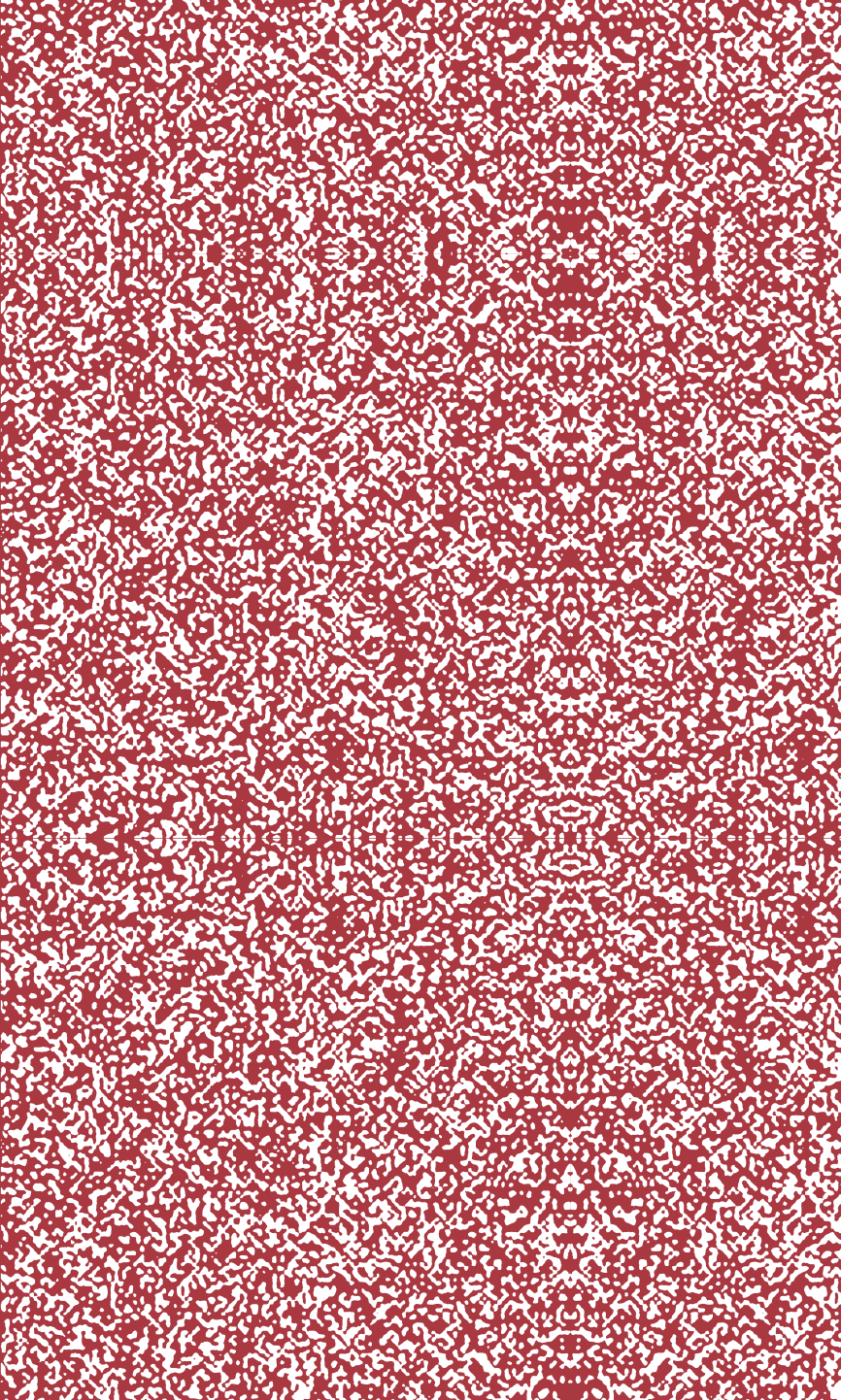
Exhibiting the Exhibition and Other Contemporary Art Reconstruction Activities

Directed by Mélanie Boucher
Marie-Hélène Leblanc

actes de colloque



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galerie uqo UQO PERICULUM

One Case Recounted

Introduction

Mélanie Boucher and Marie-Hélène Leblanc

As a practice, reconstruction is not new. In fact, over the last twenty years popular culture has seized on it to the point that it has become commonplace. The Marvel empire's *Spider-Man* (2021) franchise, for instance, has made the most of recycling by featuring in its latest film all three actors who have played the titular superhero over the years in a composite story that carries on from the previous instalments while promising, of course, something new. Although they are a sign of our times, such remake medleys, with their pastiches, quotations, evocations, and nods to the past, were also the basis of popular entertainment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from which film emerged. In his impressive study *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (1983), Martin Meisel convincingly demonstrates that such plays on the reprise occurred both within individual media and from medium to medium.[1] What surfaces is an awareness of the questions and usages that set the fine-arts field apart within the broader cultural sector. In a break with the past, fertile though it was, modernity served a rationale of progress and autonomy,

1 Meisel, Martin. *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1983.

and so it removed remakes from the scene. From this perspective, modern art was incapable of recognizing the contribution of the reprise beyond emblematic figures such as Manet and Duchamp, whose reflective and critical works were early heralds of postmodernity.

It is therefore worth considering reconstructions in contemporary art, and in contemporary exhibitions, through the lens of the specific history of the visual arts, while also recognizing that this history and its evolution are inscribed in a broader social and cultural context that has, perhaps, always encouraged reproductions. In this respect, it is revealing that the first mark of human creativity was found in the imprint and reproduction of a natural object.[2] As Vanessa Agnew notes, there is an appreciable difference between the approach to reprises in the visual arts, which are related to a critical or, at least, reflective intention, and the reproductions (mechanical or manual) and remakes of popular entertainment—films, life-size role-playing games, series, video games, and historical re-enactments.[3] When artists, curators, or galleries revisit the past, repositioning this history to provide a better understanding of it generally wins out over a reprise, as attractive as it may be, that is meant to be faithful to the original and counts success in terms of profits.

As its title indicates, *Exhibiting the Exhibition and Other Contemporary Art Reconstruction Activities* is concerned with reconstruction in the visual arts field. A

2 Didi-Huberman, Georges. "Formes techniques : l'empreinte comme geste," *La ressemblance par contact : archéologie, anachronisme et modernité de l'empreinte*, Paris, Éditions de minuit, "Paradoxe" imprint, 2008, p. 27–51.

3 See Agnew, Vanessa. "Introduction: What is Reenactment," *Criticism* 46, No. 3 (Summer 2004), p. 327–39.

variety of approaches and outcomes are discussed in this book: presentation of archives and artworks with an exhibition as the subject; reconstructions based on design; offerings that are performed, critical, or exceptional; and recurrent programs. These variations sketch the contours of both the extent and the limitations of exhibition reconstruction—the definition of which is not unanimous—as a genre. In this book, some authors prefer the terms "commemorative exhibitions," "re-exhibitions," or "reactivations." Each of these terms opens up to meanings—and shifts in meaning—that must be acknowledged.

The first section of the book, *A Reflective Strategy*, includes essays by Reesa Greenberg, Marie-Josée Jean, Marie Fraser, and Marie-Hélène Leblanc, who consider exhibition reconstruction—from theoretical, curatorial, and institutional points of view—as a strategy intended to enhance the meaning of the original initiative. The authors discuss narratives that form in the shadows, or due to a lack of documentation, and those that are appended and combined, thus challenging the history of reconstructed exhibitions. In the second section, *A Performative Response*, the authors explore reprises of artworks that are performative in how they deploy and employ the original artwork in a transformative way. The creative approach to the reprise used by Mathieu Copeland, Sophie Bélair Clément, Vincent Bonin, and the duo Prinz Gholam is not unrelated to the connections between research and creation in exhibition reconstruction projects. The final section, *One Case Recounted*, includes the complementary perspectives of Mélanie Boucher, Diana Nemiroff, Safa Jomaa, and Jessica Ragazzini on

the exhibition "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps," presented at the National Gallery of Canada in 1991, and its reconstruction, presented at Galerie UQO in 2019.

To conclude, we would like to acknowledge the concrete context that made publication of this book possible. Its conception falls within the pragmatics of a university gallery created in parallel with the setting up of graduate programs in an art school. Our own chosen affinities led to our desire to jointly conduct research and education activities in the framework of two exhibitions and a colloquium, which this book reports on. Each of us considers here one of the exhibitions that we curated together, and the colloquium *Passer à l'histoire: l'exposition et sa reconstitution*, which we organized at UQO in 2019, during the Congrès de l'Acfas, served as the matrix for this book.

A Reflective Strategy

Exhibition reconstructions offer diverse responses to original exhibitions that are considered important. Added to replicas, which are faithful reproductions, are the results of research and creation from which new works are created and reconstructions that aim for a better comprehension of the original projects through various interpretations. Cases belonging to this third, reflective type of reconstruction are discussed in this first section. Drawing, no doubt, on the relatively recent desire to make art history by looking at its exhibitions, these new productions revisit the past. Is it a question of bringing the artworks and how they were arranged back into the public eye? Providing context for the original exhibition by considering

its critical reception? Undertaking an investigation and reconstructing it from photographs? Or redeploying the catalogue, which usually offers a different perspective on the exhibition that it was intended to accompany? The critical positions adopted, be they feminist, societal, urbanistic, or cultural, are expressed according to the choices that guided them. Will the exhibition be redeployed in its original venue or elsewhere? Will it contribute, lastingly or fleetingly, to renewed perspectives?

In the first essay, *Reconstituting Reconstituted Exhibitions: Judy Chicago's* The Dinner Party, Reesa Greenberg raises several of these questions, including one about the scope of permanently installed critical presentations. The presentation of Judy Chicago's emblematic work *The Dinner Party* (1974–79) at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007 offers an opportunity for Greenberg to explore the ways in which, as an installation, it can be seen as either an artwork or an exhibition. In her essay *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition: an overview* Marie-Josée Jean also probes the relationship between installation and exhibition. She looks back at a series of notable exhibitions in the history of Québec art that were reactivated by VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine, between 2016 and 2019. In her examination of this experiment divided into distinct projects, Jean highlights the role of materials that are both available and absent, as well as the options and limitations of the prospective view on the exhibition to be remade. In the following essay, *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition: The case of* "Montreal, plus or minus?," Marie Fraser takes a deeper look at the issues

surrounding the availability of documentation, using as a case study Melvin Charney's reactivation of the exhibition in question at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The methodological and heuristic process that reconstruction introduces into exhibition research and practice, which Fraser also discusses, involves recognition of the enunciative positioning. In the last essay in this section, *Making the Exhibition*, Marie-Hélène Leblanc, director and curator of Galerie UQO, takes *La Galerie UQO présente ICI: Harald Szeemann, documenta 5* as her case study. Leblanc also recognizes that there is a relationship to be established between the present and past contexts that are at work in reconstruction. In the two parts of her essay, *The Exhibition in a Box* and *The Exhibition as Medium*, Leblanc explores how the positions of creator and maker of exhibitions, first addressed by Harald Szeemann, are manifested in her gallery's areas of research.

A Performative Response

This section contains three essays on reconstruction projects in which the five authors—artists and curators—explore the performative value of the remade exhibition in terms of its capacity to be choreographed and declaimed, as well as recounted in other ways. These projects also challenge the performative contribution as J. L. Austin defines "performative" in his book *How to Do Things with Words*.[4] The person who designates a work or an exhibition as a reconstruction inscribes

4 Austin's two terminological interpretations of the term "performative," which refers to corporeal action *or* to the effect of language, were the subject of a backstage discussion between Sophie Bélair Clément and Mélanie Boucher, from which we draw the reflection upon which this second section of the book is based.

it in a sequence in which it is not the original, which provides it with new significance. As Austin conceives of the performative enunciation, it produces meaning while revealing, as in the cases considered here, the failure of the remake to reproduce the past event. Because they dwell on the value of gaps and the qualities of fragments, reconstructions foreground the lacks, lacunas, and insufficiencies of intellectualization or of emotional revivification, while recognizing that the reference exhibition becomes a plastic material and highlighting the commemorative nature of the work or exhibition that is seen anew.

In the first essay, *The Exhibition as Material / The Materiality of the Exhibition*, the curator Mathieu Copeland revisits three projects: the exhibition "Vides. Une rétrospective," which he co-curated in 2009 at the Centre Pompidou and at the Kunsthalle in Berne; the series "Reprises," initiated in 2011, which involved spoken performances based on the reading of catalogues of past exhibitions; and *Chorégraphier l'exposition*, a book published by Presses du Réel in 2013, in which he discusses the connection between choreography and exhibition, using as a point of departure "Une exposition chorégraphiée," presented at the Centre d'art contemporain La Ferme du Buisson in 2008. What these projects have in common is that they exploit the para-texts of source exhibitions, including catalogues, press releases, titles, wall texts, and labels. The second essay, *From reprise to response: fragments from a conversation between Sophie Bélair Clément and Vincent Bonin*, begins with a discussion of the oddity of an autonymous label for a reconstructed work and then moves on to two projects produced, respectively, by

the artist and the curator: Sophie Bélair Clément's reconstruction *Salle Proun : mur, bois, couleur* (2011), presented during the Triennale Québécoise 2011 at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and based on an experiment and archival production of *Prounen-Raum* (1923) by El Lissitzky; and Vincent Bonin's exhibition "D'un discours," produced in two parts at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery in 2014 and Dazibao in 2015. Their conversation explores the shifts in, and possible loss of, meaning from the original that occur with successive remakes. The exchange also highlights the tense relationships between the artist's intention and the interpretive aim that both connects and distances the authorial and institutional approaches to the reconstruction. In the last essay in this section, *Passer au présent, passer à la présence : The performance practice of Prinz Gholam*, the artist duo Prinz Gholam look back at a set of works and the sequences of poses and movements that they created to reproduce works chosen from museum collections and historical artworks. These performances, executed outdoors, in galleries, in other artists' works, or at heritage sites, underscore the physical mastery and concentration that are required here—not in interpreting the original but in liberating it from didactic and simplifying discourses.

One Case Recounted

The four essays in this last section address various facets of one exhibition and its reconstruction. The solo exhibition "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps," presented at the National Gallery of Canada in 1991, remains remarkable to this day for

the controversy surrounding the showing of a dress composed of animal flesh in a national institution. By choosing to reconstruct this exhibition and contextualize both the discourses produced around it and the influence exerted by Sterbak's work on culture to the present day, the curators of the reconstruction, Mélanie Boucher and Marie-Hélène Leblanc, decided to add their voices to others and exploit the potential of research and creation within a university gallery. In the first essay in this section, *What Role for the Archive in Reconstitutions? The Sterbak case—The Flesh Dress at the National Gallery*, Mélanie Boucher looks back at this curatorial experiment by raising the specificities of the reconstruction with regard to exhibitions of art and history. As well as defining the objectives, production processes, and results of this experiment, Boucher adopts an epistemological approach to gain a better comprehension of types of exhibitions and their effects. In the next essay, *Food for Thought: Jana Sterbak's Flesh Dress and the National Gallery of Canada*, Diana Nemiroff offers a perspective on the initial exhibition in 1991, which she organized as the curator of contemporary and modern art at the National Gallery at the time. The phases of the controversy and the different types of stakeholders who opined from artistic and cultural, political, media, and popular points of view are considered in a way that captures what confronted them in a socio-economic context that also hindered the sharing of differences. In Voice of Fire *and it's media controversy: the rhetoric and its repercussions*, Safa Jomaa places the debate surrounding the presentation of a flesh dress in the context of a different debate that had broken out the previous year at the National Gallery,

whose new architectural design was drawing political and media attention: the purchase, at a price that some considered outrageously high, of a minimalist work by the painter Barnett Newman, which made headlines throughout the country and provided a pretext for new grumblings. The final essay, by Jessica Ragazzini, assistant curator for exhibition reconstructions at Galerie UQO and a doctoral student, is titled *Exhibiting flesh dresses: the cases of Jana Sterbak and Lady Gaga*. As the title indicates, Ragazzini establishes connections between a contemporary-art garment (Sterbak's) and a pop-culture garment (Lady Gaga's), both made of flesh, in a comparison between that which arises from art and that which arises from mass entertainment.

A Reflective Strategy

Reconstituting Reconstituted Exhibitions: Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*

Reesa Greenberg

Reconstituted exhibitions constitute a new exhibition genre. Comprised of exhibitions about past exhibitions, reconstructed in toto or in part, the genre works to revive significant examples or "lost" experiments of rupture and/or controversy. Exhibitions by and/or about women, however, more often than not, are excluded[1] and, when discussed, attention to artwork overshadows discussions of exhibition value. In the text which follows, I want to offer a corrective: a discussion of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*.

1 Important Canadian contributions to the genre include "La robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution" (2019), curated by Mélanie Boucher and Marie-Hélène Leblanc at GUQO, which reconstituted elements from Jana Sterbak's 1991 retrospective "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps" at the National Gallery of Canada and "Emily Carr: New Perspectives on a Canadian Icon" (2006), also presented at the National Gallery, and curated by Ian Thom, Charles Hill and Johanne Lamoureux. The latter exhibition included a partial reconstruction of Carr's first National Gallery exhibition in 1927, and a section inspired by her commemorative exhibition of 1945.

The Dinner Party as an Exhibition [2]

Usually, the March 2007 installation of Chicago's 1970s renowned *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) at the Elisabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art is portrayed as the culmination of Chicago's search for a permanent home for her monumental work.[3] I want to argue that *The Dinner Party* as installed in the Sackler Center is a reconstituted exhibition and that, unlike most examples of the genre, it is both permanent and temporary. As such, *The Dinner Party* at the Sackler Center offers a different model for reconstituting exhibitions, one that challenges the staging of reconstituted exhibitions as singular, ephemeral, disparate events, and, instead, demonstrates that a reconstituted exhibition can be a continuously reconstituting process. To make this claim, *The Dinner Party* must be recognized as both an iconic, epic artwork representing a feminist history and an artist-curated exhibition designed to elicit reflective, reverential responses while educating viewers about that history.

2 In her introduction, "Whose Afraid of Judy Chicago" to the book/exhibition catalogue J*udy Chicago: New Views*, National Museum of Women in the Arts / Scala, 2019, p. 13-17, Sarah Thornton describes *The Dinner Party* as a "total exhibition" where Chicago acts as "head curator." Thornton also affirms that the super-production has been almost entirely omitted from the history of exhibition-making of the post-war period, citing the example of *Thinking About Exhibitions*, the 1996 book I co-edited with Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne. Thornton was a student in my art history courses in the 1980s and has remained a close friend. She thus sent me the manuscript of her book before publication, and I was surprised at our glossing over of *The Dinner Party*. When I first saw the work when it was shown in 1982 at the Musée d'art contemporain in Montréal, I was moved, and indeed taught it in the first feminist art and art history course at Concordia later in that decade. Moreover, I also taught one of the first exhibition history courses and did not consider placing *The Dinner Party* in an exhibition context. This essay seeks to rectify these omissions.

3 Gerhard, Jane F. "From Controversy to Canonization: The Dinner Party's Journey to Brooklyn," J*udy Chicago, The Dinner Party: Restoring Women to History*, New York, The Monacelli Press, 2014, 265-275.

The literature on the artwork is extensive, yet relatively little has been said about the historical significance of *The Dinner Party* as an extraordinarily successful experiment in experiential, didactic, performative exhibition-making.[4] In general exhibition histories, discussions and analysis of *The Dinner Party* as a landmark exhibition are absent, *tout court*, an intriguing lacuna given its status as a blockbuster exhibition that was innovative in both content and form; a highly effective alternative to both the museal status quo and avant-garde exhibition practices of the period; the most visited exhibition of work by a feminist artist in the late 1970s and 1980s; the exhibition with the highest attendance in the museum venues where it showed;[5] a contemporary exhibition that toured fourteen cities on three continents in eight years; a rare crowd-funded venture financing both the production of the artwork and its exhibition-run; and Chicago as one of the first feminist artist-curators.

The lack of attention to the exhibition value of *The Dinner Party* and its reconstitutions can be attributed to a number of factors. These include:

1. Controversies about the art work's vulvar/vulgar imagery, its privileging of craft, its kitsch aesthetics, its essentialist approach to feminism, and its negative reception.[6]

4 Chicago's website, *Through the Flower*, https://www.throughtheflower.org/projects/the_dinner_party) and various catalogues and monographs provide a brief exhibition history recounting the difficulties exhibiting the work while Jane F. Gerhard's important, in-depth study examines the process of funding the exhibitions and their reception. Gerhard, Jane F. *The Dinner Party: Judy Chicago and the Power of Popular Feminism, 1970-2007*, The University of Georgia Press, 2013.

5 Over 100,000 people saw *The Dinner Party* in the three months it was first shown at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1978-79.

2. Confusion about whether *The Dinner Party* is an installation artwork or an exhibition, compounded by the use of the term installation in English to refer to the disposition of art works in an exhibition space.
3. A disdain for affirmative exhibitions, popular successes, and entrepreneurial financial models in exhibition histories.[7]
4. The exclusion of work by women artists and women curators from both art and exhibition histories.

The Dinner Party, an art installation conceived as an exhibition by a woman artist, was a victim of classification and prejudice. As a result, Chicago's contributions as a feminist artist-curator, an innovative exhibition designer, and a producer of her own exhibition audio-guide, catalogues and accompanying programmes have been under-valued. Given the absence of discussion of *The Dinner Party* as an exhibition within the relatively new field of exhibition studies, it follows that subsequent exhibitions of *The Dinner Party* have not been considered reconstitutions.

6 Kramer, Hilton. "Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* Comes to Brooklyn Museum," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1980; Larson, Kay. "Under the Table: Duplicity, Alienation," *Village Voice*, 11 June 1979; Parker, Rozsika and Griselda Pollock. *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement, 1970-85*, Pandora Press Popular Culture London, New York, Pandora, 1987; Parker, Rozsika and Griselda Pollock. "Painted Ladies," *Old Mistresses: Women, Art, and Ideology*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1981, 127-33.

7 For example, a number of features of Chicago's exhibition paradigm can be linked to precedents in 19th century American art, in particular, the practices of Frederick Church, known for creating single, large-scale artworks such as *Niagara*, 1857 and *The Heart of the Andes*, 1859 intended for public exhibition, charging admission, drawing large audiences, staging his work in darkened rooms with directed lighting, and constructing the visual experience of the exhibition with his innovative, window-like framing of the work while providing of seating for prolonged viewing. Avery, Kevin J. *Church's Great Picture: The Heart of the Andes*, New York, The Metropolitan Museum, 1993. https://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15324coll10/id/47148

Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* in Feminist Art History, 1996: A temporary reconstitution

Donald Preziosi identifies "Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History", shown at the University of California's Hammer Museum and Cultural Center in Los Angeles in 1996, as the first reconstitution of Chicago's exhibition.[8] Initially, Henry Hopkins, the Director of the Hammer and former Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art where *The Dinner Party* was first shown in 1979 suggested an exhibition documenting the 1991 political debate about art and pornography at the United States Congress that foreclosed Chicago's plan to gift *The Dinner Party* for permanent display to the partially federally funded University of the District of Columbia. Hammer senior curator, Elizabeth Shepherd proposed exhibiting *The Dinner Party* itself for the first time in the city in which it had been made and inviting UC Riverside art historian, Amelia Jones as guest curator.[9]

Jones used the reconstituted *The Dinner Party* as the major premise and presence of her exhibition but "felt strongly that this [exhibiting *The Dinner Party*] would be useful only if the work were removed from its usual isolation and resituated within the broader context of feminist art practice and theory out of which it developed and within which it has been elaborated."[10] Inspired by Kate Millet's best-selling 1970 book, *Sexual*

8 Preziosi, Donald. "'Sexual Politics' an Important Show," *The Los Angeles Times*, May 13, 1996, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-05-13-ca-3708-story.html

9 Jones, Amelia. "Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories," *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, University of California Press, 1996, p. 10.

10 Jones. "Sexual politics," p. 23.

Politics "in which [Millet] theorizes 'sex' [...] as a site of oppression and so a locus for political intervention," [11] Jones constructed an exhibition of over one hundred works dating from 1960 to 1995 by fifty-six artists whose work related to themes associated with Chicago's artwork. As such, Jones was able to accommodate the two, often opposing, schools of 1970s feminism, identity as essential or identity as constructed.

Best intentions notwithstanding, space limitations prevented all the work being shown together. *The Dinner Party* was displayed as Part One, in "isolation," on the ground floor of the museum, thereby allowing a reconstitution that closely resembled Chicago's initial conception of a stand-alone exhibition experience within a museum setting. All the key components were reassembled, beginning with the red-walled vestibule hung with six introductory, embroidered banners [12] and Heritage panels documenting the production of *The Dinner Party* as a collaborative endeavour. The vestibule was followed by the dramatically lit, darkened, single entry/exit chamber housing the elevated, forty-nine foot, open, equilateral triangular table with its thirty-nine painted china plates and embroidery place settings honouring important historical women, all set on a porcelain Heritage floor with 999 additional women's names written in gold. As such, the reconstituted ensemble recreated the performative, structured ritual designed by Chicago for her chronologically arranged feminist history.

11 Jones. "Sexual politics," p. 22.

12 The six banners read as follows: "(1) And she gathered all before her, (2) And she made for them a sign to see, (3) And lo they saw a vision, (4) from this day forth like to like in all things, (5) And then all that divided them merged, (6) And then everywhere was Eden once again." Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage*, New York, Anchor Press, Doubleday, 213-14.

On the second floor, a reading room acted as a physical and conceptual bridge between the two exhibition zones. There, "a selection of quilt segments from Chicago's International Quilting Bee outreach project completed during the 1980-88 exhibition tour, [was] showcased amongst research materials acquainting the viewer with other projects by Chicago and other artists in 'Sexual Politics'." [13] The remaining works in Jones's exhibition, including twenty-eight by Chicago, some related to *The Dinner Party*, some not, were displayed on evenly lit, white walls as Part Two, identified in the catalogue checklist as *The Dinner Party in Context*.[14] Extensive text panels contextualized the art which was arranged in seven thematic sections addressing issues and imagery raised by *The Dinner Party* and its reception (domesticity, privacy, eroticism, herstory, patriarchal history, and diversity). Although the works spanned thirty-five years, the schema was cross-generational rather than chronological. Compared to the first floor, the viewing experience was more aleatory and less programmed, more intellectual and less emotional.

The separation of material on two floors coupled with differences in content, exhibition design and viewer experience resulted in what can be seen as paradigmatic examples of both forms of exhibition reconstruction identified by Elitza Dulguerova: the *réplique-reprise* that reconstitutes an exhibition as closely as possible and the *réplique-riposte* which functions as a response.[15]

13 Larsen, Devon P. "Rethinking the Monumental: The Museum as Feminist Space in the Sexual Politics Exhibition, 1996," 2006, MA Thesis, p. 48. http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/3882

14 Jones. "Sexual politics," p. 255.

15 Dulguerova, E. "L'expérience et son double. Notes sur la reconstruction d'expositions et la photographie," *Intermédialités*, n° 15, 2010, p. 53-71.

Dulguerova's categories are enormously helpful in distinguishing two methodological approaches to reproducing past exhibitions, one that denies time and one that acknowledges that the reconstitution of the past occurs in the present.

I want to suggest that Jones's reconstitution is both a reprise and a riposte. Although the result of necessity, her dual strategy can be interpreted as a distinctly feminist response to reconstitution, one which simultaneously allows commemoration and puts it in play. Jones's amalgam of hagiography and interrogation, faithful reproduction and contextualization, is an alternative to a masculinist, masterpiece approach to exhibition reconstitution epitomized by "When Attitudes Become Form Bern: 1969/Venice 2013."[16] Instead of privileging individual genius or one extraordinary exhibition event, Jones's model embodies the cohabitation of singularity and a relational template.

Like its artist-curated predecessor, however, Jones's exhibition suffered from negative reception. The influential Los Angeles Times critic Christopher Knight called "Sexual Politics" "a fiasco" with "a failed work of art as its fulcrum."[17] Although Jones's exhibition model has not figured in discussions of exhibition reconstitutions, it did serve as the inspiration for the 2007 reconstitution of *The Dinner Party* at the Elisabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.

16 The exhibition which reconstituted Harald Szeemann's legendary "Live in Your Head. When Attitudes become Form" to scale in the Palazzo which houses the Venetian branch of the Prada Foundation was curated by Germano Celant, in dialogue with the architect Rem Koolhaas and artist Thomas Demand.

