

On
Online

Curating,
:



Buying
in
Middle

of

Time
the
Nowhere

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'On Curating, Online:
Buying Time in the Middle of *Nowhere*'
Master's Thesis
Curating, Managing, and Mediating Art
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To my supportive and insightful advisors,
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colleagues and classmates. To those who
have contributed their works, ideas, and care
throughout this process and beyond it. To
those who have been with me across time
zones. To Finland. To my family & b. To you
and your time. I am endlessly thankful to
share the middle of now with you all.

A B S T R A C T

The invention of the Internet and its related accessories, as untrodden territory and as a medium, have ushered in a new era of artistic creation and curatorial practice, new frontiers for political censorship, and have drastically altered the paradigm of information transmission. The Web, although certainly a powerful social tool, has seeped so deeply into the foundations of everyday life that it has collapsed understandings of the present in exchange for a constantly refreshing sequence of now's, and cultural institutions are struggling to 'keep up with the times.' Operating under the pressure of a capitalist system that privileges celebrity status, production, and modernity as progress, curators are ceaselessly inundated with an overwhelming amount of resources, struggling to dissect and interpret the present moment because the future has already been deemed impatient. What would it mean then if cultural workers were to slow down, and reimagine progress not as linear procession but as collective expansion?

This dissertation

looks at the ways in which alternative approaches to exhibition making and curating, specifically those taking place online, have long attempted to address the inadequacies and discriminatory practices traditionally upheld by major institutional models. While the speed and omnipresence of digital technologies has also cultivated a tendency for the creation of easily digestible content, slow curating, when used as a curatorial method rather than as a rate of dissemination, can serve as a strategy of resistance against the dueling binaries of past and future from a position that generously expands the middle of now by engaging in situated active thinking and critical reflection. Through an exploration of the evolution of the field of contemporary art alongside that of the Internet, this thesis presents examples of smaller scale institutions currently publishing and exhibiting artworks online that exemplify slow curating strategies. Through an analysis of the ways in which these platforms are designed, accessed, and address their audiences, a series of three case studies center around online publisher Triple Canopy, dis.art, a Netflix like viewing platform, and the

digital library Monoskop, in order to illustrate the diverse range of possibilities as well as the inherent problematics of technology that cultural workers face when utilizing digital media to create spaces for the exhibition of artworks, literature, and ideas.

Art and its associated movements such as conceptual art, feminist art, and modernism have already shown that while art is often thought to operate on the margins, it has the capacity to spark societal and political transformations—and despite the imposing restrictions of surveillance and control, surely art online makes for no exception. When subordination and emancipation can be achieved by the same tools, simply having the tools is not enough, and any reconfiguration of the conflict depends not only on how they are used, but by whom.

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THE FUTURE IS HYPertextUAL

In an attempt to resist the traditionally accepted linearity of research, while this thesis remains in the realm of the academic, I am purposeful in my execution and presentation of it through my style of writing as well as in the organizational approach to my material. My position is precise, singular and yet plural, and I am endlessly thankful to Donna Haraway for her writing on situated knowledge, reminding that “The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision.”¹ The dissertation itself becomes an artistic exercise that reflects its own conclusion, looking toward ideas of slow curating and sustained inquiry as curatorial methods that can be used to more deeply engage with both subject matter and varied audiences. I invite you, reader, and hope that you feel welcome in the words and spaces that follow.

Footnotes and reference lists are the contested territories of academia that have shackled personal experience and sequestered it behind the glimmering veneers

of objective knowledge. There is space to be found here between the teeth of traditional discourse when one acknowledges that “attending to the restrictions in the apparently open spaces of a social world brings us into closer proximity to an actual world.”² This is not a catering to a vicious desire to pit singular identity against singular identity, the problematics of which I will expand upon throughout this dissertation, but a necessary action to be taken up by all who are able in order to challenge the prevailing hegemonic and patriarchal power structures of knowledge production if the desire is to reshape them. To be silent and to silence is to be complicit. The technology sector is far too often perceived as being a male dominated domain—even the infamously sexist Wall Street employs more women than tech. Such a view further excludes the experience and invaluable efforts and identities of all others who have made the technology that many have come to rely on a possibility—like Grace Hopper’s source code translator, or the work of Ada Lovelace who wrote the world’s first machine algorithm

on paper back in 1843.

Citing the writing of several female-identifying authors and the ways in which their works—nonlinear, nonhierarchical, and decentering—had hypertextual qualities, in her essay *Women Writers and the Restive Text: Feminism, Experimental Writing and Hypertext*, Barbara Page proposed that writing as an expression of resistance is “to take apart the fabric of inherited textual forms and to reweave it into new designs.”³ Although this dissertation focuses most concretely on three particular case studies, there are many other insightful and inspirational projects unfolding online that speak to the research and its context, and which have thus been included in the frays of the fabric, or the footnotes, throughout the text. The production of knowledge is unfit for the assembly line, and therefore whether you are reading this in digital or printed format oscillating between pages, tabs, or other devices, I welcome your distraction as

attention. Perhaps the near future is female and sold on an overpriced t-shirt at The Wing,⁴ but it should be radically reimagined as an unmarketable, transgressive, intersectional,⁵ and hypertextual ethos.⁶

I LINK THEREFORE I AM

The curator can be thought of as, but not reduced to, a link, one that once hovered upon reveals a source, connecting actors and ideas from different fields or schools of knowledge, whether art, business, science, or technology, in order to present new ways of thinking, both producing knowledge and unlearning, or “de-linking,” it. In order to invite participation, collaboration, and critical thinking, which can be particular and distinct methods or outcomes of their work, curators undertake the responsibility to concern themselves with the questions that surround the relationships between audiences, artists, themselves, as well as the tools they utilize in their practice. They are not only to

3 Barbara Page, “Women Writers and the Restive Text: Feminism, Experimental Writing and Hypertext,” *Postmodern Culture* 6, no. 2 (January 1996): <http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.196/page.196>.

4 Marisa Meltzer, “A Feminist T-Shirt Resurfaces From the ‘70s,” *The New York Times*, November 18, 2015, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/fashion/a-feminist-t-shirt-resurfaces-from-the-70s.html>.

5 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “The Urgency of Intersectionality,” TED: Ideas worth spreading, October 2016, accessed March 14, 2018, https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality.

6 Coincidentally, Ethos is the name of a new “people-powered blockchain” cryptocurrency ecosystem. See www.ethos.io.

1 Donna Haraway, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, vol. 14, No. 3 (Feminist Studies, 1988), 582–583.

2 Sara Ahmed, “Making Feminist Points,” *Feministkilljoys*, September 11, 2013, accessed January 20, 2018, <http://feministkilljoys.com/2013/09/11/making-feminist-points/>.

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*Detail from GRAMMATRON
(Animated GIF Remix), 2017*
Artwork by Mark
Amerika.

question these associations, but to expose, not the answers that claim nonpartisanship, but rather the oft-concealed foundations upon which these connections lie by means of parrhesia, which has been described by Foucault as choosing “frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.”⁷ It is true however, that not all who claim the title ‘curator’ assume its associated responsibilities. If the age of accountability is dawning upon us with revelations of artworld misconduct—like that of Jens Hoffmann, Aaron Bondaroff, Anthony d’Offay, Gavin Delahunty, Knight Landesman—or that the exclusionary and narrow approaches to institutional representation and compensation have finally tipped the scales of tolerance, is there any hope that justice might be served not from a failed court of law, but in another court: that of the institutions wherein these offenders (amongst countless others), and such insupportable and unsupportive practices

were once sheltered?

No matter if curators are independent actors or institutional pundits, working in the ethnographical museum, minimalist contemporary blue-chip art gallery in a gentrified downtown of anywheres-ville, or eye strained agoraphobes with carpal tunnel and lower back problems aglow in the light of their screens, they are regularly faced with the daunting process of sorting through histories, theories, behaviors and artistic practices in a sea of information, overlapping accounts, and untrustworthy sources both on and offline to reveal that which lies buried—but not necessarily a ‘truth.’ First used by the Serbian-American playwright Steve Tesich in his 1992 essay *The Nation*, the term ‘post-truth,’ later dubbed word of the year in 2016 by the Oxford Dictionary, seems to foil all the best laid plans of cultural workers who have turned to art as a medium of infallibility only to see find that it might actually be, as Boris Groys contends, a “matter of taste.”⁸ Art however, despite its surrounding controversies, is defined by its will to change the worlds character, its ethics, and its attitudes, and while this

conviction is not necessarily medium specific, it is curators who are ultimately, by virtue of their duty to care, ‘troubled’ with dealing with the entirety of lived experience as their most valuable resource “to produce, present, disseminate, distribute, know, explain, historicize it.”⁹ Surely the digestion of the present moment is an important aspect of curatorial work, but what about the ability to alter the ways in which and what is consumed, particularly in this generation so regularly characterized by insatiable appetites for acceleration?

The speed and omnipresence of digital technologies has increased the production of information as well as the ability to access it, paradoxically signaling an even

greater need for sustained engagement as immeasurable stacks of books, periodicals, files, and browser histories have shaped the labyrinth in which the curator wanders as if ad infinitum, leaving behind them the traces of their experience in the form of exhibitions. While exhibitions have been thought of as as a space,¹⁰ as an act,¹¹ an idea,¹² a performance,¹³ a politically charged gesture,¹⁴ a mirror to society,¹⁵ a theatre,¹⁶ the artist’s career climax,¹⁷ a spectacle of wealth and privilege,¹⁸ and a playground for artists and curators alike,¹⁹—they have taken on yet another possible interpretation with the advancement of digital technologies. How might exhibiting art online stand in opposition to tradi-

7 Michel Foucault, “The Meaning and Evolution of the Word Parrhesia,” Michel Foucault Info, August 26, 2017, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://foucault.info/doc/documents/parrhesia/foucault-dt1-wordparrhesia-en.html>.

8 Boris Groys, “The Truth of Art,” E-flux, March 2016, accessed March 28, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/71/60513/the-truth-of-art/>.

9 Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 304–305.

10 Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan, *Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

11 Mieke Bal and Edwin Janssen, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

12 Kathleen Hefty, “Liam Gillick,” MUSE Magazine, 2016, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.musemagazine.it/liam-gillick/>.

13 Barnaby Drabble, Federica Martini, and Sibylle Omlin, eds., “Performing the Exhibition,” *On Curating*, no. 15 (2012): <http://www.on-curating.org/>.

14 *An Incomplete History of Protest: Selections from the Whitney’s Collection 1940–2017*. Whitney Museum of American Art. 99 Gansevoort Street, New York, NY 10014. August 2017.

15 Janne Vilkkuna and Pirjo Vuorinen, “Museums as mirrors of society: a case study of Finnish Museums,” *The Museum Review* 2, no. 1 (2017): <https://themuseumreview.atavist.com/vol2no1finlandmuseums>.

16 Marc Maure, “The Exhibition as Theatre- On the Staging of Museum Objects,” *Nordisk Museologi*, no. 2 (1995): accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.journals.uio.no/index.php/museolog/article/viewFile/3729/3186>.

17 Jonathan Harris, ed., *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

18 Ben Luke, “Nairy Baghramian: check your privilege,” *The Art Newspaper*, May 31, 2017, accessed February 12, 2018, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/feature/nairy-baghramian-check-your-privilege>.

19 *Playgrounds: Reinventing the Square*. Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia. Calle Santa Isabel 52 Madrid 28012. April 2014.

tional institutional models that, through the exclusivity of their exhibitions, chart the success of curatorial mediation in terms of linear progression, accumulation, and profitability, all the while moving away from accountability and the reasons that required the rush?

Engendered by the neoliberal conditions of production and in order to ensure a delivery of novelty or the new rather than the now, the curator's position tends to require a cross pollination along various fields—in technology, in science, literature, etc.—to maintain its status as an informed authoritative figure. In other words, “Hybridize or Disappear!”²⁰ As caretakers and connoisseurs, curators are often championed for their ability to navigate unfamiliar territories or retread worn paths with new insights, to forge new tools or repurpose the old ones, and for living to tell the tale; that is, to share what they have seen or experienced in innovative and creative ways, and all in a timely fashion. But what would it mean if cultural workers and practitioners were to decide that quantity, scale, reach or productivity

were no longer their methods for measuring success, and instead exchanged a future planned 3-5 years in advance for a more thoroughly explored present by slowing down, staying small, and repeating?²¹ While some dismiss the quotidian ubiquity of technological advancements, immune to the unremitting electric shocks of innovation, others move forward while looking back to see the technology's still impressive and altogether endangered potential for enacting social change in cultural and political institutions alike. How then might alternative approaches to progress, like slow curating for example, transform the operative structures that surround the field of contemporary art by working both within and outside of its formulaic patterns of production, hegemonic discourses, and the expectations imposed on its actors to accordingly respond to ‘the times?’ More importantly, how might they do so online despite the addition of restraining circumstances imposed by the technology they utilize to do so?

The conditions which enable the curatorial gesture

of caretaking, and what, or whom that care reaches on the receiving end are, like the tools that facilitate its execution, in a state of eternal flux. The rise of new technology thus certainly warrants a rethinking of the role of the curator in the digital economy, wherein the line between leisure and labour teeters on the verge of extinction. Hito Steyerl asks “Is the internet dead? [...] But how could anyone think it could be over? The internet is now more potent than ever.”²² If the Internet as a resource for artistic practice is still gaining momentum, then curators are the gears of this machine responsible not only for the direction of its movement and pace, but for providing the means to rewrite the user manual for a machine oiled by the pilfered resources of wars waged in the name of culture itself. As the realm of the online continues to isolate users from offline reality and from themselves in exchange for idealized, post-truth versions of both, insight afforded by practitioners working online today might be the missing link that can help to contribute to an atmosphere of sustained inquiry in the age of infinite distraction²³ before

a global Narcissus effect locks us all into the screen we've been gazing at to see where it is we're going.

DIGITAL NAÏVE

I began my research on curating, specifically that which is done online, as a user myself, deemed what Marc Prensky in his 2001 essay *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants* refers to as a “digital native,” albeit ignorant of the histories and laws of the place from which my citizenship was ascertained, as if out of nowhere. I felt far better represented as digitally naïve. As a bilingual and dual citizen of both Poland and the United States, and as a resident lost in translation with voting rights in Finland, it is this superficially borderless digital citizenship that is perhaps the most curious of them all. I am a considered a native of the online by means of assimilation, this particular aspect of my identity afforded to me by an adherence to unwritten codes of conduct, an ability to speak and understand the language of electronics—technology like an extension of my own extremities made familiar to me through years of

20 The final words spoken by the narrator of Oliver Laric's 2012 video *Versions*. Laric himself lifted the phrase from a 2001 poem, ‘Citizen’ by Canadian poet Fred Wah.

21 Anthony Huberman, “Pay Attention,” *Frieze*, June 1, 2015, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/pay-attention>.

22 Hito Steyerl, “Too Much World: Is the Internet Dead?” in *The Internet Does Not Exist* (Sternberg Press, 2015), 11.

23 Dominic Pettman, *Infinite Distraction: Paying Attention to Social Media* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016).

exposure within the context of academia, access to a mobile phone, a personal laptop, and an all inclusive WiFi plan. My rights and my role as a citizen of public cyberspace however, remained unclear, despite numerous Terms of Service Agreements. ‘User’ is just another word for ‘other’ in the digital census.

I have grown up with the world (within worlds) at my fingertips, and it is without a doubt that as a user, cultural worker and curator, as a viewer, and as a scholar, I—and it seems I am not alone²⁴—have taken this technology for granted. I logged on for the first time in the basement of my childhood home to the soundtrack of the era: a primal, pubescent scream erupting from the monitor like a modem to modem mating call. Already settling into her role of parental control, my mum offered to help create my first screenname on the dial-up AOL service which occupied our landline, meaning it could only be used when my father wasn’t expecting work related phone calls. Constructing my digital identity, I wanted to retain the agency afforded by the conditions of another: I wanted ‘girl’ to be part of my online alias. My mum, whose

native tongue is neither English nor netspeak, took my request for something simple as an opportunity to practice both, and ‘AngelGrill35’ was created. No, not a typo; we didn’t notice for awhile. Perhaps it is precisely this naivety which has defined my experience online as both a user and content producer, and which has driven my research toward an analysis of my own digital DNA. From the very beginning, I understood what it meant to be a woman on the Internet, how quickly I wanted to be anything but, and that there was no way to renounce this citizenship.

WHY NOW AND
WHAT CAN ART DO?

The stigma of being online hovers over users like a cloud of shame, the shadow of which leaves in its wake a trail of digital cookie crumbs to be traced, but never back to the source. The lexicon of digital technology once basked in the glow of a utopian halo, but is one now characterized by darkness; devices are like portals, a bottomless pit, something like an addiction too taboo to discuss aloud, that swallows first time users, hardened abusers, enthusiasts and junkies alike. Yet,

the ‘real world’ is positioned as something one can escape by being online, or as some accelerationists might propose, being online might allow for the destruction of the world as we know it.²⁵ While accelerationism²⁶ may be a reactionary fantasy—one that purports that if capital continues to conquer, humanity should not resist but rather surrender and advance it to the point of near apocalyptic proportions so that a new world order might emerge like a phoenix from the techno-ash—this is a future built on the exploitations of the present, one which remains unknown and yet already polluted by the outsourced responsibility of today. Some, like those of the Equitable Internet Initiative in Detroit or the Tribal Digital Village Initiative in Southern California, are attempting to build their own Internet, but complete withdrawal is not a viable option either. As Benjamin Noys in his critique of accelerationism, *Ma-*

align Velocities, writes, “Our task today is to collectively sustain forms of struggle and negation that do not offer false consolation [...] Starting from misery might instead involve developing forms of politicization that could not only recognize misery but delink from what causes us misery.”²⁷ Device dependence is not an addiction but rather an obsession²⁸ with modernity, innovation, and reciprocity—and as the saying goes: misery loves company.²⁹ Society at large is seen as catching up to rather than being caught by recent technological innovations—in either case, it’s clear that something, or someone, should slow down. The last several decades have certainly been marked by extreme technological celerity, and each update promises an even greater level of connectivity than the last, yet fails to disclose disconnection as a possible side effect in the fine print. The edges of the past are not simply retreating in

²⁵ See Alex Williams’ and Nick Srnicek’s *#ACCELERATE MANIFESTO for an Accelerationist Politics*.

²⁶ It’s worth noting that Nick Land, the father of accelerationism, suffered a breakdown in the early 2000s and disappeared from public view after what he later described as fanatical abuse of “the sacred substance amphetamine.”

²⁷ Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism & Capitalism* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2014), 70.

²⁸ Tayana Panova and Alejandro Lleras, “Avoidance or Boredom: Negative Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Use of Information and Communication Technologies Depend on Users’ Motivations,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 58 (May 2016).

²⁹ Gillian Tett, “We’d Be Lost Without GPS,” *Financial Times*, May 20, 2016, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/35180898-1d44-11e6-a7bc-ee846770ec15>.

²⁴ See www.allmyfriendsatonce.com for a collection of “memories of being online” organized by Gene McHugh.

a rearview mirror,³⁰ the past could never be contained in the rearview.

New methods of communication and expression are seen as no longer being defined by the imposed authority of unilaterality as information moves in all directions, across temporalities, and against the whims of public, personal, or corporate interests—it is updated, refreshed, shared, reblogged, retweeted, liked, commented on, reposted, cited, linked, generated, circulated and stored. That information, which theoretically anyone can create and disseminate as they like, maintains an ambiguous aura: it can be the number of flights of stairs an iAnything has tracked as being walked in a day, or the incriminating government secrets leaked by the likes of AJTransparency, Cryptome.org and Balkanleaks.eu. Computers and the software and programs they run have reconfigured the paradigm of information

transmission; the evolution from Web 1.0³¹ to Web 2.0,³² which changed the proprietary and static nature of early websites into more socially interactive versions, not only reversed the flow from owner to viewer, but also continue to flood the tributaries of public memory at such speeds that threaten official, i.e. state, narratives of power. The initial euphoria of promised connectivity subsided long ago, and has been usurped by those still safely cradled in power in distinct ways through camouflaged technologies of surveillance and manipulation.³³ It was thought that the Internet would rejuvenate democracy,³⁴ but just as the use of Youtube, Twitter, and Facebook during the 2011 Arab Spring³⁵ carried the promise that the immediacy afforded by digital technology was going to empower a new wave of positive social change, the past several years have shown that emancipation and subordination can be enacted

by exactly the same tools.³⁶ It seems however, that these tools are all that we, those deemed the users, have left.

My research is conducted between the years of 2017-2018; amidst the struggle for Net Neutrality,³⁷ as the United States Congress proposes a \$307 million increase to budget spending to fight cyber attacks during elections and quietly passes the CLOUD Act, as Facebook stock plummets \$50 billion in a day in light of the Cambridge Analytica data hacking controversy, as the possibility of ever achieving a more democratic Internet, not only in the United States, is severely threatened. Such substantially palpable effects require immediate political action. While the production of all knowledge is affected by the censorship, accessibility, and legislation of communication networks,³⁸ everyday actions

concerning the inner workings of displaying art and culture may seem inconsequential. For cultural workers, artists, curators and educators, however, art and its exhibition do not come as an end or an answer in the struggle for a more democratic Internet, and ultimately a more democratic world, but can certainly be invaluable tools when used to rethink the dominating Euro and androcentric discourses of power that have enabled the technology that has for roughly a third of the world's population³⁹ become an integral facet of daily life.

As *alpha 3.4*, a project by Charles Lim Li Yong and Woon Tien Wei of tsunamii.net for Documenta 11 wherein they streamed a live-feed of documenta.de, similarly expressed: it's not only that the physical can be made virtual, but that the virtual exists in and affects

30 Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Message*, ed. Jerome Agel (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

31 Information/news websites, i.e., online versions of traditional media outlets and institutional websites that follow a top-down approach.

32 Social media, i.e., independent blogs and unmediated interactive social network sites.

33 Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World* (London: Penguin, 2012).

34 Lawrence K. Grossman, *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age* (New York: Viking, 1995).

35 Jessi Hempel, "Social Media Made the Arab Spring, But Couldn't Save It," *Wired*, January 26, 2016, accessed February 08, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/2016/01/social-media-made-the-arab-spring-but-couldnt-save-it/>.

36 Richard Wolffe, "The Evil Genius of Cambridge Analytica Was to Exploit Those We Trust Most," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2018, accessed March 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/mar/21/cambridge-analytica-face-book-exploited-trust>.

37 Net Neutrality is a set of principles and rules that say internet service providers must treat all data fairly without blocking or "throttling" certain data streams. In a 3-2 vote, The US Federal Communications Commission ended the 2015 Open Internet Order, which protected net neutrality in the United States.

38 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

39 Daven Peng and Lodovica Biagi, "Demographics & Use," *Statista*, accessed January 22, 2018, <https://www.statista.com/markets/424/topic/537/demographics-use/>.

the physical.⁴⁰ Of course, just because something is online does not mean it pertains only to the online, but as Simon Sheikh writes, any criticism needs a target, “whether in the narrow sense of an artwork or exhibition, or in the broadest sense of the art world, societal structures of power, or capitalism as a world system of governance and exploitation. [It] must define its position not just in terms of ideology, but also, more methodologically, in terms of angle and vicinity.”⁴¹ Rather than simply exploiting the potential aesthetics of new media, crowding the already overflowing data center and museum storage basements with art object experiments, how might the practices of exhibiting online integrate digital technologies with the power of artistic communication in order to address and reflect the inadequacies founded in the offline that initially provided the tools to do so?

If we consider the advancements of capitalist interests in recent years, then

certainly, ‘progress’ has been made. I should make clear at the outset that I am not calling for a total recall, like Gretchen Bender’s 1987 installation work by the same title, nor do I oppose all notions of moving forward, and I am certainly not against all versions of progress. Such progress however, comes at a price, is subject to inflation, and the currency of the exchange must be contextualized with respect to individual subjectivity within a much larger socio-economic framework. The Web, although certainly a powerful social tool, has seeped so deeply into the foundations of everyday life that it has collapsed understandings of the present in exchange for a constantly refreshing sequence of now’s, and cultural institutions are struggling to ‘keep up with the times;’ some remain blanketed in the conserved nostalgia of the past exhibiting antiquated or stolen relics, while others are eager to make ancient the archaeological remains of the post-Anthropocene.⁴² A

tug-of-war rages ad nauseum between the two extremes—a tie seems a compromise too dangerous to risk, and as Paolo Virno contends, there is nothing “less passive than the act of fleeing, of exiting.”⁴³ Are we responsible for aiding in our own demise and becoming what Metahaven calls “captives of the cloud?”⁴⁴ Perhaps this duel of binaries is everlasting, but it is only from the middle that one can struggle for the middle, or attempt to reconfigure the conflict entirely. The middle however, is itself a shrinking position, and notoriously so in the field of arts and culture, as there is less and less time left to reflect in between updates and data downpour, little that separates leisure from labour, and yet the expectations remain the same “to tirelessly do more at once, to become increasingly flexible, to constantly change goals, plans, preferences—and to earn less and less. All this characterises neoliberal work and life.”⁴⁵ What would it mean then to repel the age of urgency, to take the time to rethink progress as a collective kind of advancement, one that

is vulnerable, malleable and porous, and yet still cultivates and nurtures an organic type of growth that resists the domination of a capitalist economic system?

Despite the odds, care here, online, still strives for survival, and several institutions, like Triple Canopy, dis.art and Monoskop, seem that they are not quite ready to show any signs of forfeiting. While these institutions continue to grapple for the middle, they do so with tenacity and endurance, rather than impetuously; their approach to curation is what I will explore throughout this dissertation as ‘slow,’ meaning that their work is rooted in historical context and personal subjectivity, and which does not situate productivity as a terminus. If the online is seen as a reimagined public space wherein democratic participation and artistic expression can theoretically flourish, and the technology and devices once thought to be emancipatory now have the potential to dominate every waking (and sleeping) moment of daily life, then temporality, politics and the quotidian

40 Manuel Castells, “The Impact of the Internet on Society: A Global Perspective,” MIT Technology Review, September 8, 2014, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/530566/the-impact-of-the-internet-on-society-a-global-perspective/>.

41 Simon Sheikh, “Circulation and Withdrawal, Part II: Withdrawal,” e-flux, March 2015, accessed March 22, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/63/60924/circulation-and-withdrawal-part-ii-withdrawal/>.

42 Benjamin H. Bratton, “Some Trace Effects of the Post-Anthropocene: On Accelerationist Geopolitical Aesthetics,” E-flux, June 2013, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60076/some-trace-effects-of-the-post-anthropocene-on-accelerationist-geopolitical-aesthetics/>.

43 Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude* (New York: Semiotexte, 2004), 70.

44 Metahaven, “Captives of the Cloud: Part I,” Captives of the Cloud: Part I - Journal #37 September 2012 - e-flux, September 2012, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/37/61232/captives-of-the-cloud-part-i/>.

45 Isabell Lorey, “Precarisation, Indebtedness, Giving Time Interlacing Lines Across Maria Eichhorn’s 5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours,” ed. Maria Eichhorn, *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours*, 2016.



Each year, hundreds of thousands of tons of electronic waste is shipped from Europe and the USA into developing countries. A large proportion ends up in Ghana.

*A topography of e-waste,
Ghana, 2012*

Photograph by Kai
Löffelbein from his
series *Ctrl-X*.

are the only positions from which the possibility of such an unfolding and burgeoning middle in the cultural field can be reconsidered.

THE MEDIUM IS THE METHODOLOGY

In order to present a series of three case studies that focus on smaller scale institutions that currently use the medium of the Internet to exhibit or publish, I first assess the field of contemporary curatorial, artistic and exhibition practices utilizing a variety of examples and a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyse both statistical data as well as existing literature. I also trace the early Internets historical roots in order to expand on its role in contemporary society, and more importantly its effects on the evolution of artistic and curatorial practice.

