

THE EXHIBITION AS INTERFACE

A Metaphor for Understanding How Art Shows Show Art

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Abstract

The present thesis aims at understanding the art exhibition through its comparison with the interface. This theoretical research is structured upon art and exhibition histories, media theory, and interface studies, which ground the metaphor of the “exhibition as interface” in a larger conceptual setting.

The thesis is structured in three chapters, which address the attributes of thinking of the exhibition as a gathering point and an exchange place. The first chapter is dedicated to the history of curating and the evolution of experimental and contemporary exhibition formats. There we analyze the creation and consequent blurring of authorship roles in the exhibition, between artists, curators, and the rapport between artworks and framework. The second chapter focuses on new media and the way they enter the exhibition space. With this premise, the enquiry into the concept of “artistic medium” – and its entanglements with communication media and post-media condition – stimulates a reconsideration of the relationships between the fields of new media art and visual art. The exhibition and its curator are proposed as two of the many points of contact between those worlds and they act respectively as platforms of exchange and translators between cultures. The third chapter deals with constructing an argument for thinking of the exhibition’s relationships in terms of interfaces and concludes with a methodological proposal to conceive the relational and social quality of the art show in a unique, complex image. The following section examines five exhibitions curated by the author, presented through the metaphor of the “exhibition as interface”. Those shows contributed to the definition of the conceptual core of this thesis, and are used as case studies to demonstrate a personal understanding of the art exhibition. In the concluding chapter, the research is critically analyzed and future possible developments of the present thesis are delineated.

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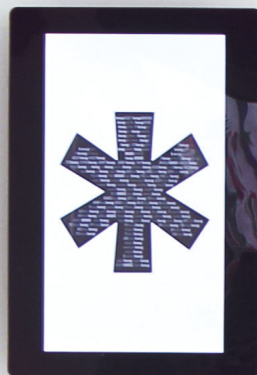
01 INTRODUCTION

"... I feel that we actually still do not really understand the potential of exhibitions. They are an important social ritual, with vast possibilities. I do not think that the exhibition as a format for the display of art has been fully explored, and it certainly has not been exhausted."¹

The research presented in this thesis focuses – through both artistic and curatorial perspectives – on the practices of curating art exhibitions. The author began the exploration of this field, which stimulated and accompanied the production of this text, when he started organizing and curating exhibitions alongside his artistic practice. The first curatorial experiments stimulated personal reflections – which were shared with friends and collaborators – about the essence of the art show, its identity, and possibilities. This thesis deepens those reflections by enquiring into the fields of curatorial studies, new media art curating, and interface studies, which structured the theoretical groundings for the author's practice.

Being active in both roles of artist and curator stimulates the writer to consider those practices as overlapping and to identify the display of the work of art as the area where the interests of artists and curators converge. This particular place – where practices and roles merge, and where the differences between art-pieces and art-show collapse – is more of a state of mind than a physical space, where actors can intervene without considering traditional definitions or established conventions from their provenance in the "art world".

1 J. Hoffmann, and M. Lind, "To Show or Not to Show", in «Mousse Magazine», Issue 31, December 2011–January 2012, available online at: <http://moussemagazine.it/jens-hoffmann-maria-lind-2011/> (accessed 5/2/2017).



Since it is not in our nature to radically reject any definition, though, the expression “exhibition as interface” represents an attempt at structuring a novel strategy for conceiving the art show as a complex set of relationships between its constitutive components. Taking into account how the curatorial narrative combines the single artworks in the whole exhibition, or how space, wall labels or catalogues connects the viewer to the artist’s practice, are instances of a methodology developed around the concept of “interfaciality” – the conjunctive essence of interfaces – that we propose in this text.

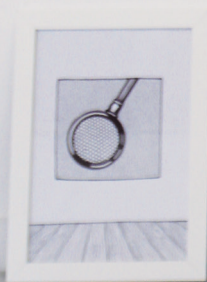
1.1. Living in the “Age of the Interface”

Before diving in to the analysis of what makes an exhibition an interface, it is necessary to clear the field of possible interpretational biases caused by the same term chosen as a comparison concept. The term “interface” is indeed very fluid and its use could raise doubts and misinterpretations. A deeper analysis of the concept is presented in the third chapter of this thesis, where interfaces assume the major role in defining the qualities of the exhibition. The concepts analyzed in the first two chapters build a conceptual foundation of concepts and practices that will be afterward reframed through the given metaphor. Keeping in mind what is meant as “interface” can be nevertheless helpful for the reader in envisioning where the text will lead.

Throughout the thesis, the meaning of “interface” refers to its original definition used in the sciences of biology and chemistry. There, an “interface” is a common surface that acts as a boundary and as an area of exchange between different systems or substances. When defining an exhibition, the substances are the artworks, the practices of the artists, as well as the history of the institution hosting the show. The exhibition is an “interface” in the sense that holds all these elements together in a complex narration, which is made coherent by further interfaces: wall labels, catalogues, and press releases are the elements that mediate between the show and the audience.

1.2. The Internet is Very Problematic

The previous explanation of the term “interface” was necessary due to its most common understanding, that is, the structures through which web designers and interactions designer regulate the user’s action in websites, computers, and smartphones. This technological connotation could lead the reader into thinking that this thesis is about exhibitions that are organized and curated on the Internet and visitable through a web-interface – the “online” exhibitions that are often mentioned in the body of this thesis. This necessitates a new disclaimer for the reader. Despite the interesting curatorial and artistic practices taking place there, this thesis will not venture into the field of curating exhibitions on the Internet.



There are various motivations for this choice. Firstly, none of the curatorial experiments analyzed in this thesis took place exclusively online. Secondly – as the quote chosen for the opening of this introduction states – this thesis is based on the idea that the exhibition is a social space, whose potentiality is far from being fully explored. Thirdly, by analyzing historical, experimental art displays becomes apparent that some of the elements characterizing the art practice on the Internet were present as social phenomena before the creation of the net. Considering them through “offline” exhibitions could highlight aspects of these tendencies that online media cannot address. Lastly – as artist Lorenzo Commisso often states – once there is an overall tendency which embraces a specific direction in a field, the choice of following the radically contrary direction is legitimized from a sort of “oppositional logic”. Since we observed that many artists, curators, and theorists are enthusiastically exploring the potentiality of the Internet as an art space, we rationally take a different position to start rethinking actual trends.

1.3. Structuring the Research

The present research was developed within the department of Interface Cultures, a course of studies dedicated to interfaces and new media art. Therefore, it should be read in the first place as a contribution to this context. This thesis is structured in three chapters: the first one is dedicated to exhibition studies and histories of curating; the second focuses on the appearance of new media in the exhibition space and the relation between new media art and contemporary art; the third one consists of a proposal for understanding the exhibition as an interface. These theoretical chapters are followed by an analysis of the exhibitions curated in the last two years by the author. This series of key studies shows the conceptual development of the metaphor and its practical use as a tool for “reading” and producing art shows. A conclusive chapter will critically analyze the present research and trace an itinerary for the future development of the topic.

The analysis of the emergence of curatorial practices in the field of contemporary art is an exploration of a set of discourses outside new media art. It structures a first enquiry into the practice of curating, stressing various challenging topics: the dispute between artists and curators on the authoriality within the art exhibition; the experimentation with hybrid formats of exhibitions that challenge and include artist’s practices into the conceptual frameworks of communication media; the critical curatorial practice developed by artists inside or outside the institution; the curatorial discourse as an oral format for diffusing art and producing knowledge and as a strategy for analysing the history of exhibiting. Those themes – at least to a degree – are present as well in the contexts where new media art is presented and discussed. Nevertheless, tracing their development in another field helps to discover a different series of artistic and curatorial examples which contribute to expanding the potentialities of exhibitions.

Fig. 2: Lorenzo Commisso, *Promemoria (Reminder)*, 2015 (see: p. 126)

The second chapter isolates the common traits of the curatorial discourse in the field of new media art. Arguably, the most evident theme of discussion is the relationship between contemporary art and new media art, which is represented by the gap between the concepts of artistic medium and technological media. In the two art fields, the views on how artworks should deal with technology are grounded on their respective languages and focus, but, as many theoreticians suggest, the emergence of new media creates room for a fruitful exchange. The exhibition is a platform for exchange between the two fields, between which the curator acts – through a post-medial view – as a translator by structuring a narrative based on the juxtaposing of different kinds of artworks.

The third chapter aims at deepening this understanding, in particular through the metaphor of the “exhibition as interface”. An initial conceptual definition of the term creates the premise for envisioning a series of curatorial metaphors based on contemporary media and technology. Those metaphors stimulate novel strategies for conceiving the art show by highlighting a different relational structure that can be created between the pieces, the artists, the location, and the audience. Acknowledging the structural potential of metaphors for curatorial production leads to the investigation of the interface as a new term of comparison. In the chapter’s conclusion, we formulate a proposal for a methodological approach that takes into account the various thoughts emerged through this research and our curatorial experiments. This method aims at stimulating how curators and artists can envision each feature of the show as an interface, through which they can weave with awareness and creativity the artworks into the exhibition display.

Those chapters are followed by the analysis of five key studies, a selection of the exhibitions we curated in the last two years. These shows had different origins, some of them are the result of a collaborative process with other artists and curators, others were conceived and organized by the author. We narrate the development of each project and our role within it, trying to highlight how they contributed to the conceptual framework of the exhibition as an interface. Documentation pictures of these exhibitions are distributed throughout the whole text to stimulate the reader in visualizing the addressed concepts.

02 A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY CURATORIAL PRACTICES

From the 1960s to the Rise of the Curatorial Discourse

Curating is a complex field of practices which are constantly evolving very much in parallel to contemporary art production. As Terry Smith states in his *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, curating is a practice related to many other practices: art criticism, art history, and art making.¹

"[C]urating now encompasses not only exhibition making but also programing at many kinds of alternative venues, and is often adjunct to even the most experimental art space."²

The various elements that contribute to what we now refer to as "curating" are quite difficult to separate from each other, due to not only their heterogeneity, but also to the fact that curating can be understood as a multidisciplinary practice that aims at creating connections, rather than divisions. One of the most influential curators of the last 20 years, Hans Ulrich Obrist,³ describes

1 T. Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, Independent Curators International, New York, 2012, p. 19.

2 *Ibidem*.

3 According to Artreview, Hans Ulrich Obrist is since roughly fifteen years among of the 100 most powerful personalities in contemporary art. Since 2009 his rank oscillates in the highest 10 positions and in the year 2016 is in position number one. See: "2016 Power 100. This year's most influential people in the contemporary artworld", in «ArtReview», available online at:



his curatorial practice as creation of connections “between objects, between people, and between people and objects.”⁴ Curating is in fact a *role* – or a *function* – not a state of being and is connected to the practices of selecting, organizing, and showing materials. Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook state in their *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media* – discussed extensively in the second chapter – that “[t]he basic definition [of curating] is “caring for objects,” but a curator of contemporary art is just as likely to be selecting artworks; directing how they are displayed in an exhibition; and writing labels, interpretational material, catalogues, and press releases. The curator in this case acts as a kind of interface between artist, institution, and audience.”⁵

This first chapter of the present thesis is dedicated to the evolution of the practices of curating and exhibiting. Through a chronological overview based on the field of “curatorial studies”⁶ we will describe how those activities proceeded and developed from the early figures of “creative museum directors” of the late 1950s and 1960s to the early 2000s, just “before exhibitions went online”, considering the Internet – as the contemporary art magazine *Mousse* proposes⁷ – as a turning point for the curatorial practice. We are aware of relevant practices that are taking place on the Internet, but we decided to focus our attention on “offline” exhibitions due to their physical and social qualities. Initiating our reflection upon a “traditional” curatorial paradigm allowed us to structure the premises of “exhibition as interface” – which will be extensively depicted in the third chapter of this thesis – an understanding of exhibitions based on the “connective” potentiality of the show, rather than its virtual or non-virtual status. The last section of this chapter examines the actual position of *supervisibility* contemporary curators have within the “exhibitionary complex”, delineating potential future developments of curatorial practice in institutions and museums.

https://artreview.com/power_100/hans_ulrich_obrist/ (accessed 1/12/2016).

- 4 D. T. Max, “The Art of Conversation. The curator who talked his way to the top”, in «The New Yorker», 8 December 2014, available online at: www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/08/art-conversation (accessed 1/12/2016).
- 5 B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2010, 10.
- 6 Curatorial studies is a young field of research, whose task is to research and narrate the emergence and evolution of the complex set of practices covered by curators. In the early 1990s, scholars, critics, and curators begun systematically questioning the origins and the evolution of the curatorial role, focusing on the last 50 years of history, when the curator developed from being a director museum or a “carer of the exhibition”, then an *Ausstellungsmacher* (exhibition-maker), “curator-as-author”, until its central positioning in biennials and in contemporary curatorial symposia.
- 7 In the introduction of «Mousse Magazine», 1985–1995 *Exhibition Views*, Issue 51, December 2015.

Fig. 3: Michele Spanghero, *Natura Morta (Lemon)*, 2016 (see: p. 141)

2.1. Demystification, Visibility and Supervisibility of the Curator

From the 1960s onwards, the notion of what curating an art exhibition entailed expanded from the rather narrow definition of giving shape to a collection in a *white cube*⁸, to a relational and discursive complex of practices which included such activities as the setting-up of an exhibition in a museum, the diffusion of exhibition materials and content through the Internet, organization or participation at large-scale events like biennials or major art-fairs, presentation in symposiums and publications, and much more. All of those places where art is shown and discussed form what Tony Bennett refers to as the “exhibitionary complex”: the contemporary architecture of art, which includes encompassing museums, institutions, kunsthallen⁹ and online sites, biennials and mega-exhibitions.¹⁰ “Performing” in the *exhibitionary complex*, the curator is therefore more and more considered as a mixed figure incorporating in itself the qualities of the artist, the art critic, the art dealer, the collector and many other identities of the art system.

To clarify this combination of activities covered by curators, we refer to curator and scholar Paul O’Neill¹¹, who in his books depicts a complete overview of the evolution of curatorial practices. He proceeds from the curator as “carer of the

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- 8 We consider the *white cube* as the standardized gallery space for exhibiting art: a neutral white-painted room with diffused light – more an ideal space than a real room – that can host (almost) any kind of artwork, focusing the attention of the viewer on the object. Other models of exhibition space existed before the birth of the white cube and others were developed after its rise as a critique of the ideals of commodification of the artwork that such a space supports through its artificial neutrality. For a deeper insight see: B. O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Berkeley, and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999.
 - 9 A *Kunsthalle* is a specific type of art space, that could be translated as “art gallery”, whereas it is usually operated by a non-profit association of artists. Kunsthallen are art institutions diffused in German-speaking countries and are similar to “art museums”. In curatorial discourse the term “Kunsthalle” refers to their particular history and structure, and is utilized in its German form.
 - 10 T. Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, p. 67. See: T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, London, Routledge, 1996. T. Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex”, in B. W. Ferguson, R. Greenberg, and S. Nairne (eds.), *Thinking About Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996. E. Barker (ed.), *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1999.
 - 11 Dr. Paul O’Neill is an artist, curator, educator and writer based in Bristol and New York. He is Director of the Graduate Program at Bard Centre for Curatorial Studies, New York. Paul O’Neill’s website, available online at: www.pauloneill.org.uk (accessed 11/12/2016). See: P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, De Appel, 2007. P. O’Neill, “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse”, in J. Rugg (ed.), *Issues in Curating, Contemporary Art and Performance*, Bristol, and Chicago, Intellect Books, 2007. P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, Mass., and London, The MIT Press, 2012.

collections" to a position of authorship of the exhibition. Along with the expansion of curating into collaborative forms of shared authorship and exhibition making, he also traces the emergence of what is now referred to as "curatorial discourse". O'Neill isolates three major periods in the development of contemporary curatorial practice corresponding to three stages of visibility of the role of the curator: *the demystification of the curatorial role* which occurred in the 1960s and 1970s; *the visibility of the curator as author* in the late 1980s; the consolidation of curator-centered discourse in the 1990s, laying the foundation of the "curatorial discourse" and the *supervisibility* of curators.¹²

Demystification and *visibility* share the general tendency of exposing the processes hidden behind exhibiting art by making curatorial activity more visible – O'Neill uses these terms respectively referring to the practices covered by museum directors and curators Seth Siegelaub and Joshua Decter.¹³ *Demystification* is a general tendency that aims at "expose[ing] the decisions, personal choices, and nuances involved in the selection, organization, and framing of art for exhibition purposes."¹⁴ As a consequence of uncovering the relational structures of power hidden behind wall texts and catalogues, more attention was placed on the individual curating the exhibition, the basis for what O'Neill names the "*Supervisibility of the curator*" in the mid- to late 1990s. This is what can be seen as the "curator's moment"¹⁵ – as Marc Brenson calls it – which also coincided with the birth of the research field of curatorial studies. During this time curators began to enquire into their own role, its history and development, which consequently stimulated the systematic organization of conferences, curatorial summits, international meetings, and panels focusing on curatorial strategies which are now commonplace in the art world. The present state of curatorial practices can be considered an execution of this third stage, which is characterized by engagement with practical and theoretical issues regarding emerging technologies, globalization, and the rise of the Internet. We will portray the complex relation between new media art and contemporary art, and how contemporary art deals with the technological era in the next chapter of this thesis.

12 P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, pp. 1–16.

13 O'Neill refers to J. Decter, "At the Verge of ... Curatorial Transparency", in C. Thomas (ed.), *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*, Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2000, pp. 102–103.

14 P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 33.

15 M. Brenson, "The Curator's Moment: Trends in the Field of International Contemporary Art Exhibitions", in «Art Journal», issue 57, n. 4, Winter 1998, pp. 16–17, quoted in P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 35.

2.2. Demystification: Curator as Creator

In his introduction for *Curating Subjects*, Paul O'Neill states that the current role of the curator originated in the "shift away from the predominant notion of the professional museum curator in the 1960s. [...] We have seen a gradual change from the perception of the curator as carer and behind-the-scene aesthetic arbiter to a more centralised position on a much broader stage, with a creative, political and active part to play in the production, mediation and dissemination of art itself."¹⁶

In the late 1950s and 1960, the role of curator started shifting from being the "carer of exhibitions" to "author". Through his long-term *Interview Project*,¹⁷ curator Hans Ulrich Obrist compiled an extensive collection of stories and reports about art projects and exhibitions through interviews with critics, curators, and museum directors active in that timeframe. He published them in a volume of narrative prehistories of curatorship: *A Brief History of Curating*.¹⁸ In the book the reader can get a closer understanding of the activities of museum directors and curators like Walter Hopps¹⁹, Pontus Hultén²⁰, Harald Szeemann²¹,

16 P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, p.12.

17 Obrist interviews artists, curators, architects, performers, philosopher, and anyone that triggers his attention. Over the time he publishes some of the materials either on art magazines or in dedicated books, whereas the rest of the conversations (the vast majority) stays in his private archive. See D. T. Max, *The Art of Conversation. The curator who talked his way to the top*.

18 H. U. Obrist, D. Birnbaum, and C. Cherix (eds.), *A Brief History of Curating*.

19 Walter Hopps (1932–2005) was an innovative american curator and museum director who organized in the '60s and '70s the first retrospectives in the US of Kurt Schwitters, Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp and the American Pop Art. Obrist's interview with Walter Hopps is published in H. U. Obrist, D. Birnbaum, and C. Cherix (eds.), *A Brief History of Curating*, pp. 10–31. See also: P. Richard, "Walter Hopps, Museum Man With a Talent For Talent", in «The Washington Post», 22 March 2005, available online at: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A55574-2005Mar21.html (accessed 28/9/2016).

20 Pontus Hultén (1924–2006): Director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm from 1958 to 1973; founding director of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris; curated in 1968 *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, a show about art and machines at MOMA. See: P. Hultén, *The Machine, as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, exhibition catalog, The Museum of Modern Art, 27 November 1968–9 February 1969, distributed by Greenwich, Conn., New York Graphic Society, 1968, available online at: www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2776?locale=en (accessed 28/1/2017). Obrist's interview with Pontus Hultén is published in H. U. Obrist, D. Birnbaum, and C. Cherix (eds.), *A Brief History of Curating*, pp. 32–50.

21 "[Harald] Szeemann radically changed notions of what a museum director could be: The museum of obsessions that he carried with him in his head no longer needed a permanent building. Or, to put it more prosaically, he essentially invented the role of the independent curator." Published in D. Birnbaum, H. U. Obrist, "Museums on the Move", in «Artforum», summer 2010, pp. 301–306, available online at: www.mip.at/attachments/420 (accessed 28/9/2016).

Lucy Lippard²², Seth Siegelaub²³, and many more. They were part of the generation of creative museum directors who re-structured the heavy architectures of the institution by inviting contemporary artists to produce pieces and exhibitions, by discovering new talents and by involving the audience to engage in participatory projects. They innovated the components of the exhibition itself, creating experimental formats for art reception that went beyond the conventional “white cube” and challenged the audience by presenting artworks in the form of magazines, books, boxes, and suitcases.

2.2.1. The Exhibition as Curatorial Medium

“The late 1960s to early 1970s also provided a transitional moment in the awareness of the curatorial gesture, with the role of a few independent curators [...] beginning to be included in critical discussion of what constituted the production and conceptualization of art.”²⁴

At that point the exhibition was considered as the “medium” of the curator, through which he would materialise and “explain” his position of contemporary art. From this perspective, an art show is considered as the physical equivalent of a critical text and “turns into the vehicle through which critical thinking about art is developed”²⁵ and diffused. Important to note is that this process did not emerge autonomously by curator’s minds, but reflected some of the tendencies explored by artists at the time. In the 1960s, in fact, contemporary artists began

22 Lucy Lippard is an art critic, author and theorist. Through her researches about conceptual and dematerialized practices in the 1960s she’s one of the most important contributors of the curatorial practice of the time. She curated exhibitions based on “chain-reactions” processes among artists and touring shows that could be transported in a suitcase, which she grounded theoretically in publications. She focused as well on political and feminist art practice. L. Lippard, *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972; a cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries*, New York, Praeger. 1973. C. Butler, et. al., *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard’s Numbers Shows 1969–74*, Afterall Books, 2012.

23 At the beginning of his career, Seth Siegelaub worked as an art dealer in gallery in the mid 1960s. Very soon Siegelaub started collaborating closely with conceptual artists, whose dematerialized practices were forcing the physical limit of the exhibition space. He proceeded exploring and expanding the exhibition format and the relation between art show and catalog. In 1968 he produced three publication-exhibitions: *Douglas Huebler: November, 1968; Lawrence Weiner. Statements; and Xerox Book*, in which the conceptual art was radically presented in a purely mental space as a book. We will describe this projects in the following pages. D. Huebler, *Douglas Huebler. November 1968*, New York, Seth Siegelaub, 1968. S. Siegelaub, and J. W. Wendler (eds.), *“Xerox book”*. Carl Andre / Robert Barry / Douglas Huebler / Joseph Kosuth / Sol LeWitt / Robert Morris / Lawrence Weiner, exhibition catalog, New York, Galerie Seth Siegelaub, 1968. L. Weiner, *Statements*, New York, The Louis Kellner Foundation and Seth Siegelaub, 1968.

24 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 4.

25 I. Calderoni, “Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties”, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, p. 79.

producing works consisting on intangible materials such as thoughts, languages, and processes, which became the actual working tools for artistic creation. At that time, the main problem in the display of conceptual art resided in its very own essence: the process of thought as artistic practice. In any moment of the life of the artwork, the underlying thought needed to be “made visible” for the audience in order to manifest the thought. Some artists like Lawrence Weiner or Joseph Kosuth produced physical outcomes as texts or sentences which represented and materialized their ideas. Others manipulated physical materials according to their concepts, rather than their sculptural qualities. They framed the limits of their bodies, pieces of time or space, or pure linguistic elements into configurations of objects, which were presented in the exhibition space as a mere a physical manifestation of the work. These works pushed the limits of the exhibition and challenged traditional categories of art production, since they consisted of objects that did not have any other value than being traces of something that took place, an art process.

This stimulated curators²⁶ – at least those receptive to these emerging practices – to develop new formats for transmitting this kind of art. They did so by involving the artists in the process of creating the exhibition, recognising their intellectual role, and creating with them displays based on mediation and collaboration.²⁷ An overview of this kind of curatorial practices is proposed by Irene Calderoni – curator at Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo²⁸, Torino – in her article “Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties”.²⁹ Calderoni describes the strong mediation employed in the production of exhibitions, highlighting how in the 1960s artworks were no longer produced in the artist’s studio as autonomous pieces and then exhibited in a show as they were. Instead, the exhibition played a crucial role in the process of artistic production.

“Carl Andre has used the term, ‘post-studio artists’ to describe himself and others who do not actually make their own art but have it fabricated. The phrase is equally applicable to artists like Serra or LeWitt, who make their own pieces though not always in their studios, as well as to Kosuth or Weiner, who may use

26 We use the term “curator” to refer to the figure who was covering the role of organizing, curating and producing the show, regardless if he or she was a museum director, a critic or already a curator according to its contemporary meaning.

27 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 20.

28 See: Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo’s website, available online at: <http://fsrr.org/> (accessed 23/11/2016).

29 I. Calderoni, “Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties”, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, pp. 66–70.

typewriters and telephones, but eliminate the production of objects entirely.”³⁰

The previously mentioned artists’ works were often specifically realized for exhibition contexts, in a condition of shared authorship between artist and curator. In such collaborations, the show “becomes the first and only context for the realisation of the artwork and, at the same time, the site in which the work adapts itself and also modifies.”³¹

Curators like Seth Siegelaub and Lucy Lippard realized exhibitions that took into account conceptual and minimal art practices, bringing immateriality and conceptual structures of the artworks into the show. According to Calderoni “[a]vant-garde art exhibitions often tried to model themselves after the characteristics of the art they displayed for the public, thus manifesting themselves as works of the same genre they were showing.”³² Especially in the time-frame of the 1960s, when processes of mediation blurred the established roles of both the artwork and the exhibition, the two became inseparable. Artwork, curatorial structure, techniques of mediation, and exhibition format collapsed into each other.³³ In fact, the works did not often survive the end of the exhibition, manifesting the same life-span as the context in which they were realized. The catalogue became therefore the primary or only medium capable of showing those artworks after the take-down of the show.³⁴

Examples of these tendencies can be recognized in the mythical exhibition curated by Harald Szeemann *When Attitudes Become Forms*, and in projects like the *Xerox Book*, a group show in the form of a book curated by Seth Siegelaub in 1968, and Lucy Lippard’s *The Number Shows*, which we will now analyze.

2.2.2. *When Attitudes Become Forms*

When Attitudes Become Forms: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information (Live in Your Head) – curated by Harald Szeemann at Kunsthalle Bern and shown between 22 March–27 April 1969 – is generally considered to be the

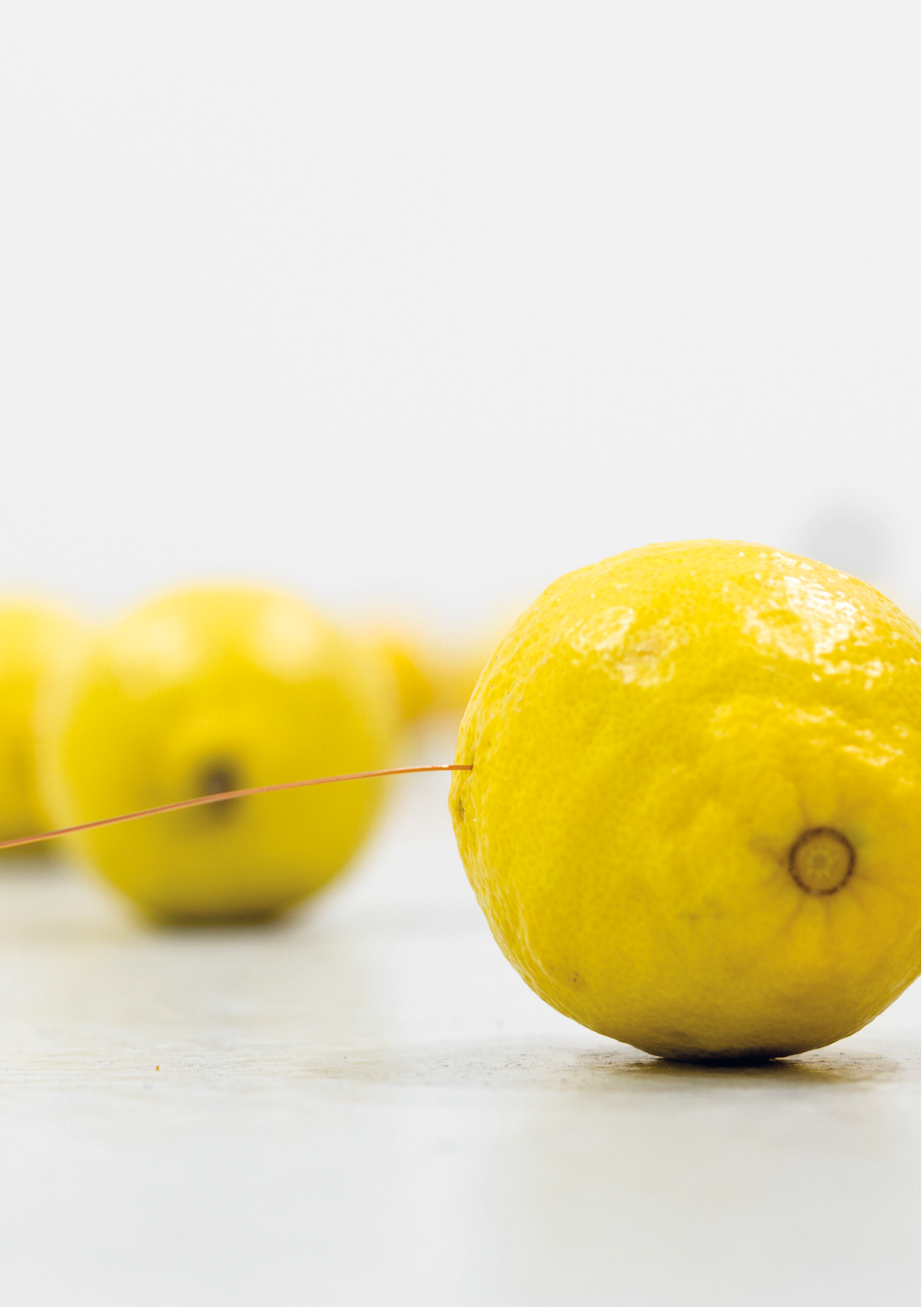
30 In the exhibition catalogue of *When Attitudes Become Form*. See: S. Burton, “Notes on the New”, in H. Szeemann, S. Burton, G. Müller, and T. Trini, *Live In Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form. Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information*, exhibition catalog, Bern, Kunsthalle Bern, 1969, available online at: <http://ubu.com/historical/szeemann/index.html> (accessed 2/10/2016).

31 I. Calderoni, “Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties”, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, p. 69.

32 *Idem*, p. 64.

33 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 22.

34 I. Calderoni, “Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties”, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, p.75.



first big event that brought the attention of European audiences toward de-materialized and process-based art.³⁵ As Altshuler reports, Szeemann's

*"first idea was to unify the work[s] under Robert Morris's term 'Anti-Form,' [...] [b]ut many of the participants objected to being shown under this rubric, associated as it was with a particular sort of sculpture. [...] [T]he show was unified by something that was missed by each of the names used to characterize its components, terms like Anti-Form, Arte Povera, Concept Art, and Earth Art. This was the primacy of process and activity, an emphasis fundamentally rooted in the salience of the artists' 'inner attitudes.'"*³⁶

At the time, the disparate practices that *When Attitudes Become Forms* aimed at encompassing were not yet formalized as a coherent whole. They were still grouped through labels referring to material qualities or physical manifestations of an otherwise immaterial art based on thoughts and intentions. For instance, "Arte Povera" was the name used by an Italian group of artist working with simple, natural materials like wood, stone, but also basic industrial ones like iron or methane gas.³⁷ The artists utilized those materials with time-extended and repetitive actions, through which they sought to eventually reverse natural processes. One example of this strategy is Giuseppe Penone's carving the structure of a tree following the internal layers of bought wooden beams. Another Arte Povera action involved the installation of a bronze hand on a tree: over the years the plant would grow, except at the point where the hand was installed.³⁸ Conversely, "Earth Art" or "Land Art" are referring to American artists doing works outside the museum, in nature, where they modified the landscape, performed actions and brought the results back into the gallery. Despite the use of similar materials, concepts or intentions, at that time art movements were often defined by the activity of individual critics, likely working with artists from a particular nation. The exhibition *When Attitudes Become Forms: Works-Processes-Concepts-Situations-Information* was an attempt at going beyond geopolitical boundaries and formulating new ground for an art movement based on shared practices, in this case actions, thoughts, and intentions.

35 S. Douglas, "Bad Attitudes: Harald Szeemann's Landmark Exhibition Was a Scandal in Its Day", in «The Observer», 6 January 2013, available online at: <http://observer.com/2013/06/bad-attitudes-harald-szeemanns-landmark-exhibition-was-a-scandal-in-its-day/> (accessed 24/1/2017).

36 B. Altshuler, *The Avant Garde in Exhibition*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1994, pp. 244–245.

37 The name was invented by art critic Germano Celant, who published a manifesto in 1967 on the art magazine Flash Art. G. Celant, "Arte Povera. Notes for a guerrilla war", in «Flash Art», no. 5, 1967, republished in «Flash Art», n. 261, July–September 2008, available online at: www.flashartonline.com/article/arte-povera (accessed 23/1/2017).

38 We refer to the works of Italian artist Giuseppe Penone *Albero di quattro metri* (Four Meters Tree) (1969), and *Continuerà a crescere tranne che in quel punto* (It Will Continue to Grow Except at that Point) (1968).

Fig. 4: Michele Spanghero, *Natura Morta* (Lemon), 2016 (see: p. 141)



In this context, the exhibition and the catalogue were built atop a processual approach like the one that involved the artists.

*"Szeemann's plan was to turn the Kunsthalle into a giant studio where the artists would produce their works, and from there extend their activity into the staid Swiss city. He also presented his own curatorial process in the catalogue. It reproduced the address list he had used to visit artists in New York, along with many of the letters written in response to invitations to participate in the exhibition. Szeemann's catalogue, in fact, functioned as did those of Seth Siegelau, for the exhibition contained more than ever would be physically realized in Bern. Of the sixty-nine artists in the show, fifteen were represented by information or documentation alluding to works elsewhere, both physical and nonphysical [...]. The catalogue pulled this all together, along with other works whose existence was as fully instantiated there as it was on sheets of paper in the Kunsthalle."*³⁹

2.2.3. Xerox Book

The Xerox Book was an exhibition project Seth Siegelau curated in a book format.⁴⁰ Throughout his career, Siegelau radically experimented with the possibilities of conceptually integrating catalogues into shows, or making them a sort of new exhibition space. *Douglas Hueber: November, 1968*, was a book which presented a series of maps and routes with instructions that the reader could decide to follow in the real world. *Lawrence Weiner. Statements* was a publication of text pieces by Weiner that the audience could decide to interpret as instructions to be fulfilled.

