensions of the original works reproduced. In fact, the size of the originals seems not to have been a concern at all, because no dimensions are given anywhere in the book – not in captions, nor in the list of illustrations – demonstrating that any sense of a 'faithful' representation of the individual works was not the aim. And although the television programme was broadcast in colour, all images here – apart from the Magritte on the cover – are in black and white, reducing the visibility of details in individual works further.²⁶⁰ All of this raises questions about the rationale for the approach in the translation from the television programme to the book from a design perspective.

The intentional visual prominence of the text in the layout is supported by Hollis's claim that the bold type 'match[es] the visual weight of the image' and the weight of Berger's 'strident tv voice'.²⁶¹ This comment suggests he chose the typeface to capture the character of Berger's spoken narrative in printed text, translating, but also transforming and adapting it to the possibilities specific to the medium of the book. The notion of visual weight, and how that works better with a sans serif than a serif, and in bold rather than regular font, underlines the expressive possibilities of the typographical treatment of text, about which Hollis suggests that '[y]ou can have a voiceover on television [...] you can be looking and listening, and it was trying to get as near to that as possible'.²⁶² What Hollis's desire to mimic the presence of the voice on the television screen in the presence of the written word on the page highlights is his awareness

²⁵⁹ Sisman, 'Ways of Seeing'.

²⁶⁰ Although filmed and broadcast in colour, how many people actually saw it that way is questionable, as colour televisions were not necessarily widely privately owned at the time. Many viewers' experience may have been in that sense similar to that of reading the book, before the book existed.

²⁶¹ Kristensen, 'The Making of', p. 193; see also Bailey, 'Works in Progress', p. 387.

²⁶² Sinclair, 'When Looking Became Seeing'.

of the difference between the two mediums, and that in his design of the book he considered the characteristics and their effect specific to both.²⁶³

How we read texts and images and their interrelationship here is also determined by the choice of paper. The 1972 and 1995 editions are printed on a white and smooth coated stock that allows for some nuances in the black and white images to still come across, despite their relatively small size. The slightly glossy stock, traditionally used to give greater definition to the details in image plates, here also carries the text, and one could argue that, by using the same for both, the difference between them is flattened, an interpretation that seems to be supported by Hollis's desire to give words visual weight equal to that of the images. The 2008 edition, however, is printed on an uncoated off-white stock on which the images lose their details altogether. In addition, because of the book's noticeably smaller page size, both the text's font size and the size of the images are reduced too,²⁶⁴ which diminishes our ability as readers to engage with the details in the reproductions of the images even more.²⁶⁵

Just like the narrative and arguments put forward in *Ways of Seeing* draw upon ideas formulated decades earlier, Hollis's attempt to treat the text as image has precedents too. He refers to film-maker Chris Marker's book *Commentaires* (1961) as a source of inspiration. *Commentaires* comprises five 'commentaries' or scripts – which in the films were effectively spoken essays – written by Marker, the first from 1953, the last from 1961. In the book, stills of each film are placed among or alongside text, where Marker played with their interaction on the page in such a manner that each chapter has a distinct character.²⁶⁶ Some chapters have quite a few smaller images alongside larger text blocks, others have fewer but larger images alongside smaller text blocks, with variations on and alternations of these approaches within single chapters. Hollis took the 'idea that you could have words going on almost at the same time like a voice-over' from Marker.²⁶⁷ For him, 'instead of talking about something, you show the objective

²⁶³ This resonates with how Benjamin is credited in the television programme and the book. The first labels him as 'writer', but in the book he is called a 'critic' and 'philosopher'. In the television programme Benjamin 'outlined' his ideas, in the book they are 'written', suggesting the mediating medium possibly inspired this difference in terminology. In the television programme the narrative is spoken, as viewers we listen while looking; in the book we read what is written, in words and images, but also by turning the page etc.

²⁶⁴ The first two editions measure 8 x 5 inch (20.3 x 12.7 cm), the 2008 reissue 7.1 x 4.2 inch (18.1 x 11.1 cm).

²⁶⁵ Which likely contributed to Hollis's contempt for the 2008 adaptation of his design.

²⁶⁶ Design critic Rick Poynor deems the treatment of the two *Commentaires* books – 1961 and 1967, by Marker himself – 'as innovative for book design as his documentaries are as film essays', calling his approach 'editorial design'. Rick Poynor, 'The Filmic Image: Chris Marker's *Commentaires*', *Design Observer*, 22 March 2014, available at <http://designobserver.com/feature/the-filmic-page-chris-markers-commentaires/38371> (accessed 5 June 2017).

²⁶⁷ Kristensen, 'The Making of', p. 189. Bailey extends the influence from film on Hollis, exemplified by books he designed on Godard's work. See slides related to Stuart Bailey's talk on Hollis at Artists Space, New York, 2013, available at https://issuu.com/artistsspace/docs/hollis_spreads (accessed 2 November 2017). The book in question is Colin MacCabe (ed.) *Godard, Images, Sounds, Politics* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1980).

visual evidence [...] rather than have images by the side or text followed by a page of images.²⁶⁸ For Hollis 'words and images, and the way they interrelate' is what graphic design is about, '[b]ecause one will always change the other – the caption will transform the image, the image encapsulates the caption'.²⁶⁹ Hollis here attributes agency to both image and text and their interrelationship, acknowledging them as active (f)actors in the process of production.

It is because of the cinematic and demonstrative use of images in *Ways of Seeing* that Stuart Bailey situates *Ways of Seeing* as part of a series in Hollis's wider oeuvre.²⁷⁰ Their common characteristic is the positioning of images in sequences of juxtapositions, in some cases also the result of a translation from moving image to the static page.²⁷¹ What these books have in common is that they 'visibly allude to their own production processes and so demonstrate how the thinking behind a piece of work works in tandem with the technology used to realize it',²⁷² which not only resonates strongly with Benjamin's ideas on montage, but also with Drucker's idea of a book performing a theoretical operation. Hollis was particularly familiar with the conventions of graphic design in relation to art, having worked for the Whitechapel Gallery in the 1970s and 1980s, during which time he was also involved in *Ways of Seeing*. Hollis is also a design historian and lecturer, which arguably equip him with extensive knowledge of design traditions and conventions – and an ability to play with, stretch and adapt them, and to transpose mechanisms and tropes from one medium to another, or consider how one trope can be replaced by another in a different medium.

Ways of Seeing is in many ways an extraordinary book that, like the television programme, continues to complicate how we can look at art by raising questions about what lies behind them.²⁷³ *Ways of Seeing* argues that how we see images is never neutral, and that the context in which we encounter them highly influences how we we interpret them. The translation of both visual and textual content from one medium to another through which *Ways of Seeing* itself was

²⁶⁸ Christopher Wilson, 'Reputations: Richard Hollis', *Eye Magazine*, spring 2016, available online at <http://www.eyemagazine.com/feature/article/reputations-richard-hollis> (accessed 16 January 2017). Hollis's idea that images are by definition 'objective' is slightly ironic, given that that is exactly what *Ways of Seeing* challenges.

²⁶⁹ Kristensen, 'The Making of', p. 192. Hollis and Berger continued their collaboration in *A Seventh Man* (1975) about which Bailey says: 'The loose, seemingly improvised layout immediately recalls *Ways of Seeing's* reflexive train of thought, and, like the previous book's proximity to TV [...] mimics documentary film, juxtaposing photographs with poetry, statistics, diagrams and incidental items where appropriate [...] The editing is as vital and present as the content, and the choices in selecting from and combining this compendium of rhetorical devices is always based on avoiding redundancy.' Bailey, talk Artist's Space, 2013. The text also appears in Bailey's PhD, on pp. 381-391.

²⁷⁰ The talk was organised alongside the exhibition on Hollis's work, co-curated by Bailey and Emily King for Libby Sellers Gallery, London (2012), and travelled to the Artists' Space in New York.

²⁷¹ *Ways of Seeing* and Hollis are discussed in Bailey, 'Ways of Working', pp. 387-388.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 256, drawing on Robin Kinross and Richard Hollis, 'Conversation with Richard Hollis on Graphic Design History', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1992, pp. 73-90.

²⁷³ The range of screenings and conferences in recent years, some to celebrate Berger's and the project's renown despite his ageing, others honouring him after his passing in 2017, are testament to its continued resonance.

made manifest demonstrates that the use of the space of the book as a space of display is on the one hand determined by traditions and conventions and technical affordances, but also open to challenge and experimentation. In presenting *Ways of Seeing* as an introductory case study, I suggest that while we may 'know' it as a book 'by' John Berger, the material object contains multiple narratives that are put forward as critical propositions that challenge traditional modes of thinking about art and its mediation. The book destabilises not only its own relation to the television programme and all the art it references, but also raises questions about collaboration and authorship by listing five contributors. Although as a paperback it may seem an inconspicuous material object, it actively engages with the conventions and potential of the book as a sequence of spaces in which text and image do different things, on their own and together, in which the reader is given an active role in its critical exploration. In doing so *Ways of Seeing* arguably outlines a range of key concerns that are central to curatorial discourse and that focus on how things are seen and what framing does to what we see and we think we know. In short, *Ways of Seeing* not only foreshadows the importance of what Visual Culture and Museum Studies would go on to explore, but also pre-empts what Curatorial Studies has started to explore more recently. In the next section I return to ANT to consider how the book can help us look beyond traditional understandings of how we appreciate publications in relation to art.

2.2. Reassembling Publications on Art as Knowledge Events

2.2.1. Actor-Network-Theory and Knowledge

Because my project challenges the foregrounding of the work of only a few individuals in narratives of art and curating, it calls for an approach that questions how these narratives are constructed. In Chapter 1, I outlined that my concern in this thesis is with processes of interaction between people, materials, traditions and other entities as they converge and jointly produce publications on art, utilising examples of which I have first-hand knowledge through my own practice as an editor. Using these examples I aim to elaborate how these interactions can be unpacked and what that means for how we consider agency. To unravel this, I draw on ANT, as developed by Bruno Latour and others.²⁷⁴ Because ANT considers the potential of both human and non-human agency in the construction of knowledge, I see this approach as also relevant for the idea of the 'knowledge event' in 'the curatorial' as outlined by Rogoff.

²⁷⁴ See for an overview of different applications, John Law and John Hassard, *Actor-Network-Theory and After* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999). The essay by Latour in this volume unpicks many of his original ideas as formulated in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), which he reaffirms in *Reassembling the Social* (2005), which can be construed as an ongoing reassembling of ANT itself.

Exploring the construct of knowledge over time, in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1992), Latour unpicks several key events of ‘discovery’, identifying three stages in the development of knowledge construction.²⁷⁵ The first stage established a ‘gap’ between objects and subjects, or between the natural world – the object of research – and people – the researchers.²⁷⁶ The second stage consisted of what he calls the ‘semiotic turn’, which focused on the nature of our human understanding through words, with words being situated in the ‘middle’, mediating between objects and subjects. The third ‘reject[ed] the whole divide between objects, discourse and subjects’.²⁷⁷ In this last phase, how we know things cannot be disentangled from any of the three elements: knowledge emerges through the interaction between subjects, objects and words. In *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour expands on how he thinks knowledge emerges. What is crucial is that he sees ‘the social’ – the gathering of actors and agents in networks – not as something that explains, but as something that can only be understood as ‘a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling’, as discussed in my introductory chapter.²⁷⁸ This movement relies on a careful tracing of lines of connection and influence that converge in and around things and events. Knowledge gained through ANT is not a static ‘ostensive definition’, but is ‘performative’; understanding can only be enacted through association and (re)assembling.²⁷⁹ Latour’s ideas don’t focus on only human intentions and actions, but other entities and phenomena can have agency too: ‘any thing that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor’.²⁸⁰ In this approach, material actors can have effect and immaterial aspects that have no physical manifestation or ‘figuration’ yet can ‘act’ too. In order for the effect of all these different kinds of ‘acting’ to be taken into account, Latour calls for ‘symmetry’ – tracing the lines of connection and effect to and from non-human actors in the same way as between human actors.²⁸¹

Not everything and everyone has equal effect or influence though: Latour makes a distinction between what he calls *intermediaries* and *mediators*, where only the latter ‘transform, translate,

²⁷⁵ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993 [1991]). NB: his narrative focuses on scientific knowledge, but the generic understanding he draws from the sciences can be applied in other fields too, as the adoption of his ideas in the arts and humanities demonstrates.

²⁷⁶ Latour literally uses the word ‘gap’ (p. 55), which can be understood as an ontological distinction, that from his perspective also generates an epistemological problem.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56. Latour admits that he is ‘simplifying considerably’, which probably resulted in the use of words like ‘gap’, but the simplification is useful for my outline here.

²⁷⁸ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 7.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71. The term ‘actant’ is derived from Algirdas Greimas’s narrative theory. An actant is neither a specific narrative event, nor a character per se: in Greimas’s structural semantics it is a fundamental structural unit that carries out patterns and that has a determining effect in the construction of a plot and how a narrative unfolds. See his key work *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).

²⁸¹ As Latour states: ‘as if non-humans themselves had not undergone a transformation as great as those of the social actors.’ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 109.

distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry.²⁸² This raises the question how to identify situations in which mediators, rather than intermediaries, are at work, and leave traces we can pick up and follow. Latour's first suggestion is to find situations in which *innovation* takes place, to identify events in which some form of performative change emerges. *Ways of Seeing* is so productive as an introductory example here, because it proposes and performs a range of changes to conventions in the articulation of both its content and form. In addition, he recommends we consider situations from a *distance* – in time and place – which should help us avoid regressing to foregone, static conclusions, where, again, *Ways of Seeing* provides a perfect example. Applied well, ANT produces accounts in which 'all the actors do something and don't just sit there'.²⁸³ To use ANT effectively, we need to look for situations in which the networked relations of actors and actants produce transformation, distortion and modification, and as a result things no longer are as they were before. As I have demonstrated, *Ways of Seeing* is not just a book 'by' John Berger, but has emerged out of complex configuration of people interacting with each other, with materials, conventions and other forces. What we encounter in and as a book explicitly isn't a static entity, but situates itself as something that is assembled through its reading, making us aware of its and our own agency and that of other actors and agents.

How does the identification of mediators 'doing something' then lead to knowledge? In descriptions of the traces of their actions and reactions, we need to ensure that what we consider an actor's agency is not 'presented simply as matters of fact but always as matters of concern.'²⁸⁴ To apply this to publications on art, they should not be approached as final, definitive matter of fact objects. Instead, they can only be known as a point of convergence in the particular network we trace around it, and as the construct of the actors and agents and concerns 'assembled' in it.²⁸⁵ Which is arguably what *Ways of Seeing* so emphatically and effectively does itself. The notion of 'concern' is what according to Latour safeguards the construction of 'knowledge' in its 'social', performative, dimension. Each account should be specific to that concern – and no account, therefore, can be exactly the same as another – and where the purpose of descriptions is to 'deploy actors as networks of mediations'.²⁸⁶

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

²⁸⁵ As Latour states: 'A thing is, in one sense, an object out there and, in another sense, an issue very much in there, at any rate, a gathering. To use the term [...] now more precisely, the same word thing designates matters of fact and matters of concern.' p. 233, in Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry*, No. 30, winter 2004, pp. 225-248.

²⁸⁶ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 136.

The introduction of the notion of ‘the curatorial’ in curatorial discourse can itself be argued to have agency in my project: approaching a book like *Ways of Seeing* through the lens of ideas of co-creation and collaboration changes how we may perceive it. Although in the previous section I started with what the book as object tells us, ANT suggests that we should ‘attend first to the associations out of which it’s made’ rather than the nature of the object itself.²⁸⁷ Consciously attending to the associations around an object of study, we should be able to assemble, and reassemble, whatever it may be as a flexible, social matter of concern – as opposed to a matter of fact, a stable entity that can only be known in unchanging and singular ways. Which is what I have started to perform in this chapter; tracing lines of connection between human and non-human actors and agents converging in *Ways of Seeing* and considering the critical propositions it offers us as readers.

The nature of matters of concern may vary greatly and cut across traditional disciplines and theoretical notions; what they have in common is that they are the starting point for the tracing of social relations, between humans, between non-humans or between humans and non-humans.²⁸⁸ Seemingly regressing to the ‘semiotic turn’ that Latour labels as only the second stage in the history of the construction of knowledge, John Law summarises ANT as ‘a disparate family of material-semiotic tools, sensibilities and methods of analysis’.²⁸⁹ The material object is in this case something to be ‘decoded’, and can only be seen as part of a network if we look beyond the materiality of the object per se, and consider what all mediators, actors or actants do as we reassemble them. Our task as researchers is to do the tracing, and recount this tracing, where ‘a good account will perform the social [...] through the controversial agency of the author’.²⁹⁰ The network surrounding and embedded in our object of concern emerges in the writing: in the process of tracing, the material object is not a ‘surreptitious presence’, but ‘connects the actors together’ through us researchers writing it into being.²⁹¹

Because of its reliance on accounts of assembling, ANT cannot operate on a purely abstract, theoretical level: it is by definition grounded in real-life examples. How to then construct narratives involves according to Law a range of ‘ingredients’ that give the required depth, nuance and specificity to the accounts we write. These include: *relationality*, where in a network

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁸⁸ Law argues that ‘actor-network theory can also be understood as an empirical version of post-structuralism.’ He ‘has argued that there is little difference between Deleuze’s “agencement” (awkwardly translated as “assemblage” in English) and the term “actor-network” (Law: 2004).’ Law, ‘Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics’, p. 6. The text makes numerous comparisons with work by other thinkers, tracing another network of connections around ANT.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁹⁰ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 138.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

all contributing actors determine each other's performative role and agency.²⁹² What I have outlined with *Ways of Seeing* is that the writing of its text is not something simply done 'by' Berger, but can be considered to have been a process that unfolded because of considerations around the affordances of the book as medium, following the television programme, drawing on the book *G.* and adaptations for *The Listener*, the juxtapositions of and with images, in a specific but at the same time open-ended sequence, in which not only the 'team of five' determined this propositional montage, but also numerous other (f)actors.

In addition, for Law there must be *heterogeneity* of the network – meaning it should comprise human and non-human actors – which *Ways of Seeing* has in abundance. There must be *materiality* – there is 'stuff' as Law calls it – meaning there are multiple manifestations that can include material in a literal and a social sense, which again, *Ways of Seeing* embodies on several levels. And we must take account of *process* and *precariousness*, by which Law means that there is an ongoing chain of interactions that shape the networks, not just a small number of defining actions. Tracing connection with ideas formulated long before *Ways of Seeing*, but also acknowledging it will forever be constructed anew by every individual reader, the network surrounding the book can be argued to be infinite. To complete the list of Law's requirements, those using ANT should take note of *power* as an effect, in how it is shaped in and through the network; and last, but not least, *space* and *scale*, which allow distant actors to be drawn into the account and where small events are not discounted in comparison to seemingly larger ones, all of which *Ways of Seeing* performs in some way too.²⁹³

What is important is that in all of this there is 'no stable prime-mover, social or individual, to construct anything [...] Rather we are dealing with enactment or performance.'²⁹⁴ In Law's version of 'material-semiotics', ANT is both ontological – it explores how reality is enacted – and epistemological – it describes the construction of knowledge.²⁹⁵ His expansion into this list of social concerns is not to say that these elements should be approached as part of a tick box exercise: a 'proper' account should reflect all these aspects. My description of *Ways of Seeing* reflects many of them, laying the foundations for my approach in subsequent chapters, but also bringing out key concerns that allow my matters of concern, publications on art, to be connected to curatorial practice and discourse. In the final section of this chapter, I outline this link and the questions to be further explored.

²⁹² Law uses the phrase 'semiotic relationality'; because an ANT approach involves processes of decoding on all levels, 'semiotic' seems possibly superfluous here.

²⁹³ Law, 'Actor Network Theory and Material Semiotics', p. 7.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

2.2.2. *Ways of Seeing* as 'Knowledge Event'

When *Ways of Seeing* was published in 1972, the book was explicitly positioned as deviating from dominant narratives in traditional art history. In its resistance and search for alternatives, it relied on collaboration and co-production – between those listed in the book, but also other, human as well as non-human entities. With its seven chapters that 'can be read in any order', *Ways of Seeing* is put forward as a set of propositional montages, even more so because readers are drawn into the process of construction and de- and re-construction of the narrative, literally given the space to continue to do so. Although there is a suggested order through the sequence of the seven chapters in the bound book, we are openly invited to disregard it and devise our own. Recent definitions of 'the curatorial' do not disavow authorial initiative, but do foreground processes of collaboration and co-production and question conventional ways of doing things in order to come to different understandings of who and what matters. If a reader does take up the liberty offered in *Ways of Seeing*, they can generate new juxtapositions, which although not fixed, are always influenced by the sequence they individually choose and how they engage – whether starting by looking, or by reading, as demonstrated by the narrative outlined in the book. Instead of presenting itself as a fixed object, the book invites its readers to see it as a beginning, similar to how Huberman proposes an exhibition can be considered a starting point for a critical exploration rather than an end point.²⁹⁶

In her conversation with Rogoff, Beatrice von Bismarck suggests that 'the curatorial' 'creates differences, deviances, and frictions with existing conditions', and argues that 'the rules [...] are constantly defined and redefined by those participating in it'.²⁹⁷ Having traced *Ways of Seeing's* development as one coming out of a 'temporary collaborative constellation' of people as well as processes and material and immaterial aspects, instead of situating it as a book by John Berger, it can be understood as much more. Not only can we see it as a re-articulation of a narrative first constructed in another medium that in its transfer makes full use of its medium-specific characteristics, of the book as form, it can also be perceived as a matter of concern that generates an 'event of knowledge' *avant la lettre*, precisely because it starts a process of challenging and redefining a whole range of assumed rules and traditions. In this case we, as readers, are made fully complicit, but beyond 'us' so much else matters too. All of this situates *Ways of Seeing* as an ever-mutable object, which is reassembled again by each new reader.

The interactions that surround the book extend beyond people, and include shared and individual sources of inspiration and of traditions – of the layout of text (or their 'deviances'), of

²⁹⁶ Huberman, 'Take Care'.

²⁹⁷ Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Curating/Curatorial', p. 37.

text in combination with images (in all their variations) – as well as events that preceded the book and the context in which it was commissioned. The experiments conducted within *Ways of Seeing* open up to complex questions of presentation and representation, and agency and value in relation to the material, spatial and narrative affordances of the medium and space of the page and the book. It suggests we take it on as much more than a static object, and engage with centuries of traditions and conventions that have shaped its specific use in relation to art.

Starting with *Ways of Seeing* as an introductory case study, I have traced a complex network of actors and agents that converge within it, and that as a book troubles expectations of form, content and production, all of which are also central to the assumed function of publications in relation to artistic and curatorial practices. In the next chapters I continue this approach, deploying a series of examples I was involved in myself. First I look at publications as spaces of display in relation to contemporary artistic and curatorial practice, drawing on historical lineages of the catalogue as a dominant type of publication in the field of curating. I consider the temporal and hierarchical relationship between artwork, exhibition and publication that has spawned traditions and conventions and thus raised expectations about their role and function. In the following chapter I build on publications' medium-specific affordances and explore what can be carried over from work and/or curatorial projects into publications and what that does to our perception of 'originals' and their mediation. In the subsequent chapter I look more closely at collaboration and authorship, which, as *Ways of Seeing* has clearly demonstrated, are often approached as equally simplistic, human-centric notions that deny more complex understandings of the processes and interactions involved. All of these explorations continue to be situated in relation to ideas of 'the curatorial' and eventually notions of value.

Chapter 3: Publications as Spaces of Display

Since we are in a book, we are also feeling the paper and [...] the dusty texture of the ink.

—Patrizia di Bello²⁹⁸

... the speech produced in (and by) its pages may provide one model for the stories that get told...

—Leah Price²⁹⁹

3.1. Space and Curatorial Discourse

Before considering contemporary use of the space of publications in relation to art and curatorial projects, I outline how space has featured in curatorial discourse. Although it is tempting to consider space in mainly physical or material terms, curatorial projects and publications are both contexts in which much immaterial work is being done in the convergence of a variety of actors and agents, as ideas of ‘the curatorial’ underline. It is therefore not surprising that in a large section of the literature that my exploration draws on there is a notable tension between attention to spatial concerns and investment in the conceptual work that unfolds. I see this tension not only as an intersection of space, practice and discourse, in which my exploration of publications on art as a locus of curatorial work is situated, but also a point from which questions of who or what has agency and value arise.

With the shift in attention from the museum and its collection to the exhibition as medium in the late 1980s and early 1990s, outlined in Chapter 1, the exhibition became a focal point that led to the emergence of a specific strand in the literature on curating. Much of this literature pays attention to the configurations of artworks and the narratives that these arrangements helped construct. This attention also manifested itself in the increased use of installation shots as material for study and analysis, becoming a visual cornerstone in the emerging field of ‘exhibition histories’ that traces the development of contemporary exhibitions as form. This shift is neatly demonstrated by Bruce Altshuler’s books that were foundational for this particular strand of literature, attempting to comprehensively outline the development of the

²⁹⁸ Di Bello, ‘Sculpture, Photograph, Book’.

²⁹⁹ Leah Price, ‘From The History of a Book to a “History of the Book”’, *Representations*, No. 108, Fall 2009, pp. 120-138, doi:10.1525/rep.2009.108.1.120.

medium of the exhibition over time, and in doing so providing a bridge between art history, which traditionally stays close to the artwork, and curating, which focuses on its exhibition.³⁰⁰

Whereas illustrations in Altshuler's *The Avant-garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (1994)³⁰¹ comprise a mix of reproductions of individual artworks and the occasional photograph of works in their exhibited state,³⁰² images of the display of work in exhibitions are more prominent in *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History 1863-1959* (2008).³⁰³ In addition to installation shots of the examples discussed – showing the specific position of works on walls and floors, on pedestals or in vitrines, providing an insight in the use of the mechanics of display over time – we also find reproductions of floor plans, providing visual and textual evidence of the narrative order in which visitors may have encountered the artworks and their interconnections, as well as catalogue pages, giving us an impression of how the exhibition was expanded on and mediated via associated publications. The sequel, titled *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962-2002* (2013),³⁰⁴ which engages with the period in which contemporary curatorial practice emerged, continues this shift.³⁰⁵ Here the visuals include multiple images that show audience members responding to spatial arrangements in museums and galleries, reflecting the increased attention on the exhibition as an environment of interaction and exchange, rather than as static presentation. These examples have contributed to the historicisation of exhibitions as the primary form for curatorial practice, documentation of exhibitionary projects becoming 'exhibits' in critical reflections in publications.

The growing attention given to art's spatial display that emerged in the 1990s is underlined by Mary-Anne Staniszewski's significant study, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (1998).³⁰⁶ In contrast to Altshuler's selection of international – mainly Western – exhibitions across time, Staniszewski looked at the spatial

³⁰⁰ See Teresa Gleadowe, 'Q&A: Curating Contemporary Art, a Profession?', *The Shadowfiles* # 3, pp. 28-34; and Tang, 'On the Case of Curatorial History'.

³⁰¹ *The Avant-garde in Exhibition* starts with the Salon d'Automne in Paris in 1905 and ends with description of three shows in the 1960s, including *January 5-31* and 'When Attitudes Become Form'.

³⁰² See for an exploration of the difference between the artwork and 'the artwork in exhibition', Paul O'Neill, 'Epilogue: Exhibitions as Curatorial Readymade Forms of Escape', in *Curating after the Global*, pp. 497-512.

³⁰³ In *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History 1863-1959*, Altshuler discusses a century of exhibitions that starts earlier than the prequel, with the book having larger dimensions and significantly more illustrations.

³⁰⁴ *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History, 1962-2002* is as hefty a volume as the previous: although covering a shorter period, the range of exhibitions discussed is just as extensive in terms of space allocated to each.

³⁰⁵ For the increase of the use of installation shots for exhibition histories, see Catalina Imizcoz, 'The Publication as Evocation: Exhibition Histories' Printed Matter', in *Revista de História da Arte*, No. 14, 2019, pp. 79-91.

³⁰⁶ In a 2017 interview, Staniszewski comments on the acceleration of interest for the exhibition as medium and the impact on discourse: 'Although the book came out at the end of 1997-beginning of 1998, the text had been finished at the end of 1994, and the publications on exhibitions and display of the mid-1990s were not in print when I had been doing my research. As the book was being produced, I added citations for many of these texts in the notes.' Interview with Paco Barragán, in the series 'Dialogues for a new millennium', *Artpulse Magazine*, available at <http://artpulsemagazine.com/category/dialogues-for-a-new-millennium> (accessed 24 September 2019).

installation of art and the underlying rationales and ideologies over a long period in one specific museum. Summarising the main premise of her endeavour, she argues that ‘in terms of most museum displays [...] the original function and meaning of the works are subsumed by the aestheticizing and transformational “power” of the art museum. Or, you might say, by “the power of display”.’³⁰⁷ Although not directly referring to ‘agency’, ‘effect’ or ‘affect’, Staniszewski’s comment indicates that how art is shown is by no means just about putting objects in a given space. On the contrary, Altshuler and Staniszewski make us aware that how space is used for the presentation of artworks has always been about particular placements that construct a narrative. Their explorations underline that the exhibition space ‘is a practised place’, following Michel de Certeau’s distinction, in which artworks in exhibitions are part of an intricate set of (inter)actions, codes and behaviours.³⁰⁸ ‘By analyzing this massive archive of visual history that documented the way art has been seen by the public’, Staniszewski was able to ‘map shifts in art practices and art world institutional conventions.’³⁰⁹ Although her research focused on just one institution, this longitudinal approach allowed her to draw broader conclusions about what over time have become well-established and widespread ‘ways of doing’ in the exhibition space.

In 2016, the Museum of Modern Art released nearly 33,000 installation shots of all exhibitions since opening in 1929 on its website, allowing access to the museum’s exhibition history in intricate visual detail.³¹⁰ The sheer quantity of the images shows on the one hand that small changes in the display of artworks did occur over time, and on the other hand that the institution maintained a highly standardised and manicured approach throughout its existence.³¹¹ The public opening up of this archive also highlights the continuing interest in art’s presentation, and the importance of visual evidence for our knowledge and understanding of the evolution of curatorial practice.³¹² What these images do not capture, however, are the

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Michel de Certeau, *A Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1984 [1980]) p. 117.

³⁰⁹ Staniszewski, Interview with Barragán.

³¹⁰ Randy Kennedy, ‘MoMA Will Make Thousands of Exhibition Images Available Online’, *The New York Times*, 14 September 2016, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/15/arts/design/moma-will-make-thousands-of-exhibition-images-available-online.html> (19 January 2022). The archive, covering 4,000+ exhibitions, is available at <https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/history?=&page=&direction=> (accessed 24 September 2019). The Centre Pompidou in Paris began to digitise its entire collection of exhibition photos in 2010. See Rémi Percollet, ‘Exhibition View – The Primary Source of Exhibition History: The Example of the Catalogue Raisonné of the Centre’s Pompidou’s Exhibitions’, *Revista de História da Arte*, No. 14, 2019, pp. 49-61. The Pompidou situated itself as a different kind of museum, and because it only opened in 1976 its ‘history’ of display is much shorter than MoMA’s.

³¹¹ With the recent (re)opening of the expanded museum, the collection has undergone a significant rehang. See for a critical response, Maura Reilly, ‘MoMA’s Revisionism Is Piecemeal and Problem-Filled’, *ARTnews*, 31 October 2019, at <http://www.artnews.com/2019/10/31/moma-rehang-art-historian-maura-reilly/> (accessed 3 November 2019).

³¹² On gaining access in the past Staniszewski notes: ‘I had to wait close to a year to gain permission to access the museum papers. I resorted to writing the museum director, Richard Oldenburg, and he responded fairly quickly and gave me permission to do this research. Additionally, the museum had a policy of not granting reproduction rights for more than 25 percent of the images of a book that was not a MoMA publication.’ Interview with Barragán.

processes that led to the curatorial projects that viewers encountered.³¹³ The visuals only show us the final result, their overwhelming quantity possibly perpetuating the lack of critical engagement with the interactions they were the result of – between people, objects and spaces, and much else.³¹⁴

In a series of essays published in *Artforum* in 1976, Brian O’Doherty questioned the perceived neutrality of the so-called ‘white cube’. The development of the white-walled, or light-coloured space as the commonly accepted twentieth-century context for the display of modern and contemporary art – pioneered in MoMA and taken up in most museums – had by then ‘reached a point where we see not the art but the space first’.³¹⁵ A decade later, Jean-Marc Poinot echoed this assessment, arguing that ‘[e]ven the most arbitrary guidelines tend, with repetition, to become cumbersome conventions’, suggesting they become seemingly inescapable.³¹⁶ As if making a case in point, O’Doherty’s essays were in 1986 assembled in a book, which in turn became compulsory reading in art, art history and curating courses, inculcating generations of artists and curators. The fact that many went on to adopt these same conventions shows that ‘[t]he white wall’s apparent neutrality [...] stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions.’³¹⁷ O’Doherty himself suggested that the space of display is able to function precisely because of its users’ understanding of the rituals and behavioural codes embedded within it.³¹⁸ One way of becoming part of this community is by mimicking its perceived codes of behaviour where ‘the intimate distances of “appropriate” forms of looking, [...] produce a closeness between those who know how to look in the “correct” way and a distance from those who do not’, as Ben Cranfield puts it.³¹⁹

Artists have of course engaged with where and how their work encounters a public. In the 1960s, conceptual art – the proposition of which was ‘to replace the object of spatial and perceptual experience by linguistic definition alone’, as Benjamin Buchloh summarised – could not but profoundly affect the use of the exhibition space.³²⁰ The disappearance – or the

³¹³ The web archive contains other documents, providing some information on exhibitions beyond the visual.

³¹⁴ For the potential danger of the focus on images, see Madeline Kennedy, ‘Documenting the Marvelous: The Risks and Rewards of Relying on Installation Photographs in the Writing of Exhibition History’, *Stedelijk Studies*, Issue #2, spring, 2015, available at <https://stedelijkstudies.com/issue-2-exhibition-histories/> (accessed 29 January 2021).

³¹⁵ Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica, CA: The Lapis Press, 1986) p. 14.

³¹⁶ Jean-Marc Poinot, ‘Large Exhibitions’, originally published (in French) in 1986, reprinted in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, p. 50.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79. See also <http://www.societyofcontrol.com/whitecube/insidewc.htm> (accessed 13 September 2018).

³¹⁸ Poinot continues in a similar vein: ‘The form becomes an obstacle to the perception of the works when an informed public anticipates the proposition that the consumption of art lies in its enunciation and performance.’

³¹⁹ Ben Cranfield, ‘Mind the Gap’, *Performance Research*, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 119, doi: 10.1080/13528165.2017.1346992.

³²⁰ Buchloh, ‘Conceptual Art 1962-1969’, p. 106. Buchloh attributes the coining of the term ‘concept art’ to Henry Flint in 1962. There are of course artists considered ‘conceptual’ who did not revert to the use of only language.

'dematerialisation' or 'perceptual withdrawal' as Lucy Lippard and Buchloh respectively called it³²¹ – of the material presence of art objects raised not only a conceptual but also a spatial question: how to use the physical exhibition space with less material, or without any objects even? This conundrum led to explorations by both artists and curators. 'Working Drawings and Other Visible Things on Paper Not Necessarily Meant to Be Viewed as Art' (1966) by Mel Bochner, for instance, 'moved to transform both the format and space of exhibitions' according to Buchloh.³²² Comprising '4 identical looseleaf notebooks, each with 100 xerox copies of studio notes, working drawings, and diagrams collected and xeroxed by the artist, displayed on 4 sculpture stands',³²³ it can be construed as conceptual – because of its visual and material 'withdrawal' – and artwork, exhibition and publication combined, with the piles of Xerox copies presented as books on pedestals in a white space. There is some similarity with what Seth Siegelaub went on to explore in *Xerox Book* (1968), in which the individual works, the exhibition and the catalogue were combined, the exhibition space and the space of the publication one and the same, in that case no longer tied to a static three-dimensional space, but transformed into a mobile object, circulating via multiple copies.³²⁴

O'Doherty himself made a contribution to the potential escape from the exhibition space as one of the guest editors of issue 5/6 of *Aspen* journal (1967), nearly a decade before his essays on the white cube. Dedicated to 'Stephen Mellarmé',³²⁵ the double issue consists of a box with a range of materials/elements – classified as 'essays' – including Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' and Susan Sontag's 'The Aesthetics of Silence' – comprising 'fiction', 'music', 'sculpture', 'film', 'interview', 'documents', 'poetry' and 'data' respectively – presented by means of the media of 'book', 'record', 'boards', 'film' and 'print'.³²⁶ This melee of materials and their carriers in effect replaced the exhibition-cum-journal space with another three-dimensional one, a box, with the difference that the various contributions have to be taken out of it, their carriers variably containing or being the work, to be read, viewed or listened to or played with. The box is thus neither a traditional journal, nor a book, exhibition, cinema, or play space even,

³²¹ See Lippard, *Six Years*; and Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969'.

³²² Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969', p. 109. Bochner went on to engage with the exhibition space in a literal way by putting its dimensions – heights, width, etc. – on the walls. NB: Buchloh's essay considers the competitiveness among the artists he discusses in terms of who does what first, focusing on white male, Western artists, ignoring the contributions of female artists at the time. Other sources, and more diverse narratives can of course be traced, but Buchloh's text provides a useful summary for my narrative here.

³²³ Derived from the artist's own website, see <http://melbochner.net/archive/1960s/> (accessed 28 October 2019).

³²⁴ See also Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*.

³²⁵ An obvious nod to Stéphane Mallarmé's explorations on writing and authorship in the book as object and concept. Well-known for his never finished project *The Book* [Le Livre, un instrument spirituel], about the 'ideal' or 'perfect' book, he is an often-cited point of reference in books about book history.

³²⁶ For the contents page of this issue, see <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/contents.html> (accessed 28 October 2019). NB: the physical *Aspen* archive is in the library of Bard College, which also delivers a well-known curating course, but the individual issues are accessible digitally via ubuweb, the digital space to some extent dis/replacing and mediating the magazine as box and the individual works.

while the different modes of mediation of the individual elements shift the responsibility of their 'display' largely to the viewer/reader/listener. What this project, and other works of that time underline is that while the exhibition as medium would become a focus point for curators not long after – and subsequently a key topic in the historicisation of contemporary curatorial practice – artists had also started to wrestle with the demands and machinations of the exhibition space, posing questions through their work and platforms like *Aspen*. This heightened awareness of the exhibition space and its characteristics, and their limitations, emerged around the same time as the realisation of the potential for a different power dynamic between those who traditionally make the artwork – artists – and those who present it – curators.

Lawrence Weiner's contribution to Seth Siegelaub's *January 5-31, 1969*, in which similar to *Xerox Book* the catalogue is the exhibition space that questions the exhibition as form, also draws attention to the dynamics between the individuals who have a stake in what happens within it. Embodying the visual (/material) withdrawal characteristic of conceptual art, the work reads 'With relation to the various manners of use: 1. The artist may construct the piece 2. The piece may be fabricated 3. The piece need not to be built. Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.'³²⁷ The work materialising as text, it is able to 'speak' directly to a viewer/reader, whose engagement – beyond the act of reading – requires first a mental rather than a perceptual/physically experiential one. Weiner – and others – relieved artworks from the need for physical manifestation, and to some extent the intervention from a curator as well as the artist for work to be realised. Commenting on possible tensions between these key actors, Robert Smithson, whose land art works also escaped the frame of the gallery, argued in 1972 that '[c]ultural confinement takes place when a curator imposes his [sic] own limits on an art exhibition rather than asking an artist to set limits.'³²⁸ Meanwhile Daniel Buren observed that '[m]ore and more exhibitions tend no longer to be exhibitions of works of art, but rather to exhibit the exhibition as a work of art', commenting on similar issues, and by extension the dynamics between two main human actors in the exhibition space – the artist, the curator – became an issue of contention.³²⁹

³²⁷ Weiner in Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969', p. 136. The nature of this text can be argued to have precursors in other lineages, such as Fluxus artist Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit: A Book of Instructions and Drawings* (1964), which comprises instructions for audience members to enact. Artists like Flynt and others working under the Fluxus banner, with its focus on 'intermedia' work (a term defined in 1965 by Dick Higgins, artist, artist's book maker and publisher) explored similar approaches. See for an early overview, Harry Ruhé, *Fluxus: The most radical and experimental art movement of the sixties* (Amsterdam: Verlag A, 1979).

³²⁸ Robert Smithson, 'Cultural Confinement' (1972), in *The Collected Writings*, edited by Jack Flam (Berkeley and LA, CA: The University of California Press, 1996) p. 154.

³²⁹ Daniel Buren, 'Exhibition of an exhibition', in *Documenta 5* (Kassel: Documenta GmbH/C. Bertelsman Verlag, 1972).

In her 2005 analysis of the endurance of the white cube – even in biennales that claim to provide an ‘alternative’ to its dominance – Elena Filipovic underlines that it is ‘a particular physical space through which relations between viewers and objects, between one object and others, and between objects, viewers, and their specific exhibition context are staged.’³³⁰ For Filipovic, even more so than O’Doherty, the white cube is about the codes it continues to foster, to which we all contribute, and that determine our actions and responses and therefore also the possible effect of whatever is put on display.³³¹ Simon Sheikh similarly argues that ‘the spatial arrangement over-determines – consumes – the works [...] to the degree that context becomes content.’ For him ‘[t]he task of critical art then becomes one of reflecting and restaging this space’, an approach that builds on what artists in the 1960s and 1970s explored.³³² tranzit also call out the white cube’s ‘normative exhibition convention’, which ‘serv[es] an ideological function of controlling and reproducing hierarchies of values.’³³³ Even though a not insignificant amount of art nowadays is temporary, performative, process-based and more or less ephemeral in nature, spatial framing remains a key concern, but often still looks exactly the same as it did in the presentation of more traditional media. Although ‘the corporeal involvement of individual viewers [i]s part of a general shift towards more relational forms of participation’, as Paul O’Neill claims, the absence of objects arguably draws more attention to the physical contexts, which therefore cannot but have an effect on how we experience what unfolds within them.³³⁴

If we embrace Maria Lind’s call to consider ‘the curatorial’ as ‘a way of thinking in terms of interconnections’ that ‘link[s] objects, images, processes, people, locations and histories, and discourses in physical space’, then the space in which this unfolds no longer has to be, nor can it be solely the exhibition space.³³⁵ As suggested earlier, the emergence of more collaborative and discursive modes of artistic and curatorial practice relies to a greater extent on other environments and modes, including publications, in which interactions between various actors and agents can become visible and accessible and by extension part of the discourse. The discussions during the ‘platforms’ which preceded Documenta 11 in 2002, for instance, are available to wider audiences via publishing: taking place in different continents, the ideas and positions put forward verbally were transformed into written texts in a series of books.³³⁶

³³⁰ Elena Filipovic, ‘The Global White Cube’, in *The Manifesta Decade*, pp. 63-84.

³³¹ See also Tony Bennett, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’, in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, pp. 81-112, in which he builds on Michel Foucault’s systemic notions of power and discourse.

³³² Simon Sheikh, ‘Positively White Cube Revisited’, *e-flux Journal*, # 3, February 2009, available online at <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68545/positively-white-cube-revisited/> (accessed 13 September 2018)

³³³ tranzit.hu, *Curatorial Dictionary*, available at <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/white-cube/> (accessed 13 September 2018).

³³⁴ O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating*, p. 11.

³³⁵ Lind, ‘The Curatorial’.

³³⁶ I reflect on the processes of turning conference presentations into published texts in Gerrie van Noord, ‘Words of Care’, in *Curating after the Global*, pp. 515-523.

Documenta 13 (2012) in turn published 100 'Notebooks' in the lead up to the exhibition; although the titles of the three-part catalogue they are now part of – comprising *The Book of Books*, *Guidebook* and *Logbook* – all allude to the book as form, emphasising their 'bookness', they are still treated as mainly means of mediation of ideas and information surrounding the exhibition. There is little reflection on how these publications are spatial as well as narrative constructs in their own right. In her essay in *The Book of Books*, Chus Martinez describes the content as 'artistic research', suggesting that hierarchical distinctions continue to be made in the appreciation of discursive approaches linked to where they are made public.³³⁷

The proliferation of publications in contexts such as Documenta, and across the breadth of contemporary curatorial practice, raises the question as to how they are positioned in relation to art and its exhibition. In some cases, publications arguably function as an extension, as a supplemental, or alternative space even, especially when publications are the only environment in which work that is discursive, and relies on collaboration and co-creation, finds some kind of durable, accessible materialisation.³³⁸ However, while critical reflection on the exhibition space, and specifically the white cube, has long debunked its supposed 'neutrality' as container, the nature and potential of publications as space has so far been all but ignored, even though these practices depend on them for their own presence and display, (re)presentation and circulation. Buchloh argued that 'materials and procedures [...] are always already inscribed with the conventions of language and thereby within institutional power and ideological and economic investment'.³³⁹ Not only because of artists' withdrawal from perceptual artwork, and the more recent embrace of collaborative and discursive practices, combined with the retreat from working with the exhibition as default form in 'the curatorial', publications arguably are more important than ever. If we consider them as material as well as conceptual spaces, what can their use tell us about curatorial practice and discourse beyond being merely a medium for dissemination? What is able to find form in that space – as ideas, as process, as collaborative thinking and doing? In addition, what are the complex forces that determine what appears on the page and how, and 'the material forms of books, the nonverbal elements [...] the very disposition of space itself, have an expressive function'?³⁴⁰ If we understand circulation as part of their materiality, what does that mean for how we appreciate their affordances? What are in

³³⁷ Chus Martinez, 'How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog – Related Aesthetics and Animated Matter: Toward a Theory of Artistic Research', in *The Book of Books*, pp. 46-47.

³³⁸ Hoffmann and Lind, 'To Show or Not to Show'.

³³⁹ Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969', p. 136.

³⁴⁰ D.F. McKenzie, quoted in Leah Price, 'The Tangible Page', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 24, No. 21, 31 October 2002, p. 39, available at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v24/n21/leah-price/the-tangible-page> (accessed 19 January 2021); original in *Making Meaning: 'Printers of the Mind' and Other Essays by D.F. McKenzie*, edited by Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

the end the implications of who and what performs in publications' space in terms of our understanding of agency and value?