17 Knight, Christopher. "More Famine than Feast: Focussing on Flawed *Dinner Party* undermines 'Sexual Politics'," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1996. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-05-02-ca-65092-story.html

The Dinner Party at the Elisabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: A "permanent" reconstitution

The Sackler Center reconstitution differs from most reconstitutions in two significant ways. It is a rare example of a permanent reconstitution and an equally rare instance of reconstituting a reconstituted exhibition. Permanent reconstitutions of exhibitions are atypical. The only other example I know (thanks to Elitza Dulguerova) is the reconstruction of another popular exhibition, Edward Steichen's 1955 "The Family of Man," inaugurated at Clervaux Castle, Luxembourg in 1994. Unlike The Dinner Party's contextualized presentation at the Sackler Center, however, the reconstituted "Family of Man" only reconstructs Steichen's exhibition. In addition to reconstituting *The Dinner Party*, the Sackler Center reconstitutes the concept of contextualization inherent to Jones' reconstitution of Chicago's 1979 exhibition and then some.

The premise of Jones's relational reconstitution inspired both the theoretical and architectural framework for the Center. Elisabeth A. Sackler, a member of the Brooklyn Museum's Board of Trustees, purchased and gifted *The Dinner Party* in 2002.[18] It was exhibited at the museum[19] the same year as a prelude to creating a feminist art centre with Chicago's work

18 Greenberg, Reesa. "Activist-Patron-Curators and North American Museums," *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections*, eds Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mørland, Hatje Kantz, 2015, 56-57. The Elisabeth A. Sackler Foundation continues to support exhibitions at the Center.

19 https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/1204

as its nucleus. The museum subsequently allocated 8300 square feet located on the 4th floor of its 19th century Beaux Arts style building and, with financing from Sackler, engaged architect Susan T. Rodriguez to accommodate both the reconstitution of Chicago's historical exhibition and *The Dinner Party*'s new role as the anchor for a Center of Feminist Art.

Rodriguez constructed a triangular gallery with sloped-walls in the centre of the Center's squarish spatial envelope. This inner chamber, the central core of the Center, echoes, in plan and elevation, the shape and symbolism of Chicago's table placed inside it as does the triangular framework designed by Rodriguez for the lighting system suspended above the table. Chicago used the equilateral triangle as her consolidating form because it was an early symbol for women, a symbol of the goddess, and a symbol of the equal world to which feminists aspire.[20] Rodriguez's triangular gallery reiterates both Chicago's table construct and the purpose of the Center.

Rodriguez's design is a simpler version of Chicago's initial proposal for permanently housing *The Dinner Party*. As seen in a 1979 poster,[21] Chicago's plan was less rectilinear, juxtaposing the straight lines of the table with curving perimeter walls encased in a faceted, undulating surrounding structure. At the bottom of the poster Chicago writes: "I envision a ceramic room whose walls extend the yearning toward liberation that the plates embody. I imagine that the shape of the

20 Judy Chicago narration in Demetrakas, Johanna. *Judy Chicago's Dinner Party: A Tour of the Exhibition*, remastered and edited in 2015: https://www.throughtheflower.org/projects/the_dinner_party

21 https://www.throughtheflower.org/shop/product/17

building that houses *The Dinner Party* would become like *The Dinner Party* itself—a symbol for the future."

Although Rodriguez's design uses more geometric shapes and materials, it invokes the inspiration for Chicago's vision, the windowed and mirrored 18th century porcelain room at the Capodimonte Museum in Naples. Rodriguez lined the inside walls of the triangular core with glass, resulting in a similar dematerialization of space. The luminous surfaces and multiplied images of the installation visually expand the chamber, heightening *The Dinner Party*'s tangible and intangible, multi-directional effects *ad infinitum*. Viewers are surrounded by reflections of both *The Dinner Party* and images of other visitors participating in the ritual of viewing. "You're aware of yourself and others as they relate to the piece," Ms. Rodriguez said. "The influence of it needed to be expressed architecturally." [22]

The viewer awareness Rodriguez speaks of is also built into her design with the inclusion of transparent, glass openings, at the bottom corners of the triangular room. These triangular "viewing holes" contrast with and connect two different types of exhibition galleries and viewing experiences. Chicago's atypical, red walls and the darkened, dramatic triangular gallery are heightened in relation to the normative, "white cube," brightly lit surrounding galleries. When inside the triangular room, views through the open corners remind viewers of exhibitions beyond; when outside the triangular room, glimpses to the inside cue viewers to the presence of *The Dinner Party* and its centrality to the Sackler Center's vision of feminist art.

22 Pogrebin, Robin. "Ms Chicago, Party of 39? Your Table's Ready in Brooklyn," *NYT*, Feb.1, 2007
https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/01/arts/design/01party.html

The spatial interplay and reflexivity set up by the glass corners is also temporal. *The Dinner Party* and its relation to art and exhibition history is continually reconstituted through its symbiosis with the changing exhibitions that surround it and what is seen through its apertures. When the Sackler Center opened, Chicago's *Dinner Party* was accompanied by two exhibitions that framed its backwards and forwards reach. "Pharaohs, Queens, and Goddesses," featuring works from the collection of the Brooklyn Museum, augmented knowledge of the historical figures in Chicago's exhibition, in particular Hatshepsut to whom Chicago dedicated a place setting, and provided examples of more traditional forms of portraiture: "Global Feminisms," an exhibition of work since the 1990s by eighty women co-curated by Maura Reilly of the Sackler Center and the pioneering, American, feminist art historian Linda Nochlin, presented examples of more contemporary feminist art in a wide range of media. Together, all three exhibitions argued for trans-historical and trans-geographical female agency and the importance of art in the transmission of feminist values and perspectives.

By contrast, the 2012 exhibition "Materializing Six Years: Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art," organized by Catherine Morris and Vincent Bonin to honour the esteemed writer and curator, presented another politically informed feminist practice that more or less coincided chronologically with Chicago's production of *The Dinner Party*. Coupling Chicago's *Dinner Party* with Lippard's work of the same period argued for a rereading of the 1970s art world, the different roles and approaches of key women practitioners, and the importance of research to both

their projects.[23] The 2017 exhibition, "We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-1985," co-curated by Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley, offered yet another feminist reading of the period while, however problematically, addressing complaints that Chicago's *Dinner Party* and, by extension the Sackler Center, privilege the history of white women.[24] Rather than expanding readings of diachronic or synchronic historical breadth, the 2017 anniversary exhibition, "Roots of *The Dinner Party*: History in the Making," organized by Carmen Herrero, utilized the outer galleries to deepen an understanding of the artwork's evolution, thereby augmenting Chicago's installation and its hagiographic status as an important landmark in feminist art and exhibition history.

The reconstitution of *The Dinner Party* itself has not been static. In 2017, the lights inside the triangular gallery were changed to LED, a change which pleased Chicago because the new lights reduce damage to the textiles on display.[25] For viewers, though, LED light is whiter and crisper, producing a cooler, 21st century visual experience. A change that is less pleasing to Chicago is the reduction of material hung outside the triangular gallery and vestibule. Efforts on the part of curators at the Center to gain gallery space for their exhibitions have resulted in the elimination of components Chicago considers essential to the work and its display. The seven Heritage Panels explaining the

23 Joselit, David. "Exhibiting Gender," *Art in America*, Jan. 1997, reprinted in *Art in America*, March 10, 2017. zine.com/news-features/magazines/from-the-archives-exhibiting-gender

24 For an insightful critique: Black, Hannah. *We Wanted a Revolution*, *4Columns*, 05, 10, 17, http://4columns.org/black-hannah/we-wanted-a-revolution

25 Email from Judy Chicago to Reesa Greenberg, April 12, 2019.

contributions of the women inscribed on the Heritage Floor have been removed as have the Portrait Panels with photographs of those who worked on the piece. The artist is dissatisfied with merely listing names of collaborators on the Sackler Center website rather than including them and the items she deems relevant in the gallery space.[26] Chicago also laments the absence of documentation of the outreach events she organized and the numerous events catalyzed by exhibitions of *The Dinner Party*, especially "The International Dinner Party" organized by Suzanne Lacy and Linda Pruess at the time of the 1979 opening, as well as spontaneous dinner parties in subsequent years in cities where *The Dinner Party* toured.

Notwithstanding the removal of didactic and process-related exhibition material that makes the reprise a less faithful replica, the premise of the Sackler reconstitution—stable core and a changing, interconnected surround that solicits ever-changing re-readings of both entities—remains constant. The result is a continuous process of reconstitution that reformulates—and multiplies—feminist art and exhibition histories in the same space over time. As such, the Sackler reconstitutions offer another feminist alternative to reconstituted exhibition practices: the reprise/riposte that is both permanent and temporary.

Unlike other multiple reconstitutions of single exhibitions such as Richard Hamilton and Victor Passmore's 1957 "an exhibit" and Harald Szeemann's 1969 "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes become Form," which occur sporadically in different venues at

26 Email from Judy Chicago to Reesa Greenberg, April 12, 2019.

different times as temporary exhibitions, the ongoing presence of *The Dinner Party* in a dedicated space allows for permanent reconstitution. Cost and practicality preclude repetition of the Sackler reconstitution model but other versions could be adapted that adopt its process rather than product ethos. That said, anchoring *The Dinner Party* within a feminist art centre reduces the possibility that it will be physically reconstituted in relation to other exhibition discourses.

Reesa Greenberg, an art historian living in Ottawa, Canada, is known mainly for her research on the history of exhibitions. The book *Thinking About Exhibitions* (which she co-edited with Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne) is a classic in the field. In her writings, Greenberg attends to identity politics, new exhibition types, digital initiatives, and collective trauma as depicted in museums of art and ethnography. She has published books in English, French, German, Dutch, Hungarian, and Russian and has been a consultant for museums in Canada, the United States, and the Netherlands. Her teaching positions include those of full professor at Concordia University, adjunct professor at York University and Carleton University, and guest professor at the California College of the Arts and the Moscow State University for the Humanities.

Créer à rebours vers l'exposition: an overview

Marie J. Jean

Créer à rebours vers l'exposition is a research project on the history and future of exhibitions as well as their documentation in Quebec that took place at VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine in Montréal between 2016 and 2019. The project focused on reactivations of seven exhibitions, all notable, albeit occasionally given short shrift in art histories:[1] the "Second Automatist Exhibition" (1947), the "Mousseau-Riopelle exhibition at Muriel Guilbault's" (1947), "Montreal, Plus or Minus?" (1972), "Périphéries" (1974), "03 23 03—First International Encounter on Contemporary Art in Montreal" (1977), "Aurora Borealis" (1985), and "Chambres avec vues" (1999). While it is true that *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition* aimed to constitute often non-existent archives for the cases studied, their reactivations differed considerably in their approaches, taking the form of a theatre stage, an installation,

1 Claudine Roger and Marie J. Jean were the curators of the reactivations, with the exception of the Automatist exhibitions and "Montreal, Plus or Minus?" The first was the work of Klaus Scherübel, and the second was conceptualized and produced under the direction of Marie Fraser and Anne-Sophie Miclo, and curated by Sarah Cousineau, Joséphine Rivard, Jade Seguela, Marie Tissot, and Camille Tremblay-Caron, and in collaboration with all of the students in the seminar "Exposition, interprétation et diffusion" offered at Université du Québec à Montréal as part of the joint museology master's program in 2018.

a catalogue page layout, a large lightbox, a period room, and a performative reactivation, all with the goal of creating specific documentary experiences that aimed to be both dynamic and insightful.[2] Exhibition views were an invaluable part of the project and served to pose a number of interrelated questions: What is their use in the research, practice and history of exhibitions? When did they first appear in publications? How do they serve artists' self-critical reflections? And how is this documentary material used today to establish historical and narrative relationships in a given exhibition? This text provides an overview of the research project, followed by a case study of the "Second Automatist Exhibition."

The Exhibition, an Ephemeral Practice

In 1983, Rober Racine wrote: "In conceptualizing and presenting an installation, the artist becomes involved in a most curious phenomenon: they agree to be included in an imagined art history. Not the history of Malraux's *musée imaginaire*, but one using their own works, which, unfortunately for them, become truly imaginary." [3] That history, he argued, consists in comments on the works that are potentially forever subject to re-actualization through critical discourse based on their documentation. For these works, in the form of ephemeral exhibitions, will eventually become no more than vague memories serving as demonstrations

2 The archival material for all exhibitions examined here, including most documents gathered, can be accessed on the VOX website.

3 Racine's essay "Créer à rebours vers le récit," from which this quote is taken, inspired the title of this series of exhibitions. It was written in 1983 and published in abridged form four years later, in *Parachute*, (Sept.-Oct.-Nov. 1987), p. 33–35.

of that discourse. Thus, Racine notes with regret, the works are reduced to publicly performing their own disappearance, because all that will subsist are the images, words and recollections of what they were when initially shown. Racine's analysis, which appeared in *Parachute* concurrently with the "Aurora Borealis" event, is applicable to exhibitions as well as installations, which are both circumscribed by the ephemeral temporality of an event.[4]

Indeed, creating an exhibition requires installing works specifically in one location and submitting them to the temporal regime of the institution; that is, they are generally displayed for a fixed period. Besides that temporary public existence, subjecting works to successive actualizations requires their reactivation, with new variables incorporated each time. Donald Judd also expressed resistance to this process. Writing in 1982, he argued that certain exhibitions should be permanently maintained: "A good installation is too much work and too expensive, and if the artist does it, too personal to then destroy. Paintings, sculptures, and other three-dimensional work cannot withstand the constant installation and removal and shipping." He continued: "In 1966, one hundred and twenty paintings by Reinhardt were shown at the Jewish Museum for longer than usual. These probably will never be assembled again and if assembled will not be the same, since almost all has been damaged and

4 That said, history is seemingly at odds with Racine, given that artists and curators since, hewing to the constraints of conservation and commodification, have re-constituted and re-exhibited works that were initially shown as part of "Aurora Borealis." Today, in hindsight, we can say that installations are re-installed, while exhibitions (and this is a recent phenomenon) are reactivated.

extensively restored. In 1966, these paintings should have been hung and never moved." [5] Imagine if from now on, museums were to conserve not only works, but their exhibitions, so as to preserve the views originally devised by the artists. This radical stance is, of course, utopian, although it encompasses an issue that goes beyond the mere logistical questions evoked by Judd: in addition to their works, artists also produce exhibitions and, by extension, are continually engaged in re-exhibition. That said, we cannot help but hear nostalgia in Racine's and Judd's writings, since both manifest the desire to preserve original events for all time. As Svetlana Boym reminds us, nostalgia speaks to us from a place of implacable ambivalence: "[...] it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialization of the immaterial." [6] We cannot re-exhibit the context in which the exhibition occurred, but we can include traces of what it was and what it becomes. Thus, to avoid ascribing cult status to the original events, or simply to rethink the past in new formats, it is useful to study the temporality that the reactivation of exhibitions allows us to experience.

The Historical Future of Exhibitions

Reactivations of exhibitions, which originally were exclusively concerned with productions of the modern avant-garde, have for the most part been pioneered by museums. Their aim is to preserve the historical authenticity of vanished works, to support art

5 Judd, Donald. "On Installation," *Museums by Artists*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1983, p. 198. This essay was originally published in 1982 under the title "The Importance of Permanence," in *Journal: A Contemporary Art Magazine*, p. 18–21.

6 Boym, Svetlana. *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York, Basic Books, 2001, p. XVII.

history research, and also sometimes to establish an aesthetic relationship with the emergence of contextually grounded practices. Reesa Greenberg has called this particular genre "remembering exhibitions," in reference to exhibitional approaches that present themselves as the remembrance of exhibitions past.[7] While the initial aim was to recreate historical accounts via literal reconstitutions, the practice grew more complex during the 1990s, when the goal became instead to foster critical reflection about the conceptual and historic framework that engendered the original exhibition. With this approach, artists engaged in the reconstitution of past exhibitions have employed far more daring methods, making use of institutional critique, revisiting the major narratives of art history and, especially, reorienting the visitor toward new and often unsettling aesthetic experiences.[8] With this type of reconstitution, we may well wonder what it is exactly that is reactivated.

In 2013, a new type of exhibition re-enactment appeared, representing a veritable *tour de force* in material terms: the complete reconstitution, of which "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form," curated by Germano Celant in collaboration with Rem Koolhaas and Thomas Demand is exemplary. Visitors

7 Greenberg also organizes them into a typology comprising of three categories: the "replica," partial and material, of an exhibition, with its celebration as the objective; the "riff," that is, a variation on or subversion of the original show involving "interplay between remembering and forgetting"; and the "reprise," in which the material experience of the original exhibition is recreated in a two-dimensional format, as a publication or a website. Greenberg, Reesa. "Remembering Exhibitions: From Point to Line to Web," *Tate Papers*, No. 12 (2009. https://www.tate.org.uk/research/tate-papers/12/remembering-exhibitions-from-point-to-line-to-web

8 The artists' approaches are daring because they shed the burden represented by the search for historical authenticity.

to the Fondazione Prada in Venice were teleported to Bern in 1969, to re-experience Process, Performance, *in situ*, Conceptual and Arte Povera works re-exhibited according to an installation schema meant to duplicate the initial exhibition as closely as possible. The reconstitution was an impressive feat because, contrary to the version devised by Jens Hoffman, it relied not on maquettes and documentation, but rather involved a painstaking, to-scale re-creation of the original show.[9] While this architectural facsimile aimed to recreate the experience of both the Kunsthalle Bern and the works themselves, it nonetheless tended to be based on a conception of the past as something fixed to be exhumed from an overarching, dominant present. This approach asserted the superiority of "oldness" to the detriment of a history of becoming, a history open to a plurality of tellings. This conventionally historical position does afford circulation between present and past, but gives scant consideration to categories of the future. And yet, there is no already-realized history; only histories made and remade. How then are we to imagine a historical reconstitution enacted in hindsight, all while accounting for the continual reshapings of its history? One answer possibly lies in awakening art historians and exhibition curators from their dogmatic slumber. They seem to be complacent in the face of "the reassuring belief in some transparency of the

9 Hoffmann, for his part, reactivated this canonical exhibition in documentary form at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts in 2012. It is interesting to note that Celant considered his reconstitution as a "ready-made," while Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, the architect behind the reconstitution, viewed it as a theatre stage. In my opinion, this remake resembled, more than anything else, a monumental set that one might come across during the shooting of a historical film about this chapter of art history.

real,"[10] which reveals a fetishizing stance that, much like classic art history texts, studies the masterpiece while neglecting the broader context and less heroic narratives that actually constitute the raw material of that history. Reactivation of an exhibition should therefore be based on the actualization of the multiple narratives making up its history, rather than a mere remake of the original event.[11] Anteriority is not necessarily authoritative, if we consider that the history of an exhibition is written with multiple narratives separating the original event from its various contemporaneities, based on an emplotment that fulfills itself over time.[12] History is thus constructed in hindsight; this is precisely the perspective from which we devised *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition*.

With the aim of making present this process of visualizing the past and, especially, the process of historicization whereby new narratives are continuously produced out of what such exhibitions become,

10 Nicole Loraux, quoted in Dosse, François. "De l'usage raisonné de l'anachronisme," *Espaces Temps*, No. 87-88 (2005), p. 26 [freely translated].

11 Thus, for example, following its initial presentation in Bern, "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form" had toured in Germany and England, having been "reconstituted" at the Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld from May 9 to June 15, 1969, and then at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London from August 28 to September 27, 1969.

12 Here I subscribe to the metahistorical approach developed by Reinhart Koselleck, who reconsiders the dialectics of the past and the future and their relationship in the present with the aim of rethinking the temporal structures of historical narrative. That is: "that covert connection of the bygone with the future whose relationship can be perceived only when one has learned to construct history from the modalities of memory and hope." This idea is the basis for the concept of history developed by Koselleck, which relies on two primary modes of subjectivation: the "space of experience" and the "horizon of expectation." These two categories allow consideration of the meanings inherent in the expectations of the historian directed toward the future and their interpretations oriented toward the past. Koselleck, Reinhart. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, New York, Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 258-259.

a specific approach was chosen. We did not so much seek to "reconstitute" the seven exhibitions studied for *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition*; we "reactivated" them, attempting to uncover the significant moments that have marked their histories, from the time they were first displayed (without neglecting preliminary stages of research) up to the present day. The distinction is important, because to reconstitute means "to restore to its form, to its original state," while our intention was more to retrace, to bring back into activity, and in turn exhibit what the exhibitions have produced, over time, in both documentary and discursive terms.[13]

Tracing the History of Exhibitions, One Document at a Time

Each of these reactivations thus relied on bringing past events into the present moment, based on documentary evidence that materializes various moments of their history. This included exhibition views (both photographic and videographic), correspondence, press clippings, audiovisual journals, publications, minutes of meetings, budgets, and other varied administrative documents, floor plans, and comments (contemporaneous or not), combined with notes, conversations, citations, reactivations of performances, and present-day testimonials. To gather these documentary materials, exhaustive searches were conducted,[14] given that,

13 Two research projects were the source of this approach and determined our methodology. See Jean, Marie J. (dir.). *Serge Tousignant. Exposés de recherche*, Montreal, VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine, 2018, and Jean, Marie J. (dir.). *Room 901*, Montreal, Éditions du passage, 2013.

14 Sources included, notably, Artexte, museums and other institutions, daily newspapers and magazines, Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, CBC/Radio-Canada, the exhibition curators' own fonds, and especially the artists' own photographic archives.

when it comes to the history of exhibitions, systematic archiving of data is an institutional practice that emerged rather late in Quebec, only in the mid-1980s. For this reason, production of new knowledge on the exhibitions studied often proceeded from simple clues found in the minutes of a meeting, or in exhibition views, which nonetheless provide the only evidence we might use in the hope of locating an informative document. This arduous process was similar to the interpretive model of Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg,[15] a proponent of microhistory, who uses the concepts of "traces" and "indiciary paradigms" to demonstrate that beyond the narrative core, "historical material indeed points toward a reality."[16] Methodologically, then, the idea was to retrace the thread of that reality by observing, as through a magnifying glass, how it had been constructed. Using the documents collated for each exhibition and the testimonials gathered, we gained a better understanding of the organizers' intentions, the conceptual and exhibitional issues that determined them, and their reception by artists, audiences and other commentators over time. Thus it was based on factual materials that we mapped out augmented narratives around the construction of the history of these exhibitions.

In the case of *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition*, that history was constructed from exhibition views, mostly

15 Ginzburg, Carlo. "Signes, traces, pistes. Racines d'un paradigme de l'indice," *Le Débat*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (1980), p. 3-44.

16 Weill, Nicolas. "Non l'histoire n'est pas une fiction," *Le Monde*, 2011. https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2011/06/04/non-l-histoire-n-est-pas-qu-une-fiction_1531877_3260.html; [freely translated].

photographic, although we did also find filmed documents of the exhibitions, with sound.[17] Present-day reconstitution of the narratives of these historical exhibitions, the arrangement of the works in space and their interactions, and the atmosphere of the venues, however, poses a challenge: how accessible is this visual documentation? These exhibition views were originally produced and distributed for documentary purposes, before becoming archives. It took decades for the views photographed by Maurice Perron to be deposited in the archives of the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, even though they were reproduced many times after they were taken in 1947, beginning with the *Refus global* manifesto. No images of the exhibition "Périphéries" had been kept in the archives of the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, though some were found in press clippings. At the time, few institutions in Quebec showed any interest in exhibition views or maintained photographic archives. It was most often the artists themselves who documented exhibitions, to keep records of their contributions; journalists also produced such documentation to illustrate their reviews. And, occasionally, a newspaper or journal might hire a professional photographer to document an exhibition they were covering.

Likewise, it was not until the mid-1980s that exhibition views began to be included in catalogues. In this sense, it is often inappropriate to speak of an

17 We presented unreleased films by Paul Gauvin documenting "Aurora Borealis" (in which the sound-based installations were also audible) and by Andrée Ménard on "Périphéries," a Radio-Canada interview with Melvin Charney and report on "Montreal, Plus or Minus?," and a video by Monique Moumblow about "Chambres avec vues." In addition, the performances, lectures and public discussions accompanying "03 23 03" had been filmed by Irwin Schneider.

"exhibition" catalogue as such, since these publications generally deal with the works and comprise cropped images of them, without showing the display context. However, there are some fortunate exceptions; for example, in 1977, the catalogue of the "03 23 03—First International Encounter on Contemporary Art in Montreal" included views of performances, and the "Aurora Borealis" catalogue reproduced views of all of the installations shown. Indeed, the organizers of "Aurora Borealis" informed us that those views were included simply because the catalogue was published subsequently to the event, since funding was only confirmed afterward. As well, artist Pierre Dorion had commissioned a photographer to record views of his exhibition, which he then used as artistic material: one of the pieces in "Chambres avec vues," exploiting a recursive *mise en abyme* effect, showed a view of the exhibition itself.

These circumstances proved beneficial because photographers, namely Pierre Boogaerts, Denis Farley and Richard-Max Tremblay, were then hired to produce true "photo reportages" of the events documented. This form of documentation, fragmentary in nature, involves cropping of space, establishment of perspective, and arrangement of the works within the frame, not to mention having to deal with mostly ambient and sometimes secondary lighting. Contrary to what one might imagine, such documentation is neither neutral nor objective; it relies on compositional strategies to better draw the viewer's attention to certain details of the works or performances. Boogaerts in particular exploited contrasts in light levels to accentuate performing subjects during "03 23 03." Farley documented

each of the installations in "Aurora Borealis" in colour, also producing remarkable black and white views of the galleries in the shopping centre that evoke a tracking-shot effect, while in the process recreating the act of gazing around the exhibition. Tremblay used the ambient colours in the apartment where Dorion showed his series of pictures, capturing a wide range of tones that enhanced the painterly qualities of his images. Beyond the fact that this photographic documentation represents the essential material from which the history of exhibitions is written, further study of the practice and production of these documentary images remains to be done.

In the meantime, one may well ask what all of these documents we retraced had to tell us. To better gauge the scope of that question, I will conclude with a specific case study: the reactivation of an Automatist exhibition by conceptual artist Klaus Scherübel.

The Case of the "Second Automatist Exhibition": A Curatorial and Art Intervention by Klaus Scherübel

In adopting a variety of roles throughout his career—working artist, editor, sponsor, sitcom and theatre producer—Klaus Scherübel has examined, in his art practice, the context and wider history of culture. For this project, VOX entrusted him with the role of "conservator," tasked with reactivating an event that is at once mythical and foundational to modern Quebec: the "Second Automatist Exhibition" of 1947.[18]

18 This "artistic reactivation" was the sixth iteration of the *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition* project.

That exhibition took place in the home of Julienne Saint-Mars Gauvreau, the mother of Claude and Pierre Gauvreau, at 75 Sherbrooke Street West, Apartment 5, from February 15 to March 1, 1947.[19] It was the second event to feature this group of Québécois artists interested in surrealism and psychoanalysis, and marked the first occasion on which a commentator styled them as "Automatists."[20] Taken together, the dozens of photo-collages and other paintings, sculptures and graphic works in the exhibition constituted one of the first collective manifestations of an artistic modernity at odds with the dominant (essentially Christian) values of Quebec society. The photographs taken by Perron at the time—the only extant images of the event—show that parts of the walls of several rooms in the Sherbrooke Street apartment had been temporarily covered in burlap to heighten the neutrality of the domestic interior, except for one room that had white walls.[21] The paintings were displayed in various ways—aligned individually or in a grid, hung on doors and even a radiator, perched on easels, densely hung in the main room—while the sculptures were arranged on a desk. At the time, young artists often showed their works in similar settings—apartments, bookstores, studios—outside the circuit of commercial galleries and other institutions, which generally showed little interest in their experimental pursuits. And yet, in

19 The exhibition included works by Marcel Barbeau, Paul-Émile Borduas, Roger Fauteux, Pierre Gauvreau, Fernand Leduc, and Jean-Paul Mousseau.

20 The journalist and art critic Tancrède Marsil Jr. entitled his account of the group's second exhibition "Les Automatistes. L'école Borduas"; this was the source of the name later ascribed to them.

21 Gagnon, François-Marc. *Chronique du mouvement automatiste québécois. 1941-1954*, Montréal, Lanctôt Éditeur, 1998, p. 307.

hindsight, the "Second Automatist Exhibition" epitomizes the advent of modernist Quebec: it simultaneously breaks with the *Grande Noirceur* and heralds the Quiet Revolution.

