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Artwork as Network: A Reconceptualization of the Work of Art and its Exhibition

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ARTWORK AS NETWORK:
A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE WORK OF ART AND ITS EXHIBITION

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It is as if we woke up one day, and suddenly all the points in the world had burst into webs, all the straight lines into nets of wires, and all the planes and volumes revealed textured layerings of branchings within branchings. Nothing is what it seemed it would be.

– Christopher Vitale, *Networkologies*

Dedicated to my son Ash who taught me to travel light
and my Oma Grietje whose determination and
internal strength I've most certainly inherited

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ABSTRACT

Leonie Bradbury

ARTWORK AS NETWORK:

A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE WORK OF ART AND ITS EXHIBITION

As it reshapes the world we inhabit, the concept of the network has emerged as the dominant cultural paradigm across numerous fields and disciplines. Whether biological, social, political, global, communicational, or computational, networks are constituted by a decentered, distributed, multiplicitous, nonlinear system of nodes, plateaus, and edges that are endlessly interconnected and interdependent. Networks prioritize relationships between things over the things themselves, suggesting a reconfiguring of binary elements including: digital/tactile, virtual/material, private/public, and past/present. As networks rapidly change our world, it is logical to assume that contemporary artistic practices are impacted as well. In fact, works of art are uniquely situated to discover and reveal new ways of understanding social and cultural phenomena including that of the network.

Several questions arise: How do contemporary works of art relate to network culture? Alternately, how do networks redefine our understanding of specific works of art? How, in turn, are these works expanding our understanding of the network? As a way of focusing these questions, the dissertation addresses works by four contemporary artists: Franklin Evans, Simon Starling, Jenny Odell, and Pablo Helguera. Based on close art historical analysis, I argue that instead of depicting, illustrating or referring to networks as context, the works discussed are constituted or composed in and *as* networks. They are dynamic relational forms in which the

work of art and the network are rendered indissociable from one another. I further claim, that components which were previously considered as existing outside of the work of art – the gallery, the studio, references to texts, histories, artworks, historic objects, other artists, place, and even public programs and participants – are now part of what constitutes the work, thus indicating a profound shift in perspective in what we consider the “work of art” and the ways in which it is addressed and interpreted.

Keywords: Network, Franklin Evans, Simon Starling, Jenny Odell, Pablo Helguera

PREFACE

In the 2010 Whitney Biennial, Kate Gilmore's performative video, *Standing Here*, was displayed on a monitor next to the sheetrock structure where the artist's performance had taken place. The video, shot from above, first shows the artist busting her way into a narrow sheetrock clad, tunnel shaped 'room' without a door or windows. The artist is dressed in a red dress with white polka dots, sheer tights, black ballet flats, and gloves – an outfit seemingly unbecoming the task at hand – and begins to punch, rip, and grab at the walls in an apparent effort to break out of the room. The audio track consists of her heavy breathing and the destructive sounds of her violent actions. She is in fact creating a stairway of sorts to climb up the sides of the wall towards the camera. The piece ends several minutes later when Gilmore reaches up and turns it off.

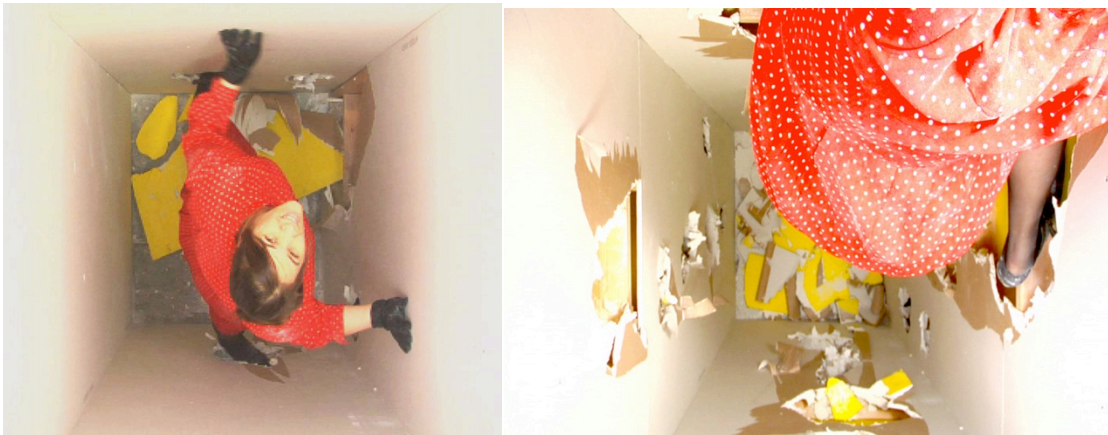


Fig. 1. Kate Gilmore, *Standing here*, video stills (2010).



Fig. 2. Installation View. Zsuzsanna Szegedi, *Erase with Me* (2011).

A year or so later, I encountered a video of a participatory drawing project by Zsuzsanna Szegedi that the artist had posted on her Vimeo channel. Entitled *Erase with Me*, the video captured a public art event held at Fourth Wall Project in Boston, an experimental artist space. It showed a stop motion animation of Szegedi creating a large-scale wall-drawing directly onto the gallery walls and its storefront windowpanes undertaken over the course of a few days. Once the drawing was finished, the artist played the animation that documented her creation of the work on a small monitor that was installed directly on top of the drawing. At the opening reception, she then invited the public to interact with the drawing and handed out spray bottles, sponges, and rags, before asking her audience to erase the work. She documented their process of erasure. Once erased, she added the footage to the monitor to play in a continuous loop following the creation documentation. Once the exhibition closed, the videos were posted on the artist's Vimeo channel.

When I first encountered Gilmore and Szegedi's works, I was intrigued and puzzled by a single question, asking myself: where is the art located? Is it located in the video on-line, on the gallery monitor, or at the performance that takes place in the gallery? Was Gilmore's art primarily the performance that had already taken place in the past, the sculptural remnant that served as a trace of the event, and/or the video documentation on the adjacent screen? In regard to Szegedi's erasing event, I wondered whether the artist's wall drawing was primarily the work? Or was it the public participatory event, the destructive erasing, or the combination of the two? Or ultimately, was it the video recording that served not just as documentation but rather as the actual work of art, especially since it seemed to capture all of the components together? In considering these questions, it became clear that *Standing Here* and *Erase with Me* both push aggressively at the boundaries of what constitutes the 'work of art.' Both works are comprised of multiple elements that exist in multiple mediums, across time, and at various locations to bring into question what is part of the work, what is intrinsic to what the work is, and what exists outside or extraneous to the work, apart from the work. In both *Standing Here* and *Erase with Me*, the video plays only one part in a constellation of fragmented yet related, objects, experiences, and sites that are distributed across multiple temporal and physical localities that *together* comprise the work of art. Indeed, it is the distributed form of the work that led to the emergence of the concept of the artwork as a network.

Artwork as Network

In 2013, I curated the exhibition *Absent/Present* for Montserrat Galleries that paired works by Kate Gilmore and Zsuzsanna Szegedi to explore these questions further. At the time, I

was primarily interested in the manner in which both artists redefined the role video plays within their complex practices, acting simultaneously as document and the work of art, a problem which formed my entry point into their work. For Gilmore, each work begins with the sculpture/performance/recording, while several of the elements, the resultant videos, and the photos are presented as independent objects. But *Standing Here* is not experienced as a singular object; rather it is precisely this constellation of the sculpture/performance/video-recording/photograph that the artist presents to an audience. Subsequent research after the exhibition allowed me to think through questions of creation, distribution, and display that eventually led to conceptual reworking and expansion of the earlier exhibition, opening to what I would come to call “the artwork as network.” While this concept was initially explored in the catalog essay for the *Absent/Present* exhibition, it quickly formed the premise for the current dissertation.

I want to argue that a new terminology is needed to describe these complex works that are constellations of many independent, yet interconnected parts. If, for instance, we consider the individual components as nodes and the relations between them as their edges, their overall form would constitute a network rather than an installation, collage, collection, or sculpture/performance/video-recording/photograph. Understood as a network, Gilmore’s *Standing Here* and Szegedi’s *Erase with Me* are but two examples of works of art that feature both temporal and spatial sequencing of formal, material, and conceptual elements working to create a single work of art that has more than one locale of existence. In this sense, viewers can fully experience specific elements that comprise each work while not seeing all of the parts, even if the artwork does not necessarily appear as incomplete. In this sense, a further series of questions begin to emerge: When has someone actually experienced *Standing Here*? Is it when

looking at the sculpture, the video, or the photograph? Similarly, when does one fully understand *Erase with Me*? When the viewer participates in an erasing? Or while watching the final animation? The answer may in fact be: “all of the above.” For it is in each of these instances that the various elements provide a singular experience of the work of art. The artwork, however, is no longer a singular object or event but rather presents itself as a network of interconnected and entangled autonomies. An artwork can now exist in numerous sites, across multiple media, and present itself through varying modes of distribution, and still be a single work of art. In other words, a single work of art can exist simultaneously in a distributed form across manifold temporal and physical localities. Executed in multiple media, its form has become relational. Crucially, the relational or networked nature of these works is not limited to the physical manifestations of each piece since these multiplicities of medium, presentation, and distribution additionally invite multiple fields of meaning.

Each component of these two artworks thus serves as a sign to the other parts and as a sign to other artistic practices, both past and present. The various elements of each piece form a network of connections that can be entered at any chronological point in a non-hierarchical fashion. One can also choose not to view the video at all, to watch it later at home on-line, or opt for a repeat visit on-line or at the museum. The order and method of engagement is up to the viewer; an added circumstance to be taken into account when we think about how work is viewed and experienced. Different material forms connect under the umbrella of ‘work of art’ and are presented in diverse configurations while using various modes of distribution. For this type of artwork, there is no center for it is a non-linear progression from one state to the next. How and where the viewer encounters the work similarly varies from one person to the next. The

various interpretations of each of these modes, by way of this non-hierarchical mode of experience, add to the complexity of the network.

This type of work thus becomes increasingly elaborate since each iteration of the work contains the possibility of connecting to infinitely more related parts. The various parts that constitute the work and the relationships that bind them congeal together to form a larger, relational form. No longer bound by the singularity of material form (sculpture, mural, video) or a singular mode of presentation (gallery, website, monitor), the location of 'the work' is an ever-shifting, non-centered, transformational site. The presentation of art through multiple mediums influences and alters the way we experience the work of art, especially if each component is presented as equally part of the overall work. The complexities of the layering of the various processes, digital and material, drawing and video, artist and audience, create a network of related and connected parts that can be experienced separately or together depending on the viewing mode of encountering the work, as well as at which point in the process of creation the viewer's interaction takes place.

These new, non-centered works allow for multiple, non-hierarchical entry points in terms of both their physical manifestations, interpretative content, and the viewer's method of encounter. There is no longer a one-to-one relationship between a unified, autonomous object and the viewer. The various iterations of a single work of art are connected conceptually, visually, and thematically, yet can be separated in terms of their presentation and viewing method. As Deleuze and Guattari so provocatively state in their seminal publication, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*: "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the

conjunction, and... and... and..." (25). This affirmation of the "and, and, and," is particularly relevant here. *Standing Here* is a sculpture, a performance, a performative video, a video document, *and* a series of c-prints, and so on. *Erase with Me* is a drawing, a happening, an erasing, *and* a stop-motion animation, and so on. Each of these pieces contains multiple individual components that are contingent yet independent, autonomous yet united to form such multiplicities. This distribution of the work of art across multiple sites happens physically, interpretively, and subjectively. The non-centered art object is no longer time or location specific, and in each of its iterations the response to the work shifts. The sequential and rhizomatic nature of each piece allow for multiple, non-hierarchical entry points, redefining the traditional, one-to-one relationship between object and subject, artwork and viewer. But how then do these works relate to the contemporary understandings of networks? In fact, in what sense can these artworks even be considered networks?

The guiding theoretical premise of this dissertation is that there are contemporary works of art that do not simply visualize the complexity of network culture. Nor do they simply image or represent the network. Rather, they exist and function *as* complex networks. Indeed, in a sense that remains for us to explore, these artworks *are* networks. The dissertation thus recognizes how contemporary artists can open up new avenues of understanding our current socio-cultural conditions through the works they create and how they are exhibited. The aim of this project, then, is not to create alternate, fixed, or reductive interpretations of networks; rather the goal is to show how specific artworks can help us understand and rework concepts of networks in additional and expansive ways. Simultaneously, the network framework allows us to expand and deepen our understanding of these contemporary works of art, how they act, what they do, how they generate meaning, and what they are showing us about ourselves in our contemporary

moment. In its most basic form, the network is a dynamic, relational form where a number of parts are connected to one another and also to other things through a set of relational connections that form a network. I propose that when an artwork brings together a constellation of objects, people and/or events in various forms across different media, across time, and at various locations, its distributed, relational form can be considered a network. No doubt “network” is a slippery term, but its slipperiness opens up a space of productive ambiguity and leaves room for continual redefinition. In short, the goal is not to create a new, fixed structure but rather allow for new, dynamic, and relational forms to emerge. The visually and conceptually divergent works by Franklin Evans, Simon Starling, Jenny Odell and Pablo Helguera that will be discussed in the chapters that follow each possess such a distributed, relational form whereby the artwork exists across localities and temporalities and is presented in that particular form at that particular moment, even if only temporarily. As we will discover, the formations that constitute the work are apt to change and reconfigure as new opportunities for exhibition or redistribution present themselves. It is important to note that although these individual practices will be examined through a network lens, this is meant as an *additional* reading of these works, one that adds to the readings of these works within their disciplines rather than serves as a substitute. As the chapter titles suggest, this project offers a rethinking of “painting as network,” “sculpture as network,” “archival art as network” and “social practice as network.”

A Reconceptualization of The Work of Art and its Exhibition

The notion of “network” is a pervasive and convincing new way of enframing contemporary societal and cultural practices. The following chapters seek to demonstrate that

networks are evidenced within artistic practice in manifold ways, but most notably in the emergence of the concept of an artwork *as* network. As artists are frequently in the forefront of interacting with and responding to societal change, it is logical to assume that networks impact their practices as well. In consequence, several questions arise that frame the dissertation's larger argument: How do contemporary works of art respond to network culture? Alternately, how do networks expand our understanding of specific works of art? Can a work of art take on a distributed form and thus become a network? In turn, how can these works of art redefine our understanding of networks? As a way of focusing these questions further, the dissertation addresses work by four artists: Franklin Evans, Simon Starling, Jenny Odell, and Pablo Helguera. Based on close description and art historical analysis, I argue that instead of depicting and illustrating networks, or referring to networks as mere context, the work of these four artists is constituted in and *as* a network.

Artwork as Network is divided in five chapters. The first chapter, "Networks and Artworks," serves as an introduction to basic concepts of networks and explores the expanded form of artworks. The main focus of this chapter is to establish a common ground between the text and the reader. It provides an overview of what constitutes a network by analyzing its different characteristics. The chapter addresses the representation of networks as illustrated diagrams and the resulting limitations in our understanding of how they work, asking how they might be addressed in other ways. Lastly, the chapter discusses the larger cultural implications of networks and how the notion of networks is shaping subjectivity and cultural explorations at large. Taken together, the different sections that compose the chapter ground the origins of network thinking within a wide range of fields, including twentieth century philosophy as well as the history of art, again with the intent of introducing the reader to the historical precedents that

serve as jumping off point for the readings of Evans, Starling, Odell, and Helguera in the subsequent chapters. In doing so, all four case studies position history in the present moment, as one node in a constellation of nodes, intimately connected to and as an integral part of the work.

The introduction also explores the connections created between Michel Foucault's essay "Of Other Spaces," Jack Burnham's critical essay "Systems Art," Rosalind Krauss' "Grids" and "The Expanded Field," and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "Rhizome" chapter as these texts together come to shape our understanding of networks in the following chapters. Additionally, contemporary precursors to "artworks as networks" are explored through Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of the artwork as a "relational form," a concept that will be expanded both in Chapter Two and in Chapter Three. Lane Relyea's introduction of the term "object networks" also serves as a contemporary contextualization of artworks that are (object) networks. His observations serve as another important starting point for the dissertation. Finally, James Voorhies' concept of "exhibition as critical form" is instrumental in setting up the different chapters, notably in the ways in which exhibitions come to generate their own theoretical content.

Chapter Two, "Franklin Evans: Painting as Network," is focused on a detailed analysis of *juddrules*, a large-scale installation and exhibition I curated for Montserrat College of Art in 2014. Evans' installation spreads across the gallery walls and floors in a maze-like form. Visually overwhelming and intense, certain sections of the exhibition read like an art history textbook with many reproductions of well-known paintings and references to art historical and theoretical texts. Other sections read more like a Google image search, but one where the images are made material and find themselves interrupted, conjoined by color test prints and strips of painter's tape. Evans' practice involves bringing together items ranging from fully finished large-scale *trompe l'oeil* oil paintings to digital printouts, from scraps of tape to bits of string.

While on site in the gallery, he adds even more items, including site-specific blocks of color painted directly onto the wall, printed-out texts from art books, and gallery press releases, layering and connecting the various elements into a site-specific installation. Although Evans considers himself first and foremost a painter, his installations go beyond any traditional definition of painting.

Evans' process reflects our ability to actively consume and produce information using the Internet as a tool. It simultaneously addresses the Internet's utility and its overwhelming complexity and contradictory nature. *juddrules* specifically offers a blend of traditional and digital technologies since it combines hyperrealist paintings with pixelated imagery downloaded from the Internet. *juddrules*' obsessive referencing to outside source materials, both visual and textual, appears to embrace information overload rather than constituting a critique. Evans engages the peripheral, ephemeral materialities that evidence one's life and collects digital images and texts in an effort to rematerialize them in his work. His process of making the abstract concrete, of looping or conceptual doubling, and of mirroring information into various states of mediatization, is where *juddrules* functions as a site of convergence between traditional artistic practices and internet cultures. These so-called feedback loops create a disorienting effect. But how exactly do they relate to the culture or structure of a network? *juddrules* is precisely an installation concerned with the space *between* things, (i.e. objects, people, images, materials, ideas), suggesting that Evans' practice is closely related to this larger cultural phenomenon of networked connectivity. But is *juddrules* in the end a mere visualization of a network? Does it simply offer a metaphor for our networked culture? Or does the work expose other ways of conceptualizing the relation between artwork and network?

Chapter Three, “Simon Starling: Sculpture as Network,” explores Starling’s conceptual research based artistic practice, which is comprised of a complex system of intensive research, art history, film, performance, and object production. The work is frequently described as “rich in associations,” as a “web of information,” and even at times as a “network.” Starling explores the interconnectedness of objects, ideas, and people both past and present. The realms examined in his varied practice include economics, politics, social issues, and the environmental, but it is always through the lens of artistic production, both his own as well as others. Chapter Three focuses on analyzing three works of art created by Starling that were on display in Chicago in 2014. The first is a sculpture, *Bird in Space 2004*, on view as part of the *Metamorphology* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. The second, a companion project, titled *Simon Starling: Pictures for an Exhibition*, was housed at and commissioned by The Arts Club in Chicago. Lastly, *Three White Desks* is a sculpture that was exhibited as part of Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Altermodern* exhibition at the Tate Modern. All three projects are engaged in the discourse and history of modernism and feature as their main protagonists Edward Steichen, Marcel Duchamp, and Constantin Brancusi.

As part of this investigation, Starling addresses concepts such as originality, repetition, reproducibility, authorship, the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, and the photograph as index. Given the ways in which Starling’s work addresses the history of modernist sculpture, the chapter also draws on the work of Rosalind Krauss; even though she has not commented directly on Starling’s work – nor in turn has he directly referenced her own writings or ideas – the chapter argues that Krauss has written many significant texts on the artists and topics raised by Starling’s work. In short, Starling’s conversation with both the history of modernism and sculpture clearly intersects with Krauss’ writings. At the same time, the chapter

situates Starling's individual art works in light of networks, demonstrating how his work can help us understand or reshape our understanding of what networks are and can be. Indeed, his work creates different ways of understanding the concept of a network within the context of contemporary art and its exhibition forms.

Chapter Four, "Jenny Odell: Archive as Network," examines an ongoing archival art project, *The Bureau of Suspended Objects*, that began as part of an artist residency when Odell collected two hundred objects from "the pile," a community dump site at a waste treatment facility called Recology in San Francisco. Odell meticulously documented, recorded, and then researched each object she "rescued" from the waste stream. The resulting information was used to form a digital and physical archive, an exhibition, and a book. The artist showed particular interest in the provenance of each object, as she obsessively traced not just where and when the objects were sold but also recovered its place of manufacture, mode of distribution, material origin, and even the advertisements used to promote its sale. The artist often included historical documentation of factories and manufacturing ephemera such as contracts and patents as evidence of the objects' origins and trajectory through time. Odell's *Bureau of Suspended Objects* consists of many interlocking and interconnected parts that together comprise the work.

As a whole, Odell's project is an archival artwork and as such it engages with current and past discourse regarding the archive. British archivist Sue Breakell's definition of archives as "bodies of information," where "objects bearing value and meaning," serves an opening epigraph for the chapter. Hal Foster's notion of the "archival impulse," a phrase he coined in an article published in *October* in 2004, is also central to our reading of Odell. Additionally, Foster's observation that, "archival artists make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present" (4) plays a significant role in our understanding of her work. We further situate the

Bureau of Suspended Objects historically in relation to two major exhibitions. The first, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, was curated by Okwui Enwezor in light of Jacques Derrida's book, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1994), which directly influenced Enwezor's exhibition and title. The second is the exhibition *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art*, based on an essay "Deep Storage. On the Art of Archiving" by Ingrid Schaffner (1995) and on view at PS1 MoMA in the summer of 1998. Situated in the context of these theoretical texts and two major exhibitions, the goal of this chapter is to address how Odell's *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* expands our understanding of networks by rethinking networks through the lens of the archive. The chapter will provide historical examples of artworks that were collections and/or archives in order to further ground Odell's project in its art historical context. Echoing the chapters on Franklin Evans and Simon Starling, and specifically the relation between their work and concepts of history, *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* is not just an archive, exhibition, and work of art marked by nostalgia and sentimental longing; rather these various components of the work together begin to rearticulate another understanding of the artwork in and as a network.

Chapter Five, *Pablo Helguera: Social Practice as Network*, considers two exhibitions, *Librería Donceles* and *Club Americano*, that present the work of art at the intersection of the venue, the event or event series, and community, which together form a socially engaged form of artistic practice. The first, *Librería Donceles*, is a fully functioning second-hand bookstore stocked with approximately 10,000 objects that also served as a community gathering space, with an active roster of community centered programming, workshops, and performing arts events. *Club Americano* was an exhibition of historic objects selected by Helguera from the museum's fine art and decorative arts collections that were accompanied by a series of

performances, all curated – and also sometimes performed – by Helguera himself. *Club Americano* likewise served as a gathering space for members of the community who were invited to select their presentation topics in response to the themes of the exhibition. Conceptually, both *Librería Donceles* and *Club Americano* explore issues surrounding identity, politics, and immigration within the larger context of The Americas.

In this last chapter, we deploy Helguera’s own definitions of the term “socially engaged art” as a baseline for analyzing the work. For Helguera, social interaction is not just an activity that lies adjacent or parallel to the work; rather it is part of the work, it *is* the work. I argue that we add to this reading of the work by demonstrating that Helguera’s projects create several types of networks: object networks, historic networks, information networks, and most importantly, social networks, in which members of the community participate with the artist, with the project, but also with each other. In looking closely at the various network connections, we will expand the reading of these two works beyond that of a socially engaged work of art. Furthermore, a portion of the public programs that accompany the exhibitions are designed by the community, produced with the community, and presented to the community. The communal aspects of the work do not simply amplify, support, or augment Helguera’s work but rather are an integral part of both what constitutes the work and what makes it a networked art experience. Lastly, I discuss the context provided by the exhibiting venues – Urbano and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, respectively – as they too are part of the network that constitutes the artwork. The chapter concludes by reconnecting these two projects to the central thesis concerning socially engaged art as it is understood in relation to networks.

Situated together, the chapters that follow investigate four artists whose work responds to, explores, embraces, and counters the increasing virtualization, mobilization, and globalization

of networked cultures. In this sense, the overarching questions that inform the research are: How do technologies, and especially the Internet and its most ubiquitous interface, the World Wide Web, transform artistic practice? With networks as the ubiquitous form of our current moment, can we discern a wide range of responses reflected in contemporary artistic practices? How do works of art expand our understanding of networks, and conversely, how do networks influence artistic practices? I propose that the aesthetic realm is precisely the place where we can find answers or reformulations to these complex questions, since art, as a questioning and revealing mode of engagement, is particularly suited for this role of visualizing and materializing this response. In the process of closely examining these seemingly disparate works by four quite different contemporary artists, similarities begin to emerge across varied practices, similarities that constellate around different ideas, people, and things across media, time, and place. They also address history, and art history in particular, in diverse ways, questioning – and thus rethinking – our preconceived notions of history as a linear process. Finally, I argue that components which were previously considered as existing outside of the work of art – the gallery, the studio, histories, other artworks or historic objects, even public programs and their participants – are now part of what constitutes the work, thus indicating a profound shift in perspective in what we consider the “work of art” and the various ways in which it is expressed in its exposure or exhibition. In short, the works discussed in the chapters that follow are dynamic relational forms in which the work of art and the network are now rendered indissociable from one another, chapters that constellate around the concept of “artwork as network.” As we will discover, some questions such as where the boundaries of the work are and whether or not the work is an explicit critique of the postmodern condition may remain unanswered throughout this process. In part, it is both the fluid, temporary, and inclusive nature

of these works that complicates an answer to these questions. However, it is my hope that in reading these chapters, and discovering the relational nature of the works of art described, that further questions emerge, questions that take these works and the concept of the artworks as network out into the world where artists and others may think through this complex notion and take it further in new directions.

CHAPTER 1

Networks and Artworks: An Introduction

The network is a pattern that is common to all life.
Wherever we see life, we see networks.

– Fritjof Capra

As it reshapes the world we inhabit, the concept of the network has emerged as a dominant paradigm across numerous fields and disciplines. Whether biological, social, political, global, cultural, communicational, or computational, networks are constituted by a decentered, distributed, multiplicitous, nonlinear system of nodes, edges, and grounds that are endlessly interconnected and interdependent. Networks prioritize relationships between things over the things themselves, suggesting a reconfiguring of binary elements including digital/tactile, virtual/material, private/public, object/subject, original/copy, and past/present. As networks rapidly change our world, it is logical to assume that contemporary artistic practices are impacted as well. In fact, works of art are uniquely situated to discover and reveal new ways of understanding social and cultural phenomena, including that of the network. But in order to understand the relation between networks and the work of art, we need to more fully understand what a network is.

In the twenty-first century, ‘networks’ are a way to see and frame everything around us. For example, our communication and transportation systems, our social networks, both physical and virtual, even the natural world, can all be considered examples of networks. One essential way to define a network is as an arrangement of intersecting horizontal and vertical lines, such as a mesh, grid, lattice, or web. Warren Sack, in “From Networked Publics to Object Oriented

Democracies,” notes that the term network originally was employed in the sixteenth century to represent the weaving together of sets of material strands such as metal, fabric leather, and so on (18). It can also be defined as a collection of connected objects or denote a system of connected things, such as computers, cell towers, or phones. The term network further represents support networks, broadcasting networks, electrical networks, distribution networks, and computer networks. Friedrich Kittler in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* defines the network as “the network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store and process relevant data” (369). It can also refer to natural networks, neuro-networks, circulatory systems, biological systems, bio-political networks, and a variety of ecosystems, both human and non-human. The use of the term as a synonym for a group of interrelated people, by contrast, is a recent invention. In the twentieth-century, it also became a verb: meaning to link, connect, and meet. According to Sack, the verb “to network,” meaning to introduce and be introduced to other people outside of one’s immediate social circle, “made its first appearance in the 1970s after the deployment of ARPAnet, the precursor to the Internet” (18). Most recently, with the advent and rise of social media, the term network also has come to denote on-line social networks that are easily accessed through the web and mobile applications.

Network as a concept, although ubiquitous, is thus broad, complex, and multiplicitous in its definition. How it is defined depends on the various disciplines through which one deploys the term. Christopher Vitale in *Networkologies* wonders what exactly the notion of networks means in a philosophical context:

Certainly the term is everywhere today. And yet, the meanings attached to this notion, at least in everyday speech, are far from clear. It is as if the term were designed to proliferate and slip away from us, to multiply and increase in intensity, functioning

differently in ever more situations, moving from tired and hackneyed to surprisingly different and back again, giving rise to new possibilities in the circuits of flight in between. (7)

No doubt network is an ambiguous term, changing and fluctuating as much as the very networks it seeks to capture. However, it is precisely this ambiguity and the slipperiness of the term that is productive, as it opens up a space for redefining, rethinking, and re-conceptualizing the significance of networks and their critical implications. Although valuable interpretations of networks have been produced in the realms of science and technology, media and communication studies, as well as, the corresponding fields of data visualization, I argue in the pages that follow that we need to move beyond illustrations of networks and look for more imaginative models for rethinking the term.

1.1 ASPECTS OF NETWORKS

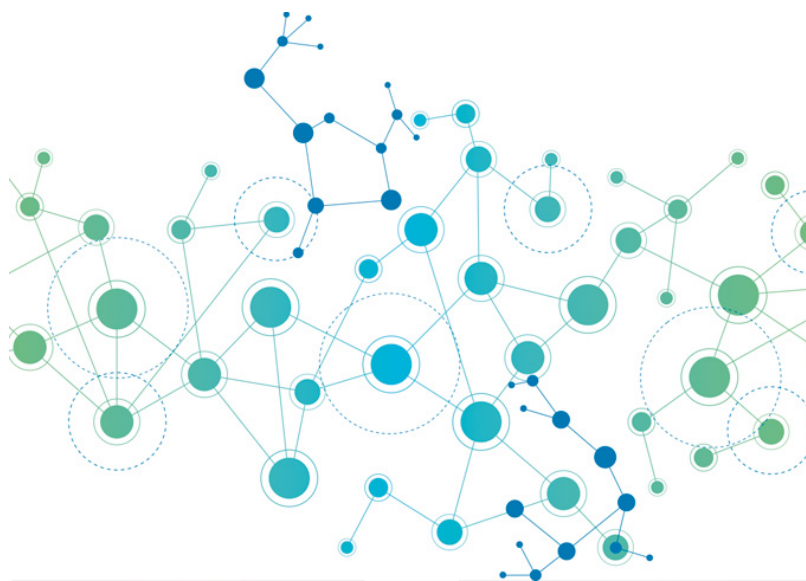


Fig. 3. Illustration of a basic network form showing nodes and edges.

A contemporary diagrammatic representation of a network generally visualizes ‘nodes’ and ‘edges,’ with the latter are also described as ‘vertices’ or ‘links’ (see fig. 3). In general, the nodes are the individuated parts used to indicate the various components or elements (people, objects, concepts), and the edges stand for the *relationship* between them, their mode of connection. The edges are dynamic since the relationship between the nodes they connect is an active process that can be temporary as elements become disconnected and reconnected to and from each other, just as their relationships are reconfigured as a result. The Internet is the most common example of a network whereby one can consider the computers and devices that comprise the network as the nodes, and the physical or wireless modes of connection between the devices as the edges between the nodes. The edges represent the way signals (communications between nodes) act in the network, rather than the actual physical connections (cables, wires, signals). Likewise, when considering the World Wide Web, the websites can be thought of as nodes while the connections or links to other sites would be their edges.

The nodes and the edges together form “the network.” As a result of their relational nature, networks exist in a temporary formation and are often mobile and flexible as they grow or shrink in size. In *The Exploit*, critical theorists Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker explore the unique qualities of networks and address their modes of operation through a wide realm of disciplines and figures, including philosophy, French theory, Marx, the military, and academic and computer programming worlds. The book provides a clear understanding of how networks operate and how nearly every aspect of contemporary culture can be located within them. The book is set up in two sections: “nodes” and “edges,” two concepts that we have established as central to any network. Networks are often presumed to be egalitarian, equal systems of distribution, in part due to the oversimplified graphic diagrams in which they are

illustrated. On the contrary, the main argument that *The Exploit* makes is that “to have a network, one needs a multiplicity of nodes. Yet the mere existence of these nodes in no way implies an inherently democratic, ecumenical or egalitarian order. Quite the opposite” (13). Networks have hierarchies within them, with certain nodes having much more weight or significance (or power) than others. Galloway and Thacker address the tension that exists between nodes and edges and the ‘whole’ they produce as follows: “The individuation of the network as a whole is different from the individuation of the network components. However, both concern themselves with the topology of the network” (59). Two terms are worth expanding upon here: “topology” and “individuation.” Topology is a key term in understanding the physical functioning of computer networks and the flow of information within it. Topology within mathematics is the study of connectedness, continuity, and boundary; all are topics relevant to network theory. Time and space are key elements in describing topology. The type of individuation discussed here is different from a classical understanding of differentiation or individualization between persons, organizations, or entities; rather, in this case, ‘individuation’ is “concerned with the tension between the individuation of networks as a whole and the individuation of the component parts of networks” (ibid.). The multiple layers of topologies, physical and logical, spatial and temporal, combine to comprise a network.

In addition to the basic topology of nodes and links and the topological layers mentioned above, Vitale adds the dimension of the “ground.” He states: “The parts connected in a network can be recast as *nodes*, which are joined together by *links*. Nodes and links are always surrounded by backgrounds, or *grounds*, which are aspects of the more general *ground* of which they are themselves parts. While grounds may appear unified, whenever they are examined more closely, they are always composed of more networks, which then reveal their own grounds in

turn” (18). Vitale reveals a level of added complexity by situating networks against a ground, which consists of additional networks, rather than a passive or vacuous background: “Considered together, nodes, links, and grounds give rise to networks, even as each is ultimately composed of more networks in turn” (ibid.). At its simplest, Vitale’s definition of a network is “any whole, composed of parts, distinguished from a background, and composed of other parts and wholes, layered into each other at multiple levels of scale” (16).

Networks, we now understand, are not just comprised of edges and links, parts and wholes, but also can include multiple layers or topologies (physical and logical, spatial and temporal), which suggests that the concepts of background and scale should also be taken into account. Manuel Castells in *Communication Power* further describes the network as a set of interconnected nodes but nuances their individual roles: “Nodes may be of varying relevance to the network, and so particularly important nodes are called ‘centers’ in some versions of network theory. Still, any component of a network (including ‘centers’) is a node and its function and meaning depend on the programs of the network and on its interaction with other nodes in the network” (19). Castells addresses differentiation in the significance of certain nodes in comparison to others:

Nodes increase their importance for the network by absorbing more relevant information, and processing it more efficiently. The relative importance of a node does not stem from its specific features but from its ability to contribute to the network’s effectiveness in achieving its goals, as defined by the values and interests programmed into the networks.
(19-20)

He continues to describe the role of the nodes in relation to the network as a whole:

However, all nodes of a network are necessary for the network's performance, although networks allow for some redundancy as a safeguard for their proper functioning. When nodes become unnecessary for the fulfillment of the networks' goals, networks *tend* to reconfigure themselves, deleting some nodes, and adding new ones. Nodes only exist and function as components of networks. The network is the unit, not the node. (20)

Castells here clearly explains both the role of the node in relation to the network as a whole and the dynamic nature of a network's form, one that reconfigures as nodes are added or deleted. In short, not all nodes are created equal, nor are they of equal importance in relation to each other and the network as a whole.

1.2 Network as Relational Form

Networks provide more polymorphous ways of theorizing what has often previously been seen as rigidly dichotomous.

– Christopher Vitale

It is useful to now look at networks in a more theoretical realm as this will aid with further additions to our vocabulary of terms and broaden our understanding of what the concept of network means as it is defined within the scope of this dissertation. Due to the relational nature of its form, networks are in constant motion. Connectivity, flexibility, changeability, and mobility are key identifiers for a network. When considering our networked culture, they are prevalent descriptors of our contemporary moment. The cultural framework of “network” has

become a way to understand and organize a complex global world. The term network now also stands for a system of nodes – decentered, distributed, multiplicitous, non-linear – that are endlessly connected to each other and inform much of what we see around us as information (data) rapidly moves from one side of the planet to another. According to Vitale:

Everything in the world can be seen as a network, and in this sense, to call anything in the world a network simply means to see it relationally, as a network composed of networks, linked to others, layered in levels, against a ground, and as an aspect of various processes and reifications. Networks are then, more than anything, a way of looking at the world, a shift in perspective, a lens, which makes everything appear networkedly.

(20)

The inherent interconnected character of our world confirms that networks are not a new phenomenon since they appear in nature, the human body, medieval transportation networks, and ancient tribal communication networks; rather, it is the dominant presence of the digital communication networks that are revealing and augmenting our inherent connectivity as connectivity becomes faster, easier, and more prevalent than ever.

The relational element of a network is that ‘something’ which exists between two or more things. In terms of the network, that which connects the nodes and the edges represents the relation between the nodes. Additionally, the relationships between the nodes and the overarching network are of significant importance. In fact, according to Galloway and Thacker, connectivity “is so highly privileged today that it is becoming more and more difficult to locate places or objects that don’t in some way fit into a networked rubric” (26). They further state: “a network in a sense is something that holds a tension within its own form – a grouping of

differences that is unified” (61) (as we will see, this concept of the “grouping of differences that is unified” provides a useful visual construct to keep in mind when looking at the particular artworks discussed in the later chapters). They repeat: “the mere existence of networks does not imply democracy or equality. If anything, it is this existence-as-such-of networks that needs to be thought; the existence of networks invites us to think in a manner that is appropriate to networks,” which leads to a further question they address in parentheses “would this then mean experimenting with something called philosophy?” (13). Galloway and Thacker simultaneously dispel the myth of the egalitarian nature of networks, while also expanding the notion of network to reach more existential realms in terms of its conceptual application.

The concept of networks can thus be applied to fields ranging from the physical and technological to the metaphorical, even, as suggested above, the philosophical. In *Reassembling the Social. An introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, Bruno Latour suggests “the word network is so ambiguous that we should have abandoned it long ago” (128). He distinguishes between two types of networks, one technological, and the other social: “network is a concept, not a thing out there. It is a tool to help describe something not what is described” (130). When Latour first deployed the term, it was initially used to indicate technical networks such as “metrology, subways, telephones” (ibid.). He did so with the intention of using it as a counter to other terms such as “society,” “institution,” or “fields” (ibid.). This was before the release of the Internet to the public in 1995 and terrorist networks such as al-Qaida, who reframed the use of the term in a social context. He laments: “But nowadays, networks have become the rule and the surfaces the exception. It has lost its sharp edge” (ibid.). Latour further disparages the initial “simple-minded visual representations” of “star-like embranchments out of which lines leave to connect other points that have nothing but new connections, [which] provided a rough but faithful equivalent to

those associations,” whose main drawback was “not capturing movements and of being visually poor” (133). He astutely reminds us that the “map is not the territory” and that poor visual graphics should not be confused with the rich and diverse relationships they are meant to symbolize. For Latour, “the ‘main tenet’ of Actor Network Theory is that “the actors themselves make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics” (“On Using ANT” 67). This last argument is particularly pertinent in the context of our close examination of the works of art that follow since they too generate “their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics.”

Actor Network Theory is an important theoretical precursor to contemporary network thinking and the relational nature of things in particular. John Law, in his introduction to *Actor Network Theory and After*, proposes that actor-network theory is based on the belief that entities have no inherent value since value is received from the relationship with other entities. This presents a post-structuralist, semiotic worldview in that values are no longer considered absolute or fixed but rather fluid and malleable. In fact, they argue against fixity and singularity. Law explains the notion of a “semiotics of relationality,” which applies notions of relationality ruthlessly to all things – including materials – summed up in the term: “relational materiality,” rather than adhering to a post-structuralist application of relationality to language alone. The second concept he addresses in the actor-network context is that of performativity, suggesting that according to the semiotic approach, entities “achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located” and that this means that these entities in turn are “performed in, by, and through those relations” (4). He further defines actor-network theory as “a semiotic machine for waging war on essential differences. [Actor-network] has insisted on the performative character of relations and the objects constituted in those relations” (7). As a social

theory, actor-network theory is significant, firstly in terms of its tremendous influence in the field of network theory, but secondly – in relation to the discussions in the chapters that follow – it serves as a historic marker, a sign-post to refer back to, and a way of acknowledging in discussing works of art through the lens of object networks that one owes a debt to the work performed by Law and his colleagues, notably as they continue to expand and reframe concepts of network, relational materiality, and the performative nature of actor-networks. Although the research that follows is not focused exclusively on actor-network's theoretical frameworks, it is necessary to acknowledge and address its critical importance.

1.3 Imaging Networks

Diagramming describes how networks deal with issues of representation, recasting these notions, as networks tend to do, in more relational form.

– Christopher Vitale

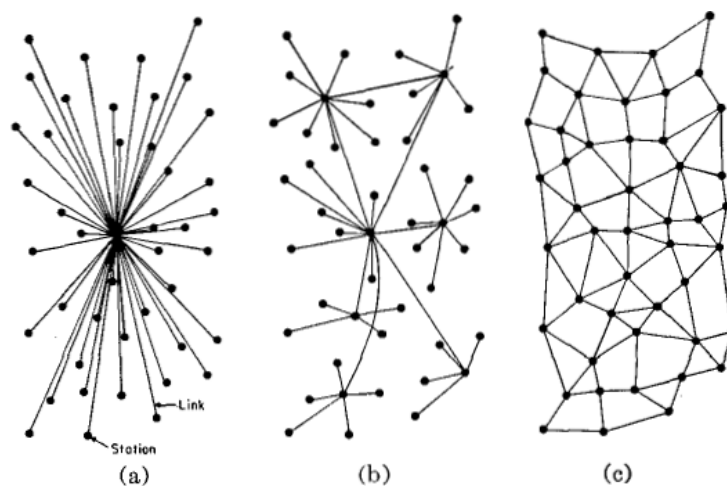


Fig. 1—(a) Centralized. (b) Decentralized. (c) Distributed networks.

Fig. 4. Paul Baran. *Distributed Networks* (1964)

What does a network look like? Now that we have discussed various definitions and applications of the term across several theoretical disciplines, it is useful to turn to some visual imagery to further our argument. The Internet, the most ubiquitous network, is a physical network of things – i.e. computers, routers, cables – yet we often envision it as an organic, expanding form similar to a galaxy or as a nervous system, where the things signal each other. But what can we learn from the visual metaphors we create for this complex network? How does this understanding, or imagining, inform network theory and ways of thinking connectivity? There are at present a few dominant modes of visual representation that come to mind when using network as a term. The three primary modes are “centralized,” “decentralized,” and “distributed” (see fig. 4). It is important to establish an understanding of these terms and their genealogy. The distributed network concept was conceived by network pioneer Paul Baran who formulated it while he worked for the RAND Corporation in the 1960s while trying to build a new system of communication using computers.

At that time, the first two notions of network – “centralized” and “decentralized” – were already in place. In the process of his research, Baran developed a third model, the “distributed” network, where all the nodes were connected to several neighboring nodes and able to communicate with each other directly without going through a centralized hub first. Each node would have several routes to and from which to receive and send data. The Baran network diagram has become ubiquitous within network imaging and continues to influence diagrams today. Baran had designed this as part of his research to find a solution to communication networks while he worked for the RAND Corporation during the Cold War (1959-1968). He created a network design proposal meant to prevent outage or breakdown due to nuclear attack. He is credited with co-inventing “packet switch network design.” What Baran was really

interested in was the process of how information traveled from one node to another, and that the distributed model was designed for maximum efficiency of a “packet” of information to reach its destination, regardless of how many nodes were potentially taken out in a military attack or due to other network failures.

It is useful to delve a bit deeper into the distinguishing characteristics of the distributed network as its specific form is influential to this day in terms of people’s initial understanding of what they assume networks look like and how they behave. Galloway in *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* describes Baran’s three models as follows: “A distributed network differs from other networks such as centralized and decentralized networks in the arrangement of its internal structure. A centralized network consists of a single central power point (a host), from which are attached radial nodes. The central point is connected to all of the satellite nodes, which are themselves connected only to the central host. A decentralized network, on the other hand, has multiple central hosts, each with its own set of satellite nodes. A satellite node may have connectivity with one or more hosts, but not with other nodes” (11). By contrast, “the distributed network is an entirely different matter. Each point in a distributed network is neither a hub nor a satellite node – they are neither trunks nor leaves” (ibid). Galloway then cites Eric Hall’s text, *Internet Core Protocols*: “the network contains nothing but ‘intelligent end-point systems that are self-deterministic, allowing each end-point system to communicate with any host it chooses’” (qtd. in *Protocol* 11). They thereby emphasize that it is the agency of the individuated elements within the distributed network model that is part of its success.

In general, and by nature, visualizations of networks are reductive and questions of their topology are notoriously problematic. Media theorist Anne Munster’s 2007 essay, “The Image in the Network,” was first published as part of a white paper that accompanied the conference

“New Network Theory” held in Amsterdam in 2007. She explores the concept of imaging the Internet through diagrams and schematics and discusses the limitations of these constructs to accurately depict network connectivity. Munster addresses Paul Baran’s diagrams and concludes that the diagram is so successful, in part, due to its representational vagueness, since it may be applied to all sorts of situations. She states, however, that, “if we really believe that the network diagram provides us with an accurate description of networks, then we are forgetting the very relationality of both diagram and network” (13).

Munster argues: “there can be no coherent, global ‘aesthetics of *the* network.’ And yet there are collective and shared experiences – aesthesias – of networks” (6). Aesthesia is the normal ability to experience sensation, perception, or sensitivity and Munster’s emphasis lies on these experiences being collective rather than individual. Although there is not a singular network aesthetic, she proposes that people have shared experiences and a shared visual understanding of what the network looks like. She further affirms that the vectoral diagram (see fig. 5) “has come to function as a dominant image of and for networks” (6). She sees this shared experience of contemporary networks as one of “repeated cycling through euphoria and boredom,” noting that node-link schematics “lull us in a kind of comatose state about the socio-aesthetic-technical assemblages that enervate network cultures” (7). In a sense, we have become so comfortable with the flat, two-dimensional diagrammatic abstract of a “network” that it has become the ubiquitous mode of representation of a network. However, this is a problematic claim since, as Latour also points out, it fails to address the complexity and dynamic reality of the relational and multidimensional nature of networks themselves.

Munster describes the representational dilemma of the diagram as image of the Internet in the following terms:

The diagram is therefore not a set of instructions – a blueprint – for mapping or building relations between objects. It is instead a representational mode that hooks one class of objects – perhaps links and nodes – to another class, potentially peoples, cultures and their processual relations within networks. This, of course, is why the network diagram is so thrilling – its spatiality and vagueness harnesses the potential to make it work as a representation of something it is not. (13)

As Latour and Munster effectively argue, the biggest problem with the vector diagram as the preferred image of a network is that it is limited in the way it chooses to represent something that is multi-dimensional, ever changing, and relational as a fixed, two-dimensional image. As Latour reminds us, the network diagram is “the map not the territory.” Munster, however, also offers alternative images of networks, in particular those that “operate via divergent, disparate, everyday and surprising associative pathways” (7). Her analysis of web visibility introduces an allegorical dimension when she introduces two illustrations featuring two contemporary diagrams of the Internet created by William Cheswick and Ben Worthen, published in *Who Owns the Internet?* (See fig. 5). As Worthen explains:

In order to build this map Bill Cheswick fired off 300,000 messages to various points on the Internet and mapped how they got there, recording the address of every router his packets passed. He also had to figure out a way to isolate routers in North America. The map is not perfect – he probably missed a few points and maybe double counted a couple more – but for all intents and purposes this is what the North American Internet looks like. (n.p.)

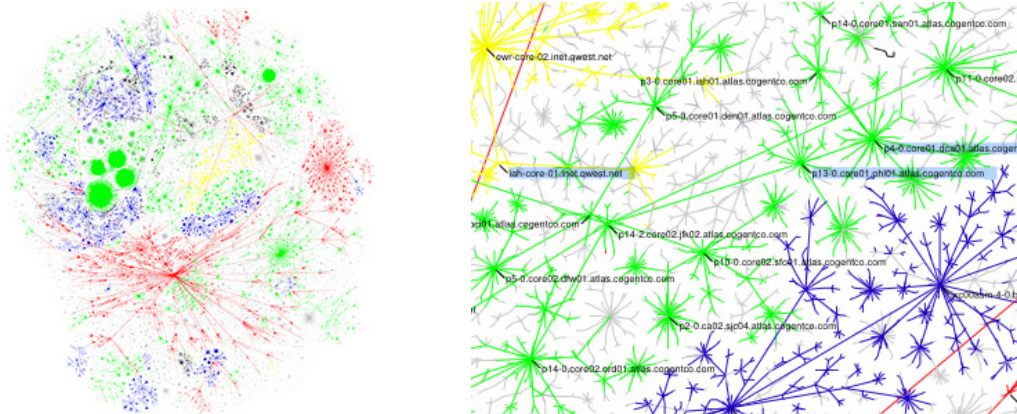


Fig. 5. Left: William Cheswick and Ben Worthen, *Image Diagram of The Internet* (2006).

Right: Detail. *Image Diagram of The Internet* (2006).

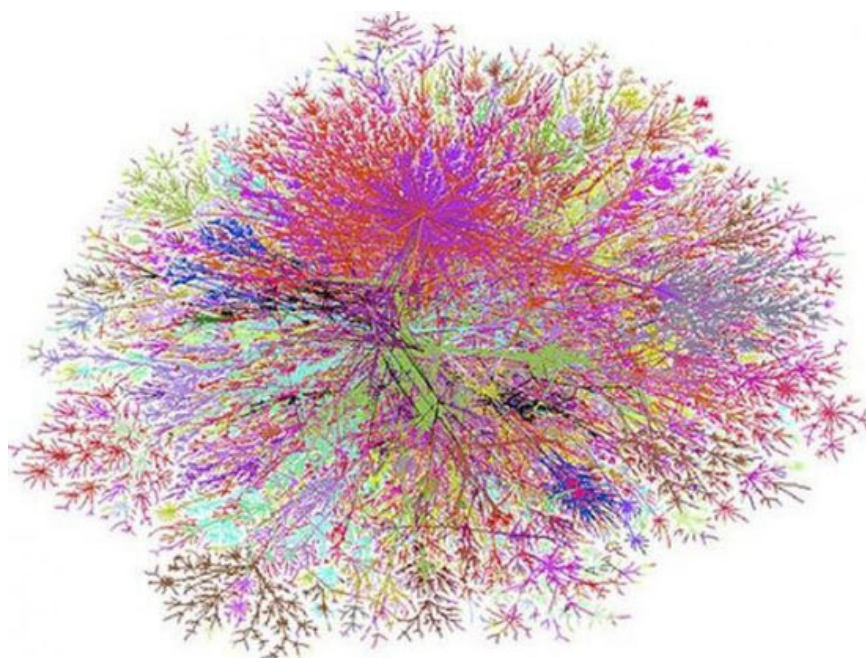


Fig. 6. William Cheswick and Ben Worthen, *Internet Splat Map* (2009).

The example of *Image Diagram of The Internet* (fig. 5) provides a mode of visualizing the abstract nature of the Internet. Worthen and Cheswick's collaboration also produced the 2009 *Internet Splat Map* that visualized Internet connectivity in the United States (see fig. 6). The data was gathered by sending a large number of IP packets out randomly across the network that produced the map.¹ It is an exercise in data visualization that is representative of a rapidly growing industry where the clear, quick communication of complex and often extremely large bodies of data is the goal. The Internet is usually presented diagrammatically as a distributed network, but when looking at the Worthen-Cheswick diagrams it functions and looks like a decentralized network. The vectorial diagram closes off the temporal rhythm of movement across time and space and collapses it into a two-dimensional spatial abstraction. However, what if the definition of a diagram was expanded? For Gilles Deleuze, in his essay "From the Archive to the Diagram," the diagram is a "spatio-temporal multiplicity" (30) and not simply a singular, two-dimensional reduction. He proposes that the diagram is a map of "relations between forces... which proceeds by primary non-localizable relations and at every moment passes through every point, or rather in every relation form one point to another" (32).