Although the space publications provide may be perceived as less three-dimensional than the exhibition or curatorial space, it is equally surrounded by tacit knowledge and conventions, power dynamics and modes of behaviour that rely on histories and traditions. Not all of these are directly related to art or curating per se. Other disciplines – including the field of Book History as it has emerged in recent decades, exemplified by the quote by D.F. McKenzie at the end of the previous paragraph – explore the particularities of the book as a platform where ideas, work, representation and reflection manifest both verbally and visually and are influenced by the processes of their production and circulation.³⁴¹ As suggested earlier, it is not my intention to make a literal comparison between the exhibition space and publications, rather I want to draw out how publications can be appreciated as complex sites for artistic as well as curatorial practice. If 'the curatorial' is a self-reflexive mode of practising, considering the possibilities and limitations of that space in terms of how it allows its theoretical operations to unfold would seem crucial. To trace how publications on art have historically been entangled with art and its exhibition, in the following section I outline several trajectories of development.

3.2. Publications on Art – Multiple Histories

In this section I trace several genealogies of publications related to art and exhibitions that have origins in different areas of the art world as a system in which various practices come together, and in which issues of ownership, access, control and value are all at play in some way. As becomes clear, material and technological advances have helped shape these trajectories, and have contributed to the formation of traditions and conventions, and also determined what is foregrounded when and how. The development of these different lineages has to some extent happened in parallel, comprising elements also present in contemporary publications on art.

In *The Painful Birth of the Art Book* (1988), Francis Haskell outlines the emergence of what he considers to have been the first 'art books', the title of his essay implying that this was not as straightforward as one might assume.³⁴² His research indicates that their form evolved from

³⁴¹ Which has led to the emergence of anthologies that cover Book History's breadth, such as David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (eds.) *The Book History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002). As Leah Price argues, 'no academic discipline can really be said to have arrived until it receives the final mark of legitimacy: a Routledge Reader'. Leah Price, 'The Tangible Page'.

³⁴² Francis Haskell, *The Painful Birth of the Art Book* (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 1988). Based on the nineteenth Walter Neurath memorial lecture delivered by Haskell in 1987. Haskell draws on Christopher Lloyd, *Arts and its Image* (1975), a catalogue for an exhibition in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, which is indebted to C.H. von

collections of individual prints made after works of art, where the distinction between these collections and what Haskell calls ‘art books’ lies in their combination with verbal descriptions of what is depicted in bound volumes. Haskell situates the initial conception of such books in the middle of the seventeenth century, and their first proper occurrences in the first half of the eighteenth century, specifically in Rome and Paris. He describes how these art books did not develop out of the blue, but emerged from a long-standing flourishing industry of reproductions – on loose sheets of paper – via various printing processes. Of significance in the production of these first art books is that in Haskell’s lineage the representation of artworks via images comes before text, and that these images are based on artworks in the collections of wealthy patrons.³⁴³

Describing the networks of production and circulation of what he identifies as the first art books, Haskell’s narrative resonates with explorations of literary books that trace trajectories of ‘commissioning, [...] composition, manufacture, circulation, and disposal’,³⁴⁴ and that are subjected to other processes when they are ‘[b]ought, sold, exchanged, transported, displayed, defaced, stored, ignored, collected, neglected, dispersed, discarded [...] in a range of transactions and rituals that stretch far beyond the literary or even the linguistic’, as Leah Price observes in the emergence of the field of Book History.³⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Haskell describes how the print workshops that produced the reproductions for the first art books were part of tightly knit networks of power and control over how information about the collections they were based on were commissioned, produced and disseminated. His descriptions also chime with Kate Fowle’s assessment that curating has always been about power and control, as discussed in Chapter 1.³⁴⁶ According to Haskell, it was the publication of the *Recueil Crozat*, (1729-1742) that marked the actual ‘birth’ of the art book,³⁴⁷ which went on to influence the production of other art books.³⁴⁸

Whereas Haskell attributed the birth of the art book to the emergence of the combination of high-quality reproductions of artworks in specific collections with text in bound volumes, the catalogue as an overview of a collection’s ‘holdings’ became common not long after, but

Heineken, *Idee general d’une collection complete d’estampes* (Leipzig and Vienna, 1771), on the development of the first image books.

³⁴³ Haskell is known for his exploration of the contexts in which artworks were commissioned and displayed. His book *Patrons and Painters: Art and Society in Baroque Italy* (1962) has been a staple on many universities’ History of Art reading lists, including mine (University of Amsterdam, 1980s).

³⁴⁴ Price, ‘From The History of a Book to a “History of the Book”’, p. 135

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁴⁶ Fowle, ‘Who Cares?’

³⁴⁷ Haskell, *The Painful Birth*, p. 54. One of the reasons Crozat became a major actor in the birth of the art book was because he installed printing presses in his own house. See Haskell, pp. 20-45. Despite his control, the project proved to be a complete commercial failure. See also Benedict Leca, ‘An Art Book and Its Viewers: The “Recueil Crozat” and the Uses of Reproductive Engraving’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Summer, 2005, pp. 623-649.

³⁴⁸ Books influenced by the *Recueil Crozat* include more well-known examples, such as the *Recueil d’estampes d’apres les plus celebres tableaux de la Galerie Royale de Dresde*, 2 volumes (1753-1759).

developed in slightly different areas of ownership, access, production and circulation. The first catalogue of the Louvre in Paris is one of many examples that appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century.³⁴⁹ Published in 1793, after the Louvre reopened as a French national collection, it has ‘the essential features’ of a catalogue, namely ‘a printed list of objects in the collection, in systematic order [...] including descriptions which facilitate identification of the objects by the public.’³⁵⁰ This definition by Fritz Keers underlines that these catalogues’ role was not only to provide an inventory of what a collection contained, but offer a means for audiences to learn more about the individual artefacts through information in text.

This description captures the shift from what can be considered the more private function of Haskell’s art book – a visual representation of privately owned work, and the display of that ownership through the art book, which was only accessible to other wealthy people – to a more public one via dissemination to a wider audience. What was until then the preserve of a privileged few became a matter of greater access, and catalogues like the Louvre’s provided information, and thus knowledge, about objects in public ownership to members of that public. The catalogue linked to the display at the Louvre foreshadows the shift to the broadening of museum access that would become more widespread in the nineteenth century.³⁵¹ While the scope of that access in such catalogues by no means stretches to contemporary possibilities – with fully fledged archival websites and social media at our fingertips wherever we are – the difference between these early collection catalogues and Haskell’s art books is that they were spaces in which artworks were initially (re)presented verbally, and only later also visually.

Contrasting with the presentation of collections of artworks in museums, temporary exhibitions of new work by living artists happened in institutions of their professional development, in which the submission of an artist’s latest achievements to their peers provided them with a framework for acknowledgement, belonging and status – or derision. In France, the exhibition of works submitted to these professional networks took place in salons, organised from the late seventeenth century onwards, accompanied by so-called *livrets* (small booklets) that listed the names of the participating artists and the titles of their works shown in each occurrence.³⁵² The content of these exhibition *livrets* consisted of factual verbal information on works shown, and compared to early museum catalogues such as the Louvre’s, the descriptions in these *livrets* are

³⁴⁹ For an overview see Fritz Keers, ‘Preliminaries for a bibliography of museum collection catalogues: Some Historical Observations on a Hitherto Neglected Aspect of Museum History’, *Art Libraries Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1997, pp. 26-34. For the digitised 1793 Louvre catalogue, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10523757j/f112.item> (accessed 8 February 2021).

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The catalogue was produced after the works were installed, and represents the order of display.

³⁵¹ See, for example, Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum* (London: Routledge, 1995).

³⁵² The Musée d’Orsay in Paris has developed a database of the *livrets*, and all salons in France (1673-1914), which can be searched on year, kind, artist, title of work, etc. See <http://salons.musee-orsay.fr/> (accessed 18 April 2018).

even more limited. Because they were meant to circulate among initiated publics – fellow artists and those interested in art in certain echelons of society – that is not surprising: of importance was the artist's presence, their work being 'there', among that of their peers and subjected to processes of valuation and validation and therefore the need for additional information was apparently less pressing. If we take into account the labour- and cost-intensive processes of reproduction and print, their modest scope and focus on words makes even more sense.

In a similar fashion, the Royal Academy in London published catalogues – read listings – of the contents of its summer exhibitions from 1769 onwards,³⁵³ and from 1870 also for its winter shows, historical exhibitions based on work in private collections, the latter in effect comprising characteristics of Haskell's art books, but in text rather than image and meant for a different audience.³⁵⁴ The descriptions in the summer show catalogues vary: in the first of 1769, for example, we find the names of artists and their place of residence, but no titles of artworks. Instead, each work is briefly described, with sometimes specifics of the medium used.³⁵⁵ In other words, the being 'there', and by which means, is also here registered in writing. Like the French salon *livrets*, the Royal Academy catalogues were produced for and circulated among an initiated public – fellow academicians and a specific audience for whom seeing the Royal Academy shows was part of their social habitus.³⁵⁶ Artists rejected for the summer exhibitions of the Royal Academy in turn started to organise their own exhibitions and self-publish catalogues as early as the late eighteenth century.³⁵⁷ What they all have in common is a comprehensive list of the artists who were/the work that was exhibited, via titles or an indication of what the work depicted.³⁵⁸

The emergence of the first illustrated temporary exhibition catalogues – in which text and image came together on the same page – occurred in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and

³⁵³ The Royal Academy in London has digitised all its catalogues related to its summer (from 1769) and winter (from 1870) exhibitions. For the latter they list the lenders, and the names of artists included (all 'deceased'). See <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/search/exhibition-catalogues> (5 April 2019). The Paul Mellon Foundation/British Art Journal have developed an online platform that discusses the summer exhibitions in greater depth with colour images and links to the catalogues. See <https://chronicle250.com/> (accessed 5 April 2019).

³⁵⁴ In the 1870s edition, organised by room, the list of lenders comes tellingly before the lists of artists.

³⁵⁵ The entry in Thomas Gainsborough in 1769, for instance, lists his name followed by 'Bath. / 35 Portrait of a lady, whole length / 36 Ditto of a gentleman. / 37 A large landscape / 38 A boy's head', showing how patchy these descriptions are. See <https://chronicle250.com/1769#catalogue> (accessed 1 April 2019) p. 6.

³⁵⁶ See Gordon Fyfe, *Art, Power and Modernity: English Art Institutions, 1750-1950* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001).

³⁵⁷ On the development of the solo exhibition, see João Ribas, 'On the Solo Show: From Resistance to Repression', in *The Curatorial Conundrum*, pp. 85-94. He mentions Nathaniel Hone, who organised a show in 1794, accompanied by a nine-page catalogue, including excerpts from exchanges about his Academy rejection, and references to previous exhibitions of works, providing another form of validation. The pamphlet is available at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=gri.ark:/13960/t3fz03r7s;view=1up;seq=3> (accessed 2 April 2019).

³⁵⁸ I have limited my references to examples in France and the UK, which are well-documented and fully digitised. Other countries no doubt underwent similar trajectories, but information is less easily accessible and scarcer.

included the catalogues connected to the World Exhibitions, such as the Great Exhibition in London of 1851,³⁵⁹ and the New York Crystal Palace exhibition of 1853.³⁶⁰ For these exhibitions, a range of catalogues was published, which captured literally everything – verbally and/or visually – presented within the exhibitions, aiming to be as encyclopaedic as the exhibitions purported to be. Some editions include image sections – with printed illustrations – that represent the exhibition space in which the precise location of what was put on show within that space is indicated, capturing not only the exhibits but also the particularities of their spatial framing.³⁶¹ In contrast, in the first illustrated French salon catalogues that appeared in roughly the same period, only a few illustrations were added to the listings of artists' names and titles of works.³⁶² In these salon catalogues the emphasis continued to be inverted compared to Haskell's art books, with words still foregrounded and the images of much lower quality than in the eighteenth-century art books, or the nineteenth-century World Exhibition catalogues, underlining their different historical lineage, function and audiences. What all of these different catalogues share though is an indexical quality, through which information on artworks and their exhibition was made accessible, able to circulate beyond the spaces in which they were presented via collated and bound printed matter.

The impact of the development of photography as a medium of representation becomes apparent through the introduction of photographic reproductions. An early example is an edition of the 1851 Great Exhibition jury reports, which contains 154 photographic images.³⁶³ Possible because of technical innovation, their production was initially so labour-intensive and costly that carefully kept records of their distribution offer an insight in who was deemed worthy of possession of such a special edition.³⁶⁴ The use of photography was therefore at first limited to places of display of great significance – such as national museums and World Exhibitions – and special commissions from publishers who – given the costs of production and

³⁵⁹ Catalogues include: Robert Ellis (ed.) and George Wagstaffe Yapp (comp.) *Official Catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851* (London: Spicer brothers, 1851), comprising text only; *Official descriptive and illustrated catalogue of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* (London: Spicer Brothers, 1951), including engravings of objects exhibited; *Plan of the Building of the Great Exhibition* (London, 1851), providing an overview of the sections of the exhibition. See also *The Industry of All Nations 1851. The Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue* (London: George Virtue, 1851) in which reproductions are foregrounded in some sections.

³⁶⁰ See Steven Lubar, 'The New York Crystal Palace Catalogs', *Medium*, 8 April 2017, available online at <https://medium.com/@lubar/the-new-york-crystal-palace-catalogs-b09d1f2bd20e> (accessed 15 April 2018).

³⁶¹ Images that represent the spatial configuration within the exhibition were used in an interactive manner to accompany the 2017 exhibition 'New York Crystal Palace 1853' at Bard Graduate Center Gallery (2017). The digital platform allows the contemporary viewer to virtually 'stroll' through the 1853 exhibition. See <http://crystalpalace.visualizingnyc.org/a-stroll-through/> (accessed 5 April 2018.)

³⁶² The catalogue of the 1879 salon boasts 112 reproductions after original drawings by the artists. See <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k213576p?rk=321890;0> (accessed 15 April 2018).

³⁶³ See Anthony Hamber, *Photography and the 1851 Great Exhibition* (London: V&A, 2018). '1851 saw a massive change in information management: in the creation and dissemination of visually based graphic information [...] photography played a critical role in this quantum leap', from the book's publicity blurb.

³⁶⁴ See Hamber, *Photography and the 1851 Great Exhibition*, Chapter 5 'Reports by the Juries' and Appendix Four and Five, which list where copies are held now and who they were originally presented to.

inclusion, with individual prints tipped into the books – produced them in limited numbers for very select audiences, in a sense combining characteristics of Haskell’s art books and Keers’s notion of catalogue.³⁶⁵ In addition, the potential hazards for both exhibits and buildings due to the chemicals involved in the photographic process at the time caused permissions for photographers to access and work in exhibition spaces to fluctuate, and comprehensive photographic documentation therefore remained initially a rarity.³⁶⁶

The inclusion of reproductions of works of art via print reproduction involved work by other artists – specialist engravers – which, combined with that of typesetters (/compositors), printers and binders led to the types of publications discussed so far. The evolution and development of photography and subsequent inclusion of their work in catalogues changed the configuration of practices involved, while the nature of representation of works of art changed too. As Rémi Percollet argues, ‘[a] photograph of an exhibition view is not a reproduction’, because photographs of work in the exhibition space place them ‘in perspective with each other’, and situate objects in relation to their space of display.³⁶⁷ In France it was Gustave le Gray – an artist, but possibly more known because of his exhibition photography – who mastered the capturing of depth of field, enabling him to take photographic images in perspective, offering ‘information mainly on display practices and the spatial organization of the artworks’, foregrounding the exhibitionary framing over the representation of individual works.³⁶⁸

As photographs became a much quicker and cheaper means for documenting artworks and capturing the spatial display of exhibitions in the course of the twentieth century – the installation shots of MoMA referenced earlier being a perfect example – technological advances in print production eventually allowed photographic reproductions to become a staple in publications on art too. While it had become possible for engravings to be printed at the same time and on the same page as text in the nineteenth century – as the World Exhibitions catalogues demonstrate – it was ‘[t]he development of the half-tone system [... that] permitted photographs to be reproduced photomechanically [...] at the same time and on the same page as

³⁶⁵ See Hamber’s summary of issues faced by Henry Talbot attempting to secure the rights to photograph, print and supply images, available at <https://talbot.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/2017/10/13/photography-the-1851-great-exhibition/> (accessed 19 January 2021).

³⁶⁶ See Dominique De Font-Reaulx and Joelle Bolloch, *The Work of Art and Its Reproduction (Photography at the Musée d’Orsay)* (Paris: Musée d’Orsay 2006).

³⁶⁷ Percollet, ‘Exhibition View’, p. 50.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51. Percollet describes how representation of spatial configuration had been a ‘pictorial genre’ since the sixteenth century. On Le Gray’s career, see Sylvie Abenas (ed.) *Gustave le Gray 1820-1884* (Paris: Bibliothèque de France, 2002), English edition, edited by Gordon Baldwin (Los Angeles, CA: J.P. Getty Museum, 2002).

text, via the same printing method.³⁶⁹ It is due to these developments that the narrative potential within the sequence of spaces of the book came into its own, and as Patrizia di Bello summarises, ‘montage as a new organizing principle by which images could convey a narrative and carry meaning spread rapidly from the avant-garde to the wider field of “modern” design’.³⁷⁰ It is precisely the possibility to convey a narrative that *Ways of Seeing* explored, as discussed in Chapter 2, albeit using photographic reproductions of works rather than installation shots.

The scope of the circulation of information and knowledge through publications only expanded with the rapid increase in the quality of colour printing in the latter half of the twentieth century, when full-colour printed matter became more affordable to produce and thus accessible for larger audiences. With the increase of the range of exhibition spaces and platforms in the 1980s and 1990s, and any self-respecting exhibition venue or curatorial project producing publications, they not only multiplied in quantity but also diversity, with installation shots an indispensable component.³⁷¹ In a 1993 essay, Markus Brüderlin even suggests ‘we sometimes ask ourselves whether documentations are becoming more important than shows’.³⁷² The shift in attention from artistic to curatorial practice, from individual works to their curatorial framing and spatial display, can be argued to be supported by developments in technical (re)production, with printed photographs as source for reproductions making place for large-format slides, and subsequently digital images with ever-higher resolutions and mechanical processes joining digital means of design and print production. Add to that the development of the Internet, websites and the emergence of smart digital platforms with an abundance of programs and apps through which content can be generated – and (co-)created, with Instagram enabling visitors to capture work (and themselves) in exhibitions and at events, using their smartphone cameras, and instantly disseminate – the possibilities of publishing in relation to art and exhibitions are now seemingly endless.

What they all have in common is that, like their historical precursors, they have a clear relational connection with the artwork and/or the exhibition and in that relational trajectory, images and texts perform very specific functions. Similar to how the ubiquity of the evolution of the

³⁶⁹ Di Bello, ‘Introduction’, *The Photobook*. She adds, ‘It also made it easier to have more than one image printed on the same page, for the verso and the recto of two pages to be combined into a “double-page spread” of text and images, or for a photograph to “bleed” across the gutter.’

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16

³⁷¹ Reflecting these developments, see *Mousse* # 51, ‘1985-1995 Exhibition Views’, December 2015–January 2016, which is dedicated to ‘the last ten years before exhibitions went online, and possibly, before the exhibition view became a requisite genre’ as the editors argue in their foreword.

³⁷² Markus Brüderlin, ‘On the Exhibition’, in *Das Bild der Ausstellung/The Image of the Exhibition* (Vienna: Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst, 1993) p. 8.

contemporary exhibition space has generated specific expectations for artist and curators how to occupy it, and for viewers how to look and behave, the trajectories outlined here have helped establish traditions and conventions and thus expectations of what publications on art are supposed to contain and how we are supposed to engage with them. The question this raises is whether these established relational connections between spaces and objects, publications and representations and viewers and readers still serve us when so much artistic and curatorial work challenges traditions, forms and modes.

In the next section I look at a contemporary example, *Black Sun* (2013),³⁷³ and consider how it builds on historical (art) book formats and uses, while also drawing attention to our expectations of publications in relation to art and exhibitions. Precisely because the book was not conceived as a traditional 'afterlife' of an exhibition, but in its conception and development was approached as a medium and space that should function independently, it challenges the traditional sequential connection between art, exhibition and catalogue that largely informed the trajectories outlined above. In doing so, the book to some extent breaks the traditional exhibition/catalogue dyad, inverting the common temporal order and hierarchy among the range of actors and agents that converged and that produced a complex book in which expectations around form and content are built on, challenged and sometimes subverted.

3.3. *Black Sun* – Inversion and Mashup

3.3.1. Traditions and Conventions

The book *Black Sun*³⁷⁴ relates to an exhibition with the same title, curated by London-based artist Shezad Dawood, at The Devi Art Foundation in Delhi (2013), an organisation that aims to 'foster a dialogue from within the Indian Sub-continent'.³⁷⁵ Although there is a connection between exhibition and book – with both carrying the same title and having been commissioned by the same organisation – the latter was conceived to function independently from the outset. Foregrounding the potential of the book because of its inherent mobility ensured the circulation of the range of ideas explored in the project, especially since the exhibition in the end only took

³⁷³ The (co)publisher's website lists: 'Edited by Gerrie van Noord; texts by Shezad Dawood, Megha Ralapati and Tom Trevor. Ridinghouse 2013, in association with Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon and Arnolfini, Bristol.' See <https://www.karstenschubert.com/publications/87-black-sun/> (accessed 4 February 2021).

³⁷⁴ 'Black sun is a term with multiple meanings; it represents the eclipse of the day, but is also a symbol of esoteric or occult significance used in various belief systems. It is linked to the metaphor "dark night of the soul", which is used to describe a phase in a person's spiritual life, marked by a sense of loneliness and desolation, and which can be experienced in particular by those who are marginalised by ethnicity, sexuality and displacement.' *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ The invitation for Dawood to curate the show was extended in 2011 by the Devi Art Foundation, a non-profit private foundation. See <http://www.deviartfoundation.org/> (accessed 13 September 2018).

place once.³⁷⁶ Instead of being approached as a traditional catalogue along the lines of Keers's definition – with lists and images of works, and documentation of their installation, together with factual information, descriptions and possible interpretations – *Black Sun* was developed as a complex site that builds on characteristics of different types of publications across its chapters, sections and inserts, but not based on a direct exhibition/catalogue relation. It is the varied use of the space – or sequence of spaces, to reference Carrón – that situate the book as not only a space of mediation, but also theoretical operations, following Drucker. Engaging with similar concerns as Carrón and Drucker, Steve McCaffery and bp Nichol contended that in artists' use '[t]he page [...] becomes instead a spatially interacting region' where 'we begin to recognize two distinct experiences: 1) The Physical experience of print [...] and ink and the book itself as a physical object. 2) The psychological and psychosemantic experience of operating [...] sign.'³⁷⁷ McCaffery and Nichol came to their statements drawing on literary histories and traditions of concrete poetry – challenging the conventions of the layout of text – but their observations apply to much more than artists' interventions and can also be explored in other types of publications on art, and is therefore relevant to *Black Sun* as a material and conceptual environment too.

My own involvement with *Black Sun* followed two other publications that Dawood and I worked on together – an artist's book and a catalogue for a touring exhibition.³⁷⁸ These earlier collaborations meant that we had an established working relationship, and a shared frame of reference and understanding of the conventions and potential of specific publishing formats and types. *Black Sun's* designers, OK-RM, had also worked with Dawood before.³⁷⁹ Their interest in book design and engagement with books as collectible objects in relation to art, combined with a preference for working closely with others laid the foundations for a collaborative approach among the artist/curator, the designers and myself as editor of the book across conception and production. The conceptualisation of the book happening ahead of the exhibition, and foregrounding collaboration over a more sequential way of working, both contributed to the inversion of the traditional temporal and hierarchical order of catalogues after exhibitions.

³⁷⁶ The dates for Arnolfini (Bristol) are listed in *Black Sun's* colophon, but the exhibition never materialised there.

³⁷⁷ Steve McCaffery and bp Nichol, 'The Book as Machine', in *Rational Geomancy* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1992), reprinted in *A Book of the Book*, edited by Jerome Rothenberg and Steven Clay (New York, NY: Granary Books, 2000) pp. 17-24; and *Publishing Manifestos*, edited by Michalis Pichler (Berlin: Miss Read, 2018) pp. 47-50. Last version used, quotes from p. 47 and p. 49 respectively.

³⁷⁸ These were *Feature Film: Reconstruction* (2008), co-published by Book Works and Wysing Art Centre; and *Piercing Brightness* (2012), accompanying Dawood's touring solo show, published by Modern Art Oxford and several other arts organisations. Both were designed by Åbake and comprise slight subversions too.

³⁷⁹ OK-RM designed *Footnote to a Project* (Dubai: Abraaj Capital Art Prize, 2011) for which Dawood was nominated. OK-RM was founded in 2008 by Oliver Knight and Rory McGrath, and also comprises a publishing imprint 'creating books as collectable in close collaboration with artists, writers, institutions and other cultural protagonists'. They run a 'Design for Exhibition Spaces' course at ISIA Urbino, underlining their interest in art and curating. See <http://www.ok-rm.co.uk/about-the-studio/introduction> (accessed 24 October 2019).

Although many catalogues are produced to be available on the opening day of the exhibition they relate to, and therefore in reality developed alongside their conceptualisation and realisation, in this case the decision to work on the book first, meant it could be approached as a site for open-ended exploration of content and form rather than focusing on concerns of capturing the artworks and exhibition.³⁸⁰ This started with Dawood writing a text about the notion of 'diaspora', the process of writing, editing, rewriting and expanding feeding into his thinking for the exhibition.³⁸¹ The final text explores 'multiple and performed diasporas', which for Dawood can encompass political as well as identity diasporas.³⁸² To broaden the scope of what the notion of diaspora may encompass, Dawood invited Megha Ralapati to contribute. Situated in a different geographical and institutional context, but interested in contemporary art from the Indian subcontinent and its relationship with other geographies, her contribution and interpretation extended the range of possible angles and points of view.³⁸³ Together with other essays added in the course of development of the project – including by co-curator Tom Trevor,³⁸⁴ and Kodwo Eshun, member of The Otolith Group³⁸⁵ – all texts circle around various understandings of 'diaspora' but do so in different ways. Where Dawood explores the notion in relation to India, Ralapati engages in a more historically situated narrative that unfolded in Europe, while Trevor considers how it directly resonates within individual artists' work, and Eshun responds from a critical perspective as both artist and researcher. Together this range of perspectives far exceeds the scope of the show and the perspectives of the artists included (fifteen in the end) as expressed in the works selected.

Following an initial meeting in late 2011, in which the topic and the potential 'feel' of the book were discussed, but when no material had been generated yet, the designers presented a reference PDF (Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). This document contains spreads from a wide range of book types, showing how visual material and texts and other elements coming together in their design generate specific impressions. Examples range from pages with various texts treatments

³⁸⁰ Expanding on the relationship between writing and curating, Ralph Rugoff has commented 'I sometimes think that I have an idea of what an exhibition I am curating is about. But then, often when I sit down to write the catalogue text, I discover that it's actually about something else.' Ralph Rugoff, in conversation with Andrew Hunt, in *Gest: Laboratory of Synthesis #1*, edited by Robert Garnett and Andrew Hunt (London: Book Works, 2008) p. 22.

³⁸¹ Dawood's writing of the essay took 1.5 years of toing and froing (first draft received 16 April 2012). NB: born and based in London, Dawood's mother is Pakistani, his father Indian, and he has an Irish stepmother.

³⁸² Email Dawood to Megha Ralapati, 4 April 2012. He continues: 'What I mean by this is a nuanced idea of both internal political diasporas, and gender or hermaphroditic possibilities'.

³⁸³ Magha Ralapati is residency curator at contemporary arts organisation Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, see <https://www.hydeparkart.org/> (accessed 28 October 2019).

³⁸⁴ Tom Trevor became involved as co-curator when the Arnolfini in Bristol, where he was then director, came on board as partner in January 2013. Dawood, the designers and I had, however, started working on the book in 2011.

³⁸⁵ The Otolith Group were included in the show, see <http://www.otolithgroup.org/> (accessed 24 October 2019).

Eshun is also a writer and lecturer in which contexts he also engages with notions of diaspora. Dawood and I undertook a long conversation with him, which was edited down to a text for the book.

³⁸⁵ Several other authors were on the initial list (proposal June 2011), but their contributions did not materialise.

and lists and diagrams in almanacs, encyclopaedias and texts on alchemy to treatises on cartography, spiritualism and mysticism, from religious books to books on astronomy and astrology, some of which dating back to the fifteenth century, when bound books started to become more widespread following the invention of the printing press.³⁸⁶

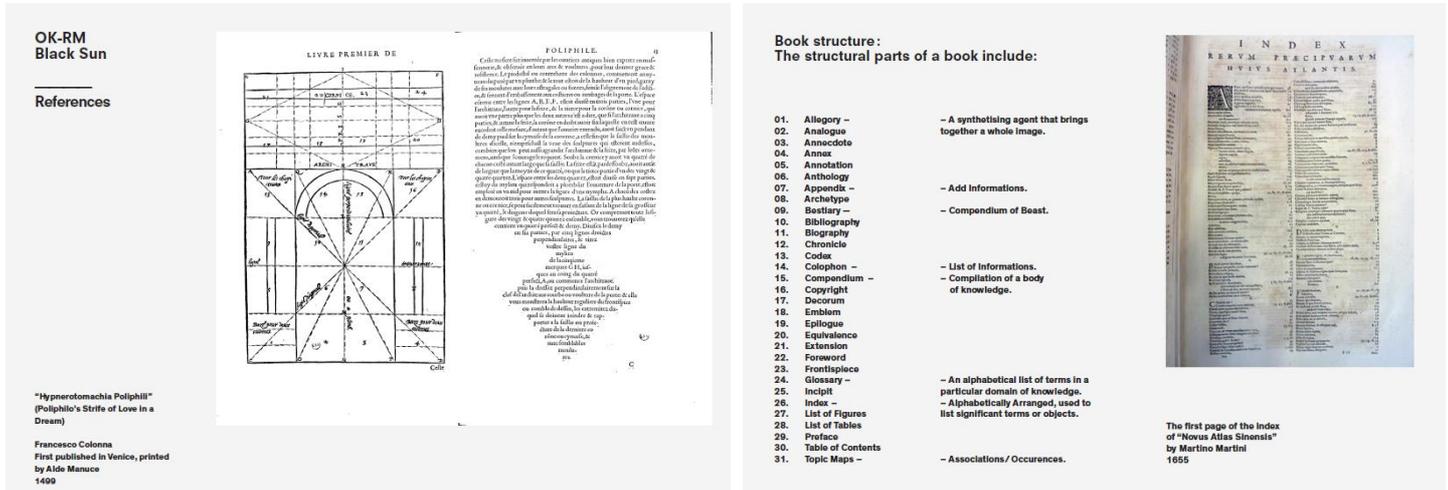


Figure 3.1: opening pages of the design reference PDF compiled by the designers early 2012;
Figure 3.2: closing page reference PDF

The PDF also comprised a list of conceptual aspects and structural elements of the book (Fig. 3.1), which reflects the evolution of the codex, the bound book, bringing concerns around the book as form into discussions about content. Collectively looking at these examples by Dawood, the designers and myself early on, led to more examples of book types, manuscript pages, text treatments, materials and other sources being added to our shared frame of reference over time, which filtered through in decisions on dimensions, the selection of typefaces and other aspects – such as the inclusion of notes and their position on the page, the varied uses of images, and the interconnections between images and texts in ways that bears some resemblance to those explored in *Ways of Seeing*.³⁸⁷ In short, producing *Black Sun* was a durational self-reflexive process in which traditions, conventions and materials arguably became active contributors.

This gathering of material and formal references helped open up ideas for potential structures of the narratives to be written, resulting in texts with multiple strands, eventually being laid out in a variety of ways, each alluding to different historical types of publications and design traditions. The selection of paper stocks, binding, de- and embossing and foil blocking, as well as material for the cover were also all discussed, some having direct links to India. The designers

³⁸⁶ Commonly attributed to Johannes Guttenberg, many of the techniques used in his printing business were already in use. See, for a very brief overview, Amaranth Borsuk, *The Book* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018) pp. 62-74.

³⁸⁷ About graphic design, Drucker comments: ‘The basic functions/roles of graphical expression remain: presentation, representation, navigation, orientation, reference, association.’ Johanna Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing* (Banff: Banff Art Centre, 2013) p. 29.

even went on a research trip there, visiting local printers and binders to consider how their traditions and conventions could feed into the book's production.³⁸⁸ The Gill Sans typeface chosen for the front cover (Fig. 3.3) and for two of the essays, for instance, was developed by Eric Gill, who had a great interest in Indian art,³⁸⁹ and other materials and choices of form relate to book history, the idea of black sun and the notion of diaspora in more tangential ways.

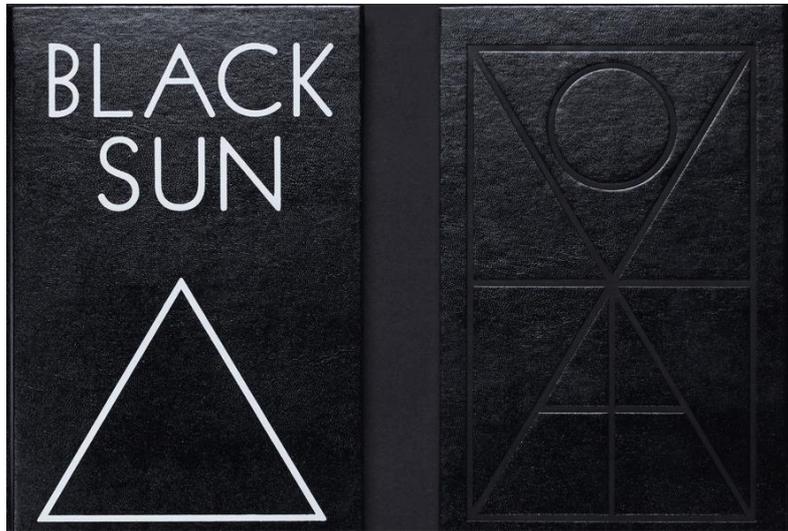


Figure 3.3: front and back cover of *Black Sun*

Each text was in the end given its own treatment in the combination of typeface, text and image grids, and paper stocks shift in tandem with changes in content and layout. These different treatments tell us something, precisely because '[p]age decorum tends to follow established rules. The rules of sequence and proximity relations are so deeply internalized that the compositional act follows their advice without coercion' as Johanna Drucker observes, which resonates with some of Filipovic's and others' observations on the white cube as dominant exhibition space in which we all behave in certain ways.³⁹⁰ The book closes with two image sections and a series of shorter texts on the fifteen artists included in the exhibition. Each of these shorter texts also has its own character – ranging from conversations, to biographical notes, and from art historical positionings to more poetic musings. Together with the last two image sections, they are the elements that are most directly linked to the exhibition, but positioned in the back could be read as signalling the inverted relationship between the exhibition 'Black Sun' and the publication *Black Sun*.

³⁸⁸ The designers undertook the trip to explore how conventions of design and production in India differed from those to Europe, where most of their book projects are produced. *Black Sun* was eventually printed there.

³⁸⁹ After meeting art historian Ananda Coomaraswamy in 1909, whose scholarship on Indian art inspired him, Eric Gill would join the India Society in 1910. Although this interest by the graphic designer/sculptor only offers a loose connection in the context of *Black Sun*, Gill Sans was chosen as one of the typefaces for this reason.

³⁹⁰ Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing*, p. 7.

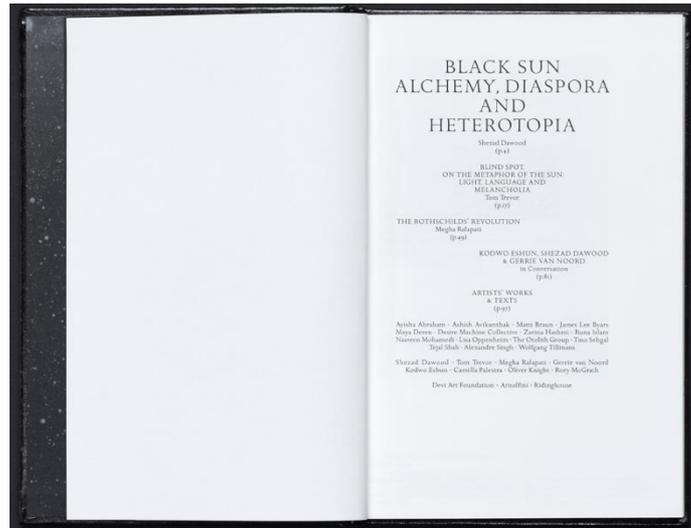


Figure 3.4: contents page of *Black Sun*, with the text triangles and text block position clearly mimicking an example from the reference PDF (see Figure 3.1)

Contrary to *Ways of Seeing*, the front cover of *Black Sun* doesn't give away much: it shows nothing but the title and a triangle, both in white debossed foil blocking on black leatherette that covers the book's casing, all of which emphasises the book as material object. Following the front endpaper that shows a night sky with an obscured sun – speaking to one of the meanings of the title *Black Sun* – the book opens with a title page that functions simultaneously as a contents page (Fig. 3.4).³⁹¹ In contemporary (Western) books, a contents page is often preceded by a half title and/or a full-title page – where the former lists title and author(s) and/or editor(s), and the latter also the publisher(s), city(ies) of publication and year. A title page thus literally situates a book in time and place but also in the networks of its production – of people and organisations and geographies. A contents page on the other hand offers the reader a sequential overview of the content within, providing signposts, offering chapter and/or essay titles, authors' names and page numbers. In *Black Sun*, however, title and contents page are one and the same, drawing attention to our own expectations of what elements a book contains and here, unusually, pointing both inwards and outwards.

The book's full title, which doubles as title of Dawood's essay – 'Black Sun, Alchemy, Diaspora and Heterotopia' sits atop the title/contents page. The text as a whole is positioned horizontally and vertically off-centre, resulting in the bottom margin and right margin seeming unusually large, the text shunted to the top left, making the space of the page appear too big for its

³⁹¹ The title page as a book's 'entry point' developed around 1480. See Borsuk, *The Book*, p. 79. For the specific name and function of each book element, both physical and in layout, see Keith Horton, *The Book: A Cover-to-Cover Exploration of the Most Powerful Object of Our Time* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 2016).

content.³⁹² The title is followed by a several triangular text ‘clusters’ underneath – mimicking the triangle on the cover, but inverted.³⁹³ Upon closer inspection we can identify them as titles of what we presume are essays, followed by authors’ names and page numbers. A list of names at the bottom – the artists eventually included in the exhibition and whose work features in the image sections in the back – is laid out as running text at full column width. Names of three organisations – Devi Art Foundation, Arnolfini and Ridinghouse – also appearing on the book’s spine, form the closing line, situating them as the book’s network of co-publishers.³⁹⁴

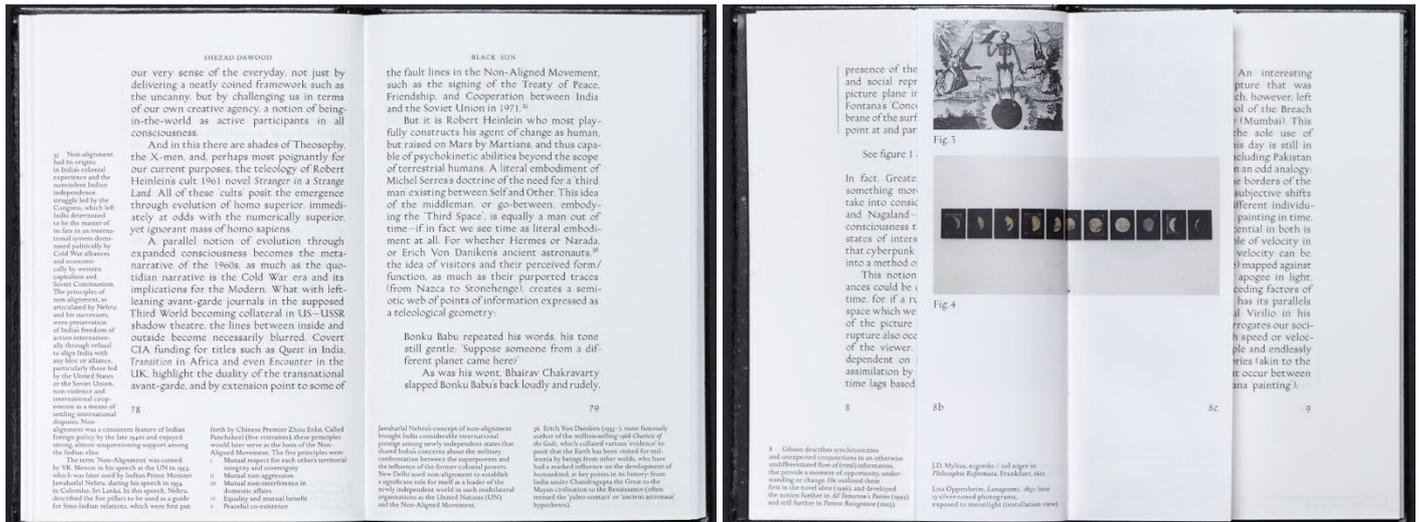


Figure 3.5: pp. 78-79 from Dawood's essay; Figure 3.6: one of the image inserts at pp. 8-9, subpages 8b-c

Dawood's essay starts immediately after the title/contents page. The title hints at the creation of something of value out of low-value elements (alchemy³⁹⁵) and the presence of several sites at once in a real place (heterotopia, borrowing from Michel Foucault³⁹⁶). The text loosely connects ideas of dispersion in relation to the Indian subcontinent, while literally performing a physical scattering across the book; divided into three parts, it enacts a spatial as well as theoretical operation.³⁹⁷ Using a large serif typeface, the main body text sits close to the gutter

³⁹² The position of the text resembles the position of text in mediaeval manuscripts, as outlined by Jan Tschichold, in *The Form of the Book: Essays on the Morality of Good Design* (London: Lund Humphries, 1991 [1975]). NB: Tschichold preceded Scholler at Penguin (1947-1949), for which he developed *The Penguin Composition Rules*.

³⁹³ These also resemble text shapes in examples in the design reference PDF (see Fig. 3.1).

³⁹⁴ Ridinghouse came on board when the book was about to go to print, and helped the book's circulation via proper distribution channels. Doro Globus, then Ridinghouse commissioning editor, reflected on the book in a recent Instagram post, commenting that it 'broke all of the rules'. See <https://www.instagram.com/p/COQdg85FcsG/> (accessed 2 May 2021).

³⁹⁵ See <https://www.etymonline.com/word/alchemy> (accessed 24 September 2019).

³⁹⁶ 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.' Michel Foucault first outlines his notion of 'heterotopia' in a talk in 1967, 'Of Other Spaces, Heterotopias'. First published in French in *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité*, No. 5, 1984, pp. 46-49, translation available at <https://foucault.info/documents/heterotopia/foucault.heterotopia.en/> (accessed 4 October 2019). Foucault first mentions the word in the introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Let Mots et les Choses, 1966).

³⁹⁷ The first section runs until page 16, after which the second essay starts, Dawood's resumes on p. 33, with another break on p. 48, and the third part starting on p. 65.

and much closer to the top edge of the page than the bottom one, replicating the positioning of text on the title/contents page, with equally large margins, but using that same space further on. Copious amounts of footnotes accompany the text, on some pages filling two short columns almost to the bottom edge, on others spilling over into the side margins (see Fig. 3.5). The footnotes contain snippets of factual information in relation to the main narrative, but also additional stories, offering expansive networks of association beyond the essay and the book.³⁹⁸ Page headers³⁹⁹ – ‘Shezad Dawood’ on the left and ‘Black Sun’ on the right – signpost where we are in terms of content,⁴⁰⁰ and numbers, positioned between body text and notes, give us the exact location. Several pages into the essay, a small colour image insert – half the width of the main book block’s pages but with the same height (see Fig 3.6) – interrupts the flow. The page numbers of the insert – such as 8b or 8c – link to references in the text, situating them as a kind of sub-pages, the half width drawing attention to the book’s structural components. In addition to the names of the artists and titles of the work depicted, the image captions list dimensions and materials, common to how images in catalogues are often presented, but only some of them feature in the later image sections, mixing their function as either documentation or illustration.

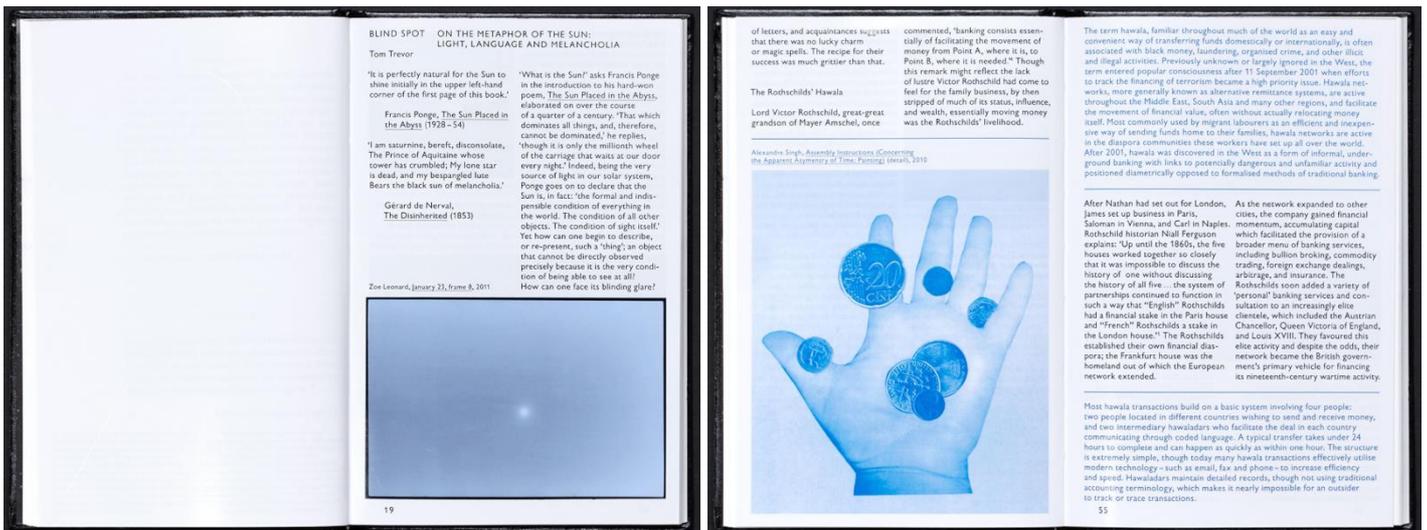


Figure 3.7: pp.18-19, opening Tom Trevor’s essay; Figure 3.8: pp. 54-55 of Megha Ralapati’s essay

After the first segment of Dawood’s essay, another text starts, following what seems a blank dividing page. Containing two blind embossed geometric shapes, it is one of several that all relate to the shape on the back of the book (Fig. 3.3).⁴⁰¹ Nowhere is the shape explained, leaving

³⁹⁸ As referenced earlier, Drucker suggest that ‘Notes [...] pull apart the obvious and apparent unity of any text and demonstrate its porousness, the incompleteness of boundaries, the impossibility of finitude.’ Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing*, p. 25.