The Xerox Book, 1968, was the following experiment of this series of publications. Siegelau invited seven artists (Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, and Lawrence Weiner) to produce a 25-pages-long work to be printed in a book that could be photocopied without losing the integrity of its content. Siegelau

"proposed a series of "requirements" for the project, concerning the use of a standard size paper and the amount of pages, the "container" within which the artist was asked to work. What [he] was trying to do was standardize the conditions of exhibition with the idea that the resulting differences in each artist's

39 B. Altshuler, *The Avant Garde in Exhibition*, p. 245.

40 S. Siegelau, and J. W. Wendler (eds.), "Xerox book". *Carl Andre / Robert Barry / Douglas Huebler / Joseph Kosuth / Sol LeWitt / Robert Morris / Lawrence Weiner*.

Fig. 5: Michele Spanghero, *Natura Morta* (Rotten), 2016 (see: p. 144)

project or work would be precisely what the artist's work was about."⁴¹

2.2.4. The Number Shows

Lippard's *The Number Shows* was a series of exhibitions realized in four different cities between 1969 and 1974. The core of the projects consisted of a chain reaction among the invited artists. One artist started by sending a piece containing a sort of instruction to the next artist. The receiver would then react, producing another artwork and sending it forward.

*"Each one was asked to pass on an "instruction" to the next. Larry wrote to Kawara something in his usual elegant language about how he couldn't bring himself to demand anything and then Kawara did one of his "I am Still Alive" telegram pieces to Sol who then did permutations of the words."*⁴²

For the display of these works Lucy Lippard applied a method for which the projects became known as the "suitcase shows". Since the works produced in the chain were highly immaterial and instruction based, they could be easily transported from one location to the next one in a suitcase. As Lippard narrates:

*"I was trying to do shows that would be so dematerialized they could be packed in a suitcase and taken by one artist to another country, then another artist would take it to another country, and so on, so artists themselves would be hanging these shows and taking them around and networking. We would bypass the museum structure."*⁴³

2.2.5. Aspen

Another example of an experimental format emerging in the same years is Aspen, a multimedia magazine that was published on an irregular schedule between 1965 to 1971. Aspen consisted of a customized box filled with supporting materials of the most variegated kinds, such as postcards, posters, booklets, phonograph recordings, or Super-8 movie film supporting contributions from the most variegated kinds. Each issue was edited and designed by a different contributing artist, for instance Andy Warhol, Quentin Fiore, George Maciunas, Dan Graham, and Brian O'Doherty, who curated the content of the box and its appearance.⁴⁴

41 H. U. Obrist, D. Birnbaum, and C. Cherix (eds.), *A Brief History of Curating*, p. 122.

42 *Idem*, p. 208.

43 *Idem*, p. 213.

44 All the issues, scanned and digitalized, are available on UbuWeb. *Aspen. The multimedia mag-*

Clearly Aspen was not an art exhibition – especially if compared to Siegelau's catalogue-shows – but an artistic expansion of the formats for printed magazines. It is nevertheless a relevant example that highlights how artists and designers re-formalized and discussed traditional standardized structures of communication, experimenting with many of the strategies for transmitting content and information available at that time.

A similar mix of languages, positions, and materials was also adopted a short time afterward in many art exhibitions, where the curator and the organizers no longer considered whether the objects included were artworks, authorial texts, or popular fetishes. As we will now portray, they included a complex narration through disparate visual materials: from magazines and newspaper, to paintings of the 18th century and works of contemporary artists.

2.3. Between Visibility and Remystification: Curator as Artist, Artist as Curator

*"In being assimilated into the dominant culture, demystification has effectively been incorporated, reinterpreted, and diluted as "visibility" for the curatorial position. [...] Demystification is now widely accepted within curatorial discourse as a method of defining and representing a curatorial position. This is to say that, today, the concepts of authorship, self-positioning and the creative value of the curator are taken for granted within the social and cultural field of art."*⁴⁵

Over the 1970s, the process of demystification shifted the focus of curatorial enquiries toward "the framing and mediation of art, rather than its production,"⁴⁶ leaving curators in what can be called a position of *visibility* in the show. As we saw in the projects mentioned before – especially the ones from Seth Siegelau – curators became fully aware of their role as *mediators*. The *Xerox Book* can be understood, in this light, as a project in which the curator/editor is an active element within the process of production. He or she stimulates the artists by proposing them a possible container for their works, through which those are mediated to the viewer. A fundamental element in establishing such collaborative process is the condition of shared authorship, which allows the hidden structures of the institution to be made visible.

azine in a box, in «UbuWeb», available online at: www.ubu.com/aspen (accessed 22/11/2016).

45 P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 34.

46 *Idem*, p. 25.

In the same years, another set of experimental exhibitions was produced as a consequence of the “visibility” of the curator. These shows did not make visible and discuss the curatorial process, but were highlighting only final outcome. These cases presented what O’Neill calls the “remystification” of the curatorial role, which later assumed an aspect of “authoriality”.

“By the 1980s, the idea of the “curated” exhibition has been established as an entity of critical reflection in its own right, with the figure of the individual curator at the center of debates as the sole author of the group exhibition form.”⁴⁷

Arguably the most famous example of this is Harald Szeemann, whose curatorial practice anticipated and inspired new ways of understanding the exhibition as the manifestation of the view of the curator.

The protests that followed *When Attitudes Become Forms* lead Szeemann to resign his position at Kunsthalle Bern and to become the first “independent curator” in the sense of its “contemporary meaning”. He was a professional “exhibition maker” who organized and produced shows in art institutions without necessarily being part of their institutional structure. In the following years Szeemann curated large shows which became paradigmatic examples of an authorial, subjective way of curating. These exhibitions were huge, complex intellectual structures encompassing disparate types of artworks (and non artworks) into comprehensive narratives aiming at framing the whole world in a single view. Perhaps the most known of Szeemann’s shows are *documenta 5 Questioning Reality / Pictorial Worlds Today* (1972), *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk (Pentchant for a Synthesis of the Arts)* (1983), and *A-historische Klängen (Ahistorical Sounds)* (1988), the titles of which reveal the curator’s awareness of and intention to enter history. These shows – as well as the Jean-Hubert Martin’s *Les Magiciens de la Terre (Magicians of the Earth)* (1989), often mentioned in curatorial histories – were large shows based on subjective juxtapositions of artworks of different styles and time periods, which were fitted together according to the narrative of the main author of the show, its curator.⁴⁸ Often the art pieces were accompanied by various non-art materials, creating a constellation of disparate elements whose inclusion depended on the conceptual vision of the principal author.

As described previously, the idea of *visibility* in the 1970s implied the “exposure of the various decision-making processes through which exhibitions are produced”⁴⁹, meaning that curators made their actions visible, de-centralized

47 *Idem*, p. 5.

48 *Idem*, p. 30.

49 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 32.

their position of power, and shared it with the artists as collaborators. The *remystification* which followed did not renounce the condition of *visibility* developed in the 1960s, but changed its structure. What remained *visible* was the position of the curator and the *results* of his or her work, not the process. The ways through which the show was put together were again hidden and centralized, renewing the curator's status as a powerful figure working to surprise and astonish the audience. Those new curators entered the public spheres as intellectual entities at the same level of literary authors or film directors. As stated by Beech and Hutchinson, "[t]he curator has taken up the mantle of the author after artists have adapted to the death of the author."⁵⁰

Nevertheless, remystification and the new curatorial position of authoriality should not be characterized solely by a negative accentuation. Particularly relevant and positive outcomes from this are evolution of the language of the exhibition and its understanding as an intellectual construct. The show could be therefore read through semiotic categories as a conceptual structure that interweaves single artworks under comprehensive principles. Moreover, the rise of the curator as *author* radically changed the complex architecture that was connecting artists, critics, art dealers, public and institutions in the art system, transforming the way art was produced, displayed and perceived. At the same time this tendency triggered critical and curatorial responses by artists, creating the conditions for the emergence of the semi-structured movement of Institutional Critique. The following pages portray some exhibitions and projects that illustrate this process.

2.3.1. Curator as Author: *documenta 5*

The first event that aimed at creating a large, comprehensive pictures of the world through the view of a single author was *documenta 5*, curated in 1972 by Harald Szeemann. This show stimulated the future curatorial practice just as much it stimulated negative reactions regarding its conception from artists and critics of the time.

documenta 5 was the first edition of the yearly art exhibition in Kassel which was not organized and curated by Arnold Bode, its founder and first organizer/curator. Szeemann – at the time already a freelancer curator – took over Bode's role and assumed the role of "General Secretary of *documenta 5*", a mixture of general manager, organizer and chief curator. He demonstrated himself to be highly aware of the critical aspect of his very centralized position of power. "[F]rom the start, I asked, I demanded that I have that power. I insisted that they replace the committee and give me total responsibility for this exhibition. Otherwise I couldn't do it."⁵¹ In this condition, Szeemann rethought the original

50 D. Beech, and M. Hutchinson, "Inconsequential bayonets. A correspondence on curation, independence and collaboration", in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, pp. 57–58.

51 M. Spellerberg, "Harald Szeemann and Daniel Buren in *Documenta 5*", April 2013, partial tran-

structure of the event, conceiving the now-traditional 100-day format and including into it practices like performance or “happening”. He organized a large single-themed exhibition entitled *Questioning Reality / Image Worlds Today*, which distributed artworks and non-art visual materials through 25 categories, re-structuring the relationship between images and reality. The exhibition included in its encyclopedic approach works of contemporary artists, happenings and performances, but also ordinary objects, collections of items gathered by artists, religious art, propaganda posters, kitsch postcards, films and videos, and much more – presenting something similar to what will be defined in the next chapter as a post-medial approach, consisting in the creation of complex collections of elements regardless their material or “intellectual” provenance. The mind of its creator is what bound all these materials together within a singular framework, anticipating by decades the formats of contemporary blockbuster shows and biennials.

Art historian, curator and author Dorothee Richter critically describes Szeemann’s position as General Manager of documenta 5 in her article “Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?”.⁵² As she states about his curatorial role, “Szeemann’s view focused entirely on himself as author, and he considered the exhibition to be an image of one single world-view.”⁵³ Richter refers to one picture taken the last day of opening of documenta 5 as capital representation of his role. The image portrays Harald Szeemann while sitting on a throne-like chair, surrounded by artists, critics and politicians, in what could be seen his position as curator, a god-like figure acclaimed as the only author of the art show.

“[T]he pose adopted by Harald Szeemann on the last day of Documenta 5 established the occupational image of the authorial curator as an autonomous and creative producer of culture, who organised exhibitions independently of institutions. [...] [T]he image unmistakably reveals a specific arrangement of power: a cast figure enthroned amid a group of persons is a highly traditional kind of image composition.”⁵⁴

scription of the movie *Documenta 5: A Film by Jef Cornelis* (2012), available online at: <http://martyspellerberg.com/2013/04/transcript-of-harald-szeemann-and-daniel-buren-in-documenta-5/> (accessed 29/11/2016).

52 D. Richter, “Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-Workers?”, in «Oncurating.org», Issue 19, June 2013, available online at: www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-19-reader/artists-and-curators-as-authors-competitors-collaborators-or-team-workers.html (accessed 28/11/2016).

53 *Ibidem*.

54 *Ibidem*.

"Szeemann's demonstration of power did not unfold without conflict," states further Richter.⁵⁵ Some artists like Daniel Buren and Robert Smithson reacted denouncing the excessive power of the curator. Both artists produced text contributions criticizing the conditions of limited freedom for the artists that Szeemann set in the production phase of a show. They were claiming that the show was not any-more about artworks, but only about its display.

"More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art. [...]"

The organizer assumes the contradictions; it is he who safeguards them.

It is true, then, that the exhibition establishes itself as its own subject, and its own subject as a work of art. The exhibition is the "valorizing receptacle" in which art is played out and founders, because even if the artwork was formerly revealed thanks to the museum, it now serves as nothing more than a decorative gimmick for the survival of the museum as tableau, a tableau whose author is none other than the exhibition organizer. And the artist throws her- or himself and her or his work into this trap, because the artist and her or his work, which are powerless from the force of habit of art, have no choice but to allow another to be exhibited: the organizer."⁵⁶

This critical text, *Exhibitions of an exhibition*, is the contribution of the artist Daniel Buren in the catalogue of documenta 5, Kassel 1972.⁵⁷ Both Buren's and Smithson's contributions were included in the catalogue of the exhibition, becoming again part of the omni-comprehensive picture created by the curator.⁵⁸

55 *Ibidem*.

56 D. Buren, "Exhibitions of an exhibition", in H. Szeemann, and M. Grüterich, *Documenta 5 Befragung der Realität / Bildwelten heute*, exhibition catalog, Kassel, Documenta-GmbH, 1972.

57 "Exhibitions of an exhibition" was initially included as artist contribution in the catalogue of documenta 5, see: H. Szeemann, and M. Grüterich, *Documenta 5 Befragung der Realität / Bildwelten heute*. The text was renewed in 1992 and published in *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, an e-flux project – curated in 2003 by Jens Hoffmann – featuring reflections of various of artists about the relationship between artists and curators. D. Buren, "Where are the artists? Exhibitions of an exhibition", in J. Hoffmann, *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, e-flux/Revolver, 2004, available online at: http://projects.e-flux.com/next_doc/d_buren_printable.html (accessed 3/12/2016). D. Fox, Being Curated, in «frieze magazine», Issue 154, April 2013, available online at: <https://frieze.com/article/being-curated> (accessed 3/12/2016).

58 H. Szeemann, and M. Grüterich, *Documenta 5 Befragung der Realität / Bildwelten heute*. For further information: *documenta 5 – retrospective*, in documenta's official website, available online at: www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_5 (accessed 28/11/2016).

2.3.2. Artists vs. Curators: Institutional Critique

*"The idea of an art exhibition as a "curated" space made it apparent that there was a remit operating beyond the interests of the artists, which occasionally closed down art's semiautonomous function or opened it up to new alignments. This opened a space of critical contestation that extended beyond a centralized critique of works of art – which, ironically, increasingly concerned themselves with mediation and the language of mediation as already outlined – and began to address the curated exhibition as its own entity, as an object of critique."*⁵⁹

In 1977, a group of artists named AMCC – Artists Meeting for Cultural Change – vehemently reacted to the exhibition of the Whitney Museum of American Art "Three Centuries of American Art" (1976), which was rhetorically featuring John D. Rockefeller III's collection of 18th and 19th century art as comprehensive review of the artistic production of this period. The show, though, was not representing the actual complexity it claimed to portray: only one African American artist and one woman were in effect in the exhibition. This exclusion triggered AMCC's production of *An Anti-Catalog*⁶⁰, a document focusing on class, race and gender discrimination in the art world and the critical analyses of the role of institutions.

Various artists taking position and criticizing the art system through similar actions and statements are gathered under the label "Institutional Critique", a group of practices which finds its roots in the "critique of institutions" of the avant-garde explained by Peter Bürger in his *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*⁶¹. As Terry Smith reports, the term "institutional critique" was first used by artist Mel Radmensen in his essay "On Practice" (1975), where he referred to the necessity of addressing the problems inside the institution through social and political engagement, rather than wasting time on empty "institutional critique".⁶² A first "constructive" use of the term was later adopted by the performance artist Andrea Fraser in her essay "In and Out of Place", published in 1985 in *Art in America*, identifying artistic or theoretical actions which would highlight the power (and therefore responsibility) of institutions in shaping the future.⁶³

59 P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 27.

60 R. Baranik, et al., *An anti-catalog*, New York, Catalog Committee of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, 1977, available online at: www.primaryinformation.org/product/an-anti-catalog/ (accessed 29/11/2016).

61 P. Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974, Engl. trans. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. M. Shaw, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

62 M. Ramsden, "On Practice", 1975, in A. Alberro, and B. Stimson, *Institutional Critique*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, pp. 176–177, quoted in Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, p. 113.

63 See note 70 in P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 138.

Following Fraser's definition, *Institutional Critique* is generally understood as an artist-driven practice of exposing the limits of the exhibition through various strategies. Some of these consist in enquiring into the essence of the reception of art, showing the strategies of power within the institution itself – and eventually the “uncultural” interests of cultural centres –, questioning the role of the gallery and the museum, and reconsidering the relationship between artist, audience, and curator. A shared activity among Institutional Critique artists is the production of critical, philosophical and theoretical texts, which are often brought further as a complementary part of the artistic practice. The roots of Institutional Critique can be traced in several movements active in the 60s and 70s, like Minimal Art, which was investigating the phenomenology of the viewer through formalist art criticism and art history; Conceptual Art, which enquired into language, processes, and power structures; and Appropriation Art, which used irony to criticize consumption and the loss of identity caused by contemporary consumerism. Each of these movements challenged the limits of what has been defined as “art” until then and managed to go beyond the modernist progression of styles and techniques theoretically grounded by critic Clement Greenberg. Greenberg framed the work of individual artists of Abstract Expressionism into a historical narrative based on the progressive enquiry into the essence of the artistic medium – e.g. paintings presented their being simple paint on a canvas, with large, pure-colour-filled surfaces and no illusion.⁶⁴ Artist-theoreticians from Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, and Land Art began enquiring into elements of the art system that surrounded the artwork and including them into their works, sustaining the impossibility of considering art and its exhibition without considering the museum surrounding them.

Artists Daniel Buren and Robert Smithson – mentioned before regarding their critique of the centralization of curatorial authority in Harald Szeemann – are recognized as being part of a second generation of Institutional Critique artists in the 1960s, after Dadaists and historical avant-garde, which is followed by a third generation active from the 1970s. In the last group we can identify Marcel Broodthaers, Joseph Kosuth, the same Andrea Fraser, Mark Dion, Fred Wilson and Hans Haacke, and artist groups as Group Material and General Idea. In the following pages we will focus on two different tendencies of criticizing the institution: one approach involves working within it, disrupting and bringing to the surface its hidden structures of power; the other approach moves outside the space of the museum, thereby questioning the representative and social role of institutions.

2.3.2.1. Between Normalization and Critique: Artists in Institutions

Fitzwilliam Museum's Head of Learning Miranda Stearn published an article focusing on how artists appropriate the languages of museums to subvert it

64 The reader can find a more detailed overview on the topic of medium specificity and Clement Greenberg's position in the second chapter of the present thesis.



through artistic practice, "Re-making utopia in the museum: artists as curators".⁶⁵ Stearn interprets Institutional Critique as a current of tendencies shared among numerous artists which "have all straddled the divide between interrogating the museum and manipulating its forms from the outside"⁶⁶. Those artists often work as curators, criticizing the same concepts of the exhibition or the museum.

She refers in particular to Hans Haacke's practice as an example of an artist realizing his own *museum utopia* directly within museums. In so doing he is criticizing and "re-making the ideal museum within the institution"⁶⁷ itself. In *Viewing Matters: Upstairs* (1996) Hans Haacke relocated the collection's storage from the basement into the exhibition space of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam. The artworks were installed in storage racks following the logic of collector's carers, who – in the storage – do not consider differences in the traditional art specifications as medium, age, thematics, but look for the configuration that allows the highest amount of artworks to be stored in the minimum amount of space. Through his action, Haacke made visible and public the whay in which archival and conservations practices follow completely different ideals and values when hidden behind the walls of the institution, highlighting how the museum works when unobserved. In addition to the racks, Haacke selected from the museum's collection other existing works that he divided into the thematic groups "Artists", "Reception", "Work/Power", "Alone/Together/Against Each Other", and "Seeing", displaying them grouped together with disregard for traditional museographic categories as chronology, medium and technique, artist or national school. Some curators felt outraged and attacked by Haacke, claiming he did not treat the artworks with the proper respect, whereas the artist was repeating the same actions done privately by the museum itself.⁶⁸ Through his juxtaposition Haacke denounced the artificiality of the way art is transmitted through abstract categories defined through a structure of power and he stated that museums – as institutions that "institute" society about its traditions and culture – should make visitors aware that there is not a unique way of considering the past. In his words,

*"[w]hat museums should perhaps do is make visitors aware that this is not the only way of seeing things. That the museum – the installation, the arrangement, the collection – has a history, and that it also has an ideological baggage."*⁶⁹

65 M. Stearn, "Re-making utopia in the museum: artists as curators", in «Museological Review», no. 17, Museum Utopias Conference Issue, Leicester, January 2013.

66 *Idem*, p. 37.

67 *Idem*, p. 36.

68 *Idem*, p. 39.

69 Hans Haacke in M. Glover, "Stop making sense", in «The Independent», 30 January 2001, p. 11, cited in M. Stearn, "Re-making utopia in the museum: artists as curators", p. 41.

Fig. 6: Michele Spanghero, *Natura Morta* (Rotten), 2016 (see: p. 144)

Stearn mentions other projects by the same artist, raising some fundamental doubts on the practices of artists critically working within institutions. A museum that invites an artist to criticize the same institution could be performing as a practice of normalization, exploiting the artist “as a show of tolerance or for the purpose of inoculation”⁷⁰. On the other side this could represent an “avoidance of curatorial responsibility,”⁷¹ asking artists to talk about topics that the institution itself cannot officially address. If anything goes wrong with the project, indeed, the museum can always say that the artist was invited and take distance from him or her, magnanimously showing to be open for uncomfortable critiques. This gives the impression that institutional critiques “always ends up serving the institution.”⁷² Those side-effects are nevertheless part of the foundations of the artist's practice, sometimes the very reason for the institution to allow the artist to act, and Institutional Critiques consciously plays with those. In the end, Stearns concludes, an “insider” wouldn't have the authority for doing so simply because it has to follow the rules set by the same institution where he works, while the artist is “creating a more questioning visiting public who will continue enacting the project of critique rather than passively accepting museum narratives”⁷³.

2.3.2.2. Outside the Institution: Artists Curating in the Social Context

If one tendency of Institutional Critique is represented by Hans Haacke's works on the inner structure of the museum – making visible to the audience the anatomy of power within the institution – another set of critical practices aims at leaving it and directly engaging with the society that the same institution should represent. This is the case of the Group Material, an artist collective active in New York from 1979 to 1996, who used the exhibition as a medium to discuss political and social issues that museums do not include in art shows.

A quote from Julie Ault – one of the co-founders of the collective – highlights very well the political and social motivation of Group Material.

“Exhibitions are crucial junctions within which art and artifacts are made accessible to audiences, and particular narratives, histories, and ideas are activated. Furthermore, every mode of display establishes relationships between artist, art, institution, and audience and generates routines and rituals for looking. It is precisely because of the power that exhibitions have in assign-

70 Stearn refers to H. Foster, *The Return of the Real: the Avant-Garde at the end of the Century*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1996.

71 Miranda Stearn, “Re-making utopia in the museum: artists as curators”, p. 43.

72 *Ibidem*.

73 *Ibidem*.

ing or opening up meanings, in creating contexts and situating viewers, that standardized exhibition methods and formats as well as display conventions need to be critically rethought and potentially subverted."⁷⁴

Group Material was based on a non-hierarchical, open and democratic structure and over the years oscillated in size quite dramatically. "In September 1980 the group had fourteen members; a year later, it had depleted to three."⁷⁵ Some of the early members studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York and were part of Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, whose critical position on the institution addressed in *An Anti-Catalog* was at the core of Group Material's practice. Other members were Doug Ashford, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Mundy McLaughlin, and Tim Rollins, another of the co-founders.⁷⁶ To disrupt the strong individual view of the single curator-as-author Group Material strongly relied on collective processes and collaborative displays. For one of their early project, *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* (1981), Group Material invited the inhabitant of the districts of the Lower East Side to contribute to the show with materials that were hanging on their private homes' walls.

*"The People's Choice was made up of a hundred or so diverse objects, including class photographs and collectibles, a mural by local kids, posters, 'folk art', kitsch and religious icons. They were installed floor to ceiling as they arrived. Labels identified the owners, some of which included a personal story about the object."*⁷⁷

Group Material exceeded the exhibition space through the artistic use of posters or billboards, which were hanged on buses, in the metro, or on walls; even the surfaces of shopping bags were used to shock or to transmit messages to the inhabitants of the city.⁷⁸ The common strategy of these activities was the occupation of public displays, usually places hosting commercial materials, with political content that the population should be aware of. After various interventions outside the museum, in 1986 Group Material was invited to produce its first institutional solo show in the Whitney Biennial, organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art – the same museum that ten years before provoked

74 J. Ault, "Three Snapshots from the Eighties: on Group Material", in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, De Appel, 2007, p. 32.

75 J. Griffin, "Arroz con Mango (What a Mess)", in «Mousse Magazine», Issue 23, March 2010, available online at: www.moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=537 (accessed 30/11/2016).

76 B. Schweitzer, "GROUP MATERIAL", in «LEFT MATRIX - art / politics», online resource, available online at: www.leftmatrix.com/groupmlist.html (accessed 30/11/2016).

77 A. Green, "Citizen Artists: Group Material", in «Afterall», Issue 26, Spring 2011, available online at: www.afterall.org/journal/issue.26/citizen-artists-group-material (accessed 30/11/2016).

78 J. Griffin, "Arroz con Mango (What a Mess)".

the production of *An Anti-Catalog*. Group Material utilized the communication strategies developed outside the museum into the curatorial project *Americana*, that “engaged critically with notions of what American culture is and how curatorial practices have supported a monolithic notion of American art.”⁷⁹ *Americana* consisted in a “*salon des refusés* of marginalized artists with sociopolitical concerns, alongside products from supermarkets and department stores, thus breaking the boundaries between high and low culture by questioning the function of cultural representation and the hierarchies of cultural production.”⁸⁰

In their curatorial projects, Group Material directly addressed the representational qualities of the show. Both *Americana* and *The People’s Choice* take on curatorial issues regarding the content of the exhibition, that does not necessarily need to include artworks to become itself a work of art. Under this sight Group Material’s shows position themselves among the various other artists curating *collections* of items as Marcel Broodthaers’s *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (*Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles*) (1968–1971), Claus Oldenburg’s *Maus Museum* (*Mouse Museum*) (1972), or Marcel Duchamp’s *La Boite en Valise* (*The Box in a Valise*) (1941) – which were nevertheless exhibited by Szeemann in documenta’s section “Artists’ museums”.

A fundamental difference with those artworks, though, was the fact that Group Material’s works were *exhibitions*, with a curatorial approach framed into an institution’s space – even gallery hosting *The People’s Choice* can be considered as an alternative, “self-instituted” institution – and with the intention of addressing an audience. Group Material’s inclusion of disparate materials is comparable to Szeeman’s juxtapositions in *Questioning Reality / Image Worlds Today* but based on opposite conceptions of the curatorial role. One is *decentralized*, radically open, accepting contributions from the visitors and representing collective views, the other is *centralized*, subjective and close in the representation of one individual intellectual position.

2.4. Supervisibility, Curatorial Discourse, New Institutionalization

In the 1990s the role of curator reached what Paul O’Neill defines a position of *supervisibility*. According to Annie Fletcher,⁸¹ the process of demystification is a

79 J. Ault, “Three Snapshots from the Eighties: on Group Material”, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, De Appel, 2007, pp. 34–35.

80 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 108.

81 Annie Fletcher is currently chief curator at the Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven. Van Abbe Museum’s website, available online at: <https://vanabbemuseum.nl/> (accessed 30/11/2016). Annie Fletcher’s interview with Paul O’Neill, Brooklyn, 30 March 2005, is mentioned P. O’Neill, *The*

combination of two elements: a “maximum transparency” that defines the how much the curator makes public his or her own action, and a level of “curatorial supervisibility,” which is a mixture of “visibility, public display, and a strange brand of celebrity.”⁸² We already mentioned the “curator’s moment”, which consists in the emergence of events whose focus is the curatorial practice, corresponding to a peak of attention of the art system on curators. This moment includes the active realization of large-scale exhibitions or biennials, or more self-reflective confrontations with other curators or critics in conferences and symposia, and is directly linked to the curatorial supervisibility.

O’Neill identifies three main reasons that contribute to this new centralization of the curatorial role. The first one is the result of the process of demystification, which brought curating, and especially some individual curators, in a position of *hypervisibility*. A second element is the emergence of a level of discursivity in the curatorial practice, “the practice of talking together publicly”⁸³, what Mick Wilson defines as the “discursive turn” in curating.⁸⁴ The third factor which amplified the attention paid to curators is the birth of the curatorial studies, marking the beginning of an academic reflection on the predecessors of contemporary curators of the 1950s and 1960s.

2.4.1. Exhibition Histories and Curatorial Discourse

O’Neill dates the emergence of curatorial discourse and curatorial studies – which stimulated a radical change in the understanding of curatorship – in the late 1980s.⁸⁵ In particular he refers to 1987 as a turning-point, which was marked by the opening of the first postgraduate curatorial training program, l’École du Magasin at Le Magasin in Grenoble, France, and by the restructuring of the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP) into Curatorial and Critical Studies. O’Neill sustains that the practice of curating became, from that moment, the subject of structured academic analyses and professional training, officially beginning its rise within the institutional art system. This hype continued in the 1990s with the publication of numerous books focusing on historical exhibitions and innovative curatorial methods developed by figures such as Harald Szeemann, Walter Hopps and Pontus Hultén. Books like Altshuler’s *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition* (1994)⁸⁶, Ferguson’s, Greenberg’s, and S. Nairne’s *Thinking about Exhibitions* (1996)⁸⁷, and Staniszewski’s *The Power of Display*

Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s), p. 34.

82 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 35.

83 *Idem*, p. 33.

84 M. Wilson, “Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns”, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam, De Appel, 2007, pp. 201–211.

85 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 1.

86 B. Altshuler, *The Avant Garde in Exhibition*.

87 B. Ferguson, R. Greenberg, and S. Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996.

(1998)⁸⁸ started to analyse historical and contemporary exhibitions. In the same period – from 1996 – Hans Ulrich Obrist began publishing parts of his archive of interviews on the art magazine *Artforum*,⁸⁹ which inspired and influenced the field of curating. The central focus of this concurrent activities was the temporal displacement and theoretical analysis of the “curatorial discourse”, meaning the complex network of discursive practices that surround the display of art, “drawing on Foucault’s understanding of discourse as a meaningful but malleable assemblage of statements.”⁹⁰

As Mick Wilson states, in his panoramic of discursive practices in art, movements like Conceptual art and Art & Language were actively investigating the structures of language and the conception of spoken words as artistic action already in the 1970s.⁹¹ Curators, critics, and academics applied the same concept of “word as action” through the emerging conferences, symposia, and publications of the 1990s, where curatorial talks assumed the role of actions in the construction of a body knowledge.⁹² Wilson named this as “discursive turn”⁹³, defining the discourse as an essential component of the contemporary art professional. For curators, this meant becoming aware that their work was beginning to include a growing set of practices beyond the display of objects, their very role in the production of knowledge, and the “development of cultural circulation”⁹⁴ in the art system. Michael Brenson witnesses the absolutely central presence of the “discourse” in the “curator’s moment” assisting at one of the many curatorial summits happening in the 1990s.

“The new curator understands and is able to articulate the ability of art to touch and mobilize people and encourage debates about spirituality, creativity, identity, and the nation. The texture and tone of the curator’s voice, the voices it welcomes or excludes, and the shape of the conversation it sets in motion are essential to the texture and perception of contemporary art.”⁹⁵

88 M. A. Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1998.

89 Part of the interviews are available online: Hans Ulrich Obrist contributions’ list, in *Artforum*, available online at: www.artforum.com/contributors/name=hans-ulrich-obrist (accessed 19/1/2017).

90 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 9.

91 J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1962. Mentioned in M. Wilson, “Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns”, in P. O’Neill, *Curating Subjects*, p. 202.

92 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 46.

93 M. Wilson, “Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns”, in P. O’Neill, *Curating Subjects*, pp. 201–216.

94 P. O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 22.

95 M. Brenson, “The Curator’s Moment: Trends in the Field of International Contemporary Art Exhibitions”, in «Art Journal», issue 57, n. 4, Winter 1998, pp. 16–17.

The actual stand of the practices of curating sees the development of a flexible and self-reflective curatorial discourse to which not only curators, but also artists contribute. The contemporary art system is more and more structured on a "exhibitionary complex" relying on large events like art fairs, biennials, mega-exhibitions, or symposia in which supervisable curators like Hans Ulrich Obrist, Nicolas Bourriaud, Jan Hoet, biennial curators like Hou Hanru, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, and curator-directors of Kunsthallen like Jens Hoffmann and Adam Budak meet and discuss about their profession. The diffusion of the format of the curatorial symposium is definitely a sign of the awareness curators developed through the years. The growing presence of talks, presentations and conferences within the program of museums and biennials almost suggests that these are the most actual transmission format in contemporary art. The talk becomes an "exhibition of discourse", a "public display of speaking voices"⁹⁶ dealing with the figures of the curator and the development of the curatorial discourse.

Nevertheless, not all the voices agree on this point. There are positions that question the centrality of these practices in the curatorial profession, still agreeing on their importance. An interesting position is the one of Jens Hoffmann, Director of Special Exhibitions and Public Programs at The Jewish Museum, New York⁹⁷, that defines many of these activities as *paracuratorial*⁹⁸. In his conversation with Maria Lind published in Mousse Magazine,⁹⁹ Hoffmann defines the exhibition making as the still fundamental occupation of a curator, which is then surrounded by a series of activities surrounding it. For him, "lectures, screenings, exhibitions without art, working with artists on projects without ever producing anything that could be exhibited"¹⁰⁰ miss the point of exploring the potential of exhibitions. As he states,

*"[exhibitions] are an important social ritual, with vast possibilities. I do not think that the exhibition as a format for the display of art has been fully explored, and it certainly has not been exhausted."*¹⁰¹

96 P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 35.

97 The Jewish Museum's website, available online at: <http://thejewishmuseum.org/about/staff-profile/jens-hoffmann/> (accessed 5/2/2017).

98 J. Hoffmann, and T. McDowell, "Reflection", «The Exhibitionist», n. 4, June 2011, available online at: <http://the-exhibitionist.com/archive/exhibitionist-4/> (accessed 5/2/2017).

99 J. Hoffmann, and M. Lind, "To Show or Not to Show".

100 *Ibidem*.

101 *Ibidem*.

2.4.2. New Curatorial Rhetorics, New Institutionalism

In his essay *A Certain Tendency of Curating*¹⁰², Jens Hoffmann reflects on the role of the curator as an author and a recent tendency of independent curators that go back to work within the institution. The title of Hoffmann's text quotes François Truffaut's essay "A Certain Tendency on the French Cinema", in which the film director is defined as an *auteur* like literary ones, a comparison which Hoffmann rephrases in the context of curatorial practice. For him the curator is less and less a bureaucratic entity supposed to fill the walls of the gallery with pre-existent artworks, and becomes more and more a figure – like a film director – who's creating something with thematic consistency and presents strong creative sensibility, capacity of interpreting materials, as well as an evolution of its artistic skills over the course of his or her career.

Hoffmann nevertheless updates Truffaut's definition through Roland Barthes' critical perspective on the author theory expressed in "The Death of the Author"¹⁰³. Barthes' essay, published in the aforementioned issue 5+6 of *Aspen*, strongly criticizes the author as the "unifying and sole creative source for the meaning and value of a unified work of art."¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the curator cannot be understood as "the unique artist" in his "exhibition-text,"¹⁰⁵ but is, in a Foucauldian sense, a function that "limits, excludes and chooses"¹⁰⁶ pre-existent materials, whose author is not neglected, rather it occupies a relevant part in the construction of the whole.