Since Munster's analysis in 2007, new forms of networks have emerged and with it new images, illustrations, and diagrammatic renderings aimed at more accurately capturing the three dimensional and temporal nature of a network. Networks are active processes, and due to their relational dynamic forms, they can only be partially represented in static or two-dimensional schematic abstractions given that the network's temporal nature is completely absent. What is of interest to the argument in the following chapters in particular are precisely the limitations of the illustrative diagram, for the work of art can present the essence of network functionality in new and differing ways, not simply as illustrations or representations *of* networks.

1.4 Network Cultures

In considering the various definitions of network through the lens of network theories and social theories outlined above, several questions emerge in regard to networks and their effect in the cultural realm. Are networks influencing human behavior? If so, how? How is the increasingly networked nature of our world impacting our relationships, our choices, and our very experience of the world? Is this the beginning of a new cultural paradigm? Vitale articulates the overwhelming nature of seeing the world through a networked lens. Once you begin, it seems a Pandora's box, and suddenly everything seems inescapably networked, connected, dynamic:

Static territories, rigid boundaries, linear trajectories, flat surfaces, and unitary individuals, all the basic components of the world of yesterday need to be recast. In order to truly deal with the challenges of our age, we will need to learn how to think, act, experiment, learn, value, and perhaps even dream networkedly. We need a new worldview: a philosophy of networks for our hyperconnected age. (Vitale 24)

The question remains whether this will organically happen or if it requires intentional efforts on the part of institutions and governments to embrace these new modes of being in the world.

What then is network culture? According to cultural theorist Kazys Varnelis, network culture is defined as a broadly historical phenomenon in which the network has become the dominant cultural logic of our times. In "The Meaning of Network Culture," he argues: "Although other ages have had their networks, ours is the first in the modern age in which the network is the dominant organizational paradigm, supplanting centralized hierarchies" (147). The volume explores how the Internet, digital media, and mobile technologies intersect with culture and examines the ways that social and cultural shifts created by these technologies have

transformed our relationship to (and definitions of) place, culture, and politics. Varnelis proposes that the Modern and Postmodern paradigms no longer work for us and that we have entered a new stage of consciousness. He aims to capture the rapidly shifting grounds of the dramatic societal changes that he sees are happening as a result of the rise of Internet use and mobile phone technologies, as smart phones were just emerging and supplanting desktop technologies as a main mode for accessing the Internet and its content. Communication networks are everywhere, both visible and hidden. Varnelis remarks: “In contrast to digital culture, under network culture information is less the product of discrete processing units than of the outcome of the networked relations between them, of links between people, between machines, and between machines and people” (146). The author boldly states that this cultural moment is no longer represented by the term “information age” and argues effectively that digital culture is being replaced with network culture. Varnelis clarifies, “But our networks are different. They are lighter, more pervasive, colonizing everyday life. There's no way to separate out technology from mainstream culture anymore.... They've become our primary means of communication not only in the workplace but beyond” (“Introduction” n.p).

For Varnelis, the contemporary subject – unlike its predecessors in the autonomous modernist subject and the fragmented postmodern subject – is “constituted within the network” and has become the networked subject (152). So not only do we live in a networked society, we ourselves are networked subjects. He states that “the subject is increasingly less sure of where the self begins and ends, the question of what should be private and shouldn’t fades” (154). In perhaps an oversimplified analysis, one might conclude that Modernity gave us an autonomous subject while Postmodernity brought the fragmented subject. Our current networked culture brings us a relational subject, a networked subject that is constituted within the network. In

network theory, “a node’s relationship to other networks is more important than its own uniqueness” (Varnelis 153). For Varnelis, the network is not just a relationship between people or information; it also includes things. For the networked subject, boundaries between self and other, private and public, real and virtual are increasingly blurred. So too in the art world, as it becomes increasingly less sure where an artwork begins and ends, just as the question of what should or shouldn’t be considered art also fades. He argues that network culture succeeds postmodernism by delivering “remix, shuffling together the diverse elements of present-day culture, blithely conflating high and low [...] while poaching its ‘as found’ contents from the world” (Varnelis 151).

The artists whose work will be addressed in the following chapters are concerned with the spaces between things, (i.e. objects, people, images, materials, ideas), and in such a way that it is the relational connections that constitute the work. It is precisely through this emphasis on relationality that their practice is closely related to this larger cultural phenomenon of network culture. As their work demonstrates, remix, nostalgia, the conflation of high and low are concepts central to network culture. So too the collision and disintegration of binary realms – high/low, digital/tactile, real/imaginary, private/public – are signature elements of network culture. Additionally, the appropriation of “as found” content (as Varnelis puts it) is also clearly evident in their works. To reiterate, the aim of this dissertation is not to create alternate, fixed, or reductive interpretations of networks; rather, the goal is to show how specific artworks can help us understand and rework notions of networks in additional and expansive ways. At the same time, the network framework allows us to expand and deepen our understanding of these contemporary works of art, how they act, what they do, how they generate meaning, and what they show us about ourselves as networked subjects.

1.5 Heterogeneous Spaces

Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites.

– Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces”

Michel Foucault’s essay “Of Other Spaces” allows us to trace back the origins of the use of the term “network” as it pertains to its larger cultural implication. Published posthumously in 1986, the text was based on Foucault’s lecture notes from a lecture he gave in 1967. Foucault opens the essay by arguing:

We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein. (22)

Foucault’s use of the term “skein” refers to a long thread, loosely coiled and/or knotted after the yarn is removed from the reel, a quantity (hank) of yarn, a tangled or complicated arrangement, state, or situation, a web, a weave, a tangle. It also refers to an ovary membrane in fish, or a flock of fowl in flight v-shape formation. Taking up the implications of this material rethinking of what constitutes a network, his text’s emphasis on an “epoch of simultaneity” foreshadows Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of the rhizome and the affirmation of the “and, and, and” that radically challenges binary thinking and the pervasive either/or mentality of oppositional thinking: good/bad, heaven/earth, sacred/profane, public/private, and so on. Foucault’s further definition of this epoch as one of “juxtaposition,” of “the near and far” and the “side by side,” can be read as the compression and collapsing of linear time, a non-linear viewing of history and

time that displaces any progressive view of history in which all events move toward a greater, more sophisticated moment, where time and events take place in succession along a linear path, each building on the moment that came before and superseding it.

Significantly, Foucault introduces the term “network” in this context as a way to define this epoch, declaring that “our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein” (22). Foucault’s analysis here indicates a shift in thinking from a linear, progressive model to an interconnected, heterotopic model for understanding our experience of the world. He follows this claim with an analysis of Structuralism, one that emphasizes its relational nature: “Structuralism, or at least that which is grouped under this slightly too general name, is the effort to establish, between elements that could have been connected on a temporal axis, *an ensemble of relations* that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other – that makes them appear, in short, as *a sort of configuration*” (22, my emphasis). Here too Foucault proposes that elements that could have been arranged as linear are transformative, set off against one another, yet are still connected “as a sort of configuration,” in other words, like nodes within a network, individuated yet assembled. Structuralism in this context is defined as a methodology of understanding culture in terms of its structure or system. Its aim is to reveal the underlying structures that inform both language and human behavior (as in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Lévi-Strauss). Foucault is often considered a post-structuralist since he resisted what he took to be the rigidity and determinism of Structuralism, as if proposing other ways of thinking the question of relationality that he found in Structuralist thinking. Indeed, it was Galileo Galilei’s discovery that the earth revolved around the sun which “opened up this space” that constituted a radical shift in the basic understanding of the universe.

According to Foucault: “the real scandal of Galileo's work lay not so much in his discovery, or rediscovery, that the earth revolved around the sun, but in his constitution of an infinite, and infinitely open space” (23).² One might argue that Foucault himself is attempting a similar move by analyzing a shift in current thinking away from a linear progression of a lifetime as it moves through space and time, proposing instead a new relational model of defining a site. He explains: “Today the site has been substituted for extension, which itself had replaced emplacement. The site is defined by relations of proximity between points or elements; formally, we can describe these relations as series, trees, or grids” (ibid.). He then reinforces this concept by declaring: “Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites” (ibid.). It is precisely Foucault’s emphasis here on the primacy of relationality between sites that is significant for our understanding of network thinking, even when Foucault’s network often seems to emphasize the geographical and spatial dimensions of this relational “grid,” as opposed to their temporal dimensions as well.

Foucault’s space is a heterogeneous space, not a void but rather “a set of relations that delineates sites, which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another” (23). It is a dynamic space, filled with a variety of spaces that one goes through or goes by and that are linked with other spaces. He determines there are two types of spaces: utopias (unreal spaces, placeless places) and heterotopias (real places). Foucault lists many examples of heterotopias such as café, cinemas, cemeteries, but also the home and the garden. They are organized by principles, which includes museums and libraries, which he further describes as “heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time” (26). He differentiates between museums and libraries that reflected individual choice (until the seventeenth century) and the modern idea of establishing a “general archive, the will to enclose in one place, all times, all epochs, all forms...

that is itself outside of time...an indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place” (ibid.). Foucault contrasts the “sites of permanence and accumulation of time” with the fleeting nature of the festival site, a transitory, temporal place such as fairgrounds or the Polynesian themed vacation villages, declaring that heterotopias “always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (ibid.). He ends the essay with a reference to brothels and Jesuit colonies as extreme examples of illusionary, yet real spaces, spaces that stand in sharp contrast to the reality of the space of real life that is “messy, ill constructed and jumbled” (27). What is most useful about Foucault’s text within the context of this dissertation and the works it addresses is that “Of Other Spaces” proposes notions of relationality, space, and time, in larger cultural and social contexts, identifying heterogeneous spaces that are connected to one another as a networked “ensemble of relations.” He astutely observes and articulates a historic shift away from a linear progressive model of understanding space and time to that of a non-linear, relational model, a model that will serve our later analysis of the four artists’ case studies. As we will see, it is precisely the relational nature of the art works discussed that makes these projects networks. As such, the artists’ visually and conceptually diverse artistic practices are connected to one another in that they share a common nature, namely that of a dynamic relational form. A form, that allows these works to exist both inside and outside the gallery, across media and includes many objects, people, events, and information that without its networked form would remain outside of the work or be included only tangentially.

1.6 Systems Art

Foucault's analysis of a socio-spatial shift toward relationality is significant and not without contemporaneous context. In September of 1968, Jack Burnham's seminal article "Systems Aesthetics" was published in *Artforum*. His provocative opening sentence sums up the article's thesis: "A polarity is presently developing between the finite, unique work of fine art, i.e. painting, or sculpture, and conceptions which can loosely be termed 'un-objects,' these either being environments or artifacts which resist prevailing critical analysis" (31). Burnham further observes: "We are now in transition from an object-oriented culture to a systems oriented culture. Here change emanates not from things, but from the ways things are done" (32). The author traces this larger cultural phenomenon to a related art world occurrence he names "systems art." Burnham bases the term on the Pentagon's introduction of the term "systems analysis," declaring systems art to be the direct result of a "transition between major paradigms" that "may best express the state of present art," suggesting that "reasons for it lie in the nature of current technological shifts" (31). At the time, an electronic revolution had impacted all manner of social context; for example, space travel was proven possible, satellites were sent into orbit for observing weather patterns and enabled live television, the electric type writer was invented, and audio cassettes and supercomputers were able to be scaled down in size and price to make computers available for commercial and business use, among other things.

Burnham defines systems art as an expansion of the work of art from an autonomous, singular object to that of a system. He compares Picasso's cubism and Marcel Duchamp, noting that Duchamp's lasting influence demonstrated that "art does not reside in material entities, but in relations between people and people and the components of their environment" (ibid.). In a retort to Michael Fried's critique of post-formalist art as "theatrical" and "literalist," he notes:

The systems approach goes beyond a concern with staged environments and happenings; it deals in a revolutionary fashion with the larger problem of boundary concepts. In systems perspective there are no contrived confines such as the theater proscenium or picture frame. Conceptual focus rather than material limits define the system. Thus any situation, either in or outside the context of art, may be designed and judged as a system.” (32)

Burnham defines what is to be considered part of a “system” by arguing: “Inasmuch as a system may contain people, ideas, messages, atmospheric conditions, power sources, etc., a system is, to quote the systems biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a ‘complex of components in interaction,’ comprised of material, energy, and information in various degrees of organization” (32).

Burnham’s deployment here of Bertalanffy’s term for systems – “a complex of components in interaction” – is clearly a precursor to emerging theories of networks.

A specific example Burnham provides to support his argument is the exhibition *Art by Telephone* held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, where the presentation of a work by László Moholy-Nagy included the recorded conversation between artist and manufacturer. Burnham emphasized in italics that it was “to become part of the displayed work of art” and declared that for systems art, “information, in whatever form conveyed, becomes a viable aesthetic consideration” (32). He also cites Robert Morris’ *Untitled*, a painted wood piece from 1966 exhibited at the 68th American Show at the Chicago Art Institute in the same year. Morris had the piece recreated through sending instructions to carpenters based in Chicago rather than have the work shipped from NY, as this was more economical. Burnham declares: “In the

context of a systems aesthetic, possession of a privately fabricated work is no longer important. Accurate information takes priority over history and geographical location” (ibid.). As further proof, he also mentions Carl Andre’s modular forms, Robert Smithson’s *Site-Selections*, and Les Levine’s environments of vacuum-formed, modular plastic units.

As a result of this new mode of artistic practice, he also notes that the role of the artist is also changing from solitary maker and/or master craftsman who produces “art for art’s sake,” to that of a “quasi-political provocateur” or “perspectivist.” As Burnham notes: “In evaluating systems the artist is a perspectivist considering goals, boundaries, structure, input, output, and related activity inside and outside the system. Where the object almost always has a fixed shape and boundaries, the consistency of a system may be altered in time and space, its behavior determined both by external conditions and its mechanisms of control” (32). Furthermore, the artist must become interdisciplinary and expand their practice beyond the field of art:

“Consequently some of the more aware sculptors no longer think like sculptors, but they assume a span of problems more natural to architects, urban planners, civil engineers, electronic technicians, and cultural anthropologists” (34). He assures the reader that, “this is not as pretentious as some critics have insisted. It is a legitimate extension of McLuhan’s remark about Pop Art when he said that it was an announcement that the entire environment was ready to become a work of art” (ibid.).

Systems Aesthetics’ prophetic statement – that “in the context of a systems aesthetic, possession of a privately fabricated work is no longer important. Accurate information takes priority over history and geographical location” (32) – foreshadows the advent of a later expansion of systems art in installation art and information arts. Again, Burnham’s analysis of the system as a dynamic physical and temporal form is an early indicator of network thinking. In

fact, Burnham's essay further suggests that the notion of an artwork as distributed across time and space is not a post-1995 phenomenon (the advent of the World Wide Web) but was already in play in the late 1960s. For by that time, Burnham had already observed: 1) the concept of a distributed work of art; 2) the artwork as a spatial and temporal system; and 3) systems art as a "complex of components in interaction" that could include "people, ideas, messages, atmospheric conditions, power sources, etc." The dissertation argues that all three of Burnham's concepts are central to understanding the artwork as network.

1.7 Grids, Diagrams, and Networks

One cannot discuss the relation between artworks and networks without acknowledging the importance of the grid in modern art as a visual precursor. Rosalind Krauss – known for her astute analysis of modernist art and its transition towards the postmodern – discusses the grid on several occasions throughout her career. In terms of critical texts relevant to the chapters that follow, I wish to highlight two of Krauss' essays, "Grids" and "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," both from 1979. The first is discussed as a means to illustrate the documentation of the grid as the underlying structure of modernist art, and the latter as a text that documents the shift away from the grid and modernist thinking to the expanded field of postmodernist thinking. The question that motivates our reading of Krauss here turns on how her emphasis on the grid shapes our thinking of the artwork as network? In other words, perhaps the network is to the art of *our* time what the grid was to the art of the modernist era, and the expanded field was to the postmodern era. It is a new model or paradigm for the art of our times.

In "Grids," Krauss addresses the importance of the grid to modernist painting. She distinguishes two types of relationship to the grid: centrifugal or centripetal. The centrifugal grid,

or “beyond-the frame attitude,” extends the work beyond boundaries of the painting (as object) and extends into the infinite space that is the world. She explains this as follows: “By virtue of the grid, the given work of art is presented as a mere fragment, a tiny piece arbitrarily cropped from an infinitely larger fabric. Thus, the grid operates from the work of art outward, compelling our acknowledgement of a world beyond the frame (60). The centripetal grid, by contrast, works from the outside of the painting within the picture plane, it is “complete and internally organized” rather than being “continuous with the world” (63). Krauss calls this the “within-the-frame attitude”: “The [centripetal] grid is an introjection of the boundaries of the world into the interior of the work; it is a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself. It is a mode of repetition, the content of which is the conventional nature of art itself” (61). Krauss thus sets up a duality and set of binary oppositions to structure the argument including: inside/outside, infinity/containment, and continuity/autonomy. She then describes the function of the grid as both temporal and spatial, suggesting that its defining characteristic that it is a “form that is ubiquitous of the art of our century” (52). Additionally, she defines its purpose in terms of art that secures its own autonomy and self-purpose:

Insofar as its order is that of pure relationship, the grid is a way of abrogating the claims of natural objects to have an order particular to themselves; the relationships in the aesthetic field are shown by the grid to be in a world apart and, with respect to natural objects, to be both prior and final. The grid declares the space of art to be at once autonomous and autotelic. (51-52)

Krauss also addresses its capacity to bridge the gap between science and spiritualism and adds a psychoanalytic dimension by analyzing the grid’s “capacities to repress” both the scientific and the spiritual. She concludes her essay by reiterating the powerful hold the grid had on modernist

art: “Indeed, as we have a more and more extended experience of the grid, we have discovered that one of the most modernist things about it is its capacity to serve as a paradigm or model for the anti-developmental, the anti-narrative, the anti-historical” (64). In short, Krauss equates the grid with the very essence of modernism.

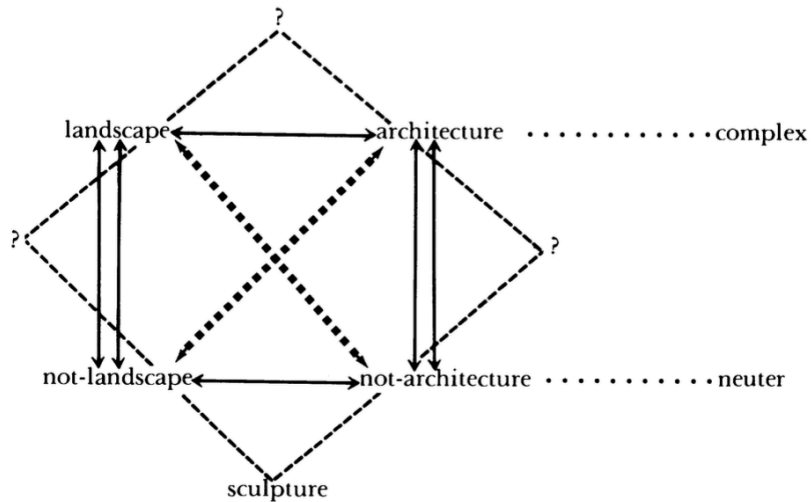


Fig. 7. Rosalind Krauss, illustration of the quaternary field model (1979).

Krauss wrote “Grids” and “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” at a time when Modernism was in the process of being surpassed by a new, emergent model of the postmodern. In contrast to her analogy of the grid, which was limited to the field of painting, her argument in the “Expanded Field” essay is focused on the domain of sculpture. In both essays, she uses a mathematical model to explain her case. For “Grids,” as the title suggests, she uses the grid as a model underlying abstract painting, whereas for the “Expanded Field” she offers a new mathematic model derived from a Structuralist mapping operation known as a “Piaget group,” which is illustrated through a diagram or “quaternary field” (see fig. 7). In this case, the diagram is not a model that visualizes the underlying structure of a painting, as she explained through the

use of the grid in Agnes Martin's work, among many others; rather, this diagram is meant to illustrate a phenomenon in the field of sculpture, where artists are making work that falls outside of the established categories of modernist sculpture. She describes this transformation as a "logical expansion" whereby a set of binaries (not sculpture, not architecture) is "transformed into a quaternary field which both mirrors the original opposition and at the same time opens it" (37). Her earlier emphasis on binaries and the modernist grid has thus now been expanded to include more axes (as if there are two grids overlaying each other at a 45° angle). Her diagram highlights the reciprocal relationships – the "edges" – between the various "nodes" such as "landscape," "architecture," and so on, relationships that can be read as a type of network diagram.

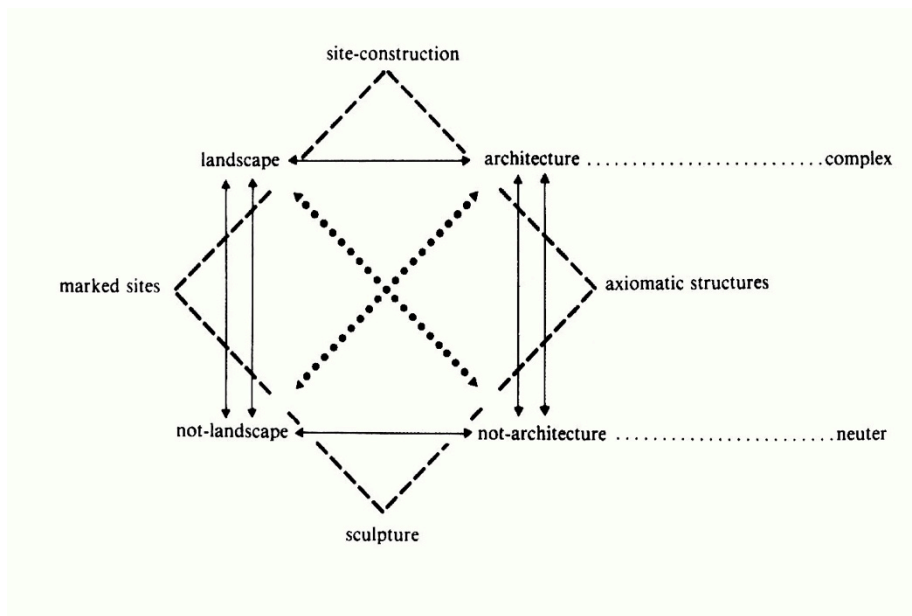


Fig. 8. Rosalind Krauss, illustration of the complex model (1979).

This new “complex model” is used to capture and reflect the many emergent three-dimensional art forms that could no longer be classified by the category of sculpture, which Krauss defines as “not-landscape” plus “not-architecture” (37). These contradictory relationships are in turn opposed by their opposites “landscape” and “architecture,” which Krauss terms “the complex.” Krauss acknowledges that other (non-western, earlier) cultures have generated works in this category, even if this work was not included in “ours.” In addition to “the complex,” she also introduces the newly added categories of “marked sites,” “site-constructions,” and “axiomatic structures” as categories for classifying new works (that are now primarily identified as earthworks) such as those created by Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Nancy Holt, and Alyce Aycock. She then summarizes the diagrammatic relationship as follows: “The expanded field is thus generated by problematizing the set of oppositions between which the modernist category sculpture is suspended” (38). Modernist sculpture, she argues (recalling a phrase that we observed in Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces”), moves away from its “site” and becomes “placeless and self-referential,” essentially “nomadic” (280). Additionally, its relationship to the base/pedestal is altered since it becomes absorbed into the art object itself: “the sculpture depicts its own autonomy” (ibid). Krauss aligns her theory of the expanded field with the term postmodernism, a counterpoint to the medium specificity and “demand for the purity” of modernism.

It is in this sense that Krauss is also able to address a critique of postmodern work as “eclectic,” emphasizing that postmodernist practice is not “defined in relation to a medium,” but rather “on a set of cultural terms” for which any medium can be used (288). She solidifies this with an analogy of the “field” as the new operative mode: “Thus the field provides both for an expanded, but finite set of related positions for a given artist to occupy and explore, and for an

organization of work that is not dictated by the conditions of a particular medium” (288-289). According to Krauss, “the expanded field of postmodernism occurs at a specific moment in the recent history of art”; it is “a historical event with a determinant structure” (44) that could be mapped in the quaternary field diagram.

The distinction between Krauss’ affirmation of the grid and field and the concept of the network is instructive, for one might argue that both of Krauss’ models no longer work completely today in the same way and that a new structural model has emerged, namely the network. It is important to remember that the network model – although a structural model like Krauss’ models – is not a fixed model but rather a dynamic model that is capable of expanding and contracting. It is a model that is not comprised of a series of binary oppositions defined by a finite relational activity (i.e. a two-way street), but can be characterized instead as a multiplicitous sets of Deleuzian “and, and, ands....” It is a system where the relational possibilities are complex and infinite. Networked artworks combine the postmodern embracing of literature, narrative, and discourse (history) with a new system where the relational form (the network) includes both the grid and the expanded field. However, both the grid and the field are flat, geometrically ordered, and concerned with the surface of things (they are diagrams), whereas the network’s structure is deep, dynamic, and multidimensional.

The question thus emerges whether the network can serve as a contemporary diagrammatic model, signifying an even further expanded field of artistic production, or whether it presents something entirely different? If Modernism is characterized by a breaking away from the past, and if we equate Postmodernism with a re-embracing of the past (as pastiche/collage), what is the model for the networked artwork’s relationship to the past? Is it the mash-up? A feedback loop? My argument lies parallel to Krauss’ in the sense

that I too find myself at a moment in time where a new paradigm is emerging, one connected to the network. Krauss identified the grid as the ubiquitous art form of the twentieth century. The network has most certainly emerged as the prominent form of our own current moment, although whether it will come to visually represent an entire century of cultural production remains to be seen. When analyzing the structures of artworks and recognizing within them the structure of a network, the network provides us with a new model (or system) through which to understand contemporary artistic practice. Whereas Clement Greenberg's model was related to the artwork as a formal entity (organism) and Krauss' model was structural (mathematic), the interpretive model addressed in light of the works included in the following chapters is the network. Just as Krauss in 1979 identified new concerns within postmodern art practice, concerns that no longer reflected those of modernism, the set of conditions informing artistic practice today can no longer be described as postmodern. I propose, therefore, that we need to consider new interpretive models for the work of our current time, which – in the case of the works discussed in this research – is a networked model.

That Krauss' arguments are still relevant today is evidenced by the recent publication of *Retracing the Expanded Field: Encounters Between Art and Architecture* (2014), an anthology of contemporary texts that resulted from a 2007 conference of the same title organized at Princeton University's School of Architecture. Both the conference and the book discussed the continued influence of Krauss' original essay. Its purpose is twofold: first, to revisit conditions that frame the origin of Krauss' essay, and second, to examine it within the context of subsequently expanded practices of art and architecture (viii). The editors Spyros Papapetros and Julian Rose state in the introduction: "The history

of the expanded field is thus as open and ongoing as the future practices that will continue to constitute it” (xiii). Although the continued influence and significance of Krauss’ “Sculpture in the Expanded Field” cannot be denied, the two closing statements of the book’s introduction suggest that new diagrammatic forms may be warranted, especially since, “ultimately, the expanded field designates not only a set of axiomatic principles but also a constellation of themes that can reflect as well as deflect the orientation of the scheme devised by the essay’s author.” As they argue, “the diagram’s resilient afterlife demonstrates that the Structuralist framework that Krauss was so instrumental in introducing into art historical writing has not dissipated entirely; instead, it has generated a number of alternative geometries that both retrace and transgress the grid of her crystalline pattern” (xvii). Perhaps, then, these new diagrammatic models include the multi-dimensional, dynamic form of a network, especially since it too provides a “constellation of themes” and an “alternative geometry” that seems reflective of our contemporaneity. Indeed, several authors in the volume address the transition of the grid into a network by way of representing a transition from a modern to the postmodern sensibility. For instance, Lars Bang Larsen in “The Unimaginable Globality of Networks” asks us to reconsider this relation between the grid and the network: “the grid epitomized modernism, as the interior space of reason, planning and representation. The network, on the other hand, is grid-like but also a flexible and plastic space of conjecture and proliferating connections” (12). In the face of the world’s increasing complexity and heterogeneity, the grid thus fails to capture this complexity and heterogeneity. In the words of Vitale: “With each passing year, space appears less like a grid, and time less like a linear progression, even as neither seems to be returning to the simple bordered terrains or cyclical seasonal patterns of old” (4).

1.8 The Rhizome

In addition to Foucault's heterogeneous space, Burnham's systems art, and Krauss' systematic approach laid out in various grids and diagrams, there is fourth concept to consider in relation to our understanding of the notion of network, namely that of the "rhizome." The rhizome is a concept brought to the foreground of twentieth century theoretical thinking by Deleuze and Guattari's book *A Thousand Plateaus* (1984) where a short text titled "The Rhizome" forms its preface. The book is an open-ended system, a treatise about flow and flux, movement and multiplicity. It is a call to action to build up intensity in life and create a circumstance of heightened critical awareness and a highly energized state. Organized around a series of "plateaus," the authors declare that "a plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end" (21), suggesting how multiple connections and passages can be built between the various hubs of activity and creating a "fabric of heightened states" (Massumi, xiv). As a site of multiplicity, when extended these plateaus form a rhizome. The fundamental image of classic, western philosophy is the root-tree, which is based on the binary logic of the dichotomy. It is hierarchical, centralized, and filled with binaries. Deleuze and Guattari criticize this dualism of the oldest form of thought since it limits the affirmation of multiplicities. Their goal is to break with the dualism of binaries set up by this system they call the arborescent (based on hierarchical tree forms). They advocate instead for the diverse and distributed form of the rhizome. The principal characteristics of the rhizome are "connection" and "heterogeneity," with "any point of a rhizome having the capability to connect to anything other" (7). Their third principle is "multiplicity," which has "neither subject nor object only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions" (8). They continue: "There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (ibid). The fourth principle

is an “asignifying rupture,” also known as “line of flight.” It is an interruption of the structure or line, which is part of the rhizome (9). The fifth and sixth principles of the rhizome are those of “cartography and decalcomania” (ibid).

Deleuze and Guattari’s most famous example of a rhizomatic connection is the relationship between a wasp and an orchid. They are separate elements, plant and animal, that are connected and depend on each other for survival and who together form a rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari ask: “how could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?” (10). They use the scenario of the wasp and the orchid as an example of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, both the animal and plant bringing out one state in the other, interlinking and repeating, thus forming a site of intensity, what they term a plateau. Viruses are another example of the rhizome: they form a symbiotic relationship with their host site, at times “jumping” from one line (species) to another. This moment of discontinuity and rupture is rhizomatic and a perfectly “normal” phenomenon in nature. Rhizomatic behavior is also evident when considering cartography and decalcomania, the process of transferring a picture from one surface onto another. For Deleuze and Guattari, “tracings are like the leaves on a tree ... all of tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction” (12). By contrast, the rhizome is not a tracing but rather forms a map. The map has multiple entry points. It is “an experimentation in contact with the real” (ibid). A tracing is closed representation of the unconscious whereas the map is open, connected, and susceptible to change. A tracing tries to translate and reduce the map into an image. However, they can be connected through to the map and be incorporated. There are, for example, various “map-tracings” or “rhizome-root-assemblages” which, as a result of their unusual combinations, can become deterritorializations. The map is a form of territorialization and is closely related to the

deterritorialized space. It is always *en route* from one state to the other, always in a state of “becoming.” Conventional art is part of this space. By signing a work of art, you claim it as yours and it becomes part of the territorial machine. Another example of this are tattoos as a way of claiming the body as a territory. The territorial is concerned with boundaries, which are always in flux and linked to the center, which is where the intensity of activity happens. Again, Deleuze and Guattari set up counter points, but connect passages between them and allow for the matter to flow between the various states on the spectrum.

The world of Deleuze and Guattari is not binary, nor static. Although they set up dichotomies as a method of creating understanding of a spectrum, the most notable thing to remember is that all things are in flux, constantly changing, folding in on each other, becoming one or the other and then becoming remixed again. Flowing from one state to the next, they create a place between. It is non-dictatorial, non-dialectic, non-structured, non-reproducible place. Instead, it is a collection of lines and multiplicities, always changing, moving. The “lines of flight” or “deterritorializations” are not links between points as in a structured system like a tree, but rather a line that passes through points and redirects, non-centered. It is about the movement that speeds through places and points, emerging from the middle rather than beginning and end: the place between things, and as such a relational form. What Deleuze and Guattari are describing is, in essence, a networked space. The place between things, the middle, is a relational space, which can be phrased as the space between nodes, people, objects, ideas – in other words – a “network.” The state of flux and continuous state of remixing, looping, and folding in on itself is also a characteristic of networks.

The wide influence of Deleuze and Guattari’s text in understanding networks is undeniable. According to Lars Bang Larsen, the concept of the rhizome “owes its influence to its

capacity for lateral articulation of structures and events” (14). When considering history through a rhizomatic lens, “instead of primal scenes and immaculate origins, this view would accept cross pollinations and irregular developments at all levels of life and culture. When binary recapture of truth and essence is prevented, non-linear energies and influences are set free” (ibid). Umberto Eco in “The Encyclopedia as Labyrinth” describes the rhizome as a “vegetable metaphor,” “a tangle of bulbs and tubers”; “it is dismantlable, reversible and susceptible to continual modifications ... it is multi-dimensionally complicated but also because its structure changes through time” (qtd. in Larsen 30-31). Galloway also evokes the rhizome in his discussion of the distributed network, which he deems “native to Deleuze’s control societies”: “like the rhizome, each node in a distributed network may establish direct communication with another node, without having to appeal to a hierarchical intermediary” (qtd. in Larsen 166).



Fig. 9. Installation View. Matthew Ritchie, *Universal Cell* (2005).

An example of an artistic practice that is influenced by the concept of a rhizome is that of Matthew Ritchie, whose diverse, expansive practice is an embodiment of rhizomatic thinking. For *Universal Cell* (2005), Ritchie started by scanning several drawings onto his computer, which became a set of digital vector files. The files were then sent to a machine that cut the drawings out of a metal sheet. The many drawn components became a fractal pattern, functioning as three-dimensional, modular building blocks to become architectural, sculptural forms. The piece is a collaboration between the artist, the computer, the machine, and a group of fabricators. In a sense, it is a living document of its own history and all the “hands” (human and machine) that participated in its making.

Those same vector drawings were projected onto the gallery wall, where they were then reproduced and painted by hand. They were combined with framed water-colors on paper, adhesive vinyl on the floor, and repeated as glowing wall-mounted light boxes and an interactive digital game of chance played on a LED screen console that was in turn accompanied by projections of the game results on the wall. Throughout the process, there is a consistent vocabulary of shapes and lines that teeters on the edge of abstraction and figuration. *Universal Cell* explores a single vocabulary of a few original drawings across multiple scales, media, and modes of artistic production. Their organization is rhizomatic in nature as its multiplicitous forms intersect, interconnect, and disconnect at various points. It is simultaneously cohesive and diverse, expansive yet controlled, repetitive yet original, all the while inviting contemplation in which we are asked to question our place in the universe.



Fig. 10. Left: Installation View. Ryan McGinness, *Paris Mindscapes* (2016).



Fig. 11. Right: Installation View. Ryan McGinness, *Ryan McGinness Works* (2009).

A second artist whose practice can be characterized as rhizomatic is Ryan McGinness, whose ornate vocabulary of visually sensual signs and linear graphic marks appears across paintings, prints, sculptures, aluminum objects, skateboards, and t-shirts. McGinness skillfully integrates dense design forms with poetic content, generating a unique alphabet of forms that repeat as a prolific visual language, transcribable across multiple surfaces. His opulent iconography is at once personal and universal, acting as a set of metadata that is deployed as a unique visual communication system. The artist frequently quotes and references well-known artworks and symbols of popular culture. His baroque organic forms are frequently repeated and applied across both fine art and commercial applications, even extending into unauthorized territories of use and exploited in t-shirts, TV shows, and other media. His work explores surface and depth, simplicity and complexity, scale and surface patterns, and repetition is innate to the process. The silkscreened paintings evoke psychedelic experiments that allow a discerning viewer to become immersed in the imagery and lose sense of their surroundings.



Fig. 12. Ryan McGinness, *Ryan McGinness: Studio View and Collection Views* (2017).

Most recently, the exhibition *Ryan McGinness: Studio View and Collection Views*, held at the Cranbrook Art Museum in Detroit, featured a large-scale installation based on the artist's studio practice that included thirty-six paintings, sketches, and a room sized "maze" made out of the silkscreen frames McGinness uses to create his work. By including the elements of the process of their making such as the sketches and screens as part of the final work, *Studio Views* shows how an image icon "travels" from a sketch to a digital image, then through a silkscreen and onto the painted surface. *Studio Views* serves as yet another iteration of McGinness' familiar vocabulary that advances to new places while remaining connected. In short, the work functions like a rhizome.

1.9 Artwork as Relational form

What is a form that is essentially relational?

– Nicolas Bourriaud “Relational Aesthetics”

The conceptual overviews concerning networks in the previous sections allow us to now turn to the concept of artwork as network as it shapes the readings in the chapters that follow. In light of the examples of rhizomatic art work by Matthew Ritchie and Ryan McGinness discussed above, several questions emerge: What differentiates networked art from rhizomatic art? What can the networked artwork do that other forms cannot? How is it different from an installation, assemblage, painting, or sculpture? How does a networked artwork differ from other object, technological, or social networks? One basic question to address is also how a networked artwork is different from a “regular” artwork. Although there is no such thing as a “regular” artwork, we could entertain for a moment the question whether a portrait painting by Rembrandt is or is not a networked artwork. One could argue that the object is part of a network of other Rembrandt paintings, prints, replicas of Rembrandts, and so on. It is also part of particular time period and cultural production, which can be considered a network. I would argue that although the painting is a part of a network of relations (associations, socio-economic systems, etc.), it in and of itself, is not a network. Its “form” remains that of a singular object, that, even though contingent in relation to its social, economic, and historic circumstances, is not in and of itself a networked artwork. Networked artworks by definition are relational forms and consist of multiple elements and “nodes” that have relational connections “edges” to other “nodes,” and to the network/artwork as a whole and therefore do not constitute a singular, autonomous object. Even a series of works such as prints do not constitute a network unless its serial form unfolds as

a dynamic, relational form where the relationships between things are as important – if not more important – than the things in and of themselves.

A late twentieth century example of art that features inter-relational characteristics, including the relationships between people, is Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetics." In relational aesthetics projects, the artist functions as a catalyst – reminiscent of Burnham's artist as perspectivist – rather than a central point of power, or the genius 'maker.' Bourriaud first introduced the term "relational aesthetics" in 1996 in an exhibition catalog for *Traffic*, an exhibition of so-called "open-ended" works of art, where the phrase identifies what he saw as a new thematic framework for contemporary artistic practices. In the catalog essay, Bourriaud adopted Internet terminologies such as "user-friendliness" and a "DIY" (do-it-yourself) aesthetic. In a subsequent publication, *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprograms the World* (2002), Bourriaud describes relational aesthetics as works of art with a "collective sensibility" that deal with the "interhumansphere: relationships between people, communities, individuals, groups, social networks, interactivity, and so on" (7). To further summarize his definition, he states: "The work of art may thus consist of a formal arrangement that generates relationships between people, or be born of a social process; I have described this phenomenon as 'relational aesthetics,' whose main feature is to consider interhuman exchange an aesthetic object in and of itself" (*Postproduction* 33). Bourriaud emphasizes that for the artists he is describing, the Internet is a tool that has opened up new spaces for thinking and creativity.

This brief mention of relational aesthetics serves as an initial, yet important, touch point in terms of tracking the concept of "relational form" prominent in the chapters that follow since it closely relates to Bourriaud's thinking. Bourriaud coined the term "relational form" when he deployed it to describe contemporary artists whose works included a social context and had

“spectator participation” as a “constant feature of artistic practice” (*Relational* 11). He states: “Artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; it is not an immutable essence. It is the critic's task to study this activity in the present” (*Relational* 4). He argues that we need different terms to describe these new artistic practices:

In order to invent more effective tools and more valid viewpoints, it behooves us to understand the changes nowadays occurring in the social arena, and grasp what has already changed and what is still changing. How are we to understand the types of artistic behavior shown in exhibitions held in the 1990s and the lines of thinking behind them, if we do not start out from the same situation as the artists? (*ibid.*)

Bourriaud explains that the work of art is expanding beyond the boundaries of a “thing” that is being made by an artist:

The setting is widening; after the isolated object, it now can embrace the whole scene: the form of Gordon Matta-Clark or Dan Graham's work cannot be reduced to the “things” those two artists “produce”; it is not the simple secondary effects of a composition, as the formalistic aesthetic would like to advance, but the principle acting as a trajectory evolving through signs, objects, forms, gestures... The contemporary artwork's form is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination. An artwork is a dot on a line. (*Relational* 8)

Bourriaud’s question in the epigraph above – “What is a form that is essentially relational?” – is thus decisive for the pages that follow and for the dissertation as a whole. However, I am addressing the question somewhat differently than Bourriaud would suggest. For I will be

deploying the term “relational form” throughout the following chapters as another way of indicating the networked condition of a work of art, rather than Bourriaud’s focus on the relationships between people. Bourriaud uses the term to describe works of art whereby human interaction – frequently on the part of the viewers – play an active part in completing, if not constituting, the work. He concludes that “art is the place that produces a specific sociability” (*Relational* 6) and “...the artist sets his sights more and more clearly on the relations that his work will create among his public, and on the invention of models of sociability” (ibid. 12). My use of the term “relational form” extends the “sociability” of Bourriaud’s term to include the formal and physical elements of a work – objects, images, texts – and the associations and ideas they elicit and generate in response to one another (through their relationships), including the exhibition in which they are presented, which is a relational context as well.

Fourteen years later, in 2009, Bourriaud first introduced the term “altermodern” as the title of a large group exhibition of British contemporary art, the Tate Triennial, held at The Tate Modern in London. The exhibition had an accompanying essay by the same title, which is the focus of Chapter Three. In *Altermodern*, Bourriaud introduces the idea of contemporary artworks as an “archipelago.” The analogy serves as an example of a way that many smaller entities, the islands, can relate to a larger one, the archipelago. In Bourriaud’s eyes, postmodernism has died, and the altermodern is there to take its place, or at least “delimit the void” (*Altermodern* 12), where “alter” implies both ‘difference’ and ‘other.’ The exhibition was an examination of nomadism in contemporary artistic practices and included works by Simon Starling, Katie Paterson, Tris Vonna-Michell, Subodh Gupta, and many others. Bourriaud concludes that “displacement has become a method of depiction, and that artistic styles and formats must

henceforth be regarded from the viewpoint of diaspora, migration and exodus” (ibid. 14). Of greater significance to the chapters that follow is the following claim:

These differing modes of displacement indicate, more generally, a fragmentation of the work of art. No longer can a work of art be reduced to the presence of an object in the here and now; rather it consists of a significant network whose interrelationships the artist elaborates, and whose progression in time and space he or she controls: a circuit, in fact.

(Altermodern 14)

The three main points to foreground here are the “fragmentation of the work of art,” the work as a “network of interrelationships,” and that it is the artist who controls this “circuit.” Bourriaud continues this line of thought in describing the way the exhibition “assembles works whose compositional principle relies on a chain of elements” rather than a singular element, and that additionally the works “become a dynamic structure that generates forms before, during and after its production” (ibid.). Although all these terms appear to indicate a network structure, Bourriaud likens this format to a “journey” rather than a network. He states: “The journey format, as it appears so frequently in the works of today’s artists, goes hand in hand with the generalization of hypertext as a thought process: one sign directs us to a second, then a third, creating a chain of mutually interconnected forms, mimicking mouse-clicks on a computer screen” (ibid. 15). One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that these mutually interconnected forms that constitute the work of art are not just a “journey” but a network, which remains irreducible to the analogy Bourriaud celebrates. His invitation to think “in a manner that is appropriate to networks” is an idea that certainly applies to the project at hand, but we will also be interested in the ways he closes off the very affirmation of networks he intends to open up for analysis.

The emphasis on “relational forms” describes a conglomeration or constellation of all these various independent yet interconnected elements that together still form what Latour would call a “unit.” Bourriaud’s suggestion that “each particular artwork is a proposal to live in a shared world, and the work of every artist is a bundle of relations with the world, giving rise to other relations, and so on and so forth, ad infinitum” (*Relational* 9) certainly rings true for the work of Franklin Evans, Simon Starling, Jenny Odell, and Pablo Helguera that forms the basis of the following chapters. However, one important distinction to make is that, although the various parts within each of the artworks connect to one another in a variety of ways, they do not congeal or become absorbed into a cohesive totality, a singular whole. The parts continue to be the parts even as they are momentarily contained within the space of the gallery, the context of the exhibition, and/or the work of art. It is in response to the particular dynamic forms of the works described in the chapters that follow that a new terminology is again needed. “Relational form,” “artwork as network,” and “networked artwork” begin to designate a new set of terms that have emerged in response to the recent developments in contemporary art and theory. They will be deployed throughout to describe the unique nature of the various projects discussed. In short, the question that will be explored here is: rather than their installation becoming a visualization of a network or resorting to networks as a useful metaphor, how *exactly* does the work of Franklin Evans, Simon Starling, Jenny Odell, and Pablo Helguera begin to rearticulate and inform our understanding of a “relational form,” i.e. a network?

1.10 Object Networks

Their constituent parts are never so transformed as to lose their prior, independent identities; the results are conglomerations of heterogeneous, loosely related items – in short, object networks.

– Lane Relyea

Numerous artists today are countering the increased virtualization of all aspects of society by creating complex, object-based projects and works that emphasize relational materiality and a bodily encounter with the work of art. Take, for example, the work of Sarah Sze, Mark Dion, and Gabriel Orozco, artists whose practice includes the creation and presentation of large-scale installations of objects. In his essay “Thing Theory,” media theorist Bill Brown elucidates the power inherent in objects and materials, and recognizes a return to objecthood as one of the ways that recent artists are responding to the digitalization of culture. Brown outlines the situation as follows:

If, more recently, some delight has been taken in historicism's “desire to make contact with the ‘real,’” in the emergence of material culture studies and the vitality of material history, in accounts of everyday life and the material *habitus*, as in the “return of the real” in contemporary art, this is inseparable, surely, from the very pleasure taken in “objects of the external world,” however problematic that external world may be – however phantasmatic the externality of that world may be theorized to be. (2)

Brown recognizes how “we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us ... when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily.” What then happens to objects when they

are taken out of circulation and become part of a work of art? Does it alter their thingness or meaning in any way? What happens when they are not only part of a “work of art” but also part of a larger installation with numerous other objects?

In his 2006 essay, “In Your Art World, or The Limits of Connectivity,” Lane Relyea describes networked forms of recent art as “relational aesthetics” and “multiple and fictive artist-identities,” and then considers them romantic examples of the New Economy and/or neo liberalism that explodes the “everyone is an entrepreneur” culture. Relyea observes that commodities of all sorts, in a manner similar to the postmodern artwork, are no longer as concerned with autonomy: “as with every other form of labor under the New Economy, so too has value production in the consumer marketplace become relational, dialogical, networked. The commodity, like the postmodern artwork, has relaxed its former pretenses to autonomy” (8). For Relyea, the network is exemplary of a post-Fordian rejection of previously culturally dominant institutions, such as unions, political parties, and factories. He situates “the network, with its one-to-one connections and additive, combinatorial logic [as] replacing the organization's former pyramidal hierarchy and hard external shell. The network privileges casual, weak ties over formal commitments so as to heighten the possibility of chanced-upon associational link-ups that lead outward from any one communicational nexus or group” (9). While I’m not sure I agree with Relyea’s description of network connections as inherently casual or weak. It is easy to imagine examples of the opposite, where the power of a network lies in the strength of its enduring connection. Relyea further dismisses relational art as not critical, denouncing its causality as it “surfs” the leading edge of the dominant system.

In “Studio Unbound,” Relyea further describes the recent trend in “unmonumental” sculpture as exemplified in the work of Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison. Noting their use of

bricolage sculpture and its mode of assemblage, Relyea argues: “Their constituent parts are never so transformed as to lose their prior, independent identities; the results are conglomerations of heterogeneous, loosely related items – in short, object networks” (346). Additionally, in describing the conditions of the studio, Relyea identifies the structure or system that it belongs to as a network:

In contrast to enclosures, networks are characterized by what Gilles Deleuze has called ‘modulation,’ like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point... By the same token, the characteristic flexibility and informality of network structures, the way they depend on the constant, relatively independent movement of their participating actors, is taken as evidence of diminished structure and greater agency... Thus networks are often championed for how they accommodate self-styled independent actors who, because of their movements and decision making are supposedly less embedded in and dictated by governing structure and context, are more loosely affiliated within a dispersed field. (345)

Relyea’s characterization of networks as both flexible and informal again seems to miss the mark. Why would a network structure be inherently informal? On the contrary, computer networks are governed by strict rules of engagement known as “protocol” that restrict and direct behavior within the network. Furthermore, his characterization of the “actors” in a network as working independently within a diminished structure also seems oversimplified, especially since one of the primary characteristics of the network is that, although the nodes are independent, they are also contingent upon the relationships with other nodes and with the network they form.

The supposed “loose affiliation within a dispersed field” also seems to underestimate the inherent power and strength that can be derived from the connectivity found in a distributed form.

In the context of discussing works that evidence a return to materiality and the importance of “things,” Relyea responds to several exhibitions, including *The Uncertainty of Objects and Ideas* at the Hirshhorn (2006), *Thing* at the Hammer Museum (2005), and *Unmonumental* at the New Museum (2007). He observes:

And yet what was put forward by these sculpture shows, despite their emphasis on the studio and on the individual fabrication of physical things, were not autonomous objects. The bricolaged everyday materials that constitute the work of Genzken, Harrison et al., though personalized through hands-on artistic intervention, still remain opened out and available to larger communities and cultures, continuous and interwoven with larger systems of exchange. Their constituent parts are never so transformed as to lose their prior, independent identities; the results are conglomerations of heterogeneous, loosely related items – in short, object networks. (346)

He further states that “the work is too internally diverse and intersected to be characterized as unified and consistent, and in its heterogeneity and flexibility it refuses to commit to just one identity” (347). In closing, he declares that, as with art, “it is the ease and agility of access and navigation through and across data fields, sites, and projects that takes precedence over any singular, lone *objet*. And the new sculpture shows [...] don’t contradict this. It doesn’t stand in defiance of network forces but rather proves their further extension by measuring how these

forces have subsumed the very opposition between the single and the multiple, the enclosed and interpenetrated” (348). Although Relyea’s definition of network characteristics appears somewhat problematic and contradictory in places, his analysis of the works by Genzken, Harrison et al. in terms of “object networks” has been useful for the work addressed in the dissertation, notably the way it can serve as an intermediary between Bourriaud’s definition of “relation form” and the networked artwork.

1.11 Exhibition Networks

One element of artistic practice that has always embraced the concept of a network, although it is not explicitly phrased in these terms, is the exhibition. In its very nature, an exhibition brings together objects, people, ideas, events, and experiences and puts them on display. Generally, each individual component (work of art or artist) maintains their individual nature, while also being connected to an overarching theme or relational framework that binds the various exhibited entities together. Whether a small solo show at a commercial gallery, a large retrospective at national museum, or large-scale survey at a biennial exploring a single theme across geographic regions, each exhibition presents a group of ‘objects’ (including things, people, ideas, events, and experiences) as part of a large unifying whole. Visitors are meant to seek connections between the various ‘objects’ and draw certain conclusions about their relatedness (or lack thereof).