³⁹⁹ See Houston, *The Book*, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁰⁰ Drucker argues, ‘A header inflects the text block even though it is in a subsidiary role’, *Diagrammatic Writing*, p. 7.

⁴⁰¹ The shape on the back is loosely based on images in the reference PDF (see Fig. 3.1). NB: Drucker identifies blank pages as ‘A pause. Not empty. Anticipatory. Alert to Possibilities.’ Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing*, p. 10.

the reader to decode it as in some way related to 'Alchemy, Diaspora, Heterotopia'. The second essay, titled 'Blind Spot. On the metaphor of the Sun: light, language and melancholia' by Trevor, is a more traditional curatorial text in that it describes artists and their work in relation to the concept of *Black Sun*. Laid out using a sans serif typeface in two columns, their edges much closer to the page edge than in Dawood's text, some words are underlined – in both body text and captions – using an old-fashioned convention for titles.⁴⁰² Here images of artworks are inserted in the text, printed in duotone, with blue as second colour alongside the text's black, which, in contrast to the image sections in the back and the colour inserts in Dawood's essay speak to how reproductions are built up through multiple runs of different colours of ink.

As we move from page to page and from text to text, the paper stock changes repeatedly: Trevor's text is printed on a smoother, coated paper, while Dawood's is printed on slightly off-white uncoated stock. The image inserts, however, are also printed on the coated version, all of which reflects the convention that coated paper is traditionally better suited to show the finer nuances in reproductions of images.⁴⁰³ Using the same narrow margins and paper as Trevor's text, the third essay by Megha Ralapati, titled 'The Rothschilds' Revolution', follows another blind embossed page. Here, sections with double columns in black are interspersed with single-column fragments in blue, again speaking to the transfer of image and text onto the page via the multi-layered printing process. Reading the fragments sequentially, the different widths and colours accommodate two distinct stories.⁴⁰⁴ Although the text does not refer to any artists or an exhibition, the two strands are interspersed with images, some of which by artists whose work also features in the back of the book. Depending on which of the two narrative strands they are situated in, they are either blue or black, rather than duotone like in Trevor's essay. The latter has no notes, but Ralapati's has end- rather than footnotes, which are spatially disconnected from the main body text. All these slightly different treatments underline the range of aspects that contribute to the spatial, material and conceptual uses of the book as carrier of content and as medium of display in which a raft of traditions and conventions are at work. They not only draw attention to the book as a physical and material construct, but also to how their characteristics can be mobilised in relation to the nature/content of each individual contribution.

⁴⁰² Derived from the time when it wasn't possible to type italic font on a typewriter yet.

⁴⁰³ Advances in paper manufacturing mean that some uncoated stocks now perform as well for image reproduction as only coated stock did in the past.

⁴⁰⁴ Drucker comments that 'Two monologues written and put next to each other are not a dialogue, no matter how cleverly they are written, even though they may be in dialogue by virtue of their proximity.' Drucker, *Diagrammatic Writing*, p. 25. Ralapati's two strands are not literally in dialogue, but their juxtaposition does impact our reading.

Without running heads in Trevor's and Ralapati's essays, it is as if we should get lost in the verbal and visual information that fill their pages to the edges, although we do have page numbers to orientate ourselves. Where Trevor's essay talks about artworks in relation to the topic of *Black Sun*, Ralapati's double narrative combines the description of Hawala – an international money transfer system that relies on exchange and trust – and a biography of the Rothschild family, the combination of the two implying how we interpret each is influenced by the other, resonating with Walter Benjamin's notion of montage. Trevor's essay, combined with the image sections and short texts about the artists in the back, do what we expect from contemporary exhibition catalogues: they situate the selection of artists in relation to the project's overarching topics and give us information on the work and wider practice of each artist. Here, there are obviously no images of the exhibition, instead we have to make do with photographic reproductions of individual works.⁴⁰⁵ Ralapati's contribution and its connection to the exhibition and the project is more elusive, performing on the one hand a diasporic move with two diverging narratives, on the other hand describing two diasporic journeys. In the end, the most direct reference to the exhibition is to be found in the colophon in the back – 'published on the occasion of the exhibition' – but explicitly not calling it a catalogue.

Much of the material laid out in *Black Sun* responds in some way to long-standing traditions and expectations around the relationship between exhibition and catalogue. Considering the conventional relational, temporal connections between publications and artworks and their exhibitions via images and text as they evolved over time, because *Black Sun* challenged that connection, the book could engage in a playful use of the structural elements and deployment of conventions we have come to expect. The book arguably performs a kind of institutional critique in which publications on art are exposed as highly conditioned and formalised spaces, not dissimilar to how O'Doherty and Filipovic and others considered the white cube as exhibition space, here enacted in ways that are comparable to the experiments proposed in *Ways of Seeing*. The formal play with the book's constituting elements also bears some similarity to those performed by artists such as Michael Asher, whose work directly responded to exhibitions' environment as framing device.⁴⁰⁶ However, as Andrea Fraser posits, 'Asher demonstrated that the institutionalization of art as art depends not on its location in the

⁴⁰⁵ The only images that show spatial installations are of a Matti Braun work (at Arnolfini in 2012, p. 106), and an exhibition view of an Alexandre Singh show (at The Drawing Center in New York in 2013, p. 72b). All other images show either film/video stills, or two or three-dimensional work in isolation. This making do with reproduction of the work in isolation or from previous installations/exhibitions is of course common practice for many catalogues.

⁴⁰⁶ I am specifically thinking of the exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum of Modern Art in which all temporary walls used for temporary exhibitions were reinstalled. See Andrea Fraser, 'Procedural Matters: the Art of Michael Asher', *Artforum*, Summer 2008, available at <https://www.artforum.com/print/200806/procedural-matters-the-art-of-michael-asher-20388> (accessed 19 March 2021).

physical frame of an institution, but in conceptual or perceptual frames'.⁴⁰⁷ *Black Sun* engages in a similar kind of demonstration of the institutionalisation of the exhibition/catalogue dyad and the use of the space of the book in relation to art – from the approach to the cover, withholding images or other indications of its content, to the title/contents page that conflates what are conventionally specific anchors in a book's construct, and the various treatment of the essays in which text and images are put together in very distinct ways. Many of these elements don't do what we expect them to – through inversion, displacement and/or conflation – precisely because of what we are accustomed to, based on centuries of conventions, traditions and technological advances in reproduction and print production, paired with conceptual explorations of their limits and potentialities.

3.3.2. Presence and Absence, Obscuring and Revealing Actors and Agents



Figure 3.9: pp. 160-161, with 'Tino Sehgal', 'This Success, 2007 or This Failure, 2007' and page numbers

Following my overview of the diverse treatments of texts and images within *Black Sun*, which explicitly play with historical uses of the book as infrastructure in which text and images are combined, I want to focus on the image sections, situated in the back.⁴⁰⁸ Not dissimilar to the three visual essays in *Ways of Seeing*, in *Black Sun* readers are to a large extent left to their own devices to figure out what it is they are looking at, not least because both sections (pp. 99-128 and pp. 145-176) comprise minimal textual information. All the reader gets is a single line at the

⁴⁰⁷ See Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, September 2005, available at <https://www.artforum.com/print/200507/from-the-critique-of-institutions-to-an-institution-of-critique-9407> (accessed 12 March 2021).

⁴⁰⁸ A material 'section' is formed by the folding and cutting of a full printed sheet leading to a series of pages folded into to each other, which can then be assembled with other sections to form the book block.

bottom of each page and a number.⁴⁰⁹ Those that throw us back on ourselves most are two seemingly empty double-page spreads: apart from a name and what we assume are titles and years – ‘Tino Sehgal’ and ‘*This Success, 2007 or This Failure, 2007*’ (see Fig. 3.9), ‘*This Objective of That Object, 2004*’ on the subsequent spread – there is apparently nothing to see here.

The captions refer to something outside the frame of the book that is withheld here – we are not offered any images, either of the work in isolation or in its exhibitionary context, and there is no further description either.⁴¹⁰ What we register all the more are the words and their position, and what frames them. Within the expanse of white paper, the book’s gutter stands out – slightly sunken in the middle of each spread – as well as the black edges of the endpapers and cover that surround them. The book block – the total of folded and cut sections attached to the spine/cover – with pages fanning out on either side of the two spreads, puts the object’s ‘bookness’ literally on display here.⁴¹¹ Although there is no visual representation of what we presume is an artwork, the lack of an image enhances the presence of the book itself. The absence of an image performs a withdrawal from the convention to represent the work by way of a reproduction, but the titles do make something appear: the reference to the idea of the work. In the context of the image sections in *Black Sun* we are made all the more aware of the lack of representation because these pages do not conform to all the other spreads and what we have historically come to expect.

A practical, but very pertinent question is how these four particular pages remained empty, apart from the captions: who and/or what led to this decision? Although the works are not represented visually, there is no mistaking Sehgal’s presence within the framework of the project. It was the artist’s studio that stipulated that no images were to be used, a strategy applied consistently throughout his practice.⁴¹² Sehgal’s artworks are often labelled ‘performative’, and collaborators interpret what he calls ‘constructed situations’, in which the distinction between audience and those who enact these ‘situations’ often blurs.⁴¹³ Although durational, ephemeral and performative work has in recent years been fully embraced in the

⁴⁰⁹ Further details, such as dimensions, collections and image copyright holders, are provided in the image credits pages in the back of the book, mimicking the isolation of the work of art in the white cube, with minimal information often displayed on labels adjacent or in handouts and floorplans.

⁴¹⁰ The list of image credits also offers material specifics of artists’ works; in Sehgal’s case there is simply a repeat of the captions, without any further details. There are obviously no image credits either.

⁴¹¹ It is worth reminding the etymology of the word ‘display’ here, i.e. to ‘unfold, spread out, unfurl’.

⁴¹² The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam organised a year-long retrospective of Sehgal’s work in 2015, during which a different ‘constructed situation’ was staged each month. The museum did not use images in any publicity. The curator’s blog shows one, but of audience members rather than the work enacted. See <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/digdeeper/martijn-van-nieuwenhuyzen> (accessed 3 March 2019).

⁴¹³ Who ‘enacts’ these constructed situations depends on the scale, duration and context. The Stedelijk solicited participation by volunteers to become ‘interpreters’ of the pieces throughout the retrospective. *These Associations*, which was first ‘enacted’ at Tate, has been acquired by the Stedelijk Museum, where it was ‘restaged’ in February 2019. See <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/a-year-at-the-stedelijk-tino-sehgal> (accessed 3 March 2019).

curatorial programmes of even the largest institutions,⁴¹⁴ Sehgal's practice upstages expectations and conventions along the entire spectrum of production and circulation, including how artworks manifest themselves in the exhibition space and their representation in publications, be they material or virtual.⁴¹⁵ To illustrate the extent of this strategy: when a Sehgal work is sold, transfer of ownership happens verbally rather than via written and visual documentation, circumventing conventions of transfer – which rely on signed certificates of authenticity – using purely symbolic, ephemeral means of transmission instead.⁴¹⁶ Where Sehgal challenges conventions surrounding ownership and presentation through replacing texts that usually verify and validate artworks with verbal transfer of information, in publications information is withheld altogether, both visually and textually, and this absence allows for a lot of other work to unfold.



Figure 3.10: pp. 146-147 Runa Islam, *Moroë* (still), 2012 and *This much is uncertain* (stills), 2009-10

The emptiness of pp. 160-163 in *Black Sun* is all the starker because of what precedes and follows: a variety of configurations of reproductions of drawings, sculptures, photographs, and images of performance as well as moving image work (see Fig. 3.10), combined with names, titles and years in text. In other words, the effect of montage that *Ways of Seeing* so neatly demonstrated, following Benjamin, is in full effect here too⁴¹⁷; the lack on Sehgal's pages is

⁴¹⁴ Examples of this embrace are projects such as Performa – the performance biennale launched by RoseLee Goldberg in 2005 – and the fact that museums like MoMA, New York, and Tate Modern, London, among other collecting institutions, now have dedicated spaces and programme strands for the medium.

⁴¹⁵ Although no 'official' images circulate, a lot of visitor documentation, in photographs and video, can be found on platforms like flickr, YouTube, Instagram, etc.

⁴¹⁶ Each work is verbally 'passed on' or 'handed over', in the presence of a legal representative and witnesses. One could argue that those who are entrusted with the description become literally the 'mediators' of the work.

⁴¹⁷ Benjamin's notion of montage resonates in Irit Rogoff's reference to the gap; she derives it from Jacques Derrida's idea of *différance*. See also Ben Cranfield's 'gap' in his text 'Mind the Gap'.

emphasised by the presence of images on all the other ones.⁴¹⁸ Among these surrounding pages, Sehgal's empty spreads are arguably not a failed representation of something that took place elsewhere at another time, but are activated here and now, in the act of reading.⁴¹⁹ It is their demonstrative emptiness that suggest the potential of reading something that is specific to this page and this book, different from the artwork it refers to altogether. Another 'work' is displayed here, then, that derives from a reader looking through the image sections and the captions on these pages, and not necessarily from knowing the work they supposedly relate to. Sehgal's insistence on a lack of representation⁴²⁰ – related to but also different from the 'perceptual withdrawal' in conceptual art – asks a reader to do a lot of mental work here, and in the gap between presentation and representation read beyond what we think they see. The 'twists, turns, and tensions' these empty pages conjure,⁴²¹ can be argued to allow for a 'knowledge event', as Irit Rogoff calls it, to occur, in which different knowledges – based on historically developed conventions of representation of artworks in publications and by extension deeply ingrained expectations of what a publication related to an exhibition, even if not a catalogue, should be or do – come together and create another (set of) knowledge(s).⁴²²

A form on displacement – which does not speak directly to the notion of 'diaspora' – is at play here, and in the representation of Sehgal's work in general: the written title and the empty pages in *Black Sun* activate something that goes beyond common conventions and traditions. Images and what they stand for – as placeholders for the work and/or how they were displayed as Martha Buskirk argues – tend to be taken for granted.⁴²³ All other image pages in *Black Sun* conform to that convention of visual representation and to some extent the image credits do too, offering details on materials and dimensions. While it is rare that all work in a show is visually represented in a publication related to it, here all artists listed on the book's contents page have image pages dedicated to them, as well as a brief text.⁴²⁴ In the one on Sehgal, written by Dawood, he recounts his own experience encountering the artist's work, concluding that '[w]hat Sehgal is doing, then is to [...] lead us back to ourselves, and to a point of thinking and being', which summarises what the empty pages in the book effectively do.⁴²⁵ Where Sehgal's *This Objective of That Object* 'centers on the agency of the visitor in the face of an unorthodox and

⁴¹⁸ In the visual representation of work on all the other pages, what is being 'translated' and how varies from work to work, or practice to practice.

⁴¹⁹ One could classify this as a 'writerly' approach to authoring, as described by Roland Barthes.

⁴²⁰ There is a small image and a description related to *This Objectives of That Object*, on sub-page 72a, in the context of Dawood's essay. The size of the image, in black and white, and the description are not about showing the work, but are about withdrawal.

⁴²¹ Lind, 'The Curatorial'.

⁴²² Rogoff, 'Curating/Curatorial', pp. 22-23.

⁴²³ Martha Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003)..

⁴²⁴ The full list of artists is present on the title-cum-contents page and reflected in the brief text about each artist.

⁴²⁵ Shezad Dawood, 'Tino Sehgal', in *Black Sun*, p. 183.

decidedly oblique invitation from complete strangers to participate [in a work of live art]',⁴²⁶ in *Black Sun* 'This success' or 'This failure' throw the conundrum of a perceived lack directly back at the reader. Depending on who we are – a member of an initiated audience or not – this conundrum can be more, or less confusing; seen as either a successful intervention or subversion, or an absolute failure to deliver. Sehgal's approach to safeguarding the integrity of his work and practice collides here with common expectations of publications and exhibitionary projects, causing a tension, but also a potential for a different, and possibly productive reading of the void presented here.



Figure 3.11: Wolfgang Tillmans, *Eclipse, China (a)* (2009) and *Zuversicht* (2005)

Wolfgang Tillmans's pages show another approach. His are the last of the image sections, comprising two double-page spreads (see Fig. 3.11), and a last, single page, on which contrary to Sehgal's, each shows a discrete image. Two images are identifiable as skies, confirmed by their titles – 'Venus transit, clouds, 2005', and 'Eclipse, China (a), 2009' – and two are seemingly more abstract – 'quiet mind, 2005', and 'Zuversicht, 2005' (confidence). What is recognisable as a piece of paper folded in on itself – 'paper drop (Krishnamurti), 2006' – closes the section. Each spread thus has a recognisable image, underlined by the title, combined with a more abstract one – with the last page highlighting the materiality of the page onto which it is printed, showing an image of a piece of folded paper printed on paper. Although each image has its own dimensions, position on the page and therefore varying white borders within the frame of each page and spread, together they are understood as a carefully laid out sequence. Between them they also play with the difference between presentation and representation, of revealing and obscuring, and therefore the connection between Tillmans's images and *Black Sun* as project is evident,

⁴²⁶ Elizabeth Carpenter, 'BE THE WORK: Intersubjectivity in Tino Sehgal's *This objective of that object*', 2014, available at <http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/be-the-work/> (accessed 13 March 2019).

without the former being illustrations of the latter. Tillmans's 'Venus' and 'eclipse' embody a physical interpretation of 'the eclipse of the day', one of the meanings of black sun. In contrast, the more abstract images can be seen as obscuring their relation to the project's focus – of a sun obscured – taking a more conceptual interpretation, which is underlined by the last page, literally denying us a glimpse of the image the folded paper may hold – withdrawing it from our reading, but in an entirely different way than Sehgal's withdrawal, and with another effect.

Although the space of Tillmans's pages is occupied by reproductions, he also took full control, and did so in a way that exceeded that of the other artists, who simply sent a selection of images for the designers to work with. Completely bypassing the latter's usual prerogative to suggest an order and determine how they sit on the page in relation to text and image grids, Tillmans decided the sequence and position of each on the five pages himself.⁴²⁷ This is not surprising though: when the artist's work started to be exhibited in the mid-1990s, he took a similarly hands-on approach. Rather than relying on curators positioning the work, he put images in often unusual positions, including well above viewers' eye height, and taped or pinned them directly to the wall – playing with the conventions of the presentation of two-dimensional work in the gallery space.⁴²⁸ In a physical space Tillmans seems to behave in a similar way as in a magazine or book – transposing the potential of a double-page spread onto the walls or onto tables, but aware of their difference in terms of how both he and we move within and between them.⁴²⁹ In fact, Tillman's career trajectory itself arguably embodies a kind of inversion to most artists' experience with printed matter in relation to the exhibition of their work: his early work featured in magazines rather than exhibitions, introducing him to the effects of the juxtaposition of images and text on the page. His knowledge of the conventions of the printed page no doubt enabled him to engage in this direct manner with his sequence of pages in *Black Sun*.

The examples of Sehgal's and Tillmans's contributions – exceptions in sequences of image pages – can of course be read through the lens of the history of artists' books and the conflation of exhibition space and publications as explored by people like Siegelau and Carrion, as outlined in Chapter 1. What Sehgal's and Tillmans's pages in the context of *Black Sun* demonstrate is that it is specifically when conventions are elided, amplified, subverted or entirely circumvented that their dominance and power comes sharply into view, not dissimilar to the power of display and

⁴²⁷ He was given the book's page dimensions, and the trim margin, needed to cut the printed sheet into a section.

⁴²⁸ Wolfgang Tillmans's first institutional solo exhibition in London took place at Chisenhale Gallery in 1997. See <https://chisenhale.org.uk/exhibition/wolfgang-tillmans/> (accessed 13 March 2019). Titled 'I didn't inhale', the exhibition used all 'techniques' the artist still uses today, including in his solo exhibition at Tate Modern (2017).

⁴²⁹ The show at Tate also included a series of glass-covered tables onto which images and clippings from a variety of printed media were presented as if they were topical essays; the selection and juxtaposition engaged with the construction of meaning and what we perceive to be the truth and knowledge. See <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/wolfgang-tillmans-2017/studying-truth> (accessed 13 March 2019).

the conventions of the exhibition space that Staniszewski and others outlined. It is precisely the deviations and innovations that highlight the power of ingrained and embodied expectations, inculcated through centuries of development of traditions. Sehgal's and Tillmans's examples also underline that it is not only artists' individual agency, but also (im)material (f)actors such as conventions that influence how publications on art are approached as spatial, material and conceptual constructs. Playing with withdrawal and presence, and taking direct control rather than passing on to others, both examples of artists' image pages here draw attention to the complex convergence of agencies within *Black Sun*.

3.4. Publications on Art as Spaces of Display

In her review of *The Book History Reader* (2002), Leah Price argues that 'it remained for book history to upstage the text (a sequence of "words") with its tangible form (the "page")',⁴³⁰ capturing a tension between content and carrier, which she attributes to the fact that '[o]ne is a tangible object, the other a verbal structure. One exists in space, the other in minds.'⁴³¹ What I have outlined in this chapter is a similar tension in publications on art in the field of curating. The issue Price identifies when the book is analysed as more than a material medium of something that also performs on a conceptual level, is not dissimilar to what writers like Carrion and Drucker argue in relation to the artist's book. And although much curatorial discourse has focused on the exhibition space as a physical environment, a lot of the conceptual work that is supposed to happen when work is made public – by artists, curators and others, including audiences – has only recently started to be challenged more explicitly, especially in ideas of the 'curatorial'.

Many contemporary art and curatorial practices now take a discursive approach rather than manifesting as material object and/or exhibition as form, through which interaction and collaboration with others takes precedence and the work produced is not necessarily material. In relation to such work, publications come specifically into view; not only as carriers of information and means of documentation and mediation, but rather as multifaceted sites of display, exchange, collaboration and potentially knowledge production. After all, often they are the only place where discursive gathering can become manifest in ways that are not about literally representing what was present at a certain moment and place. Price observes that in *Book History* the 'object of study is also its means of transmission [...] It asks how past readers have made meaning [...] and] where the conditions of possibility for our own reading came

⁴³⁰ Price, 'The Tangible Page', p. 36.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*

from'.⁴³² Publications on art that acknowledge and challenge traditions and conventions and explore their conditions of possibility are arguably exactly those that materialise and perform the de-centred and collaborative nature of 'the curatorial'.

Interrogating what happens in interactions between humans and non-humans, Sophia Krzys Acord shows that by focusing on how 'conventional action' is 'physically accomplished in the [...] process', we may come to a different understanding of who and what has agency in the exhibition space and how these different agencies are being valued.⁴³³ Similar to how focusing on the material characteristics of the exhibition space can obscure its ideological foundations and limit our understanding of curatorial practice as also a theoretical undertaking, merely considering the material aspects of publications and their diverse lineages can obscure the potential for theoretical operations performed within these spaces. By exploring how *Black Sun* builds on and pays tribute to a variety of historical book-related forms and uses, I have shown that sometimes subtle, and at other times explicit subversions of temporal orders and tacit conventions make us aware of the power these traditions and their often deeply ingrained ways of doing things hold. Especially when our expectations are confounded, the tension between form and content within the space of the book makes us realise that we are highly conditioned to expect them to behave and function in a certain way, and also the effect that our own adherence to this behaviour has. These are also the instances from which the origins of these conventions and their endurance in publications related to art and its exhibition can start to be unravelled, in ways similar to how O'Doherty and Filipovic have challenged the endurance and effects of the conventions of the white cube. While long-standing 'ways of doing' things in the space of the book keep filtering through in contemporary publications on art, this is closely connected to whose and what work is being valued. The moment these are challenged, inverted or circumvented, a publication can arguably be situated as platform for a kind of institutional critique of its own bookness in which a range of actors and agents have some form of agency, which can be articulated within that space.

In this chapter I have considered how the book as form can be used to destabilise common assumptions about the temporal relationships within the triad of art, exhibition and publication. What this doesn't offer is an insight into how this triad can be understood differently: could or should we see them as separate areas of practice that operate in different spaces, or are they by default always related? How does this relationship become manifest, and what can be carried

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁴³³ Sophia Krzys Acord, 'Beyond the Head: The Practical Work of Curating Contemporary Art, *Qualitative Sociology*, No. 33, 2010, p. 448 and p. 449, doi:10.1007/s11133-010-9164-y.

over between the space and medium of the curated project and the medium of the publication, and who and what contributes to this work? What does that do to our perception of the various media and practices involved? In the next chapter, I consider mediation, an often used term in curatorial discourse, and translation, and look at understandings of source and destination and what happens in the processes of carrying over from one to the other. Because this carrying over involves a range of practitioners working together, in the subsequent chapter I consider understandings of collaboration as they have been explored in relation to art and curatorial practice. This allows me to then look at ideas of authorship as they have been discussed in curatorial discourse and in relation to publications on art. Combined, the two following chapters explore what work is being valued and how, which, in turn, can help us further consider the implications of 'the curatorial' for publications, and vice versa, think through the implications of a different understanding of agency in publications for 'the curatorial'.

Chapter 4: Mediation and Translation in Publications on Art

*Understanding is never more than translating, that is, giving the equivalent
of a text, but in no way its reason.*
—Jacques Rancière⁴³⁴

*Some new thing starts to get made in the frame of againness: something that is of the original, yes,
but that will extend beyond the reach of it, the purview of it*
—Kate Briggs⁴³⁵

4.1. Terms of Difference

In a significant number of texts on contemporary curating, a curator is described as ‘the subject who mediates’.⁴³⁶ Even though understandings of the power dynamics between different actors and agents in the production and presentation of art have shifted significantly in recent decades – through the partial departure from the focus on objects in physical spaces of display towards processes of interaction and co-production in both artists’ work and ‘the curatorial’ – and curatorial discourse no longer focuses on singular modes and temporalities of presentation, it still largely outlines a linear trajectory that positions the artist and their work as the authentic starting point and audiences as the receiving end point, with the curator as channelling mediator in between. In this largely one-directional chain, curators are situated as those providing access to the possible meanings artworks may hold, where meaning is often approached as largely intrinsic rather than contingent on a range of (f)actors.⁴³⁷ This conception of curating as a channelling practice ignores the fact that artists are as conscious as curators are of the art world as a system that functions on the basis of conventions, and that they therefore also produce for and behave in certain ways within its codified spaces. At the same time, this understanding of curating as a mediating practice perpetuates hierarchies that attribute explicit agency to the artist, and positioning curator and audience in more passive or even subservient

⁴³⁴ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991) p. 9. The book became a point of reference in curatorial discourse in the early 2000s.

⁴³⁵ Kate Briggs, *This Little Art* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017) p. 328.

⁴³⁶ Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen, ‘The Middleman: Beginning to talk about Mediation’, in *Curating Subjects*, edited by Paul O’Neill (London: Open Editions, 2007) p. 21. NB: the authors actually challenge the particularities of the understanding of curating as a mediating practice here, and in several other essays.

⁴³⁷ For contemporary art and curatorial work that is process-based, ‘documentation’ often becomes the substitute anchoring point for similar expectations and projections. See Buskirk, *The Contingent Object*.

roles, in which the former's ability to act is situated as contingent on 'making public' or 'providing access to', and in which the latter 'receives' an already fully formulated 'message'.

What publications do to our perception of art and curatorial projects in this process of sending and receiving remains less explored: on the whole, they are considered as carriers of information about art and curatorial projects as apparently finished entities. They tell us about these entities through texts and images in material objects – and now also digital platforms – that are seemingly fixed end products themselves. Writing in the early 1990s, Robert Morgan argued that some of Seth Siegelau's catalogue-as-exhibition projects, which he called 'primary information',⁴³⁸ underlined that 'most exhibition catalogs contained second-hand information or information that was deliberately distanced from the initial intention or proper context of how artists had conceived their works' where '[l]anguage was the structure; while typography, photographs, diagrams and so forth were the media'.⁴³⁹ Using phrases such as 'second-hand', 'initial intention' and 'proper context', Morgan's assessment was based on the then – and arguably still now – prevalent perception of a hierarchical trajectory that by default starts with artists and artworks and ends with audiences and their experience, via curators and modes of display, and that also sets out a temporal order – first comes the work, then its exhibition and interpretation, and then its reception. At the same time, Morgan outlined the connection between the 'media' that make up a catalogue in service of a specific structure that uses a specific 'language' that generates a particular narrative, drawing attention to the construct of meaning in ways that are similar to how meaning in exhibitionary projects is constructed.

For artistic and curatorial practices that rely on discursive, collaborative, performative and durational approaches, however, publications are often the only means of encountering the work for those not 'participating', for the publics that simply weren't able to 'be there', let alone engage over a longer period. In these cases, knowledge of the work, its development and moments of crystallisation and presentation is largely dependent on the existence of publications in some shape or form. These publications are therefore often the sites where ideas, manifestations, presentations and representations and experiences merge, and where information is not necessarily primary, in the way Siegelau considered it in his publication-as-

⁴³⁸ Many of Siegelau's projects from the late 1960s are accessible on the website of the non-profit organisation Primary Information, founded in 2006 to publish artists' books and writing. See <https://primaryinformation.org/pdfs/seth-siegelau-online-archive/> (accessed 12 February 2021).

⁴³⁹ Robert C. Morgan, 'The Exhibition Catalog as a Distancing Apparatus: Current Tendencies in the Promotion of Exhibition Documents', *Leonardo*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1991, p. 343, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1575579> (accessed 18 December 2019).

exhibition projects, and not just secondary⁴⁴⁰ – distanced from the work and its exhibition, as Morgan described – either. In these instances, publications on art can be argued to be more important than ever before – for everyone involved.⁴⁴¹ Writing this while the Covid-19 epidemic has taken hold, many arts organisations – from museums to art fairs, and commercial galleries to art schools – are shifting their physical presentations to online formats: one could argue that digital platforms and the gallery space are merging in a way that is not entirely dissimilar to Siegelau's notion of 'primary information' in the catalogue-as-exhibition space.

Following my outline of various lineages and characteristics of publications as spaces of display in Chapter 3, here I explore what publications on art mediate, and, more importantly, how. To be able to do so requires a more detailed understanding of what is or can be transferred from the artwork and its exhibition – however temporary or ephemeral – into publications, and what the implications of these acts of transfer may be. What, in both conceptual and concrete terms, is actually being transferred – and from what and/or where? – and what as a consequence enables publications to mediate something about the art and/or their exhibition? Which brings me to questions of translation: what is being translated and by whom or what means?

Etymologically speaking, to translate is to 'carry over' something from one place to another. The idea of carrying over in relation to publications suggests we consider what can be transposed – from the artwork and its exhibition to the printed page, and, more recently, to digital platforms. To put it slightly differently: what means or processes of carrying over – and by extension, what kinds of practices – allow publications to fulfil their mediating function? The idea of moving something from one place to another requires we consider the difference between the presentation of art and curatorial projects and the (re)presentation and (re)mediation in publications that relate to it. How can the work and its display be (re)presented through processes of carrying over into a publication, and what does that do to our perception of both 'original(s)' and what was carried over? Do we see the latter as merely derivative – as secondary, as about – or can we accept the result as something that relates, but is distinct and that has its own qualities? And what if there is 'nothing to see here' in the first place – because the work resides in processes, images and text are withheld or simply not available – what may 'carrying over' consist of and what impact does that have on our understanding of the work

⁴⁴⁰ Siegelau argued that these could 'act as primary information for the exhibition as opposed to secondary information *about* art in magazines, catalogues, etc.' In 'On Exhibitions and the World at Large: Seth Siegelau in Conversation with Charles Harrison', *Studio International*, Vol. 178, No. 917, December 1969, pp. 202-203.

⁴⁴¹ However, given the speed at which this has started to happen, the understanding of their conceptual and material differences remains for many of these firmly in place, for now (March 2020). A year later (March/April 2021) nuances are starting to emerge, with the term 'phygital' now circulating, and many engaging with the differences between irl (in real life) and digital mediation, but also acknowledging they can complement each other. See, for instance, The VOV project <https://www.thevov.art/about> (accessed 23 April 2020).

and/or its curatorial framing? And last, but not least, what does that mean for our perception of the different practices that play a part in these processes of carrying over or manifesting in print – or now also on screen, with the added potential to mediate, or ‘display’, sound and moving image? Could publications on art – and the various practices that contribute – be perceived in a way that challenges their linear, temporal and hierarchical position in relation to artworks and their display and how audiences encounter them?

Discussing the adoption of ideas about translation from purely linguistic and literary arenas in broader Cultural Studies, Modesta di Paola observes that ‘a multitude of synonyms, such as “emulating”, “adapting”, “rewriting” and “recreating”’ have started to circulate.⁴⁴² These words all implicitly assume a primary source, but also acknowledge the potential for the result of these acts to be valuable in their own right – and not merely be secondary – and provide food for thought in terms of considering how translating from artworks and exhibitions to publications could be perceived. What activities make all these slightly different understandings of carrying over possible, and how do we value them in relation to the seemingly fixed primacy of the artist in relation to curator and audience? Approaching carrying over as a phenomenon that often involves a transfer from one culture to another, Doris Bachman-Medick warns us that ‘only if [cultural translation] reaches beyond the qualities traditionally ascribed [...] such as equivalence, “faithfulness” to the original, appropriation, or representation’ and ‘include[s] a wider horizon of [...] practices’ can other cultural arenas benefit from borrowing from notions of linguistic translation.⁴⁴³ Bachman-Medick’s words are worth bearing in mind when scrutinising publications on art, certainly when we accept that ‘originals are not simply givens or precursors; they too are created through translation in the first place.’⁴⁴⁴

In what follows, I use a range of terms in relation to a specific publication I was involved in as (co-)editor, *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon*, published in 1999 on the occasion of the launch of Douglas Gordon’s work *Feature Film*.⁴⁴⁵ I have chosen this example not least because the project explicitly acknowledges the difference between the medium of the work and that of the book, while both are part of sequences of translational steps that destabilise ideas of original, source, copy and destination, as well as the hierarchical linearity of artistic creation,

⁴⁴² Modesta di Paola, ‘Translation in Visual Art’, *Interartive*, August 2013, available at <https://interartive.org/2013/08/translation-in-visual-art> (accessed 21 November 2019). Others refer to other terms and other issues. See, for a much more political take, Boris Buden, ‘Translation is impossible: Let’s do it!’, November 2006, available at <https://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/1206/buden/en.html> (accessed 21 November 2019).

⁴⁴³ Doris Bachmann-Medick / Boris Buden, ‘Cultural Studies – a Translational Perspective’, June 2008, available at <http://translate.eipcp.net/transversal/0908/bachmannmedick-buden/en.html> (accessed 16 January 2020).

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ Gerrie van Noord and Jane Rolo (eds.) *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon* (London: Artangel and Book Works, 1999).

mediation and reception. Considering the complexity of *Feature Film* – comprising moving images and sound – allows me to outline how persistent singular notions of artwork and mediation hide the complex contributions involved in translation and mediation in publications, and issues of value attributed to them, also in a temporal sense. Even though these publications are often produced in parallel to curatorial projects taking shape, their perception of being an afterthought following a primary event persists, allowing the latter an ‘afterlife’, to borrow from Walter Benjamin, which is largely considered derivative rather than a creation in its own right.⁴⁴⁶ While long-established conventions perpetuate hierarchical perceptions of artwork, exhibition and publication – and with these, ideas about originality, authenticity and their respective value – they prevent us from questioning persistent ideas around authorship and collaboration in publications on art, which I explore in the next chapters.

4.2. Mediating and Curating and Discourse

As indicated earlier, although ideas of contemporary curating have evolved significantly in recent decades, notions of mediation have remained a firm reference in the discourse. What those who use the word mediation mean, however, is not necessarily always clarified in detail; like the word curating, mediation operates as an umbrella term that may mean slightly different things to different people at different moments in time. A common characteristic among various understandings of curating as a mediating practice is that it is tied to the notion of ‘bridging a gap’. In contemporary curatorial discourse the gap referred to is generally that between the artist and their artwork, and the audience and their engagement with that work in a network of relationships in which a curator mediates by way of framing the work as part of a curatorial project. Gerald Raunig identifies and links this perpetual aspect of bridging to the idea of the curator as caretaker to that of the religious curate – etymologically connected to the contemporary curator – and their role in mediating between ‘higher powers’ and mere humans,⁴⁴⁷ and Kate Fowle refers to them possibly providing a ‘cure’ for mental wellbeing,⁴⁴⁸ both of which attribute to the curator a certain agency that is delineated in various ways.

For example, when commenting on the task of the curator as mediator, Hans Ulrich Obrist contends that ‘it is not the job of the curator to impose their own signature but be a mediator

⁴⁴⁶ Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, p. 71. Benjamin argues that translation allows a text another life in another place and at another time and values it as more than derivative.

⁴⁴⁷ Gerald Raunig, ‘What is Critique’, in *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice*, edited by Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009) pp. 113-130.

⁴⁴⁸ Fowle, ‘Who Cares?’

between artists and public'.⁴⁴⁹ Obrist here clearly situates artists as the starting point and the audience as destination for the curator's mediating role, but in his urge to abstain from a 'signature' he implies the need for neutrality of the latter. Miguel Hernández-Navarro, on the other hand, adds specific requirements, stating that '[the curator] must be faithful to the demand of the work and the public's demand', situating it as a multi-directional position – bearing in mind both the work (and the artist) and the public that are being connected in the process of mediation. He complicates things when he adds that curators 'cannot be transparent' – implying that their intervention needs to be noticeable – while also refuting any similarity between curating, mediating and translating when he states that 'a curator is not a mediator or a translator'.⁴⁵⁰ Contrasting Hernández-Navarro's descriptions with Obrist's underlines that although the word mediation and its derivatives may be common in descriptions of what a curator is and does, what that actually means is by no means as simple as it looks or is stated.

Discussing the contributing components in systems of mediation – in a generic sense – Gilles Deleuze argues that '[m]ediators are fundamental. Creation is all about mediators, and without mediators, nothing happens.'⁴⁵¹ For Deleuze, mediators can be human as well as non-human, where both are always part of what he calls a 'series', arguing 'I need my mediators to express myself and they'd never express themselves without me', emphasising that they operate in relationships of inter- or co-dependence.⁴⁵² Interdependence is also taken up by Sophia Krzys Acord in her close scrutiny of what happens in artists and curators' interactions in spaces of art's display, but she cautions us about their unpredictability. Similar to Deleuze, she acknowledges the possible agency of non-human entities, noting that '[a]s actants, objects have non-objective consequences for mediation; they do not simply perform the "scripts" they are given'.⁴⁵³ While she here on the one hand implies that artists' intentions are not necessarily always easily legible, on the other she suggests that something else can appear as a result of curatorial mediation that was not intended or planned – by either artist or curator, or even by an audience member. When taking the agency of the work – an agency that is not limited to literal material objects – within the framework of presentation into account on top of that of the artist, the curator and the audience member, long-held ideas of intent and (intrinsic) meaning of

⁴⁴⁹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Mentors', in *Ways of Curating* (London: The Penguin Group, 2014) Loc. 1228 kindle edition. He attributes this 'vital lesson' to Kasper König.

⁴⁵⁰ Miguel Hernández-Navarro, 'The Curator's Demands: Towards an Ethics of Commitment', *Manifesta Journal* # 12, 2010-11, p. 10.

⁴⁵¹ The essay 'Mediators' from which this quote derives is based on a conversation between Gilles Deleuze, Antoine Dulaure and Claire Parnet, and was originally published in *L'Autre Journal*, No. 8, 1985. Rather than being a coherent argument, it meanders. Despite the lack of direct reference to art, Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen also quote this passage in their essay 'The Middleman', p. 22.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ Krzys Acord, 'Beyond the Head', p. 452.

artworks, as well as hierarchical sequences of narrative construction become increasingly difficult to uphold. What is being mediated and what an audience member 'receives' may already be significantly removed from what an artist thinks they send out into the world.

Deleuze's emphatic description of mediators and Krzys Acord's acknowledgement of objects' agency – which can extend to the curatorial frameworks, institutions and the conventions at play within them – is aligned with Bruno Latour's stance that an 'endless number of mediators' exist.⁴⁵⁴ Latour, however, makes a clear distinction between an 'intermediary', which is 'what transports meaning or force without transformation' – and the mediating function of an intermediary is purely a matter of 'passing on', of literally bridging – and 'mediators', which are much more active, and effective, precisely because they 'transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry.'⁴⁵⁵ As mentioned before, for Latour proper mediators are actors that 'do something and don't just sit there'.⁴⁵⁶ What is more, for Latour – as well as Deleuze and Krzys Acord – what can be transformed through mediation is multi-faceted and multi-directional: transformation can happen at different moments and in various ways and affect a range of actors and agents along the way.

In relation to the context of the white cube, Brian O'Doherty argues that '[w]ith post-modernism [...] The classical hostility [between artist and audience] is mediated.'⁴⁵⁷ Relying on one of the specific meanings of mediation – of bringing two parties that are not necessarily neatly aligned together – O'Doherty already positions mediation as an explicitly active notion in the mid-1970s; in his understanding something needs to happen in the process for some form of (re-)alignment to occur. Expanding on what that may mean in practical terms, he states that '[i]t often feels as if we can no longer experience anything if we don't first alienate it [...] Much of our experience can only be brought home through mediation.'⁴⁵⁸ These two observations combined come close to what Latour argues the difference between an intermediary and a mediator to be: the former is more passive or neutral, whereas the latter transforms what is being mediated – or, in O'Doherty's terms, 'alienates' it somehow from its original appearance – and thereby allows mediation, connection through some sort of alignment, to occur.

Johannes Cladders goes as far as calling the museum 'a non-verbal mediating system', positing that 'participating [...] as a mediating institution' is 'the process that transforms a work into a

⁴⁵⁴ Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 39

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁴⁵⁷ O'Doherty, 'Inside the White Cube', p. 76.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

work of art'.⁴⁵⁹ His attribution to the museum of the power to designate something an artwork is based on the premise that when it enters and circulates in this system, the 'original' work is already transformed, simply because of its inclusion. If on top of that the work is 'alienated' through its curatorial framing, one could consider it transformed twice over, simply by dint of its inclusion in the system of display. Simon Sheikh adds that '[i]n a historical sense, institutions of art mediate, and are as such educational platforms',⁴⁶⁰ expanding that '[c]urators are a specific form of educators, whether as tastemakers, managers of consciousness, or pedagogical mediators'.⁴⁶¹ In Sheikh's interpretation, mediation is linked to education in the broadest sense, also attributing a transformational role, because through the curator's mediation visitors are 'schooled', or changed in some way. Sheikh's interpretation of mediation thus adds yet another possible layer to the transformations within the system of art's circulation.

While Cladders's and Sheikh's statements identify transformations resulting from acts of mediation at different points in art's circulation, affecting multiple entities, what they describe seems to still explicitly go in one direction though: from the artist and their work towards audiences and individual members. Sheikh suggests that these are not necessarily separated by a proverbial 'gap' when he defines mediation as 'an organisation in which both articulation and elements belong to the same totality. It is in-between these two forms [...] that curating is placed and positioned. It is in this nexus that the curator works.'⁴⁶² Sheikh here situates the curator as operating in a system – as Cladders does – but sees their task less as a bridging between artist and audience than engaging in a process within a system in which all elements and participants are already implicated. It is, according to Sheikh, the curator's articulation with the elements within that system that provides 'access to the works', which he specifies as happening through 'a linguistic introduction and initiation into the works and their appreciation', and 'a certain knowledge [...] can be transmitted [...] through the mediator'.⁴⁶³ Sheikh here explicitly brings language – and by extension translation, an articulation linked to the artwork and/or its framing in words, or what Siegelau defined as secondary information, *about* the work – into the relationships forged by and through curatorial work as a mediating practice.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁵⁹ Interview with Johannes Cladders, in Obrist, *A Brief History*, loc. 1092, kindle edition.

⁴⁶⁰ Simon Sheikh, 'Curation and Futurity', in *The Curatorial Conundrum*, p. 153.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴⁶² Simon Sheikh, 'Articulation: On the Position of the Curator', *The Shadowfiles* #3, p. 69.

⁴⁶³ Simon Sheikh, 'Letter to Jane (Investigation of a Function)', in *Curating and The Educational Turn*, p. 64.

⁴⁶⁴ Sheikh's notion of linguistic introduction here is both narrower and more expansive than referenced by Morgan in his description of the exhibition catalogue constructed of a 'language', which relies on combining words and images.

Approaching mediating and curating as part of a neoliberal production chain of value creation, Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen replace the term mediator with that of 'middleman',⁴⁶⁵ and argue that 'the middleman is typically seen as a conformist, parasitical agent responsible for short-circuiting authenticity.'⁴⁶⁶ In this perception, the creative act – often equated with the 'authentic' – is attributed to the artist, and the mediating curator situated as a dependent – parasitic even – party in a one-directional process that yields a particular benefit within a wider neoliberal logic, in which the currency of the value added through mediation is a derivative of an original, authentic value. Andreasen and Bang Larsen detail what they see as the problem with the ubiquity of this understanding when they state that '[t]oday mediation is a cultural given [...] a modality for easy exchange, with no apparent beginnings or ultimate reason'.⁴⁶⁷ As a 'modality for easy exchange' the notion of curating as a mediating practice has become virtually devoid of meaning, exactly because of its perception as a practice that simply connects and bridges rather than transforms in the Deleuzian or Latourian sense, or even in Sheikh's.