The first section, “Keywords and the Framework of the Network,” situates the research and includes an in depth investigation of keywords and concepts such as exhibitions, platforms, and public space with respect to the role of the curator. The chapters “Who Cares?” and “On Curating, Online” look at the multifaceted nature of the curatorial role with a specific

focus on curating online and caretaking as a precarious professional field deeply embedded in the dominant structures that enable the circulation of economic and social profit both online and off. The following chapter, “Where is Care?,” explores exhibition practices in relation to new technologies, artistic processes, and socio-economic and political circumstances by looking at the ways in which alternative approaches to exhibition making are implicitly tied to their precursor conditions. The chapter “World Wide Web?” provides a historical framework of the Internet as a networked technology, as both a concrete structure and an ideological one, and the accompanying chapter “World Within Worlds” addresses the question mark included in the previous chapter title and attempts to rethink the narratives that have defined the Internet as emancipatory, democratic, and free. The chapter “Better Off Online” explores the influence of early net.art on contemporary artistic practice online, dissecting the term “post-Internet” and the relationship between the realms of the offline and the online. The chapters “Platforms” and “Public Cyberspace” provide a definition of platforms and marks the

distinctions and similarities found between independently designed platforms and social media platforms, as well as users relationship to them. The chapter “In the Public I” examines the ways in which individual identity is constituted in the public space of the online realm through an interpretation of Chantal Mouffe’s “agonistic pluralism,” and expands upon the challenges posed by technology in regards to any attempts made toward genuine democratisation.

The second section of the thesis, “In the Middle of Nowhere Together,” presents the underlying theoretical framework of the research. The chapter “Being Singular Plural” looks at communication and care through Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophical interpretation of being, or rather *being-with*, to mark the distinctions of true sharing and pseudo-sharing as they pertain to curatorial practice in the increasingly privatized digital domain. The chapter “Buying Time in the Middle of *Nowhere*” from which the thesis takes its title, positions critical thinking as an important site of everyday resistance in and for the contested middle of cultural production. This chapter positions time as a form of curatorial currency, and sets

the stage for an understanding of how certain curatorial strategies can be used to actively engage critical thinking with the same tools that are thought to have disabled it.

The section “Slowing Down the Internet,” begins with the chapter “Success (in Progress)” wherein I look at the ways in which success is defined and currently measured in major museums and art institutions, as well as how such quantitative approaches can result in a contradiction of intentions that ultimately fail to achieve a goal that claims to serve the public. The chapter “Rethinking Success as Slowness” expands upon a possible interpretation of slowness as it pertains to “slow curating” and how as a method rather than as a rate, it can be used to rethink the aforementioned institutional models and address what is forfeited in their approaches to quantifying progress. This section will also introduce three case studies wherein I have looked at the ways in which curators working online have pursued alternative exhibition methods that reflect upon the notions of transparency, habit, and content. Each case study is explored in its own section, “Triple Canopy,” “dis.art,” and “Monoskop,” where I look at online publisher

Triple Canopy's approach to transparency, the way that dis.art, a Netflix like viewing experience that mixes critical theory with entertainment to subvert patterns of habitual usage, and assess the content exhibited by the digital archive Monoskop with respect to the distinctions posed by sharing and pseudo-sharing.

Each case study is conducted through an analysis of pre-existing material in the form of interviews, press releases, and publications released by or in collaboration with the institutions themselves. I have chosen to analyse pre-existing material as my dissertation centers on the availability of such information, and whether or not, and if so how, these particular institutions are working to make their content, processes, or internal structures more easily accessible and understandable to the "average"⁴⁶ user. I have chosen to examine three distinct approaches to exhibiting online to explore the tip of the iceberg of its possibilities. The exhibited content on these sites or platforms is not limited to artworks, but is expanded

to include literature, academic or non, as well as multimedia projects as I argue that their inclusion can serve to contextualise works which are primarily visual and which might allow for a more engaging viewer experience.

I do not aim to provide a detailed historical overview of curatorial, artistic, or exhibition practices in the digital age, as this information can be accessed obliquely and in greater depth through the accounts made by various authors and institutions,⁴⁷ and because the overwhelming assemblage of available technology has evaded consistency; its general characteristic being one marked by innovation. The Web as a platform for distribution has given rise to the idea that virtually anyone can be not only a curator, but a content producer as well,⁴⁸ meaning that while there are many meaningful projects unfolding online, they are buffered by copious amounts of digital litter. Alongside an array of publications, books, journals, magazines, etc. in the fields of new media, visual art, education, art history and techno-

logical theory, I am, of course, using the tool I am researching to conduct my research. If the Web is seen as the archive of all archives, it is thus similarly plagued with an onslaught of questions concerning the traditional archive with regard to authority, agency, authenticity and conservation,⁴⁹ the problematics of which I more thoroughly investigate in my case study on Monoskop. While I aim to expand my research to take into account a more broad and international experience, I also hope to explore what it means, and respectively, why it is problematic, to have encountered such difficulty in my attempts to find sources and examples which are not generated through, and circulating solely amongst, a seemingly singular hegemonic and primarily Western discourse. As with the production of any and all knowledge, the problematics of this position include the inclination for generalization, further exclusion, and most violently and devastatingly: erasure. I aim to illuminate whether or not this dilemma I encounter in my own research is yet another

example of the digital mirroring the distinctions and obstacles posed by the tendencies of inequality, racism, sexism, classism, and social status that plague our present day world. "In a different paranoid fable, we imagine that technology is the latest addition to the series of collective agents generated by history, as in a matryoshka doll: religion - theology - philosophy - ideology - science - technology. This is to say that the history of thought is stratified in information and intelligence technologies even though we only remember the last episode of this series, i.e. the network that embodies the dreams of the previous political generation."⁵⁰ A pure or quantitative approach simply does not suffice because the subject matter cannot be alienated from the contexts that have produced its status as it stands to-date, thus in order to address the case studies, it is necessary to first dig deeply into the stratified layers that support the surface. "Such are the dangers of addressing the contemporary. We fear that the future does not care; its people have moved on to

46 Those who might be characterised as digital natives, digital immigrants, or otherwise.

47 For example, the exhibition *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today* runs Feb 7th - May 20th 2018 at the ICA in Boston.

48 Jennifer Yin et al., "Everyone's a Curator: Do Museums Still Matter?" (lecture, SXSW Interactive, Omni Downtown, San Jacinto, March 9, 2014), accessed February 15, 2018, https://schedule.sxsw.com/2014/events/event_IAP20388.

49 Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995).

50 Matteo Pasquinelli, "Cultural Labour and Immaterial Machines," in *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, ed. Joasia Krysa (Autonomedia, 2006), 271.

other concerns.”⁵¹ Perhaps the future does not care, but as curators we should. I propose then to start in the middle of *now*, here.⁵²

CASE STUDIES & QUESTIONS

The exhibition of art creates an entry point for posing questions that may never cease to surround social, political, academic, and professional life, and the Web has become yet another space in which such questions can be raised. Does exhibiting or publishing online however also pose its own set of obstacles? In order to better understand the extent to which they can or cannot be overcome by curators or practitioners working in this context, it is necessary look at the Internet's transition from private ownership to the public sphere and as an artistic medium—or, more succinctly, how it has come to appear as though we are stranded in the middle of nowhere.

One of my primary concerns in my case studies

is thus whether or not the institutions I examine are also engaged in questioning the restrictions posed by the medium they use. Virtual content is created, designed, and disseminated by those who occupy positions of power both online and off, and thus my research centers on the exhibition practices of curators who are working in ways specifically affected by the Web and whose practices involve digital publishing, online exhibitions, and digital archives.

The realm of the online has already made a real world impact, inspiring a multitude of texts, exhibitions, and academic programs that center on the effects of new media practices, and therein lies the hope that exhibition practices online can be used to rethink the neoliberal logic of contemporary institutional models, specifically but certainly not only museums and art institutions, that envision progress as production, accumulation⁵³ and expansion.⁵⁴

What is slow curat-

ing, and in regards to creative expression and exhibition making, how might the implementation of its methods counter the accelerated nature of cultural production and still allow for different ways to move forward? In order to explore examples of slow curation, I present three case studies wherein each institution has been analysed with special attention to several factors including, but not limited to, the ways they are designed, accessed, assessed, interpreted, the types of work they show, and most importantly, how or if the curatorial intention aims to be distinguished from the traditional models of major cultural institutions or their exhibition practices operating today. Beyond this general examination, I also ask several questions that are particular to each example with respect to the notions of transparency, habit, and content, as these are the aspects which I have considered to be of importance in regards to slow curating as a curatorial method.

Triple Canopy:

How, if at all, has Triple Canopy articulated the notion of transparency as well as their position in their practice in terms of their design?

What methods do they use to analyze the data collected from their Web analytics?

How does transparency actually enable visibility, and in turn, accountability?

dis.art:

How does dis.art rethink the potential of habitual patterns of usage online and resist the tendency to privilege chronology?

How, if at all, does dis.art challenge the exclusivity of the exhibition as an event?

Monoskop:

What is the content of this digital library and how does its manner of organization address the ability to access certain types of information that can be online, but perhaps not off?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of digital libraries/archives if spatial or material limitations are not imposed upon them in ways similar to their physical counterparts?

In a more broad sense, this thesis asks how exhibition practices online can confront the quotidian act of pseudo-sharing on corporate owned social platforms and if curators can embody a responsible and meaningful

51 Ed Halter, “Foreward,” in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (HOME and Space, 2014) 15.

52 Irit Rogoff, “Starting in the Middle: NGOs and Emergent Forms For Cultural Institutions*,” in *Public Servants: Art and the Crisis of the Common Good*, ed. Johanna Burton, Shannon Jackson, and Dominic Willisdon (MIT Press, 2016).

53 Keith Christiansen, “Growing The Met’s Collection of European Paintings,” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, i.e. The Met Museum, December 12, 2016, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2016/european-paintings-growing-the-collection>.

54 See the Lillehammer Art Museum in Norway.

approach if the translation and communication of care and information are mediated through so-called lifeless devices and occur between docile bodies. The Internet has surely enabled progress, but at whose expense, and in what currency? Can all this multi-tasking and multi-tabbing be mindful, and if so, how? And to whom does such a multifaceted responsibility belong?

Ultimately, I ask what methods curators can employ online to awaken individual agency and critical thinking in the public cybersphere, wherein persons-*cum*-users are reduced to their IP addresses and technological advances are thought to have led to societal regression.

Can the speed of connectivity enabled by the Internet be used to slow down and actually leave us, the users, with more time, not in the ever and over promised future but rather in an elongated and generously swelling *now*? Ever closer to capitalizing on all aspects of human existence, technology continues to advance because of our willingness to freely share and upload ourselves into pocket lining profit. How can

we buy ourselves some time in the middle of nowhere?

KEYWORDS AND THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NETWORK:

In this thesis, it is important to understand the extent of what might categorically be described as 'online,' 'exhibition,' and 'public space' in order to address possible exceptions and applications which are vital to another keyword: curator. Contemporary artistic and curatorial practices that involve digital technologies rely on the implementation of specialized language, not only by means of remixing existing art historical vernacular, but which also include symbols, code, and net specific configurations. In the words of early net.artist Olia Lialina, "If something is in the net, it should speak in net.language."⁵⁵ Language has been a major concern for those working with newer media technologies, and rightfully so—as Walter Benjamin reminds, "What does language communicate? It communicates the mental being corresponding to it."⁵⁶ Many individuals and groups have focused on providing definitions, glossaries and

explanations for artistic and curatorial practice in a post-Internet world, including *Toward a Lexicon of Usership*⁵⁷, no-net.org's list of art keywords,⁵⁸ The New Hacker's Dictionary,⁵⁹ the University of Richmond's online journal *Digital America*,⁶⁰ Hd Kepler's *Online/offline* visual glossary,⁶¹ Tranzit.org's *Curatorial Dictionary*,⁶² alongside numerous others. With so many overlapping and contradictory definitions for post-Internet, curatorial practice and exhibitions, reading them all remains an impossible task, but imposing universality would result in the exclusion of personal experience, understanding, and the evolution of colloquial use. These varying accounts, provided by individuals, groups, or institutions are invaluable in that they contextualize an understanding of the contemporary condition from a specific perspective, whether geographic, cultural, or conducted by expert or novice. Although my personal interpretation of these definitions is as volatile as the things it attempts to grasp, a better now demands all such attempts.

57 Nick Aikens and Stephen Wright, eds., *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2014).

58 See www.no-org.net/akw.php.

59 a.k.a., The Jargon File was released as etext #817 by Project Gutenberg in 1997.

60 See www.digitalamerica.org.

61 See www.hdkepler.net.

62 See www.tranzit.org/curatorialdictionary.

55 "Olia Lialina interview Ljubljana," interview by Josephine Bosma, August 5, 1997, accessed February 11, 2018, <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/net-time-l-9708/msg00009.html>.

56 Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 1 1913-1926* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 63.

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[illegible]

WHO CARES?

What is a curator?

The platitudinous question evades definition and is one to be refuted no matter how it is answered and despite how often it is asked as long as the curator's position is subject to the demands of the ever changing societies it seeks to serve.

In Ancient Rome, curatores were senior civil servants in charge of various departments of public works, overseeing the Empire's aqueducts, bathhouses and sewers. Fast forward to [...] the curatus, a priest devoted to the care (or 'cura') of souls. By the end of the 20th century, 'curator' came to describe a broad category of exhibition makers, from museum employees who spend years working on modest, scrupulously researched displays of Sumerian pottery, to free-lancers who approach large scale Biennales of contemporary art as an opportunity to clear their auterual throat.⁶³

As Tom Morton seer-ingly denotes, the ever shifting role of the curator has doubt-lessly been the center of often polarising debate amongst those whom the definition most severely affects, be they artists, cultural workers, edu-cators, employers, marketing managers, and of course, curators themselves. Although this Medusa of a moniker has tentacled itself into various

fields of production, I propose to look at the curator's posi-tion as one that, at its most foundational purpose, inten-tion, and expectation, stem-ming from the Latin "cura,"⁶⁴ is as that of a caretaker. The notion of caretaking has been the source for a plethora of texts regarding curatorial practice, most notably Hans Ulrich Obrist's 2014 *Ways of Curating* or amongst many essays featured in the 2003 anthology *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* edited by Jean-Paul Martinon. Caretaking in curatorial work continues to be a site of con-templation as the character-istics of care continue to shift and different kinds of care are required to address particular contexts. The title 'curator' remains multifaceted in its application; used by both the most powerful institutions that dominate the cultural land-scape projecting their curators as walking advertisements with agendas and daytime bloggers who post their 'outfit of the day' to online photo galleries as fashionistas. Is everyone really a curator? Yes. And no. As I will explore more deeply in the theoretical

framework of this thesis, being itself ontologically necessi-tates care, but colloquially, curation can still be seen as an inevitable condition of existence; choices are always being made, and opinions are exercised through the most minute of decisions, whether it concerns what to, or not to, wear, eat, do, listen to, or say. (Is it possible not to look?) These decisions may be greatly informed, dictated, or limited by the socio-economic realities of the individual, but here, I am interested look-ing at the 'no' portion of the answer, focusing on curators who consciously identify themselves as such, whether they work independently or under institutional recognition.

Although curators often work on projects in collaboration with others, such as designers, editors, writers, educators, etc., there is an element of bias inherent in this process, as the curatorial role is ultimately an embodied individual position, meaning that the act of linking is a far from neutral gesture that can be traced back to a source such as personal opinion, political position or interest. Curators are deeply embedded within market dynamics, and

for those who take the title professionally, the act of care-taking is both compensated and compensating—their role as tastemakers is instrumental in determining what and whose artworks are shown (and there-fore assigned value) when, where, and in what context.⁶⁵ This process of visibility they enable ultimately drives both the accumulation of econom-ic and social profit for the network of involved parties as artworks and artists move from institution to institution in a ladder like pattern of progress, the curator often acting as both an instigator and para-site, rather than parrhesiastes. While models of for profit only curatorial practice can regrettably still be seen today, manifested in the viral or trend dominated world of advertising and across cultural institutions worldwide, I propose to look instead at the guiding princi-ples, but perhaps unfulfilled expectations, of early inde-pendently minded curators who concerned themselves with rethinking the convention-al frameworks of the museum or exhibition, establishing counter publics and ushering in an atmosphere of question-ing that affects artistic and curatorial practice still today.⁶⁶

63 Tom Morton, "A brief history of the word 'curator' | Art | Agenda," Phaidon, September 9, 2011, accessed January 24, 2018, <http://de.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2011/september/09/a-brief-history-of-the-word-curator/>.

64 Cura or curae meaning: attention, care, pains, zeal, concern, worry, anxiety, trouble, cure, treatment.

65 See www.mon3y.us for the exhibition *MON3Y AS AN 3RROR*.

66 See for example Marcia Tucker, Alexander Dorner, and Pontius Hulten.

The rise of the transnational curator in the 1990s, articulated in the mounting number of group exhibitions and biennales, the professionalization of the curator, now a hypermobile force in the globalized world and the subject of much critique, led to both an increased demand for locally based expertise and the expansion of a privileged and predominantly Western idea of contemporary culture, modernist ideas and histories. Like the once popular early computer game Snake, wherein the digitally slithering creatures body lengthens with each pixelated morsel he chomps, simultaneously avoiding making a meal of his own tail, an increase in the number of museums resulted in the need for more curators, and subsequently the rise of graduate or certificate based curatorial programs in academia, like those at De Appel in Amsterdam, Bard in Upstate New York, or my own program, CuMMA in Helsinki. The last several decades have seen the curatorial profession flooded, perhaps for the

promise of incrementally rising salaries,⁶⁷ not only by those who have graduated from such programs but also by artists, autodidacts, actors from nearly all fields from the likes of science and literature to advertising and marketing, and most often by women.⁶⁸ While 'curator' is a relatively new title to be taken, self or otherwise assigned, embraced, rejected, celebrated or decried, no matter the individuals intention, it has, despite its surrounding controversy, been exposed to, or is perhaps even characterized by, notions of celebrity.⁶⁹ The highly problematized notion of qualification within the field has led to an influx of competitive scurrying, paradoxically propelled by the desire to be first to 'discover' new approaches to non-hierarchical thinking, to exhibition making, and critical discourse.

The role of the curator is doubtlessly a position of distinguished economic and social privilege paired with authority, and should therefore be weighted with responsibility: the curator keeps the keys and deter-

mines the value of the currency in the exchange between artists and institutions. A responsibility to what, and to whom, however? I have deliberately avoided dissecting the curator's daily tasks as the potential repository of responses is as numerous as there are types of curators: the academic researcher, the globe trotter collecting frequent flier miles and business cards, the beurocrat hidden behind stacks of administrative paperwork, the activist rallying at the local election. The curator's role of commitment can be reduced to a menial task like answering e-mails from artists or collectors, arranging objects on a floor plan for an upcoming exhibition, organizing travel arrangements, taking late night calls when plans go awry, or otherwise launched into an infinitude of expectations when the career is a lifestyle, or even a brand.⁷⁰ It seems that the job description is refreshed and updated every time a new gadget leaves the factory assembly line, unlocking new levels of responsibility and expectation while simultaneously scrapping the source code that was originally developed from care.

ON CURATING, ONLINE

If one were to scrutinise this repositioning of the curator in the cultural domain for its correspondances with other fields of production, a parallel would be the recasting of the manager from the put-upon functionary to dynamic genie of profit creation and employee inspiration, or the elevation of the consultant (not least in arts administration) as broker of immaterial goods. Another paradigm could be the shift from producer (artist) to manipulator of information and systems (curator). [...] This is a phenomenon observed across institutional and self-organised practices, but also most conspicuously in net art, where some boundaries of specialisation are eroded while others are enforced, in the sense that a 'social technology' is only ever as 'social' as the relations it enables and reproduces.⁷¹

Marina Vishmidt's reflection reminds that as the curator's position has been reconfigured in the blue light of new technologies, now more often seen as a managerial and administrative role rather than that as of a cultural liaison, the possibilities of curatorial and artistic practice must also be accordingly reconsidered. While early net.art, or art made online, may have sought to create a museum without walls, major museums and institutions have instead built walls around it, starting their own online ex-

67 The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that the number of curators will rise 7% between 2014-2024, and salaries will continue to increase by about 4,6% annually.

68 Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, "Precarity and Cultural Work In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work," *On Curating: Precarious Labour in the Field of Art*, no. 16 (2013): http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue16.pdf.

69 Jessica Morgan, "What is a Curator?" in *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, ed. Jens Hoffman (Mousse Publishing, 2013), 24.

70 Simon Graj, "Skill Set of a Brand Curator," *Forbes*, April 16, 2012, accessed March 03, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/simongraj/2012/04/16/skill-set-of-a-brand-curator/#6d0a7905ee18>.

71 Marina Vishmidt, "Twilight of the Widgets," in *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, ed. Joasia Krysa (Autonomedia, 2006).

hibition spaces, like the Walker Art Center's *Gallery 9*, SF MO-MA's *e-space* and the Whitney Museum's *artport*. Artists and independent curators however, are making digitally based exhibitions elsewhere, not only within these institutional frameworks: online residency and gallery *isthisit?* invites artists for a 25 day residency on its own website,⁷² Rebekah Modrak and Marialaura Ghidini's 2017 *#exstrange* wherein they curated artworks-as-auctions on Ebay, on the various host sites such as AirBnB or Soundcloud that the artists of parasite platform CosmosCarl.co.uk re-appropriate for their own works, or *Pivilion*, Dina Karadži and Vedran Gligo's decentralized and uncensored user-curated art gallery on the darknet. Whether exhibiting on or off, curators are often seen as "editors and guides, providing a trusted filter in the new economy, helping to cut through the noise of dramatically increased culture and information production that has marked this same period."⁷³

Are curators responsible for sorting through and recycling the piles of digital litter? The clichés of curatorial humility advise a sensitive emphasis

on 'proper' curatorial behavior which can be characterized as being self-aware, responsible, trustworthy and informed, and while these traits are regrettably not industry standard, few would argue against their invaluable effects on curatorial practice. Reflecting on the notion of curatorial responsibility, Peter Eleey asked

Can curators be considered "messengers" in a similar sense, actors permitted to occupy a place both inside and peripheral to the culture that provides the content and context for their work? Messengers who, in exchange for reflecting back to their recipients essential characteristics of contemporary life, are accorded a comparable degree of indemnity from responsibility for the way we use things, people, institutions, and ideas.⁷⁴

*Don't shoot the curator!
If not the curator, then who else?*

If curators are to assume attitudes of responsibility barren authority as simple messengers, or if they are reduced to links, they risk becoming dispensable accessories in a multifaceted economic equation. In the case of the curator working online, this results in adding to the piles of digital litter that already obscure the horizon of any possible future,⁷⁵ and not in the sense of Cornelia

Sollfrank's 1997 *Female Extension*, wherein she created 300 fake female artists by remixing existing websites to create data trash in response to Hamburger Kunsthalle's 5MB open call submission limitation. While artists are granted a general freedom in their expression, a curator has a responsibility to the public, or publics, be they constituted of the past, present, or imagined future, and I believe the position is both valuable and necessary only when it is marked by a level of accountability. As Groys reminds

to be responsible toward the public, a curator does not need to be part of any fixed institution: [they are] already an institution by definition. Accordingly, the curator has an obligation to publicly justify [their] choices—and it can happen that the curator fails to do so.⁷⁶

It is precisely this failure to do so or to actually be held accountable for their actions⁷⁷ that the professionalized field of curatorial practice is so often defined by precarious

ity,⁷⁸ and which is one of the driving reasons behind the desire for alternative approaches to exhibition practices that seek to tackle the perpetuation of inequalities, contradictions, and corporations that currently plague the cultural landscape.⁷⁹

This responsible act of public justification is enabled by the curatorial task of mediation, most aptly described by Maria Lind as

[...] creating contact surfaces between works of art, curated projects, and people, about various forms and intensities of communicating about and around art. As a term 'mediation' seems to be open enough to allow for a wider variety of models of approaching exchanges among art, institutions, and the outside world. [It] appears to provide room for less didacticism, less schooling and persuasion, and more active engagement that does not have to be self-expressive or compensatory.⁸⁰

Online, the curatorial act of mediation, or the creation of contact surfaces, can be interpreted rather literally as device screens, platforms and websites have become

76 Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *Politics of Installation - Journal #2* January 2009 - e-flux, January 2009, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/>.

77 Ben Quinn, "Tate artist in residence quits, claiming gallery is failing women," *The Guardian*, March 07, 2018, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/mar/07/tate-modern-artist-quits-saying-gallery-is-failing-women>.

78 Maura Reilly, "Toward a Curatorial Activism," 2018, accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.maurareilly.com/pdf/essays/CIAEssay.pdf>.

79 On March 10th 2018 the artist Nan Goldin and fellow demonstrators threw pill bottles into the moat surrounding an ancient Egyptian temple at the Metropolitan Museum in New York to protest the museums sponsorship by the Sackler family, who own Purdue Pharma, one of the largest makers of opioids.

80 Maria Lind, "Why Mediate Art?" in *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, ed. Jens Hoffman (Mousse Publishing, 2013), 88.

72 See www.isthisitisthisit.com.

73 Peter Eleey, "What About Responsibility?" in *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, ed. Jens Hoffman (Mousse Publishing, 2013), 114.

74 Ibid, 118.

75 See for example www.cloaque.org.

new spaces for exhibitions, not only of artworks, but of ideas, histories, identities, literature, images, and reflections alike. The results of curatorial practice and artistic expression as mediation in the form of the exhibitions online are expressed by means of “sharing.” This type of “sharing,” which I later distinguish from the lucrative exchange of pseudo-sharing, is one of the more decisive curatorial gestures that offers an entry point into understanding what can be done with exhibition practices online, in particular that which is currently being undertaken by projects like Triple Canopy, dis.art, and Monoskop. Beyond simply creating these contact surfaces, curators are those who determine their depth and dimensions depending on the content they exhibit, the ways in which they configure communication through them, and how they address their audiences from a position above, below, or within. If everyone is a curator⁸¹ possessing the ability to create variations of these contact surfaces, the question is then not one concerned with *who* cares, but rather how to differentiate that ways in which

who, what and how *are cared with*.

WHERE IS CARE?

Exhibitions, following a dictionary definition, are denoted vaguely as “offering or exposing to view.”⁸² Art exhibition history subsequently remains enigmatic because of its dependence on contextualisation; artistic production during the Middle Ages primarily serviced the church’s interests until the 16th century, when artists began adding their own names to their aesthetic productions thus establishing their own reputations. This does not mean that artworks were not created prior to this, or that exhibitions had not already taken place, but at the time, they were not categorized or recognized as such. This ambiguity is similarly the case today as contemporary art often engages in collaborations with other disciplines such as science, architecture and politics in an effort to widen its scope of effects. For example, projects like research agency Forensic Architecture’s collaboration with the Society of Friends of Halit that investigated a series

of racially motivated murders carried out by the National Socialist Underground which was later presented in a video shown in documenta 14, or Model Court’s 2013 *Resolution 978HD*, a film and installation first shown at London’s Gasworks Gallery that questioned the role of technology in international criminal jurisdiction in a trial that was conducted over Skype of François Bazaramba, a Rwandan national convicted of genocide by a the district court in the Finnish town of Porvoo, might not be as easily categorized as belonging to a singular or particular field, but do reveal the potency of cross pollination as well as the challenges of categorization.

Institutionally however, the earliest art academy in Europe, The Accademia delle Arti del Disegno in Florence founded in 1563, became a model later copied in 1648 by L’Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris. Responsible for the state’s educational program in the Fine Arts, its first exhibition was held in 1667 for the court society only, but by 1725 the exhibition moved to the Louvre and was open to the general public where it

became known simply as the Salon.⁸³ Indicating a characteristic that would define many exhibitions to come with a shift from quantitative approaches of presentation toward the qualitative and more personalized, salon style exhibitions soon went out of fashion. These academies, while providing context for the artworks they exhibited, wielded immense power in determining not only the content they represented but also to whom it was made accessible, and this tradition of exclusive access, as seen with museum membership fees and collector or V.I.P. exhibition previews, has held far more firmly than manner of arrangement.

Exhibitions later took on a colloquial understanding as, mostly simply, an arrangement of objects in space—Parisian salons, World Fairs and Venice Biennales organized artworks in crowded arrangements, often in decorative and ornate frames, their intent being to sell rather than create space for sustained audience interpretation or contemplation. Characterized by overabundance, this style is now en vogue again across art fairs

81 Miya Tokumitsu, “The Politics of the Curation Craze,” *The New Republic*, August 24, 2015, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://newrepublic.com/article/122589/when-did-we-all-become-curators>.

82 “Exhibition,” Merriam-Webster, January 27, 2018, accessed February 09, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exhibition>.