For more than seventy years, the "Second Automatist Exhibition" has been widely studied in monographs and anthologies, to the point that it is today thought of as a legendary historical event. Much like exhibition catalogues, these publications shape our perception of works and orient our appreciation of the context in which they appeared, whether through the substance of their critical commentaries, or the quality of their visual documentation. In general, as already noted, exhibition catalogues tend to consist simply of artwork reproductions, only on rare occasions showing the context in which the artworks are presented.[22] And yet, in publications that mention the "Second Automatist Exhibition," a photograph often accompanies the textual commentary. It shows a number of works and, in the background, Paul-Émile Borduas and Madeleine Arbour framed in a doorway.[23] Over time, this photograph has gradually superimposed itself on people's idea of the exhibition, eventually becoming its consummate visual reference.

How to go about reactivating an exhibition made up of works of which few traces remain, and that survives in collective memory only through published

22 As Remi Parcollet reminds us, exhibition views first appeared around 1850 and "are distinct from photographic reproductions of artworks, with the particularity of being dated and, more importantly, situated." Parcollet, Remi (dir.). "La photographie de vues d'exposition," *Photogénie de l'exposition*, Paris, Manuella Éditions, 2018, p. 13 [freely translated].

23 This view was first reproduced in the *Refus global* manifesto in 1948. Another often-reproduced photograph shows the Automatist group in front of Borduas' *Sous le vent de l'île* (1947). There are ten views of the "Second Automatist Exhibition" in the Fonds Maurice Perron at the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec.

Klaus Scherübel
Untitled (Seconde exposition des Automatistes, au 75 rue Sherbrooke Ouest, chez les Gauvreau, 1947), 2019. Announcement

photographs and commentaries? [24] Scherübel answered that question not by constituting new archives, nor by reassembling the works shown, but by rematerializing the partial view of this exhibition held in the private confines of an old apartment. Seeking to work backwards through time and to reactualize the past from the present moment, the artist used this image as a conceptual tool: he reconstituted, three-dimensionally, the black and white photo taken by Maurice Perron in a context that has since become historic.[25] Through this

24 To date, only one of the works seen in this exhibition view has been identified with certainty: an oil painting on canvas by Borduas entitled, variously, *Sans titre*, *Abstraction* and *Construction barbare* (1947). It is thought that the work seen on the door is also an oil on canvas work by Borduas (though no trace of it now remains), that the ink works in the background were by Gauvreau, and that the sculptures on the desk in the foreground were by Mousseau.

25 This project extends the thinking around exhibition catalogues initiated by Scherübel when he developed the exhibition "Tractatus Logico-Catalogicus" for VOX in 2008. It brought together pieces by artists who, from 1954 to the present, have made the catalogue the principal object or subject of their works. See http://centrevox.ca/en/exposition/tractatus-logico-catalogicus/

diversional operation, the image, which had originally been reproduced in the "book space," infiltrates the gallery space and, through that shift effect, takes on the form of an exhibition.

To that end, Scherübel employed a representational mode borrowed from "analogue" museography: the period room. This practice, as Raymond Montpetit has written, "installs an *image* of reality, a *scène de vie* that refers, through resemblance, to a real situation, which visitors recognize as being the source of the presentation." [26] It aims to reconstitute the characteristic interiors of a given period, like a series of freeze frames.[27] Creating a period room relies on an arrangement of architectural components, furniture and objects, an assemblage that seeks to reproduce the particular "style" of an interior, often a living space, as it appeared at some point in the past. It typically incites a particular experience of space and time in the viewer and, in so doing, contributes to the production of new forms of knowledge, partly by placing art objects or works in a setting and atmosphere that offer new perspectives on the history and narratives that have stemmed from given objects or artworks. The

26 Montpetit, Raymond. "Une logique d'exposition populaire : les images de la muséographie analogique," *Publics et Musées*, No. 9 (1996), p. 91–92 [freely translated].

27 In the 1920s, Alexander Dorner conceptualized this relationship linking space and image in the exhibition context, in the process coining the term *Raumbild*. Translated literally as "spatialized image" or "image of space," the idea refers to the unsettled frontiers between space, time and the image, between perception and knowledge, between material and immaterial. Dorner also used the expression *Atmosphärenräume* ("atmosphere rooms") to describe his museographical approach, which sought to create an immersive experience using furnishings that referred to the style of a given period. See Löschke, Sandra Karina. "Material aesthetics and agency: Alexander Dorner and the Stage-managed Museum," in *Interstices. Journal of Architecture and Related Arts*, No. 14 (2012). https://interstices.ac.nz/index.php/Interstices/issue/view/30

space is built based on historical documents—inventories, archives, first-person accounts, literary texts, architectural plans, paintings—and, where possible, photographs. Except, as Marie-Ève Marchand reminds us, "history as formulated in, and from, these various sources is already a representation; that is, a translation of what was lived, a composition subjected to the point of view [...] of the person who is recounting, interpreting the past and, in so doing, constructing a history."[28] And, in this case, it was based precisely on a "composition" expressing a personal point of view—a photograph by Maurice Perron—that Scherübel established his reconstitution. As an artistic photographer, and signatory and publisher of *Refus global*, Perron was a privileged witness to the Automatists' exhibitions and performances; his are the only known photographs documenting them. Consequently, his images have undeniably contributed to the trajectory of research on the Automatists, having been so often displayed and reproduced in various publications. While Perron typically made exhibition and vernissage views that employed subjective composition, he also occasionally used staging and lighting to create, for example, more expressionist moods.[29]

28 Marchand, Marie-Ève. "L'histoire de l'art mise en pièces. Analyse matérielle, spatiale et temporelle de la *period room* comme dispositif muséal," Ph.D. thesis in Art History, Montréal, Université de Montréal, 2014, p. 116–117 [freely translated].

29 In addition, the photographer's attention was less on the works than on the individuals present, usually his colleagues in the Automatist movement—as, for example, when he photographed the 1947 exhibition of Mousseau's and Riopelle's works in Muriel Guilbault's apartment. These images are part of the Fonds Maurice Perron at the Musée national des beaux-arts in Quebec City.

The task of painstakingly replicating, to scale, an exhibition that took place in the everyday setting of a family apartment prompted Scherübel to cast a critical eye on practices around period rooms. First, it must be pointed out that the creation of period rooms, as found in museums, often falls within a political, elitist endeavour aiming to represent the contexts or lifestyles of the dominant social classes, which are often sources of funding for those very institutions.[30] Scherübel's reconstitution instead shows us a view of a living space bereft of luxury: the Gauvreaus were a family of free thinkers, engaged with the cultural and literary milieu, but they came from a modest background.[31] Second, in disengaging from any attitude of "connoisseurship"—that is, knowledge constituted around the provenance and originality of the objects, furniture and coverings in the room—Scherübel abstained from the conventions of authenticity and historicism that ordinarily inform the design of a period room.[32] For this replication of the "Second Automatist Exhibition" does not reproduce the attributes of the 1947 apartment so much as those of its photographic documentation: the fragmentary view, tight framing, black and white, cast shadow, subjective vision, and intimate setting, among other things.

30 For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City includes many period rooms recreating the *salons* and living rooms of France, England and Austria, fragments of townhouses reflecting the tastes of the haute bourgeoisie or aristocracy, and this exhibitional mode is featured in many museums to represent the affluent classes.

31 Saint-Mars Gauvreau hosted many exhibitions in her Sherbrooke Street apartment. A single mother, she had an interest in arts and culture.

32 As Marie-Ève Marchand explains, "[t]he idea of authenticity based on the practices of connoisseurship entails a process of meticulous observation and formulation of hypotheses, the goal of which is to distinguish the original from its copy, and the effect of which is to construct the value of an object." Marchand, Marie-Ève. « L'histoire de l'art mise en pièces », p. 15. [freely translated].

Klaus Scherübel
Untitled (Seconde exposition des Automatistes, au 75 rue Sherbrooke Ouest, chez les Gauvreau, 1947), 2019. Drywall, aluminium, wood, glass, textiles, vintage door and mouldings, light switch, adhesive vinyl, set painting, digital prints on paper, LED lighting. 270 × 370 × 550 cm, installation view, VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine, 2019. Photo: Michel Brunelle. Copyright Klaus Scherübel.

This sort of enterprise, moreover, is nothing new: many historical reconstitutions have used exhibition views as reproducible data. In 1986, a certain Kazimir Malevich endeavoured to faithfully reproduce the "Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting 0.10" (1915) in a Belgrade apartment, using the only subsisting photograph of it.[33] Elitza Dulguerova also evokes the practice in her discussions of exhibitions devoted to the Russian avant-garde, which included similar historical reconstitutions, themselves based on

33 In addition to the approximate facsimile, in colour, of the famous canvases shown in "The Last Futurist Exhibition of Painting 0.10," the reconstitution recounted, in a so-called autobiographical manner, the life of the Russian artist via a compilation of various documents. See Jean, Marie J. "Art Histories: Artists' Temptations," *Journal VOX*, 2012. http://www.centrevox.ca/en/exposition/art-histories/

photographs.[34] Scherübel's undertaking nonetheless diverges from those approaches: by partially replicating the Automatist exhibition, in black and white, it locates us explicitly in the space of its photographic representation. Moreover, the artist has placed his reproduction behind glass, thus producing a deliberate distancing that contributes to the visitor's seeing the replicated scene as a film "set." About this referencing of a process that is fairly commonly used for period rooms, Marchand writes: "the glass wall, despite seeming to afford maximum visibility—a visibility whose artificiality is, moreover, betrayed by the reflections it produces—is in fact the most hermetic of barriers constructed between the period room and the visitor."[35] Indeed, the illusion produced by the reactivation of a past moment is here coupled with the explicitly concrete experience of the museographical device. Standing between the visitor and the reconstituted exhibition view, the glass situates us in the present moment of a remembered past. Moreover, this separation is all the more blurred by the fact that text—including a title, the author's name, and a volume number—has been inscribed on the glass itself, which again implies a spillover: this time, we (re)enter "book space."[36]

34 Dulguerova distinguishes between two different attitudes: on the one hand, "use of documentary views that favour a fetishizing of history" and, on the other, "ironic posturing and an insistence on the unfinished that invites interplay between photographic referent and three-dimensional reconstruction." See Dulguerova, Elitza. "L'expérience et son double. Notes sur la reconstruction d'expositions et la photographie," in *Intermédialités. Histoire et théorie des arts, des lettres et des techniques*, No. 15 (Spring 2010), p. 64 [freely translated].

35 Marchand also calls these types of period room "vignettes," "whose general form is reminiscent of a theatre stage, owing to the removal of one wall, generally referred to as the 'fourth'." Marchand, Marie-Ève. « L'histoire de l'art mise en pièces », p. 45–51 [freely translated].

Thus we might assert that Scherübel's installation fits within the categories of the present: it is a space of memory that, via its conceptual *modi operandi*, tends to tell us something about our present moment. It affords us the unsettling experience of a place belonging to a past that is gone, marked by a history in which one of the crucial scenes of modernist Quebec was played out, but the story of which is and always will be developing.[37] This operation is precisely what enables the past to be revealed from the vantage point of a future made present by reason of the artistic and conceptual experience that we make of it. This type of reconstitution likely has affinities with "presentism," a regime of historicity defined by François Hartog, because in addition to activating past events and actuating new narratives in anticipation of the future, it reveals to us a particular facet of our present: the desire to historicize it. The practice of "returning to," Hartog explains, no longer rests on the transmission of past stories, but on a reconstruction that guarantees their reappropriation and reactivation. How? Through a process of reflection: "by making the past's selective recycling, or the passage from the past into the present (which is how memory works) into the starting point

36 The text placed in front of the "image" also recalls, in some ways, a poster announcing an upcoming event.

37 It is especially significant to note here that the exhibition views first appeared with the publication of *Refus global* in 1948, the first edition of which is held at the Musée national des beaux-arts in Quebec City, and would not appear again until 1971, in the catalogue of the exhibition "Borduas et les Automatistes. Montréal 1942-1955," under the direction of Henri Barras, who oversaw this first historical exhibition of the Automatists, presented at the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in Paris (1971) and later at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (1972). Following that return, after an absence of 24 years, these exhibition views would be abundantly reproduced in monographs and anthologies dedicated to the Automatist movement and artists.

of its historiographical operations."[38] In this sense, the period room device employed by Klaus Scherübel—as well as the documentary devices imagined by all the artists and researchers involved in *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition*—helps generate an operational experience of historicity by bringing together complex temporalities.

38 Hartog, François. "Memory, History and the Present," in *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, tr. Saskia Brown, New York, Columbia University Press, 2015[1995], p. 145. Originally published as "Temps et histoire. 'Comment écrire l'histoire de France ?'," in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales*, Vol. 50, No. 6, (September/October 1995), p. 1234.

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Créer à rebours vers l'exposition: The case of "Montreal, plus or minus?"
VOX, centre de l'image contemporaine
April 19 – June 30, 2018

Curators:
Sarah Cousineau
Joséphine Rivard
Jade Seguela
Marie Tissot
Camille Tremblay-Caron

Communications / Conceptualization of urban itinerary:
Yasmina Ali Yahia
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Finance committee:
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Research team / Symposium:
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Marie-Pierre Cloutier
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Marie Ricci
Alexandre Treuil

Under the artistic and scientific direction of Marie Fraser, assisted by Anne-Sophie Miclo, this project was carried out in the winter of 2018 in the context of the museum studies master's seminar MSL6104: *Exposition, interprétation et diffusion*, at Université du Québec à Montréal. The project received support from UQAM's museum studies program, from Figura, centre de recherche sur le texte et l'imaginaire, and from the Chaire de recherche sur la gouvernance des musées et le droit de la culture.

Exhibiting Exhibitions

Marie Fraser

Museums, curators and artists are becoming more and more interested in bringing events from the past back to life. There is no lack of examples: reenactments of exhibitions, displays, museum installations, and artist-created environments, presentations of archives and documents, and re-exhibitions of ephemeral artworks. Might one regard these practices as a critical and methodological approach to thinking about the writing and history of exhibitions? What might their historiographical role be? Is there a connection here with the emergence of curatorial studies, where the exhibition is not viewed solely as discourse on the artwork, but also as an object of study and a site where knowledge is produced? In 2018, I was looking to find out how these questions might be received in an academic context, and, more specifically, in the areas of museum studies and art history. In a 20-student master's seminar on exhibitions, we reconstituted "Montreal, plus or minus?," an exhibition created by artist and architect Melvin Charney at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1972. Presented at VOX in the context of a series of documentation-oriented exhibitions organized by Marie-Josée Jean and Claudine Roger, this project is part of a broader reflection on

history, practice, and the future of exhibitions that aims to inventory emblematic examples of exhibitions held in Quebec. The historical significance of "Montreal, plus or minus?" also emerged as one of the most important elements showcased in this reenactment. It wasn't simply a matter of creating one exhibition out of another, but rather of acknowledging that this curatorial experimentation is an integral part of exhibition historiography. For me, this context seems conducive to begin thinking more generally about the writing of exhibition history, as well as its methods, tools, models, advancements, and, especially, its limitations.

From the outset, it was clear that "Montreal, plus or minus?" had been an unconventional exhibition, and that entrusting its organization to an artist with a background in architecture was no accident. In so doing, the Museum of Fine Arts was indeed seeking to insert itself into the then-current trend of interdisciplinary exhibitions on the theme of the city, as pointed out by Francine Couture.[1] In the exhibition catalogue, David Giles Carter (the museum's director at the time) mentions having had discussions with actors from two American museums that had recently presented similar exhibitions: "Back Bay Boston, the City as Work of Art," at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1969, and "City," at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The theme of the city was also very present in the programming at New York's Museum of Modern

1 Francine Couture examines the connection between "Montreal, plus or minus?" and other thematic exhibitions on the city. She also gives other posthumous examples, such as "Corridart," also organized by Melvin Charney at the Museum of Fine Arts, in 1975. See Couture, Francine. *L'exposition et la ville : entre le local et l'international*, Paris, L'Harmattan, *Sociologie de l'art*, 2003/1, Opus 1 & 2, p. 115-130.

Vue de l'exposition *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition: The case of* "Montreal, plus or minus?" VOX. 1972-2018. Photo: Michel Brunelle.

Art (MoMA), which, since the 1950s, had frequently presented exhibitions focused on architecture and photography. A few years later, Pontus Hulten would organize a series of important exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou, in Paris: "Paris—New York," in 1977, "Paris—Moscow," in 1979, and "Paris—Berlin," in 1978. Besides their parallel themes, these exhibitions share a resolutely interdisciplinary vision, where painting, sculpture, photography, architecture and design coexist. They also present two distinct ideas of the city itself: one local, and innately entwined with social and political issues, and the other international, focused on the relationships between cities, and showcasing cultural, artistic, and diplomatic dialogue.

"Montreal, plus or minus?" also belongs in this list of city-themed exhibitions. The title, however, is somewhat surprising, given its post-October Crisis

context. By directly posing a question, it invited the general public to take position on the cultural, social, and political debates that marked the urbanization of the city in the early 1970s. In the exhibition catalogue, and in his correspondence kept in the MMFA archives, David Giles Carter fully endorses this position, and states that the title implies a collective form of consciousness-raising. He also affirms that the exhibition was designed to be a "forum" [2] for increasing awareness of the transformations that were adversely affecting Montreal at the time. The Museum was indeed actively seeking to contribute to debates around the current social climate and patrimonial status of the city. The public and participatory format of the exhibition was typical of Charney's artistic, and perhaps curatorial [3] position, one that looked to move beyond the limits of art, and to question the museum itself with the goal of reaching "a much broader part of the population," as he himself writes in the exhibition catalogue.[4]

Our reactivation of "Montreal, plus or minus?" almost fifty years after the fact takes into account this somewhat unusual idea of the exhibition as a citizen platform. This view of the exhibition, which was indeed radical for the time, raises many questions on its original context, on reconstructing the bygone past, and on curatorial practices rooted in creating exhibitions from other exhibitions. How might it

2 See David Giles Carter's acknowledgements in the *Montreal, plus or minus?* exhibition catalogue, edited by Charney, Melvin. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 1972, p. 4-7.

3 Melvin Charney is identified as the organizer of the exhibition. The term curator is not yet widespread in the early 1970s, although the role of the *curator* is indeed beginning to assert itself during this period.

4 See Charney, Melvin. *Montreal, plus or minus?*, exhibition catalogue, 1972, p. 12-13.

be possible to revive an ephemeral past event? How to recontextualize its participatory and politically engaged format? What place should we give to the political and social climate of the 1970s? Should debates around the city itself be foregrounded today? What relevance do these social issues still hold, and what of their impact remains? What does an event that happened in a specific past context signify today, and what will it signify in the future? Can reconstituting an exhibition from its material traces hinder its understanding, and by extension, its memory? These questions are crucial to curating such an exhibition:

> *The reactivation of "Montreal, plus or minus?" is anything but nostalgic and eschews praise for the original; it seeks to comprehend its underpinnings and repercussions. As Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield*[5] *have written about re-enactments of performances and events, any revisiting of an exhibition must investigate the implications intrinsic to its historical and political context. In that light, the reprising of "Montreal, plus or minus?" aims to contextualize the thinking of its artists and organizers during a troubled time in the city's history, and project it forty-six years forward, to today. This generates tension in the "double historicity"*[6] *of the original event and its reconstitution. The goal is to note the time interval, but also to identify continuity across it: clearly, the questions that were germane to the 1970s*

5 See Jones, Amelia and Adrian Heathfield. *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, Bristol, Intellect Books, 2012.

6 See Fraser, Marie and Florence-Agathe Dubé-Moreau. "Performer la collection. Comment le *reenactment* performe-t-il ce qu'il recrée ?," *Intermédialités*, No. 28-29, (fall 2016—spring 2017). https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/im/2016-n28-29-im03201/1041088ar/.

remain topical. From urban planning (Maison de Radio-Canada is to be relocated by 2020) to government policy (another Trudeau government was elected in 2015) to, of course, feminist concerns, many of the same issues are resurgent today.[7]

What Remains of "Montreal, Plus or Minus?"

The research began with the photo documentation kept in the Museum of Fine Arts archives: black and white contact sheets of exhibition views taken during the vernissage. At the time, it was common to document an exhibition's opening, rather than the exhibition and the works themselves. While these photographs indeed show that the vernissage was well-attended, it is difficult to make out the exhibited artwork. The documentation thus speaks to the unusual conception of the exhibition, but doesn't allow viewers to identify and authenticate the works themselves.

Conceived as a veritable forum, "Montreal, plus or minus?" sought to give voice to various points of view, and to abolish existing artistic and social hierarchies. Presenting both everyday life and the then-current debates on the destruction of the city's architectural heritage created a situation where objects and documents from well outside of the artistic context ended up being exhibited in a fine arts museum. As Melvin Charney mentioned in a Radio-Canada television interview at the time, the exhibition was conceptualized as a non-hierarchical space that could include artists, photographers, illustrators, poets, theatre companies,

7 Excerpt from the press release for *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition: the case of "Montreal, plus or minus?,"* 2018. http://centrevox.ca/en/exposition/creer-a-rebours-vers-lexposition-the-case-of-montreal-plus-or-minus/.

Contact sheets of exhibition "Montreal, plus or minus?", views taken during the vernissage. Photo: MBAM.

musicians, community groups, activists, and associations, all on equal footing. It brought together new and ephemeral artistic forms and various means of expression: conceptual art,[8] installation, performance,

8 Works presented include *Route 37*, by Bill Vazan, *Telephone Square*, by Tom Dean, and *La rue Saint-Laurent, entre Sainte-Catherine et Dorchester, le 16 novembre 1965, 4 :15 pm.*, by Melvin Charney.

photography, comics, cartoons, audiovisual works, poetry, feminist practices, and artworks that would now be described as participatory. Many of these works no longer exist, as they were created specifically for the exhibition and thus not conserved. Ad hoc collectives were also formed for the occasion, and disbanded afterwards. Melvin Charney gave participating artists a great amount of freedom in regard to the choice of works and how they were exhibited. Invitations had been extended to municipal and provincial governments—and their letters of refusal were shown in the exhibition.

The layout of the exhibition space was also quite experimental. Various non-traditional media were present, including sound, which accentuated the already unsettling atmosphere. Documents and photos were pinned directly to the wall, and visitors could remove posters and take them home, and wander through a maze designed for the exhibition. There were many other heterogenous elements as well: a map of Montreal's downtown traced out on the floor, life models, road signs, newspaper stands, a Canada Post mailbox, park benches, and live plants "borrowed" from the city. The artworks seemed to overlap, so much so as to sometimes be indistinguishable from each other. According to surviving exhibition views and accounts from visitors, the exhibition was a sort of total environment. It also included performances; the six-woman collective Groupe Mauve[9] showed up at the vernissage dressed in bridal gowns, and cleaned the

9 The collective Groupe Mauve was formed specifically for the exhibition, and was made up of six members: Catherine Boisvert, Ghislaine Boyer, Céline Isabel, Thérèse Isabel, Lise Landry and Lucie Ménard.

Museum's stairs and entryway. A reimagined Montreal logo was displayed outside the entrance to attract attention, and public actions took place at various sites throughout the city. For example, Groupe Mauve presented performances in shopping centres, and an installation titled *La femme et la ville* in the windows of the Dupuis Frères department store, then situated at the corner of Sainte-Catherine and Saint-Hubert. Several activists and intellectuals involved in the protection of the city's green spaces and architectural heritage also organized public activities and guided visits throughout the city.[10]

The exhibition invite was designed to look like a postcard. The catalogue was also unusual, in that it didn't document the works presented, as would a traditional catalogue, but rather recounted the process of creating the exhibition, it's conceptualization, the letters of invitation sent to government and their replies, artists' texts, projects whose final form remains uncertain, and photographs documenting different neighborhoods throughout the city.

Bringing an Exhibition From the Past Back to Life

The reenactment came up against both the complexity of the exhibition itself, and its public and participatory format. It quickly became evident that remaking an identical "Montreal, plus or minus?" wouldn't be feasible. This limitation indeed ended up being one of the leitmotifs of this curatorial approach, as the curators explain in this excerpt from the press release:

10 See *Montreal, plus or minus?* exhibition catalogue, 1972. These particularities were also discussed by Francine Couture in her opening lecture for the symposium *Histoire d'exposition : la réactualisation par les archives*, UQAM, April 27, 2018 [unpublished].

> *Materially reconstituting an event of this scale would be impossible, because of the sheer number of works, artists and collaborators involved, and because some artefacts have been lost to time. Since we cannot present the original works, our reactivation of "Montreal, plus or minus?" has been woven together from collective memory: that of a number of citizens, artists and historians who took part in or reported on the event. This exhibition* [...] *seeks to adopt a social, human perspective on our history, but also on the possibilities afforded by an art that is responsible and inclusive.*[11]

This research necessitated an investigation of several archival fonds besides those at the Museum of Fine Arts: at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, where the Melvin Charney archives are kept, CBC/Radio-Canada, Artexte, and the private archives of photographers who participated in "Montreal, plus or minus?" The documentation we found was, however, far from complete. To fill in these gaps, we had to create new sources, and locate certain actors from the period to give their accounts.

The 2018 exhibition presented material traces of the original 1972 version of "Montreal, plus or minus?"; not the artworks as such, but rather documents recounting the process from varying points of view, from conceptualization to reception, and the memories of those who experienced the exhibition directly. This history is narrated through approximately sixty documents, several of which are quite exceptional and never

11 Excerpt from the press release for *Créer à rebours vers l'exposition: the case of* "Montreal, plus or minus?." http://centrevox.ca/en/exposition/creer-a-rebours-vers-lexposition-the-case-of-montreal-plus-or-minus/

before publicly shown: from CBC/Radio-Canada, a colour TV segment filmed during the exhibition set-up and opening, and an interview with Melvin Charney conducted by Joël Le Bigot just before the vernissage,[12] exhibition views, posters, photographs, the catalogue, letters, press releases, basic layout drawings, newspaper articles, manifestos, letters from visitors, original documents and typescripts presented under glass. In the participatory spirit of the 1972 exhibition, where visitors were encouraged to take posters home with them, the exhibition layout and list of exhibited documents in the 2018 exhibition were offered free to the public as well. The entirety of this archival material was presented as an "archive wall" that could be read like a *storyboard*, recounting the entire process, before, during, and after of the exhibition. It was almost as if we had rewritten the script of the exhibition after the fact. In a reading room located nearby, five interviews with artists Lise Landry from Groupe Mauve, Sylvain Campeau and Roger Charbonneau from Groupe Action Photographique (AGP), François Vincent of Groupe Point Zéro, Claude Grenier, and the poet André Major recount both the atmosphere of the period, and Melvin Charney's unique approach.[13]

12 Television interview by Joël Le Bigot with Melvin Charney broadcast on Radio-Canada television during the program *Format 30*, March 28, 1972. A colour segment was also filmed during the exhibition set-up and opening, and broadcast on *Format 30* on June 23, 1972. This segment is a rich source of information on the exhibition, featuring interviews with the Museum director, David Giles Carter, as well as with Normand Thériault, and participating artists and visitors to the exhibition, notably mentioning how radically the Museum had been transformed for the occasion. The story also includes rare footage of Groupe Mauve washing the outside and inside steps of the Museum.

13 The five interviews were carried out by the curators between March 8 and 30, 2018. They were broadcast in a reading nook set up within the exhibition space.

The curators also organized the reactivation of several performative works from the original exhibition. The feminist collective Women With Kitchen Appliances (WWKA) reenacted Groupe Mauve's 1972 vernissage performance, and actor Alex Bergeron interpreted André Major's poem *Au cœur de la ville*, accompanied by musician Charles Barabé. The outreach and education team recreated one of the guided visits of the city, organized by Association Espaces verts, inviting the public to revisit buildings whose "lives were threatened," as it was said at the time. We rode a vintage public transit bus from the 1970s to several of the sites, some of which were indeed gone, while others had been preserved in part or in whole, thanks to the work of activist groups.[14] These reactivated projects and actions opened up a space between 1972 and 2018, and, as in the first iteration of the exhibition, also raised public awareness on current urban development and social issues.

Moreover, the research team organized a one-day symposium aiming to both contextualize "Montreal, plus or minus?," and to foster more general discussions on the history of exhibitions and their archives.[15]

14 The causes opposing activist groups like Association Espaces verts and Montreal city administration included the demolition of several neighborhoods and affordable housing to make way for large-scale development and infrastructure projects such as La Cité in Milton-Parc, the Ville-Marie Expressway, and the CBC/Radio-Canada building, as well as the destruction of a large part of Chinatown to build Complexe Guy-Favreau. Jean-Claude Marsan, a founding member of Association Espaces verts who was key in the 1972 exhibition, and Martin Drouin participated in the reenactment of the urban itinerary.