Trying to find a way out of this dilemma, and considering the interconnection between knowledge and power, Nora Sternfeld underlines the complexity of mediation in contemporary art institutions and the various roles – including those explicitly dedicated to education as a sub-section of curating – that contribute to museums' mediating function. Acknowledging the increased complexity of the power dynamics in wider curatorial practice, she asks: 'What if educators [and/as curators] were no longer the ones with knowledge and visitors no longer those in need of knowledge? What if mediation processes were conceived as spaces of collective agency, in which to engage with different forms of knowledge?'⁴⁶⁸ She concludes that '[i]t is precisely at th[e] point, when [...] mediation allows for something to happen [...] that art education [...] steps off the path of reflexivity and deconstruction and begins to engage in transformation.'⁴⁶⁹ The transformation Sternfeld refers to is no longer about education in the traditional sense – with the curator being ascribed a greater knowledge and power, not unlike the religious curate – but about working together, aligned with ideas of 'the curatorial', and with Jacques Rancière's ideas around understanding and translation.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁵ Their first jointly written essay on mediation was published in 2006 ('Remarks on Mediation'), followed by 'The Middlemen; Beginning to Talk about Mediation' (2007, which also includes Rancière), culminating in a small book, titled *The Critical Mass of Mediation* (Copenhagen: Internationalistiske Ideale, 2012). The gendered nature of 'middlemen' can of course be commented on, but is not my focus here.

⁴⁶⁶ Andreasen and Bang Larsen, 'The Middleman', p. 21.

⁴⁶⁷ Andreasen and Bang Larsen, *The Critical Mass of Mediation*, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁸ Nora Sternfeld, 'That Certain Savoir/Pouvoir: Gallery Education as a Field of Possibility', in *It's all Mediating: Outlining and Incorporating the Roles of Curating and Education in the Exhibition Context*, edited by Laura Kokkonen, Nora Sternfeld and Kaija Kaitavuori (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013) p. 4.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ Rancière states that '[u]nderstanding is never more than translating, that is, giving the equivalent of a text, but in no way its reason. There is nothing beyond texts than the will to express, that is, to translate', underlining the distance between 'learning' and 'understanding'. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, p. 9.

Considering a different mode of practice in her definition of ‘the curatorial’, Maria Lind argues that ‘[a]t the most basic, pragmatic level we need to think harder about mediation’.⁴⁷¹ In her essay ‘Why Mediate Art?’, she contends that ‘mediation can create space for exchange with something “other”’ and calls for curators to ‘consider earnestly the question of what art does in culture, what its function can be in society.’⁴⁷² Lind’s call to arms and idea of exchange implies an interaction that, when taken seriously, can be understood as a complex and multi-directional process that happens ‘in the making’ and is ‘a conduit for difference’, that ‘can be seen as an opponent of the neo-liberal doctrine of consensus and transparency.’⁴⁷³ In this conceptualisation, which explicitly moves away from Andreasen and Bang Larsen’s observations on parasitic and derivative ‘middlemen’ practices, mediation is never simply a one-directional ‘passing on’ or about articulations within a systemic nexus, as Sheikh suggests. For Lind ‘working curatorially is the equivalent of this understanding of mediation within the current discourse on curating.’⁴⁷⁴ In this proposition, nothing is already fully formulated, but instead emerges in processes of encounter and explorations of difference, and everyone and everything has potential agency.

Considering the drive in ‘the curatorial’ to rethink traditional, linear twentieth-century (modernist) power dynamics in art and exhibitions as proposed by Lind and others, I want to think through what this may mean for publications on art, especially since for many contemporary curatorial practices publications are more than (re)mediations of previous mediating moments. As mentioned earlier, contemporary publications on art are for many – artistic and curatorial practitioners alike – exactly the sites where intentions and their manifestations, (re)presentations and audience experiences can come together and merge. By extension, what is being mediated is not just secondary information – at a remove from the artwork and its exhibition, as Morgan saw it⁴⁷⁵ – but is not fully primary either, in the sense Siegelau explored. In those instances publications are an essential part of curatorial constellations of ideas, manifestation, presentation, mediation, representation, interpretation and reception.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷¹ Maria Lind, ‘Reform or Revolution’, *The Shadowfiles* # 3, 2012, p. 108.

⁴⁷² Maria Lind, ‘Why Mediate Art?’, *Mousse Magazine*, No. 28, May 2011, part of the series ‘Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating’, available at <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/ten-fundamental-questions-of-curating-chapter-iv-why-mediate-art> (accessed 14 January 2015).

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ Morgan, ‘The Exhibition Catalog’.

⁴⁷⁶ Exceptions remain, of course, artists’ books, although other practitioners – editors, writers, designers, printers, to name but a possible few – contribute to many of these too in contemporary examples, see Chapter 1.

To think through what the implications are of situating publications on art as more than simple carriers of derivative information, we cannot but take into account the differences between the media of the artworks and curatorial projects – however ephemeral – and publications. What, in these complex convergences, then, are the challenges for producing publications that do more than simply ‘passing on’ information at a ‘distance’ from any original, to reference Morgan once more?⁴⁷⁷ Could we consider (some of) them as ‘conduits for difference’? How might that change the perception of publications in wider curatorial discourse and of the practices that contribute to their articulation? In the following sections I try and tease out the inherent complexity of these questions.

4.3. On Mediation and Translation

4.3.1. Complicating ‘Work’ and ‘Translation’

In this section, I first describe *Feature Film* (1999) – the work⁴⁷⁸ – and subsequently *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon* (1999) – the publication – to reflect on issues around mediation and translation in publications on art.⁴⁷⁹ This requires first an outline of the specifics of the work, before shifting attention to the various conventions and practices related to the media involved – including my own role as co-editor – all converging within the framework of commissioning organisations and other entities that are part of the art world’s system of production, display and dissemination.⁴⁸⁰ I start by introducing the artist’s practice, which concerns itself with notions of original and copy and medium and (re)mediation.

Douglas Gordon is one of a range of artists who started exploring the potential of film as a medium in the 1990s.⁴⁸¹ He initially became known for the use of found footage – ranging from obscure archival to mainstream films – through which he ‘makes visible the contours of a post-VHS cinephilia’, characteristic for his generation, as Erika Balsom argues.⁴⁸² For *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), for instance, Gordon appropriated Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960), presenting it

⁴⁷⁷ Morgan, ‘The Exhibition Catalog’.

⁴⁷⁸ Michel Foucault complicates possible understandings of ‘work’ when he argues that ‘The word work and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author’s individuality’. See Michel Foucault, ‘What is an Author’, p. 208.

⁴⁷⁹ Initial ideas for this section were formulated as part of a talk at the conference ‘The Moving Image: Photographic Views in Contemporary Art’ in June 2017, organised by Kunsthalle Zürich.

⁴⁸⁰ I have chosen to dedicate quite some space to the slippery layering that complicates notions of original and copy and medium and (re)mediation of *Feature Film* because it supports work in the subsequent sections. For transparency: I met Gordon in 1995, when he participated in a show organised by students at De Appel’s Curatorial Training Programme, and later helped set up his studio archive in Glasgow (2004-2005).

⁴⁸¹ That is not to say that artists did not use film as a medium before – many examples from the 1960s (and earlier) could be listed – but the emergence and subsequent widespread showing of such work in gallery spaces in the 1990s allows for consideration in relation to the concurrent development of curatorial practice and discourse.

⁴⁸² Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013) p. 113.

slowed down to last a full 24 hours – at 2 frames per minute rather than 24 frames per second.⁴⁸³ This slowing down challenges expectations of the perception of movement and the passing of time, and the unfolding of action and narrative arc in film as a medium,⁴⁸⁴ the work effectively becoming a sequence of ‘nearly static tableaux’.⁴⁸⁵ Rather than shown in a cinema, *24 Hour Psycho* is projected onto a screen suspended in the gallery space, so that visitors can walk around it – being able to see the work and its apparatus of display from both sides, the footage in both the ‘right’ and the ‘wrong’ way – and choose to stand or sit or lie on the floor, providing a different experience than in a cinema where one sits in a static position throughout.⁴⁸⁶

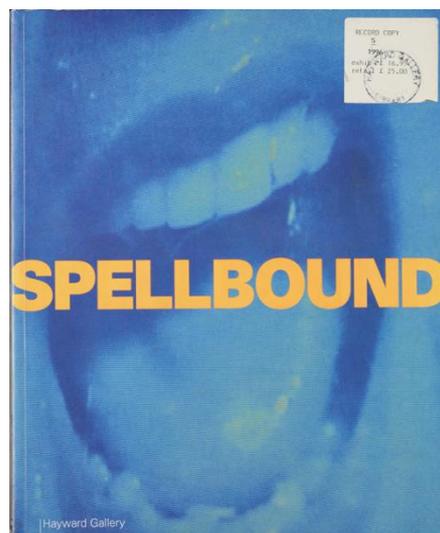


Figure 4.1: cover of the *Spellbound* catalogue for the 1996 Hayward Gallery exhibition⁴⁸⁷

With artists embracing the potential of film, explorations of various modes of presentation in gallery spaces gained momentum too, to which Gordon actively contributed.⁴⁸⁸ His *24 Hour Psycho* was included in the landmark exhibition ‘Spellbound’ at the Hayward Gallery in 1996, one of a growing range of exhibitions focusing on moving image work.⁴⁸⁹ The adoption, transfer,

⁴⁸³ For an excerpt of *Feature Film*, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtlG5TqqVeA> (15 December 2019). NB: Balsom uses the term ‘recycling’ and ‘re-edits’ rather than appropriating. Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, p. 119.

⁴⁸⁴ One could argue that the work inverts the development of film itself. The shift from still to moving image has been the subject of several studies. See, for instance, Laurent Guido and Olivier Lugon (eds.) *Between Still and Moving Images: Photography and Cinema in the 20th Century* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2011).

⁴⁸⁵ Richard Dorment, ‘Mixed Media caught on camera’, *The Telegraph*, 23 February 1996.

⁴⁸⁶ Some museums and galleries showing the work have offered visitors special ‘sleepovers’, allowing them to see the work in its entirety, i.e. all 24 hours of it. A recent example was Modern Art Oxford, in 2016, see <https://www.modernartoxford.org.uk/event/24-hour-psycho-sleepover/> (accessed 5 November 2021).

⁴⁸⁷ This image shows an archive copy of the catalogue of the Hayward Gallery (indicated by the label with stamp), derived from https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/catalogue-for-spellbound-art-and-film-hayward-gallery-1996/UgGYGVULc_kV-A (accessed 30 March 2020).

⁴⁸⁸ Balsom argues that “[i]n combining multiscreen film and video installations with a suspicious embrace of mass cultural codes and the poaching of signs, the contemporary generation synthesizes elements of 1960s expanded cinema with 1970s and 1980s appropriation.’ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, p. 122. NB: note the use of ‘poaching’.

⁴⁸⁹ ‘Spellbound: Art and Film in Britain’ was a collaboration between the Hayward Gallery and the British Film Institute, indicative of this development. The exhibition was curated by film historian Ian Christie and writer/editor Philip Dodd. See <https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/PQKybZ80h8egIA> (15 December 2019). The catalogue

appropriation and 'recycling', as Balsom calls it, of the medium of film by artists and the display of their work in gallery spaces created a situation in which '[t]he copy cannot help but throw the original into crisis, and yet it also expands the reach of that object, disseminating it in new contexts.'⁴⁹⁰ In the same year, Gordon won the Turner Prize with a double-screen installation, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1995), comprising slowed down fragments from the 1932 film *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, more explicitly using the tropes of doubling and inverting, already implicit in *24 Hour Psycho*, with a positive and negative version of the same footage on two screens positioned at slightly different angles next to each other on the gallery floor.⁴⁹¹

The characteristics of these works offer a range of challenges when considering the notion of carrying over, or translating, material from artwork to publication. Confronted with the image of a gaping mouth on the cover of the *Spellbound* catalogue, for instance, what do we think we see?⁴⁹² Is it an image that we recognise as 'belonging' to Hitchcock's *Psycho*, or is it understood as deriving from Gordon's appropriation of the film in his work *24 Hour Psycho*? The visible pixellation implies it is a shot of a video rather than a film projection, which subtly clarifies it is an image of Gordon's work as it is being exhibited that has been transposed, even though we don't see how and where the work is shown.⁴⁹³ What, in short, has been translated is both the image – the content – and the nature of its carrier. This raises the question whether it matters that we understand this not as an image carried over into print from Hitchcock's film *Psycho*, but of Gordon's work, *24 Hour Psycho*. In light of the artist's concerns – and my own – I argue it is important, because our ability to recognise which version is being mediated underlines the differences between the two works that the single image represents.⁴⁹⁴ This example of a printed cinematic image – derived from a feature film that is already transformed through an

comprises a 'Chronology' that traces historical connections between art and film going back to the late nineteenth century. The title was derived from Alfred Hitchcock's 1945 film with the same title.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 142. Balsom also quotes Laura Mulvey, who writes: 'Just as *Psycho*, in 1960, marked a final staging post in the history of the studio system as a basis for the Hollywood film industry, *24 Hour Psycho*, like an elegy, marks a point of no return for the cinema itself.' In Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, p. 146.

⁴⁹¹ Dan Glaister, 'Turner show will turn no heads', *The Guardian*, 29 October 1996, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/1996/oct/29/20yearsoftheturnerprize.turnerprize> (accessed 15 December 2019).

⁴⁹² The gaping mouth – also used on the exhibition's poster – can be considered to speak to film as a medium entering the field of visual art and its sites of display, given its resonance with more traditional artworks, from *The Scream* by Edvard Munch to Francis Bacon's paintings in which the protagonists seem caught in existential howls, which, captured as if in movement, can be read as cinematic (as observed by Ben Cranfield).

⁴⁹³ Following Raymond Bellour and Laura Mulvey, Balsom situates Hitchcock's *Psycho* as a work on the cusp of the transition between classical Hollywood cinema and films heavily influenced by television. About Gordon's reworking, she states 'In *24 Hour Psycho* [...] Gordon telescopes this past moment of transition with that of the present, confronting the possibilities of a VHS cinophilia while fetishistically overvaluing the director who both emblemized and reflexively interrogated the institution in its classical form.' Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, p. 138. Note Balsom's use of the term 'remake' here, where 'The remake [...] is itself a process of translation'. (p. 146)

⁴⁹⁴ Balsom states: '*24 Hour Psycho* is not merely *Psycho* slowed to an approximate duration of twenty-four hours; it is also an unabashedly video-based copy of *Psycho* slowed to an approximate duration of twenty-four hours. Along with inserting *24 Hour Psycho* into an existing history of found footage and slow motion, its relationship to the home video technologies that made it possible must be emphasized.' Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, p. 141.

artist making it his own, via another medium, and subsequently presenting it as a new moving image work – highlights that seemingly defining and distinct labels such as original, appropriation, copy and translation can become slippery and blurry very quickly, while the medium-specific pixellation at the same time subtly establishes the ‘authorship’ of this particular work here.⁴⁹⁵

Gordon’s work *Feature Film* complicates these distinctions on several levels. Although the artist had made shorter video works for which he shot material himself, *Feature Film* was his first venture into making a feature-length film – working with a ‘proper’ film crew – and using actual film stock rather than video tape.⁴⁹⁶ Like *24 Hour Psycho*, *Feature Film* also relates to an Alfred Hitchcock film, in this case *Vertigo* (1958), but does not rely on the slowing down of existing footage transferred and projected into a gallery space. Instead the work comprises newly shot material, edited into a feature-length film, making extensive use of montage in the sense Benjamin outlined. However, although *Feature Film* was made out of newly shot footage, it does deconstruct Hitchcock’s ‘original’ – the inverted commas indicating use of the term for that work belies its complexity too⁴⁹⁷ – in other ways.

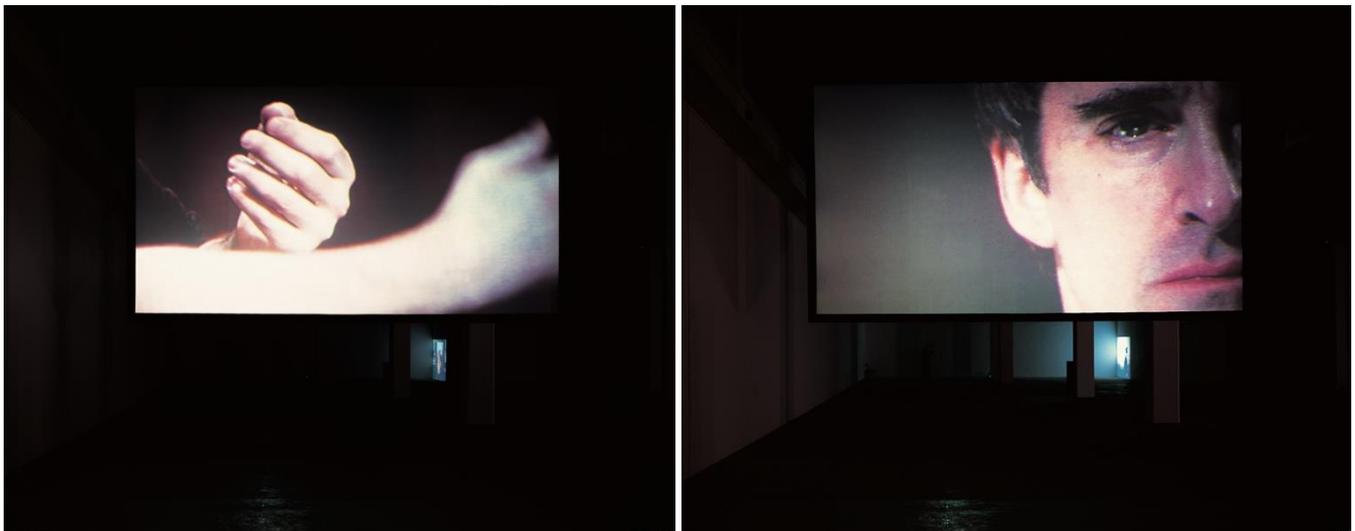


Figure 4.2: installation shot, with *Feature Film* projected onto a large suspended screen, and *Vertigo* projected in the background, London, 1999; Figure 4.3: same installation, with close up of Conlon’s face⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ Authorship, which is as complex as the notion of ‘original’, is explored by way of ‘collaboration’ in the next chapter.

⁴⁹⁶ The production involved three fixed and two moving cameras, and thus required an extensive crew, with all members credited at the end. Film differs in that sense from publications, in which only a few contributing human actors are listed, for example, the name of the printing company, but never the name of the person at the press.

⁴⁹⁷ *Vertigo* is based on the 1954 novel *D’entre les morts* (From Among the Dead) by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac, written under the name Boileau-Narcejac (and Thomas Narcejac is a pseudonym for Pierre Ayraud). The screenplay was written by Alec Coppel and Samuel A. Taylor. The film already went through two translation steps – from book to screenplay and from screenplay to film.

⁴⁹⁸ Images © Artangel, photographs by Stephen White. NB: derived from scans from large-format slides, which, until digital cameras emerged in the 2000s, were the main mode of documentation of art and exhibitions for a while.

Like most films in mainstream cinema, *Vertigo's* narrative as it unfolds visually is accompanied aurally by a soundtrack,⁴⁹⁹ in this case based on an iconic score by Bernard Herrmann, who wrote several for Hitchcock's films,⁵⁰⁰ and whose oeuvre contributed to what we consider characteristic for the latter's work: the drama constructed visually is matched by an equally dramatic score.⁵⁰¹ In Gordon's *Feature Film*, however, there is no traditional 'story' with a plot: instead, we see (parts of) the face, hands and arms of a conductor, James Conlon, conducting an orchestra playing the score to *Vertigo*, which is therefore also the score to *Feature Film*.

Different from *Vertigo* though, where the sound seems to support the visuals, in *Feature Film* the sound literally drives the visual narrative of a conductor conducting the score.⁵⁰² But although we hear the *Vertigo* score played virtually throughout *Feature Film*,⁵⁰³ we never actually see the orchestra; instead we are faced with a 'ballet for hands' and arms⁵⁰⁴ that 'swoop and soar, oscillating from sharp to blurred',⁵⁰⁵ and the occasional intense look from Conlon, apparently looking directly at us looking, but actually staring intently at the written score in front of him, or at members of the full orchestra in the studio in which the recording took place. Commenting on this multi-layered relationship between *Feature Film's* image and sound, Raymond Bellour argues that 'to match this music to images inspired by the music itself, is a turn of the screw that strikes very near to the madness of its source.'⁵⁰⁶ Considering the notion of source in a different way, Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli and Martine Beugot see *Feature Film* as one of several 'supplementary works [to *Vertigo*]', and argue that 'like the original film [it is] about duplicity, doppelgänger, and dissimulation.'⁵⁰⁷ Although Gordon's project literally explores

⁴⁹⁹ Numerous books and essays have been dedicated to film scores, and various websites catalogue and analyse them. See, for instance, <https://www.filmscoremonthly.com/daily/index.cfm> (accessed 15 March 2020).

⁵⁰⁰ Herrmann wrote the score for seven of Hitchcock's films: *The Trouble with Harry* (1955), *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1956), *The Wrong Man* (1956), *Vertigo* (1958), *North by Northwest* (1959), *Psycho* (1960), and *Marnie* (1964). He also worked as a consultant on *Birds* (1963). See <http://www.bernardherrmann.org/articles/misc-nature/> (accessed 15 March 2020).

⁵⁰¹ The drama focuses on actor James Stewart playing former police detective John 'Scottie' Ferguson. Scottie is forced into early retirement because of an incident and he develops acrophobia (an extreme fear of heights) and vertigo (a false sense of rotational movement). Scottie is hired by an acquaintance, Gavin Elster, as a private investigator to follow his wife Madeleine (Kim Novak). In the film's final scene – the famous bell tower shot – the woman who Scottie thinks is Madeleine falls to her death. For an analysis of the drama in the score, see Royal S. Brown, 'The Music of *Vertigo*', in *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon*, text insert, pp. 5-8.

⁵⁰² One could argue there is a double doubling or a chain of mediations: the conductor conducts the orchestra, which results in the score being played, and thus the soundtrack. Conlon's gestures drive the soundtrack, which drives the narrative of *Feature Film* here twice over. We could go a step further back, and argue it is actually the printed score, composed by Herrmann, which is being translated or mediated via Conlon into sound, and which reaches us via watching the film. Similar to tracing the 'origins' of *Vertigo*, we could look into how Herrmann wrote his score. Did he see rushes before he set to work? Or the screenplay and story board sketches? Did he work together with Hitchcock?

⁵⁰³ During the dialogue sections in *Vertigo*, the installation version of *Feature Film* shows panning shots of the studio space in which the work was recorded and we hear the dialogue softly in the background.

⁵⁰⁴ Michael Rush uses the phrase 'ballet for hands' in his entry on *Feature Film*, in *New Media Encyclopedia*, available at www.newmedia-art.org/cgi-bin/show-oeu.asp?ID=15000000035762&lg=GBR (accessed 17 February 2020).

⁵⁰⁵ Raymond Bellour, 'The Body of Fiction', in *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon*, text insert p. 4.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁰⁷ Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli and Martine Beugot, 'Vertiginous Hauntings: The Ghosts of *Vertigo*', *Film-Philosophy*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 2019, p. 234, doi: 10.3366/film.2019.0114. The description here is even more evocative than Rush's.

these themes in relation to the key elements of (mainstream) film – image and sound and their close interrelation – as viewers we experience them as a single whole, but not necessarily all in the same way, because *Feature Film* is a complex constellation of a work.



Figure 4.4: installation view *Feature Film* at Mead Gallery, Warwick University, Coventry (2012) with suspended screen; Figure 4.5: installation *Feature Film* at MARCO, Vigo (2015) with screen on floor⁵⁰⁸

In addition to *Feature Film* launching as an art installation via exhibitions in London, Paris and Cologne in the course of 1999,⁵⁰⁹ a 35mm film version premiered during the Venice Biennale in the same year, and subsequently toured the international film festival circuit.⁵¹⁰ The different mediums for dissemination of these two versions – Digibeta video tapes for the installation and a 35mm print for the film⁵¹¹ – have their own requirements in terms of equipment and how they are to be shown, and the former circulates as an installation in museums and galleries while the latter does so – with a few exceptions⁵¹² – as a traditional cinema film. The installation version is not a static proposition though: sometimes the screen is suspended, at other times situated on the floor (see Figs. 4.4-4.5), and on occasion the projection of *Feature Film* is doubled or even mirrored, challenging the idea of a singular version of the installation.

⁵⁰⁸ *Feature Film* was shown as part of the exhibition 'Score. Between Image and Sound' (2015) at MARCO in Vigo in Spain, which was dedicated to the relation between sound and image in artists' moving image work.

⁵⁰⁹ The work was shown in a former brewery space in East London by Artangel, in Paris at the Centre Pompidou and in Cologne at the Kölnischer Kunstverein, all organisations involved as co-commissioners. In addition, two of the artist's commercial galleries – Yvon Lambert in Paris and the Lisson Gallery in London – contributed financially, in return for an installation version for sale, as well as sponsors Beck's beer and fashion designer agnès b. See <https://www.artangel.org.uk/project/feature-film> (accessed 15 December 2019).

⁵¹⁰ Situating the film as an artwork rather than a mainstream film, *Feature Film* premiered during the art biennale, rather than the Venice Film Festival, but was subsequently submitted for inclusion in a range of international film festivals.

⁵¹¹ Digibeta tapes were known to carry and thus mediate sound better than Beta tapes. With 35mm film the standard used in cinemas at the time, Gordon opted for a Kodak stock for the prints that was known to mediate black, which features throughout, particularly well.

⁵¹² The film *Feature Film* was shown at a one-off screening at the Royal Festival Hall (2000), for which a sound system was brought in, alongside a 35mm projector and a large screen hung above the stage, to do justice to the quality of the sound recording and the affordance of film versus video.

The way in which *Vertigo* is presented alongside *Feature Film* – incorporated in the overall installation, and thus becoming part of Gordon’s work – may differ as well: sometimes it is projected, but on a much smaller scale than *Feature Film*, but most often it is shown on a monitor.⁵¹³ The screening of *Vertigo* alongside *Feature Film* underlines the relationship between the two films, but at the same time draws our attention to them being separate entities, because we can never see the footage of both at the same time: we have to move physically through the space and turn our back on *Feature Film* to be able to see *Vertigo*, or vice versa. What links the two in our experience is the sound, which reaches us via numerous speakers.⁵¹⁴ Those who know *Vertigo* may remember specific sequences as they watch *Feature Film*, generating a third, mental space in which both films exist side by side.⁵¹⁵ Bellour goes as far as stating that the ‘viewer is led astray’, the extent of which is determined by their ‘desire to play the game’ that Gordon sets up, and their ‘degree of familiarity with Hitchcock’s film’.⁵¹⁶ Each installation iteration operates within the conventions of the exhibition space that impact on the experience of the work, where they do not necessarily simply ‘perform a script’, to follow Krzys Acord.

Feature Film highlights that image and sound are the key components that together present a whole, but the existence of multiple ‘versions’ of the work provides a conundrum that multiplies when we consider the process of its making and its presentational forms. Both installation and film version are compiled from footage shot by 5 cameras, some 40 minutes more of which made the ‘final cut’ in the installation version. Where carrier and what is being carried are intimately interconnected, what we should consider the ‘original’ work here becomes a question that is increasingly difficult to answer. Is the film a shorter version of the same work in the installation version that uses Digibeta tapes, or could we even see it as a distinct work, because of the different length – and thus content – and carrier? Or might it be more productive to consider them iterations of the same work? In addition, should we see the wide range of possible installations – that circulate in a different system than the feature film – as distinct versions, or should they be grouped as iterations of one and the same work?⁵¹⁷

⁵¹³ The description on the Tate website, to which an edition of the installation version was donated in 2012, states that the work uses a double projection. However, when shown in summer 2019, there was only one, with *Vertigo* on a monitor on the floor. The initial instructions for the Centre Pompidou only refer to a single projection, demonstrating that Gordon’s own ideas for the work’s presentation changed over time, complicating ideas of ‘original’ and ‘work’.

⁵¹⁴ The technical specification for the Centre Pompidou collection version lists the requirement of 4 to 6 speakers.

⁵¹⁵ Gordon says: ‘The viewer is catapulted back into the past by his [sic] recollection of the original, and at the same time he is drawn into the future by his expectation of an already familiar narrative... a slowly changing present forces itself in between.’ Gordon in Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, p. 142. Original in Russell Ferguson, ‘Trust Me’, in *Douglas Gordon*, edited by Russell Ferguson (Los Angeles, CA, and Cambridge, MA: MOCA LA and MIT Press, 2001) p. 16.

⁵¹⁶ Bellour, ‘The Body of Fiction’, p. 2

⁵¹⁷ Film as a medium has a long history of re-edits, with ‘the director’s cut’, ‘fully restored’, ‘uncensored’ all familiar categories, and the one that first came into circulation tends to be seen as the ‘original’. See, for a selection of re-edits of mainstream films, for instance, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/search/search-bfi/reedits> (accessed 20 February 2020).

This is further complicated when we know that *Feature Film* was shot on super 16mm film, which was transferred to Digibeta videotape, in which format it was edited – resulting in the two master versions or iterations, or sources – then transferred back to Digibeta master tapes for the installation version as well as a 35mm film negative from which film prints can be made. All of these steps of transferral complicate what we can argue constitutes the ‘original’ work *Feature Film*, and by extension as ‘source’ for any carrying over to other media, including publications. This complexity suggests that what we consider a work can exist across several material – in terms of medium – versions and in different iterations that are presented in different systems and networks of cultural circulation. If we accept that, the question whether it is productive to think of a singular ‘original’ work altogether looms large.

4.3.2. Practising Translation: Appropriation and Adaptation

The production of a publication on art does not necessarily commence after an artwork is completed and/or exhibited: many are printed to be available for the opening of the curatorial project they relate to and are often finished before the work has been installed.⁵¹⁸ However, to be able to carry something over from one place to another, there needs to be something to carry over from in the first place: a source of some kind. When an artwork is already in existence, there is indeed some place to start from: images can be shot of or derived from it; factual descriptions, interpretations and contextualisations can be written; and modes of installation, events and interactions with the work can be captured in image and text, be they staged especially or borrowed from previous exhibitions or events. When a work is newly conceived though, there are slimmer pickings in terms of what can be carried over, not only visually, but also verbally, simply because there has not been an opportunity to encounter the work in its presentational state and context.⁵¹⁹ Among these individual possibilities in terms of carrying over, however, it is rarely a case of direct transfer via copy and paste; more often than not, some kind of transformation – or translation – happens in the process, and less direct forms of transfer are required or preferable, which diffuse notions of fidelity and the relationship

⁵¹⁸ This also applies for publications that are not categorised as catalogues per se, like *Feature Film: a book by...*, which is one of a few exceptions in Artangel’s Afterlives publications series, which I oversaw (1997-2002). Most started development *after* the work had been realised and presented. A good example that also uses moving image work is *Tony Oursler, The Influence Machine* (London and New York, NY: Artangel and Public Art Fund, 2001). In this case the work relies on projections that only become visible when they land on a surface, such as trees or buildings, so images of the work and documentation of its exhibition are the same, as the work had to be presented to be documented.

⁵¹⁹ One could argue that the dictum ‘context is half the work’, coined by John Latham while working as part of the Artist Placement Group in the 1960s, is not fully worked through here in the translation of work into publication. I mention that, as Gordon was among the first students of the Glasgow School of Art’s Environmental Art department, founded by David Harding in 1987, embracing Latham’s ideas. See for reflections on Harding’s influence, Charlotte Higgins, ‘Glasgow’s Turner Connection’, *The Guardian*, 17 October 2011, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/oct/17/glasgow-turner-prize> (accessed 15 March 2020).

between translations and their source, which is never one of direct equation. While fidelity – ‘being faithful to a truth or reality’⁵²⁰ – seems self-explanatory, *Feature Film: a book by...* underlines it can be anything but. Much like the work, the publication raises questions about medium, context and source and destabilises their apparent singularity.

With *Feature Film*, the decision that the publication had to be ready when the work was to be first exhibited⁵²¹ – early 1999 – impacted directly on the range of potential material to consider: in short, no visual representation of the work as encountered in its exhibited state could be included. Instead, we had to make do with material derived directly from the work.⁵²² As outlined, for *Feature Film* footage was shot with multiple cameras, leading to an abundance of material that did not end up being part of the work, in whatever version or iteration. While these frames might have been just as close to the final work as traditional film stills – shot by still photographers rather than derived directly from footage⁵²³ – in terms of staying close to the work as the original or source (despite its multiple versions and/or iterations) that footage was off-limits. In addition to considerations as to what could be used as source material here, however, there were other (f)actors, not related to *Feature Film*, which influenced the translation of *Feature Film* into *a book by...* Then recent work by graphic designer Bruce Mau on a book related to a work by another film-maker was crucial here.

When Douglas Gordon, graphic designer Phil Baines, co-editor Jane Rolo and I sat down to discuss what the publication could be, it made sense to look at existing publications in relation to (artists’) films.⁵²⁴ No practitioner operates in a vacuum, after all; even if they reject prevalent conventions, they still respond to them in some way, as demonstrated in Chapter 3. In this case, Gordon mentioned *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman* (1996), related to the film *La Jetée* (1962) by Chris Marker, as a valuable example for us all to look at, providing a common point of reference.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁰ See <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=fidelity> (accessed 24 April 2020).

⁵²¹ Having a publication ready when an exhibition opens, means a greater guarantee of sales, and thus some return on production costs within a certain time frame, which was a key consideration in this case.

⁵²² We could have considered to engage with the process of making the film, but this was discounted. An example that considers ‘the making of’ a film is *Film*, on Samuel Beckett’s work *Film* (1964), featuring Buster Keaton, in which the work differs from the script that Beckett originally wrote. *Film* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1971) contains the complete scenario, illustrations and production shots, with an essay ‘On Directing *Film*’ by Alan Schneider.

⁵²³ On the film still, David Company comments that ‘There is something intriguing about the gap between the film still and its distant origin.’ See ‘Once more for stills’, in *Paper Dreams: the lost art of Hollywood stills photography*, edited by Christoph Schifferli (Göttingen: Steidl, 2006), available at <https://davidcompany.com/once-more-for-stills/> (accessed 18 December 2019).

⁵²⁴ Baines had worked on another publication co-published by Artangel, with Matt’s Gallery, an artist’s book with images derived from 8mm films, and a catalogue of a body of work. For an interview with Baines, particularly known for his focus on typography, see Christopher Wilson, ‘Reputations: Phil Baines’, 2008, <http://eyemagazine.com/feature/article/reputations-phil-baines> (accessed 15 March 2020).

⁵²⁵ The book calls itself ‘**La Jetée ciné-roman**’ (note the bold, regular and roman, and differing capitals), but the Zone Books website lists it as *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*, which is why I reference it like that. See <https://www.zonebooks.org/books/65-la-jetee-cine-roman> (accessed 20 March 2020).

The book comprises very little text – often no more than a single line on each spread, telling a story mainly via images. Bruce Mau, who designed the book in collaboration with Marker himself,⁵²⁶ describes it as ‘a study on translation, not between languages but between different media’, which makes it even more relevant, and I therefore discuss it at some length.⁵²⁷

Mau’s description underlines that translation between different media relies on aspects that deviate from linguistic translation – where words are translated into other words – because the source and target medium may already comprise vast differences, with their own histories, traditions and conventions.⁵²⁸ In addition to questions of translation of a story or narrative, the material and behavioural particularities of the media involved need to be taken into account. What, alongside this double translational concern, is important is that this reference to the book about Marker’s *La Jetée* did not simply occur to Gordon out of the blue: when working on *Feature Film*, he had already collaborated with Mau on a catalogue for an exhibition, launched when he was in full production mode for the film.⁵²⁹ We can safely deduce that it was through working with Mau, who by then was a well-established designer, that Gordon encountered *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*, which subsequently acted upon the translation into *Feature Film: a book by...*⁵³⁰

This is all the more relevant, because *La Jetée* also has a relationship with Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, although the connection of Marker’s work with this ‘source’ is more oblique than Gordon’s.⁵³¹ Despite their difference, both appropriated aspects from *Vertigo* and made them their own; they carried things over, but not to make a literal translation, which would have focused on the storyline, but exploring the affordances of the media they were working with.⁵³² Marker’s *La*

⁵²⁶ It took Mau six years to convince Marker to work with him on the publication. See Kyo Maclear with Bart Testa (eds.) *Bruce Mau: Life Style* (London/New York, NY: Phaidon, 2000) p. 138.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵²⁸ ‘Source’ and ‘target’ language are terms derived from translation theories. See, for a comprehensive overview of shifts in thinking about what matters in translation, Lawrence Venuti (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2000); for notions of translation in relation to art, see Sophie J. Williamson (ed.) *Translation* (London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2019).

⁵²⁹ Bruce Mau designed *Douglas Gordon: Pictures* in relation to his exhibition at the Kunstverein Hannover (1998). Mau also designed the catalogue for/in collaboration with (as stated in the blurb) the artist of Russell Ferguson (ed.) *Douglas Gordon* (2001). All this to underline an ongoing working relationship between Gordon and Mau.

⁵³⁰ Mau founded Zone Books in 1985, engaging in interdisciplinary projects. He was embraced by the art world and invited to participate in curatorial projects, such as Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden’s ‘Laboratorium’ in Antwerp in 1999. See Maclear and Testa, *Life Style*, pp. 562-571. Mau states: ‘One of the underlying ambitions of our project, *Book Machine*, was to demonstrate the book’s vitality by treating the production of a book as a real-time performance.’ Mau’s adoption within the art system can itself be considered a contributing factor in how his design for *La Jetée* was relevant for *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon*.

⁵³¹ Marker has said about *Vertigo*: ‘*Double entendre? All the gestures, looks, phrases in Vertigo have a double meaning. Everybody knows that it is probably the only film where a “double” vision is not only advisable but indispensable for rereading the first part of the film in the light of the second.*’ See ‘A Free Replay: Notes on *Vertigo*’, originally published in French in *Positif*, No. 400, June 1994, pp. 79-84, available at <https://chrismarker.org/chris-marker/a-free-replay-notes-on-vertigo/> (accessed 6 April 2020).

⁵³² Balsom outlines an interesting distinction among artists’ responses to film’s traditional conventions. They include ‘beyond the fiction feature’, which according to her unleashes ‘cinematic heterogeneity and multiplicity’ and ‘competition of media forms’ where ‘Infrastructures, personnel, modes of production, aesthetics, and technologies are

Jetée plays with the difference between still and moving image, where, apart from one short scene, his film is made up of still photographs.⁵³³ In essence, the film captures the shift from the photographic to the cinematic image – and how each can be used to construct a moving image narrative – in which the single moving scene in *La Jetée*, and the female protagonist opens her eyes, makes us all the more aware of the conventions of both: it is an experiment in the perception of time, movement and images, and also the untrustworthiness of our perception.⁵³⁴ The book, *La Jetée-Ciné-Roman*, which reverses what the film did by turning the moving image work back into a sequence of stills within the space of the book, is, according to Marker, ‘not a film’s book, but a book in its own right – the real *ciné-roman* announced in the film’s credits’.⁵³⁵

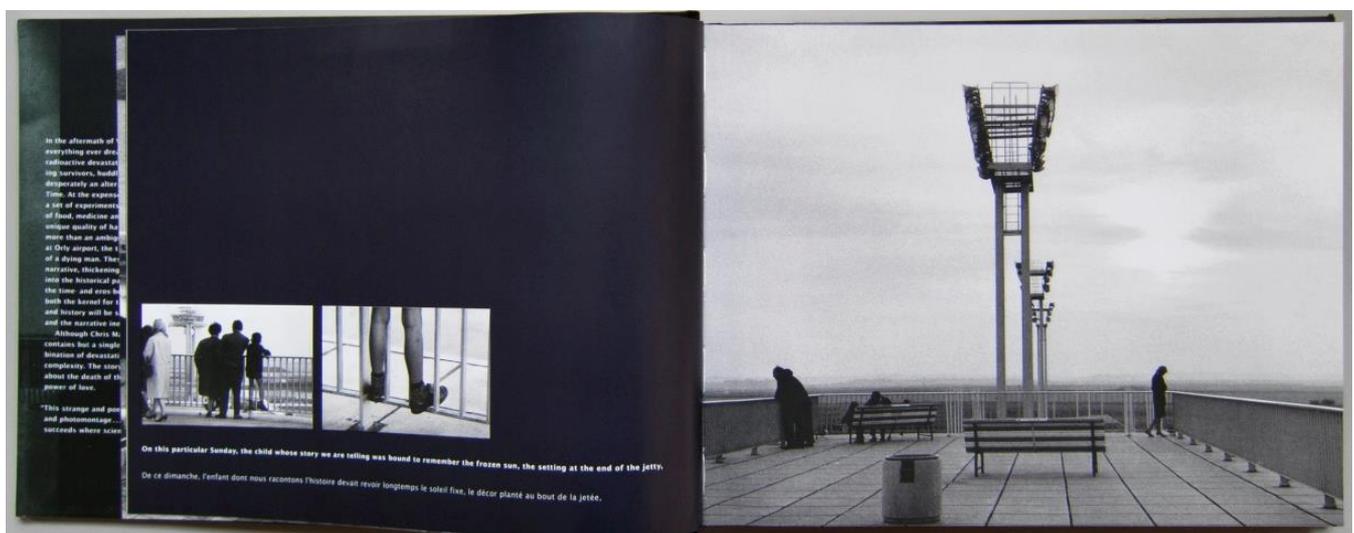


Figure 4.6: a double-page spread from *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*, showing different use of still images in the book and the English text in bold, and the French in regular font (left-hand page)⁵³⁶

The fact that most of *La Jetée*'s 28 minutes are based on a set of still images makes the work a much simpler source than a film of that length, which would have provided over 40,000 different frames to choose from to carry over. That they are still images rather than moving images, however, also complicates the notion of original or source for the book: are they the still images, or their moving counterparts, in which each still image was transposed into multiple film frames? This is pushed further by the fact that Marker changed his mind about certain sequences, including the start of the film, as demonstrated by his workbook, which shows

shared between cinema, art, and a broader visual culture.’ Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema*, p. 188.

⁵³³ For an analysis of this tension in *La Jetée*, see, for instance, ‘Chris Marker’s *La Jetée*: Mortality and the Illusion of Time’, available at <http://filmslie.com/chris-marker-la-jetee-analysis-temporality/> (accessed 30 March 2020).

⁵³⁴ JG Ballard argues the film is ‘a fusion of science fiction, psychological fable, and photomontage [... which] creates its own conventions from scratch. It triumphantly succeeds where science fiction invariably fails, quote printed on front flap of dustjacket of the book, and used on Zone Books’ website.

⁵³⁵ The film is called a ‘photo-roman’ in the text that appears on screen. Marker made this comment in response to the first design sketch for the book he received from Mau. See Maclear and Testa, *Life Style*, p. 139. The quote is also included on the book’s front flap of the dust jacket and can also be found on the Zone Books website.

⁵³⁶ Image from https://www.musi-um.info/chris_marker_la_jetee_cine_roman-g1851 (accessed 6 April 2020).

alternative propositions for several scenes, and the fact that different versions of the film exist and also have been shown: like Gordon's *Feature Film*, the work is more than just one.⁵³⁷ Commenting on how the film *La Jetée* is translated into a book, Federico Antonini argues that '[i]f the opening titles of the short played on the nature of the film by announcing a photo-roman, the book form adaptation changed the subtitle to ciné-roman to emphasize the intermedial aspect of the project'.⁵³⁸ This notion of intermediality here speaks directly to the interrelationship between original(s) and its (/their) translation into another medium (/media), where the term adaptation is particularly relevant. It is intermediality, rather than intertextuality – which concerns the story told – that is the focus of the carrying over here.⁵³⁹



Figure 4.7: display of workbook in 'Chris Marker: A Grin Without a Cat', Whitechapel Gallery (2014)⁵⁴⁰

The notion of adaptation takes account of the characteristics of the media between which things are being carried over, and that what is being carried over is altered because of the specificity of

⁵³⁷ The workbook, with drafts of the sequences of still images in the film, including variations for certain scenes, were shown in the exhibition 'Chris Marker: A Grin Without a Cat' at the Whitechapel Gallery. Reproductions can be found in the catalogue. See Chris Darke and Habda Rashi (eds.) *Chris Marker: A Grin Without a Cat* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014) pp. 57-69. The catalogue references 'an early cut of [*La Jetée*] with a different opening scene', screened during the show, on p. 124.

⁵³⁸ Federico Antonini, 'Lost & gained in translation', *Progetto Grafico*, No. 32, autumn 2017, published in English by *Medium*, 14 December 2017, <https://medium.com/progetto-grafico/lost-gained-in-translation-6e68a9eb66a3> (accessed 15 March 2020).

⁵³⁹ The word intertextuality was coined by Julia Kristeva, who used it first in the essay 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' (1966) and then in 'The Bounded Text' (1966-67). For a lucid overview of the development of the notion and its genealogy, see María Jesús Martínez Alfaro, 'Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept', *Atlantis*, Vol. 18, Nos. 1-2, 1996, pp. 268-285. Alfaro summarises the main premise as follows: 'There are always other words in a word, other texts in a text. The concept of intertextuality requires, therefore, that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures.' p. 268.

⁵⁴⁰ The show's curator, Chris Darke, comments on the display of workbook in the exhibition and the danger of 'fetishising' material like that. See Chris Darke, *La Jetée* (London: British Film Institute & Palgrave, 2016) p. 17; first chapter available at <https://chrismarker.org/chris-marker-2/chris-darke-la-jetee-chapter-one-bfi-classics/> (accessed 6 April 2020).

each and the conventions of their use.⁵⁴¹ In *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*, time, movement and narrative all work differently than in the film, but despite the differences between film and book, we recognise not only their direct connection but also that those characteristics are themselves addressed through transformation. Comparing film and book, it is clear that the layout of the images in *La Jetée*, the book is indeed not a literal transposition of how the stills are used in the film: leafing through it (see Fig. 4.6), we see that certain images are much smaller than others – some appear in differently sized configurations together on a page, others appear large, bleeding off their pages, and short linear sequences appear across double-page spreads. This contrasts with Marker’s workbook for the film: there they all have more or less the same size, as they also appear in the film (see Fig. 4.7).⁵⁴² Although the workbook explored the possible order of the images for the film’s scenes and is not a work in its own right, it provides a compelling comparison with *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*, underlining the difference between film and book.⁵⁴³ Chris Darke comments that *La Jetée* ‘had its phases of production, its first drafts and rough sketches’,⁵⁴⁴ adding that ‘when it comes to stillness and movement a difference, however small, can be decisive’.⁵⁴⁵ Expanding on how Marker’s practice is one of continuous transferral between different spaces and mediums, while being utterly aware of their specificity, he observes that ‘we move constantly from word to image, page to screen, book to film and back again, sometimes even in the same work [...] [t]he screen has the attributes of a page, and the page those of a screen. A book’s a film and a film’s a book’, underlining the intermedial back and forth.⁵⁴⁶ Although their practices and how they adapted elements of *Vertigo* differ significantly, all this highlights Marker’s and Gordon’s shared concerns with the specific affordances that allow the construction of narrative, also in the books related to their respective films.