83 Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, *The Triumph of Art for the Public, 1785-1848: The Emerging Role of Exhibitions and Critics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 1. 3 Holt, 3.

such as Frieze and Art Basel⁸⁴ wherein the walls are adorned with the most profitable works in order to finance a \$50,400 to \$100,800 per weekend booth,⁸⁵ on platforms such as Instagram or Facebook that allow for an infinitely scrolling supply of content, and some websites that layer crowded graphics and texts to the point of illegibility.⁸⁶ While there may not have been an obvious conceptual thread connecting arrangements immediately, such object oriented exhibitions became loosely organized by theme or category, or otherwise relinquished some sense of control and invited the viewer to draw their own interpretations without so much as a press release. The constant evolution in exhibition practice continues to reflect the changes that are taking place in artistic production as a result of political, economical and ideological conditions imposed by authoritarian governments,⁸⁷ conservative

principles,⁸⁸ recontextualized philosophical debates⁸⁹ and technological advancements.⁹⁰ For the last several decades, exhibitions have been more intensely critiqued as events.⁹¹ Positioned as events, exhibitions lend themselves to a particular type of reception and reproduction, increasingly made with the intention to cater to media consumption and serving to further amplify curatorial, artistic and institutional celebrity status. The approach to durational art that emerged in the 1960s, like that of Allan Kaprow's *Happenings*, Joseph Beuys' *7000 Oaks*, Tehching Hsieh's series of year long performances, Andy Warhol's films *Sleep* and *Empire*, John Lennon and Yoko Ono's wedding day turned into a peace demonstration, sought to prolong the event with works spanning hours, even years, some still ongoing or growing in the case of Beuys. Exclusivity became a medium in itself.

The event, prior to being documented and distributed, is temporary, and with an anticipated end in sight, becomes an exclusive experience elevated by the nature of its rarity, and can thus be more readily adapted to the existing discourses of art history that attempt to chart periods and movements on a timeline. The event, as well as the objects within it, retain what Benjamin referred to as cult value, or their unseen presence which maintains an exclusivity in terms of reception, aura and authenticity. Advancements in technological reproducibility, with the invention of photography and film, have dislodged art objects from their original locations, making them more easily transported, exhibited, and accessible to larger and more diverse audiences, and for longer periods of time. Benjamin's critique lies in the idea that while the possibility of such reproduction has emancipated the artwork from its intended viewing context, it has done so to reach a wider audience that is still receiving, but doing so in a state of distraction. Bruce Nauman unabashedly commanded "Pay Attention Motherfuckers!" in his

1973 lithographic work and the sentiment continues to echo. It reverberates at a screeching decibel level in the case of artworks exhibited online, where the status of individual contemplation and attention remain central curatorial and artistic concerns today,⁹² detailed in Sternberg Press' 2013 publication *Attention Economy*, Kunsthalle Wiens 2014 exhibition "Attention Economy," or Peter Doran's 2017 *A Political Economy of Attention, Mindfulness and Consumerism: Reclaiming the Mindful Commons*. Nauman's admonition however, remains an echo devoid of destination, the attention to be paid has no nowhere to land, and instead keeps bouncing, losing the force that vulgarity or an exclamation point might wish to retain. Certainly we are paying attention, but attention in itself is not virtuous, and the question is where, to what or to whom do we pay it?

It is no secret that the art world, the canonized curriculum of art history, and the museums decorated walls, are cemented together with names belonging mostly to privileged white males.⁹³ While many artists, educators, and curators,

84 Andrew Goldstein, "Has Art Basel Become the Facebook of the Art World? An Interview With Marc Spiegler," *Artnet News*, March 19, 2018, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/market/marc-spiegler-art-basel-facebook-interview-1235456>.

85 Julia Halperin, "Art Fair Economics: Why Smaller Galleries Are Forced to Gamble," *Artnet News*, June 13, 2017, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/market/art-fair-economics-small-galleries-gamble-989555>.

86 See for example, heaven.internetarchaeology.org.

87 See for example www.cointemporary.com.

88 See for example www.left.gallery.

89 See for example www.x-temporary.org.

90 See for example www.gazell.io.

91 Beti Žerovc, *When Attitudes Become the Norm: The Contemporary Curator and Institutional Art* (Ljubljana: Igor Zabel Association for Culture and Theory, 2017).

92 Tim Bajarin, "Why We Need Liberal Arts In Technology's Age Of Distraction," *Time*, July 24, 2017, accessed March 18, 2018, <http://time.com/4870642/liberal-arts-technology-distraction/>.

93 "Art Statistics," 2017, accessed January 29, 2018, <http://www.havenforthe-dispossessed.org/>.

like Feminist Curators United and curatorial collective If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution, have worked tirelessly against this status quo, (the legacy of Guerrilla Girls still a force to contend with), many commercial galleries, museums, and biennales continue to advance it, expanding at unprecedented rates with multi-million dollar building additions and satellite locations⁹⁴ on distant shores, like the Louvre Abu Dhabi,⁹⁵ all in the name of delivering culture to those they have deemed so desperately in need of it. Exhibitions, expansions, galas and events are churned out and force fed to the public at breathtaking speeds, allowing for reflection or criticism only after the fact, if at all. Where is care relegated to reside if capital occupies every corner?

Exhibitions function much like liquids in that they take the shape or form of

their containers, taking place in various structures, ranging from the most conservative museums and galleries, to city sidewalks,⁹⁶ a kitchen,⁹⁷ online, and even in space.⁹⁸ Although the contents and programming of museums and galleries are malleable, exhibitions are dictated to some extent by the architectural structure that houses them: walls, ceilings, central air systems, handicap friendly ramps, electricity bills and mazes of hidden registrar offices. Institutions are cemented in geographical reality, and in order to visit a museum or gallery, visitors are tasked with a necessity to pre-plan. Such visits require the coordination of transportation, the funds, the energy, maybe even a babysitter, and it goes without saying: time. While this uninterrupted mode of reception may have its benefits, allowing the body a special and rare experience as a temporal and spatial escape

from the confines of the home and safety against the expanse of the city, it is nonetheless becoming increasingly difficult for visitors to dedicate their resources in this way as the boundaries between work and leisure continue to be redrawn and as ticket prices rise—the Metropolitan Museum in New York recently exchanging its pay-as-you-wish policy for a solid \$25 entrance fee.⁹⁹ The physicality of institutions is further complicated by structures, namely walls, both actual and metaphorical; these walls, erected to ensure the safety of their contents in the name of cultural conservation, are the ostensible border, violently delineating the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

EXHIBITING ONLINE

Many authors have argued endlessly, and any recently published text on the topic will show that the end is nowhere in sight, about the ontological discrepancies posed by the concepts of installations, exhibitions, space, audience, public(s), etc.

The reasons for this are perhaps no mystery: despite

its fundamental importance as a primary context through which art is first made public, circulated, seen, and discussed, the exhibition has long been considered an ambiguous object of study at best, partly due to the tenuousness of the exhibition's—any exhibition's—ontological ground, no matter who curated it.¹⁰⁰

The traditional exhibition is most simply described by Christiane Paul as:

[...] shown in physical space, has a set opening and closing date, requires a visit to a physical locality and, after its closing, becomes part of the 'cultural archive' through its catalogue, documentation, and critical reception in the press.¹⁰¹

An exhibition of art online however,

is seen by a translocal community, never closes and continues to exist indefinitely (until some party fails in sustaining it). It exists within a network of related and previous exhibitions that can be seen directly next to it in another browser window, becoming part of the continuous evolution of the art form.¹⁰²

I would add that online exhibitions are not only in conversation, either directly or indirectly, with the contents of other browsers, tabs or windows, but are simultaneously inextricable from the extensive history of artistic and curatorial practices and the socio-economic conditions that preceded

94 Plans for a Guggenheim Bilbao # 2 in the Basque Country have been under consideration for more than a decade.

95 Nick Trend, "Louvre Abu Dhabi: first look inside the £1 billion art museum in the desert," *The Telegraph*, November 07, 2017, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/middle-east/united-arab-emirates/abu-dhabi/articles/louvre-abu-dhabi-first-look-review/>.

96 'Singapore Poetry on the Sidewalks,' a public art project, uses a specially formulated paint to inscribe rain-activated excerpts of local poetry on sidewalks

97 *The Kitchen Show* was the first exhibition Hans Ulrich Obrist curated.

98 In his 2012 project, *The Last Pictures*, Trevor Paglen developed an ultra-archival disc, micro-etched with one hundred photographs and encased in a gold-plated shell that was launched into orbit by the communications satellite EchoStar XVI and in theory, will circle the earth ad infinity.

99 See www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2018/admissionspolicy/.

100 Elena Filipovic, "When Exhibitions Become Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator," *Mousse Magazine*, August 24, 2015, accessed February 09, 2018, <http://moussemagazine.it/taac0/>.

101 Paul, 87-88.

102 Ibid.

them, thus they also contribute to the “cultural archive” and more importantly, its market. Organized by those who wield social or economic power both online and off, exhibitions that unfold online remain implicitly tied to patterns of commerce, but are not as explicitly confined to temporal or spatial limitations, which I argue in three case studies, allows for more considered, inclusive and durational curatorial approaches as well as more distracted or fragmented audience and individual reception.

This narrow approach to representation, as major institutions tasked with the preservation and conservation of cultural heritage continue to fail to preserve or conserve, or do so for one culture while neglecting its relationship with another or others, has long inspired boycotts, protests, institutional critique, and the desire for alternatives.¹⁰³ The 1950s saw the rise of modern artist-run initiatives gaining popularity in major metropolises like London and New York, but as projects like *artist-run-spaces.org* show, artist led initiatives are on the rise outside of these urban hot spots, and of course, online too. These alternatives, are

not, or should not be, outwardly mirrored reflections of existing structures with antithetical contents erected in haste, but rather invested in carefully exposing what the archive, manifested as an exhibition or institution, has discarded in its quest for preservation. As Seth Price’s ongoing 2002 *Dispersion* suggests, working in relation to established institutions, but still with the intention of critiquing their methods and hierarchical models, such alternative spaces and practices might allow for a more nuanced understanding of what is considered to be valuable or worth preserving and conserving through distinct perspectives and interpretations. The ability to exhibit artworks, ideas, histories and narratives online may serve as a possible site for such alternative practices, but an understanding of the networked technology that predates the Internet reveals the inherent problematics that continue to suppress creativity, circulation and democracy in recondite ways.

WORLD WIDE WEB?

Marisa Olson coined the term “Post-Internet” in an article

published by FOAM in 2008,¹⁰⁴ but before unraveling the tangle of questions a prefix as charged as “post” invites, it is necessary to begin with the root: Internet. While the Internet is often used to describe everything related to the online universe, I would like to refer to the Internet more simply as “the physical infrastructure connecting computers, [...] a network of routers that communicate with each other through protocols.”¹⁰⁵ Tracing the history of its inception, the Internet had a rather short sighted beginning, but to think of the Internet as a recent phenomenon is misguided—it was the product of decades of development and although often viewed as an agency of peace, it was a product of the Cold War.¹⁰⁶

While writing a history of the Internet might itself be pointless [...], writing a history of how we talk about the Internet might be a little more fruitful. That does not mean that we shouldn’t be writing histories that would also try to uncover efforts that point to alternative paths that were not taken and alternative languages that were used [...] but it’s very important to understand the conceptual residue left in our political struggles by that term, the “Internet.”¹⁰⁷

This thesis, rather than attempt the near impossible task of excavating a complete history of actors responsible for the creation of the Internet, focuses on the effects of its evolution and the development of certain functions which are currently used by practitioners who publish or exhibit online. In order to avoid the risk of detaching the networked technology from the economic and political conditions that enabled it, it is vital to understand how and where the Internet came into being through a lens of collaboration and conflict, rather than solely through a timeline and the names of a handful of inventors. To better understand how both users and curators can more actively engage with works and exhibition practices online, it is helpful to expose how these systems and functions came into being, to see how their original intentions have been expanded upon, or perhaps even completely altered over time as a direct result of domi-

¹⁰⁴ Marisa Olson, “PostInternet,” *FOAM Magazine*, no. 29 (2012).

¹⁰⁵ Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: the New Science of Networks* (Plume, 2003), 147.

¹⁰⁶ James Curran, Natalie Fenton, and Des Freedman, *Misunderstanding the Internet* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 36.

¹⁰⁷ Evgeny Morozov, “Internets Past,” Canadian Centre for Architecture, December 2017, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/issues/3/technology-sometimes-falls-short/55160/internets-past>.

¹⁰³ See for example the Instagram account @art.exit.

nating power relations.¹⁰⁸

In 1958, ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency), funded by the Department of Defense, was founded in the United States as a response to Russia's launch of Sputnik in order to stay ahead of its military rivals—its mission echoed an ideology which rings loud today, of making America great, “again.”¹⁰⁹ With military concerns in the event of a Soviet attack in mind, the networked technology was originally designed with resilience as one of its main features. Once established as having greater potential than initially anticipated, it was slow in stepping into a role of widespread acceptance as the technology was expensive and access was limited. When a group of developers seeking to improve network services formed USING (Users Interest Group), the reality of the situation became clear and still holds fast today: while individual users or teams had permission to alter or add hard/software, they ultimately had no say in regards to the design or priorities of the ARPANET project. As Janet Abbate points out in a sentiment that resounds as

if lamenting the realities of today, “The ARPANET experience is a reminder that the efforts of individuals to build virtual communities are constrained by the realities of money and power that support the infrastructure of cyberspace.”¹¹⁰

ARPA's success came in the form of an accidental discovery: e-mail. Although e-mail was not exactly a new concept¹¹¹ it prompted a paradigm shift, and ARPANET subsequently began to focus on providing access to people rather than computers. While it may have appeared in the public sphere as an overnight sensation, the Internet was the result of nearly two decades of experimentation that resulted from a shift from military to civilian control during the 1980s and 90s with a split into ARPANET and MILNET. ARPA was initially responsible for Internet technology but it ultimately released its control, and responsibility was usurped by a network of actors including the Bush and Clinton administrations, computer vendors, The National Science Foundation, public and private institutions outside of the United States, and

individual users. While military and scientific interest shaped the early Internet, its further development was influenced by what Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron called “the Californian Ideology” in an essay published in 1995 by the same name. “Hip journalists and cultural entrepreneurs” starting working together with scientists in the techno utopia Silicon Valley, proclaiming that they could “free the computer from its utilitarian purpose and make it work for humanity”¹¹² but while “the Californian Ideology has been embraced as an optimistic and emancipatory form of technological determinism [...] this utopian fantasy of the West Coast depends upon its blindness towards—and dependence on—the social and racial polarisation of the society from which it was born.”¹¹³

The 1980s saw the rise of electronic communal networks wherein enthusiasts of all kinds could gather together, and as single-user computers grew in popularity amongst universities and businesses, so did the demand for simple, low-cost, Local Area Networks. While AR-

PANET was centrally planned, the introduction of LANs was a decentralized phenomenon made politically feasible and economically viable in the early 1980s because ARPANET was not in the business of selling Internet service to its users, meaning that they had no economic incentive to restrict access. In fact, the reverse was true and became a characteristic of platforms on the network to come: a larger community of users increased the Internet's value and initially, the expansion of a decentralized system reduced the need for exercising control on ARPA's behalf. However idealized a decentralized system may appear, in order to avoid chaos, several functions were put in place to enable system wide coordination, allowing communication between all users and varying platforms. “In order for protocol to enable radically distributed communications between autonomous entities, it must employ a strategy of universalization, and of homogeneity,” writes Alexander R. Galloway in *Protocol*.¹¹⁴ The system is thus designed not on openness, nor is it random

108 Janet Abbate, *Inventing the Internet* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 2.

109 “Make America Great Again” is a campaign slogan used in American politics that was popularized by Donald Trump in his successful 2016 presidential campaign. President Ronald Reagan used the similar slogan “Let's Make America Great Again” in his 1980 presidential campaign.

110 Abbate, 95.

111 MIT's CTSS computer had a message feature as early as 1965.

112 Curran, Fenton, and Freedman, 38.

113 Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, “The Californian Ideology,” *Mute*, September 1995, accessed March 03, 2018, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/californian-ideology>.

114 Alexander R. Galloway, *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (MIT Press, 2004).

or free; it is rather based on anti-diversity to facilitate the exchange of information, the content of which may itself be unique but relies on standardization in order to be transmitted.¹¹⁵ The Domain Name System, or DNS, advanced such standardisation by translating domain names into unique IP addresses, which allowed users to access an Internet location by its domain name *sui generis*.¹¹⁶

In 1989, while at CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, Tim Berners-Lee, an Oxford-educated Englishman who was both a physicist and software engineer, “wrote a proposal for an approach to the problem of institutional memory at a large scientific organization with high staff turnover. ‘Information is constantly being lost,’ he warned.”¹¹⁷ To remedy this loss, each document needed to be located with a file name, which he called the Uniform Resource Locator (URL), and the pages were written in

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and could thus always be displayed with a suitable piece of reading software. “Hypertext’s compatibility with the associative, nonlinear structure of discourse made it a valuable tool for the empirical analysis of social behaviors, in this case, allowing the relationships among employees to be mapped and organized.”¹¹⁸ Berner-Lee’s accepted proposal was thus devised not only as social medium, but one in which surveillance was an irrevocable factor of its design. The URLs took a form which resembled <http://www.yourdomainname.com>,¹¹⁹ which is still used today in creative ways; many countries often replace the .com with abbreviations, and if one sentence¹²⁰ can say it all, it should speak volumes that rather than .us the United States uses .com, which stands for commercial.¹²¹ In a gesture that could have predicted a possible, but still unfulfilled future, Berners-Lee had also produced a browser

that decoded and displayed the contents of an HTML file which he called the World Wide Web.

Imagine then an individual user, aware that there is an ocean of information awaiting their discovery, yet unsure of how to access it. This prompted the need for a resource that was able to scour the multitude of links and domains to provide the querent with a ranked list of results pertinent to their search. Though not the first of its kind, but certainly one of the most widely recognized, Google’s story began in 1995 at Stanford University, where Larry Page and Sergey Brin built a search engine that used links to determine the importance of individual pages on the World Wide Web. They initially called this search engine “Backrub,” a gesture that evokes an intimate transference of care between persons, but soon renamed it “Google,” a play on the mathematical expression for the number 1 followed by 100 zeros, which can be said to more aptly reflect their future profits rather than their mission “to organize

the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful.”¹²²

While most G7 countries were experiencing an economic downturn at the time, the dot-com boom in the 1990s positioned the Internet as a new marketplace and made for an notable exception. “During its peak period between 1997 and 2000, technology stocks rose 300% and took on a market capitalisation of \$5 trillion.”¹²³ By the year 2000, at its still unsurpassed peak, annual investment in computers and related accessories reached an astonishing \$412.8 billion. Government regulations in the U.S. made it possible for companies to ‘modernise’ and update their computational infrastructure, which relied on the telecommunication companies who were already expanding into foreign markets with financial support (with over \$330 billion invested in 1990).¹²⁴ Such expansions in communication technology meant that it was now even easier to access global markets, and so “millions of miles of fibre-optic

115 See for example www.legion-tv.com/online/reliable-communications.

116 Per Christensson, “DNS,” DNS (Domain Name System) Definition, August 30, 2014, accessed January 15, 2018, <https://techterms.com/definition/dns>.

117 Michael Connor, “Speaking in Net Language: My Boyfriend Came Back from the War,” Rhizome, November 10, 2016, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2016/nov/10/my-boyfriend-came-back-from-the-war/>.

118 Ibid.

119 J. B. Williams, “Going Online: The Internet,” SpringerLink, January 01, 1970, accessed January 22, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49088-5_22.

120 See for example www.ose.kadist.org.

121 The art world now has its own exclusive domain ‘.art’ which is available for purchase on www.art.art.

122 “How we started and where we are today,” Google, accessed January 22, 2018, <https://www.google.com/intl/en/about/our-story/>.

123 Carlota Perez, “The Double Bubble at the Turn of the Century: Technological Roots and Structural Implications,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 33, no. 4 (2009).

124 “Comments of Verizon and Verizon Wireless. 2010. Department of Commerce, 6 December. <https://www.ntia.doc.gov/files/ntia/comments/100921457-0457->”.

and submarine cables were laid out, major advances in software and network design were established, and large investments in databases and servers were made.¹²⁵ The tendency for companies based predominantly in the United States and United Kingdom to outsource labour to low-income economies, a trend made popular already decades ago in the 70s but deeply rooted in the colonialist and imperialist histories of the slave trade market, spice routes, and agricultural exportation, was now common practice and normalized the colonialist profit seeking method in the name of connection, modernity, and progress.¹²⁶ Once cables were laid on distant shores, the power to restrict access and information relied less on visible human force, but militant technology still battled, now silently and as if cloaked in invisibility. Last Moyo, in *Rethinking the Information Society: A Decolonial and Border Gnosis of the Digital Divide in Africa and the Global South*, recalling the dangers

of a conception of a universal sense of objectivity writes that “When knowledge pretends to be universally applicable, it hides its locus of enunciation so that the colonial subject accepts it as superior.”¹²⁷

In 1997, when a standard protocol for credit card transactions was adopted, the Web became a shopping mall, and the colonization of cyberspace brought with it far more advanced technologies of surveillance and metadata controls, and advertising interest followed suit. While search engines created new ways to navigate the Web, they tended to navigate to mainstream destinations, further marginalizing alternative sources.¹²⁸ These media conglomerates sought to make money under the pretext of making ‘knowledge’ more easily accessible, but in this case, knowledge is reduced to content, content becomes capital, and connection facilitates the exchange. Connectivity is measured by the speed of the network: the faster the better, the more profitable, the more expen-



Still from the 1940s film *The Great Dictator*.

125 Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017), 26.

126 See for example www.or-bits.com/outsourcesd.php.

127 Last Moyo, “Rethinking the Information Society: A Decolonial and Border Gnosis of the Digital Divide in Africa and the Global South,” in *Theorizing Digital Divides*, ed. Massimo Ragnedda and Glenn W. Muschert (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 138.

128 Matthew Scott Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

sive, exclusive, unlimited.^{*129}

"However, the *content* that proved easiest to sell was not the creative works of minority artists about which some analysts write so lyrically, but pornography and gaming."¹³⁰ This remains a tragically accepted norm that characterizes the online realm for many still today, as Astra Taylor notes in *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age*,

Instead of directly squelching artistic expression when it's too brazen— a tactic that can backfire to the artist's advantage— advertisers and sponsors protect themselves by favoring docile voices in the first place. Thus they alter the cultural ecology, fostering work that is apolitical and unchallenging, making the innocuously entertaining more plentiful than it would be otherwise. While many hoped that the Internet would help create a more varied cultural landscape, advertising dollars continue to distort the market by creating perverse incentives, encouraging the production of irresistibly clickable content. [...] When advertisers call the shots, they encourage only that which will help them sell.¹³¹

WORLD WITHIN WORLDS

A world within worlds rather than a world wide Web, the In-

ternet "itself quickly became a mirror of the actual world, with corporations and e-commerce colonizing the landscape."¹³² The Web has certainly become yet another marketplace, not only for cheap clothing and accessories, pornography, and get-rich-quick schemes, but for art as well.¹³³ Acceleration has defined the Internet's path of progress as it physically advances and establishes connections on distant shores, as well as the way it is thought to have contributed to maximizing efficiency in all aspects of life; the technology may spread spatially, but it affects individuals temporally. Product producing industrial labor, hegemonic in past phases of capitalist development, is now rapidly being replaced with cultural, cognitive, affective and information labour, or immaterial labor, made possible by such technological advancements. Post-Marxist scholars such as Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, and Michael Hardt have elaborated on the liberating potential enabled by the shift away from assembly line labor

production in Post-Fordist economies; the production of value is no longer as easily defined by linear time and working hours. However, "even if these authors claim that immaterial labor portends a radical change in the activities of labor, it remains hypothesized primarily as a commodity-producing activity."¹³⁴ As Sylvia Federici notes, that while Negri and Hardt may recognize affective labor as material, "what [they] do not see is that the tremendous leap in technology required by the computerization of work and the integration of information into the work process has been paid at the cost of a tremendous increase of exploitation at the other end of the process."¹³⁵

Abbate again reminds that while "Communications media often seem to dematerialise technology, presenting themselves to the user as systems that transmit ideas rather than electrons. The turbulent history of the Internet may

be a reminder of the very real material considerations that lie behind this technology and of their economic and political consequences."¹³⁶ Many users remain unaware of the extent to which wireless connections, delivered as if by invisible force out of nothing and nowhere, are inextricably tied to a reality rooted in both materiality and corporeality. The Internet, as a system of cables or as a phrase that encompasses all of digital technology, certainly did not come out of 'nowhere,' as if it were born like an amicable version of Victor Frankenstein's creature.¹³⁷ The online is not a nowhere either, it is in the most literal sense, on a line, on the network of cables that link all continents save for Antarctica, on a line that charts every digital footprint ever made.

The weightless rhetoric of digital technology masks a refusal to acknowledge the people and resources on which these systems depend: lithium and coltan mines, energy guzzling data centers and server farms, suicidal worker's at Apple's Foxconn factories, and women and children in developing countries and incarcerated

129 *Restrictions apply.

130 Curran, Fenton, and Freedman, 42.

131 Astra Taylor, *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (New York: Picador, 2015), 205.

132 Christiane Paul, "Flexible Contexts, Democratic Filtering and Computer-Aided Curating: Models for Online Curatorial Practice," in *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, ed. Joasia Krysa (Autonomedia, 2006), 82.

133 In 2013, the Phillips Auction House collaborated with Tumblr for their first digital art auction which took place both on and offline.

134 Monique Lanoix, "Labor as Embodied Practice: The Lessons of Care Work," in *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 1st ed., vol. 28 (Hypatia, 2013).

135 Sylvia Federici, "Precarious Labor: A Feminist Viewpoint," in *The Middle of a Whirlwind*, July 1, 2008, accessed February 15, 2018, <https://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarius-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/>.

136 Abbate, 3.

137 Interestingly, the Arctic Circle, where Frankenstein ultimately dies in search of his monster who also hides away there until he dies, is the only place yet to be connected by high speed Internet cables. This however, will change in coming years as trade agreements between China and Finland are aptly timed with unprecedented climate change and polar melting that will finally enable the 10,500km fibre-optic link to be laid across the Arctic Circle.

Americans up to their necks in toxic electronic waste.”¹³⁸

A situated understanding of the conditions that enable the craved connection to the the cloud reminds that the technology of today was never liberating nor emancipatory on either end of the line. The rise of artificial intelligence and the Internet of things have shown that while devices may continue to shrink in size, their ability to synchronize with the perceived desires of a select portion of humanity grows, and so too do the already heaping piles of e-waste.¹³⁹ Countries like Finland, the first to declare access to broadband Internet connection a human right back in 2009, the legislative counsel- or for the Ministry of Transport and Communications, Laura Vilkkonen, quoted saying [emphasis added] “*it’s something you cannot live without in modern society*. Like banking services or water or electricity, you need Internet connection,”¹⁴⁰ remind that both disconnection and connection produce death.

Websites are no longer a jumble of clunky

pixel glitches and slow to load sticky scrollbars, but seamless minimalist pastoral landscapes wherein smog is mistaken for clouds. The news is just nows. It all serves to widen the gap between past and future so quickly that we do sense ourselves falling into the faultline because the GPS failed to account for construction on the route to the the future.¹⁴¹ The future however, ended back in 1972. *The Limits to Growth*, a report funded by Volkswagen and commissioned by the Club of Rome, detailed the long-term consequences of exponential economic growth, noting that without a change in human consumption habits, without a revolution in industrial economies, and more importantly, if the natural world and its finite resources are not accounted for in capitalist business models, then we should expect to see utter depletion within the next hundred years. While the report received criticism in regards to its methodology, or what constitutes a ‘resource,’ the idea remains a poignant

¹³⁸ Taylor, 179.

¹³⁹ Sarah Karacs, “Revealed: the toxic trail of e-waste that leads from the US to Hong Kong,” South China Morning Post, July 05, 2016, accessed March 11, 2018, <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/health-environment/article/1984534/revealed-toxic-trail-e-waste-leads-us-hong-kong>.

¹⁴⁰ Saeed Ahmed, “Fast Internet Access Becomes a Legal Right in Finland,” CNN, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/TECH/10/15/finland.internet.rights/>.

¹⁴¹ Ashley Halsey III, “Eyes down, minds elsewhere, ‘deadwalkers’ are among us,” Washington Post, September 27, 2015.



Transatlantic Sub-Marine Cables Reaching Land, VSNL International, Avon, New Jersey

These VSNL sub-marine telecommunications cables extend 8,037.4 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Capable of transmitting over 60 million simultaneous voice conversations, these underwater fiber-optic cables stretch from Saunton Sands in the United Kingdom to the coast of New Jersey. The cables run below ground and emerge directly into the VSNL International headquarters, where signals are amplified and split into distinctive wavelengths enabling transatlantic phone calls and internet transmissions.