Of the works of art described as “networked artworks” in the chapters that follow, most have ‘object’ networks at their core. What I mean by this is that the work of art consists not of a singular object, like a painting or sculpture, but rather they are collections or constellations of

‘objects,’ that is, they are relational forms. The objects included within the work of art can also be works of art or historic objects, ordinary objects, or even trash. Many of them are ‘found’ objects, as in objects not made by the artist but rather found in the world, whether in an artist’s studio, an archive, a recycling center, or the prominent collection of an art museum. It is important to note that the ‘objects’ that form the core of the exhibitions addressed here can also take non-object forms such as ideas, images, events, people, and experiences. But first and foremost, the works of art that form the focus of this research are *exhibitions* or parts of exhibitions. However, instead of the “work of art” existing *within* the larger context of an exhibition alongside other works of art – other separate, autonomous works – the works addressed here are exhibitions in and of themselves. In other words, they are installations of multiple ‘objects,’ whose physical form and context of presentation lies, as it were, in their very exhibitionality. In short, the work’s relation to the space of its exhibition must be thought through differently.

In the introduction to the book, *Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology*, published in 2007, Florence Derieux states: “It is now widely accepted that the art history of the second half of the twentieth century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions” (8). Along those same lines, Christian Rattemeyer writes in *The Exhibitionist* in 2011 that there was a pressing need for an “accepted canon of important exhibitions even in the most general form (37). In “Rewriting or Reaffirming the Canon? Critical Readings of Exhibition History,” Linda Boersma and Patrick van Rossem similarly question how “a meaningful relationship can be created between object-focused art history and the new turn to exhibition history” (n.p). The significant nature of exhibitions in terms of shaping the history of art is further underscored by Bruce Altshuler’s two monumental publications, *Salon to Biennial – Exhibitions That Made Art*

History: 1863-1959 (2008) and its sequel, *Biennials and Beyond – Exhibitions That Made Art History: 1962-2002* (2013). These are two books that not only describe a selection of significant exhibitions spanning the past hundred and fifty-five years but that also include wall texts, curatorial statements, artist statements, artist-curator correspondence, and exhibition reviews.

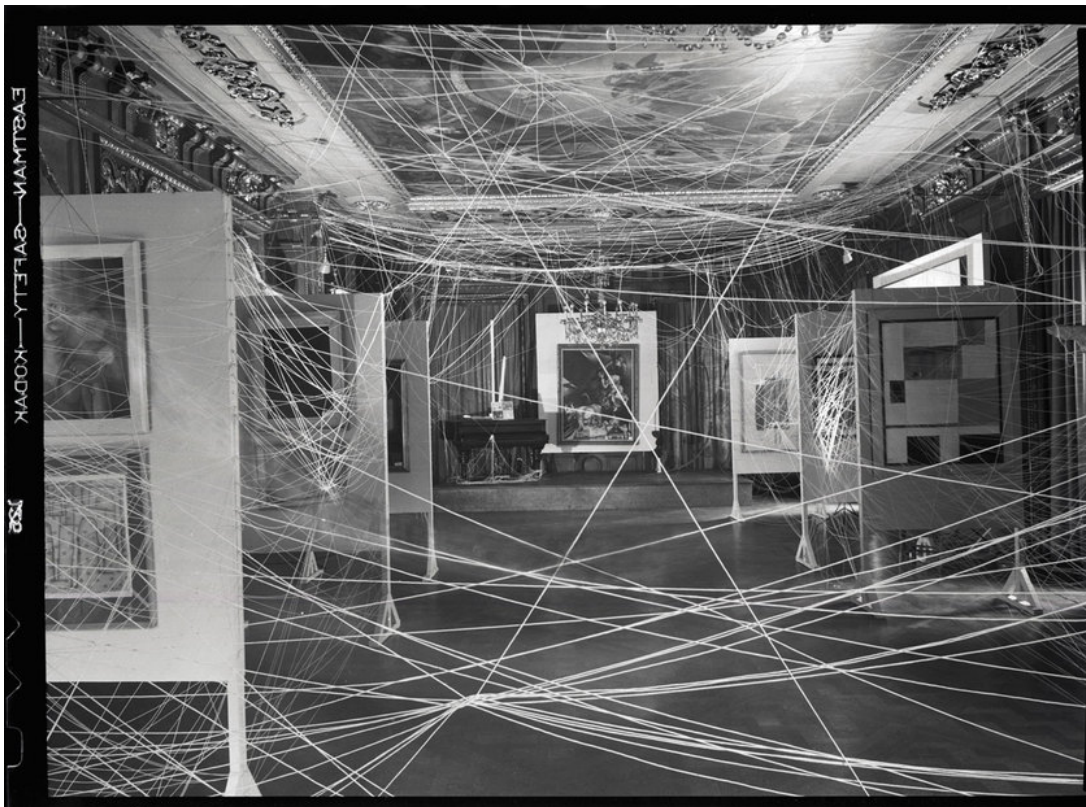


Fig. 13. Installation View. Marcel Duchamp, *Sixteen Miles of String* (1942).

One example of a historically significant exhibition that is of interest in considering the exhibition as a networked form is André Breton's exhibition, *First Papers of Surrealism*, organized by Breton and installed by Marcel Duchamp at the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies in New York during the Fall of 1942. Although it included works by a wide range of artists that were not considered Surrealists (such as Henry Moore and Robert

Motherwell), it was still considered a Surrealist exhibition. Its focus was on showcasing works by European Surrealists and the American artists whom they influenced. The exhibition was installed in one of two ornate drawing rooms on the second floor of the Villard House (also known as the Whitehead Mansion) on 451 Madison Avenue. Fashion designer Elsa Schiaparelli had asked Breton to curate the show in order to raise funds for French prisoners of war and children in unoccupied France (Altshuler 299). In a letter announcing his selections, Breton introduces Duchamp as the man who would “take care of the arrangements of the ‘mise en scene’” (ibid). The exhibition included over a hundred works that were installed on freestanding walls that were positioned as partitions perpendicular to the drawing room walls (see fig. 13). In addition to laying out the paintings, collages, and sculptures in the room, Duchamp added a dramatic visual element of his own in the form of a web of white twine, now known as *Sixteen Miles of String*, that crisscrossed throughout the gallery, connecting the various works to one another while also connecting them to several architectural features of the room, such as the crown molding and the chandelier. Several critics at the time lamented how the string “cobweb” obscured the viewing of the other works and considered it a distraction. Additionally, during the opening Duchamp arranged to have children present who were asked to play ball between the partition walls to add further physical chaos to the already visually chaotic string entanglement. According to Miranda Ambrose, this one image “has come to stand in for the irretrievable experience of the exhibition itself. In it, there is no imaginative entry point to the room, no space that allows us to occupy the same area as the paintings themselves. The string stands in the way. It is difficult to visualize walking up to the Mondrian on the right, or even to the Klee directly in front of us, let alone proceeding through the rooms of the exhibition. We can only feel our ankles getting tangled in the web” (n.p.). She then offers a correction regarding the overwhelming

impact that *Sixteen Miles of String* appears to have had by stating: “If you go to archives, if you look at other images of the exhibition, you can see that Duchamp’s intervention was in fact more permeable than the dominance of this one image has led us to believe. You could walk around in the space, you could approach the paintings” (Ambrose n.p.). Although the presentation here of this particular exhibition includes a literal web that connects the various objects on view to one another, as well as, elements of their environment, and so is perhaps too literal an example of the argument we are making, it serves as a symbolic illustration of the networked nature of all exhibitions, whether they literally showcase the interconnectedness of the objects on display through a web of white string or extend to much more subtle articulations of connectivity to take place in the viewer’s imagination.

In *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968* (2017), James Voorhies discusses the development of the exhibition as artistic medium and as a critical form. Voorhies presents a series of case studies of critically significant exhibitions of the last fifty years that range from Robert Smithson's antimodernist non-sites (1968) to more contemporary, participatory projects such as Thomas Hirschhorn’s *The Bijlmer Spinoza-Festival* in Amsterdam (2009). Voorhies considers iconic exhibitions such as Harald Szeeman’s *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern (1969) and *Americana* at the Whitney Biennial (1985) through the writings of Jacques Rancière, Claire Bishop, and New Institutionalism. He frames the historic overview with a theoretical analysis of Carsten Höller’s *Experience* at the New Museum (2011), which he describes as “a symbol of the current fragmentary state of a form of relational art whose aspirations feed institutions’ and visitors’ appetites for spectacular contemporary art” (8). In this sense, he is critical in his assessment of contemporary art institutions – alternately described by the author as “the museum industry,” the “industry of contemporary art,” and the

“industrial art complex” – which are seen as institutions in the business of creating experiences for consumers, where “the consumer is the spectator” (9) whose experiences are primarily created to “generate capital” (10). Voorhies’ primary concern is that the exhibition as a critical form needs to retain its “critical attitude” and remain “alive, intact, and relevant,” since he observes that exhibitions risk losing their critical stance when they become absorbed by the very institutions that exhibit them (ibid.). Voorhies’ suggestion that the exhibition itself is a critical form is especially useful for the proposition central to this dissertation that an artwork (or an exhibition) can be a network. His assessment that the projects examined in his research are not just straightforward displays of individual works on a gallery wall but instead are “presentations that interweave objects, images, texts, sound, video, or social engagement to create complex and immersive environments both inside and outside the art institution, materially and virtually” (Voorhies 13) resonates strongly with the works and exhibitions – the networked artworks – that follow.

In comparing exhibitions that were organized prior the 1990s to those organized since the advent of the Internet, Voorhies also observes that exhibitions are presently considered as a form of “knowledge production” and as such include “lectures, panel discussions, symposia, research and film screenings,” further noting that even if “this type of activity was once peripheral to the exhibition, it is increasingly the main event” (198). He also notes that “research, periodic journals, radio programs, television stations, lectures, libraries, seminars, and workshops which usually take more auxiliary positions relative to the main exhibition (and are sometimes even categorized in the realm of education), are put on equal footing with what occurs inside the gallery” (73). As a result of this phenomenon, the exhibition form is expanded into a “multiplicity of simultaneous activity” (ibid). As we will see, these three

observations are of central importance to the chapters that follow, notably this expansion of the work of art to include elements that were previously excluded. Components that were previously considered as existing outside of the work of art – the gallery, the studio, histories, other artworks or historic objects, even public programs and their participants – are now part of what constitutes the work, thus indicating a profound shift in perspective not only in what we consider the “work of art” but the sites – the very networks – in and through which the work comes to be exposed and exhibited.

CHAPTER 2

Franklin Evans: Painting as Network

...The effect of walking in a painting.

– Franklin Evans



Fig. 14. Installation view. Franklin Evans, *juddrules*,
Montserrat College of Art Galleries (2014).

Created for Montserrat College of Art Galleries in Beverly, Massachusetts in the fall of 2014, the immediate effect of Franklin Evans' installation is the sense of a visual encounter that is both instantaneous and fragmented. As the viewer enters the gallery space, vibrant swaths of neon color and an overwhelming barrage of images crowd the glass entrance doors. The

exhibition fills much of the visual and physical space of the gallery with brightly colored objects and materials that cover the white linoleum tiled floor, each of the ten feet tall gallery walls, and even parts of the ceiling. A disorienting sea of information – a wide array of visual materials, texts, and numerous objects of all kinds, such as chairs, tables, buckets, tape rolls, and even an inflatable swimming pool – are arranged, distributed, or choreographed throughout the space. The overall color palette is wide-ranging, from earthy yellows to fluorescent pinks and oranges. Brightly colored reproductions of found images, black and white photographs, vinyl album covers, and fragments of all sorts of art-related ephemera gathered from the Internet, galleries, and art history and theory books are taped down on the gallery floor and walls. At times, the installed material is barely visible thanks to the large quantity and variety of intensely colored painter's tape screens that divide up the space into a maze-like formation. The overall effect is stimulating, even over-stimulating, perhaps causing confusion, bewilderment, and discomfort as much as fascination, attraction, and captivation.

Throughout the gallery there are large blocks of color painted directly onto the gallery walls in vivid oranges, earth tone mustards, greens, blues, and muted purples. Layered over these blocks are a number of large un-stretched canvases with abstract color-block compositions reminiscent of Matisse, hundreds of photographic reproductions, including details of previous installations by the artist and others, portraits of the artist himself, reproductions of other artists' works, and a plethora of other types of images. Everything adheres to the wall or canvas substructures with intentionally visible staples or tape. The ephemeral nature of the images is emphasized by the wear and tear caused by many footsteps across the gallery, marring the surface of the images adhered directly to the floor. Certain sections of the exhibition read like an art history textbook, with numerous reproductions of recognizable paintings by artists such as

Henri Matisse, Barnett Newman, and Andy Warhol. Other sections read more like a Google image search, where numerous versions and sizes of a single image are presented side by side.



Fig. 15. Installation view. Franklin Evans, *juddrules* (2014).

Throughout *juddrules*, Evans also incorporates texts in a variety of forms and from a wide range of different sources and genres. There are stacks of press releases from exhibitions he has visited, fragments on well-known art historical and theoretical texts on various painters such as Fernand Léger and Piet Mondrian, as well as texts written by artists themselves. The complex web of images and texts is repeatedly interrupted by various strips of painter's tape: short, long, loose, tight, some just scraps while others extend from floor to ceiling as an assertive visual element. Upon entering *juddrules*, it is immediately clear that this visual experience is not just

extraordinarily complex but visually overwhelming. What is less clear is what we exactly we are looking at, or what “it” even is.

The winding labyrinth of painter’s tape, the spatial confusion caused by the placement of imagery on the floors and ceiling, and the overwhelming quantity of visual stimulation lead to an overall effect of disorientation. The way the viewer interacts with the piece is also a multipath, multi-sensory and self-selecting experience. Wandering and meandering, both your eye and feet drift through the installation as if a twenty-first century flâneur, having exchanged the dense streets of Paris for the text and image filled forest of *juddrules*. Due to the density of the information and its immense quantity, it takes time for the viewer to begin to discern certain distinct elements and to identify what it is we are experiencing. In addition to the sense of visual disorientation, *juddrules* thus causes confusion in terms of its basic definition. Is it an installation, an environment, a work in progress, or a work abandoned? Has the gallery become a studio space? Are we looking at a sculpture, an assemblage, or perhaps a three-dimensional collage? What exactly is the nature of all of the art historical references and the conversations they provoke? At the same time, are the many references to other art works intended as ironic gestures, or do they serve as a critical examination of the elevation of certain painters or paintings over others? In short, should we consider *juddrules* as a parody of art history’s great icons or a well-intended homage? As I will argue, what binds these various questions together – what forms the core argument of this chapter – are two fundamental observations about the exhibition. First, that *juddrules* is a work engaged not just with painting but also with the *history* of painting. And secondly, that the exhibition’s very organization – its sense of overwhelming visual complexity, its sense of sensory disorientation – has strong suggestions of our current

condition of visual overload, of a world saturated with digital images, of our immersion in a culture increasingly shaped by the visual.

The uncertainty regarding *juddrules* as a work and its definition leads us to questions of interpretation, including the question concerning the method of the work's very creation. For it remains uncertain whether it is an intuitively created composition of objects and materials in the space of the gallery or whether there is an underlying system that connects all of these various parts together. If there is a system, is it discernable to the viewer and how does it operate? Certainly, we know that the *juddrules* is a composite of many parts that are organized in a quite particular way. But whether their organization is intentional, planned, and/or intuitive is not immediately clear, even as numerous associations can be made between the various parts, both formal and intellectual. Viewers are thus encouraged to see and make these connections between the various parts as they engage with and walk *through* the work. In this sense, in addition to the ways in which the work gestures toward rethinking the history of painting, as well as toward a sense of visual overload, of our immersion in a world already saturated with images, the argument also informing this chapter is that the various elements that comprise *juddrules* have combined into a "relational form" – in short, the various elements are combined into what we will call a "network."

2.1 A Studio in the Gallery

The overwhelming visual presence of *juddrules* begins at the gallery's double door entryway with an image-covered floor that spreads out into the gallery space. The work leads immediately into a large blue metal and wood scaffolding that has been partially covered with strips of painted painter's tape that connects it to both the ceiling and the floor. The "tape-

screens” are created by adhering one end of the roll of tape to the ceiling and rolling out the rest of the tape roll until it hits the floor or, in this case, the scaffolding, where it becomes secured. Each strand of tape has a different color, thickness, and dimension. Some are painted, while others are unaltered and appear in one of the many commercially available colors. Although visually arresting, the vertically suspended scrolls of tape appear fragile and move gently and subtly back and forth as the result of the airflow in the room. Their shimmering generates a visible vibration that permeates the room and gives the illusion of the installation acting as a living entity.



Fig. 16. Detail. Franklin Evans, *juddrules* (2014).

The three-foot high blue scaffolding platform holds ten used plastic paint trays that show paint remnants in the colors used to paint the color blocks directly onto the gallery walls. At the back edge of each tray, an image is propped up at an angle. They are reproductions of a Polaroid image that has been digitally scanned and printed out with its original white border intact. They include snapshots of the artist as a child, as a young man, and tourist travel pictures taken by the artist or his travel companion. Carefully displayed are a selection of used brushes, paint rollers, and a grouping of small Masonite shelves repurposed from gallery storage. On a wooden plank underneath the platform are thirteen separate stacks of rolls of painter's tape of various dimensions, several tubes of Golden paint, and five cans of paint and primer. Additionally, arranged is a selection of tools, including a staple gun, staples, scissors, pen, nails, knife, and putty knife. Together they represent the tools and materials used to create *juddrules*. Indeed, they are presented at the very entrance to the exhibition, as if gesturing in a fully transparent way to the process in which the work was created, or as if suggesting that the installation is not yet finished or, since the tools are not yet put away, suggesting that they could be taken up at any moment and as such are ready to be used again. The blue scaffolding used to install images and tape onto the gallery ceiling has thus also become part of the installation. With its prominent placement at the entrance, the inclusion of the scaffolding and its accompanying objects in the space of the gallery suggests that it becomes an integral part of the viewer's experience of the work as the viewer enters the very space of the gallery, or at least an experience in which the viewer remains uncertain of the exact status of the exhibition as finished or unfinished at the very moment of encountering the exhibition for the first time.

The works in progress, the sketches, and the various image and object collections have been transferred from Evan's personal studio space to the gallery. Here, they are arranged in new

configurations to form the beginning of an organizational form that expands and reshapes itself in response to the site and the particular moment in which the exhibition comes into existence. In the specific context of the exhibition at Montserrat, Evans was invited to campus as part of a three-week artist residency. The artist approached the gallery space as if it were the blank walls of his studio. In thinking of the gallery as intimately related to his studio, Evans would seem to affirm a claim proposed by Nicolas Bourriaud in *Postproduction* when he argues: “the exhibition is no longer the end result of a process, its ‘happy ending,’ but a place of production” (69). In this sense, the gallery not only becomes the site of production; the exhibition itself refuses to offer a finished product or sense of completion, instead presenting itself as a place in flux, of becoming, of work “in progress” of objects that refuse to be installed and fixed in place once and for all.

In *juddrules*, the boundaries between the studio as a place of production and the gallery as its displaying counterpart are thus intentionally and creatively blurred and displaced. The gallery becomes the studio and vice versa. Already, in 1971, Daniel Buren wrote in “The Function of the Studio” that the “analysis of the art system must inevitably be carried on in terms of the studio as the *unique space* of production and the museum as the *unique space* of exposition. Both must be investigated as customs, the ossifying customs of art” (51). With the artist’s studio now part of the “art system,” the uniqueness of both studio and exhibition space are now displaced and the museum and the gallery themselves can become spaces of production, just as for Buren the entire world outside of the museum’s confines can become a place of display. In his essay, Buren briefly addresses “those curators who conceive of the museum as a permanent studio” (52). He presents the studio as a “place of multiple activities: production, storage, and distribution,” whereas the gallery is presented as the studio’s counterpart and as a

place of both “promotion and consumption” (53). The art objects as a result need to be portable to move between the two spaces. Buren thus argues:

The loss of the object, the idea that the context of the work corrupts the interest that the work provokes, as if some energy essential to its existence escapes as it passes through the studio door, occupied all my thoughts. [...] In the studio we generally find finished work, work in progress, abandoned work, sketches – a collection of visible evidence viewed simultaneously that allows an understanding of process; it is this aspect of the work that is extinguished by the museum's desire to ‘install.’ Hasn’t the term *installation* come to replace *exhibition*? (56)

When we consider Franklin Evans’ installations in the context of Buren’s post-studio essay, they seem to be an effort to combat this “desire to ‘install’” through the inclusion of many of the components of his studio that are normally lost or “extinguished” in the transition from studio to exhibition, or simply left behind deemed not worthy of inclusion in the display. For *juddrules* also includes finished works, works in progress, abandoned works, sketches, inspirational sources – the artist’s “visible evidence” – and presents them as part of the gallery installation, as part of a ‘finished’ work that is simultaneously and constitutively unfinished. The studio, no matter how glamorous or humble, is at its core a workspace. In *juddrules*, the artist’s studio has become the space of display, yet including evidence of the conditions of its making, such as the scaffolding, the paint trays, and brushes. The space of display continues to echo as workspace, so much so that it seems to still be in a state of flux and work could resume at any time.

Even as numerous artists have rejected the studio as the locus of artistic practice – one thinks of artists as diverse as Robert Smithson, Chris Burden or Andy Warhol – the studio is still seen as the ideal vehicle for the creation of art and the practice of making objects such as painting and sculpture. Despite the fact that many artists are no longer just making objects and are focused instead on creating *experiences* for viewers, the studio still serves an active function as a place of work and inspiration. In her preface to *The Studio Reader: On the Space of Artists*, Mary Jane Jacob aptly describes the studio as “a generative place” and a “necessity of being” for the artist (xi). She describes it as a place of making, reflection, and engagement with the discourse of artistic creation. With the current trend of “art as social practice” and the so-called “post studio moment,” where artists fly across the globe to create site responsive works for audiences in other regions of the world, the role of the studio has undergone a profound transformation. However, this movement away from the studio also coincides with an increasing fetishization of the studio itself and a cultural obsession with the artist’s inner sanctum, which has now become an historical and cultural curiosity. Arguably the height of such fetishization is the careful relocation in 1998 of Francis Bacon’s Reese Mews studio by its director Barbara Dawson to the Hugh Lane Gallery, including the walls and ceiling. Along with her team, Dawson catalogued its entire contents – over seven thousand items – as part of the Francis Bacon Studio Database. Yet this problematic of the studio space has a longer history, a history that is instructive for our understanding of the role of the studio in the *juddrules* exhibition.

For example, the 2014 exhibition at London’s Tate Modern, *Mondrian and his Studios*, traced Piet Mondrian’s transformation from a figurative to abstract painter and featured a life size reconstruction of his Paris studio from 1921-1936, a digital reconstruction of his London studio, and an archival reconstruction of the 59th Street studio in New York.³ The curators at the

Tate Modern used the example of Mondrian's Paris studio to "illustrate how the painterly space of Mondrian's canvasses was in constant dialogue with their direct surroundings" ("Mondrian and His Studios"). According to the curators, what comes into focus is the symbiotic relationship between the artist and his workspace:

Blurring the boundaries between his art and his life, the vitality Mondrian instilled in his paintings flowed over to all the surfaces of his studio, on which he continually altered compositions of colored planes. By the time of his death, Mondrian's personality became inseparable from the working environment he created for himself. (ibid.)

The studio here is again presented as a generative space and as a symbiotic extension of the artist's mind. According to the Tate Modern's press release for the exhibition, "Mondrian's studios in Amsterdam, Paris and New York all represented an ideal viewing space, described by the art historian Yve-Alain Bois as 'an experimental expansion of the work and the condition for its accomplishment'" (ibid.).

Another example of reconstruction and fetishization of the artist's studio can be found in the many flawed attempts in recreating Constantin Brancusi's studio in Paris. After its initial destruction due to its deplorable physical condition, and to make room for a nearby hospital expansion, the studio was partially recreated at Palais de Tokyo in 1962. This was only a temporary installation for the "studio" was eventually moved inside a sterile glass covered building designed by famed architect Renzo Piano as part of Centre Pompidou complex.⁴ Brancusi's original studio was once described by Man Ray "as a sacred forest, an enchanted or

mythical place” where every object, even the tools, seemed to “vibrate with a supernatural presence” (qtd. in Barthel 1). In its current iteration at the Pompidou, the objects are carefully set up in their original configuration, yet the overall effect is one of a static sterile recreation of a once “sacred” place.

Henri Matisse is another painter whose studio is well documented in photographs, paintings, and verbal accounts, both by the artist himself and by many of his contemporaries. In many images, Matisse’s studio is shown with a consistent vertical “stacking” of the works, often covering much of his studio walls from floor to ceiling. This type of display, commonly referred to as the French “salon” style, fell out of favor by the mid twentieth century, when a more spacious arrangement of the works had become the preferred method of showing works of art. In part, Dr. Albert Barnes instigated this transition, an American businessman turned art collector, who wanted viewers of his collection to be able to see each work individually to appreciate its significance. Recently, Matisse was honored with an exhibition *Matisse in the Studio* that showcased his studio practice through a selection of objects from his studio – vases, textiles, sculptures, African masks, etc.– and paintings that depicted them, which was organized by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2017. In short, the studio as a generative space and a symbolic extension of the artist’s mind remain a constant feature of modernist assumptions and continues to garner contemporary interest.

juddrules offers many of the qualities that a studio offers an artist. The exhibition space is a place of reflection and inspiration, and so experienced as a generative space. It also serves as a symbiotic extension of the artist’s creative mind. But instead of a static display of the artist’s genius to be admired by the viewer as an outsider looking in, the viewer is included and invited to “complete” the creative process. The viewer is not simply encountering a reconstructed studio

on display but rather becomes enveloped by the studio environment. Visitors can now wander around inside this gallery become “studio.” When comparing *juddrules* as gallery or studio space to the recreations of Mondrian, Brancusi, or Bacon’s studios in their respective new settings, it is clear that this installation is in fact not an archival recreation of the artist’s studio but its simultaneous extension and displacement. It is also not a carefully preserved relic but rather functions as a place of contemporary production and flux. For the duration of the residency, the gallery space was indeed a “place of production” (to follow Bourriaud’s suggestion) and with the inclusion of all the modes of production as part of the display, it promotes the illusion that the gallery space continues to function as a work space, or at least could resume doing so at any moment.

If we are to consider *juddrules* as a relational form, and more specifically a network, what role does the studio play in this formation? Given that both the artist’s studio in Houston Street, New York and the Montserrat Gallery are places of production and that a wide range of objects – papers, tape, scraps, photographs, magazine pages, studies, and finished ‘fine art’ works – moved back and forth between the two locations, what is the form that holds it all together as a work of art? Where does the work begin and end? Or does *juddrules* not have clear boundaries, so that the boundaries are intentionally blurred, ambiguous? The occasion of the exhibition and the limitations of gallery space (both in terms of physical dimensions and the duration of its availability) serve, temporarily, as a constraint that contains the work. As the gallery became the artist’s studio and the studio became part of the work, both its primary location at Houston Street and its temporary manifestation at Montserrat are not separate entities but rather are part of the networked form that now composes *juddrules*.

As for earlier installations by Franklin Evans – including *felibrary2012to1967* (2012), *houstontohouston* (2012) held at DiverseWorks in Houston, Texas, and *paintthinks* (2013) installed at the deCordova Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts, – his installations always seem complete, designed specifically for each space they occupy, even as they also feel open ended, appearing at once fluid and temporary. As elements of the various works become de-installed and re-installed in new configurations, the installations’ many components are carefully saved and reused to become a part of the next project at future locations. As a result, where a particular ‘work’ begins or ends is no longer clear. Certain objects can, and have been, extracted from each installation, identifiable as autonomous works, sculptures, or paintings, while on display in the gallery, these same objects form a web of connected and interrelated parts. For example, for *paintthinks*, Evans installed a physical replica of the bookcase from his studio and all its contents. Rather than including the actual books, he scanned and printed their covers and installed them underneath a piece of Plexiglas to *appear* as if they were actual books. Viewers were invited to walk directly onto the case as part of their entry into the installation. After the exhibition ended and the various elements were returned to the artist’s studio, the bookcase component was sold to a collector. For *juddrules*, Evans again included a visual replica of the replicated bookcase, yet this time he did so by simply attaching a flat photographic reproduction of the bookcase (as it was installed in *paintthinks*) on the gallery wall with small bits of torn green tape. Together they present a provisional system, a network of related parts that are at once fluid and temporary in their organizational relation. For *juddrules* – as is true for many of Evans’ installations– the studio and the gallery space are rearticulated into one space, albeit only temporarily. Each installation offers a momentary state of suspension and refuses permanency, since the various objects and elements are always waiting to be disassembled and returned to the

studio only to be reconfigured once again, recycled back into a new network of relations at a future installation.

2.2 The Artist on Display



Fig. 17. Portrait of Franklin Evans inside *juddrules* (2014).

For the first three weeks of the exhibition, Franklin Evans himself was part of *juddrules* as he worked to create the installation during open gallery hours. This was an intentional act on behalf of the curator of the exhibition, with the aim of making transparent the creative process to its primarily college student audience. Akin in format to an open studio or a studio visit, visitors could enter the work in progress and watch the artist while at work and/or engage in

conversation. This format of “artist on display” is emblematic of a larger trend in museums. In her essay “Studio Visit,” Judith Rodenbeck discusses Corin Hewitt’s installation, *Seed Stage*, on view at The Whitney Museum of American Art in 2014. The installation consisted of a room within a room within the museum, surrounded by a small pathway where visitors could walk around the structure and peer in through designated vertical slits. Part tool shed, part kitchen and root cellar, the studio was a space where the artist performed a set of actions using various tools to manipulate and create photographic imagery that was put on display elsewhere in the museum.

Rodenbeck ponders the consequences of relocating an artist’s studio into a museum setting: “Bringing these private and obsessive workspaces into the museum, if anything, posits a dysfunctional collaboration with the audience: we are voyeurs rather than relational participants” (340). She notes a shift in the relationship from the studio visit to the museum visit and how the studio once on display negates its intended purpose as private workspace. She then counters her first statement by questioning this observation of division and separation: “Perhaps the notion of the studio as a fragile ecosystem is one that encompasses the viewer also, so that when encountering a work that closely approximates an artist’s studio they become activated by the process” (340). Rodenbeck describes this performed dimension of *Seed Stage* by arguing that it “most immediately seems to reward notions of solitary artistic mystery and the inaccessibility of the creative impulse” (337). In light of Rodenbeck’s reading of *Seed Stage*, while there might be a certain analogy with *juddrules*, Franklin Evans’ situation at Montserrat was different in that the artist was not on display for the duration of the exhibition. At the same time, the access to the artist and the space while in progress was controlled through daily public “open studio” hours. The doors to the gallery have large glass panes and were not covered during the installation, suggesting that for the three weeks the artist was in residence, visitors and passersby could watch

the artist at work. For the three weeks of the residency, Evans was physically present in the gallery while the gallery was open to the public and although at work was accessible to visitors for questions and conversation. He was part of the work, albeit temporarily.

Although the practice of showcasing a living artist as part of the exhibition is *au courant*, the underlying concept of artists putting themselves on display as part of the work is a longstanding motif in the history of painting. Two common historical examples are Diego Velazquez's famous self-portrait at the Spanish court, *Las Meninas* (1656), and Gustave Courbet's complicated composition, *The Painter's Studio: A Real Allegory Summing Up Seven Years of My Artistic and Moral Life* (1855), both of which attest to the interest in depicting the artist in relation to the place and conditions of the work's production. Both are allegories and self-portraits showing the artist in the act of painting. In the case of Velasquez, it was a moment in Spanish court life, while for Courbet recognizable references were to everyday life in the mid nineteenth century. Likewise, *juddrules* is also a "portrait" of Franklin Evans, not just literally through the inclusion of hundreds of portraits of the artist at various stages in his life but the installation as a whole provides an image of the artist, his interests and working methods. *Las Meninas* and *The Painter's Studio* are formal portrayals showing the artist in their professional setting, the studio while at work. Evans as part of his residency also presented himself in the gallery as an "artist at work" in his studio setting. In addition to physically putting himself on display, Evans also included many informal photographs of himself as a child, as a young man, on vacation, or with lovers, and thus shared not just his professional image as "painter" but also revealed moments of his private life and childhood. As a result, even when the artist was not physically present, the piece can be read as the "portrait" of a painter.

Is there a new model at work in *juddrules*? Does Evans' deployment of the gallery as an

extension of his studio space expand or change our understanding of either or both spaces? In his 2010 essay, “Studio Unbound,” Lane Relyea introduces the idea of a new type of fluctuating, transitory space that exists somewhere between the gallery and studio: “Today studio and museum are superseded by more temporal, transient events, spaces of fluid interchange between objects, activities and people” (344). Relyea opens the essay with a reference to the exhibition catalog for *Laboratorium*, a project curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden for the city of Antwerp in 1999. The project brought together artists and scientists from across disciplines in an effort to reveal the “laboratory” as a shared concept underlying their wide ranging creative creations, with the goal to present “a creative blur between the making and exhibiting of work” (Obrist, qtd. in Relyea 341). Relyea brings Obrist and Vanderlinden’s project into his essay because the exhibition catalog included a reprint of Buren’s essay “The Function of the Studio,” presumably to provide what he calls “historical contrast” (ibid.).

Relyea also quotes Claire Bishop’s essay, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” where she calls these types of open-ended installation projects “essentially institutionalized studio activity,” declaring that the studio has turned into “a showroom display, *a tableau vivant*” (qtd. in Relyea 344). However, this analogy, although convenient, does not seem applicable to the model of the artist on display, especially in the context of Franklin Evans in *juddrules*. A *tableau vivant* consists of living actors carefully staged in a dramatic scene yet in a static display. Considered “living pictures,” the event displayed is often a reenactment of a painting (or events depicted in a painting) on a stage. When bringing this comparison to the artists on display or in residence in their “gallery studios,” it is important to note that they are actively working, not pretending or acting as if they are working. One can argue that, to a certain extent, they are performing, but the scene is not scripted, nor are the artists acting as anyone other than

themselves. Bishop's assessment of this phenomenon as constituting "institutionalized studio activity" does nevertheless seem to fit as a description of *juddrules* since the artist was performing studio activities within an academic institutional setting.

More pertinently, Relyea further argues that, unlike Buren's system of "frames and limits," the studio now belongs to a system or structure more "properly described as a network" (345). Relyea uses the term network to indicate the structure of the art world as a whole within which the studio is a node that stands in relation to all other actors in the network, including other artists, museums, galleries, residencies, etc. He is referring to the recent interest in the art world as a context for the production of works of art: "interest today focuses not only on the studio but also on the art school and the international exhibition, all looked at in terms of their roles within a larger array of interlocking functions..." (ibid.). He further clarifies the changed status of the artist studio by suggesting: "No longer does the studio appear as an ideological frame that mystifies production, a space where the realities of social or mass production are supposedly held at bay in favor of an antiquated craft model that showcases the individual artist's creative genius" (ibid.). In this light, we can argue that *juddrules* does not stand in direct opposition to Buren's system of frames and limits even as it is aligned with Relyea's definition of studio as part of a network. The question nevertheless remains how *juddrules* offers a reconfiguration of all these concepts? In short, does it extend and/or displace Relyea's argument?

Obrist's assertion and Relyea's echoing of his argument in "Studio Unbound" that the type of work in *Laboratorium* presents "a creative blur between the making and exhibiting of work" seems applicable to *juddrules* since it too blurs and blends boundaries between making and presenting, studio and gallery, performance and work. Rather than simply positioning the studio as part of Relyea's network of exterior actors, institutions, museums, galleries, etc.

juddrules positions the artist studio in the gallery as an intrinsic part of a work of art. It not only includes all the objects on display within its “boundaries” but also the artist on view as part of the three-week residency, including his studio both on Houston Street and the temporary studio created at the Montserrat Gallery, and the exhibition itself. Together these components form a relational form, a network. Furthermore, if in turn we position this exhibition-network within Relyea’s larger network that is the art world, we can consider *juddrules* a network within a network. Of course, Relyea’s networked art world is part of even larger networks, at once social, economic, and so on. So that we can now see how Evans’ rethinking of the artist in the studio and his repositioning of the studio within the gallery as an integral part of *juddrules* now expands our understanding of both the studio space and the gallery space, not just in and as a network but as a part of a larger series of networks of which the exhibition-network is now a part.

2.3 Donald Judd: Critical Writings

Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all. Any material can be used, as is or painted... A work needs only to be interesting.

– Donald Judd

In one of the corners of the exhibition, to the right of the mustard and blue grid, another vignette is formed by two color blocks painted directly onto the gallery wall and a large unstretched canvas. The left block is formed by a tangerine orange rectangle (one foot off the floor, about four and a half feet wide, and approximately six feet tall). A pink rectangular block on the

right meets its tangerine partner in the corner, equal in size. The latter, however, is partially covered with the large un-stretched piece of canvas that extends to the ceiling. Also superimposed on the far right of that same block are blue and purple tape strips. Next to it, there is a schematic rendering of a gallery wall that includes two photos from previous installations, one at MoMA PS1 and a close up of another installation. Additionally, the rendering has two color swatches: one a light pink, the same as the wall color, and the other darker pink that echoes the paint on the blue painter's tape underneath it. It is clearly a layout design for an upcoming installation.



Fig. 18. Detail. Franklin Evans, *juddrules* (2014).

A vertical line of small metal nails interrupts the design, but also attaches it to the wall. The nail line sits right on the edge of the pink color block and extends down to its bottom right corner. A third of the nails have a strand of colored sewing thread wrapped around them that extends across the corner to a similar line of nails on the left edge of the tangerine color block. The top seven string lines are neon pink, the next fourteen are black, followed by a section with nails, but without string, a nearly two feet gap with no nails, and then twenty-one more nails with a winding strand of green sewing thread. Together the thread lines create a barely visible thread screen that prevents the viewer from moving closer into the corner. The string and their shadow counterparts create a dynamic visual effect of intersecting lines on the wall behind it. The difference between the string and its shadow is subtle and at times tricks the eye. The illusion is further complicated by the two pencil lines that extend out of the large Xerox or color printout reproduction of the distinctive yellow cover of a book, *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959-1975*. It is casually tacked up with small, torn pieces of curling yellow and white tape onto the tangerine rectangle. To its right, what appears to be a vertical strip of pink and white painted painter's tape is adhered to the wall; however, it is not tape but a realistically rendered painted replica. In addition, an arrangement of seven strips of (actual) tape of varying colors and length is layered on top of the pink color block.

Evans frequently selects a book or text as the conceptual inspiration and focus of an installation. For a previous exhibition, *paintingassupermodel* at Ameringer McEnery Yohe Gallery in New York in 2014, Evans focused on Yve-Alain Bois' book, *Painting as Model*, which features a series of essays discussing how the work of Modernist painters such as Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and Robert Ryman address the debate concerning "painting-as-medium" and the question of painting as a theoretical practice. For that exhibition, a physical copy of *Painting*

as *Model* was centrally placed on the gallery floor. In *Juddrules*, the distinct yellow cover of *Donald Judd: Complete Writings, 1959-1975* is a repeated visual motif throughout the exhibition and in fact forms the inspiration for the title of the exhibition itself. The book was first published in 1975 and offers a compilation of texts written by Donald Judd, including exhibition reviews for *Arts Magazine* and later *Art International*, in which Judd discusses over five hundred of his contemporaries between the late 1950s and 1965.

One particular review included in *Complete Writings* is significant to the *Juddrules* installation in several ways. It is an exhibition review of Martial Raysse's *The Swimming Pool* published in *Arts Magazine* in January of 1963 as part of the "In the Galleries" section. The piece *Rayse Beach* was on view at the Alexander Iolas Gallery in New York. It was originally commissioned by the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1962 as part of the experimental *Dylaby* exhibition that included Robert Rauschenberg and Niki de Saint Phalle among others. The Stedelijk Museum installation did include an inflatable pool around which other inflatable beach toys, a working jukebox, and the large-scale photographic reproductions of the female bathers were arranged. Raysse attached props such as plastic flowers and glasses to the images. According to Rosemary O'Neill in *Art and Visual Culture on The French Riviera, 1956-971, Ecole de Nice*, the November 1962 re-installation of the piece in New York was not identical to the Stedelijk installation since the artist "framed the space with photographs rather than also including wall mounted assemblages of readymade pool products" (112). The gallery space was also notably smaller and rather than being presented within the context of a larger exhibition, *The Swimming Pool* (note the change in title as well) was presented as a solo exhibition.

Judd's review of the installation was published in January of the following year in the "In the Galleries" section of *Arts Magazine* (1963) shortly after having seen *The Swimming Pool* at

Alexander Iolas Gallery. It is a relatively short text compared to other reviews published in the same issue. Judd opens with a quote from a supporting exhibition text that cites Raysse: “The swimming pool corresponds to sophisticated and expensive tastes and not to ordinary needs of life” (67). Judd follows up by stating: “This is the stated purpose of a room with sand on the floor, a full rubber swimming pool, rubber seals, geese and balls, a jukebox, mannequins in bathing suits and life sized photographs of girls, some of which are over painted or have flowers and fruit attached.” To which he then adds: “The purpose of this room, designated *Raysse Beach*, is not evident. Anything that Raysse has altered, such as the photographs, is corny. The rest looks like any unsophisticated and cheap back yard in Canarsie” (ibid.). Raysse was specifically interested in creating assemblages that appropriated items from popular consumer culture, in particular those cheap items made in plastic, many which were newly invented products at the time. Considering his origins in southern France, beach culture was part of his own personal popular-culture experience. O’Neill concurs with Judd in regards to the lack of evident purpose in the New York installation, stating: “At the Iolas exhibition, Raysse’s installation was by itself; the action based premise of *Raysse Beach* in *Dylaby* was less evident....” (113). She is referring here to the fact that the *Dylaby* installations were intended to be participatory spaces. She rightfully assesses that Judd failed to connect the works with “the Riviera aesthetic and to envision his [Raysse’s] use of “bad taste” as a means of expressing the relationship between sophistication and artifice” (ibid.). “Vulgarity,” according to O’Neill, “was precisely the issue Raysse was addressing. Cultural ‘taste’ was then the subject of much discussion among French intellectuals in light of French Americanization. From the perspective of the French, American culture was vulgar” (114). Perhaps these culturally specific nuances were not evident to the

American viewer, and certainly not to Judd at the time, who ironically cites the installation as lacking in sophistication and taste.



Fig. 19. Installation view. Martial Raysse, *Raysse Beach*, Centre Georges Pompidou (2014).

The 2014 reinstallation of *Raysse Beach*, part of a major Raysse retrospective held at Centre Georges Pompidou, displayed the large-scale photographic reproductions of female figures in bathing suits as well as the inflatable beach toys, installed on or around a floor covered in actual beach sand. However, the inflatable swimming pool was not included this time. Despite Judd’s obvious disdain for the installation and disapproval of the “corny” photographic alterations in 1963, both the piece and the artist were received positively by contemporary critics reviewing the retrospective, including Philippe Dagen writing for *The Guardian* who described Raysse as an under-appreciated, “major” French pop artist on a par with Andy Warhol and Roy

Lichtenstein, and an artist who created “[art] installation before the word existed” (n.p.). Dagen contextualized the piece within theoretical interests at the time: “Raysse finds his ideas, subjects and methods in the present. From the outset, his principles were clear. In 1957 he assembled objects made of plastic, groceries, bottles and brushes, turning them into reliquaries for the consumer society, which philosopher Roland Barthes was analyzing at that very moment in *Mythologies*” (ibid.). Interestingly, Dagen appreciates the blatant pop culture quotations in *Raysse Beach* (2014), the very quotations that Judd refused to embrace in 1963.



Fig. 20. Detail. Franklin Evans, *juddrules* (2014).

In direct reference to Judd’s exhibition review of *Raysse’s Beach*, *juddrules* also includes a small inflatable children’s swimming pool. The Judd review and Raysse’s *Swimming Pool*

serve as a point of inspiration for the exhibition, and although Evans makes Judd's review a conceptual focal point, the inflatable swimming pool is placed on top of a temporary wall near the ceiling and behind a dense tape screen, where it blends into the overall visual complexities of the installation and the many other art historical references that surround it. Is the effect of the literal inclusion of a plastic swimming pool by Evans similarly "corny," "unsophisticated," and "cheap," as Judd's original review of *Raysse Beach* suggests? What is Evans' intent with the inclusion of this – until fairly recently – obscure reference to a past installation that a limited amount of people experienced at the time and only a few were introduced to by way of Judd's review? Is it intended as an inside joke? Or a counter-critique of Judd's dismissal of *Raysse Beach* as "unsophisticated," which, knowing Judd's appreciation for purity of form and minimalism, was undoubtedly not to his taste, but is now appreciated by Evans who clearly embraces the tacky and the corny and elevates it alongside the serious and the well-crafted? In a sense, Evans, Raysse, Dagen, O'Neill, and Judd are all engaged in a cross-cultural, cross-generational dialogue that spans time and place. Indeed, one might imagine how Evans might be responding to the renewed interest in *Raysse Beach* since the original installation is now receiving praise as having been ahead of its time, hailed as a quintessential example of French Pop Art. Additionally, since a plethora of visual evidence and art historical research is newly available on line, one might further imagine that this background will find its way into the next Evans installation.

A 2006 reprint of Judd's *Complete Writings* allowed for an entire new generation of artists and researchers to appreciate Judd's insights. Most notably, the book contains Judd's famous essay from 1965, "Specific Objects," in which the categories of painting and sculpture are questioned by introducing a new category of "three-dimensional work." In describing some

of the distinguishable qualities of three-dimensional works, Judd states: “So far the most obvious difference within this diverse work is between that which is something of an object, a single thing, and that which is open and extended, more or less environmental” (183). In this sense, Judd is responding to artistic practices when sculpture moved off its pedestal and began to directly engage the floor or the wall, and when painting similarly moved away from a form constrained by the rectangle and the creation of illusionistic space and moved onto “objects” installed throughout the gallery space, both on the floor and wall. Judd declares:

The several limits of painting are no longer present. A work can be as powerful as it can be thought to be. Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface. Obviously, anything in three dimensions can be any shape, regular or irregular, and can have any relation to the wall, floor, ceiling, room, rooms or exterior or none at all. Any material can be used, as is or painted.
(184)

juddrules also defies categorization as neither sculpture nor painting, nor installation or assemblage, and instead presents viewers with a complex, three-dimensional environment. As stated in the epigraph to this section, working in three dimensions is exciting and “more powerful and specific” than a regular painting on a “flat surface.” Judd’s mention of the walls, floors, ceilings and entire rooms being a part of the work certainly speaks directly to *juddrules*’ engagement with the gallery space. However, in the next paragraph, in comparing to three-dimensional work to paintings, Judd states: “It isn’t necessary for a work to have a lot of things to look at, to compare, to analyze one by one, to contemplate. The thing as a whole, its quality as a whole is what is interesting” (ibid.). When considering this statement in the context of

juddrules, it is easy to see how it is indeed interesting to look at as a whole, yet it also offers that which Judd deems “unnecessary” by offering hundreds of things to look at, compare and analyze. *juddrules* thus embraces and contradicts Judd’s “rules” as they are laid out in “Specific Objects,” for there are numerous correspondences and dissonances between the text’s ideas and concepts and the installation on view.

Despite the obvious and extreme differences between each artist’s creative output, the installation can still be considered an homage to Donald Judd, especially the way in which it highlights the significance of his practice and the relevancy of his ideas forty years after the publication of the *Complete Writings*. In his review of *juddrules* in Art New England, the art critic and fellow painter Robert Moeller analyzes the relation between the two artists:

It begins here with Judd and transforms itself fully into Evans. What Judd allows, Evans expands upon. Judd’s rules become markers in Evans’ story. It’s not a question of primacy but rather the natural accrual of information and influence and its reinvestment in new work. Interestingly, one wonders if Judd would find Evans’ approach too unruly, too much the free-for-all he cautioned against. That being said, it is hard to imagine Judd finding fault in the precise nature of Evans’ harnessing of so many disparate elements into such a singular and profound work. (n.p.)

2.4 Representing Representation

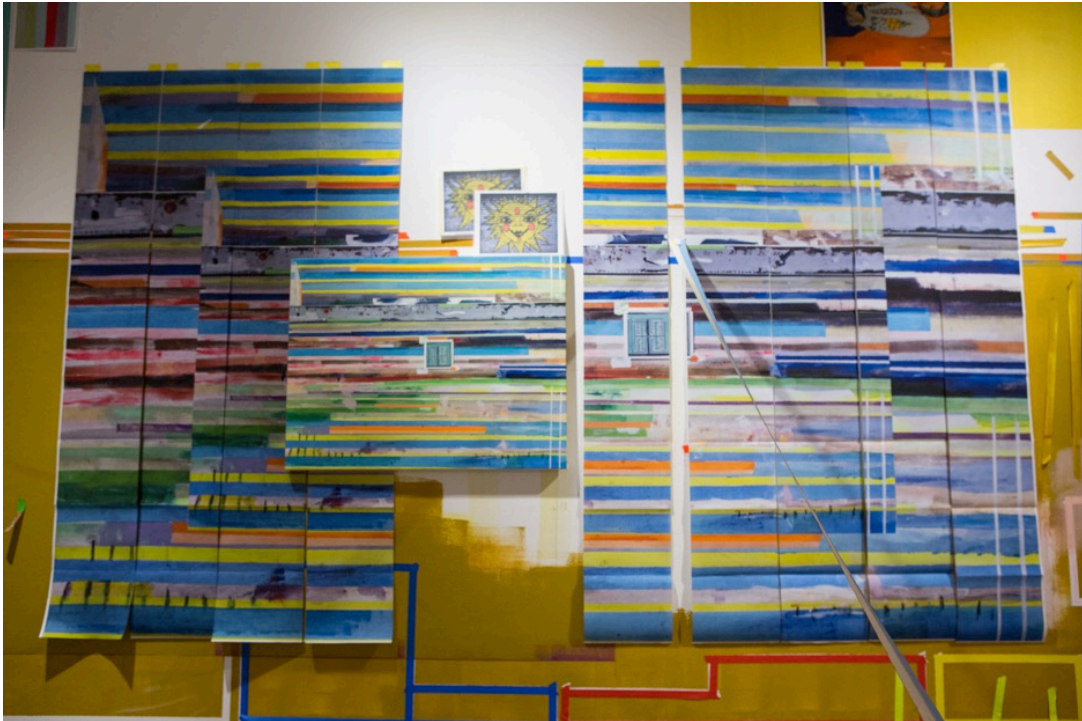


Fig. 21. Detail. Franklin Evans, *juddrules* (2014).

Across the back wall, *juddrules* features a partially defined grid of color blocks, executed in a primarily a yellow mustard color, with the exception of one block of wine colored purple on the far upper left. Parts of the grid are painted solid, others sketchy and less finished, while yet others are delineated in peeling, multi-colored painter's tape. On the upper right-hand corner of the grid, blocks of a brighter hue of yellow paint are alternated with 14" x 17" paper printouts. Some of the prints are abstract textural details of photographs, while another print features the partial torso of a nude male. One image – placed sideways at the top of the grid – features Henri Matisse's painting, *Romanian Blouse* from 1940. Reproductions of this particular painting are repeated throughout *juddrules* and in a variety of colors, states of distortion, and with varying

degrees of pixilation. Superimposed on top of the mustard grid hang two large paper collages. They are reproductions of one of Evans' stretched canvas paintings – the only stretched canvas in the exhibition as all the other canvasses are un-stretched – which itself is installed directly on top of the wall collage. Immediately above the canvas painting hang two laminated images of a cartoonlike rendering of a sun spray-painted onto a metal garage door. This door was located downstairs of the artist's studio and apartment on Houston Street for many years and served as a daily reminder of a neighborhood in transition that was newly emerging as one of New York's artistic centers.