Rather than serve as merely an example, *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman* can arguably be considered a source of some kind too, or we could call it a ‘preliminary’ work to *Feature Film: a book by...*, similar to how *Feature Film* has been called a supplementary work to *Vertigo*.⁵⁴⁷ Not only because of the connections of both *La Jetée* and *Feature Film* with *Vertigo*, but precisely because of the multiple aspects that are appropriated and adapted from the former in the latter. *Feature*

⁵⁴¹ Adaptation is particularly known in relation to the transition from text (be it a novel or screenplay) to moving image/film. The concern in most adaption theories is on the ‘story’, and less the specificity of the media involved. See Linda Hutcheson, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York, NY, and Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

⁵⁴² See Darke and Rashi, *A Grin Without a Cat*, pp. 57-69.

⁵⁴³ Other artists have also explored the tension between still and moving image in *La Jetée* via printed matter. See, for instance, Simon Starling, *Black Drop Ciné-Roman* (Milan and Oxford: Humboldt Books and Modern Art Oxford, 2013).

⁵⁴⁴ See Darke and Rashi, *A Grin Without a Cat*, pp. 12-13

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14. Darke describes the discovery of the workbook was ‘like a secret manual of the film [...] Particularly interesting is the comparative exchange it sets up with the film, for there are things in the workbook not in the film and things in the film not in the workbook’. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁵⁴⁷ Ravetto-Biagioli and Beugot, ‘Vertiginous Hauntings’.

Film: a book by... directly references – in a way that is similar, but also different from *La Jetée* – the media involved: the book’s title mentions a particular kind of film, a feature film, implying a certain length and narrative arc, and also situates the medium and space of the book alongside that of film, positioning the interrelationship between the two literally upfront.

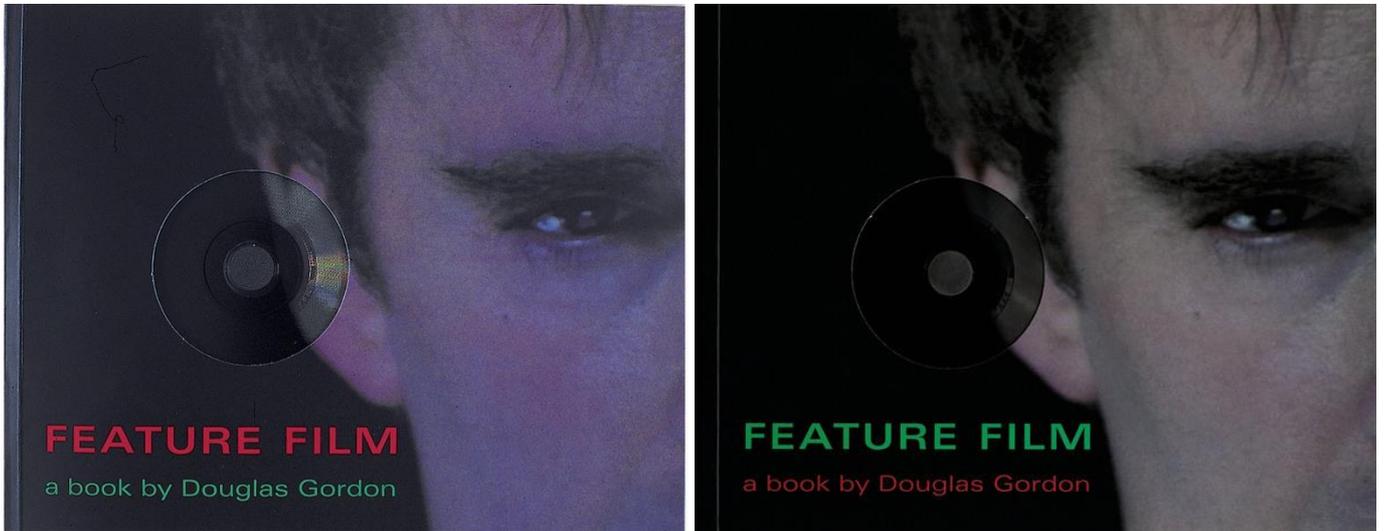


Figure 4.8: front cover of *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon* (1999); Figure 4.9: in the reprint (2002) the red and green of the title are inverted while the back blurb is green instead of white⁵⁴⁸

On the cover of *Feature Film: a book by...* the name Douglas Gordon, combined with ‘by’ situates the artist in an authorial position similar to John Berger’s on the cover of *Ways of Seeing*, discussed in Chapter 2. Like *Ways of Seeing*, *Feature Film: a book...* was made by several actors and agents, among which one could include the book *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman* as much as Mau and Marker. Like the collaboration between those who worked on the *Ways of Seeing* television programmes haunted *Ways of Seeing* the book, Mau’s collaboration with Marker haunts the collaboration between Gordon, graphic designer Baines, and Rolo and myself as the book’s co-editors, as well as others involved, via his collaboration(s) with Gordon.⁵⁴⁹ We could widen the circles of hauntings and argue that Marker’s own forays in exploring the translation of film into publications, carrying image and text over from film to the page of the book, haunt both *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman* and *Feature Film: a book by...*⁵⁵⁰

⁵⁴⁸ The cover shots derive from two sources: Fig. 4.5 from Book Works’ website (<https://www.bookworks.org.uk/node/64> (accessed 15 December 2019)), Fig. 4.6 from the Discogs website (<https://www.discogs.com/James-Conlon-Douglas-Gordon-Bernard-Herrmann-Feature-Film-A-Book-By-Douglas-Gordon/release/14465487> (accessed 15 December 2019)). The different hues of Conlon’s face are due to the (re)mediation of the image, with disintegration through transfer across the digital files and resolutions.

⁵⁴⁹ Book Works’ co-director Jane Rolo had been talking with Gordon about a publication with him for years. By Artangel and Book Works joining forces for *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon*, the network of actors and agents expanded.

⁵⁵⁰ In the 1950s Marker designed travel books and subsequently used this experience for the design of his two *Commentaires* books, published in 1961 and 1967, in which he ‘translated’ his own film works to the printed page, as discussed in Chapter 2. See also ‘L’An 2000, Chris Marker’s Book Design’, available at <https://chrismarker.org/lan-2000-rare-chris-marker/> (accessed 6 April 2020), which states: ‘Marker was as intimate with Gutenberg as he was



Figure 4.10: the front cover of *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon* with CD and text insert

In media terms, one aspect directly appropriated from *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman* to *Feature Film: a book by...* is its format – oblong, rather than the much more usual portrait – which mimics the orientation of the filmic image, through which multiple steps of transferral are already present.⁵⁵¹ But whereas *La Jetée* has written and spoken text, in *Feature Film* there is no fictional narrative.⁵⁵² Instead, the close interconnection between sound and image that *Feature Film* explores, and inverts, is extended: a CD with the recording conducted by James Conlon is embedded in the front cover (see Figs. 4.8-4.9). The sound is mediated via another medium – a CD⁵⁵³ – and the completion of Colon's ear by the same image printed on the CD, visible through a die-cut in the cover, represents what the work does: the intricate connection but also separation of sound and image is adapted here by way of the different carriers. One could even argue that the book and CD combined reference the two versions of *Feature Film*: the CD carries the full soundtrack of the film version (close to 80 min.), but the images for the book are derived from the installation version (128 min.).⁵⁵⁴ In addition, the book comprises two essays – one by film scholar Raymond Bellour, situating the work in film history, and Royal S. Brown, considering the score to *Vertigo* and its representation of the visual drama in sound – printed on an insert in the back flap, adding another medium, paper carrying text. These texts provide what Morgan calls secondary information – they describe the work in words and go beyond it, situating it in

with McLuhan. The vast majority of his “estate” consists of books. And he knew how to make them too. He weaves the two ciphers for media stages/epochs, over and over again, into rare media fabrics and a new temporal praxis for media.’

⁵⁵¹ There are clear differences too: *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman* is a hardback, clothbound book with a dustjacket and *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon* is a paperback with flaps, but the book block is the same size: 19 x 24 cm (h x w).

⁵⁵² There is a French and an English version with voiceover of *La Jetée*, which has been translated into printed text in the book, with the English is set in bold, and the French in regular.

⁵⁵³ CDs had become accessible for mass-productions in the late 1990s, meaning it was no longer financially prohibitive, offering the potential to literally ‘carry over’ the sound from a work comprising sound to a publication.

⁵⁵⁴ The musical sections of *Vertigo*'s score combined are more or less the same length as can fit onto a sound CD (they can hold around 80 min of sound), so no (re-)edit of Herrmann's soundtrack was required.

larger concentric circles of various fields – alongside the primary information of the images and sound directly derived from the work, in all its complexity as source. Using the media available at the time, a reader can literally listen while looking and reading when engaging with the publication through its three discrete elements.

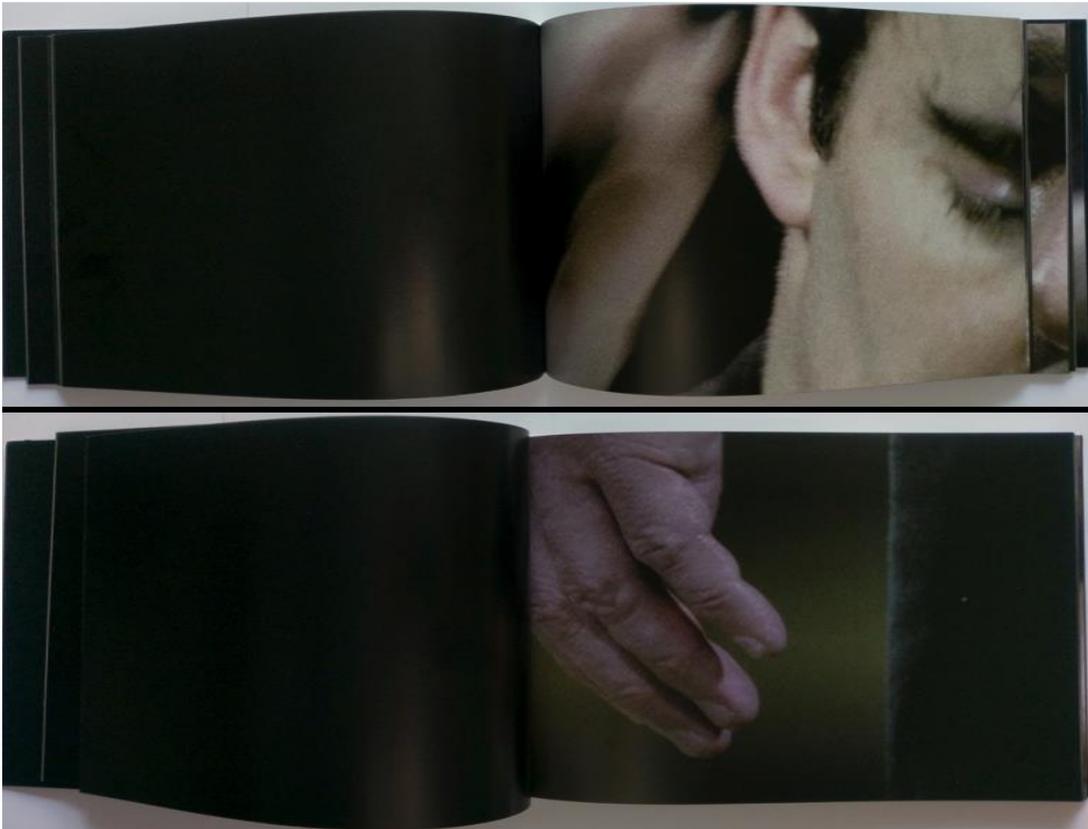


Figure 4.11: two spreads with stills from *Feature Film*, within the top spread several pages with fragments of Conlon's face, underlining the movements of his face / head in the work

The format of the book was thus partly determined by the example of a predecessor, but also by the orientation of the medium of film – aided by the converging networks surrounding that book and *Feature Film* – the process of selection and transfer of images from *Feature Film* was more complex, not least because of the amount of stills available to choose from.⁵⁵⁵ Rather than still photographs that could be carried over, as was the case in *La Jetée*, here there were thousands and thousands of frames to consider.⁵⁵⁶ The eventual selection was based on the aim to cover the entire length of the installation version of the work, and thus hold on to some sense of faithfulness, covering the entire story arc across *Vertigo's* and *Feature Film's* 128 minutes.

⁵⁵⁵ The dimensions of both books are economical, meaning that a good amount of the printed sheets end up as book block, where less economical formats lead to more waste cuts, making them more expensive.

⁵⁵⁶ A film of 128 min. (24 frames per second) comprises 184,220 frames. Even if we had 'only' worked with the film version, which comprises around 115,200 frames, there would have been 'enough' to select from.

In the process of deciding what images from among this plethora to carry over from work to book, it was not the artist who made the selection – even though the ‘by Douglas Gordon’ in the title may seem to imply that. Instead, as one of the book’s editors I spent several days in a small studio in Soho – some of which with my co-editor – going through the tapes of the installation edit of the work to select frames, one by one, that captured the visual drama of Conlon conducting the soundtrack. Although I was the one who (mainly) made the selection, one could argue that it was the soundtrack that had generated the images that was the driving (f)actor here, which was of course directly related to the story arc in *Vertigo*, as outlined earlier. These selected frames were gathered on sheets similar to photographic contact sheets,⁵⁵⁷ which gave a good impression of the possible visual flow across the full sequence, which followed the narrative sequence of *Vertigo*. In the book’s design by Baines, each image is given an entire page – similar to the treatment of some of the images in *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman* – printed in full bleed, always on the right-hand page (see Fig. 4.11) – set off against black pages on the left hand. Although no installation shots are included, these black pages represent the darkness in which one encounters *Feature Film*, be it as installation or film. Different from *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*, and in a sense closer to how Marker used still photographs for his film, each image is treated in exactly the same way: they are all the same size positioned on the page in the same way. One could, in principle, flick through it as if it were a flipbook, mimicking the movement of the film.⁵⁵⁸

To also carry over and underline the relationship between *Feature Film* and *Vertigo* – which in turn represents the fact that both are shown together in the installation version of the work – a small selection of stills from Hitchcock’s film is included among the still images from *Feature Film* (see Fig. 4.12). They are printed at a much smaller size, in full colour against a white background on left-hand pages, which reminds us of the different image sizes in *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*. This different positioning, scale and framing could be read as representing the relationship between *Vertigo* as ‘source’ and its ‘translation’ in *Feature Film*. These *Vertigo* stills show key dramatic scenes, with Scottie, and sometimes Madeleine, the main protagonists, in iconic scenes. Although these *Vertigo* images seem like small additions, their limited availability – via image libraries licenced to grant reproduction rights to third parties – had a direct impact on the selection of stills from *Feature Film* and thus the sequence eventually used.⁵⁵⁹ Few in

⁵⁵⁷ The frame sheets have, unfortunately, not survived: I only have very clear memories of them. Fig. 4.13 shows a sequence of images in a 2007 catalogue that is similar to the frame sheets I describe.

⁵⁵⁸ While possible in principle, the book is too big to be able to flip through it fast enough to simulate cinematic movement. In flipbooks images sit close to the cutting edge of the page, here the images bleed of the page in all directions, so when flipping one can’t see whole segments of the ‘action’. The chosen stills are also too far ‘apart’.

⁵⁵⁹ At the time of production of *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon*, only a limited number of stills, shot by still photographers, was available in 35mm slide format via only a few image libraries in London.

number, they provided anchoring points, making it easier to narrow down which *Feature Film* frames could be paired with the stills from the 'same' moment in *Vertigo*, not least because the drama relayed via Conlon conducting the score related to these stills concerned scenes in which hand and arm gestures and shifts in facial expression are particularly lively.



Figure 4.12: a spread with left a still from *Vertigo* and right a 'corresponding' still from *Feature Film*, which shows a blurry image of Conlon, demonstrating the aim was not to show 'perfect' stills

Although *Vertigo*'s narrative plot is not transposed into the book, it haunts *Feature Film: a book...* through the seven stills and the shots of Conlon in action. They provide a connection to Hitchcock's original and by extension Gordon's work, but one that is rooted in medial translations, rather than translation of the story arc per se. That this aspect is effectively determined because of the limited available *Vertigo* stills, adds another layer of haunting. *Feature Film: a book...* forced everyone involved to consider how image and sound can be treated in entirely different ways to carry over different aspects from work to publication. Rather than focusing on the story and its narrative arc, both *La Jetée-Ciné-Roman* and *Feature Film: a book by...* demonstrate how they work differently across the distinct media used and that mediate their originals and predecessors in nuanced and complex ways. Many publications on art, however, rely heavily on much more limited selections of images for the representation of artwork, and often extend to the work in its exhibitionary state, and thus also need to consider how that can be translated. In other books on Gordon's practice, we rarely get an impression of the visual narrative arc across *Feature Film*, an exception being a sequence in one catalogue (see Fig. 4.13). In the main, verbal descriptions, interpretations, explanations and contextualisations do a lot of the work of carrying over, and these translations in words are exactly what Morgan refers to as a distancing, offering second-hand information.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁶⁰ Morgan, 'The Exhibition Catalog', p. 343.



Figure 4.13: a selection of stills from *Feature Film*, laid out in a grid, in *Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light*, published by Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, which owns an installation version of the work⁵⁶¹

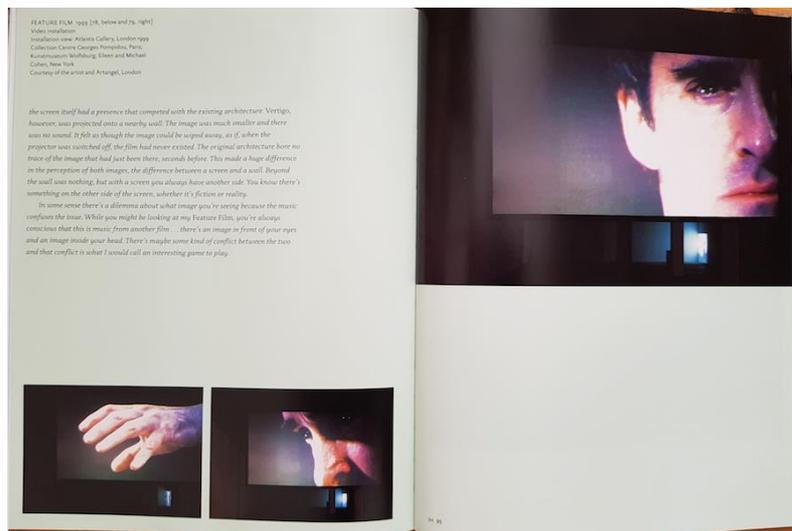


Figure 4.14: three installation slots of *Feature Film* in Katrina Brown, *DG* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004)

Feature Film: a book by... is a combination of direct transfer (of images and sound), appropriation (of sound and a few images from another original) and various adaptations (of format and how the range of images are used) from the different versions of the work and its various predecessor(s) into a publication. As a result, the book comprises primary information, as Siegelau defined it, which is underlined by the partnership with Book Works as co-publisher. As an artists' book publisher they produce books that *are* the work, rather than a translation of something made manifest in another medium first.⁵⁶² In addition, *Feature Film: a*

⁵⁶¹ Holger Broeker (ed.) *Douglas Gordon, Between Darkness and Light* (Wolfsburg and Ostfildern; Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg and Hatje Cantz, 2007) pp. 32-33.

⁵⁶² Having been founded in 1984, and after over 35 years of publishing and with a significantly changed field, Book Works still situate themselves as the leading publisher of artists' books. Their extensive and varied back catalogue

book by... contains what Morgan qualifies as distancing material by way of the two essays. What all of this does is provide an articulation of key aspects of the work through the media that are part of the publication, using their medial affordances – the book block with the images, the CD with the musical score and the text insert in the back – all of which make the publication a site in which we oscillate between a variety of sources and their various medial translations and transformations in a way that is similar to, but also different from *La Jetée: Ciné-Roman*. The book neither prefigures, nor equals or documents the work; instead, it is part of an already complex network of carrying back and forth between the work and book.

4.3.3. From Medial Transfer to New Articulation

In *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999), Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin scrutinise the ongoing development of media – understood as means of communication that lead to specific cultural forms and expressions – and their conventions through comparing older media with newer ones that follow on through technological advances or entirely new inventions.⁵⁶³ Using the term *remediation* rather than *mediation*, they argue that “[t]he process of remediation makes us aware that all media are at one level a “play of signs””,⁵⁶⁴ emphasising that each act of mediation needs a medium to mediate through. In their analysis they identify certain common behaviours: in what they call ‘transparency’, the medium is separated from the message, arguing that when a medium is used in a transparent way we don’t ‘see’ the medium of transmission and are able to focus entirely on what it is trying to convey.⁵⁶⁵ As a result, when transparency is at play – in a film broadcast on television, for instance – the viewer is able to fully engage with the story, rather than being conscious of the apparatus that mediates. In contrast, in Bolter and Grusin’s conception of ‘hypermediation’, the characteristics of a medium are an integral part of the act of mediation *and* what is being mediated. In the case of hypermediation, the specifics and affordances of the medium and the process of mediation are acknowledged and made visible, becoming part of the message.

Applying these ideas to Gordon’s work, hypermediation is exemplified by the still image of *24 Hour Psycho* on the cover of the *Spellbound* catalogue mentioned earlier (see Fig. 4.1): not only are we presented with the image of the gaping mouth, appropriated from Hitchcock’s *Psycho*, we

can be argued to offer an overview of changes in artists’ book publishing over time. See also Jane Rolo and Gavin Overall (eds.) *Again, A Time Machine: From Distribution to Archive* (London: Book Works, 2012).

⁵⁶³ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*. NB: the fact that the book was published in the same year as *Feature Film* launched is coincidence. That said, its content underlines a heightened awareness of the specificities of different media and how they may relate to each other, with newer media responding to the characteristics of older ones.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁶⁵ Bolter and Grusin build on Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1964); and McLuhan and Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (1967).

are made aware of its appropriation by Gordon through its visible pixellation, which literally shows us that it is already carried over from the medium of film to that of video. Gordon's *Feature Film* in turn emphasises that in most feature films the narrative arc is constructed through the combination of image and sound by literally prising them apart in the exhibition space, and by inverting what drives what: the score for the sound generates the images we see.



Figure 4.15: one of James Conlon's eyes in close up in *Feature Film*; as he seemingly looks at us looking at him, we see his contact lens slowly move down on his eye ball

Whereas the image from *24 Hour Psycho* on the cover of *Spellbound* also mediates the specifics of its carrier, those derived from *Feature Film* in *Feature Film: a book by...* don't tell us much about the work's medium (see Figs. 4.15-4.17). If anything, they appear rather blurry, certainly from the perspective of our HD era, in which even the most basic smartphone provides images of a resolution that can easily be printed.⁵⁶⁶ Following Mieke Bal's notion of 'preposterous history' in which she argues that quotations change an 'original' work forever, the way we encounter *Feature Film* through remediation in the book also changes what we may see in the original.⁵⁶⁷ This applies on the one hand to the story arc, which, as outlined, can in *Feature Film* be argued to comment on medial specificity – but also to the material qualities and affordances of the media used. The film version of the work, printed on extra black 35mm film stock, shows no fragmentation when screened,⁵⁶⁸ but the installation version does: we see pixels. Even

⁵⁶⁶ I have used photos shot by smartphones for reproduction for over a decade. My 2020 phone can take shots of over 7 MB, which puts the 72 dpi of the *Feature Film* frames to shame.

⁵⁶⁷ See Mieke Bal, 'Introduction', *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago, L, and London: Chicago University Press, 1999) p. 1. Bal explores how we can consider a work by Caravaggio by way of references in contemporary artists' practices. Although what happens in quotations and translations is slightly different from appropriations, they can be argued to have similar effects.

⁵⁶⁸ During the exhibition at the Kölnischer Kunstverein in 1999, a screening was also organised in a local cinema. Because a print of the film version was not available yet, a Digibeta version of the film edit was screened instead, and – like in the installation version – pixellation was clearly visible on the projection screen.

though the images in the book were rastered in the process of printing – needed to produce multiple colour layers that together make up each image⁵⁶⁹ – we have to look extremely closely to see any fragmentation in the seemingly unified mechanical reproduction of the filmic image.



Figure 4.16: spread with close up of James Conlon's eye in *Feature Film: a book by Douglas Gordon*⁵⁷⁰

The reason for this is also here a matter of translation – and transformation – between different carriers. In this case, the resolution of the still frames selected from the Digibeta tapes – 72 dpi – was not high enough to reproduce the images in print, through which the resulting fragmentation would have become highly visible. To make them printable – and their content more legible and thus a ‘better’ translation of image content – a process called interpolation had to be applied, ‘filling’ the gaps between raster dots, or pixels – generating more pixels to print – but that also leads to a certain amount of blurring of what is depicted.⁵⁷¹ One of the deciding factors for the level of interpolation was the nature of the original image⁵⁷² – in this case the Digibeta version, which shows a level of fragmentation itself – that would be the basis for the printing rasters.⁵⁷³ If one were to see the video version of *Feature Film* after having first seen the book, the pixellation of the projection might come as a surprise, especially to viewers who have grown up in our current era of hyperdensity on all forms of contemporary screens.

⁵⁶⁹ In this case the book block's pages were meant to mimic the deep black in reproduction of both film image and opposite pages, so an extra, fifth print run of black was added to the standard four colour run.

⁵⁷⁰ Comparing Figs. 4.15 and 4.16, it is clear images were cropped too, which adds another layer of adaptation to the idea of carrying over here, which I have chosen not to expand on.

⁵⁷¹ For a very simple explanation of what image interpolation is and does, see <https://www.cambridgeincolour.com/tutorials/image-interpolation.htm> (accessed 20 April 2020). The blurring generates a less sharp image, but one that has fewer discernible gaps among the printed dots.

⁵⁷² I vividly remember sending two sets of different degrees of interpolation to Gordon by courier, and meeting my co-editor, the designer and the printers' representative in Book Works' office in London to come to an agreement on which level to print. The interpolation tests have not survived.

⁵⁷³ With the low resolution of the source image and the subsequent rastering, ‘moiré’ could occur, which is the result of competing fragmentation systems, which then distort the image through an interference pattern.

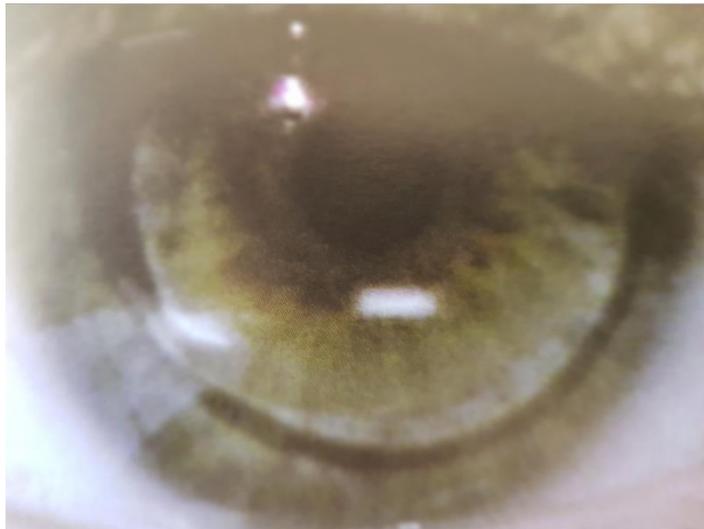


Figure 4.17: a close up of the same printed eye shot, in which fragmentation is barely visible⁵⁷⁴

Reason for expanding on these technical aspects is to underline that a translation in the case of a film image to a book image is not simply a matter of carrying over of an image as image. In *Feature Film*, each individual one underwent several steps of translation and transformation – grabbed from Digibeta, or transferred from 35mm slide for the *Vertigo* stills, rastered, interpolated and then printed – adding to the already expansive sequence of translational and intermedial steps that represent the film as a whole via an extremely fragmentary selection of 62 frames from the work, alongside 7 stills from *Vertigo*. One could outline similar trajectories for the sound: the score to *Vertigo*, and thus *Feature Film*, was originally played on analogue musical instruments – some 80 of them, which together produced the overall soundtrack – following the conductor's directions, following Herrmann's score, digitally recorded, then going through a process of sound balancing, then transferred to CD, from which we can listen to it via a CD player, which uses a laser beam to translate the inscriptions on the plastic disc back to sound, which requires an amplifier and a set of speakers or headphones for us to be able to hear it... All these individual steps transform the 'original(s)' between carriers and media, where a lot of translation work is being done to allow mediation from the source to us as listeners to take place.

All these media-specific descriptions draw attention to their potentials and limitations, but what they ignore is the fact that the possibilities on offer only come to fruition through interventions and interactions of a wide range of practitioners. Each one of them – be they artist(s), filmmaker(s), composer(s), conductor(s), musician(s), designer(s), editor(s), curator(s), sound

⁵⁷⁴ Image taken with my current smartphone: several intermedial translations are embedded here too.

editor(s) and balancer(s), image interpolator(s), printer(s), etc. – are just as essential, each of their wide-ranging knowledge and skill sets converging and impacting on the translations described. Their combined work makes the potentials of each medial translational step manifest. Where I, as co-editor, considered what could work within *Feature Film: a book by...* – through the selection of images from the installation version of the work and other aspects, in discussion with others – another editor, designer and printer would have resulted in another publication. Here I want to tease out the implications of the convergence of all these individual transfer acts once more through the lens of translation as a practice of re-articulation.

In her thoughtful exploration of the work of literary translation, Kate Briggs underlines that much of what we read to some extent fools us in our perception as original and unique works: many were written in a different language in the first place.⁵⁷⁵ While Briggs does not directly equate translating with writing – and theories of intertextuality see every expression as ‘traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures’⁵⁷⁶ – for her the practice of translating requires making decisions that are creative in their own right.⁵⁷⁷ When we read translations, we ‘receive them twice-written’,⁵⁷⁸ because in the process of doing their work the translator is ‘redoing, rewriting, remaking’ argues Briggs.⁵⁷⁹ For her ‘original’ and ‘translation’ are ‘the names for the position we put writing in’ – which maintains a certain hierarchy – and ‘the histories of writing labour that we assign to them (first-time writing, second-time writing)’ ensure that we continue to perceive the second writing as being in service of the first.⁵⁸⁰ To counter these hierarchical perceptions, Briggs contends that in the process of re-writing – translating – it is ‘attending to all differences’ that attests to the specificity of each choice, carefully made, and that situates the practice as much more than subservient and secondary.⁵⁸¹ As a result, she argues that ‘[s]ome new thing

⁵⁷⁵ Briggs, *This Little Art*. Briggs observes that many writers come to writing via reading other people’s writing. The same applies to other creative practitioners, be they artists, composers, film-makers, curators etc., and others’ work.

⁵⁷⁶ Martínez Alfaro, ‘Intertextuality: Origins and Development of the Concept’, p. 268.

⁵⁷⁷ Briggs gained her PhD through translating Roland Barthes’s late lectures. He features among the references in the book – which are not added via notes, but form a list in the back, allowing the body text to be its own thing, while acknowledging all the reading and thinking it is based on – via a quote: ‘it is obvious that knowledge enters [...] by means of very fragmented bits [...] I try to create, to invent a meaning from independent materials, which I liberate from their historical, doctrinal “truth” -> I take the referential bits (in fact, bits of reading) and I submit them to an anamorphosis.’ Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*, translated by Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007) pp. 64-65, in Briggs p. 367.

⁵⁷⁸ Briggs, *This Little Art*, p. 31.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40. Expanding on this, Briggs states that translation therefore ‘complicates the authorial position, sharing it, usurping it, sort of dislocating it’ (p. 34).

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46. An interesting development here are joint prizes for authors and translators such as the Man Booker International Prize, inaugurated in 2015. See Mark Brown, ‘Man Booker International and Independent foreign fiction prizes merge to create super-award’, *The Guardian*, 7 July 2015, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jul/07/man-booker-international-and-independent-foreign-fiction-prizes-merge-to-create-super-award> (accessed 20 May 2020).

⁵⁸¹ Focusing on translation as a thoughtful, laborious practice that is also imbued with gendered connotations, Briggs quotes Sarah Ahmed’s question: ‘What work goes into making of things such that they take form as this thing, or that

starts to get made in the frame of againness: something that is *of the original*, yes, but that will extend beyond the reach of it, the purview of it, since it is made by someone else.’⁵⁸²

Although Briggs’s carefully wrought argument focuses on language, her concerns can be carried over to other intermedial and textual situations with different affordances, vocabularies, syntaxes and grammar. Through my exploration of the translation from *Feature Film* into *Feature Film: a book by...* I have outlined that the former already relied on the coming together of multiple practices of translation and transfer, highlighting that each transfer from work to the publication relied on several sets of skills, knowledge and expertise. It is exactly through a collective ‘attending to all differences’ in the processes of translation – including all their technical and medial specificity – that allowed *Feature Film: a book by...* to become the work’s *ciné-roman*, to use Marker’s term. In translating the work into a publication, however, it was not about each individual transfer, or each juxtaposition, it was about ‘[l]ooking to the whole’ and ‘the way the thing is working and reading altogether’ as Briggs puts it.⁵⁸³

In his exploration of the ‘task’ of the translator, Walter Benjamin urges considering a text’s ‘translatability’, which requires taking into account how significance – or meaning – can be translated into the cultural context in which it will be received, which is by definition different than that of an original. For Benjamin the idea of fidelity to an original can therefore even be damaging, because fidelity and meaning are not necessarily always directly compatible.⁵⁸⁴ Rather, he argues, ‘in its *afterlife* [...] the original undergoes a change’,⁵⁸⁵ through which ‘a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense’.⁵⁸⁶ For Benjamin, the reproduction of images, as a mode of visual translation or mediation, ‘allow[s] the original to meet the beholder halfway’ by putting ‘the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself’,⁵⁸⁷ and ‘technical reproduction’ reactivates what is depicted for the viewer.⁵⁸⁸ Benjamin also attributes influence to the construction of meaning to editing, montage and sequence when considering the specific significance we are able to glean

thing?’ p. 306. Original in Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 40. Although Ahmed’s question is related to gender, it can be asked in a much more general sense, because in many projects only a few people’s work is acknowledged.

⁵⁸² Briggs, *This Little Art*, p. 338.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

⁵⁸⁴ Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, p. 78.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.* Lawrence Venuti shares Benjamin’s concern about ‘sense’, but shifts his focus towards the implications of what he calls ‘domestication’ of inscription, which fully embraces rather than denies difference, and explicitly works with it. For Venuti the message or meaning is ‘always reconstructed according to a different set of values and always variable according to different languages and cultures.’ Lawrence Venuti, ‘Translation, Community, Utopia’, *The Translation Studies Reader*, p. 70

⁵⁸⁷ Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art’, p. 220. This quote is also relevant for and referenced in Buskirk, *The Contingent Object*, p. 65.

⁵⁸⁸ Benjamin, ‘The Work of Art’, p. 221.

through mediation, or remediation, to apply Bolter and Grusin's term.⁵⁸⁹ Crystallising the implications of these ideas more explicitly, Sergei Eisenstein argues that the principle of montage 'resembles a creation – rather than a sum of its parts' where 'in every such juxtaposition the result is qualitatively distinguishable from each component element reviewed separately.'⁵⁹⁰ Both Benjamin and Eisenstein see the potential of creating something new from disparate shots through montage in film, and this idea of montage as a creative act, or sequence of acts here, resonates in Briggs's notion of 'redoing, remaking re-writing', through which translating results in a new articulation, or re-articulation in another language for another context. With the medial translations involved in *Feature Film: a book by...* montage plays itself out on multiple levels, with different practitioners contributing to different sequential transformations within the publication as a whole allowing us to see it not as the film's book, but 'a book in its own right', to borrow from Marker once more.

Morgan contends that '[i]f art could be reduced to a set of ideational parameters through image and text, the presentation of these elements could then be read directly as art'.⁵⁹¹ *Feature Film: a book by...* demonstrates that one medium is indeed not another; a work and its translation into a publication can be considered as related but also as two different articulations that are produced and disseminated in overlapping but also distinct systems of circulation. Here, I was one of a range of practitioners coming together, 'attending to all differences' in the process of translation of the work into a publication, and contributed to its making as a social object and a new articulation. Staying close to the complexity of the original work, the book challenges simplified notions of mediation and translation from one space and/or medium to another, or multiple others, in the process of which an endless chain of actions and reactions among a range of actors and agents transform what is being mediated into something else. The inherent complexity of work, connected to equally complex publications, via various modes of (re)presentation suggest we scrutinise and destabilise the focus on just a couple of easily identifiable human actors and reconsider what happens in and through their interaction and collaboration. With *Feature Film: a book by...* I have on purpose stayed close to an artwork and its translation into a publication to underline that what we perceive as a single work already presents an immense set of choices in terms of carrying over. If we expand our concerns to multiple works and their exhibition, the complexity of what can be translated and how only expands and multiplies.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228 and p. 230.

⁵⁹⁰ Sergei Eisenstein, 'Word and Image' [1939], in *The Film Sense*, edited and translated by Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1968) p. 6.

⁵⁹¹ Morgan, 'The Exhibition Catalog', p. 243.

Boris Buden suggests that similar to the qualitative change of the role of the curator, the position of translator has undergone 'a huge symbolic transformation' that 'has shifted from the margins of cultural production towards its center [...] becoming a general metaphor for a historically new type of cultural articulation and identification'.⁵⁹² If we accept his assessment, we should also recognise that different media, works and other cultural manifestations circulate in interconnected systems that each allow them to be engaged with and understood in specific ways, where 'translation always already implies a social relation: two different languages are automatically understood in terms of two different social spaces'.⁵⁹³ Although the elements of the triad art – exhibition – publication are generally perceived as clearly related, they do circulate in slightly different areas of production and dissemination. What Buden warns against is what he calls the 'trap of the homosphere', that is, the perception of one sphere as a closed homogeneous area, and the process of mediation – or translation – to another closed area.⁵⁹⁴ To avoid this trap, we need 'another mode of address' that goes beyond 'an allegedly proper sphere of art, knowledge, or whichever sphere of cultural mediation' which requires a 'new articulation'.⁵⁹⁵

Buden's argument is concerned with cultural translation, which should go beyond 'qualities traditionally ascribed' as Bachmann-Medick warns us,⁵⁹⁶ and applied to publications on art, our understanding of their position in relation to art and its exhibition can possibly shift. When Buden suggests that difference 'doesn't lay in the question of what and how to select but rather in whom and how to address', this means diverting our focus from the direct relationship between source and translation to the relationship between translation and its potential within the context of the publication as form.⁵⁹⁷ Lind states that 'the curatorial' is all about 'in the making' as 'a conduit for difference'; my argument is that repositioning publications in relation to art and their exhibition relies on taking the specificity of the space of publications into account and letting go of narrow understandings of fidelity and faithfulness, original and copy, source and target, and focus on what these publications may offer up for future readers. It is precisely the 'attending to all differences' that then allows them to become new articulations,

⁵⁹² Boris Buden, 'Towards the Heterosphere: Curator as Translator', in *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, edited by Maria Lind (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012) p. 25.

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 32. Venuti states: 'standards for what makes a good translation, for what the work of translation involves, and for how the translator should think and feel are historically and culturally determined and – they change.' Lawrence Venuti in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, 22 December 1998.

⁵⁹⁴ Buden, 'Towards the Heterosphere', pp. 34-45.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁶ Bachmann-Medick / Buden, 'Cultural Studies – a Translational Perspective'.

⁵⁹⁷ Buden, 'Towards the Heterosphere', p. 42.

rather than derivative objects comprising secondary information, which could lead to singular knowledge events for each individual future reader.⁵⁹⁸

A key question that remains is whether persistent and, as I have argued, simplistic views of publications' space and notions of origin and transfer ultimately help us with the bigger questions here about agency and value. Especially if we take Buden's suggestion on board that in a new articulation we potentially speak to a different audience via different means, how to develop a mode of address that is articulated via a range of practices coming together becomes a key concern. In the next chapter I therefore consider notions of collaboration, and following an outline of understandings in curatorial discourse, I explore several examples of publications that trouble the focus on only specific human actors converging in these processes. By challenging this persistent emphasis on human actors, traditional notions of authorship, which tend to be ascribed to single individuals, become tricky to hold on to. Shifting our perceptions of collaboration and authorship in the end may help shift enduring notions of value and hierarchy among individual positions and our understanding of 'the curatorial'.

⁵⁹⁸ Lind, 'Why Mediate Art?', p. 109.

Chapter 5: Collaboration and Authorship in Publications on Art

The art of the experimenter is related to power: invention of the power of conferring on things the power of conferring on the experimenter the power of speaking in their name.

—Isabelle Stengers⁵⁹⁹

Just because the entanglements are infinite doesn't mean the specificity of entanglements doesn't matter; on the contrary, the details matter.

—Karen Barad⁶⁰⁰

5.1. Another Set of Terms

Throughout this thesis so far, I have teased out complexities embedded in publications on art through dwelling on often intricate details by way of lengthy descriptions, using my 'authorial agency'. By way of single examples, I have outlined that the space of the book is just as constructed as the exhibition or curatorial space and is therefore far from a neutral space, and that the mediation of art and curatorial projects in publications is rarely a case of simple transposition or translation of elements from a unified original or source into another singular space and medium. In this chapter I think through how all of that matters and what the implications are for how we understand the range of positions involved in publications as curatorial projects, and what that may mean for how we understand agencies assumed in ideas of 'the curatorial'. Here I focus on two aspects that I have hinted at but not explicitly engaged with yet: collaboration and authorship. Rather than consider them as separate conceptual lenses, I treat them as closely connected and interdependent. As much of the literature on art and curatorial work shows, writing about working with others often implicates specific understandings of authorship too. What remains to be explored further is whether dominant notions of agency and value that underpin many of these understandings can be thought otherwise.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁹ Isabelle Stengers, 'La Question de l'Auteur dans les Sciences Modernes', *Littérature*, Vol. 82, 1991, pp. 3-15. Translation by Kris Pender. Stengers asks: 'And what happens when the author can only become author by engaging themselves, by transforming themselves in the very process where they learn?', which resonates with notions of knowledge production and 'the curatorial'.

⁶⁰⁰ Karen Barad, 'Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart', *Parallax*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2014, pp. 168-187, note 7, doi: 10.1080/13534645.2014.927623.

⁶⁰¹ I have referred to the notion of value throughout, but it is useful to look at its etymology here: 'value (n.) c. 1300, "price equal to the intrinsic worth of a thing;" late 14c., "degree to which something is useful or estimable," from Old French *value* "worth, price, moral worth; standing, reputation" (13c).' See <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=value> (accessed 15 June 2020).

Positioning issues of collaboration and authorship as my main concerns in this chapter requires me to consider explicitly declared human collaborations and those that aren't, as well as collaborations between humans and non-humans. In addition, it urges me to weigh up the relevance and resonance of often-cited theories on authorship in relation to contemporary practices. As Eva Weinmayr argues, 'in theoretical writing, modes of production are too often ignored, which means in practice that theorists uncritically comply with the conventional micropolitics of publishing and dissemination.'⁶⁰² Scrutiny shows that what these theories and their adoption in curatorial discourse have in common is that they tend to focus on individual(ised) agency, rather than the intersection of multiple agencies. If they do acknowledge the implications of the latter, they are interpreted as applying to only humans, even though there is scope for much broader understandings. Working through ideas formulated by several thinkers related to ANT – specifically Isabelle Stengers and Karen Barad – I explore how these may be productive when attempting to disentangle what happens in the convergence of a range of different entities and practices and positions. I weigh up what they have to offer in relation to notions of collaboration and authorship, and how they may help crystallise notions of 'the curatorial' in my objects of concern, publications on art.

Rather than following the same approach as in previous chapters, here I bring in several projects in a lighter manner to focus on these bigger questions. I deploy them to think through ideas of agency and consider how expanded notions of 'the curatorial' allow us to see publications on art as more than afterlives of artistic and curatorial work. I also argue they can be considered as constellations of curatorial and other practices, as collections of complex entanglements that enable us to rethink collaboration, authorship and value.

5.2. Collaboration and Authorship in Curatorial Discourse

Instead of focusing on discussions of the 'authorial' curator, which are often linked to the expansion of exhibitionary frameworks, not least the proliferation of biennales in the 1990s,⁶⁰³ in this section I engage with ideas around collaborative and collective working in curating,

⁶⁰² Eva Weinmayr, 'Confronting Authorship, Constructing Practices (How Copyright is Destroying Collective Practice)', in *Whose Book is it Anyway? A View from Elsewhere on Publishing, Copyright and Creativity*, edited by Janis Jefferies and Sarah Kember (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2019) p. 295, available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0159.11>. Weinmayr explores how legally grounded ideas of 'copyright' negate more egalitarian and collaborative ways of working.

⁶⁰³ For an early critique, see Douglas Crimp, 'The Art of Exhibition', in *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), which homes in on Rudi Fuchs's *Documenta 7* (1982).

which became more prevalent in the 2000s.⁶⁰⁴ Despite the emergence of various modes of collaboration – among artists and curators as well as between them – ideas of authorship and potential shifts therein as a result of working with others seem to have remained somewhat limited, or maybe less clearly articulated. Crucially, even when growing tendencies towards collaborative working are observed, and labels such as ‘collective’ authorship are introduced, authorship remains firmly attributed to humans. I therefore (re)visit some ideas of writers who look at wider constellations of production, including non-human (f)actors, and that can be argued to contribute and thus ‘co-produce’ in some sense. I (re)engage with understandings of collaboration within ‘the curatorial’ and consider how they deviate from more individualistic understandings through the emphasis on collaboration and co-creation. My aim is to bring into focus areas that have remained less theorised in relation to curating, and that are pertinent to publications, which are, after all, the natural habitat of ideas of authorship.⁶⁰⁵

Thus far I have looked closely at the use of specific terms, and continuing in that vein I start here with the *Curatorial Dictionary* – initiated in 2012 by the tranzit collective – which explores the meaning(s) of words prevalent in curatorial discourse.⁶⁰⁶ Their entry for ‘collaboration’ opens with a quote, stating ‘[c]ollaboration is the generic name for artworks, exhibitions, or projects, in which, instead of one person (artist, curator), a group of people work and develop a concept together’.⁶⁰⁷ The operative words here are, not surprisingly, ‘work’ and ‘together’, and ‘develop a concept’ clarifies that producing something tends to follow an idea, which is clearly attributed (great) value, implying a certain hierarchy between those who execute and those who can claim ownership of the idea that precedes its realisation.⁶⁰⁸ The entry also states that ‘[c]ollaboration

⁶⁰⁴ Collaboration has of course always happened, but it became a much more common and explicitly acknowledged mode of working in this decade, informed by the increase of socially engaged artistic practices. Collections of essays dedicated to collaboration and curating include Johanna Billing, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson (eds.) *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007); *Manifesta Journal* # 8 (2009-10); and *OnCurating* # 19 (2013); and Ellen Mara de Wachter, *Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration* (London: Phaidon, 2017). There are numerous essays on the topic, a selection of which I reference.