An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar, 2007 Photograph by Taryn Simon.

and stark reminder that no direct political action has been taken since, regardless if the results reflected even an inkling of a possible reality in 5, 10, or 500 years. In 2012 however, one of the authors of the 1972 publication, Jørgen Randers, released an update, *2052: A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years*,¹⁴² and according to his analysis of trends on consumption, any possible future requires a reduction in consumption, a decline in population, a low carbon energy system, and most importantly, institutions that counter national short termism. The Internet, he says, which has increased access to knowledge, might be able to help, but only if it is first realized that knowledge is simply not enough in the face of powerful opposition.

BETTER OFF ONLINE

The scope of the nets effects are still not entirely clear to present day Web 2.0 users, which are less than half the total worldwide population, and so to say that we are living in a post-Internet world is, at first glance, perhaps premature; a symptom of impatience that has categorized most contem-

porary experiences. Refresh the source, perhaps by the time you read this, things have already changed, or you can try to, as Kristin Lucas who in 2007 filed to legally change her name from “Kristin Sue Lucas” to “Kristin Sue Lucas,” refresh yourself. While there have been many attempts to apply an umbrella term to the artistic practice and artworks created as direct or indirect results of the Web, most endeavors have followed a trajectory similar to the technology they hope to address: replaced, upgraded, modified, hacked, or ultimately discarded. The system for naming can hardly resist the entrapment of an art historical taxonomy, and authors and artists alike have subsequently raced toward concepts like post-Internet or post-digital to distinguish themselves aesthetically, theoretically, and conceptually from preceding movements all the while seeking the validation and freedoms afforded by such recognition.

While the prefix “post,” literally defined as meaning “behind,” “after,” “later,” “subsequent to,” or “posterior to,” does not necessarily imply an end, or the death of, it is still ultimately a term that assumes a particular position—if only 47% of the world population has Internet access, then to whom does post-Internet apply?¹⁴³

When thinking about the shape of the shelter that post-Internet or post-digital provide however, The prefix ‘post’ should not be understood here in the same sense as postmodernism and post-histoire, but rather in the sense of post-punk (a continuation of punk culture in ways which are somehow still punk, yet also beyond punk); post-communism (as the ongoing social-political reality in former Eastern Bloc countries); post-feminism (as a critically revised continuation of feminism, with blurry boundaries with ‘traditional’, unprefixated feminism); postcolonialism; and, to a lesser extent, post-apocalyptic (a world in which the apocalypse is not over, but has progressed from a discrete breaking point to an ongoing condition).¹⁴⁴

From this perspective, the term post-Internet surely applies to the contemporary condition, but it is important to understand that this appetite for definition is the result of the artists, cultural workers and their dependant institutions, positioning within a market that privileges pioneers and rewards with celebrity, social, and economic status. This is most certainly not said in order to avoid giving credit where credit is due, but rather to reinforce an idea which I will expand upon in subsequent chapters, and which is central to all that follows: *slow down the Internet*.

Rather than dissect the categories of post-Internet and post-digital, I would like to use the term ‘online’ with the understanding that the term can be reductive and general, in that it lumps together very distinct artistic processes and intentions that distinguish say virtual art from robotic art, which certainly deserve their own sensitive approaches, corresponding theories, and conservation strategies. The term, which in this context can be reduced to refer to any content made available through technologically networked processes and accessible through devices such as mobile phones, computers, etc., is applied here for its relationship to production in artistic practice on the Web, and most importantly, because it straddles a locus that consistently refers to positions both analogue and digital (offline vs. online), and thereby reiterates that networks are not confined solely to technology. Ultimately, I embrace the term because it forces one to ask questions concerning the limitations of contemporaneity and the binary

143 Adam Taylor, “47 percent of the world’s population now use the Internet, study says,” The Washington Post, November 22, 2016, accessed March 11, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/22/47-percent-of-the-worlds-population-now-use-the-internet-users-study-says/?utm_term=.b3df664540b9.

144 Florian Cramer, “What is ‘Post-digital’?” A peer-reviewed journal about __, January 23, 2014, accessed February 01, 2018, <http://www.aprja.net/what-is-post-digital/>.

142 See for example www.2052.info.

nature inherent in the interplay of on versus off.¹⁴⁵ In this thesis, while I focus on exhibition and curatorial practice situated online, this does not mean that the projects and artworks included in my research are limited to digital existence, as they often extend outside of these parameters, the reasons for which I will expand upon more thoroughly in my case studies.

In the early 1980s, the enhanced fibre-optics which enabled the development of digital communication networks and digital technology, which are based on binary code combinations of 0s and 1s, quickly replaced analog signals in telecommunication forms, particularly cellular telephone and cable systems, because they could compress large amounts of data onto more easily preserved and transported devices.¹⁴⁶ This digital information was shared through physical networks, like those of wires and cables, in order to reach more abstract

networks, of people, communities, and of ideas. The notion of networks, the digital, and the transference of images and information, however, were already sources of great inspiration for artists long before the 80s and can be seen in early photographic works,¹⁴⁷ kinetic light works,¹⁴⁸ and installations.¹⁴⁹ In looking at an already relatively canonized account of the history of net.art,¹⁵⁰ one is confronted with conflicting points of reference which are all heavily dependent on language and context. As Caitlin Jones reflects,

Like Duchamp's urinal, what would soon become known as "Web art" or "internet art" and the broader moniker, "new media art," posed a challenge not only to the arbitrary line between art and non-art, but it also questioned the necessity of the institutions established to contain and present art—namely, museums and galleries—as well as the primacy of the artist in the creative process.¹⁵¹

The term "net.art" was born from a software glitch in a discussion thread on

Nettime,¹⁵² a mailing list for art and activism, which was set up by Geert Lovink, Pit Schultz, and Nils Röllér in 1995, and correspondingly spread amongst online communities like a virus. Characterized as "communications, graphics, emails, texts and images, referring to and merging into one another, artists, enthusiasts, and technoculture critics trading ideas, sustaining one another's interests through ongoing dialogue,"¹⁵³ early net.art laid the foundation for virtual artistic communication and creative expression online that future new media practitioners have been able to build upon, deconstruct, and question. E-mail, ARPA's game changing function, was an essential component of the flourishing community of early net.artists, facilitating the instantaneous sharing of ideas and publishing potential of their manifestos, and the technology remains a powerful one still today. In comparison, the systematic exchange is perhaps far less exciting now as it serves as another reminder that being online is being tied to time; the inbox is always open, frequent-

ly refreshed, searchable and time stamped—a user can see exactly how much time has passed before replying with *Sorry for the delay*. While the immediacy of mixed media messaging technology, whether e-mail, Messenger, WhatsApp, etc., can instill in users a sense of guilt when left on 'seen,' it can also be used to deliver information, artworks,¹⁵⁴ texts, and even exhibitions more quickly, still with the possibility, but without the requirement or expectation of an impending response.¹⁵⁵

While American corporations retained a considerable amount of power on the Web in the 90s, and still today, the post-communist and neoliberal territories of Eastern Europe and Russia ushered in an era of pluralistic politics which trumpeted the open ended potential of the Internet and digital technology with a positive outlook on cultural reform and the formation of international alliances. In 1994, the Web was still a relatively uncrowded constellation of sites that were used for virtual show-and-tell like scenarios by various hobbyists, enthusiasts

145 Lelia Green, *The Internet: An Introduction to New Media* (New York, NY: Berg, 2010).

146 "Digital Technology," Dictionary of American History, 2003, accessed February 03, 2018, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/digital-technology>.

147 Eadweard Muybridge's 1879 zoopraxiscope.

148 Thomas Wilfred's 1919 *Lumia*.

149 In 1958, Wolf Vostell became the first artist to incorporate a television set into his work *The Black Room Cycle*.

150 See for example Zachary Kaplan's *A History of Net Art*, www.Dam.org, or Oliver Laric's *An Incomplete Timeline of Online Exhibitions and Biennales*.

151 Caitlin Jones, "My Art World Is Bigger Than Your Art World," *The Believer*, December 01, 2005, accessed January 22, 2018, https://www.believermag.com/issues/200512/?read=article_jones.

152 See www.nettime.org.

153 Rachel Greene, "Web Work: A History of Internet Art," *Artforum*, May 2000, 162.

154 See for example www.mutations.gallery.

155 See for example *Slowly 10*, a digital curatorial residency wherein a digital programme is distributed through a daily e-mail to the KoProjects mailing list, and features one artwork, text, reference etc. for a period of 10 days.

and companies advertising various types of communication tools that could be used within the technology—some sites are no longer functioning, R.I.P. Yahoo! GeoCities 1994–2009, but live on in digital archives like that of archive.org. By 1995, these new methods of distribution, communication, and production, which used images, colorful lo-fi graphics, and rudimentary coding to customize sites, were still aglow and basking in the light of a utopian halo, and drew the attention of artists, leftist intellectuals, and tech savvy individuals—many have been joined by newcomers and haven't left since.¹⁵⁶ As Omar Kholeif writes in *You are Here, Art After the Internet*, “After all, the internet seems like the ideal place for artists. It is a nimble, malleable, and responsive sphere that enables a degree of autonomy, which most artists crave but are often unable to achieve due to the hierarchical nature of the art world and its institutions.”¹⁵⁷ The Web provided the tools fundamental for building; it was both a space for creating content and the site of community, and at

the time (but of course not for long), the artistic community online was seen as being far removed from the commercially exploited art and culture of the white cube that defined the 1980s, the ideology of which Brian O'Doherty's 1986 *Inside the White Cube* chronicles in a way that remains of seminal significance. The Web is still the site of solace for many, not only do its effects remain unclear, but so too do its scope of possibilities for the arts, and the last several decades have shown that artist driven or non-profit online galleries are not uncommon; many printing presses have turned to digital publishing for its feasibility and affordability, popular social platforms are being repurposed, and digital libraries are turning away from the limitations imposed by structures and political and economic ideologies of the offline.

Early net.art sought to claim a position as a temporary autonomous zone that signaled the death of the author and shrank the gap between art and everyday life by proposing that every artist or individual could exist on the same level

as an institution or corporation online.¹⁵⁸ As Domenico Quaranta notes that

the Internet initially favoured depersonalisation and anonymity over authorship and self-promotion, as well as community over individualism. As a place without gatekeepers or the validating power of institutions, it prompted artists to develop platforms, networks, directories and community projects in order to contextualize their efforts within a broader practice.¹⁵⁹

Looking at the early works of net.art from the 90s today can be a rather disorienting experience for the contemporary user when considering that works have been stripped from their original context. Early works were made on particular browsers like Netscape or softwares no longer in use, their manner of reception altered upon entering the physical space of the gallery or exhibition, and sometimes lost entirely because the now antiquated technologies or devices have since been abandoned. Extracted from its context, the works of early practitioners of net.art, or net.artists, such as Yael Kanarek, Jodi.org, Heath Bunting, Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries, and Lorna

Mills, appear almost impossible to decipher. These works seem as though presented in a foreign language because—like in Mez Breeze's 1994 *Mezza-negelle*, wherein she combined the English language, informal speech and codework to create a new hybrid form as a result of the interplay between humans and machines—for most digital newcomers it is. The Internet has also allowed for a reworking of previously explored concepts and visual language and mediums, for example works like Wafaa Bilal's 2007 *Domestic Tension*, wherein the artist confined himself to a gallery, broadcasted a live feed over the internet 24/7 while viewers could watch and chat with him at all hours and fire at him with a robotically controlled paintball gun, recalls Chris Burden's 1971 *Shoot*, where the artist is shot in the arm by one of his assistants. Since early net.art often evaded archivability and even welcomed the limitations of temporality, some works have not been such lucky survivors,¹⁶⁰ but these early experiments with websites, coding, and computer systems intro-

¹⁵⁶ See for example the works of An Xiao Mina, Aleksandra Domanovi, Kate Steciw, Jennifer Chan, Parker Ito, Joshua Citarella, Brad Troemel, Alexandra Grczynski, and Oliver Laric.

¹⁵⁷ Omar Kholeif, “Preamble,” in *You Are Here Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester: HOME and SPACE, 2017), 12.

¹⁵⁸ Natalie Bookchin and Alexei Shulgin, “Introduction to net.art (1994–1999),” Introduction to net.art (1994–1999), March & April 1999, accessed February 01, 2018, <http://www.easylife.org/netart/>.

¹⁵⁹ Domenico Quaranta, “The First Life of Net Art: UBERMORGEN, JODI, Vuk Cosic, Olia Lialina,” Spike Art Magazine, October 20, 2016, accessed February 01, 2018, <https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/netart>.

¹⁶⁰ See for example www.oneterabyteofkilobyteage.tumblr.com.

duced a different approach to contemporary art practice, one that may have at first sought to function externally from the mainstream, but were things really better off online? As Josephine Berry Slater, who currently teaches at the Media and Communications Department at Goldsmiths, reminds

The cursory list of events in Net art's swerve from avowed outsiderhood to, by and large, comfortable institutional involvement, mirrors and entails many parallel narrative of disillusionment. It charts the development of the World Wide Web from virgin and libertarian frontier or 'virtual reality,' to universalized tool of late capitalism; its administrative techniques, its instantaneous circulation. It repeats some of the same steps as conceptual art, for which the innovative dematerialization of the art object worked both as a radical attempt to withdraw the pretexts of veneration (aestheticism, retinality) and commodification (the aura of originality), whilst also providing an uncanny advance warning of the coming info-capitalism.¹⁶¹

Created by artists who sustained themselves by other means and through the creation of works sold offline, net.art generated a demand

for its preservation and collection¹⁶² through an already established reputation in more traditional sites of commerce—auction houses, dealers and collectors found in new media a new market.¹⁶³ Early net.art, though it was originally made and accessed online, quickly found its way into galleries and institutions, and was loosely termed "new media art," which is curtly described by Quaranta as "the art that uses new media technologies as a medium-period."¹⁶⁴ The interplay of online works in the offline world like those by Thomas Ruff, Cao Fei, Laura Owens and Artie Vierkant amongst many others, allows artists another opportunity support themselves through sales, reveal their processes, and contextualize themselves and their work, which still battles for respect or reception alongside more traditional (read: profitable) practices such as painting or sculpture.¹⁶⁵ The

last several decades have seen artists selling memes made online in galleries,¹⁶⁶ or placing outdated computer models in exhibition spaces to run or display artworks and independently designed programs or software.¹⁶⁷ New media already boasts its own relics and antiques. One of the most notable institutions working today, Rhizome's Net Art Anthology, is an ambitious project that seeks to retell the history of artistic practice in the digital age, in which even the most influential works have faded into obscurity as a result of technological obsolescence.¹⁶⁸ With the launch of tools like Web Recorder, such databases dedicated to preserving, collecting, or displaying online artworks, even those which like Rhizome are artist driven, dictate which works are selected to be archived and how, in effect changing the type of work which is made. Twenty three years later, a belated reflection on the timeline of artists and artworks which have since been categorized as belonging to net.art's oeuvre reveals that the early

infatuation with the evasion of institutional reception was more of a fantasy than a possible reality. As Claire Bishop points out

It seemed desperately to crave recognition by and integration into mainstream contemporary art, falling over itself to name digital artists who had already appeared in Artforum, gallery shows, biennials, or art fairs. The ambivalence is curious, and perhaps best resolved by eliminating the artificial distinction between the new media gang and mainstream contemporary art altogether, or at the very least acknowledging their significant overlap.¹⁶⁹

Neither the works of early net.artists nor those of new media practitioners working today can evade the principles, and more importantly, markets, economies, and politics that dictate the ebb and flow of value, production, and creativity in the societies they touch—no matter how many times you click the switch on Rafaël Rozendaal's *Onandoff.org*. This is not a statement intended to evoke a paralyzing sense of hopelessness and certainly not one intended to diminish the importance of the work done by early net.artists or the institutions that

161 Josephine Berry Slater, "Unassignable Leakage: A Crisis of Measure and Judgement in Immaterial (Art) Production," in *In Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, ed. Joasia Krysa (Autonomedia, 2006), 140.

162 See for example www.netvorth.com.

163 Jennifer Chan, "From Browser to Gallery (and Back): The Commodification of Net Art 1990-2011," Pool, December 28, 2011, <http://pooool.info/from-browser-to-gallery-and-back-the-commodification-of-net-art-1990-2011/>.

164 Domenico Quaranta, "What's (Really) Specific about New Media Art? Curating in the Information Age," Rhizome, December 6, 2012, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2012/dec/6/whats-really-specific-about-new-media-art-curating/>.

165 Ben Hobson, "Galleries around the world are finally 'starting to take digital art seriously'," Dezeen, February 17, 2015, accessed March 15, 2018, <https://www.dezeen.com/2015/02/17/movie-galleries-around-world-starting-to-take-digital-art-seriously/>.

166 See for example www.s-a-d-e.la/air-pop---memes.html.

167 See for example the 2017 Whitney Biennale.

168 "The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology Launch," New Museum, October 2016, accessed February 03, 2018, <https://www.newmuseum.org/calendar/view/1106/the-art-happens-here-net-art-anthology-launch-1>.

169 Claire Bishop, "SWEEPING, DUMB, AND AGGRESSIVELY IGNORANT! REVISITING 'DIGITAL DIVIDE,'" in *Mass Effect*, ed. Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter (MIT Press, 2015).

now work to archive and conserve it, but rather is a realization that once understood, actually reactivates a once promised potential of digital technologies.

P L A T F O R M S

When using the phrase ‘on-line exhibition space’ in this dissertation, I am referring to a spectrum of cyberspaces, meaning that these spaces involve computers or computer networks, and which range from hashtags, to 3D rendered websites, and which are most often accessed on their own distinct URLs, or make use of pre-existing social media platforms, the most common being Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. but which also have similar country specific iterations, such as Russia’s V Kontakte, Poland’s NaszaKlasa, or China’s Baidu Tieba. What exactly are these platforms? Artists Olga Goriunova and Alexei Shulgin explain that

A platform is [...] organised in a special way: as a relatively simple database with artefacts, or a more complex portal built around a database. A platform differentiates itself [...] by the relation of creative, social, instrumental, educational and historical character it establishes and is involved

with. A platform is aimed at supporting and stimulating creative initiatives and work, and it provides a possibility for continues exhibition of artefacts, often accompanied by reactions to them and various discussions. Sometimes there is also a set of instruments available for a particular kind of creative work. A platform often also puts effort into translating digital creative process into offline and more official cultural scenes, establishing connections between cultural movements of different times and orders. Most platforms organize (ir)regular real-life, gatherings such as festivals, concerts, workshops or those of a less formal nature. Technically speaking, a platform should have an open database with a user friendly interface that anyone can download from/upload to, and instruments for the contextualization and development of a practice it works with—blog, forum, chat, ranking, voting, featuring, and others.¹⁷⁰

These databases, platforms, and digital spaces are sites of interaction, participation, and collaboration shaped by and for the material they work with, be it music, literature, art, software, etc. Their formulas have been arrived at by a multitude of routes, and because they exist online, are political in their very nature, no matter if the content they exhibit is explicitly stated as such or not.¹⁷¹ While there are many types of platforms that have been created by artists, designers, and curators, the corporate owned

social media platforms that many Web users have come to know continue to maintain a facade of neutrality, of access, and of social potential; the minimalist design of Google’s homepage is incongruous with the amount of data it collects from its users. At their core, however, they are simply economic actors responding to the demands of a capitalist society; Uber’s price surge after a New York City bombing in September of 2016 or the JFK Airport protests in response to Executive Order 13769, Tinder’s 2016 performative gesture of gender inclusivity, or Instagram and Snapchat’s recently renounced collaboration with Giphy after a racist GIF surfaced in a tweet by Ly-auna Augmon, and should be treated as such no matter how often they claim to accommodate user interests with ethical or moral updates.¹⁷²

PUBLIC CYBERSPACE

The Classical Athenian agora, or the public square on which politics and administration,

religion and commerce were all concentrated, was initially considered a vital component of democracy as it was the site in which citizens could rationally deliberate political issues.¹⁷³ In the context of the public cybersphere, or electro-agora, however, debate has been tranquilized, as if placed behind a fence in a zoo, ‘free’ to roam within the confines of a cage and entertained according to the schedule of the keeper. “The media constitute us as citizens by offering us *processed* insights into an array of significant domains—economic, political, scientific and so forth—through which democratic choices and opinions can emerge, and not by breaching the boundaries between decision makers and those on the receiving end of their decisions.”¹⁷⁴ Considering that the connection afforded by such social platforms was always characterized by corporate interests, it quickly transformed into competition and comparison, wherein the number of follow-

170 Olga Goriunova and Alexei Shulgin, “From Art on Networks to Art on Platforms: (Case Studies: Runme.org, Micromusic.net, and Udaaff.com),” in *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, ed. Joasia Krysa (Autonomedia, 2006), 237–238.

171 See for example www.desktoppresidency.com.

172 In June 2017, Tinder announced a “More Genders” update accompanied by the statement: “Starting today, no matter how you identify, you can express your authentic self,” apologizing for their failure as allies excusing themselves saying “We haven’t had the right tools to serve our diverse community in the past, but that changes today.” See www.blog.gotinder.com/genders/.

173 Manuel Castells, “Public Space in the Information Society,” *Public Space*, 1994, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://www.publicspace.org/en/text-library/eng/1-espacios-publicos-en-la-sociedad-informacional>.

174 Luke Goode, *Jürgen Habermas: Democracy and the Public Sphere* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 95.

ers, retweets and subscriptions translates to popularity, success and potential profit; lamentably, the accounts with the most followers in the world are highly paid female pop stars from the U.S.¹⁷⁵

It seems that the ‘social’ aspect of these social platforms was not enough to delink us from misery and has instead exacerbated it.¹⁷⁶ Anxiety, depression, loneliness, jealousy, and stress levels rise the more time we spend on social media yet the FOMO (fear of missing out) on any of these dismal emotions renders us unwilling to let go—someday, all the stress might actually power our devices.¹⁷⁷ Users generate data, the clicks and likes to be sold to advertisers, but they also generate affective emotional responses such as pleasure, disgust, anger, etc., that resist being entered into the market, but might find their way into projects like Sev Kamvar and Jonathan Harris’ *wefeelfine.org*, a system that searches the world’s newly posted blog

entries for occurrences of the phrases “I feel” and “I am feeling” to create a database of human feelings across a number of demographics.

As we continue to upload versions of ourselves online, our nucleus accumbens aglow with every ‘like’ and our levels of loneliness lowered with every post if only momentarily, despite all of the risks, we do so because we define our identities through and with others, we nurture so that we might be nurtured in return, and most often, we share, post, and update because want to tell the rest of the world what it is we care about, whether or not anyone is listening.¹⁷⁸ In exchange for hits of dopamine and serotonin, users voluntarily relinquish their information into capitalist receptacles, thus the digital economy is nothing new, but simply a thinly veiled extension of pre-existing conditions. As Seyla Benhabib notes, “Hannah Arendt’s prediction that modern societies would be increasingly dominated by the

‘social’, with the concomitant rule of the bureaucracy on the one hand, and an obsessive preoccupation with intimacy on the other, has proved remarkably prescient.”¹⁷⁹ Benjamin also reminds that

The increasing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two sides of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly proletarianized masses while leaving intact the property relations which they strive to abolish. It sees its salvation in granting expression to the masses—but on no account granting them rights. The masses have a right to changed property relations; fascism seeks to give them expression in keeping these relations unchanged. *The logical outcome of fascism is an aestheticizing of political life.*¹⁸⁰

We reached the tipping point long ago with the rise of yellow journalism, competing news outlets vying for ratings and rather than reality, reality television that reduced reality to television. Yet Benjamin’s materialist perspective purports that technology is not the antithesis of nature, but rather a new configuration of it, and that through a collective innervation of technology, humanity can, through mimetic faculties, dialectically augment its relationship to both. Innervation,

which Miriam Hansen broadly describes as the “neurophysiological process that mediates between internal and external, psychic and motoric, human and mechanical registers,”¹⁸¹ is a mode of cognition that is active, corporeal, intense and which allows for the imagination of a different existence than the one characterized by the sensory alienation afforded by the aestheticization of political life in which we can see ourselves reflected and with others. Artworks, opinions, and images may glide across the glossy surfaces of screens, but this does not mean that they are inherently superficial, as both their exhibition and reception can still be sites of resistance.

These social platforms, because they do attract so many users, remind that assimilating into the masses or adopting a mob mentality leads to a diffusion of responsibility, and what social psychologists have called “social loafing,” when individuals put forth less effort when working in a group. A study conducted in 2005 showed that people extended greater

175 Singer Katy Perry has over 109 million followers, and in 2017 her Twitter bio read: “Artist. Activist. Conscious.”

176 Jessica Brown, “Future - Is social media bad for you? The evidence and the unknowns,” BBC, January 05, 2018, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20180104-is-social-media-bad-for-you-the-evidence-and-the-unknowns>.

177 In 2017, the Swiss Federal Laboratories for Materials Science and Technology created a rubbery material that generates electricity from stress.

178 Maurizio Mauri et al., “Why Is Facebook So Successful? Psychophysiological Measures Describe a Core Flow State While Using Facebook,” *CYBERPSYCHOLOGY, BEHAVIOR, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING* 14, no. 12 (2011).

179 Seyla Benhabib, “Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt’s concept of public space,” *History of the Human Sciences* 6, no. 2 (1993): 110, 2011, <http://hhs.sagepub.com/content/6/2/97>.

180 Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Uni. Press, 2008), 41.

181 Quoted from Elizabeth Stewart, *Catastrophe and Survival: Walter Benjamin and Psychoanalysis* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2010), 86.

individual effort when they were in smaller groups in both distributed and collocated situations, but when placed in collocated groups however, people felt greater pressure to look busy even when they were not, while those in the distributed groups were less likely to feel such pressure.¹⁸² What is seen through the screen thus has the potential to be a starting point for both political action and inaction. Social media platforms, created and maintained by power-wielding corporations, are the most commonly accessed sites on the Web and have further expanded an illusion of participation each time a 140 character tweet is added to the thread. Surfaces find their temporal and spatial dimensions in platforms, and become the site of voluminous and expansive politically charged public space; a public cybersphere, producing what Foucault refers to as docile bodies. On social media platforms, users are treated as wholesale goods by the “uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result [...] exercised

according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement. These methods [...] which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility.”¹⁸³ Through habitual usage, these types of platforms and digital devices have ever so clandestinely disciplined bodily gestures, pace, and behaviour to the extent that even the movements that allow users to work within them can be trademarked—Apple alone has won a number of key swipe gesture patents for virtual keyboards since 2001.

Understanding the limitations of social media platforms may allow users to seize some control, to manipulate their functions,¹⁸⁴ and appropriate some of their strategies within new contexts and toward different goals,¹⁸⁵ and projects like *The Wrong*, the world’s largest digital art biennale that uses Facebook as its primary exhibition platform, have attempted to do just that. However, in the following chapter, I explain that without the addition of alternatives that allow for different forms of

communication, engagement, criticism, and content, the breadth of diversity of personal experience, emotion and expression is reduced to the confines of what several men have deemed worthy of sharing.¹⁸⁶ The screen is thus not a portal through which one can escape to another possible world, it is a two-way mirror gazing back at us from the extension of the one in which we currently live, reflecting the misery and maladies of modern life. While it is here where the masses are constituted, wherein the personal becomes public, it is also here in the reflection wherein the public gets personal.

IN THE PUBLIC I

Social media platforms have not yet entirely replaced public forums for discussion, but they have dramatically altered the ways in which debate is positioned, addressed and received, now more simply uploaded or downloaded in online forums or threads like

Reddit, freebird.is, or micgoat.com. Opinions need not be expressed as tedious or protracted theses, but have been reduced to comments, or even more minutely, gestural avatars that symbolize affirmation or disapproval; this is hardly a debate interested in reaching agreement, let alone a Habermasian notion of consensus.

Chantal Mouffe, a notable critic of Habermas’ theory of deliberative democracy, in her theory of agonistic pluralism, acknowledges that both power and antagonism are ineradicable forces and that they play a “crucial role in the formation of collective identities.”¹⁸⁷ She reminds that the consensus of which Habermas conceives is not only an impossibility, but that it would signal the end of contestation and dissidence, arguing that the failure of such a conception of democracy is that identity is “abstracted from social and power relations, language, culture and the whole set of practices that make the individuality possible.”¹⁸⁸ Mouffe goes

182 Laku Chidambaram and Lai Lai Tung, “Is Out of Sight, Out of Mind? An Empirical Study of Social Loafing in Technology-Supported Groups,” *Information Systems Research* 16, no. 2 (June 2005): 149–168.