The two images are nearly identical, although one is extremely pixelated and the other less so. The canvas painting does not have an individual title that allows it to be identified as an autonomous work. It features the same image as the one on the paper grid underneath. It consists of many, multi colored horizontal bands that look like a printed version of the vertical tape screens, but it is placed on its side. Near the top of the painting, a realistically rendered metal ruler covered in paint and strips of painter's tape forms one of the wider bands. At the center of the painting, a Polaroid is painted in *trompe l'oeil* style. It appears as if the Polaroid is attached to the canvas with painter's tape, yet both the photograph and the tape are entirely painted, an optical illusion. The placement of the Polaroid on top of the canvas, although illusionistic in this case, reveals a significant part of Evans' process – where the artist adheres photographic source images directly on to the canvas with tape and then paints a detailed replica of the Polaroid onto the canvas beside it. Although earlier in his practice the artist would remove the source image, only leaving the painted copy, now he frequently allows for them to exist side-by-side. As copies and originals exist beside one another, they create what might be described as an image feedback loop, which in turn creates a disorienting effect in which the distinctions between object and

image, between original and what Walter Benjamin terms it “reproducibility,” are at once inscribed and articulated.

The reference to Benjamin is instructive here since the primary concern in his celebrated essay on “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility” is the authenticity of the work of art, notably in relation to the question whether modern technologies (which at his time meant revolutionary developments in mechanical visual reproduction and film) have destroyed the authority of art. Benjamin argues that the “aura” of the original unique work of art is lost to reproducibility, and that this is not something to mourn but opens up progressive possibilities. He describes how the reproduction of works of art and the art of film had a major impact on art in its traditional form, transforming the relation between original and copy: “Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (Benjamin 217). He further declares: “The presence of the original is prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (ibid.). Combining originals and reproductions at every turn, *juddrules* would seem to offer a kind of meta-commentary on Benjamin’s essay, as if asking what happens to Benjamin’s concepts of “authenticity” and “aura” in our contemporary, image-saturated moment.

In their non-object form as digital files, digital images have extensive reach in terms of audience when compared to the reach of original works of art, whose display is always limited to those with physical (and social and economic) access to the work. The reference to digital files might be considered here as signaling an intensification of Benjamin’s objects of reference, his assertion that “by making many reproductions, [mechanical reproduction] substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence” (218) and that “in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced” (ibid.).

Indeed, Benjamin observes that this process leads to a “tremendous shattering of tradition” (ibid). No doubt the most powerful agent for this “shattering” in Benjamin’s own time was film. But what constitutes this shattering of tradition in the age of digital files and the Internet? And how might we conceive of this reactivation of the original object through its reproduction in relation to *juddrules*, and in a world increasingly characterized by our immersion in a culture of digital images? Does Matisse’s *Romanian Blouse*, which is normally housed at the George Pompidou Center in Paris, become reactivated through its inclusion in the exhibition, even though its form is a poorly reproduced replica? Whether this reproduction meets a viewer on the Internet or in the form of a printed-out version in *juddrules*, the image meets the beholder in “their own particular situation,” and in this case, in the exhibition of *juddrules* at Montserrat College of Art.

Benjamin wrote his essay at the beginning of the twentieth century regarding the reproductive technologies of printed matter and the visual reproduction of images in particular, but the argument remains relevant today when applied to digital images. With the Internet, the pluralities of copies are infinite and visual access to the image (though not the original object) has both multiplied and become globalized. The question nevertheless remains today whether the original is a better, more authentic object, retaining its aura when compared to its reproducible copy? Is this an outdated assumption? In what ways has the very distinction between original and the reproduction become displaced to a new understanding of this configuration between object and its reproducibility? Does one need to be present with the original to perceive the aura of the image or can the aura transcend its original source and be manifested in the copy?

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger dramatically declared: “For the first time ever, images of art have become ephemeral, ubiquitous, insubstantial, available, valueless, free” (32). Berger

here describes the modern means of production of that time – television and computing technology – as having destroyed the authority of art. Certainly the emergence of new technological means of representing images influences or changes the way we look at images. But is Berger’s statement still pertinent when looking at contemporary image culture over forty years later, when images of all kinds are so readily available online for download and sharing? Are ephemeral and more available images less valuable than their supposed rare, singular, and “stable” counter parts? What kind of aura is now at stake here? This brings us back to Benjamin’s argument regarding the reactivation of the original through the plurality of the reproductions. But what if art’s authenticity paradoxically increases as its image becomes increasingly represented, repeated, and shared? Digital reproductions and image distribution through the Internet and mobile technologies are currently the primary mode of communication for a contemporary audience whose interaction with “works of art” is shaped by virtual or digital images. One could even suggest that the currency of images grows as their public representation or reproducibility expands. So, in what ways does this larger background concerning the relation between original and reproducibility shape the use of images in *juddrules* and its effect on an audience already immersed in a world saturated with images and suffering from visual overload?

2.5 Sites of Convergence

Three versions of the same image appear in different states and different material manifestations as part of *juddrules* (fig. 21). One is a highly finished painting, while the other two are pixelated and enlarged versions of that painting printed out in full color (each at a different size) and taped together as a paper grid and mounted onto the gallery wall. The original

painting, which itself includes a reproduction of a preexisting image, exists superimposed on two large-scale reproductions. Again, this begs the question as to the significance of whether something is an original or a copy? What is the relationship between a low-resolution reproduction of a painting and its original counterpart when the former is placed larger than life size behind it? What does it say about our current understanding of images and the values we attach to them? Central to Evans' practice is the play between materializing the work and the immaterial, whether he is using *trompe l'oeil* effects to create the illusion of a photograph taped to his canvas or printing out images by other artists included in the exhibition as part of his own work. The question thus arises what happens when these copies get photographed or scanned and become part of a work of art, and in the process become "original" again. This process of blurring the boundaries between original and copy and the confusion surrounding authorship that it generates manifests itself as a "feedback loop" within the work. The basic principle of a feedback loop here refers to a circuit that returns some of its output back into the circuit as input. In *juddrules*, all the images – whether copies of Evans work, copies of work by others, or originals by Evans – are placed by him on the gallery wall as visual equals, each version returning to one another and in doing so becoming part of the work that is created. If they are presented as equal, does the fine art painting become "lesser" in value –whether monetary or aesthetic – by being placed on par with its reproduction (and others), or alternately do the reproductions become more valuable?

Evans' environments are filled with such "sites of convergence," where traditionally created images, such as paintings, collide with new, digitally generated imagery. The term "sites of convergence" is introduced by Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New*

Media Collide, and refers to the colliding of existing, non-digital, cultural practices with digital cultures. Jenkins explains his concept as follows:

By convergence I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the corporation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want. Convergence is a word that manages to describe technological, industrial, cultural and social changes depending on who's speaking and what they think they are talking about. (2-3)

Convergence thus represents the cultural shift consumers experience as they are encouraged to seek out new information through new platforms and required to make connections among dispersed media content. According to Jenkins: "The emerging convergence paradigm assumes that old and new media will interact in even more complex ways" (6). In addition to introducing us to a hardly new culture of complexity, Jenkins presents the term "participatory culture," which he opposes to the "passive" spectatorship of the TV and radio broadcast era. This participatory element refers to the active role that consumers now play in piecing together their understanding of the world through information that is provided by numerous and at times disparate sources. He summarizes this transition by arguing: "each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives" (3-4). Similarly, in *juddrules*, the viewer is not a passive spectator but is asked to put together the connections between the various, dispersed sources of visual information in order to form a – highly individual – interpretation of

the exhibition. The exhibition visitor, like Jenkins's spectator, is active, not passive, and has agency in terms of meaning-making and understanding.

juddrules is a giant, trans-historical "mashup" where fine art meets the digital printout. A "mashup" is a term originally used within the music industry, where it signifies the practice of mixing multiple songs together into a new song without one song dominating. Within web culture, the term refers to data mashups that use open application programming interfaces that integrate information from multiple sources to create new web services. The term seems applicable to *juddrules* since the exhibition takes "samples" from a variety of sources. Although Evans does not target the abolition of fine art, he does ask it to co-exist as a low culture version of itself. *juddrules* presents the unapologetic appropriation and recirculation of art world related media content. In reprinting an image found on the Internet, Evans (re-)materializes something that exists in immaterial form. He turns a copy (representation, an image) back into an original, a physical object, which in turn is not the initial original but becomes an "original" nonetheless.

In "True Blue or the Work of Images in the Age of Digital Reproduction," Jennifer Allen argues that the "aura" of an image now increases as it becomes reproduced as "shares," "likes," "comments," "tweets," or forwarded via email. She uses the example of the most retweeted photograph in the world at the time, a "collective selfie" at the 2014 Oscars that shows a group of celebrities posted to the twitter account of popular TV host Ellen DeGeneres. The photograph was retweeted over 2.5 million times and received over 34 million views. Allen argues: "The digital image – either moving or still, either put into animated motion or brought to a halt as a still or otherwise modified – is qualified today through the quantification of statistics. As an image goes 'viral,' the fusion of cult value and exhibition value can be calculated in the number of followers and the number of times an image has been seen, liked, embedded or redistributed"

(n.p.). Allen adds an intriguing new dimension to the argument by directing our attention not only to the image's ability to be reproduced but to be altered in the process: "Unlike a more modern work of art made for secular exhibition, the digital artwork can and is even expected to be continuously modified. Every viewer is a potential user, reproducer, redistributor and transformer of the work" (n.p.). Remarking that this continuous modification contributes to the conflation of high and low culture that occurs when looking at information on the Internet or via a mobile device. Allen concludes:

When we're online, a historical event appears in the same way as a banality. The news, amazon.com, a make-up tutorial, a movie trailer, fake or real, a Benjamin essay, a French-English dictionary, some porn, our most private correspondence, a fashion photography book, an art magazine, yet another funny cat video all appear together and interchangeable—not to mention our music, photographs, texts, contacts and other material stored in other programs. (n.p.)

Allen's statement that "every viewer is a potential user, reproducer, redistributor and transformer of the work" is made evident in *juddrules* since Evans is not only collecting but also redistributing the thousands of images he's found online, which suggests at once a user, a redistributor, and a transformer of images. Allen's analogy that a historical event "appears in the same way as a banality" certainly applies to the manner in which *juddrules* presents significant works of art in the same way as, for example, a pornographic image or a photocopy of a press release. In doing so, *juddrules* dramatically visualizes the new realities of digital image culture in a visceral manner. It also asks us to consider an original *trompe l'oeil* painting, low-resolution

reproductions of famous masterpiece, and random image printouts of all sorts of content that to all appear together and on equal footing. In this new flattened structure, the perceived hierarchies of the art world are no longer valid and in many ways, that is the point of *juddrules*: it intentionally questions what makes a work of art valuable, why, and who decides. Instead of providing an answer, the exhibition provides an overwhelming amount of visual information that repeatedly asks this exact question in multiple and diverse ways.

2.6 Painter's Tape

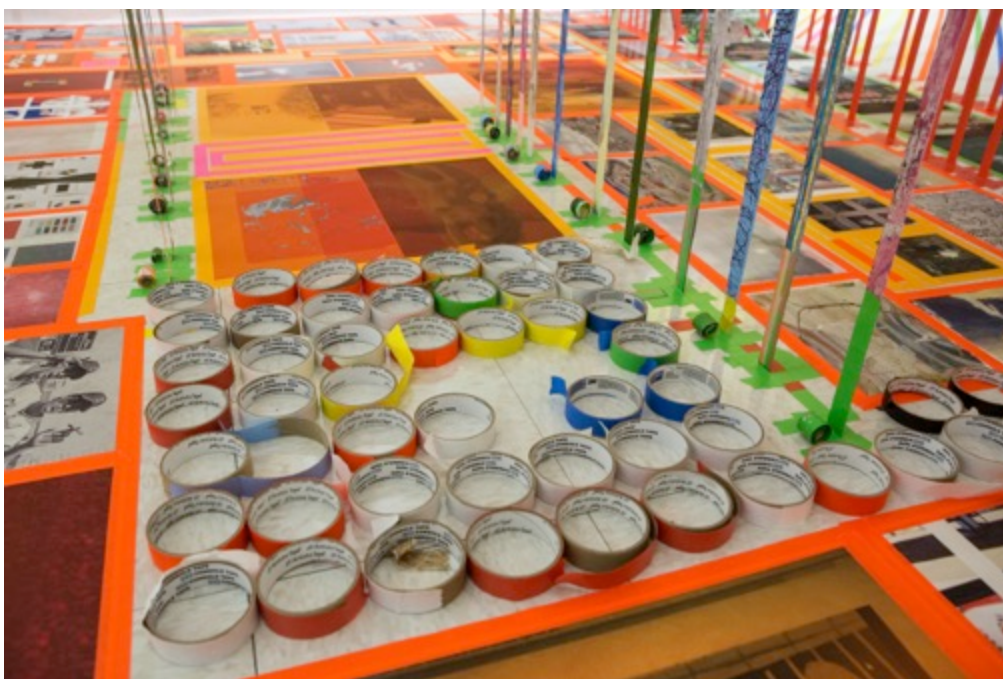


Fig. 22. Detail. Franklin Evans, *juddrules* (2014).

A medium designed to assist a painter in making clean, straight lines; *juddrules* is characterized by the excessive use of the ubiquitous painter's tape, which becomes one of the main visual foci within the installation. Painter's tape is a product commonly used to delineate

between walls and ceilings, or for separating sections of color, or for blocking off trim in a household setting. It is also used in fine artists' studios to assist in blocking off certain areas of a work's surface to either protect it from accidental marks, smudging or to create a similarly "professional" straight line. In *juddrules*, the tape has been allowed to take over all aspects of the gallery space, where it is no longer a substrate or mere tool to aid in the production of a painting or installation but instead has become the primary medium.

The tape is used in a variety of ways and with different functions. One is to create the familiar visual tape screens. It is also used to adhere the found images and texts to the floors and walls of the gallery and to create abstract patterns. Additionally, the tape is used to form a variety of compositional elements and create visual effects. There are stacked rolls of unaltered, unused, or unfinished rolls of tape that form small sculptural components; empty conglomerations of the remnants of the used-up tape rolls that are arranged to form patterns on the floor; rolled up, altered "tape screen" rolls from previous installations that are seen as a still life arrangement; and long and short, used and curled strips of tape that are arranged in seemingly haphazard formations directly onto the gallery walls. The leftover strips and bits of tape make visual reference to Evan's studio walls and provide a playful color element, as well as contributing to the impression of the exhibition as "in process." Evans, among other things, uses the tape in his studio to adhere inspirational images to his canvases as a visual resource from which he creates his *trompe l'oeil* elements.

In 2009, in a piece title *2008/2009 < 2009/2010*, Evans created his first major mixed media process-based painting installation at Sue Scott Gallery in New York, in which the tape was an assertive visual element. The piece was developed over a one-year period while in residence in 2008-2009 at the Marie Walsh Sharpe Art Foundation Space Program. The newly

discovered process was repeated at the Scott Gallery during the one-month installation period in October of 2009. The materials included paint, tape, canvas, paper, watercolor, acrylic, wallboard, bubble wrap, art books, and exhibition press releases from all the exhibitions the artist has visited. In the Sue Scott Gallery press release “Franklin Evans 2008/2009 < 2009/2010,” Evans described the impetus for the project:

The question considered to start the studio exploration was: what might happen if the system-based work of Frank Stella (1959 Black Paintings) was explored alongside Casper David Friedrich’s “parallel band application of discrete hues” from a 2003 memory of seeing Friedrich’s work in Berlin, in particular, *Solitary Tree*, 1821? The inevitable image of an isolated leafless tree on a flat ground was repeated in different forms throughout the installation. (n.p.)

The exhibition’s press release authored by the gallery described the installation in reference to the artist’s studio as follows:

During the past year the studio’s evolution over time has become [Evans’] primary subject. He has created an experimental visual lab that celebrates the present over the past and upends the hierarchies of the studio. Tape, residue systems and process are elevated, and painting and the idea of finished artwork are demoted. He democratizes the studio components, such that a cluster of residual blocking tape and a watercolor can stand on equal footing. (ibid.)

This last quotation provides additional insight into Evans' practice of conflating high and low culture, image and copy, since the materials of constructing the work are also placed on par with the work itself. Indeed, they are now not simply part of the work but appear as the work in its very construction.

In 2010, Evans was invited to install a new piece, *timecompressionmachine*, at MoMA PS1 as part of the *Greater New York* exhibition, which focused on the creative process and the generative nature of the artist studio. The exhibition's press release described the room-sized installations as a way to provide artists with a "studio space to create new work on-site" (May 23, 2010). Evans repeated the tape screens and used the tape to adhere different elements to the floor and walls of the gallery space. It is here that the painted strips of tape start to play a bigger role in the overall composition of the installation, which, as a result, is now experienced as an immersive environment. In "Franklin Evans: Paint and Process," Rachel Wetzler describes *timecompressionmachine*:

Interested in what he describes as the equalizing of product and process, Evans's considers his installations as attempts to probe the nature of the artist's studio. Utilizing a range of materials, including common art supplies such as paint, canvas, tape, paper, and Bubble Wrap, as well as art books and press releases from galleries he has visited, Evans creates environments that provide insight into his working process and treat the studio as the site of exploration and possibility." (n.p.).

Evans himself described the piece as: "the not-quite-finished, the in-transition, the nearly-emerging, the slowly-evolving, the near-end, and the move-towards-erasure" (qtd. in Wetzler

n.p.). As the epigraph to the chapter highlights, Evans remarks that the tape screens in their vertical spatial application “create the effect of walking in a painting, but because it’s a three dimensional space the relationships between the painted tape screens and their relationship to the ground keeps changing” (Evans qtd. in Schultze n.p.).

Throughout the exhibition, there are a number of visual references to various modernist painters through the use of painter’s tape, including Frank Stella and Piet Mondrian. A contemporary of Donald Judd, Stella became known early on for his deliberate method of creating tight geometric compositions. His early *Black Paintings* are often assumed to have been created using masking tape. However, the paintings were in fact all done by hand, and a close-up inspection of the stripes reveals irregular edges rather than tightly controlled lines. The first mention of Stella using commercial painter’s tape is found in relation to his *Copper* series where, at least according to Christie’s Auction House, the artist began using tape to demarcate edges within the work, which allowed Stella to determine the width of the lines. Christie’s “lot essay” for Stella’s *Telluride* (oil paint on canvas, 1962), describes his practice as follows:

The tight geometric shape of *Telluride* was the result of careful and precise preparation. Using graph paper, Stella would first draw the strict outlines of the shape with a sharp pencil. He would then mark up initial internal lines and spaces using a soft pencil. The precise width and configuration of the internal lines was the only pre-determined element, their dimensions being the width of the commercial masking tape Stella used to mark up the canvas together with the width of the brush he used to construct the rich pattern of parallel lines that characterize his work. This combination of the two and one-half inch stripe of the brushstroke plus the quarter-inch width of the masking tape

resulted in the mesmerizing internal structure of his works. (Christie's Auction House, n.p.)

Stella intentionally references commercial painting practices in an effort to make his practice seem less expressive and to help flatten out the picture plane in order to limit perspectival illusion. In the visual references to Stella's work within *juddrules*, these same references would appear as playful vignettes and add a postmodern element of pastiche to the plethora of art historical references already present.



Fig. 23. Detail. Franklin Evans, *juddrules* (2014).

juddrules visually references Stella in multiple locations within the installation including in a black tape sequence on the floor (fig. 23). By contrast, the vertically stretched paint strips

come across as an ode to Piet Mondrian, as they echo Mondrian's use of tape as a practice or preliminary brushstroke. In a video interview "The Front Row" with Tony Schultze, Evans describes the creation of the painted tape strips as a way of providing the otherwise flat plane brushstrokes with mobility. He has not substituted the tape with actual paint for the finished painting, as Mondrian would have, but rather paints directly onto the tape and uses the painted tape as "mobile brushstrokes" that are not only applied to raw canvas or a flat surface such as the gallery wall but used to create "paint screens," even if the concept of a mobile brushstroke is exactly how Mondrian's tape functioned as well.

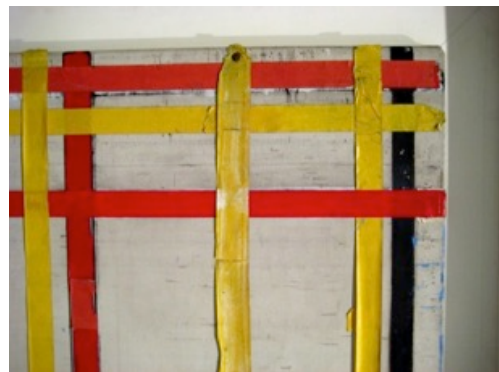


Fig 24. Left: Detail. Piet Mondrian, *New York City* (1942-44).

Right: Detail. Piet Mondrian, *New York City, study* (1942-44).

Mondrian is known for having used colored paper tape in his abstract paintings, particularly for his late works created in New York in the early 1940s.⁵ His use of tape in preparing, or “sketching” out his compositions prior to painting them, is most evident in his last two paintings, *Painting New York City II* (1942-44) and *Victory Boogie Woogie* (1944). In his essay, “Mondrian, Hegel and Boogie-Woogie,” Harry Cooper suggests, based on photographic evidence:

The greater the pressure to conclude, the more second thoughts [Mondrian] had. Judging from photographs, he "finished" the picture at least twice, once in late 1942 and once in January 1944, just ten days before his death from pneumonia. Each time he began a new campaign, sketching furiously with bits of paper and tape over the paint until the surface became the battlefield it has remained – revenge of the repetition he had tried to eliminate by dropping the series. (138)

The tape here is clearly used as a preparatory method in order to make compositional decisions prior to committing them on the canvas in paint.

Both *New York City II* and *Victory Boogie Woogie* were left “in progress” as Mondrian was still working on them when he died in February of 1944. The two paintings are representative of the few unfinished Mondrian works that exist, and they show clearly how the tape plays a constructive role in the process in which the paintings are created. Soon after arriving in New York, Mondrian began applying the newly discovered colored paper tapes to the canvas as a method for figuring out both the construction (i.e. which lines overlap with which other lines) and the composition, the physical placement of the linear elements in the paintings.

In his book, *Painting as Model*, Yve-Alain Bois describes *New York City* (1942) in the following terms:

For in this painting, Mondrian insists on retaining the sculptural quality of its unfinished state when it (like its companions) was no more than a braided field of overlapping tapes and therefore superimposed not only the ‘immaterial’ optically colored grids, but the actual strips of tape as well, each endowed with a certain thickness (which ultimately projected shadow) and with upper and ‘under’ surfaces.” (162-163)

Although *New York City* in this description was describing a finished painting, Bois suggests that Mondrian wished to retain some of the qualities of its unfinished state by mimicking the thickness of the tape and also the braided effect in paint resulting in a shadow effect, just as it had in its unfinished state while using the tape. Describing a photo of Mondrian in his studio standing beside *New York City*, then in progress, Bois comments: “This photo must have been taken in early September of 1941, since Mondrian had already begun to replace the colored tapes with paint” (165). Bois’ analysis continues with a detailed description of the various differences between this state of the painting and the final state while acknowledging the crucial role that tape played both in the process and the features included in the final outcome.

Other sources further confirm Mondrian’s use of tape soon after his arrival in New York. In her remarkably detailed analysis of Mondrian’s process in her essay “Mondrian’s Last Thoughts,” Nancy Troy describes the introduction of tape as a new material:

In Europe, Mondrian had long been accustomed to sketching his paintings with the help of long black paper strips and rectangles of colored paper, which enabled him to layout compositional alternatives that could readily be revised. Soon after his arrival in New York, he was introduced to black and colored adhesive tapes manufactured by Dennison that facilitated this experimental process. These tapes, made of sticky paper and in some instances also of a newer synthetic material, probably cellophane, may have encouraged the introduction of colored lines in compositions where the tapes were eventually translated into paint. (16)

The same text quotes Mondrian's friend and fellow painter, Carl Holty, testifying to the colored adhesive tapes that were central to the making of Mondrian's late paintings:

The small pieces he had cut would stick to the canvas on contact and enable him to compose his boogie-woogie paintings with physical ease. Without some means of this kind, it would have been practically impossible for Mondrian to produce these complex compositions. (Qtd. in Troy 17)

For Mondrian, the tape allows for an increased compositional complexity and while in process, the flexibility to alter his compositions until the desired effect of dynamism and balance was achieved. In *juddrules*, Evans uses the tape screens to achieve a similar complex compositional effect. For the tape functions to divide the space into distinct sections: it adds verticality to the composition and creates a vibrant color field in a manner similar to Mondrian, albeit at a completely different scale and in a different color palette. Just as Mondrian wished to retain

some of the qualities of his painting's unfinished state by mimicking the thickness of the tape he used in his study in the finished product, Evans also deploys tape to achieve three-dimensionality in the work. In other words, he uses the tape to bring the conditions of the studio and his working methods to the gallery to be displayed as part of the "finished" work.

2.7 Feedback Loops

Juddrules is an exhibition that physically challenges the space in which it is contained. The conventional use of a gallery space is to display works of art either on the walls or situating them on the floor or pedestal. By contrast, *juddrules* fully covers the entire floor of the gallery, most of the wall surfaces, and part of the ceiling as well. Where one wall begins and another wall ends is often not clear as images and content continue beyond the limits of the wall or floor and flow from one to the other. Additionally, through the creation of the tape screens, the three-dimensional space of the gallery is also occupied and intentionally interferes with and disrupts the spatial experience of the room. Although the installation does not continue beyond the physical boundaries of the gallery space, it challenges the various physical, conceptual, and cultural boundaries regarding images and their value.

Referring to the exhibition *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century* from 2007, Lane Relyea seeks to describe the recent trend in "unmonumental" sculpture exemplified in the work of Isa Genzken and Rachel Harrison.⁶ Noting their use of bricolage sculpture and its mode of assemblage, Relyea argues: "Their constituent parts are never so transformed as to lose their prior, independent identities; the results are conglomerations of heterogeneous, loosely related items – in short, object networks" ("Studio Unbound" 346). Although *juddrules* is not usefully

categorized as “unmonumental” sculpture, the parallels to Relyea’s description is useful. For *juddrules* allows the parts to remain identifiable as what they are – i.e. paint roller, press release, and inflatable swimming pool – while simultaneously applying them as formal aesthetic elements within a larger composition. The composition of a work of art is generally defined as the unifying construct that governs the placement of visual elements and guides the viewer to discern the main focus of the work. Yet within *juddrules*, the viewer is not guided to a single focal point but becomes distracted and disoriented by the profusion of images and the intentional lack of a single focal point. The traditional elements of composition – unity, balance, focus, contrast, pattern and proportion – are deliberately challenged by the density of the information and the multiple visual clusters competing for the viewer’s attention. In both its physical form and complex content, *juddrules* is disorientating, questioning many culturally constructed categories regarding high and low culture and the value of images in society today. If high quality “finished” paintings are juxtaposed with popular culture ephemera, reproductions of famous art works, and the artist’s own work, then this juxtaposition can also be thought of as a question of *framing*. According to Bourriaud:

High culture relies on an ideology of framing and the pedestal, on the exact delineation of the objects it promotes, enshrined in categories and regulated by codes of representation.

Low culture, conversely, develops in the exaltation of our limits, bad taste, and transgression – which does not mean that it does not produce its own framing system.

(*Postproduction* 41-42)

Understood in this context, Evans does not simply extend or expand the categories of high and low culture; rather he nullifies both by intentionally transgressing the boundaries between the two. By not distinguishing between the original and the copy, fine and low art, he reveals that the boundaries between high and low art are culturally constructed, thus opening to a renewed understanding of their relation, their own “framing system.”

Regardless of their source or origin (artist’s studio or the internet), all the images in *juddrules* are thus considered equal. The “mashup” of heterogeneous layers of materials operates at a nexus between the two ends of the digital and analog spectrum, at once fine art and the culture of popular images. In addition to reframing categories of high and low art, *juddrules* also intentionally and creatively blurs the boundaries between the studio as a place of production and the gallery as its displaying counterpart. There is little separation between the public and the private. *juddrules* presents a continuous re-articulation of the way images and the categories we create to define and contain them are perceived. It is an environment where these boundaries are constantly shifting and fluid. It is a place where a painting can be a print or an image, or where a piece of tape becomes a painting, or where a photograph becomes a sculpture, and all of it together forms an immersive environment, understood here as a relational form. Each image or component presents a reframing of ideas, concepts, and artistic conventions. The installation thus requires active participation from the viewer, stimulating them to make connections between the many various parts, moving between the present moment and across time by the inclusion of historical references. It contests preconceived assumptions about what comprises a work of art and opens up of new limits in terms of how we decide on certain categorical distinctions. In the repeated reframing of art world conventions, *juddrules* creates multiple, simultaneous feedback loops in terms of space, time, and content. It proposes a new model of relations that is not binary

or fixed but inclusive and fluid. This does not constitute a mere dissolution of these boundaries and categories but rather their reframing and rearticulating, which results in an expansion of these binary categories into a re-articulation of different qualitative states. In this sense, the work becomes a fluid interchange of ideas, visual formats, definitions of space and spatial designations. Interchangeable, conflatable, and mutable, the installation only temporarily exists in its present form. Always in flux, *juddrules* waits to be dismantled so it can emerge as a new relational formation at its next location, with similar components, yet different emphases, foci, and associations. In and as a relational form, *juddrules* enacts and performs this recasting, its continual reconfiguration, into new, yet related formations.

juddrules has a sense of formality to its composition that betrays a conversation with painters and painting across time, both imaginary and real. Evans engages with his fellow painters through art historical references or “quotations” of both text and image, employing their methodology (Judd’s “rules” as much as Mondrian’s tape). Indeed, the tape allows *juddrules* to connect to the rich history of this humble household medium, a tool for generating complex, creative compositions. Evans elevates the tape to an active participant in the final product rather than a means to an end, even if the tape serves to complicate how a work is finished or remains unfinished. It serves as a connector, a web, and a structure that both binds and unbinds all the physical components of the installation, offering a rich tapestry of art historical references that add to the density of the work. The quotations and the numerous historical references combine to form an articulated whole where past and present are layered and so presented in a non-linear fashion. It is precisely this layering effect that makes this work a relational form. The physical components and the interpretive and associative details combine together to form a web of forms and ideas. In short, it is in this way that we may begin to call *juddrules* a “network.”

CHAPTER 3

Simon Starling: Sculpture as Network

Now the world has been mapped by satellites, and nowhere is unknown, artists are exploring history as a new terra incognita. Artists mine both their own archives and those of institutions or organizations, connecting chains of ideas. They remix, re-present and re-enact, using the past as part of an understanding of the present.

-- Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern"

Simon Starling is a contemporary artist whose practice actively and intentionally engages the discourse of art history, and modernism in particular. At the same time, his works innovatively establish and reposition a series of links connecting modernism with postmodernism and our current moment. In a manner that also recalls the work of Franklin Evans in the previous chapter, the works thus serve as conduits that trace ideas to their art historical moments of origin while simultaneously producing insight into our contemporary moment. Starling's works nevertheless invite multiple readings, revealing connections between contemporary systems of production and their cultural contexts, all the while identifying historical references that are brought to the fore and made explicit in the work. The three projects by Starling that will be discussed in this chapter – *Bird in Space 2004* (2004), *Simon Starling: Pictures for an Exhibition* (2014), and *Three White Desks* (2009) – each skillfully weaves together information, ideas, images, objects, and the complex systems that these works navigate – art, economics, history – into mutually interconnected forms that do not only extend beyond the boundary of the gallery space; they serve to rethink the gallery itself as a space of exhibition, as a space that, following Foucault, one might term "heterotopic."

At the same time, the reading of Starling's work discussed in this chapter asks how the work relates to or engages with *history*. Thus, it asks in what ways the three projects by Starling central to this chapter engage with history in a way that is different from – that cannot be reduced to – postmodern “quotations” of history, understood as remix or pastiche. In other words, how exactly do Starlings' works articulate the connections between past and present that inform the work? More pertinently, one of the central tenets of the chapter – indeed one of the central tenets of all the following chapters – is to ask whether history itself can be conceived as a network. This argument further suggests that we need to rethink this relation between past and present not as a linear trajectory or narrative but as a non-linear assemblage of relations and heterogeneous or *heterochronic* connections.

The opening epigraph from Bourriaud is taken from the online exhibition text for *The Tate Triennial* (2009), entitled *Altermodern* that included Starling's *Three White Desks* of that same year. The main impetus for the exhibition was twofold: the writings by George Seabald – a German immigrant living in England – and the concept of the archipelago and its related forms, which Bourriaud locates in terms of the “constellation,” “archipelago,” and the “cluster.” In the exhibition text, the curator declares that artists today are exploring history as the new unknown territory, “a new terra incognita” (Tate Modern “Archive” n.p.). It is true that the Internet has brought decades of information to our fingertips, and a quick online search allows anyone to do research in a matter of minutes. Through computers and mobile devices, artists also now have easy access to images and texts from centuries of art making, whereas previously it might have taken decades of research, travel to multiple locations, and extensive resources to find that same information. Bourriaud's assessment that artists “remix, re-present and re-enact, using the past as part of an understanding of the present,” suggests a pertinent way of imagining how numerous

contemporary artists engage with history (Tate Modern “Archive” n.p.). And yet, however pertinent the argument, the claim also seems problematic, warranting further investigation, especially in the context of a reading of Starling’s work. Is the artist’s method of approaching the past simply a “remix”? Do the works alter something from the past and present it in a new way, thus merely “mining” the past? In short, how might a reading of Starling’s work complicate many of the assumptions informing Bourriaud’s understanding of the “altermodern”?

Given the ways in which Starling’s work quite explicitly refers to art history or art’s historical past, a number of related questions also come into view. Thus, does Starling practice the postmodern gesture of “pastiche,” where the artist is critiquing and/or quoting a culturally constructed, historical meta-narrative? Similarly, does his work deliver nothing more than an ironic commentary on work of the past? Or again, is it simply nostalgic? The following chapter argues that Starling’s work poses a quite different set of critical conditions that transforms these questions in new ways. Through a close examination of these three works from 2004, 2014, and 2009 respectively, I seek to examine how the work specifically addresses historical references. And I want to argue that these references to history are not merely a “context” that exists outside of the work toward which the work then points us but rather constitute an integral a part of the work itself. The way these three works engage with history is not by creating a linear narrative in which the work becomes significant in relation to a historical context of which it is then a part. Instead, it works by revealing and building up a *network* of objects, ideas, characters, stories, and images, and a network in which the very question of history as much as the work itself becomes inscribed anew.

3.1 Bird in Space



Fig. 25. “How They Know It’s ‘A Bird’ and Are Sure It Is ‘Art’,” *America* (1927).

In 1926, Marcel Duchamp arrived in the New York harbor on a steamboat named *Paris*. He was accompanying twenty Brancusi sculptures destined for a solo exhibition to be held at the Brummer Gallery in New York. Although U.S. law permitted artworks to enter the country free from import taxes, when Brancusi’s sculptures arrived, officials refused to let them enter as art. *Bird in Space* in particular was targeted as problematic. In her essay “An Odd Bird,” American Journalist Stéphanie Giry described the arrival circumstances as perplexing:

United States Customs officials opened the crates and uncovered 20 mysterious

disks, eggs, and flame-like forms of carved wood, polished metal, or smooth marble. One work in particular left them dumbfounded: a thin, 4 1/4-foot-tall piece of shiny yellow bronze with a gently tapering bulge called *Bird in Space*. It didn't look like a bird to the officials, so they refused to exempt it from customs duties as a work of art. They imposed the standard tariff for manufactured objects of metal: 40 percent of the sale price, or \$240 (about \$2,400 in today's dollars).

(n.p.)

Brancusi initially paid the tariff, but later filed for a dismissal. In her 2001 book *Brancusi vs. The United States: The Historic Trial, 1928*, curator Margit Rowell describes that in order for imported works of art to qualify as “sculpture,” and thus be exempt of the tariffs, works had to be “reproductions by carving or casting, imitations of natural objects, chiefly the human form” and “have natural proportions” (1). The U.S. custom’s office decision to label the work as a “utensil” rather than “work of art” made headlines and was discussed in numerous publications in the art world, as well as in mainstream media. Eventually, due to mounting media and public pressure, the sculptures were released “on bond” and under the classification “Kitchen Utensils and Hospital Supplies.” As a result, they could be exhibited at the Brummer Gallery in December of 1926 and at The Arts Club in Chicago the following January (Giry n.p.).

Despite their temporary release on bond, federal customs appraiser F.J.H. Kracke ruled in February of 1927 that any Brancusi sculpture purchased in the U.S. would be subject to the forty percent duty. The following month, Edward Steichen, the legal owner of Brancusi’s *Bird in Space*, filed for a lawsuit and, as a result, the abstract sculptures became the subject of a U.S.

Customs legal case dubbed *Brancusi vs. United States*. The trial began in October of 1927. Giry describes the court situation as follows:

Present in the courtroom as Exhibit 1 was the *Bird*, which sat on a table, shimmering and soaring toward the ceiling while the lawyers debated whether it was an “original sculpture” or a metal “article or ware not specially provided for” under the 1922 Tariff Act. For the *Bird* to enter the country duty-free under the act, Steichen's lawyers had to prove that Brancusi was a professional sculptor; that the *Bird* was a work of art; that it was original, and that it had no practical purpose. (n.p.)

Testimony was provided by a number of experts, including Edward Steichen, Jacob Epstein, and William Henry Fox, who all testified on behalf of Brancusi and in defense of the *Bird* as art. During his testimony, art critic Frank Crowninshield was asked what it was about the object “Exhibit A” that would lead him “to state it ... to be a bird?” He responded: “It has the suggestion of flight, it suggests grace, aspiration, vigor, coupled with speed in the spirit of strength, potency, beauty, just as a bird does. But just the name, the title, of this work, why, really, it does not mean much” (qtd. in Rowell 38). Ironically, the testimony – although intended to serve against the sculpture being declared art – showcases how well the object expressed the artist’s intention of capturing the “essence” of a bird in flight.

On November 26, 1928, after an intense legal battle determining whether *Bird in Space* could be considered to be a work of art, Judge J. Waite sympathetically ruled in Brancusi and Steichen’s favor, declaring the piece “beautiful and symmetrical in outline,” “pleasing to look at

and ornamental” and “in fact a piece of sculpture” thus giving it free entry in the United States (qtd. in Giry n.p.). The Judge’s decision further read:

In the meanwhile there has been developing a so-called new school of art, whose exponents attempt to portray abstract ideas rather than imitate natural objects. Whether or not we are in sympathy with these newer ideas and the schools which represent them, we think the facts of their existence and their influence upon the art worlds as recognized by the courts must be considered.” (Qtd. in Rowell 115)

After months in court, the verdict was cast and the \$279 import tax, which had been paid by Steichen, was reimbursed. The trial is considered a landmark case in terms of the definition of what is considered art – sculpture in particular – and redefined its legal status. Unfortunately, the law itself was never altered at the time and so continued to lead to difficulties in terms of museums importing works of art for exhibition purposes and facing hefty fines.

3.2 Tilted Arc

One of Richard Serra’s largest public sculptures, *Tilted Arc* (1981), a hundred and twenty feet long, twelve feet tall “wall” of curved raw steel, was commissioned by the Arts-in-Architecture program arm of the General Service Administration (GSA), a federal agency, for Foley Federal Plaza in New York. *Tilted Arc*, while echoing the curved forms of the existing plaza’s stone patterns, was placed perpendicular to the pattern and intentionally disrupted the openness and sight lines of the plaza. After its placement, pedestrians had to navigate around the sculpture to cross the plaza, rather than be able to walk straight across. This was an intentional

gesture on the artist's part. Serra commented that as a result of the restructuring of the space of the plaza: "The viewer becomes aware of himself and of his movement through the plaza. As he moves, the sculpture changes. Contraction and expansion of the sculpture result from the viewer's movement. Step by step the perception not only of the sculpture, but of the entire environment changes" (qtd. in Weyergraf-Serra 64-65).



Fig. 26. Richard Serra, *Tilted Arc* (1981).

Immediately after its installation, the sculpture garnered much negative feedback, including a petition and a letter writing campaign that resulted in a public hearing held four years later by William Diamond, the regional administrator for the GSA at the time. In 1984, Diamond had circulated a petition demanding the removal of *Tilted Arc*. He obtained nearly 4,000 signatures supporting its removal. The hearing questioned whether the sculpture should be

relocated. A hundred and eighty people testified, of which one hundred and twenty were in favor of keeping the work, and fifty-eight in favor of removing the work. Those in favor were artists, curators, and art critics, including Benjamin Buchloh, Roberta Smith, and Frank Stella. Those testifying for the removal of the sculpture were primarily people working around the plaza who claimed it interfered with the function of the plaza as a space. Rosalind Krauss testified in favor of the work and in defense of the abstract nature of the work as well as its aesthetic use value. She stated: “This aesthetic use is open to every person who enters and leaves the buildings of this complex, and it is open to each and every one of them every day. Given this premise, I think it is important to understand the specific operations of this use as it is brought into being by *Tilted Arc*. And this means that we should try to grasp something of *Tilted Arc*’s meaning as a work of art, as an extraordinary work of modern sculpture” (qtd. in Weyergraf-Serra 81). She closed her testimony by emphasizing the sculpture’s “sweep” and related its forward motion to the bodies moving across the plaza. She ends with this dramatic sentence: “Like vision, its sweep exists simultaneously here and there – here where I am sited and there where I already imagine myself to be. In the beauty of its doing this, *Tilted Arc* establishes itself as a great work of art” (ibid. 82). Despite the majority of people testifying to support the work, the five-person jury voted four to one in favor of removing the sculpture. As part of his defense, Serra stated in court: “My works become part of and are built into the structure of a site, and often restructure, both conceptually and perceptually, the organization of the site” (qtd. in Weyergraf-Serra 64-65). In this sense, Serra testified that the work was site-specific and could not be relocated and would need to be destroyed if removed. After appealing, he failed to overturn the ruling and in 1989 the piece was cut into three pieces and removed from the plaza. Per the artist’s instructions, the piece is currently in storage and, unless it is re-installed in its original location, it will remain there.

3.3 Bird in Space 2004



Fig. 27. Simon Starling, *Bird in Space 2004* (2004).

In 2004, Starling created *Bird in Space 2004* for a solo exhibition held at the Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York. The piece is comprised of a large, rectangular nearly five-thousand pound, raw industrial steel plate – fabricated in Romania – placed on top of two black, helium filled inflatable jacks, while leaning against the gallery wall and resting against a third jack. The jacks serve both as the base *to* the work and as part *of* the work of art simultaneously. A large silver helium tank sits to the left of the steel plate, connected to one of the bags through a bright red hose, as if engaged in the process of raising the sheet of metal off of the gallery floor. In the center left section of the plate, white spray-painted print indicates the marks of its making and reveals the plate is of Romanian origin. With its rusty surface and imposing mass, the work instantly delivers a visual reference to the minimalist

steel slab sculptures of Richard Serra. Although Starling does not explicitly refer to either Serra or *Tilted Arc*, the act of placing a raw slab of steel in the gallery instantly and unescapably evokes Serra. In placing the slab on top of the two jacks, the incredible weight of the slab is lifted with a simple engineering solution. In doing so, *Bird in Space 2004* appears to be literally making light of the gravity and seriousness of Serra's iconic works, especially since Serra's sculptures are about site, volume, and mass, and so are generally monumental in scale, engaging the viewer directly since the viewer often can walk in, around, and through the sculptures. The viewer's experience of Serra's work is a fully embodied, immersive experience. Yet, despite their monumentality, they also possess (as Krauss testified) a sense of movement or elasticity that makes the steel seem lighter and more pliable than it is. Ironically, Starling's *Bird in Space 2004*, while referencing Serra's work formally, seems much more static. Indeed, it reads more like a traditional painting engaging the viewer's exclusively visual experience rather than the embodied experience that Serra's sculptures repeatedly provoke.

In its title, *Bird in Space 2004* provides a second, yet equally significant reference to another Modernist sculptor: Constantin Brancusi and his iconic bronze and marble sculpture series, *Bird in Space*, which he began making in 1910 and for which he became widely known in the 1920s and 1930s (many of the individual works had this same title, which was used for the series as well). Even more than the reference to Serra's work, Starling's title makes this reference to Brancusi quite explicit. The question thus immediately arises: Is Starling's rendition of *Bird in Space* in 2004 simply a reinvention of a Modernist classic? An homage to Brancusi? Or at once an homage to Brancusi *and* an ironic joke on Serra? Or is something else at stake here? The multiple references to the two renowned sculptors and several of their iconic works

are certainly intentional and begin to reveal the investigative practice that characterizes Starling's work. Indeed, if his practice engages the discourse of modernism in this way, it is useful to look at how *Bird in Space 2004* specifically navigates these modernist paradigms. For *Bird in Space 2004* is an object on a pedestal, viewed in a traditional gallery setting, and seems modernist in nature. It is also site-responsive in that it was made for a gallery located in New York, with imported materials to intentionally echo the historic arrival of a group of sculptures by Brancusi in 1926. However, the work does not only exist in reference to events of the past, to art historical references; it also presents a rethinking of our contemporary moment, and notably the issue of steel production understood in a global context.

When creating *Bird in Space 2004*, Starling was fully aware of the historic circumstances surrounding Brancusi's work. *Bird in Space*'s steel plate bears the marks of its own making in the form of the white spray-painted text on the raw surface. The text reveals the name of the Romanian Ispat Sidex factory where the plate was fabricated. In discussing *Bird in Space 2004* as part of his review of *Metamorphology* for *Wall Street Journal* (August 20, 2014), arts critic Richard B. Woodward wryly remarked: "What isn't visible is that the metal was imported into the U.S. only after years of deal-making over steel tariffs by unions, world-trade organizations and politicians, including George W. Bush and Tony Blair" (n.p.). What Woodward refers to here are events from 2002 when President George Bush proposed an identical forty percent tax for most countries trying to import steel into the U.S. (the excessive tariffs were eventually deemed illegal by the World Trade Organization and abolished). Indian steel tycoon, Lakshmi Mittal – who was based in Great Britain and highly visible in the news at that time – was heavily involved in lobbying for the enforcement of the tariffs. Mittal had recently purchased the formerly nationally owned Romanian steel company Ispat Sidex. According to the UK

Telegraph: “Mr. Mittal gave the Labor Party £125,000 shortly before Prime Minister Blair signed a letter urging Romania to sell its steel industry to the LNM group owned by Mr. Mittal” (Harnden et al. n.p.). Although Woodward suggests that these contemporary political circumstances are “not visible” in the work, I want to suggest that they are in fact part of the work and inform its very content – as if this part of history is indeed inscribed in the very work.

Pursuing the connections to Brancusi’s famous 1927 customs case, Starling decided to import a single slab of Romanian steel into the U.S. rather than having it fabricated locally. As perhaps expected, or at least hoped for, *Bird in Space 2004* was also stopped at U.S. customs and was similarly fined with a hefty steel tariff. The artist had intentionally purchased the plate from Mittal’s Ispat Sidex steel company since it was based in Romania. He also provided the reference to Brancusi and at the same time referenced the heated debate in British media surrounding the tariffs. Like Steichen and Brancusi before him, Starling contested his case with the U.S. Customs Office stating the steel plate was an art object. Unlike Steichen and Brancusi, however, Starling easily won his case and did not have to go to court or pay tax since the steel object was considered a sculpture. By having the plate produced by the company owned by Mittal, and clearly revealing its origin and conditions of production with the white stamp on its surface, Starling inscribes the work with the conditions of its production, the circumstances that are at once art historical and contemporary, at once aesthetic and economic.

3.4 Metamorphology

In 2012, Starling was invited to exhibit *Bird in Space 2004* as part of the exhibition *Metamorphology* at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (MCA Chicago) held in collaboration with the Arts Club of Chicago. Described as a mid-career retrospective the

exhibition was curated by Dieter Roelstraete and included sculptures, objects, photographs, and video. The exhibition showcases Starling's engagement with the fundamentals of sculpture: mass and materiality, which include the different ways he tries to undermine or defy both mass and materiality. For example, Starling uses contemporary engineering techniques to suspend two unrefined marble blocks (2200 lbs. each) from the museum's ceiling in *The Long Ton* (2009) and attaches a small red and white Italian car (Fiat 126) to the gallery wall in *Flaga* (1972-2000). Both pieces refer to market conditions and production processes. *The Long Ton* points out inconsistencies in terms of value between Chinese and Italian marble, while *Flaga* highlights the relocation of Fiat's Italian factories to Poland.



Fig. 28. Simon Starling, *The Long Ton* (2009).



Fig. 29. Simon Starling, *Flaga* (1972-2000).

The exhibition has two overarching themes: Starling's engagement with art history and the socioeconomic, geopolitical frameworks of his work. The art historical aspect that informs the exhibition is Starling's investigation of modernist sculptors and how they have mediated or framed their creative practice. This becomes evident in his focus on multiple projects concerning the work of both Brancusi and Henry Moore. For instance, for *Infestation Piece: Musseled Moore* (2006–08), the artist sank a replica of Henry Moore's *Warrior with Shield*, (1953-54) into Lake Ontario. In 1954, the Art Gallery of Toronto had purchased Moore's *Warrior* under protests and public dismay that they had not bought works by Canadian artists instead. Starling submerged the statue in order to attract Zebra mussels, an accidental foreign invasive species that has caused

significant problems in the Great Lakes. In 2006, the Art Gallery of Toronto (now known as the Art Gallery of Ontario) commissioned *Infestation Piece*. The commission testifies to Starling's methodology in that the work is inspired by the specific history of a work of art, includes historical facts concerning the very venue in which it is exhibited, all the while pointing to a current economic and environmental problem.

Each of Starling's works reveals and conceals the rich history of its materiality, the process of its making, and the contextual complexities encountered along the way. In "Twice as Nice: Simon Starling at the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Arts Club of Chicago" an interview with Frank Mercurio for *Chicago Gallery News*, Roelstraete remarks about Starling: "He's very interested in cycles of production and consumption and in the way that modern materials can travel around the globe, and how the world economy is powered by all these cycles" (n.p). In Roelstraete's catalog essay "Metamorphology," the curator goes into more depth and further emphasizes the economic frame of Starling's practice, which is one aspect that is indeed central to the work, although not an exclusive concern. As evidenced by the analysis of Starling's *Bird in Space* and the brief discussions of *Infestation Piece: Musseled Moore*, *The Long Ton*, and *Flaga*, there is much more at stake in these projects than a set of socioeconomic circumstances or contexts. For the works of art extend beyond the scope of the objects simply presented in the gallery to include stories, facts, and historical and economic circumstances that together not only inform but become part of what the work *is* – its subject matter.

3.5 Pictures for an Exhibition



Fig. 30. Installation view. Simon Starling, *Pictures of an Exhibition*, The Arts Club of Chicago (2014).