⁶⁰⁵ For the entanglement of different notions of authorship in the book as material object, see David Saunders and Iain Hunter, ‘Lessons from the “Literatory”: How to Historicise Authorship’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 3, spring 1991, pp. 479-509; see also Lisa Maruca, *The Work of Print. Authorship and the English Text Trade 1660-1760* (Seattle, WA, and London: University of Washington Press, 2007); in addition, see Molly Nesbit, “What was an Author?”, in *Midnight: The Tempest Essays* (New York, NY: Inventory Press, 2017) pp. 9- 41. Nesbit specifically looks at the shift in understanding of authorship in (French) legal terms over time in relation to art.

⁶⁰⁶ Many often-used words in curatorial discourse have (or until recently had) no direct resonance in Hungary (where tranzit are based), because of a lack of infrastructures and certain practices being more common in the (former) West. The project explores whether and how certain roles can be practised in other contexts.

⁶⁰⁷ Eszter Lázár, ‘Collaboration’, in *Curatorial Dictionary*, available at http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/collaboration/#_ftn2 (accessed 3 July 2020). The quote is derived from Christian Kravagna, ‘Working on the Community Models of Participatory Practice’, *republicart.net*, January 1999, available at http://republicart.net/disc/aap/kravagna01_en.htm (accessed 3 July 2020). NB: although each entry lists an individual author, the project overall is positioned as a discursive and collaborative effort under the tranzit moniker.

⁶⁰⁸ tranzit’s entry on authorship opens with references to legal parameters that determine such ownership.

between an artist and a curator is based on their shared authorial position',⁶⁰⁹ clarifying that the two positions are not one and the same, but that despite their difference some sort of ownership – or authorship – can apply to both. The same entry confirms that 'as an active producer of meaning, a curator can be considered through the notion of authorship', associating the production of more slippery, ephemeral matter (narrative, meaning) with authorship.⁶¹⁰ That word's entry in turn states that 'artists are considered authors of artworks and curators as authors of exhibitions', underlining their difference, but also highlighting that 'when the projects are planned together by artists and curators [...] blur[s] the boundaries further between the types of practices.'⁶¹¹ These definitions appear simple and direct, but also underline the potential for varying intertwinement of the distinct positions of artists and curators and that collaboration can manifest itself in numerous ways among and between them.⁶¹²

In the introduction to a 2004 *Third Text* issue dedicated to collaboration, John Roberts and Stephen Wright elaborate on the idea of positions on a theoretical and systemic level, arguing that 'collaboration in art expressly allows one to talk about value in art as a political matter', because 'collaboration is where labour embodied in the artwork (manual skill, cognition, art specific competences of all kinds) is exposed to scrutiny.'⁶¹³ Without using the word authorship, the idea of labour is implicitly linked to it here – and notably across the whole spectrum, from idea to execution to reception – and said scrutiny is implied to allow for the recognition of multiple kinds of contributions (and possibly authorships) at the same time. What is crucial is that Roberts and Wright situate collaboration as squarely embedded in wider systems of value and argue that 'because collaboration defines art as a problem of *cultural form* [it] addresses the very basis of art's relationship to democracy, the art world and capitalist relations of production.'⁶¹⁴ Focusing specifically on these 'capitalist relations of production' that throughout the latter half of the twentieth century became more explicitly intertwined with art, for them 'brings the category of art face to face with its most cherished expectations and ideals – individual authorship and autonomy'.⁶¹⁵ Their assessment goes some way in explaining why

⁶⁰⁹ Lázár, 'Collaboration'.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹¹ Balázs Beöthy, 'Authorship', in *Curatorial Dictionary*, available at <http://tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary/index.php/dictionary/authorship/> (accessed 3 July 2020).

⁶¹² A selection appeared as 'Curatorial Dictionary: Unpacking The Oxymoron', in *Curating Research*, pp. 230-251.

⁶¹³ John Roberts and Stephen Wright, 'Art and Collaboration: Introduction', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 2004, p. 531. The authors/editors state that '[t]heoretical discussion on the question of collaboration has been largely in abeyance in Anglo-American art since the 1970s' (p. 532) and claim this *Third Text* is the first journal issue in English dedicated to the topic related to more contemporary practices.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 532. For a discussion on value in relation to art over time, see Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). For a shorter overview see David Beech, 'Work in Postcapitalism', *PARSE Journal*, # 9, spring 2019, available at <https://parsejournal.com/article/work-in-postcapitalism/> (accessed 15 September 2020).

⁶¹⁵ Roberts and Wright, 'Art and Collaboration: Introduction', p. 532.

authorship is still mainly attributed to individuals rather than configurations of more than one person, the obvious exception being those who pertinently position themselves as a collaborative group, like tranzit do.

Considering how collaboration in art has manifested itself over time, Charles Green observes a shift between the 1960s-1970s and the start of this century. He describes it as one 'from fashioning the self through collaboration' to 'depicting the collaborating self in order to enact particular ethical problems' on the one hand, or 'positioning the self in relation to new or old friends and communities, and in relation to tasks and projects' on the other.⁶¹⁶ Although this shift sounds like a worthy rejection of the singular individualist modernist artist (and their authorial) position, Brian Holmes argues that '[c]ollective autonomy becomes a question both of individual or small-group artistic production, and of the large-scale cultural policy that conditions its uses'.⁶¹⁷ He sees the outcome of the shift Green describes much more cynically, noting that alternative and anti-hierarchical forms of positioning 'have been appropriated as rhetorical and organisational devices [...] to reinstate exploitation and alienation under another guise'.⁶¹⁸ This reading is shared by others taking a critical stance in relation to this wider embeddedness, which is illustrated by – and possibly to some extent derived from – the uptake of Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (2005) in curatorial and artistic discourse.⁶¹⁹ Their research into the increase of flexible working conditions across society is reflected in a shift in attention from individual output in the arts – as artworks or exhibitions, to follow tranzit's definitions – to the conditions surrounding cultural production becoming a key topic in critical writing, not least through the increase of collaborative, process-based practices and a growing scrutiny of the art world as a system in which certain power dynamics prevail.⁶²⁰

In their introduction to the book *Taking the Matter into Common Hands* (2007), the editors provide an overview of these developments, but also observe that "collective process" has

⁶¹⁶ Charles Green, 'Group Soul: Who Owns the Art Fusion?', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 2004, p. 595. Roberts and Wright hail Green as one of the first authors to critically engage with the topic in *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art, from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

⁶¹⁷ Brian Holmes, 'Artistic Autonomy and the Communication Society', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 2004, pp. 548, doi: 10.1080/0952882042000284952. Holmes also asks: 'Why talk about autonomy when the major thrust of experimental art in the 1960s and 1970s was to undermine the autonomous work?' (p. 547).

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 552.

⁶¹⁹ Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005 [1999]). The book is based on systemic analysis of literature on management in the 1960 and 1990s. References started to appear in international art discourse after the English edition was published. See, for instance, Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray (eds.) *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (London: Mayflybooks, 2009); see also Barnaby Drabble, 'Stop Making Sense: The Ends of Curating and the Beginnings of the Exhibition', PhD, Edinburgh College of Art, 2010, available at <https://era.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/31836> (accessed 15 September 2020).

⁶²⁰ See, for example, Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray & Ulf Wuggenig (eds.) *Critique of Creativity Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the 'Creative Industries'* (London: Mayflybooks, 2011); and Vidokle, 'Art Without Artists'.

different meanings', explaining that in activist contexts 'it refers to an instrument for formulating a political protest', whereas in management situations 'it stands for networking and effectiveness'.⁶²¹ Expanding, Maria Lind argues that '[c]urrent ideas about collaboration in art are intertwined with other contemporary notions concerning what it means to "come together", "be together" and "work together"',⁶²² observing that 'collaboration as a method has become a central aspect of immaterial production during the last few decades',⁶²³ echoing Holmes's and Boltanski and Chiapello's observations of wider tendencies. In her consideration of a range of (mainly artistic) collaborative practices and the varying terminologies used to describe them,⁶²⁴ Lind argues for a distinction between what she calls 'single' and 'double' collaboration: in the former 'the author remains alone and contributions of others are towards the realisation of an idea', in the latter 'collaboration takes place both on the level of the author, with the formulation of the idea, and also in the realisation of the work.'⁶²⁵ Lind here thus also distinguishes between idea and execution – upholding a hierarchy and linking ideas directly to authorship – but at the same time acknowledges that collaboration of multiple contributors can be present at diverse stages of development and realisation in her understanding of 'double' collaboration. She makes this more concrete when observing that many of the collaborations 'consist of agents from different fields' and 'very often these collaborations lie on the border between activist, artistic and curatorial activities'.⁶²⁶ To illustrate this, Lind references the curatorial collective What How and for Whom (WHW),⁶²⁷ who argue that 'the motivation to collaborate is that it [...] has to make possible that which is otherwise impossible', underlining the explicitly political impetus for their own collaborative practice.⁶²⁸

In a special issue on collaboration of *Manifesta Journal* (2009-10),⁶²⁹ Magalí Arriola connects collaboration more directly with authorship, and argues for a distinction between 'collective

⁶²¹ Johanna Billing, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson, 'Introduction', in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands*, p. 9.

⁶²² Maria Lind, 'The Collaborative Turn', in *Taking the Matter...*, p. 17. Lind references an extensive series of projects and events that involve different modes of collaboration, all in the early 2000s.

⁶²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁶²⁴ A significant expansion was published as 'Complications; On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art', *Public, Art, Culture, Ideas*, special issue on 'New Communities', No. 39, Spring 2009, pp. 53-73.

⁶²⁵ Lind, 'The Collaborative Turn', p. 27. In her essay 'The Social Turn' (*Artforum*, February 2006), Claire Bishop takes issue with Lind's embrace of socially engaged artists' work primarily on the basis of their collaborative nature.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶²⁷ Having worked as a collective since 2000, initially mainly in Zagreb, WHW became well-known internationally through 'their' edition of the Istanbul Biennale in 2009, which argued for the need for art and culture to be political.

⁶²⁸ Lind, 'The Collaborative Turn', p. 29. The statement is derived from WHW, 'New Outlines of the Possible', in *Collective Creativity*, edited by René Block and Angelica Nollert (Kassel: Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005).

⁶²⁹ The journal is published by the Foundation that since the mid-1990s organises Manifesta. 'For almost every edition the foundation commissions a team of high-profile curators who may, or may not, know each other in advance. They are invited to collaborate in order to curate a single exhibition that should in one way or another relate to the already selected by the MF exhibition location and overarching geopolitical agenda.' See Eva Fotiadi, 'The canon of the author: On individual and shared authorship in exhibition curating', *Journal of Art Historiography*, No. 11, December 2014 [2013], available at <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/fotiadi.pdf> (accessed 20 June 2020).

curating as the shared responsibility of selecting, confronting and outing into dialogue a series of artists and curatorial visions', which again emphasises the different positions of artists and curators, 'and setting up a shared authorship uttered as a single voice.'⁶³⁰ Her concerns are slightly different than Lind's and her idea of 'single' and 'double' collaboration, and Arriola complicates what authorship can be understood to be by indicating that there is more to it than a simply dichotomy between one or more than one. To get past this prevalent binary, she argues for a rethinking of exhibition models as 'not only articulating artistic content, but also as addressing the shifting roles of cultural production' by 'exploring the point where artistic and curatorial practice can actually meet without competing.'⁶³¹ Like Lind, she mentions WHW, praising them for 'the importance they place on their curatorial practice over their identity,'⁶³² and applying 'strategies that have less to do with a democratic mission' than the ability of 'calling into question the transactions and exchanges that animate our globalized capitalist art world and its systems of legitimation'.⁶³³ Which brings into relief that their mode of collaborative curating is by definition self-reflexive and questions rather than affirms known values and hierarchies. Although approaching notions of collaboration and authorship from different angles, Arriola's assessment shows clear affinity with Roberts and Wright's, and their views on social systems and art's embeddedness within it, as well as Holmes's sceptical views on the potential collaboration within said systems, while at the same time remaining open to the possibility of multiple modes of authorship being active at once.

With this increased thinking around collaboration and networks of actors in the 2000s, it is no surprise that ideas formulated by thinkers associated with ANT started to be referenced within the curatorial field. This is not to foreground ANT per se, but an observation of the demonstrable resonance between ideas of collaboration in relation to curating and ideas of networks and agency as developed by those applying an ANT(-like) approach.⁶³⁴ This is not least exemplified by Bruno Latour's own ongoing collaboration with Peter Weibel in a range of exhibitions, of which 'Making Things Public' (2005) is particularly relevant for the evolving discourse on collaboration and curatorial practice in the 2000s.⁶³⁵ Referring to this show,

⁶³⁰ Magalí Arriola, 'Towards a Ghostly Agency: A Few Speculations on Collaborative and Collective Curating', *Manifesta Journal*, # 8, 2009-10, p. 26.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶³³ *Ibid.* The appointment of WHW as directors of Kunsthalle Wien in June 2019 generated a flurry of articles and interviews on the merits of curatorial collaboration.

⁶³⁴ Lind's various descriptions of 'the curatorial' strongly resonate with ANT thinking, although she does not explicitly reference or acknowledge this; I have not found a direct mention other than her use of the word 'agent'.

⁶³⁵ 'Making Things Public' took place at several venues in Europe in 2004-05, and was organised by ZKM, Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Frankfurt. The exhibition was accompanied by a hefty catalogue, titled *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), to which Latour contributed the essay 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public'. The latest collaboration of Latour with Weibel and ZKM launched during spring 2020's lockdown: titled 'Critical Zones', the web iteration of which opens with a quote

Katharine Schlieben contends that '[m]any collaborative constellations of actors could be ascribed to a "culture of practice" because the component of gathering is indeed integral to social practice',⁶³⁶ her terminology resembling Latour's, as explored in earlier chapters.⁶³⁷ Schlieben elaborates, noting that collaborative working 'could be described as a performative and process-oriented practice that expands and develops in response to its constellation of phenomena.'⁶³⁸ By emphasising the importance of process – as always in response and relation to the context in which it unfolds – Schlieben also draws attention to the fact that because of the emphasis on collaboration, the focus is no longer on an end product – be that an exhibition or other form – but now lies with a more ephemeral range of interactions and exchanges that together constitute something that is more fluid and flexible, and is dependent on who and what are involved.⁶³⁹ This chimes with one of Lind's descriptions of 'the curatorial', which argues that it manifests itself as 'a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas [...] that strive to create friction and push new ideas', which similarly points at a more unstable and unpredictable performative unfolding that is contingent on multiple variables, both human and non-human.⁶⁴⁰

In a 2009-10 essay, Paul O'Neill questions the widespread attention, reverence even, for these processes of collaboration, and asks whether 'the merging of people and practices [can] offer any sustainable resistance to the cult of creative individualism, or is the "collective" just another marketable brand in disguise?'⁶⁴¹ He argues that every group exhibition is, after all, 'the result of divergent, complex and dialectical relations between curators, artists and all those provided with agency in the process as co-producers.'⁶⁴² While this sounds like an open and inclusive description of the (group) exhibition as medium, it does raise the question whether the agencies involved in all this coming together are indeed acknowledged, and whether or not that inclusiveness is borne out in how such projects are described. Looking beyond the exhibition as medium in which artists and curators clearly 'work together', O'Neill acknowledges that there is greater potential for 'proper' collaboration – beyond superficial labelling – in activities that take

from Donna Haraway, 'There is no becoming, there is only becoming with'. When scrolling down, you are told 'You are not alone, there are XX entities here with you.' See <https://critical-zones.zkm.de/#!/> (accessed 15 July 2020)

⁶³⁶ Katharine Schlieben, 'The Crux of Polyphonic Language, or the Thing as Gathering', *Manifesta Journal*, # 8, 2009-10, p. 20.

⁶³⁷ The publication of Latour's *Reassembling the Social* in 2005 likely impacted the development of 'Making Things Public' at ZKM.

⁶³⁸ Schlieben, 'The Crux of Polyphonic Language', p. 20.

⁶³⁹ Virtual iterations and extensions of curatorial projects, the development of which has accelerated significantly during the Covid-19 pandemic, offer their own potential in terms of real-time gathering and collaboration that differ from discursive collaborative events in real life. This will no doubt filter through in ideas of 'the curatorial'.

⁶⁴⁰ Lind, 'Performing the Curatorial', p. 20.

⁶⁴¹ O'Neill, 'Beyond Group Practice', p. 37.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 39.

place under what he calls the ‘educational turn’.⁶⁴³ He contends that the ‘notable punctuated shifts away from the “single-author” curatorial model [...] towards more collaborative, discursive and collective models [...] has] demonstrated the advantage of pooling knowledge, resources, networks and opinions’.⁶⁴⁴ In 2012 – when more definitions of ‘the curatorial’ had started to circulate – he argues that ‘the curatorial is at its most productive when it prioritises a type of working with others that allows for a temporary space of cooperation, coproduction, and discursivity to emerge in the process of doing and speaking together’, as quoted before.⁶⁴⁵ The question that these developments and definitions raise for my own enquiry is what the implications are for the understanding of authorship. If there is no clear linearly sequential trajectory from idea to execution any more, and engaging in a discursive process with others is part of the work, or constitutes the work altogether – for artists and curators, possibly including audience members – the recognition and attribution of authorship becomes more complex, and is something that is certainly no longer about merely a distinction between idea and execution.

In another 2009-10 essay, John Roberts references Walter Benjamin’s 1935 text ‘The Author as Producer’,⁶⁴⁶ and argues that ‘[w]hatever authorial role the curator takes on, [their] contribution to the overall production of art is still largely designated as secondary to the authorial voice of the artist, no matter how displaced or attenuated the independent voice of the contemporary artist is.’⁶⁴⁷ In light of all the writing around process and discursive interaction, Roberts’s assessment seems regressive, especially when he contends that ‘[t]he current identification between the artist as producer and immaterial worker and curator as producer as immaterial worker, then, gives away too much to the positivisation of the artist as technician’, but one could also argue this view puts questions of hierarchy and value centre stage.⁶⁴⁸ Explicitly distancing themselves from the idea of the ‘mythical artist’, the editors of a 2019 issue of *PARSE Journal* on ‘work’ refer to ‘the pragmatic arrangements under which studio assistants, fabricators, curators, administrators, support staff and educators produce, maintain and reproduce the system of art’, neatly identifying said system as reliant on a broad spectrum of individuals.⁶⁴⁹ Observing that many traditional theorists have been evoked in ‘contemporary

⁶⁴³ O’Neill was at the time in the process of production of Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.) *Curating and The Educational Turn* (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions and de Appel, 2010).

⁶⁴⁴ O’Neill, ‘Beyond Group Practice’, p. 42.

⁶⁴⁵ O’Neill, ‘The Curatorial Constellation’, p. 437.

⁶⁴⁶ Benjamin, ‘The Author as Producer’, pp. 85-103.

⁶⁴⁷ John Roberts, ‘The Curator as Producer: Aesthetic Reason, Noneasthetic Reason, and Infinite Ideation’, *Manifesta Journal*, # 10, 2009-10, pp. 54.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.* See also Marion von Osten, ‘Editorial – “In Search of the Postcapitalist Self”’, *e-flux Journal*, # 17, June 2010, which she edited out of frustration with the limited discourse. See further reflections in ‘Marion von Osten on her collaborative style and multiple roles, interviewed by Charlotte Barnes’, *OnCurating*, # 19, p. 89.

⁶⁴⁹ Benjamin Fallon, Dave Beech, Kirsteen Macdonald and Marina Vishmidt, ‘Editorial introduction’, *PARSE Journal*, # 9, spring 2019, available at <https://parsejournal.com/journal/#work> (accessed 15 July 2020). They list a range of relevant authors on the topic, among whom Angela McRobbie, Stefano Harney and Gregory Sholette,

discourse that challenges the assumptions that artistic work can be bracketed off from the regimes of labour', they wonder how creative labour can be a force for wider change.⁶⁵⁰ While this is an absolutely valid objective, the downside of the lumping together of all 'workers' in creative contexts versus 'the system' is that it takes us away from the fact that greater value is still attributed to the contributions of specific individuals – holding particular positions, e.g. artist, curator – while essentially setting up another binary. Going back to Roberts, he sees the potential for a more balanced relationship between artists and curators through 'accepting the equalization of the skills between artist and curator within the new digital economy' where 'artist and curator converge as cognate identities.'⁶⁵¹ While his characterisation of the digital economy on the one hand greatly over-simplifies the diversity of contemporary practices, the labelling of both artists and curators as two 'cognate identities' in their collaborations points in the same direction as Arriola's and O'Neill's, where a sense of ownership – and thus authorship – across a trajectory of conception and production can be shared, however production materialises, or remains immaterial.

Boris Buden engages with similar concerns when he argues that 'production in cognitive capitalism breaks down the distinction between production and consumption as separate spheres', through which he broadens the spectrum along which collaboration can occur.⁶⁵² Buden also builds on Benjamin, for whom 'the truly political meaning of art emerges [...] in such a change in the mode of art production that enables consumers to become producers and turns spectators into collaborators.'⁶⁵³ By making 'consumers' and 'spectators' part of the range of possible productive collaborative configurations – where the first label is a direct nod to the neoliberal context in which we all operate – Buden recognises the potential authorial role of audiences too. Whereas Roberts and Buden reflect on the ongoing relevance of a well-known text on authorship, what is striking among most of the curatorial texts on collaboration in its various guises mentioned so far, is that theirs are exceptions: most authors (used intentionally here) use the word without defining parameters or providing concrete references and considering their impact, be it in conceptual, legal or other terms.⁶⁵⁴

Another such exception is Federica and Vittoria Martine's 2010 essay 'Questions of Authorship' in which they approach the topic in relation to curating head on. Referencing Roland Barthes's

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ Roberts, 'The Curator as Producer', p. 57.

⁶⁵² Boris Buden, 'The Wine Was Very Good: On the Task of the Curator', *Manifesta Journal*, # 10, 2009-10, p. 11. The title of the text can be read as a nod to another Benjamin essay, 'The Task of the Translator', referenced in Chapter 4.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁵⁴ Eva Weinmayr demonstrates the conundrum this can lead to when she ironically asks herself 'do I simply and uncritically affirm the mechanisms I am criticising by delivering a single-authored text to be printed and validated within the prevailing audit culture?' Weinmayr, 'Confronting Authorship', p. 298.

text ‘The Death of the Author’ (1967)⁶⁵⁵ and Michel Foucault’s response in ‘What is an Author?’ (1969),⁶⁵⁶ they note that when these thinkers’ essays appeared, ‘the definition of this new role of curator and the resulting discourse of curatorial authorship arguably ran parallel to the establishment of new forms of collaboration between artists and exhibition makers’, implying a connection of sorts.⁶⁵⁷ Their references to Barthes and Foucault are not the first: in one of their ‘middleman’ texts, Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen contend that ‘any mode of authorship is a complex and variable function of discourse, and as such cannot be isolated from the apparatuses of representation surrounding it’, freely quoting Foucault.⁶⁵⁸

In the opening of their essay, Martini and Martini juxtapose Barthes and Foucault slightly differently, underlining that for Barthes, ‘book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a “before” and an “after”’, and ‘the modern “scriptor” is born simultaneously with the text’, situating the human act(or) and its result as interdependent.⁶⁵⁹ They pair this with a quote from Foucault arguing that the idea of authorship ‘results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author’, qualifying that ‘these aspects of an individual, which we designate as an author (or which comprise an individual as an author), are projections.’⁶⁶⁰ Martini and Martini trace the conditions and contexts in which these ‘projections’ appear in the curatorial field, including around Harald Szeemann, often classified as an, if not the first example of the ‘authorial’ curator. Szeemann himself, however, describes the process of ‘his’ Documenta 5 (1972) as one in which ‘seven people [...] are responsible and reach the final decisions, together with the secretary general’.⁶⁶¹ Counter to his usual characterisation, Martini and Martini argue that this ‘collaborative structure [...] seems to have anticipated the trend of having a central curator and a network of collaborators.’⁶⁶²

Tracing subsequent iterations, they see a range of permutations: on the one hand there are Documentas in which a single curator can be identified and attributed individual authorship –

⁶⁵⁵ Roland Barthes, ‘The Death of the Author’, in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977) pp. 142-148. The text appeared first in English as one of the elements of *Aspen* journal, issue 5/6 in 1967, referenced in Chapter 2.

⁶⁵⁶ Foucault, ‘What is an Author’.

⁶⁵⁷ Martini and Martini, ‘Questions of Authorship’, p. 262.

⁶⁵⁸ Andreasen and Bang Larsen, ‘The Middleman’, p. 26. For Foucault an author is a ‘variable and a complex function [...] the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning’. Foucault, ‘What is an Author’, p. 208.

⁶⁵⁹ Martini and Martini, ‘Questions of Authorship’, p. 261. The term ‘scriptor’ refers to the writing down of ideas, and both the book and the author coming into existence through the act. In their essay ‘Lessons from the “Literatory”’, Saunders and Hunter complicate this through outlining the complexity of who is actually considered to ‘write down’ and own ideas in the production of printed books (see note 605).

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶¹ Mueller, *Harald Szeemann, Exhibition Maker*, p. 157. The ‘secretary general’ refers to Szeemann himself.

⁶⁶² Martini and Martini, ‘Questions of Authorship’, p. 266. See also Fotiadi, ‘The canon of the author’. Like Martini and Martini, Fotiadi unpicks the myth of the authorial curator around Szeemann and the 1972 Documenta. She uses a quote from Bazon Brock, one of the other curators, to set up her argument: ‘[t]he Zeitgeist proclaimed that everybody had to shift from arguing in terms of structuralism into patterns of individualism’, demonstrating the influence of wider societal processes and modes of thinking on curatorial practice and subsequently discourse. Brock in Lucia Pesapane. ‘Interview with co-curators: Jean Christophe Ammann, Bazon Brock, Francois Burkhardt, and Johannes Cladders’, in Derieux, *Harald Szeemann*, p. 135.

Jan Hoet's in 1992, for example⁶⁶³ – on the other hand acknowledging that 'biennials and other large-scale exhibitions have also actively contributed to the dissemination of collaborative curating'.⁶⁶⁴ Instead of linking the rise of the authorial curator to the proliferation of biennials as form, Martini and Martini thus argue that it was precisely their spread that gave rise to a more nuanced range of associative, correspondent-like and 'proper' collaborative initiatives, including 'multiple authorship', like in Okwui Enwezor's 1997 Johannesburg Biennale.⁶⁶⁵

For Enwezor's Documenta 11 (2002), the idea of 'communities of discourse' was introduced, intended to make 'room for new forms of knowledge', a description edging towards what later definitions of 'the curatorial' outline.⁶⁶⁶ This was the Documenta with discursive events prior to the exhibition – the so-called 'platforms' – allowing for plural, multi-vocal exchanges rather than presenting a singular narrative. Also exploring a plural approach, Francesco Bonami took things in a different direction in the Venice Biennale of 2003 when he invited other curators to each take ownership over a section of the main exhibition. Rather than producing a joint narrative, each curator's voice was presented as a distinct one, which according to Daniel Birnbaum 'pushed plurality as far as possible.'⁶⁶⁷ The last iteration of Documenta in 2017, in turn, was organised by a group of around 40, carrying a labels such as 'associate curator' and 'curator-at-large', 'led' by Adam Szymczyk, and which 'proposed that documenta did not belong to anyone in particular – politicians, sponsors, etc. but to those who made it happen: artists, organizers and visitors together.'⁶⁶⁸ Although Szymczyk does not mention authorship here, his statement neatly links the legal notion of authorship – as a form of ownership – with wider systems of cultural production, at the same time acknowledging the various human actors within it, including audience members. He also references ruangrupa, the Indonesian collective 'in charge'

⁶⁶³ Jan Hoet did collaborate closely with another curator, Bart de Baere. Similar to how the names of other curators in Documenta 5 are often omitted, De Baere's name is often lacking in references to Documenta 9. Another example is Aperto 93, which was the result of an exchange between thirteen curators, initiated by and generally attributed to Helena Kontova and Giancarlo Politi.

⁶⁶⁴ Martini and Martini, 'Questions of Authorship', p. 267.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 268. The phrase was formulated by Boris Groys, in 'Multiple Authorship', in *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennial in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006) pp. 93-95. Groys posits that the roles of artists and curators have become conflated, not so much because curators claim ownership over their role as creative acts, but because of artists taking on what curators used to do: 'Today an author is someone who selects, who authorizes. Since Duchamp the author has become a curator [...] and therefore [w]hen confronted with an art exhibition, we are dealing with multiple authorship.'

⁶⁶⁶ Carol Becker, 'A Conversation with Okwui Enwezor', *Art Journal*, No. 58, summer 2002. Rather than Szeemann's iteration with a team of seven, Enwezor's Documenta – for which he also worked with six others – is most often hailed as the first collaboratively 'authored', even though there are similarities between their respective approaches.

⁶⁶⁷ Daniel Birnbaum, 'The Archaeology of Things to Come', in Obrist, *A Brief History*, p. 237. The statement by Birnbaum, involved in Bonami's Venice Biennale, underlines the emphasis on collaboration in curatorial discourse.

⁶⁶⁸ Pablo Larios and Adam Szymczyk, "'Museums must evolve or they will not exist": Curator Adam Szymczyk Speaks Out on the Future of Museums, Colonialism and his documenta 14', *frieze*, 20 July 2020, available at https://frieze.com/article/museums-must-evolve-or-they-will-not-exist-curator-adam-szymczyk-speaks-out-future-museums?utm_campaign=later-linkinbio-friez%E2%80%A6 (accessed 21 July 2020). This iteration was preceded by a conference in 2015 under the header 'expanding thought collectives', subtly situating thinking as a collaborative process. See <https://arthist.net/archive/10592/view=pdf> (accessed 15 September 2020).

of the next Documenta, scheduled for 2022.⁶⁶⁹ They themselves state they ‘rarely have hierarchy’, and argue that the ‘shift towards knowledge- or information-based practices and away from object-making [...] has never been so clearly necessary to so many.’⁶⁷⁰ In their approach, which foregrounds collective nurturing and care, ‘we are quite far from the concept of an exhibition as a display of artworks as static carriers of ideas’,⁶⁷¹ Szymczyk notes, succinctly doing away with the distinction between idea and execution, simply because it is no longer relevant in ‘practices that depend on accumulations of value in time, knowledge, and dissemination’ as ruangrupa see it.⁶⁷² Considering the permutations of curatorial positioning in biennials, Martini and Martini conclude that in the twenty-first century some have indeed shown that individual views have become ‘intersubjective’, with which the ‘notion of the singular, unequivocal curator as “author” seems to be in tension’.⁶⁷³ Coming to a similar conclusion, Eva Fotiadi argues that ‘the image of the curator as a charismatic single-author is to some degree a construction’, chiming with Foucault’s idea of the author as a ‘projection’.⁶⁷⁴

What all this thinking about singular or collaborative positioning of the curator obscures is that things don’t have to fall in either a singular or collaborative mode, but can be perceived as ambiguous. Nanne Burman, for instance, comments on Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s Documenta 13 that her ‘curatorial authorship oscillated ambivalently between a compliance with the model of the invisible female hostess and the (re)centring on the curator as an object of attention.’⁶⁷⁵ For Fotiadi, the ‘dominant single-author model in curating has concealed the importance of collective and collaborative practices’,⁶⁷⁶ and the enduring question ‘what is an author?’ has continued to obscure the for her more important question of ‘what is a work?’⁶⁷⁷ That this potentially sets up an equally obscuring dynamic is demonstrated by Molly Nesbit when she argues that ‘[t]hose who go looking for authors must devise the means by which to recognize not only the worker but the work’, highlighting that the positioning of the former is

⁶⁶⁹ Although they are perceived as a collective, individuals often speak on behalf of the group while also speaking to their individual interests and strengths. Underlining their belief in the value of working in collaborative configurations, their first announced participants for Documenta 15 include a range of other groups, under the idea of *lumbung*, or rice barn, which contributes to everyone’s nourishment, with care and wellbeing as core values. See <https://www.documenta.de/en/documenta-fifteen/#news> (accessed 21 July 2020).

⁶⁷⁰ ruangrupa, ‘Ruangrupa, the Collective in Charge of the Next Documenta, Reflect on What It Means to Curate in Times of Crisis’, *Artnet*, 4 June 2020, available at <https://news.artnet.com/about/ruangrupa-1506> (accessed 30 October 2020).

⁶⁷¹ Larios and Szymczyk, “Museums must evolve”.

⁶⁷² ruangrupa, ‘Ruangrupa, the Collective’.

⁶⁷³ Martini and Martini, ‘Questions of Authorship’, p. 272.

⁶⁷⁴ Fotiadi, ‘The canon of the author’, p. 2. Without her acknowledging Foucault’s notion of the ‘projection’ of authorship, Fotiadi’s idea of it being a construction clearly resonates with this. It is worth noting that her essay appeared in a historiographical journal, rather than one focused on art or curating.

⁶⁷⁵ Nanne Burman, ‘Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at DOCUMENTA (13)’, *OnCurating*, # 8, 2011, p. 149.

⁶⁷⁶ Fotiadi, ‘The canon of the author’, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

intrinsically connected to how we define and thus perceive the latter.⁶⁷⁸ According to Nesbit, '[i]t is possible to plot a politics of cultural labour and possible to imagine a collective of authors, individuals who do not lose themselves when working with others', suggesting that different modes of authorship can indeed be present concurrently.⁶⁷⁹ While this may require a conceptual leap with work that manifests in a singular material form, in practices that rely on collaborative, process-based exchanges the interconnection between what can be perceived 'the work' and its 'authors' quickly generates conundrums of authorial identification and acknowledgement.⁶⁸⁰

In another 2009 essay Roberts asks the following pertinent questions: 'Is collaboration essentially a post-autonomous condition? Is it the means by which art is able to dissolve its use-values into everyday practice? Or is it the space where autonomy (or rather the necessary fiction of autonomy) is defended and implemented?'⁶⁸¹ It is this latter question – about collaboration and autonomy, or its fiction – that is particularly relevant for publications on art. It points at the persistent contradictions in artistic and curatorial discourse: if one accepts that artists and curators' practices are heavily networked and by definition collaborative in nature, then why continue to acknowledge and thus attribute greater value to only some individuals? It may be more fruitful to consider what, indeed, the ramifications are of the continued use of specific labels when their traditional connotations are effectively challenged by how the positions they refer to are being practised. Does the use of these terminologies itself contribute to the perpetuation of specific value systems and hierarchies that belie the often much more nuanced and complex nature of the interactions and connections they refer to?

Of course there are many more examples of ever so slightly differently phrased descriptions of how collaboration in curating can manifest itself and be understood. However, as all of the above shows, they do follow certain patterns, and therefore it may be more productive to ask: what is missing among all these definitions and attributions, and where does that leave us in terms of the interconnection between collaboration and authorship? To summarise: in many of the descriptions referenced, there is not only some implied division between idea and execution – with greater value attributed to the former – but also an accepted distinction between the assumed positions of artists and curators. Some argue that these can come very close – and even

⁶⁷⁸ Nesbit, 'What was an author?', p. 9.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁶⁸⁰ As Stephen Wright puts it: 'As users contribute content, knowledge, know-how and value, the question as to how they be acknowledged becomes pressing. With the rise of collectively organised art-sustaining environments, single-signature authorship tends to lose its purchase – like possessive individualism in reverse.' Stephen Wright, *Towards a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2014) p. 11. NB: the notion of 'authorship' (as well as copyright) in the lexicon is labelled as a 'conceptual institution that should be retired'.

⁶⁸¹ John Roberts, 'Collaboration as a problem of art's cultural form', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 2004, pp. 557-564, doi: 10.1080/0952882042000284961.

audiences can be drawn into the constellation of production – and there is now more ambiguity over what and who has primacy than in the 1990s, when curatorial discourse started to develop. However, rarely do these descriptions pay attention to how ideas and their execution can shift in and through the interactions of all these collaborators, and how new possibilities reveal themselves as things unfold in the process. Nor do they engage with the fact that what a work – as art or as curatorial project – can be is not necessarily always thought through in advance, and isn't always part of what materialises – as specific form or as process – either.

While explorations around labour and value focus on changes in power dynamics in the post-Fordist, or post-autonomous, environment in which artist, curators, as well as other practitioners and audiences operate, it continues to focus on individuals working within a dominant system (often treated as an amorphous whole) and where the work that is produced collectively is partly or wholly immaterial – the question of how exactly collaboration happens is rarely teased out. In addition, how ideas on agency that are no longer anchored to specific individuals and that embrace a more expanded, distributed nature may change notions of value – and what they apply to, including ideas of creativity, intention, originality, contribution – remains to be thought through further. Despite the increase of an acceptance of process as work, which is integral to the generation of new knowledge through the coming together of 'different knowledges' in ideas of 'the curatorial', attention remains focused on either ends of the process. Descriptions still home in on ideas that precede interactions – thereby foregrounding the 'intentions' of a few individuals and/or the issues they address – or elaborate on how the effects are experienced by some (often very specific) participants, largely bypassing what happens in between. As a result, understandings of authorship remain firmly associated with a limited set of human actors and tend to ignore non-human (f)actors. When these are acknowledged, they are often condensed as systemic frameworks that challenge or subsume individual human agency, like in institutional critique.⁶⁸² Rarely are we presented with a narrative that pays detailed attention to interactions over time, to potential frictions and gradual shifts towards agreements between parties and within the specific contexts in which they operate, and that recognises accidental events that may nevertheless change the direction of the process and what the work(s) becomes. In the next section I return to publications on art, and consider how they may help disentangle what happens in these processes of convergence and what that may tell us about collaboration and authorship and 'the curatorial'.

⁶⁸² For an overview of critical writing rather than descriptions of works, see Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.) *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writing* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).

5.3. Producing Collaboratively – Complicating Authorship

In this section, I bring the limitations of a question posed by Marion von Osten, namely ‘why don’t other people name all their collaborators?’, into perspective.⁶⁸³ It is indeed an important question to consider; why don’t they? However, rather than rushing towards identifying and naming all the individuals we can think of, might it be more productive to wonder who and what do we consider our collaborators to be. What if we count the frameworks in which we operate – the ‘system’, as some call it – and other entities that have an effect on the processes of conceptualising and realising as active agents? In addition to exploring who and what we may be able to identify as agents in wider constellations of actors, what remains to be explored is what happens in their coming together: what was said and what wasn’t said, acted out or implemented? Who or what pushed back, allowed new possibilities, raised expectations, introduced habits or came with embedded and embodied conventions? How did decisions emerge and on the basis of what rationales or impetuses? What emerged accidentally, but was deemed worthy sticking with? When we take all of that into account, how much do individual roles and positions still have relevance or matter? Although Von Osten talks about wider acknowledgement of contributions in often complex projects, my argument is that only when we extend this to non-human influences will we get away from the tendency to still focus on individual human authorship(s). And naming everyone while also specifying each individual’s contribution arguably perpetuates existing hierarchies. Engaging with all of the questions above may shed light on how interactions between humans and humans and non-humans unfold, and show us how collaboration and authorship can possibly be perceived differently than in the largely human-centric understandings and definitions discussed so far.

To challenge Von Osten’s assertion, I consider several examples that demonstrate that specific ideas of collaboration and authorship in art and curating are equally present in publications on art. To reiterate the issues, I briefly return to a book mentioned before, Documenta 13’s *The Book of Books*. This is followed by a discussion of *The Invisible Generation* (2011), of which I was editor, that relates to an exhibition and a series of performative events. I then consider two digital projects – ‘The Failure of Participation’ (2018),⁶⁸⁴ a single text published as a blog, and Olivia Plender’s website that presents her wider practice (2021).⁶⁸⁵ I outline how these very

⁶⁸³ Critically reflecting on who gets credited in relation to creative work, Von Osten observes that ‘in other forms of culture production, like film production, it is usual to credit everybody who was involved.’ Referencing a project in which everyone, including non-creatives were credited, she argues ‘it is actually a political strategy against this normative idea of how exhibitions are made and who the contributors to exhibitions are.’ See ‘Marion von Osten on her collaborative style’, p. 89 and p. 92.

⁶⁸⁴ Current version at <https://the-failure-of-participation.com/> (accessed 19 June 2020). NB: the blog has been adapted for a series of workshops in 2020, underpinned by the questions explored in the original.

⁶⁸⁵ Plender and I started working on the website in spring 2020, launched summer 2021.

different publications perform as collaborative frameworks and how they confirm, challenge or possibly shift how collaboration and authorship can be understood. The digital examples are not put forward to replace the printed codex as focus of attention, but given that websites, blogs, and more recently social media and also apps, are now well-established means of publishing in relation to artistic and curatorial projects, it is worth engaging with what they may be able to add in relation to these topics for my enquiry.⁶⁸⁶ Reason to pay attention to them here is because they bring out aspects inherent to collaboration and authorship and non-human agency that function differently and are less noticeably embedded in printed matter.

5.3.1. Forms of Distinction

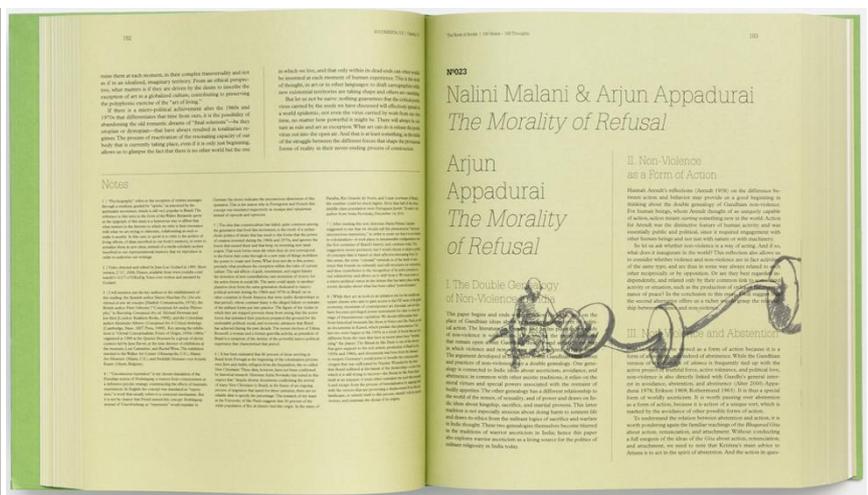


Figure 5.1: a selection on individual Notes; Figure 5.2: a spread from *The Book of Books*

The catalogues for earlier iterations of Documenta in the main relate to what was present in the exhibitions or projects at large⁶⁸⁷ – providing an afterlife. In contrast, Documenta 13's *The Book of Books* brings together a series of notebooks initially published individually in a series, titled '100 Notes – 100 Thoughts', in the two years preceding the opening of the exhibition. Different from Documenta 11's 'platform' publications, which gathered ideas exchanged in real life – and that can still be classified as a translation of something that manifested in another form first – these 'Notes' can be argued to be manifestation and display and mediation all at once,⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁶ While some organisations developed web and app iterations as (temporary) parallel spaces/platforms to projects they had been able to realise in real life (irl), because of the nature of the 2020-21 pandemic some projects only exist(ed) digitally, which challenges temporal and hierarchical perceptions in terms of physical and other spaces. As mentioned, blending the physical with the virtual in the notion of the 'phygital', may lead to more nuanced thinking.
⁶⁸⁷ Here I mean publications 'capturing' the exhibition, rather than other formats such as platform, reader, magazine.
⁶⁸⁸ Notes 'comprised facsimiles of existing notebooks, commissioned essays, collaborations, and conversations'. See <https://d13.documenta.de/#/publications/100-notes-100-thoughts/> (accessed 30 October 2020). The description acknowledges a range of people involved: 'Commissioned by DOCUMENTA (13)'s Artistic Director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev together with Agent, Member of Core Group, and Head of Department Chus Martínez, this series is edited

following Leah Price's assessment around message and carrier and my discussion in Chapter 3.⁶⁸⁹ In her preface to *The Book of Books*, curator Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev describes the Notes collectively as 'a temporary rupture in discursive intelligence' that directs us 'towards a different understanding of the role of consciousness', as a 'mind in a prologue state; a space [...] before decisions are taken as to what is to be done'.⁶⁹⁰ While part 2 of the Documenta 13 catalogue – *The Logbook*, which recounts the process of 'the making of' the show – and part 3 – *The Guidebook*, a guide for visitors of the exhibition – are more modest in scope, *The Book of Books* places seemingly extra weight, literally, on the ideas of all those contributors, or 'participants' as they are called, for this iteration.

In her introductory essay, titled 'The dance was very frenetic...' that frames Documenta 13 as a whole, Christov-Bakargiev underlines that 'documenta is a state of mind', with this edition 'dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiments, and active life in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory and epistemological enclosures'.⁶⁹¹ Although this seems a generous acknowledgement of the heavily networked framework of ideas on which 'her' Documenta rests,⁶⁹² exemplified by the heft of the book as form and object, by situating thinking and speaking through writing as 'a space before decisions are taken', a distinction between this fertile ground and the exhibition, and between thinking and doing is implied that resonates with Lind's 'single' and 'double' collaboration. It is difficult, however, to see/read this publication as anything other than an intellectual framing and legitimising of the project at large. Although Christov-Bakargiev situates herself in close conversation with all these 'participants', and the book as a whole can be seen as a 'pooling [of] knowledge, resources, networks and opinions',⁶⁹³ to quote O'Neill, it arguably shows a duality similar to the one Buurman observes in the exhibition; of Christov-Bakargiev being both a generous host in publishing all these writers' thinking, but simultaneously also positioning herself as 'the author of authors', co-opting all others' work in *The Book of Books* and the exhibitionary project as a whole. In doing so, she performs an act of authorial positioning that became the subject of critique in much of the discourse in and after the 1990s.

by Head of Publications, Bettina Funcke'. The label of 'Agent' for Chus Martínez here is worth noting, in all its vagueness (alongside her other more specific titles) and in relation to others' labels.