*"This means within the process of making an exhibition the curator is as a result decentered, only a part of a larger structure, a subject position, and not the core."*¹⁰⁷

This can be understood as the main difference between what was happening in certain exhibitions in the 1970s, where the curator was the author of the show, and now, when younger generations of curators employ the critical structures of self-analysis developed in the curatorial discourse to establish an open format of collaboration with artists.

102 J. Hoffmann, "A Certain Tendency of Curating", in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, pp. 137–142.

103 R. Barthes, "The Death of the Author", in S. Heath (ed.), *Image, Music, Text*, New York, Hill, 1977. Mentioned in J. Hoffmann, "A Certain Tendency of Curating", in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, p. 139.

104 *Ibidem*.

105 P. O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, p. 9.

106 M. Foucault, "What is an Author?", in D. F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1977. Mentioned in J. Hoffmann, "A Certain Tendency of Curating", p. 139.

107 J. Hoffmann, "A Certain Tendency of Curating", in P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, p. 139.

Although Hoffmann states that in the last twenty years a paradigm shift changed curating “to a degree that is unlikely to return to the situation in which the curator is perceived as facilitator or caretaker,”¹⁰⁸ in this new generation of curators he recognizes a renewed movement towards the institution.

“The main shift that took place over the last few years is that many independent curators have moved into institutional position resulting in a form of “new institutionalism”.”¹⁰⁹

Independent curators, who became famous through their activities outside the institution, now see museums and biennials as a novel space for formulating curatorial practices. According to Hoffmann, this could result from two opposite tendencies: on one side art institutions started being more open to experimental curatorial practice, which – after more than forty years of independent curating – is finally legitimated to work again in the museum; on the other side curators accepted moderating their experimental practice and find compromises to work in famous museums. Hoffmann asks himself if there is still space for alternative curation in New Institutionalism. The format of the group exhibition, the favorite for the experimentation of curatorial thoughts, has become less popular and too specialized for the general audience.¹¹⁰ Since then “[m]useums have become the arena for blockbuster exhibitions”¹¹¹. Experimental and political projects take place in smaller institutions, becoming again attractive for creative curators. Nevertheless, those institutions offer little space for creative curating as it used to be outside them: marketing departments decide titles, images to be used, graphics, almost relegating the curator back to its role of carer of the collection. Hoffmann’s prevision for the future seems quite pessimistic: since the biennials and mega-exhibitions have established themselves with a very precise (yet fluid) structure, the only solution seems to be the production of “intelligent shows with mass appeal”¹¹² and at the same time going back to a system “that would allow independent curators to find producers for their curatorial endeavours, [...] in a manner similar to the author directors of the 1950s”¹¹³.

108 *Idem*, p. 138.

109 See: J. Ekeberg (ed.), *New Institutionalism*, Oslo, Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003.

110 J. Hoffmann, “A Certain Tendency of Curating”, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, p. 140.

111 *Idem*, p. 141.

112 *Idem*, p. 142.

113 *Ibidem*.

2.5. Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the evolution of the curatorial practices between 1960s and 2000s. In the course of this time-span, the figure of curator arose inside the institution from the roles of museum directors and carers of collections. The process which followed – which Paul O'Neill defines as "demy-stification" – brought independent curators into a position of "hyper-visibility" outside of the institution. This journey has been portrayed focusing on curators, aware that many other elements changed at the same time. Contemporary art changed into a constantly-growing multiplicity of artistic practices that encompass, to name just a few, texts, thoughts, languages, semiotics, performances, and happenings. Furthermore, the emergence of new technologies and digital media involved a whole new set of issues that we still did not address here, but will be portrayed in the next chapter.

Taking a perspective dedicated to the curatorial practice allowed us, in fact, to focus on the main topic of this thesis: the language of the art exhibition. When the process of demystification brought the exhibition maker in a position of visibility, valuable changes took place in the ways art shows were created. On one side enlightened curators began collaborating with artists in the production of exhibitions that considered in their structures the dematerialized art practices of minimal and conceptual art. On the other side *authorial* curators developed narratives capable of combining radically different artworks into an architecture of thoughts that did not consider traditional archival categories of like medium, age, or provenance of the single works. Some exhibitions included non-artwork materials, others incorporated perceptive strategies original from other communication media. We mentioned Seth Siegelaub and Lucy Lippard as examples of curators that shared with the artists their centrality in the show, whereas Harald Szeemann's career is taken as a model for the "curator as author", centralizing a large amount of discretionary power in order to create very subjective narratives.

Beyond the novelties in the exhibition's structures, Harald Szeemann's practice is also interesting for the vehement reactions he ignited through his centralized practice, which we took as opportunity to investigate the complex relationship between artists and curators. In the 1970s and 1980s artists responded to the increasingly dominant position of curators becoming more aware of their intellectual activity. Practices of Institutional Critique demonstrate how artists began intervening against and within institutions to denounce and criticize their power structures. Hans Haacke's practices are examples of provocations toward the revered status of the art institution. Comparing his works to Group Material's political and social actions outside the art universe highlights how artists are capable of employing curatorial practices through variegated strategies.

The overview on the history of curating concludes with the attention paid to curators in the 1990s and 2000s. The position of curatorial hyper-visibility – in our

opinion caused mainly by the cult of celebrity happening in any field of human activity, rather than a result of the mere curatorial research – concurred with the emergence of the discursive turn in contemporary art and with the establishing of the field of curatorial studies, which brought the discussion on the same identity of curators. These three elements contribute to what O'Neill labels as curatorial *supervisibility*.

We conclude the chapter with the restructuring of the concept of “curator as author” by Jens Hoffmann. His position develops a new possibility, for curators, of collaborating with artists in the creation of shows. Curators should act indeed as a *function* that regulates and reacts to the artistic practice without imposing and forcing them. Furthermore, considering the strong contemporary tendencies of exiting the art exhibition to discuss and transmit art, Hoffmann on one side refuses the centrality of the various *paracuratorial* discursive practices for a concept of curating closer to its origin, on the other portrays a contemporary reconciliation between independent curators and institutions. According to Hoffmann, small institutions offer interesting future possibilities for curators willing to organize creative exhibitions that should be appealing also for large audiences.

Closing with Hoffmann allows us to bring the focus again on the exhibition, rather than the contemporary multiplication of languages, practices and discourses taking places within the framework of biennials and art fairs. We agree indeed with his positions about the unique social qualities of the art exhibition, which is still full of potential to be explored, to show, produce and transmit art, keeping nevertheless in mind the relevance of discursive practices which have emerged in the last twenty years, which can contribute to a methodological approach of self-awareness. Those, in particular, allow us to reconsider the roles of both artists and curators within the larger “exhibitionary complex”. “Artists” and “curators” are no longer functions that can be clearly distinguished in every case. In fact, those sometimes overlap and merge into side collaborative practices of creative exhibition that integrate the two roles in the creation of new formats for the show. Moreover, their identification as cultural producers in a landscape of symbols and practices allows the expansion of their agency into various other environments where art can intervene.

03 CURATING MEDIA

From the Definition of New Media Art to the Construction of the Art Practices of Our Technological Times

In the previous chapter, dedicated to the history of curating, we acknowledged how radical novelties emerged in the art world between the late 1950s and the 1960s, initiating reflections on exhibition formats and the evolution of the curatorial figure. In the same time span we can trace the initial steps of the initial steps of what can be understood as Information Society, a society whose structure relies on the distributed presence of computer technology, and in which the exchange of information and movement of individuals is part of the 'normality'. These developments have been foreseen by intellectuals and artists, who narrated and explored them through art.

If Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Forms* (1969) became mythical in the field of contemporary art, its equivalent in new media art is definitely *Cybernetic Serendipity*¹, an exhibition curated by Jasia Reichardt in 1968 at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), London.

What *Cybernetic Serendipity* and *Attitudes* share, besides the period of realization and "posthumous" fame, is their structures. Both exhibitions gathered disparate artistic practices of the time into a coherent curatorial view. Cyber-

1 B. MacGregor, "Cybernetic Serendipity Revisited", undated (2008). For more materials on the exhibition and its catalogue, see: Cybernetic Serendipity unofficial archive website, available online at: <http://cyberneticserendipity.net/> (accessed 26/1/2017).

netic *Serendipity* aimed at stressing the relationship between technology and creativity through a series of works of art dealing with cybernetics.

*"At the time, the word "computer" designated a variety of devices, from IBM mainframes to individually improvised analogue machines. By linking the computer to creative practices, the exhibition challenged the separation of art and creativity from science and technology. Because computers could produce work in diverse media, the exhibition also implicitly questioned distinctions between presumably discrete creative realms."*²

Compared to Szeemann's centralized approach, Jasia Reichardt's curatorial role was that of coordinator, aided by some advisers who took care of part of the selection, like Peter Schmidt's musical selection, and by many other contributors that provided suggestions and guidance from specific fields of expertise.³

The curatorial strategy used by Reichardt supported the exhibition's aim of bridging art and technology by including different kinds of works created through computers, from musical compositions to printed computer graphics, screened video and films, from sculptural objects like robots and machines, to experiments in literature and poetry with generative and combinatorial texts. Artworks were shown alternated with non-artworks, such as an IBM computer used to book flights and an information-wall with a time line about the history of cybernetics.

*"Neither the wall texts nor the accompanying publication specified the disciplinary affiliation of each contributor, making it difficult for a viewer to determine whether an artist, engineer, mathematician, musician, or architect created the object or the environment. This intentional confounding of boundaries left the responsibility for evaluating and classifying the work entirely to the viewer, encouraging the interrogation of stereotypes of the engineer and the artist."*⁴

As with *Attitudes*, the reaction of the audience to *Cybernetic Serendipity* was highly varied. As the reader can imagine, many criticized the show according

2 M. Fernández, "Detached from HiStory: Jasia Reichardt and Cybernetic Serendipity", in «Art Journal», Vol. 67, No. 3, Fall 2008, p. 7, available online at: www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40598908.pdf (accessed 26/1/2017).

3 Reichardt recognised their work in the publication of Studio International dedicated to the exhibition. J. Reichardt (ed.), *Cybernetic Serendipity: The Computer and the Arts*, Special Issue of «Studio International», London, Studio International, 1968, available online at: www.cyberneticserendipity.com/cybernetic_serendipity.pdf (accessed 28/1/2017).

4 M. Fernández, "Detached from HiStory: Jasia Reichardt and Cybernetic Serendipity", p. 10.

to a conservative ideal of art, asserting that it shouldn't be about technology, or involve too much technology, and highlighting prejudices that still regularly emerge, fifty years after the seminal show. However, for many *Cybernetic Serendipity* became a model to follow, in which they recognized the creative power of a format capable of displaying several artistic practices that deal with contemporary technologies and media.

Cybernetic Serendipity was not the first show to focus on the emergence of technology and the information society. A few years before, at the same Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the artist Richard Hamilton realized *Man, Machine and Motion* (1955), an installation-exhibition presenting a collection of photographs about the visual imaginary of mobility, mechanisation, and speed.⁵ The same Hamilton realized the collaborative art exhibition *This is tomorrow* (1956) at the Whitechapel Art Gallery (London), in which artists were divided into groups that developed the twelve installations of the show about "the 'modern' way of living"⁶. In the same period as *Cybernetic Serendipity* many other shows focused on computers, machines, technology and communication media were realized, demonstrating a substantial relevance of those topics to contemporary society at that time. MoMA hosted *The Machine as Seen at The End of the Mechanical Age*⁷, curated by Pontus Hultén in 1968, and *Information*⁸, curated by Kynaston McShine in 1970.

The Machine as Seen at The End of the Mechanical Age consisted of a display of disparate materials that formed the visual iconography of the machine, strongly recalling Hamilton's afore mentioned *Man, Machine and Motion*. It also included works closer to Art and Technology – what we could consider now "new media art" – from artists such as Edward Kienholz, Nam June Paik, Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg (these last two being the founders of the well known E.A.T. Experiments in Art and Technology). *Information*, on the other hand, depicted the practices of contemporary artists who made use of the artifacts of new technologies within their work, such as computer print-outs, telephone pieces, faxes, magnetic tapes and so on. This second show, involving conceptual artists working on media and technologies of the time from

5 Richard Hamilton at the ICA, in ICA Institute of Contemporary Arts' website, available online at: www.ica.org.uk/whats-on/richard-hamilton-ica (accessed 28/1/2017).

6 *This is Tomorrow*, in Whitechapel Gallery's website, available online at: www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/this-is-tomorrow (accessed 28/1/2017).

7 P. Hultén, *The Machine, as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, exhibition catalog, The Museum of Modern Art, 27 November 1968–9 February 1969, distributed by Greenwich, Conn., New York Graphic Society, 1968.

8 K. McShine (ed.), *Information*, exhibition catalog, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 2 July–20 September 1970, Baltimore, Publication Press, 1970, available online at: www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2686?locale=en (accessed 28/1/2017).

a contemporary art perspective, focused more on the visual and conceptual aspect of these new mediums that their *mechanical qualities*.

In our view those shows, interrogating technological media of the late 1960s, manifest in the sum of their parts, what can be seen as the birth of the Information Society. A turning point after which the dynamics that characterize life in the 21st century started to emerge. In the same period one can locate the historical division between “contemporary art” and “new media art”, which is highlighted through the comparison between *When Attitudes become Forms* and *Cybernetic Serendipity*. From our point of view, rather than a divergence, there is a substantial connection between those two exhibitions, based on relational, mediated, and processual elements, which imply that there is space for a new understanding of artistic practice. For this reason, in the present chapter we will analyse the elements that divide the two fields, reflecting on what we recognise as keystones that could perform as a “bridge” between the two.

In the following pages we introduce the thoughts of various curators, critics, theoreticians, and scholars working on the edge between new media art and contemporary art, whose positions recognise that artistic and cultural practices once very characteristic in new media art manifest themselves also in contemporary art. Despite an overall convergence, these two art worlds still present some frictions that impede a strong connection. The common belief is that there should be a strategy that includes practices embracing both technology and science, visual languages and artistic traditions within a larger landscape. Our analysis will initially focus on the evolution of the concept of medium, media and *postmedia* to structure a common field of references between new media art and contemporary art. We will then refer to Christiane Paul’s *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond*⁹, Domenico Quaranta’s *Beyond New Media Art*¹⁰, and Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook’s *Rethinking Curating*¹¹ to delineate how the practice of curating new media art developed concepts and strategies useful for overcoming the existing borders between those art worlds.

The summary of the various contributions to the concept of *medium* proceeds from the *medium specificity* of Clement Greenberg to the various conceptions of *post-mediality* from Rosalind Krauss, Felix Guattari, Lev Manovich, and Peter Weibel. The latter brings to the surface what is in our opinion the real possibility of overcoming the separation between artistic practices. For Weibel, the emergence of new media generated a shift in the paradigm that considered the disparate artistic media as disconnected containers, allowing artists to

9 C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 2008.

10 D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, Brescia, Link Editions, 2013.

11 B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 2010.

range with critical awareness from painting to performance art, from video to interactive installation. From Christiane Paul's analysis it becomes clear that artistic products require "platforms of exchange", in which the different media are held together. This platform of exchange appear to be the exhibition, where the curator acts as a "translator" among works coming from different "art worlds". As examples of curatorial practice creating connecting tissues between contemporary art and new media art, we describe the three modalities for creating shows proposed by Domenico Quaranta alongside Sarah Cook's categories for analysing artworks based on contemporary "media behaviours": "computability", "connectedness", and "interactivity". We close this chapter by referring to Nicolas Bourriaud's reflections on a *Radical Art* practice as the final point on the journey of the "artistic medium". Considering *movements*, *connections*, *technology* and *new localisms* as the basic components of our contemporaneity, Bourriaud formulates his proposal for a contemporary art that includes those components in its practices. Therefore, he legitimises the existence of a common ground between contemporary art and new media art, consisting of the various art practices that reflect and integrate the qualities of their historical time.

3.1. Defining New Media Art

A common element shared by all discourse about *new media art* is the desire and need for defining what the term actually means. Indeed, every curator, researcher, or academic dealing with this topic has to start his or her analysis with the definition of which artistic practices can be considered under the terms he or she is using.

Over the course of the last 60 years of practices between art and technology, terms like Electronic Arts, Computer Art, Interactive Art, Cybernetic Art, Software Art, Digital Art, Media Art, Virtual Art, New Media Art... and many others has been proposed, defined, used and then abandoned, to refer to a slightly different set of practices in the larger field of art and technology.¹² None of these terms seems to be satisfying in embracing and representing every single experience and action that has and is being done, thus revealing a complexity of practices that cannot be encompassed under a single definition and point of view, neither in its analysis nor in its forms of presentation.

Our reference authors Paul, Quaranta, Graham and Cook, like many others, all agree on the vagueness of the term "new media", considering it as the very first cause of misunderstandings and confusion in the field itself and in its fur-

12 D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, pp. 23–24.

ther interfacing with artistic practices or institutions outside of it.¹³ As Christiane Paul states:

*"Everyone seems to agree that the term itself is unfortunate. First, it is not helpful in describing characteristics or aesthetics of the digital medium. The claim of "newness" also begs the question of what exactly is new about the medium. Some of the concepts explored in digital art date back almost a century and have previously been addressed in various traditional arts. Novelty seems to consist in the advancement of digital technology to the stage where it offers entirely new possibilities for the creation and experience of art."*¹⁴

Independent curator Kathy Rae Huffman highlights how enthusiasm for the "new" highlighted by Paul is problematic because it focuses attention on the evolution of technology, rather than its critical understanding.

*"'New' entails keeping up with an expanding international artistic offering while also keeping informed about rapidly developing technology. It's important for me to understand which artists use media to interpret, identify and expose important issues, not simply to exploit technology. Content is now the issue."*¹⁵

As we will see in a few lines, "medium" or "media" are also very ambiguous terms, which are difficult to use in defining artistic practices. We find Domenico Quaranta's attempt at a sociological definition of new media art, based on its contexts rather than its materials, to be particularly stimulating:

*"[w]hat the expression New Media Art really describes is the art that is produced, discussed, critiqued and viewed in a specific "art world", that we will call the "New Media Art world". [...] [T]o define New Media Art we need to refer to a "context" rather than a movement or a given use of the medium."*¹⁶

13 Despite acknowledging the imprecision of the term "new media art", in this thesis we will use it to define, "the art that is produced, discussed, critiqued and viewed in a specific "art world", that we will call the "New Media Art world". [...] to define New Media Art we need to refer to a "context" rather than a movement or a given use of the medium." See: D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, pp. 35–36.

14 C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, p. 2.

15 S. Cook, B. Graham, V. Gfader, and A. Lapp, (eds.), *A Brief History Of Curating New Media Art: conversations with curators*, Berlin, The Green Box, 2011, p. 6.

16 D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, pp. 35–36.

If for Quaranta new media art is the thing shown and done in frameworks like Ars Electronica, ZKM in Karlsruhe, and ISEA (among many others), we could define contemporary art – the element that he constantly juxtaposes against new media art in his conception of “art worlds” – as what is visible in locations like MoMA, Guggenheim and the Venice Biennale. Clearly, this definition does not take into account the growing presence of artworks based on new media art within “contemporary art places”, and the opposite inclusion of many visual artists within new media art events. Nevertheless, despite being based on the general assumption that those frameworks would always show similar contents, the definition is useful in Quaranta’s proposal, which suggests the merging of those art worlds.

In the rest of this chapter we will adopt this sociological definition, which stresses the contextualized nature of new media art, and moreover highlights the coexistence of two (and more) art worlds, “new media art” and “contemporary art”, which many consider on their way to becoming interlaced.

3.2. A Matter of Medium

Rather than “newness”, the biggest source of confusion in our opinion is what is understood as *medium*, a concept fundamental in both the fields of art and technology, and with a complex history of stratified meanings. In the following pages we proceed with a brief overview of the term, seeing how contemporary art and new media art reframed the matter. This will stress out positions that do not match entirely, but that generally agree on the definition of a common area between *artistic* and *technological media* that gives hope for future clarification.¹⁷

Historically, modern art was clearly separated into disciplines, each of which could be referred to as an *artistic medium*.¹⁸ Artists used to master one of these and bring it further, in a collective evolution of styles and practices labelled

17 A great collection of references and excerpts of texts is available on the online platform Monoskop, collaborative studies of the arts, media, and humanities. See: “Postmedia”, in «Monoskop.org», last modified 18 October 2016, available online at: <https://monoskop.org/Postmedia> (accessed 6/12/2016). To analyze then deeper this topic that we will briefly summarize, please refer to D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, pp. 23–34; and A. Chierico, *Aesthetics of seams. The emergence of media properties*, MA diss., Interface Cultures department, Kunstuniversität Linz, 2016, pp. 7–27.

18 To highlight the difference between the acceptations of *medium* following Greenberg or McLuhan, we will use the expression “artistic medium” or “artistic media” to refer to the traditional disciplines of painting and sculpture, whereas “media” will address communication technologies. The same distinction happens for the *post-medium* in Krauss, referring mainly to “artistic media”, and Guattari’s and Manovich’s *post-mediality* that considers mainly technologies of information. With Weibel the distinction does no longer apply since his concept sees a merging of the two categories in “old and new artistic media”.



as “tradition”. Historians and critics used to fragment this continuum into groupings or movements identified with names like “impressionism”, “expressionism”, “abstractism” or “surrealism”, which considered stylistic similarities as part of a coherent whole. This critical practice is well represented by the position of Clement Greenberg, who in the 1960s framed the evolution of modernist art, with a focus on abstract painting, as an incessant quest towards its *medium specificity*, the purity of its language.

“This process of formalist purification eliminated from the language of painting everything that wasn’t attributed to the specificity of its medium: the surface of the canvas, the properties of the colour, the contours of shapes.”¹⁹

Greenberg’s position was rapidly contradicted by the upcoming postmodern practices, in which artists abandoned the privileged use of one artistic medium to embrace all of them as part of the artistic and expressive possibilities open to them. Rosalind Krauss’ addressed this tendency through the concept of *post-medium*, which in particular referred to the practices of artists active in the 1960s, 1970s and later, whose work couldn’t be attributed to a single traditional artistic discipline.²⁰ Those artists – like the ones encountered in the first chapter of the present thesis – were active in conceptual and installation art and according to Krauss would “reinvent or rearticulate”²¹ the medium through which they produced their works with every project.

Despite being rejected by many critics and artists, Greenberg’s approach towards the specificity of the artistic medium has remained present in some artistic practices. Post-modernism allowed the multiplication of formats and practices: artists are still perfectly legitimated to select their favourite techniques and bring them further in a personal linear progression, or reinterpret *medium specificity* in other exceptions. As our colleague Alessio Chierico states, “it is possible to assume that some of the [motivation] behind New Media Art comes from a reminiscence of modernity. [From] a certain perspective, New Media Art can be considered as the son of modernity, grown up in the post-modern uncertainty.”²² This is because, despite its different environment, new media art brings further a certain reflection on the specificity of the medium, in particular regarding works that rely on the material uniqueness of the specific technological artifact/object used.

19 A. Del Puppo, *L’arte contemporanea. Il secondo Novecento*, Torino, Einaudi, 2013, p. 12. Translation by the author.

20 R. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1999.

21 *Ibidem*.

22 A. Chierico, *Aesthetics of seams. The emergence of media properties*, p. 9.

The concept of *medium* in the field of new media art is deeply influenced by technology and media studies, which become sources of reference and provide vocabulary for artists and theoreticians. The general idea of *medium* is obviously shaped around McLuhan's definition of technology as an "extension of our bodies"²³, a definition that gives very little room for *traditional artistic media* like painting or sculpture. That said, in most cases, within new media art, "media" typically refers to digital technologies, tools for communication, information infrastructures, computers and, most recently, the Internet as a "meta-medium" that swallows the more 'traditional' media.

Parallel to Krauss' post-medium, which can be understood as "art practices going beyond the medium-based definition", various other researchers and theoreticians active in the field of art and technology used the term "post-medium", but with a slightly different meaning. For them, indeed, *post-media* connotes "after-media", rather than "beyond-media", referring to *media* as something that "has happened", changed us and therefore shifted our way of considering art in particular and, more generally, the world.

In the 1980s, Felix Guattari was the first to use the term "post-media" to refer to technology and communication.²⁴ He conceived of it in his vision of a *post-media* era, a new utopian golden age in which humans will be finally independent from hegemonic *mass media* and become thus free to produce, consume and subvert information and technology.²⁵ This critical view motivates the practices of artists and theoreticians active in the field of media hacking, critical media theory and open source, who, through their actions, aim to break through the centralized power structure of communication media – and by extension politics and economy – and redistribute it in a society organised horizontally.

Two other meanings that take on Krauss' definition rather than Guattari's were introduced by Lev Manovich²⁶ and Peter Weibel. Both refer to new media as a way of reconsidering contemporary art practices.

In his *Post-Media Aesthetics* (2001), Lev Manovich states that "digital technology" changed both the production and reception modalities of traditional art.

23 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.

24 Even before Rosalind Krauss, who referred to him by stating that artists were "reinventing the medium".

25 F. Guattari, "Towards a Post-Media Era", in «Chimères», n.28, spring–summer 1996. Online as F. Guattari, "Towards a Post-Media Era", in «Mute magazine», 1 February 2012, available online at: www.metamute.org/editorial/lab/towards-post-media-era (accessed 22/12/2016).

26 L. Manovich, "Post-Media Aesthetics", 2001, available online at: www.manovich.net/DOCS/Post_media_aesthetics1.doc (accessed 6/12/2016).

*"The shift of most means of production, storage and distribution of mass media to digital technology (or various combinations of electronic and digital technologies), and adoption of the same tools by individual artists disturbed both the traditional distinctions based on materials and conditions of perception and the new, more recent distinctions based on distribution model, method of reception/exhibition and payment scheme."*²⁷

In this article Manovich proposes a new set of aesthetic categories based on information theory, consisting of "concepts, metaphors and operations of a computer and network era"²⁸, but his very personal point of view goes radically further. Focusing on production and the distribution of images within social media practices – a natural consequence of his previous research about new media and remix culture – Manovich maintains that technological evolution challenged the very definition of art, with the consequence of erasing the residual gap between low and high culture, art and design, and pushing towards a democratization of the production of art based on social media and internet practices.²⁹ Manovich tries to subvert the whole definition of art given by the traditional art system, proposing one based on technological development.

"In the last few decades of the twentieth century, modern computing and network technology materialized certain key projects of modern art developed approximately at the same time. In the process of this materialization, the technologies overtake art. That is, not only new media technologies – computer programming, graphical human-computer interface, hypertext, computer multimedia, networking (both wired-based and wireless) – have actualized the ideas behind the projects by artists, but they extended them much further than the artists originally imagined. As a result these technologies themselves have become the greatest art works of today. The greatest hypertext text is the Web itself, because it is more complex, unpredictable and dynamic than any novel that could have been written by a single human writer, even James Joyce. The greatest interactive work is the interactive human-computer interface itself: the fact that the user can easily change everything which appears on her screen, in the process changing the internal state of a computer, or even commanding reality outside of it. [...] Which means

27 *Idem*, p. 3.

28 *Idem*, p. 6.

29 L. Manovich, *How to curate 2 billion digital artworks per day?*, conference talk in «Challenges of Digital Art for our Societies», Mumok Vienna, 4 December 2015. *Challenges of Digital Art for our Societies - Lecture by Lev Manovich*, video recordings, available online at: <https://youtu.be/sYSd0hoBFZA> (accessed 7/12/2016).

*that computer scientists who invented these technologies – J.C. Licklider, Douglas Engelbart, Ivan Sutherland, Ted Nelson, Seymour Papert, Tim Berners-Lee, and others – are the important artists of our time – maybe the only artists who are truly important and who will be remembered from this historical period.*³⁰

Starting from the crisis of the artistic medium in contemporary art and taking into consideration the emergence of media technology, Manovich holds onto the idea of a rupture between new media and older art practices. In his view the latter lose the role and position they had until now and become like any other of the billions of images uploaded every day on the Internet.

Conversely, Peter Weibel's theoretical discourse, based on a similar understanding of new media as a catalyst for change in art and society, unfolds in the opposite direction, restructuring, rather than neglecting, a stronger connection with older art practices. In his catalogue introduction for *Postmediale Kondition*,³¹ an exhibition he curated in 2006, Weibel states that the effect of new technological media like video or computing is that anything else can be seen as a "medium".

*"New media not only built a new branch on a tree of art but they have also changed the tree altogether. This is why one has to differentiate between old technological media (photography, film) and new technological media (video, computer) on the one hand and between the arts of painting and sculpture on the other hand, which until recently, haven't even been considered as media at all, but under the influence of the media have become media themselves, the non-technological old media. With the experience of the new media we now take a different look at the old media. With the methods of the new media we also re-evaluate the methods of the old non-technological media."*³²

In these paragraphs Weibel refers not only to the old concept of specificity within the "artistic medium" as Greenberg did, he also legitimatises painting and sculpture as communication media under a McLuhanian meaning, creating *ad hoc* a new category for them, the "old non-technological media". Through this expansion, he locates all traditional art disciplines of the contemporary

30 L. Manovich, "New Media from Borges to HTML", 2001, p. 6, available online at: http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/033-new-media-from-borges-to-html/30_article_2001.pdf (accessed 8/12/2016).

31 P. Weibel, "Die postmediale Kondition", in E. Fiedler, C. Steinle, and P. Weibel (eds.), *Postmediale Kondition*, Graz, 2005, pp. 6–13, Engl. trans., "The post-medial condition", in «Arte Contexto», no. 6, 2005, pp. 11–15.

32 P. Weibel, "The post-medial condition", p. 11.

landscape at the same level of new media, allowing a comparison and a communication between the two art worlds. Through this new understanding of *medium*, artists are free to adopt a truly multi-medial artistic behaviour using any technique, material, and media in their practice. And at the same time, curators and critics are legitimated to consider and juxtapose in their theoretical analysis works and concepts with different provenance and history, as Weibel does in his curatorial practice.

Weibel's key essay was part of a larger curatorial concept for the exhibition *Postmediale Kondition*, curated by Elisabeth Fiedler, Christa Steinle, and Weibel himself in 2005.³³ The exhibition was shown in the Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum and then at the contemporary art fair ARCO 2006, Madrid, where Austria was invited as Special Guest Country.³⁴ The show involved a selection of Austrian artists working with very different media. Common traits were the reflection on contemporary society and the specificity of technology, an awareness of the Austrian historical and post war avant-garde, and the adoption of remediation and remix practices, which in Weibel's words could be defined as art in the "Post-media condition".³⁵ The show brought together artists working with technological media like Thomas Feuerstein, 5voltcore and Simon Wachsmuth, artists dedicated to painting or sculpture, such as Alois Mosbacher and Rudi Molacek, and artists with long and complex careers who had explored various techniques and media, like Heimo Zobernig and Erwin Wurm. The show was staged within a large exhibition space. The works were distributed and separated by partial walls, allowing the viewer to perceive at least parts of many different works at the same time.³⁶ Sadly, the curatorial concept of the show established a prominent position within art and media theory, while the exhibition itself left less significant traces.

3.3. New Media in the Exhibition Space

Despite having two different theoretical visions, Manovich and Weibel are two of the many influential voices that describe the emergence of new media as something that did influence how art has developed and how it is produced. We will now focus on the ways new media make their appearance in the gal-

33 E. Fiedler, C. Steinle, and P. Weibel (eds.), *Postmediale Kondition*, exhibition catalogue, Neue Galerie Graz am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, 15 November 2005–15 January 2006, and Centro Cultural Conde Dunque, Medialab Center Madrid, Madrid, 7 Februar–26 April 2006, Gesellschaft der Freunde der Neuen Galerie, Graz, 2005.

34 "ARCO 2006 Madrid", press release, in «Kunstaspekte», available online at: www.kunstaspekte.de/event/arco-2006-madrid-2006-02-event (accessed 22/1/2017).

35 "Die Postmediale Kondition - ARCO 2006", press release, in «Kunstaspekte», available online at: www.kunstaspekte.de/event/die-postmediale-kondition-2005-11 (accessed 22/1/2017).

36 E. Fiedler, C. Steinle, and P. Weibel (eds.), *Postmediale Kondition*, pp. 98, 99.

lery, analysing through Cook and Graham, Paul, and Quaranta, the modalities through which new media innovate the exhibition space. They enquire into the specific set of discourses that surround the curating of new media practices and the negotiations necessary for the display of new media artworks in a gallery.

An extensive overview on the topic is depicted in *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*³⁷, 2008, publication edited by curator and professor Christiane Paul. The book is a collection of contributions by some of the most relevant new media art curators, including Paul herself, Charlie Gere, Sarah Cook, Steve Dietz, Joasia Krysa and Patrick Lichty, whose projects introduced new media art to significant contemporary art institutions such as SFMOMA, Whitney Museum, Walker Art Center, Guggenheim Foundation.

In her essay, published in *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond*, Paul addresses very concretely the problems of installing and showing technology-based projects: since new media art gathers a vast variety of practices, from installation to Internet art, curating specific projects requires particular models of curating, as well as custom-tailored strategies for involving and guiding the audience.

*"Presenting new media art in the museum or gallery space always recontextualizes it and often reconfigures it. [...] traditional presentation spaces create exhibition models that are not particularly appropriate for new media art. The white cube creates a "sacred" space and a blank state for contemplating objects. [...] The black box, the preferred space for film/video projections and installations, does not necessarily provide better conditions."*³⁸

Paul maintains that the traditional art gallery is a non-neutral space that does not entirely fulfill the needs of new media art. This happens in particular because "[m]useums, galleries, and the art world have long been oriented mostly toward objects and have configured themselves to accommodate the presentation and preservation of such static works of art."³⁹ Those spaces are often not technically equipped for hosting technological-based works, nor do they present the optimal qualities as places of reception for new media art works, which are usually meant to be shown in more "friendly" environments, such

37 C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*.

38 C. Paul, "Challenges for a Ubiquitous Museum. From the White Cube to the Black Box and Beyond", in C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, p. 56.

39 C. Paul, "Introduction", in C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, p. 1.

as new media art festivals or the Internet. Artworks of this kind, due to their physical complexity and the requirements of interaction that goes beyond the standardized type of white-cube-objects, often look out of place in contemporary art environments.

Another interesting position regarding new media in the exhibition space is that of Sabine Himmelsbach, curator and art historian, currently artistic director of HeK, Haus der elektronischen Künste (House of Electronic Arts) Basel.⁴⁰ In "Vom »white cube« zur »black box« und weiter. Strategien und Entwicklungen in der Präsentation von Medienkunst im musealen Rahmen" (From "white cube" to "black box" and beyond. Strategies and trends in the presentation of media art in the museum's framework)⁴¹ Himmelsbach deals in particular with the ways the exhibition space hosts artworks and how the art display can stimulate comparisons between various artistic practices. Similarly to Paul, Himmelsbach begins with the necessity of museums to be equipped with technical equipment to host new media art. She investigates further the role of "white cube" and "black box" in the presentation of the artwork: if the "white cube" is the typical presentation settings for contemporary art, focusing the viewer's attention on the single object, the "black box" is the space dedicated to new media art and "accommodates the need of darkened, enclosed and acoustically isolated environments for projections."⁴² Despite their apparent opposition, both are artificial spaces that regulate the observer's modalities of reception, allowing the artist to have maximum control over the conditions in which his or her work is presented. Both appear to provide an absence of context.⁴³ Himmelsbach sees a novelty, though, in the new possibilities given by the technique of showing new media artworks outside of the "black box".