183 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 137.

184 See for example www.bubblebyte.org.

185 See for example www.facebook.com/GalleryOnline.

186 Of the four most popular social media platforms, Facebook, the world’s largest social media platform, was started by Mark Zuckerberg, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz, and Chris Hughes. The mobile photo-sharing platform Instagram was started by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. Snapchat, a multimedia application was started by Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown, and the mobile news and social networking service Twitter was founded by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams.

187 Chantal Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?” *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (1999): 752.

188 Chantal Mouffe, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism,” *Political Science Series*, no. 72 (December 2000): 10.

on to say “[...] if we accept that relations of power are constitutive of the social, then the main question of democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic values.¹⁸⁹ What Mouffe is then proposing, if both structurelessness and consensus are impossibilities, is not a conservative approach that seeks to replace the existing structures of power with yet another structure of power, as if women were to replace all men in positions of political power all would be right in the world, pitting hegemony against hegemony, but that “the constitution of democratic individuals can only be made possible by multiplying the institutions, the discourses, [and] the forms of life that foster identification with democratic values.”¹⁹⁰

Applying Mouffe’s theory to the field of arts and culture atop the electro-agora would mean that rather than seek the validation of established, or recognized institutional, governmental or market defining bodies, a multiplicity of expression and reception is needed in order to make space

for non-conformity, scrutiny and resistance, calling into question a homogenous view of a public by embracing the notion of a more intersectional understanding of identity, which can be comprised of different spatial and temporal positions of understanding. Objective knowledge would hold no seat here, as only subjective perspective and the ability to self-identify resist the impositions of a rigid universality, neutrality and consensus. Mouffe notes that a “properly political intervention is always one that engages with a certain aspect of the existing hegemony in order to disarticulate/re-articulate its constitutive elements. It can never be merely oppositional or conceived as desertion because it aims at re-articulating the situation in a new configuration.”¹⁹¹ As Andrea Fraser reminds, “if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a ‘totally administered society’, or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get outside of

ourselves.”¹⁹² If we lose sight of the inherently political character of the online, as Stephanie Bailey notes “we lose exactly what is at stake: a perception of the internet as a territory that is a ‘live’ and volatile as the fertile fields over which battles have been waged and social contracts drawn.”¹⁹³

How can such multiplicity can be enacted within pre-existing structures or with the creation of new ones online? Is multiplicity or polycentrality a viable counter argument, and more importantly, is it reserved solely for the leisure privileged middle class? While online discussion can serve to expose participants to the non-like minded, it can also become the site of political polarisation,¹⁹⁴ and so the fetishized positive nature of connectivity is equally called into question. Although digital media can certainly be used to engage in counter-expression against authoritarian governments amongst many other things, it still poses a risk for punitive action,¹⁹⁵ and “roman-

tised retrospectives of past and future civic engagement frequently impose language and expectations that misrepresent what actually happens in the mediations of the present.”¹⁹⁶ Such forms of counter-expression need then to be visibly and actively contextualized within the overarching framework of existing power structures that dominate discourse online; they require an understanding of the inherent problematics of the technology they occupy that predates the Internet, as well as an understanding that participation online is simply not enough to spur a recasting of dominating structures of power in the name of democracy. As Natalie Fenton reminds “Genuine democratisation requires the real and material participation of the oppressed and excluded; the real and material recognition of difference, along with the space for contestation and an understanding and response to its meaning. This is not an argument simply for inclusivity, multiplicity, par-

189 Mouffe, (1999): 753.

190 Mouffe, (December 2000): 11.

191 Chantal Mouffe, “Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention,” Eipcp, April 2008, accessed February 17, 2018, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en/base_edit.

192 Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum*, September 2005, 104.

193 Stephanie Bailey, “OurSpace: Take the Net in Your Hands,” in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester: HOME and SPACE, 2017), 130.

194 Matthew Scott Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

195 Lily Kuo, “Tanzania is threatening more citizens with jail for insulting the president on social media,” September 15, 2016, accessed February 08, 2018, <https://qz.com/782239/five-tanzanians-were-charged-with-cyber-crime-for-insulting-president-john-magufuli-on-social-media/>.

196 Curran, Fenton, and Freedman, 132.

ticipation or for the creative autonomy of everyone, as these claims alone can only ever take us to first base.”¹⁹⁷ In the case of corruption, as is the case online, direct criticism falls short and must seek equally cunning ways to subvert the logos of power. It is here wherein art, through works like the 2001-2003 *Black Net.Art Actions* by Mendi + Keith Obadike that address art online with race as a central concern, has the potential to propose alternative blueprints, not an escape plan. As Gerald Raunig explains, “the poststructuralist proposals for dropping out and withdrawal [...] is anything but this kind of relapse into the celebration of an individual turning away from society. The point is to thwart dichotomies such as that of the individual and the collective, to offensively theorize new forms of what is common and singular at the same time.”¹⁹⁸ It is here, in instituent practices that the singular becomes plural and expands the middle that lies between the extremes of escapism and complicity.

If it is true that as

Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi writes that there is no identity, only processes of identification, then rather than attempting to rebuild a sense of belonging based on a false concept, things might be better off if identity is “forgotten altogether.”¹⁹⁹ But change comes ever slowly, no matter how quick the connection, and a position that proposes to do away with identity entirely when politics police its very core and wait armed at borders, erecting higher walls, and exercise control through more inconspicuous methods that all too frequently go unnoticed, is one of great privilege. Perhaps all this visibility will in the future reveal a different kind of immateriality, or invisibility; a disappearance of the need to be identified alongside a re-appropriation of the phrase of the right-wing rhetoric “All Lives Matter” when they actually do matter, and not as sources of imprisoned or low-cost labor forces, as imperialist subjects, or as demographically targeted consumers. As Nancy writes “Community is bare, but it is imperative,”²⁰⁰ arguing that our task is to think community as something always unfolding,

rather than to work it or to perceive it as a goal, or something forced, a claim which enters an arena of violence. After all, if the Internet really was a World Wide Web, what good is a border?²⁰¹ For now, however, establishing solidarity on the basis of more than a singular and reduced concept of identity, such visibility, contextualized and transparent in its intentions,²⁰² is a site of strength and can do much more than making the rounds through reblogging.²⁰³

While each country faces its own set of conditions that rule the regulation of its version of the Web, China for example boasts the largest number of Internet users and one of the most advanced models for digital censorship,²⁰⁴ artworks and exhibitions that occupy social media platforms or use digital technologies to generate and establish divergent territories away from the center, can become the spaces of such possibility for intervention or interruption that at the very least, can be this first step toward a more democratic sense of expression. If the screen is something like a mirror, albeit one which

works two-ways, reflection is an active gesture, akin to Ryan McNamara’s 2013 and still ongoing performance *MEEM 4 Boston: A Story Ballet About the Internet*, wherein we come to recognize that the relationships between ourselves and others are always subject to change.²⁰⁵

197 Ibid, 142.

198 Gerald Raunig, “Instituent Practices,” *Eipcp*, 2006, accessed March 22, 2018, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en/base_edit.

199 Franco “Bifo” Berardi, “Trap of Identity and Delusion of Truth,” in *Authenticity? Observations and Artistic Strategies in the Post-Digital Age*, ed. Barbara Cueto and Bas Hendriks (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017), 143.

200 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, ed. Werner Harnacher and David E. Wellbery (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 35–36.

201 www.dis.art/60-million-americans.

202 See for example www.m-est.org.

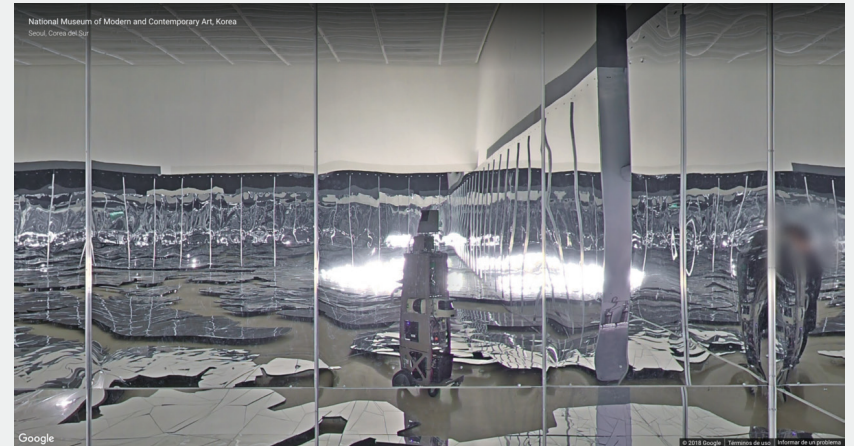
203 See for example www.not-surprised.org.

204 Nick Routley, “Map: Internet Censorship Around the World,” *Visual Capitalist*, September 30, 2017, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://www.visualcapitalist.com/internet-censorship-map/>.

205 See for example www.parallograms.info.

over there.
 to pass through this virtual point which is
 unreal, since in order to be perceived it has
 the space that surrounds it, and absolutely
 at once absolutely real, connected with all
 moment when I look at myself in the glass
 it makes this place that I occupy at the
 functions as a heterotopia in this respect:
 myself there where I am. The mirror
 my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute
 back toward myself; I begin again to direct
 is on the other side of the glass, I come
 from the ground of this virtual space that
 gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me,
 I see myself over there. Starting from this
 my absence from the place where I am since
 from the standpoint of the mirror I discover
 counteraction on the position that I occupy.
 exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of
 a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does
 is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also
 see myself there where I am absent: such
 visibility to myself, that enables me to
 am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own
 surface; I am over there, there where I
 virtual space that opens up behind the
 myself there where I am not, in an unreal,
 is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see
 The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it

October 1984, 4.
 I Michel Foucault, "Des Espace Autres", trans. Jay Miskowiec, Architecture/Movement/Continuity.



*National Museum of Modern
 and Contemporary Art. Seoul,
 South Korea.*

Screenshot by Mario
 Santamaria from *The
 Phantom in the Mirror, 2013*
 - ongoing.

3

[illegible]

BEING SINGULAR
PLURAL: SHARING VS.
PSEUDO-SHARING

In *Being Singular Plural*, Jean-Luc Nancy complicates the very core of community itself through his analysis of the co-existential, and writes

Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence. [...] But this circulation goes in all directions at once, in all the directions of all the space-times [*les espace-temps*] opened by presence to presence: all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods—and “humans,” that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying “we,” by *saying we to themselves* in all possible senses of that expression, and by saying we for the totality of all being.²⁰⁶

Being-there is the way we experience ourselves through the lens of everyday life, and most importantly, with others, and not exclusively humans. In this understanding of being, the notion of sharing is an inherent trait, as the world is *always and already* a shared one. Sharing thus becomes not only an ontological concept, but because communities and identities are formed by virtue of being-with, a political one as well—without sharing, meaning remains an impossibility.

One could say— even more simply that Being is communication. [...] If “commu-

nication” is for us, today, such an affair—in every sense of the word[...] — if its theories are flourishing, if its technologies are being proliferated, if the “mediatization” of the “media” brings along with it an auto-communicational vertigo, if one plays around with the theme of the indistinctness between the “message” and the “medium” out of either a disenchanted or jubilant fascination, then it is because something is exposed or laid bare. In fact, [what is exposed] is the bare and “content”-less Web of “communication.” One could say it is the bare Web of the *com-* (of the *telecom-*, said with an acknowledgment of its independence); that is, it is *our* Web or “us” as Web or network, an *us* that is reticulated and spread out, with its extension for an essence and its spacing for a structure.²⁰⁷

With the rise of social media usage, the notion of communication has been reduced to the act of “sharing;” sites and platforms invite users to share their photo, share their moods, share their thoughts, share their location, to share in a private message, or to share publicly. Sharing has come to define what it means to be online; as users upload personal information to construct their profiles, they mark the positions of their existence within the network, geographically or in terms of their beliefs and interests, and thus assert their commercial value in the chain. Sharing, or rather pseudo-sharing in this sense, unlike its ontological position as described by

Nancy, has taken on a different dimension, and requires an additional phenomenological interpretation through the lens of the quotidian. The immediacy of sharing online has shifted away from the editorial transcription of the everyday, which in effect, positions every day as if it were not everyday. Sharing on social media platforms remains disguised, even when its inner functions are revealed time and time again by the likes of Edward Snowden or Julian Assange, as a neoliberal reconstruction of Marx’s “commodity fetishism,”²⁰⁸ masking the relationship between the capitalist and the laborer as entertainment rather than as work, or connection rather than commodity.

The user is
using,
using,
used.

Once online, the possibility of ever being offline again vanishes—you are locked in a state of ever-sharing. Perma-share. Over-share.²⁰⁹ Pseudo-sharing further deconstructs a traditional model of work, previously defined by linear time and

working hours, now exploded into all aspects of existence after the first click, or as in Christian Marclay’s 2010 *The Clock*, the first tick. When does the user become a citizen?

At the core of capitalism is the driving force that seeks the endless commodification of human beings and the natural world for a profit; pseudo-sharing has become the site of seemingly endless exploitation, as it capitalizes on *dasein* itself. As it advances embodying a global dimension, the capitalist system becomes increasingly intersectional, and even capitalizes on intersectionality, and thus requires intersectional resistance. In the United States in the 1960s for example, several organizations, like the women’s liberation and civil rights movements, were formed on the basis of fragmented identity politics that focused on reform, but only as it pertained to each respective group, ultimately acting to legitimize the very systems they sought to critique by seeking inclusion within them.²¹⁰ In 2018, capitalism is viciously preying on the politics of inclusivity, yet hiding

208 “Marx’s Theory of Commodity Fetishism,” Libcom.org, 2017, accessed March 03, 2018, <https://libcom.org/library/i-marxs-theory-commodity-fetishism>.

209 See for example www.sleepingupright.com.

210 For example, women of color were systematically excluded from both feminist and civil rights movements.

206 Nancy, (2000): 3.
207 Ibid, 28.

its locus of enunciation: fast fashion companies like Zara print the phrase 'Feminism!' on sweatshirts while paying the women who work to make them in notoriously unsafe sweatshop conditions dying rather than living wages, mega corporations like media giant Google tick boxes for diversity and attempt to hire people of color to save themselves from discrimination lawsuits, while on International Women's Day McDonald's flips its signature golden arches upside down to show solidarity with women without raising the wages of the single mothers it employs. This is not to say that identity politics should be wholly eliminated, but rather that it needs to take into account the larger framework and structures of the existing political economy, otherwise it risks enabling the same right-wing politics which are built on nationalism, militarism, and dogmatic fundamentalism.

Nancy writes

[...]one could begin to describe the present transformation of "political space" as a transition toward "empire," where empire signifies two things: (1) domination without sovereignty (without the elaboration of such a concept); and (2) the distancing, spacing, and plurality opposed to the concentration of interiority required by political sovereignty. [...] How is one to think the spacing of empire against

its domination? In one way or another, bare sovereignty [...] presupposes that one take a certain distance from the politico-philosophical order and from the realm of "political philosophy." This distance is not taken in order to engage in a depoliticized thinking, but in order to engage in a thinking, the site of which is the very constitution, imagination, and signification of the political, which allows this thinking to retrace its path in its retreat and beginning from this retreat.²¹¹

If the Web has already enabled the convergence of individuals within communities on many, but not all, points of the spectrum of political ideology from extreme right to extreme left, as well as entirely contrived identities like 'Caroline,' the persona crafted by Ann Hirsch for an eighteen month long Youtube performance in 2008, what is left to be done if we are to be together by means of using the tools which have been gifted to us by corporate entities? It is essential that one does not lose sight of the fact that politics is based on being-with, on being together, and on sharing, which occur dialogically but without imposition through the acts of caretaking, writing, or artistic expression. "In each case it calls us forth, to recognize being-with, to be open to being-with, to hold signification open. [...] Nobody can make me have this ethos. They can,

however, help me find my way to it."²¹²

BUYING TIME IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE

Where are we when we think? The elasticity of temporality is psychological, not something sensed like touch, taste, sight or hearing, but rather it is perceived, and varies between individuals. The privatization of time in economic systems however, imposes the sequential stacking of Newtonian time on a spinning clock that measures physical, or public, time in terms of accumulated currency; salaries defined by working hours, vacation periods scheduled according to calendar columns and rows, alarms sounding at intervals so we don't oversleep the morning meeting. Wasted time may equate to wasted money, but it also establishes both as forms of currency. In the age of accelerated time in Western culture, the distinction between time for leisure and time for labor, particularly pertaining to freelance positions in creative fields, is endangered if not already extinct. Job descriptions seek efficiency and productivity, the skills to

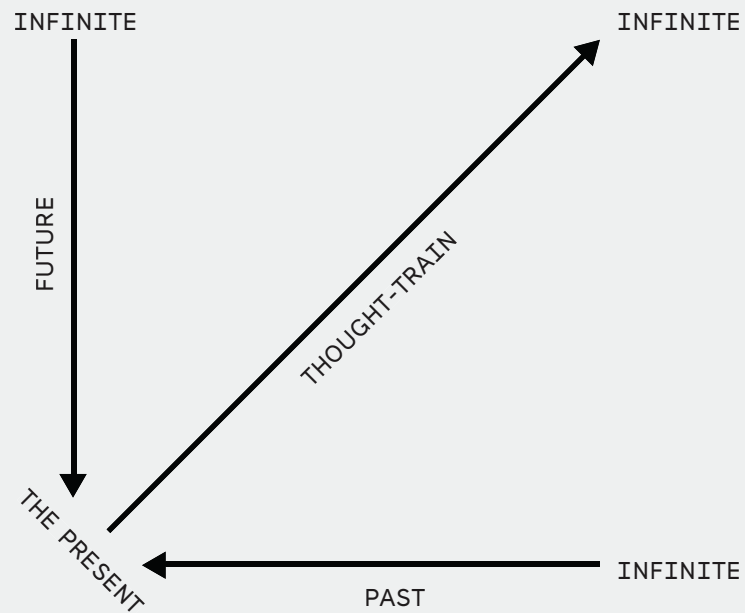
multitask in a fast-paced environment, the ability to not only wear many hats, but to wear them all at once. No leisure, just labor, latte capitalism,²¹³ and for some curators, like Obrist whose favorite word is 'urgent,' barely any sleep. The sentiment that there is simply too much to be done rings like an alarm you can't hit snooze on. If this was already the case prior to the invention of the Internet, considering that in 1937 Time magazine published *Pep-Pill Poisoning*, an article that condemned the American obsession with speed both literally and figuratively,²¹⁴ the feeling has only been exacerbated to an unsustainable extreme as technological advancements have accelerated the rates of production and expectation but have not shortened the working day. The American dream is unnatural, simulated, overly stimulated, and its natives continue to march onto distant shores planting symbolic flags of wavering proficiency.

As Raqs Media Collective laments, "We are restless, exhausted through the operation of the worst, most damaging technique available to torturers: sleep deprivation.

²¹² Matthew Anderson, *Martin Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy on Community*, PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2010, 78.

²¹³ See for example www.visualcapitalist.com/latte-index-currencies/.

²¹⁴ *Take Your Pills*, dir. Alison Klayman, March 9, 2018.



Graphic reproduced from
Hannah Arendt's 1977
book *The Life of the Mind*.

We could all do with a ‘sleep in’ on the long night shifts. It appears as if there has been a generalized forgetting of the arts and sciences of dreaming, especially lucid dreaming.”²¹⁵ Antagonizing the war between past and future, news outlets and social media platforms have opened fire with an unlimited ammunition of nows, forcing users to pick sides and abandon the struggles of the present so that they might, at the very least, get some shut eye. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt comforts, and writes

That we can shape the everlasting stream of sheer change into a time continuum we owe not to time itself but to the continuity of our business and our activities in the world, in which we continue what we started yesterday and hope to finish tomorrow. In other words, the time continuum depends on the continuity of our everyday life, and the business of everyday life, in contrast to the activity of the thinking ego—always independent of the spatial circumstances surrounding it—is always spatially determined and conditioned. It is due to this thoroughgoing spatiality of our ordinary life that we can speak plausibly of time in spatial categories, that the past can appear to us as something lying “behind” us and the future as lying “ahead.” [...] The gap between past and future opens only in reflection, whose subject matter is what is absent—either what has already disappeared or what has

not yet appeared. Reflection draws these absent “regions” into the mind’s presence; from that perspective the activity of thinking can be understood as a fight against time itself.²¹⁶

For Nancy and Arendt, thinking becomes the site of resistance; thinking allows us to buy some time, not in the middle of nowhere, but in the middle of now, here. Engaged thinking brings neither a sense of false consolation of escape, as accelerationism or artificial intelligence attempt to, it avoids the immobilizing extremes of either optimism or pessimism, but results in a realization that what happens now does matter, that the future, as Rebecca Solnit reminds in a recent Guardian article, *Protest and Persist: Why Giving Up Hope is Not An Option*, remains unwritten.²¹⁷ No matter if plans and programs have been written in anticipation and advance, no matter that Siri schedules our weekly ‘me-time’ every Tuesday evening, no matter that time marches twice daily over the same spot on the clock irrespective to that which occurs outside of its defining digits—no two moments are ever the

same, but that is not to say they are dissimilar.

To say that we as a society have stopped thinking both undermines and paralyzes humanity, but certainly, the way that thinking in the attention economy is practiced has changed.²¹⁸ A bulimic appetite for distraction and a diet that consists solely of nows is hardly enough to sustain a life, let alone a struggle. Thinking, like writing, or love for Nancy, calls one closer to recognizing the significance of being-with; it entails letting ourselves be opened to difference, to resist exclusion and violence, and the rigid formation of identity if we realize that our very own is constructed by its relation to others.²¹⁹

Arendt continues,

This diagonal, though pointing to some infinity, is limited, enclosed, as it were, by the forces of past and future, and thus protected against the void; it remains bound to and is rooted in the present—an entirely human present though it is fully actualized only in the thinking process and lasts no longer than this process lasts. It is the quiet of the Now in the time-pressed, time-tossed existence of man [...] we find our place in time when we think, that is, when we are sufficiently removed from past and future

to be relied on to find out their meaning, to assume the position of “umpire,” of arbiter and judge over the manifold, never-ending affairs of human existence in the world, never arriving at a final solution to their riddles but ready with ever-new answers to the question of what it may be all about.²²⁰

Arendt finds within temporality and the quotidian an act of thinking the site of resistance, but this is far more than the neoliberal notion of self-care that is already fed back to us in the form of mindful apps like Vent, where you can express your feelings with “those who care” on a sliding scale of emotion, or Coffitivity that creates soundtracks of environments like “University Undertones” or “Texas Teahouse” to be used as background noise while you work (or maybe just feel lonely), or Viridi that simulates taking care of growing plants in real time, or Offtime which lets you control your digital self without the feeling of missing out and which boasts having already created more than 750 years of undistracted time— and is still creating more than 525,600 minutes each day.²²¹ This kind of thinking instead requires an understanding of what has necessitated such mindfulness in

²¹⁵ Raqs Media Collective, “Is the World Sleeping, Sleepless, or Awake or Dreaming?” e-flux, June 2014, accessed March 23, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60349/is-the-world-sleeping-sleepless-or-awake-or-dreaming/>.

²¹⁶ Arendt, 205–206.

²¹⁷ Rebecca Solnit, “Protest and Persist: Why Giving Up Hope is Not an Option,” *The Guardian*, March 13, 2017, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/13/protest-persist-hope-trump-activism-anti-nuclear-movement>.

²¹⁸ See for example www.idlescreenings.com.

²¹⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy and Peter Connor, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

²²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Inc., 1977), 205–206.

²²¹ See www.offtime.co.

the first place—it is, not unlike the early ARPANET, resilient. Applying Belgian philosopher Isabelle Stengers' plea for "slow science" to the field of arts and culture in her article *For Slow Institutions*, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez notes that resilient thinking "focuses on the diversity of practical solutions for a specific locality, and on the cooperation and creativity of everyone involved in a community or society. [It] looks at the critical and dystopian near future; unable to anticipate or postpone it, it can only react by adapting to it."²²²

Industrialization, urbanization and the technisation of life have created and perpetuated the seemingly insignificant notion of the every day, "when everything—money, work hours, miles, calories, minutes—became calculated and calculable, and when objects, people and the relations between them changed under the onslaught of such quantification."²²³ As Bernard Stiegler writes in *Relational Ecology and the Digital Pharmakon*, "the support of social

time, is ceaselessly rerun, re-commenced, reformed, deformed and transformed by the individuals who retemporalise it,²²⁴ the everyday action of engaged thinking can thus result in a more true sense of sharing. Thinking becomes the site of critique wherein individuals can formulate questions and propel action, not in the sense of reactionary short term solutions, but rather actions that can endure with collective support. As Aruna D'Souza writes of the #MeToo movement shortcomings, "here, at the beginning of this moment of heightened recognition, the artworld has the opportunity to stop operating purely reactively, and instead imagine new ways of being and doing, in order to recreate our professional spaces."²²⁵ In her writing on Henri Lefebvre's notion of the quotidian, Kristen Ross reminds that "[...] to formulate the quotidian as a concept, to wrench it from the continuum in this it is embedded (or better yet, the continuum that it is), to expose it, examine it, give it a history, is already to

critique it. And to critique it is to wish for and work toward change, transformation, revolution in the very nature of advanced capital society."²²⁶ The opportunity to recreate our professional spaces is as it has always been: *now*.

As more and more users spend more and more of their time online, for most Americans the total exceeding ten hours a day, while attention span decreases, and content, rather than knowledge colonizes and circulates spasmodically in the form 30 second video clips, GIFS,²²⁷ and 1000 character articles, what can true sharing actually come to look like? How might smaller institutions, those without grandiose amounts of funding, utilize the currency of time in praxis? How can the professionalized position of care, that of the curator who acts like a link, utilize the same digital technologies and types of platforms toward different goals and perhaps unlink us from what necessitated such resistance to begin with?

222 Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, "For Slow Institutions," October 2017, accessed March 24, 2018, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/155520/for-slow-institutions/>.

223 Kristin Ross, "French Quotidian," in *The Art of the Everyday: The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture*, ed. Lynn Gumpert (New York, NY: New York Uni. Press, 1997), 21.

224 Bernard Stiegler, "Relational Ecology and the Digital Pharmakon," *Culture Machine* 13 (2013): 3-4, www.culturemachine.net.

225 Aruna D'Souza, "Worst-Case Scenarios: Contemporary Art's #Metoo Handwringing," *Momus*, March 22, 2018, accessed March 26, 2018, <http://momus.ca/worst-case-scenarios-contemporary-arts-metoo-handwringing/>.

226 Kristin Ross, "French Quotidian," in *The Art of the Everyday: The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture*, ed. Lynn Gumpert (New York, NY: New York Uni. Press, 1997), 19-20.

227 See for example www.ani-gif.com.



*NSA-Tapped Undersea Cables,
North Pacific Ocean, 2016*
Photograph by Trevor
Paglen.

4

[illegible]

SUCCESS (IN PROGRESS)

Isn't it odd that museums—one of society's principal institutions dedicated to culture—do not measure their success or impacts in cultural terms? Attendance, revenue, objects accessioned, exhibits mounted, and publications published are some of the measures that museums use to assess their operations. But, it can be argued, none of these are cultural indicators. They do not reflect on the cultural needs, opportunities, or well-being of the community. Nor do they offer insights into the cultural impacts of museum operations on individuals. What these measures do offer is some insight into the activity of museums as institutions—as nonprofit, corporate entities.²²⁸

An understanding of the way that success is currently quantified by existing institutions that claim to seek social and political change can reveal how a different set of priorities might better serve the same goal. Museums, galleries, or other art institutions, despite their abundance of glass doors and skylights, are upheld by bricks of bureaucracy and cemented in place by capitalist driven markers of success, yet in *Measuring Museum Impact and Performance: Theory and Practice*, John Jacobsen admits: “The field still lacks an accepted way to measure impact.”²²⁹ While traditional modes of

analysing success through the lenses of attendance, revenue and review are certainly not enough to qualify the effects of reception on communities, it is virtually impossible to assess the impact of cultural institutions without the use of tangible measurements, namely numbers and statistical data. In 2004, Maxwell L. Anderson published *Metrics of Success in Art Museums*, an article in which he intended to delineate tangible methods that can be used to consider a museum's “success” internally.²³⁰ Within the confines of the 20 page article, Anderson expands upon each section with proposed methods for respective quantification through the use of surveys, ranking, demographics, and of course, numerical data. These methods can then be used to translate the attendance and participation of the audience, often unbeknownst to them, into information—as knowledge deemed necessary for the advancement of the institution rather than the public. The resulting data is used internally to inform future planning, expansions or closures, employment oppor-

tunities, and the programming of content. But is this information made available to the public which provided it?