Bird in Space – both Brancusi’s original and Starling’s interpretation on view at MCA Chicago – further informs the companion installation held at The Arts Club, where a similar methodology becomes evident as Starling delves into the history of The Club through the lens of Brancusi’s *Bird in Space*, as well as the sculpture’s trajectory and contribution to the history of Modernism. In conjunction with *Metamorphology*, Starling was invited by The Arts Club of Chicago to create a new piece that materialized as a companion exhibition entitled *Simon Starling: Pictures for an Exhibition* that was on view at the Arts Club June 6 – September 26, 2014. The gallery presentation consisted of thirty-six framed gelatin silver prints and a vitrine holding a Deardorff 8 x10 inch camera, several film holders, a tripod, and an archival photograph. All thirty-six prints in the exhibition were matted and framed in identical white

frames, although they were not all identically sized. As the point of departure for the project, Starling chose two of four known photographs that document the 1927 exhibition, *Sculptures and Drawings by Constantin Brancusi*, held at The Arts Club in Chicago in January 1927. *Sculptures and Drawings* was the first, large solo exhibition of Brancusi in the city of Chicago and it featured many of the sculptures included in the New York Brummer Gallery exhibition, notably *Bird in Space* (1923). It is also interesting to note that the latter was exhibited in Chicago despite the sculpture's involvement in the customs tariff battle back in New York. The exhibition featured eighteen other sculptures, including *Golden Bird* (1919-20), a work that was purchased by The Arts Club after the exhibition's closure. Many of the works in the 1927 exhibition became canonical Brancusi works.

Brancusi was first introduced to Chicago art audiences as part of the notorious 1913 New York Armory Show exhibited at the Chicago Art Institute later that same year. This event, among others, inspired the founding of The Arts Club of Chicago in 1916. Interestingly, Brancusi's solo exhibition was curated and installed by Marcel Duchamp in collaboration with Alice Roullier, chair of The Arts Club Exhibitions Committee and the daughter of Albert Roullier, a significant Chicago gallerist and print collector. The relationship between Duchamp and Brancusi is an important one, to which we will return later in this chapter. According to The Arts Club's records, the Chicago-based commercial photography firm, Kaufmann & Fabry, took the official installation photographs using large format plates in the then innovative field cameras designed by another Chicago-based company, Deardorff and Sons. It is the Kaufmann & Fabry images that Starling chose as the focus for his investigative project. They each show the Brancusi exhibition from an opposing view, one from the entrance looking in, and the other from the

opposite end of the gallery looking towards the entrance. Both appear to have been taken from a slightly elevated position in order to more clearly capture all of the objects on display.



Fig. 31. Installation view. Kaufmann & Fabry, *An Exhibition of Sculpture by Brancusi*, The Arts Club of Chicago (1927).

The other two images known to exist are horizontal and were shot by an independent photographer, Frederick O. Bemm, who served as the staff photographer for the Art Institute of Chicago at the time and operated a local photography studio. Duchamp was fully aware of the importance of creating photographic records of exhibitions as is evidenced in his correspondence of the time and in his letters to Brancusi in particular. On January 24, 1927, he wrote:

Opening today—big success. The room [is] quite large, 13 m by 7 m, specially hung with

gray canvas as [it was] at Brummer's. Everything got here in good condition: I did my best to display things in groups. In the middle, Steichen's Bird, at other end, Golden Bird and Maiastra, and, between Steichen's Bird and Golden Bird, the Column. I arranged the rest around these four focal points. The effect is really satisfying; I'll send you some photos. (Qtd. in Hulten 180)

It is assumed that Duchamp most likely arranged for the documentation to take place.

According to a footnote by Starling, Duchamp commissioned a photographer, the Japanese artist Soichi Sunami, to document the 1933 Brummer Gallery exhibition. As Starling himself notes, Sunami had "annotated the images on the reverse with the catalogue numbers corresponding to the positions of the sculptures on the front, so that the exhibition appeared as an esoteric-looking cloud of floating numbers" ("Simon Starling" 34).

It is not clear why Starling chose to focus solely on the Kauffmann & Fabry images, except, perhaps, because they are the most widely reproduced and have become in many ways "the definitive view" of the 1927 exhibition (Mileaf "Footnotes" 55). Their images do have better lighting and are of a higher pictorial quality due to the use of 8x10 inch plates and the then innovative camera technology. In addition, it could be argued that the history of the firm and the cameras they used provided a more interesting "back-story" for Starling in comparison to the life of Frederick Bemm, although one can see how Bemm's images could easily have informed this project as well.



Fig. 32. Installation view. Frederick O. Bemm, *An Exhibition of Sculpture by Brancusi*, The Arts Club of Chicago (1927).

According to Janine Mileaf, the Executive Director of The Arts Club of Chicago at the time of Starling’s exhibition: “such photographic traces of museum and gallery installations have become a central concern for Simon Starling, who looks to such images to understand how they shape or obscure knowledge, especially in relation to the institutions and economies of art” (“Footnotes” 52). The images and the objects represented in the Kauffmann & Fabry images contain a wealth of knowledge, although most of it is not actually visually present in the images themselves. Certainly, the images serve as an index of and entry point into a world of information, which Starling foregrounds for his viewers in various ways. They are the historical documents from which Starling’s project emerges. The installation photographs serve as an anchor for the artist’s many journeys that follow the trajectory of each of the sculptures they depict. Additionally, one of the Kauffmann photographs is physically present in the gallery space as it is included in the entryway vitrine. Lastly, the photographs are reproduced in both

exhibition catalogs, where they again anchor the project while also serving as a catalyst for the investigative research.



Fig. 33. Interior view of the glass covered vitrine, showing an 8x10” Deardorff & Sons camera, negative case, tripod, the Kauffmann & Fabry 1927 installation view of the Brancusi exhibition, and an identification label.

The key component of the project is that Starling traveled to the current location of each of the nineteen sculptures documented in the Kauffmann photos. The travel took the shape of multiple journeys between December 2013 and January of 2014 and included visits to twelve locations, including private collectors’ homes and art institutions throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Once he arrived at the various places where the Brancusi sculptures were located at the time of the research for the exhibition, Starling photographed each sculpture using one of two vintage 8 x 10” Deardorff cameras similar to the one used by Kaufmann & Fabry in the 1920s (Mileaf “Footnotes 58). Moreover, he attempted to mimic the angle and distance

between the camera and the object. In order to create a more accurate replica of the object's placement in relation to its counterparts, he even had the placement of the original sculptures' configuration etched on each camera's ground-glass viewfinders. This allowed him to line up the works in their "original" positions (Mileaf "Simon Starling" 1). Once he had documented the sculpture, the artist also photographed the camera documenting the work from the opposite point of view (from the work looking back), mimicking the twofold direction of the original archival photographs, except this time documenting the camera as well.

In addition to documenting the location and circumstances of the sculptures at the moment of Starling's research (2013-14), the artist tracked down and recorded each object's physical journey and provenance since it left the Chicago venue up to its present location. Mileaf summarizes Starling's findings by equating the provenance of each object with its economic and cultural significance: "The stories and facts that Starling unearthed sketch out a terrain of power, ownership, and value that is inextricable from the meaning of Brancusi's sculpture" ("Footnotes" 58). Mileaf thus argues that the primary reason these sculptures are iconic is due to their economic trajectories. However, Mileaf continues to elaborate on some of the details relating to the sculptures' trajectories and describes Starling's tracing of them as revealing a complex network of relations: "Exponential increases in prices paid, exchanges between public and private hands, remote or proximate relationships between the diamond trade, the Bonaparte family, the Dallas Cowboys, prohibition, sports cars, racketeering, Andy Warhol, US Trade Law, Nazism, and Israeli politics construct these artworks as they have existed from 1927 to today" ("Footnotes" 58). She concludes: "enabled by the photographic record, Starling's journeys place Brancusi's sculpture within a network of value that is neither fungible nor immaterial, but is inscribed in each viewing" (ibid. 59). Mileaf thus squarely places Brancusi's sculptures within

their economic context, terming it a “network of value.” However, the emphasis on the economic framework is but of the many networks of value that are revealed as a result of Starling’s investigative process, including a much wider set of diverse cultural references that are also at play in the work.

If Starling’s journey has not only revealed but also put back into focus the financial climate that surrounded, protected, elevated, and continues to support and elevate the works by Brancusi, what does that say about the “meaning” of Brancusi’s sculptures? Are they, as Mileaf suggests, primarily important as a result of their provenance and economic value? Are artworks mere gateways into the economic circumstances that facilitated the increase in fame and fortune of the artist, the objects, and their owners? Is it Starling’s aim to reveal only these types of connections? Of course, connecting art to money is an obvious move. But Starling is also interested in revealing other complex realities of a work of art both in terms of its material origins, as well as of its social and relational path through the (art) world.

3.6 Titles and Notes

The objects and the information networks that Starling discovers on his travels are captured and articulated by two separate yet related texts written by Starling in conjunction with the project. The first is the essay Starling contributed to the *Metamorphology* catalogue, “This Thing is Made to Perpetuate My Memory, or Notes on the Provenance of an Exhibition.” This text is devoted entirely to the *Pictures for an Exhibition* project at The Arts Club, despite its inclusion in the *Metamorphology* catalogue. In the essay, Starling reveals the complex connections between artist and curator, curator and collector, and details the trajectories the

objects traveled since their exhibition at The Arts Club. The essay opens with a small black and white image of Brancusi's Paris studio taken by Edward Steichen in 1920 of the upper left corner of the first page.

Starling sets the stage with a vivid description of the cultural climate of Chicago at the time of Duchamp's arrival to the city in 1927 to organize the Brancusi exhibition. The scene includes bootlegging, bribery, multi-million dollar box office revenues, and the twenty-seven modern art exhibitions held that year at The Arts Club. He then discusses *Bird in Space* and the series of collectors who owned the work after Steichen's initial ownership: John Quinn, Hester Diamond, ending with Jon and Mary Shirley, who have promised the work to the Seattle Art Museum, the same institution that now owns Starling's *Bird in Space 2004*. Starling establishes Brancusi's works as an investment opportunity, tracking down each collector and how much they paid for each piece, and how they acquired their fortune. Brancusi's *Bird in Space* was initially purchased for \$600 by Edward Steichen from the artist directly and eventually was sold for over thirty million dollars when it changed hands from Hester Diamond – who had paid \$750,000 for it when she purchased it from Edward Steichen's widow, Johanna – to Seattle based art collectors Jon and Mary Shirley.⁷ The artist highlights a culture of wealthy patrons who acquired Brancusi sculptures as an investment. One interesting detail is that Marcel Duchamp is foregrounded as an art dealer, agent, as well as representative of Brancusi, often being involved in the sale or introducing the buyer or gallerist to the works.



Fig. 34. Edward Steichen, *Brancusi Paris Studio* (1920).

A second text by Starling, “Titles & Notes,” accompanies The Arts Club exhibition publication, *Simon Starling: Pictures for an Exhibition Titles and Notes*. Although closely related in content to the “This Thing is Made” essay, this text is structured like an annotated exhibition checklist and provides greater detail regarding the specific works that make up the exhibition. In addition to Starling’s contribution, the catalog features a foreword by Mileaf and a single page overview of the Brancusi sculptures and their current ownership at the time of publication. The booklet gives greater insight into the specific photographic works included in the exhibition by including captions, notes, and footnotes linking the provenance content from “The Thing is Made” essay to the images. The works are presented in the physical order they were installed in the gallery. It reveals the process of their creation and also clarifies Starling’s methodology and approach. The two Starling texts discussed serve an important purpose as they

relay, reveal, and communicate the many discoveries Starling has made in regards to the trajectory of the Brancusi sculptures. In short, “Title and Notes” allows for the reader to understand the many connections and relationships that exist between the Brancusi works as well as each of the circumstances that brought the objects to their present location.



Fig. 35. Left: Simon Starling, No. 1, *Modified Deardorff 8 x 10 Field Camera Photographing Wrigley Building* (2014).

Fig. 36. Right: Simon Starling, No. 2, *Constantin Brancusi, Socrates (1922), Mademoiselle Pogany II (1920), Torso of a Young Man I (1917–22), Three Penguins (1911–12), Newborn I (1915), Golden Bird, (1919–20), Fish (1922), Endless Column (1918), Bird in Space (1926), Prometheus (1911), Beginning of the World (c. 1920), The Chief (1924–25), Torso of a Young Woman (1918), The Kiss (1916), Oak Base (1920), Chimera (1915–18), Maiastra (1910-12), Princess X (1915), Adam & Eve (1916–21) (from left to right) (2014).*

The artist thus located and photographed each of the nineteen Brancusi sculptures. He went through great lengths to photograph them in such a way as to be able to reconstruct the

photograph into a single composite image, which is on display as the second image in the exhibition, following the opening image of the Wrigley Building. The latter has superimposed upon it the outlines of the sculptures of the 1927 Brancusi exhibition. The image functions as if a palimpsest, where the original is reused or altered, but still bears the traces of its earlier form. Additional composite images were created along the various journeys and are also included in the exhibition. They serve as a type of update, or benchmark, on how far Starling has progressed in terms of finding the works and reuniting them in a single contemporary image. He temporarily brings together certain sculptures in pairs or as a trio in order to highlight their visual or contextual relationships either in their current configuration at their present site or in reference to their original Arts Club configuration. As these photographs form the most visible, physical component of the project, it is important to offer a close description of their content. Of the thirty-six photographs, seven depict the Deardorff camera as it was set up to take the photographic image of the Brancusi sculpture(s) and, in one case, of another photograph (no. 8). Three of the photographs depict architectural structures. Photograph no. 1 *Modified Deardorff 8 x 10 Field Camera Photographing Wrigley Building* (fig. 35) depicts the Chicago skyline and emphasizes the Wrigley Building, no. 25 *Seagram Building, New York (1958)* shows Mies van der Rohe's famous Chicago Seagram building (as it is today), and no. 6 *Former headquarters of Streep Diamonds Ltd, Amstel 208, Amsterdam* documents the Streep Diamond Headquarters in The Netherlands. Nineteen of the photographs record Brancusi sculptures, of which four show a single object, four show multiple sculptures within a single frame, and the remaining eleven are composite images where Starling has superimposed multiple sculptures in order to line them up according to the outline based on the archival Kaufmann image.

**28.**

Giallo Fly (yellow) Ferrari 275 GTB/
4 N.A.R.T. Spyder (1967).

Collection Jon Shirley, Seattle.

Photograph courtesy Spike Mafford, Seattle.

Note While well known as a collector and patron of the arts, Jon Shirley is perhaps more widely known as a collector of classic sports cars. Since 1990, he has amassed one of the most impressive and valuable collections of museum standard, rare Ferraris and Alfa Romeos, as well as significant racing cars from the 1950s and 1960s. One of the rarest Ferraris in existence, only two alloy versions were ever made, the soft-top N.A.R.T. Spyder, was the brainchild of Luigi Chinetti, a racing driver turned US Ferrari dealer. A red 275 GTB/4 N.A.R.T. Spyder was famously driven by Faye Dunaway in the 1968 film *The Thomas Crown Affair*. Dunaway's car-crazy co-star Steve McQueen later owned a N.A.R.T. Spyder. Jon Shirley recently stated that the two most beautiful objects that he owns are Brancusi's *Bird in Space* and the Giallo Fly Ferrari.

Fig. 37. Simon Starling, *No. 28, Giallo Fly (yellow) Ferrari 275 GTB/ 4 N.A.R.T. Spyder (1967)* (2014).

Alternately, three images show objects that are related to Brancusi's collectors, but are not considered works of art per se, even if objects of often extreme economic value: photograph no. 18 *Dallas Cowboy Autographed Football* shows the football against a white background while the text refers the reader to note no. 16 *Constantin Brancusi, Beginning of the World* (c.

1920); photograph no. 26 depicts a sixteenth century British metal helmet; and photograph no. 34 *Gianlorenzo Bernini, Allegory of Autumn (1616)* showcases Hester Diamond's newly acquired Bernini statue. The remaining four images are reproductions of existing photographs by other artists: no. 8 depicts a photograph by Kaufmann & Fabry Co. of plans for the unrealized "Banking Exhibit," planned as part of *A Century of Progress International Exposition* in Chicago in 1933, and no. 9 *Kaufmann & Fabry, Reconstruction of Bohemian Paris, A Century of Progress International Exposition, Chicago (1933)* displays Kaufmann & Fabry's image of the Chicago Fair in 1933 (the image is on view sideways both in the catalog and on the gallery wall).

Additionally, photograph no. 28 *Giallo Fly (yellow) Ferrari 275 GTB/ 4 N.A.R.T. Spyder (1967)* and no. 29 *Giallo Fly (yellow) Ferrari 275 GTB/ 4 N.A.R.T. Spyder (1967)/Interior View* feature the re-photographed image of collector Jon Shirley's Ferrari taken by a Seattle photographer Spike Mafford (also displayed sideways). Shirley was discussed earlier in this essay as the current owner of Brancusi's *Bird in Space (1923)*. Lastly, image no. 15 *Christopher Williams, Main Staircase for The Arts Club Chicago, 1948–51 Steel, travertine marble 359.4 x 458.8 x 609.3 cm; 141 ½ x 180 5/8 x 239 7/8 inches Arts Club commission 1948–1951 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe 109 East Ontario Street, Chicago, Illinois, 1951–1995 Repositioned by John Vinci, 210 East Ontario Street, Chicago, Illinois, October 1, 1998, 1998, in the storeroom of the Art Institute of Chicago* is a reproduction of photographer Christopher Williams' 1998 re-photographing of an anonymous photograph of van der Rohe's classic modern 'floating' staircase at The Arts Club in Chicago (1948-51). The van de Rohe photograph is part of the collection of the Chicago Art Institute. Williams is known for re-photographing magazines, images, and advertisements as part of a critical, conceptual art practice that questions the history of Modernism. His own first museum survey exhibition was on view at the Art Institute of

Chicago in 2014, several months before Starling's first major U.S. exhibition *Metamorphology* was hosted a mile away at the Museum of Contemporary art.



Fig. 38. Simon Starling, *Constantin Brancusi, Socrates (1922), Maiastra (1910-12), Adam & Eve (1916-21) (2014)*.

Significantly, van der Rohe, who served as the Director of Architecture at the Chicago-based Illinois Institute of Technology at the time, designed the interior of The Arts Club when it moved to its 109 East Ontario location in 1951. The design included a gallery, dining room, and lecture hall. The gallery was specifically designed to house Brancusi's *Golden Bird*. When The Club was forced to change locations again in 1997, they were only able to take the van der Rohe staircase to its new larger location, while its previous interior was controversially destroyed in

1995. Ironically, in order to buy land for its future home, The Club sold the *Golden Bird* to the Art Institute in 1990. Originally purchased for \$1200, it was sold for a then record price of \$12 million. The new, permanent Chicago Arts Club building was built to house the architectural masterpiece staircase and coincidentally was designed by Dirk Lohan, Mies van der Rohe's grandson. Williams' image of the famous staircase shows the historic document against the background of a museum's storeroom's metal grid art storage system, which is how it was "displayed" when he photographed it (fig. 40). Starling's re-photographing of William's photograph of a historical photograph (of an unknown author) is produced with William's permission and with acknowledgement of the second author in the caption of Starling's reproduction of the work in the exhibition. Starling's re-photographing of this well-known staircase as part of *Pictures for an Exhibition* is put on display in the current location of The Arts Club where the staircase now resides.

In short, Starling again draws our attention to a specific historic circumstance of one of Brancusi's sculptures, as well as to another modernist legend, Mies van der Rohe, in order to bring both to our present attention, even as he also provides a commentary on the complex circumstances, both contemporary and historic, that surround each work of art. In the process, he highlights other artists' careers and the systems of production that support the very creation, display, and preservation of their work. I propose that Starling's project *Pictures for an Exhibition* is not only an exhibition that relies on mere recording but also functions as a work of art. More pertinently, I claim that *Pictures for an Exhibition* expands our understanding of what an artwork is (and can be), namely a work that is inscribed in and as a network of relations and historical associations.



15. Christopher Williams, *Main Staircase for the Arts Club Chicago*, 1948–51 Steel, travertine marble 359.4 x 458.8 x 609.3 cm; 141 ½ x 180 5/8 x 239 7/8 inches Arts Club commission 1948–1951 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe 109 East Ontario Street, Chicago, Illinois, 1951–1995 Repositioned by John Vinci, 210 East Ontario Street, Chicago, Illinois, October 1, 1998, 1998, in the storeroom of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 39. Left: *Main Staircase for The Arts Club of Chicago* (1948-1951).

Fig. 40. Right: Simon Starling, *No. 15 Christopher Williams, Main Staircase for the Arts Club of Chicago, 1948-1951*. Original photograph (1998), reproduction in *Titles and Notes* (2014).

In researching the trajectories of each of the Brancusi sculptures of the 1927 exhibition, Starling discovered a glimpse of under-acknowledged historical events that were extremely influential in terms of the development of the history of modern art, including: the processes of industrialization and business in the U.S.; collecting practices of both individuals and institutions; and the various roles certain “players” took on in shaping these forces. It is interesting to note that most of the great collectors of modern art made their fortunes through industrialization and banking. In fact, more importantly, it is the relation between these three aspects – industry, the wealth it generates and how this wealth supports the arts– that becomes pertinent in Starling’s work. None of them can be isolated from the others. *Pictures of an*

Exhibition is the artist's vehicle for sharing his research, extending Mileaf's understanding of Starling's project as "mapping the ways in which a single exhibition can become a cipher of a society's greater concerns" and anticipating that it would "generate renewed reverberations that will cause viewers to reconsider our investment in and cognizance of the accrued histories of objects" (Mileaf "Footnotes" 11). Indeed, I would argue that the historic source photographs serve not just as reference points to Starling's project but are fully part of the work. In fact, they are centrally located *within* the work and *as* the work. They are not mere support material but rather form an active and integral part of the image and information network that Starling builds and gathers together to form *Pictures for an Exhibition*.

In keeping with our argument – that the exhibition functions in and as a network – we can now add the travel stories, footnotes, and anecdotes as part of the elemental makeup of the piece. Likewise, the Deardorff cameras are not just tools used to create the work but part of the historic fabric that constitutes the work. In reviewing Starling's earlier work and exhibition related texts for *Art in America* in 2010, Wade Saunders and Anne Rochette remark: "The books published in connection with [his] exhibitions are well suited to his discursive method, and help us relate works to their initial contexts, as do other accompanying texts, putting Starling's work in a long tradition of art whose full appreciation relies on a corpus of knowledge outside the frame" (104). Their reference to a body of knowledge "outside the frame" is significant. However, rather than "outside" the frame, as if providing some context, the historical references informing *Pictures for an Exhibition* are neither strictly inside nor outside the work. Occupying a place that cannot be situated as immanent to the work itself, these historical references function like the border or framework of the work, at once both intrinsic and extrinsic, as if history is never simply a context that enframes the work but the history (in the past) that the work now *is* (in the present).

3.7 Three White Desks



Fig. 41. Simon Starling, *Three White Desks*, Tate Modern (2009).

Starling's *Three White Desks* (2009) is a piece that, as the title mundanely suggests, consists of three “white” desks. Two are indeed white, while the third is natural wood. The desks are provocatively placed on their transportation crates that bear the shipping labels and various stamps that reveal their physical trajectory from the place of their making (respectively Berlin, Australia, London) to their place of display in the gallery. As the pieces travel to other locations for future exhibitions, more labels are allowed to accumulate on their crates, revealing their continued trajectory as works of art. *Three White Desks* is presented alongside an oil painting created by Roy de Maistre, an artist who assisted Francis Bacon in acquiring commissions for his furniture and interior designs. Additionally, a large photographic print, showcasing smaller photos of each of the desks and other related artworks and interiors, is also on display.⁸ *Three*

White Desks is based on a vintage photograph of a writing desk designed by Francis Bacon for his friend Roy de Maistre's lover, Patrick White, in 1932. Starling discovered the image in the archives of the National Library of Canberra, Australia. White, upon moving back to his native Australia in 1947 – fifteen years after receiving the desk – had sold the desk (and all his other furniture) at auction, “a move he regretted almost immediately” (Starling *Black Drop* 1). Once settled, he commissioned a local joiner in Parramatta, Sydney to make a replica of the desk based on the photograph of the Bacon original, but White was never satisfied with the outcome. According to Starling, the replica “was a watered-down, provincial take on Bacon's tough modernist styling – the elegant nickel-plated handles had gone, replaced by humble knobs and the austere white leather desk top of the London-built original had given way to a piece of brown linoleum” (ibid.). Starling described the process as follows: “The story of Patrick White's thwarted attempt to reanimate Bacon's design 17,000 km from its place of origin led in 2008 to the formulation of a Chinese-whispers-like process of informational slippage which eventually generated the work *Three White Desks*” (ibid. 2). The term informational slippage is one used frequently by Starling to indicate the erosion or distortion of information that takes place over time as information changes hands, or is translated into and through other media.

Starling acquired a high-resolution scan of the Patrick White photograph and commissioned the Berlin furniture maker, Uwe Kuttner, to build a replica of the Bacon desk based solely on the information in the photograph. Once complete, Kuttner used his cellphone to photograph his rendition of the desk and sent a low-resolution image to Charmain Watts, a furniture maker in Australia, where she fabricated a second desk (the copy of the copy). She then sent an image of her desk via email to George Gold in London where the third desk was produced (the copy of the copy of the copy). All three copies are on display at the Tate Modern,

in sequence, alongside a wall text and a framed set of images that share the photographic source materials used by each of the builders. Together the three desks and their photographic counterparts now come together to form a single work of art. As viewers, and as if rehearsing a Platonic allegory of the cave, we are asked to interpret Starling's interpretation of a photographic image of Bacon's desk through the triple layer of interpretative choices made by the cabinetmakers, each, in turn, filtered through a photographic image.



Fig. 42. Patrick White, *Francis Bacon's Desk* (1947).

3.8 Acts of Transference

The wooden desks that comprise *Three White Desks* are placed on top of their transportation crates that serve as the object's pedestal, elevating each desk both literally from

the floor and symbolically into an artwork. On a basic level, the crates can be described as geometric forms that provide a visual and textural contrast to the objects they are presenting. However, the “pedestal” has taken on an importance equal to the sculpture, since they are now part of the work, rather than providing a secondary support (here we might note that the pedestals are of similar importance to both Brancusi’s *Bird in Space* and Starling’s *Bird in Space 2004* discussed above). Starling’s practice is generally concerned with researching and visualizing the modes and systems of artistic production, so that showing the crates that transported the works as part of the works is how he visualizes this aspect of the process. Due to their presence in the gallery and their contribution to the overall narrative of the work, the crates play an equal role in the interpretation and formation of the work as the desks.



Fig. 43. Simon Starling, *Three White Desks*, Monash University Museum of Art (2008-9).

Interestingly, Brancusi also complicated the relationship between the pedestal and the sculptural object it supported when he created geometric bases using materials such as wood, stone, marble, or limestone to provide visual and textural contrast to the sculptures, frequently stacking multiple forms on top of one another. In her seminal text, "Sculpture in The Expanded Field," Rosalind Krauss uses Brancusi as an example of a modernist sculptor who fetishized the base or support. She describes his sculptures as "reaching downward," as if to "absorb the pedestal into itself and away from actual place"; "through the representation of its own materials or the process of its construction, the sculpture depicts its own autonomy" (280). She further defines the base "as essentially transportable, the marker of the work's homelessness integrated into the very fiber of the sculpture" (ibid.). In terms of Krauss' argument, how does this argument regarding Brancusi then relate to Starling's treatment of the base and the relationship between the object, the sculpture, and its support?

The shipping crates, like Brancusi's pedestals, are in conversation with all the objects around them and act as relational forms to the sculpture they uphold. The base in Starling's *Bird in Space 2004*, as in Brancusi's originals, has become (to use Krauss' term) "absorbed into the art itself." Likewise, for *Three White Desks*, where the crates are not just part of the work physically but also serve as active agents in the interpretation of the work, their exterior reveals the trajectory of the sculptures through time and space, an important concept that informs Starling's practice. By including the crates as a base, *Three White Desks* references both Brancusi's practice of making the pedestals part of the work and, more importantly, Duchamp's gesture of selecting and then placing an ordinary object on a pedestal. However, any suggestion that *Three White Desks* also offers a reference to Duchamp necessarily raises a related question:

in placing a set of desks on their shipping crate, has Starling not only referenced Brancusi, but also Duchamp, and specifically a “readymade”?

Duchamp’s action of placing an ordinary object on a pedestal to make it art is described by Krauss in her chapter “Forms of the Readymade: Duchamp and Brancusi,” as an “act of transfer” (77). She uses the term when describing Duchamp’s most notorious work, *Fountain* (1917). Krauss starts with an analysis of Duchamp’s early readymades and describes exactly what happened when Duchamp placed the urinal on a pedestal:

For Duchamp, the work was no longer a common object, because it had been transposed. It had been flipped or inverted to rest on a pedestal, which is to say that it had been repositioned, and this physical repositioning stood for a transformation that must then be read on a metaphysical level. Folded into that act of inversion is a moment in which the viewer has to realize that an act of transfer has occurred, an act in which the object has been transplanted from the ordinary world into the realm of art. (ibid.)

The act of transfer, then, is the moment when the object is transformed from an ordinary thing to an art object through the act of placement. Krauss further analyzes this moment as follows: “This moment of realization is the moment in which the object becomes ‘transparent’ to its meaning. And that meaning is simply the curiosity of its production – the puzzle of how and why this could happen” (ibid.). Duchamp’s *Fountain* has been much written about, although the artist himself never publically commented on it. There is, however, a well-known comment that was

published in the second issue of *The Blind Man*, a Dada magazine, which featured an image of Duchamp's *Chocolate Grinder* on its cover. On page four, a full-page reproduction of Stieglitz's photograph of *Fountain* appeared with the following caption: "The Exhibit Refused by The Independents." The following page leads with the headline: "The Richard Mutt Case." Just below the headline and above the essay by Louise Norton –Duchamp's friend who had sent *The Fountain* to the exhibition for consideration – we read: "Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object" (*The Blind Man* 5). The statement supports Krauss' analysis where she describes the act of placement as "the act of transfer" where an ordinary thing becomes an art object.

The second half of Krauss' chapter is a detailed discussion of Brancusi. In the opening paragraphs, Krauss addresses her pairing of the two artists: "We are tempted, then, to place these two figures, Brancusi and Duchamp in mutual opposition – with Duchamp cast as the disturbing dialectician and Brancusi as the creator of objects that invite contemplation" ("Forms" 85). A few pages later, after she has analyzed and described a number of Brancusi's early works, she makes a surprising comparison: "For like the readymade, the ovoid of [Brancusi's] *The Beginning of the World* is a found object, a form that is in a real sense given to Brancusi rather than invented by him. Similarly the aesthetic act revolves around the placement of this discovered object, which transposes it into a particular context from which it will be 'read' as art" (ibid. 88). Her argument here is that Brancusi's sculpture is itself a type of readymade and that any strict distinction between Brancusi and Duchamp is problematic. She then observes that for Brancusi to "conceive and accept" this abstract found form as a "work," a radical evolution

must have taken place in his artistic process from a nineteenth century model of figurative work to his “mature” abstract work.

Although Krauss places both artists in the same chapter and compares their overlapping practices (in terms of place, time, and concept), curiously she never mentions their close personal relationship and intertwining careers. She does mention in her discussion of Brancusi’s *Bird in Space* that it was part of twenty-six sculptures Brancusi shipped from France to New York for the exhibition at the Brummer Gallery in 1926, but fails to reveal that it was Duchamp who brought them there. Towards the end of her chapter, she boldly compares Brancusi’s combining of erotic human form with the mechanical in *Torso of a Young Man* (1925) to Duchamp’s similar gesture in *Fountain*. She then extends the parallel by likening the Society of Independent Artists’ rejection of Duchamp’s *Fountain* for the 1917 exhibition in New York to Brancusi’s 1920 scandal at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris caused by the phallic nature of his submission, *Princess X* (1916). However, in her conclusion, Krauss rationalizes her pairing of the two influential artists by stating that “both took the same position on the question of sculptural narrative” – namely, they questioned narrative structure and created works that were “unitary” and “unanalyzable,” thus placing them outside of the trajectory of Futurism towards the “constructivist sculpture” she had traced in the preceding chapters. Her conclusion is that both artists are similar in that they stand apart from their contemporaries and were ahead of their time. She closes the chapter by arguing: “Indeed, it was not until the 1960’s that Duchamp’s concern with sculpture as a kind of aesthetic strategy and Brancusi’s concern with form as a manifestation of surface assumed a central place in the thinking of a new generation of sculptors” (“Forms” 103).

Starling's *Three White Desks* references both Duchamp and Brancusi, but I want to argue that the work also connects us to Krauss and the role she has played in bringing these artists to the attention of history and our present moment. Krauss' observation that, in order for something to be "read as art," it is a matter of placement of the found object suggests that it is the very placement that "transposes" the ordinary object into an aesthetic context. Starling's desks, although commissioned by the artist himself, were inspired by a found object, although in this case it is not a found desk but rather a found photographic image that documents a desk. If the desks were exhibited without pedestals, they would read as desks – albeit nicely designed ones – but not as art. The desks need the pedestals to transform them from an ordinary object into a work of art (just as the jacks in *Bird in Space* 2004 elevate the raw Romanian steel plate into a work of art). The desks need to be elevated both physically and symbolically into the realm of art to become readymades and as such, they are indeed readymades.

3.9 Archipelagos, Circuits, and Loops

While references to Krauss are helpful in connecting us to the historic moments and modernist icons referenced in the *Three White Desks*, Nicolas Bourriaud is useful in interpreting its significance to our current moment. In 2009, Bourriaud organized the Tate Triennial, "Altermodern," for Tate Britain, which included Starling's *Three White Desks*. Bourriaud organizes his exhibitions around the formulation of a question, a platform that invites conversation, whereby artists respond to his curatorial concept and provide feedback in the form of asking further questions or providing answers. For this occasion, Bourriaud asks: "what is our

modernity?” He questions how we make meaning in this convoluted time and uses the “death of postmodernism as a starting point for reading the present” (“Altermodern” 12). For Bourriaud, the present is a landscape of “pluralities of locales” where the new modernism results from a place of global dialogue, rather than concerns of nationalist or individual identity. The term “altermodern” is Bourriaud’s attempt at naming our current moment. Alter is “other” in Latin and in the translation to English brings in the dynamic of other as “different” as well. In an interview with *Art in America*, Bourriaud defined altermodern in the following terms: “[it] intends to define the specific modernity according to the specific context we live in – globalization, and its economic, political and cultural conditions. The use of the prefix ‘alter’ means that the historical period defined by postmodernism is coming to an end, and alludes to the local struggles against standardization” (qtd. in Ryan n.p.). He continues his definition by adding: “The core of this new modernity is, according to me, the experience of wandering – in time, space and mediums. But the definition is far from being complete” (ibid.). Wandering implies a mode of travel from place to place with little intention or directional foresight, to go aimlessly. It also means to get somewhere indirectly, or casually.

The Tate exhibition had four sub-themes that deal with spatiality and travel between places: “Altermodern,” “Exile,” “Traveling,” and “Borders.” Bourriaud presented *Three White Desks* (2008-9) as part of the “Traveling” section of the exhibition. For Bourriaud, the contemporary artists he brought together under this theme were exploring time and space. As suggested in the quotation from our opening epigraph, according to Bourriaud, history or time is the new “continent” to be explored or mined through the format of the journey. He introduces here the structure of the “archipelago,” “the constellation,” and “the cluster,” describing the artistic field as a “structureless constellation awaiting transformation into an archipelago”

(“Altermodern”¹²). He further advocates for “a leap that would give rise to a synthesis between modernism and post-colonialism” and presses that we need to be concerned with issues of the present (ibid.). Altermodernism is further described by Bourriaud as “a positive vision of chaos and complexity. It is neither a petrified kind of time advancement in loops (postmodernism) nor a linear version of history (modernism), but a positive experience of disorientation through an art-form exploring all dimensions of the present, tracing lines in all directions of time and space” (ibid. 13). It thus appears as if Bourriaud’s altermodernism is a positive synthesis of the modern and the postmodern, yet at the same time is neither.

In his essay for the exhibition, “Altermodern,” Bourriaud introduces a number of parallel and contrasting terms in describing *Three White Desks*, including: a “chain,” a “network,” a “dynamic structure,” a “dynamic system,” a “circuit,” “clusters of thought,” and “mutually interconnected forms.” He also brings in the format of “the journey” and the concept of “hypertext,” which he explains as “a thought process: one sign directs us to a second, then a third, creating a chain of mutually interconnected forms, mimicking mouse-clicks on a computer screen” (15). Although Bourriaud’s terms are applicable to all three of Starling’s works discussed in this chapter, and prior to analyzing their relationship, a closer examination of the terminology introduced here is warranted.

Even though there is certain amount of overlap between these various terms, some seem more related while others are contradictory. They seem to form two categories. The first is linear: a chain, continuous line, circuit, and the journey, and the second is created out of mutually interconnected forms: clusters of thought, network, dynamic structure, dynamic system, and hypertext. However, there is some overlap between the two categories as well. For example: a “chain” is a series of connected links, implying a sense of sequence, an order, one thing

happening before another thing or leading to the next thing, each piece usually only connected to its immediate neighbor. It is a mutually connected form, yet offers a distinctly different model from the network where multiple points can connect to other points, but not in a single, chronological sequence. Chains are flexible yet linear, with the links usually in fixed positions and the chain breaking when one link is disconnected from the whole. By contrast, a network is an adaptive system of varying, interconnected parts (hubs, nodes, links). It is a dynamic system, a relational form.

Situated in light of these various distinctions, Bourriaud describes Starling's (and fellow exhibiting artist Darren Almond's) practice as one where the two artists:

Displace objects in space to illuminate their history: they could be said to 'viatorise' them (from Latin *viator*, 'traveller). For them, historical memory, like the topography of the contemporary world, exists only in the form of a network. Signs are displaced, 'viatorised' in circuits, and the work of art presents itself in the form of this dynamic system. ("Altermodern" 22)

The artist is presented here as a gatherer of (historic) objects and the activator of the signs and information that accompanies them. The first concept Bourriaud presents in this context is that of "displacement." But in what ways does *Three White Desks* relocate or displace objects in space to illuminate their history? It should be noted that Starling did not take an object from the past (i.e. Bacon's desk), but rather took a representation of the desk, an image, and to be more precise, a copy of White's photograph, and used it as a catalyst to create a contemporary

response that comments on modes of communication, emails, text messages, and so on. He also commissioned the three desks to be made in response to an historic event of minor significance – someone lamenting the sale of a piece of furniture due to moving across continents. In recreating the process of reproducing Bacon’s desk based on an image, the *Three White Desks* echo the circumstances of the inadequate reproduction of an original in a kind of intensification of a Platonic problematic. But are they dislocated? Or relocated? The shipping crates serve as a clear visual evidence of the desks travel history. But one can argue that Bacon’s desk conceptually “traveled” through time and space while taking on different physical forms (object, images, idea) from the point of its creation to its reproduction as part of *Three White Desks*. Although I agree with Bourriaud that the work of art presents itself in the form of a dynamic system, and that the crates reveal their trajectory through space and time, I’m not certain that they are dislocated nor that the signs are traveling *through* the circuit.

Bourriaud’s second proposal is that, for these artists (Starling and Almond), “historical memory, like the topography of the contemporary world, exists only in the form of a network” (“Altermodern” 22). For centuries, Western history was and is still often perceived and represented as a linear narrative, a progression from one state to an improved, more advanced state. In contrast, many ancient and Eastern cultures have a cyclical model for their histories, with multiple returning phases. Bourriaud suggests that for these two artists, there is a new model at work, namely that of history or collective memory understood as a “network.” Fundamental here is the concept of history as a network, a dynamic system rather than a fixed, linear progressive form. But this raises an equally fundamental question: is the artwork that reveals that history as a network also in itself a network? And if so, how does it do this? The last sentence of Bourriaud’s claim presents an interesting statement in line with this inquiry: “the

work of art presents itself in the form of this dynamic system” (“Altermodern” 22). Bourriaud proposes here that the work of art, in this case *Three White Desks*, has become a dynamic system, and indeed it has. The artwork is a network that reveals other existing systems as networks. Bourriaud further claims that the goal of the dynamic system is story telling. “But what is a network?” he asks, before suggesting that it is “a connected chain of distinct elements in time or space. Various materials can serve as a ‘glue’ to hold the component elements together, yet one of them today assumes a particular importance: story telling” (ibid.). Bourriaud applies the model of a network chain to Starling’s visual storytelling, arguing that *Three White Desks* is a dynamic system whose main purpose is to unfold a narrative. However, is that all there is? Is *Three White Desks* simply telling an entertaining story of a desk and its owner? Or does the work make a more significant statement, one that is not reducible to the genre of storytelling? In short, recalling Bourriaud’s exact phrase, in what ways does *Three White Desks* present itself “in the form” of this dynamic system of the network?

Bourriaud’s assessment of *Three White Desks* as a “network chain” can be expanded upon. A chain is a linear type of network model, whereas I believe Starling’s practice invites a much more complex model. *Three White Desks* is not simply a journey or a story with a beginning, middle, and end. It is a complex arrangement of information, objects, and images that questions systems of production, communication, and transportation and the subsequent loss, distortion, and/or accumulation of information as objects in their diversity of forms (desk, photographic image, data, text) flow through various communication and transportation networks. In a manner that should recall the work of Franklin Evans in the previous chapter, as a non-linear form, the work is also a commentary on modern and current modes of communication. It is connected to Starling’s idea of information “slippage” and suggests that

modes of communication are an imperfect process and outcome, one where neither the artist, the builder, nor the viewer is fully in control.

Bourriaud further observes that the artworks he has chosen to display as part of *Altermodern* are no longer singular objects but have become networks:

These differing modes of displacement indicate, more generally, a fragmentation of the work of art. No longer can a work of art be reduced to the presence of an object in the here and now; rather, it consists of a significant network whose interrelationships the artist elaborates, and whose progression in time and space he or she controls: a circuit, in fact. (14)

In the case of Starling's *Three White Desks*, the work is indeed a "significant network whose interrelationships the artist elaborates," as Bourriaud usefully suggests. But I would add that Starling, in addition to elaborating various inter-relationships, also identifies, highlights, researches, visualizes, and critiques these inter-relationships. I agree with Bourriaud's observation that the work can no longer be reduced to the presence of an object in the "here and now" since "the work" extends beyond the confines of the gallery, becoming part of a network's "progression in time and space." The artwork not only extends beyond its objecthood (the expanded object), but also expands across time and space. And it is a methodology that Starling will continue to employ with increasing intensity and complexity in the projects that follow. But what imports here is that this extension beyond the work's objecthood and this expansion across time and space becomes the work, or *is* the work, so that this "beyond" is not merely beyond the frame of the gallery, extrinsic to the work within the gallery, but what the work, as it were,

makes itself out of. One could even say that these inter-relationships are integral to that which constitutes the work.

Where I disagree with Bourriaud is his proclamation that this progression is “controlled” by the artist and that the term best suited to identify this network is as a “circuit.” The artist may lay out a path, or provide indicators in terms of direction he would like his viewers to take in terms of interacting with the ideas of the work, but once a visitor interacts with the work, the associations and connections they make are their own, having the potential to exceed or diverge from those intended and created by the artist. Secondly, a circuit is a circular loop, a route that starts and finishes at the same place; it is a closed path that – although things can be discovered along the route – remains a circular journey that returns to its place of origin without deviation. Both the circuit and the chain are linear, and therefore limited paths of travel with beginning, middle and end. Starling’s model offers us something both more interesting and complex, as the “journey” the work invites multiple outcomes and unpredictable routes that may or may not return to the point of origin.

Three White Desks is thus neither the result of, nor does it present itself as, a controlled circuit, since it does not return to where it started in a predictable, repeatable loop. It is also not a closed loop either. Rather, the work opens up an ever-unfolding, outwardly expanding world of data points, historical facts, fictions, images, and biographical details of individuals whose lives cross paths with the objects. *Three White Desks* presents an infinitely expanding, interconnecting wave of information paths that can be followed (as widely diverging tangents) throughout time, intersecting pasts and presents, across multiple continents, disciplines, and involves more options for future connections to be made or alternate paths to follow. Although you can metaphorically “return to” the objects in the gallery, it will not be with the same information you started with,

but rather a pile of loose ends, a realm of possibilities and signs pointing in multiple directions. The artwork has become a means of accessing infinite expanses of knowledge rather than a closed and controlled circuit.

In this context, the idea of a circuit might be better replaced by the concept of “the switch.” Switches generate networks and are used to control networks, but primarily they enable communication. Switches receive and process data and send it to a targeted device. A switch is in essence both the generator of the network and a connector within the network. The physical works in the gallery serve as conduits or switches within the network that is the work. They, in turn, are part of an artistic practice that also functions as an elaborate, dynamic system of intricately connected and interrelated objects, images, and ideas. For Starling, the objects in the gallery serve an important purpose, one of grounding the work. In *Actualizing Potential: A Conversation with Simon Starling*, Joshua Reiman quotes Starling: “There is a slightly romantic notion that making sculpture is a way of affecting transformation of the world. It’s a bit idealistic perhaps, but that’s how I feel most able to affect things. I suppose the dynamic in the work is about trying to give rather intangible narratives, histories, and stories a gravitational center, something that holds them in sway for the audience. For me, making objects has that potential” (qtd. in Reiman n.p.). For Starling, the objects are a point of access and a place of origin. In this sense, we could argue that these objects serve as a “switch,” both the generator of the network that is the artwork and a connector within the network, thus becoming active agents in revealing the networked nature of history itself.

Bourriaud further describes the compositional principle underlying these art works as reliant on a “chain of elements: the work tends to become a dynamic structure, that generates forms before, during and after its production” (“Altermodern”14). Bourriaud’s analysis of the

works existing as dynamic structures clearly applies to *Three White Desks* as the work extends beyond its own physical boundaries to connect to the realm of ideas and forms that also extend beyond its own making. The work was generated by an artistic process, photographic images, travel of people and things, object production, ideas, a set of logistics, and many conversations, prior to coming together in the gallery as a work of art. During its presence in the gallery, viewers can make numerous associations to the objects and the connections and trajectories they reveal. Beyond the exhibition, the ideas and connections made and questions asked can continue to create forms as the work presents information with an open-endedness that invites inquiry.

Bourriaud describes this open-endedness of the works as a lack of finish: “Often works are not conceived as finished – they are clusters of thought and production, or points on a continuous line. Artists transform ideas or signs, they transport and translate them” (Tate Modern “Archive”). Contrary to Bourriaud, however, I assert that Starling’s *Three White Desks* is definitely a “finished” artwork in the sense that the artist is done making it and considers it a completed work of art. However, the finished form is a dynamic, open-ended form that allows for mutations, expansions, and contractions to occur over time and across geographic and temporal locations. In an interview with curator Francesco Manacorda, Starling states: “I like the idea that works don’t die but keep being remade, reconstituted and retold in different ways” (Starling qtd. in Manacorda 19). In discussing *Bird in Space 2004* Starling mentions that the “artworks are just one part of a larger complex whole,” including in this case the world of international trade (ibid. 38). Starling’s works are simultaneously objects and information networks. They are themselves large complex wholes; networks within networks. Through its networked form, *Three White Desks* reveals a new model of considering what is and isn’t the work of art, and where its physical and temporal boundaries are. In short, the work presents

historical memory as a dynamic network of mutually interconnected parts (objects, ideas, events, people), rather than either a linear narrative (modern) or a cyclical form (postmodern).

3.10 Expanded Objects?

As has become evident in the analysis of *Bird in Space 2004*, *Pictures for an Exhibition*, and *Three White Desks*, Starling's works are complex and expansive: networked artworks that work recursively within larger existing networks. In contrast to both Duchamp and Brancusi, Starling is not simply presenting an autonomous sculpture in the gallery. For *Bird in Space 2004*, *Pictures for an Exhibition*, and *Three White Desks* each consist of a network of connections, both historic and current. The works present as dynamic systems of related forms, ideas, narratives, images, and objects that together comprise the work. They are also generative in that they produce knowledge in addition to referencing knowledge. Their material components are part of the network, but do not form the extent of the work, as the work expands to include components that exist beyond the material forms presented in the gallery even if this "beyond" is simultaneously "within" the work.

Starling's research of the history of sculpture through the trajectories generated by his projects has also brought to the forefront new contributions and historical insights, especially in terms of the inner workings of the art world and the economic, legal, and institutional systems that help shape its history and development. The network that is the artwork includes artifacts, ideas, facts, texts, books, data, and even images and objects created by others as well. The depth of content and form becomes so layered and complex that previous terms describing artworks, such as the autonomous object, installation, collage, or assemblage, are no longer suited to

describe them. As each work encompasses multiple objects that exist in different time periods, the network extends across multiple geographical locations as well as temporal locations. The extension of the boundaries of the work of art beyond the gallery walls, beyond the autonomous object, has expanded the field of the work of art to an unprecedented extent to a form that is complex, dynamic, multi-dimensional, and traverses through time and space in a non-linear manner, at once heterotopic and heterochronic.

In answering the questions posed at the beginning of the chapter, I have sought to demonstrate that Starling's practice is neither ironic nor nostalgic, and certainly not a pastiche or superficial post-modern quotation that positions history as a visual grab-bag. Rather, the artworks discussed are generative, knowledge producers that illuminate their material components, their production process, serving as active agents in the networks that both inform and form the work of art. It is through their networked configuration that they reveal new models of considering what is and isn't a work of art, thus revealing in the process how history is constituted as a dynamic network of mutually interconnected parts (objects, ideas, events, people), rather than a linear or cyclical form, a topology of relations that are at once historical and contemporary.

CHAPTER 4

Jenny Odell: Archive as Network

At a time when we both crave and feel overwhelmed by information, the archive can seem like a more authoritative, or somehow more authentic, body of information or of objects bearing value and meaning.

– Sue Breakell, “Perspectives, Negotiating the Archive”

San Francisco based-artist Jenny Odell’s archival art project, *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* (2015), involves cataloging, organizing, and tracing the lifespans of two hundred objects she found at a local dump. The first *Bureau* was created during a three-month artist residency at The Recology, a San Francisco Artist in Residency Program that has been hosting artists for over twenty-five years. Recology is a waste, recycling, and compost processing facility also known as “the dump” or “the pile.” The Recology website describes Odell’s project as a “fictional combination of bureaucratic office, investigative government agency, and academic archive” (Recology AiR). In this context, Odell’s research-based practice is primarily concerned with the acquisition, categorization, and representation of objects and their genealogies through photography, research, and display. At the same time, the artist uses the Internet as a research tool in an attempt to highlight hidden aspects of the material dimensions of our contemporary networked existence.

The Bureau’s archival content is drawn from the Internet while simultaneously also existing as a dynamically linked on-line archive that connects found objects to the various and vast sources of information the artist has discovered in her many diligent web searches. The object’s data points often include Google street views of the factories and manufacturing plants,

thus documenting the literal, physical point of origin for each object. Odell further collects the TV commercials and magazine advertisements that marketed the products at the time of their commercial release in order to show the products in their original glory, when they were desired objects rather than discarded and rejected. In doing so, she highlights the object prior to the moment of being purchased as another point of origin. In light of this practice and initiatives, the question thus remains: Is Odell's collecting project simply an act of nostalgia? Merely an effort to retrace or capture a moment gone by? Or is it a representation of a sentimental longing for a different time? Echoing the previous chapters on Franklin Evans and Simon Starling, and specifically the relation between their work and concepts of history, the following chapter argues that *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* is not just an archive, exhibition, and work of art marked by nostalgia and sentimental longing, but rather that these various components of her practice together begin to form renewed understanding of the artwork as network.