"Opposed to the perspectives described until now, that see media art presented uniquely in dark rooms, through the new technical possibilities emerge also new formats for the presentation in the museum's space that allow a curatorial conception

40 Sabine Himmelsbach was previously Director of museums, collections and institutes of fine arts at the city of Oldenburg of the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, and head of the exhibition department of the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Technology in Karlsruhe. Edith-Russ-Haus' website, available online at: www.edith-russ-haus.de/ (accessed 25/1/2017). Haus der elektronischen Künste Basel's website, available online at: www.hek.ch/ (accessed 25/1/2017). ZKM's website, available online at: <http://zkm.de/> (accessed 25/1/2017).

41 S. Himmelsbach, "Vom »white cube« zur »black box« und weiter. Strategien und Entwicklungen in der Präsentation von Medienkunst im musealen Rahmen", in M. Fleischmann, and U. Reinhard (eds.), *Digitale Transformationen, Medienkunst als Schnittstelle von Kunst, Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, Heidelberg, Whois Verlags- & Vertriebsgesellschaft, 2004, pp. 171–175.

42 *Idem*, p. 171. Translation by the author.

43 *Ibidem*.



beyond "black" and "white cube": a more open way of presentation and a stronger dialogue among the exhibited artworks."⁴⁴

Directional loudspeakers and alternative screens represent two of the technical solutions that allow new media art to abandon the isolated rooms of the "black box" and begin to be installed in more open environments, where without these technologies the works would disturb each other.

*"The strong "autistic" separation of multimedia works in dark rooms, that was for a long time a specific characteristic of the presentation of digital art, can be broken."*⁴⁵

For Himmelsbach these new technological solutions allows new media art to go "outside the black box" and be installed in the "white cube" – or something in between – where finally one could perform a direct comparison between the elements that are sharing the same space.

What Himmelsbach sees as novelty is the software-based nature of new media, which becomes a strength in the exhibition of media art. Thanks to its flexibility, a single work can be installed through radically different strategies and supports and can distributed and synchronized among screens and spaces. For instance, the same visual material can be displayed through normal monitor screens or large projections, even on holographic screens or on custom-made visual devices.⁴⁶ Each of these solutions provides the artwork with a slightly different aesthetic, and it is the curator who, with the artists, decides how to install each piece. In her opinion, this can finally stimulate a true *post-medial* relationship among works from different styles, materials, and traditions. Through these new technologies of display curators are able to reinvent the space of the museum and create new connections between new media art and visual arts.

Both Quaranta and Paul agree on the centrality of curators in the mediation between the technical and conceptual requirements of the artwork and the possibilities and expectations of the settings, negotiating and smoothing the frictions that might arise. As Paul states,

44 *Idem*, p. 172. Translation by the author.

45 *Idem*, p. 173. Translation by the author.

46 In her analysis, Himmelsbach refers to three works exhibited through different display technologies. Maciej Wisniewski's *"Instant Places"* (2002) is exhibited through holographic displays in "Future Cinema. The Cinematic Imaginary after Film", curated by Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel in ZKM, 2002, see *Future Cinema. The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*, in ZKM's website, available online at: <http://zkm.de/en/event/2002/11/future-cinema> (accessed 2/2/2017); Jeffrey Shaw's and Michael Gleich's project *Web of Life* (2002), see *Web of Life*, in ZKM's website, available online at: <http://zkm.de/en/event/2002/03/web-of-life> (accessed 2/2/2017); Peter Cornwell's *Surveillance of Assailants* (2000–2001), in *ctrl[space]*. [work] Peter Cornwell, available online at: <http://hosting.zkm.de/ctrlspace/d/works/12> (accessed 2/2/2017).

"New media art requires platforms of exchange—between artwork and audience or the public space of a gallery and the public space of a network, for example. Practical challenges include the need for continuous maintenance and a flexible and technologically equipped exhibition environment, which museum buildings (traditionally based on the "white cube" model) cannot always provide, as well as conceptual issues and a continuing need to organize educational programs for audiences to make them more familiar with this still emerging art form."⁴⁷

We understand the exhibition, as context in which this mediation happens, as the platform of exchange that Paul mentions. The art show is the structure that in our view should integrate the artworks in a broader discourse that is understandable to the audience. Through its components it should provide information about the works, but at the same time it could require the adaptation of some works, to let the spectator approach them on the basis of his or her knowledge.

3.4. Overcoming the Separation: Three Models

Domenico Quaranta integrates Christiane Paul's proposal by structuring some modalities for interfacing the environments of new media art and contemporary art through the exhibition, which ought to prove helpful in stepping over the obsolete division.

His book, *Beyond New Media Art*, the English translation of his Ph.D. thesis,⁴⁸ is based on the assumption that there are different art worlds that through time developed specialized vocabularies, histories and actors. Over time, the world of "contemporary art", in this case considered as the "official art world" of commercial galleries, private collectors, well-known museums, represents the larger picture within which, sooner or later, the independent, alternative, and critical art practices will be included. This inclusion, when it happens, implies the recognition of until-that-moment-ignored artists into an "official art history". Until that moment, in a sort of ritual of approach towards the other environments, in a first place those artists are rejected, and then slowly incorporated, making extremely visible practices that once exclusively existed in experimental niches such as new media art.

47 C. Paul, "Challenges for a Ubiquitous Museum. From the White Cube to the Black Box and Beyond", in C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, pp. 54–55.

48 D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*.

Unfortunately, in this latter case, Quaranta suggests that no happy ending followed the initial phase of excitement and “flirtation” that took place during the late 90s and early 2000s between new media art and contemporary art.⁴⁹ Quaranta exposes what he thinks are the essential misunderstandings that prevented a deeper intersection, caused mainly by mismatches of histories and technical vocabularies, and amplified by still existing reservations on both sides that make this exchange more difficult. Quaranta proposes three curatorial models that in his opinion should be used in future relationships between contemporary art and new media art: the “Discreet Guest”, the “Workplace Quota”, and the “Ivory Tower”.

Important to note is that these three proposals are not mutually exclusive, conversely they are thought to be combined together in a complex relationship between contemporary art and new media art, both involving specialized museums, festivals, artists, and galleries. New media art in fact still needs these specific platforms for legitimating and building critical discourses around the works of new media art. If these frameworks disappeared, the specific reflections about the aesthetics of contemporary technology that happen in festivals like Ars Electronica, Transmediale or ISEA, would not be developed elsewhere. They would not be further developed in contemporary art, since that environment has other main points of interest. Through his models, Quaranta proposes a specific type of equilibrium between contemporary art and new media art, with the aim of structuring a fruitful mediation.

What Quaranta calls the “Discreet Guest” is the presentation of new media art through “well curated, conceptually solid, medium-sized events, often held in small institutions or private galleries”⁵⁰. This strategy fulfils the need of proposing specialized insights to “offer the contemporary art public the opportunity to get a handle on topical issues that are often treated superficially in the media and overlooked in the mainstream art world”⁵¹. To be accepted by the art world, those shows shouldn’t focus too much on technological details – as new media art festival do, nor be over-emphatic – as big retrospectives in a famous museums often are, to avoid the risk of being labelled as “technophilic”.

The “Workplace Quota” consists in calling for the reduced but constant presence of new media artworks in contemporary art shows, gathering together works from different disciplines and media around a topic close to traditional art history that embraces them all. Through this strategy, new media artworks might find their position within broader art discourses that are based on content and styles, without considering the specific medium. Workplace Quota

49 *Idem*, p. 146.

50 *Idem*, p. 149.

51 *Ibidem*.

implies the progressive merging and integration of new media into traditional art history in a strategy that recalls the *post-media* perspective we encountered earlier. The role of these kinds of exhibitions would be to create strong mutual references among works, in what we will describe later as *interface*.

The third scenario described by Quaranta includes the new media art world as it exists today. In the provocatively named “Ivory Towers” of Ars Electronica and ISEA, new media artists, theorists and curators should continue to explore the aesthetics of technology, discuss the relational qualities of devices, and present artworks that contribute to the critical discourse between media and society. This allows new media art research to further develop in a highly specialized framework, where deep and complex enquires can be made without having to “dumb down” and explain everything for an audience that is not used to these subjects and themes.

3.5. Curator as Translator

As we saw earlier, overcoming the separation and distance between the different “art worlds”⁵² is loudly demanded by several authors, who agree on the need for “cultural translators”, those able to bridge different traditions, vocabularies and histories.⁵³ As Christiane Paul maintains, the art world needs “media literacy” to understand and integrate new media.⁵⁴ Quaranta, on the other hand, highlights the need for “art literacy” for new media art, needed to address the right themes in contemporary art history and critique. He identifies the ideal curator as someone able to understand both traditions.

The desired curator should work like a good translator, who takes care of avoiding “barbarisms”, or “metaphrasis” in the reformulation of texts. The first are failed translations, resolved by importing foreign concepts into a new context as is, and hoping that it will acquire the desired meaning. The second are literal translations, which do not take into account the culture of the destination language.

Quaranta identifies an example of *barbarism* in the installation of the work *Vertiginous Mapping* (2008) of Rosa Barba in the exhibition *21x21* (2010), curated by Francesco Bonami. The work is based on a hypertext containing digital materials – images, texts, and videos – collected by the artist from a city. The website was projected on a wall and the viewer could click and navigate with a mouse, very quickly losing interest. What Quaranta proposed as a good trans-

⁵² *Idem*, p. 81.

⁵³ *Idem*, p. 186.

⁵⁴ C. Paul, “Introduction”, in C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, p. 5.

lation for this work was to print these materials and distribute them in the space of the museum, to represent the “hypertextual nature or the online narrative”⁵⁵ through a material installation.

Quaranta saw *metaphrasis* in *Data Dynamics* (2001), curated by Christiane Paul at the Whitney Museum. He states that the work *Apartment*, consisting of an installation where interaction took place through a custom designed work station, presented technology without considering the cultural horizon of the audience. The work collected words inserted by users and used them to build a 3D apartment, which was then projected. This is his comment, specifically about the use of the work-station interface: “While on one hand this got round the need to have a normal PC in the exhibition venue (a barbarism), on the other it evoked technology in ways that might work well at Ars Electronica, but not at the Whitney Museum (metaphrasis).”⁵⁶

The creation of various versions and new variations of an artwork implies the understanding of each piece of art as the temporal manifestation of a larger research process, namely the artist’s practice. We could define it as the creation of visible landmarks at specific key-moments within the ongoing proceedings of an arts practice. In these moments, the artist produces a more or less physical output, which ideally corresponds to the achievement of important steps, or a new occasion for displaying the work in a show. Presenting his own research in another framework, then, the artist is invited and allowed to modify, reinterpret and transform his own work, creating eventually new versions that can better respond to the specific settings of each exhibition where they are going to be shown.

“So how does a good translation come about? It is basically about identifying the essence of a work and trying to translate that into another language.”⁵⁷

The curator is the other main actor in this process, working side by side with the artist. The curator needs to know how to negotiate with the artist, proposing solutions and versions based on the same concepts of the work, and that do not stretch this to the point of becoming something else. Fundamental in this process then is the ability, for the curator, of properly “reading” the artist’s

55 D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, p. 184.

56 *Idem*, p. 185. In this case, the project could have also worked as it was, since it was included in what Quaranta itself names a “Discreet Guest”. In a show focusing on specific topics of new media art, one can also allow himself to push the spectator’s habits without being too much accommodating towards his or her taste. We choose to present the example as Quaranta expressed it to provide the reader with an image of what a *metaphrasis* could be.

57 D. Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, p. 186.

intentions and the work's inner structure. In the following pages we present the strategies used by Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook to "rethink curating"⁵⁸.

3.6. Curating Behaviours: The Art Formerly Known as "New Media"

As we saw earlier, the main idea in positions like Manovich's and Weibel's is that new media challenges the categories and boundaries of what was considered art until this point. The thoughts of Cook and Graham, Quaranta, and Paul are grounded in the same considerations. The logical consequence of this is that curatorial practice needs to be expanded and rethought to react and adapt itself to these changes.

*"This cultural change brought about by technology (as witnessed in the transformation of an avant-garde modernism into a postmodern hybrid condition) obviously isn't solely confined to the field of new media art, but is evident in art a whole. Curators are aware of art's role in commenting on current conditions using strategies from modernism and postmodernism, just as those who follow new media art are tired of the "new" and tend toward thinking of the latest technological form of art more inclusively as the form "formerly known as new media." Our current condition also means we have to rethink what curating means in terms of new networked structures, database structures, and an increasingly technology-led society."*⁵⁹

This fits very well with Manovich's proposal of a post-media aesthetic, expanding and materializing this idea into concrete practices that "consider works of art beyond their technological newness"⁶⁰. Whereas, as we saw, new media is the main focus of Manovich's research, Cook and Graham abandon the label of "new media" and do not look for a new construct or term.

*"[F]rom 2006 until today, understandings of new media art in relation to contemporary art have changed significantly, and the use of the term new has become outmoded. At the time of writing, new media art was more commonly understood as art (formerly known as "new media")."*⁶¹

58 B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*.

59 *Idem*, p. 48.

60 *Idem*, p. 47.

61 *Idem*, p. 21.

Their “art formerly known as “New Media”” is a very fortunate expression, originally the title of an exhibition curated in 2005 by Sarah Cook and Steve Dietz,⁶² who clearly wanted to smooth out the strong technological connotation of the term “new media art”. The phrasing, very often adopted by Christiane Paul and Domenico Quaranta, emphasizes the shift beyond the old definition of “new media” without negating its history, and underlines the intent of interfacing new media art and contemporary art. Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham also acknowledge that the term “new media art” is fundamentally misleading and inaccurate, and in the first section of their book *Rethinking Curating* they present an inquiry into the essence of the practices that would be defined as “new media art” in order to find a new expression for naming them.⁶³ As Steve Dietz highlights in the introduction,

“Graham and Cook strategically define so-called new media as a set of behaviors, not as a medium. [...] “new media” changes our understanding of the behaviors of contemporary art precisely because of its participation in the creation of a cultural understanding of computational interactivity and networked participation. In other words, art is different after new media because of new media - not because new media is “next,” but because its behaviors are the behaviors of our technological times.”⁶⁴

Graham and Cook define “computability”, “connectedness” and “interactivity” as the contemporary “media behaviours” that should be referred to while analysing a work.⁶⁵ These three specific terms are taken from the terminology used by Steve Dietz to define the characteristics of new media, developed to formulate a model based on behaviours rather than materiality.⁶⁶ Sarah Cook connected Dietz’s categories to concepts from the contemporary art world like “variable”, “distributed”, and “collaborative”.⁶⁷ These terms highlight a continuity with the traditional qualities of artistic practice, appearing more familiar to curators, who define the materiality and production of artwork, its accessibility and placement, and the way the audience is engaged. With their new termi-

62 *The Art Formerly Known as New Media*, Walter Phillips Gallery, Banff, 17 September–23 October, 2005.

63 B. Graham, and S. Cook, “Art After New Media – Histories, Theories and Behaviors”, first section of the book *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, pp. 17–144.

64 S. Dietz, “Foreword”, in B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, p. XIV.

65 B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, p. 9.

66 See: S. Dietz, “Curating New Media”, in «Yproductions», Steve Dietz’s website, 25 August 2000, www.yproductions.com/writing/archives/curating_new_media.html (accessed 11/12/2016).

67 S. Cook, *The Search for a Third Way of Curating New Media Art: Balancing Content and Context in and out of the Institution*, Ph.D. diss., University of Sunderland, 2004, mentioned in B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, pp. 8–9.

nology Graham and Cook maintain that elements like “space”, “time”, “materiality”, “participation”, and “interaction”,⁶⁸ which are strong in contemporary art critique, are challenged and changed by contemporary technologies and media. This is another method to connect new media art and contemporary art, through joining together vocabularies, practices and traditions.⁶⁹

What is interesting in Graham’s and Cook’s approach is the idea that contemporary art could learn from the experiences and practices developed within new media art, a field that has been working with and around technology for at least 50 years. Agreeing that some materials and practices that emerged in new media art are being absorbed by contemporary art, we can assume that in some cases, similar kinds of problems will emerge, and media art could contribute to contemporary art’s development. Graham and Cook’s focus starts by taking a historical perspective, then proceeds towards contemporaneity, addressing specifically that which technology and new media stimulate in “Space and materiality”, “Time”, and “Participative Systems”.

The behavior of “connectedness” changes the qualities of space and matter as a continuation of the processed of dematerialization of the art object that happened in the 1960s. Through this focus one recognize a continuity that connects together Conceptual Art practices and “network or system-based art practices of the 1970s, telecommunications works of the early 1980s, and Internet-based art of the 1990s”.⁷⁰

“Many new media art projects (through certainly not all) are not interested in the object outcome, but rather in the process, the engagement, and the interaction. They are interested in how the system becomes both the space and the material of the work. In this sense, unlike new media design or architectural projects that are the result of new media tools, new media art

68 Each chapter of the first section in *Rethinking Curating* focuses on one of those components and is structured as follows: an initial explanation of the topic and its evolution within “traditional” art history; a sub-chapter always entitled “How New Media Art Is Different”, which shows how new media art does bring the themes further and with its own means; one “Art Example”; another sub-chapter entitled “Rethinking Curating” envisioning how traditional curating should adapt itself to those changes; an “Exhibition Example”; a final summary.

69 Other media art theoreticians and curators have been extensively contributing to this tendency. Another way is the one taken by Oliver Grau and Peter Weibel, who created histories of new media art highlighting its roots in the avant-garde. This strategy consist in finding references, forerunners, and pioneers in experimental art practice, demonstrating that concepts like “virtual”, “programmed” and “kinetic” – fundamental in media art discourse – were already present in artistic practices since the beginning of the 20th century, explored by precursors of contemporary media artists long time before the computer was even invented.

70 B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, p. 83.

is not necessarily materialistic, but is instead concerned with method rather than with final form."⁷¹

In art production that mirrors what has taken place in the last years of technological innovation, "[t]he work itself is distributed across space and time"⁷². Curating such a piece of art requires considering carefully how to address the spatiality of the context that is hosting the work.

*"Net art demands the context of the Internet and the browsable World Wide Web, and yet curatorial approaches on how to present it have varied hugely as curators come to grips with what the Internet is and how deeply embedded it is in the work of art they are attempting to show. Should the work be shown solely online or in actual space? Or should it be divorced from its locative context and isolated in the gallery or be left in situ but presented formally?"*⁷³

"Computability" influences, among other things, the concept of time. Graham and Cook refer to the differences in the cultural understanding of "real time" after the emergence of process-based artworks as outlined by Charlie Gere's *Art, Time, and Technology*.⁷⁴

*"[N]ot only is the development cycle of technology accelerating, but the concepts of real-time connectivity and real-time computer processing are becoming inextricable from the behaviors of new media technology. This "real time" differs from the concepts of "time based" or "live," which may be more familiar to video or live-art curators, and, of course, all three concepts come as a fundamental challenge to curators of objects."*⁷⁵

To a certain extent, the performativity of code is juxtaposed against people's: "the score of a computer program is a much looser performance than the score of a conventional musical performance, but it can be argued that computer code displays performativity."⁷⁶ In this sense, also the choice of a particular spatial setting for an installation influences the perception of the "performance" and its meanings, as well as the comfort of the audience and its openness to the prolonged observation of a work.

71 *Idem*, p. 61.

72 *Idem*, p. 84.

73 *Idem*, p. 70.

74 See: C. Gere, *Art, Time, and Technology*, London, Berg, 2006.

75 B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, p. 87.

76 *Idem*, p. 98.



Cook's definition of contemporary media behaviours structures a first guideline for the kind of curator that Quaranta is demanding: a translator who is able to isolate the essence of the artwork to conjugate it into another environment. This shift from the definition of *media* to its *behaviour* is parallel to a certain attention in contemporary art, which also started to reflect on themes like technology, communication media, Internet, economy and globalization, and to a certain extent suggests what the available ground for the very much desired intersection between new media art and contemporary art might be.

3.7. Contemporary Art Aware of Technology: Radicant Art

If, as we have discussed, new media art is opening up space for a confrontation with contemporary art – through Weibel's position and its reframing by Graham, Cook, and Quaranta – then contemporary art approaches media, technology and Internet culture through the French critic Nicolas Bourriaud. In his books *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*⁷⁷ and *The Radicant*⁷⁸, Bourriaud acknowledges the importance of communication media and post-production, online sharing and cross-mediality in contemporary art and culture, which he considers fundamental for the development of a new positive future, the *altermodernity*. Altermodernity is the attempt of Bourriaud to imagine a new, alternative model of modernism for the twenty-first Century, necessary to react to the actual state of conformist pressure given by globalization. In this view, "'alterglobalisation' defines the plurality of local oppositions to the economic standardisation imposed by globalisation, i.e. the struggle for diversity."⁷⁹ Altermodernity is then a proposal for a modernism which takes over from globalised culture (its positives and negatives), economy and massification, nomadism as heightened mobility, travel and migration, exile and exploration, multiculturalism, and becomes "that moment when it became possible for us to produce something that made sense starting from an assumed heterochrony, [...] a positive vision of chaos and complexity."⁸⁰

After the loss of stability and the certainty of values in postmodernity, for Bourriaud, art should face the contemporary globalized world, embrace what

77 N. Bourriaud, *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, London, Tate Publishing, 2009. See also: N. Bourriaud, "Altermodern Manifesto", 2009, available online at: www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/altermodern/explain-altermodern/altermodern-explainedmanifesto (accessed 8/12/2016).

78 N. Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, New York, Sternberg Press, 2009.

79 N. Bourriaud, *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*.

80 *Ibidem*.

drives towards plurality, mobility, and multiculturalism and use them as the foundations for a new modernity.

*"The historical role of modernism, in the sense of a phenomenon arising within the domain of art, resides in its ability to jolt us out of tradition; it embodies a cultural exodus, an escape from the confines of nationalism and identity-tagging, but also from the main-stream whose tendency is to reify thought and practice. Under threat from fundamentalism and consumer-driven uniformisation, menaced by massification and the enforced re-abandonment of individual identity, art today needs to reinvent itself, and on a planetary scale. And this new modernism, for the first time, will have resulted from global dialogue."*⁸¹

From the proposal of altermodernity based on movement, connections, technology and new localisms in a globalised landscape, Bourriaud construes his definition for an art practice that mirrors and reflects those elements, which he calls *Radicant Art*.

*"For contemporary creators are already laying the foundations for a radicant art—radicant being a term designating an organism that grows its roots and adds new ones as it advances. To be radicant means setting one's roots in motion, staging them in heterogeneous contexts and formats, denying them the power to completely define one's identity, translating ideas, transcoding images, transplanting behaviors, exchanging rather than imposing."*⁸²

In *The Radicant* Bourriaud proceeds by connecting his theories and proposals to historical and neo-avant-gardist references based on shapes, gestures, and aesthetics, rather than to new media art and technology. Nevertheless, clear hints of his legitimization of media can be read into his previous quote: the mentioned actions of *translating*, *transcoding*, *transplanting* and *exchanging* appear to be based on communication media, in particular on the acts that any user performs on the Internet. This could be taken to be the contemporary understanding of *post-mediality* within contemporary art, where the world of technology enters in the form of intentions and behaviours rather than machinery and sensors, closing the cycle of attempts to interface the worlds of contemporary art and new media art.

81 *Ibidem*.

82 N. Bourriaud, *The Radicant*, p. 22.

3.8. GLOBALE: Reset Modernity!

In 2016 the Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, ZKM, produced the exhibition *GLOBALE: Reset Modernity!*⁸³ which aimed to propose a new concept of modernity based on premises similar to the ones described by Nicolas Bourriaud. The project was curated by a team of curators, whose main figure was the French philosopher Bruno Latour.⁸⁴ Latour is well known for his book *We Have Never Been Modern*⁸⁵ in which he analyzes the dichotomy between nature and society and proposes a new definition of modernity, the same themes brought further by the show in ZKM.⁸⁶

*"In this exhibition, we offer you to do something similar: resetting a few of the instruments that allow you to register some of the confusing signals sent by the epoch. Except what we are trying to recalibrate is not as simple as a compass, but this most obscure principle of projection to map out the world, namely Modernity."*⁸⁷

GLOBALE: Reset Modernity! examined what the curatorial team identified as the key-points of the contemporary age – globalization, relation subject-object, responsibility, geopolitics, religion and secularization, and technological innovation – whose role in modernity was rediscussed. The show was structured into six sections, named "procedures", each one consisting of a series of artworks with disparate natures that described, commented, showed and questioned one of the themes, accompanying the visitor on a journey towards a "partial reset"⁸⁸ of the specific topic. The procedures were physically separated from one another, dividing the show into autonomous "chapters" with a strong internal coherence, together forming a multifaceted perspective on contemporaneity. The sections of the show consisted of sequences of various installations, videos, paintings, and objects, plus what was defined as a "station", a wall composed of printed materials where the observer could delve deeper into the section's topic. The audience was guided through the show by

83 *GLOBALE: Reset Modernity!*, in ZKM's website: <http://zkm.de/event/2016/04/globale-reset-modernity> (accessed 28/1/2017).

84 The curatorial team consisted of Bruno Latour, Martin Guinard-Terrin, Donato Ricci, Christophe Leclercq.

85 B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Engl. trans. C. Porter, Harvard University Press, 1993.

86 B. Latour, *We have never been modern*, book presentation, in Bruno Latour's website, available online at: www.bruno-latour.fr/node/108 (accessed 29/1/2017).

87 *GLOBALE: Reset Modernity!*, in ZKM's website.

88 B. Latour, *Reset Modernity! Field book*, exhibition field book, Karlsruhe, ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, 2016, available online at: http://zkm.de/media/file/en/2016-zkm-reset-modernity-fieldbook_e.pdf (accessed 29/1/2017).

a “field book”, a publication that presented each subject of the show in order of appearance. By scrolling through its pages during the visit, the visitor could acquire a deeper understanding of the show.

That the visitor could choose to take the field book, or not, made the experience of the show quite flexible, despite its structured installation. Although *Reset Modernity!* presented a strong philosophical core that was intellectually challenging in approach, the audience were free to explore the show as they wanted.

Reset Modernity! presented various elements encountered throughout this chapter. The variety of materials exhibited highlighted a *post-medial* approach that was fundamental to the show. The *artistic media* involved, like paintings, videos, installations, and objects, had an evident heterogeneous origin: from pieces addressing the languages of “contemporary art”, to installations clearly developed in environments closer to “new media art”. ZKM, the venue that hosted and produced the show, which is a new media art center with interests in all artistic and technological media, clearly manifests the multiple interests of its chairman, Peter Weibel. The curators were able to use all available media, without discrimination due to their medium, age, provenance, or history, to stimulate reflections on modernity and contemporary time through not only the content, but also the format of the exhibition.

3.9. Summary

After a first chapter that focused on the evolution of the role of curator, its relationship and entanglements with artists and the development of exhibition formats – a necessary initial exploration of the field – this second section was dedicated to the curatorial discourse taking place in our field of provenance, new media art.

Among the many relevant contributors to the fields, in this overview we mainly referred to scholars and curators like Christiane Paul, Domenico Quaranta, Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook because of their particular attention to the practice of curating new media in relation to the outer world of contemporary art. In particular, Christiane Paul’s position highlights what seems to be the key issue of the moment, the difficult relationship between new media art and contemporary art. Her analyses focus on the lack of understanding contemporary art institutions demonstrate towards new media art and call into question what is behind the stereotypes of spectators’ reactions when seeing new media in fine art museums. We integrated Paul’s view with Domenico Quaranta’s research, based on the sociological and historical differences between the languages of new media art and contemporary art. While Paul describes the separation as ongoing, Quaranta points out that there are some aspects that are on their way towards conjunction. Paul presents a more “classical” understanding of the field of new media art – that of the expert insider who consumes and strongly

believes in the research taking place within the field. Conversely, Quaranta's interest is in addressing artistic practices unfolding on the Internet, which over the last years have developed, in our opinion, a closer relation with contemporary art due to the centrality of visual imagery. We see this set of practices as a potential "third way" between new media and contemporary art, which neither of the aforementioned can properly claim as their own. As stated in the introduction, we decided not to consider this field, which often calls into question the role and the identity of art in a similar way to Lev Manovich. The importance of Domenico Quaranta's position lies in his recognition of a partial merging between the two fields, which takes into account their specificity as a strength rather than a weakness, and demonstrates how "traditional" practices of new media art have changed and begun, somewhat successfully, to communicate with contemporary art.

From among the authors featured, Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook present the most clear attempt at formulating a system of taxonomies for describing what the presence of new media actually does in the art gallery. In our overview, their thought is the one that deals most with curatorial practice, especially through their consideration of the *behaviors* of new media, which proves to be very useful in understanding the qualities of artworks. The strength of their taxonomy, which is especially relevant in the bridging of art worlds, relies on its groundings. The *behaviors* of new media are built on the concepts used by art historians to describe the status of artworks (*variability, distribution, and collaboration*), which are connected to qualities of media and technology as part of the language of new media art (*computability, connectedness, interactivity*). In understanding the curator as a mediator between these worlds, this connecting of vocabularies is fundamental to the transportation of concepts and works from one framework to another.

In recent productions of curatorial discourse within new media art we have observed the recurring appearance of topics such as the difficult definition of new media, the analyses of the concept of *medium*, the role of the curator as mediator or translator, the different ways, or versions, of displaying artistic research, and the exhibition as a place where the mediation between practices and art worlds. We employed those elements as the foundations of this chapter.

Acknowledging and experiencing personally the difficulty of defining the sets of practices included under the label of new media art had led us to the analysis of how the term *medium* actually developed in the fields of contemporary and new media art. One observes a constant crossing of references, in particular for the concept of *post-medium*. After discussing the positions of Rosalind Krauss, Felix Guattari and Lev Manovich, we refer to Peter Weibel's explanation as being the most supportive of our perspective on communication between these art worlds. Granting *artistic media* and *technological media* equal relevance allows direct comparison between artworks. We will refer to Weibel's *post-medial* perspective in the next chapter of the thesis, as a starting point for understanding the *mediality* of the whole exhibition.



In his thesis *Beyond New Media Art*, Quaranta considers the exhibition as one of the axes through which the fields of new media art and contemporary art might develop a fruitful relationship based on a dynamic equilibrium. He proposes three modalities for this relation, through which the two worlds can communicate without one having to entirely incorporate the other. One consists in introducing new media art's topics into contemporary art environments through small coherent shows based on the specific themes of art and technology that visual art does not typically cover. The second option corresponds to what we define as a *post-medial* perspective in curating: the creation of thematic shows that include new media artworks within traditional contemporary art narratives and topics. The third stage is temporary non-communication, in which new media art is "free to be itself", dealing in depth with its specific issues in the frameworks of new media art festivals and museums, before taking them "outside".

We concluded this chapter with an insight into how contemporary art discusses the inclusion of technology and media within its fields of interest. We refer to the definition of *Radicant Art* given by Nicolas Bourriaud, one of the most relevant critics in contemporary art. *Radicant Art* is an art practice that includes the positive characteristics of our contemporary world, such as mobilization, nomadism, pluralism and multiculturalism, in what for Bourriaud should become a new *modernism* formulated to challenge the negative uniformisation, massification and renunciation of individual identities. *Radicant* practices are those based on the activities of *remediation*, *transcoding*, and *exchange*, terms which appear to be derive from contemporary technologies, in particular the Internet. This shows that contemporary art can reflect on its surroundings through the classical concepts of *form*, *behaviors*, and *artistic intention*.

Following this research, we cannot recognize ourselves in the proposals for a merging of new media art and contemporary. The various positions described in this chapter suggest that one of the two frameworks should embrace the second one. Some say that it is time for contemporary art to accept and absorb the practices of new media art into the "official" art world. Others propose the opposite, namely that new media art has radically altered traditional art practices, and that therefore contemporary art should be included inside the theoretical framework of new media. Either way, it is apparent that both contemporary art and new media art deal with their surroundings, which are globalization, technology, and the Information Society. Regardless, each of these two worlds has developed a system of concepts, histories and traditions that have to be addressed using their own references in order to be understood. Without agreeing on a complete merging, the integration of one into the other one, or the substantial separation of the two environments, our position is to acknowledge that there is an area in which practices overlap, where artists and curators active in one or the other fields can intervene. In this area there is less of a need to define one's identity, because what matters is the contribution that one produces in the framework where this is shown or produced.

Fig. 10: Henning Schulze, *Gegenwartsmaschine*, 2014 (see: p. 117)

As the researcher Pau Waelder demonstrated through a survey, artists prefer not to stick to definitions or labels. Waelder asked, among many other things, whether the interviewed defined themselves as “artists”, “new media artists”, “artists working with new media”, or “artist working with various media, according to needs of the projects”.⁸⁹ As he reported,

“[a]rtists tend to dislike labels. Most of them do not see themselves as “new media artists,” nor consider that the media they use define their work. While they perceive a separation between new media art and contemporary art, they are not inclined to reinforce its relevance, expecting that in the future the gap will disappear. They also seem to be uncomfortable, tired, or even infuriated by this subject. Artist Aram Bartholl [...] admits that he describes himself in different ways according to the context, shifting between “artist,” “media artist,” “conceptual and media artist,” “contemporary fine artist” or even “interdisciplinary artist.” [...] Although part of a younger generation, Nicolas Sassoon [...] also indicates that he uses different terms according to the context, conflictingly describing himself as new media artist while stating that he does not feel like one.”⁹⁰

Waelder suggests the development of a specific awareness on one’s own position, highlighting that subjects involved in the complex network of relationships that constitute the art system behave according to written and unwritten rules to best position themselves. Topics such as the emergence of new media and the *post-medial* approach, the flexible boundaries between contemporary art and new media art, the specific ways these envision and deal with technology, and the understanding of the curator as a translator among them contribute substantially to this “situational awareness”, which in our view manifests itself in the framework of where art is shown: the exhibition.

89 P. Waelder, *Selling and Collecting Art in the Network Society. Interactions among Contemporary Art, New Media, and the Art Market*, Ph.D. diss., Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), 2015, pp. 109–150.

90 *Idem*, pp. 147–148.

04 THE EXHIBITION AS INTERFACE

Exhibition Metaphors as Catalysts for Artistic and Curatorial Intervention

The following chapter focuses on understanding the art exhibition as an *interface*, a common surface between independent systems. This reflection comes into being after a series of observations on the growing variety of contexts where art is produced and transmitted. Those – as seen in the previous sections – are influenced by the emergence of new media, by the theoretical discussion developed in the framework of curatorial studies, and by the blurring roles of artist, audience, and curator. Most recently, a growing enthusiasm leads artists and curators to consider the Internet as the most contemporary platform for showing art, neglecting the actuality of the exhibition in a physical space.