15 Besides the curators and organizers, several people participated in the symposium *Histoire d'exposition : la réactivation par les archives*: Francine Couture, Marie-Josée Jean, Claudine Roger, Florence-Agathe Dubé-Moreau, Michel Hardy-Vallée, Bénédicte Ramade, Valérie Perron, Louise Pelletier, Joanne Burgess, and Marie-Ève Dion.

Overall, the project raised many questions on reconstitution, which—as Reesa Greenberg pointed out in one of the earliest texts on the subject, in 2009[16]—has become a new genre of exhibition in and of itself.

An Exhibition Within an Exhibition

Can an exhibition contain another exhibition? Under what conditions, and in what form? What exactly is this active mode of recursion? What does it mean? What is the role of "exhibitions about exhibitions"?[17] Whether created by museums, curators or artists, reconstitutions make possible the documentation and study of past exhibitions. As such, their historical and documentary usefulness is undeniable. As we have seen, the reactivation of "Montreal, plus or minus?" allowed for the creation of a new archive, one that drew from many accounts and sources, bringing together documentation that had previously been fragmentary and scattered.

Exhibitions are primarily studied through their documentation, but this type of research often comes up against the ephemeral nature of exhibiting, as well

16 See Greenberg, Reesa. "Remembering Exhibition": From Point to Line to Web, *Tate Papers*, No. 12 (2009). www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/remembering-exhibitions-point-line-web.

17 The expression is used by Elitza Dulguerova, in "L'expérience et son double : Notes sur la reconstitution d'expositions et la photographie," *Intermédialités. Histoire et théories des arts, des lettres et des techniques*, No. 15 (Spring 2010), p. 53-71. www.erudit.org/revue/im/2010/v/n15/04467ar.pdf. Daniel Buren also uses an expression similar to the title of this article: "exhibition of an exhibition." In a text published in the documenta 5 catalogue, in 1972, he denounces the fact that curator Harald Szeemann had "folded" the works about him, and that his role as an exhibition organizer had surreptitiously evolved into that of an exhibition artist. See Buren, Daniel. "Exposition d'une exposition", in Szeemann, Harald (ed.). *documenta 5*, Kassel, 1972, p. 17-29; and Buren, Daniel. "Where are the Artists," in *The Next documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, (June-November 2003). http://www.e-flux.com.

as significant epistemological and methodological issues.[18] Their history can only be done in reverse, based on surviving documents and the accounts that can be drawn from them. It should, however, be noted that the documentation of exhibitions is a relatively recent practice, and, consequently, large parts of their history are inaccessible to researchers. To paraphrase Rober Racine, in *Créer à rebours vers le récit* (the text that inspired the title of the series of documentary reactivations at VOX), exhibitions are doomed to "perform their own disappearance."[19] Archives thus play a crucial role, and documentary research has indeed proved to be essential to writing their history. However, unlike artworks themselves, there is no established protocol for archiving exhibitions, and documentation is often fragmentary and scattered throughout different archives, museums, and organizations, and in the personal archives of artists, curators, and photographers. Documents kept in archives also vary greatly from one exhibition to another, and from one museum or organization to another. In most cases, exhibition views are the only visual documentation available for studying exhibition layout, and understanding the relationships between artworks. Floor plans are often imprecise, as they are regularly modified according to the availability of works, and the many changes that occur over an exhibition set-up. For similar reasons, lists of artworks can also be partial or inaccurate. While catalogues are

18 Rémi Parcollet and Léa-Catherine Szacka address these epistemological and methodological questions in "Écrire l'histoire des expositions : réflexions sur la constitution d'un catalogue raisonné d'expositions," *Culture & Musées*, No. 22 (2013). p. 137-162. https://doi.org/10.3406/pumus.2013.1755.

19 See Racine, Rober. "Créer à rebours vers le récit," *Parachute*, No. 48 (1987), p. 33-35.

an important source of information, they usually focus on content rather than curatorial approach or the exhibition itself. The catalogue for "Montreal, plus or minus?" is an exception in this regard, as it speaks to the exhibition's conceptualization, with less focus on the artworks as such. The invites and press releases are an important source, however, they are limited in that they only represent an official, or institutional point of view. Press reviews document the reception of the event, but provide little information on the conditions of presentation, favouring an aesthetic appraisal of the works, and commentary on the choice of themes. When still extant, correspondence is often inaccessible and incomplete. The question thus remains largely unanswered. How might we safeguard the memory of exhibitions?

It seems to me that these essentially material issues are paradoxically fundamental. They demonstrate that the exhibition is a unit of time and space that is impossible to reproduce. Curator Germano Celant, architect Rem Koolhaas, and artist Thomas Demand all came up against this impossibility as well, despite the comprehensiveness of Harald Szeeman's archives, and the financial means available to them for recreating "When Attitudes Become Form" (Kunsthalle, Berne, 1969) at the Prada Foundation, in Venice, in 2013. Here, the catalogue aims to be just as comprehensive as the exhibition itself, and indeed, with its 780 pages of photographs and analysis, is an incredible resource.[20] It opens with 366 pages of photo documentation from

20 See *When Attitudes Become Form, Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, exhibition catalogue, Fondazione Prada, 2013. The exhibition was presented as a parallel event to the Venice Biennale — 55th International Art Exhibition.

the original 1969 exhibition, space by space, with floor plans, exhibition views, and set-up photos, while the rest of the book is dedicated to the 2013 version, conceptualized by Germano Celant. It's almost as if the original exhibition catalogue was published four and a half decades after the fact in the second exhibition's catalogue. The reenactment of "When Attitudes Become Form" didn't have to contend with the problem of fragmentary documentation; rather, their primary issue was the impossibility of reproducing conditions comparable to the first version. The architecture of the exhibition spaces was vastly different: on the one hand, a modern, 20th-century building, and, on the other, an 18th-century Venetian palace. Certain artworks weren't shown, particularly several site-specific installations that ended up being impossible to recreate, like Richard Serra's *Splash* (1969), because of the toxicity of its original material, lead. Some loans from public and private collections were also refused, given the fragility of the artworks and overly risky exhibition conditions, as was the case for certain Eva Hesse sculptures. The 2013 version did, however, use the same layout as the original, which invited visitors to wander among works installed on the floor with relatively little space between them.

The organizers' choices in regard to material conditions didn't solve everything. Many critiques focused on the cult of exhibition that the reconstitution amplified in the context of a major international contemporary art event. Research on exhibitions, in general, inevitably raises this kind of historiographical question. The two-volume study by Bruce Atlshuler, *Exhibitions*

That Made Art History,[21] sheds light on the history of exhibitions by bringing together an impressive amount of documentation on their nomenclature, from the *Salon des Refusés*, in 1863, to today's contemporary art biennials. This type of documentation has proven to be essential to research, and to the memory of exhibitions. However, as many have pointed out, including Bruce Atlshuler himself, a historical approach focusing on exemplarity runs the risk of creating an exhibition canon.[22]

In this historiographical perspective, should we indeed study "Montreal, plus or minus?" as an exemplary exhibition? If so, what distinguishes it from other exhibitions, and according to what criteria? Because it was radically atypical, questioning the museum itself, foreshadowing institutional critique? Because it blurred the art world's traditional boundaries? Was it the exhibition's participatory approach, expanding the limits of art and exhibitions by erasing the museum's separation between art and life, between passive contemplation and political engagement? Is it because the exhibition took place during the emergence of a new kind of interdisciplinary exhibition on the theme of the city, or because of its social impact in saving threatened architectural sites from demolition? Because it

21 Altshuler, Bruce (ed.). *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History. Vol. 2: 1962-2002*, London, Phaidon, 2013; Altshuler Bruce (ed.). *Salon to Biennial. Exhibitions That Made Art History. Vol. I: 1863-1959*, London, Phaidon, 2009.

22 See Glicenstein Jérôme. "En quête d'un canon des expositions," *esse arts + opinions*, No. 84, (Spring-Summer 2015), p. 14-21. http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/73797ac.; Boersma, Linda and Patrick Van Rossem (eds.). "Rewriting or Reaffirming the Canon? Critical Readings of Exhibition History," *Stedelijk Studies* No. 2, (Spring 2015). https://stedelijkstudies.com/issue-2-exhibition-histories/; and Bruce Altshuler. "A Canon of Exhibitions," *Manifesta Journal* No. 11 (2011), "The Canon of Curating," p. 15.

articulated what me might today call a critical, or even politically engaged curatorial approach? All these characteristics provide a criteria of exemplarity for a history of exhibitions that, to borrow Bruce Altshuler's term "make art history."

Seeing as reconstitutions make it possible to understand significant exhibitions, and to insert them into history, shouldn't we also reevaluate the conditions that make these historiographical models possible, as well as their limitations? Instead of viewing the reconstitution as a way to exemplify, why not focus our interest on the effects of its imprecision on history, and on its potential as critique? According to Reesa Greenberg, reconstitutions are a function of memory, or homage. Indeed, for Greenberg, "remembering exhibitions" can take on many forms, depending on their demands of authenticity: response, riff, or reprise.[23] Elitza Dulguerova also highlights their historiographical potential and sees a critical and reflexive posture in the tendency to consider the presentation context of artworks.[24] In her book on the reinvestigation and reuse of art museum collections, Claire Bishop[25] foregrounds this introspective posture as well. Museums that organize the reconstruction of artist-created environments, exhibition layouts, or presentation systems with works from their collections are forced to reflect on their own history and practices. Reconstitution here is viewed as a way of participating in the historicization of exhibitions, but also as a catalyst for reflexive and critical approaches to exhibition-making.

23 Greenberg, Reesa. "'Remembering Exhibition': From Point to Line to web," 2009.

24 Dulguerova, Elitza. "L'expérience et son double," 2010.

25 Bishop, Claire, *Radical Museology: Or, What's Contemporary in Museums of Contemporary Art?*, Cologne, Verlag Der Buchhandlung Walter Konig, 2014.

This catalyzing aspect was demonstrated in one of the first known examples of reconstitution in a museum context, in 1991. Organized by Stephanie Barron, curator of 20th century art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), "'Degenerate Art', The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany" offered an in-depth reflection on the exhibition of "Entartete Kunst" ordered by Hitler and presented in 1937 in Nazi Germany.[26] This reconstitution revived the original exhibition, while denouncing its dramatic consequences. It also drew a parallel with the American context in the early 1990s, a period marked by a rise of conservatism that threatened artistic freedom and censured several exhibitions and artworks. In other words, this reconstitution allowed the past to resonate with the present.

"The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany" was created using photo documentation, archival documents, film stills, and accounts from visitors. It brought together 150 seized artworks that had appeared in the original exhibition. While the exhibition featured works that were able to be restored after WWII, it also highlighted the many others that had been irretrievably lost. Stephanie Barron didn't try to fill these absences or gloss over this dark history; on the contrary, she foregrounded them, by leaving empty spaces in the detailed reproduction of the exhibition spaces in the catalogue. The critical and reflexive aspect of this *mise en abyme* didn't end there; one of the exhibition spaces was dedicated to a reconstruction of

26 See Barron, Stephanie (ed.). *"Degenerate Art," The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, Los Angeles County Museum, exhibition catalogue, Harry N. Abrams Publisher, 1991.

the original maquette, and the catalogue contained the 1937 catalogue, underlining its hateful and propagandistic nature. It should be said that a section of "Degenerate Art" also reproduced (and poked fun at) the avant-garde presentation modes of Berlin's "First International Dada Fair," in 1920.

One of the primary objectives of the reenactment is to retrace the trajectory of an exhibition by identifying a connection between the past and the present. In a text on the reconstruction of art works, Claire Bishop describes this temporal effect as being anachronistic: for Bishop, the reconstituted "object" is "an archival representation of the past, and a voice that speaks to the concern of today." [27] This anachronistic project brings a double temporality, and indeed a double historicity into play,[28] fostering a critical view of the past, while also recontextualizing the present.

Since the 1990s, reconstitutions have dynamized the documentation and study of exhibitions, while also creating spaces of reflection on their history. Can we thus view reconstitution as a research method? By way of conclusion, I would like to foreground the heuristic potential of the reconstitution, rather than its historical dimension. As I highlighted earlier, recreating an exhibition is like rewriting a script after the fact. This approach privileges experimentation, which is to say, working on the exhibition, within the exhibition, and

27 Bishop, Claire, "Reconstruction Era: The Anachronic Time(s) of Installation," in Germano Celant (ed.), *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969 / Venice 2013*, Milan, Progetto Prada Arte, 2013, p. 436.

28 Fraser, Marie and Florence-Agathe Dubé-Moreau. "Performer la collection," 2017.

29 This curatorial approach is rooted in the ideas of Paul O'Neil and Beatrice von Bismark. See O'Neil, Paul. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2012; and von Bismarck, Beatrice, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski (eds.). *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2012.

from the exhibition.[29] Pedagogically speaking, the example of "Montreal, plus or minus?" foregrounds the experimental aspects of this kind of method, and highlights its importance in studying exhibitions. The goal here is not to historicize an exemplary event as such, but rather to reflect on its conditions of possibility according to the epistemological and methodological issues that its object of study raises: the ephemeral nature of exhibitions, the precarity of their memory, the irreproducibility of their time and space, their unique materiality, the absence of documentary models or protocols, and the fact that their archives are necessarily assembled from fragmented and scattered sources. It is with these elements in mind that we might be able to envision reconstitution as a way of working with and against history.

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Making the Exhibition

Marie-Hélène Leblanc

The story of Galerie UQO began in spring 2015. There it was, just an empty exhibition space, and I was entrusted with the mandate of setting up a university gallery. So, I was charged with simultaneously developing a mandate, an organizational structure, research areas, a visual identity, and an artistic program. Curating as a field of research and exhibition as a language and medium took shape as decisive issues as the new gallery was being formed. It was at this time that I contacted Independent Curators International (ICI) in New York, a unique organization that focuses on the role of curating as a contextualizing force for contemporary art and that produces, among other things, exhibitions. I was drawn to the exhibition "Harald Szeemann: documenta 5," organized by David Platzker and put in circulation by ICI.[1] It was also at this time that I became interested in working with Mélanie Boucher, professor of museology at UQO, as we shared several research interests. So, together, we became involved in developing the ICI exhibition at Galerie UQO.

1 Starting the program with the Szeemann exhibition was in no way intended to glorify him but to mark the Galerie UQO's position with regard to exploration of the exhibition as a subject and its intention, in coming years, to delve into the different positions that emerge, including author, maker, and narrator of the exhibition.

My interest in Szeemann stems from both his curatorial posture, which he claimed as an authorial act, and his reflections on forms of exhibitions. As Béatrice von Bismarck observes about Szeemann, "When it comes to the formation and foundations of the profession of 'exhibition curator,' the authorial reach of this function, and the changes that the presentation of art has undergone since the 1960s, he is a standard reference." [2]

The Exhibition in a Box

> *But above all, he [Harald Szeemann] introduced a rupture in the very concept of the exhibition by inventing a structural "independent worker" position: the curator, creator, and author of exhibitions; he would more happily define it as a* maker of exhibitions. [3]

The exhibition arrived at the gallery in early fall 2016 in a cardboard box containing artworks and documents on documenta 5 (d5) and information on the main people involved. Specifically, the box contained forty items, including multiples by Joseph Beuys, Art & Language, Edward Ruscha, and Laurence Weiner, as well as the d5 catalogue, along with magazines, books,

2 Von Bismarck, Beatrice. "Harald Szeemann et l'art de l'exposition," trans. Marianne Dautrey, *Perspective* 1, 2013, p.176, http://journals.openedition.org/perspective/1992. Our translation of "Dès lors qu'il s'agit de la formation et des fondements du métier de « commissaire d'exposition », de la portée auctoriale de cette fonction, ou encore des changements qui ont affecté la présentation de l'art depuis les années 1960, il fait figure de référence."

3 Derieux, Florence. *Harald Szeemann, Méthodologie individuelle*, Paris, JRP Ringier, 2008, p. 8. Our translation of: "Mais il [Harald Szeemann] a surtout introduit une rupture dans le concept même d'exposition en inventant une position structurelle de « travailleur indépendant » : le curateur, créateur et auteur d'expositions ; lui-même se définira plus volontiers comme un *faiseur d'expositions*."

and newspaper clippings. The starring object in the box was the exhaustive, dense catalogue, presented as a two-ring binder, in a format compliant with European standards. Its orange vinyl cover features a serigraphed work, by Edward Ruscha, of ants arranged to form the number 5. The catalogue contains an index of artists, an introductory section, and separator tabs, which make it look more like a project submission dossier rather than a classic exhibition catalogue. The text is in German, English, and French.

The box came to us a few months before the exhibition, so we were able to integrate analysis and interpretation of its contents into two master's seminars at UQO—one for *Séminaire en muséologie et pratiques des arts : l'exposition* (Seminar on museology and art practices: The exhibition), and the other for *Atelier d'études langagières* (Language studies workshop). As a result, the materials contained in the box put in circulation by ICI were subsequently complemented by students' research and creation projects.

The exhibition design at Galerie UQO, developed by Mélanie Boucher and me and designed by Alexe Houtart, was conceived as a catalogue.[4] First, we used the same typography as had Szeemann in the d5 catalogue: Helvetica. The same graphic grid was used to produce the introductory essay: the long labels for each object and the texts in each section. We also presented

4 The catalogue was the research subject of Alexe Houtart, at the time a graphic design student. Her research took her to the Library and Archives of the National Gallery of Canada in order to better understand who, Ruscha or Szeemann, was the author of the catalogue's form. Although Ruscha had created the artwork on the cover, the form of the catalogue was in fact the work of Szeemann, who had done something similar for the catalogue for the exhibition "Quand les attitudes deviennent forme (Œuvres – Concepts – Processus – Situations – Information)" in 1968–69.

the opening text as a double page of the catalogue on the outside wall of the gallery. When visitors entered the gallery, it was as if, in a way, they were entering the catalogue. The presentation devices for the objects and texts were constructed to be easy to read. Composed almost entirely in black and white, the exhibition was punctuated with the colour orange, emblematic of the d5 poster and catalogue.

Five interacting sections, like five chapters in a catalogue, brought to light the artistic and social issues raised in the context of d5 and placed them in a contemporary perspective. The sections were on Szeemann, on documenta 5, on the status of the catalogue, on critiques of the event, and on the contributions of the art and the artists to the event and the debate. The research and creation contributions, which enhanced the materials from the box, included short videos, books, and images selected by Mélanie Boucher and me; in addition, several projects on museology and art practice were integrated. For example, Jean-Michel Quirion compiled and printed a full list of all those involved in d5, the ICI project, and the exhibition at Galerie UQO. Acknowledgment of the sociopolitical context of the time, post-1968 Germany, was presented in the form of a series of images on iPad by Laurence Buenerd, Gerardo Familiar Ferrer, and Safa Jomaa.

Under the supervision of Geneviève Has, lecturer in the Department of Languages Studies at UQO, the students in the department translated into French certain items in the box that were in German or English. The translations were used to produce labels for each of the objects displayed. It was the first time in the history of the circulation of ICI's exhibition in a box that labels

were produced in this way. In the exhibition's previous iterations, the objects had usually been simply placed on tables, with no mediation.

For Galerie UQO, the presentation of this exhibition was, first and foremost, an effort at taking a position for and making a commitment to curating and exhibition practices. By proposing a form of historical anchoring in the advent of independent curating and by analyzing the stance of the curator as maker of exhibitions, we wish to situate ourselves with a view to our future reflections and programs. This project will have offered an opportunity to demonstrate that Galerie UQO occupies an important place in students' academic career and to involve different disciplinary fields by playing an active role in developing a network among the university's departments, while presenting an eminently professional—and international-calibre—exhibition. The exhibition will bring the gallery and the university greater recognition thanks to its coverage in specialized publications. It will also make it possible to acknowledge that this type of exhibition is important in a context in which contemporary art and academic research are related. To date, no other exhibition at the gallery has drawn so many visitors.

The Exhibition as Medium

> *Contemporary art comes to us through the medium of the exhibition. History has shown that the other ways it makes itself manifest are fast becoming obsolete and regressive, no longer mobilizing talent, resources or attention.*[5]

5 Poinsot, Jean-Marc. "Large Exhibitions: A Sketch of a Typology," in Greenberg, Reesa, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne. *Thinking About Exhibitions*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 27.

Integrating the idea of the exhibition, considered as a medium or language, into the research and creation areas of Galerie UQO arose from both institutional and curatorial positions. For a university gallery that neither has nor manages a collection, concentrating on exploring the exhibition as a subject of study and regarding it as a medium involves a constant commitment to research and experimentation.

If exhibition is considered as a language, the curator defines its contours by adopting the role of author. This approach to the exhibition is deployed both by recounting the exhibition by using language as a working method and by manipulating the exhibition's narratives and texts. The stance of author, in Szeemann's view, is inscribed, notably, in the writing of the exhibition as a history:

> *It is to show you also that, for me, making exhibitions means writing histories that are always a bit more complicated. This also distinguishes me from many other curators; I see the exhibition is a means of expression, which does not make the work easier (in existing institutions or those that will be created in the immediate future.*[6]

For Galerie UQO, this method consists of thinking about and questioning each element of the textual

6 Bernard, Christian, Otto Hahn, Catherine Millet and Jean-Yves Jouannais. *Harald Szeemann (les grands entretiens d'artpress)*, Paris, IMEC éditeur/artpress, 2012, p. 26. Our translation of "C'est vous montrer aussi que, pour moi, faire des expositions, c'est écrire des histoires toujours un peu plus compliquées. C'est cela aussi qui me sépare de beaucoup d'autres conservateurs; pour moi, l'exposition est un moyen d'expression, ce qui ne facilite pas le travail (dans les institutions existantes ou à naître dans l'immédiat)."

and methodological content, and circumventing some approaches that are more conventional.

This leads us to consider the exhibition as a medium, a manipulable material whose components are unstable and shifting. There is nothing new in thinking about the exhibition as a medium; Szeemann did so during his career, as he expressed in a 2002 interview with Beti Žerovc: "I do what I have to do. I see myself functioning much more as an artist, without being an artist—one who has chosen the exhibition as his medium of expression." [7] In the context of a university art gallery, in which the making of exhibitions falls within a research and creation approach, promoting a critique of traditional strategies and exploring innovative practices, while allowing for errors, makes the design and production of exhibitions highly invigorating.

Organizing the exhibition *Szeemann* at Galerie UQO caused a sort of shock; as I handled the objects in the box, I realized that I had always worked with artworks, often in collaboration with the artists who had created these very works, and that the exhibition of documents represented a new challenge. How could an exhibition with newspaper articles, archival documents, books, and a catalogue be mounted—or, rather, be made *exhibitable*? This was not a new challenge to museology but a personal point of view: it was new to me. It offered an opportunity to think about the notion of language (exhibition as catalogue, translation, narrative) and about the notion of medium (the form of wall texts and devices, colours, materials).

7 Žerovc, B. "Interview with Harald Szeemann," *When Attitudes Become the Norm: The Contemporary Curator and Institutional Art*, Berlin, Archive Books, 2018, p. 88.

Marie-Hélène Leblanc has been the director and curator of Galerie UQO at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, since 2015. As a curator, she has organized more than thirty projects presented in various exhibition venues in Quebec, Canada, and Europe. She was previously executive director of the artist-run centre Espace Virtuel in Chicoutimi (now known as BANG) and artistic director of the DAÏMŌN production centre in Gatineau. She has also taught visual arts at the college and university levels. She is a doctoral student in art studies and practices at the Université du Québec à Montréal. In 2018, she received the Prix Relève, an award for those with emerging practices, from the Société des musées du Québec; previously, in 2013, she received the Bourse Jean-Claude Rochefort, for curating of contemporary art, from the Fondation de l'UQAM.

A Performative Response

The Exhibition as Material / The Materiality of the Exhibition

Mathieu Copeland

> *What remains of an exhibition, once it has run its course, is crystallised in its catalogue, the materials it generated, and the memories of those who experienced it. Yet the exhibition that once was is also a material—equal to any other—and as such can be reprised weeks, months or years later, and in different contexts.*[1]

With the 2011 series "Reprises," I proposed revisiting an exhibition as an invitation to consider its memory, and to reinsert it into reality by using the catalogue as score, with the goal of "interpreting" a new exhibition. Past reality is thus reappropriated and revisited through the presentation of a "bootlegged" exhibition. More specifically, the idea was to organize an exhibition without choosing any of the artworks that were to make it be. Here, the reprised exhibition functions as an echo of the original, now in expansion, evolving from what it once was.

1 In Copeland, Mathieu. "Reprise," 2011, published as an introduction to "Reprises."

In this essay, I consider both the exhibition as material, and the materiality of the exhibition. In so doing, I aim to address what an exhibition *can be*, in order to deconstruct what it is normally understood *to be*. Indeed, we need to push back against what is widely accepted as the nature of the exhibition by reinventing its possible forms and reflecting on its inherent materialities. We must address the mechanisms that make up exhibition contexts, and thus redefine what curating is, while also questioning both the role of the exhibition curator and the tacitly accepted ideas around current exhibition curating. To conceive of an exhibition is to take manifest once voice. An exhibition curator is in turn and simultaneously a choreographer, a filmmaker, and a writer. An exhibition curator builds up a repertoire, and asserts a unique approach to their art.

The Exhibition as Material

"Voids. A Retrospective" was a retrospective of "empty" exhibitions, beginning with Yves Klein's launch of the genre in 1958. "Voids" was organized by a curatorial committee consisting of John Armleder, Mai-Thu Perret, Gustav Metzger, Clive Phillpot and myself. As is often the case, the desire to work together as a collective stemmed from an initial discussion, in this case one I had organized with John Armleder and Gustav Metzger for another context: the book that accompanied my exhibition "Soundtrack for an Exhibition" (MAC Lyon, 2006), which I was working on at the time. Mai-Thu Perret and Clive Phillpot joined us, and altogether we continued the discussion that would eventually result in "Voids. A Retrospective," at the Centre Pompidou from February 25 to March 23, 2009,

and then at the Bern Kunsthalle from September 13 to October 11, 2009. "Voids" was a historical retrospective that posed several questions: the questions of *reproduction*, *reenactment*, and *reprise*. As a specifically historical retrospective, it seemed essential for us to write this history together, through discussions with various historians, artists, curators and researchers, who can all be found in the wide-ranging publication that accompanies the exhibition, and embodies its lasting trace.

At Centre Pompidou, each room in the exhibition was empty, with a simple explanatory text panel at the entrance to each space. Texts were also presented in the information leaflet, and, more monumentally, on the walls of the corridors outside the exhibition spaces, and in the common areas of the museum. The dimensions of the spaces didn't correspond exactly to the originals: the empty exhibitions by Stanley Brown, Bethan Huws, and Maria Eichhorn, for example, were originally designed to occupy entire museums (Mönchengladbach Städtisches Museum [1973], Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld [1993], and the Bern Kunsthalle [2001], respectively). It was, of course, impossible for us to reproduce these spaces and durations. We thus took these empty exhibitions rather as scores to be interpreted. As we wrote in the catalogue, "A retrospective of exhibitions (is) a genre of its own to be explored!" [2]

We brought these empty exhibitions together in a sequence of empty spaces with the goal of creating

2 Copeland, Mathieu. "Qualifier le vide," Armleder, John, Mathieu Copeland, Gustav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot, *Vides. Une rétrospective*, JRP Ringier, 2009, p. 171.

a historical retrospective, an invitation to visitors to experience these "emptinesses" in the present-day, to experience the differences between the original and the reconstitution, while also bearing witness to their formal similarities. It was necessary to experience these exhibitions within museum spaces, as mentioned in our catalogue text, as these were "events where a totally empty space, museum, or gallery was shown. [...] With this perspective, a number of works, of empty exhibitions, were selected with the idea of devoting a room to each of them. These surfaces are used almost allegorically to represent the exhibitions in question. Only a label marks the work allocated to each room. These have not been modified and partake of the permanent architecture of the museum where the retrospective takes place. There is therefore clearly no intention to reconstitute the original sites of the works exhibited, no documentary endeavour, nor material authenticity in the presentation. In the same spirit, no period documents, invitation cards, or exhibition announcements, catalogues, or photographs are added to the display. The idea is truly to face empty exhibitions. This is obviously a slightly polemical and subjective, even questionable, position, especially since it is not sustained by a credo or a theory, but by a critical and practical intention." [3]

"Voids" took place at the Centre Pompidou in 2009, and the architecture of the spaces was not modified in any way. The Centre's transition to a white cube type space dates from the early 1990s, at odds with

3 Armleder, John, Mathieu Copeland, Gutav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot. "Vides. Une rétrospective," *Vides. Une rétrospective*, JRP Ringier, p. 29.

architects Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers' original open-area design, without walls and dividers, where each zone is adaptable and multifunctional. The spaces in "Voids" were indeed white cubes, but they were not necessarily white cubes in the traditional sense. For its part, the Bern Kunsthalle is radically different than the Centre Pompidou, architecturally speaking; it was founded by and for artists in 1911, and its architecture reflects this heritage. It's interesting to note that although the Kunsthalle's walls were originally brown, they are now white, as are those of the vast majority of contemporary art institutions, where the white cube has become the norm.