Odell's *Bureau of Suspended Objects* or *B.S.O.* consists of many interlocking and interconnected parts that together comprise the work. In addition to an archive, exhibition, and work of art, they include: the residency; a collection of two hundred found objects; the research process; the objects' data, or their physical and digital records denoting their provenance; the digital photographic records that document the object; the on-line digital archive in the format of a Tumblr page used to share these findings; the books (a self-published physical book and its digital counterpart); the performance (the artist as archivist); and a series of animated GIFs that accompany several of the objects. Additionally, the project has taken on two different versions in subsequent and related exhibitions that serve both as extensions of the project while becoming part of what the work is. Subsequent exhibitions include *In That Case: Havruta in Contemporary Art – Jenny Odell and Philip Buscemi* at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco, an

installation created in collaboration with designer Philip Buscemi (July 2016); and *Creative Ecology: The Bureau of Suspended Objects* at the Palo Alto Art Center (2016). *Creative Ecology* included an added element of audience participation and the collection of additional unwanted objects, which in turn were made available for redistribution to the public.

In the first part of the chapter, I will introduce Odell's project by providing a detailed description of *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* and its many components, variations, and exhibitions. In the second part – “What is an Archive?” – I will consider British archivist Sue Breakell's definition of archives as a way to set the stage for the rest of the chapter. The third part – “The Archival Impulse” – will examine Hal Foster's notion of “the archival impulse,” the phrase he coined in 2004 in an article published in *October*. As his essay astutely captured, the phrase responds to the widespread interest among contemporary artists to engage with archival practices. Foster's observation that “archival artists make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present” (4) will play a significant role in our understanding Odell's work, offering us a framework not just for our reading of her project but for the following chapter on the work of Pablo Helguera as well. In many ways, references to an archival impulse reveal a desire to create order in a chaotic world. As we will see, the increased interest in archives that Foster has observed is a phenomenon that is not exclusive to the art world but rather emerges alongside an emergent theoretical discourse that first took place in Europe and then continued in the U.S. The last two parts of the chapter aim to examine this phenomenon more closely. The first, on archival objects as art, will thus examine the art historical contexts for several recent archival art projects, specifically through the lens of a major historical exhibition, *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art*, organized in 1998 at the Haus der Kunst in Munich. The curatorial premise for the exhibition was a response to an earlier essay by Ingrid Schaffner,

“Deep Storage. On the Art of Archiving” published in 1995. This section will examine several historical examples of artworks that were collections and/or archives that provide an historical and contextual grounding for Odell’s project. Examples include Marcel Duchamp’s *Green Box*, Andy Warhol’s *Time Capsules*, as well as two somewhat later examples from the 1990s, by the German conceptual artist, Karsten Bott’s *One of Each*, and Iylka and Emily Kabokov’s *The Man Who Kept Everything*. One of the decisive questions raised in this part of the chapter turns on whether there is a difference between a collection and an archive, and whether we can use these terms interchangeably. The chapter’s conclusion examines a 2008 exhibition, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*; curated by Okwui Enwezor in light of Jacques Derrida’s essay “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression” (1994), a text which directly influenced Enwezor’s exhibition and title. In “Archive Fever,” Derrida offers a deconstructive analysis of the notion of archiving and the archive through the lens of Freud’s estate, both physical and intellectual. Derrida’s definition of “archival fever” as a “place of absolute commencement” (57) aptly describes Odell’s obsessive search for the beginning of things as she tenaciously uncovers her found objects’ points of origin. Together, these three texts – Foster’s “The Archival Impulse,” Schaffner’s “Deep Storage,” and Derrida’s “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression” – serve as the groundwork for much of the recent scholarly discourse on archival art.

Situated in the context of these different texts and two major exhibitions, the goal of this chapter is to address how Odell’s *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* expands our understanding of networks by rethinking networks through the lens of the archive. However, in addition to describing archival art in terms of the “electronic network,” as Foster will suggest, Odell’s project introduces a further question as a key part of the argument: whether we now need to build on Foster’s reading by introducing the terminology of the “networked artwork” and/or the

“artwork as network.” In other words, how do all three concepts – archive, artwork, and network – relate to one another in *The Bureau of Suspended Objects*? Alternately, how does Odell’s work transform our understanding of networks by rethinking networks as a form of archive?

4.1 The Bureau of Suspended Objects

What are the circumstances (cultural, economic, emotional) that account for the existence of this object in the world?

– Jenny Odell



Fig. 44. Jenny Odell in front of “The Pile” at The Recology Center (2015).

Odell’s *Bureau of Suspended Objects* was created as part of The Recology Artist in Residence program at the San Francisco waste-processing center, a program that provides artists with a monthly stipend, studio space, and an exhibition opportunity. At the start of the residency,

each artist receives a shopping cart, scavenging privileges of the disposal area, and 24-hour access to the company's well-equipped, collective art studio, and a private studio space. In exchange, the program asks artists to speak to school and adult groups about the experience of working with recycled materials. Artists are also asked to donate three works of art to Recology's permanent collection. These works, in turn, are shared in touring exhibitions to continue to promote recycling, reuse, and waste reduction. At the end of each artist's residency, Recology hosts a two-day solo exhibition to share the created works with the public. Odell's exhibition took place September 18-22, 2015.

The disposal area of the dump is affectionately called "the pile" by locals and artists-in-residence alike. Odell's instinctive response to the overwhelming chaos of the pile was to rescue objects from their immanent destruction and to create an archive of the objects she rescued, a process she termed "suspending" objects from their fate of becoming trash. Her studio became known as *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* (the B.S.O.), a one-person archiving agency whose main objective was to catalog, organize, and research the "suspended" objects and uncover their points of origin. In the self-published book on the project, *The Archive of the Bureau of Suspended Objects*, Odell describes its purpose: "Activities of the B.S.O. stem from the assumption that we are estranged even from those objects closest to us, or that their inner workings and past lives are too often experienced as opaque and inaccessible. As such, research at the B.S.O. involves learning to 'read' and understand an object on its own terms – to understand why and how it came into being" (*The Archive* 4). She further outlines that the mission of *The Bureau* is to:

- Photograph, research, and archive as many discarded objects as is reasonably possible.
- Reframe the objects not as items in a static and irreversible category (trash) but as
 - 1). Inflection points in an ongoing flow of material
 - 2). Specific products of constantly changing economic contingencies.
- Use photography and research to embody an attitude towards objects that is at once fascinated, sorrowful, and diagnostic.
- Articulate the role images play in manufacturing our desire for objects, explore the interchangeability of objects with their images, and use the archival function of photography – its protest against “time’s relentless melt” (Sontag) – ironically, given that nothing discarded ever truly goes away. (*The Archive 4*)

This ambitious mission statement is part descriptive – *The Bureau* will perform the following actions indicated by a descriptive verb such as ‘photograph,’ ‘research,’ ‘archive,’ ‘reframe’ – and part philosophical in its desire to contextualize the work by “embodying an attitude” and “articulating the role of images and desire,” exploring the relationship between image and the object it represents, and using images to “protest the melt of time.”⁹

The second point in the mission statement regarding the reframing of an object’s status from “trash” to a new, albeit temporary, state is exemplified when Odell recalls: “When I picked up an object to put in my shopping cart, it suddenly stopped being trash. At the end of my residency, when I returned my archived objects to the pile, they became trash yet again” (Odell, *Contemporary Jewish Museum 3*). Although her goal was to “suspend” as many objects as

humanly possible, and include them as part of her archive, she did not intend to keep the objects permanently. According to Odell, “suspending an object,” meant:

Rescuing it from the pile and the giant front loader that would eventually crush it; photographing and isolating it from multiple angles; and conducting obsessive online research into the objects’ materials, use, manufacturing origin (with Street View imagery of the factory where possible), company history, initial and current value, original TV or print commercials, etc. (“I Mined San Francisco” n.p.)

The central question guiding her research remains: “what are the circumstances (cultural, economic, emotional) that account for the existence of this object in the world?” (Odell *Contemporary Jewish Museum* 3). Extensive, and obsessive, Odell’s Internet based research forms the core of the project. The artist collects not just primary information on each object such as it’s “what,” “where,” and “when,” but also searches out Google street views of the factory of origin, commercials and advertisements promoting the object at the time it entered the commercial sphere, as well as testimonials of users and the creators of the object. In doing so, she recontextualizes the object beyond the basic retail source of origin (i.e. it came from Target). Instead she digs deeper into the object trajectory in order to discover its path of creation prior to landing on the retail shelf and moment of purchase, and ultimately the moment of discarding the once coveted object at the pile. Her process here would seem to illustrate Derrida’s definition of “archive fever” as “compulsive, repetitive . . . an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia” (57).

During the course of the residency, Odell selected and collected annotated data on two hundred objects. She describes this process in an exhibition catalog statement for a later iteration of the project held at the San Francisco Contemporary Jewish Museum as follows: “Objects in ‘the pile,’ as we called it, had been not only discarded, but stripped of all of the context that might make them legible as functional or desirable products. I would find a 1940s-era barber’s latherer next to a My Little Pony toy from 2014, or the 1973 edition of *Divine Principle* next to a half-eaten cheeseburger” (3). She describes her selection criteria as “intuitive,” but it also seems strategic and often motivated by curiosity and nostalgia, whether her own curiosity and nostalgia or a curiosity and nostalgia that is more cultural and collective. Once selected, Odell is primarily interested in gathering basic information regarding the object’s manufacture, attempting to trace its trajectory from its place of production to its present location. Several further questions inform this inquiry: Where had the object been designed? Where was the factory that made it? In terms of public presentation, advertising, and public reception, how excited were people about it when it came out? How far had it traveled from the place where it was made to the municipal dump in San Francisco?

Several of these questions cannot be answered, since many of the objects come without a narrative of their journey. In order to get as close to its point of origin as possible, Odell researches the country, region, and date of manufacture. Each archived item is carefully tagged for date of discovery, materials, damage/wear, provenance, and production details. She also indicates whether the product was still in production, its value (or price), and its use. Additionally, she creates several less common tagging categories, including: #archivist favorites, #objects with exact factory address, #objects with link to original TV commercial, #objects of unknown origin, #mystery objects (purpose and origins unknown), and #local (San

Francisco). Each category, in turn, has multiple sub categories that further identify the specific location, decade of manufacture, object type, or color. The online archive allows for searches by keyword or category and cross-referencing of tagged information.

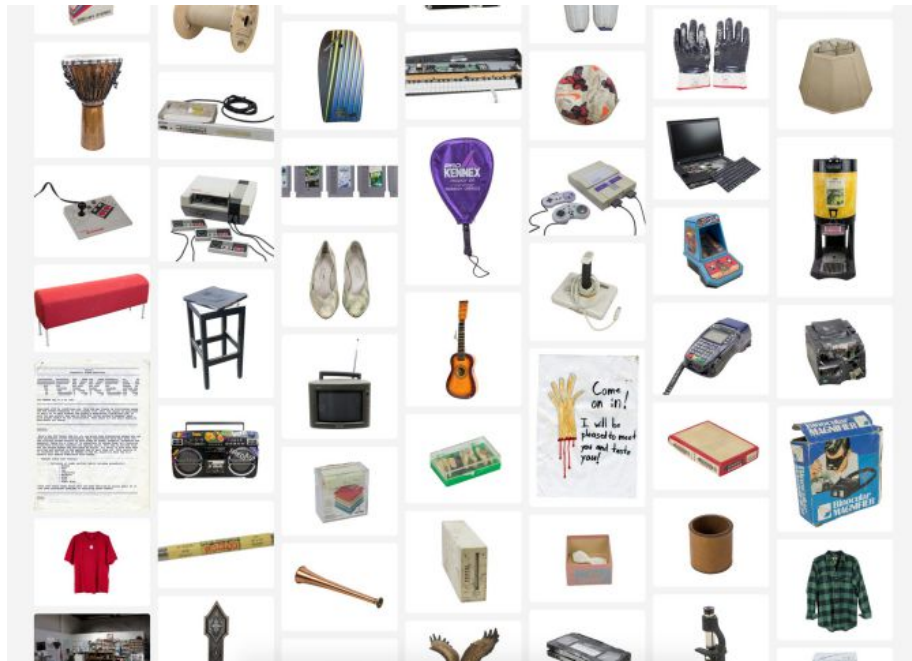


Fig. 45. Selection of “suspended” objects, as seen on *The Bureau*’s website. Each item when clicked would open up a new page or post showing the object’s data of origin and use.

In terms of the archiving process, the first place Odell recorded the provenance information is on the Tumblr website. The artist describes the process as follows: “I’m bringing [the objects] back here, photographing them from multiple angles, cutting out those photographs, and from each item, creating what was a Tumblr post” (qtd. in S. Smith n.p.). She then also transcribes certain information in handwritten notations on a 3” x 5” index card that served as a physical record to be kept with the object while in archival storage in the studio, and that served dual purpose as an object ID label when the objects were placed on display as part of the

exhibition. This intentionally low tech, analog component was included to add a physical dimension to the record keeping, but also to reference traditional analog methods of archiving that include the ubiquitous index card and meticulous handwritten notes by archivists in the past prior to the digitization of archival records. In addition to the handwritten information, the cards included a stamp that printed “Archived” and “Bureau of Suspended Objects” in blue while in between the two blue marks the artist leave enough space for a separate stamp –in red – that indicates the date the object was officially archived. The cards in turn also feature a manually glued-on white paper square with a printed QR code that, once scanned, leads back to the Tumblr website where the full research findings can be accessed. The QR code is positioned as if it were a postage stamp on a traditional postcard in the upper right-hand corner of the index card.

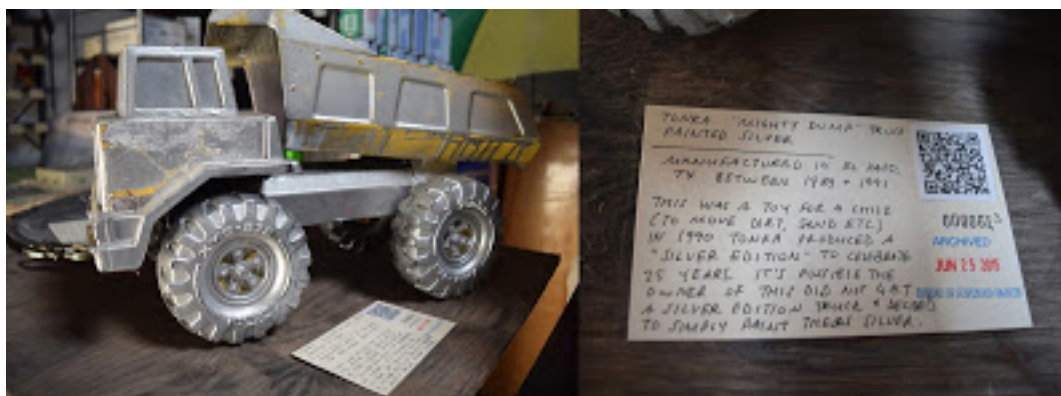


Fig. 46. Jenny Odell, *Item 074. Tonka "Mighty Dump" Truck Painted Silver* with its corresponding data card (2015).



Fig. 47. Jenny Odell, *Item 0143. Forty-one Assorted Music Cassette Tapes with Handmade Covers* with corresponding data card (2015). As part of the exhibition the artist made available a playlist via a nearby QR code featuring one song from each of the tapes.

One example of a suspended object included in the archive is the silver, spray painted Mighty Tonka Dump Truck (item #074 in the archive). Although similar models are readily available in the market today, they are generally painted in the signature Tonka color of bright yellow. Tonka celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Mighty Dump in 1990 with a special commemorative "Silver" edition of the popular truck, which at the height of its production sold over 1 million units a year. However, the truck found by Odell had been altered – presumably by its owner – to replicate the silver edition. She states: “This concatenation of time—the ability to see an image both in its original newness and its eventual ‘trash’ state—was something I tried to make palpable for visitors to the *Bureau of Suspended Objects*’ final exhibition” (“I mined San Francisco” n.p.).

Another example on the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of provenance information and data collection is from the mystery objects category described as “ITEM 043: an unidentified box of red glass (?) filaments.” Odell records the date she found the object as 6/10/15, and answers “#unknown” to the “Materials” and “Damage/wear” and “provenance” categories. For

the “Production Details” she states: “This is an unknown product manufactured by an unknown company in an unknown place for unknown purposes.” Despite its lack of archival information and definition, the artist did decide to include the object in the archive. This seems curious since, in terms of archival object, it is rather uninteresting as it does not come with a clear provenance story nor does it provide interesting details regarding its purpose or function. One might argue that this was purely an aesthetic or artistic choice, as the bright red filament certainly appears attractive to the eye. Or perhaps it simply was the fact that Odell did not know what it was but wanted to find out that lead to the inclusion of the box and its content.

As part of the project, Odell also employed specific archival techniques and actions such as collecting, describing, listing, ordering, assigning a record number, documenting, provenance research, record keeping, storage, tagging, and data processing. These actions are all part of the standard archival process, but in this case they also inform the artistic process. Odell also created a “physical archival space” to house the research documents in overflowing manila folders and oversized file folders and the suspended objects themselves are stored on shelves and on pedestals along with their tag ID cards. Additionally, the artist generated a digital counterpart – “the digital archive” – that includes the artist’s laptop that stores research in folders and files, as well as the photographic records. Besides being housed on the artist’s laptop, the digital archive also has a public interface on the project’s Tumblr website. Lastly, all the records, research, and object image profiles are reproduced in book form – “The Catalog” – that serves as a finding aid and a striking visual representation of the archive. All of the components listed above then come together to form the multidimensional archival project that is *The Bureau of Suspended Objects*.

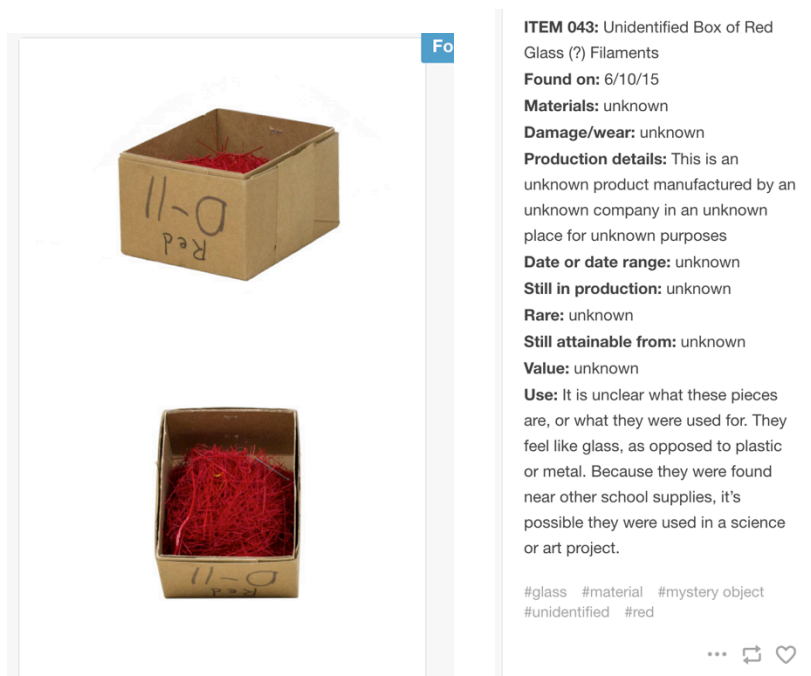


Fig. 48. Jenny Odell, *Item 043. Unidentified Box of Red Glass (?) Filaments*, Tumblr image (left) and corresponding ID tag (right) (2015).

In terms of contemporary information technology, *The Bureau* highlights the capacity of the Internet to provide data about objects, events, and their places of production. It is a tool that can be used to trace the origins of things, but only in as far as that information is made available on websites that are “live,” that exist on IP addresses that are currently maintained. Data that predates the website can be digitized and extend the reach of information to go beyond the date of the creation of the site. With more and more institutions digitizing their material content and making it available on line, the very archival function of the Internet seems to be expanding. Odell’s project is reflective of an overall shift in archival practices that have moved from the storing of objects and their related documentary information in a fixed, controlled location to digitizing their collections and making the digital archival content accessible on line. However, websites are ephemeral and in flux as their content is continuously updated and/or deleted. They

are not a reliable source of archival content, as is evidenced by the current crisis in library sciences or scholarly citation as more than half of cited web links no longer exist six years after being cited. American Historian Jill Lepore, cites a 2014 study conducted at Harvard Law School in *The New Yorker* when describing the inherent temporality of websites as follows: “more than 70% of the URLs within the *Harvard Law Review* and other journals, and 50% of the URLs within United States Supreme Court opinions, do not link to the originally cited information” (n.p.). The average life of a Web page is about a hundred days. “Link rot,” “reference rot,” and “content drift” are additional problems, ironically, since they expose the ephemeral nature of online archiving where, while pages come and go, the data is stored forever somewhere else. According to Spanish Art Historian Anna Guasch Ferrer, “the medium typical of archival art is digital culture or the network of the Internet,” an observation that draws from Arjen Mulder and Joke Brouwer’s essay “Information is Alive” where they state: “digital archives are unstable, plastic living entities, as stories and rituals were in oral cultures” (qtd. in Ferrer 4). Here we begin to see how the very medium of archival art is the network, a dynamic unstable form. Or rather, perhaps the network is less a problem of instability than flexibility, a dynamic relevant form for providing access to information, which in turn is also not a fixed form and subject to continuous change.

Besides presenting herself as the creator of the project and thus the producer and creator of the work, Odell is also presenting herself in a performative role, the “artist as archivist” or, as she describes herself on her website, the “Chief Operating Officer.” In this case, we are not simply referring to her creative practice that constitutes a performative working method – that is, archival art – but rather the artist physically and publically performing as “the archivist” (see fig. 50). Odell held “office hours” as part of the open hours of the exhibition. At the entrance of the

exhibition at Recology, she set up a basic Ikea desk, with an official looking traditional desk signage denoting her name and title “Archivist,” a vintage clock, two clip boards with handwritten notes listing the items suspended and archived respectively, and a stack of her self-published book that documents each object. The administrative form of the list immediately evokes record keeping and archival practices. In many ways, the book is also a list and, like the online archive, serves as a reference guide where objects and their research results can be looked up and referenced.



Fig. 49. Installation view. Recology AiR studio space organized as an object depository i.e. the archive (2015).



Fig. 50. Odell as archivist at the Recology exhibition opening, September 2015.

In her essay “Art, Work, and Archives: Performativity and the Techniques of Production,” artist and scholar Jane Birkin states: “archival practices are performative in nature; they are directed by prescribed standards and defined by bodies such as the International Council on Archives, which [...] sets out clear rules to be followed when writing and organizing descriptions” (n.p.). Birkin discusses Margaret Iversen’s essay, “Automaticity: Ruscha and Performative Photography,” in which Iversen argues that the term performative is often wrongly used to define work that has an element of performance, suggesting that it should be “reserved for the work of those artists who are interested in displacing spontaneity, self-expression and immediacy by putting into play repetition and the inherently iterative character of the instruction” (Iversen 841). According to Birkin:

In performative art practice authorial control is established early on in the work, in the design of the workflow; this method parallels that of the archivist, who, working to

established conventions, produces work that is near algorithmic in form and intent, and where authorship is largely unrecognized. In art and in the archive, though, chance events materialize, resulting in a hybridity between human and system that can be seen in all levels of archival description even today, as well as in other information management systems generally. (“Art, Work, and Archives” n.p.)

On her website, Odell writes: “The BSO’s chief and only officer is artist Jenny Odell.” The artist here again references a corporate or institutional culture by giving herself a formal title within the structure *The Bureau* provides. The artist is also presenting herself as an administrator. The professionalization of the artist and the changing nature of the relationship between the artist and their labor are well analyzed in Helen Molesworth’s book *Work Ethic*. She discusses the artist as blue-collar worker (Pollock), as an executive (Stella), and as director (Yoko Ono). In the case of Odell, the artist performs the dual role of administrator and archivist, one example in a long line of societal roles artists take on as part of their practice.

In September 2015, at the end of the residency, Odell organized a two-day exhibition in her studio at Recology in order to share the project with the public. It included the two hundred objects she had pulled out of the pile alongside their handwritten archival ID labels. The majority of the objects were organized in neat linear rows on four long white shelves. The pedestals (rather than positioned in their previous maze-like arrangement when functioning as the archive) were now all pushed to the center and holding fewer objects each in order to provide a better viewing experience for the visitors. One of the studio walls displayed three composite photographs installed in traditional gallery style that each showed a digitally composed collage of the two hundred objects collected.



Fig. 51. Installation View. *Bureau of Suspended Objects* in the AiR studio organized as exhibition space (2015).

The final component that differentiates the exhibition from the archive are the technological and interactive elements: the objects' QR codes, the Layar application component, and the animated GIFs Odell created for the website, which were all part of the exhibition as well. In addition to being able to scan the object's QR codes to find out the detailed provenance information, the audience could read about its history, see its factory of origination on Google Street View, and watch related videos. For example, *ITEM 171*, a PowerBook G4, includes a 2001 video of its creator Steve Jobs at Macworld 2001, the Apple-oriented tradeshow, that shows him introducing the new product and bragging about its titanium body, claiming it to be “stronger than steel, lighter than aluminum” and touting its “15.2 inch mega wide screen” and “one inch thick” body (Jobs). The video was both on display on a monitor directly beside the

laptop in the shelf and available via the QR code. The artist's extensive research was thus directly accessible within the gallery setting.

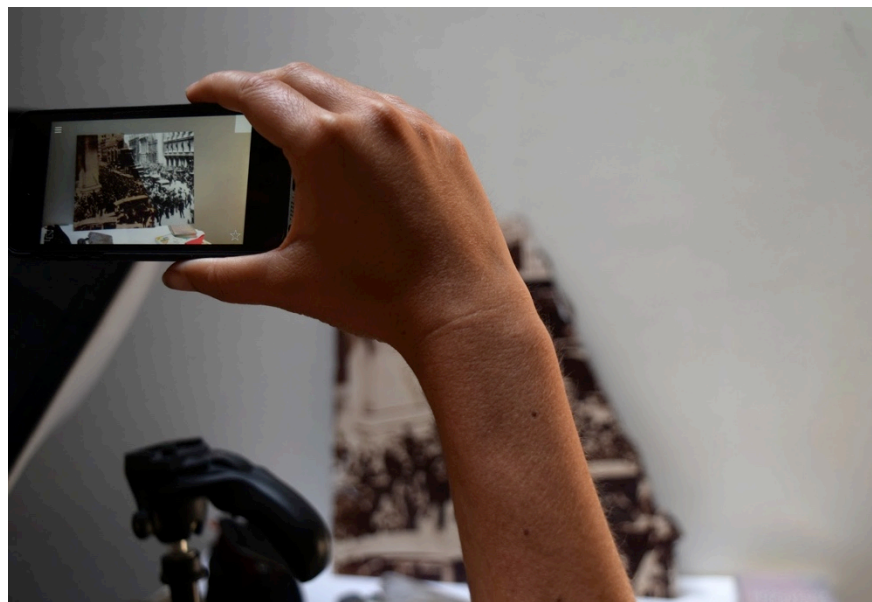


Fig. 52. Image showing Odell using the Layar application to fill in the missing part of the found photograph.

One innovative way that Odell explored the question of the objects origins was through use of the Layar application. As part of the exhibition experience, visitors were encouraged to download the application, one of the first mobile augmented reality applications. When the application was downloaded on their mobile phone, visitors could then ‘scan’ photos of archived items in order to see a photographic overlay showing the product as it would have looked like when in new condition and compare that to the current worn, used condition of the object. The application also could scan a fragment of a damaged object in order to reveal the object in its entirety. And lastly, it allowed for the scanning of digital prints (*Things Made in Asia* and *Things*

Made in North America) to present a text overlay showing the visitor where each item was manufactured.

In an interview with the Contemporary Jewish Museum curator, Pierre-Francois Galpin, Odell revealed: “One of the things I’m interested in with this project besides the function of time and value, is also the idea of a part of the whole. A lot of things in here are parts that are missing other parts, and so in order to understand an object on its own terms is to understand what it was supposed to be as a whole” (qtd. in S. Smith n.p.). For example, the vintage photo, ITEM 163, commemorating the 1929 stock market crash is missing its upper right corner, but Odell wanted to have a way for visitors to the exhibition to see the entire photograph. She tracked down a digital, complete version of the image on Wikimedia Commons. The Layar app lets you scan an image, in this case the fragment, and then to digitally overlay it with an image of the original product photo. Odell remarks: “It’s about time, and part and whole – using the object as the starting point to get other information that’s layered on top of it” (ibid.).

At the end of her residency, Odell returned many of her suspended objects to the pile. In her words, they became “trash” yet again. In recalling the experience afterwards, Odell muses: “A lasting effect of having done this project is that trash feels to me less like an identifiable category and more like a psychological judgment that is as reversible as it is arbitrary. Stores seem full of trash and the dump seems full of products. The effect is temporal as well as spatial: spending time in the decades-crushing pile invites an understanding of the present as imminently historical” (“I Mined San Francisco” n.p.). *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* seemed to end here. The performance was over, the exhibition requirement met, and the artist donated the three digital collages to the collection of the Recology as part of the residency arrangement. The physical object archive was dismantled, but the digital archive, the book, and the paper records

lived on. Ultimately, the artist decided to not return approximately twenty-nine objects to the pile but rather held on to them. It is not entirely clear what Odell's intention was, but perhaps she had become too attached to several of them or hoped to save them for future exhibition projects. The objects she retained have indeed gone on to be displayed in several additional iterations of *The Bureau* and continue to do so at the time of this writing. On the one hand, these subsequent installations are extensions of the original project. On the other hand, I want to argue that they are very much part of the networked artwork that the *Bureau of Suspended Objects* has become.

4.2 *The Bureau* Re-Imagined



Fig. 53. Installation view. *In That Case: Havruta in Contemporary Art* – Jenny Odell and Philip Buscemi, The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (2016).

In January of 2016, four months after *The Bureau* at Recology was dismantled, Odell was invited to participate in an ongoing series at the Contemporary Jewish Museum entitled *In That*

Case: Havruta in Contemporary Art. The project, also situated in San Francisco, was based on the Talmudic study principle of *Havruta*, the ancient Talmudic principle of studying religious texts by people in pairs, a shared and as a result creative, learning experience. *In That Case* at the Contemporary Jewish Museum repurposes that practice of shared learning for the contemporary art community by “pairing visual artists with established professionals in another field of their choosing” for a ten-week fellowship (CJM web). Due to the specific focus on collaboration, predetermined conditions of display, and the unique placement of the project in a corridor, Odell elected to collaborate with a commercial window display designer and stylist Phillip Buscemi. In the exhibition’s catalog essay by the artist, Odell explains her choice: “In order to address the role of desire and sentiment in our reading of objects, I needed someone who knew how to manipulate meaning through arrangement, staging and visual elements” (Odell, *Contemporary Jewish Museum* 4). Rather than using the standard white display case made available to the invited artists in the Havruta residency, Odell and Buscemi decided to design new cabinets with an entirely different, decidedly more upscale aesthetic to cover the old ones.

The project’s major components consisted of three custom-built display cases with bright teal backgrounds that have been described by the artist and museum as a cabinet of curiosities. The display case also references an institutional trophy case and curio display case used to showcase trinkets, porcelain sets, and/or valuable collectable items in someone’s home or office. Each case had a specific framework of criteria for the objects on display. The three categories included: new things (i.e. purchased by the artist at a big box store); used things (owned by the artist and selected from her apartment and her parents’ home); and discarded things (items rescued from the Recology trash pile during her residency). All were displayed in a similar manner and with similar care regardless of each object’s monetary value or place of origin.

Similar to the Recology iteration, each object came with extensive provenance record, was meticulously documented both on the Tumbler page digital archive and in a self-published book, and was displayed with a handwritten label card (although no QR code was included for this installation). One added dimension is the collaboration with Buscemi and the resulting emphasis on visual merchandising as a means to explore assigned value to objects new and old and to explore whether, through a specific mode of display they could bring these three categories of objects (found, owned, new) to a single plane in terms of perceived value or perceived worth.



Fig. 54. Detail (new things case). *In That Case: Havruta in Contemporary Art* –Jenny Odell and Philip Buscemi, The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (2016).

The first display case, on the left, was the “new things” case. On display were items that were purchased by the artist at local Walmart, Big Lots, and Target stores in the area of Gilroy, CA, near to where the artist grew up and her parents still reside. There objects included a baby blue bird cage, a white mannequin hand, trunk box, a bag of corks, a glass oil bottle, a porcelain jewelry dish with gold colored antlers, a marble dipping bowl, a Paula Deen ‘mystery’ candle, a monopoly money coffee mug, a glass vase, and a striped pitcher, a porcelain bird, glass pumpkin shaped jar, a piggy bank, ceramic elephant tea light holder, a watch, a souvenir shot glass, faux (red) apple, red glitter little girl dress shoes, electronic football game, Thomas tank engine, table top fountain, a photo album, and lastly a scented pine cone. Under provenance, the artist listed the store at which she purchased the item. Other categories of description included: manufacturing origin; materials; production details; date produced; whether still in production (y/n); value (in \$); and use. At the bottom of each online entry, numerous tags categorized the objects. In the case of the birdcage, for example, these include: #new, #decor, #blue, #metal, #faux-antique, #china, #Asia, #2010s.

The center case represented the “objects in use” category. On display were items that belong or belonged to the artist as a child or were recently in use in her home. Their value was sentimental and intensely personal to the artist. In her interview with Galpin, Odell further admits that these objects were the ones that made her understand her project the most profoundly, as it was her own emotional connection to these objects that imbued them with value. In turn, it was her sentiments, as it were, that were placed on public display and added to the elevation of the objects. This time, the twenty three objects on display included: a globe coin bank, Japanese fan, painted ceramic fish, porcelain pig, a pine cone, small blue vase, large blue vase with peacocks, hedgehog stuffed animal, a book of poetry, sailor bath toy, fake apple, a

miniature piano, pair of worn children’s tap shoes, a peanut shaped box with a vial of saliva inside, HP employee award, Thomas the tank engine toy, Barbie happy meal toy, Simpsons figurines set, a glass coke bottle, 1933 issue of World Progress, an assortment of bottle corks, a NASA shot glass, and a French fry scented soy candle. Under “provenance,” most items say “my parents’ house,” “my room,” or “my apartment.”



Fig. 55. Detail (new things case). *In That Case: Havruta in Contemporary Art* –Jenny Odell and Philip Buscemi, The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco (2016).

The third case, on the right, is filled with discarded items that were rescued during the Recology residency and were included in the previous archive and exhibition. They include: a ceramic heart model, aquarium grass, plush toy orange (with eyes and a mouth), transistor radio, a stuffed animal bird, a red rotary dial phone, a Norleans figurine, Around the World box set, microscope, glass Delaware punch soda bottle, a Vietnam veteran photo album with photos,

Adidas roller skates, alarm clock, floppy disk set (with letter), antique tin, June issue of *The Modern Priscilla* magazine, sexy pig figurine, blue sake bottle (empty). Under “provenance,” they all state “Recology SF” and are tagged as #trash in addition to their country of origin and object category, such as #souvenir, #beverage, or #decoration.

The cases are designed specifically to add an air of importance to the objects on display. The drawers underneath imply the cabinet of curiosities function as specimen drawers in museums and private or research collections, while the dark stained wood implies age, gravitas, and an element of luxury. Inside each case there are three shelves that hold the objects; some are placed on small rectangular risers, mini pedestals painted in the same blue as the backdrop that physically elevate the objects, which also further emphasizes the elevation of the object from ordinary to special and significant. Their mode of display suggests that the objects are presented as if collectables or museum objects rather than personal items in a home, items found in the trash, or on the shelves at a big box store. Their previous distinctions are made obsolete as each object is presented with the same care and attention to detail.

4.3 Suspended Objects Exchanged

Several months after her collaboration at the Contemporary Jewish Museum, Odell installed *Creative Ecology: The Bureau of Suspended Objects*, an exhibition held at the Palo Alto Art Center in the summer of 2016. It is the third iteration of the *Bureau of Suspended Objects* project and consists of a residency with fieldwork, making artwork, a public participatory element, and an exhibition. The project again included extensive Internet research to generate object records both analog and digital, as well as thorough digital image documentation that was shared on the digital archive pages and later documented in book form. For three months Odell

collected “about-to-be-discarded” objects (according to the artist’s own terminology) from the art center’s visitors. Odell’s directive was for visitors to give her something, an object, whose imminent status as trash was “only a matter of time” the artist terming these objects: “pre-trash” (Odell, *Palo Alto* 3). In addition to donating an object that they were going to discard (but instead brought to the museum), each donor filled out a detailed questionnaire that asked about the object’s origin, where and why the owner bought it, why they were getting rid of it, why now, and their level of guilt related to their discarding of the object. The artist’s ability to collect this type of personal owner related data stands in stark contrast to the discarded objects rescued at the Recology residency where the artist did not have access to any personal information related to the object’s previous owner, nor could ask why it was thrown away. In return for his or her contribution, each visitor received a packet containing the archival images of the object they donated (photographed by Odell), the B.S.O. research on the history of the object, and (if available) images related to the object’s production.

Within the exhibition space, the visitor’s objects were “exchanged” for an account of its history provided by the artist. Odell suggests: “What I hope visitors to the exhibition took away from this project (besides a useful or pleasing object) is that waste is as much a psychological issue as it is a material one. Of course we should learn to recycle, but we should also learn simply to look at our own objects, and carefully. Doing so might lead to the (inherently, if subtly, anti-capitalist) recognition of the symbolic function of objects – and the ways in which they all too often form the physical collateral of changing desires and circumstances” (Odell, *Palo Alto* 4). At the end of the exhibition, visitors could each take home an object that they had claimed throughout the duration of the exhibition by placing a red dot next to an item, an act that mimicked the sales process of an art object in a commercial gallery although no money was

exchanged. In addition to the exhibition ID tag, the new owners also received the questionnaire filled out by the object's previous owner as well as Odell's provenance research.



Fig. 56. Installation view. Jenny Odell, *Creative Ecology: The Bureau of Suspended Objects*, Palo Alto (2016).

Odell observes in her essay that accompanies the project: “the most intensely desired objects were ones whose [original] owners cared the least about. Furthermore, the specific characteristics or potentials of the objects that drew these visitors to them were completely different from the things their owners had perceived in them. It seemed that in many cases, an object was simply more *legible* to one person than another – for instance, being able to identify a Steiff bear, or having seen the movie *Kung Fu Panda*” (Odell, *Palo Alto* 4). She concludes by saying that: “I can’t stress enough that these differing perspectives changed the way the objects appeared in a very real way” (ibid.). For *Creative Ecology*, like the Contemporary Jewish

Museum installation, Odell's process changes the value perception for each object. By researching it, documenting it, and placing it in a museum context, she elevated each item of 'trash' to an object displayed in a museum setting. By researching it, elevating its mode of display and status as object, she changed the perceived value of the object, which in turn led to the objects becoming desirable again. The change in context and perception moved each object from trash to treasure.

The Bureau of Suspended Objects began as a residency and became a physical archive, a digital archive, an exhibition, a performance, and a book. These six components when taken together form a distributed work of art, a work of art that has multiple locations, material formations, and digital counterparts. The interconnectedness of the various objects, the repetitive approach in terms of artistic process – collect, document, research, and, in the case of subsequent installations, the display of the same objects in a new context – further indicate the interwoven nature of the various components into a single dynamic form that can best be described as a “network.” The artist then extended the Recology *Bureau of Suspended Objects* into two new formations: one at the Contemporary Jewish Museum and the next iteration at Palo Alto Art Center. Rather than viewing the subsequent installations as either a reinstatement of an existing project or the creation of a new, autonomous project, I present them as both as part of the same network that constitutes *The Bureau of Suspended Objects*. When considered collectively, the various components constitute a network of nodes linked to one another by their content, their process, and multiplicitous references back and forth. In short, I want to argue that the entire project in its different iterations unfolds according to different modes of operation, modes in turn, that further extend and expand the archive as network.

4.4 What is an archive?

The Bureau of Suspended Objects at its core is an archival work of art, in other words, an artwork created in the mode of an archive, and thus what might be termed an archival artwork. I further argue that *The Bureau* – in addition to engaging with the network as part of its process of creation – is a network in and of itself, and as such it serves as a case study for the networked artwork. What complicates this particular reading of *The Bureau* as a networked artwork is that it is also an archive, in that it opens up a new field of questions within which it needs to be addressed. Thus: What is the relationship between the artwork, the archive, and the network? Are they extensions of one another? What exactly is an archive in this context? The dictionary definition of the archive as a collection of historical records or as a bastion of national or colonial power no longer suffices to capture its contemporary importance. Artists have been interpreting “the archive” throughout the twentieth century, but there appears to be an emergence of new questions around archival practices starting in the 1990s and carrying through to the early 2000’s. Even today, the archival impulse is present both in creative artistic practices across the globe but also in everyday life. Artists have staged interventions and critiques of existing archives, but also presented the archive as an art form in itself: an archive as a work of art.

The work of Michel Foucault is pivotal to recent discussions concerning the notion of archive. Foucault’s discussions of the archives, classifications, and the naming of things influenced both Jacques Derrida and, much later, Hall Foster, as well as many of the artists working in the archival mode. First, I will address Foucault’s discussion of Borges’ short story on the “Library of Babel” in Foucault’s preface to *The Order of Things* (1966), as well as *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969). Significantly, Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (translated from the original French *Les Mots et Les Choses*) had as its subtitle *An Archeology of the Human*

Sciences. Although Foucault considered his methodology to be both archeological and systematic, the book focuses on knowledge, how it is formed, and what it means and how its meaning changes over time.

The Order of Things is a study of the history of the social sciences. Foucault uses a method of inquiry, akin to that of an archeologist, whereby he analyzes categories of thought (which he terms *epistemes*) in order to reveal the underlying structures that limit knowledge during a particular time period. For Foucault, “representation governs the mode of being of language, individuals, nature, and need itself. The analysis of representation therefore has a determining value for all the empirical domains” (208). He takes this concept of representation and uses it as a leitmotif throughout his analysis of the various modes of thinking, relating and explaining each time period’s relationship to knowledge in terms of its relationship to representation. It is through this process of analysis of the history of ideas that Foucault reveals the underlying structure of a specific time period of thinking in Western culture from the Renaissance onwards. He writes that in any given culture and at any given moment, “there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice” (168). For example, during the Renaissance, the primary episteme was that knowledge was divine and god was truth. Sciences at the time were primarily concerned with a “science of interpretation,” that is, knowledge based on similitude in a world filled with “signs” created by a divine power that were waiting to be discovered and interpreted (57).

The primary part of the text that is most relevant to the discussion at hand is the preface, in which Foucault responds to a short story, “The Library of Babel,” by Argentine author and librarian, Jorge Luis Borges, first published in 1942 and modified in 1956. Borges describes the

universe as an infinite, limitless library of books whose content is finite since language itself is limited. His ultimate hope is that, underneath all the uncertainty, there is an underlying order that might be discovered. Halfway through the preface, Foucault addresses his desire for finding or creating an order among things:

For it is not a question of linking consequences, but of grouping and isolating, of analyzing, of matching and pigeon-holing concrete contents; there is nothing more tentative, nothing more empirical (superficially, at least) than the process of establishing an order among things; nothing that demands a sharper eye or a surer, better-articulated language; nothing that more insistently requires that one allow oneself to be carried along by the proliferation of qualities and forms. (13)

He continues by introducing what he calls a “system of elements”:

A definition of the segments by which the resemblances and differences can be shown, the types of variation by which those segments can be affected, and, lastly, the threshold above which there is a difference and below which there is a similitude – is indispensable for the establishment of even the simplest form of order. (14)

Foucault speaks here of taxonomies and creating categories of difference, of how things can either be classified as belonging to the same category or not. At this point, Foucault brings up a hidden network that connects and ties all things together, which for the author takes the form of a grid:

Order is, at one and the same time, that which is given in things as their inner law, the

hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language; and it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there, waiting in silence for the moment of its expression. (14)

This emphasis on the grid resonates with Foucault's ideas on the network as defined in his text "Of Other Spaces," a text developed from a lecture he gave in 1967, in which he introduces the term "network" as a definition for his particular moment in time: "We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (22). The grid has become a network of points and skein and serves to indicate relations among sites. It is interesting to note Foucault's use of the term network in *The Order of Things* a year prior, where he also discusses the archive:

The idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity. (26)

In short, Foucault considered notions of network and archive in the same context.

Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge* is frequently cited in any discourse regarding the archive. According to scholar Marlene Manoff: "Foucault's concept of the archive is more easily described by what it is not than by what it is. For Foucault, the archive is not 'the library of libraries;' nor is it 'the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon its person as documents

attesting to its own past.’ The archive, for Foucault, is what he calls ‘the system of discursivity’ that establishes the possibility of what can be said” (10). If the reference to the “library of libraries” refers us back to the limitless library of Borges, Foucault’s concept of archive as discourse is further explained in the following passage:

Instead of seeing, on the great mythical book of history, lines of words that translate in visible characters thoughts that were formed in some other time and place, we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use). They are all these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call archive. (*Archeology* 146)

Foucault also indirectly describes the archive as a relational entity, as a “system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” (Ibid. 146-147). We will see that Foucault’s concept of the archive was especially influential on both Derrida and Foster’s writing. He has also influenced many scholars in the humanities, including librarians and archivists.

4.5 The Archival Turn

The “archival turn” took place gradually over several decades and most traces lead back to Foucault and Derrida’s work. In her essay, “Perspectives: Negotiating the Archive” (2008), Sue Breakell asks how we should interpret the current interest in archives by tracing recent developments both in archival theory and art. She begins by affirming the existence of the romantic notion of “the archive” as a place of secrets and power where “for some” the archivist

“is a rule maker, casting spells around archives (damsels in distress), which are suspended in time, waiting to be rescued and re-animated by users (in shining armor)” (1). She recalls the extensive literature on the subject of using archives and “the impulse to rescue and rehabilitate not just the lives and actions documented in the archive, but the very material itself – the stuff of history,” citing one novel where the archivist is described as a “proud gatekeeper to countless objects of desire” (ibid.).

Breakell further argues: “Archives no longer belong to the lawmakers and the powerful; archivists see themselves as serving society rather than the state” (2). She makes a connection between the fascination with archives and expanding consumerism, suggesting that “within Western capitalist societies we are surrounded by stuff but uncertain about what is significant. Even with the advent of the Internet, we seek to order and privilege certain cultural objects over others (and individuals over others)” (1). She expands her argument by suggesting that perhaps it is also the surplus of visual documentation that is part of the cause: “Today our lives are documented in ways unimaginable to previous generations – as seen in recent debates about information security, both that held by government and that which we offer up ourselves on such sites as Facebook, tagging our pages and creating our own taxonomies” (ibid.). Situated in these terms, we can argue that, for Odell’s work, it is not the private information about people’s lives that she’s interested in but rather the incessant collective record keeping and information sharing by companies and individuals on the Internet that informs her research on the genealogy of her objects.

Breakell proposes that the archive arguably offers a much-needed respite to this general sense of anxiety, of feeling overwhelmed with the huge amount of visual information: “The archive can seem like a more authoritative, or somehow more authentic, body of information or

of objects bearing value and meaning” (1). Extending two fundamental definitions for thinking about archives – in which, “although no activity is objective or free of bias, a core principle of archival practice is to seek to be as objective as possible in what might be called the ‘performance’ archivists enact on the archive” (3), and in which, “there is no one fixed meaning of any archival document: we may know the action that created the trace, but its present and future meanings can never be fixed” (4) – then it becomes clear when situated in the context of Odell’s project that Odell is focused on documenting a trace and reestablishing the object’s meaning within the present moment, while also highlighting its significance at its point of creation. She is also fully aware that the meaning will continue to fluctuate as the objects either continue as part of the artwork, enter someone’s home, or are returned to the waste stream.

4.6 Archival Art as Network

In the first instance, archival artists seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object, and text, and favor the installation format as they do so.

– Hal Foster, “The Archival Impulse”

In his 2004 essay, Foster describes the artwork as archive, or alternately the archival artwork as “a tendency.” According to Foster, the archival impulse denotes – on a general level – an “idiosyncratic probing into particular figures, objects and events in modern art, philosophy and history” (3). However, he states that this impulse is not new but rather can be traced to several art historical periods (both pre- and post- WWII) and he names several 1970s examples as well, including Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Prince, and feminist art. His description of the

contemporary archival artists is that they “seek to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present” and that they “favor the installation format” (4). Foster warns that “sometimes archival samplings push the postmodernist complications of originality and authorship to an extreme” (4) and cites a project by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno, *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999-2002) as an example. Their project began with the purchase of a generic manga character named “Annlee,” both its copyright and original image, in the form of a computer file. They asked fellow artists to use the file and create a work with it to bring the character to life. The project took the form of a collection of animations, paintings, posters, prints, books, and sculptures. After several exhibitions across Europe and the United States, the character was eventually “terminated” and taken out of circulation, an action formalized by Huyghe and Parreno with a legal contract ending her accessibility to be used for artistic purposes. The character was then symbolically “buried” in the SFMOMA galleries in a coffin created by artist Joe Scanlan.

For Foster, the *No Ghost Just a Shell* project “became a ‘chain’ of projects, a ‘dynamic structure that produce(d) forms that are part of it’”(4).¹⁰ The author refers here to Nicolas Bourriaud’s term “post-production” as a suggestion that, in Foster’s words, “the work of art in an age of digital information” has “changed status” (ibid.). After suggesting that Bourriaud’s reference to an “age” is of course an “ideological assumption,” Foster then introduces the idea of information as a “virtual readymade” since there is “so much data to be reprocessed and sent on” and that “many artists do ‘inventory,’ ‘sample,’ and ‘share,’ as ways of working” (ibid.). Foster concludes this section of the essay by implying that “the ideal medium of archival art is the mega-archive of the Internet” and supports this statement by introducing three terms that, according to Foster, reference “electronic networks” namely: “platforms,” “stations,” and

“Internet interactivity”(4), although he quickly counters his statement by saying that the archival art projects are in fact “more tactile and face-to-face than any web interface” and “call out for human interpretation, not mechanic reprocessing” (4-5). These concluding statements raise a number of basic yet consequential questions for our understanding of Odell’s work: Is the Internet indeed a ‘mega-archive’? What would it mean that networks are defined as “platforms,” “stations” and places of “interactivity”? And how do the answers to these questions inform our discussion of Odell’s project?

In the conclusion to the introduction and prior to moving into a detailed description and analysis of specific works of art, Foster defines archival art as both “drawing on informal archives” and “producing them as well” (5). He declares that archival art does so “in a way that underscores the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private” (ibid.). Lastly, he describes the arrangement of the materials as existing according to “a quasi-archival logic, a matrix of citation and juxtaposition and [the archival artist] presents them in a quasi-archival architecture, a complex of texts and objects (again platforms, stations, kiosks)” (ibid.). The latter part of this statement refers back to his earlier comment about electronic networks and related terminology. The artists Foster discusses as examples of the archival impulse are Thomas Hirschhorn (Switzerland), Tacita Dean (Great Britain), and Sam Durant (USA), suggesting that this archival art trend is an international one. The three singular terms that the artists themselves use to describe their practices are, respectively, “ramification,” “collection,” and “combination” (ibid.). Additionally, Foster offers up the Deleuzian trope of the “rhizome” as an additional term to describe these archival artistic practices. Together, all these terms set the stage for the argument in this chapter that a new

terminology is needed to describe the archival practices of various artists, including the work of Jenny Odell.