In this chapter, we propose therefore a metaphor that allows the return to “analog exhibitions”¹ through a *post-medial* awareness on the specificity of the art display. This metaphorical approach focuses on the relational quality of the art show as a strategy for analyzing the specific settings in which the exhibition takes place. In our view, this strategy helps curators and artists by uncovering

1 As “analog exhibitions” we mean a display of art deeply rooted in physical space. It can consist of a visitable room in a building, an art gallery or an off space. In this chapter we do not consider anything that could be labeled as a “digital exhibition”, for example a screen, a social network photographic gallery or an online exhibitions, despite some of them have very interesting features that one might want to bring in the exhibition space.

the various elements of the show that construct its meaning and, once addressed, offer new ways to address and involve the audience.

In our opinion, each curatorial metaphor allows to critically rethink the various elements forming the exhibition, finding blank spaces for artistic intervention or possibilities for involving the audience, the hosting institution, and the surrounding city in a deeper relationship. A good example is Sarah Cook's use of technological metaphors. Cook shows how exhibition formats can be renovated through comparison with other media like *software*, *broadcasting*, or *community markets*. Each one highlights a particular aspect of the show that would have otherwise been less visible, but those metaphors cannot be applied to just any exhibition.

We propose therefore the metaphor of the *interface*, more flexible and abstract, in order to address the various components of any exhibition. The *interface* being a structure of connection and mutual agency among elements capable of assuming virtually any shape, it represents the most encompassing term of comparison for a show.

Our research for references of exhibitions as interfaces brought to light three examples, each of them referring to a different declination of the metaphor. Art historian Romy Golan presented as interface the conceptual connection between all the pieces in the show, as well as the ways the works and the show affect the hosting institution and further art history; the curatorial practice of V4ULT define the exhibition interface as a place of encounter; researchers Penn and De La Vega propose its general understanding as the surface among countless hidden software processes. We will list them as three particular cases of the exhibition as interface, but our definition of exhibition as *interface* also encompasses more diverse practices.

Finally, the chapter will be concluded with a less structured text composed of disparate reflections, observations, and suggestions which contribute to the formalization of a method for reading exhibitions as interfaces.

4.1. Interfaces

In the previous two chapters, we highlighted how terms like "curating" and "medium" can be expanded into very disparate meanings and how their definition slowly changes through the stratification of new connotations emerging over time. In a contemporaneity based on technology and interaction, the definition of "interface" is similarly elusive, especially if considered in metaphorical constructs rather than technical systems. The root of the word "interfaces" relates to surfaces "forming common boundaries, as between bodies or

regions”². Originally coined in 1882 to define membranes or areas of contact between different substances in biology and chemistry, from the 1960s begun identifying the zones of interaction between computers and other systems attached to them, like the connections with printers, keyboards, screens and so on.

With the emergence and pervasiveness of GUIs (Graphic User Interfaces), interactive displays, smartphones, and responsive websites, interfaces acquired a strong technological connotation in culture. The common understanding of *interfaces*, though, confines those very often within the elements in the realm of communication design and obscures its originally wider significance. An example of this is visible in Sara Hromack’s and Rob Giampietro’s article-conversation entitled *The Museum Interface*, featured in *Art in America* in 2014.³ The authors consider as *museum interface* what in other words could be defined as mere social media marketing strategies – the online presence on websites and social media. The interface, in this case, is perceived as a set of tools for “customer loyalty management” and platforms for audiences’ encounter with the artist’s work before the visit.⁴ This vision of “interface” is quite common, especially in the emphatic lexicon of marketing departments, but *per se* does not imply any radically new scenario that rethinks the relationship between museum and audience. The website and social network presence of an institution are a simple integration of the press office, that usually does not structure its communication strategies as a direct extension of the exhibition. A more abstract understanding of “interface” could conversely stimulate a more complex reflection – when applied to exhibition making – that includes the critique of the same show into it. It could challenge the connections between the components of the exhibition as spaces for artistic experimentation.

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- 2 H. Burke, “Interfacial: WYSIWYG :p”, in V4ULT (ed.), *a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave*, Rome, Produzioni Nero s.c.r.l., 2014, p. 9.
 - 3 S. Hromack, and R. Giampietro, “The museum interface”, in «Art in America», October 2014, available online at: www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/the-museum-interface (accessed 11/8/2016).
 - 4 Another element of Hromack’s and Giampietro’s article could be stimulating for further inquiries, which we won’t develop further in the thesis but report it here since it considers Internet-based practices of “exhibiting” content. The authors consider commercial ‘collection-based’ websites such as Ebay or Etsy at the same level of museum archives, suggesting that museums should then learn from the online processes of “collectively producing knowledge”. Both suggestions seem more than legit, but their view lacks entirely in a contemporary understanding of digital art. They refer to The Google Art Project, which is scanning and making available online the content of museums all over the world, which according to them highlights again the difference between image, documentation and online processes, and the *holy* and *vibrant* physical object. Why can (or should) the museum’s archive learn from the digital world of online collections, while artworks should keep on being stable and safe in their physical materiality? How could exhibitions in the physical space include conceptually and critically practices related to the development of online visual culture like sharing, commenting, and curating collections of digital images, avoiding to end up using them only as an “audience loyalty building strategy”?



To achieve this we need to develop a new view, in which “the interface becomes a ubiquitous metaphor for dealing with reality.”⁵ In this case, *interfaces* are closer to their original meaning of “common surfaces, bridges or permeable boundaries between systems”, stimulating a structural awareness towards the complexity surrounding us.

In the rest of the chapter we will attempt at considering the components of the exhibition in a dynamic state focusing on the “in-betweenness” of the *interfacing*, rather than their static position within the interface. Through this view, the exhibition appears as something that mediates among all its components, continuously legitimating their interconnection and combined acting. In our view, such an understanding of *interface* considers the disparate aspects of the exhibition in a unique portrait. This “new and vibrant” concept of our time stimulates the creation of new structures to produce, show and transmit (up-coming) art.

4.2. From Exhibition as Medium to Post-medial Shows

“Exhibitions (particularly group exhibitions, art fairs, temporary perennial shows and large-scale international art exhibitions) are the main means through which contemporary art is now mediated, experienced and historicized.”⁶

Paul O’Neill – author of the previous quote – is not the only researcher attributing traits of *mediality* to art exhibitions, understanding the show as an entity that transmits and mediates art practices. As seen in the first chapter, the origins of the concept of the *exhibition as a medium* can be traced in the 1960s, when the emerging figures of curators acquired awareness, through experiments on formats and narratives in the show, of the exhibition as a proper expressive medium of curation. The same concept has been extensively inquired in practice and theory, becoming in the course of the years a dominant expression in exhibition texts and titles of curatorial symposia.⁷ An example of

5 H. Burke, “Interfacial: WYSIWYG :p”, in V4ULT (ed.), *a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave*, 2014, p. 10.

6 P. O’Neill, “The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse”, in J. Rugg (ed.), *Issues in Curating, Contemporary Art and Performance*, p.15.

7 An example is *Exhibition As Medium*, program curated by Toby Huddlestone in 2011 in the project spaces of CRATE, which was “thinking about the exhibition as one co-authored artwork rather than a space in which to show separately authored works.” In *EXHIBITION AS MEDIUM END SYMPOSIUM* June 2012, online entry, available online at: www.cratespace.co.uk/node/554 (accessed 22/12/2016). More detailed information in *EXHIBITION AS MEDIUM*, online entry, available online at: <http://pianoproject.org/focus/exhibition-as-medium/> (accessed 22/12/2016). Another reference of the expression is “*Exhibition as Medium*”: A Symposium, co-organized

Fig. 11: *Interacting Art*, exhibition view, 2016 (see: p. 140)

considering the art show as a mediated experience is apparent in the curatorial statement of documenta 12, curated by Roger M. Buergel and Ruth Noack in 2007, in which the specific qualities of the exhibition are stressed as a reflection of the exhibition itself.

*"We conceive of the exhibition as a medium. This takes us away from the mere representation of the 'world's best artists' to the production of an experiential space, in which it is possible to explore the terms 'art work' and 'public' in stark juxtaposition. What is contemporary art? What is a contemporary public? The experience of art is always the experience of life. If we wish to redefine this relationship, we require a medium to remove us from our immediate "living context". The aesthetic experience, which begins where meaning in the conventional sense ends, could be such a medium."*⁸

As shown in the review of curatorial practices of our first chapter, the "exhibition as medium" is one of the recurrent themes of curatorial studies. There, experimental shows realized by enlightened museum directors of the 60s were referred in 1990s as the ancestors of contemporary curating. Those emerging practices stimulated strong criticisms from artists, who saw curators as figures becoming more and more central. Curators were accused of creating complex intellectual structures dominating the artworks, which were becoming invisible. Needless to say, the disputes between artists and curators never disappeared – especially with the emergence of curatorial *supervisibility* – and still occupy a relevant position in contemporary art discourse. Those positions appear at the same time outdated, being around since almost 50 years, and still dramatically contemporary creating a short circuit that will probably never be solved. Probably inheriting a position more diffused in the world of new media art, we consider the border between their roles as *porous*: artists and curators are both *functions* that act within a larger system of cultural signs and symbols. More often than not their practices should overlap, in parallel to the juxtaposition of disparate materials in the show, from text to performance, from traditional artistic media to new technological media.

Going back to the "exhibition as a medium", a more flexible understanding could emerge recalling the concept of post-medium as encompassing both traditional artistic media and technological media. We proceed as Professor

by Claire Grace and Kevin Lotery at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 8–9 March 2013. C. Haines, "Exhibition as Medium", in «Journal of curatorial studies», Volume 2, Number 3, Intellect Ltd conference Review, 2013, available online at: www.academia.edu/9396889/Exhibition_as_Medium (accessed 22/12/2016).

8 R. M. Buergel, and R. Noack, *documenta 12 - 100 days of art in Kassel*, 2007, available online at: www.documenta12.de/index.php?id=ausstellung&L=1 (accessed 25/9/2016).

of Media Theory and History Charlie Gere does by questioning himself how institutions and exhibitions “compete as a medium for cultural practice in an increasingly media-saturated world.”⁹ Keystone for this view is Peter Weibel’s *Postmedial Condition*. While Weibel deals mainly with the materials through which art is produced and does not explicitly refer to mass media like radio and television, he still legitimates the understanding as “media” of elements that “until recently, haven’t been considered as media at all, but under the influence of the media have become media themselves, the non-technological old media.”¹⁰ Adopting this perspective allows the exhibition to be understood as a part of the media-scape, implying that the art show can now be juxtaposed and compared to any other communication medium as a container and transmitter of information.

As Weibel then further sustains, “[w]ith the methods of the new media we also reevaluate the methods of the old non-technological media”¹¹, a hint that is extensively realized in various contemporary metaphors used for understanding and structuring exhibitions. We present now some of those metaphors, highlighting how their adoption characterizes the structure the art show.

4.2.1. Contemporary Metaphors for the Exhibition

In her essay “Immateriality and its Discontents”, published in Christiane Paul’s edited book *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond*¹², Sarah Cook describes various curatorial metaphors to represent the core structure of curatorial projects – which nevertheless in the more recent *Rethinking Curating* are referred to only as “models”.¹³ Cook proposes three main metaphors referring to the cultural worlds of media and technology: the exhibition as a “software program or data flow”, as a “trade show”, or as “broadcast”.¹⁴

9 C. Gere, “New Media Art and the Gallery in the Digital Age”, in C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, p. 14.

10 P. Weibel, “The post-medial condition”, in «Arte Contexto», no. 6, 2005, p. 11.

11 *Ibidem*.

12 S. Cook, “Immateriality and Its Discontents”, in C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, pp. 26–49. Cook’s text was later reformulated and included in the second section of the Graham and Cook’s *Rethinking Curating*, entitled “Contexts, Practices and Processes”.

13 In *Rethinking Curating* Graham and Cook abandon the metaphors to define theoretical models that are unbound from an image and based on the development of the exhibition. According to them, a project can be “iterative”, evolving and growing to each cycle of production and showing, “modular”, structured in many independent compartments that build together a whole that can grow and shrink according to the contingent budget-facilities-location situation, and “distributive”, where each project (or part of it) is based on collaborations built ad-hoc for each show. In this last variation, the identity of the curator – or the institution – organizing the exhibition is less important than the framework in which it takes place.

14 B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, p. 154.

Cook identifies exhibition based on a *software program* in shows with an inner conceptual structure that influence the how they are going to look like when exhibited in a new location. An example of it is *Art for Networks*, a travelling group show curated by the artist Simon Pope, which was planned to change its inner structure for each hosting location to adapt to the new space.¹⁵ She refers to the model of *trade shows* for one-day, flea-market-like events, which are more similar to informal exchanges or gathering points than structured exhibitions. *Broadcasts* are projects with an online, scheduled or live program like *TV Swansong*¹⁶, which are taking place for a fixed period of time. In each of these three metaphors is recognizable a specific quality of mediality within the show, which in this case influence the structure of the event according to the contents that are transmitted. The metaphors of those shows described and structured the ways the concepts and the work of the artists were brought to the audience.

Another example of an exhibition metaphor is proposed by the independent writer, editor and lecturer Jorinde Seijdel in her text contribution for the exhibition *InfoArcadia*, produced at Stroom Den Haag in 2000.¹⁷ Seijdel initiates her essay referring to the absence of the art show in Bruce Sterling's *Dead Media Project*¹⁸, Therefore questioning the actual "liveness" of the exhibition as a contemporary medium. "Slow, distant and linear reflection – the reigning mode of the conventional exhibition – seems opposed to our perception as it changes under the influence of new media: quick and nonlinear zapping, scanning or browsing."¹⁹ She validates the art show's survival through its expansion in any mediated public space, and through practices of *remediation* that reshape and represent the exhibition into other media. Seijdel formulates her proposal of the exhibition as an "analogue emulator" based on *remediation* and *appropriation*

"The exhibition-as-emulator can be imagined as a kind of salvage program for all kinds of worlds, belief systems and realities that it re-translates into universal codes and interfaces. [...] As a thought-experimental metaphor, the exhibition-as-emulator is

15 *Art For Networks*, exhibition presentation on the website of the gallery, available online at: www.chapter.org/art-networks (accessed 17/1/2017).

16 *TV SWANSONG*, project website, available online at: www.swansong.tv (accessed 17/1/2017).

17 J. Seijdel, "The Exhibition as Emulator", trans. J. Boekbinder, in «mediamatic.net», January 2000, available online at: www.mediomatic.net/8740/en/the-exhibition-as-emulator (accessed 26/12/2016). Mentioned in S. Cook, "Immateriality and Its Discontents", in C. Paul (ed.), *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*, pp. 26–49.

18 *The Dead Media Project*, mainling list, website, and database, available online at: www.deadmedia.org (accessed 26/12/2016).

19 J. Seijdel, "The Exhibition as Emulator".

*not an attempt to save the exhibition, but rather to understand and situate it in the here and now according to its own inherent logic. Emulation would seem to be the answer to the oft-repeated paradox that the computer as a medium can archive all other media except itself. [...] Why would we not also see the exhibition as a model, an 'analogue machine' that can include every model except itself? And is it not tempting to extend the analogy even further, by claiming that the exhibition-as-emulator is the only idea that can allow a retrospective of the exhibition? The exhibition seen as emulator thus allows us to 'play' old exhibitions, displays or shows. But they are encoded according to a new program and conditioned by a current system, so they generate a new pleasure and a genuinely contemporary experience."*²⁰

Similarly to Cook's terms of comparison, Seijdel's metaphor is an experiment of thought that takes elements of our technologized world – the computer as an ultimate medium that can emulate all media except itself – to stimulate the understanding and the potentiality of the art show. Those metaphor are very clear examples of how an exhibition can be structured in comparison to another medium, and even more importantly, they demonstrate how such images can be used to enrich and renovate the communicative elements of a project.

Software, TV or radio broadcastings, community markets and emulators are some of the many metaphors around. In effect, applying a post-medial approach allows to easily imagine shows that work as *databases*, as *archives*, or even as *postal services*. Through more "contemporary" modalities of visualizing information, the exhibition can assume traits of a *social network newsfeed*, an *online photo gallery*, or an *internet shopping service*.

4.2.2. Theoretical References for "Exhibitions as Interfaces"

This thesis shares its title and partially its underlying vision – the exhibition as interface – with some other research and presentations. None of them provided a definition of what is meant by "exhibition as interface", letting us assume that the expression is used more for its imaginative potential than its actual conception. Despite that, those examples draw some possible use of the metaphor.

4.2.2.1. The Interface as Narration Within and Around the Exhibition

In October 2014 the conference *The Contemporary Museum in Italy since 1990* presented a panel entitled *The Temporary Exhibition as Interface*, which fo-

20 *Ibidem*.

cused on “exhibitions that question both the space and the conceptual framework of the museum.”²¹

In her panel talk, Romy Golan, Professor of 20th Century Art at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, focused on historical Italian exhibitions *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine* (1967) and *Vitalità del Negativo* (1970). Both were organized in historical Italian buildings, respectively Palazzo Trinci in Foligno and Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, and in Golan's presentation they are mentioned as historically influential shows presenting a strong curatorial narrative among the works. At the time, both locations were multifunctional buildings loaded with cultural history (and ideology, in the case of the Rome location) and it was the first time that either of them had presented contemporary art. In particular, they showed installations which addressed the space as an artistic medium. The curator built an overall narrative using the exhibitions as a conceptual and legitimating framework for the artwork to be placed within. As Golan points out about *Vitalità del Negativo*, the show addressed the strong connection of the Palazzo delle Esposizioni with the Fascism through temporary installations that critically re-connoted the whole building by symbolically overturning images and emblems of the regime.²²

In the panel, it was not explained what the word “interface” was intended to mean in its title, but we may hypothesise what its meaning could be. Both exhibitions mentioned by Romy Golan present a strong authorial presence of the curator in the narrative among the artworks, presence that recalls the *curatorial visibility* examined in the first chapter of this research. Furthermore, both shows influenced what would have been the future history of the hosting institution. After *Lo Spazio dell'Immagine* a foundation was established with the aim of organizing contemporary art exhibitions on a yearly base in Foligno; *Vitalità del Negativo* marked the beginning of a ten-years-span in which the Palazzo delle Esposizioni became an important institution for contemporary art in Rome.

Both elements can be seen as interfaces: the narrative and conceptual relation among the pieces, and the connection between the institution, its history, and large audiences.

21 The conference was organized by Claire Brandon, at the time Ph.D. Candidate in the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University. *The Contemporary Museum in Italy* since 1990, conference program, available online at: www.lapietradialogues.org/dialogues_sch.php?cat=4&id=141 (accessed 28/12/2016).

22 *The Temporary Exhibition as Interface*, conference video recordings, available online at: <https://youtu.be/lzJJ-7JH9NM> (accessed 19/5/2016).

4.2.2.2. The Interface as a Place of Encounter

"Exhibition as Interface"²³ is the title of an interview – published in *Rhizome* – of Lucy Chinen with V4ULT²⁴, curatorial project of artists and curators Anna Mikkola and Hanna Nilsson. Again no explicit definition of exhibition as interface appears, but through the text, the reader gets an understanding of it as a fluid and multi-layered place of encounter, gathering, and exchange.

The two artists define V4ULT as an *interface*. "Taking place in various built environments, in book form, and online, the project has been described as an "interface" through which people, ideas and artworks move."²⁵ The connotation of both the show and the curatorial platform as interconnected *interfaces* is supported by a dual understanding of "interface": as a tissue connecting elements together and as a portal mediating the perception of another reality. V4ULT is a catalyst for the artists that involves, which act and produce under the influence of a collective process. The exhibition becomes the "access point" for perceiving some parts of this activity.

This conception considers primarily the social qualities of the exhibition, idea that is supported by a dense history of artistic practices addressing the simultaneous presence of audience and artists as key elements in the show. An example of collective displayed described in this thesis is Group Material's *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* (1981), in which the content of the exhibition was provided by the inhabitants of neighborhood where the gallery was located.²⁶ Other examples of practices of exchange in the exhibition were labeled by Nicolas Bourriaud as "Relational Aesthetics". They explore "methods of social exchanges, interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered to him/her, and the various communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools serving to link individuals and human groups together."²⁷ Bourriaud refers to the practices developed by artists that are often also active in curatorial activity. Artist Rirkrit Tiravanija is well known for staging situations in which the audience shares the experience of a meal in the gallery space and collaborated with Obrist in some curatorial project. Artists Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick organized in the Amphitheatre in Arles *To the Moon via the Beach*, a sand installation that reproduced a moonscape including 22 artists' projects, whose setting-up and production phase coincided with the exhibition length. Artist Tino Sehgal organizes "constructed situations" that involve the visitor of the museum in performative moments of various kinds.

23 L. Chinen, "Exhibition as Interface: An interview with V4ULT", in «Rhizome», 12 May 2015, available online at: <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2015/may/12/v4ult/> (accessed 27/12/2016).

24 V4ULT website, available online at: <http://v4ult.cc/> (accessed 1/1/2017).

25 *Ibidem*.

26 A. Green, "Citizen Artists: Group Material".

27 N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 43.

All these practices are based on the conception of the exhibition as a shared place, where visitors and artists gather together and meet one each other. They might be exchanging ideas, collaborating, or creating situations of interpersonal relations slightly shifted from the ones happening in reality.

In our view V4ULT, explicitly mentioning the interface in describing itself, is relevant in the consideration of the various elements involved in their practice as actors. As they state, “[w]e aim to create spaces and situations where different entities meet and coexist”²⁸. There the hierarchy among these elements is horizontal, understanding “the exhibition as a stage where different actors, the audience, the art works and practices come together either in agreement or dissonance.”²⁹ The conception of the show as “access point” recalls the idea that the exhibition is not the only way of encountering art, but one of the possible channels of transmission of the artistic practice.

4.2.2.3. Software Studies and Exhibitionary Thought

One last reference of exhibition as interface is the presentation of Samantha Penn and Juan Pablo de la Vega³⁰ in the conference *Art Matters*, taking place in Barcelona in December 2014.³¹ Their talk was entitled *The exhibition as an interface: how might software studies affect the way we think about encounters with art?*³² and focused on the display of artworks whose materiality involved in first place software and digital processes.

As in the previous examples, the authors did not explain the motivation behind the title. The talk proposed the adoption of software studies for the analysis of art exhibitions, which, according to the authors, are useful tools for describing how code and digital means are present in art production, as well as how contemporary exhibitions can include and make visible those software-based practices. A paradigmatic image used by Penn and De la Vega was the immaterial (and hidden) structure of a supermarket. This was described as a complex architecture of interfaced systems of software that regulates the transportation and storage of goods, its recognition through bar-codes, and the monetary transaction behind a credit card payment. The authors concluded their talk

28 L. Chinen, “Exhibition as Interface: An interview with V4ULT”.

29 *Ibidem*.

30 At the time both affiliated at the University of London, Goldsmiths.

31 ART MATTERS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2014 (AMIC2014), conference program, available online at: <https://artmattersconference.wordpress.com/> (accessed 28/12/2016) [previously available online at: <http://artmattersconference.com/> (accessed 27/9/2016)].

32 *The exhibition as an interface: how might software studies affect the way we think about encounters with art?*, talk presentation, available online at: <https://artmattersconference.wordpress.com/2014/11/21/the-exhibition-as-an-interface-how-might-software-studies-affect-the-way-we-think-about-encounters-with-art/> (accessed 28/12/2016).

referring to artists that include technical and metaphorical software-based practices in the exhibition.

Utilizing software as a viewpoint to analyze art shows – in our view – integrates the metaphor suggested by Jorinde Seijdel encountered before. Referring to Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux*, Seijdel asks: "Is the exhibition in the information age an interface (meaning 'area of contact' or 'connection'), or a program (not in the sense of 'overview', but rather of 'software'?)"³³ She answers herself that probably the exhibition is both. In contrast, we argue that the two components of *interface* and *software* are two views of the same structure: software is an integral part of the functionality of the interface. If Cook's metaphor of the exhibition as *software program* addresses how the project re-structures itself to adapt to each new location, its *interface* refers to the way the show is physically installed and presented to the audience.

Integrating the hidden software structure of a supermarket depicted by Penn and De la Vega with its visible *surface*, we see the exhibition in those terms: a comparable complex of visible or invisible processes that – at a much slower speed than a technical card payment – crystallize the combination and interaction of many intervening systems into a space that the spectator later experiences.

4.3. Towards a Method: Exhibition as "Interface of Interfaces"

*"To exhibit is [...] to bring a selections of such existents [...], or newly created works of art, into a shared space (which may be a room, a site, a publication, a web portal, or an app) with the aim of demonstrating, primarily through the experiential accumulation of visual connections, a particular constellation of meaning that cannot be made known by any other means."*³⁴

The exhibition is a complex system interlacing several entities, each one of whose could take the role of interface between the others. This implicates the risk of getting lost in an endless chain of "interfaces interfacing other interfaces", which generates nothing more than confusion and a substantial meaninglessness of the metaphor.

Repeating the perspective exposed until here, one could see as interface the position of the curator in the relationship between artist and audience – who

33 J. Seijdel, "The Exhibition as Emulator".

34 T. Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, p. 30.

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takes care of mediating (or interfacing) the two identities through the artworks of the artist. The curator, indeed, “lies *amongst* art (or objects), space, and audience.”³⁵ Conversely, if the analysis focuses on the artworks, their *interface* would be composed by the narration that connects them, be it a traditional theme in art history, or a concept of the curator who’s presenting a new way of reading contemporary tendencies. Referring to the art system, as stated in the second chapter of the present thesis, the exhibition can be an *interface* through which new media art and contemporary art find a meeting point. Domenico Quaranta and Christiane Paul sustain that the display of art is the one that, show after show, can create a bridge between the art worlds of new media art and contemporary art, allowing a direct comparison of practices and single works. Finally, exhibitions can be seen as one of the ways art history is created, as Terry Smith states: “[a]n exhibition is not the last word, but a contribution on the ways of understanding of art”³⁶. As seen in the first chapter, critic-curators interface separated artistic practices into coherent movements through exhibitions, and use these as well as answer to other curator’s actions, structuring a dialogue between curators. “More than any written record, exhibitions themselves are the intertexts that curators use to speak to each other.”³⁷

To avoid the hazard of overemphasizing the *interface* as ubiquitous and omnipotent, one should focus on its essence, for example examining its connective and relational qualities. This understanding is proposed by Benjamin H. Bratton³⁸ in his essay “Interface Typologies: On Design Strategy”³⁹, hosted in a *gesture waves us on, answering our own wave* – publication edited by the curatorial project V4ULT – which is specifically dedicated to the exploration of interfaces and their behaviors. Bratton’s philosophical conception of interfaces does not merely contemplate them as physical objects materially defined by what they connect, but as connective nodes that exist and are defined by their particular performative act of *interfacing*.

“Interfaces must then be understood in an expanded but carefully-defined sense as the conjunctive media of connection between subjects and objects that are, at least partially, established by that conjunction. [...] A definition of an interface is, then, not about a category of things in the world that we might already recognize as being there just to make connec-

35 *Idem*, p. 225.

36 *Idem*, p. 45.

37 *Idem*, p. 204.

38 Benjamin H. Bratton is Professor of Visual Arts and Director of the Center for Design and Geopolitics at the University of California, San Diego. See Benjamin H. Bratton’s website, www.bratton.info (accessed 26/12/2016).

39 B. H. Bratton, “Interface Typologies: On Design Strategy”, in V4ULT (ed.), *a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave*, 2014, pp. 51–62.

Fig. 12: Isidora Ficovic, *One Flower, One Electronic Part*, 2016 (see: p. 137)

tions (cables, screens, sidewalks, software, houses, etc.). Those things can be interfaces but many other things too. The shifting constitution of an interface is less a type of thing than a way that a thing comes to do something. In other words, an interface is [...] anything that has become interfacial."⁴⁰

In this light, interfaces appear as connective structures which combine disparate elements of a system in a performative configuration. Shape and function of the interface depend on what is actually connected and how the interfacing element performs its role. Interfaces need to be therefore understood as continuous processes rather than fixed objects.

*"Interfaces are very different from each other in what they do. If they weren't, everything that they conduct [is] like everything else, and clearly it does not [...]. Interfaces do not perform or condition all their connections in the same way. They perform differently, and this performative relationality between them is the basis of an interface's ability to design and to designate what it interfaces in its own image."*⁴¹

The exhibition as interface contains several layers of *interfacedness* – the performative essence of interfaces – each of them involving some of the elements. The resulting image is indeed a sort of "interface of interfaces" – an imaginary "second order of *interfaciality*". Its versatility is the strength of the metaphor, rather than its weakness. Metaphors are figures of speech that expand the qualities of an object through its juxtaposition with apparently unrelated elements. In the case of practices based on metaphors, the more diverse interpretations are implied from the figure of speech, the various will be the outcomes of this practice. Interface could therefore constitute a useful concept for a methodology to analyze exhibition that artists and curators can utilize while planning a show.

4.4. Interfaciality as a Method for Artists and Curators

The upcoming section of this chapter presents a draft for a methodology based on the interfaces in the exhibition. It consists of a loose accumulation of observations, reflections, and questions – rather than a structured scheme of rules – collected during the development of the present thesis and through the curatorial practice of the author. This fluid archive of thoughts from source-

40 *Idem*, pp. 51–52.

41 *Idem*, p. 54.

es mentioned in the previous pages is enriched by examples of projects that represent, how the exhibition can be thought of as an *interface*.

We propose three levels of understanding the exhibition as an interface: what occurs *between the works* and transforms the **components** of the exhibition in a coherent whole; what *mediates* this whole complex and its **structures** to the observers; and how this network *positions itself* within a **broader system** of tendencies, movements, manifestos, histories, collectors, academics, happening on a larger (and now global) scale.

4.4.1. Systems – How is the Framework?

*"[E]xhibition appears as a transdisciplinary and transcultural space, as a public and social sphere. It manifests itself as a set of spatio-temporal relations, a medium that is already time-based by its very nature: as a form of presentation that is of a specified duration and as an event bringing together different actors—from the exhibits to the artists and curators through to the audience and the institution."*⁴²

Exhibitions are surrounded and framed by various elements: the institution hosting the project; the city where the event takes place; the specific time of the year; there are recurrent events and festivals coinciding with a part of the show's duration ... the curator might want to point at those, take distance from it, or play around with what's happening around.

4.4.1.1. SPACE: Engaging with the Institution, Involving the City

Considering the larger system highlights the qualities of the location that is going to host the project and its audience. One might be in a big city or in a small town; this does change how people approach the show. In a touristy village it can be difficult to involve the inhabitants during high season because the locals may not have free time to attend art events during normal opening hours. In a metropolis, people have different lifestyles and this brings its own issues to considering what to show and how to structure the presentations there.

Being in a big museum devoted to *en-plein-air* paintings does not fit with a project on Internet art and smartphones. A project about how landscape is represented through photographic filters and diffused on social media, though, may fit. One should keep in mind that each location (museum, gallery, off-space, squat, Internet art platform...) has its own audience and traditions, with

42 TIMING. *On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, conference press release, available online at: www.artandeducation.net/announcement/timing-%E2%80%93-on-the-temporal-dimension-of-exhibiting (accessed 30/12/2016). The conference was organized at Cultures of the Curatorial and Studio, International Academy of Visual Arts, Leipzig, in January 2012.

Maria
Maria
Guilherme
Guilherme
Sam
Sam
Laura
Laura
David
David
Sue
Sue



its own expectations and habits. A curatorial approach could aim to satisfy or to disrupt.

4.4.1.2. TIME: Contemporaneity, Anniversaries, or Coincidences

An exhibition can be a good way of reflecting on our troubled times. Other equally important shows focus on art formalisms and close themselves in the exploration and construction of new artistic thought. In the media, there might be some major topic of discussion that the project can contribute to, or conversely an overlooked theme that could be brought into light.

Since we live in an age of forgetfulness, there are many possibilities of working with anniversaries: every year is 10, 20, 50, 100 years after something else happened. But these recurrences can present negative sides. Many other curators have done the same, for example in 2015 there were countless shows on World War One. Moreover, this multiplies the expectations of the audience: this kind of event can bring out various emotional reactions.

In 2006 and 2016 – respectively thirtieth and fortieth anniversary of 1976 Friuli earthquake – contemporary art festival Palinsesti⁴³ hosted two exhibitions dealing with earthquakes: *Sismologie* (2006) and *Fracturae* (2016). The two curators carefully avoided the display of pictures of the destroyed towns and villages. *Sismologie*, curated by Alessandro Del Puppo, focused on artists which “re-wrote” seisms creating collective memories through the artistic practice; *Fracturae*, curated by Giorgia Gastaldon, analyzed the relationship between man and the disastrous occurrences through the works of visual artists that deal with personal and collective crisis.⁴⁴

4.4.1.3. FRAMEWORK: Engaging the Surrounding

If the project takes place in correspondence with a particular event, be it a festival or a traditional event in the city, is perhaps worth addressing. Large events might be complex frameworks for realizing critical contributions, but even a small intervention can conceptually turn them upside down.

43 The festival is hosted in the small town of San Vito al Tagliamento. We will refer extensively to *Palinsesti* in the next chapter of the present thesis.

44 *Sismologie. Distruzione e costruzione nell'arte contemporanea*, exhibition presentation, available online at: www.palinsesti.org/2006/mostre.html (accessed 1/1/2017). *Fracturae*, exhibition presentation, available online at: www.palinsesti.org/mostre/fracturae (accessed 1/1/2017).

Fig. 13: Mary Maggic, *Open Source Estrogen*, 2015–2016 (see: p. 139)

The *Unplugger*⁴⁵ was distributed in media art festivals as a gadget, it consists of an electricity plug whose two terminals are wired together. If inserted in an electricity socket, it would cause a short circuit and the consequent failure of all the electronic equipment connected. The gadget gives to the audience of electricity-dependent media art festival the possibility of shutting down the event with a simple move.

A strategy consists in identifying the focus of the framework and understanding its unwritten rules. Is there the possibility of entering the official program from the main entrance or from a back door? Making something in the huge schedule of the Venice Biennale can be risky: the project might be invisible to the most of the visitors who want to check the main program and leave, but high attendance surely entails that there will be attentive visitors who would fully study the offerings in the program and find something attracting their attention. Moreover, official invitations can limit the freedom of critiquing and experimenting the same framework, whereas independent spaces have more room for those – but probably less financial support.

In 2016 Casa Cavazzini, the museum of modern and contemporary art of the city of Udine, Italy, produced a show entitled *Paradoxa: Japanese Art Today*, that opened in conjunction with the most important European film festival about Asian cinema, Far East Film Festival, organized also in Udine since 18 years.⁴⁶ The curator, Denis Viva, choose wisely to “interface” two institutions of the city – whose tracks are parallel and do not cross each other that often – with a project that challenged and stimulated both of them.