Retrospective exhibitions like "Voids" propose a window onto the history of immaterial exhibitions, and allow us to retrace the sensations that these original exhibitions evoked. Experiencing these exhibitions is a rare and indeed unique opportunity to experience a void, without directly reproducing past events. By offering this experience of the void, these exhibitions push the limit of the museum experience: leaving a museum empty is another form of exhibition-making. With "Voids," the museum undresses, and lays itself bare for all to see.

The critique that lays in the heart of "Voids" is first and foremost the one expressed by the artists themselves, and this is why, in the introduction, we state that "the artwork is, always, a provocation."[4] The institutional critique present in the exhibition was, for example, articulated by the members of Art

4 Armleder, John, Mathieu Copeland, Gutav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot. "Vides. Une rétrospective," *Vides. Une rétrospective*, p. 31.

& Language, who, in our discussions about *The Air Conditioning Show* (1966-67), reminded me that the project was a critique of European museums, which then did not have air conditioning (as opposed to most North American museums). Laurie Parsons was another instigator of institutional critique, and her contribution here foregrounds it—a reenactment of her third solo show at NYC's Lorence-Monk Gallery in 1990, an exhibition she had chosen to present entirely empty. Maria Eichhorn's exhibition, "Money" at the Kunsthalle Bern in 2001, embodies institutional critique in exemplary fashion. Eichhorn's exhibition addressed the occasional necessity of emptiness, leaving the gallery empty in order to reallocate the exhibition's production budget to the institution's renovations. The exhibition thus becomes an event in itself. With "Voids," the exhibitions are realized anew by the institution, effectively giving them form, and body.

Through this retrospective of empty exhibitions, we were able to experience (and experiment with) the retrospective as a genre. We explored the extreme limits of art, while also confronting head-on viewers' expectations, and directly questioning what forms aesthetics and politics can take. To quote the words Albert Camus left in the guest book at Yves Klein's empty exhibition of 1958: "with the Void, full powers." In our retrospective, we invoke "The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility," [5] Klein's exhibition presented at Galerie Iris Clert in 1958, the first recorded empty

5 "La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée," Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, 1958.

exhibition, not only for art historians, but also for Klein himself, who indeed qualified this exhibition as *the void*.[6] Paratext doesn't define the text, rather, it accompanies it, and for Klein, the exhibition is embodied by the experience of the empty space, imbued with *stabilized pictorial sensitivity*. I would thus venture to say that the artwork is not the frame. That being said, some months before his death, in June of 1962, Klein created his last void outside the frame. On January 26, 1962, at 8:00 in the morning, he took down the paintings exhibited in the Salon Violet of the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris. This was Klein's contribution to the Musée's *Salon Comparaisons*, to be shown in March and April of that year.[7]

To exhibit is necessarily to physically compose the set-up of an exhibition. I thus prefer the term "to choreograph." In a way, a retrospective of empty exhibitions choreographs visitors' movements without any of the usual obstacles! On the other hand, a retrospective of empty exhibitions creates the necessity of various forms of textual communication (posters, flyers, titles, cartels, etc.), as well as archives pertaining to past exhibitions. As such, our publication also contains both historical documents and documentation connected to associated events, such as the symposium. These related forms (paratexts, or to borrow Grigely's provocative term, exhibition prosthetics—we will return to this later) are no more adapted to the

6 Klein Blue was amply referenced at the 1958 exhibition, via textile arrangements outside the gallery, a blue cocktail served during the vernissage, and Klein's wish to illuminate the Obelisk at Place de la Concorde in blue (which didn't end up being realized).

7 An artwork that exists solely via Harry Shunk's photographs, reproduced in the catalogue.

situation than is the retrospective, as the provocation of the artwork itself becomes necessary, if these tools are to be more than pure historical speculation, and indeed a veritable means of facilitating new interpretations of past exhibitions.

But, let us not forget: "Voids. A Retrospective," couldn't have existed without the artists themselves, whether through their original works (the exhibition), or through their re-articulation by the curator (the retrospective). These particular voids were all violently magnificent artist-led exhibitions, or exhibition-artworks, or exhibitions as artworks, or actions around the theme of emptiness, or exhibitions where all that was shown was an empty space, gallery, or museum.

Embodying as they do the repetition of past actions and practices, it is necessary for us to question curatorial models of the past. Let's return to the introduction to the "Voids" catalogue, where we note that "there is therefore clearly no intention to reconstitute the original sites of the works exhibited, no documentary endeavour, nor material authenticity in the presentation." [8] Temporality, duration, and historical landscapes are ubiquitous, but it is the landscapes of today that we must consider in the present moment. As such, in keeping with our non-historicist approach, we assigned the spaces to artists in chronological order (so as to allocate impartially, and not subjectively). I also extended this curatorial approach to the realization of "A Retrospective of Closed Exhibitions," at the Fribourg Kunsthalle from

8 "Vides. Une rétrospective," John Armleder, Mathieu Copeland, Gutav Metzger, Mai-Thu Perret, Clive Phillpot. In *Vides. Une rétrospective*, JRP Ringier, p. 29.

August 5 to November 19, 2016, where I divided the total duration of the retrospective by the number of artists, giving each an equal duration of closure.

Let's consider again the white spaces of "Voids" at the Centre Pompidou. No temporary walls were built. The exhibition didn't take place on the 6th floor of the Centre, where temporary exhibitions are usually presented, but rather on the 4th floor, where the permanent collection are exhibited. For the exhibition, the artworks from the collection were removed from the spaces, leaving the Centre's architecture bare. Again, our goal was not to reconstruct these empty spaces in an allegorical or representational mode, but rather to create a retrospective of empty exhibitions within the architecture of a specific institution. A decidedly forward-thinking perspective for a retrospective that creates an exhibition via emptiness: to empty a museum with the goal of exhibiting, thus exhibiting emptiness.

The Materiality of the Exhibition

"What remains of an exhibition, once it has run its course, is crystallised in its catalogue, the materials it generated, and the memories of those who experienced it"—as we call it in the introduction to "Reprises"[9] (I could have used the word "protocol," but as Pierre

9 Reprise #5, "Art & Language - Jeu de Paume (1993/2013)," Jeu de Paume, Paris, 15/10/2013 - 26/01/2014.
Reprise #4, "Exposición Internacional del Surrealismo - México (1940/2013) ," Casa Maauad, México—2013.
Reprise #3, "PUBLICATION—Nigel Greenwood Inc Ltd (1970/2013)," Bikini, Lyon—2013.
Reprise #2, "Studies for a Catalogue: Cent Millions d'Étoiles—MAC Lyon (1999/2012)" , Musée des Moulages, Lyon, 2012.
Reprise #1, "Studies for a Catalogue: a Study for an Exhibition of Violence in Contemporary Art—ICA London (1964/2011)," Flat Time House, London–24/06/2011–31/07/2011.

Huyghe reminds us, military vocabulary is obviously not ideal)—"[...] A catalogue generally makes available the details of the works that were included in an exhibition. It 'reproduces' images of the artefacts that made it be and/or views of the exhibition itself. Catalogues are at best the memory of an exhibition, at worst its checklist."[10]

The reprise of the exhibition "Art & Language," which was originally presented at Jeu de Paume from November 9, 1993, to January 2, 1994, embodied the desire to revisit the memory of this event, and to imbue it with a new reality. Without any work actually being shown, the past exhibition was reconsidered through its catalogue, which we used much like a musical score. Presented at Jeu de Paume from October 15, 2013, to January 26, 2014, the sound recording (engineered by Jonathan Reig) of the entire publication—read in French by Olivier Claverie, and in English by Kate Lith—allowed for a new appreciation of this exhibition, and its relationship to text. It rendered a distant echo of the original, affirming the exhibition as a material that is constantly expanding and that, as such, can be reused in a different context, weeks, months, or years later. Through this projected (re)reading, which was a new event in and of itself, the catalogue thus became the libretto for an exhibition that is forever a work in progress.

10 In Copeland, Mathieu. "Reprise," 2011, published as an introduction to "Reprises."

02/09/2013

Dear Mathieu,

We like the idea of the catalogue as "libretto," however tenuous it might be. You may be aware that we've been involved in various "theory installation" projects with The Jackson Pollock Bar. Various theoretical texts of ours have functioned as the "libretto" for what might be thought of as operatic performances (by "playback technique") by the actors. The vocal production of an actual catalogue could indeed be operatic—but on a very grand scale: the Gesamtkunstwerk, perhaps without its attendant horrors.

We are, however, tempted to say, choose your catalogue carefully. (Well, it seems you already have.) The content of a substantial proportion of the institutional catalogues of contemporary art is as vacuous as they are interchangeable. Perhaps that presents you with an interesting problem: can the performance of a voice sublate a crappy catalogue?

Anyway, your idea is a good one. Let us know what we can do.

With best regards,
Michael, Mel.[11]

11 A personal letter from Art & Language members Michael Baldwin and Mel Ramsden.

Let's ask ourselves the question of what defines exhibitions? What can an artwork-less exhibition become? And what about its corollary—can an exhibition become an artwork? Exhibitions are not the works that make them be, although artworks are what allow exhibitions to exist.

With the manifesto-book *Choreographing Exhibitions*, I proposed a possible definition of the classicism that marks most exhibitions as a temporary grouping together of disparate objects within a given space. The spaces are interchangeable, the durations variable, the objects many and varied. The number and diversity of the exhibited objects can vary as well. The space of the exhibition is not the space of the institution. It's not a question of simply filling up a three-dimensional space. The materiality of the exhibition embraces the specific reality of each institution, and indeed goes beyond it. How can we consider the autonomy of exhibitions in relation to those who make them be? How can the exhibition become autonomous and self-sufficient?

In distinguishing its materiality from its material potential, we can see that the exhibition is not a medium per se, in the sense that the exhibition might be a film, a choreography, a show, a book, or a record. In playing with the many meanings of the word, an exhibition is also not a medium in the sense that it doesn't tell the future. However, an exhibition *is* a medium in which *we* might be able to read the future. The exhibition is a medium in and of itself. We can choreograph exhibitions. The exhibition is time: the time taken to consider the artwork, and the time needed to understand the whole of the exhibition, giving rise to the process

whereby we understand the exhibition, and whereby the corresponding affect is brought to completion.

The Limits of Paratext

All exhibitions are accompanied by a group of texts that present and represent the exhibition, and, as such, make it present (to transpose Gérard Genette's expression from literature to exhibition-making). These related forms, or paratexts (again, to use a term from Genette), or prosthetics (to use Joseph Grigely's more provocative designation) are composed of, but not limited by, the name of the artist, the name of the curator, the title, the wall texts, the labels, the list of artworks, the audio guide, etc.

As such, Joseph Grigely questions the reality of the exhibition: "where does an exhibition begin and end? Is an exhibition just about the materialization of specific works of art, or is it also—and if so, in what ways—about the various conventions that go into the making of exhibitions, which include press releases, announcement cards, checklists, catalogues, and digital-based media?" [12] Grigely prefers to speak of exhibition prosthetics: "I use the critical term 'exhibition prosthetics' to describe an array of these conventions, particularly (but not exclusively) in relation to exhibition practices." [13]

Gérard Genette quotes J. Hillis Miller, who, in *The Critic as Host*,defines "para" as being an "antithetical prefix signifying at once proximity and distance,

12 Grigely, Joseph. *Exhibition Prosthetics*, Ed. Zak Kyes. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010, p. 6.

13 Grigely, Joseph. *Exhibition Prosthetics*, p. 7

similarity and difference, interiority and exteriority [...], something simultaneously this side of the boundary line, threshold, or margin, and at the same time beyond it, equivalent in status and at the same time secondary or subsidiary, submissive, as of guest to host, slave to master. A thing in 'para' is, moreover, not only simultaneously on both sides of the boundary line between inside and outside. It is also the boundary itself, the screen which is at once a permeable membraneconnecting inside and outside, confusing them with one another, allowing the outside in, making the inside out, dividing them but also forming an ambiguous transition between one and the other." [14]

The relationship to prosthetics is a relationship of extension, but an extension made up of negative space, as opposed to the exhibition. And while the materiality of the exhibition is uncertain, immaterial, and intangible, it is also eminently intelligible, intellectual, compelling, beautiful, moving, experimental and experiential. The prosthesis has to be all these things. It must contribute to restoring a broken entity, a fragmented and incomplete reality. While the prosthesis is indeed attached to the exhibition, it doesn't belong to the exhibition, and can always remind its host that it isn't only a mere complement, but that it also contributes to the exhibition's core identity. In this sense, the exhibition acts against the site, entirely against, to borrow Sacha Guitry's expression. Let us consider those instances where the exhibition itself is the paratext, on the formal level, as with "Voids," for example. In this case, the retrospective indeed becomes

14 As published in J.Hillis Miller, *Deconstruction and Criticism*, Seabury Press, 1979.

exhibition via its paratext, hence the labels, wall texts, and information sheets providing information on the seemingly absent artworks, and thus embodying them, in a sense. Sometimes, the exhibition shares the same materiality as the artworks it contains, blurring the line between the presentation of the work, and our experience of it. Such was the motivation behind "A Spoken Word Exhibition" (2007). Lawrence Weiner's contribution, "As Long As It Lasts," sums up the exhibition's modus operandi: to bring together artworks that last the duration that it takes to articulate them within an exhibition that lasts as long as it takes to listen to these articulations.

When we exhibit, paratext is never far off. For Genette, *paratext = peritext + epitext*. If we shift from the text context to the exhibition context, paratext becomes crucial. Exhibition paratexts are the structuring elements of the exhibition's perceivable architecture. These *para-exhibitions* are everything that bring the exhibition into being, that present and represent it, and that make it visible before our eyes.

What are these sites of the exhibition, titles, texts, and other moments of expression? The exhibition is not defined by its artworks, but by the perceivable space *in between* the artworks. This "in between space," whether physical or temporal, is where a certain sensitivity and intelligence emerges, an expression of the "third mind,"[15] to misuse William Burroughs and Brion Gysin's expression. Between two artworks, a dialogue necessarily transpires: a desire, a thought, an experiment, or an illustration. The exhibition itself

15 Burroughs, Willian and Brion Gysin. *The Third Mind*, Viking Press, 1978.

is indeed what emerges, an immaterial totality that foregrounds its own workings, becoming autonomous, and coming into being.

However, rather than focusing on prosthetics or paratext, I would like to borrow from the vocabulary of botany, with an eye to better understanding the logic of grafting, cuttings, and enhanced organisms. Because the exhibition itself is an organism, replicated, transplanted, an organism that brings together, that becomes whole. The graft of a foreign body that adapts to its host, and comes to share a materiality with it. A symbiosis that finds its place, and that takes root.

Let's look more closely at the botanical definition of these terms. Cutting is a plant propagation technique that consists of creating a new individual from an isolated organ or organ fragment, and placing it on a mineral substrate. Like cloning, the plant produced by cutting is genetically identical to the mother plant. This process occurs via cellular dedifferentiation within the meristem. Grafting, on the other hand, is a reproductive technique where a bud or other fragment from one plant (the graft) is implanted in the tissue of another plant (the rootstock). The graft is introduced into the "plant substrate" in such a way that the two elements continue to grow, eventually becoming one. These two forms of plant reproduction, dedifferentiation and totipotency (the ability of a cell to differentiate and structure itself as multicellular life form) are closely related.

The catalogue/exhibition dyad contributes to the overall feeling that makes up the Exhibition. The catalogue, which one might call the second generation of the exhibition, is far too often a genetic reproduction of

the parent exhibition. And while too many exhibitions are theses (or ideas, or intuitions) simply adapted to a physical space, catalogues, for their part, do not represent the original thought in its ideal form of a book, which is essentially text illustrated by selected artworks. It would perhaps be more interesting to view the catalogue and the exhibition as two autonomous entities that come together by way of grafting, two elements that mutually feed off each other, that acknowledge each other, that accept each other's differences, and that help each other grow.

In conclusion, let's try to reconsider those moments where the exhibition as materiality and the materiality of the exhibition share a form of common materiality. All these elements contribute to the *feeling* of an exhibition. The materiality of an exhibition is fuelled by the artworks that make it up, and exhibitions indeed stem from the materiality of these same artworks. This brings us to consider the exhibition and the catalogue via new means: a paper exhibition (a project currently in development).

Mathieu Copeland is an exhibition curator born in 1977, now based in London. His curatorial practice aims to subvert the traditional role of the exhibition, and to renew our ways of perceiving it.

Copeland co-curated the exhibition "Voids. A Retrospective" at the Centre Pompidou—Paris and the Kunsthalle—Bern in 2009, and co-edited the anthology VOIDS. Among many others, he curated "Soundtrack for an Exhibition" (2006), "Alan Vega, Infinite Mercy" (2009), and "Gustav Metzger" (2013) at Musée d'Art contemporain de Lyon; "A Mental Mandala," at Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo de Mexico (2013); and "A Choreographed Exhibition," at the St. Gallen Kunsthalle and La Ferme du Buisson, in Noisiel (2007-2008). Copeland initiated the series "Spoken Word Exhibitions," "Reprises," and "Exhibitions to Hear Read," at MoMA New York (2013). His recent exhibitions include "A retrospective of closed exhibitions," at the Fribourg Kunsthalle (2016), "L'Exposition d'un rêve," at Fondation Calouste Gulbenkian, in Paris (2017), "Exhibition Cuttings," at Fondation Hermès, in Tokyo (2021), and "A Staged Exhibition," at la Ferme du Buisson (2021).

Guest curator for the 9th edition of Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon (2007-2008), at Jeu de Paume, in Paris (2013-2014), and, with Philippe Decrauzat, at Plateau—Frac Île-de-France Paris (2014-2015), Copeland has also published the anthology-manifesto Choreographing Exhibitions (Les presses du réel, 2013), and realized the exhibition of a film, an exhibition as feature-length film, in 2015. In 2017, he co-edited the radical anthology The Anti-Museum (Koenig Books) and, in 2019, Gustav Metzger, an anthology of the artist's writings (JRP|Editions).

From reprise to response: fragments from a conversation between Sophie Bélair Clément and Vincent Bonin

Sophie Bélair Clément and Vincent Bonin

Vincent Bonin: Both of us have fed our shared interest for the epistemological question of reexhibition over the course of several individual and collaborative projects, but also through a discussion that has been ongoing for almost ten years. We'll be sharing some fragments of that discussion here. In 2010, we visited the exhibition "Play Van Abbe - Part 2 - Time Machines" together at the Van Abbe Museum, in Eindhoven. It was during this visit that you discovered the remake of El Lissitzky's *Prounen-Raum* (1923) that was to become the support structure for your installation *Salle Proun : mur, bois, couleur*, 1923 (1965/1971/2010), presented at the 2011 Triennale Québécoise. At that time, you had already created several works that borrowed fragments from other exhibitions, and reconfigured them within a new space (for example, *Le son du projecteur*, Optica, 2009; *Salle 1, Collection d'Antiques*, Clark, 2011). Could you elaborate on the role of this recurrent strategy in your practice, and on how, in many of these cases, the pretext of

reconstruction/reexhibition stems largely from institutional invitations, thus embodying a response to economic constraints, among other things?

Sophie Bélair Clément: The wall text in the Van Abbe Museum exhibition read: "El Lissitzky. 1890 Potsjinok - 1941 Schodnia (RUS) Proun ruimte / Proun Space, 1923 (reconstructie 1971) beschilderd hout / painted wood cat. 634, verworven / acquired in 1971." While reading this text, I wondered to myself what really took place, on a cognitive level, when this version of the piece was integrated into the collection, thirty years after the death of the artist? I remember the patina of the paint on the walls at the Van Abbe (the reconstructed 1971 version by Jean Leering); the translucent ceiling of the version exhibited at the Berlinische Galerie (the first reconstruction, also designed by Leering, in 1965); the strange impression of a lower ceiling and cooler lighting at the MoMA (a replica of Leering's reconstruction interpreted by Lana Hum for the exhibition "On Line Drawing Through the Twentieth Century," 2010-2011). How does one explain the absence of the dark square on the floor (it can be seen in the lithography showing an axonometric view of *Proun* [Kestner Portfolio, Proun 6, 1923]), and from which the three-dimensional reconstruction was partially based? In the brief description in the 1923 Großen Berliner Kunstausstellung exhibition catalogue, the walls of *Prounen-Raum* are equated with the painted wooden elements and colour palettes used: *Wand*, *Holz*, *Farbe*. If reproduction operates here as a mode both of reading

and of projection, reexhibition also implies a certain shift in sensory perception. When I received the invitation from the 2011 Triennale at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, I was told there was no budget for production costs as such. There was, however, money for constructing display modules, plinths, etc. It was in response to these specific conditions that the project took shape, and through closely examining *Proun*'s interior, which seemed to me to have been neglected throughout the various reconstructions of the space, all while embodying a supposedly neutral empty enclosure as presentation context.

[...]

In your statement displayed at the entrance to the first iteration of "D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant / Actors, Networks, Theories," you refer to a conversation with an artist during which he asks you, "what do you want from me?" [1] You reply by saying that you wish to write an essay on his work. How does this desire to write align with the need to exhibit?

VB Before addressing your question, I should perhaps provide some context for readers. "D'un discours," presented in 2015 in two parts (at the Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery in 2014, and at Dazibao in 2015), examined the various trajectories of French Theory's discursive evolution within English-speaking art scenes (American, British, Canadian) since the late 1960s.

1 Curator's statement (vinyl lettering) reproduced in Bonin, Vincent. *D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant / Actors, Networks, Theories*, eds. France Choinière and Michèle Thériault, Montréal, Dazibao and Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery, Concordia University, 2018, p. 54.

Several of the artists I invited were also occasional exhibition creators. Some of them (Andrea Fraser, R.H. Quaytman, Gareth James and Jason Simon) had been members of the artist-run initiative Orchard, in NYC, whose activities were mostly based in a reevaluation of the art historical canons of institutional critique. It was Gareth James who had jokingly asked me, "what do you want from me?" during a conversation. We had been talking about how curators often take the liberty of claiming an assemblage of varied objects and statements as being "their" text, sometimes giving rise to "misrecognition." In this introductory statement, I evoked the desire to write, as I didn't want people to confuse the exhibition with the authorship of the book, also titled *D'un discours*, which I was writing at the time. During our discussion, James raised the issue of the limitations inherent to a given artistic project. For example, how might one describe ideological operations that privilege intentionality over the history of anonymous materials (considerations that go beyond the ready-made)? Throughout several years, James systematically placed an element from one of his previous exhibitions in the exhibition he was currently working on, thus establishing a sequence. In 2008, at the Christian Nagel Gallery, in Cologne, among other works, he exhibited a stolen bicycle, whose illegal existence was the source of his series shown the following year at the Elizabeth Dee Gallery, in NYC. James used the bicycle's inner tube as grapheme, or smallest possible unit of written meaning. By bending the rubber tube, one of his structures reproduced the lines of a diagram that philosopher Louis Althusser had drawn on the blackboard during one of his classes. According

to James's research, no one had been able to determine the date of this class, nor the meaning of the diagram. James also repeated different configurations of this motif, or "floating signifier" in his following exhibition, in 2011, at the Miguel Abreu Gallery. This exhibition wove together several episodes from the history of "French thought" tainted by Althusser's murder of his wife, Hélène Rytmann-Legotien, in 1980. In "D'un discours," the contribution from Julie Ault, member of the now defunct collective Group Material, was based on the ambivalent act of referencing an exhibition when the artists have specifically stated their desire to not reexhibit works to the curator. The members of Group Material had always declined to recreate their installations from the 1980s-90s when invited to do so. I had a long discussion with Julie Ault (who only agreed to participate with this caveat having been made clear) on the best way to show remaining archival traces of the project *Resistance (Anti-Baudrillard)*, created in 1987 for White Columns, in New York, without attempting to reconstruct the exhibitions. At the time, during the tumultuous Culture Wars, the collective wanted to take a stance against the cynicism typified by Baudrillard in providing evidence that political art was still possible, here by means of an action bringing together agitprop works by artists from their affinity-based network. In the "D'un discours" exhibition, before entering into the space where *Resistance (Anti-Baudrillard)* was shown, visitors encountered a multiple from *Prison*, a 1987 work by Peter Halley, at the time an ardent defender of Baudrillard and member of the Neo-Geo movement (of which Jeff Koons was the most famous representative). Halley had been one

of the "targets" of the community of artists revolving around Group Material. Julie Ault and I decided to blow up Ken Schles's photographs, which systematically documented the walls of White Columns in high definition. In the collective's archives (now kept in the Downtown Collection at New York University's Fales Library) we identified the sole material residue of the exhibition (which is to say, the only fragment that we could exhibit, according to Group Material's aforementioned proscription): *Namibia in Struggle: Portable Exhibition of Photographs*. In 1987, this chronicle of the rise of apartheid was disseminated by the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa. During *Resistance (Anti-Baudrillard)*, the lengthy document had been pinned over an entire wall. For "D'un discours," we exhibited it in "museum-mode," laid out flat in a large display case. In parallel with Schles's exhibition views and this "portable" archival fragment, we showed a single episode of the 1976 TV series *Six fois deux/Sur et sous la communication*, by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville. In 1987, dozens of hours of the series had been exhibited in a program including many films and videos presented on two monitors. For Group Material, Godard and Miéville's collaborative practice was a counter-example to Baudrillard's nihilistic philosophy within the field of "imported" French thought available in translation (the series had been subtitled by the BBC). In the episode we showed (6a, *Avant et après*), Godard verbally summarizes all the previous episodes, while a headphone-wearing collaborator repeats his words with a slight delay. In favouring the fragment over the completeness of restitution, certain artists in "D'un

discours" (Julie Ault, Gareth James and several others) decided to detach themselves from the formalism of reenactment, and thus from the logic of exhibition canonization. In one of the texts from her 2010 book, *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material* (which brings together a detailed history of the collective beginning in 1979), Ault states that "contexts cannot be replicated. It is impossible to reproduce the climate of circumstances and perceptions and understanding for events." [2] Rather than reading the failure of a historically focused undertaking into this statement, we should perhaps see there a reflection on the difficulty inherent to transmission itself. The set of affects associated with the political activism of this period cannot be conjured up by merely presenting the same configuration of artworks, nor via a narrative on the past.

SBC Does the question of posthumous space have a place in Julie Ault's practice? I'm thinking of Derrida's reflections on the subject: "Within the singularity of the event, repetition must already be at work, and repetition must have already initiated the erasure of the first occurrence, hence the mourning, the posthumous, the loss that cements this first instant of the event as being the origin." [3] If death already comes into play with the inaugural event, what type of space does re-exhibition generate? It was with these questions in mind (without, however, having explicitly articulated them) that I

2 Ault, Julie. "Case Reopened: Group Material," in *Show and Tell: A Chronicle of Group Material*, ed. Julie Ault, London, Four Corners Books, 2010, p. 212.

3 Derrida, Jacques. "Une certaine possibilité impossible de dire l'évènement," in *Dire l'évènement, est-ce possible ? Séminaire de Montréal, pour Jacques Derrida*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001, p. 100.

was reflecting on the context of the 2011 Triennale, among other things, by asking Benoit Bourdeau to reconstruct a *Proun* space based on a group of images taken from different recreations that I had seen exhibited. The result is much closer to a mausoleum than it is to Lissitzky's original work.

VB Yes, a mausoleum that evokes the possibility of an absence of meaning (rather than the absence of a body), before institutional mediation comes into play, re-suturing the discourse together, and thus filling the void. I feel that your work evokes the event that is the irreversible loss of the experience of the original context, at least on the temporal plane. Julie Ault, for her part, attempts to reconstitute a history of Group Material partially because, for a time, she herself was the custodian of these initially delocalized archives, gathered by several people throughout the existence of the collective. Ault aims to respect all these voices, including those who have chosen silence.