While some museums, the ICA in Boston for example, do make this information available in either dedicated publications for visitors at their localities or as a download friendly PDF on their websites, this aggregate fiscal data is also often compiled and translated into colorful infographics later published by a number of art world publications that break down annual spending and chart trends throughout a specific period.²³¹ These cheery infographics are simply visualizations of data, and are posited as methods for advancing institutional agendas in a gesture akin to pseudo-sharing, made public to attract both private and public sponsorships, to justify spending habits as they pertain to economic and professional growth, and to assert their improvement of critical thinking skills, histori-

cal empathy, and tolerance.²³² According to several accredited museum “Core Mission” statements, most museums strive to serve the public through several means which include but are not limited to the collecting, preserving, researching and interpreting of objects, living specimens and historical records, providing many social services, language, job training programs, and programs that cater to low-income families and veterans.²³³ While museums and major cultural institutions have certainly been the sites of educational initiatives, community programs, and very particular expressions of historical narratives, it is far too often that they function as spaces for capital exchange rather than cultural or community exchange—accepting corporate sponsorships is standard practice, exhibiting only that which will draw crowds (sales) the norm, and diluting controversy to preserve the guise of sophistication, are the museum PR

228 Douglas Worts, “Measuring Museum Meaning: A Critical Assessment Framework,” *Journal of Museum Education* 31, no. 1 (2006).

229 Dan Weiss, “What Makes a Museum Successful?” Yale Insights, August 3, 2016, accessed January 27, 2018, <https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/what-makes-museum-successful>.

230 Maxwell L. Anderson, *Metrics of Success in Art Museums* (The Getty Leadership Institute, J. Paul Getty Trust, 2004).

231 “Art Museums By the Numbers 2016,” Association of Art Museum Directors, January 9, 2017, accessed January 27, 2018, <https://aamd.org/our-members/from-the-field/art-museums-by-the-numbers-2016>.

232 “Museum Facts,” American Alliance of Museums, 2013, accessed January 27, 2018, <http://www.aam-us.org/about-museums/museum-facts>.

233 Ibid.

team's daily struggle.²³⁴

In the museum-as-factory, something continues to be produced. Installation, planning, carpentry, viewing, discussing, maintenance, betting on rising values, and networking alternate in cycles. An art space is a factory, which is simultaneously a supermarket—a casino and a place of worship whose reproductive work is performed by cleaning ladies and cell-phone-video bloggers alike.²³⁵

Here in the museum-as-factory, exhibitions are like canned products stacking on supermarket shelves, neatly stored, preserved, hermetically sealed to avoid rot, leakage, or tampering—evidence rather than artwork, storage rather than exhibition. Culture is kept secret, or kept safe, from culture itself. Recently, two new white curators have been hired by the Brooklyn Museum to oversee the African Art and Photography department, and in response, Assistant Professor of History of Art at Cornell University, Ananda Cohen-Aponte, started a Twitter thread (#POCarthistory) not to disparage their visible qualifications, but to highlight a

general lack of diversity in the arts as it pertains to representation.

With so many employees, questionable funding from both public and private sources which are often kept private, it is no surprise that museums are often compared to corporations, wherein accountability is dispersed across so many actors that any blame might never reach the right ears, let alone be addressed. The question “*Who cares?*” resounds here in different tone like that of a war cry in the museum-cum-battlefield.²³⁶ In exchange for attendance and ticket sales revenue, visitors can come to expect a return on investment, but much like an algorithm which can only work with pre-existing data rather than invent it, these methods of measurement contribute to reproduction of much of the same, and often penalize those who push against those limits,²³⁷ like Olga Viso of the Walker Art Center, Helen Molesworth of LA MOCA, and

María Inés Rodríguez of the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux, for their brazen attempts to politicize narratives. Instead, the museum has become a selfie factory that invites you to do their social media marketing for them.²³⁸

Museums celebrate their success to the tune of a Spotify playlist on repeat as audiences are exposed time and time again to the things they have already expressed interest in based on the options offered, and often without being presented the opportunity for an alternative approach; anything else it seems is too expensive to risk. The transmission of information in this institutional context resembles that of Web 1.0; static, proprietary and delivered from the top down, a position that claims to serve the public from above, rather than from within. How can one claim to approach a truth from above

when to practice parrhesia is to speak honestly from a visible vulnerability, from below, and thus bring forth a sort of radical and meaningful care of the self with others?²³⁹ Those who have turned to the Web to exhibit or publish are certainly faced with their own sets of problems, as Harun Farocki explored in his 2009 series *Serious Games*, the online is also a battlefield. It is not without its own set of regulations concerning limitations,²⁴⁰ content,²⁴¹ productivity,²⁴² accessibility,²⁴³ and accountability.²⁴⁴ In response, many working online have chosen to base their strategies of resistance on the ideas of transparency, critique,²⁴⁵ and concern²⁴⁶ in an attempt to address and embody the qualities they feel serve a middle rather than a side.

Curatorial and artistic research, now more easily conducted through the use of social media platforms, net-

234 For example, The Frick Collection in New York is the gift of a man who ordered his security guards to shoot on strikers; Brown University in Rhode Island was founded by a man who made his money in the slave trade; the Rhodes scholarships bear the name of an imperialist; TATE London and the National Portrait Gallery accept funding from the major oil corporation BP; Boeing sponsored the Afghanistan Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum.

235 Hito Steyerl, “Is a Museum a Factory?,” in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Sternberg Press, 2012) 35.

236 See Hito Steyerl’s 2012 video lecture *Is the Museum a Battlefield*, which was first shown at 13th Istanbul Biennial.

237 Christopher Knight, “MOCA Fires Its Chief Curator,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 13, 2018, accessed March 14, 2018, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-moca-fires-molesworth-vergne-20180313-story.html>.

238 Arielle Pades, “The Rise of the Made-for-Instagram Museum,” *Wired*, September 27, 2017, accessed March 24, 2018, <https://www.wired.com/story/selfie-factories-instagram-museum/>.

239 Foucault, “The Meaning and Evolution of the Word Parrhesia,” 2017.

240 See for example the “New New Wight Gallery” www.dma.ucla.edu/exhibitions/newnewwight/thegalleryisnaked.

241 See for example www.oneacre.online.

242 See for example www.raum.pt.

243 See for example www.fluidity.online.

244 Aint-Bad Magazine, an online and offline independent publisher, recently issued a public acknowledgement of their involvement in perpetuating the conditions of gender-inequality that they seek to address alongside an apology, a refund to all those who entered their latest Open Call, and have postponed their following issue in order to best assess how they might progress, if at all.

245 See for example www.bodyanxiety.com.

246 See for example www.feltzine.us.

working sites, e-mail exchanges and long distance calls,²⁴⁷ can be used to replicate or reinforce existing conditions, i.e. more of the same, but can also provoke necessary conversations about the politics of inclusivity and visibility of marginalized histories within institutional walls. While in no way providing a complete replacement for human interaction, digital technology has certainly strengthened and enabled contact and connection across geographic locations in ways that were previously unthinkable.²⁴⁸ Although the Internet has energized activism, often called click-tivism, “the context of political disaffection, increasing political manipulation at the centre, an unaccountable global order and the weakening of electoral power, the internet has not revitalized democracy.”²⁴⁹ In 2011, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 80% of Internet traffic to news and information sites was concentrated at the top of 7% of sites, a majority of which (67%) were controlled

by organizations whose power predated the pre-Internet era, meaning that the opposite was true: the hegemony had simply extended across technologies.²⁵⁰ The success of monopolies is, at one level, because of the weakness of their opponents, and while it is a challenge to both withstand and compete with prevailing methods of information dissemination and easy to digest viral content, it is nonetheless a worthwhile fight when considering the snowball effect of local or smaller movements.²⁵¹

R E T H I N K I N G S U C C E S S A S S L O W N E S S

Contemporary art thus not only reflects, but actively intervenes in the transition toward a new post Cold War world order. It is a major player in unevenly advancing semiocapitalism wherever T-Mobile plants its flag. It is involved in mining for raw materials for dual-core processors. It pollutes, gentrifies, and ravishes. It seduces and consumes, then suddenly walks off, breaking your heart. From the deserts of Mongolia to the high plains of Peru, contemporary art is everywhere. And when it is finally dragged into Gagosian dripping from head to toe with blood and dirt, it triggers off rounds and rounds

of rapturous applause.²⁵²

How to avoid contemporary art heartbreak? *Only fools rush in.* The clock of industrial capitalism continues to quantify time down to the tick, the ticks now multiplied and visually represented in Apple’s World Clock application, but time in the information age of the networked world flows. Although I have frequently referred to notions of speed and acceleration when speaking about digital technologies and exhibition practices, in the case of ‘slowing down the Internet,’ slowness is not the inverse of acceleration as it still too implies progress—it does not refer to the speed at which digital content is received or disseminated and requires clarification. Rather than a rate, slowness is a method, and it can be understood as a curatorial gesture that “intentionally and directly connects to context and specifically notions of the local, employs relational and collaborative processes, and reaches out to diverse communities.”²⁵³ Here, ‘slow down the Internet,’ does not call for an intentional tangling of submarine cables,

nor a reversion to dial-up, nor does it require deleting social applications (using a VPN, Tor browser, turning off your Location Services and disabling Platform in your Facebook settings however is not a bad idea), instead the phrase reflects the endangered potential of the increasingly ubiquitous technology to communicate, to share and to foster deeper connections across networks of ideas and people.

Slow curating, as Megan Johnson has described, “includes a meaningful and deep understanding of one’s immediate context, working with local experts to learn the cultural politics, the poetics of place, and to investigate issues conscious and unconscious that affect everyday lives.”²⁵⁴ The turn to durational approaches in artistic or curatorial practice which extend the period of being together, does not come as a singular solution to address the contradictions in the reception of art as an exclusive event as the significance of duration does not lie “in a single extended project, but rather in the

247 See for example www.domain-gallery.net.

248 See for example www.timesupnow.com.

249 Curran, Fenton, and Freedman, 17.

250 Russell Heimlich, “Internet Gains on Television as Public’s Main News Source,” Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, January 04, 2011, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.people-press.org/2011/01/04/internet-gains-on-television-as-publics-main-news-source/>.

251 See for example www.seeclickfix.com, www.sunlightfoundation.com, www.opensecrets.org, www.change.org, and the use of hashtags such as #Ferguson, #WakeupAkhilesh, or #MeToo.

252 Hito Steyerl, “Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Post-Democracy,” in *The Wretched of the Screen* (Sternberg Press, 2012).

253 Megan Johnston, “Slow Curating: Re-thinking and Extending Socially Engaged Art in the Context of Northern Ireland,” *On Curating: After the turn: art education beyond the museum*, no. 24 (December 2014): 26.

254 Ibid.

relationship between projects in place across time.”²⁵⁵ When slowness is used as a method in curatorial practice, a multiplicity of interrelations is both made and subsequently opened to the possibility of being re-made, both in terms of materiality and spatiality and through temporality. Online, where digital media is quickly consumed, accessed alongside other browsers or tabs, and vying for attention with a users more immediate surroundings, enacting such a sense of slowness certainly poses a challenge, and has hence spurred a pedagogic turn in artistic and curatorial practice that seeks a target for the unpaid and misguided attention we should be paying. Socially based projects that sustain commitment have been expressed in alternative approaches to education, legislation, or markets, such as in Jakob Jakobsen and Henrietta Heise’s Copenhagen Free University, Pablo Helguera’s *The School of Panamerican Unrest*, or Rirkrit Tiravanija’s *Untitled (Free/Still)*, in an effort to resist the consumable moment, but these projects and others are not impervious to the struc-

tural demands of the market, and eventually must, to some extent, concede to survive.

From the 1960s, durational approaches in artistic and curatorial practice, as in the works of John Cage, Tehching Hsieh, Marina Abramovic, Santiago Sierra and Tino Sehgal, have sought to intervene in industrial capitalism’s disciplined and regimented imposition of time by ‘wasting’ it, extending it, exposing it and laying it bare. Rather than as a line or like the Snake that avoids its elongated tail, as Adrian Heathfield notes, such “durational aesthetics give access to other temporalities: to times that will not submit to Western culture’s linear, progressive meta- narratives, its orders of commodification; to the times of excluded or marginalized identities and lives; to times as they are felt in diverse bodies. Time, then, as plenitude: heterogeneous, informal, and multi-faceted.”²⁵⁶ While artists have long explored engagement as a medium, what about curatorial and exhibition practices that seem to do the inverse and continue to speed through the pre-planned calendar year? Jenny Jaskey, director and curator of

The Artist’s Institute, suggests where we might begin to speed toward instead

Might we pay attention to the structural inequalities that persist for women artists, artists of colour and artists without financial means? If that’s a priority, then curating won’t necessarily consist of paying attention to the latest name whizzing through the existing circuits of value production. Might we pay attention to the precarious conditions that often accompany making art, thoughtful criticism and experimental exhibitions? If that’s a priority then, as institutions, we must justly, even generously, compensate the artists and thinkers we work with and serve.²⁵⁷

While museums and institutions continue to expand their physical forms, they do so while simultaneously forgetting to expand the variety of histories, narratives, and perspectives of those outside their walls. As square footage pricing rises worldwide and is increasingly privatized, websites and independently designed apps and platforms remain a comparatively more affordable, cost-effective and accessible space which may not function to solve, undo, or otherwise patch omissions within institutional narratives, but do build networks of support and solidarity amongst those who find community within them without necessitating a premium which

immediately excludes entire populations of potential digital citizens. As Raluca Voinea, director of Tranzit.ro, a network of independent contemporary art initiatives operating in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, stated of the organization’s approach, “organic processes, learning from doing, recycling and adapting from one project to the next, developing long-term relationships, learning to be patient and to appreciate long durations, seeing a space grow in time, together with a community, enlarging this community by expanding the fields of knowledge rather than forcing everyone to embrace the same models—these are things that are working.”²⁵⁸ This approach to slowness still builds, it allows institutions to grow, to develop, it is still productive, but it does so with respect to those that comprise its community; rather than the hierarchical stacking of a new building development, it spreads organically, still with a center as it cannot avoid structure, but its peripheries are just as valuable as the middle.

255 Paul O’Neill and Claire Doherty, eds., *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011), 11.

256 Adrian Heathfield and Tehching Hsieh, *Out of Now: The Lifeworks of Tehching Hsieh* (London: Live Art Development Agency and The MIT Press, 2009), 23.

257 Anthony Huberman, “Pay Attention,” *Frieze*, June 1, 2015, accessed February 20, 2018, <https://frieze.com/article/pay-attention>.

258 Adriana Ledecouvreux, “Tranzit.ro,” *Temporary Art Review*, April 06, 2017, accessed March 22, 2018, <http://temporaryartreview.com/tranzit-ro/>.

CASE STUDIES:
As I explore in the following three case studies, while no one method can be used to exemplify curatorial strategies that embody slowness, a combination of approaches have been used by these institutions to address the notion of quantifying such parameters of success itself in order to offer a more engaged experience to citizens, not users. Addressing distinct aspects of slow curating, projects like Triple Canopy, dis.art, and Monoskop have used the Web as a platform for artistic, curatorial, and exhibition making practice and research in distinct ways; online publisher Triple Canopy addresses critical thinking in the digital world, particularly the ways in which literature and multimedia artwork are consumed. dis.art, a new moving image platform, attempts to dispel the notion that the media most frequently accessed or viral digital content like videos and humorous images in the forms of memes and GIFS need to be not only quick but shallow in order to survive the forces of circulation, and Monoskop, a digital library for arts and humanities, does not produce or commission new content, but categorically organizes historical material online in a way that addresses the ways in which

linear presentations of information are unfit for the inherent subjectivity of any chronicaled or documented narrative of the past. I have chosen to look at these specific examples in order to explore the diversity of ways in which exhibiting takes shape online, and how the curatorial act of caretaking has been contextualised according to intention, community, and medium. These particular institutions, while they are also subject to economic demands in the way that aforementioned large scale museums are, have been selected as my focal points because of their considered approaches to a more authentic notion of sharing that are ultimately remunerative, but are not intrinsically pecuniary. I have chosen to look at the work done by Triple Canopy, dis.art, and Monoskop to see how they have attempted to rethink digital technology's potential for connection, despite the relentless socio-economic stipulations, unrealistic professional expectations that surround the fields of art and cultural production, and the impediments inherent in utilizing the Web as a platform for distribution.

TRIPLE CANOPY
ON TRANSPARENCY
It is important to note that prior to the publishing practices popularised on the Internet, artists or authors were often known locally before they could gain global notoriety. Online however, the reverse is the standard and virtual content begins in a state of general global accessibility and returns to local contextualization.²⁵⁹ Groys' *In the Flow* reminds that "to be able to survive in the contemporary culture one also has to draw the attention of the local, offline audience to one's global exposure—to become not only globally present but also locally familiar."²⁶⁰ Creative expression is often perceived as an individual experience, practised in a time of seclusion and away from the gaze of others, but online, the algorithmic stare is in a state of ever and over-gazing, and digital artwork or published material is no longer fixed but in flux; the process itself becomes a not only a documentation of the artwork, but its source of

sustenance. It is no secret that every Web user is being surveilled, their data ceaselessly mined and collected across platforms, processed by analytical software, subsequently sold, and converted into targeted advertising content.²⁶¹ How can, or should, this mass amount of data be utilized in the context of contemporary art exhibited online? For their exhibition *Black Transparency - The Right To Know In The Age Of Mass Surveillance*, Amsterdam based research and design collective Metahaven noted that the "visualisation of 'transparency' also raises questions about identity, representation, and the role of the design discipline(s) itself. The Internet as a superstructure of creation, transmission, and imitation, means designers are not only capable of creating a message but also play an important role in catalysing political and social change."²⁶² Exhibiting or publishing on the Web, by virtue of exhibiting itself as exposing to view, implies a degree of transparency in the sense of accessibility. Prior to addressing another aspect of transparency, visibility, I

²⁵⁹ Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London, UK: Verso, 2016), 179.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, 178.

²⁶¹ Taylor, 31-32.

²⁶² Metahaven, *Black Transparency-The Right To Know In The Age Of Mass Surveillance*, Bureau Europa, March 2013, accessed March 13, 2018, https://www.bureau-europa.nl/en/manifestations/black_transparency_the_right_to_know_in_the_age_of_mass_surveillance/.

propose to first approach transparency in the sense of exposing the inner workings of digital technology and its systems of control, and how the articulation of this information can be more explicitly communicated as a publishers subjective position.

Backend developers, Web designers, and curators of digital exhibition spaces have access to the Web analytics and statistics of their sites or platforms when logging into their administration pages. Logging in to my own domain, which is hosted by Squarespace, I can toggle through to the “Analytics” page to reveal my “stats,” which are represented in minimally designed graphs and charts. Squarespace shows me who (each unique IP address) is viewing my site, where (highlighting geographic pinpoints on a world map) they are viewing it from, on what device (mobile, desktop, or tablet), how they arrived (directly, or through Google, Instagram, Facebook, Other), the browser they are using (Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, etc.) the operating system on their device (Android, Windows, iOS, or OS X), it even shows me the exact time and date each user accesses my

site, and how they navigate through my content, organized across several pages, before they eventually close the tab. Squarespace claims that “While metrics are critical for tracking and testing the performance of our business, they are merely a reflection of our ideas and execution in the market. Our values and ideals are our decision making guide.”²⁶³ If I were to rely only on the information provided by such analytical data, which reduces my site visitors into their respective IP addresses, I would fall into the same pseudo-sharing trap of the museum who interprets their success only through attendance and ticket sale revenue, and responds accordingly to attract more of the same. This collected data speaks to particular aspects of my site audience, but it does not reveal anything about an individual’s reasons for navigating my exhibited content in a manner that is distinctly their own. Such statistics are thus not the penultimate mode for understanding cultural or communal impact; the data collected by hosts and server sites is also kept hidden from viewers, often relinquished to a back-end cellar crowded with rows and rows of custom

CSS and HTML code. Few sites on the Web readily release this information publicly perhaps because a jumble of numbers might be considered uninteresting to the average user, deter engagement because of the reminder of ever present surveillance, and because it is simply uncouth in terms of presentation as minimalist Web design is the current prevailing trend.²⁶⁴

The numbers remain numbers, until they become meaning. That meaning, I argue, to follow Nancy’s understanding, comes from engaging with the data from an informed critical distance, distinguishing data from knowledge. In order to begin to approach a genuine democratisation, as Luke Goode notes,

It would be dangerous to overlook those agencies which, whilst not accruing any direct political power, nevertheless influence the political process. Whatever ‘public interest’ credentials accrue, for example, to a media institution or campaign group, such organisations cannot legitimately stand aloof from the obligations of critical publicity. In other words, institutions that claim to be institutions of the public sphere must, themselves, be opened up to the critical scrutiny of a wider public sphere.²⁶⁵

Transparency as a principle, when making such information not only publicly available but publicly interpreted, can lead to accountability on the side of the publisher and can serve to foster greater levels of trust between institutions and individuals, which in turn impact the results of collaborations.²⁶⁶

CANOPYCANOPYCANOPY

Triple Canopy is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization manifested as an online magazine that was launched in 2007 and which is currently based in New York with satellites in Berlin and Los Angeles. It fittingly appropriates its name from Triple Canopy Inc., the security contractor working with federal governments in Iraq and Afghanistan founded by US Army Special Forces in 2003, “presumably to profit from the free-market outsourcing of the Bush-Cheney administration.”²⁶⁷ Officially, the magazine is CanopyCanopyCanopy Inc., already alluding to their interest in the power of

²⁶⁴ See for example www.brutalistwebsites.com.

²⁶⁵ Luke Goode, Jürgen Habermas: *Democracy and the Public Sphere* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 26.

²⁶⁶ Michael Johnston, publication, Department of Political Science, Colgate University, 2016, accessed March 10, 2018, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un/unpan0>.

²⁶⁷ Alexander Provan, ed., *The Binder and the Server* (New York, NY: Canopy Canopy Canopy, 2012), 10.

²⁶³ See www.squarespace.com.

repetition. With strategic Web development skills they have advanced a model for online publishing that encompasses digital works of art and literature, public conversations, exhibitions, and books.

Triple Canopy's transition from print to Web begs the question, is paper is better than digital? Despite the fact that decades have passed since the digital revolution and many schools have already implemented devices into classroom settings, no major research has proved a definitive answer to the question, although some reports have shown that when reading something more than 500 words or more than a page of a book or screen, comprehension will likely decrease when using a digital device. Digital mediums have influenced the perception that the ease and speed of delivery of information through devices have increased understanding, but this remains an illusion due in part to the physical and mental demands for reading on a screen: the need for scrolling, the reflective glare, and the different levels of concentration characterized by browsing

or multitasking that have been normalized in such environments.²⁶⁸ However, while linear reading might lend itself to narrative or fictional work, researchers have also argued that such formats might not be suitable for academic or scientific texts. As Dutch scholar Joost Kircz reminds "Not all information is linear or even layered. There's a lot of information that's spherical. You cannot stack it up. The question is to what extent can we mimic human understanding?"²⁶⁹ Digital publishing systems that incorporate video, images, and hypertextual or linked additional information alongside their texts might thus better serve not only a plurality of reading interests and abilities, but might also enable a greater level of engagement with information.

Aware of these discrepancies in memory and information retention across mediums, Triple Canopy utilises the aesthetics and experience of traditional print media—their webpage and reading platform mimics a classic book with its off white background and stark black text—in order to contextualize Web specific content.

Working closely with artists, writers, technologists, and designers, Triple Canopy aims to produce projects that demand considered reading and viewing.²⁷⁰ Their platform model hinges on the development of digital publishing systems that incorporate networked forms of production and circulation to achieve greater distribution, all the while retaining many of the benefits afforded by printed matter such as the gestures of page flipping and the ability to bookmark. In an interview published by The New Yorker, they noted their desire to "collapse the old model of the print publishing industry, with its assembly-line approach and its walls between author, designer, publisher, and distributor."²⁷¹ Achieving this synthesis however, was no easy feat, and was a process of trial and error, evolving through their careful interpretation of analytical and statistical data collected from the users that accessed their platform. Triple Canopy sought to identify their viewers not solely as numbers or IP addresses, and themselves not only as producers, but rather addressing both

positions ultimately as readers. In the case of Triple Canopy, rather than simply publish the raw data, their collected information about their readers is interpreted through the lenses and discourses of many fields in the forms of their "Issues" and "Series" with respect to individual subjectivity, and if possible, ultimately made available beyond their webpage, often extending into printed matter or as an embodied exhibition, lecture or seminar in physical space. Their collection of "Series," which gather contributions based on a single theme or topic, such as *Universal Time*, *Passage of a Rumor*, or *Did You Get the L?* compile the work of artists, writers, and researchers "who trace histories that are obscured, partially erased, or seemingly unassimilable" and bring to the foreground the forgotten, against the "authoritative sources that speak of consequential institutions and figures," and "whose consciousnesses are more easily relatable to those with power."²⁷² Triple Canopy seeks to recover lives that have been lost, and tell stories that have

268 Joost Kircz and Adriaan Van Der Weel, *The Unbound Book* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

269 Claudia Wallis, "A Textbook Dilemma: Digital or Paper?" The Hechinger Report, August 23, 2017, accessed March 19, 2018, <http://hechingerreport.org/textbook-dilemma-digital-paper/>.

270 "About," Triple Canopy, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/about>.

271 Sasha Frere-Jones, "Triple Canopy: 'Slowing Down the Internet'," The New Yorker, June 17, 2012, accessed March 26, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/triple-canopy-slowing-down-the-internet>.

272 See www.canopycanopycanopy.com/series/active-recollections.

not, and perhaps cannot, be told. Their series remain active and open, and contributions to each topic can be presented in their entirety, or otherwise altered over time with additional artworks or literature. As seen in series such as *Did You Get the L?*, *The Page and the Screen*, and *Media Studies*, a recurring theme of the collections is a reflection on Triple Canopy's transition from a traditional print publication to an online publisher through an assemblage of writing and deliberations that attempt to, in their own words,

rethink publication amidst the inevitable churn of novelty and anachronism that characterize the "digital age," as the distinction between experience online and IRL narrows. [The series "The Page and the Screen"] includes media excavations and Web 1.0 reminiscences, software experiments and samizdat scholarship, as well as polemical writings by the editors—on writing after conceptual art, on syntaxes of verse and GIF, and on publishing after the shift from disciplinary to tech-enabled control societies.²⁷³

They have published a number of books, most notably *The Binder and the Server*, articles, and interviews with the likes of The New York Times, Harper's Bazaar, Financial Times, BookForum, and The Stranger, that chart their progress, pitfalls and

ongoing transitioning from offline to online and recount the problems inherent in analysing data and developing new platforms for the distribution of their content. Creative Director Caleb Waldorff and Senior Web Developer Adam Florin created the original platform which mimicked the gesture of turning pages in a book, a horizontal movement that pushed against the Web's vertical scrolling default. Upon reviewing the ways in which viewers navigated their content according to time spent on each page, browsers or devices used, etc., they addressed numerous platform bugs and malfunctions, and a standard protocol was subsequently enacted to ensure consistency. In *The Binder and the Server*, Triple Canopy states "However much we wanted Triple Canopy's platform to counteract the entrenched reading habits of the Internet, we also wanted first-time users to understand intuitively how to engage with our content,"²⁷⁴ noting that for an online publication, unlike their spatially confined printed counterparts, distribution, production, and learning together were continuous, and still ongoing, processes. Their

approach to slowing down the Internet "it turns out, isn't an oppositional stance, but a continually negotiated one."²⁷⁵

This sustained inquiry is their marker of distinction; extraordinarily chronicled with a propensity for detail, Triple Canopy's approach to transparency is one to be heralded for its deeply invested attempt to make sense of the numbers by contextualizing them both online and off. TC is also a part of Common Practice, an advocacy group that fosters research and discussions about the role of small-scale arts organizations in New York City, their main topics of focus being: "sustainability not at the expense of quality; long-term relationships with artists and publics; less compromised access to artwork; and horizontal networks and collaboration."²⁷⁶

As another digital publication, the trend forecasting K-hole, reminds in their first issue, a report on visibility, "saying who you aren't is just as important as saying who you are."²⁷⁷ The medium, for Triple Canopy, was not then

simply the message,²⁷⁸ but it was the tedium.²⁷⁹

TOWARD VISIBILITY

David Joselitt, in his 2011 essay *What to Do with Pictures*, conflates the networks that support the images, or artworks that inhabit them with the human body, where in a failure of the circulatory system leads to death; the museum wherein artworks are contained might then be more aptly renamed a cemetery. Museums are often referred to as mausoleums, the final resting place for histories or artworks that are destined to a dust collecting life in a wooden crate in a poorly ventilated basement, rendered inaccessible to the general public. While many institutions are moving toward making the digitized versions of their collections available to the public, through programs such as the Google Cultural Institute which has created 360° views of gallery interiors that allow for an 'ultra experience' of artworks that actually

²⁷³ See www.canopycanopy.com/series/the_page_and_the_screen.