4.4.2. Components – Space, Time, Artworks

“The primary means [of] “explaining” an artist’s work is to let it reveal itself. Showing is telling. Space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased. Installation is both presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation. Galleries are paragraphs, the walls and formal subdivisions of the floors are sentences, clusters of works are the clauses, and individual

45 *Readymade for Ars Electronica • Media Attack & Exhibition & Lecture & Publication • 2002–2006*, project presentation, available online at: www.rainer-prohaska.net/Unplugger (accessed 1/1/2017). K. Demblin, R. Prohaska, and M. Sägmül, “Plug and Pray!”, in «Skug – Journal für Musik», 21/10/2002, available online at: www.skug.at/index.php?art_id=2648 (accessed 1/1/2017).

46 *Paradoxa. Contemporary art from Japan, with an installation premiering in Italy*, exhibition presentation, available online at: www.civicimuseiudine.it/en/exhibitions-and-events/34-casa-cavazzini/95-paradoxa-en-gb (accessed 30/12/2016).

*works, in varying degrees, operate as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and often as more than one of these functions according to their context.*⁴⁷

The disparate components of the exhibition are the effective means that frame, enclose and transmit the artist work. Any artwork or object deals with a topic, occupies a space, needs a specific setting to help the viewer get to know it. This entails that the curator – and the artist as well, when it comes to the setting of its own work – has to first understand the type of material he or she is dealing with, the necessities of each project, and how the space frames the artistic research. Broadening the focus, all other exhibits contribute to the theme of the show with singular perspectives and positions. The curator should be able to shift the scale that he or she is using to create a solid narrative.

4.4.2.1. CONTENT: Understanding the Artwork

Sometimes art shows do not show art. The artist might select found objects through a personal strategy and exhibit them. The curator can select non-art materials to accompany the artworks. Or build a show uniquely based on other materials, like other curator's activities.

In 1971 the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers displayed at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf a large collection of materials under the title *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (*Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles*). The exhibited objects were ordinary objects whose common trait was the representation of an eagle, a strong symbolic element that represents power and strength. To remember its non-art origin, each of the object was provided with a label saying "This is not a work of art". Despite that, the whole display was an artwork, becoming one the most referenced examples of artist curating exhibitions that criticized the same identity of the museum.⁴⁸

An exhibition can contribute to a traditional theme, propose a new definition for a set of practices which do not yet have a label, or review the career of one artist. The realization of an exhibition can have very different origins. Some curators start a new project from one or two works that they know, define a topic, and look for other works that add some elements in the complex until the mix is thick enough. In other circumstances, the pool of invited artists is already defined and one has to find a strategy to frame everything in a show. For an artist,

47 R. Storr, "Show and Tell", in P. Marincola (ed.), *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006, p. 23, quoted in T. Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, p. 48. Italic markings as in the original text.

48 T. Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, p. 105. See also R. Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea*.



being invited in contributing to a show might mean to produce new works or show older projects, eventually adapting those to the new framework.

*Curating Degree Zero Archive*⁴⁹ (2003–2008) was a research project about collecting exhibition documentations produced by more than 100 internationally recognised contemporary art curators. The materials were structured in an archive, “a representative cross-section of the critical curatorial discourse at the beginning of the 21st Century”⁵⁰, which was presented in several galleries in various installation forms that could be explored by the audience.⁵¹

Analyzing the works before the setup can be quite a challenging activity. What does it look like? What does the work need? How much space should there be around each work? Light or darkness? How does the work “behave” or engage with the audience? Is there a need for additional explanation?

The right strategy to fully understand the elements one is working with is to focus on the more challenging elements in the artwork, isolating and amplifying them. Any artwork should be considered “finished as it is” or any topic as “impossible to negotiate with”. Sometimes there are different versions of the same artwork produced in different media. There might be one of them which is fitting better than the others in the concept or in the space. Is there the necessity or possibility for a new translation? Does the artist agree with the proposal?

4.4.2.2. SPACE: Building a Narrative within an Architecture

The space hosting the show has a specific potential that should not be forgotten. It will nevertheless force the curator to make choices according to its characteristics. A way to start is understanding its particularities, imagining how a visitor would perceive it, and isolating the elements that could be disturbing for a work.

Where to start placing works? This should help the narrative emerge, but the works shouldn’t be sacrificed for the story. Some connections might be too obvious, other too subtle if the works are placed in a spatial sequence or in another.

49 Curating Degree Zero Archive webpage, available online at: www.zhdk.ch/index.php?id=miz_curating_engl (accessed 18/1/2017).

50 *Ibidem*.

51 D. Richter, and B. Drabble, “Curating Degree Zero Archive 2003–2008”, in «Oncurating.org», Issue 26 – Curating Degree Zero Archive: Curatorial Research, October 2015, available online at: www.on-curating.org/issue-26-reader/curating-degree-zero-archive-20032008.html (accessed 18/1/2017).

Some curators divide the space into sections and place the works according to their position in the curatorial concept. Some assign a room per artist, whose sequence constructs the narrative of the show. A strategy is to start in a small or open space is placing large works first, proceeding with smaller ones to “fill the gaps”. The physical placement helps in highlighting some qualities rather than others. Small works with fine details need to be seen closely; larger pieces are first seen from further away and then approached.

Coalesce is an “evolving” curatorial project of Paul O’Neill that was repeated five times between 2003 and 2009. Each show was structured throughout three spatial categories, *background*, *middle ground* and *foreground* that regulated the distribution of the works respectively in the “architecture of the exhibition space”, “the exhibition design and the layout of the exhibition space”, and the “space of containment” usually used in the exhibition display of single works.⁵² As a result of the understanding of the “exhibition as a landscape” the works were superimposed, contained, and merged into each other, to create an “overall group exhibition form rather than an accumulation of discernible, autonomous, individual artworks.”⁵³

How does one conquer the space? What is the first thing that the viewer will notice, once entering the space? What is the last object shown before leaving the exhibition? Like in a movie, one visitor will perceive a sequence of objects and might need some rest from one to the other.

4.4.2.3. TIME: When, how long?

Artworks and installations develop principally in space, but time is another dimension to consider. Some video work might need more than other to be seen from the beginning to the end. For other examples the spectator can “jump in”, see a fragment and leave, getting an overall idea.

How long should the exhibition period be? In small art spaces, the most of the people come during the openings and struggle to have an audience come during the run of the show. They use events as a strategy for gathering viewers. The beginning and the end of an exhibition mark a frame in which events like performances or talks can be included and still be conceptually part of the project. Absolute time can be a variable.

52 P. O’Neill, “Co-productive Exhibition-Making and Three Principal Categories of Organisation: the Background, the Middle-ground and the Foreground”, in «Oncurating.org», Issue 22 – Politics of Display, April 2014, available online at: www.on-curating.org/issue-22-43/co-productive-exhibition-making-and-three-principal-categories-of-organisation-the-background-the-middle-ground-and-the-foregrou.html (accessed 1/1/2017).

53 *Idem*.

*6PM YOUR LOCAL TIME (6PM YLT)*⁵⁴ is a one-night networked event organized by Link Art Center that took place simultaneously in different locations all over Europe, coordinated by a central venue in Brescia. All the participants scheduled events at the same time (6 PM), and during the evening would produce and share documentation materials on the web. The web platform of the project had a scraping algorithm that automatically collected online materials distributed over social networks and store it in a website with pictures and texts from all the locations. The synchronous happening of the events and their immediate web documentation created a framework in which real and mediated experience, physical space and web collided.

Some projects are structured in elements that can be repeated cyclically. Or present recurrent or sequential parts. Knowing the history of the building hosting the project can be a fruitful strategy for addressing its past, present, and future, creating connections that look like "time-space tunnels".

The work shown in this space is a response to the existing conditions and/or work previously shown within this space is a series of exhibitions organized in 1978/1979 in Peter Nadin Gallery at 84 West Broadway. Initially the show presented the empty space of the gallery just refurbished by the artists Peter Nadin and Christopher D'Arcangelo.⁵⁵ Then, for a period of five months, a series of artists was invited to produce a work that – following the title-statement – was an answer of what the space already included, developing a cumulative environment. Artists like Daniel Buren, Sean Scully, Jane Reynolds, Peter Fend, and Rhys Chatham participated to this "chain reaction" that concluded with a group work of Dan Graham, Louise Lawler, Peter Nadin, and Lawrence Weiner, who stenciled their names on the gallery floor.⁵⁶

54 *6PM YOUR LOCAL TIME* official website, www.6pmyourlocaltime.com/about (accessed 2/1/2017).

55 H. Cotter, "'Christopher D'Arcangelo': 'On the Work of Christopher D'Arcangelo (1975–1979)'" in «New York Times», 13 October 2011, available online at: www.nytimes.com/2011/10/14/arts/design/anarchism-without-adjectives-on-the-work-of-christopherdarcangelo-1975-1979.html (accessed 2/1/2017).

56 From the Wikipedia entry "Christopher D'Arcangelo", in «Wikipedia» available online at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_D%27Arcangelo (accessed 2/1/2017). And in *This is the Gallery and the Gallery is Many Things*, 27 September–22 November, Eastside Projects, Birmingham, press release of the exhibition, available online at: https://djn8xv8z6ik0.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/20161007145112/EASTSIDE_PROJECTS_THIS_IS_THE_GALLERY_2008_PR.pdf (accessed 2/1/2017).

What is the average length of a visit, and how much time are people willing to dedicate to each work? Many people do not have time to waste even on holiday, and do not tolerate spending more than ten minutes in a small show. For many more, a few minutes is the time-span of attention before they go back to their smartphones' screens. The curator or the artist better use them well.

4.4.3. Structures – Texts, Labels, Documentation

"They're telling you what you're supposed to be seeing. It's a kind of mind control, almost."⁵⁷

"When treated as writerly text, and not just a mode of description or information, what is written on the wall can provoke a receptive and associative state of mind. Labels have the potential of art itself, to be sensual, smart, and experiential."⁵⁸

Once entering the space the audience has no (or little) idea about what is going to happen there. An exhibition might have different kinds of visitors, also depending on the type of show, the location or the whole framework surrounding the exhibition. One should not forget it. The spectator might have read only the title, or maybe the general text that has been written to introduce the works. If this particularly stimulated her or his curiosity, he/she might have looked up the names of the artists and their works, trying to figure out what will be shown there.

Which kind of information could the audience need to appreciate the works and the whole show?

4.4.3.1. Artwork-Visitor Interfaces: Wall Labels, Guided Tours, Instructions

A common strategy is to use wall labels with basic information about the work: artist, title, dimensions of the work, its technique of realization, and year of production. Sometimes they have a bit of a text, a quote from the artist, or a sentence from the curator that includes the specific work in the larger narrative. Maybe there is at the entrance a larger text that is explaining the show, and – if the exhibition is composed of different sections – an introduction per section going into details.

Labels and text can be "portable". The information could be placed on a small flyer, an A4 paper sheet or a brochure with the information necessary through the whole show. In contemporary technologized reality they become smart-

57 A. Landi, "Wall Talk: Do We Even Need Museum Wall Labels?", in «Artnews», 21 Decembre 2015, available online at: www.artnews.com/2015/12/21/wall-talk-do-we-even-need-museum-wall-labels (accessed 2/1/2017).

58 *Ibidem*.

phone applications or website's entries summoned by a QR Code on each work.

*Ars Wild Card*⁵⁹ is a smartphone app developed by Ars Electronica Futurelab that combines wall labels providing information about the piece with the feedbacks in a guestbook. Visitors that downloaded the app *Ars Wild Card* can use it to take pictures of the artworks, retrieve information of exhibited objects and their artists, and experience what other visitor thought in front of that piece.

Guided tours through an exhibition or audio-guides are other strategies for mediating the works. Again, the possibilities are endless, from the performative event to the didactic explanation.

It's important not to forget the instruction for correct behavior in the exhibition. In many cases, interactive installations use standard A4 signs with invitations like "please touch" to indicate that the audience should activate or interact with the work. "Please do not touch" signs can also be placed near a work if there is confusion about what can be touched and what cannot. Some might argue that giving instructions might be a symbol of a bad exhibition design, but one should consider how the audience of the specific institution is used to behaving.

Some artists prefer to make a general introduction in the form of wall text and have the audience focusing on the pieces rather than the descriptions. Others like to provide more than enough information so that the attentive visitor can appreciate a work as he wishes. One has to decide case by case, according to the works and to the habits of the audience and the research of the artists.

4.4.3.2. AFTERLIFE: What Remains and What Should Remain?

*"100% design would equate total definition, a complete correspondence between map and territory, between plan and execution. 0% design, on the other hand, is embodied by the catastrophe: the absence and active refusal of any design."*⁶⁰

Documentation is a time interface. What should stay and what is unnecessary? How to recreate the feeling of the exhibition and share it with someone? A publication with a curatorial statement, some critical contributions and the descriptions of the works might be a good solution, but does not necessarily

59 *Ars Wild Card +*, project presentation, available online at: <http://awcplus.aec.at/> (accessed 2/1/2017).

60 M. Kalliala, "100% Design, Zero Tolerance", in V4ULT (ed.), *a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave*, 2014, p. 29.

transmit the physical feel of the show, the experience of walking through the space, the perspective between the artworks.

A video recording could show what a visitor sees walking in the exhibition. One could furthermore interview artists, curators, and audience to collect materials and thoughts before they're gone forever. But isn't the disappearance part of the game? Is it desirable to have a precise scanning aiming at recording the 100% of the project? Maybe the show, to be remembered forever, "just" needs to enter in the collective mythology of the art world, in lack of pictures or direct witnesses.

Documentation anyway implies a remediation, which requires a particular awareness about the chosen medium.

Masaki Fujihata, Anarchive°6⁶¹ is an augmented reality book that collects works and researches of the pioneer of media art Masaki Fujihata.⁶² As archive of a still living artist, this monograph is published in the flexible format of a ring binder containing hole punched entries resuming Fujihata's work: being that the artist still alive and active, the publication allows the integration of additional entries or a rearrangement. As extension of the printed paper, the book is usable in combination with a smartphone augmented-reality application. Once the device is pointed towards a specific project on the page, it shows additional photographic and video materials of the artwork, combined with a dynamic three-dimensional rendering of the installation that reacts to the interaction as the project used to do in the physical space. The perception of the work is therefore virtualized and restored through a re-mediation.

4.5. Summary and Conclusion

In the present chapter, an understanding was outlined of the various components of the art show through the very flexible simile of the exhibition as an interface. As explained at the beginning of this section, "interface" did not refer to its contemporary technologically-loaded meaning, but instead to its original definition of a common surface between different states of matter. The term is used in chemical sciences to describe "[t]he area where two immiscible phases of a dispersion come into contact."⁶³ This suggests a very different perspective on the art show than the term *medium*, as depicted in the first two chapters.

61 M. Fujihata, *Masaki Fujihata, Anarchive*, 2016. See "Masaki Fujihata", book presentation, available online at: www.lespressesdureel.com/EN/ouvrage.php?id=4598 (accessed 3/1/2017).

62 Masaki Fujihata's website, available online at: www.fujihata.jp (accessed 3/1/2017).

63 "Definition of Interface", in Chemicool.com, online chemistry dictionary, available online at:

Despite being used within of the scientific vocabulary of museum studies, “the exhibition as medium” strongly implies two issues encountered in this research. On one hand, the expression evokes the always-actual dispute between artists and curators over the real author of the show. On the other, “medium” is a term that involves the idea of something being encoded, embodied, transmitted, or diffused unidirectionally from a source to a recipient. After reframing these issues in the previous sections of the thesis – through a more flexible understanding of both roles of artist and curator and the consideration of *medium* and *post-medium* – “exhibition as interface” seemed to be a good expression to go beyond those controversies. This metaphor emerged gradually from a series of personal reflections about the social qualities of the art show, and since then it accompanied us in our curatorial and artistic practices.

The *medium* of the exhibition can, in fact, be “updated” through the concept of *post-mediality* delineated by Peter Weibel, who legitimates our metaphorical comparison with technological items as the *interface*. We recognized, though, that the term “interface” is as problematic as the concept of “medium”. The common understanding of interfaces can characterize the conceptual and practical problems of the production of a show as a mere *web-design issue*, or even worse, suggesting a focus uniquely on online exhibitions. We were therefore encouraged in considering its more intelligible chemical acceptance, which would allow a first exposition of the metaphor with the necessary distance from its strictly technological connotation.

The meaning of interface as “area of contact and intersection between systems” allowed to highlight the relational qualities of the exhibition, not considering whether the show is happening online or offline, in a true post-medial attitude that encompasses all media as possible terms of comparison. Before delineating a more detailed analysis of our proposal, a few examples of curatorial metaphors based on technological media – that were source of inspiration for the present proposal – were listed. Sarah Cook’s and Jorinde Seijdel’s exhibitions as *software*, *broadcast*, *trade-show*, *emulator* emphasize how a conception of the show through the qualities of new media helps in imaging and recognizing new configurations of the art display, which was the aim of our metaphor.

During the research, other cases of the use of the expression *exhibition as interfaces* were identified, which put into effects particular declinations of the metaphor and were therefore mentioned here. They define the interface as the narrative connecting all the works, as the show becoming space of encounter between artists and audiences, and a surface that allows to access to processes that are invisible to the audience – as the broader research of the artist or the

story of the institution – who can access to them through the exhibition. The metaphor proposed in this thesis aims at including these specific instances in a broader structure, which visualizes each of the components of the show as an *interface* capable of connecting two or more elements. In our intentions, this panoramic view can help artists and curators in becoming aware towards the specific setting surrounding them.

In the last fraction of this chapter, we portray what could be in our view a model for analyzing exhibitions as interfaces. The method consists of a series of questions and thoughts that we collected through our curatorial practice and the consequent theoretical research. Those reflections address three groups of *interfaces* that constitute the show. The first one refers to the relationship between the fundamental components of the exhibition (time, space, artworks and audience) and what weaves them into a whole. A second grouping involves how the exhibition's content is explained and mediated to the visitor (through wall labels, flyers, press texts, catalogues, ...). The third conception considers how the show locates itself in the broader system of art history (which is made of institutions, tendencies, movements, and story-tellers). Many of these elements are moreover transversally connected to each other. For example, the physical space occupied by the exhibition, considered as one of the *components* of the show, is closely related to the specific location where the institution is placed and to its history – which are defined as part of the *system* surrounding the exhibition. Textual interfaces like wall texts and press releases cover two very different roles: the first ones connect the artworks with the visitors, in our system at the same level to the artworks; the second transmit the core of the project to the press, part of the *systemic* "outer world". In our methodological approach, those affinities act as a sort of "bridge", allowing the user to address elements from another level in the conceptual construction of the exhibition. We consider such connections as spaces that can host creative interventions and critical reflections, which could be integrated into the show and extend the standardized practices of exhibiting art. As an example, a curator could include in the show the intervention of a *mail* artist, who can "perform" his work expanding the space of the exhibition in the invitations for the same show.⁶⁴

This does not imply nevertheless that all exhibitions have to push forcefully the existing boundaries of art display, in the quest of an always increasing experimentalism for its own sake. We believe that a high degree of awareness on the specific conditions surrounding the show corresponds to a higher creativity in envisioning still unforeseen possibilities of the exhibition.

64 An example of this is the project *Biennale.py*, a computer virus created by the artist group 0100101110101101.ORG and diffused online as performative invitation at the 49th Biennale of Venice, 2001. See: *Biennale.py* (2001), in Eva and Franco Mattes' website, available online at: <http://0100101110101101.org/biennale-py/> (accessed 7/2/2017).

The next and last chapter of this thesis presents the description of five curatorial projects of the same author demonstrating the concept of *exhibitions as interfaces*.

05 PRACTICAL PART: KEY STUDIES OF EXHIBITIONS AS INTERFACES

In this fourth section we analyse – through the metaphor of the exhibition as interface – a series of curatorial projects realized by the author of this thesis, often in collaboration with other curators and artists. The shows were realized in Italy and Austria in 2015 and 2016. They are described in chronological order to highlight a progressive evolution of the author's curatorial practice.

To avoid the grammatical confusion that might arise from using the impersonal pronoun "we" – especially for distinguishing the projects realized by the author with other artists and curators to the ones in which the author of this thesis was the only curator – in this chapter the use of the personal pronoun "we" refers to a collaborative project, whereas "I", indicates the specific role of the writer.

The exhibition *Unmade Displays*, realized at the beginning of 2015, was a group show that addressed the topic of the screen and its communicative potential through a series of interactive installations. The following project, *Digital Tools for an Analog Society*, was a three-month curatorial residency at an art association in South Tyrol that took place during the summer of 2015. There, in a place very far from big cities, I experimented with artists and exhibition formats to address the juxtaposition of contemporary technologies within rural places, realizing three small exhibitions and a series of social gatherings for the inhabitants of the hosting town. The solo exhibition of the artist Stefan Doepner, *A Measurement Measures Measuring Means*, represents a condensation of the reflections made during my curatorial residence, this time through a technological narrative of the machines and devices that people use in their ev-



everyday lives. The fourth project, *Interacting Art: working unworks and unworking works*, was an experimental group display that explored and exposed the limits of the exhibition itself. It was realized in the framework of Ars Electronica 2016. The last show featured was the solo exhibition of the Italian sound artist Michele Spanghero, which opened in November 2016 and consisted of a one-to-one collaboration between the artist Michele Spanghero and myself, the artist-curator.

5.1. *Unmade Displays*

Unmade Displays was an interactive media art exhibition produced by Interface Cultures¹, department of the Kunstuniversität Linz, in Villa Manin di Passariano², a modern and contemporary art institution in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy. The show was part of the Cinema & Contemporary Visual Art section of the program of the Film Forum Festival³ 2015. Ars Electronica Center, University of Udine and Municipality of Codroipo, the hosting town, provided various support to the project. I co-curated the exhibition with Vincenzo Estremo, Ph.D. candidate of the universities of Udine and Linz.

Unmade Displays focused on the relationship between man and displays through a series of works that stressed the idea behind the *cinematic dispositif* and explored the conceptual, relational and communicative possibilities of film, video, vision, screens and the communication of information.

5.1.1. Addressing the Screen: Concept Development

The theme of the exhibition, the *display*, was chosen for its conceptual relevance in the fields of contemporary art, interface studies, film studies, and

1 Interface Cultures is a department of the Kunstuniversität Linz dedicated to interface and media studies with focus on human-machine interaction, media archaeology, interface design, art and science. See Interface Cultures' website, available online at: interface.ufg.ac.at (accessed 3/1/2017).

2 Villa Manin is a modern and contemporary art center located in the Italian region Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in north-east Italy. It hosts various kinds of exhibitions: from large shows dedicated to major names and movements (impressionists, expressionists, dada, ...) to surveys on regional artists like the Basaldella brothers, Giuseppe Zigaina, and many more. See Villa Manin's website, available online at: www.villamanin.it (accessed 3/1/2017).

3 Film Forum Festival is an international festival devoted to cinema and the contemporary visual arts that brings together scientific research, the dissemination of culture, and exhibition shows. It aims at discovering and developing artistic areas and research fields as videogame studies, postcinema, porn studies and film heritage. Film Forum is organized by the University of Udine (Italy) in collaboration with several European universities active in the field of film and media studies. See Film Forum Festival's website, available online at: www.filmforumfestival.it (accessed 1/1/2017).

media studies.⁴ In each of these areas the *display* has a slightly different declination and its specific use often does not coincide: in the vocabulary of fine art it defines the way an artwork is shown in a gallery; in interface studies the term literally refers to a screen, whereas more conceptually it indicates how the interface manifest itself and its own physicality to the user; the display of information involves the strategies that one employs to make more or less visible the elements that need to be communicated; in film studies the traditional display is the large screen of movie theatres, but with the emergence of new technologies the projection surface changes its shape, dimension and materiality. All those definitions often overlap, but differ in their specific use, creating a background full of potential.

The concept of the exhibition was therefore to address *displays* and *screens* in their various dimensions: as a projection surface; as an information display to transmit data; as exhibition display through which the artwork is shown; as vision interfaces that create new modalities for approaching reality; and new strategies for cinematic storytelling.

5.1.2. Interfacing the Works

The exhibition consisted of seventeen works, among which four recurrent themes can be recognised. The *materiality of the display* and its *expansion*, the investigation of *interfaces as new perception devices*, the display's renovation through the practice of *media archaeology*, were all envisioned through critical deconstruction and hacking, technological manipulation, and interface design.⁵

5.1.2.1. The Materiality of the Digital

*"The exploration of the material quality of the medium is fundamental when the evolution of digital media is integrated into an analogue world. The immateriality of the bit is represented through a physical display with specific aesthetic properties. The reciprocal influence between content and screen takes place in both digital and analogue systems: the different materialities and roles are overlapped and intersected to the point where we rarely question the existence of a new structure of reality."*⁶

Alessio Chierico's⁷ works analyse the specific materiality of screens and their physical influence on the content they are showing. *Arnulf Rainer for digital*

4 Specific research topics of Interface Cultures and Film Forum Festival, the main partners involved in the projects.

5 D. Bevilacqua, V. Estremo, and S. Bunn (eds.), *Unmade Displays*, exhibition catalog, Linz, Kunstuniversität Linz, 2015, pp. 8–15.

6 *Ibidem*.

7 Alessio Chierico's website, available online at: <http://chierico.net/> (accessed 4/1/2017).

performer, concert version is a software-art installation based on a live-generated reproduction of Peter Kubelka's experimental film *Arnulf Rainer*. All the screens used in the installation display a sequence of white and black frames alternated at high frequency. Despite being identically produced in a factory line, each screen reacts differently to the same score and shows its uniqueness as defined by the specifics of its materiality. Similarly, *Unpainted Undrawn* explores the materiality of screens, focusing on the aesthetic of their rupture (see Fig. 7, p. 52). The artist collected and framed broken screens and smashed devices. Contrasting the immateriality of the digital content to the strong physicality of their supporting structures, the casual images created by the ruptures on the display are declared as "art" that the audience is invited to appreciate.

Two other artists explored the materiality of digital content without its physical support. *It dont mean nothing[0]*: is a glitch video whose content is erased through the digital mistakes of the artist. Marta PCampos⁸ voluntarily generated errors while copying or manipulating the file, corrupting its readability. The audience can only grasp bits of information and is blocked by the impossibility of making a linear reading of the piece. Whoun⁹ (a.k.a. Juan Cedenilla) brings the dematerialization of digital moving images to its extreme: the hyperlink. *251114:HYMO* is a movie formed only by a sequence of QR Codes. Each frame is a functioning link to a video available on online sharing platforms. The audience can follow each link using personal devices and watch the content using the artwork as a virtual bridge among digital non-places.

One of the performances of the opening night, *VJ DADA*, uses strategies to re-actualize the materiality of film, remixing Hans Richter's abstract film *Rhythmus 21*¹⁰. The film is a rhythmic animation of geometric shapes based on formal principles of musical composition. In his performance, Enrique Tomás¹¹ analyses Richter's film through a computer vision algorithm which extrapolates, frame by frame, the graphic structure and its evolution, and generates music according to the numeric procedure.

5.1.2.2. Expanding the Display

Exploring the materiality of the display calls into question the limitations of the screen. Following this line, artists are pushed to explore and overcome the limits of commercial devices, producing works that expand and extend the screen beyond its two dimensions.

8 Marta PCampos' website, available online at: <http://martapcampos.com/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

9 whoun whoun's website, available online at: <https://whoun.net/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

10 Hans Richter. *Rhythmus 21*. 1921, available online at: www.moma.org/collection/works/91477 (accessed 20/1/2017).

11 Enrique Tomás's website, available online at: <http://ultranoise.es/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

In 00:00, a video mapping installation from Dear-No¹² (a.k.a. Arno Deutschbauer) and Andrei Warren Perkovic¹³, the projection surface becomes three-dimensional. The video is mapped onto a sculptural configuration of shapes and objects and invites the audience to break the classical frontal relationship with the work and enter into a spatial relation to it.

In the interactive video installation by Jure Fingušt, *My Haptic Diary*, the interaction between viewer and image takes place through the physical modification of the display that shows the video stream. The spectator is invited to manipulate a block of clay while a video camera captures his or her hand movements. A video-collage of different viewers shaping the material is then projected back onto the clay, which becomes host to the traces of manipulation, of both matter and image.

In the work of Carina Lindmeier¹⁴ and Federico Tasso¹⁵, *Pop the movie*, the act of streaming the video generates the display for the projection. In this installation the audience simply activates the system by feeding a popcorn machine with dried corn. Every time a new piece of popcorn is produced, a new video frame is displayed, merging the frame rate of the movie with the temporality of its screen's production.

Rotation / Translation is a video installation from Cristian Villavicencio¹⁶ that deals with the gap between the production and consumption of the cinematographic image, highlighting the spatial and temporal shift between the act of filming and its reproduction. The installation consists of a video camera installed on rails out of the audience's reach. The camera is in continuous movement, and is positioned to capture the movement of the audience inside the exhibition (see Fig. 8, p. 60). The video created is streamed to a projector placed on a rotating base in a separate room. The viewer grasps the system in its entirety only upon seeing the second part of the installation, when they understand that they have already been a part of the projection.

5.1.2.3. Interaction and New Realities

The expansion of the display turns attention towards the user of the system. Reflecting on interaction and interfaces, the artists address the possibilities of

12 Dear-No's website, available online at: www.dear-no.com (accessed 3/1/2017).

13 Andrei Warren Perkovic's website, available online at: <http://andreiwarrenperkovic.tumblr.com/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

14 Carina Lindmeier's website, available online at: <http://carinalindmeier.com/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

15 Federico Tasso's website, available online at: <http://federicotasso.altervista.org/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

16 Cristian Villavicencio's website, available online at: <http://cristianvillavicencio.net/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

breaking the boundaries of an otherwise strictly frontal man-machine relationship based on visual communication. The results of this process are interactive pieces inviting the user to perform an uncommon behaviour, or that become portals to access whole new realities.

Martin Nadal¹⁷ challenges the audience with his work *Money Never Sleeps*. It consists of a tangible interface connected to a monitor, on which one sees a real-time visualization of the prices on international markets. The interface allows the audience to buy or sell shares of chosen companies through the action of inhaling a line of glucose, visually similar to cocaine, and to gain or lose money through this ironic financial service.

Interaction creates completely new ways of seeing the world, as Henning Schulze¹⁸ states with his work *Gegenwartsmaschine* (see Fig. 10, p. 76). It is an interactive installation made of a black box with a hole, through which the visitor is invited to observe the insides. Referring to quantum physics and systems theory, in the instant when the interaction takes place, all possible states of the present (metaphorically co-existent within the box) collapse into a single one, represented as an endless, coloured space. The colour of this space is determined by the interaction itself: interaction moulds the present.

Referring to the science of biology, the work of Marie Polakova¹⁹ and Veselina Dashinova is built on a shifting of scale, which focuses on unforeseen interaction scenarios. *Micro Pets* is an artwork based on a customized microscope, through which the viewer can enter an otherwise imperceptible landscape and observe microbes playing as if they were pets. The two artists propose a playful relation between humans and micro-organisms, creating nanometric toys and other accessories.

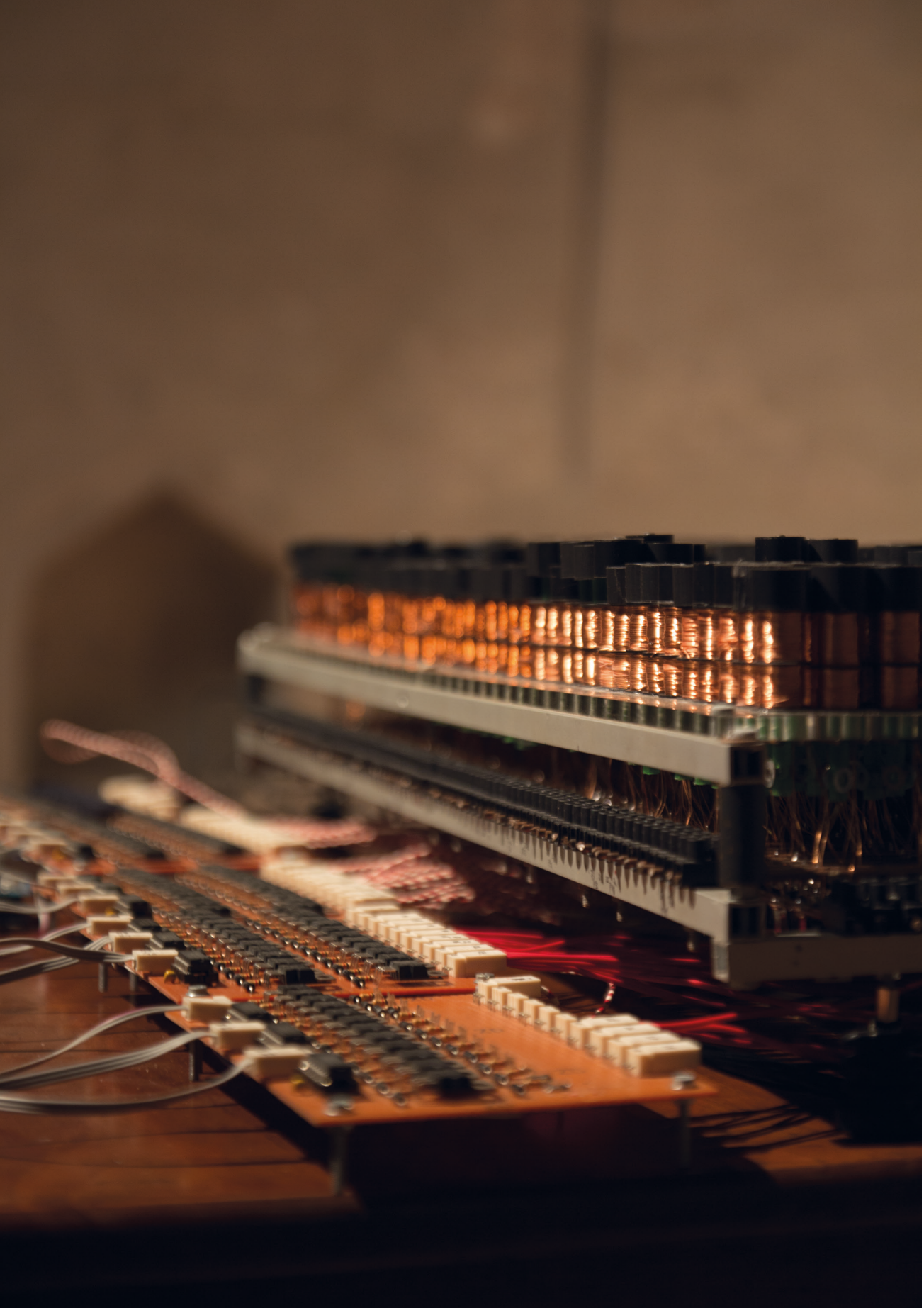
Interaction and collaboration, as well as continual shifting of the focus between the performance of filming are at the basis of Sam Bunn's²⁰ *Flat Screens / Shooting Through / Holey Lands*. The artist wrote a sci-fi movie script about a post-apocalyptic love story between cellphones, which was shot on smartphones through a collaborative process during a two-week residency at Villa Manin. Bunn asked the locals to lend him their phones to shoot the sequences, inviting them to contribute by producing video materials to be used as background scenarios in the planned performative presentation. The resulting movie-performance was originally thought to be presented in the form of a puppet

17 Martin Nadal's website, available online at: <http://spectrum.muimota.net/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

18 Henning Schulze's website, available online at: <http://minuteman.mur.at/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

19 Marie Polakova's website, available online at: <https://marura.wordpress.com/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

20 Sam Bunn's website, available online at: <http://sambunn.com/> (accessed 3/1/2017).



theatre show. In finalizing the presentation, the artist decided to overturn the project and, rather than simply narrating the story, formalize it into a performative documentary deconstructing the process of creating the movie. In keeping with the exhibition title and concept, he literally unmade his own display (see Fig. 9, p. 70). The piece concluded with an explanation of Bunn's political motivations for making the piece followed by a performative act, wherein the audience was asked to lend a hand in removing all residue of the performance from the space. A video documentation of the resulting performance was displayed in the exhibition, accompanied by props and material leftovers of the happening.