In *Proun Room : murs, bois, couleurs (1923, 1965, 1971, 2010)* (2011), it seems to me that you removed the main elements present in El Lissitzky's original project (the wall works) with the goal of amplifying this rustling, this historical murmuring that is always displaced. In this instance, in order to truly hear it, one had to leave the exhibition space and go to the mediathèque of the museum, where you had deposited a large number of documents chronicling your research process on the numerous reconstructions in detail, giving rise to the cube as approximative embodiment of all readings of the original work, in their varying degrees of fidelity. The file is still kept in the mediathèque,

which is presently closed to the public. As you note, these different registers draw us into an experience of mourning, for, if we agree with Freud's definition,[4] what occurs here is effectively a replacement (and not a substitution) of one thing by another [...].[5]

August 2020

4 Freud, Sigmund. *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, translated by Shaun Whiteside, Penguin Modern Classics, 2005 [1917].

5 For more on the repetition as a concept, see Sabeth Buchmann, Ilse Lafer and Constanze Ruhm (eds.). *Putting Rehearsals to the Test. Practices of Rehearsal in Fine Arts, Film, Theater, Theory, and Politics*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2016, p. 196-210.

Vincent Bonin lives and works in Montréal. With curator Catherine J. Morris, he co-organized "Materializing 'Six Years': Lucy R. Lippard and the Emergence of Conceptual Art" at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, in 2012-2013, with a catalogue published by MIT Press. In 2013-2014, he conceived the two-part exhibition "D'un discours qui ne serait pas du semblant/Actors, Networks, Theories" at the Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery and Dazibao in Montréal, on the reception of French Theory in the anglophone art milieu. The exhibition's publication was launched in 2018. In 2015, he organized "Passages vers l'abstraction: Geneviève Cadieux" at the Musée d'art de Joliette. In 2016, he organized an exhibition on the work of French philosopher Catherine Malabou titled "Réponse/Response," presented at the Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides in Saint-Jérôme. His essays have been published by, among others, Galerie 1700 La Poste (Montréal), the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Kingston), Canadian Art (Toronto), Fillip (Vancouver), the Centre André Chastel (Paris), the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, and the Vancouver Art Gallery.

Vincent Bonin and Sophie Belair Clément have been in conversation for over ten years in the form of group exhibitions, academic conferences, and collaboratively conceived publications around shared theoretical concerns.

Sophie Bélair Clément is an artist and author, and holds a PhD in Literature and Art History and Theory (Université de Montréal/Université de Rennes 2). She currently teaches at the École multidisciplinaire de l'image at the Université du Québec en Outaouais. With Marie Claire Forté, she co-organized the exhibition "I'd rather something ambiguous. Mais précis à la fois" and co-directed the publication of the same name (Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery, 2017). She is the author of T*andis que la fleur d'une hydrangée posée sur le sous-main en cuir résiste à la décoloration* (Le Quartanier, 2020).

Passer au présent, passer à la présence : The performance practice of Prinz Gholam

Prinz Gholam

We see ourselves as one author, and this author also happens to be a couple. We, Wolfgang Prinz and Michel Gholam, feel the union that lead to "Prinz Gholam" freed us from the rigid notion of individual and personal authorship. Our practice is based in our experience as visual artists. Our performances manifest themselves as a meeting point between a language, which is visual in origin, and our relationship to the current society we live within.

Our performances, which are presented live or created for the video camera, can be described as sequences of gestures or corporeal constellations accompanied by intervals of movement. As protagonists, we internalize references carefully selected from artworks, mainly with roots in art historical canons. This practice encompasses activating, relocating and negotiating the self, the body and the world we now live in.

Some of these works are placed in the context of an already existing exhibition. In some cases we select artworks from the museum's collection that we integrate into the set-up of the performance piece, according

to an image or situation we have encountered in our research (described below). We consider embodied images in a performance as a subjective collection of artworks, which we add to the already existing museum context in such a way as to not quite fit in, in order to avoid overtly didactic statements. Our interest is, on the one hand, questioning the role of the museum, and, on the other hand, applying new roles to it. Our bodily actions call on human qualities like affectivity, desire, physical stamina, energy, and presence.

We consider appropriation and embodiment as one and the same. Arranged gestures, coordinated constellations of bodies depicting art—all these elements play the role of an entire exhibition. The spectator acts as witness to a situation in which we, via our contemporary bodies, exhibit a heterogenous collection of works of art.

Upon the invitation to participate in the colloquium organized by Galerie UQO presented on May 29, 2019 at the Université du Québec en Outaouais, we chose to create a video instead of a lecture to show five works spanning from 2005 to 2017.

This text is a further-developed version of the script to the video that was screened as our contribution for the colloquium. Periodically throughout the video, black panels with white letters appear with comments or captions. Sometimes we choose to use voice to subjectively narrate descriptions of situations or recite citations and excerpts from notes collected during the creation of the work.

Echo
2005
Video with sound, 12 minutes
A series of tableaux recorded in a garage

An excerpt of our video-performance Echo *from 2005 fades in*

In a garage in the south of Germany, both of us on the floor, crouching. One of us, sideways in a light blue t-shirt, holds his large hand over his ear, the head slightly tilted. The head gradually conceals itself while slowly turning away. The other of us is more frontal, legs bent up to the foreground, his head thrown back.

The left hand placed on the right knee. This hand is later placed on the waist. The back of the hand on the waist, the whole arm forms half a circle. Slowly and gradually, the thrown back head tilts forwards and sideways. It finally hangs downwards in profile, while the back of the left hand now rests on the floor.

Arranged gestures, coordinated constellations of bodies depicting art, through performance we conceive an entire exhibition that takes shape through passing time.

Three further scenes from Echo *with us in an embodiment of the lying figure and the mourner from Eugène Delacroix's* Scène des massacres de Scio, *1824, two years after the massacre on the Isle of Chios by the Ottoman troops. In this quiet garage, the buzzing of the video camera can be heard. A further scene depicts an adoration pose outdoors in a green forest. Then, a third scene back in the garage; one of us lies face down across the lap of the other. Slight movements and adjustments of the positions. The sitting figure leans to the right. The left arm extends, the hand reaches to the thigh of the one lying face down.*

We strongly felt the necessity to depict the self as resistant to its surroundings, while manifesting affective behaviour deeply rooted in our collective cultural being.

Video fades out

Fire or Revolution by Night
July 1st, 2012
4 PM to 5 PM
Performance
Kabinett der Abstrakten, Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany

We decided to locate our performance in the *Kabinett der Abstrakten*, which was originally created by El Lissitzky for the provincial museum in 1927.

A camera travels along the outside wall of the Kabinett der Abstrakten, and comes across a group of viewers gazing into the cabinet. The camera turns in the direction they are looking in, and records the performance.

After the work was destroyed in 1937, during the National Socialist era, the space was reconstructed in 1969, based on the original designs. It was installed at the Sprengel Museum Hannover in 1979.

The small space, with black walls, grey carpet, and a built-in vitrine, has an overall austere and stripped-down colour scheme. We move following still moments in which each position is configured and performed. The camera recording us moves from time to time to take in the setting and situation.

Meanwhile, the voice-over says:

*Fire or Revolution by Nigh*t in the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* in Sprengel Museum in Hannover, July 1st, 2012.

Inside the Kabinett we placed a plexiglas plinth in the middle of the space. Video cameras of various resolutions, angles and capacities were installed in one corner. A live performance had been programmed. Viewers watched the performance through the threshold of the Kabinett or via simultaneous video transmission projected life-size on the outside wall of the Kabinett.

One sees close-ups of us in the performance activating a small sculptured Pietà *found in Mergoscia, Switzerland, depicting the virgin sitting up straight with her feet to the right pressed together. Jesus on the floor to her left leans sideways, head bent to the right. Wide open arms are still stiffened from the cross. The virgin holds the wrists of each hand. A further position appears in which we incarnate another* Pietà.

The voice-over continues:

The title of the work harks back to Max Ernst's painting *Pietà or Revolution by Night*, a 1923 painting of himself in the clasped arms of his father. Our performance took place in a reconstruction from 1969, which was based on photographs of El Lissitzky's original work from 1928/29: the Kabinett der Abstrakten. In the Kabinett, apparently abstract and reference-free paintings and graphics were combined with architectural elements to create an overall work of art. The viewer or visitor is encouraged to activate the sliding walls, so as to conceal some paintings, and to reveal others. We chose an incongruous mode of activating imagery using a wide range of attitudes and poses to cite an entire catalogue of physical stances from the history of art and popular culture from the 16th to the 20th century.

After performing a third Pietà, *or* Deploration, *we shift to several less recognizable gestures drawn from* Une Semaine de bonté *by Max Ernst (1934). Bending forward over the transparent plexiglas plinth, and pressing the top of the head on the grey carpet while the legs are bent and in the air. This dynamic twist allows the two legs and one arm to remain in the air, turning the falling figure into a sort of kinetic sculpture on the pedestal. The second figure undergoes a counter-reaction by swiftly lying down on his right side while twisting the torso so as to place both arms on the floor and gazing sharply to the right side of the room. His right hand rests on the left lower arm, the left foot leaves the floor and presses into the plinth.*

Video fades out

Video fades in

The camera shows a recorded take of the performance on a stage in the newly inaugurated Centre Pompidou in Metz, France. For this work, we chose a wall on which a Malevich, a Braque and a Kupka painting hang. A leaning replica of a rifle is placed between Malevich's Black Cross, *1915, and George Braque's* Woman playing a Guitar, *1913. Five oversized yoga mats each 3 meters long, and in colours matching Frantisek Kupka's* Vertical Planes I, *1912-1913, are installed on the floor in front of the paintings, parallel to each other.*

We enter into the camera frame. Following our score, each one of us positions himself on the yoga mats. Visitors of the museum pass by.

Faces, shapes, tones, acts, places
November 3rd - 7th, 2010
Performance
Exhibition “Chefs d’œuvre?” (2010), Centre Pompidou Metz, France

An excerpt of Pasolini’s film Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom, *1975, fades in. To Carl Orff’s* Carmina Burana, *Pasolini’s camera travels the walls of the interior of a villa. This final scene of the film depicts an interior with futurist and cubist paintings and sculptures presenting the exquisite taste of the fascist owners. The camera stops to show two young men, each with a rifle. The music changes as one of the boys tunes the radio to another station, hence different music. Sentimental music plays. They leave their rifles to dance awkwardly together. They move as though following the steps of the dance and less by moving to the music. The film* ENDS *with the Italian word* FINE, *while the recording of us in the position of the two boys fades in. No music or sound, only random comments by museum visitors. During the entire performance, the appointed guards of the Centre Pompidou are quick to restore order if anyone touches the artworks.*

In Centre Pompidou Metz, we replaced Pasolini’s chosen film set with the French national museum’s collection of modern art, adding a replica rifle leaning against the wall.

We move into another constellation. Both of us seen from behind, one of us hangs over sideways and balances on the left leg while clasping his right leg around the thighs of the other. A combat-like position taken from 19th-century photographs of wrestlers. Then, a later moment of the performance becomes visible: The Shade with the fallen Caryatid *before 1893, after Rodin, in an evening gloomy lighting of November. Right after that we shift into depicting two* Shades *created by Rodin, c.1885. Three visitors pay attention and, smiling, they speak to each other. Their heads tilt and arms stretch slightly while explaining to each other what they are seeing.*

Video fades out

Faces, shapes, gestures, tones, acts, places
2010 - 2014
September 26th, 2014
Performance
Exhibition "Soleil politique," Museion Bolzano

Selecting, placing, and superimposing artworks from the collection of the museum is already part of the artistic action that follows.

The video recording of the performance in Bolzano shows both of us holding the pose of the dance, then moving back to the wall and leaning beside the arranged paintings in another pose.

Voice-over:

Faces, shapes, tones, acts, places was shown again a few years later on an invitation to the Museion in Bolzano, Italy, in a group exhibition called "Soleil politique."

For this version of the work, we tried to reenact the wall depicted in the final scene of Pasolini's *Saló or the 120 days of Sodo*, 1975. We wanted to organize paintings in the same order on the wall behind the

dancing youths. These paintings had to come from the collection of the Museion. We went through the archives of the collection, experimenting with formal relationships between the paintings, and aiming to find a choice that would not only fit formally but influence the whole appearance of the performance as well. Twelve paintings were chosen to replicate the wall on Pasolini's film set. Along with the leaning rifle, the installation remained up the entire duration of the exhibition. The rifle was a replica of a pre-World War I model (approximately from the same period as the modernist paintings on the walls of the *Salò* film set), evoking the rifles the two young men in Pasolini's film put aside in order to dance together.

Voice-over continues:

The performance consists of 15 postures. While performing, we would randomly decide in which order we would present them, not hesitating to repeat many of them and to experiment with their order to find new combinations. Alternating, each one of us would decide what to do next. Sometimes one of us would really leave the frame given to us to perform within, coming back a few minutes later to rejoin the other still performing. The limited space in front of us due to flats installed on the floor to exhibit other works sometimes felt like physical obstacles. This influenced our way of performing. There was also a rawness in the rendering of these positions when we performed them in a loud hall with many visitors, some attentive, and some not.

The title is borrowed from the text panels in the prologue of Jean Cocteau's film *The Blood of a Poet*, 1930: "Free to choose the faces, the shapes, the gestures, the tones, the acts, the places that please him, he composes with them a realistic documentary of unreal events. The musician will underline the noises and the silences." [1]

1 Film still from: Cocteau, Jean, *The Blood of a Poet*, 1932.

My Sweet Country
2017
Video and performance
Olympieion, Temple of Olympian Zeus,
documenta 14, Athens

A painting by Eugène Delacroix appears: Prise de Constantinople par les croisés (12 Avril 1204), *1840, in the musée du Louvre, Paris.*

The research as a corporeal activity engaging with the reality encountered on site through the daily practice.

The print by Georges Rouault from the series Miserere *titled* Mon doux pays, où êtes-vous ?, *1927 appears.*

The video fades in

Our figures, large in the frame. The sound of Athens in early evening. We are dressed in dark blue jeans and shirt, light blue jeans, and a green sweatshirt, lying on our sides and turned away from the camera. One of us turns and is lying prone on his front. He is propped up on his arms so as to be able to look straight ahead.

Voice-over:

These are the first takes we made on site at the Olympieion. After long debates, meetings and arrangements with the Central Archaeological Council of Greece, we were granted authorization to work on site with a video camera, and were thus able to develop a performance that would be later presented live during documenta 14. We were also authorized to work there after opening hours. Right after the last visitors left, we would begin recording our takes. There wasn't much time before sunset and darkness. We focused on key images in our minds to explore possibilities of their depiction.

We were already aware of the complexity of our endeavour, and this was confirmed on site as we immediately realized how oppressive these monuments are, and how limiting and limited their usage on the part of institutions. The constraints of economic and touristic pressure, and the general human behaviour within these restricted parameters were omnipresent. The long-awaited authorization to work and develop a piece on site was now replaced by a heavy feeling of mistrust, inertia, and doubt. It took days for us to understand that the reality encountered on site might be able to free us from generally established cultural roles and symbols of national identity (flags of Greece, Athens and the European Community on high poles waved constantly).

Each corporeal constellation has its logic, and it was our task to follow this logic and free ourselves from pre-imposed ideas. We had to leave behind

our preconceptions of how to represent something. We felt that it was becoming less about performing, and more about "being" and "behaving" in a certain mode.

The video shows us moving hesitantly into a posture while the voice-over speaks:

In a slow and complex shift we adopt a position that we realized we had also performed almost twelve years before in a family garage in the south of Germany. Drawn from *Scène des massacres de Scio* by Delacroix, 1824, we depict the wounded and mourning to the left of the columns of Zeus. Ungraceful but minute and precise in the positioning of the limbs, shifting of weight from one buttock to the other on the hard dried-out earth, readjusting the distance between us, the height of the elbow and shoulder according to the arm and the knee of the other. The mind does not cease to segment body parts and to configure the space between us, in front of us, and behind us.

The video depicts another scene much later, in early evening. A wider shot showing another view of the Olympieion. In the background, the sun has already set. Acropolis Hill, the waving Greek flag and parts of the surrounding buildings are visible. We are on the ground and move away from each other. One of us gets up and walks in a wide curve. The other still on the ground turns to his left.

Voice-over:

While the constant sound of the city with its late-afternoon traffic, the chattering of birds and whistling of the large colonies of green parrots goes on and on and on, we change positions slowly, making decisions, turning the face away

from the camera to the left, not concealing that we are reflecting on the next change we wish to make, understanding that attention and the pulse of time passing enriches the quality of movements we make, even if hardly detectable for the viewer. The sound of the birds continues and gets stronger as light diminishes.

One evening we haul our camera out to the tall columns with the Acropolis in the background. With this view, we record one single take from sunset until dusk. Attentiveness to the movement of rearranging and disarranging manifested itself all throughout the work on this piece.

It is already dusk in the video. The monuments are now silhouettes that appear to be cut-outs over a gradation of cool light. Immersed in semi-darkness, we are still performing, adding, exploring variation possibilities, following impulses, reiterating the images we have internalized, while giving ourselves over to the conditions found in this place.

Voice-over for a final citation:

Except for a guard employed by the Olympieion administration to watch over us while working, we were alone on this large site in the early evenings. An uncanny citation from *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 1971 by Roland Barthes is present:

"The enclosure of the Sadian site has another function; it forms the basis of social autarchy." [2]

Prinz Gholam
May, 2019

2 Barthes, Roland. *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1989 [1971], p. 17

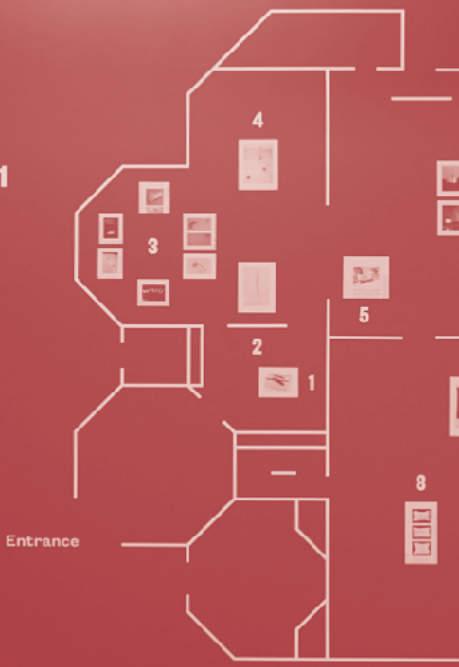
The Berlin-based artist duo Prinz Gholam consists of Wolfgang Prinz (Leutkirch, Germany, 1969) and Michel Gholam (Beirut, Lebanon, 1963). They both studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe, Germany in the 1990s. Working together since 2001, they have developed an artistic practice based on performative and collaborative processes that lead to live performances, videos, and installations, including objects, photography, drawings and text. The work often revolves around the iconic imagery of art history, negotiating and revising this often static visual legacy. They focus on the visual expression of character, situation, relationship, intimacy, and on emotion.

Chronology of performances and exhibitions (selection): *While Being Other* (2021), Mattatoio Rome; *Hidden Histories* (2020) Palazzo Altemps Rome; *Kunsthalle Memmingen* (2020); *Dial F for Father* (2019) Art in Public Space Tyrol Austria; *Punta della Dogana* (2018) Palazzo Grassi Venice; *Fire or Revolution by Night* (2018) Kupferstichkabinett Dresden; *Speaking Of Pictures* (2018) Galerie Jocelyn Wolff; *Performance extracts* (2017) documenta 14 Athens and Kassel; *Ymages et personnage* (2016) National Gallery Prague; *Soleil politique* (2014-2015) Museion Bolzano; *Blue Times* (2014-2015) Kunsthalle Wien; *Le Mouvement, Performing the City* (2014) Swiss Sculpture Exhibition Biel/Bienne; *Die Irregulären* (2013) NGBK Berlin; *Air* (2013) Frac Pays le la Loire; *Fire or Revolution by Night Part 3* (2012) Sprengel Museum Hannover; *Palace Party* (2011) Kunsthal Charlottenborg Copenhagen; *Postures, figures, episodes, sessions* (2011) Momentum Biennial Moss; *Junge Akademie 2009/2010* (2010) Akademie der Künste Berlin; *Projet Phalanstère* (2007) Centre d'art Contemporain Brétigny; and the itinerary exhibition project *La Monnaie Vivante/The Living Currency* 2006-2010 (Studio Micadanses Paris, STUK Leuven, Tate Modern London, Teatr Dramatyczny Warsaw, and HAU Berlin).

One Case Recounted

PLAN DE L'EXPOSITION DE 1991

1 Tongue
2 Spare Spine
3 Golem: Objects as Sensations
4 I Can Hear You Think (Dedicated to Stephen Hawking)
5 Drawing Room
6 Seduction Couch
7 Sulking Room
8 Attitudes
9 Remote Control I
10 Remote Control II
11 Inside
12 Untitled drawings
13 I Want You to Feel the Way I Do... the Dress
14 Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic
15 Inhabitation
16 Standard Lives
17 Measuring Tape Cones
18 Generic Man




6
space not
used in exhibition
13
7
12
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10
15
16
18
17
Exit

RECONSTITUTION

La conférence de presse n'aura pas l'effet escompté. S'en suivra un nombre considérable de prises de paroles publiques par l'institution, dont une déclaration de Diana Nemiroff datée du 9 avril 1991.


UQO

UQO


Références


Instructions originales de Jana Sterbak pour la production de la Robe
01
02
03
06
07
10
11
12
16
17
Oh, for the pun of it
NATIONAL ART GALLERY
WASTE
BOTTLES
REPERTOIRE


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L'exposition de *Vanitas : robe de chair pour albinos anorexique*, au Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, a soulevé une virulente polémique médiatique. Un flux ininterrompu d'articles a été publié sur une période approximative d'un mois, soit du 28 mars au 25 avril 1991. La *Robe de chair* a fait l'objet de discussions dans plus de 300 articles.

Près d'une centaine de journaux, la moitié ontarienne, l'autre répartie dans les neuf provinces canadiennes, ont joint leur voix à cette conversation nationale. Les opinions de politiciens, journalistes, économistes et publics amateurs intensifient l'affaire Sterbak jusqu'à la porter aux délibérations de la Chambre des communes du 10 avril 1991.

① Curators: Mélanie Boucher, Marie-Hélène Leblanc, Assistant curator: Jessica Ragazzini, “La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution,” Galerie UQO, 2019, plan of the 1991 exhibition. Photograph : House of Common.

② Curators: Mélanie Boucher, Marie-Hélène Leblanc, Assistant curator: Jessica Ragazzini, “La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution,” Galerie UQO, 2019, reenactment of the 1991 press conference by Shirley Thomson and Diana Nemiroff, represented by their institutional counterparts Denis Harrison and Charmain Levy, video: Levy L Marquis. Photograph: House of Common.

③ Curators: Mélanie Boucher, Marie-Hélène Leblanc, Assistant curator: Jessica Ragazzini, “La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution,” Galerie UQO, 2019, overview. Photograph: House of Common.

④ Curators: Mélanie Boucher, Marie-Hélène Leblanc, Assistant curator: Jessica Ragazzini, “La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution,” Galerie UQO, 2019, bibliographic research. Photograph: House of Common.

⑤ Curators: Mélanie Boucher, Marie-Hélène Leblanc, Assistant curator: Jessica Ragazzini, “La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution,” Galerie UQO, 2019, creation of a journal based on articles about the 1991 exhibition published the same year. Photograph: House of Common.

What Role for the Archive in Reconstitutions? The Sterbak case— The Flesh Dress at the National Gallery

Mélanie Boucher

Most visual arts exhibitions are monographic, thematic, or group exhibitions. Other organizing principles have indeed emerged, including reconstitution, which is the subject of this book. Reconstitution is a relatively recent approach to exhibition-making that revisits past exhibitions, be they memorable, unique, or exemplary. The reconstitutions that Marie-Hélène Leblanc and I took on as curators at Galerie UQO are no exception to this tendency of highlighting outstanding exhibitions. Indeed, the exhibitions we chose as points of departure were events that had marked the collective imagination: documenta 5, presented in 1972, in Kassel,[1] and the monographic exhibition "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps," shown at the National Gallery of Canada in 1991. This essay tackles the latter, considered here through the lens of the archives-based reconstitution.

1 The reconstitution entitled *La Galerie UQO présente ICI: Harald Szeemann, documenta 5* was presented at Galerie UQO from January 18 to February 25, 2017. For a more detailed description of this project, see Marie-Hélène Leblanc's text in this book.

A memorable case in a university gallery

For us, the 1991 Jana Sterbak exhibition was ideal, and indeed exemplary for reconstitution purposes. Because of this exhibition, Sterbak made history, as did her artwork *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987), which became the main subject of the show. Still today, Jana Sterbak is closely associated with this meat-based sculpture, an early work that led to her becoming much more widely known. "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps" was the National Gallery's first monographic exhibition of a woman artist in twenty years, and only the second in its history.[2] The exhibition, which left its mark on art history[3] and Canadian history more broadly, also fuelled the collective imagination of several generations, associated as it was with a controversy which remains to this day unlike any other. As opposed to most reconstituted exhibitions—which insert themselves into exhibition history with a view to renewing artistic and curatorial approaches,[4] or to generate reviews—the "Sterbak" exhibition is still known largely for a single artwork, the controversial

2 The first monographic exhibition at the National Gallery was Joyce Wieland's, in 1971.

3 Lamoureux, Johanne. " Vanitas : robe de chair pour une albinos anorexique / Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic ", *Espace sculpture*, No. 51 (Spring 2000), p. 14-17. "Felix Holtmann contre Jana Sterbak : une guerre d'expertise," in *Penser l'indiscipline en art contemporain*, Montréal, Optica, 2001, p. 165-177; "La *Robe de chair* : l'allégorie par la viande," *Revue d'esthétique*, No. 40 (2001), p. 161-166.

4 We are reminded, for example, of the exhibitions examined in the following anthologies: Adkins, Helen, Brown, Milton, Eltz, Johanna Zu, and al. [translated from German by Denis Trierweiler], *L'art de l'exposition. Une documentation sur trente expositions exemplaires du XX^e siècle*, Paris, Éditions du regard, 1998 [1991]; Altshuler, Bruce, *Salon to Biennial —Exhibitions That Made Art History, Volume I: 1863-1959*, London, Phaidon, 2008; Altshuler, Bruce, *Biennials and Beyond—Exhibitions That Made Art History, Volume II: 1962-2002*, London, Phaidon, 2013; Hoffmann, Jens, *Showtime: The 50 Most Influential Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2014.

Flesh Dress, which indeed overshadowed everything else in the show. We thus also aim to highlight the oxymoronic nature of interest in this exhibition.

What were the primary intentions of the National Gallery and curator Diana Nemiroff in organizing "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps"? What works were exhibited? How were they arranged? How did visitors navigate the spaces? The answers to these questions were public,[5] yet paradoxically hidden by the controversy, and we carefully considered them in Galerie UQO's reconstitution via the narratives produced around "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps" and its infamous centrepiece. Consequently, our reconstitution, titled "La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution," included five sections, detailed in the floor layout (fig. 1) and photo documentation (fig. 2–5). The five sections were: ① *official discourse* (museum, curator and artist) (fig. 2); ② *media* (journalists, citizens, politicians) (fig. 5); ③ *research* (on the exhibition, the artist, the flesh dress, food in art) (figs. 3-4); ④ *factual data* (diagrams, layouts, procedures, statistics); ⑤ and a *timeline* (on the use of meat as clothing/accessory since the 1960s). Documents from first three sections, which were displayed on the gallery walls, spoke to the primary narratives produced in the context of the original exhibition. The fourth section, in the middle, brought together factual information on the production of the work and the exhibition itself, and the fifth, displayed on another wall, overviewed the use of meat in arts and culture. The articulation of these positions followed

5 Notably, in the exhibition catalogue: Nemiroff, Diana. *States of Being/Corps à corps*, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1991.

our chosen critical approach, while acknowledging the academic context of the reconstitution project. Indeed, several people from the university community contributed to its realization: a group of students who had been in my MA class on exhibitions undertook various connected projects, some of which were also presented in the exhibition;[6] the then university rector and dean took part in the project via a role-playing game; and the UQO library loaned us a considerable amount of material for reference purposes.