⁶⁸⁹ Price, 'The Tangible Space', p. 39

⁶⁹⁰ Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 'Preface', in *The Book of Books*, p. 14.

⁶⁹¹ Christov-Bakargiev, 'The dance was frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time', *The Book of Books*, p. 31.

⁶⁹² For example, in the last section of 'The dance was frenetic', 'vii. to focus', Christov-Bakargiev hops from writing about Arnheim, to Merleau-Ponty, then performs a detailed reading of an image from a previous Documenta iteration, then turns to Chris Marker (mentioning *La Jetée*) and then to photography in general.

⁶⁹³ O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation', p. 437.

'Agent' Chus Martínez does something similar in her essay 'How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog' by also labelling all the texts gathered in *The Book of Books* 'artistic research', and stating that '[n]othing productive emerges from translating ideas into images', seemingly relegating ideas to the territory of language, and art to being mainly visual.⁶⁹⁴ By situating all these texts as 'artistic research' rather than plain 'research' – which would have designated it as also potentially applying to the curatorial work undertaken – the distinction between artists and curators is upheld. By calling it 'artistic research' – made manifest through writing in a range of modes and approaches, many accompanied by copious notes – instead of acknowledging the potential of research as a mode of practice or classifying all these Notes as 'curatorial research',⁶⁹⁵ hierarchies between thinking and doing, between knowledge and practice, remain in place too.⁶⁹⁶ In this case there is also some inversion at play: where Lind and others attribute greater importance to ideas over implementation, here curatorial doing – and for Christov-Bakargiev, decision-making – are situated as apparently valued more within the frame of Documenta. This shows that even when publications – in all their singularity and plurality, as embodied in Documenta 13's individual 'Notes' and their collection in *The Book of Books* – play such an essential role in a project's development, and, by being brought together, generates a literal book over which the curators themselves claim some sort of owner/authorship, they are not positioned as fully part of that curatorial work. Instead, they are situated ambivalently: as fundamental, but not integral and therefore still peripheral. The book as form putting, and holding them, in their distinct place. By way of the discussion of the three examples that follows I attempt to challenge such persistent positioning and the different values attributed among those who and that what come together and work together.

5.3.2. Making the Invisible Visible

A small book of which I was editor, titled *The Invisible Generation (TIG)* relates to a project of the same name, 'The Invisible Generation' ('TIG'), comprising a series of dispersed events, including an exhibition and performances.⁶⁹⁷ In it, I 'reflect[s] on the difficulty and necessity of mediating ephemeral projects'.⁶⁹⁸ Although this emphasises that the publication concerns itself with

⁶⁹⁴ Martínez, 'How a Tadpole Becomes a Frog'. This statement seems to underline the assumption that art is indeed (still) mainly visual, mirroring in a way the title of Documenta 5, 'Questioning reality – Pictorial worlds today'.

⁶⁹⁵ For ideas of curating and research, see O'Neill and Wilson, *Curating Research*, including tranzit's essay.

⁶⁹⁶ This is a very specific reading for the purpose of my exploration here, performed in the spirit of Kate Briggs's urge of '[l]ooking to the whole' and 'the way the thing is working and reading altogether'. Briggs, *This Little Art*, p. 338.

⁶⁹⁷ The colophon in the back of the book lists a wide range of people and organisations involved with each iteration of the project, including the publication, and describes the multiple networks intersecting in the project at large.

⁶⁹⁸ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Invisible_Generation (accessed 19 June 2020). The reference to a Wikipedia page is intentional here: screenshots of the Wikipedia page feature as the book's introduction, an act of hypermediation, to follow Bolter and Grusin.

notions of translation and mediation – which it does – I want to focus on collaboration and authorship here. The project’s Wikipedia page describes ‘TIG’ as ‘a project by William S. Burroughs filtered through time and Daniele Balit and Per Hüttner’, indicating a generative constellation of ideas, interpretations, adaptations and appropriations – all terms related to translation and mediation – but also a multitude of actors and agents in conception and implementation.⁶⁹⁹ The inspiration and title for the project were taken from Burroughs’ descriptions (included in the book) of the use of a tape recorder to generate new forms of production and engagement, using the technical affordances of the apparatus to make random sequences of new material.⁷⁰⁰ The unpredictability of what would happen by using the mechanical device of the tape recorder that underpinned Burroughs’ ideas was key to ‘TIG’.



Figure 5.3: front cover *The Invisible Generation* with a description of the content on the pink band;
Figure 5.4: the section with all original instructions printed on pink paper

‘TIG’ included an open call for instructions, providing the starting points for outcomes that were similarly largely unpredictable.⁷⁰¹ The first iteration, which included an exhibition with printouts of all the instructions submitted, took place in Melbourne in 2009, followed by events in Beijing, Shenzhen and Kiev in 2009-10. Per Hüttner invited me to work together with graphic designer Marie Proyart to produce a publication related to the project.⁷⁰² I was familiar with Hüttner’s questioning approach, as demonstrated in ‘I am a curator’ (2003), a project that explored the intricacies of who and what can contribute to making exhibitions, covering the

⁶⁹⁹ See <http://theinvisiblegeneration.blogspot.com/2009/10/info-credits.html> (accessed 20 June 2020).

⁷⁰⁰ See William S. Burroughs, ‘Selection of Instructions’, *The Invisible Generation*, pp. 9-11; and both Hüttner’s and Balit’s essays in the book.

⁷⁰¹ The open call was issued via Vision Forum, ‘a mobile laboratory, an open community and a platform for developing new forms and contexts to produce and present interdisciplinary art across multiple genres’, run by Hüttner, affiliated with Linsköping University. See <http://www.visionforum.eu/about/> (accessed 20 June 2020).

⁷⁰² Proyart was educated and is based in France, which influenced her experience, preferences, habits and how she applies conventions. More on her practice can be found at <https://www.marieproyart.com/> (accessed 20 July 2020).

entire spectrum from idea, selection of artists and works to installing in the exhibition space, grappling with questions similar to those I explore here.⁷⁰³

Because Proyart and I were not involved in ‘TIG’s conception, nor saw the exhibition or any of the events, we were entirely dependent on the material we were ‘given’ to work with.⁷⁰⁴ These included the instructions, a range of images (of performances and exhibition) and written texts. In addition, I wrote some reflections on how to deal with the material.⁷⁰⁵ Especially with performative work, we expect images to capture and represent key moments, where sometimes one image suffices, at others a sequence is needed to represent what unfolded.⁷⁰⁶ Texts are expected to provide information – not least factual details – but also offer descriptions of ideas, possible interpretations, and maybe provide a sense of what a work or event entailed when experienced ‘live’.⁷⁰⁷ We know how images and texts can work together when presented on the page of the book, as explored in Chapters 2 and 3. This is often understood as a matter of form, of how the material is laid out on the page – in relation to work and/or its presentation, as discussed in Chapter 4 – but the conversations Proyart and I had highlighted that traditions and conventions are not simply tacitly embodied points of reference: they are always present when selecting, arranging and juxtaposing, and considering how to navigate material for and within the space of a book and on its pages.⁷⁰⁸ Like in the exhibitions space, immaterial (f)actors act within the space of the book too, sometimes subverting or confounding their role.

Through asking what images and texts ‘worked’ and which didn’t in terms of legibility – from our respective positions of editor and designer, but also as readers – we ended up with a range of interventions that can be perceived as slight provocations. Underlining that an image is not necessarily always capable of ‘speaking’ about a work or event – of carrying over or mediating –

⁷⁰³ See <http://www.perhuttner.com/projects/i-am-a-curator/> (accessed 1 July 2020). Lisa Lefeuve describes the options and challenges of the project, and outlines the difference between selecting people and objects in her text in the publication *I Am a Curator* (London: Chisenhale Gallery, 2006) pp. 57-67. Her text underlines the range of collaborative constellations exhibitions rely on that muddy notions of authorship. For a critical response, see Paul O’Neill, ‘I am a curator’, *Art Monthly*, No. 275, April 2004, pp. 7-10.

⁷⁰⁴ Because we did not have first-hand experiences, we were relieved from the pressure to try and translate and could focus on what the material we were given had to offer in the context of the book. To ensure readers some overview of the various iterations, the book includes two different indexes and an extensive colophon.

⁷⁰⁵ The texts are ‘Looking back to the future’ (pp. 5-8), ‘Lost in translation’ (pp. 25-27) and ‘Right here, right now: relative simultaneity’ (pp. 105-107), and relate to questions I explore in this thesis.

⁷⁰⁶ Writing about the role of documentation in relation to performative work, Martha Buskirk quotes John Perrault: ‘Photography in particular became the art object and the language of communication. Photography became the proof of art.’ Buskirk, *The Contingent Object*, p. 235.

⁷⁰⁷ ‘Video, film, and particularly photographs play a key role at the intersection of performance, site-specific, process-based, and conceptual methods, with the images thus recorded thus performing a multitude of functions.’ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

⁷⁰⁸ It is worth noting that Proyart at that time had mainly worked on projects for French institutions. As a result, her points of reference were subtly different than those of designers I’d worked with in the UK, including those operating internationally. This is not a qualitative observation, but to underline the invisible forces that impact interactions.

the book comprises several blank pages with only the title of the works they relate to.⁷⁰⁹ Whereas these empty pages may appear similar to Tino Sehgal's in *Black Sun*, our visual non-representations are also distinctly different from it.⁷¹⁰ In Sehgal's case, the refusal to have images of the performative work in the book arguably reinforces his ownership and authorial control over the works' ideas and their manifestation and representation, even when mediated non-visually. In the case of 'TIG', what Proyart and I ended up focusing on was no longer about translating the work/its presentation, but about making explicit the limitations of visual representation. The pages in question situate the publication as space of encounter, as a new articulation, partly through lack or absence. The question this throws up is who or what we consider to be contributing (f)actors, and what that means for authorship.⁷¹¹



Figure 5.3: spread in which images represent performance(s); Figure 5.4: the available images of the work on the right did not 'say' anything, which is why we left the page blank

I happily acknowledge that Proyart had the idea for these empty pages, but would like to clarify that they were not a conceptual design statement: originally they were placeholders for projects of which we had no images or that didn't 'do the job' of visually mediating the work.⁷¹² In other words, the lack here was initially accidental.⁷¹³ My decision that leaving these pages blank would make a statement specific to the context of the book in relation to the performative event

⁷⁰⁹ Although not represented by images, each 'work' is referenced in the two indexes in the back of the publication – one organised alphabetically on title, the other on artist's name – so information can easily be found.

⁷¹⁰ NB: *The Invisible Generation* was produced years before *Black Sun*, so this was not an appropriation.

⁷¹¹ Speaking to these issues, we added a statement in the colophon: 'This publication is not a catalogue but an attempt to capture the core essence of the ideas and events as they emerged and happened at various moments and in different locations.' *The Invisible Generation*, p. 132.

⁷¹² NB: based on memory. I can no longer access the email exchanges concerning the design process.

⁷¹³ Although specialising in early modern literature, Random Clod (Randall McLeod) underlines that what we perceive to be authentic 'authored' material is often already 'distorted' through both human and non-human interference, which is often accidental. See Random Clod and Random Clod, 'Information on Information', *Text*, Vol. 5, 1991, pp. 241-281; and Randall McLeod, 'Un "Editing" Shak-speare', *Substance*, Vol. 33/34, 1982, pp. 26-55.

and the impossibility of visual translation, led arguably to an intervention over which Proyart and I share authorship in ways that are related to those defined by tranzit and others – with responsibility for ideas and execution – through which the first emptiness transformed into another. We can complicate this and position it as a much more intricate coming together of several practices and positions – including that of Burroughs, of curators Hüttner and Balit, of the authors of the instructions, of the various performers of some of these, of those who ‘captured’ the performances (or ‘failed’ to do so), prior to Proyart and myself being brought in as designer and editor. In addition, it was a set of commonly understood conventions of (re)presentation of artworks and curatorial projects in publications – and the questions they raised here – that helped determine decisions made.

We could argue that this is what Krzys Acord describes when observing that, ‘object-interactions play important roles to help individuals confirm or create orders of worth’.⁷¹⁴ If we transpose this thinking to *TIG*, just because there were images it did not automatically follow for Proyart and myself they were able to translate the work. In the process of producing the book our question ‘what works?’ replaced the expectation that images would by definition ‘stand in’ for the performances.⁷¹⁵ Although many did allow the construction of a new articulation within the publication, maintaining a connection with instructions and events – some were still unclear or ambiguous. In these instances, I asked for additional writing to be produced, ranging from short, descriptive background information to longer explanatory and interpretative texts, all intended to address issues of translation and mediation, but therefore also shifting the dynamics in terms of source and target. The resulting diverse treatment of the range of performative works highlights the impossibility of equality in terms of representation, translation and mediation, and the book can be ‘considered an event in time itself’, as the colophon qualifies it.⁷¹⁶

What this description draws attention to is the question whether it is even possible to attribute specific ownership – and thus authorship – in such a varied chain of events. Even in a small book like this, the diversity of material and what we thought that was capable of doing for future readers went through a drawn-out process of questions, discussions, disagreements, trials, rejections, revisits, agreements, accidents, reorganisations and reconsiderations before we landed on a proposition for each project in the context of the book. Rather than accepting the traditional linear, temporal and hierarchical trajectory of idea, execution, framing, experience,

⁷¹⁴ Krzys Acord, ‘Beyond the Head’, p. 461.

⁷¹⁵ Buskirk, *The Contingent Object*, p. 253.

⁷¹⁶ This statement was also a nod to conceptual artists’ challenge to what constitutes a work, referenced earlier

translation and representation and reading as singular moments and acts, the interactions in the process of production here underlined the multitude of minor actions and shifts that produces a book rather than a set of clear-cut decisions based on singular intentions. Instead of assuming a comprehensive attribution of specific authorship to individuals, it seems to be more productive to accept these processes as always collaborative and contingent on a series of practices reliant on an equally broad range of variables, and where even lack, accident and mishap can have agency.⁷¹⁷

5.3.3. Co-opting Collaborators

'The Failure of Participation' (2018) is a reflexive text published as a blog⁷¹⁸ by artist Anthony Schrag, written following a socially engaged project he deemed unsuccessful.⁷¹⁹ By way of writing this text he wanted to consider what actually went wrong, and, more importantly, why. Socially engaged art is considered to always be collaborative in nature, although the power dynamics between those involved has been a hotly debated topic.⁷²⁰ The project concerned was a commission situated within a specific community over a longer period of time, and Schrag wanted to understand what had happened, from the moment he began his work – including him living for short periods within the community – until it came to a conclusion of some sort.⁷²¹ In short, writing a text was aimed at clarifying whether the failure was specific to this project, or due to other, more systemic (f)actors that therefore were worth publishing.⁷²² This included scrutinising his own expectations in light of his long-standing practice as a socially engaged artist. Schrag invited me to work with him as an editor in the process of reflection and writing following a day of talking about conversation as a mode of collaborating.⁷²³

Because of the various parties involved in his project – a nation-wide arts commissioning organisation, a regional arts organisation and a local community, as well as Schrag as artist – and the fact that he initially was not sure who he was writing the text for, and who his possible

⁷¹⁷ For an exploration of the minor gesture, which transforms interaction between people and other entities, and that counters the modernist narrative of the grand gesture (and by extension the 'great man' narrative mentioned in Chapter 2), see Erin Manning, *The Minor Gesture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁷¹⁸ For a brief overview of the development of the blog as platforms and its key characteristics, see <https://www.webdesignerdepot.com/2011/03/a-brief-history-of-blogging/> (accessed 20 September 2020).

⁷¹⁹ For more on Anthony Schrag's practice, see <http://www.anthonyschrag.com/> (accessed 25 July 2020).

⁷²⁰ For a critical overview see Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London, New York, NY: Verso, 2012); see also Lind, 'Complexities'.

⁷²¹ Schrag deemed it 'failed' because he felt he 'did not make any art', as stated in both blog and essay (see next note).

⁷²² The blog also formed the basis for an academic essay: Anthony Schrag, 'TrainWreck or The failures of Infrastructure: reflections on a Creative People and Places project', *Artnodes*, No. 21, 2018, pp. 177-186, available at <https://www.raco.cat/index.php/Artnodes/article/view/n21-schrag> (accessed 3 November 2020).

⁷²³ We spent a day walking and talking about practice-based research and the frameworks in which it is conducted and through which it circulates. See <https://gerrieat.work/2016/11/10/conversations/> (accessed 25 July 2020).

readers might be, I suggested a blog as publishing platform. Blogs have become easy to set up and manage, with interfaces now available for download via apps or use in a web browser. Blog platforms allow people to collaborate through the option to attribute posting and editing rights to more than one person. Compared to printed publications, which require not only conceptualising, writing and editing, but also designing and printing, which tends to be done by a variety of parties each with specific skillsets and for which no budget was available at the time, this was an attractive proposition.⁷²⁴ In addition, blogs can be kept private, and revisited and restructured, and redesigned, making them ideal for testing things out.⁷²⁵ Once we agreed a blog would be a conducive (plat)form, I suggested we consider co-opting its medium-specific affordances in the process of writing. We were both familiar with typical blog features, such as static pages alongside individual 'post' strands, and navigating and organising options such as 'categories' and 'tags'.⁷²⁶ Because these structural elements function in such clearly determined, yet still very flexible ways – they are tools to organise content – I suggested they might help disentangle the complexity of the issues Schrag wanted to address and help determine how the narrative was constructed as well as presented and accessed by future readers.⁷²⁷

Different from *TIG*, 'The Failure...' did not require direct involvement of a designer, but was given shape via a predesigned template with a range of in-built, predetermined functions that allow their 'users' to construct⁷²⁸ information, having a certain 'look' in terms of typefaces and font sizes, colour sets and ways in which images are incorporated, for future readers to access in certain ways.⁷²⁹ These features are built in by a template designer, who in turn works within the given parameters of the platform, but are meant to be adapted by each user – and continue to be adaptable once 'live' – and are therefore always already collaborative in nature. Rather than seeing the template as more limiting than starting 'from scratch' with a designer,⁷³⁰ we explicitly drew on the range of known functional characteristics of the platform as a productive (f)actor – or set thereof – to help write, structure and publish the text.

⁷²⁴ Publishing as a blog was also aimed to help determine whether a printed pamphlet or other format might be worth the cost. Schrag did apply for funding but was not successful.

⁷²⁵ Strategies include password protection and preventing the blog being picked up by Internet search engines.

⁷²⁶ Categories allow individual posts to be identified as part of a specific group or strand of posts, and order information within an overarching structure; tags allow each individual post to be attributed keywords and are therefore far more flexible. NB: depending on the platform, naming of specific features may differ.

⁷²⁷ At the time of our first conversations in November 2016, we had both used WordPress blogs, which we found easy to manage; we decided to work with a free account with access to a variety of design templates.

⁷²⁸ 'Users' here designates those who 'use' the platform, e.g. create their own blog, to distinguish them from 'readers'.

⁷²⁹ The range of templates has increased significantly in the last five years, but when creating more complex blogs, effectively operating as fully-fledged websites, technical assistance becomes a necessity. This is not so much about how things look, but about the functionality of the site/blog.

⁷³⁰ Which is a misnomer: each designer comes with their own style, ways of working and preferences, defined by education, context and practice. See earlier references, including Richard Hollis in Chapter 2, for instance.

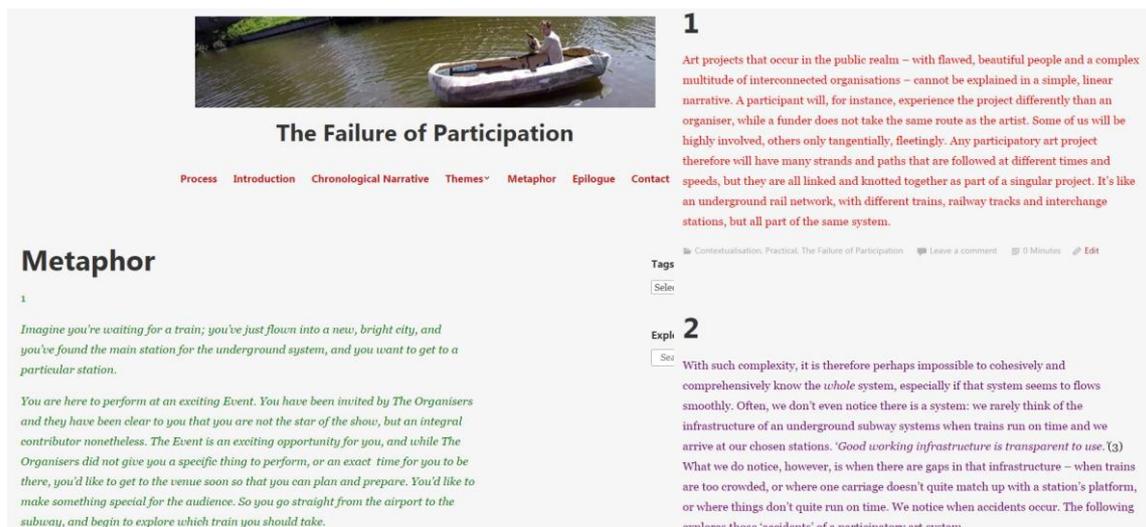


Figure 5.5: screenshots from ‘The Failure of Participation’, showing different mechanism that helped structure the writing, including metaphor as a ‘category’ on the left; on the right the start of the chronological (numbered) narrative that emphasised the different strands were part of a single story

The point of outlining these technical details is not to emphasise the increasing importance of digital platforms for translating and mediating art and curatorial work. Some of the differences, however, vividly bring out the range of interactions between human and non-human actors that are largely missing in explorations on collaboration and authorship, as described earlier. The example of Schrag’s blog also demonstrates that the level of interaction with and embeddedness of human actors’ work – comprising ideas and execution – in a blog manifests itself differently than in the codex. While the shape of books produced in specific geographical areas, for instance, tends to visibly differ from printed matter produced elsewhere⁷³¹ – which is the result of distinct printing and design traditions, which have filtered through in different tastes and sensibilities – the basic component for all those who converge in the book as a physical and conceptual construct is still literally the proverbial ‘blank page’.⁷³² In the case of a blog, however, that blank page is no longer entirely blank; what starts as an apparently empty post is already imbued with a wide range of flexible functionalities that have been integrated by human actors, which themselves are reliant on characteristics specific to these platforms of dissemination and mediation.⁷³³

⁷³¹ US paper sheet sizes, for instance, are based on inches, and European sizes are based on metric millimetres, contributing to books from the US generally being wider in relation to their height than books produced in Europe.

⁷³² These different sensibilities can lead to interesting tensions and disagreements. I am, for the sake of argument, here ignoring the fact that a sheet of paper – in its production from wood or rags or recycled paper – is of course also already imbued with a chain of human and non-human interactions, although the sequential structure of the book is much simpler than that of any online platform.

⁷³³ We could extend this range of intricate interconnections between human actors and material (albeit manifesting themselves in a mixture of material and virtual ways) and add the coding that allow template designers to produce specific functionalities, which illustrates the multiple levels of entanglement embedded before users (= blog creators) can get to work making these platforms ‘their own’.

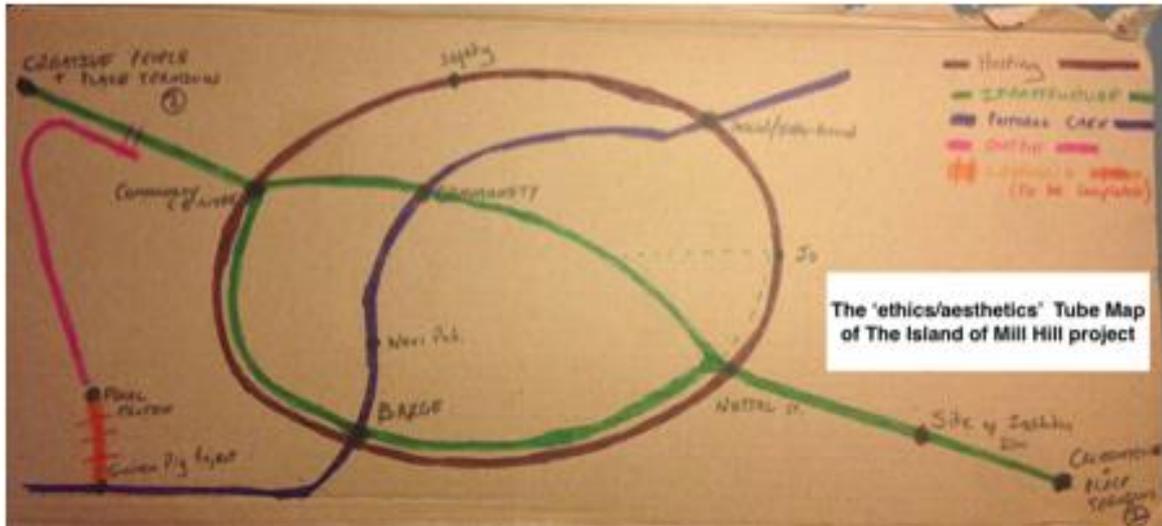


Figure 5.6: the metaphor of a tube map was helpful in disentangling the different narrative stands; the image shows a sketch by Schrag to try and determine what narrative fragments could be written⁷³⁴

As a result, the platform of presentation of the blog can be argued to already be a much more explicitly collaborative constellation, which subsequently can be positioned as part of a wider authorial network in the production of a text/post/publication. Although in the case of ‘The Failure...’ Schrag wrote the text, and is its author in the traditional, writerly sense, how it was written was not a simple act of him putting down ideas as ‘scriptor’ – to reference Barthes – but rather involved a complex range of interactions between him, the platform and me – and Schrag being both artist and academic, speaking to the wider landscape of socially engaged artistic practice and commissioning frameworks. As editor I drew upon my knowledge of such work, previous collaborations in publication projects, as well as my familiarity with the affordances of the blog platform, and the interactive functions of structure and organisation attached to the template we had selected. Although as users we may appear to have been given more agency across a wider span of the production process than in a codex – we can literally click ‘publish’ for each post or edit – the space of a blog is arguably less neutral than that of a book, because that flexibility is already largely pre-determined.⁷³⁵ For ‘The Failure of...’ it was precisely this already enmeshed framework of human and non-human actions that was crucial for how ideas took shape as both content and form. This increased complexity of collaborative actors and agents also impacts the who and what we consider the ‘author’ to be. In the next example I look at an even more complex network.

⁷³⁴ The metaphor of the tube map was transposed to the academic essay that followed the blog through the reference to the proverbial ‘trainwreck’ in the title. Image from private email exchange between Schrag and myself.

⁷³⁵ The speed of technological developments means that blog user interfaces change regularly (the interfaces I use in both app and web browser are automatically updated all the time, for instance), adding in complexity swiftly, through which the need for technical support for more complex platforms increases again. Compared to the relative stability – and simplicity – of the codex as material object, the speed with which this happens is breath-taking.

5.3.4. Form and Function Back to Front

In 2020 I started working with artist Olivia Plender on a website about her work.⁷³⁶ Having previously co-edited a book with the artist following a series of exhibitions, I had a good insight in the heavily research- and process-based nature of her practice and its strong political and feminist focus.⁷³⁷ A key concern in our initial conversations was how to think about ‘material’ in a way that would also help capture – and thus carry over and mediate – underlying values and beliefs; how this could be organised and navigated, while also allowing for additions in the foreseeable future, so the site could continue to be expanded at will. Artists’ websites can be considered as archives, or digital catalogues even, and can also be thought of as a way of keeping narrative control, and thus owner- and authorship – like Sehgal does with his practice – over how they and their work are (re)presented in ways that are distinct from commercial gallery and institutional websites.⁷³⁸ One of the key reasons for Plender to have her own website is exactly because her presence on the Internet thus far does not offer much insight into the multifaceted nature of her work. And with websites increasingly being image-led, the prevalence of photographic reproduction as stand in for the work, as Buskirk underlines,⁷³⁹ seems to have become more rather than less important, and the question how non-visual work can be (re)presented, specifically in practices that rely on collaboration and/or that can be argued to fall under the idea of ‘the curatorial’, is a concern for many.

Rather than us gathering material to hand over to designers for them to give form, I suggested we identify designers first and have them *think with us* in clarifying the conceptual and structural intricacies of producing a site related to Plender’s diverse practice. Different from ‘A Failure...’, in which case design interventions were already embedded in the functionality and ‘look’ of the blog template we chose, here it made sense to start working with design professionals, as they could help negotiate between conceptual ‘needs’ and the site’s look, as well as its technical functionalities. After a meeting in which they offered useful pointers and that underlined their interest in the interconnection of form and content, especially in terms of

⁷³⁶ Olivia Plender is a British artist based in Stockholm. She has been undertaking practice-based PhD research (submission 2021) at the Royal Institute of Art and the Swedish Artistic Research School/Lund University. See <https://kkh.se/en/research/doctoral-studies/> (accessed 2 November 2020). The development of the website is connected to reflections on her own practice as engaged with in her PhD, which is why I mention it here.

⁷³⁷ Remco de Blaaij, Gerrie van Noord, Olivia Plender (eds.) *Rise Early, Be Industrious* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016). De Blaaij was then curator at one of the co-publishing organisations, CCA Glasgow, but was not hands-on involved in the book’s production. To underline our close collaboration, Plender and I are both listed as editors.

⁷³⁸ Plender is represented by a commercial gallery, but how her work is shown on their website does not offer a comprehensive overview of the variety in practice: categorised under ‘images, biography, exhibitions, publications’, such sites tend to focus on (representation of) objects and their circulation, which makes sense for a commercial entity. See <https://www.maureenpaley.com/artists/olivia-plender/?image=1> (accessed 20 September 2020).

⁷³⁹ Buskirk, *The Contingent Object*, p. 243.

structuring and navigation within the website as platform, designers APFEL were appointed.⁷⁴⁰ They in turn brought a web developer on board, who would build the site's 'back-end', once the functionalities required were thought through in relation to what the 'front' would look like.



Figure 5.8: landing page Olivia Plender website (2021), which shows the thematic approach in organising her practice into strands, each strand containing multiple projects

Different from *TIG*, which relates to many artists, instructions and events – all of which were to be mediated in a book somehow – and from ‘The Failure...’ – which focused on systemic issues of production – here the material to consider and work which was produced over a much longer period of time, comprising great diversity of ideas, development, process and manifestation as well as ‘material’ to carry over.⁷⁴¹ We agreed that traditional approaches – such as chronological tracing, or a medium-specific categorisation, (still) common organisational principles for many artists’ websites – were not appropriate, especially because personal and political concerns around who is able to speak and how are strongly present in Plender’s practice. In the end, the website has been organised in thematic strands that reflect Plender’s interests and values, in which individual projects are grouped in clusters. The image on the site’s landing page (see Fig. 5.8), for instance, relates to the ‘Many Maids Make Much Noise’ strand, which focuses on women’s rights and their position in society in eight projects produced over a decade.⁷⁴² How

⁷⁴⁰ APFEL is the acronym for A Practice of Everyday Life, derived from Michel de Certeau’s book. For more on APFEL’s work, see <https://apracticeforeverydaylife.com/> (accessed 25 July 2020). They have designed a range of artists’ websites, catalogues and artists’ books. I had worked with them before on Heather & Ivan Morison’s, *Falling into Place* (London and Bristol: Book Works and Situations, 2009), which bears some similarity to Plender’s project in that it presents a whole body of work by the Morisons.

⁷⁴¹ Plender’s practice comprises workshops, gatherings, public events, publications, objects and sculptural work, installations, sound and video, where quite a few of her exhibitions can be considered environments in which individual pieces become part of a bigger whole.

⁷⁴² This strand holds, for instance, information on a display of Sylvia Pankhurst’s work in 2013-14, which was the result of extensive research and a series of interventions, including *Open Letter to Tate Britain* (2010) by Olivia

work is (re)presented differs from project to project, with some having sound, video or publication excerpts, and/or contextual material, including interviews and PDF downloads.

Because making the intricate interconnections across her wider practice 'visible' was a key aim, we decided to revisit an element also included in the book *Rise Early, Be Industrious* (2016), namely the *Index*, which is a work in its own right. As the title implies, in the *Index* each entry comes with a description and/or image and is connected to a project/work or a whole series of works. Where the *Index* for the book was produced at the end, after all the other elements had been thought through and laid out in the design and page numbers could be added – following the logic of the book as a linear sequence of spaces – for the website it made sense to bring thinking about its functionality forward, so its organisational nature could contribute to thinking through how the *Index*, and the website as a whole, could work online.⁷⁴³ As indicated with 'The Failure...' navigating online platforms are determined by specific features – such as tags and links – that enable information to be interconnected differently time and time again, but always appearing as coherent sets of information on screen. As a result, what we see as 'readers' is provided by affordances that rely on a much greater transparency, to reference Bolter and Grusin, than in the codex. Much of what we see is designed via very user-friendly interfaces, while the complexity of their functionality through coding behind the scenes is an entirely different matter, no longer dependent on the linear sequentiality of a printed book.⁷⁴⁴

In Plender's website, just as much, if not more, thought and work has gone into how things 'hang together' structurally and how visitors/viewers are enabled to pull up information beyond what work looks like in purely aesthetic terms on screen. Because of the need for cross-connections and fluid assembling through a carefully constructed back-end, the dynamics between material and immaterial (f)actors in decision-making about form and functionality shifted. In the process of development, these non-human aspects have been much more 'present' in the interactions between those involved than with that of a book. Because of this shift, notions of collaboration and authorship can be argued to have changed too: that is no longer about acknowledging the involvements of a wide range of individuals, like Von Osten suggests,⁷⁴⁵ but also about

Plender and Hester Reeve that questioned how her work was framed at the Tate. See <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/display/bp-spotlight-sylvia-pankhurst> (accessed 30 October 2020).

⁷⁴³ The order of the book's essays and image sequences changed in the process, so the index could only be concluded – and page number added – once narrative and sequential 'logic' had been fixed.

⁷⁴⁴ Early new-media art tends to have, from our 2021 perspective, a specific 'look' that is overtly technical, which is derived from a direct engagement with 'how things work', i.e. making direct use of the intricacies of coding etc. Such work therefore embodies what Bolter and Grusin call hypermediation, in which the means of dissemination are foregrounded in what we see. In contrast, how websites and other virtual interfaces now function is transparent: what we see on screen gives us little insight in how all of that is able to appear, precisely because of the increase in 'user-friendly' (= reader-friendly) interfaces that rely on a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) rationale.

⁷⁴⁵ Von Osten, 'Marion von Osten on her collaborative style and multiple roles', p. 89 and p. 92.

considering all these other (f)actors in an infinite range of interactions that enable an equally infinite range of mutations in the process of development, design and implementation and future use. This increasing complexity therefore asks for a different thinking about collaboration than has been discussed in curatorial discourse thus far, which by extension also has consequences for how we can think about authorship. In the next section I introduce ideas that allow us to home in on these interactions in the coming together of human and non-human actors, and that can equip us for rethinking who and what has agency in relation to 'the curatorial'.

5.4. From Actors and Interactions to Ecology of Practices and Intra-action

In the previous sections I have largely relied on terms like 'interaction' and also 'convergence'. What I have aimed at is bringing to the fore that in the production of publications on art a wide variety of (f)actors is involved, and that it is precisely through their interactions and 'the reflexive and process-oriented ways in which tacit knowledge, aesthetic codes, and meaningful conventions are born, communicated, and mobilized' that artworks, exhibitions and publications take shape.⁷⁴⁶ What that has underlined is that that is rarely a neat linear process from a singular idea to a singular form. As mentioned before, these interactions are not necessarily led by fully formed 'grand plans'; rather, they tend to unfold through the application of tacit or embodied knowledge and 'codes', in which unplanned events, serendipity and accidents can also lead to changes that affect concept and form, ideas and execution.

Earlier I have discussed how curatorial discourse still largely focuses on the intentions of a limited set of individuals and specific positions and their outcomes, despite a notable shift towards more collaborative and discursive practices among artists as well as curators. There is therefore absolutely something to say for naming all the 'studio assistants, fabricators, curators, administrators, support staff and educators' who are part of, and 'produce, maintain and reproduce the system of art'.⁷⁴⁷ Meticulously engaging in their naming could contribute to us getting away from the perception that 'the author-ization of the curator as an (independent) exhibition-maker [... who] owes his [sic!] authorship not least to an analogy with traditional conceptions of artishood as sovereign creation', as Buurman describes the ongoing positioning of the curator as author.⁷⁴⁸ However, if we also attributed the specific role each played in the 'whole' of the system, as is customary in film for example, the hierarchies embedded within that

⁷⁴⁶ Krzys Acord, 'Beyond the Head', p. 447.

⁷⁴⁷ Fallon et al., 'Introduction'.

⁷⁴⁸ Buurman, referencing Sören Gammel and Beatrice von Bismarck in 'Angels in the White Cube?', p. 147.

system would also be perpetuated: what Buurman specifically draws attention to, after all, is that the focus on the curator is to be ‘understood as a “masculinization of curating”’, that foregrounds the singular male (modernist) embodiment of specific positions in the field.⁷⁴⁹

Looking at the development of curatorial discourse, there is no denying that many women have contributed to its expansion, not least those engaging with notions of ‘the curatorial’, while what a more feminist approach to curating may mean has been the topic of a steadily growing body of literature too.⁷⁵⁰ Sarah Ahmed has highlighted that it does indeed matter who is speaking: for her ‘who’ is speaking makes a difference, precisely because who they are is ‘a marker of a specific location from which the subject writes’.⁷⁵¹ For Ahmed ‘refusal to enter the discourse as an empirical subject [...] may finally translate into a universalising mode of discourse’, which in turn ‘negates the specificity of its own inscription’.⁷⁵² I want to address this ‘masculinisation’ of the discourse as it manifests itself in the focus on the singular authorial curator persona by thinking through the implications of Ahmed’s comments, but shifting the focus to processes of collaboration rather than looking at who collaborates, and what that may mean for ideas of authorship, and ultimately who(se work) – and also what (work) – is being valued.⁷⁵³

If, indeed, we focus less on a few human positions, and consider them as empirical subjects, following Ahmed, what happens in contemporary modes of practising that are much less concerned with individual achievements? What happens to the ‘who’ when the ‘materialization of the work, rather than concretizing and containing a single person’s authorship, disperses it into the history of the networks of communications that went into its making’ as Raqs Media Collective describe their approach?⁷⁵⁴ Naming themselves a collective, they argue that ideas, development and execution take place ‘not within the sealed, hermetic spaces of our three

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁰ See, for instance, Amelia Jones, ‘Feminist Subjects versus Feminist Effects: The Curating of Feminist Art (or is it the Feminist Curating of Art?)’, and other essays dedicated to ‘Curating Feminist thought’, *OnCurating*, # 29, 2016, available at <https://www.on-curating.org/issue-29.html#.X74-RP7S7N> (accessed 12 October 2020); see also essays by Helena Reckitt and the Feminist Duration Reading Group, which ‘focuses on under-known and under-appreciated feminist texts, movements and struggles from outside the Anglo-American canon’, at <https://www.feministduration.com/> (accessed 23 November 2020). There are of course many more.

⁷⁵¹ Sarah Ahmed, *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1998) p. 125.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 125. This comment refers directly to Michel Foucault and his text ‘What is an Author?’ in which Foucault according to Ahmed effaces the specificity of his own perspective as a gay male philosopher.

⁷⁵³ That is not to deny the value of drawing attention to the gendered construct of various fields and practices. See Maruca, *The Work of Print. Authorship and the English Text Trade 1660-1760*, about women’s involvement in the print industry, which has remained largely under-valued; see also Maryam Fanni, Matilda Flodmark and Sara Kaaman, *The Natural Enemies of Books: A Messy History of Women in Printing and Typography* (London: Occasional papers, 2020), which reflects on the 1937 publication *Bookmaking on the Distaff Side* that brought together contributions by women printers, illustrators, authors, typographers and typesetters to the book industry in the US.

⁷⁵⁴ Raqs Media Collective, ‘Additions, Subtractions: On Collectives and Collectivities’, *Manifesta Journal*, # 8, 2009-10, p. 8. NB: different from WHW, all women, Raqs comprises two men and a woman.

individual consciousnesses, but at the intersection of all our communication.⁷⁵⁵ Working by way of a ‘collegial relay’ their practice is one of ‘build[ing] structures that can coalesce many kinds of actors and acts’, and as ‘infrastructure[s] of relationships, of precepts and affects.⁷⁵⁶ For Raqs, the ‘figure of the individuated artist and the solitary intellectual is [...] a momentary blip in the long human history of dividuated practices and dialogic forms of thought.’⁷⁵⁷ We can see these descriptions of their own collaboration and those with others as embodiments of what Schlieben calls a ‘culture of practice’, in which it is about what emerges through social gathering, rather than the ideas and intent of a few that through working together generates a clearly delineated outcome.⁷⁵⁸ Whereas Schlieben focuses on the polyphony of the social in human interaction, I want to expand this plurality towards non-human (f)actors.

In a 2005 text, Isabelle Stengers introduces the phrase ‘ecology of practices’, in which ‘ecology’ implies the potential for a mutually beneficial coming together of multiple habitats,⁷⁵⁹ and the plural of ‘practices’ signals a fluid, ongoing process of interactions between different modes of thinking and working that constitute that ecology.⁷⁶⁰ Stengers comes at what an ‘ecology of practices’ may entail with an explicit agenda, but what she describes is relevant more generally and can also be applied to other practices, including creative ones. Stating that an ‘ecology of practices’ ‘aims at the construction of new “practical identities”’, she argues that it is about ‘new possibilities for them to be present, or in other words to connect’, and, crucially, this ‘does not approach practices as they are [as we know them] but as they may become.’⁷⁶¹ Rather than looking for grand gestures, Stengers posits that it is about what she calls the ‘minor key’, in which senses of belonging, possibilities, potentials and agencies can manifest themselves.⁷⁶² These seemingly generic aspirational descriptions offer a useful counter to the traditional singular and temporal trajectories of origin and destination, of intention and outcome, and other dichotomies and distinctions that prevail, and clearly not only in curatorial discourse. By deliberately avoiding focusing on the major key, Stengers argues it may be possible to ‘create a different practical landscape’,⁷⁶³ underlining that there is no ‘identity of a practice independent

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁶ Georgina Maddox, ‘We Will Follow in Your Afterglow’, *Art Dose*, 5 August 2020, available at <http://artdose.in/we-will-follow-in-your-afterglow/> (accessed 8 October 2020).

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁵⁸ Schlieben, ‘The Crux of Polyphonic Language’, p. 20.

⁷⁵⁹ In the literal environmental sense as well as in the sense of Bourdieu’s notion of ‘habitus’, comprising our social habits, skills and dispositions, informed by class, belief, ethnicity, etc. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 [1972]).

⁷⁶⁰ Isabelle Stengers, ‘Introductory Notes to an Ecology of Practices’, *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol. 11, No. 1, March 2005, pp. 183-196. ‘Ecology’ has of course connotations directly linked to our physical environment, but I want to engage with the potential of its conceptual use here.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

of its landscape'.⁷⁶⁴ Situating herself as a woman practitioner (of philosophy in her case), Stengers emphasises the need to do so given the dominant universalisation of the male perspective in her field, which brings us back to Ahmed's specific argument that it does matter 'who' is speaking and Buurman's idea of the 'masculinisation' of the discourse.⁷⁶⁵

Bringing these ideas to bear on the examples discussed, in each a different set of practices is involved that individually are rooted in different ecologies. In *TIG*, the material generated within a project that considered the unexpected encounter of art via instructions, based on ideas formulated by Burroughs, mediated via curators Hüttner and Balit, performed by the artists who wrote the instruction (sometimes by others), was considered by Proyart as designer and myself as editor – in this case indeed two women contributing from their respective practices in an ecology of practices enacted by mainly men – within the context of the book as medium and form. Our decisions were not so much concerned with intent and desire of others' ideas, but about what worked from our perspectives as practitioners, linking our ecologies to others', but operating in another space and therefore applied towards that, rather than focused on only their origins. The 'ecology of practices' converging in the digital realm, in blogs and websites, can be argued to broaden the sets of practices, and even link entirely different ecologies – those of artists, curators, editors and designers joined by ecologies specific to coders, and web, blog template and user-interface designers and all their specific material and immaterial traditions and conventions that in turn contributed to and impacted on what was published and how.

While Ahmed draws our attention to relevance of the 'who', and Stengers underlines the interconnection between a practice and the landscape in which it is being practised – and by extension the interconnection of all the human and non-human actors and agents within it – how we can approach what happens in and through this ongoing chain of 'minor key' interactions among and between them still raises the question why only certain voices, and agencies seem to come to matter, and what that means for our understandings of collaboration and authorship. Although references to collaboration are ubiquitous in curatorial discourse, what happens in these processes of coming together remains vague, as discussed earlier. In the set of examples discussed in this chapter, I have underlined that in the 'coming together' of humans and non-humans it isn't always easy, if not impossible – or relevant even – to identify who or what matters most. To try and consider what takes place in the black box of complex

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁵ Stengers's 'Notes' are a response to Brian Massumi proposition that 'a political ecology would be a social technology of belonging, assuming coexistence and co-becoming as the habitat of practices', first presented at a 2003 conference at which Massumi circulated a handout that used the phrase 'ecology of practices'. The phrase could be attributed to him, but it is what Stengers does with it in her essay that matters here.

social gathering, I want to bring in Karen Barad's ideas on 'intra-actions' in her understanding of 'agential realism' and the 'agential cut'.⁷⁶⁶ Her ideas of 'intra-action' and 'entanglement' may provide a way out of the conundrum of what we focus on, and by extension who and what we value in collaboration and the convergence of human practices and non-human (f)actors.