5.1.2.4. Media Archaeology

In re-evaluating the contemporary technological landscape, the analysis of its evolutionary path plays an important role. Many of the exhibited artworks are the result of very distinctive strategies from the field of media archaeology, like the use of obsolete technologies to explain contemporary devices. The works are impossible (or possible) hybrids that actualize old technologies with contemporary materials, or devices from today that employ ancient techniques.

Ivan Petkov's²¹ *A Day in a Life* consists of a white book whose pages are flipped by an airflow. The flipping of the pages, from the first to the last, takes one day. It uses a hybrid strategy of measuring time, similar to an hourglass but working only during daylight time like a sundial. The regular flow of white pages recalls minimal forms of completely abstract pre-cinema and highlights the arbitrary temporality of the moving image.

Isidora Ficovic²² reflects similarly about the core of the moving image as sequences of single pictures. *The gesture of drawing light with a body movement*, *Form 24* is a series of pictures saved on a small digital photcamera. Through a simple manipulation of the device, the sequence is played in a loop on the screen and becomes a unitary video.

Cesar Escuder Andaluz²³ presented two works structured on practices of media archaeology, which he uses to alienate pervasive visual elements from their usual context. The function of computer icons and social networks is turned upside down to expose their underlying power structures. *Tapebook* is an archive of tapes that carries information originally displayed on the graphical user interface (GUI) of Facebook profiles of artists, philosophers and theoreticians of art and media. The installation employs a reversion process: the information organized in the rhizomatic structure of the web hypertext is converted into a

21 Ivan Petkov's website, available online at: www.ivanpetkov.info (accessed 3/1/2017).

22 Isidora Ficovic's website, available online at: www.isidoraficovic.com (accessed 3/1/2017).

23 Cesar Escudero Andaluz's website, available online at: <https://escuderoandaluz.com/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

linear sequence of sound. *File_món* is a series of photomontages generated through screenshots of the computer desktop. The pictures, downloaded from the internet, are set as a background and modified by the adding and repositioning of file icons. Objects and people from historical visual documents are covered and recodified through an unrecognisable flow of information. The *File_món* project explores the possibilities of creating new pictures with a computer, without using any additional software.

Retro Product – Vacuum Cleaner Bag was the main instrument of another sound performance on the opening night. The project is based on a hybrid, digital/analog musical instrument hand-built by the artist through references to media archaeology, hacking, and remix culture. The system consists of a keyboard similar to an accordion's, and a suitcase with a vacuum cleaner inside. Through using this tool the artist Yen Tzu Chang²⁴ develops a delicate soundscape of rarefied and nostalgic sounds, mechanical and dense atmospheres. She plays on the short circuit of meaning between the wind instrument and the household appliance, whose roles are combined together to create a strange mash up between performing a household chore or a delicate minimal sound piece. The piece is further complicated through Chang's gender. As a female user of technology, she straddles domesticity and the avant garde with her curious sonic wind interface.

5.1.3. Interfaces in the Exhibition

Despite *Unmade Displays* being realized before the development of the central metaphor of this thesis, we can analyse its components as interfaces in the exhibition.

The graphic representation of the project was based on an exhibited work, *Unpainted Undrawn*, by Alessio Chierico. Exploring the short circuit between the uselessness of broken devices, showing the materiality of the digital, and their conceptual restoration through the analogue aesthetic of the glitch, it seemed to be the work that was closest to the spirit of the show. Most importantly, it was visually very intriguing: once printed or published online it created a curious clash between the support of the image and its content. Moreover, since the graphic design of the exhibition was developed around a detail from a small broken screen, the large prints and posters transposed this close-up onto a completely different scale. The work's presence in Chierico's installation was an additional surprise for the attentive visitor who recognized its correspondence to the show's graphic design.

The first work of the show that the visitor encountered, an installation that I realized by using a modified overhead projector, can also be considered as an

24 Yen Tzu Chang's website, available online at: www.changyentzu.com (accessed 3/1/2017).

interface for the whole exhibition.²⁵ The device was placed at the entrance of the building, just outside the space dedicated to the show, and functioned as both an artwork and a piece of exhibition design. Before the opening I asked all the exhibiting artists to draw a sketch representing their project onto the celuloid, which was then projected as it looped. Playing between my role of curator and my artistic practice, I conceived the installation as a sort of *overture* of the exhibition, a work that contained all the other works, giving to the visitors a “preview” of the show they were about to enter.

Climbing up a staircase, the audience entered the exhibition space directly in its centre. Part one of Christian Villavicencio’s *Rotation / Translation* was placed above the staircase – a camera on a moving robotic arm – which gave one an initial unpleasant feeling of being under surveillance. As previously mentioned, this work was split into two separate installations, which were the first and the last things respectively that one would see in the exhibition. In the first section of *Rotation / Translation*, technology is central, apparently unresponsive to the humans presence, silently performing its mysterious task of space exploration via the robotic arm. The exhibition developed from this first image, showing a series of “living” technologies that reframe consumer technologies, such as *Arnulf Rainer for digital performer, concert version*, or *A Day in a Life*, whose cyclical activation surprised the audience, thinking it was a regular guestbook at the entrance to the show. After viewing all the pieces, through which the visitors became accustomed to participating and diving into the specificity of digital matters and vision devices, one reached the second part of *Rotation / Translation* – showing the images taken by the camera of the robotic arm. At this point the viewer realised that he or she had been consumed into the show without being aware of it. The entire exhibition assumed the role of a large machine that was making the spectators aware of the two sides of technology and devices: they allow us to control and perceive the world, but in so doing, they also allow the world to observe and manipulate us.

5.2. *Digital Tools for an Analog Society*

A particular stage in the development of my curatorial practice was my experience as curator in residence at the atelier house GAP Glurns Art Point²⁶, which occurred in summer 2015 in Glorenza-Glurns, the smallest town of South Tyrol.

25 *OHP*, in Davide Bevilacqua’s website, available online at: <http://davidebevilacqua.com/projects/overheads.html> (accessed 4/1/2017).

26 GAP Glurns Art Point’s website, available online at: glurns-art-point.com (accessed 04/06/2016).

5.2.1. Glurns Art Point: the Atelier-House

GAP is a project that was born in the summer of 2012 in Glorenza, when a small group of artists based in the Upper Venosta Valley²⁷ decided to gather together and provide themselves with a place to work and organize events from. They founded an association, Glurns Art Point, and started running the first atelier-house for young artists in South Tyrol.²⁸ Since then, an artist-in-residence program has been run every summer. Artists have the possibility to stay for a period in the atelier, to produce and present their works, as well as to enjoy the quiet village, a place to retreat and take a break from ones everyday working life. The association is run by six active members that take care of the house from a distance. Two of them live in the neighbouring villages, while others are based in Merano and Bolzano (one and two hours by train), or further afield in Austria and London. In 2015, aside from the artistic residences, they decided to host a curator in residence, to help them structure a program of events for the summer. The curator in residence was asked to manage the house and keep it regularly open, assist the artists in residence, guide tourists and citizens through the exhibitions and present the association to them.

5.2.2. The Residence

My proposal for the residence was centred around reflecting on the presence of technology in daily life. The theme was structured into a series of exhibitions and projects, the proposal of events, and moments of exchange between the artists in residence, the association, the inhabitants of the town, and the visiting tourists.

The overall title for the residency was *Digital Tools for an Analog Society*, which was chosen to highlight that my research is focussed on the contrast between the "digital" and "analog" worlds. Life and daily rhythms in places in the countryside, like Glorenza, are still very bound to nature, but at the same time people are surrounded by the invisible infrastructure of networks, electrical energy, and (more visible) media, almost as they would be in the city. Its inhabitants use computers, smartphones and the Internet, but at the same time they live in closer contact with nature, and are still active in social activities now obsolete or seen as "nostalgic" in the metropolis, in which people are focused on a very "modern" way of living. My idea was to use art to explore this contradiction and then present a series of contemporary artists working with media whose work addresses technology in a critical way. The project consisted of three

27 Upper Venosta Valley (in italian Alta Val Venosta, in german Obervinschgau) is the last part of the Venosta Valley, right before the border to Switzerland (Müstair) and Austria (Landeck-Zams). See: Upper Venosta Valley's website, available online at: www.vinschgau.net/en/upper-venosta-valley.html (accessed 07/6/2016).

28 GAP is located a couple of hundred meters from the main square. Even if the distance is very small, the atelier results to be quite difficult to find. The space is equipped with a workshop room, a presentation room, kitchen, bathroom and sleeping rooms.

shows and a series of proposals for inviting and involving the artists and the visitors into the development of a stable community around GAP.

5.2.3. *Your Unread Messages Will Be Deleted Soon*

The first exhibition, *Your Unread Messages Will Be Deleted Soon*, focused on the Internet as a performative space, based on conversations and the exchange of stories. The artists invited were the Italian artist Valentina Colella²⁹ and the Linz-based collective KairUs³⁰, co-founded by Andreas Zingerle³¹ and Linda Kronman.

The collective KairUs main focus is online-fraud and digital storytelling. It produces video-installation, data visualizations and interactive-storytelling devices. The works of the components explore the narrative strategies used by Internet criminals to build fictional identities and to mislead their victims.³² For the exhibition, KairUs presented the works *Password:******³³ and *Let's talk business*³⁴, both dealing with online-fraud, privacy and digital storytelling. *Password:****** is a video installation of six monitors showing a data visualization of the most common passwords used by scammers – a particular category of internet fraudsters – in their multiple online accounts (see Fig. 1, p. 6). Six common roots emerge from the database, ironically underlying the important values of internet criminals: "good", "love", "money", "mother", "jesus", and "bless". *Let's talk business* is a collection of real phone-call conversations with Internet fraudsters. The artists perform over the telephone, talking with scammers and creating with those fictional stories. They try to interfere with the script of the fraudster, often forcing him or her into improvising outside of the habitual performance structure. The archive is displayed as a five channel sound installation based on a series of modified tin cans of the famous precooked meat brand SPAM. At the exhibition opening Andreas Zingerle presented KairUs research in the form of a lecture/performance, in which he outlined strategies and traps used by criminals to fool their victims. After receiving instructions on how to safely approach an internet criminal, the audience could experience direct contact with a scammer via a phone-call.

29 Valentina Colella's website, available online at: www.valentinacolella.com (accessed 06/06/2016).

30 KairUs' website, available online at: www.kairus.org (accessed 5/1/2017).

31 Andreas Zingerle's website, available online at: www.andreaszingerle.com (accessed 6/6/2016).

32 KairUs' works bring into light the invisible action of vigilantes communities of online activists that work to stop the fraudsters, the socio-economical motivations and rituals that the criminals use for justifying their actions, as well as the way they use the Internet to achieve their aims.

33 *Password:******, in KairUs' website, available online at: <http://kairus.org/password/> (accessed 5/1/2017).

34 *Let's talk business*, in KairUs' website, available online at: <http://kairus.org/portfolio/lets-talk-business/> (accessed 5/1/2017).

Fiction and self-narration on the Internet is also the foundation of the work of Valentina Colella. In *Chatroom* (2009) the artist performed on various on-line anonymous chat-rooms, creating ten different characters and exploring the modalities of virtual relationships through these fictional identities. In her conversations she either accommodated or refused the requests of the other participant. Encounter after encounter, she built more and more shades of the personality of her characters. Colella presented a selection of conversations from her archive in the form of a wall installation that the audience could read, accompanied by books containing all the chats.

5.2.3.1. 6PM YOUR LOCAL TIME

The opening of the exhibition happened in conjunction with the networked online event *6PM YOUR LOCAL TIME EUROPE (6PM YLT)*, organized and produced by Link Art Center in Brescia.³⁵ *6PM YLT* was based on an online platform that hosted and coordinated a network of contemporary art events, which took place simultaneously around Europe on 22 June 2015 from 6PM, and were perceived and documented on the same web application. Being part of this event gave a lot of online visibility to GAP and the exhibition itself, but forced the opening to happen on Wednesday at 6 PM, when the inhabitants of the town were still working. A better solution could have been to split the event in two, for example, opening the exhibition at the weekend.

5.2.4. *Mindworks: Artificial Intelligence and Induced Thought*

Mindworks, the second exhibition of the residency, was not part of the project proposed to GAP. Rather it was decided after my arrival in Glurns.

After observing that the presentation space was too small to host many projects at the same time, the presentation of the work *#innerstagram* of Nina Mengin, which was intended to be part of the previous show, was relocated to an empty date and became the starting point for the next one. *#innerstagram* consists of a series of digital pictures in which the artist escapes the dominant strategies of self-narration present on social networks. The artist creates extremely deformed images with expressionist qualities using software available for smartphones. The project was part of a research project in which the artist reflected on how our thinking and subconscious are being affected by online activities.

Taking the idea of a “mechanized thought” as a starting point, I observed that a different contribution to the topic was made by an already-existing artistic work of mine: *Evolving Calculators*. The installation, produced in collaboration

35 Link Art Center's website, available online at: www.linkartcenter.eu (accessed 6/6/2016). *6PM YOUR LOCAL TIME* official website, available online at: www.6pmyourlocaltime.com (accessed 2/1/2017).

with Veronika Krenn³⁶, consists of two calculators connected together that play at guessing one another's "thinking".³⁷ Through the inclusion of this work, the exhibition became more thematically linked to algorithms and artificial intelligence, rather than to self representation on social networks. After defining this second work, I started looking for a third project, ideally involving a local artist – to balance the works already present – but I didn't have much success. At this time, Google had just released the source code of its artificial intelligence algorithm *Deepdream*, which was immediately utilised by artists and programmers to produce psychedelic, artificial-intelligence-processed images.³⁸ I fed the algorithm with a series of pictures taken at the beginning of the residence, realizing *Glorenza Deepdream*³⁹, a project that represents the residency's host town through the most advanced software available at the time.

A last-minute contribution arrived from Timna Krenn, a performer who was at GAP a few days before the opening. Inspired by the title of the exhibition and by the works already present, she prepared a short performance for the opening night, in which she took her distance from the world of high-tech. *Bitte kein Hirn! (Please no brain!)* was an ironic monologue in which the will of a person who thinks too much crashes into contradictions that block her from solving even the smallest of daily problems.

5.2.5. *Me and the Medium*

The last show of the residency, *Me and the medium*, involved two radically different yet very compatible Italian artists: Francesco Nordio and Lorenzo Comisso. Before the beginning and during the course of the curatorial residence, I had a constant exchange of ideas and proposals with both artists. I informed them about the topic of the whole residency and developed a specific plan with both of them.

36 Veronika Krenn's website, available online at: <http://vkrenn.at/> (accessed 10/6/2016).

37 *Evolving Calculators*, in Davide Bevilacqua's website, available online at: <http://davidbevilacqua.com/projects/evolvingCalculators.html> (accessed 10/6/2016).

38 *Deepdream* is a code repository released in July 2015 by Google Research. The software is a sort of debug-version of their algorithms, shows how an Artificial Neural Network detects faces and other visual patterns in images. More information available at the following links. *Deep-Dream – a code example for visualizing Neural Networks*, in «Google Research Blog», 1 July 2015, available online at: <https://research.googleblog.com/2015/07/deepdream-code-example-for-visualizing.html> (accessed 20/1/2017). *deepdream*, in «Google GitHub repository», available online at: <https://github.com/google/deepdream> (accessed 7/6/2016). *Inceptionism: Going Deeper into Neural Networks*, in «Google Research Blog», 17 June 2015, available online at: <https://research.googleblog.com/2015/06/inceptionism-going-deeper-into-neural.html> (accessed 20/1/2017).

39 *Glorenza Deepdream*, in Davide Bevilacqua's website, available online at: <http://davidbevilacqua.com/projects/deepGlorenza.html> (accessed 20/1/2017).

Francesco Nordio⁴⁰ is a visual artist and social activist focusing on community-building, alternative economic models, ecology and body-mind research. He initiates discussion groups and urban gardening projects, proposes workshops about experimenting spiritual and bodily situations and has a strong theoretical approach. Since his work is social and theoretical, the idea was to work on both tracks. One proposal consisted in reframing the topics of the residency – the Internet, media and technology – through his theoretical structures. He created elegant hand-drawn schematics of concepts that functioned both as a work and as the conceptual framework for the second project. The latter consisted of a series of exercises for spiritual and sensitive research on the human-machine relation. This version of his workshop consisted of exercises that he and I proposed to the visitors who passed by in the days before the exhibition opening. Since visitor numbers during this time were low, we condensed all the exercises into one interactive installation, to test the visitor's patience with a badly-working machine.

Lorenzo Commisso⁴¹ is a conceptual artist who manipulates linguistic signs and playfully remixes other artists' works and practices. He is also a musician and works on the audio-video project COLORA with artist Rachele Burgato.⁴² Commisso is very aware of the languages of exhibition formats and in his works he tests their conceptual limits. He produces objects and installations characterized by the use of other artists' concepts, which are subverted, actualized, and rebuilt on a different scale (see book cover and Fig. 2, p. 8). He borrows and steals from art history, remixing it with elements from popular culture, making his own versions through his personal visual imagination. Once in the exhibition space, Commisso turns his practice into a curatorial-performance: in every installation he creates a composition of his works on the walls. The resulting process is a stark negotiation between himself and art history, philosophy and pop-culture.

At the opening of the exhibition, COLORA performed their project *The Zebra Crossing*, an audio-video set in which the two performers rhythmically play sequences of pre-recorded videoclips, showing weird combinations of toys, plastic objects, and the artist themselves in various costumes. Francesco Nordio, conversely, proposed a buffet for the opening, to function as a collaborative performance. He prepared the food with the help of the public, generating a social situation in which people started talking to one another, commenting

40 Francesco Nordio's website, available online at: <http://francesco-nordio.tumblr.com/> (accessed 20/1/2017).

41 Lorenzo Commisso's website, available online at: <http://cargocollective.com/lorenzocommisso/> (accessed 7/6/2016).

42 Rachele Burgato's website, available online at: <http://cargocollective.com/racheleburgato/> (accessed 7/6/2016), COLORA's website, available online at: <http://cargocollective.com/COLORA/> (accessed 7/6/2016).

upon the works and sharing cooking techniques. Once the buffet was ready, people started eating and enjoying the social situation.

5.2.6. Extended Projects

Alongside the exhibitions, an important part of the residency consisted of involving visitors, citizens, and other artists-in-residence in a "social container", based on understanding the association as an *interface*. Ideally it should have become a fluid structure of groups that interacted with each other, exchanging information and knowledge, and establishing a dialogue between the city and the space. I planned four proposals for the whole duration of the residency, which should then have been co-opted and brought further by the association. The four proposals were: an open-discussion regulars' table, a running version of *Bibliotecha*, the installation of a *Deaddrop* in the town, and an internal wiki.

The regulars' table was intended to create a regular exchange between me, the artists and the village inhabitants. The experiment was inspired by the project *Da Luigino*, initiated by the artist Francesco Nordio in 2011 in Venice.⁴³ The first two meetings in Glurns were quite successful: the members of GAP invited some friends and a fruitful informal discussion arose. However, as the residency progressed, participation did not increase, nor did it stabilize into a core group. After a few week I added a film screening to the proposal, with the idea of catching some more interested people and focussing the discussion around the movie. For several meetings more participants came, but when participation decreased again, and as lots of other things were happening alongside, the meetings were not continued.

A second project dedicated to the regular visitors and the artists-in-residence was the installation of a running version of *Bibliotecha*, a tool developed by a group of artists and researchers to exchange materials wirelessly among people working within a shared location.⁴⁴ Since there was only one other artist in resi-

43 In its 2011 version in Venice initiated by Francesco Nordio, a small group of students gathered together on a weekly basis in a bar to talk freely about art and culture. The conversations proceeded without a clear structure: sometimes one of the participants proposed though a starting point, like the listening of sound records or readings, after which the discussion arose. The group of participants was constantly changing: always new friends or colleagues were invited, and the bar owner or other customers sometimes intervened. The small community was aware of the structure of the project, and the conversations were intentionally towards radically-experimental thoughts. After a few months the group decided autonomously to crystallize the talks into an exhibition, after which the discussion group did not go further. *Da Luigino*, in Francesco Nordio's website, available online at: <http://francesco-nordio.tumblr.com/luigino/> (accessed 20/1/2017).

44 "Bibliotecha is a framework to facilitate the local distribution of digital publications within a small community. It relies on a microcomputer running open-source software to serve books over a local wifi hotspot. Using the browser to connect to the library one can retrieve or donate texts. Bibliotecha proposes an alternative model of distribution of digital texts that allows specific communities to form and share their own collections." Excerpt from *Bibliotecha* project

dence over the summer, and not enough people were projected to stay at the space for prolonged periods the installation was deemed unjustified and the project was simply dropped.

In the public space of the city I planned to realize a conceptually similar work, Aram Bartholl's *Dead Drop*⁴⁵. The exchange platform is a USB stick installed in pre-existent holes on walls, benches and other surfaces. People can plug their devices to it, and download, upload or delete materials from the stick. In Glurns I installed a *Dead Drop* in the main square of the village, which, due to the free wireless Internet connection provided by the city, was an informal gathering point for tourists. This *Dead Drop* disappeared after a few days, probably due to vandalism. I made the second installation inside GAP, in the corridor that leads to the sleeping rooms. In both installations, the initial content of the USB was the summer events program.

The last of the planned long-term projects was the creation of a Wiki, to provide the atelier with a tool for the indirect transmission of knowledge over time. There, artists-in-residence could have retrieved informations about the area, such as the location of shops and facilities, and contributed to the shared resource. During the residency the website of the association was in the process of migrating from one hosting provider to another one, so there was no possibility for realizing the project at that time.

Like the planned long-term projects, a graphic communication was planned to involve the town through public intervention. I wanted to represent GAP as something belonging to the town by representing the town's inhabitants on GAP's graphic communications. Inspired by the series of pixelated images by Facebook-artist Intimidad Romero⁴⁶, I realized a series of pictures of people that I encountered on the street. This was even more effective than expected: asking the inhabitants for permission to take their picture made clear that something was going to happen, and at the same time the gesture stimulated their curiosity. In fact, many came to GAP for the presentation of the pictures or stopped by during the summer and asked to see their picture.

5.2.7. Summary of the Residency

In many respects, the projects planned and realized in Glorenza didn't fulfil my initial expectations. Perhaps I was too ambitious for this very specific environment. In certain cases, the structure of the residency was too tight, forcing some works and projects into awkward compromises. I refer in particular to the show *Me and the Medium*. The exhibition's accompanying text had to be

website, available online at: <http://biblioteca.info/> (accessed 5/6/2016).

45 *Dead Drop* project website, available online at: <https://deaddrops.com/> (accessed 7/6/2016).

46 Intimidad Romero's tumblr profile, intimidad.tumblr.com, (accessed 10/6/2016). Intimidad Romero's Facebook profile, www.facebook.com/intimidadromero (accessed 10/06/2016).

delivered very early on in the residency and could therefore not represent the interesting points of the show. The title was strangely fitting, since Lorenzo Commisso and Francesco Nordio represent two radically different artistic practices but both perform strong self-reflection and self-criticism. However, the text referred mainly to the relationship between man and media, rather than presenting a neat description of what was happening within the exhibition.

Keeping in mind that a residency is a period of experimentation that must not necessarily give an answer to one's initial questions, GAP can rather be seen as a fundamental node in the emergence of my first conceptions of the exhibition as interface. Glorenza is most alive during the summer, when visitors come in large numbers and the weather is friendly. During the summer, though, all locals are very busy with their jobs, so likely not available for society-based projects with a fixed schedule such as those of my residency. Nevertheless, many inhabitants or neighbours came regularly to visit me, especially outside of the opening times of the space. They did not come for the scheduled meetings but were rather interested in sharing a second with the strange foreign figure of the curator-in-residence. The social dynamics that allow the emergence of a group of regulars likely require more than a couple of months. Regardless, a good portion of the visitors were tourists on a bike tour who arrived in Glorenza and by chance found GAP whilst taking a walk in the town. Following this observation, one way of maximising the energy of the program could have been the production of one single large show running for the whole summer. The tourists would come, receive everything at once, and then leave. That said, another group of visitors was made up of artists, critics, and art enthusiasts from the area who came to GAP exclusively for the program. Some of them were present at all the openings, meaning that something was indeed attractive for an art audience looking for smaller events.

In terms of audience, the most successful event during my residency was the *Glurnser Nacht*, a night event across the whole city organized by the mayor, during which the association presented their summer program. I did not succeed in bringing so many people to any of the other events of my residency. That night, a combination of elements worked jointly to bring around one hundred people into the space: the presentation was part of one of the city's regular events and was accompanied by a printed schedule; there was traditional folk music; it was a Friday night; the production of the photographs with the inhabitants happened a few days previously; almost all the members of the association were in town. This was probably a fortunate case, but it highlights how this kind of society best responds to a cultural call, to which I as a curator-in-residence should have adapted my doings.



5.3. A Measurement Measures Measuring Means

A Measurement Measures Measuring Means was the title of the solo show of German artist Stefan Doepner, which I organized in the small town of San Vito al Tagliamento, in the north-eastern Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in the framework of the contemporary art festival *Palinsesti*⁴⁷. *Palinsesti* is organized every year by the cultural office of San Vito, which works in close collaboration with the University of Udine. In 2015, having been involved the previous year as a performer, I was invited to curate the solo show of an international artist, a project that was mainly developed during my curatorial residence at Glurns Art Point (see above).

5.3.1. Concept Development

Palinsesti is a very flexible framework, changing the format and number of exhibitions that are organized each year. Since 2014, one of the formats is the solo show of an international artist, for which I was invited to propose a project.⁴⁸

Since the conceptual development of the show took place during my curatorial residency in Glurns, its themes naturally reflected the thoughts on the relation between man and technology that I developed at that time. In this case, the focus was on understanding domestic appliances as *media*, as entities that mediate between humans and the outer world. This interest in the mutual dependencies between man and device was ignited by a mysterious sentence I found in Gene Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*. In the book, the author appears to refer to John Cage's thoughts on notation systems, in the context of Youngblood's idea of a spiritual revolution caused by the emergence of technology. I never found any further reference to this quote of Cage's, but this line became the title of the show: *A Measurement Measures Measuring Means*.⁴⁹

In *Expanded Cinema* Youngblood analyses early forms of video art and computer graphics, both emerging technologies at the time, and enthusiastically declares them to be the tools that will allow humanity to reach a new level of spiritual awareness. Taking some distance from this very positivist and optimis-

47 Palinsesti's website, available online at: www.palinsesti.org (accessed 16/1/2017).

48 The first edition of *Palinsesti* was realized ten years ago, in 2006, taking over a precedent 15-years-old tradition of contemporary art events in the town initiated by the festival *Hic et nunc*. In 2015 the festival included a group exhibition curated by the general curator of the festival, Giorgia Gastaldon, *Città che si vedono (Cities in sight)*, a retrospective of one of the artists in the collection of contemporary art of the city, Alessandra Lazzaris, an international competition of sculpture in the public space, *Premio in Sesto*, and the solo show of the winner of 2014 edition of the same competition. We will mention *Premio in Sesto* in the following pages.

49 G. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1970, p. 136.

Fig. 17: Stefan Doepner, *Luci Giocanti (Playing Lights)*, 2015 (see: p. 134)



tic prevision, in the exhibition we wanted rather to stress the mutual dependence between humans and technology.

5.3.2. Addressing the Space

Initially the show was supposed to happen in the Essiccatoio Bozzoli, a restructured industrial building just outside the inner perimeter of the historic town centre. The designated space for the show consisted of a very large darkened room with a high ceiling that was suitable for large installations as well as two-dimensional pieces.

I started researching for works based on technology that could occupy this big space with light, sound and devices. The artist that appeared to best suit the setting was Ljubljana-based German artist Stefan Doepner⁵⁰. His works are mostly based on simple household devices or objects that have been hacked in various ways and freed from their functional behaviour, becoming autonomous entities capable of creating large and loud noise installations. After verifying his interest and availability for the show, I invited Doepner to discuss the topic, which led to his selection and started a process of negotiation to select which works to install and how.

During this early phase the location for the show changed. The festival organisers decided to change the venue of another show, liberating the old castle of San Vito al Tagliamento. The artist had actually been hoping for a location with a stronger connection to its exterior and to the city centre. The castle offered both. The building is located a few hundreds meters from the main square. The castle consists of four stories, has large rooms, and required a clear strategy to address the space. Even grandiose projects could get lost inside its spaces.

The artist and I agreed to occupy the entrance room with one piece that would be visible from the street, and to develop the rest of the show on the second floor, occupying its length with various light and sound installations. Doepner proposed another light installation for the windows of the facade, suggesting to the viewer that the house was being used by someone who was turning the lights on and off. This became the starting point for a new work, which we realized in the building opposite the castle – a completely anonymous concrete building from the 1970s, with no history or architectural aesthetic besides its functionality. This additional facade was drawn into the show through our implementation of a light installation similar to that of the castle facade, which allowed the two buildings to “communicate” with each other.

⁵⁰ Stefan Doepner's website, available online at: www.f18institut.org (accessed 6/1/2017).

Fig. 18: Stefan Doepner, *Luci Giocanti (Playing Lights)*, 2015 (see: p. 134)

5.3.3. Interfacing Works – Narrative in the Space

The viewer's first contact with the show was through the installation placed in the entrance room of the museum, *midishelf – household orchestra* (1996–2015), which was visible from the street through the large windows (see Fig. 19, p. 142). Through this first work, the audience got to know the recurring elements of the show: sound, light and devices brought into the exhibition space from the home environment.

midishelf consisted of a sound installation based on the rhythmical powering on and off of small household appliances, distributed throughout the space and in front of the windows. Radios, sewing machines, food processors, electric knives, shavers, hairdryers, and vacuum cleaners were activated through a MIDI protocol, becoming proper instruments that "played" a poetic composition of sounds. Like a cinematographic condensation of one's life into a short sequence of repetitive actions, *midishelf* represented our habits through a rapid succession of familiar sounds.

By the time the composition faded out the audience had reached the first floor, where they would first see the flickering light bulbs placed at the windows. These were the lights visible of the facade installation. From the inside of the castle, one could see the other building's lighting through the windows, including the second building in the show. This installation, realized for Palins-esti, was entitled *Luci jucanti* (2015) and allowed the direct comparison of two constructions with radically different stories (see Fig. 17, p. 130; and Fig. 18, p. 132). The work was derived from Doepner's *Jedinica Jedan/UnitOne* (2013), which was exhibited in the next room.

Jedinica Jedan/UnitOne was a noise installation based on electromagnetism. Fluorescent lights attached to an automatized switch were distributed throughout the space, hanging from the ceiling or lying on the floor. Once the visitors had activated the installation, the bulbs were rhythmically lit, creating a composition similar to the one in the entrance of the castle. By lighting up, these bulbs produced an irregular magnetic field, which was then captured through antennas placed around each light. In *Jedinica Jedan* the magnetic signal was then converted to sound, creating an "electrically charged" soundscape of noises and thunders that, combined with the flashings of the lights, hit the audience very physically.

When this sonically loud installation concluded its programmed schedule of light and sounds, the visitor could enter the next room, where the *Mechanical Book* was shown (see Fig. 16, p. 118). The work, produced in collaboration between Doepner and Sanela Jahić, acted as a in-between-counterpoint to the loud surrounding projects, in which the audience could calm down using the subtle sound and languid behaviour of the object. *Mechanical Book* is a hybrid technology of information display, a fictional-but-plausible electro-mechanical predecessor to the e-book – the contemporary electronic books based on digital formats. It is composed of a matrix of more than 400 moving dots

that, through electromagnets and solenoids, can change their height, therefore creating letters and words that one can read. While reading them, the visitor is forced to adjust to the slow speed of the machine, which subverts and mechanises one's usual rhythm of perceiving written information.

The last work in the show was *noiseBot*, an automatized sonic performer. The robot constantly wandered around the exhibition room, scanning the space and its human visitors through sensors and interacting with those present, generating sounds according to their behaviours and movements (see Fig. 15, p. 112). Its "voice" was perceivable throughout the whole exhibition space and also from outside of the building, giving somehow the impression that the whole castle was haunted by "technological ghosts".

5.3.4. The Audience's Role

The partial perception of the space and the facade installations suggested that the whole building was occupied by such interventions, and that the visitors could see only one of the many possible narratives. Some sounds from the installations were easily audible from outside, giving the feeling that the castle was "haunted" by technology that had started behaving independently.

Considering the audience's role in the sequence of works, what emerges is how the show proposed a new human-machine relationship. In the first two installations, mainly based on the rhythm of the composition, the visitor was simply an observer, passively perceiving the composition of sound and light. Moving up the stairs, the public became more active in its relation to the works. When approaching the windows of the first floor, they had to actively discover the external dimension of the show. They were then asked to launch the process of *Jedinica Jedan/UnitOne* and "receive" its action, without being given any possibility to react. The observer then approached and actively followed the mechanical behaviour of *Mechanical Book*, occupying a more central role in the interaction with the device. Lastly, the public could playfully interact with the *noiseBot*, testing its reactions and often developing a strong empathy with it, perhaps perceiving some rational intentions in the action of the machine.

In more metaphorical terms, the larger landscape of autonomous machines in *A Measurement Measures Measuring Means* forced its observers to reset their role towards the machines. This exhibition was an *interface* for this new understanding, and accompanied the visitor through a series of steps towards a more emphatic relationship with devices.

5.4. **Interacting Art: Working Unworks and Unworking Works**

Interacting Art: Working Unworks and Unworking Works was an experimental exhibition I realized in collaboration with the artist-curators Sam Bunn⁵¹ and Sebastian Six⁵² in the framework of Ars Electronica 2016⁵³. The trio of authors, hereafter mentioned as BB6, were invited to realize a show in Raumschiff⁵⁴, an association for art and culture in Linz, to open during the Ars festival.

During Ars Electronica the hype on new media art reaches its peak in Linz. Being in an independent location that typically hosts visual arts gave us the possibility to play between both environments and their languages. Our intention was to rethink themes very typical in the field of new media art, exploring their application within the visual arts with works that fit into both categories, addressing an audience that usually does not go to Ars Electronica, and proposing pieces that are not usually included in the festival program.