Reconstitutions can create an entirely new kind of exhibition, "Sterbak" being a case in point. These re-exhibition projects in contemporary art, which don't have an equivalent in other fields of museum knowledge or practice, bring countless previously neglected perspectives to the study of exhibitions. But they do stand alone in the field of art exhibitions, less for their metonymic role than for the kind of exhibition they invoke: more communication-oriented than aesthetic, to use Davallon's terminology.[7] In *L'exposition à l'œuvre. Stratégies de communication et de médiation symbolique*, Jean Davallon lays out the three primary types

6 *Séminaire de maîtrise en muséologie et en pratiques des arts : l'exposition*, (Graduate seminar in museology and art practice: the exhibition) held at UQO in fall 2018. Projects from several students were selected for the exhibition: Clara Chaleyssin, Pierre Dion-Bisson, Jessica Minier and Alice Wickert.

7 Some reconstitutions have primarily aesthetic objectives, for example, Germano Celant's remake of "When Attitudes Become Form," 1969, in 2013 at the Prada Foundation. However, this approach (where artworks are presented in the same arrangement as the original exhibition) is relatively uncommon, as we can see from the examples cited in this book, as well as in Reesa Greenberg's article on "remembering exhibitions": "'Remembering Exhibitions': From Point to Line to Web," *Tate Papers*, No. 12 (Fall 2009) http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/remembering-exhibitions-from-point-to-line-to-web [visited June 1, 2016].

of exhibition : aesthetics, communication, and play.[8] Davallon's book, published two decades ago, is now somewhat dated, but his breakdown of the three main types of exhibitions remains quite useful. An *aesthetically oriented* exhibition focuses on the exhibited object itself, on making it "appear." A *communication-oriented* exhibition is didactic, and seeks "comprehension" by contextualizing the exhibited object, while the *play-oriented* exhibition aims to "move" the viewer by way of experience, pleasure, and disorientation. Whether classical or contemporary, visual arts exhibitions have traditionally been focused on the aesthetic approach, as they primarily encourage contemplative or intellectual observation. As such, the choices that factor into exhibition planning usually serve to showcase the works and other exhibited artifacts, which is however not the case for most reconstitutions, as I explore throughout this article.

Reconstituting the exhibition through its archives

Reconstitutions that seek to transmit knowledge stand out from other visual arts exhibitions for at least three reasons. The first: these exhibitions are less based on the works themselves (production, availability, loanability, transportation, arrangement in the space) than on archives (photos, press releases, correspondence, floor plans, media clippings, catalogues, etc.). These sources, which reconstruct the past, also seek out unexplored perspectives on this same past, to shed light on blind spots, and to create new narratives from it.

8 Davallon, Jean. *L'exposition à l'œuvre. Stratégies de communication et de médiation symbolique*, Paris, L'Harmattan, coll. "Communication et Civilisation," 1999, p. 103.

The "Sterbak" reconstitution is not an exception in this regard: the National Gallery archives (documents concerning the 1991 exhibition, curator Diana Nemiroff, and director Shirley Thompson) were researched, interviews conducted, media reviews analyzed, and the catalogue scrutinized.

The second reason behind this difference stems from the objects exhibited in such an exhibition: documents, for the most part. The distinction (in principle insubstantial) between methods of production (artworks/archives) and the outcome (artworks/documents) is important, as the outcome (and not the method employed) determines the type of the exhibition—aesthetic (looking, experiencing physically, acknowledging the artist's approach) or communicational (communicating the past that the documents recount). Unlike artworks, which imply fiction, documents are index-oriented, and act as evidence. In "Sterbak," approximately half of the archival documents were previously published, but had, however, remained relatively inaccessible, and were not available in digital form. The other half of the material, essentially National Gallery internal use documents, had initially served in the preparation of the exhibition, or documented its reception: attendance statistics, and transcriptions of on-site meetings and phone conversations. Only one loan from Jana Sterbak herself was used in the GUQO exhibition: a photograph depicting a woman sitting on the ground, wearing the flesh dress—a photo usually shown in conjunction with the garment itself. The ambiguous status of the photograph (as part of an artwork, or as

an artwork in and of itself?) was highlighted in the wall text accompanying it.

The third reason for this difference lies in the presentation context. While reconstitutions are different from other visual arts exhibitions, they also stand out among exhibitions focused on history and society, which Davallon cites as being communication-oriented. Unlike history and society-oriented exhibitions built on narratives that essentially serve to support objects, reconstitutions are the product of contemporary art, and its specific relationship to objecthood. As such, they are presented in contemporary art spaces, and intended for a contemporary art public. The basic experiential frameworks that structure the visiting and reception of a reconstitution are also those of contemporary art: its museums, galleries, centres, and events.

For Erving Goffman, these basic frameworks are the organizing principles that structure life events and our subjective relationship to them. According to this logic, we should, for example, approach an exhibition related to a commercial auction according to principles that differ from those of a museum exhibition. For Goffman, five types of phenomena explain how these frameworks affect our ways of understanding: astounding phenomena, stunts, goofs, fortuitousness, and segregation issues. The specificity of the reconstitution with regard to visual art exhibitions and exhibitions of history and society can be explained by framework segregation. This phenomenon of making visible an organizing principle consists of integrating a component into the exhibition that is not usually associated with it. This

unusual component of the reconstitution is the archival document. It is superimposed here onto the "official" principle of the exhibition of an artwork in exhibitions of contemporary art. Reconstitutions, drawing as they do from archives, stand out both among visual arts exhibitions (which for their part make things "appear"), and among history and society-oriented exhibitions (which seek "understanding"), as their archival elements are not usually taken from these more conventional types of exhibition. Their primary elements focus on the result (the exhibition itself), on its production (practices, methods, phases), and its reception (publics, expectations).

The reconstitution consequently has a tendency to produce contemporary art exhibitions that "could easily be seen to a radically different one, the latter the one which officially applies."[9] The reconstitution's propensity to broaden perspectives and thus consolidate ambiguity has been widely accepted since Reesa Greenberg's work on the subject,[10] and was central to the exhibition at Galerie UQO. The reconstitution proposes a modelling of the primary frameworks of the exhibition that brings together, according to Goffman, "the set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary frameworks, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something

9 Goggman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1974, p. 35.

10 See her definition of "the riff," in "'Remembering Exhibitions': From Point to Line to Web," *Tate Papers*, No. 12 (Fall 2009) http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/remembering-exhibitions-from-point-to-line-to-web [Visited June 1, 2016].

11 Goffman, Erving. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, p. 43-44.

quite else." [11] The reconstitution thus transforms the contemporary art exhibition—its model—, offering a new and different experience, which helps to explain its current importance.

Exhibiting reconstituted archival documents

In contemporary art, the reconstitution is a type of exhibition (remembering, critiquing, reactivating).[12] But it also designates a type of artwork whose primary characteristic is to revisit the past in order better comprehend it and to bring it into the present.[13] In the vocabulary of the 2011 Triennale québécoise, the reconstitution was understood as being an artwork (and not an exhibition): "the reconstitution consolidates several types of artistic updating that significantly move away from the postmodern ideas of appropriation and citation." [14] These "substantial reenactments of a thing already realized" [15] contribute to an art of postproduction that "interprets, reproduces, re-exhibits, or uses artworks created out of other, already-available cultural products." [16] As such, when reconstitution is employed in a contemporary art exhibition for the purposes of articulation, it can be likened to a work of contemporary art.

12 There isn't a clear consensus on the term "reconstitution." Some prefer other terms, such as the "remembering exhibition," "re-exhibition," or "reactivation." To my mind, all these terms imply a relationship with the past whose meaning is somewhat hazy.

13 Agnew, Vanessa. "Introduction: What is Reenactment?" *Criticism*, vol. 3, No. 46 (2004), p. 327.

14 Fraser, Marie (et al.), *Le travail qui nous attend. La Triennale québécoise*, Montréal, Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, 2011, p. 00.04.47.

15 Lageira, Jacinto. "Re-enactment : fausse évidence et dangers," *Esse arts+opinions*, No. 79, (Fall 2013), p. 15.

16 Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction*, Dijon, Les presses du réel, 2003 [2009], p. 5.

What then is a reconstituted archive in the context of a reconstituted exhibition primarily presenting archives? This question, which was indeed at the heart of the "Sterbak" project, has generated much discussion, on at least two levels. First, on the material level: the archives exhibited at the Galerie UQO were not presented in their original form. Data was graphically processed, and newspaper articles were used to create a publication. The floor layout of the National Gallery was reproduced and blown up in order to cover a wall, while a large part of the presented material was printed on fabric or adhesive vinyl. These material transpositions, from original to copy, remove to some extent the sacred aura around the archives, while also creating harmony among the various elements, particularly through the use of scenographic aesthetics, and colour choices of the minimalistic display system used.

These discussions also focused on updating the past, which is reflected in two projects here. The first, organized by Marie-Hélène Leblanc and myself, drew from three texts that had been written in 1991 to calm the uproar around the *Vanitas* controversy: a speech given by Gallery director Shirley Thomson at a press conference on April 2, and a speech given on April 9 by curator Diana Nemiroff during which she read a text written by Jana Sterbak. These three previously unpublished texts clearly outlined the positions taken by different parties, whether institutional, curatorial or artistic. We decided against displaying the texts on the wall, feeling that the written form isn't as compelling as oral reactivation, which is the avenue we chose. It seemed to us that the spoken form was more faithful to the original function of the texts, while also serving to

bring these historical statements into the present day. The dialogue between the two spatio-temporal contexts (the National Gallery and the University, thirty years apart) was consolidated by the choice of site for the shoot (the University), and the chosen readers. Denis Harrisson, then-rector, and Charmain Levy, then-dean of research and creation, each interpreted the texts written by their institutional counterparts. The black-and-white videos were filmed at UQO. The readers were filmed separately, and the videos were shown alternately on separate monitors. The third screen, to the right, presented an archival photograph of the imposing banner advertising the "States of Being/Corps à corps" exhibition displayed on one of the outer walls of the National Gallery. This wall of the Museum faces the street that becomes Alexandra Bridge, an important crossing point between Ontario and Quebec, and between the two exhibition contexts, Gallery and University.

The second project was realized by graduate student Alice Wickert.[17] Particularly struck by political cartoons of the period, Alice Wickert noted on the many puns used in the titles of articles on the controversy. "Beefy Art that Puts Fat in the Fire," [18] "Lettuce Not Criticize this Dress," [19] and "Artist Outflanks Anger Critics" [20] are three examples of the 29 titles inventoried by Wickert. In her text, she focuses on the excessive wordplay on the part of many journalists, the use of

17 This project was awarded with the jury prize in the graduate seminar given in conjunction with the exhibition. The jury members were Mario Beaulac (UQO), Sophie Bélair-Clément (UQO), Louis-Charles Lasnier (UQAM) and Jakub Zdebik (University of Ottawa).

18 Lounder, Jan. *The Toronto Sun*, Ontario (March 31, 1991).

19 *The Ottawa Sun*, Ontario (April 12, 1991).

which betrayed their bad faith and lack of neutrality. For her project, Wickert reappropriated this derisive tone and style, creatively critiquing the original texts, and putting them in perspective.

The reconstitution of the "Sterbak" exhibition at Galerie UQO reexamines and renews with the archival document in the field of aesthetics. Here, the status of the exhibition and the document were both questioned through the integration of components which revisit traditional categories: that of the exhibition, on the one hand, discussed by Davallon, and which connects contemporary art and aestheticism; and, on the other hand, that of the exhibited object, as an artwork, and as an object of information. The Sterbak reconstitution indeed provides answers to the following questions: *what changes does the reconstitution make to the art exhibition?* and *what changes does it make to the communicational function of the exhibited document?* The reconstitution contributes to deconstructing established categories by generating new connections between aesthetics and knowledge, and, by extension, between research and creation.

20 Gold, William. *The Calgary Herald*, Alberta (April 5, 1991).

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Food for Thought: Jana Sterbak's Flesh Dress and the National Gallery of Canada

Diana Nemiroff

Much has been made of the fact that Jana Sterbak's *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic*, a key work in the survey "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps," which I organized for the National Gallery of Canada in 1991, had already been exhibited in several cities in Canada, Europe and the United States without attracting controversy. The implication is that the Ottawa reaction, which received international press coverage within a brief but intense two-week period, was somehow aberrant. What did the controversy it aroused in Ottawa say about the local audience, the National Gallery, the municipal politicians, the federal government, or some combination of all of these that can be rolled up into the word "Ottawa" for many? This paper attempts to draw out the various themes of the controversy as reported in the media, and to interpret their meaning for the museum as a social as well as a cultural institution (and the implications of this for curatorial practice). I will also consider the role played by the media in relation to what I will call "controversy as spectacle."

The initial responses to the exhibition were in line with the tacit expectations of any art gallery: as much as exhibitions are broadly advertised in the general press as well as in more specialized media, art, especially contemporary art, is usually assumed to concern mainly that segment of the population with already expressed cultural interests. For this reason, art coverage in newspapers is generally done by art critics who are sympathetic to the phenomenon of culture, if not to each of its particular manifestations. Thus, the art critics who initially reviewed the show —all of them, significantly, women—tried to come to terms with the exhibition as a whole. They situated the *Flesh Dress* in the context of the artist's use of other unusual materials chosen for their ability to convey her ideas in a literal and dramatic way, the presence of other garment- and body-related sculptures in the exhibition, and the feminist perspective perceived in Sterbak's work. These and other themes intrinsic to her practice, such as her black humour and ironically mocking comments on the human condition, were set aside as members of the public, local politicians, and the media vigorously introduced new themes into the discussion of the work, which suddenly entered the larger public arena.

The controversy began with the publication of a letter in *The Ottawa Citizen* from Maxine Robert Bedard, a Gatineau woman. She attacked the National Gallery for showing the *Flesh Dress* and suggested that the exhibit was a calculated attention-getting move. Most of the subsequent themes of the first phase of the controversy, the offensive against Sterbak and the National Gallery, were expressed in her letter: the use

of meat for a sculpture while people are going hungry and lining up at soup kitchens; the fact that government funds were used to finance the exhibit (a point that was later refined into outrage that the Gallery, rather than the artist, had paid for the meat to make the dress); the National Gallery's perceived lack of public accountability; and, lastly, the affront to public taste. According to Bedard, "What most Canadians want is art that embodies beautiful and sensuous forms either in painting, photography, statues, music, or speech." [1] This statement, along with the charge of lack of public accountability, reveals another important theme of the controversy, the charge of elitism against the art establishment. In an article in *The Ottawa Sun*, Peter Stockland wrote: "This 'art' is the Vanitas (Vanity) of an elitist, over-privileged artistic clique which believes itself so immune from ordinary humanity that it can indulge itself by extravagantly wasting what many in the lower orders can no longer afford." [2]

The polarization of values evident at this stage of the controversy was summed up in the immediate reaction of the art world, which viewed these charges as popular philistinism. I would like to look more closely at these themes, which, while they do represent common reactions to contemporary art in general, also have particular meaning in the context of this exhibition. Firstly, the exhibition took place in the midst of a recession that took a toll on the economy and, in particular, on the poorest members of society. Recipients at local food banks had increased by 20 to

1 Bedard, Maxine. "Voices of ire are raised once again at Gallery; Meat is the issue." *The Ottawa Citizen*, (March 30, 1991), B7.
2 Stockland, Peter. "Art that really stinks." *The Ottawa Sun*, (April 3, 1991).

25%, and food banks were about to launch a new drive for contributions.[3] By contrast, Sterbak had conceived her work while living in New York during the boom period prior to October 1987, where making money easily encouraged people, in Sterbak's words, to think of themselves as gods. The change of circumstances undermined the mocking irony of Sterbak's handling of the vanitas motif, and led to many misreadings.

Secondly, while all museums have a symbolic role insofar as they create metaphors of reality that may at times be contested, the National Gallery's position is doubly symbolic, and therefore vulnerable, as it also represents the national cultural identity. The decade of the 1990s was an exceedingly complex period in which a number of national identities within our borders were struggling for definition and realization, whether they be Québécois, Canadian, or Indigenous. In such circumstances, all national institutions are subject to intense scrutiny, and none more so than the National Gallery, housed in a monumental new building, intended, as its transparency and architectural echoes of Parliament itself suggest, to convey the shared democratic heritage of the nation.

The situation of contemporary art in such a context is inherently difficult. Art is public, it's meant to be seen, and it is placed in public places like the National Gallery to this end. However, unlike other types of public interventions, its place in the social fabric is quite marginal. One reason for this is that most contemporary art—most modern art—has sought to question social and cultural values, and has taken an exploratory

3 Eade, Ron. "Art or wasted food? Drying meat as sculpture infuriates area politicians and food banks." *The Ottawa Citizen*, (April 1, 1991), E3.

role in regard to the means at its disposal to do this, developing an increasingly unfamiliar vocabulary of forms and materials. Modern society is not only a specialized society, it is also one in which the values that hold us together are increasingly fragmented. Nonetheless, while conflict is tolerated at the political level, and in certain ritualized forms such as organized sports, art is generally seen by the public as an arena in which consensual values should prevail. As Bedard's comments show, many people expect art to provide a contrast or respite from the ugliness or harshness of reality. In other areas of popular culture, the movies for example, this expectation is largely met. But because contemporary art is a highly individualized endeavour, artists are attuned to the expectations, not of the general public but of the specialists—critics, curators, gallerists, and collectors. Seen as a whole, the art world forms a subculture not especially unified in and of itself, but still relatively separate from the popular conceptions of the public and the media. Even when museums and curators attempt to bridge this gap, they must contend with a generalized suspicion of expert opinion, increasingly associated with elitism, as the Sterbak controversy demonstrates.

The second, more complex phase of the controversy began with the press conference held by the National Gallery to clarify its and the artist's intentions, which introduced several additional themes into the debate. Since these themes were either elements of the National Gallery's defence or the reflections of newspaper columnists in sympathy with contemporary art, it is not surprising that the new themes constituted mirror images of the old ones. Thus, in response to

the criticisms regarding public accountability, the theme of artistic freedom was introduced. *The Brockville Recorder and Times* cited Oscar Wilde to the effect that "art never expresses anything but itself" while Claude-Sylvie Lémery, in the local paper *Le Droit*, more pertinently observed with indignation, "What an idea, to think that as soon as an incongruity arises in the vast world of creation, which some elected official doesn't understand, we should muzzle artists by debating in public concepts that lie beyond public affairs." [4] And the National Gallery's director, Dr. Shirley Thomson, stated uncompromisingly that to remove the *Flesh Dress* from the exhibition would amount to censorship.

Similarly, the charges of elitism were answered by counter-charges of political hypocrisy and provincialism, while the issue of the affront to public taste on aesthetic grounds was challenged, even by those like *The Ottawa Citizen*'s John Ibbitson, who, though he didn't like the work, reminded readers that there were others, taxpayers like himself, who did. "It takes all kinds to make a civilization," he concluded.[5] Not surprisingly, the most vigorous defence of pluralism came from women, for whom the work's aggressively ironic critique of the cult of youth and beauty hit home. According to Kate Taylor, the work's strength lay partly in the variety of interpretations it elicited: "Some," she wrote, "may see the process of decay in the work as a parallel to the ageing of the body.

4 Lémery, Claude-Sophie. "Art inconfortable." *Le Droit*, (April 1, 1991). Translated from French: "quelle idée de penser qu'aussitôt que surgit, dans le monde vaste de la création, une incongruité que ne comprenne quelque élu, il faille museler les artistes en débattant sur la place publique des concepts qui dépassent les affaires publiques."

5 Ibbitson, John. "Give artists the freedom to fall flat." *The Ottawa Citizen*, (April 2, 1991), D3.

Other viewers (including this one) may remember that Sterbak has often addressed issues of women's experience of pain, and perceive the bleeding dress as a body turned inside out, raw flesh exposed." [6]

For its part, the charge that Sterbak's use of meat as a material, paid for by taxpayers' money, was wanton waste in a society hard hit by the recession, was countered by the artist's observation that "making art with meat is not more wasteful than painting" since "arguably, the money expended for paint and canvas could have been better used to feed the hungry." [7] Sheila Robertson, writing in *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, remarked on the irony that most Canadian artists live below the poverty line and are hardly getting rich through outrageous gestures. She commented astutely,

> *The recession has this conservative segment of society lashing out at anything perceived to waste money. It's pointless to try to convince these folks that* Voice of Fire *is a significant artwork* [...] *It's pointless to argue that* Vanitas *effectively raises issues about the human condition. Concrete thinkers who are obsessed with accountability don't appreciate symbolism.*
>
> *What this adds up to is a stultifying period for artists. The National Gallery, funded by taxpayers, can still take some risks, but how many artists and galleries can't, as cultural funding is slashed at federal, provincial and municipal levels?* [8]

6 Taylor, Kate, (April 10, 1991), C1.
7 Sterbak, Jana. Statement prepared for the press conference, (April 2, 1991).
8 Robertson, Sheila. "National Gallery gets raw end of this deal: Flesh dress repugnant, but it works as conceptual art." *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, (April 6, 1991).

Indeed, a little earlier, Felix Holtmann, chairman of the House of Commons Communications and Culture Committee, had obligingly stated that his committee would question the Gallery closely on the exhibition and whatever the arm's length relationship might be, and had the power to recommend a cut in the National Gallery's budget. Thus we see another constituency of the government—the cultural sector—being distinguished in the debate, dependent on handouts (cultural spending) just like the country's poor.

Was this response adequate? Was the art world, habituated to think in terms of poetic gestures, metaphor and critiques, of blurring the lines between art and reality, simply refusing to accept the popular appropriation of Sterbak's work as an (unintended) symbol of another reality? Is meat really no different from paint and canvas when used to make art?

I do not think that museums are in the business of controlling meanings any more than we are in the business of feeding the hungry, and so I believe that we cannot simply refuse to credit with any legitimacy unexpected and apparently inappropriate popular readings of works of art. Nonetheless, there are several sub-texts to the controversy over *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* that go beyond the standard themes I've just enumerated and, as such, require elucidation in order to understand its meaning more fully. In my catalogue essay, I was concerned to trace the iconographic meaning and history of the vanitas motif; I also discussed the artist's use of meat in terms of the Surrealists' interest in incongruous materials and transgressive images as a means of short-circuiting rationality and directly accessing the unconscious. In

the past, women's bodies have been seen as somehow more fleshly, inherently less controllable than men's, and as insistent reminders of our animality. In the present, a premium is placed on youth and sensuality, and death is carefully occulted, yet ageing men tend to be seen as more attractive than ageing women because the active principle of the intellect is still more closely associated with the male sex than the female. Discussing her work with a reporter, Jana Sterbak said that the *Flesh Dress* had its genesis in joking discussions with female friends who were turning thirty about becoming old hags. As her ironic comments reveal, we women are more or less willing participants in this society's determined efforts to deny that death is the inevitable consequence of our human existence.

During the controversy, I occasionally wondered at the vehemence of the reaction to Sterbak's unorthodox material, which seemed out of proportion to the stated concern for the hungry. Her gesture clearly transgressed a general sense of propriety, but not, in my mind, primarily because the meat should have been used as food. It seems to me that the reaction was at least in part an effort to rationalize some primordial revulsion in the face of decaying flesh. The National Gallery had, after all, previously shown works of art that incorporated foodstuffs, such as Giuseppe Penone's use of real potatoes with bronze replicas interspersed among them in his 1983 exhibition. I believe the *Flesh Dress* provoked as strong a reaction as it did precisely because any flesh reminds us of our own flesh. Many people dislike to prepare meat because touching raw meat disgusts them. Others refuse to eat meat. But meat also has a much deeper

meaning in Judeo-Christian culture. The story of Cain and Abel in the Bible is proof of this. When Cain, the farmer, offers God some of the fruits of his harvest, while Abel, a shepherd, offers fat portions of some of his firstborn, God rejects Cain's offering, finding it unworthy, but accepts that of Abel. We can understand by this, and the subsequent exile of Cain after the murder of his brother, that the flesh is considered sacred and that substituting the sacrifice of an animal for human sacrifice is an important step for human civilization. Even today, animal flesh retains some sense of the sacred in our collective unconscious. Far from ignoring the real meanings of meat in the life world, it was precisely this uneasy closeness of meat as food and human flesh that Sterbak made use of in choosing to fashion her dress from meat rather than making a painted representation.

Much of Sterbak's work is an ironic reflection on the social conventions that shape communication, and the public personas we create for ourselves. In this sense, clothes are a kind of armour, covering us up while simultaneously projecting our identity. Surely a flesh dress is the ultimate double cross, turning our "second skin" inside out and exposing what we don't want to confront: the gradual desiccation of the flesh. And if Valerie Steele, the author of an enlightening book on clothing entitled *Fashion and Eroticism*, is correct in stating that the underlying meaning of all clothing is erotic, then the transgressive character of the *Flesh Dress* is intensified.[9] Could it be that one reason for the extreme response to Sterbak's dress was a collective

9 Steele, Valerie. *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of feminine beauty from the Victorian era to the Jazz Age*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 5.

need to deny her exposure of the cannibalism of desire that language, in its vulgar and colloquial manifestations, reveals to us daily?

There are many lessons for museums to learn from such a controversy. If we consider the unrolling of a polemic from beginning to end, it is clear that controversies reveal a dramatic arc in form as well as substance, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. When the story's energy is discharged, the effect is cathartic. A controversy is a shared experience whose resolution creates the possibility of a change in perception, and maybe in values. Looked at in this way, we might say that a controversy involves a complex intersection of narratives, individual, institutional, and public. The effect of this intersection is to create a spectacle, that is to say, an event in which we are simultaneously onlookers and participants, during which the gap between the aesthetic and social or moral realms are provisionally bridged. As exhausting as defending its position can be for the institution, as treacherous and simpleminded as the media may be, and as intolerant as the public response can be, a controversy allows art to abandon its usually marginal position for centre stage.

One of the difficulties I see in maintaining this new status lies in the relative inaccessibility of the poetic discourse of works of art. In an age that values communication, the work of art is cryptic and concrete, open and elusive. Similarly, the museum is both public and elitist, in the sense that it creates narratives whose form and, frequently, content are based on the abstract discipline of art history, which parallels a lived reality whose own form is by no means unitary. Finally, the media is far from being as transparent as it often

claims to be; wedded by its very nature to immediacy and instantaneity of communication, and dominated by an ideal of democracy that often descends to anti-intellectualism, it offers at best an imperfect forum for debate.

At the beginning of the Sterbak controversy, one reviewer pointed out the incongruous juxtaposition of the artist's aggressively acerbic works and the grand surroundings of the National Gallery, "a gilded, elegant, and luxurious frame for time-honoured works of art," concluding that there are certainly many art lovers who will never get over their visit." [10] At the end, another writer called the National Gallery a "secular cathedral for a material age" and discussed the art gallery as a public institution where political, aesthetic and moral issues are raised. Seen within the context of the National Gallery's collection, Sterbak's *Flesh Dress* was a work that carried on "a tradition of showing pain as part of a common human identity." [11] The controversy revealed its share of political opportunism, sexism, and self-righteous indignation, but it also gave the National Gallery and its supporters the occasion to affirm values such as pluralism, tolerance, and artistic freedom whose public expression is essential to our sense of a collective identity.

10 Lepage, Jocelyne. *La Presse*, (March 23, 1991). Translated from French: "un cadre doré, élégant et luxueux pour des œuvres d'art de grande renommée [...] plusieurs amateurs d'art ne se remettront jamais de leur visite."

11 Baele, Nancy. "Iconoclasts challenge gallery's status as a material-age cathedral." *The Ottawa Citizen*, (April 7, 1991), C2.

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Voice of Fire and it's media controversy: the rhetoric and its repercussions

Safa Jomaa

The National Gallery of Canada's bold 1989 acquisition of *Voice of Fire*, 1967, by American painter Barnett Newman (1905-1970), created a wave of controversy that was to shake the institution to its core. The Gallery's 1991 exhibition of Jana Sterbak's (1955-) *Vanitas*[1] also riled many feathers. However, while *Voice of Fire* was a permanent acquisition, the *Vanitas* controversy, for its part, revolved around a temporarily exhibited sculptural piece. Sterbak, a Canadian artist, had created her stylized sculpture out of raw meat, which was intended to decompose throughout the exhibition period.

Beyond their differences, these two controversies were both fueled by ideas around the "quality" of works acquired and exhibited in a national museum funded by taxpayers' dollars. These very Canadian stories unfolded in a prestigious national cultural institution, a context that invites us to reflect on the unavoidable

1 *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987) is an artwork by Canadian Czech-born artist Jana Sterbak (1955-). The sculpture consists of a hand-sewn dress made of 23 kg of raw, salted beef. The work is currently exhibited at Centre Pompidou (Paris), who acquired it in 1996.

clash between cultural actors, their ways of thinking, and the opinions present in the public sphere.