²⁷⁴ Alexander Provan, ed., *The Binder and the Server* (New York, NY: Canopy Canopy Canopy, 2012), 27.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 27.

²⁷⁶ See www.commonpracticenyc.org.

²⁷⁷ Greg Fong et al., "K-Hole #1 FragMOREtation: A Report on Visibility," *K-Hole*, May 2011, accessed March 13, 2018, <http://khole.net/>.

²⁷⁸ The phrase was introduced in Marshall McLuhan's book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964.

²⁷⁹ The 1978 song "The Medium Was Tedium" by the Desperate Bicycles, the lyrics of which say "All I can say to you is this: it was easy/ it was cheap/ go and do it!"

surpasses bodily limitations,²⁸⁰ this can be a tedious process resulting only in unsuccessful translation. Institutions digitizing their collections are often not working with born-digital objects; the objects were not made with the consideration of what they would look like online, so a photograph of a Renaissance painting in a digital database speaks less to the painting than it does to the potential of photography, cameras, editing software, and pixel resolution. While this is an aspect of artwork central in many ways to its conservation, and can be a method for decolonized conservation practices,²⁸¹ it must be approached differently with Web based works that are subject to their own processes of decay, destabilization, and site specificity. While conservators and curators are both working in areas that require distinct expertise and specialization, their work is tightly woven together within the archive in which they often situate their practices. The conservator of new media art must consider artist intention and the transience of both the artworks

and the technology which have been used in the process of production, so preservation in a pure sense here is almost perverse: to position digital works in finitude denies their existence and value, which is maintained and accrued by virtue of its circulation. Careful not to step onto the territory of conservation, how can curators expose their processes as well as artworks on active sites before they are later saved, stored, re-coded, or archived in another location?

Triple Canopy not only publishes online and off, but also hosts various events, seminars, lectures, and began an Arts Education Initiative to address the often unexamined vocabulary, politics, and architecture of cultural literacy in the digital age. Their education initiative, which receives major support from The Brown Foundation, Inc. of Houston as well as from many generous individuals, brings together a variety of expert perspectives in the fields of art, media studies, and Web development to offer “a rigorous, carefully designed curriculum focusing on critical inquiry and interactive learning

in and around digital environments.”²⁸² A major component of their Education Initiative is their Publication Intensive—a two week program that welcomes applicants from the fields of writing, art, literature, art history, new media, and design free of charge to focus on the history and contemporary practice of publication through discussions and workshops—the last iteration of which was held in Los Angeles in January of 2018. Triple Canopy also offers an internship and volunteer program that compensates selected participants with a stipend as well as school credit.

It is important to note that Triple Canopy is certified by W.A.G.E, signaling their commitment to fair compensation for contributors at every level while simultaneously ensuring that each issue of the online magazine is available in its entirety at no cost. As a non-profit, Triple Canopy distributes its digital content free of charge, but welcomes donations and also offers tiered memberships—the Friend, the Contributor, and the Supporter—which serve to support their writers and contributors, each level offering special

discounts on printed publications, free entry to events, or a dedicated acknowledgement on their site, amongst other benefits. With permission, Triple Canopy makes publicly available not only the names of those working directly for the organization, but also its sources of funding, contributors, and supporters, in turn allowing viewers to see and ‘search’ those who financially support them. While TC does not publish the names of every reader or visitor, the disclosure of those who financially support the organization enables a crucial aspect of visibility that counters the approaches of major institutions that continue to accept corporate sponsorships and funding from sources that sway institutional agendas and politics. As Solnit decries, “Democracy depends on public participation, which itself depends on visibility. On purely theoretical grounds, you can argue that invisibility is thereby undemocratic; practically, it is ferociously so, again and again.”²⁸³ Transparency, afforded by digital technologies in this sense calls into question the curatorial function of mediation with respect to accountability in a way that is

280 Brian Droitcour and William S. Smith, “The Digitized Museum,” *Art in America*, September 1, 2016, accessed November 20, 2017, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/the-digitized-museum/>.

281 Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, *Decolonizing Museums*, PDF, L’Internationale Online, 2015.

282 See www.canopycanopycanopy.com/education.

283 Rebecca Solnit, “The Visibility Wars,” in *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 249.

far less likely to appear within institutional frameworks, let alone be implemented.

While still maintaining the authority of decision making in curatorial practice, Triple Canopy's educational initiatives are intended as gestures that invite conversation without positioning their resulting exhibitions or publications as truth or fact, but rather as explicitly subjective and vulnerable perspectives that remain malleable over time. The site becomes a porous space for sustained contemplation, one which invites viewers to engage with a process rather than solely the results of it. Curators who are able to open themselves and their projects for input in such a way that allows for the intersection of interests, roles and content are likely able to address the concerns, and suggestions of their communities by being a part of them, not simply serving them from above. By making this type of multifaceted inquiry available to viewers, the reception of the exhibited artwork or research is considerably enhanced in that it speaks to readers with

divergent interests from an embodied perspective which reveals curatorial and artistic perspectives—questions are more important than answers.²⁸⁴ While this approach may lead to an oversimplification of artistic and curatorial practice, something that might regrettably and unintentionally deter viewers because it can be interpreted as circular or frivolous, it can still be seen as a valuable component for curators working online when considering the educational potential of both their content and processes. This horizontal approach to education becomes a space of learning together rather than a reinforcement of the hierarchical Web 1.0 dynamics of teacher and pupil.

Publishing artworks alongside texts and interviews can also serve to establish the agency of the figure off screen, functioning as a gesture that speaks to a more true sense of sharing in that it is a gift made public through the contributions of those involved who embrace their positions as those characterized by a responsibility to

contextualize, to reflect, and to critically implore.²⁸⁵ As with some early net.art, some visual works may be difficult to understand when taken out of context, and the inclusion of additional multimedia materials may enable a shift away from the idea that to look at art, or anything, online, you must already know how—that you must be already be deemed a digital native. *Dear Future Reader*, a lo-fi video made by Triple Canopy for the 2018 exhibition *Publishing as an Artistic Toolbox: 1989–2017* at Kunsthalle Wien, bleakly imagines a future wherein books have been replaced by biological computers. By sending a kind of extraterrestrial message, Adam Lampert, who is the only figure made visible on screen, attempts to contextualize Triple Canopy's work in the present moment with language that may seem commonplace now, like jpegs and paper, but if history continues to repeat itself, one day won't. He shows the camera pages and pages of paper upon which their website contents have been printed, recalling Paul Soulellis' 2013 *Library of the Printed Web*,²⁸⁶ while explain-

ing that while the contents might be saved and relatively 'accessible' by future devices, the experience of navigating Triple Canopy's archives is not as easily preserved. While specialization is certainly of great value, diverse modes of reception and connection that rely less on elitist or specialized knowledge create a more hospitable space, one which can welcome practitioners and viewers from various economic, social, or educational backgrounds and establish solidarity across publics, those unbeknownst to us, including digital immigrants—and maybe even the non-human, or aliens, but hopefully at the very least, the ghosts that have been violently neglected since time immemorial.

D I S . A R T

END OF THE
LINE(AR) TIMELINE

Social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram automatically refresh upon opening and continuously regenerate with their incessant improved feature, and improved ethics,

284 Ronald D. Vale, "The Value of Asking Questions," *Molecular Biology of the Cell*, March 15, 2013, accessed March 14, 2018, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3596240/>.

285 Brigid Limerick, Tracey Burgess-Limerick, and Margaret Grace, "The politics of interviewing: power relations and accepting the gift," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 9, no. 4 (1996).

286 See www.soulellis.com/projects/library/.

promising updates. Google's Advanced Search allows users to prioritize search results based on how recently they were published, down to the hour. As Robert Hassan and Ronald E. Purser's 2007 aptly titled text *24/7: Time and Temporality in the Network Society* reminds: the Web is open for business 24/7, and this has certainly changed the way audiences have come to expect to receive or access their content; now. Time presents a particular challenge to curators working online on many levels as the works they engage with are often not static objects, and the space wherein those objects are encountered lends itself to accelerated consumption, easy to digest content, and tends to privilege the most recent rather than relevant. As Maria Popova, founder and editor of the website Brain Pickings, has observed, "the dominant way knowledge and information are organized online pushes us toward the already familiar instead of broadening our horizons."²⁸⁷ The priority afforded to chronology has long plagued the dissemination of information, through newsprint, radio, television, and

now online. Just as journalists, reporters and photographers rushed to be first on the scene, as newspapers raced editions toward headlines, digital media naturally followed in their quick footed tracks; content, like baseball caps that boast World Series winners, are pre-made in anticipation of predicted results so as not to miss a moment, or a sale. Spurred by market driven consumption, being first, though not necessarily most accurate or thoroughly researched, has changed the face of culture to one pockmarked by greed, selfishness, and capital. The field of art has decidedly followed suit to an untenable zenith, as gallerist Jose Freire notes his reason to end his participation in art fairs: "It's not only that the art world has become bigger. It has also become faster."²⁸⁸ This model of exhibition making is decidedly unsustainable, and participants should be aware of the dangers of succumbing to such patterns of habit solely to please the neoliberal agenda that prides itself on progress as novelty and innovation. Content, care and culture need not be sacrificed in the name of speed. As Rauning warned

already years ago,

What is needed, [...] are practices that conduct radical social criticism, yet which do not fancy themselves in an imagined distance to institutions; at the same time, practices that are self-critical and yet do not cling to their own involvement, their complicity, their imprisoned existence in the art field, their fixation on institutions and the institution, their own being-institution. Instituent practices that conjoin the advantages of both "generations" of institutional critique, thus exercising both forms of parrhesia, will impel a linking of social criticism, institutional critique and self-criticism. This link will develop, most of all, from the direct and indirect concatenation with political practices and social movements, but without dispensing with artistic competences and strategies, without dispensing with resources of and effects in the art field.²⁸⁹

As seen by the amount of new products that enter the digital market annually and the rate at which images, topical youth serums, data, clothing, information, new gadgets and junk mail are projected onto the public from all angles, haste has already become an unhealthy habit for individuals as well the environment. While habits can certainly generate comfort, they also create dangerous conditions of collective disinterest that can lead to complacency and acceptance, both online and off, as the "distracted person

too can form habits."²⁹⁰ By collecting user data, social media platforms create hyperreal reflections of selfhood and docile digital bodies are exposed time and time again to the interests and habits of their corporeal counterparts, convincing them that to stay the same they need to renew.

Communication not only increases the number and variety of habits, but tends to link them subtly together [...] recognizing that new modes of association will exact a new use of it. Thus, habit is formed in view of possible future changes and does not harden so readily [...] By a seeming paradox, increased power of forming habits means increased susceptibility, sensitiveness, responsiveness.²⁹¹

Habits, a condition of being, cannot be done away with, but can be altered. Online, users are defined by their habits, and the patterns in which they maneuver websites and content are the world of advertising's glimpse into future revenue. Phrases like 'eyeball economy,' or 'attention economy' are used to refer to the ways in which capital is accrued online; advertisers are aware of the the overwhelming amount of information available on the Web, and recurrently choose to deliver content that is unchallenging, quick, and

²⁸⁷ Taylor, 102.

²⁸⁸ Andrew Goldstein, "Team Gallery's Jose Freire on Why He Is Quitting Art Fairs for Good," *Artnet News*, March 06, 2018, accessed March 30, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/market/jose-freire-art-fairs-interview-1235624>.

²⁸⁹ Gerald Raunig, "Instituent Practices," *Eipcp*, 2006, accessed March 22, 2018, http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/raunig/en/base_edit.

²⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2007), 241.

²⁹¹ John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (Dover, 1958), 281.

in the case of viral videos or memes, often vapid, fleeting, and promptly replaced by the following trend that already waits impatiently in the queue.

If users unconsciously retread familiar paths on the Web when seeking information or inspiration, or continue to consume content in the forms of videos, visual jokes, and form their perceptions of political climates from Youtube 'reaction' videos, can the perceived problem of habit and desire for distraction actually be part of the solution in the crisis of critical thinking? Habits can be expanded to reflect user expectations on the platforms and sites they access when looking at or for information; 40% of Internet users abandon websites that take more than three seconds to load and frustration arrives when sites are too cluttered to navigate, or formatted in user unfriendly ways.²⁹² The notion that every second counts has resulted in the rise of minimally designed platforms or web-pages that present attention grabbing content that seeks to shock, disturb, or otherwise placate and tranquilize user reactions; predators preying on

the perceived numbness of digital viewers they have deemed too distracted to notice.

For Benjamin, films were a site wherein collective innervation might occur—should contemporary art thus also seek to appease a trajectory of obsessive virtual routines and be exhibited in formats that mimic the methods used by media companies to deliver consolidated, or curated, information as quickly and as efficiently as possible? How might the same tools that have fostered online habits and the expectation of speed and ease, actually be used to slow things down? As Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook note, "For the audience, the time characteristics of new media art can be confusing because they are based on the mixed metaphors of event, cinema, and video game. For the curator, they are equally confusing, with choices to make between metaphors of means of exhibiting new media art and limited information on time and audience to inform these choices."²⁹³ Exhibitions and artworks which occupy pre-existing social platforms, like Instagram based artist res-

idencies, or those which exist on dedicated URLs,²⁹⁴ have the opportunity to reconfigure traditional modes of operation by subverting the precedents of conventional usage. To present the overlooked possibilities of Web based exhibitions, dis.art for example, does this by speaking the same language as the ad agencies and marketing teams who have usurped the language of digital natives, but instead use it to broadcast a different and more complex message.

DISTORTING AND DISARMING: DISSENT ON DISPLAY

The statistical numbers, those detached from context, can still be a cause for concern for creators and curators of Web centric content who aim to reach particular audiences, such as those who tend to read about or view exhibitions on blogs, follow galleries and institutions on social platforms, or create artwork with digital tools. If video content, for example, is expected to repre-

sent 74% of all internet traffic by the end of 2018,²⁹⁵ then curators can explore the ways in which they can harness and reshape the content transmitted through these preferred mediums for viewing and communicating information. DIS, which began in 2010 under the pretense of a lifestyle and fashion magazine, but not really as either, describe themselves as

a dissection of fashion and commerce which seeks to dissolve conventions, distort realities, disturb ideologies, dismember the establishment, and disrupt the dismal dissemination of fashion discourse that's been distinctly distributed in order to display the disenfranchised as disposable. All is open to discussion. There is no final word.²⁹⁶

In 2018 they launched a new platform, dis.art, that combines critical theory and what they refer to as "edu-tainment" videos.²⁹⁷ Institutional critique, politics, and popular culture collide on screen at 24fps—each presented clip is highly produced, often involving actors and special effects, exploring what happens when new technology meets old ideas. Refashioning topics of contemporary concern, one

292 Sean Work, "Kissmetrics Blog," How Loading Time Affects Your Bottom Line, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://blog.kissmetrics.com/loading-time/>.

293 Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, "Space, Materiality, and the Audience," Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook (2010). Rethinking Curating - Art after New Media, 2010, accessed February 24, 2018, <http://www.immersence.com/>.

294 See for example www.panthermodern.org.

295 "2017 Internet Trends Report," May 31, 2017, accessed February 03, 2018, <http://www.kpcb.com/internet-trends>.

296 Natasha Stagg, "The Path-breaking, Piss-taking Legacy of DIS Magazine," Dazed, February 22, 2018, accessed March 26, 2018, <http://www.dazeddigital.com/art-photography/article/39117/1/dis-magazine-bernadette-corporation-print-video-rip>.

297 Ben Davis, "DIS Magazine, New York's Hippest Art Media Outlet, Is Launching a 'PBS for Gen Z'," Artnet News, December 04, 2017, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/dis-makes-the-pivot-to-video-1158761>.

video, Christopher Kulendran Thomas and Annika Kuhlmann's *60 Million Americans Can't Be Wrong*, opens with a sequence of footage of border walls and fences around the world while an off-screen narrator reminds that nomadism was once the norm. In an attempt to combat the notion that visual media makes for a passive experience, DIS encourages viewers to engage in active thinking by repurposing the method of delivery of its content, and with short videos they manage to communicate facts, news, and knowledge in ways that are aesthetically attractive, comical, and entertaining. Their approach to presenting cartoons, talk shows and documentaries, as a press release for an upcoming exhibition at the De Young Museum notes, "reveals a 'DIS-topian' take on the future of education—decentralized and open access, yet communal and physically connected."²⁹⁸ The launch of the platform uncannily coincides with the President of the United States' solution to the rising death toll of the opioid epidemic, wherein he proposed making "very,

very bad commercials"²⁹⁹ while simultaneously releasing the 2019 budget plan which slashes funding for the National Endowment of the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting—the organizations that support the public television networks and radio stations he might've imagined streaming those commercials on as well as the artists who understand how to produce them.

Relishing in the nostalgia of reruns and box-set DVD's while experimenting with science-fiction CGI, dis.art sits somewhere in the middle, and complicates the notion of the exhibition as an event in several ways not for their extended periods of duration as videos rarely exceed thirty minutes, but rather for their condensation of duration; their episodes can be accessed on different days, alongside an endless array of other open tabs or ongoing external experiences, they can be viewed on mobile devices, paused and returned to. While each video appears to explore a particular genre of television

or media, they are not easily categorized into the systems of organization that one might find on sites such as Netflix or Hulu, ie. "Independent Cinema" or "Nordic Thrillers," and thus present content in a genre non-conforming manner. Each video remains available for a period of thirty days, and while an archive may be formulated and added to the site in the future, it is not yet a feature on the platform as it stands today. In a sense, this evasion of archivability raises a question concerning the reasons for such a decision when lengthy CV's full of exhibitions and events are the receipts, the proof of participation, so frequently used to vouch for one's success and contributions to the field. Instead, each video has an information drop down menu that offers a description of the work, the names of collaborators and producers, and is accompanied by suggested reading or visual material that further supports the work or otherwise as a citation of inspiration.

The lack of an episode archive reminds that perhaps there is no need for one if the topics that dis.art approaches are already in circulation elsewhere; the ideas recycled and bound to repeat themselves in one

form or another like trends in fashion. Perhaps there is also an expectation that a desire to preserve the videos might come from an external source considering DIS' already well founded institutional reception, the working members averaging in age in the their late 30s and already boasting curatorial roles in biennales, several museum exhibitions and frequent appearances in Frieze, ArtNet, The New York Times and many more. These collaborations with institutions and various networks allow DIS to share insights to their practice while also being a part of their practice, further implicating their institutional relationships as fodder for production and consideration.

Similarly, the videos on the dis.art platform explore the possibilities of linking contemporary art and popular culture in television and film, and viewers can learn critical theory from a cooking show, or watch a headless McKenzie Wark speaking about general intellects, or find themselves amongst a circle of children gathered around and looking up at artist Babak Radboy as he poses the question "What is Money?" Episodes are cushioned with commercials that address those in front of the screen as if personally and

²⁹⁸ "Genre-Nonconforming: The DIS Edutainment Network," De Young Museum, March 12, 2018, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://deyoung.famsf.org/exhibitions/genre-nonconforming-dis-edutainment-network>.

²⁹⁹ Ted Johnson, "Trump's Budget Again Proposes Elimination of Public TV, Arts Funding," *Variety*, February 12, 2018, accessed March 30, 2018, <http://variety.com/2018/tv/news/trump-budget-eliminates-pbs-nea-funding-1202695205/>.

return viewer awareness to the current state of the attention economy in a way that both chastises and simultaneously lets you in on a secret. Recognizing the advantages of the medium it operates through,³⁰⁰ albeit in a quirky, ironic and often seething fashion, dis.art attempts to critically reflect on the ways that contemporary society has long sought solace in media propaganda, and lets you know off the bat that this might not be the TV series you imagined playing in the background while you try to zone out after a long day on the job (“dis.art and chill,” as opposed to the phrase “Netflix and chill,” first used by Twitter user “NoFaceNina” in 2009, seems an unlikely pick-up line, but might soon find itself printed on a tote bag and pictured on a street style blog). The interplay of aesthetics, effects, and divergent narratives and characters presented in each segment is forceful and intentioned, seeking to apprehend attention in a way that is both active and passive: a viewer feels involved, yet is always relegated to watching rather than directly contributing to that which plays out on the screen. However, dis.art

speaks to the indirect manner in which individuals contribute to their content; DIS has long been inspired by the patterns of consumerism and trends in art, commerce, fashion, pop culture, etc., and their content is thus derived from a reflection on the larger operative structures of society. In a segment called *Mothers and Daughters*, stand-up comedian Casey Jane Ellison speaks to her unborn baby in a dramatic talk show setting, congealing the contemporary fascination with reality television, the tropes of females-as-mothers narratives in media, the politics of pro-life vs. pro-choice, the prenatal worry of a child’s financial support or success in life, and the inflated egos of individualism, as Casey suggests naming her baby ‘Casey.’ The visual results of the concoction seep back into the offline wherein we’ve grown accustomed and disturbingly comfortable to the exaggerated dramas and re-enactments of Lifetime television, the monotonous recitals of newscasters, and the fairytale ending of every Julia Roberts film that has you thinking she won’t but she always does. The opportunity to create alternative endings

and narratives in media is long overdue. dis.art however, shares what has long been pseudo-shared, and seems to take us into the kairos in a way wherein we as viewers feel comfortable, understood, perhaps even safe, but with just enough risk to gradually and deliberately push the boundaries of what can be done when old dogs are taught new tricks, and new technology confronts old habits.

The potential of the media platform to engage in more inclusive practices of representation than those of the TV and film industries is, for me, the most compelling reason to subscribe to their mailing list, which, like the @dis Instagram account, announces recently added content. Their dedication to a different aspect of visibility in regards to representation has been central to DIS’ approach to creative production since their inception as a magazine or their brand. *disown*, their webstore, features an array of objects from a HBA salad bowl, or a Judith Butler activewear top so that you can perform performativity while performing, and a t-shirt with

a label that reads “Not For Everyone” to be worn inside out and backwards, accompanied by the description “this shirt might not be for everyone, but it’s definitely for you.”³⁰¹ Representation in popular media mimics what one might find in many major cultural institutions: In the United States, females comprised 24% of protagonists featured in the 100 top domestic grossing films of 2017, Black females not necessarily as protagonists comprised 16%, and Latinas and Asian females both comprised a mere 7%.³⁰² In a 1976 paper titled *Living with Television*, researchers George Gerbner and Larry Gross wrote that representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation. Visual media has long contributed to the ways in which we understand our positions in society, or rather the ways in which our positions are imposed upon on us and perceived by others; what is seen on screen becomes the depiction of what is ‘normal,’ and anything else is an unwelcome aberration. dis.art may be a new platform, but

³⁰⁰ Amol Sharma, “Big Media Needs to Embrace Digital Shift-Not Fight It,” *The Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 2016, accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/big-media-needs-to-embrace-digital-shift-not-fight-it-1466568061>.

³⁰¹ See www.disown.dismagazine.com/collections/frontpage/products/not-for-everyone.

³⁰² Martha M. Lauzen, “It’s a Man’s (Celluloid) World: Portrayals of Female Characters in the 100 Top Films of 2017,” *Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film*, June 16, 2016, accessed March 21, 2018, <https://womentvfilm.sdsu.edu/research/>.

this is only another iteration of their ideology manifested in a new medium. Recalling their 2012 video *Watermarked* which parodies the disingenuous representation of pluralism in advertising campaigns, works on the new platform like Aria Dean's *Euology for a Black Mass*, a narrated compilation by Dean herself of sourceless videos that explore "blackness through memes and memes through blackness,"³⁰³ or the series of dress tutorials by Women's History Museum and Jack Scanlan³⁰⁴ that revisit the complex history of women's dress and teach us how to (re) dress, unflinchingly engage with contemporary conflict of consumerism's attempt to diversify by seizing its weapons and turning them into tools. Here diversity and multiplicity are not to be achieved by statistical comparisons, nor are they promised in the next scheduled software update; they are the status quo, the new normal that says 'normal' was never an option to be included on their diversity checklist.

Surely this is all nothing short of ushering in a new wave of artistic propaganda as conversations that might otherwise only be encountered

in extensive academic theses are now presented as entertainment. It's a gesture that says—in the way that evokes The Yes Men's 1999-2002 *Gatt.org*, a website that looked like a legitimate government owned page but which decried human rights and celebrated corporate profit—anything you can do, art can do better, or even further, as damali ayo's 2003 *Rent-a-Negro* website reminds, that only art can do. Employing the dense sarcasm that has characterized their previous projects to subvert society's relationship to media consumption, commercialism, comedic value, and the aestheticization of politics, this new platform might allow users to more consciously connect and process information at their own pace in between virtual and mental clicks. *dis.Art*, a Netflix for the art world, does exactly what its moniker connotes as self-aware jokes expose the melancholy of modern life while criticizing their own position of complicity, reminding that if the field is to be changed there is work to be done, but without any sense of relief or pleasure, a laugh at the very least, we might be rendered too weak to struggle for a tomorrow, let alone a today.

M O N O S K O P

UNPACKING MY DIGITAL LIBRARY

Online exhibition spaces, and digital libraries in particular, have facilitated the circulation of materials, and thus ideas, across spatial and temporal limitations. These electronically dependent archives are transforming the reception of information and its level of accessibility by engaging with various platforms for distribution that extend far beyond the book shop or traditional library. Sites like *aaaaarg.fail*, *Bibliotek*, *UbuWeb*, *Pad.ma*, *Memory of the World*, and so many more, are committed to the circulation and contextualization of their content, often made possible by the collaborative efforts of their users and authors. By asserting the value of individual experience across class, ethnicity, race, status or sex, the idea that "when everyone is a librarian, library is everywhere," aims to restructure the hierarchies of preservation practices in institutional collections, which time and time again privilege the contributions of academics, the educated, or already

canonized authors.

Among many digital archives and libraries, there is one that stands out: Monoskop. A Wikipedia like website that functions as a repository for multimedia content in the form of artworks, literature and publications primarily associated with the fields of art, media studies, and the humanities, Monoskop was originally organized by Dušan Barok in 2004. It takes its name from "the Slovak equivalent of the English 'monoscope', [...] an electric tube used in analogue TV broadcasting to produce images of test cards, station logotypes, error messages but also for calibrating cameras. Monoscopes were automatized television announcers designed to speak to both live and machine audiences about the status of a channel, broadcasting purely phatic messages."³⁰⁵ Think the 1976 film *Network* where protagonist and longtime news anchor Howard Beale just wants you to "get mad."

A visit to the Monoskop landing page shows the site divided into several segments. Moving from left to right, a list of linked topics can lead to the organized con-

³⁰³ See www.dis.art/eulogy-for-a-black-mass.
³⁰⁴ See www.dis.art/e2-ylang-ylang.

³⁰⁵ Annet Dekker, "Copying as a Way to Start Something New: A Conversation with Dušan Barok about Monoskop," in *Lost and Living (In) Archives: Collectively Shaping New Memories* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017) 212.

tent of the site, broken down into categories such as “Art,” “Literature,” “Cities,” “Countries,” etc. that function as the scaffolding for a seemingly endless amount of sub-titles, genres, and sections that both breakdown and multiply into numerous sections, echoing Benjamin’s remark in *Unpacking My Library*, “For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?”³⁰⁶ Below the primary heading, recent changes made on the site are logged, noting the latest entries, as well as a permanent link, archives and backups, a link inventory, and even a site that reveals the page information in a consolidated view of what a back-end developer might see. In the “About Monoskop” section, there is only a short one sentence blurb provided about the project that reads “Monoskop is a wiki for collaborative studies of the arts, media and humanities.”³⁰⁷ Below this however, lies a list of selected lectures, events and talks that Barok has participated in (hyperlinked, of course) as well as writing done about Monoskop, and a presenta-

tion of interviews or reviews that give a better sense to the breadth of Barok’s involvement and personal background through a transcription of communication than a simple blurb might. The center of the page is filled with small scale images representing the site’s recent entries, not in accordance with any particular style of categorization, and which can be clicked on in order to be redirected to an article where most of the content is presented in bullet form and bolstered by additional HTML or PDF formats, recalling Mariela Yeregui’s 1999 *Epithelia*, an exquisite corpse of HTML with Javascript popup windows, pictures, and alerts. The right hand side of the site displays a live Twitter feed, as updates to the archive are posted on both Twitter and Facebook, as well as an option to create an account, which enables users to edit pre-existing entries with the option of having their contribution credited.