5.4.1. **Interacting Art**

The concept of *interactivity*, very dominant in the new media art scene, seemed the right one to start playing with. We wanted to address the extreme overemphases on *interactivity* that sometimes is used to described pieces that are activated by pushing buttons as being “interactive” or that, through some sensors, simply adapt themselves to the situation.⁵⁵ With this in mind, we aimed at viewing *interactivity* with a slightly tweaked meaning: as a merging and mutual crossings of all the elements in the show. We wanted to start a process in which each artist who participated could bring work and make it available for the whole group. In a secondary phase of negotiation, the participants could identify some of the contributions as fitting together and build new configurations, based on their affinities. Unfinished or broken projects seemed

51 Sam Bunn's website, available online at: <http://sambunn.com/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

52 Sebastian Six' website, available online at: <http://sebastiansix.net/> (accessed 10/2/2017).

53 RAUMSCHIFF: *Interacting Art*, in Ars Electronica's website, available online at: www.aec.at/radicalatoms/en/raumschiff (accessed 20/1/2017).

54 Raumschiff's website, available online at: <http://raum-schiff.at/> (accessed 6/1/2017).

55 “What is popularly termed *interaction* in these cases is often a more simple “reaction” - a human presses keys or triggers sensors, and the machine or computer program reacts. Some have argued that an artwork can “act upon” a human in terms of a mental or emotional reaction, but considering that some kind of human reaction can be expected from any kind of external stimulus, then this “default option” makes almost everything “interactive,” and then the word becomes an inaccurate catchall. [...] What emerges from an examination of the use of the three words *interaction*, *participation*, and *collaboration* is that quite often the rhetoric used (more often by the press or curators than by artists) claims at least “one rung above” the actuality. Hence, reactive artworks are claimed as interactive, participators are hyped into collaborators.” In B. Graham, and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, pp. 112–114.

to increase the possibilities for combination and mixing, so we published an open call for contributions in which non-finished works and non-working machines were explicitly requested.

As an outcome of this process, we anticipated the merging of all the works into an *interface* for the audience. This required the overcoming of many traditional categories and labels usually taken for granted in exhibitions. We decided therefore to abandon the separation of roles and identities between artists and curators, as well as the division between single pieces and whole exhibition, showing the displaying of art objects as a performative practice of creating structures between works. Our intention was to expose, through a messy performative set-up that played on several layers of meaning at the same time, what actually gives to anything the status of “artwork”, and how its presentation and perception relate to one another.

5.4.2. Interfacing Artworks

After the contributions started arriving, it became apparent that the process of combining works needed to be guided and supported by us, as artist-curators. Many artists couldn’t be present for the setup-time, or were due to arrive late, and therefore someone that had an overview and knew all the proposed contributions was needed. In order to avoid going back to classical curatorial positions, we set up further communication channels with those that were not coming, asking them to produce materials that were later emailed and included in the show. We considered those artists’ materials as instructions for performative acts to be realized in the space. We then interpreted and translated these proposals, adapting them to the general framework and atmosphere of the show.

Isidora Ficovic’s⁵⁶ suggestion of a drawing workshop entitled *One Flower, One Electronic Part* was realized in two parts. One became a motorized installation with images taken from the artist’s paintings, and the second was an arcade-style slot machine that the audience could decorate (see Fig. 12, p. 93). Another example was Stella Baraklianou’s⁵⁷ *Vertical Hang*, a photographic picture with a perpendicular reflective strip attached to it that moved when someone blew on it. We extended her project into a larger audio-kinetic installation using a fan that rhythmically moved the reflective strip and blew into a microphone hanging in front of the piece, making the concept of the work more visible. The *Fernsteuerungen* of Patrick Schabus⁵⁸ were hosted in two separated installations: a “shrine-station” allowed the visitor to “pray” before

56 Isidora Ficovic’s website, available online at: www.isidoraficovic.com (accessed 3/1/2017).

57 Stella Baraklianou’s website, available online at: <http://stellabaraklianou.com/> (accessed 11/2/2017).

58 Visual artist living and working in Vienna.

the non-functioning remote controllers and a “media-case” that mediated the view of one device through a low-quality cctv camera and tv screen.

Two installations were based on combinations of unfinished projects. One was the result of the proposals of Federico Tasso⁵⁹ and Julio Sosa⁶⁰, who respectively provided a semi-functioning app that transforms photographs into ASCII-code-like pictures, and a line of code that converted a stream of data downloaded from the Internet into sound. Since both relied on the transformation of images, the two processes were fed with the same material and the outputs were combined in an audio-video installation. The other combination consisted of connecting Henning Schulze’s⁶¹ *Lichtspeicher* – a not-yet-working device that was originally planned to save and then reproduce environmental light – and my work, *Memory Wheel*⁶², a kinetic machine that sorted combinations of concepts related to itself, metaphorically “thinking about its own identity”. The merging of the two presented a parallel with another work exhibited, *Brainlight* by Laura Jade⁶³. This work consists of a brain-computer-interface that reads the brainwave frequencies of the wearer. A brain-shaped sculptural object visualizes the brain activity through coloured lights. Both systems displayed the thoughts of a “brain” through outputting light: where *Brainlight* was a functioning work in itself, *Automatische Gehirnlicht* was its playful ekphrasis.

5.4.3. Artworks as Interfaces

Many proposed works were capable of conceptually reframing all the other exhibited works, acting as a real *interface* for the show. Francesco Nordio⁶⁴ produced a hand-drawn schematic that included all of the exhibited pieces into a diagram of titles, modalities of reception and type of interaction. Nordio’s scheme was reproduced on the wall opposite of the entrance door, becoming the first element of the show that the viewer encountered. Through this positioning, the audience could appreciate a “map of the show” and immediately understand that the whole exhibition was based on connections and processes of thoughts. Similarly, *Premonition Tour*, the combined work of Federico Tasso and Julio Sosa visualized and sonified the pictures of all the works included in the exhibition. Both the schematic and *Premonition Tour* provided the visitor an anticipation of what he or she would see further on in the show. Similarly,

59 Federico Tasso’s website, available online at: <http://federicotasso.altervista.org/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

60 Julio Sosa’s website, available online at: www.juliososa.net (accessed 11/2/2017).

61 Henning Schulze’s website, available online at: <http://minuteman.mur.at/> (accessed 3/1/2017).

62 *Memory Wheel*, in Davide Bevilacqua’s website, available online at: <http://davedebevilacqua.com/projects/memory-wheel.html> (accessed 11/2/2017).

63 Laura Jade’s website, available online at: <http://laurajade.com.au/> (accessed 11/2/2017). *Brainlight* project website, available online at: <http://brainlight.com.au/> (accessed 11/2/2017).

64 Francesco Nordio’s website, available online at: <http://francesco-nordio.tumblr.com/> (accessed 20/1/2017).

the work of Maria Czernohorszky⁶⁵, *Arguments*, consisted of a memory-like board game whose cards showed pictures taken of works in the exhibition, downloaded from the websites of all the participant artists, or shot during the set-up. Through Czernohorszky's work the audience was free to play the game and, discussing together, create new combinations and connections among the cards, repeating the process of negotiation that happened during the setup. Another interface, allowing a very intimate encounter between artist and audience was provided by the Boston-based bio-hacker Mary Maggic⁶⁶, who showed her long-term project *Open Source Estrogen*. Prior to the opening of the exhibition, Maggic extracted through biological and chemical processes the estrogens and various hormones present in the urine of the artists. After the extraction she installed the samples on a wall, allowing the audience to smell the extracted sexual hormones of the exhibiting artist (see Fig. 13, p. 96). The work of Laura Jade, *Brainlight*, could also be performed as an interface for the whole show: one could wear the BCI and walk through the exhibition whilst watching the works. The light output of *Brainlight* would show the mental state of the visitor viewing the other works.

In addition to this, the artist-curators contributed to the show with further interventions that interfaced with the works. I intervened with each work in the show, assigning them texts copied from Ars Electronica's jury statements for the Golden Nica in Interactive Art. I decontextualized these expressions on the "rhetoric of interaction", printed them as microscopic wall texts and placed one alongside each work. During the opening night, Sebastian Six interfaced with a selection of artworks based on their sonic qualities. Six made a sound performance in which he was "playing" these works using them as sound sources. He recorded, amplified, remixed and reproduced the sounds coming from them, interfacing them once again through his own work. Another contribution of Sam Bunn, *Switchable Obstacle*, was an electric switch that interfaced two other works, Isidora Ficovic's *It's Always Better with a Cat*, and the shrine containing the *Fernsteuerungen*. Turning the key from one position to the other switched off one of the works, whilst activating the other, allowing the audience to alternatively activate parts of the exhibition.

5.4.4. Symbols and Recurrent Elements

During the performative setup of the show, a few elements emerged recursively, sometimes as playful connections among the works, other times as invasive presences to be dealt with. Through their cyclical surfacings, they occupied a central role in the process, acting as a sort of *refrain* that influenced the positioning of the contributions or inspired further connections between them. These symbolic presences were the *water* and the *cat*.

65 Maria Czernohorszky's website, available online at: <http://mariaczernohorszky.wixsite.com/identities> (accessed 11/2/2017).

66 Mary Maggic's website, available online at: <http://maggic.ooo/> (accessed 11/2/2017).

Water was mainly introduced into the show by artist Yen Tzu Chang⁶⁷. She proposed two functioning works based on fluids. The first one, *Flux*, was a sound installation based on an interaction with fluorescent-water dripping from a tap into a sink. The second consisted of a sound-dance performance with the dancer Yoh Morishita, who performed in a two-centimeter-deep pool of water. Before the pool was placed in its final location, the inner yard of the building, it was temporarily installed in the first room. The prolonged presence of a large amount of water, and its successive replacement, suggested the installation of a small water pool into the room, which then became another interface in the exhibition. The pool hosted a video-stream coming from another work in the room, Sam Bunn's *David sees*. This work was a wheel-mounted autonomously-wandering plant that observed from its moving perspective all of the works in the first room, displaying them in the pool (see Fig. 14, p. 100). Furthermore, a drip bag dripped water into the pool, cross referencing one part of the installation *Open Source Estrogen*, another work based on liquids.

The second recurrent symbol of the show, the cat, was inspired by Isidora Ficovic's painting. The cat was multiplied in the exhibition, and became part of the support stand for the *Memory Wheel*. After the opening performance by Yen Tzu Chang and Yoh Morishita, the kinetic piece was placed in the water-pool. Its base was extended with a skirt, a pair of boots and a furry cat tail (see Fig. 11, p. 182). The cat was also present in *darkFunkData*, a disorientating and highly rhetoric piece of text created between us, Bevilacqua, Bunn and Six, and the artist Henning Schulze. The text was based on the Ars Electronica's Jury Statements I had selected for "the rhetoric of interaction", and was composed to describe what was happening in the double work *Automatische Gehirnlicht*. It was installed in front of the Lichtspeicher, and made reference to the cat-like support of the *Memory Wheel*.

5.4.5. What Remains?

After an exhibition set-up disrupting the conventional dimensions of the show, its documentation necessarily needed to follow the same logic of interconnections and reframings happening between the works. The classical printed book with pictures and essays did not seem the right choice, being it pretty much linear as the text the reader is seeing now. The format that mostly highlighted the network of connections happening among the works was the hypertext. The exhibition catalogue was therefore structured as an offline website produced in HTML, that the reader could explore. The first page of the documentation presented as in the physical space Francesco Nordio's schematic, which worked as a site-map to reach all other works. Clicking on one of the titles in the scheme would open the corresponding page, where the viewer could get more information on the specific project, seeing its behaviour and a brief description of

67 Yen Tzu Chang's website, available online at: www.changyentzu.com (accessed 3/1/2017).

what happened during the phase of negotiation. Nordio's schematic appears again at the end of each page, highlighting the pieces that are closely related to the current page.

The choice of keeping the website as an "offline" material, and not creating an online website, was taken after reflecting on the role of documentation. As an "afterlife" of the exhibition, a real website would create misunderstandings on the effective structure of the project, which could look like an autonomous online exhibition. Distributing the documentation online, but in the form of an autonomous package to be consumed offline, highlighted the materiality of the exhibition without being misleading.

5.5. *Natura Morta*

Natura Morta is the last exhibition proposed in this review of key studies. It was a solo show of the Italian artist Michele Spanghero⁶⁸ that I curated in the space of the Fondazione Ado Furlan⁶⁹ in Pordenone, Italy. The exhibition was part of the 2016 contemporary art festival Palinsesti. The solo show was planned after Spanghero won the 2015 *Premio in Sesto*, a prize for the realization of a sculpture or installation in the public space of the town.⁷⁰ In this case the festival organization decided that I would curate the show, with the requirement that it should contain a presentation of *Pebbles*, the awarded project, which was first realized in San Vito, accompanied by other works of the artist.

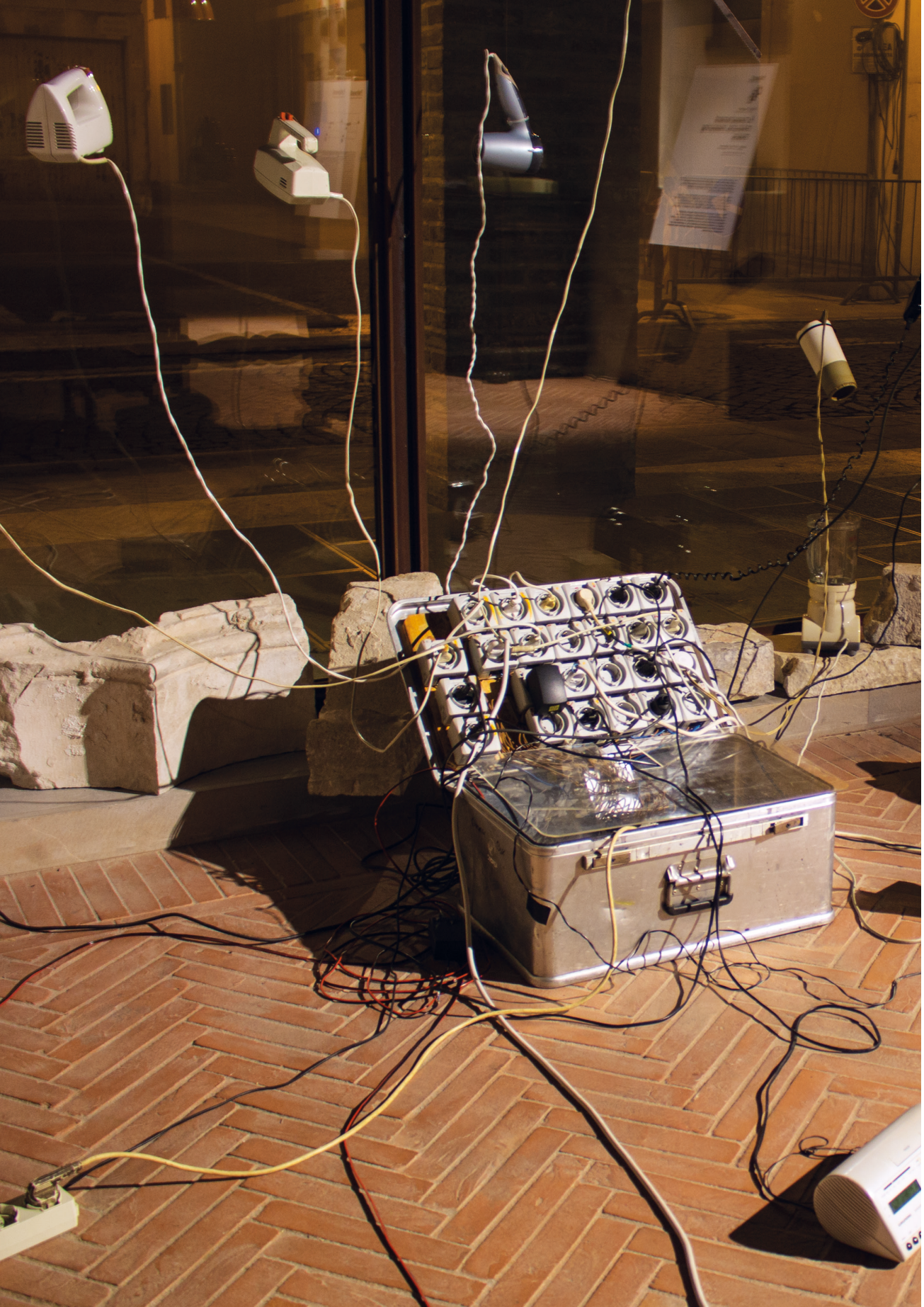
5.5.1. Concept Development

In the first phase of negotiation, which focused on the direction that the show should take, Michele Spanghero and I went through his portfolio to isolate a work to be paired with *Pebbles*. It was our intention that the second work should have the possibility of being extended or re-structured to fit into the exhibition space: a small entrance room with large-windows and a large white cube on the underground floor of the space.

68 Michele Spanghero's website, available online at: <http://michelespanghero.com/> (accessed 11/1/2017).

69 Fondazione Ado Furlan website, available online at: <http://servizi.informsrl.it/eds/adofurlan/index.html> (accessed 11/2/2017).

70 Since its beginnings in 2009, *Premio in Sesto* is a competition among artists selected by a jury. The participant artists propose an installation project for a given location of the town center. The audience of the show can vote the proposals and the most voted one will be realized in the public space. Furthermore, the following edition of the festival usually includes a solo exhibition deepening the practices of the winner or the installation project.



Among many other options, the sound sculpture *Natura Morta*⁷¹ (2013) was the work that offered the most room for a collaboration between he and I, artist and curator. *Natura Morta* is a sound sculpture based on the visual juxtaposition between a clean sculptural piece, an oval sphere made in acrylic stone, and an organic element, a piece of fruit such as a lemon, orange or apple. The relation between the two elements is realized through sound. The sphere contains a loudspeaker that produces a composition of sound recordings the electric potential between two electrodes inserted in the fruit. Since in my artistic practice I also dealt with sound generated through organic materials in the performance *Ursuppe*⁷², Spanghero's *Natura Morta* motivated us both to create a new iteration of our respective projects.

5.5.2. Upgrading an Artwork

The plan resulting from the collaboration was to upgrade the project to generate sound in real time, which would change and eventually collapse after the fruit in the installation had begun to rot. I prepared some electronic circuits that would generate sound waves, whose frequency of oscillation was given by the resistance of the fruits. Thanks to a technical sponsor, a company producing furniture pieces in acrylic stone that was also involved in the first realization of the project, Spanghero produced two more spheres with embedded loudspeaker.

Having in total three spheric elements to use plus the presentation of *Pebbles*, we decided to organize the show according to the spatial qualities of the location. The small entrance room of the gallery has large windows that allows the passer-by to look inside. It could work as an introduction to the underground room, so we installed the documentation of *Pebbles* there, which consisted of a video loop in which both artist and curator interact with the sound-generating iron semi-spheres installed in San Vito. In the same room, one of the acrylic spheres was displayed on a pedestal with a mandarin on top, close to the window and visible from outside. This sculpture looked like the 2013 project – except for our use of a mandarin instead of lemon, citron or apple. We provided it with new electronics generating sound in real-time. It worked as a neat “eye catcher” to stimulate the curiosity of passers-by.

The underground room was dedicated to a large installation that visualized on a bigger scale the process happening in the sound sculpture upstairs. The two newly produced spheres were placed in a grid of lemons that were connected to each other with copper wire (see Fig. 3, p. 12; Fig. 4, p. 20). The copper passed electricity from an analog oscillator circuit through all of the lemons and back to the circuit. In this configuration, the organic material of the fruits

71 *Natura Morta* (2013), in Michele Spanghero's website.

72 *Ursuppe*, in Davide Bevilacqua's website, available online at: <http://davidebevilacqua.com/projects/ursuppe.html> (accessed 20/1/2017).

took the role of variable resistors, influencing the frequency produced by the oscillators. When the current returned to the oscillators, it generated sound that corresponded to the amount of water and salt present in the lemons. This sound was emitted by the loudspeakers inside the acrylic spheres. The initial state of both small and large installations was prepared for the opening of the show, when the oscillators were tuned to harmonic frequencies and the sound emitted was equilibrate and more constant. Throughout the duration of the exhibition the fruits began to rot, drying out or moldering, which modified the amount of water in the lemons (see Fig. 50, p. 22). As a result, the sound altered over time, changing the main frequencies and causing some percussive beats emerge.

5.5.3. The Work as a Living System

The title of the work plays with the traditional painting form, *still life*, in Italian *natura morta*, which can be translated as “dead nature”, and usually contains stylized painted representations of compositions involving food, flowers or natural elements and man-made objects. In *Natura Morta*, Spanghero refers to this composition style, bringing it into three-dimensional sculptural space. If the natural and artificial materials attained compositional coherence at the surface of the painting, in the installation version it is the presence of sound that compositionally completes the system.

Through the presence of rotting materials, the project played with the discrepancy between the English and the Italian expressions, between life and death. The exhibiting of the work negated its own stability over time, producing a state of continuous evolution that coincided with the exhibition’s length. As a visitor asked herself while visiting the show during its final weekend, “Is the artwork alive or is it dead? While rotting, are the lemons in the installation dying, or the opposite? Can we define the lemon as alive once it has been separated from the lemon tree?” She concluded that the mould was probably the most living thing in the installation, highlighting how the perception of the work changed according to which elements were brought into consideration (see Fig. 6, p. 32).

5.6. Resume: the Evolution of the “Exhibition as Interface”

Unmade Displays can be considered as the starting point of the process of seeing the exhibition as an interface. There, the concept of the show framed the works into a structure analysing contemporary technologies. The exhibition *interfaced* the works within a conceptual narrative that wasn’t replicated through their physical placement in the space. The works were installed according to their spatial needs, without forcing the audience into an interpretation based on physical “sections”. The show *interfaced* the institutions involved in the project, creating a particular crossing of interests and disciplines addressed by the thematics of the screen.

In my curatorial residence in Glurns Art Point, the exhibition and its space are seen as the *interface*, as a potential place of encounter. There, the visitor could encounter various artistic practices that tackle the technological environment that surrounds him or her, and discuss art and technology. The project focused on the people living in the area, who were invited to participate in some of the events as *audience*, and in some others, like the discussion groups, as *actors*. The exhibition in this case started losing its coherence as *container* of art to become a *shared space*.

A Measurement Measures Measuring Means can be seen as a further step in my reflections on contemporary technology that started in Glurns. This show crystallized my thoughts about media and machines within a large spatial narrative. In this case the *interface* was the space and the location itself, in which the works were placed to build a crescendo out of the experience of the audience moving through the space. We could say that this show didn't *contain* any work, but the project coincided with its settings. Besides curating the organization of the show, through its realization I became directly involved in the installation of the pieces, acting as an assistant of the artist.

Among the mentioned projects, *Interacting Art: working unworks and unworking works* is definitely the one that pushed most the borders of the exhibition as interface. In the show, all the elements were interwoven into a complex system of symbols and references. In many cases there was no clear demarcation between works and exhibition, as many of the pieces were interpreting the other ones through their own structures, "exhibiting" the exhibition multiple times within itself. In its playful, conceptual, and multifaceted display, the show "showed the various ways art can be shown" without distinguishing much between the roles of artist and curator.

After the radical experimental display of *Interacting Art*, the last example in this chapter was another solo show, *Natura Morta*. In this project, the concept of *interface* declined in its less experimental setting, which nevertheless saw the production of the exhibition as a close collaboration between artist and curator. In this case there was no overlap between the role of artist and curator. As the curator, I performed two activities: one as a more classical "mediator" between artist, audience, hosting institution and the larger framework of the organization of the project; and the other, more supportive, as a collaborator of the artist for the realization of one part of the work. The roles stayed nevertheless more or less clear. Spanghero remained the author of the piece, to which I contributed, helping to bring about a further step in the development of the artist's work. In this case the exhibition can be seen as the result of the *interfacing* of artist and curator.

06 CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND EVALUATIONS

The conception of the exhibition as an interface and the methodology proposed in the third chapter represent the conclusion of the research presented here. Nevertheless, this should not be understood as an ultimate result of the research. Already the various observations which emerged during the process of formalizing the present thesis illuminated several cues for its future continuation.

The initial phase of this research consisted in the exploration of the topic of "curating new media art", in particular regarding the curatorial and theoretical discussion taking place there. A very crucial point appeared to be new media art's relationship (or better, non-relationship) with contemporary art, the conception of artistic media, and how the emergence of new media modifies the traditional exhibition practice in the gallery space. An interesting point is that the various contributors to the discussion, Domenico Quaranta, Christiane Paul, Sarah Cook, or Beryl Graham, despite having different positions, all seemed to agree on the necessity of a closer relationship between new media and contemporary art. According to them, various elements could contribute to a fruitful collaboration: the curator, acting as a translator among the worlds; the exhibition, as a platform for combining the different languages; new media, which allow the emergence of tools utilized in both worlds and creating new categories of understanding and conceiving art. Taking over Domenico Quaranta's wish for a field of new media art with more "art literacy", the research enquired into the curatorial discourses taking place in the world of contemporary art. The aim of this exploration was to focus on the evolution of the

different exhibition formats in order to isolate the shows that employed experimental curatorial structures. Examples of conceptual art exhibitions of the 1960s and 1970s demonstrated how curators challenged and involved artists into the creation of innovative exhibition formats based on the structures of communication media of that time. Those shows merged the art pieces into unique architectures of thought, which in some cases presented a non-hierarchical character of shared authorship between artists and curator; in other cases, the curator overwhelmed the artists and assumed the position of “author of the show”. This part of the research was structured into a historical narration of the evolution of the role of the curator, the focus of which could highlight various themes: the evolution of exhibition formats; the clash between artists and curators; the evolution of the curatorial awareness; the curatorial and theoretical practices of artists and their reaction to the rise of the curator; the actual supervisibility of curators. We positioned this historical overview as the opening chapter of the thesis due to its more general inclination, followed by the specific focus on art dealing with technology.

Focusing on the exhibition, the enquiry highlighted curious elements about the conception of the show. The exhibition is the way through which curatorial discourse crystallizes in space and time; the space in which both artists and curators intervene; the architecture of concepts between artworks; the platform that allows the interaction between disparate art worlds; and many more dynamic configurations of elements. This suggested the comparison with the concept of interface, which seemed capable of representing all these aspects into a unique, complex picture. The third chapter dealt therefore with the use of metaphors in the curatorial practices, culminating in a methodological proposal for understanding the “exhibition as interface”.

6.1. Framing the Curatorial Practice

The methodology for understanding the art show is used in the fourth chapter as a conceptual framework for describing our own curatorial practice. The five exhibitions analyzed in this chapter were realized in the time span of the last two years, corresponding to the period in which the theoretical research was also conducted. The shows, therefore, including the reflections presented here were the occasions in which ideas and hypotheses were tested and verified.

The first show can be understood as the initial state: *Unmade Displays* was a coherent exhibition presenting disparate artworks through a non-invasive conceptual structure that was built upon the topic which connected all the works. Despite the concept of the interface emerged only afterward, some of the elements of the show manifested already the characteristics of the interface between works, audience, and institutions. Referring to Domenico Quaranta’s models for bridging new media and contemporary art, *Unmade Displays* is a show about new-media-art-related topics, produced in a medium-sized contemporary art institution. It mixed both modalities proposed by Quaranta into

a third one: the works in the show had an inner coherence of materials and approaches, what he defines as “Discrete Guest”, whereas the topic of the exhibition mediated between concepts of contemporary art, film studies, and new media art, in a sort of “Workplace Quota”.

A more experimental phase followed, in which the framework surrounding the gallery space was addressed with more awareness. During the residence in Glurns Art Point, the atelier-house was conceived as a shared place where artists could produce and show their works, but also where the audience could have an active role. This experiment was rooted in the collaborative practices of Group Material or other relational art practices, as well as the paracuratorial activities organized in museums around a show with the intention of making the institution a social space.

In *A Measurement Measures Measuring Means* the role of the curator was again less experimental. It consisted in mediating the project with the larger framework of the festival and in supporting the artist in the realization the works. The exhibition and the installation addressed the building and its outside, therefore creating a narrative in space that the viewer could experience. This can be read as a more “traditional” exhibition, meaning that one does not need to be fully experimental in each project, the exhibition needs to address the space and the audience with the right language.

The framework surrounding *Interacting Art* allowed the team of artist-curators to address playfully the circumstances in which the event happened. The artists were involved in a strong process of mediation – this time very invasive towards individual contributions – but aimed at decentralizing the curatorial role, in an attempt at mixing a narrative practice à la Szeemann into a collaborative structure like Lippard’s one.

The exhibition *Natura Morta* became an interface between artist and curator. The separation between artist and curator was blurred, but not until the complete coincidence of their roles. During the production of the piece, the artistic skills of the curator contributed to the realization of one technical part, but the roles stayed more or less clear. The artist clearly still the author of the piece, which reached a further step of development through the contribution of the artist-curator.

Comparing these descriptions to the ones mentioned throughout the thesis makes it possible to recognize various elements in common between our own projects and the shows organized by established and worldwide recognized curators like Peter Weibel, Harald Szeemann, and Bruno Latour. Their practices are sources of inspiration for the author’s own curatorial practice, specifically regarding the juxtapositions of apparently incoherent materials, demonstrating the quality of exhibitions to justify and make coherent this agglomerate. On the other side, we take distance from the concept of the curator as a centralized, individual author, embracing collaborative processes and collective activities.

Artists' groups like Group Material or the Independent Group were characterized by the participation of many individuals with the aim of creating a more complex view on specific topics. Since we believe that complexity occupies an important role in an exhibition, it is important to develop a set of procedures for addressing it. The tendency of oversimplifying things often hides the beautiful complexity of the details and does not necessarily make difficult topics easier to understand. The proposal of seeing the exhibition as an interface could be one possible strategy for acquiring awareness on the multi-layered architecture involving the show and for finding a way to utilize critically or creatively its elements.

6.2. Critical Analysis

As stated earlier, interfaces are part of the public domain only in the last decades and, due to their essence, their definition is far from being fully standardized throughout cultures. Due to their pervasiveness, though, interfaces are very common references, at the moment transversally shared in societies. This represents a critical point for both the metaphor and the method proposed in this thesis. Methodologies should be based upon tangible and clear concepts so that the user can *apply* them as a scientific procedure. Conversely, metaphors should be abstract, in order to empower the reader to *visualize*, through their own personal experiences, the qualities of an object that would be otherwise tedious to describe literally. The exhibition as interface occupies an undefined area. Regarding the metaphor, the blurriness around the term seems to be its strength, inspiring the most disparate interpretations. Since art shows aim at presenting novel perspectives on the collection of items they show, the concept of interface represent an attempt at envisioning new possibilities of connection and intervention between the elements shaping the exhibition. Conversely, a methodology based on this concept lacks a clear procedural sequence. The conclusion of the third chapter is structured as a fluid collection of references, thoughts, and observations, and it does not present a clear strategy, nor a practical technique for realizing exhibitions. Nevertheless, the impracticality of this method fits well with the complexity of practices and elements that contribute to an art show. It was not in the intentions of the author to develop the perfect recipe for creating art shows, but to explore the world of exhibition-making and to find a strategy for reflecting on it.

The choice of considering the interface – at least initially – without focusing on its technological meaning is another critical element. This was mainly caused by the purpose of avoiding overly wide misinterpretations given by the narrow view of the interface as exclusively web-based. This decision, nevertheless, left out of the field of this thesis a series of interesting reflections, such as the understanding of the visitors as users interacting with a technological space, or how technical interfaces can visualize artworks in the physical space. In this light, this thesis could have focused on projects like Jeffrey Shaw's *The Virtual*

*Museum*¹ (1991) and *The Net.Art Browser*² (1999), or the portal designed by Antenna Design for presenting the online exhibition curated by Steve Dietz *Art Entertainment Networks* in the larger framework *Let's Entertain*³ (2001), happening in a physical gallery of the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Those examples deal with art practices happening and mainly visible on the Internet, which through these technical *interfaces* are bridged in the physical space of the gallery. Shaw's and Dietz' interfaces are valid examples of strategies for bringing immaterial works in a show, extending its spatial limits to include further online art.

6.3. Future Developments

This research does not conclude with the last page of the present book but can be considered as a first step in understanding the qualities of art shows. A natural consequence of this perspective could be the development of a taxonomy of the exhibition as interface. A vocabulary based on specific terms – which should refer to the quality of the interface – is necessary for being able to analyze the various shapes that exhibitions can assume. This would as well be useful to define the conditions under which each element of the display becomes an interface. In the methodological proposal, we grouped some elements as systems, components, and structures, referring to the “scale” in which the elements act. A more precise nomenclature, though, could be very helpful in categorizing transversally the curatorial strategies employed in the art museum as well as in the artist-run association, highlighting some otherwise unnoticeable tendencies in the curatorial practice.

Another valuable extension of the research would be to address what has been put outside the scope of the research. Internet-based practices – at the time of this writing – are becoming more and more utilized as strategies for showing art to audiences that otherwise could not be reached. Art production and curating on the Internet are in general characterized by a radical disruption of existent roles and categories: terms like “artist”, “curator” or “audience” lose their common meaning in the web 2.0, which generated a distributed and collective creativity, content production, and newsfeed curation.

A further development of the methodological approach could proceed with the “post-medial perspective” outlined as the basis for the metaphor. As already

1 *Media Art Net* | Shaw, Jeffrey: *The Virtual Museum*, available online at: www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/the-virtuel-museum (accessed 1/2/2017).

2 *ZKM | Works* | *The Net.Art Browser*, available online at: <http://on1.zkm.de/zkm/e/werke/netartbrowser/> (accessed 1/2/2017).

3 *Let's Entertain. Celebrity. Desire. Seduction. Transgression*, available online at: www.walkerart.org/archive/B/9E13C5FA142230B2616E.htm (accessed 31/1/2017).

referred to extensively throughout the thesis, this attitude allows the medium of the exhibition to be compared with other contemporary media, stimulating new conceptions of the art show. Some of the analyzed curatorial paradigms are based on the attempt of representing and framing the complexity of the world into a single image – e. g. Szeemann's encyclopedic approach in *Questioning Reality / Image Worlds Today* or Jean-Hubert Martin's geopolitical representative method based on statistics for *Les Magiciens de la Terre*. This characteristic is also present in various of the new media that allow people to perceive the world. As historical examples of exhibitions taking place in television or on digital billboards, the strategies for representing the world applied by social media and new communication media could enrich this pool of techniques to build the show with.

This analysis of Internet and communication media could be labeled "interfaces as exhibitions". Reversing the terms highlights the focus on the modalities through which content is perceived, that in some cases allow a direct interaction. This would be based on the idea that media – printed press, television, cinema, radio, or as well the many paradigms of online browsing – influence the way spectators or users behave to get in touch with the available contents, creating some perceptive habits based on the interaction with a surface of contact. This analysis could bring modalities of displaying artworks based on concepts like "zapping between channels", "algorithmic-based newsfeed" or "endless scroll", "user-created content", or "photo gallery", that curators or artists might want to include in their practice for the unique communicative and relational structures they subtend.

These future steps for this research should not be purely theoretical. Since the present research was supported by a series of practical tests – which were fundamental for the development of the concept here described – a future research scenario would need to be accompanied by experimental frameworks where to apply, to test, to calibrate and to discuss the upcoming hypothesis.

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