This article draws parallels between these two controversies, while also putting them into perspective, with a particular focus on the acquisition of *Voice of Fire*, an abstract painting solely consisting of three swathes of color.

Voice of Fire: Acquisition and Controversy

Originally created by Newman for the American pavilion at Expo 67, in Montreal, *Voice of Fire* was subsequently lent by Annalee Newman, the artist's widow, to the National Gallery in 1988 for the opening of their new building on Sussex Drive. One year later, the Gallery officially acquired the painting for 1.76 million dollars. This amount represented 50% of the Gallery's acquisitions budget at the time.[2] The acquisition and sale price were announced on March 7, 1990, in a press release detailing all acquisitions for 1989-1990. The controversy, both in media and politics, was thus born on this date.[3] It was covered by news networks across the country, and the majority of print media outlets reported on the acquisition not in the cultural section, where it would normally appear, but rather on newspaper headlines. As such, *Voice of Fire* became a public affair, interwoven with the Canadian economy and Canadian politics. Although the acquisition received support from numerous specialists, editorials in many newspapers, including the

2 Barber, Bruce. Guilbaut, Serge and O'Brian, John. *Voices of Fire Art, Rage, Power, and The State*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 3.

3 Normandin, Pascal. "Autopsie d'un scandale : l'acquisition de *Voice of Fire* de Barnett Newman par le Musée des beaux-arts du Canada," MA thesis, Montréal, Université de Montréal, 1997, p. 15.

Toronto Star, expressed disapproval.[4] *Voice of Fire* was also criticized on television and radio programs across the country.[5] And, in addition to countless satirical cartoons, the acquisition was condemned in over a thousand newspaper articles.[6]

According to Pascal Normandin,[7] much of the controversy originally stemmed from the seven-month delay between the completion of sale and the official announcement of the work's acquisition. This lag raised many questions, and even misunderstandings, between the National Gallery and the media, politicians, and artists. In order to better understand the nature of the disagreement between these parties, Normandin retraces [8] critiques of the Gallery's acquisition process via contemporaneous media reports. By focusing on the financial aspects of the affair, the media led the public towards the idea of the purchase as a scandal. The Gallery, for its part, gave some traction to criticism through its largely improvised reaction, particularly in terms of public relations, the goal of which is normally to maintain a healthy relationship between the institution and its community.

To understand all the issues surrounding this controversy, additional context is perhaps necessary. *Voice of Fire* was acquired to mark the opening of a new National Gallery building. The National Gallery defines its mandate in relation to several essential spheres: political, social, artistic, and museological. At the time of acquisition, the Gallery had just moved

4 Hume, Christopher. "Voice of Fire & Voice of Ire," *The Toronto Star*. April 15, 1990.
5 Barber, Bruce and *al*. *Voices of Fire Art, Rage, Power*, 1996, p. 3.
6 Normandin, Pascal. *Autopsie d'un scandale*, 1997, p. 9.
7 Normandin, Pascal. *Autopsie d'un scandale*, 1997, p. 13-15.
8 Normandin, P. *Autopsie d'un scandale*, 1997, p. 15-16.

into this new, spectacularly designed building with a 122-million-dollar price tag, a veritable fortune [9] during a period of economic crisis that had given rise to unprecedented fiscal restraint in government. Politics may also have played some role in the controversy, as the new Gallery had been initiated and supported by the previous government under Pierre Elliot Trudeau, a staunch rival of the then-current conservative government. Many members of the artistic community of the day also expressed indignation; in their view, the Gallery's primary mandate should be the promotion of Canadian art and artists.[10] Significantly, this point of view was to resonate with certain influential members of government. The protectionist position (defended by finance minister Don Mazankowski, and by Felix Holtmann, Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Culture) motivated the government to pass a resolution (proposed by MPs Larry Schneider and Felix Holtmann) to "consider selling *Voice of Fire* and reallocating these funds to support the Canadian arts sector." [11] A Radio-Canada news bulletin from April 10, 1990, reports then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney giving into pressure from MPs, who wished to have a say in National Gallery acquisitions, putting forward the argument that "a choice could be artistically good, but politically bad." [12]

9 National Gallery of Canada, "Building," Official Site. https://www.gallery.ca/about/building?_

10 Normandin Pascal. *Autopsie d'un scandale*, 1997, p. 25-33.

11 "Résolution rejetée par huit voix contre cinq," *La Tribune*. April 27, 1990, p. 6. Translated from French: "de considérer l'opportunité de vendre *Voice of Fire* (*Voix de feu*) et d'affecter les profits aux arts plastiques canadiens."

12 "1,8 million $ pour une 'Voix de feu'," *Téléjournal*, *Radio-Canada*, April 10, 1990. http://archives.radio-canada.ca/art_de_vivre/arts_visuels/clips/1433/. Translated from French: "un choix peut être artistiquement bon, mais politiquement mauvais."

For politicians, it can indeed be tempting to interfere in the affairs of cultural organizations, under the pretext that they are publicly funded. This authoritarian intrusion of the political into culture was seen as being justified in this instance by the purchase price of the work. According to the National Gallery's acquisition policy, purchases of more than one million dollars must be presented to the board of directors, who act as acquisitions committee in such circumstances. The acquisition of *Voice of Fire* had indeed followed this protocol.

Most criticism of the acquisition also focused on the appearance of the work, evoking the fact that it didn't seem to have involved any labor, therefore insulting the work of artist, especially given the sale price. To convince the government of the acquisition's merit, Shirley Thomson, the Gallery's director at the time, decided to give a speech in the House of Commons. Her address, based on solid argumentation, focused on the importance of the artwork, and on Barnett Newman himself as an important thinker and philosopher-artist. She compared *Voice of Fire* to masterpieces of artist history, such as those by Michelangelo, Monet, and Renoir: "[…]when it was decided that this work was the 20th-century masterpiece we wished to buy, the acquisition approval process was set in motion." [13] The resolution to resell the work was finally rejected by eight votes for over five votes against.

13 Thomson, Shirley. *Notes pour un discours prononcé par Mme Shirley Thomson, directrice du Musée des beaux-arts du Canada, devant le comité permanent des communications et de la culture de la Chambre des communes*, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, April 10, 1990, p. 6. Translated from French: "[…] lorsque fut convenu que ce chef-d'œuvre était le chef-d'œuvre du XXe siècle à acheter, le processus d'approbation des acquisitions fut mis en branle."

Voice of Fire has remained a veritable social phenomenon over time, as attested to by the ten or so archival boxes kept in the Gallery library containing newspaper clippings and the like from the *Voice of Fire* affair. Ironically, perhaps, the controversy helped grow the popularity of the work. Today, many copies and derivative versions are floating around, notably in the garment industry.[14] This industrial reproduction of the image has "expanded its sacred magnetism, and, much like a pilgrimage, fostered the public's desire to see the original with their own eyes."[15] The archive of comments in the National Gallery's guest book also attests to this fact, as they become more and more positive as time goes on.

Voice of Fire and *Vanitas*: Reflection on a Terrain of Austerity

The controversy surrounding the acquisition of Barnett Newman's artwork necessarily had considerable impact on the exhibition of *Vanitas*, as is amply documented in the anthology *Voices of Fire: Art, Rage, Power and the State*.[16] In one chapter, entitled "The Higher Meaning of the *Voice of Fire* and *Flesh Dress*

14 The fashion industry indeed continues to be inspired by the work; it has been copied and reappropriated by Gucci and Tommy Hilfiger, among others.

15 Bonazzoli, Francesca. "La fabrique des icônes" in Bonazzoli, Francesca. and Michele Robecchi, *Ceci est une icône : du chef-d'œuvre à la culture populaire*, Milano, 5 Continents éditions, 2013, p. 14. Translated from French: "accroître son magnétisme sacré et a suscité, à l'instar du pèlerinage, le désir de voir l'original de ses propres yeux."

16 Barber, Bruce and al. *Voices of Fire Art, Rage, Power*, 1996. This anthology can be considered as a case study, providing both a historical account of the context of *Voice of Fire*'s acquisition by the National Gallery, and a presentation of the Gallery's positions. The authors also discuss the unique and paradoxical nature of abstract art in general, and the difficulties it presents in terms of public reception. Newman's work is used as a case study and central point of reference.

Controversies," Bruce Barber compares the two histories.[17] Seeing as the media was in some sense still in shock from the *Voice of Fire* acquisition, the journalistic reception of *Vanitas* didn't seem to take into consideration the fundamental difference between the permanence of an acquisition, and the ephemerality of an exhibition. In regard to *Vanitas*, the media often suggested that the Gallery had indeed purchased the work, which would imply regular replacement of the meat it was composed of. Disapproval in the media also stemmed from the base material used: food, which shouldn't, of course, be wasted. According to Johanne Lamoureux, the economic context also played a role: "the bad momentum, the unfortunate timing of the work which 'wastes' food in a year when the users of food banks have risen almost 20%." [18]

In the case of *Voice of Fire*, the medium itself was not questioned, but, as we saw earlier, the economic argument was indeed front and center. Despite their differences in terms of medium and permanence, the two artworks seemed to be destined to a similar fate: resistance from the public, and a media scandal based on the idea that such daring works don't have their place in a publicly funded museum. Interestingly, this rejection greatly contributed to the notoriety of both artists.

Voice of Fire has become one of the emblematic artworks associated with the National Gallery, who has

17 Barber, Bruce. "The Higher Meaning of the *Voice of Fire* and Flesh Dress Controversies" in Barber, Bruce and al. *Voices of Fire Art, Rage*, 1996, p. 96-120.

18 Lamoureux, Johanne. "Vanitas : robe de chair pour une albinos anorexique / Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic," *Espace sculpture*, No. 51 (Spring 2000), p. 16. Translated from French: "on invoque le mauvais *momentum*, le *timing* malheureux, d'une œuvre qui « gaspille » de la nourriture l'année même où la clientèle des banques alimentaires vient d'augmenter de près de 20 %."

indeed fostered this status over the past three decades, be it in their press releases, publications, outreach, or promotional material. Jana Sterbak, for her part, has become inextricably tied to her now-famous *flesh dress*.

Safa Jomaa trained as an architect École nationale d'architecture et d'urbanisme, in Tunis, where she completed her master's degree. She also holds a master's in museology and studio arts from Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO). Jomaa's research focuses on the work of museum professionals, notably exhibition designers, with the goal of accomplishing the tricky task of reconciling the exhibition space and the exhibited object. During a professional internship at Tunisia's Institut national du patrimoine in 2011, she participated in several restoration, rehabilitation, conservation and development projects at Tunisian museums and archeological sites. Jomaa's academic work as research assistant (2014-2018) with the research and reflection group CIÉCO (Collections et impératif évènementiel/The Convulsive Collections) was instrumental in developing her present grasp of issues surrounding events strategies in the art museum context.

Exhibiting flesh dresses: the cases of Jana Sterbak and Lady Gaga

Jessica Ragazzini

At the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards, Lady Gaga shocked the viewing public by appearing in a dress made of meat. However, her outfit was nothing new. Already, in the 1980s, Ann Simonton, a former model and founder of Media Watch, regularly protested beauty contests [1] wearing dresses and bikinis made of meat,[2] the most popular version being a low-cut mini-meat-dress.[3] In 1982, singer Linder Sterling took to the stage covered in meat scavenged from the dumpsters of local restaurants.[4] The venue where Sterling performed was wallpapered with tampons, and offal wrapped in pornographic images were distributed to the public.[5] However, in the museum context, it was Jana Sterbak's

1 Research at the archives of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History at The McPherson Center also show that, in the 1920s, women participating in the Miss California contest were criticized for wearing skimpy clothing, and for seeming too artificial. Since the 1960s, criticism has mostly been directed towards the lack of diversity and the reification this type of contest creates.
https://archives.santacruzmah.org/guides/guide-to-the-trini-contreras-photographs-miss-california-collection-1955-1985/history/

2 With Nikki Craft, she created "Myth California," (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agyEAhwrVUU, 2'40 and 3'40), "anti-runways" where protesters wore sashes resembling those used in official contests. Names using puns like "Miss Behavin'" were often written on them.

3 One version of Ann Simonton's flesh dress was photographed by Paul Schraub in 1982.

4 O'Brien, Lucy, "The woman punk made me," in Sabin, Roger (eds.). *Punk Rock: So What?*, Routledge, 1999, p. 186–198.

5 Bare flesh had shock value, and provoked people into reflecting on female sexuality. (O'Brien, Lucy, "The Woman Punk Made Me," p. 197).

famous flesh dress that captivated the attention of an entire country. In 1991, the National Gallery of Canada exhibited *Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic* (1987) in "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/ Corps à corps," a retrospective of her work. Despite the fact that the flesh dress had already been exhibited five times without provoking any notable reaction,[6] the National Gallery show triggered an unprecedented scandal across Canada. While the art world read the piece as a kind of *memento mori*, the general public saw little more than a waste of food.[7]

While the uses of meat by Simonton and Sterling in the 1980s seem to have faded from collective memory, Sterbak and Lady Gaga's flesh dresses would meet another fate, by way of media coverage and the museum context. Today, these dresses have become well-known, both in contemporary art and in pop culture. This text aims to show how their exhibition has transformed the flesh dress into an archetypal image of controversy.

The 1991 controversy: Sterbak's flesh dress

Sterbak's *Vanitas* addresses the ephemeral nature of the body,[8] while also embodying a social critique of dieting culture and the search for eternal youth traditionally associated with women.[9]

6 In Montréal in 1987, Toronto in 1988, Regina in 1989, Boston in 1990, and Paris in 1991.

7 For more on this, see Boucher, Mélanie. *La nourriture en art performatif. Son usage, de la première moitié du 20e siècle à aujourd'hui*, Trois-Rivières, Éditions d'art le Sabord, 2014; Boudier, Valérie and Anne-Hélène Delavigne. "De la Robe de chair de Sterbak à celle de Lady Gaga. Artistes contemporains et représentations de l'activité bouchère," *Déméter*, 2012. http://demeter.revue.univ-lille3.fr/lodel9/index.php?id=564

8 Canada Council for the Arts, "Sterbak, Jana (2012), Canada Council Laureate—on *Vanitas*, the meat dress," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFbvE1crXkI

9 Potvin, Claudine. "Féminisme et postmodernisme : la main tranchante du symbole." *Voix et Images*, 171, 1991, p. 73-74.

Vanitas' sculptural, and even statuary[10] meat was to be worn by a young woman strolling around the National Gallery during the opening of the 1991 retrospective.[11] In *La nourriture en art performatif et son usage, de la première moitié du 20e siècle à aujourd'hui* (2014), Mélanie Boucher underscores the semantic particularity of raw meat, which doubly references survival, in that it evokes both the body, and the food that nourishes it. Contemporary art consolidates these two elements: "meat, when transposed from the culinary to the performative context, and thus not undergoing ordinary food preparation, but rather a sort of ritual, appears suddenly to us as being both animal and human."[12] As Emily Newman notes, dead flesh, when used as clothing, contrasts starkly with living skin.[13] What's more, in the cases of Sterbak and Lady Gaga, the meat was worn by a young, attractive woman embodying a certain ideal of beauty.

Sitting on a stool with her hair in a bun, the young woman who posed for Sterbak only ended up wearing the dress for the duration of the photo shoot.[14] The resulting image accompanied the dress itself, presented

10 Lamoureux, Johanne. " Vanitas : robe de chair pour une albinos anorexique / Vanitas: Flesh Dress for an Albino Anorectic ", *Espace sculpture*, No. 51 (Spring 2000), p. 15.

11 Remarks by Richard Gagnier taken from the lecture "Performer l'objet n'est pas le reconstruire : *Vanitas : robe de chair pour albinos anorexique de Jana Sterbak*," presented at the panel *Passer à l'histoire : l'exposition et sa reconstitution* during the 2019 ACFAS conference.

12 Boucher, Mélanie. *La nourriture en art performatif et son usage, de la première moitié du 20e siècle à aujourd'hui*, p. 203.

13 Newman, Emily L. "Weighing the body: Female body image in contemporary art," PhD thesis, The City University of New York, 2012, p. 91.

14 Remarks by Richard Gagnier taken from the lecture "Performer l'objet n'est pas le reconstruire : *Vanitas : robe de chair pour albinos anorexique de Jana Sterbak*" presented at the panel Passer à l'histoire : l'exposition et sa reconstitution during the 2019 ACFAS conference.

on a coat hanger[15] during the exhibition. However, contemporaneous critiques of the piece seem to have neglected to examine the performative potentiality of the photograph,[16] instead focusing exclusively, and reductively, on the exhibited meat.

In subsequent exhibitions, two major changes were made to how the dress was presented. Firstly, the hanger was replaced by a dress form-type mannequin, evoking luxury and the fashion industry.[17] The form of the dress also evolved over time, beginning as a simple tunic (1987), then as thick armour (1991), and, finally, as a much shorter dress (1996). The space used to exhibit the work also changed over the years; it initially resembled a clothing store with a fashion show-style catwalk, a mode of presentation that was later employed at the Centre Pompidou as well (1996).[18] Sterbak eventually forewent the 1991 photograph to return to that of a young woman with her hair loose, sitting on the ground and wearing a dress made of much thinner pieces of meat that originally used in 1987. Today, the work remains well-known through the official photograph taken in 1987, which now replaces the meat itself in museum exhibitions of the piece.

In 2019, the Galerie UQO exhibition "La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution"

15 Remarks by Johanne Lamoureux taken from the lecture "Point de suspension. *Vanitas* mise en espace," presented at the panel *Passer à l'histoire : l'exposition et sa reconstitution* during the 2019 ACFAS conference.

16 The majority of media outlets questioned the legitimacy of contemporary artworks using meat exhibited in a national museum, particularly during a period of economic recession.

17 Lamoureux, Johanne. *Doublures. Vêtements de l'art contemporain*, exhibition catalogue, June 19 – Oct. 12, 2003, Montréal, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, ABC Livres d'Art Canada, 2003, p. 14.

18 Remarks by Johanne Lamoureux taken from the lecture "Point de suspension. *Vanitas* mise en espace," presented at the panel *Passer à l'histoire : l'exposition et sa reconstitution* during the 2019 ACFAS conference.

(2019) explored the history of the controversy surrounding *Vanitas*. The cartel text written by Clara Chaleyssin for the exhibition questions the role of the two photographs used:

> [...] *Following the exhibition at the National Gallery, the photographic version from 1991 was shown with the dress on only three occasions. It is rather the 1987 photo that was sold with the artwork, and that has remained its primary point of reference. Having been reprinted in innumerous catalogues and invitations, this photograph has indeed over time come to symbolize the entire artwork. It is perhaps the most conceptual of the two, and the draped aspect of the dress is more striking. The 1991 photo, on the other hand, shows an armour-like dress, much less resembling a feminine garment.* [...] *Nonetheless, one question remains: has the photograph not become a more effective reference to flesh that the dress itself?*

From scandalous outfit to museum piece: Lady Gaga's flesh dress

During her performance at the 2010 MTV Video Music Awards, Lady Gaga changed costumes three times.[19] Her first outfit, signed Alexander McQueen, displayed a printed image of two Renaissance-style angels; the second was a black dress accompanied by an Armani-designed spiked headband; and the third was her now-famous flesh dress.[20] Fishnet stockings were visible between the tattered meat hanging off her body. Gaga's

19 Images of the three outfits can be viewed on the MTV website: http://www.mtv.com/photos/jll89k/vma-2010-lady-gaga-lookbook

20 In September 2010, Lady Gaga posed in a meat bikini for photographer Terry Richardson. (*Vogue Homme Japan*). Her flesh dress was designed by designer Franc Fernandez and stylist Nicola Formichetti.

heavy boots were also made of meat and were held in place by white string. Her arms, hands and neck were adorned with glittering jewelry, and her white and blue wig contrasted sharply with her scarlet lipstick. She held a small meat hat completed the outfit.

Lady Gaga regularly draws from art history, as evidenced both by the McQueen dress and the music videos from her album, *Born This Way*, released on the same evening as the MTV event.[21] However, when questioned on the outfit by Ellen Degeneres,[22] Lady Gaga acknowledged neither the reference to the artist nor even to art history. A great admirer of Andy Warhol, she later told ArtPress that "I'm interested in how you can use someone else's celebrity status to create your own."[23] Her artistic approach is indeed partially based in the citing of other artworks and art movements. In the music video for the song released during the 2010 MTV Music Awards, Gaga pushes the pastiche even further, as detailed in journalist Aylin Zafar's in-depth analysis, "Deconstructing Lady Gaga's *Born This Way* Video."[24] Re-appropriated and transposed away from its original intention, the flesh dress thus entered into pop culture. For Lady Gaga, the dress itself was a concrete metaphor for the struggle for the rights of all not be reduced to mere flesh. In her own words: "I'm not a piece of meat."[25]

21 Excerpt from the MTV Video Music Awards, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVN4M-illi4

22 Lady Gaga interview with Ellen Degeneres, *Lady Gaga Speaks About Meat Dress On Ellen!*, 2010. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk0M54MPEqg&t=4s

23 Céh, Yan. "Warhol vu par Lady Gaga," *artpress*, 378, 2011, p. 63.

24 Aylin Zafar. "Deconstructing Lady Gaga's Born This Way Video," *The Atlantic*, 2011. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/03/deconstructing-lady-gagas-born-this-way-video/71924/

25 Lady Gaga interview with Ellen Degeneres, Lady Gaga Speaks About Meat Dress On Ellen!, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk0M54MPEqg&t=4s

Conversely, her outfit provoked many reactions from the general public, and animal rights groups saw it as an insulting provocation.[26]

The museumization of Lady Gaga's dress also contributed to its status as an art object. Unlike Sterbak's piece, which naturally deteriorates and speaks specifically to the aging body, in the museum context, Gaga's dress has been treated like an artifact that should remain unchanged over time.[27] Several exhibitions have considered Lady Gaga as a leading figure in contemporary pop music, presenting her dress as an emblematic piece. The travelling exhibition "Women Who Rock: Vision, Passion, Power," [28] presented in 2012 at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington), exhibited the dress in a vitrine, accompanied by a photograph of Gaga wearing it at the MTV Music Awards. The red and purple tones of the background were well-matched with the dress, evoking the colours of meat. Interestingly, the same colour scheme was used for the cover of the "Jana Sterbak: States of Being/Corps à corps" exhibition catalogue. Whether

26 See, for example Alexandra Topping's article quoting Ingrid Newkirk, "Lady Gaga's meat dress angers animal rights groups," The Guardian, 2010. https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/sep/13/lady-gaga-meat-dress-vmas, or the many petitions calling for the end of meat in fashion: https://www.change.org/p/tell-fernandez-meat-is-not-fashion

27 Coverage at cleveland.com of the dress's conservation for exhibition: https://www.cleveland.com/entertainment/2015/09/lady_gagas_meat_dress_takes_ce.html

28 The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame has presented the dress to the public on three different occasions: in 2011, in the exhibition "Women Who Rock: Vision, Passion, Power"; in 2015, in the exhibition "Right Here, Right Now Exhibit," where the dress was presented on a blue background; and the following year, in the exhibition "Louder Than Words: Rock and Politics exhibit," the 2012 and 2015 versions are remixed. In 2019, the dress was also part of the exhibition "Haus of Gaga / Las Vegas" at the PARK MGM Las Vegas Resort. This neon-tinged show takes an entirely new approach, devoid of photographic documentation.

coincidental or not, the convergence between the two — with respect to colour and the use of photography — is nothing less than striking.

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The history of meat in art and pop culture is a tumultuous one, as is amply demonstrated in "La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution" at Galerie UQO. In their respective areas, Jana Sterbak and Lady Gaga remain the most emblematic artists to have explored the genre. In art and exhibition history, *Vanitas* encompasses both Sterbak's piece, and the debates following its exhibition in 1991. Likewise, after its unveiling at the MTV Music Awards, the flesh dress became universally associated with Lady Gaga, and as a vector of controversy as well, one now largely centred on animal cruelty. In sum, the dress worn at the National Gallery of Canada and the dress worn by one of the most popular singers of her generation have now become part of the same fleshy continuum.

Jessica Ragazzini was assistant curator of "La Robe de chair au Musée national : expositions et reconstitution," presented at Galerie UQO in 2019. Working on a joint PhD between Université du Québec en Outaouais and Université Paris Nanterre under the supervision of Mélanie Boucher and Thierry Dufrêne, Ragazzini makes use of her background in philosophy in her transdisciplinary research on the tension between the reified body and the subjectified object in art, photography and fashion. Since 2018, she has been a research assistant for the project *Origine et actualité du devenir objet du sujet : se recréer au musée, dans les expositions* (Origins and current state of the becoming-object of the subject: recreating oneself in exhibition and museum contexts), research assistant at Galerie UQO, part-time professor at Université du Québec en Outaouais, and author of several articles on confusions between body and object in photographic practice.

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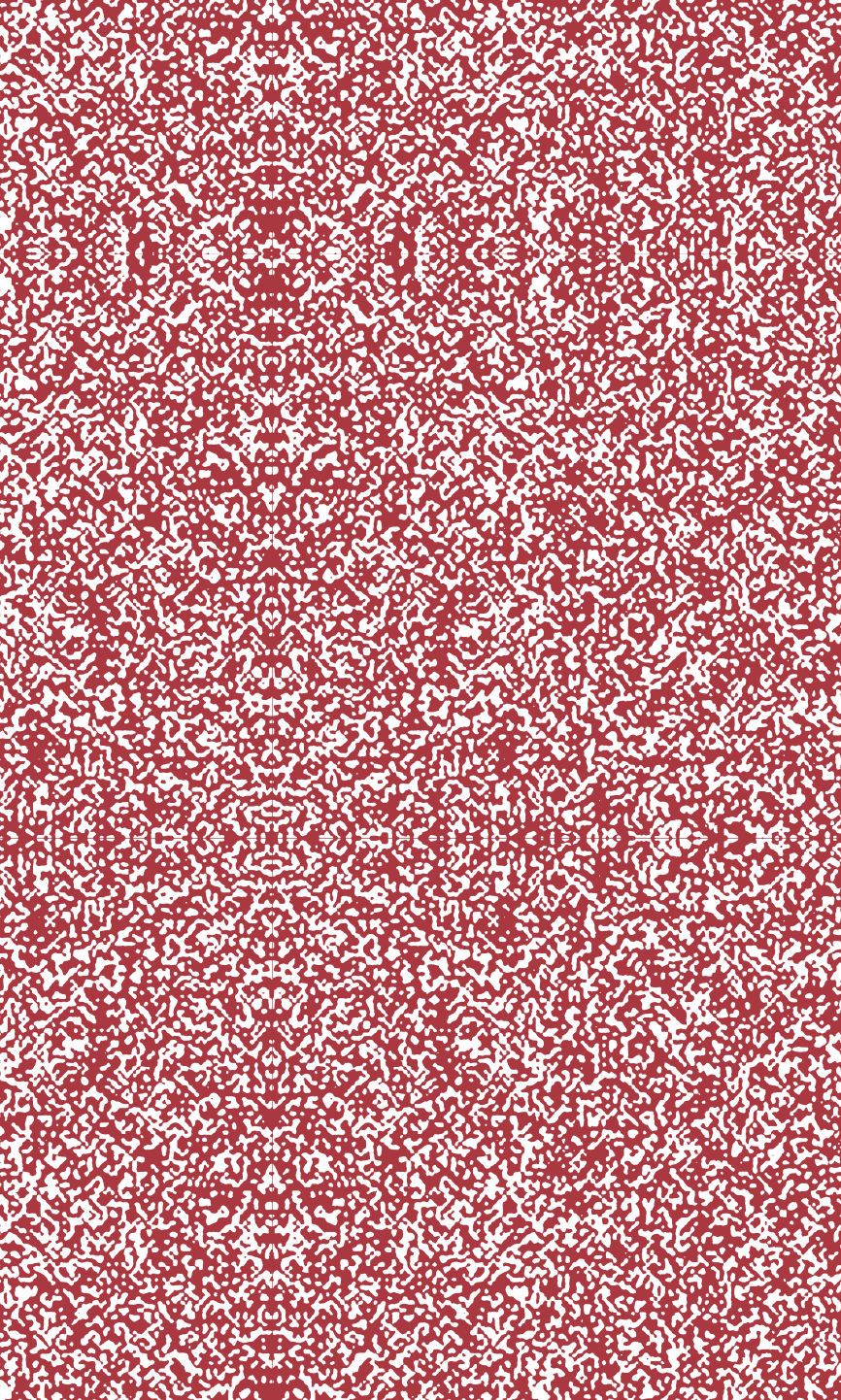


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