In his conclusion, Foster introduces the concept of “the will to connect what cannot be connected” in archival art (21). He states that this “will to connect” is the distinguishing factor between Craig Owens’ widely discussed argument concerning an “allegorical impulse” and the “archival impulse,” since the former denoted “allegorical fragmentation” which stands in contradiction to the impulse to connect and control information that characterizes the latter. In one of the two final footnotes to the essay, Foster wonders whether archival art “might be bound up with ... ‘archive reason’ at large, that is, with a ‘society of control’ in which our past actions are archived so that present activities can be surveilled and future behaviors predicted” (22). In a somewhat melancholic final footnote, he notes that, “behind the will to connect,” this “networked world does appear both disconnected and connected – a paradoxical appearance that archival art sometimes seems to mimic” (ibid.).

4.7 Artist as Archivist

In considering Foster’s notion of the “artist as archivist” and his definition of “archival art,” several questions immediately arise. How does Foster’s tentative suggestion that archival art references “the electronic network” complicate our reading of Odell’s archival project as a networked artwork? Does the *Bureau of Suspended Objects* allow us to rethink the archival impulse as a networked art practice and, in doing so, does it revise Foster’s argument? The designation of an artwork as a network is a new phenomenon, even if the artwork as a distributed, archival form is not new and the “archival impulse” as identified by Foster is a

tendency that emerged in contemporary artistic practice during the 1990s. Historically, there are a number of other artists who used an archival methodology as their mode of operating, and their works of art also take the form of collections of objects.

A canonical exhibition that chronicled this phenomenon prior to Foster's essay is *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving*, which was a large scale, multi-venue exhibition that offered a substantial accompanying catalogue with the same title. *Deep Storage* has its origins in a 1995 essay "Deep Storage. On the Art of Archiving" by Ingrid Schaffner, in which the author examines the contemporary artist's urge to document and collect. In 1998, Schaffner presents the original essay as part of the exhibition catalog alongside an update reflection, "Digging back in to Deep Storage," where she describes Walter Benjamin's principle, albeit unfinished, work, *The Arcades Project*, as "the archive," which in her words was "an attempt to organize the tidal waves of an ensuing modernity into a cohesive architecture of information and imagery. The inherent futility of this attempt, as each fragile structure slips beneath the crushing weight of the next oncoming wave, makes for an appropriately unstable paradigm in an age of reproduction that is itself giving way to the juggernaut of the information superhighway" (18). This citation and description regarding Benjamin seems to hold true for the *Bureau of Suspended Objects* as well. It too can be seen as a futile attempt to stem the tide of both information overload and the overload caused by rampant consumerism and its resultant waste. On numerous occasions, Odell has alluded to the influence Benjamin has had on her work.

Christoph Vitali, Director of the Haus der Kunst in Munich (where the *Deep Storage* exhibition was first installed) writes in the foreword to the catalogue: "The catalogue, an alphabetical 'archive,' uses the theme of the exhibition to create a multitude of cross references in the information it provides, forming a network which itself reflects the multi-layered structure

of the exhibited works” (7). Vitali here likens the catalogue, the artworks, and the information they reference to “multilayered structures” and as forming a “network.” Schaffner builds on Vitali’s assessment: “The results will read like an assemblage. Unlike a thematic show whose elements all riff off and return to an encompassing framework, this one constantly refers outside itself” (“Digging” 10). The concept that both authors introduce here – the catalog “reading like an assemblage” and in essence functioning like a network – is again decisive for our understanding of Odell’s project.

The exhibition *Deep Storage* differs from most exhibitions in that it “refers outside itself” rather than adhering to and staying within a thematically defined curatorial framework. It brings to mind Derrida’s proposal in *The Truth in Painting* that a work of art always points to something outside of itself, which he meant to indicate the layers of meaning in and around works of art that are neither internal nor simply external to the work as a work. Derrida poses this concept of the frame, the *parergon*, as a way to think through this problem, in contrast to Emmanuel Kant’s belief in the significance of a work of art as final, fixed (singular), self-contained, and transcendental. Derrida is interested in what is neither purely intrinsic nor extrinsic to the work, which is the edge or the frame, the supplement that is neither fully inside nor outside the work. I contend that the elements that are considered “outside the frame” of the artwork are now “part” of the artwork, the network that extends beyond the boundary of the so-called “object in the gallery,” its frame, now becomes what the work “is.”

The Bureau of Suspended Objects pushes at the edges – or frame – of what constitutes a work of art. It questions whether the paper research records are part of the art, and if so whether this extends to include the archivist’s clipboard, her nametag, and even her desk? Or the artist herself? What about the QR codes, the GIFS, or the Google street view images? Just as Odell

rethinks the boundaries of what is trash and what is treasure, she also intentionally rethinks the boundaries of what is the frame of the work of art. Where does it end? Or is there no end (yet)? *The Bureau*'s ability to expand in an essentially infinite direction by accumulating connections, multiplying associations, and inviting continuous reinstallations –its variations in new, yet related and still connected forms – is also an underlying condition of a network.

4.8 Archival Objects as Art

A simple feeling speaks about the value, the
importance of everything...

– Ilya Kabakov

In 1998, a team of five curators, including Schaffner, curated a second collaborative version of *Deep Storage, Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art*. It was held at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York (now part of MoMA) and included one hundred art works created by forty American and European artists. The exhibition included all the works from the original German installation at Haus der Kunst in Munich, except for Gerhardt Richter's *Atlas* and Claus Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum*. Roberta Smith's exhibition review "In the Eye of The Collector: Seeking the Innate Order or Chaos" in *The New York Times*, notes: "In recent years, the artist as collector, archivist, curator or documentarian has become a familiar figure" (n.p.). As early precedents, she mentions Eugene Atget and August Sanders. She goes on to suggest that the exhibition includes "suspects both usual and not, and often obscures the line between art and archive" (ibid.). As usual suspects, she mentions Marcel Broodthaers, Joseph Beuys, and Edward Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966). Five of Warhol's "Time

Capsules" were also included in the exhibition, where "the contents of one capsule, including mail, magazine and exhibition announcements, line the bottom of a large vitrine," as well as the earlier example of Karsten Bott's *One of Each* that included "a wall-to-wall display of thousands of carefully ordered small objects that is viewed from a raised walkway" (ibid.).

I want to the foreground four artists who I propose serve as predecessors to Odell's *The Bureau* and anchor her project to a longer lineage of archival projects, the first three of whom were included in the *Deep Storage* exhibition: Marcel Duchamp's *The Green Box* (1934); Andy Warhol's *Time Capsules* (1974-1987); Karsten Bott's *One of Each*, (1993); and Ilya and Emily Kabakov's *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (1996). I include the Kabakov project as an additional case study primarily because it also features trash turned into archival art and an archival mode of display within a museum setting. Although each of these projects was created by a different artist at diverse and geographically dispersed locations and at divergent moments in time – and of course without direct knowledge of or relation to *The Bureau* – I propose that they are part of the expanded network that surrounds and informs the work of art. These historical examples thus inform how we understand *The Bureau* and should be seen as part of the field of art that gives the work context and meaning, as if these other works were themselves supplements to Odell's project. It is these relational associations between the various components, as well as between the project and its historical predecessors that also make *The Bureau* a networked artwork. Indeed, recalling our reading of Franklin Evans and Simon Starling in previous chapters, art historical references are an important part of what constitutes Odell's project.



Fig. 57. Marcel Duchamp, *Boîte-en-Valise*
(de ou par Marcel Duchamp ou Rose Sélavy) (1935-41).

Duchamp's *The Green Box*, officially known as *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* (1934), was the first of Duchamp's conceptual serial boxes. Produced under the alter ego of Rose Sélavy, the leather suitcase contained ninety-four documents in the form of photomechanical prints, a method that was new at the time and did not become common until much later. Duchamp's use of phototypography, or the callotype, allowed him to reproduce his own handwritten notes from 1912-15 and paintings and drawings with great accuracy. The box was produced in an edition of three hundred, with twenty deluxe versions that were presold to help finance the project. In 1935, Marcel Duchamp began a second large-scale serial project, *Boîte-en-Valise* (which translates as a box in a suitcase) (see fig. 57). It was a mobile, physical, monograph with sixty-nine miniature reproductions of iconic works of art by Duchamp, including his *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)* and *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*. The collection featured primarily prints mounted on

paper, although each box also contained one original. The suitcase presents a traveling, solo exhibition of reproductions questioning the distinction between the original work of art and its reproduction. The suitcase's intended purpose was to serve as documentation of the originals as many of those were in private, and primarily American collections, which then allowed Duchamp to share his work with an expanded audience in France and beyond. At the same time, Duchamp created this project out of a need to document his own work within the context of a series of increasingly threatening historical circumstances that would become World War II and would lead to his migration to the United States in 1915.

Photographic reproduction and the digital documentation of the found object also play a crucial role in Odell's project. One area where her process of documentation differs from that of Duchamp is that the latter was documenting works of art – “originals” – while Odell is documenting found objects, i.e. trash. However, Odell's photographing of the object plays a crucial role in the found object becoming designated as art. It is precisely through its representation in the photographic record that Odell's objects become part of the archive and as such part of the work of art. In *The Bureau's* case, there is no “original” as such. Rather, the object's value as an art object is constructed precisely through the act of archiving it in much the same way that Duchamp's “readymades” become art by placing them on their pedestals and declaring them to be art. In a similar act of transference, Odell takes an item of trash out of the flow or stream of production – her temporary “suspension” of the object – and she gives it a new status as art, as “original,” albeit only temporarily. In doing so, the artist also references Benjamin and Derrida, for whom the object is constructed both through the archive and the image that documents it. Scholar and curator Okwui Enwezor likewise claims that the object is reinforced through the “image” (49). In other words, the photographic reproduction of the

original is not arbitrary; rather it “creates” the object. Through the act of archiving and documentation, the ordinary “found” object first becomes an archival record (i.e. a historical document) and then, through the act of transference, becomes an art object. The art object then becomes a part of an archive of two hundred related objects, a residency, an exhibition, a performance, a book, etc., and ultimately a work of art that becomes – that *is* – a network.

Odell’s action to divert objects from the waste stream in order to change its status from trash to art is reminiscent of Andy Warhol’s famous archival projects, including the *Time Capsules*. Over a period of thirteen years, starting in 1974, Andy Warhol filled, sealed and sent to storage six hundred and ten standard sized, brown cardboard moving boxes with contents from his studio. The boxes entered his studio – and life – when he was in the process of moving from his studio at 33 Union Square West to a new studio on Broadway. It was at his new studio at 860 Broadway that Warhol began using the boxes as a way to clear the clutter from his desk. In his 1975 book, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, from A to B*, Warhol describes the simple process for creating a time capsule: “What you should do is get a box for a month, and drop everything in it and at the end of the month lock it up. Then date it and send it over to Jersey. You should try to keep track of it, but if you can't and you lose it, that's fine, because it's one less thing to think about, another load off your mind” (145). Warhol further described the process of collecting ephemera and sending things to be stored off site: “I really hate nostalgia, though, so deep down I hope they all get lost and I never have to look at them again. That's another conflict. I want to throw things right out the window as they're handed to me, but instead I say thank you and drop them into the box-of-the-month. But my other outlook is that I really do want to save things so they can be used again someday” (145). Warhol’s sentiment of saving things so they may have another use connects to Odell’s impulse to suspend objects from the pile. Both artists are pulling

items out of the normal object life cycle and redirecting their fate from trash to treasure. A major difference, however, is that Odell is selecting the objects with the intention of elevating them to objects worthy of both research and display, while Warhol is in essence dismissing the objects by sending them to a warehouse.

Warhol's project became an archival project as each box was filled with a wide range of materials that passed across his desk, an array thoroughly addressed by Schaffner in Warhol's exhibition catalog entry in "Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art." She describes the project as follows:

Once relocated, Warhol began to use these boxes to store the bewildering quantity of materials that routinely passed through his life. Photographs, newspapers and magazines, fan letters, business and personal correspondence, art work, source images for art work, books, exhibition catalogues, and telephone messages, along with objects and countless examples of ephemera, such as announcements for poetry readings and dinner invitations, were placed on an almost daily basis into a box kept conveniently next to his desk. (279)

Although Warhol did not categorize or document each item prior to placing it in the box, the box and its contents in and of itself became a document of a moment in time within a very specific context of Warhol's life and his studio practice. Schaffner suggests that in doing so, he is creating a "complete, though often cryptic diary of his life and the worlds of art, fashion, society and the New York underground through which he circulated" (279). Although the materials he packed into the box were the detritus of his life, they were not the things he actively collected or

cared for but rather things that entered his life unsolicited – mainly through the mail or as gifts – and his way of getting rid of the items was to box them up and send them away. In a manner similar to Odell's, it was through the act of archiving that the objects (re-)gained their use value, that they became “art.”

Warhol's time capsules serve as a record of his everyday life rather than a collection of specially or carefully curated items that were selected with a future audience in mind. This contrasts with Odell who, as if performing the role of the curator, carefully selects the objects out of the pile with the intent to share them with the Recology audience. In their archival actions, both artists produce a collection of once insignificant items that would have ended up in the trash, giving these items new use and changing their “value.” While Warhol is intercepting the everyday materials prior to it being designated as trash, he is still redirecting these materials from being trash to becoming a work of art. Odell, by contrast, is redirecting objects that have already been designated as trash by someone else. Warhol's capsules serve as physical snapshots of his life and, through the lens of his actions, his time period. Odell's project provides a physical snapshot of a time period as reflected through the discarded items of a group of citizens in a specific location (San Francisco) at a specific moment in time (July-September of 2016). However, as a result of her curatorial selections and the scope of her project, this also provides a lens into her life as a person who grew up in Silicon Valley, whose archival art practice is engaged with both physical and virtual readymades.



Fig. 58. Installation view. Karsten Bott, *One of Each*, Historical Museum Frankfurt (2012).

Odell is not alone in the obsessive collecting of materials destined for obliteration in a landfill and redirecting their fate by including them as part of an archive. Since 1988, German artist Karsten Bott has been collecting and cataloguing discarded objects into an archive of overwhelming proportions having collected over half a million objects by the year 2000. In addition to collecting the objects, documenting, and cataloguing them, the artist also produces books and large-scale installations to share his findings with the public. David Michalski, in his 2002 essay “Cities Memory Voices Collage,” contextualizes Bott’s works among several of his contemporaries: “In recent installations by new assemblage artists such as Jason Rhodes, Karsten Bott, and Gregory Green, one can feel a mounting anxiety and powerlessness in the face of overburdened archives crammed with seemingly endless variety of objects and perspectives”

(117). Michalski goes on to describe the feeling of experiencing Bott's installation at P.S.1 in New York in 1998: "Karsten Bott's *One of Each* ... duplicates the uneasiness about the future felt by one staring into an attic bursting with objects accumulated over thirty years of living. The weight of history is made literally unbearable as everyday artifacts crowd the floor. [...] The work is indicative of our plight as we fully engage the information age" (ibid.). In an artist statement on his website, Bott describes his project as an "Archive for Contemporary History." He states: "In it I gather objects that surround us daily. These everyday objects are neglected by museums and archives" (Bott n.p.). He then wonders: "Why does history need to be buried and then excavated by archaeologists?" Bott explains his methodology further: "I try to collect and archive all the things that happen. I would like to create a copy, a net-like image of our environment. Each individual has the function of a binding member. For example, a patched, worn-out workhorse can be found under the factory/pants, clothes/trousers, social class/worker/pants, and crafts/sewing. In the different groups, the trousers are then with each other related things" (ibid.). Bott's method of classification is similar to the hash tags applied by Odell, in the sense that they are a combination of logical, common senses designations such as "pants" or "clothes," as well as some idiosyncratic categories, such as "factory/pants" or "social-class/worker/pants."

Bott's storage process is straightforward and deceptively simple. The archive consists of a storage room where the objects are sorted in over five thousand "banana" crates. In terms of documentation, the artist's goal is to "capture all things on the computer. For each thing, a card with a photo and the different assignments in the 'alphabetical stock catalog' are noted. Then the numbered items packed in boxes are stacked in shelves" (Bott n.p.). In addition, *Karsten Bott: One of Each*, a photographic catalog documenting two-thousand items taken from everyday life,

was completed and published in 2007. While Odell's storage system was less methodical and certainly conducted at a much smaller scale, like Bott, she sorted, catalogued, and documented her objects while producing a similar digital photographic catalog to further document the items collected. However, there also is a difference in terms of their respective emphasis or artistic intent since Bott is interested in the amassing and preserving of the objects themselves, in order to create "a net-like image of our environment," whereas Odell only temporarily holds on to the found objects and focuses her interest on the research and provenance of each object (the data), as well as the digital representations of the discovered content and the objects themselves. In Odell's *Bureau*, the digital representation of each object transformed the object into art through the act of archiving; once the object was returned to the waste stream, as most were, the image took the object's existence as the artwork to become part of the "original."



Fig. 59. Ilya and Emily Kabakov, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, MoMA, New York (1996).

The last example I wish to discuss is an installation by Ilya and Emily Kabakov, *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away* (1996). Their project relates to *The Bureau* in numerous ways: both use found objects and/or trash and turn it into art; both are creating an obsessive taxonomy describing and labeling the objects; both present an archive as installation art; and both projects contain a performative element. For this installation, the Kabakovs created an imaginary character, a plumber, who lived in a communal apartment building. It is a work of art that began as a story first published in 1977 and was first realized as a multi-room installation in 1989. According to art historian Randall K. Van Schepen in his essay “The Heroic ‘Garbage Man’: Trash in Ilya Kabakov’s *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*” the piece was “formed by simply letting the paper garbage that arrived at his studio amass into an overwhelming pile and then taking these objects and labeling and installing them ... Kabakov’s lack of choice and discrimination were the work’s ironic modes of creation” (183). Although Van Schepen’s analysis of the Kabakov’s “lack of choice” is debatable since the selection of the objects and their very specific installation most definitely reveals curatorial intent and thus choice, this description reveals an interesting connection to Warhol’s *Time Capsule* process. In both cases the detritus of everyday life found its way into a work art simply by the artist’s act of transference from trash to treasure. Unlike Warhol, however, whose capsules were not displayed in an exhibition context until after the artist’s death, the Kabakovs chose not to send the materials to storage but rather created an archival museum display.

According to the project’s story, one day the building’s supervisor known as “Uncle Miska” and a few workmen had to enter the plumber’s apartment while he was at work and once inside then they found a series of rooms filled with garbage. In the words of Uncle Miska: “... this wasn’t a disgusting, stinking junkyard like the one in our yard or in the large bins near the

gates of our building, but rather a gigantic warehouse of the most varied things, arranged in a special, one might say carefully maintained order” (Kabakov 32). The rooms presented collections of innumerable ‘garbage’ items – scraps of paper, rags, empty boxes, jars – gathered into bunches and packages all carefully arranged in cabinets (there are two of them in the room), in glass display cases, glued on special cardboard stands, hanging on the walls. Everything, even the tiniest junk, has a label attached to it, an inscription, everything is numbered and cataloged” (ibid.). In a detailed description provided by the artist, the organizational structure is discussed: “Almost all the shelves were accurately labeled, and each item had a five- or six-digit number glued on it and a label attached to it from below. There were also lots of things – piles of paper, manuscripts – on a big table standing in the middle of the room, but these things did not have numbers or labels on them yet...” (ibid.). The artist’s own voice and intention for the project comes through in a statement from the protagonist:

A simple feeling speaks about the value, the importance of everything ... this is the memory associated with all the events connected to each of these papers. To deprive ourselves of these paper symbols and testimonies is to deprive ourselves somewhat of our memories. In our memory everything becomes equally valuable and significant. All points of our recollections are tied to one another. They form chains and connections in our memory, which ultimately comprise the story of life. (Kabakov 33)

At the same time, the protagonist feels mired in the accumulated waste and the debilitating burden of this garbage, as becomes evident from the following description. In reflecting on the

burden garbage brings to modern life, the protagonist wonders about his attraction to the problems of over consumption and production of trash related to capitalist society. He surmises that part of the reason is “Because I feel that man, living in our region, is simply suffocating in his own life among the garbage since there is nowhere to take it, nowhere to sweep it out – we have lost the border between garbage and non-garbage space” (Kabakov 35). It is exactly at this same border between “garbage” and “non-garbage” that *The Bureau* operates, as it provocatively shifts objects between categories, especially in the Contemporary Jewish Museum installation. Kabakov adds: “A dump not only devours everything, preserving it forever, but one might say it also continually generates something; this is where some kinds of shoots come for new projects, ideas, a certain enthusiasm arises, hopes for the rebirth of something” (37). Here we come close to the same underlying logic informing Odell’s *The Bureau*, which is very much born from the dump, becoming a productive, generative project within which many products received their “rebirth” in terms of the care and attention they received from the artist archivist.

Each of the projects discussed in this section inform, recontextualize, and most importantly, anchor Odell’s approach and archival inquiry in to a solid art historical lineage. And yet, is the project simply a continuation or variation of an ongoing practice that has interested artists for the past century? Is it part of a “trend” as Foster suggests? If the works included in *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* are still contained within a single project, container, or exhibition rather than extend and expand beyond the boundaries of their chosen mode of delivery and/or display, what is the significance of this observation for our understanding of this archival practice, and for the concept of network to which it is attached? In short, how does Odell’s project simultaneously extend, and expand, or displace the practice of artist as archivist?

4.9 Archive Fever

It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.

– Derrida, “Archive Fever”

For Odell, the photographic image that documents the object is as important, if not more important than the object itself. It is what remains after the suspended objects were returned to the pile at Recology or when their new owners adopted the donated objects at the Palo Alto Art Center. The archival document is an integral part of the archive and the networked artwork that forms *The Bureau of Suspended Objects*. This concept of the photographic image as archival document was the focus of the exhibition, *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art* on display at the International Center for Photography (ICP), New York in 2008. The exhibition was curated by Okwui Enwezor who selected artists who used archival documents to “rethink the meaning of identity, history, memory and loss” with a focus on the role of the photograph and film as “archival documents” (ICP 1). According to the ICP media release, the works selected “take many forms, including physical archives arranged by peculiar cataloguing methods, imagined biographies of fictitious persons, collections of found and anonymous photographs, film versions of photographic albums, and photomontages composed of historical photographs. These images have a wide-ranging subject matter yet are linked by the artists' shared meditation on photography and film as the quintessential media of the archive” (ibid). Enwezor’s curatorial emphasis lies with works that represent collective and individual experiences of trauma, such as images of victims of the Afghanistan war and the

World Trade Center.¹¹ The title refers to the well-known text by Derrida, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” which analyzes the archive within a scientific context.

On the opening page of the exhibition catalog essay, “Archive Fever: Photography Between History and the Monument,” Enwezor wonders what the aesthetic and historical issues are that govern photography’s relation to the archive? He equates the photograph with the archival record, photo as fact, as evidence:

From its inception, the photographic record has manifested ‘the appearance of a statement as a unique event.’ Every photographic image has been endowed with this principle of uniqueness. Within that principle lies the kernel of the idea of the photograph as an archival record, as an analogue of a substantiated real or putative fact present in nature. The capacity for mechanical inscription and the order of direct reference that links the photograph with the indisputable fact of its subject’s existence are the bedrock of photography and film. (11)

He extends the archival prowess of the photographic image even further by claiming that the camera is an archiving machine and thus “every photograph, every film is *a priori* an archival object” (12). And in a provocative gesture, he adds: “The infinitely reproducible, duplicatable image, whether a still picture or a moving image, derived from a negative or digital camera, becomes, in the realm of its mechanical reproduction or digital distribution or multiple projection, a truly archival image” (ibid.). Enwezor here is referencing Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” When thinking of Benjamin, Enwezor argues that the philosopher’s main concern was not with aura per se, since the

photographic image had been around for over a century, but rather with the fact that “the infinitely reproducible image manifests a wholly new mode of pictorial distribution, a shift not only indexical but temporal” (12). Enwezor claims that “the advent of mechanical reproduction initiated an archival formation that would overtake all relations to the photographic record: the systems of production and distribution and, more recently, the processes of permanent digital archivization and inscription” (ibid.). The question thus remains whether this claim can be applied to our current moment? Has the advent of digital reproduction indeed initiated a new archival movement that has overtaken the photographic record, systems of production, and distribution?

In her critical review of *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, for the College Art Association, Israeli scholar Vered Maimon compares the exhibition and the accompanying catalog essay to Hal Foster’s “Archival Impulse” essay. She argues that “while ‘an archival impulse,’ to use a term coined by Hal Foster [...] dominates current artistic production, its objects and aims of critique are no longer focused on the museum or on aesthetic notions of autonomy and authenticity. Rather, as Enwezor argues, the works included in the exhibition are concerned with ‘art’s relationship to historical reflections on the past’ and with ‘art’s active interpellation of history and document as a way of working through the difficult zone between trauma and memory” (n.p). Maimon is highlighting the exhibition’s emphasis on trauma and the photographs role as document and archival record, its ability to bear witness to culture and its woes. By contrast, Odell’s project does not operate in the realm of trauma, although the objects do “bear witness to culture” and Odell’s photographs play a crucial role as documents and as archival records.

Maimon finds Enwezor’s “inclusive” definition of the term “archive” problematic, since

“every collection of images, every form of database becomes an ‘archive’” (n.p). She argues that the term “the archive” is a “critical and historiographical term” and that it “designates a historical form of intelligibility that is composed not from ‘data,’ but from statements that are regulated forms of enunciation” (ibid.). She continues her analysis by recalling Foucault, for in his “archeological analysis, it is precisely the *rarity* of statements that is significant, the suggestion that in specific periods only certain things can be said and seen. By collapsing the ‘archive’ into no more than a generalized (digitalized) databank of information, the exhibition reifies the term’s critical currency and obscures the *specificity* of its contemporary operations” (ibid). In light of this critique, how then do Maimon’s statements complicate our reading of Odell’s project? One important difference for Odell is that she is precisely and intentionally not archiving rare or unique objects (as expressed in Foucault’s references to the rarity of statements); rather, she is rescuing discarded, damaged, and mass-produced items with little inherent value monetarily, historically, or personally. However, by placing these found items on a pedestal and making them “art” – an action that clearly references Duchamp’s act of transference of *The Fountain* – she also invests them with artistic value and as such makes them valuable again.

At the same time, in keeping with this line of questioning, the question also remains whether *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* is really an archive or just a generalized databank of information? Does it simply reference the archival impulse or is it an actual archive? According to Jane Birkin: “The responsibility of the archive is primarily one of custodial care and preservation. It is a space that demands stasis in order to justify its existence, yet it still emerges as a powerful, productive and temporally dynamic space” (13). If we apply Birkin’s statement to Odell’s project, we realize again that Odell’s *Bureau* only temporarily cares for its objects and is not concerned with the long-term physical preservation of the objects. In fact, at the conclusion

of the residency, most of the objects collected were returned to the pile to be sorted and processed, while only about thirty objects or so were retained for future art installations. Despite its lack of a preservation focus, *The Bureau*, I argue, is an archive in that it is a “powerful, productive and temporally dynamic space.” And as such, it highlights the inter-relational connections between objects and information, it can also be described as a network, at least insofar as a network is also defined as a temporally dynamic structure.

Both Enwezor and Foster’s argument owe much to Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, the book based on a lecture given in 1994 and first published in France in 1995 as *Mal d’Archive: Une Impression Freudienne*. The lecture was given in the context of Freudian psychoanalysis and of the physical establishment and institutionalization of Freud’s archive and the questions that arise regarding the classification of his written works. For Derrida, the archive is a place of power, with the archivist in a position of power at its center, occupying both a place and position of authority: “the meaning of ‘archive,’ its only meaning comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: originally a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded” (9). He continues: “the archons are first of all the document’s guardians. [...] They have the power to interpret the archives” (10). In other words, the archivist is the guardian of the documents, the person of authority in regards to their role in interpreting the collection.

Odell very much fulfills this role as the archivist as the guardian and authority in terms of *The Bureau*. She is the “Chief Administrative Officer,” the curator, the selector, the researcher, the one who makes all the decisions regarding each object, including its modes of documentation and display. Derrida describes what it is like to have caught this archive fever: “It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably, from searching for the archive right where it slips

away. It is to run after the archive ... It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement” (57). Odell’s archival practice certainly seems to fall into this passion and the relentless pursuit of knowledge, together mixed with a nostalgic vision of restoration or “saving” objects from impending doom of destruction (i.e. the dump). Her practice is based in the process of discovery and reflects both an interest in knowledge formation and the preservation of objects (albeit temporarily).

In her illuminating 2004 analysis of archival discourse, “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines,” Marlene Manoff provides an overview across various disciplines in an attempt to capture the emergence of this interest in or passion for “the archive.” She skillfully addresses the ambiguities and complexities in addressing and defining the importance of the archive and how it relates to knowledge formation and preservation. She argues: “Two related forces are apparent in this archival discourse. One is the conflation of libraries, museums, and archives; and the other is the inflation of the term ‘archive,’ which has become a kind of loose signifier for a disparate set of concepts. Many have attributed these effects to changes in information technology” (10). In her segment “Derrida and the Archive,” she positions Derrida as a central figure in terms of influences in archival discourse beyond library and information sciences, noting: “The methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced. Library and archival technology determine what can be archived and therefore what can be studied” (12). She then foregrounds Derrida’s claim that “archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Derrida qtd. in Manoff 12). Situated in relation to Odell’s project, and extending earlier statements by Enwezor and Benjamin, we can see that the act of archiving *creates* the archival document rather than merely preserving or saving it, an act

of transference that in the context of Odell's *Bureau* produces the object that we come to call art.

Manoff attributes the renewed interest in the archive to conditions in which the "archive is under siege." Combined with the realization that "both the archive and the laboratory are sites for knowledge production" (13), this has led to an increased awareness among scholars of the importance of the archive. Another important factor is the realization that archives are not neutral, nor objective depositories of facts. Manoff's analysis brings to the surface a friction and critique of the archive within certain academic disciplines such as women's studies and postcolonial studies, in which gaps and biases in collected records have been exposed, revealing the ways in which archives are at once reflective and constitutive of the ambitions of the centers of power that created them. She states:

In women's studies, for example, a considerable amount of scholarship has been devoted to redressing the limits of the official record. One way of defining women's studies might be as a project to write women back into the historical record – to fill the gaps and correct the omissions in the archive. Similarly, the new field of postcolonial studies is highly suspicious of the colonial record and could be defined, in part, as an attempt to locate the voices of the silenced native within the literature produced by colonial powers. (15)

Manoff cites Harriet Bradley, who notes: "even in an age of postmodern skepticism, the archive continues to hold its alluring seductions and intoxications. There is the promise (or illusion?) that all time lost can become time regained. In the archive, there lingers an assurance of concreteness,

objectivity, recovery and wholeness” (Bradley qtd. in Manoff 15). Odell seems to be similarly motivated in her attempt to restore “wholeness,” both by tracing an object’s history and thereby giving it a sense of purpose and significance, as well as more literally by using the Layar app and finding images of the found objects in their original, non-tattered state, as if to remind us of the object’s initial place of value and desirability. Her archive of suspended objects presents each object and its carefully researched data as a time capsule, as if possessing an air of nostalgia and wistfulness.

The final pages of Manoff’s essay address some of the criticism of Derrida’s reading of the archive. For example, she brings to our attention historian Carolyn Steedman, who vehemently disagrees with Derrida, stating, “that archives are nothing like this at all” (17). According to Manoff, Steedman is impatient with the archive as metaphor. For Steedman, the archive is a very literal and concrete space where those involved with the historical disciplines engage with material objects. Manoff concludes that, “despite their limitations, we cling to archival materials in the hope of somehow connecting to a past we can never fully know” (17). Part of Odell’s motivation is her desire to know an object’s past, to try and make it more whole through research and thorough documentation, yet all the while not knowing why and how an object ended up in the pile. In Manoff words, “certainly part of the attraction of the archive is this contact with objects that have survived to bear witness to the pastness of the past” (18). Odell plays an important role in the rescued objects’ survival and allows them each to bear witness to a specific moment of time when a silver Tonka truck or titanium MacBook were collectively desirable and seen culturally valuable objects.

Manoff claims that the attraction to and interest in the archive has “only grown in response to an increasingly virtual culture” (18). It is in this last statement that we may have

found a concrete clue to explain the phenomenon, not just in society in general but in the archival impulse as it presents itself in contemporary art practices and Jenny Odell's *Bureau* in particular. The amount of new information that becomes available on a daily basis is overwhelming. Archives and collections of all sorts are digitizing their holdings at a consistent pace. As more information becomes available, the need to control, organize, and create systems of understanding increases. Odell's *Bureau of Suspended Objects* is perhaps such a system, an attempt through research, archiving, and exhibition display to provide a path into the dense forest of the many digital platforms that connect us to our past and generate a contemporary understanding of neglected objects and their temporal condition. In its complexity as a dynamic, temporal form, *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* simultaneously redefines our understanding of archives, artworks, *and* networks. It is through the form of a networked artwork that it reframes the past in the present moment and so ensures a new vision of the future.

CHAPTER 5

Pablo Helguera: Social Practice as Network

Spaces hold objects; they also facilitate experiences. However, physical location is only one of the factors that play a role in the production of an experience. Experience—whether art-related or not—emerges in the conjunction of a location, an event—a temporal space—and a social context, or social space.

– Pablo Helguera, “Alternative Time”

New York-based Pablo Helguera is an artist and educator whose socially engaged art practice critically examines his American identity and Mexican heritage in particular, while expanding and questioning the role art plays in society. In his essay “Alternative Time and Instant Audience (The Public Program as an Alternative Space)” (2010), Helguera proposes a rethinking of how an art experience is produced and suggests curators and public programmers always should have an audience in mind. He reconsiders the gallery space as an event-based space rather than characterized as a space that merely hold objects, and proposes it should be seen as a space where experiences are facilitated and people connect to one another. For Helguera, the gallery space is a dynamic, fluid space capable of expanding and contracting; it is also a communal space. He suggests that art spaces are “not static spaces at which static viewers arrive, but rather ever-evolving, growing, or decaying communities that self-build, develop, and eventually dismantle” (“Alternative” 3). As the epigraph above suggests, he places the production of the art experience at the intersection of the venue (i.e. physical space), the event or event series (i.e. temporal space), and community (i.e. social space), which together form a socially engaged form of artistic practice.

Librería Donceles and *Club Americano* were held consecutively at two radically different venues located only two and a half miles apart in Boston: respectively a non-profit community art studio called Urbano and the fourth largest encyclopedic fine art museum in the country, the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA), Boston. Urbano is located in Egleston Square in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood. It hosted *Librería Donceles*, a temporary Spanish-language bookstore on view from January 11 through April 22, 2017. The second, the prestigious Museum of Fine Arts located in the Back Bay neighborhood, hosted *Club Americano*, a collection-mining project held between April 22 and June 4, 2017. *Librería Donceles*, although a temporary community engagement project created by Helguera, was a fully functioning second hand bookstore stocked with approximately 10,000 objects that also served as a community gathering space, with an active roster of community centered programming, workshops, and performing arts events. *Club Americano* was an exhibition of historic objects selected by Helguera from the museum's fine art and decorative arts collections that were accompanied by a series of performances, all curated – and also sometimes performed – by Helguera himself. *Club Americano* likewise served as a gathering space for members of the community who were invited to select their presentation topics in response to the themes of the exhibition. Conceptually, both *Librería Donceles* and *Club Americano* explored issues surrounding identity, politics, and immigration within the larger context of The Americas. Although these thematic concepts permeate and help define the meaning of the work, I want to argue that what is at stake here is not the content of the work but rather how the various components of the work connect to one another.

5.1 What is Social Practice?

Helguera's practice in general, and these two projects in particular, are easily characterized as social practice art, also termed socially engaged art. In "Living as Form," an essay on social art practices and their histories curator Nato Tompson defines "participation, sociality, and the organization of bodies in space" as key, contributing factors to socially engaged artworks. He proposes that these methods of working allow for "genuine interpersonal human relationships to develop" (21). According to Tompson, the gathering of people can also be an art form in and of itself: "Just as video, painting, and clay are types of forms, people coming together possess forms as well" (22). Tom Finkelpearl also defines social practice as a form of social cooperation in his book *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation*. Through discussion of specific projects, he addresses a set of terms – "participatory, interactive, collaborative, dialogical and the relational" – as decisive for our understanding of socially engaged artistic practices. Other terms such as "complicit engagement" and "social sculpture" have also been proposed in this same context. Helguera follows a similar argument, and as our epigraph suggests, counts the events, venue or location, as well as the social aspects of the work as not just related to the work but part of what constitutes the work as a work. According to Helguera: "All art, inasmuch as it is created to be communicated or experienced by others, is social. Yet to claim that all art is social does not take us very far in understanding the difference between a static work such as a painting and a social interaction that proclaims itself as art – that is socially engaged art" (*Education* 1).

In this chapter, we will focus on Helguera's own definitions of social practice or socially engaged art. His signature and oft-cited publication *Education for Socially Engaged Art. A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (2012), serves as a guidebook on how to teach social

practice art to students. In the opening pages, he confesses: “While there is no complete agreement as to what constitutes a meaningful interaction or social engagement, what characterizes socially engaged art is its dependence on social intercourse as a factor of its existence” (2). Helguera observes that “social practice,” a closely related term to socially engaged art, seems to be the preferred term that “has emerged most prominently in recent publications, symposia, and exhibitions and is most generally favored term for socially engaged art” (*Education* 3). Helguera himself prefers the latter and defines it primarily as “dependent on the involvement of others besides the instigator of the artwork” (*ibid.*). For Helguera, social interaction is not just an activity that lies adjacent or parallel to the work; rather it is part of the work, it is the work. He describes the role of the centrality of “the social” as follows: “All art invites social interaction; yet in the case of socially engaged art it is the process itself – the fabrication of the work – that is social. Furthermore, [socially engaged art] is often characterized by the activation of members of the public in roles beyond that of passive receptor” (*Education* 11). As I will argue, Helguera’s projects create a network in which members of the community participate with the artist, with the project, but also with each other.

For Helguera, it is important that “participants willingly engage in a dialogue from which they extract enough critical and experiential wealth to walk away feeling enriched, perhaps even claiming some ownership of the experience or ability to reproduce it with others” (*Education* 13). He describes participation in art as a “multi-layered participatory structure” and breaks it into four categories: “nominal participation,” which is the (passive) contemplation of a work of art; “directed participation,” where a visitor completes a task instructed by the artist; “creative participation,” where a visitor contributes content within the structure provided by the artist; and lastly “collaborative participation,” where visitors share responsibility for the structure and

content development (*Education 15*). For both *Librería Donceles* and *Club Americano*, the visitors are actively invited to participate in the projects. Those who attended the exhibitions, whether at Urbano or the MFA, can choose to remain a passive spectator and simply look at the objects on display; but they can also buy a book in the bookstore and become a directed participant. Indeed, the best example of “creative participation” was provided by the performing art happenings at the MFA, where members of the community participated as part of the performances organized by the artist. Lastly, “collaborative participation” would be the best way to describe the many community events hosted both at Urbano and at the MFA, where community members, both individual and institutional, were invited to host events as part of the exhibitions. As Helguera suggests, these various forms of participation are what constitute the work. Additionally, the respective venues provide the physical space of the work, while the community programming provided the temporal space. However, the following pages will expand this reading of the work in two ways: first by including the material space as it is presented through the exhibited objects, and secondly by reconsidering the works as a series of interconnected networks.

5.2 A Community Bookstore

And as much as I have enjoyed and appreciated what virtuality has brought to us, my impulses as an artist have always been of restoration, or remembrance, of the feelings and experiences that existed before the digital revolution.

– Pablo Helguera, “A Vicarious Learning”

Librería Donceles (2013–2017) is a social practice artwork that presents a second-hand bookstore that exclusively offers Spanish books for sale. Its originally published dates were

January 13 – March 31, 2017, but the show was extended into April of that same year to allow for overlap with the *Club Americano* installation at the MFA. It was on view at Urbano, a non-profit community art studio for neighborhood youth in Egleston Square, Jamaica Plain, one of Boston's twenty-three distinct neighborhoods. For *Librería Donceles*, Helguera filled the normally cavernous exhibition space of Urbano with dozens of metal and wooden bookshelves filled to their maximum capacity with stacks of books. The books were organized by general categories: poetry, art, philosophy, religion, fiction and so on, but their assignment in the space itself seemed somewhat random and temporary, which added to the experience of the piece as an idiosyncratic bookstore rather than a library, which are meticulously and systematically organized and governed by mutually agreed upon organizational structures such as the Dewey decimal system.



Fig. 60. Installation view. Pablo Helguera, *Librería Donceles*, Urbano, Boston (2017).

The various categories were indicated by a handwritten label on small pieces of paper that were taped onto each corresponding section of the shelves. Their overall appearance was ad hoc, as if suggesting a temporary situation. The atmosphere in the gallery space was like a bookstore, but also a living room with cozy chairs and ambient lighting strategically placed throughout the space. Reading nooks, coffee tables, and also worktables – recalling those found in a library rather than a bookstore – complete the experience. The set-up encouraged browsing, discovery, and relaxation. It invited people to stay longer, linger, and perhaps sit and read, while it also promoted discussion and meeting others since many of the reading spaces were set up for more than one person in order to encourage conversation and companionship. Each visitor was allowed to purchase one book, at a price that they themselves set, substituting the terms of a market economy with those of a gift economy. The money that the book sales generated was given to support Urbano's art education and social justice programs.

To begin the project, Helguera collected over 25,000 books in Mexico City. Each donated book bears the name of its donor on an *ex libris* plate inside its front cover, pointing to the social history retained within that book. The books were all donated in exchange for artworks created by Helguera. Several of the major donors were additionally acknowledged with a plaque and photograph at the entrance to the exhibition. The collections that were donated provide a portrait of each of the donors since a personal library or book collection suggests something about a person and their changing interests. The books reflected the individuals who donated them, but also provided a glimpse into the larger intellectual community of Mexico City where the books were read and collected. It also represented the larger Spanish speaking community's rich literary traditions and as such provided a cultural portrait of a larger community as well. *Librería Donceles* also highlighted the lack of books in the Spanish language available in Boston and

other cities, especially since there are no permanent Spanish language bookstores in the Boston area. Most contemporary bookstores only devote a few shelves to selections in Spanish even though the Spanish speaking population makes up eighteen percent of the country and is rapidly growing. The title of the exhibition further referenced a historic street, *Calle Donceles*, in Mexico City that is lined with used bookstores. After its initial creation, the installation traveled across the country and in each city it was shown – Miami, Phoenix, San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago, and Indianapolis – it was the only Spanish language bookstore available in that city. In short, as Helguera acknowledged, “*Librería Donceles* was a project that sought to respond to two important phenomena in the urban landscape of the U.S: the phasing out of the bookstore, and the invisibility of the Spanish language” (quoted in Roa, n.p.). Collectively, the 10,000 or so books on display at Urbano constituted an object network: if one took the time to analyze each object, it would provide connections to other books, ideas, individuals, authors, genres, literary styles, movements, and so on.

5.3 The Bookstore as a Temporal and Social Space

In addition to its role as a functioning, community-centered bookstore *Librería Donceles* served as a meeting place for the local community. It hosted a series of bilingual salon-like gatherings for conversations, musical performances, poetry and book readings, and art making workshops designed to encourage cultural understanding, tolerance, and social activism. According to Helguera the social function of his bookstore mimics that of a real bookstore:

Amidst the upheaval caused by many important social and economic events in the 21st century, the demise of the physical bookstore might be a small footnote. Yet it is important to think about the cause of these events. We live in a society that while everyday being more interconnected through social media is less invested in the physical experience of holding and reading a book. And yet it is widely acknowledged that bookstores serve as important gathering places for a community where meaningful interactions can take place. (Qtd. in N. Berger, n.p.)

Helguera here highlights the important role of a bookstore in a community as more than a retail establishment, and emphasizes its role as a social space, a space where community *happens*. Of course, the bookstore provides a physical space where books can be purchased or explored, but it also serves a venue that promotes social connectivity, where people can connect to other people in person and presumably share their appreciation of the literary world. It becomes a place where people come to have a relational experience rather than a mere transactional one, a relational experience which is a hallmark of socially engaged art.

In collaboration with the curatorial and educational staff at the Urbano, Helguera created a series of public programs that featured members of the surrounding community, many whom were previously unaffiliated with the institution. All the programming took place within the context of the bookstore itself, rather than in an adjacent space, dedicated event space, or out in the community at a host site. They collaborated with multiple, local organizations to co-create programming to take place in the bookstore. Each event was co-hosted by an individual community collaborator who brought their expertise and knowledge, but who also brought with them the specific segment of the community they usually serve when programming their site.

The collaborative approach to community programming that Urbano and Helguera put into action feels successful in that it included input from the communities it aimed to serve. Rather than using the model whereby a cultural organization curates public programming *for* a community, but without their input, Urbano was working alongside and in close partnership with their local community organizations. As such, Urbano served as a new and different platform for these community organizations to share their mission, ideas, and vision for their neighborhood from the grassroots level up.

While it may seem unnecessary, and perhaps even a bit tedious, to describe each of the events and the participating community partners, our thesis is that one significant layer of the work is the public program layer or the “temporal space.” One thing that emerges through the close descriptions of these programs is that the “temporal space” is closely related to the “social space” of the project as each informs the other. The events are designed by the community, produced with the community, and presented to the community. These detailed descriptions further reveal how the communal aspects of the work do not simply amplify, support, or augment Helguera’s work but rather are an integral part of what constitutes the networked art experience. Specific events that took place in the *Librería Donceles* included a celebration entitled *Noche de Homenaje a Julia de Burgos* (February 17, 2017), a night-time event where local poet Glaisma Perez Silva and guitarist Gian Carlo Buscaglia paid homage to Puerto Rico's illustrious poet Julia de Burgos (1914-1953). Burgos was an outspoken civil rights activist whose poems engage themes of feminism and social injustice. She worked as a teacher and journalist in both Cuba and New York and advocated for Porto Rico’s independence. The event was co-hosted by Luis Edgardo Cotto, Director of Egleston Main Streets, a local neighborhood improvement organization, and Center Without Walls. The Center is an initiative that presents artists and art

that challenge audiences to strive toward social change. Together, their aim is to bring these artists and works to resident communities of color, which are often ignored by the standard cultural offerings in most cities. The next event was *Noche de Nueva Canción* (February 22, 2017) featuring Puerto Rican singer-songwriter Fernandito Ferrer. Ferrer draws inspiration from the Nueva Trova musicians' post Cuban revolution in the late 1960's and 1970's whose songs were a cornerstone of Latin American protest music of that era. Nueva Trova artists combined the sounds of traditional folk music with new politically motivated lyrics that reflected the excitement of Castro's revolution. Ferrer brings the essence of this historically significant genre to the present moment, but with lyrics that respond to contemporary political situations. This event was also co-hosted by Center Without Walls and Luis Edgardo Cotto.

The following week, the bookstore hosted an artist talk and public reading featuring Chilean-American author and poet Marjorie Agosín (February 25, 2017) who is also known for her work as a human rights activist and literary critic. Her work is inspired by the theme of social justice, the pursuit of remembrance, and the memorialization of traumatic historical events both in the Americas and in Europe. The first week of March, Librería Donceles served as the location for a "book arts workshop" led by two local artists Sara Rivera and Denise Delgado. The artists set aside texts from the collection and led workshop participants through an artistic intervention with the books. Participants were encouraged to physically alter the books as a way to experiment with ideas and materiality. The end product of the workshop was a set of sculptural, altered artist books that became part of Librería Donceles collection and were again made available to the public. This event was co-hosted by JP Reads, a community based initiative designed to engage the Jamaica Plain neighborhood to join together in reading books, presenting author readings, workshops, and related events that celebrate the book. The theme of communal

creativity was then repeated in the *Resistioke!* a community sing-along with a live-band that took place within the bookstore as well. The event was a type of group karaoke with a twist, in which, the band was teaching the audience to sing pop tunes that respond to our politically divisive times. This event was co-hosted by ResistArts, a joint project of Jamaica Plain's Porchfest and Wee the People, who together presented a series of community building arts-based events in collaboration with several non-profit community groups serving and advocating for vulnerable populations within their neighborhood of Jamaica Plain. Through the power of arts programming, their mission is to build community across the divides of race, class, age, culture, and immigrant status. Additionally, a silk-screening as activism workshop was led by Shey Rivera, the artistic director of AS220, a non-profit community arts center located in downtown, Providence, Rhode Island, whose mission is to provide resources to artists of all levels and types (March 18, 2017). The center provides a vibrant blend of arts-related program spaces including galleries, performance venues, and public-access art studios.

Multiculturalism, bilingualism, and the immigrant experience were a distinct theme for several of the events. Award winning children's book illustrator and visual artist Raúl Gonzalez served as a visiting artist. Gonzalez developed a practice of painting, illustrating, and writing that is informed by his bi-cultural upbringing since he was raised between El Paso, Texas and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. During this artist talk, Gonzalez discussed how he became an artist and his process for creating characters for the books he co-creates and illustrates. At the end of March, Jamaica Plain resident Andrea Atkinson organized a "Bilingual Story Slam" that explored immigrant stories of work and labor. She and several other regional storytellers shared narratives detailing the immigrant experience, but also welcomed stories from exhibition visitors making the event participatory in nature. The event was co-hosted by One Square World, a community

empowerment organization that is actively working with the local population to address issues of gentrification in Egleston Square. The following month, on April 22nd, One Square World hosted a bilingual dinner and visioning session inside the bookstore that included a variety of representatives of the Egleston neighborhood. During this event, guests presented ideas for preserving diversity and increasing sustainability and justice in their and Urbano's joint community.

The space also served as a venue for community groups to hold events that explored questions of writing, text, and race. One of the final community events was *Pre-texts: Doris Sommer with Librería Donceles* that featured Harvard University Professor of African Studies, Dr. Sommer. Sommer also serves as the Director of Cultural Agents, a civic engagement initiative that explores arts and humanities within a community context. *Pre-texts* is an arts-based training program for teachers of literacy, critical thinking, and citizenship. Sommer used the books from the *Librería* collection to introduce and demonstrate her methodology. Lastly, there was an event hosted by GRUBstreet, a Boston-based independent writing center, who held a *Writers of Color Meeting* inside the *Librería*. One of the main impact areas of community programming is the way it highlights and brings to the forefront the stories, people, and rich diverse cultural contributors that exist locally and in the present moment. When considering all these initiatives, social interaction and creative participation are thus core to Helguera's practice. Of additional interest here are the historically significant cultural contributions that are brought to the fore through these various community engagements. These otherwise invisible narratives, such as the life of Julia Burgos or the rich Neuvo Truvo musical traditions, are brought to the present moment and exist side by side with the contemporary. This flattening of the temporal moment, historic and present, is also part of what make these projects part of a network.

The last component to discuss is the physical place, the venue that hosted the bookstore, in order to see how it is part of the network that governs these projects as a socially engaged artwork. Founded in 2009 by artist and curator Stella McGregor, Urbano organizes public art projects, exhibitions, and artist residencies to promote creative place making while advocating for social issues. It brings together professional artists, local youth, and community members to learn and experiment through place-based projects. Urbano also intentionally invites projects to its venue that blur boundaries between art and everyday life. A quotation on the Urbano website lists community as their art form and that they consider it “the canvas of our transformation” (Urbano, n.p.). As part of an earlier artist project *El Barrio*, Urbano defined itself as follows:

Urbano is located in Egleston Square – a historic Boston neighborhood spanning the border between Jamaica Plain and Roxbury. Its main artery is a primarily Spanish-speaking commercial district running along Washington Avenue and Columbus Street, composed mostly of small businesses including barbershops and beauty salons, bodegas, dry cleaners and tailors, dollar stores, and takeout restaurants. On either side of Washington are residential neighborhoods. Many absentee landlords have failed to maintain or repair their properties, creating blight in the area. Still, working immigrant families have made Egleston Square home over years and multiple generations. The neighborhood has a strong Dominican cultural identity and [it is] predominantly Latino, African American, and working-class residents who rent apartment housing.