What is attractive in Barad's ideas is that in her notion of 'intra-actions', humans and non-humans are no longer separate entities with or without intentions and distinct forms of agency. She argues that 'existence is not an individual affair [...] rather individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating.'⁷⁶⁷ It is humans' coming together with non-human entities in what she calls the 'agential cut' that leads to specific materialisations that are particular to the moment of their 'intra-acting'. Following Barad's ideas and applying them to the digital blog and website, it becomes possible to be less concerned with the who and the what, but rather with the getting to grips with the unfolding of the how in the coming together. Thinking through the notions of 'intra-actions' and 'entanglement' it becomes possible to see each moment of 'intra-action' – between pre-configured blog templates and ideas being formulated by humans, between the blog and future readers, between the artist and their practice, between the mechanism designed by a web designer and graphic designers, between an editor and artist and material, between material and editor and the user-friendly interface to upload material, between the thematic organisation and the user interface, etc. – as having an impact that is specific to each moment of 'intra-active' mattering.

These momentary instants of mattering, or rather the endless sequence of such moments in which mattering is performed, gets right to the heart of the vague understandings of 'the social' that ANT approaches have set themselves off against.⁷⁶⁸ In Barad's focusing on the specific configurations of 'intra-action', everything becomes defined, and is performed momentarily, in which what materialises is a proposition that in its subsequent 'intra-action's continues to transform. Whereas this seems not that dissimilar to Latour's ideas – from which perspective publications on art can be argued to continue to be reassembled again by every new reader – Barad's ideas allow us to circumvent some of the lingering questions around agency in his notion of reassembling. So how are 'intra-actions' and 'entanglements' different?

Although Barad, like Stengers and Latour, developed these ideas in relation to the history of science, Maaike Bleeker, among others, observes that Barad's work 'points to the importance of

⁷⁶⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁷⁶⁸ For the 'evolution' of ANT, see, in addition to John Law's work, Javier Lezaun, 'Actor-Network Theory', in *Social Theory Now*, edited by C. Benzecry, M. Krause and I. Reed (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

insights in performativity as developed in social sciences and humanities', and argues that the arts have something to offer in how 'intra-actions' and 'entanglements' can be understood.⁷⁶⁹ Rather than foregrounding gender in terms of who speaks and notions of performativity per se,⁷⁷⁰ for Barad agency is 'not something possessed by humans, or non-humans for that matter. Instead, agency is an enactment that 'enlists [...] "humans" as well as "non-humans"' and 'matter is a dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its intra-active becoming.'⁷⁷¹ Underlining that this is not about literal, physical matter, Barad posits that '[m]atter is substance in its iterative intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency.'⁷⁷² The notion of 'intra-action' thus brings us to 'an understanding of knowing that acknowledges the fundamental entanglement of the knower and the known, as well as the fundamental performativity of practices of knowing' as Bleeker puts it.⁷⁷³ The knowing that comes out of 'intra-action' emphasises that it 'is a direct material engagement, a cutting together-apart, where cuts do violence but also open up and rework the agential conditions of possibility' according to Barad.⁷⁷⁴ Applying Barad's ideas to the digital examples discussed earlier, with the broadening of the range of practices coming together, the increase in complexity of the 'intra-actions' and 'entanglements' embedded in the seemingly immaterial media of blog and website poses real challenges when trying to think through who or what has agency. If each and every coming together within endless chains of 'intra-action' contributes to defining what becomes manifest, it becomes difficult to think in terms of who and what matters in clear-cut terms, if not entirely impossible. What matters at one moment, potentially does so less at another, and maybe more at another again, and so on, ad infinitum... How does this different way of thinking about working together matter for my enquiry? How, in the end, does it help us rethink collaboration and authorship, and thereby agency in the field of curating, specifically in how they can be seen to play out in publications on art?

Amelia Jones argues that Barad's ideas 'afford[s] the possibility of understanding the mutual

⁷⁶⁹ Maaïke Bleeker, 'The Mise en Scène of Post-Human Thinking', *PARSE Journal*, # 12, available at <https://parsejournal.com/article/the-mise-en-scene-of-post-human-thinking/> (accessed 9 December 2020). Bleeker also references the notion of 'human implicatedness' as developed by Mark Hansen, which posits, in Bleeker's words, that 'technology can no longer be understood as a set of tools used by humans, and instead has become an ecology in which humans participate'. See Mark Hansen, *Feed Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First Century Media* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2015).

⁷⁷⁰ Acknowledging the value and importance of feminist approaches and gender studies for the development of her own ideas, including Judith Butler's writing on performativity, Barad uses it as a mode of thinking rather than an issue of identity per se. See Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2003, pp. 801-831; and Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (eds.), "'Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers": Interview with Karen Barad', in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Publishing, 2012), available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/o/ohp/11515701.0001.001> (accessed 19 June 2020).

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷² See Barad, 'Ma(r)king Time: Material Entanglements and Re-memberings', p. 18.

⁷⁷³ Bleeker, 'The Mise en Scène of Post-Human Thinking', n.p.

⁷⁷⁴ Barad, in "'Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires'", n.p.

coextensivity of artists, artworks, interpreters/experiencers, exhibitions, institutions of art [...] in the structures of meaning and value surrounding art and artists', thus placing what happens through 'intra-actions' and 'entanglements' within wider systems of production.⁷⁷⁵ Jones underlines that when approaching artworks through an 'intra-actional' lens, what is being produced cannot be considered independently from its production, and thus who and what produces, and how, adding that '[i]n so doing we foreground as well the work of interpretation and come to a new level of understanding of how art's materialities come to mean and to be valued.'⁷⁷⁶ If we transfer this to the field of curating, to publications, or to any manifestation of 'intra-actions' – be they material or immaterial – we can rethink who and what has agency.

Rather than providing a different outline of what that means in terms of value and hierarchies among the various positions involved in the production of art, exhibitions and publications, Barad's proposition provides us with a different starting point in thinking about what matters altogether. The various examples described here demonstrate that is not necessarily about who or what made what decisions in the process of producing the publications, or about what mattered more compared to something or someone else, but about what 'intra-acts' with what or who in ongoing chains of 'intra-acting'. Each of the publications discussed can be argued to be an articulation within its own specific 'ecology of practices', as outlined by Stengers, where even accidents – such as the empty pages in *The Invisible Generation* – the affordances of the chosen blog platform and template to construct a narrative – like in 'The Failure of Participation' – and the intricate configuration of the back-end that allows a seamless gathering of information on a flat screen for Olivia Plender's website – are all constellations of 'intra-actions' in which each 'entanglement' matters and constitutes something specific; these 'intra-actions' happen within overlapping 'ecologies of practices' converging in art, exhibitions and publications. Both Stengers's and Barad's ideas offer us ways of thinking beyond individual human and non-human agency, that not only may change how we think about collaboration and authorship; in the concluding chapter I consider what the implications are for publications on art and ideas of 'the curatorial' and for curatorial discourse overall.

⁷⁷⁵ Amelia Jones, 'Material Traces: Performativity, Artistic "Work," and New Concepts of Agency', *The Drama Review*, Vol. 59, No. 4, winter 2015, p. 32.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Jones states: 'we can revise the notion of the artwork as bridge (in Kant's system, one almost as privileged as the agential materiality of the philosopher/subject at the other end) in order to articulate (or "discursively materialize," in Barad's terms) the artwork along with the work of its having been made.'

Chapter 6: Conclusion – ‘The Curatorial’ as ‘Intra-active Ecology of Practices’

... ecology is about interdependency, the necessity to go through others in order to be what you are.

—Isabelle Stengers⁷⁷⁷

Is it not always a question of what is seen, acknowledged, and counted as present, and for whom?

—Karen Barad⁷⁷⁸

6.1. How Did We Get Here?⁷⁷⁹

I started this project in 2015 from my long-standing experience as an editor of publications on art, and the apparent lack of attention and appreciation for them in the field of curating had really begun to nag me. My concern was not only based on the absence of recognition and value attributed to the careful work that goes into producing these publications – akin to the care commonly described as being at the heart of curatorial practice⁷⁸⁰ – but also on the lack of acknowledgement of the fact that they are central to how and where information about art and curatorial work circulates and is reflected on, and that it is through their production and circulation that such work remains known and accessible long after projects are over and gone. This latter function – of publications being an afterlife of some sort – takes on even greater significance for practices that hinge on open-ended collaborative processes rather than manifesting as physical artworks and/or exhibitions and that in recent years have become the focus of practices described in ideas of ‘the curatorial’.

I started my exploration with a historical introductory case study of a publication on art that challenges ideas of power and value and how they are embodied in art – *Ways of Seeing* – that helped me outline several key areas of concern. I subsequently homed in on publications as

⁷⁷⁷ Isabelle Stengers in Casper Bruun Jensen and Line Marie Thorsen, ‘Reclaiming Imagination: Speculative SF as an Art of Consequences. An Interview with Isabelle Stengers’, *NatureCulture*, 2018, available at <https://www.natcult.net/interviews/reclaiming-imagination-speculative-sf-as-an-art-of-consequences/> (accessed 10 December 2020).

⁷⁷⁸ Karen Barad, ‘No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetime-mattering’, in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, edited by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, Heather Anne Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) p. 113.

⁷⁷⁹ In the spirit of what I discuss here, I situate music as a productive contributor to thinking and developing ideas, with this sub-header adapted from a Talking Heads song titled ‘Once in a Lifetime’ (1980).

⁷⁸⁰ NB: what is understood by ‘care’ continues to be redefined as urgencies as to who or what needs caring for change. The current spate of talks/publications about care in relation to art and curating is a specific peak in a long lineage.

spaces of display, tracing various genealogies and describing how – no matter their type or combination of different ones – they are environments in which a range of practitioners jointly construct something new specific to that context. Challenging the perception of publications as derivative platforms of mediation, I then looked at the relation between publications and art and curatorial projects, questioning the hierarchical sequentiality that continues to underpin what work is valued in systems of art’s circulation and display and how. By troubling notions of original and source and engaging with various ideas of mediation and translation, I argued that publications can be considered as articulations in their own right, and are the result of an expansive range of contributions and interactions that stretches far beyond those of the artworks and displays that they relate to. This led me to looking at how collaboration and authorship have been understood in curatorial discourse, specifically in ‘the curatorial’, which relies on the convergence of multiple actors and agents and that generates shifts that lead to what Irit Rogoff calls a ‘knowledge event’.⁷⁸¹ What became clear is that when people come together, be together and work together – to paraphrase Maria Lind⁷⁸² – and engage with each other, as well as the materials and contexts in which they operate, what unfolds in and through their interactions has remained more or less a blind spot in the discourse, in which traditional notions of authorship, and thereby hierarchy and value remain largely intact.

With the increase of creative projects in which individual interests and concerns are often approached as if they are by definition always already held ‘in common’,⁷⁸³ curatorial discourse can be perceived to have fallen victim to somewhat of a bifurcation. Large sections of the debate continue to focus on the specifics of different kinds of curatorial projects in which roles and positions are presented as seemingly clearly defined, but in the last fifteen years we have also seen greater engagement with the boundaries of the field and the roles and positions within it, not least through questioning the form(s) curatorial practice can take. In a 2016 essay, Tara McDowell posits that the discussion about the differences and connections between curating and ‘the curatorial’ – or ‘the paracuratorial’, as she and others call it⁷⁸⁴ – is ‘an unstable binary, a dubious hierarchy’ and ‘a theory in which to poke holes’,⁷⁸⁵ and ‘[t]he distinction between discursive curating and a regressive “artwork-first model of curation” rests on shaky ground’.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸¹ Rogoff, ‘Curating/Curatorial’.

⁷⁸² Lind, ‘The Collaborative Turn’, p. 17.

⁷⁸³ To avoid any possible confusion: this is meant as a general reference, rather than a nod to the discourse around ‘the commons’ and ‘commoning’ that has emerged in relation to both artistic and curatorial practices.

⁷⁸⁴ The term ‘paracuratorial’ was formalised in *The Exhibitionist* issue 4, June 2011, by way of several essays – by Vanessa Joan Müller, Livia Paldi and Emily Pethick – with ‘the *para* conceived of as operating away from, alongside, or supplementary to the main curatorial work of exhibition making’. O’Neill, ‘The Curatorial Constellation’, p. 435.

⁷⁸⁵ Tara McDowell, ‘The Post-Occupational Condition’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2016, p. 24, doi: 10.1080/14434318.2016.1171723.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26. In her conversation with Irit Rogoff (2012), which I have referenced several times, Beatrice von Bismarck argues similarly that for her there is no distinction between curating and ‘the curatorial’, but rather that she

Her comments are a response to Paul O'Neill's observation of a 'conservative urge to return to the more stable distinctions between the work of the artist, the curator, the educator, the public' that some assumed following the apparent abandonment of the exhibition as medium.⁷⁸⁷ For McDowell, 'rather than uncritically embrac[ing] discursivity as a space of productive dialogue and contestation [...] it is imperative to interrogate the contemporary conditions of labour producing this new state of affairs'.⁷⁸⁸ While she – rightly – questions the essentialist either/or stances some initially formulated, as discussions about what 'the curatorial' may encompass have evolved, what has emerged is that it is not so much about negating individual roles and positions and traditions and genealogies, but about 'initiating an unfolding [...] as a mode of dissonance and difference, rather than positivistic coincidence' as Ben Cranfield puts it.⁷⁸⁹

Although McDowell's suggestion allows us to circumvent a sense of hierarchy, by grouping individual positions versus systemic issues – not unlike Roberts, Wright and Holmes did, as discussed in the previous chapter – this grouping also flattens all the differences between those who, and not to forget what, converge and what these differences may engender, which is where Lind and Rogoff situate the potential of 'the curatorial', albeit coming at it from slightly different angles. For Cranfield that is also where the productive possibility resides when he argues that 'there is something in the curatorial that exceeds the act of bringing together to serve a narrative, answer a question or solve a problem'.⁷⁹⁰ His suggestion of this explicit 'exceeding' can therefore also be set to work in institutional spaces, rather than be limited to the discursive and process-based projects that thus far have been the focus in the literature. To try and think through what the ramifications of this open-endedness and exceeding are, I want to consider more extensively what Karen Barad's ideas can contribute to working through the potential of 'the curatorial' by teasing them out via the notion of 'intra-actions' and 'entanglements'. In addition, I want to further explore how Isabelle Stengers's idea of 'ecology of practices' allows us to reconsider who and what matters; not only in publications on art, but also in the wider field of curating and 'the curatorial'. Eventually I want to think through what embracing Stengers's and Barad's ideas may mean for how we engage with notions of agency and value.

sees them as interconnected. I find Rogoff's and Lind's understandings more productive.

⁷⁸⁷ O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation', p. 436.

⁷⁸⁸ McDowell, 'The Post-Occupational Condition', p. 35.

⁷⁸⁹ Cranfield, 'Mind the Gap', p. 123.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

6.2. Words and Ideas: 'Ecology of Practices' and 'Intra-actions'

It is the potential that Cranfield observes in 'the curatorial' that makes Stengers's notion of an 'ecology of practices' useful to discuss first. Her suggestion to think of an 'ecology of practices', rather than of an expanding range of individual practices coming together momentarily – as certain interpretations of 'the curatorial' emphasise⁷⁹¹ – offers a way of thinking that leads us away from the persistent urge to assess what positions and practices have greater effect, and value, than others. Instead, her ideas point towards a thinking *around* individual contributions and contributors – while not negating their individual relevance and agency per se – and what happens in their 'coming together' itself. In other words, the shaky binary of separating curating and the paracuratorial that McDowell identifies can indeed be considered somewhat of a red herring. After all, O'Neill himself already argues that all exhibitions are always collaborative in some way, as referenced in Chapter 5, and suggests that because of the transformations that exhibitions by definition engender – of artworks, but also of everyone who and everything that converges in it – they can be considered manifestations of 'the curatorial' too.⁷⁹² The larger question that remains though, is how what happens in the unfolding of coming together of humans and non-humans can be understood and acknowledged, and how that can help us circumvent or even abandon the urge to determine who and/or what matters more.

Despite all the talk of discursivity, reflections on all forms of artistic and curatorial practice have remained largely inward-facing – as commented on in previous chapters – with curatorial discourse consisting mainly of curators and theorists talking about curatorial work (in addition to artists' work), which assumes an initiated audience, or set of audiences.⁷⁹³ What this 'talking among ourselves' inescapably perpetuates is precisely the focus on only a few positions around which increasingly expansive histories are constructed. When Lind argues for an expanded field of curating that is no longer about producing exhibitions, but 'a multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education, and fundraising',⁷⁹⁴ and outlines 'the curatorial' as

⁷⁹¹ Von Bismarck refers to 'constellation'. In my understanding that tends to denote a static grouping, and does not offer the same sense of mutability and interdependence that 'ecology' does. Von Bismarck, 'Curating/Curatorial'.

⁷⁹² O'Neill, 'Beyond Group Practice'; O'Neill, 'Epilogue: Exhibitions as Curatorial Readymade Forms of Escape'. He suggests: 'By extending a conception of "the curatorial" to account for multiple sites of contact, assemblages and gathering of diverse bodies and subjects as well as their discursive connections, I wish to open up the "exhibition" itself as a potential mode of research in its own process of becoming.' (p. 499).

⁷⁹³ Despite the word curating having been hijacked in everyday life, the discourse around curating and art has remained the domain of those embedded in the field, not least through associations with institutional or educational frameworks. The launch of *The Exhibitionist*, in January 2010, of which McDowell was editor, can be understood as the perfect embodiment. In her 'Endnote' to the first issue, she claims that with this journal, '[p]racticating curators [...] have for the first time a recurrent public forum of record to debate, examine, historicize, self-critique, and editorialize the processes and results of exhibition making'. Although the editors sided with a more authorial mode of curating, the journal (ceased in 2017) provided a platform that contributed to the bifurcation of and what McDowell et al. call *paracuratorial* work, based on Gérard Genette's ideas of the 'paratext' (as everything that surrounds a book's body text) by making it a topic of discussion.

⁷⁹⁴ Lind, 'The Curatorial'.

'signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas [...] that strive to create friction and push new ideas',⁷⁹⁵ her descriptions skirt past the fact that these convergences also draw in practitioners, histories, traditions and conventions that are not necessarily rooted in art, and that also 'work' on others in moments of encounter and exchange. As a result, rather than 'accept[ing] the need for different practitioners to weave relations around issues of common interest' and considering the effects of these unfolding relations, their distinct discourses tend to 'dismember[ing] these issues with their diverging demands' as Stengers observes.⁷⁹⁶ Different practices therefore remain perceived as distinct, if not downright other, only temporarily interloping in each other's territories, not considered to be connected beyond their encounter in which a common interest is only temporarily mobilised.

When Stengers contends that '[p]ractices are interdependent, each needs others in order to exist and expand', she does not have the curatorial field, let alone the notion of 'the curatorial', in mind, but it might as well have been at the centre of her concern.⁷⁹⁷ For her, the idea of an 'ecology of practices' 'accentuate[s] positive divergence', which she describes as something that 'opposes any ordering, any derivation of the "each" from its place in the ensemble, just as contemporary ecology opposes the idea of an order of nature.'⁷⁹⁸ The underlying question of my enquiry is whether we can see publications on art as productive sites of convergence of divergent practices that have something to offer to the notion of 'the curatorial' and thus to the field of curating as a whole, rather than just publications. My proposition is that it is precisely because of their range of contributors – where not only artists and curators and audiences/readers come together, but also editors, writers, translators, photographers, designers, printers, binders, publishers, distributors, and others – publications can help us think beyond pervasive hierarchies that continue to place greater emphasis, and value, on only a few practices and positions over many others. It is this spectrum of practices – each bringing with them their own practice-specific materials, traditions, as well as networks of production and circulation, in other words, all the non-human actors and actants that each practitioner mobilises while practising – that publications on art can be argued to be produced within an

⁷⁹⁵ Lind, 'Performing the Curatorial', p. 20.

⁷⁹⁶ Although Stengers's observations (in 'Reclaiming Imagination Speculative SF as an Art of Consequences') relate to these issues within science, they have started to filter into creative fields. See, for instance, H el ene Frichot, 'A Creative Ecology of Practice for Thinking Architecture', *Ardeth*, No. 1, 2017, available at <http://journals.openedition.org/ardeth/1007> (accessed 10 December 2020). The journal 'originally created a shared location where diverse ideas and practices could cluster and jostle alongside each other' according to Frichot. The notion of 'jostling' could be considered to be of a nature not dissimilar to Chantal Mouffe's idea of agonism that is a key point of reference for Maria Lind's conception of 'the curatorial'. However, I see Stengers's notion of 'ecology of practices' as an approach that engages with the potential of disciplinary differences rather than Mouffe's more political concerns, and therefore relates more directly with Rogoff's interest in the 'knowledge' event and my own.

⁷⁹⁷ Stengers, 'Reclaiming Imagination'.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

ecology that situates it beyond the 'original' ecology surrounding the artwork and/or curatorial project.⁷⁹⁹ It is this connecting of slightly different networks in and through publications, that make them useful examples of the kind of 'ecologies of divergence' that Stengers posits as so productive – and perceptibly so – compared to many projects that have been situated as embodiments of 'the curatorial' in the discourse.⁸⁰⁰ Applying Stengers's ideas to the publications discussed in this thesis, I suggest there is something to gain from considering what the convergence of practices in publications in terms of ideas of space, mediation and translation, and collaboration and authorship may mean, and can offer to ideas of 'the curatorial'.

In *Ways of Seeing*, discussed in Chapter 2, the book follows a television programme, interconnecting two different media and their networks and means of production and circulation. This merging of two distinct networks, each relying on a range of practices, is perfectly embodied in the pairing of BBC and Penguin as co-publishers. Not only are we made aware of the direct connection between these networks, with television programme and book fronted by a writer; his collaboration with a set of other practitioners is explicitly acknowledged, as is the fact that both iterations build on ideas developed by Walter Benjamin, but in the book have been expanded beyond what the television programme explores. The human and non-human contributors coming together in the book's seven chapters, with their different configurations of images and text and the potential of montage, literally 'display' the chains of smaller convergences the book is the result of. In all of these, it is not about everyone and/or everything being present in the same way at the same time, nor is it about listing everyone involved as Marion von Osten suggests – even though the credit list at the front of the book, combined with the 'Note to the reader' are refreshing exceptions among the common absence of such egalitarian acknowledgements in publications and the art world at large. Within their networked coming together, these individuals and the non-human (f)actors involved were all part of chains of smaller, minor, interactions that led to another set in slightly different configurations. All of which can be construed as part of interconnecting chains where 'one is [...] offering the result of its previous operation [...] for the other, to operate, only to become active again at the next step, when the other presents the new entanglement' as Stengers puts it.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁹ I am not necessarily disagreeing with Maria Lind, who in 'The Curatorial' (2009) states that it 'resembles what an editor should do, only with a broader set of materials and relationships'. However, my concern here is not what embodies 'the curatorial' to a greater extent, but rather to use publications to think through how the idea of an 'ecology of practices' can help us scrutinise what happens in any 'coming together'.

⁸⁰⁰ One of the criticisms levelled at some of the discourse around 'the curatorial' is that the proposition remains largely theoretical/philosophical.

⁸⁰¹ Stengers, 'Reclaiming Imagination'.

In *Black Sun*, human and non-human actors and agents that come together and the relationships between art and its exhibition and the publication – in this case the book being prioritised over and ahead of the exhibition – counters traditionally perceived temporal sequential orders and by extension prevailing hierarchies, and positions the space of the book squarely as a practised place, occupied by the work of a range of practitioners. In their convergence in this ‘ecology of practices’, the object engages with the conventions of its form and their potential within its ‘bookness’, comprising elements that relate to different types of publications on art in which various interventions underline the different genealogies they build on, clearly speaking to several traditions, but sometimes also actively deviating from them. To some extent upending the notion of afterlife, *Black Sun* can be argued to perform a kind of institutional critique of the space of the book, destabilising expectations around the temporal relation between art, exhibition and publication. In doing so, *Black Sun* can be situated as a materialisation of a productive ecology of differences, in which divergences from prevailing uses of the space of the book and conventions speak most vividly, and most effectively.

Continuing in this vein, *Feature Film, a book by Douglas Gordon* underlines that what are generally perceived as stable entities – (art)works – and tend to be positioned as authentic singular ‘sources’, can be situated as propositional manifestations in a never-ending chain of transformations that are always already connected with other iterations – and thus other convergences of practices, traditions and conventions – and that when ‘translated’ into other media by definition become new articulations, in the processes of which the particular characteristics of the media that mediate exert their influence too. That their specific materiality matters greatly in all chains of minor moments of interacting is further explored in the examples discussed in Chapter 5. Each mode of publishing – including printed books, but also seemingly immaterial blogs and websites – shows different degrees of (im)material agency in the chains of interaction of various practices coming together. These take effect not only through human ideas, intentions and interventions, but also through non-human (f)actors that offer functional solutions for spatial arrangements of images and text, but also come with their own limitations and accidental events and effects. And although digital space appears much less sequentially determined than the space of the book and how it can be used is easily perceived as a freer and more boundaryless space, this freedom comes with increasingly complex mechanisms that help structure and navigate what is positioned in that space and that expand the scope of the ‘ecology of practices’ that converge, now including coders, web designers, template builders, hosting platforms, and the expanding entanglements of hard- and software.

Where that leaves human actors in their encounters with the range of non-human agents at play is described poetically by Stengers when she suggests that in all of these ‘gestures’, each practice ‘presents itself with [...] its “demands,” what it requires and depends upon [...], but also with the “obligations” to which the practice commits its practitioners’.⁸⁰² Despite these ‘obligations’ imposed by each practice upon those who practise, Stengers gives us licence to, on the one hand, situate ourselves as individuals among a wide range of others, and on the other, to worry less about each of our actions and contributions. Instead, her idea of ‘ecology of practices’ suggests we also always consider the whole (and Kate Briggs’s notion of ‘tending to all differences’ takes on a slightly different resonance), which is what my shorter descriptions of each example as space, medium or platform in terms of collaboration and authorship outline. Looking at the chains of coming together of multiple practices, Stengers argues that they should be considered as always interdependent, and also always flexibly so.

If we apply Stengers’s ideas to art and curatorial practice, they suggest we no longer focus on identifying individual achievements, but understand specific positions and their individual agency as dependent on and determined through interactions *with* each other. That is not to say that individual agency as traditionally understood – driven by ideas, intentions, desires and expectations, but also compliance (even if playing to the persistent expectation not to comply, à la Sehgal) and traditions, among other (f)actors – does not exist. From Stengers’s perspective, however, an ‘ecology of practices’ – in which the possibly infinite whole of ecology comprises the more delineated whole of each practice – trumps individual agency in the momentary fragmental ‘passing on’ that she describes as so productive. If, in addition, we bring in Karen Barad’s ideas of ‘intra-actions’ and the specific, singular ‘entanglements’ that occur within them, our appreciation for individual agency can shift too. Rather than zooming out, like Stengers does, Barad’s idea of ‘intra-actions’ does the inverse; it forces us to home in on the specificity of each and every moment of encounter, however small or minor – be that between materials, individuals or practices and their immaterial (f)actors, such as traditions and frameworks – and acknowledge their interdependence in each ‘intra-action’. Barad’s ideas literally put a magnifying glass on each coming together and does so recognising that those who/that which converge are also defined in and by the moment of ‘intra-action’, in always specific ways. Whereas Stengers’s ideas operate on a macro or even meta level – also allowing us to see the relevance of what happens there for the micro level – it is Barad’s focus on each micro ‘intra-action’ that allows us to understand their importance for the macro and meta levels.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*

Barad proposes a way of looking at events of coming together that generates a posthumanist account that ‘calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of “human” and “nonhuman”’, which requires ‘examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized’.⁸⁰³ In other words, for Barad too, it isn’t so much about the who and the what, but about the how between and among and the disciplinary delineations that seem to hold various categories firmly in place. To come to an account that elides the focus on the who and what, on disciplinary positions, or even the human and non-human, if we stay with ANT terminology, Barad mobilises the notion of performativity – building on Judith Butler’s and Eve Sedgwick’s understandings⁸⁰⁴ – and posits that ‘performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.’⁸⁰⁵ Barad thus takes ANT – which relies on the ‘controversial authorial agency’ in the tracing of actors and agents through description – to some extent to task, arguing that we need ‘a robust account of the materialization of all bodies – “human” and “nonhuman” – and the material-discursive practices by which their differential constitutions are marked’ in order to avoid ‘cheat[ing] matter out of the fullness of its capacity’.⁸⁰⁶

This sounds not entirely dissimilar from what Stengers suggests, but for Barad to come to a fuller understanding of that capacity we need to take on board that ‘relations are not secondarily derived from independently existing “relata,” but rather the mutual ontological dependence of “relata” – the relation.’⁸⁰⁷ In other words, it isn’t so much about tracing the actions and reactions of the actors and agents, but about understanding that the specificity of what unfolds in their coming together reflects back onto how we define the who and the what. I understand Barad’s questioning of actors’ ‘givenness’ not as only a bold, but also a liberating move; by situating the magnifying glass literally in the moment of ‘intra-acting’, the human- or non-humanness of who or what converges is effectively ignored. What matters instead is that ‘[a]gential intra-actions are specific causal material enactments that may or may not involve “humans”’ where ‘the differential boundaries between “humans” and “nonhumans”’ and other dichotomies such as “culture” and “nature,” the “social” and the “scientific” are constituted’ in the moment of ‘intra-acting’.⁸⁰⁸ For Stengers the larger whole of a set of practices displaces our

⁸⁰³ Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity’, p. 808. NB: this essay precedes the 2007 book, but provides a comprehensive overview of Barad’s ideas and ‘intra-actions’ with ideas formulated by other thinkers.

⁸⁰⁴ Barad offers a neat summary of the lineage of various understandings of performativity, from J.L. Austin to Jacques Derrida to Judith Butler via Michel Foucault, concluding ‘In *Bodies That Matter* (1993) Butler argues for a linkage between gender performativity and the materialization of sexed bodies. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) argues that performativity’s genealogy is inherently queer.’ Barad, ‘How Matter Comes to Matter’, note 8, p. 808.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 810. NB: like Latour and other ANT-ers, Barad does not necessarily mean literal ‘matter’, but that what matters, or has agency, in each ‘intra-action’.

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, note 20, p. 815, to which she adds ‘there are no independent relata, only relata-within-relations’.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 817. Barad also argues that ‘[h]olding the category “human” fixed excludes an entire range of possibilities

usual focus on specific whos and whats, and Barad's ideas suggest that a similar displacement can take place by looking at the momentary 'mattering' through 'intra-action' and 'entanglement'. What that means in terms of the narrative we construct in 'an agential realist account', is that we understand 'discursive practices' as specific 'material (re)configurings of the world through which local determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted'.⁸⁰⁹ To think through what Barad's concerns have to offer when we look at publications on art, and ultimately our understanding of 'the curatorial', I return to the void of the blank page that features in several of the examples discussed in this thesis.

The first, *Ways of Seeing*, already offers us several blank pages, but their blankness is not a static material givenness to use Barad's terminology; it is a heavily imbued blankness. Not only because of everything we encounter alongside and because the context and space of the book and its content make us aware that 'the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled' – a statement that through the lens of Barad's ideas takes on a specific resonance – but also through the invitation to read the essays in any order, and the various modes of writing, seeing and reading explored across the book's chapters, ending with the explicitly open-ended invitation 'To be continued by the reader...' on the first blank page. These blank pages are thus already loaded with multiple layers of potential meaning, but only in their 'intra-action' with a reader's eyes do they gain their specific significance, which in turn defines the singularity of the reader and their experience as well as the pages themselves. Through Barad's lens of 'intra-action', the blankness is not just a lack of text and/or image on a white piece of paper, but one that signals endless potential mattering, which resembles the open-endedness of 'the curatorial' in Rogoff's understanding and her quest for the 'knowledge event', where we can now place this blankness within an 'ecology of practices' that Stengers posits as productive, especially because in each 'intra-action' the blankness is redefined through difference.

Difference can be attributed agency in Tino Sehgal's empty pages in the space of *Black Sun* too, as they are the only empty pages in several sets of image spreads where on each page, in the sequence of spaces, the 'intra-actions' they offer up push against a certain givenness in our expectations. In *Black Sun*/Sehgal's case, the blank page can also be read as denoting an exploration of the boundaries of control of the artist in relation to their practice as a whole, and its documentation and mediation within the framework of a range of practices that converges in the book. Applying Barad's ideas, for each reader 'intra-acting' with the page's materiality, its emptiness and the single line at the bottom open up to myriad possible matterings that go

in advance, eliding important dimensions of the workings of power', p. 826.

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 828.

beyond the dichotomy that the works and the words 'success' and 'failure' conjure. On the one hand, the captions place the blankness in a very specific 'ecology of practices' through which their difference is mobilised, on the other hand, these words themselves engage in 'intra-actions', broadening the range of actors and agents within this blankness; how these can come to matter remains open to further 'intra-actions'. In each moment of 'intra-active' mattering the knowledge they may generate for the reader remains singular though, rather than generic, which chimes with and also helps clarify how Rogoff's 'knowledge event' might manifest itself, while remaining entirely slippery at that.

The book *Feature Film: a book by...* at first glance does not contain blank pages, but its (extra) black ones arguably mimic the black box of the cinema in ways that resemble the similarity between the apparent neutrality of the white cube of the gallery space and the blank page of the book. While they can be read through the idea of convergence in an 'ecology of practices' of film and art, exhibiting and publishing, and the various affordances of the media and apparatuses of display, how we read that black void is again already configured through all the 'intra-actions' between these various actors and agents, and as a result each black page is never 'just' black. Similarly, among the configurations discussed in the chapter on collaboration and authorship, the blank pages in *The Invisible Generation* are not the same blank as those in *Ways of Seeing* or in *Black Sun*, and their blankness is also different from the black void in *Feature Film: a book by...*, all of which are different from the apparently empty – but in reality already highly constructed through sets of 'intra-actions' themselves – templates of blogs and the mechanisms of information organisation and navigation of websites. All these cursory revisits and re-readings – these little 'intra-actions' with specific elements in the examples deployed in this thesis to (re)consider notions of agency, and thus value, within a specific field – demonstrate that in Barad's words '[t]he world is an ongoing open process of mattering through which "mattering" itself acquires meaning and form in the realization of different agential possibilities'.⁸¹⁰ Through all of this, agency can be understood not to emanate in a clearly defined direction from only a few easily identifiable human or non-human actors, but rather remains malleable and is always defined in the moment of 'intra-action'. To conclude my exploration, I consider how Stengers's and Barad's ideas – filtered through my exploration of publications – can help us reconsider who and what matters in 'the curatorial'.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 817.

6.3. Towards a New Terminology: ‘The Curatorial’ as ‘Intra-active Ecology of Practices’

Although the examples discussed in this thesis are publications on art, and I come at this enquiry as a practising editor, this thesis is in the end not only about addressing the apparently marginal position of publications in the field of curating, nor is it about whether or how the role of an editor is or isn’t similar to that of a curator; instead it is about what the understandings gained through looking at publications on art through several sets of terms have to offer ‘the curatorial’. Although publications can be positioned as one of many possible manifestations in the expanded field of curating, and as new articulations in processes of collaboration and co-production that embody ‘the curatorial’, my proposition is that ideas formulated by Stengers and Barad can help address the persistent adherence to traditional human-centred notions of agency that underpin perceptions of hierarchy and value. To work through the implications of their understandings for curatorial discourse, I revisit ‘the curatorial’ once more.

Whereas Lind formulates her deliberations as a practising curator who also writes and teaches, Rogoff comes at hers as an academic and lecturer, who occasionally curates. That is not say that their positions and activities don’t overlap, but the respective contexts in which they are situated – or were situated in at the various moments of formulating their ideas – and the frameworks they operate within cannot but contribute to what is of specific interest for each.⁸¹¹ Although Ahmed’s argument that it matters who is speaking is important, the notion of ‘ecology of practices’ offered by Stengers shifts the emphasis from the individual towards the wider frame in which they practise, in which the ‘intra-actions’ that Lind and Rogoff each engage in obviously differ – brought into sharp relief by Barad’s ideas – and what ‘matters’ in their apparently similar concerns cannot but do so too.⁸¹² Despite their clearly shared interests, they approach the notion of ‘the curatorial’ from slightly different angles, with Lind’s descriptions focusing on the coming together towards the unfolding through which shifts can occur, and Rogoff most interested in what emerges out of these shifts as an ‘event of knowledge’ but

⁸¹¹ Rogoff says as much: “The questions that interest me in the curatorial are, “is it a mode of knowledge production? Is it a mode of getting things done?” Rogoff, ‘Curating/the Curatorial’, p. 26.

⁸¹² In addition to Ahmed’s comments, it is useful to consider Barad’s resonance in terms of positioning. Frances McDonald, for instance, posits that ‘we must use the term collaboration to refer to a feminist sensibility and sensitivity that underwrites a scholarly work, rather than to a crude head-count of contributors’, and for her ‘[a]t the bottom of every good collaboration is entanglement’, or the inability to determine who came up with something ‘first’ and can therefore be attributed authorship in the traditional sense. See Frances McDonald, ‘To Collaborate is to Become Entangled’, *Post 45*, How we write (well), 1 February 2019, available at <https://post45.org/2019/02/to-collaborate-is-to-become-entangled/> (accessed 9 March 2021). She also argues for ‘a commitment to a non-hierarchical praxis that literally cannot imagine arrogance; an extravagant openness to everything, to *all those*’. *Ibid*. Directing her response at academia, Sarah Wasserman argues that ‘frequently denied the symbolic and institutional “loneliness” granted to genius men, the female scholar must remain keenly aware of her intellectual debts, her interlocutors, her own ego and those of her audience’, chiming with Ahmed. See Sarah Wasserman, ‘Acknowledgement(s): A response to Frances McDonald’, *Post 45*, How we write (well), 8 February 2019, available at <https://post45.org/2019/02/acknowledgements-a-response-to-frances-mcdonald/> (accessed 10 March 2021).

remaining entirely open to where and how that manifests itself. In Lind's descriptions the term 'together' is the key operative, and Rogoff complicates things by drawing attention to the inadequacy of the language we use to talk about what unfolds, suggesting that terms like "art", "audience", "curator", "institution" are 'evacuated of meaning'.⁸¹³ What a different terminology might encompass for curatorial discourse therefore becomes a key concern, which is why I suggest that Stengers and Barad together offer valuable entry, or exit points.

At the heart of coming, being and working together for Lind,⁸¹⁴ 'lie connections – between artworks and other material, the space, the specific time of presentation', as she states in a recent text in which she (re)situates her idea of 'the curatorial'.⁸¹⁵ For Lind, the underlying assumption is that 'the world outside the institution, as well as the institution itself, is always already unbalanced, and for this reason, it does not shy away from tension and divergence.'⁸¹⁶ 'Curatorial' projects can take on social and/or political relevance because they work with and through these tensions and divergences and in doing so are able to address and shift existing power dynamics. Rogoff's interests are also invested in change, however, in what can be perceived as a direct critique of the rapid and widespread embrace of collaborative, co-productive process-based practices, she observes that 'the art world became the site of extensive talking', and wonders 'did we put any value on what was actually being said? Or, did we privilege the coming-together of people in space and trust that formats and substances would emerge from these?'⁸¹⁷ Addressing the bifurcation in curatorial discourse mentioned earlier, she posits that 'we should not be arguing formats with counter formats, structures with counter structures, protocols with counter protocols'.⁸¹⁸ Rather than looking for more generic understandings of 'how' to come together while holding on to traditional descriptors of positions and outcomes, Rogoff suggests we look for practices that offer 'a permission for knowledge that is tangential and contingent and whose sociability [...] is based not on linearity and centrality but on dispersal and on consistent efforts at re-singularisation.'⁸¹⁹ It is the potential of continued re-singularisation that makes Rogoff's conception of 'the curatorial'

⁸¹³ Rogoff, 'Curating/Curatorial', p. 35.

⁸¹⁴ This repeated paraphrasing is derived from her earlier (2005) text in *Taking Matters in Common Hands*, which can be considered a precursor to 'The Curatorial' (2009).

⁸¹⁵ Maria Lind, 'Situating the Curatorial', *e-flux Journal*, # 116, March 2021, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/116/378689/situating-the-curatorial/> (accessed 7 March 2021).

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.* NB: the article is an expansion of a 2017 talk, in which Lind reflects on a series of projects in and around Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, of which she was director until 2018.

⁸¹⁷ Rogoff, 'Turning'.

⁸¹⁸ Irit Rogoff, 'Practicing Research, Singularising Knowledge', *MAhkuzine, Journal of Artistic Research*, summer 2010, p. 40. O'Neill suggests that '[c]ertain articulations of 'the curatorial' have identified a strand of practice that seeks to resist categorical resolution, preferring to function in the Adornian sense; as a constellation of activities that do not wish to fully reveal themselves.' O'Neill, 'Epilogue: Exhibitions as', p. 502.

⁸¹⁹ Rogoff, 'Practising Research', p. 42. NB: although this is an essay about practice-based research, its tenor is similar to Rogoff's texts about 'the curatorial', which is why I refer to it here.

indeed very slippery, but also points towards the idea that in all of 'the curatorial's' openness we should be looking for specificity rather than what can be translated into something universal.

It is precisely because Stengers's and Barad's terms allow us to go beyond a generic coming together of specific actors and agents – the who and the what – while simultaneously allowing for complexity and singularity – or singularities – in each and every 'knowledge event' that they offer potential to fine-tune ideas of 'the curatorial'. While Stengers's ideas shift our attention to the wider frameworks in which there is always a collective passing on – of ideas, matter, work – taken up by other collectives of practitioners that through their collectiveness generate something that they on their own, building on practice-specific traditions and conventions, would not be able to, Barad's ideas allow us to acknowledge the specificity that defines and (re)resingularises what emerges, as well as what and who contribute to this emergence. If we zoom in on this specificity and singularity – to keep Rogoff's vocabulary in view – of each 'intra-action', we can situate that as not being about individual – or dividual, to use Raqs Media Collective's term – positions, but about the 'intra-actions' among the specific whos and whats, whose own mattering is defined through their 'entanglement'. Although this may seem a rather circular chicken-and-egg rationale, together these ideas take our focus away from individual accomplishments and make the case for a different vocabulary.

If we accept that it is within chains of 'ecologies of practices' that ideas, work, exhibitions, reception and knowledge emerge, then the continued use of words that identify only a few positions and the work they are supposedly producing/doing – such as artist, curator, audience member, but also work, mediation, authorship, reception – perpetuates the perceived greater importance of these positions and their attendant values and hierarchies over others. If we also accept that rather than thinking about interactions between entities, the notion of 'intra-action' allows us to think about 'the curatorial' as a much more fluid and continuous manifesting – simultaneously producing the actors and agents of each specific 'entanglement' – in which nothing is a predetermined given, then we end up with a much more amorphous field of practice – or rather a continuously 'intra-acting' in an 'ecology of practices' – with which the language we use is out of sync.

Thinking through the lens of 'intra-actions' and 'entanglements' 'the very act of collaboration loosens and liquefies the contours of the subject' as Sarah Wasserman puts it,⁸²⁰ indicating that

⁸²⁰ Wasserman, 'Acknowledgement(s)'.

the vocabulary we have at our disposal is both too generic and too simplistic. Following Stengers and Barad, chains of 'intra-actions' not only lead to singular 'statements' in the process of mattering, but 'subjects [also] emerge from a field of possibilities [...] a dynamic and contingent multiplicity'.⁸²¹ Without wanting to end up in what may seem like mere wordplay, approaching 'the curatorial' as an 'intra-active ecology of practices' instead of a 'coming together' of a set of given entities suggests we stop thinking in static positions. Instead, we should be exploring the complexity and variety of 'intra-active entanglement' within chains of passing on, in which the role, position and value of human and non-human actors continuously shift within the 'ecology of practices' of 'the curatorial'. This does not mean disavowing existing terminology per se, but acknowledging that the terminology we use anchors our understanding to some extent to obsolete static realities, through which how many practices are currently being practised are paid a disservice.⁸²² By thinking of 'intra-action' rather than interaction, and 'entanglements' that occur within an 'ecology of practices', we can reconceive who and what we value when and how again and again. Rather than take up only one of the terms put forward by Stengers and Barad, I argue that it is their combination – their own 'intra-active' 'entanglement' – that enables us to link Lind's ideas of 'coming together' with Rogoff's ideas of the singularity of the 'knowledge event', but to also go beyond them. Conceiving of 'the curatorial as an 'intra-active ecology of practices' we can zoom in and out simultaneously, get to the heart of the how while at the same time situating that how in wider networks beyond the who and what.

The big question that remains is how new terminologies can be engendered and start to be used. Given publications' accepted ability to capture, mediate, translate, disseminate and circulate, they offer themselves up as the perfect site and medium to try out, test, exchange and explore. Could we conceive of new ways of speaking in, through and about publications to propose new terminologies and different ways of talking that move away from the whos and their specific roles or positions? Could we see publications leading the way in going beyond terms such as 'together', 'convergence' (use of which I have shown myself to be guilty of), 'configuration' or 'constellation' and start to explore the complexity of 'intra-active' mattering in the 'ecology of practices' that traditionally delineated positions – of artists, curator, writer, editor, designer, audience member, viewer, reader, etc. – are all part of? Might we use publications – in whatever shape or form, rooted in whatever tradition(s) or convention(s) – to 'stop[s] knowledge from travelling as information', and instead 'begin[s] to travel as a series of

⁸²¹ Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity', p. 819.

⁸²² The word 'intersections' in the title of this thesis was an attempt to start to speak to the complexity of coming together and the impact thereof on all practices involved: 'intra-active ecology of practices' does, however, a lot more work, and is both more expansive and more precise.

proposals or a series of provocations'⁸²³ and in doing so contribute to no longer 'approach[ing] practices as they are [as we know them] but as they may become', as Stengers suggests?⁸²⁴ In doing so, might we be able to start to think of '[m]atter [... as] not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency'?⁸²⁵ By using publications on art as prompts, propositions and provocations they could offer 'the curatorial' its 'unfulfilled potential lurking at its edges – as its very significance', no longer relegated to the fringes, but fully part of the wider spectrum of curatorial practice and discourse. ⁸²⁶

⁸²³ Rogoff, 'Curating/Curatorial', p. 23.

⁸²⁴ Stengers, 'Introductory Notes to an Ecology of Practices', p. 186.

⁸²⁵ Barad, 'Ma(r)king Time', p. 18.

⁸²⁶ Rogoff, 'Curating/Curatorial', p. 24.

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