Getting lost in this archive is effortless—several hours after accessing Monoskop for the first time, I found myself with hundreds of opened tabs to be bookmarked for a subsequent return. With a

background in library studies, Barok’s manner of presentation on his own platform, which was expanded upon as his final project at the Piet Zwart Institute, follows a categorical indexing of topics or major ideas, and through individual articles expands, by means of hypertextual linking, the sources and citations behind ideas to better contextualise them expansively rather than linearly. While neoliberal progress may privilege novelty and flexibility, it does so by dislodging content from context, thus alienating it from the operative structures which initially enabled it. As Barok notes in an interview with Annet Dekker, his digital library approaches contextualisation

by treating publications as a corpus of texts that can be accessed through an unlimited number of interfaces designed with an understanding of the functionality of databases and an openness to the imagination of the community of users. [...] by creating layers of classification, interlinking bodies of texts through references, creating alternative indexes of persons, things and terms, making full-text search possible, making visual search possible—across the whole of corpus as well as its parts [...] Isn’t this what makes a difference?

Digital (re)production has drastically shifted cult value to exhibition value, and

on the Web, meaning emerges from this circulation. Online, artwork, ideas, texts, etc., are not necessarily tied to their original forms or sources; aura is shattered as things appear in multiple forms and can be seen or accessed as reproductions, low-res scans, PDFs, remixes, memes, mash-ups, links, or copies. Privileging authenticity in this sense would do nothing more than enable exclusivity; books, texts, or artworks, the tangible vessels that have been the instruments used to communicate knowledge, experience, and the imaginary, would exist only in their original versions, relegated to a dust accruing life on a shelf, accessible only to one set of eyes and white gloved hands at a time. It is also important to note that while Monoskop may track itself, it does not track its visitors; there is no record of what has been downloaded or by whom—“we don’t track, we don’t care.”³⁰⁸

Monoskop “makes clear that it is offering content under the fair-use doctrine and that this content is for personal and scholarly use, not commercial use.”³⁰⁹ While copyright laws can be an obstruction to

³⁰⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 2007), 60.

³⁰⁷ See www.monoskop.org/About_Monoskop/.

³⁰⁸ Dekker, 218.

³⁰⁹ Sarah Hamerman, “Cataloging Plunder: Thoughts on the Digital Text-Sharing Underground,” *LIS Theory*, November 20, 2014, accessed March 26, 2018, <http://listtheory.prattsilts.org/cataloging-plunder-thoughts-on-the-digital-text-sharing-underground/>.

publishing certain materials online in certain places, i.e. social platforms that have their own terms of service or restrictions pertaining to infringement, as Aymeric Mansoux, one of Barok's mentors, notes in his essay *How Deep is Your Source?* regarding the techno-legal frameworks of online publishing,

The organization of such communities can effectively help rethink and reinvent the access to culture in the age of distributed infrastructures by opening up the institutional walled gardens of conservation. Museums, art institutions and archives urgently need to look closer at the different models of sharing in which the conservation of content can be globally scaled and accessed publicly while still benefiting from the love and care of a network of dedicated collectors, instead of building a business model around zombified works, exploiting their every possible permutation, and thus replication at a different scale the exploitative cultural dead-end found in the relationship between media industries and copyright.³¹⁰

Those who defend copyright legislation seek to maintain the rights of labour laden property, whether images, artworks, texts, literature, etc. while Internet pirates inversely argue for free access, unlimited usage, and the circulation of information and material in the public domain.

However, despite "being at opposite ends of the spectrum, both of these instances may be construed as operating with assumptions of eternity and timelessness that are ultimately cultural constructs and fantasies."³¹¹ While this particular version of the digital archive, and all others, may not live forever, and those who inhabit it today are confronted with the same reality of impermanence, it is here that the curator walks as if ad infinitum.

THE CRISIS OF CONNECTIVITY: CONTENT

The type of sharing enabled by a multiplicity of large knowledge archives, Trebor Scholz says

[...] can challenge the content hegemony of institutional repositories (i.e. museums) and the selected histories that they offer. [...] Artist contributed archives of cultural data can inspire younger generations by exposing them to artwork that they would not find behind the gates of the museum or gallery. Knowledge, here, is not delivered by authorities but assembled by the user/producer swarm.³¹²

Situated knowledge, contextualized with respect to individual experience denies the claims of relativist perspectives of knowledge that emanate as if from nowhere and everywhere at once.

Barok's manner of exhibiting his partial perspective, the iteration of which is situated in the particular fields of media arts and humanities from the 1860s onward, as Haraway reminds, is the only way to question the foundational myths of traditional objectivity considering that claims for knowledge are an ongoing struggle. His digital library is doubtlessly impressive, and yet it manages to remain an attitude of vulnerability, the "Art" page disclaims,

Admitting a certain power of the concepts of style and movement even today, this page can be seen as an entry point and contextual resource for modern and contemporary art which is not be based primarily on technique, subject matter, material or economic value of works nor on identity of their authors or owners.³¹³

Aware of the powers of corporate surveillance, the legal or designed oriented restrictions of exhibiting or publishing online, we continue to upload ourselves online, still seeking, despite all of these circumstances, connection—as if sharing a struggle might make it easier to bare, overcome, or at the very least, make some sense of. The crisis of connectivity lies precisely in this intention; it marks the separation of actual sharing and pseudo-sharing, which

utilize the same tools and gestures of uploading, clicking, and publishing to achieve distinct results: the former denies the obligation of reciprocity, and the latter embraces and chases the fruits of exchange. We cannot account for how much we owe one another.³¹⁴ True sharing seeks not commodity but community by contributing to the commons; we upload our experiences and shortcomings, log the trajectories of our research, artwork and writing, answer questions on forums and use hashtags in a search for companionship and connection with individuals or groups, all in the hope that generosity will prove more contagious than greed. Such virtual repositories for art and knowledge require spectator participation, collaboration, and intervention in order to function, and do so across across diffused points of research outside the frame of the work itself and outside of a state of simplified full contemplation. Content production has exploded in the age of computation, and all users can be thought of as active or unconscious contributors to the archive, each action subject to recording

310 Aymeric Mansoux, "How Deep is Your Source?" in *Lost and Living (In) Archives: Collectively Shaping New Memories*, ed. Annet Dekker (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017), 97.

311 Thomas Widlok, *Anthropology and the Economy of Sharing* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 176-177.

312 Trebor Scholz, "The Participatory Challenge," in *Curating Immateriality: The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems*, ed. Josia Krysa (Autonomedia, 2006), 196-197.

313 See www.monoskop.org/Art.

314 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013).

and surveillance. As in their 2004 project *How Do You See the Disappeared? A Warm Database*, when Chitra Ganesh and Mariam Ghani, in response to the rise in surveillance in the wake of 9/11, proposed a collection of personal but non-identifiable information of the lived experience of those subjected to political invisibility, a “warm data,” they sought to express the idea that the digital archive is destined always to exclude more than it could ever imagine to contain. File sharing ≠ life sharing; but Eva and Franco Mattes, who for three years made the contents, from e-mails to bank statements, of their home computer accessible to the public, certainly tried to test the possibility until it became too difficult to maintain and was eventually taken offline in 2003 and stored as a static archive.

No matter their intention, however, such digital libraries are archives by default, and as Achille Mbembe notes, “the archive is primarily the product of a

judgement, the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority, which involves placing certain documents in an archive at the same time as others are discarded.”³¹⁵ As Tomislav Medak writes in *The Future After the Library: UbuWeb and Monoskop's Radical Gestures*, “libraries could never close the rift or between the universalist aspirations of knowledge and their institutional compromise. Hence, they could never avoid being the battlefield where their own, and modernity's, ambivalent epistemic and social character was constantly re-examined and ripped asunder.”³¹⁶ Using the Web to scour for resources requires a specialized knowledge compounded with an able body, and at minimum, an initial driving query to engage with a search engines latent inertia, and this “is just the first challenge of the archive.”³¹⁷ This manner of gathering material, producing knowledge, and sifting through credible sources might, at first glance, opens endless opportunities for the querent, but one must know how, what, and

where to search; the way that speaking the same language can allow for deeper connections. The digital archive is still far from being neutral, the curator a far from neutral link, and accessibility here too can be perceived as a wall, towering over an illusion of connection. Renate Holub writes

The production of intellectuality is contingent on a very basic reality, namely the body. That body lives within the 'structure of feeling' of a specific community, the socio-psychic language of which informs a person's imagistic and symbolic referentiality. ... The 'structure of feeling' of one community, and the experiences, assumptions and exclusions underlying it, are not identical with but different from the 'structure of feeling' from other communities.³¹⁸

Digital libraries like Monoskop, the contents of which remain ultimately determined by Barok's curatorial authority, can still serve to empower a more authentic version of sharing rather than a commodified exchange or pseudo-sharing of the “structure of feelings,” which vary from individual to individual and community to community, by remaining publicly accessible and explicit in its positions and intentions. While the archive cannot be conceived of without its positioning in geography and in histories,

this is not to say divergent perspectives cannot co-exist. The digital archive is perhaps the most fitting place for such convergence, as it acts less like a claustrophobic storage space and more like porous concrete; it is permeable and rigid all at once. Its construction and maintenance requires a dynamic approach, one that shifts away from the hierarchical tendencies of education, and which might enable a different kind of transfer: learning and unlearning alike, or linking and de-linking.

This type of exclusion or inability to archive everything, however, tragic when applied to hard drive failure, is the site of unlearning, or de-linking; in order to embrace new methods of creating value, it is first necessary to unlearn the old ones. How can such unlearning, which is not a regressive process but rather an intellectual awakening, happen when we are constantly tasked with the call to upgrade, seeking distraction from distraction itself, and disciplined by the social conventions of habit and connectivity? Distraction is attention. To follow John Roberts, art has the

[...] ability to work with, reflect on, move through various non-artistic disci-

315 Achille Mbembe, “The Power of the Archive and its Limits,” in *Refiguring the Archive*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, and Razia Saleh (Capetown, South Africa: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 20.

316 Tomislav Medak, “The Future After the Library: UbuWeb and Monoskop's Radical Gestures,” ed. Tomislav Medak and Marcell Mars, in *Javna Knjižnica/ Public Library* (Zagreb: WHW & Multimedia Institute, 2015), 122.

317 Kate Crawford, “Asking the Oracle,” in *Astro Noise: A Survival Guide for Living Under Total Surveillance* (Yale University Press, 2016).

318 Renate Holub, *Antonio Gramsci: Beyond Marxism and Postmodernism* (Routledge, 1999), 175.

plines and practices without fully investing in them. [...] art is thereby able to secure its autonomy and the open-endedness of its research programs on the basis of the contingent distance it is able to establish from both the reification of aesthetic reason and art's assimilation of non-aesthetic reason. Thus what distinguishes art from other practices [...] is that it is the only practice that operates out a direct sense of its own impossibility and impermanence.³¹⁹

We speak in and through a language of gaps as understanding, meaning and questions emerge in reflection, in thought, in the search; thinking is not only the site of connections, but disconnections, too. Without these gaps in artistic reception, production and political engagement, "the emancipatory, non-identitary horizon of art is indistinguishable from the operations of non-aesthetic reason."³²⁰ How to speak in a language of gaps in a world that demands an assimilation to protocols of hypertext? How to enlarge these moments of interpretation when the clock continues to tick, and as production deadlines seem to loom over small and large scale institutions like the dark clouds of digital technology? Roberts continues,

Knowledge is not the thing that protects the authority of art and culture, but the thing that dissolves or dispels art and culture as received and

affirmative categories. This is why, the questions of how the artist possesses knowledge, and it what forms and under what conditions it is disseminated and exchanged become crucial areas of concern for all the key participants in [art], as the pursuit of collective intellect strips the metaphysics of intuitivism and 'inner creativity' from artist authorship.³²¹

Here, inside the digital indexes of virtual libraries and archives, sharing in both artistic and curatorial practice, can function to deconstruct the authoritative codes of conduct that are upheld by the legal frameworks of private property, against predetermined categories and privileged narratives, against colonial methods of possession, against the conception of a singular identity other than being itself. Sharing in this way repels the monetization of knowledge as content as capital, and can reveal its position of enunciation, exposing that which and whom has been both protected and neglected by the erection of an institutional partition.



Still from the 1976 film *Network*.

319 John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2015), 116

320 Ibid, 258.

321 Ibid, 142.

5

[illegible][illegible]

C O N C L U S I O N

As we continue to connect, to share, and to upload content to polished platforms, the risk of disconnect paradoxically rises, the transparency of the screen reveals an opacity, a mental dullness of the socio-economic conditions that enable its proliferation. It appears as though critical thinking has been outsourced from our bodies and assigned to our devices; habitual patterns of usage breed a sense of normalized complacency while individual agency is disregarded to better serve the more profitable masses; the danger now is not so much the impending rise of artificial intelligence, but its byproduct of natural ignorance. Online, users are both the laborers and the commodity, coating screen protectors with layers of greasy affect while generating offline profit for those who hide behind the glossy surfaces of cyberspace. Corporate capitalism cannot be reformed no matter how frequently it rebrands, refreshes, or updates itself, and within its framework, political or economic justice for the working class, impoverished, people of color, and women remain as impossibilities. Working within, updating to, and pseudo-sharing in this

system continuously endorses it, but while immediate escape also remains an impossibility, global alliances and the sustained struggle for intersectional solidarity however, can be the most powerful sites of resistance that can bring about more than just cosmetic repair to an unsightly system. Online, the multidimensional and mobile situatedness of content is still subject to the same material and immaterial qualities of non-virtual labour, still unable to plot an adequate exit strategy; afterall, art under capitalism can never be anything but art under capitalism, even when it critiques capitalism.

These online exhibition spaces and digital archives are neither answers nor replacements to traditional exhibition and pseudo-sharing practices, but they do threaten the stringent content hegemony and narratives of major cultural institutions and propose alternative reimaginings of collective progress. As more affordable alternative spaces for presenting content, these online exhibition spaces are able to more easily expand the potential of their platforms by conducting more thorough research on their subject matters, by inviting contributions from an array of perspec-

tives, and to make their materials both financially and temporally more easily accessible for their audiences. Without financial and economic backing, there is no promise of preservation for these works made online; the archive is more about the future than it is the past, projecting value into a future that is difficult to imagine wherein profitability and production are not markers of success. Tied to patterns and demands of commerce, their employees, artists, and contributors still requiring a salary to live and survive in the offline, those working on the aforementioned digital platforms have shown that time as a currency is the most valuable natural resource of them all. Building community, addressing the contemporary, recirculating, repeating, resounding; these are the aspects of cultural work that can empower a different way of doing as a forceful movement that cannot be ignored by major museums and art institutions. Rather than looking for answers to put upon plinths and display, it might be the search that yields not the the most recent or best match, but yet another search that questions the conditions that underlie the act of searching itself. Embodying

the attempt to approach actual sharing in the practice of curating as caretaking is then to remain methodical and yet accessible to the community one seeks not only to serve but to be a part of, neither as native nor as immigrant, but as one who is *already and always* both with and worldwide.

While the Internet remains a space of government, corporate and institutional surveillance and control, it can also be a medium, a subject, a space for exhibitions, and most importantly, a tool that can be used to reshape the operative structures of the offline world that it reflects, or, as the Bureau of Inverse Technology who in 1997 flew a remote control plane with a miniature video camera and transmitter through Silicon Valley showed, a tool for counter-surveillance. Without having to explicitly adhere to the conditions of physical structures or temporal limitations, although still not entirely free from all restrictions, such as bandwidth or local network legislation, exhibiting online has allowed curators and artists to propose alternative ways to understand a relationship with the present tech-obsessed moment—neither celebrating recent technological advancements

as progressive achievements nor campaigning for a retreat back to a bygone era, but instead sustaining the struggle against the forces of past and present by remaining open to reflection, criticism, change and connection rather than opting for immediate distinction or celebrity status. Curators are thus not “curating immateriality,” as the 2006 Autonomedia publication by the same name suggests, but rather curating against the threat of immateriality, manifested as the disappearance of natural world resources as well as the disappearing narratives of those buried under the byproducts of the West’s material obsessions. While an unraveling of fibre-optic submarine Internet cables seems at this point highly unlikely and equally as unproductive, technology continues to spread along a legislatively defined path and there is still hope to grab hold of the cables, to crawl out from the rocky crevice and reroute the race toward the ever retreating finish line of neoliberal progress.

There cannot be a singular synthetic solution applied to the preservation or exhibition of artworks and ideas that attempt universality or to achieve a consensus. A

multiplicity of forms and platforms for creative expression however, are the first steps to be taken in order to put forth alternative plans for restructuring the field of contemporary art and rethinking its hypocritical aims and exclusionary politics. Working online, curators are fighting a multitude of battles: against advertisers, against the politics of network legislation and censorship, against the privatization of information, new technologies, and they are doing so in the context of an already deeply contested field of contemporary art that is itself situated within an unjust society. Despite knowing that the odds are severely stacked against those using the Internet as a medium for the distribution of information, the struggle to redistribute the resources in the center continues. One must first recognize oneself as already *being-with*, and this act of love, or care, in a more true sense of sharing, underlies an understanding that singular-plurality is not a closed gesture of othering, but rather an opening with others. In practice, this can become a durational unfolding that unfixes the exclusivity of the exhibition as event, denying a premeditated transcription, and which allows the process of connection it affords more

value than its immediate result, privileging vulnerability over authority. Situated within and subject to the demands of existing power dynamics while seeking not only to reshape them, doing so explicitly by naming them and exposing them, exhibitions online can call attention to the urgency of the offline wherein, through public political intervention, a more democratic Internet might one day reflect a more democratic world.

The world, or rather the representation of the world within worlds, is increasingly dictated by algorithms; power, both on and offline, lies with those deemed responsible and capable of establishing and altering those algorithms and the input of data required to fuel them. Behind every algorithm however, is a human being, meaning that our lifeless devices are both handmade and handheld, and can thus be repurposed tools that are more attuned to the natural world and its finite resources and made accessible not only by a sliver of a privileged portion of the population. Not simply seeking a motionless awareness but rather demanding action and accountability in different aspects of social,

economic, or creative spheres, these approaches to exhibition practices have the potential to expand conversations not by giving a voice but by turning their platforms into stages upon which those long silenced can speak if they so choose. If as curators we are destined to infinitely wander in the archives of recycled trends in popular culture, down the aisles of data centers in the middle of the desert, to and fro the publishing house to the backend of a website, exhibitions are then not the exits, but rather they are points of entry. If we throw away the gatekeepers keys in exchange for keyboards, the spaces we create should serve only to welcome, not users but all beings, regardless of the status of their citizenship, to join and to walk alongside one another amongst the stacks of books, periodicals and browser histories of today where these echoing voices do not fall on deaf ears. To allow ourselves to be lost and listening to these archives is to slow down, to resist the ‘fear of missing out’ by becoming inhabitants of experience, to live in them as witnesses who when taken out of time can realize that something will always be missed. These

spaces of loss are the gaps wherein de-linking occurs, where users are no longer others, where questions widen the openings of understanding to make room for interjection and amelioration “as a means of establishing a [...] space for the entrance of those “others” chronically excluded from [...] dogmatists and power interests.”³²²

As Adrienne Rich writes in the foreword of *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, I portend that our task as curators is not to emerge from the labyrinth of information with answers, but

To question everything. To remember what it has been forbidden even to mention. To come together telling our stories, to look afresh at, and then to describe for ourselves, the frescoes of the Ice Age, the nudes of “high art,” the Minoan seals and figurines, the moon-landscape embossed with the booted print of a male foot, the microscopic virus, the scarred and tortured body of the planet Earth. To do this kind of work takes a capacity for constant active presence, a naturalist’s attention to minute phenomena, for reading between the lines, watching closely for symbolic arrangements, decoding difficult and complex messages left for us by [those] of the past.³²³

The moment for active presence, critical thinking, and questioning is overdue, flawed, and certainly any attempt will be messy, but that moment

remains generous, somehow forgiving, and presents itself still in every moment and in every decision: to be more ecologically aware, inclusive, to decolonize institutions, to create safer and properly compensated working conditions. The present is here in slowness is dilated; it resists the language of the “never before seen,” the “unprecedented,” the “once in a lifetime,” and the aura of originality in exchange for the interconnectedness of all things, movements, and moments across temporalities and borders. Actual sharing, enacted by the individuals and cultural workers, so deeply embedded within the categorical domination of a capitalist society, so fixated on productivity while trying to organize an encrypted strategy for revolution on Whatsapp, remains at best a utopian ideal, but, as Isabell Lorey notes

If capital exploits all social activities and therefore life itself, however, this does not mean that, in turn, resistance is no longer possible, no other living practices, no other modes of passing time. As the debt and finance economy increasingly enjoys access to all social activities through measuring and evaluation, a break with the concomitant partitioning of time becomes necessary. We need time, a time of break, one in which the general mobilisation can be stalled, a time that suspends the time of debt

and exploitation.³²⁴

Of course, one first needs time in order to give it. In order to understand what it means to give time requires a repositioning of the now as less of an accumulating process which stacks past upon past like bricks only to shield the inner structure from the elements, or as a point fixed on a timeline like an event, but as a circulation which both goes and comes in all directions at once. In practice, this becomes the duty of the curatorial role afforded by both the privilege and responsibility inherent in the coupling of being and its professionalized version. It necessitates the act of care when rethinking ways of both being and (un)learning together. It is more than corporate backed mindfulness or the self care of neoliberalism that strips engaged thinking from the sources of distress—it is instead a situated mindfulness, one that although it occurs on an individual level, requires contextualization within existing power structures in order to be a site of resistance.

Care and support, which make survival possible, can be excessive gifts that

suspend economic calculus, interrupt exchange, and break with equivalence. If there really is gift, then, according to Derrida, it opens the circular process of exchange, because it opposes the levelling measure.³²⁵

True sharing, unlike exchange, becomes a space of intimacy that enables others to access what is valued and when used more like a “Backrub” than “Google,” provides a conceptual and practical alternative to market and gift exchange.³²⁶ True sharing, as opposed to pseudo-sharing, is non-reciprocal and cannot be calculated or manifested as capital, and can therefore limit the expansion of exchange. The call for sincerity and generosity in the context of community building is surely as cliché as it is platitudinous. However, if this synthesis of Aristotelian ethos, pathos, and logos, not in chronos but in this emerging kairos,³²⁷ is to be answered and embodied by any field it is that of the arts and humanities. This is the task of curators, artists, and cultural workers, if we desire to keep our titles. Yet, as the age of accountability reflects, too many of whom already claim these identities appear

³²⁴ Lorey, 2016.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Widlok, 23.

³²⁷ Interestingly, Kairos is the name of a new “empathetic” Artificial Intelligence facial recognition software. See www.kairos.com.

³²² Page, 196.

³²³ Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

to have been overcome with a convenient case of amnesia for far too long. Dasein, like curating, is characterized by 'cura,' positioning being together in the world as *care*, and being together with things as *taking care*, evoking the phrase "sharing is caring" here not in the sense of a fake smile from a retail associate or the one-dimensional altruistic "Californian ideology" of kindness as counter-culture, but meaning that the world concerns us, particularly those who are compensated for their concern. However, it is the "average everydayness of taking care of things becomes blind to possibility and gets tranquilized,"³²⁸ as the weight of the future in discourse, in commerce, and in art are compounded with an "an insufficient recognition of the specific temporality as it is built into successful sharing practices,"³²⁹ drastically compressing the possibility to perceive the power and long term effects of every and everyday actions on individual or common fronts.

If the Web functions as a mirror reflecting the tendencies of the offline, there is hope that the reflection can also work in reverse: if the on-

line can become a site wherein care can not only survive but thrive, then perhaps it will cross the digital divide and plant roots in reality.

328 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1996) 181-182.
329 Widlok, 194.

Atlantis by W.H. Auden
Being set on the idea
Of getting to Atlantis
You have discovered of course
Only the Ship of Fools is
Making the voyage this year,
As gales of abnormal force
Are predicted, and that you
Must therefore be ready to
Behave absurdly enough
To pass for one of The Boys,
At least appearing to love
Hard liquor, horseplay and noise.

Should storms, as may well happen,
Drive you to anchor a week
In some old harbour-city
Of Ionia, then speak
With her witty scholars, men
Who have proved there cannot be
Such a place as Atlantis:
Learn their logic, but notice
How its subtlety betrays
Their enormous simple grief;
Thus they shall teach you the ways
To doubt that you may believe.

If, later, you run aground
Among the headlands of Thrace,
Where with torches all night long
A naked barbaric race
Leaps frenziedly to the sound
Of conch and dissonant gong:
On that stony savage shore
Strip off your clothes and dance, for
Unless you are capable
Of forgetting completely
About Atlantis, you will
Never finish your journey.

Again, should you come to gay
Carthage or Corinth, take part
In their endless gaiety;
And if in some bar a tart,
As she strokes your hair, should say
"This is Atlantis, dearie,"
Listen with attentiveness
To her life-story: unless
You become acquainted now
With each refuge that tries to
Counterfeit Atlantis, how
Will you recognise the true?

Assuming you beach at last
Near Atlantis, and begin
That terrible trek inland
Through squalid woods and frozen
Thundras where all are soon lost;
If, forsaken then, you stand,
Dismissal everywhere,
Stone and now, silence and air,
O remember the great dead
And honour the fate you are,
Travelling and tormented,
Dialectic and bizarre.

Stagger onward rejoicing;
And even then if, perhaps
Having actually got
To the last col, you collapse
With all Atlantis shining
Below you yet you cannot
Descend, you should still be proud
Even to have been allowed
Just to peep at Atlantis
In a poetic vision:
Give thanks and lie down in peace,
Having seen your salvation.

6

[illegible]

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© Roy Export SAS
Still from the 1940's film *The Great Dictator*

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Each year, hundreds of thousands of tons of electronic waste is shipped from Europe and the USA into developing countries. A large proportion ends up in Ghana.

A topography of e-waste, Ghana, 2012
Photograph by Kai Löffelbein from his series *Ctrl-X*.

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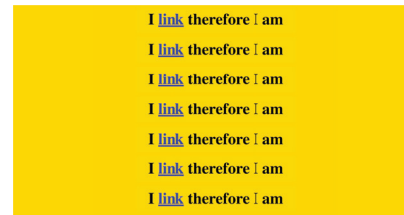


Transatlantic Sub-Marine Cables Reaching Land, VSNL International, Avon, New Jersey

These VSNL sub-marine telecommunications cables extend 8,037.4 miles across the Atlantic Ocean. Capable of transmitting over 60 million simultaneous voice conversations, these underwater fiber-optic cables stretch from Saunton Sands in the United Kingdom to the coast of New Jersey. The cables run below ground and emerge directly into the VSNL International headquarters, where signals are amplified and split into distinctive wavelengths enabling transatlantic phone calls and internet transmissions.

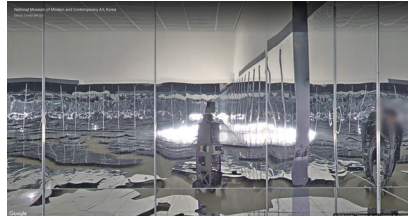
An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar, 2007
Photograph by Taryn Simon.

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Detail from GRAMMATRON (Animated GIF Remix), 2017
Artwork by Mark Amerika.

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National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea.
Screenshot by Mario Santamaria from *The Phantom in the Mirror*, 2013 - ongoing.

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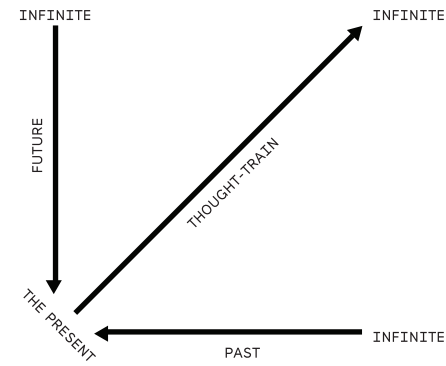
NSA-Tapped Undersea Cables, North Pacific Ocean, 2016
Photograph by Trevor Paglen.

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Still from the 1976 film *Network*.

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Graphic reproduced from Hannah Arendt's 1977 book *The Life of the Mind*.