The Jamaica Plain side of Egleston Square is in the process of rapid gentrification. In the last few years, these neighborhoods have experienced an

influx of new homeowners and landlords made up mostly of white, college-educated young families, hipsters and professionals. Market property values have risen precipitously. With some exceptions, the newer, more affluent residents also prefer to patronize businesses west of Washington Street and further into Jamaica Plain. Lower-income residents and small business owners face the prospect of rent increases and displacement.

Jamaica Plain has a long history of activism and community engagement. In fact, Latino residents recently obtained support from local city councilors to designate our area as an official Latin Quarter in recognition of the Latinos who have long called the area home. 40% of residents in our neighborhood speak Spanish, yet there is an ongoing cultural and economic struggle against displacement. (Urbano, n.p.)

What is striking here is that the neighborhood is described as in flux and extremely diverse, and that there is a current of malcontent in terms of the rapidly changing realities of gentrification that the neighborhood faces. There is no single solution in terms of representing this community; rather it requires a multi-pronged approach that is thoughtful and considerate. *Librería Donceles* with its emphasis on bringing people together around Spanish language cultures seems not only appropriate, but also urgent, necessary, and reflective of local current affairs.

At this point, it is necessary to return to our initial claim that *Librería Donceles* consists of four interconnected layers: material space (the bookstore), temporal space (event series), physical space (Urbano) and social space (community). We defined the material space in terms of the physical components that comprise the bookstore including the books, shelves, lighting

fixtures, and furniture; the temporal space of the work was addressed through a detailed description of the co-curated and co-presented public programming that took place inside the bookstore; the physical space through our analysis of Urbano as a venue and the bookstore as a platform for socially engaged art; and lastly, the social space or the community aspect of work is woven throughout each of the layers. The bookstore plays a role in the community that houses it as a gathering place and a site for knowledge and literature related events. The creative community programming allowed people to connect to one another and exposed organizations to new audiences. Urbano itself became a platform for creative engagement with youth and artists and, through their work with the larger local community. All these components formed a socially engaged artwork, a dynamic, relational form or network. However, as we will see, they do not constitute an isolated or autonomous network but rather connect to Helguera's installation on view at the MFA, for many of the community members, programming partners, and also the audiences for the two installations overlap.

5.4 An Object Network

Across town, at the Museum of Fine Art's expansive and imposing Beaux-Arts building, it takes considerable navigating to get from the main entrance of the museum on Huntington Avenue to the Wing of The Americas where, after a short elevator ride to the second floor, we find Gallery 231 where *Club Americano* was installed. The gallery is separated from the hallway with a set of tall and imposing glass doors, but the deep dark maroon walls of the gallery look inviting and beckon visitors in. Immediately to the left of the glass entrance was a traditional museum vitrine holding a number of three-dimensional decorative objects of various origins, materials and sizes. At the center of the gallery space, visitors were confronted with an imposing

nineteenth century mahogany dining table surrounded by eight high backed chairs. A large painting showing an elaborate dinner scene was installed in a prominent position directly behind the table. On the surface of the table were placed a series of table toppers that were the interpretive wall labels for the objects installed around the room. There were several paintings of varying sizes, framed historic photographs, and a number of framed graphic prints installed ‘salon style’ on the wall. Additional comfortable leather chairs and a couch lined the walls of the gallery, each with an end table holding additional table toppers with extended object labels.



Fig. 61. *Installation view. Pablo Helguera, Club Americano, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (2017).*

The installation was the result of a collection-mining project that began in 2016, when Helguera was invited by contemporary art curator Liz Munsell of the Museum of Fine Arts to

come to Boston as part of an artist residency with the intent to explore American identity through the lens of the MFA's collection of art from the Americas. In collaboration with several of the MFA's curators, Helguera conducted research on the origin, history, and functionality of a large number of objects, and a select number of those were chosen to be on view. In an interview with a local college blog, Helguera describes part of his process: "Looking at the vast and rich collection of the MFA, I was interested in objects that, while unique and special in and of themselves, would also be representative of historically significant aspects about the Americas: for instance, our colonial past (be it Spanish, Portuguese or British); the way in which race played a role in structuring colonial societies, and the legacy of that history in our present" (quoted in Shi, n.p.).

In a structure that will mimic that of the previous example of the Librería Donceles, I will first discuss the material space of the objects, then the two types of participatory programming: the "creative participation" where community members were invited to participate as part of the performances organized and structured by the artist, and secondly the "collaborative participation," where community members were invited to design their own programming and bring it to the MFA. I will then discuss the physical space and context of the Museum of Fine Arts, and end with a conclusion that reconnects these projects to the central thesis of the chapter concerning social practice art, here understood in terms of networks.

Each of the objects selected by Helguera speaks to and complicates our understanding of "American identity" in its own unique way. Their placement within the gallery and in relation to the other objects nearby or facing each other allows for unexpected connections to be made across time and geographic areas that normally would not be considered together. In an earlier

book, *What In The World: A Museum's Subjective Biography* (2010), Helguera observed the following regarding museum collection practices:

Most museums have a mission of educating through object-centered study, firm in the nineteenth-century belief that an object is a microcosm of a culture or an artwork a window to the world of an artist. What this focus often underplays is the fact that there are usually very subjective reasons – philosophical, personal, political – for the presence of an object or artwork at a particular museum, reasons why it was chosen by a particular person to represent a particular culture or art movement (or conversely, why certain objects or artworks are absent or not deemed important enough for inclusion). (3)

Although this statement was made in response to a collection-mining project in Philadelphia, it holds true when considering it in the context of *Club Americano*. The objects were gathered together in the form of an exhibition but as a result of the many interwoven and thematic connections between the objects that inform each other, the objects taken together presented a shared inquiry into what it means to be “an American.” Due to the relational nature of this project, all the objects connected to one another in myriad ways. Rather than describe the objects in the room chronologically or navigationally (from left to right or right to left) based on their location in the gallery, I have divided the discussion of the objects into two geographic categories – “Mexico: A Place of Origins” and “New England: Inventing America” – even though they are not installed this way in the gallery. The reason for these two rather large and encompassing categories is that they really are the two identities with which the artist himself is primarily concerned. While born and raised in Mexico, the artist is a long-term resident of the

United States and lives and works in New York. Rather than providing an overview of all the Americas by selecting objects across regions, Helguera made selections that fit within these two categories.

The historic objects generate associative and relational connections to the objects directly beside them as well as those installed in their general vicinity. Additionally, they also make connections across the room, across time, and across geographic origins to larger contextual themes. Although our examination will take us down divergent historical journeys – at times in great detail – it is precisely in their expansiveness and relational connectivity that these objects become a network, in which each object becomes a node and each theme is part of a cluster of nodes. In other words, many of the objects are connected to objects I present in adjacent themes. Although this may add a layer of complexity, it is emblematic of the way the objects resonate across the space of the gallery and across time and space of origin.

5.5 Mexico: A Place of Origins

A common misconception about the development of the Americas, both as a place and an identity, is that the continents were *discovered* by Christopher Columbus but also the Spanish Conquistadores, the Pilgrims, the Dutch traders, the French fur trappers, etc. It is important to remember through this discussion that North and South America were home to millions of native peoples who had lived on the continents for millennia. An extremely diverse world of tribes, languages, trade systems, infrastructures, cosmological understandings, ecological knowledge, and architecture was in place prior to European conquerors and the colonists' forceful take-over

of the continents. The exploration extends through multiple time periods and what will emerge is a complicated, composite of definitions of what it means for someone to be “American.”



Fig. 62. Jost (Jodocus) Hondius, *Map of North and South America* (late 16th–early 17th century).

Club Americano includes several historic maps that show both North and South America at various states of understanding by European explorers. At the time of their creation, the maps were presumed to represent factual information rather than fictional accounts, even if maps betray and reveal the cultural context of their maker. They are as much a reflection of a value system as they are ‘facts’ representing a real place. They are symbolic representations as much as geographic representations. They are human creations and as such are biased interpretations based on a set of limited data. Maps tell stories. Maps have a purpose. They are created to advance the interests of the patron who commissioned the map to be made. The maps provide a

perspective of the world, not just of the area they are seeking to represent in visual form, but rather also the cultural norms of their moment in time and the cultural context in which the maps were produced. One fairly large engraving depicts a map of the Americas created by a Flemish cartographer Joost de Hondt (in Latin Jodocus 'Jost' Hondius) of the early seventeenth century while located in Amsterdam (fig. 62.). Hondt established himself as a geographic expert and rose to fame by purchasing all the plates of the Gerard Mercator's *Atlas* and printing and publishing the series with thirty-six additional maps, including some he himself produced. The Mercator & Hondius *Atlas* was released in over fifty editions and produced in many European languages, thus establishing de Hondt's reputation. At the time, Flemish maps were sought after for their accuracy and wealth of information and were crucial instruments in supporting global explorations. The Dutch East India Company was sending ships around the world to trade and bring back spices and metals. Dutch, French and English explorers were searching for a Northeast or Northwest Passage as a quicker way to get to The Indies. Hondt's maps were instrumental in Henry Hudson's explorations of New York. Using explorer's travel journals and eyewitness accounts, *The Map of the Americas* shows both North and South America, and extends to New Guinea in the West and North Western Europe in the upper right corner. In addition to geographical details, de Hondt also included bits of anthropological information that depict scenes of native peoples in a variety of clothing, activities, and in traditional boats, as well as European ships and sea creatures, both real and imagined. The decorative illustration in the lower left corner shows "Americanos in Brasilia" native peoples in Brazil brewing beer.

On the west wall, there was a grouping of two-dimensional objects that addressed the development and understanding of Helguera's Mexican heritage as well as the developments of the larger context of Mexican cultural identity within the Americas. The grainy image on the top

right, *Collosal Head at the Base of a Pyramid in Izamal, Mexico* (1860), (fig. 63) was by French archeologist and photographer Claude-Joseph Désiré Charnay. Charnay explored Mexico and Central America in the mid nineteenth century on behalf of the French government and used photography to document his “discoveries” of native cultural sites and objects. As part of his travels, he visited Mexico in the 1860 and the 1880s and returned several times to the sacred pyramids of Yucatan. Charnay published a set of forty-seven images in a book entitled *Cite et Ruines Americaines*. As Evans suggests: “Although Stephens and Catherwood had produced daguerreotype images of the ruins on their 1841 expedition, Charnay’s 1863 work represented the first widely available photographic images of the ancient Mesoamerican monuments” (105). The *Collosal Head* photograph shows an imposed head carved in the side of a stone temple wall at Izamal, which no longer exists. When American explorer John Lloyd Stephens visited the same site in the early 1840s, his artist companion Frederick Catherwood also captured this iconic work of art. It was still there when Charnay arrived seventeen years later in 1860, but was gone by the time of his later voyage in the 1880s.



Fig. 63. Left: Claude-Joseph Désiré Charnay, *Collosal Head at the Base of a Pyramid in Izamal, Mexico* (1860).

Fig. 64. Right: Claude-Joseph Désiré Charnay, *Mitla, Palenque, Izamal, Chitzen – Itza, Uxmal* (1862)

Stephens was an American explorer from New Jersey who is credited with the “rediscovery” of the Mayan Civilization. He was assigned as a Special Ambassador to travel to Central America by President Martin van Buren in 1839. He traveled with architect and graphic artist Frederick Catherwood and they encountered several important pre-Columbian sites of Mayan culture that they documented through drawings and lithographs illustrating many of their artistic and intellectual achievements. He published his findings in a popular book, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán*, originally published in 1841. American art historian Tripp Evans describes the relationship between Stephens and Charnay as follows: “Beginning in the 1860s ... Stephen’s perception of a unified, national antiquity was adopted and transformed by Desire Charnay, a French explorer working under American patronage. Charnay’s work was particularly important in that he both recast the ethnic history of ancient Mesoamerica and harnessed powerful new photographic and casting technologies to record the ruins he investigated” (T. Evans 103). According to Evans: “Charnay favored the more continentally inclusive adjective ‘American’ over Mexican” (ibid.), a choice that reflected Stephens taxonomy rather than that of Baradere, Charnay’s countryman and Stephens’ predecessor. Charnay’s frequent usage of the modifier “American” mirrored Stephen’s reliance upon this term’s dual national and geographical significance, foretelling Charnay’s later insistence on Pan-American unity. By including the old maps and also two prints showing traditional Mexican culture, Helguera brings to our attention the existence of ancient sophisticated cultures that, although not yet fully “discovered” or known by the Dutch mapmaker, were thriving prior to the arrival of European colonists.



Fig. 65. Maria Jacoba de la Torre, *Sampler* (early 19th Century).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, embroidery was used as an educational tool for young women and girls to learn patience, and occupy their time in a calm and domestic setting. As a visual expression of cultural identity, samplers were used to showcase and teach different techniques and styles for patterns and stitches. At the center of the de la Torre's *Sampler* (fig. 65) we see a man dressed in a white pantsuit holding a falcon on his arm, a status symbol signifying nobility and/or wealth, as it was an aristocratic sport. Symbolically, it indicates control or strength, but can also be read as a symbol for love. The woman is also dressed in her fineries and she is holding a single stemmed flower with two large blossoms, perhaps a lily. Flowers in scenes like this are seen to represent the woman's virginity, so perhaps this is a sampler indicating a betrothal. The making of samplers in and of itself was considered an aristocratic or upper-class activity. Both British and Spanish pattern books were used as source imagery for the

Mexican embroideries in this style. Cora Ginsburg's catalogue entry in the *Costume, Textiles, Needlework* discusses the educational purpose of the sampler in Mexican culture as follows: "As in Europe, the creation of samplers by young girls of genteel families was an important component of their education; in addition to learning a range of stitches that could be used for both decorative and practical sewing purposes, girls were also expected to acquire values associated with femininity including patience, obedience, and diligence" (31). She also reveals that, although most surviving Mexican samplers date to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the motifs were established in the sixteenth century. Pattern books – one of the primary means of circulating designs for samplers in Europe – were less available in Mexico where needlework "served to both record and disseminate motifs and stitches" (ibid.). It also disseminated those sixteenth century aristocratic values of a docile femininity. It is one of the few objects in the exhibition that is made by a female artist and explores a uniquely female perspective of someone living in colonial Mexico. Although several of the objects address race and class, few objects address gender, an important factor in identity formation.

One small, but striking painting by Ignacio de Castro shown in Gallery 231 is *Casata de Nueva Espana*, which translates as "Castes of New Spain." The painting is one of a set of three on display that are framed together in a single frame and depicts an indigenous woman dressed in fine clothing who with her left hand is holding a boy child dressed in colonial ruling class. They are following behind a Caucasian man who is wearing a white wig and white costume, who is leading the way with his index finger, pointing to a place beyond the picture frame. The scene is set against a shallow somewhat non-descript landscape showing a brick wall and a field with a large tree. At the bottom of the scene there is an insert with the text: "*Castas de Nueva Espana. 1. De Espanol e Yndia nace Mestizo,*" which translates as: "Castes of New Spain. 1. From

Spaniard and Indian, a Mestizo is born.” Mestizo literally means, “mixed” (here used to indicate of mixed race) specifically indicating a lineage of half Spanish and half indigenous American, usually the male being Spanish and the female indigenous. The Mexico’s *mestizos* is a term used to identify a range of individuals and a very complex history and reframing of the term at various times over the past five hundred years. It is a common term used as part of a pervasive, hierarchical system of race classification created by Spanish elites during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Spanish colonies as a solution to socially rank mixed race people. Anthropologist Guillermo Bonfil Batalla in *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* claims that, contrary to popular opinion, Mexico is not a predominantly mestizo country but rather should be regarded as a country deeply steeped in its millennia-old Mesoamerican heritage, as the majority of the population is of indigenous descent and continues to embody its ancient cultural roots in the everyday.



Fig 66. Ignacio de Castro, *Casata de Nueva España* (castes of New Spain) (1775).

A tension still exists between the indigenous populations of Mesoamerican descent and those who represent western civilization and this presents a dilemma that continues to trouble Mexico today (Batalla, xv). Batalla's *Mexico Profundo* describes that part of Mexican culture that has been shaped by and continues to be influenced by Mesoamerica traditions as seen in food cultivation, the many indigenous languages spoken, and the general genetic makeup of many Mexican citizens. According to Batalla, the racial differences are a basic historical fact that is reflective of five hundred years of reality: "A colonial society was established whose nature made it necessary to distinguish subject populations from those who were dominant" (16). He continues: "The colonial order was based ideologically on affirmation of the superiority of the dominant society over those colonized, in all terms of comparison, including racial ones" (17). This racial difference needed to be taught to the conquered native populations, as well as to those who arrived from Europe where the co-mingling of native populations with the dominant "culturally superior" social group was perceived as taboo. In reality, with few women coming across with the conquering armies, many of the soldiers and officers ended up taking on native wives and having mixed race children.

The Casta paintings were a new, secular art form primarily produced in eighteenth-century Mexico that 'educated' people on societal standing based on race (Indian, African, Spanish) and the assigned class. Ilona Katzew (a curator of Latin American art who has published several texts on the Casta paintings and who organized an exhibition of these works at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) determined that these paintings were destined for European market: "*casta* paintings reveal the elite's attempt to represent and categorize the process of race mixing in Mexico" (*Inventing* 3). We might imagine that these paintings were primarily useful for those individuals of Spanish descent who were living in New Spain,

especially with many more continuously arriving from their country of origin. It was these ‘immigrants’ and their potential marital (or other) relations that posed a risk of diluting the ‘pure bloodline’ of the Spanish. Batalla effectively argues that “this separation of colonial society in both biological and cultural terms, continued to be a burning problem throughout the sixteenth century, and even persists today” (ibid. 16). He further denotes that it was precisely this strict segregation of cultures that has allowed for both the continuation and resurgence of the indigenous genetic traits and cultural traditions to the present day.

Most *Casta* paintings came as set of sixteen scenes or categories, with each image showing a different combination in terms of races mixing and the resultant offspring and their categorization and position in relation to the other castes. According to Katzew: “As family groups become more mixed their social status diminishes” (*Casta* 3). She continues: “viewed within the framework of creole pride, these early works are careful descriptions of Mexican self-identification that distinguishes the New World from the old” (ibid. 7). Racial labels always appear in or underneath the caste paintings to clearly identify and describe the resultant racial identity and corresponding nomenclature. The carefully crafted visual clues in each image further illustrate the socio-economic circumstances – or the class – in which the person of this caste belongs and what those circumstances look like. Dramatic changes occur when considering the various castes with items such as food, clothing, and housing as they depict the Caucasian individuals clearly living a life of opulence, with the darkest skinned people living in poverty.

Katzew states that the very creation of the *Casta* paintings should be seen as a reflection of fear by the dominant class of losing their power: “Anxiety over this loss of control permeated much of Mexico’s reality during the colonial period and may account in part for the emergence in that country of the *Casta* painting” (*Casta* 39). I agree with Katzew and her assessment that

motivation for their creation is most likely based on fear, but would add that a desire to maintain power and control was also at play. However, Katzew also describes these works in a more problematic fashion by characterizing them in problematic terms: “Casta painting is a rich and nuanced pictorial genre that demonstrates the great artistic skill obtained by colonial artists, as well as a fascination with the genealogy of humankind. The works are extraordinary visual documents of a social phenomenon that shaped life in the Americas” (ibid. 15). Her statement grossly ignores the repugnant racist purpose of these paintings, and how, rather than just a “rich and nuanced pictorial genre,” these works were designed and used to propagate a colonial world view where people were ranked and assigned social status based on the color of their skin and cultural origin. By focusing on the “great artistic skill attained by colonial artists” and describing their depicting of race divisions as a “fascination with the genealogy of humankind,” Katzew is glossing over their intended purpose as examples of propaganda and enforcers of colonial power. By contrast, Helguera succinctly calls the *pinturas de castas*, “a bureaucratic form of racial discrimination to assign a socioeconomic status to an individual during the colony” (qtd. in Shi, n.p.). Although Batalla does not specifically address the practice of *Casta paintings*, he also strongly denounces the rigid caste divisions as a systemic racist ideology used by the Spanish for purposes of discrimination and oppression of the native peoples of Mesoamerica and the African slave populations. Sadly, the divisions outlined in these eighteenth century ‘genre’ paintings continue to be of influence in Mexican culture today, as families with colonial wealth and power at that time passed on their assets to future generations and elitist class divisions still persists.



Fig. 67. Left: Leopold Mendez, *Deportation to Death* (deportacion a la muerte) (1942).

Fig. 68. Right: José Clemente Orozco, *The Masses* (1935).

On the west wall of the gallery, there is a grouping of five framed images installed salon style. On the upper left, we find two black and white works on paper, a linocut by Leopold Mendez, and a lithograph by José Clemente Orozco directly below the Mendez. The works are representative of a dramatic change in Mexican identity as a result of the Mexican Revolution, a process of radical cultural and political reform that took place from 1910-1940. In 1943, the Mexican art collective Taller de Gráfica Popular (TGP), the People's Graphic Workshop, published an early and shocking book, *The Black Book of Nazi Terror in Europe* that protested the rise of fascism around the world. Leopold Mendez's dramatically lucid linocut, *Deportation to Death* (deportacion a la muerte) from 1942 was included in the publication. The image shows the mass deportation of Jewish peoples being moved from trucks onto train wagons heading to death camps. The systematic extermination of the Jewish people was decided by the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 and had already started by then. Mendez is clearly referring to the death camps here, not to the mass executions perpetrated by the Einsatzgruppen following the

conquest of Poland and the Soviet Union. He clearly knew that by this stage no one was spare. As Diane Miliotes points out, “*Deportación a la Muerte* is one of the earliest representations of the Holocaust, perhaps the first, to be published” (qtd. in Dagen, “Death Train” n.p.). TGP’s *The Black Book of Nazi Terror in Europe* showcased the horrors of the Nazi regimes through graphic prints while World War II was fully raging. The TGP was founded during the Spanish Civil War, when Mexico supported the Republican cause. According to Philippe Dagen: “Many Mexican or émigré artists took part in the studio’s activities. Their aim was to use lino cutting, a cheap art form well suited to large-scale publication, to broadcast an explicit, committed political message, close to the line of the Communist party and other anti-Fascist groups” (“Death Train” n.p.).

The lithographic image installed below the Mendez is *The Masses* (1935) by Jose Clemente Orozco, who was known as one of “The Three Greats” (the other two “greats” were the celebrated Mexican muralists Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros). While growing up in Mexico City, Helguera lived right next to Siqueiros’ biggest mural in Mexico, an experience that undoubtedly had an effect on him. An avid printmaker, Orozco was known for his expressive and intensely emotional style. The artist had a background in cartoon illustrations and political cartoons for newspapers. Printmaking was the preferred medium for revolutionaries as it allowed for widespread distribution of images; whereas a painting could only reach people locally, a print could travel across the globe to reach international audiences. Although conceived as a print, *The Masses* later served as the basis for a black-and-white mural in the public Gabiño Ortíz Library in Jiquilpan, Mexico. According Deborah Wye: “Orozco was influenced primarily by native sources: the prints of José Guadalupe Posada; the expressive symbolism of his teachers in Mexico City; his work for the local press; and the horrors of the

Mexican Revolution of 1910” (125). Orozco openly criticized both the Mexican Revolution and the post-Revolution government.

Lastly, I’d like to introduce a work that, although it falls outside of the scope of *Club Americano*, as an exhibition, is useful in grounding Helguera’s approach to the endless transformations of history and identity. In 2012, Helguera created and performed *quodlibet* (*Bellas Artes*), a performance piece that examines the history of the Palacio de Bellas Artes (a premier exhibition and performing art center established in 1934) as revealed through extensive research of its archives. The term *quodlibet* refers to a musical composition that takes from with various melodies. In describing the piece, Helguera stated that “the construction of a nation’s cultural identity is dependent of physical stages where to enact it, and this process, always complex and prone to accidents, is made as much through canonization of artists and works as through misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and omissions, thus building a selective history that, before we know it, becomes official” (qtd. in *Universes in Universe Magazine*, n.p.). The article further describes *Quodlibet* as “an exercise in composition, mixing elements from official and personal histories, as an interpretive project that uses this building not only as a container, but also as performer of its own history” (ibid.). Artists and the objects they create are shaped by the culture that produces them and reveal the values or counter values of a particular moment in time. As such they provide portals into other times and over places, yet through the context of a work of art such as *Club Americano* they can be brought together to form a new, different, or expanded understanding of one’s own identity, whether in the case of the artist or the identities of those who responded to the objects on view from their particular cultural perspective. Even the “nominal participant” in reflecting upon the objects and their histories and interconnections might reconsider either their own identity or those of others.

5.6 New England: Inventing America



Fig. 69. Paul Revere, *The Sons of Liberty Bowl* (1867).

North American colonial identity is a complex system of shifting roles and changing identities, and like the destruction of Mayan and Aztec cultures, the indigenous populations in North America were decimated by diseases, victims of displacement and land dispossession, and suffered many wars and violent attacks. Those who managed to survive were forced to move westwards, pushed out in front of the waves of European settlers. The term ‘settlers’ is a euphemism used to describe the violent invasion of Dutch, British, Belgian, and French opportunists who came and claimed land that was not theirs to sell, take, or purchase. Despite the centuries long process of genocide, systemic assimilation, and discrimination, there are over five hundred tribes of Native Americans existing today, with five million people identifying as Native American in the 2010 census. Unfortunately, there are no objects in the *Club Americano* that

address the original inhabitants of North America. Instead the exploration of American identity within the Northern hemisphere begins with the New England colonies as represented by the *Sons of Liberty Bowl* of the American Revolution.

In 1606, British King James issued two charters for the colonial development of the Eastern American seaboard, the Virginia Company of London and the Virginia Company of Plymouth, with the purpose to claim land for England, set up trade, and return profits for the King. The northern part of the new territory was named New England and reached from the northern most part of Maine (where it bordered on New France) to Cape Cod in the south. It was flanked on the west by New Belgium and The New Netherlands. In 1620, the Plymouth Colony (Plymouth, MA) was established by the first colonizers to arrive on the shore of what is now known as the Cape Cod area of Massachusetts. The famous Mayflower ship carried about a hundred individuals, who identified as puritans, who were escaping persecution in their native England. They arrived as tradesmen, farmers, and fishermen rather than a conquering army, but their unsolicited presence and religious zeal quickly displaced the native tribes that had occupied the region for thousands of years. A few years later, in 1629, four hundred people settled in Massachusetts Bay, a neighboring colony. Its capital city, Boston, was established in 1630. Boston's role in the history and formation of the United States of America is well known and will only be discussed in as much as it pertains to the objects on view as part of *Club Americano*. What is significant for the purposes of this chapter is that Boston was the site of the American Revolution, after which the thirteen colonies declared their independence from British rule. Boston's historic role in the establishment of the United States of America and thus the establishment of a national American identity provides a significant context for *Club Americano*.

In the large antique display cabinet to the left of the exhibition's entrance, there sits a sizable shallow silver bowl with elaborate inscriptions. It is a replica of the well-known engraved punch bowl created by Boston-based silversmith Paul Revere: *The Sons of Liberty Bowl*. It was originally commissioned in 1767 by a group of fifteen men belonging to the Sons of Liberty, a secret political organization, to commemorate the actions of "the illustrious Ninety-Two" a group of members of the Massachusetts Bay House of Representatives "who voted in spite of peremptory orders from England, not to rescind the circular letter which they had sent to the assemblies of the other colonies and in which they urged united action against repressive measures of the Crown" (*The Metropolitan Museum* 213). They were protesting the Townshend Acts (1767), which taxed tea, paper, glass, and other commodities imported from England. According to the MFA website: "This act of civil disobedience by the 'Glorious Ninety-Two' was a major step leading to the American Revolution. Jonathan Fairbanks mentions that Revere also created a much lesser known commemorative printed piece for the seventeen house representatives who did cooperate with the governor's demands, a print entitled *A Warm Place – Hell* that "shows a devil using a pitchfork to drive seventeen men into the mouth of Hell, represented as the yawning, fiery jaws of a monster. Above flies a demon crying 'push on Tim,' referring to Timothy Ruggles, one of the active Loyalists" (Fairbanks 137).

The names of the fifteen original owners or commissioners of the Bowl are inscribed along the bowl's edge, as are references to the Englishman John Wilkes, whose writing in defense of liberty inspired American patriots. The famous motto of the sons of liberty was "no taxation without representation." According to Fairbanks: "The names that appear on the rim of the bowl suggest that the movement was pluralistic – a genuine people's movement. There were modest property owners – small merchants, tradesmen, tavern keepers, a mariner, a distiller, and

a woodcarver – many of whom had their lives and work tied closely to wharves, docks, and the marketplace” (n.p.). Revere himself was a craftsman rather than a wealthy patron, nor did he enjoy the gentlemen status of some of his painter friends such as John Singleton Copley, whose 1768 portrait of Revere is arguably better known than Revere’s bowl. Regardless, in the context of *Club Americano*, *The Sons of Liberty Bowl* is a significant symbolic selection in terms of what it means to be an “American.” American in this context provides a definition that falls in line with the historical narrative of the American Revolution, the subsequent independence from the British Empire, and the formation of the United States of America as a nation. In choosing to include this bowl in the exhibition, Helguera reminds the viewer of the significance of the city of Boston in the creation of the country and thus the origin story of the formation of a national American identity. Helguera’s inclusion of this famous bowl that is a symbol of nationalist pride draws our attention to one of the most well-known stories that defines the American spirit and of the revolution that helped shape American national identity.



Fig. 70. Right: *A Perspective View of the City of Naples* (1795).



Fig. 71. Left: Samuel McIntire, *Perspective Machine* (1795).

Several additional objects illustrate a similar nostalgic looking back at either European values and cultural traditions or an idealized colonial past. Americans had a complex relationship with the “motherland” which most immigrants left for a distinct reason, yet many clung to the values and traditions, as those were important vestiges of identity and family lineage. Even to Americans born in the United States, there was a certain reverence for the European culture that one wished to import and sustain primarily in an effort to make America a ‘civilized’ country. One such object is an eighteenth century “perspective machine” made of pine with a glass lens in the form of an obelisk. It hails from Salem, MA. The medallion and urn on top of the machine are attributed to Samuel McIntire, a Salem based architect and carver who most likely also created the box itself. Also known as an optical box or peepshow, it was used to show

perspective views of cityscapes or exotic landscapes and its intended function was to entertain. Wendy Bellion, a scholar of American visual and material culture, describes the phenomenon as one where the genteel population could, “from the comfort of one’s own parlor [...] transport herself into urban squares and manicured parks, imaginatively joining other ladies and gentlemen in polite conversation and promenades” (51). She also describes the specific and unusual shape of the obelisk serving as a perspective box: “In other early national cities, gentlemen and amateur scientists gathered around optical lenses embedded within tambour desks and neoclassical obelisks. These unlikely, if exquisite, objects recalled the origins of the optical box as a device constructed for use by learned societies and aristocratic collectors during the mid-seventeenth century” (Bellion 51). It is interesting to note that as technology progressed, the optical box’s place in the parlor was replaced with the Zogrscope – consisting of a lens and mirror on a wooden stand – and the optical boxes became available to the general public and were shown at markets and street fairs where people paid a small sum to ‘take a look.’ What was once perceived as an enlightened activity by an educated audience, became seen as “vulgar amusement” once it became enjoyed by the masses, and spectators were considered “victims of artifice and self-deception” rather than “sophisticated and self-possessed” (Bellion 52).

The next object I wish to discuss in the context of the material space of the *Club Americano* is John Sargent’s *Dinner Party* (1821) whose composition is centered on a large dining room table; a positioning that echoes the real dining table directly in front of it. Sargent’s table is set with fancy glassware, fruits, and nuts and is host to eighteen, white male guests with two servants in attendance. The scene is partially repeated in the large-scale mirror at the head of the table adding to the imposing feel of the overall scene; it is also a clever way of showing the face of the man at the foot of the table, which is otherwise obscured. The paintings’ selection is

particularly interesting and significant in that it depicts the type of upper class social scene or club that Club Americano means to critique. According to Janet Comey et al. in *American Painting: MFA Highlights*, the image might represent a gathering of a particular group: “the Wednesday Evening Club, which met weekly for dinner and discussion at members’ houses. The club, which survives today, in Sargent’s time, consisted of four clergymen, four doctors, four lawyers, and, as is noted in a nineteenth century history of the group, four ‘merchants, manufacturers or gentlemen of literature and leisure.’ Guests were sometimes included at the dinners, which would explain why there are more than sixteen in attendance here” (101).



Fig. 72. Henry Sargent, *The Dinner Party* (1821).

The group of dining gentlemen is surrounded by imposing portrait and landscape paintings and fashionable decorative pieces such as the glass bottles and silver pitcher on the elegant serpentine sideboard by the door in the lower right-hand corner of the painting. The scene in Sargent's painting is set in a fashionable Boston row house designed by architect Bulfinch known as 10 Franklin Place. It was the painter's home. It is interesting to note that although Sargent was the host, he is not listed as a club member in the publication created in conjunction with The Centennial Celebration of the Wednesday Evening Club in 1887. A few years later, Sargent also painted a companion piece entitled *The Tea Party* (1824) showcasing the interior of the adjacent parlor room while it was hosting an elaborate tea party with men and women dressed in their finest attire. The dinner party, the company depicted, and the fanciful location of the event, all are symbolic of the lifestyle of the wealthy upper middle class in Boston at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The scene in the painting is echoed in the gallery as the visitors are also surrounded by large paintings and decorative objects that are staged within an opulent setting. By including the painting, Helguera is attempting to make the museum visitor feel like they too can have access to opulence and be "a part of the club." In many ways, the people who regularly visit the museum are most likely of a certain higher income classes despite extended outreach efforts to bring in public school children and members of the community at large.

As previously noted, upon entering the gallery immediately to one's left, there stands an imposing antique vitrine with a number of bowls and vases of various origins and size. One piece of rustic stoneware stands out with its organic dripping glaze and flowery handwritten inscription. An enslaved African American master potter Dave Drake also known as Dave the Potter created it. Drake is believed to have created over forty thousand pots in his lifetime, most

of them while he was enslaved. He lived and worked in the Edgefield Pottery district in South Carolina in the nineteenth century (1800-1870). Edgefield County was known for its rich and abundant clays, which led to the development of a large-scale pottery center with an active production from the late eighteenth century until 1900. Today it has become a tourist attraction as a result of a revival of the pottery traditions through the hands of local artisans. The pot on view in the Club Americano was originally used as a food storage jar. One unusual element to Drake's pots was that many were inscribed with a bit of text – usually rhymed couplets – near the rim of the pot. All were dated and many were signed with his name “Dave” and usually also included his owner's initials.

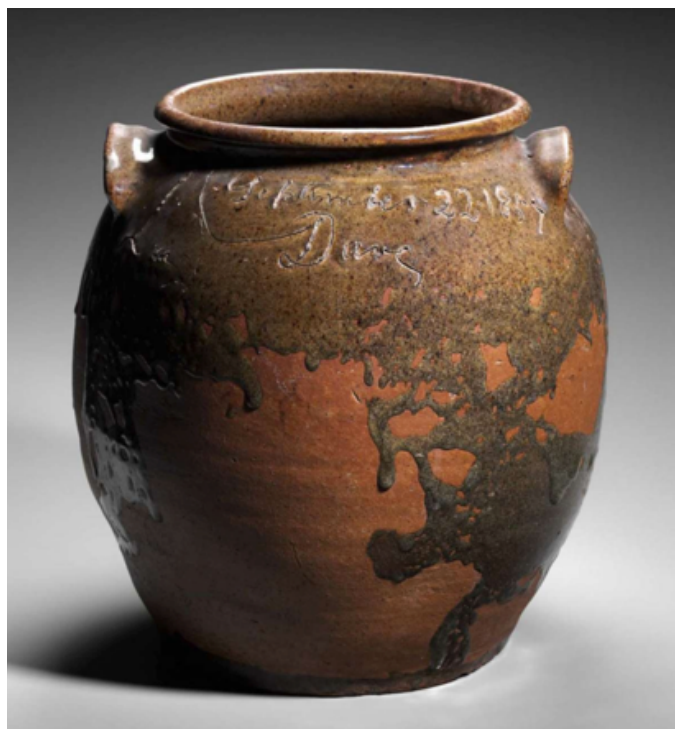


Fig. 73. Dave Drake (or Dave the Potter), *Jar* (1857).

This particular pot is signed “Dave” on each side and dated “Aug. 22, 1857,” a day right in the middle of Dave’s career. Its inscription states: “I made this Jar for Cash – though it’s called lucre trash.” Dave also added the initials “Lm” for his owner at the time, Lewis Miles. In addition to his reputation as a master potter, Dave built a secondary reputation as a poet, and the pots that include poetry are the most sought after. Considering it was culturally frowned upon for slaves to read and write and to be taught literacy, in fact it became illegal to do so in 1834, the fact that these pots include writing by a known slave is remarkable. Dave initially belonged to a man named Abner Landrum, the founder of the Pottersville Stoneware Manufactory. Landrum published a newspaper, the South Carolina Republican, later called *The Hive*. According to African-American scholar John Vlach: “Dave was taught to read and write by Landrum, perhaps as an example of his scientific attitude” and “filled the post of typesetter for *The Hive* until 1831 (77). Another scholar, John Burrison, describes Dave as “country born” (that is born in the United States rather than Africa). He further builds the connection to Landrum through Harvey Drake, Landrum’s nephew and partner in the Pottersville Stoneware Manufactory. According to Burrison, “Drake subscribed to the liberal Christian view that it was his duty to teach his servants to read the word of God, and it’s likely that he was the one who taught literacy to Dave, who furthered that gift while helping at Abner Landrum’s newspaper, *The Edgefield Hive*” (Burrison n.p.). Upon emancipation in 1870, Dave chose his first owner’s name, Drake, as his surname, which was common practice for newly freed slaves. Dave’s life and work speak to a shared but hidden cultural experience within American cultural identity: slavery and the economic power of slave labor, the denial of racial exploitation, and the invisibility of many of the cultural contributions to American material culture and craft culture in particular. Helguera’s inclusion of this pot is a powerful gesture towards changing the racist narratives that comprise American

culture and what it means to be an “American” and who decides. This object reveals an ugly part of American culture that continues to influence discourse and cause societal problems today with the renewed rise of racism and the continued discriminatory treatment of people of color as second-class citizens.



Fig. 74. Wallace Nutting, *A Peep at The Hills* (1907).

In showcasing *A Peep at The Hills*, a colored photograph by New England based photographer and furniture salesman Wallace Nutting, Helguera includes a drastically different

type of commentary on Colonial American identity. The image shows a gently winding country road with pink-blossomed apple trees at the peak of their bloom, while soft sunlight breaks through the branches onto the dirt path. Although a photographic print, it is hand-colored with soft tonal greens and greys that complement the bright pops of the pink blossoms that filter the light. The image overall comes across as a romantic lithograph or, when looking at it at a glance, a painting. Nutting was best known for his photographs that represented idealized images of “olde” colonial America long after the colonial era had past. In addition to pastoral landscape scenes, his extensive repertoire included interior domestic scenes showing women in colonial dress sitting near a hearth engaged with a domestic activity such as knitting, or posing in front of colonial homes he had purchased to serve as backdrops for this lucrative images series.

Nutting also documented colonial architecture, furniture, décor details, and decorative items as part of colonial interiors. In 1904, he founded the Wallace Nutting Art Prints Studio in New York City. Shortly thereafter, he moved his enterprise to Southbury, Connecticut and by 1912 he relocated it again to Framingham, MA where he employed up to two hundred colorists at one time. Once there, he expanded his business to include the manufacturing of ‘colonial’ furniture and decorative items for the home, which were primarily copies of authentic colonial furniture he had collected himself. Nutting was part of the colonial revival movement at the turn of the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries, and his images helped define a popular, collective image of “olde America.” According to Thomas Denenberg, Director of the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, Nutting played a major role in defining an American colonial identity for middle class Americans. He writes: “Wallace Nutting’s images, objects, and texts – from moralizing platinum prints to 17th-century furniture – fed upon one another to create a seamless narrative of colonial forms that made a virtue of the past for the modern era. In this way, Nutting employed

the fantasy of Old America to sell an idealized notion of American history to a nation fervently embracing the culture of consumption as an antidote to the worries of modern life.” He concludes: “Not only did Nutting provide a ‘natural, tasteful’ picture at little expense, he offered a set of organizing myths for consumers in Connecticut and throughout the United States” (“Past Perfect” n.p.). The photographic images and the reproduction furniture provided the ultimate, affordable, and decorative collectables for the middle class and represent a larger cultural nostalgic sentiment for an imagined, idealized colonial past. Nostalgia for an imagined, better past is a cultural phenomenon that is still active today, and although this image does not directly refer to the current political climate in the United States, its presence does foreground the historic nature of a constructed nostalgia for an idealized past.

It should be apparent that, throughout this brief description of the various objects, many of the objects are not only connected to one another; a number of themes constellate around the objects as well, including questions of national identity, personal history, grand narratives, imagined pasts, oppressive systems of power, and nostalgia. It is precisely these types of connections to history situated in the context of our present moment that the objects stage. Each object serves as a portal through which to explore a trail of information, leading to the connections and the interconnectedness of the selected objects across space, time, geographic, and cultural locations. Each historic object, once examined, reveals an ever-expanding world of knowledge connecting the past to the present.

5.7 Creative Participation

As part of organizing the Club Americano exhibition, Helguera collaborated with MFA curators from several different departments to curate a series of three performing art gatherings,

each with a different theme, entitled respectively: “What Is a Club?” “Worldly and Otherworldly Perspectives,” and “Inventing América.” The events took place on three Friday evenings at 6:30pm, spread one month apart in April, May, and June of 2017 and were held in the Gallery 231 space. With Helguera as the host, each evening featured guest speakers and performers, including local academics, musicians, artists, youth, and activists, who addressed, analyzed, and contextualized several of the exhibition’s objects’ histories from their personal point of view. In the exhibition’s press release, “Club Americano at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,” curator Liz Munsell addressed the series’ intent as follows: “Through the performance series, *Club Americano* invites people from very different walks of life to take a seat at the same table” (qtd. in “Club Americano” n.p.). It further states: “The performances are inspired by the tradition of the ‘after-dinner speech,’ a longstanding practice of social clubs that can be traced back to the 19th century” (ibid.) The taking of seats at the table is partially a literal action, as the center of The Club is occupied by the large dining table and attendees are invited to sit at the table, at the same time as it recalls and subverts the scene in Sargent’s *The Dinner Party*. Helguera discussed his motivation behind the events in an interview with a local reporter: “In a moment where the politics of divisiveness have had such presence in the public discourse, I believe it is important to point out how art and culture are not subject to borders. *Club Americano* is meant to be a place where all sorts of borders, be they geographical or socioeconomic, are eliminated” (ibid.). No doubt it is questionable if the project in fact eliminates borders as much as it reveals them and makes them more apparent. But in the context of this chapter, it is not only of interest to introduce these performances and events but to demonstrate that they are fully part of the networked artwork.



Fig. 75. Installation View. Yvette Modestin, *What Is a Club?* (2017).

The first evening of public performance entitled “What Is a Club?” was held on Friday, April 21, 2017. The first of three events, this event’s description on the invitation stated as its subtitle: “What brings us together? What sets us apart?” and described the nature of the event as follows: “This evening of performances and lectures in *Club Americano* reflects on the history of the social club, tribalism, and the impulse to try to distinguish ourselves from others” (MFA “What is a Club” n.p.). Co-hosted by exhibition curator Liz Munsell, the evening’s program reflected on the complex history of social clubs and how objects complicate, hide, and reveal the many histories that inform identity formation and the politics of socio-economic classifications within the Americas, colonial New England, and Mexico in particular. According to the program description by the MFA, the evening’s four presentations: “exemplify how some objects in the gallery – including a 20th-century reproduction of Paul Revere’s Sons of Liberty Bowl – come to

embody a sense of belonging, while others were designed to distinguish and divide” (MFA “Club Americano” n.p.) It continued by stating: “The program addresses racial hierarchies as depicted in the Spanish colonial *casta* painting by Ignacio de Castro, and examines how this legacy survives in a contemporary society through personal perspectives” (ibid.) Furthermore, the performers each provided their unique commentary on “mestizaje” in Spanish colonial culture and connected it to their specific contemporary cultural context.

Helguera himself performed a “negrilla” in this same context, a type of Spanish colonial carol in existence between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries incorporating elements of African slave music and speech, including its signature staccato syncopation. Benjamin Juarez, professor of Fine Arts at Boston University, presented research on Medieval Spanish music recently discovered in indigenous tribes in New Mexico, whose oral culture preserved the music for several hundred years. Mexican guitarist Zaira Meneses performed a number of musical pieces and accompanied Helguera while he sang a variety of historic songs. They were followed by an impassioned, emotionally rich, spoken word performance by Yvette Modestin. She is a writer, poet, and community activist born and raised in Colon, Panama. Modestin is an influential Afro-Latina figure and considered an influential leader in the global African diaspora as well as the founder of Encuentro Diaspora Afro. Lastly, Darianna Young, a member of the MFA’s Teen Arts Council, spoke about her experience as a young women living in Boston and growing up in the neighborhood across the street from the museum.

The second evening gathering, “Worldly and Otherworldly Perspectives,” was held on Friday, May 1 and it featured a diverse set of voices and perspectives by individuals who addressed how “distant times and places” are perceived through “optical illusions, printed matter and the narrative tradition of magical realism in Latin America” (MFA “Worldly” n.p.). One of

the evening's themes was magical realism, a fiction genre where magical or fantastical elements are presented within the context of a realist narrative and/or a real world setting. It is frequently associated with Latin American authors, in particular, Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Jorge Luis Borges. Helguera paid tribute to the Mexican essayist, philosopher, and diplomat Alfonso Reyes with his performance of Reyes's 1912 short story, "La Cena (The Dinner)," a literary work that interweaves dream sequences with reality. The film is rooted in Mesoamerican cultural traditions and reflects understandings of space and time that were native to the indigenous people of Mexico. Reyes was a major influential literary figure within Latin America, but not well-known elsewhere. Helguera's performance shines a spotlight on a legendary figure and introduces him to new contemporary audiences who most likely were not familiar with Reyes' life and work. Local children's book illustrator Raul Gonzalez, who was discussed earlier in the context of *Librería Donceles* (where he presented an artist talk), presented a live drawing workshop and story-telling session. His personal story embodies the dual or hybrid identity that *Club Americano* aimed to explore. Dennis Carr, curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture in Art of the Americas, served as the museum co-host for the evening. He presented on the "perspective machine," also known as an optical box, an object that was on display in the gallery next to Sargent's *Dinner Party*. Attendees were invited to look into the box to view a historic print. Additional speakers included Dr. Doris Summer, who was previously included for the *Pre-text* event at Urbano, and Marina Nguyen, a member of the MFA's Teen Arts Council.

A third and final presentation "Inventing América" was presented by Layla Bermeo, Assistant Curator of Paintings in the Art of the Americas Department, on Friday June 2 and concerned academic and personal perspectives on contemporary notions of American identity. The presenters explored a range of definitions of the term "America" and the many shifts and

changes of its use throughout different time periods and regions within the Americas. Helguera chose to highlight an influential literary text by Mexican Irish scholar, Edmundo O’Gorman’s 1961 publication *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History*, as well as the hand-colored photograph by antiquarian Wallace Nutting that was included in the exhibition. According to O’Gorman, the term “America” derives from the Latinization of the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci’s name (1454–1512), to Americus Vespucius by the German cartographer Martin Waldseemüller, who is credited with its first official use on a world map from 1507 where he used the term America to denote what is now referred to as South America. It was Vespucci who mapped South America's east coast and the Caribbean Sea in the early sixteenth century and Waldseemüller wanted to honor Vespucci’s work through the naming and in his belief that he was the first to have “discovered” it.

The term ‘Americans’ was commonly used at that time to denote the native peoples of the New World in both North and South America. By the seventeenth century, the term was extended to include the colonial settlers and their descendants. According to medieval scholar Sebastian Sobceki, the term ‘America’ gained momentum “only during the second half of the sixteenth century, following Gerard Mercator’s (1512–1594) projections of 1538. The spatial and narrative invention of the American continents remained an unfinished project well into the seventeenth century” (2). Likewise: “Spain did not adopt the name ‘America’ until 1758, and English writers, usually drawing on inferior, homemade cartography, continued to struggle with the name and the newness of the continents” (ibid.). President George Washington, in his 1796 *Farewell Address* claimed: “the name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any appellation.” Political

scientist Virginia L. Arbery notes that, in his *Farewell Address*: “Washington invites his fellow citizens to view themselves now as Americans who, out of their love for the truth of liberty, have replaced their maiden names (Virginians, South Carolinians, New Yorkers, etc.). Over and over, Washington said that America must be something set apart. As he put it: ‘In a word, I want an *American* character, that the powers of Europe may be convinced we act for *ourselves* and not for *others*’” (Arbery 204). Within the English language, “American” exclusively designates citizens of the United States of America, while many people throughout Latin America have long referred to themselves as *Americanos*.

Additional guests to the event speakers included: Jennifer De Leon, fiction writer, editor, and community education advocate; José Falconi, Lecturer at Brandeis University, Fellow at Harvard University, and photographer; Kevin Brea, member of the MFA’s Teen Arts Council; Aisha Donna, Teen Fellow of Urbano; and Denise Delgado, the Neighborhood Program Fellow and instructor at GRUBstreet, a Boston literary arts center. Her ongoing project, *Bodega Signs + Wonders*, transforms oral histories into poetry, public art, and business signage in Boston’s Egleston Square neighborhood. Again, the overlap with the *Librería Donceles* project should be evident since they also hosted GRUBstreet and Aisha Donna is one of Urbano’s youth fellows. All of the speakers, museum staff, and teen council members’ contributions to the exhibition are an essential part of the exhibition. They themselves are part of the project and their musical performances, lectures, poetry, expertise, topics, and themes all addressed whether the personal and/or societal issues raised are all part of the experience of the exhibition, helping to form not just the meaning of the work or its interpretation but the very constitution of the work in and as this network of objects, events, and performances. In other words, the exhibition is inherently social in nature and as such invites not just a set of associations to and between the objects but

the relationship between objects and the people who came to respond to and participate with those objects. These relationships, on the one hand, form a specific layer in the network that represents the social space of the work. On the other, they are deeply intertwined with the object network as they respond and react to specific objects and the themes they bring forth. This part of the network also extends out beyond the confines of the physical space of the gallery and the museum as they connect out into the communities that surround the museum, which they in turn represent.

5.8 Collaborative Participation

On select Wednesday evenings, when admission to the MFA is free, local student and community advocacy groups were invited to use *Club Americano* and the Gallery 231 space to host public events related to topics of inclusivity and cultural understanding. These community group hosts included the MFA's Teen Arts Council; an open mic night organized by Sociedad Latina, a Roxbury-based organization that cultivates leaders among Latino youth and a longtime MFA community partner; Intelligent Mischief, a creative action design lab that uses culture, narrative, and design to hack social change and shift the "common sense," who organized an event called *Lime: the Fine Arts Edition*, a round-table discussion about the Black Atlantic, arts activism, and decolonization; Beyond Conflict, a Boston-based organization that engages leaders and diverse communities to advance peace who organized *New American Identities: Experiences of Subjective Belonging*, an event that explored inclusivity and the immigrant experience through the lens of neuroscience; and University of Massachusetts (UMass Boston) organized a *Tertulia*, a conversation, entitled *Translating Immigrant Experiences*.

In order to clarify the stakes of these initiatives, it is worth describing these community events in slightly more detail. The Intelligent Mischief group organized an event called *Lime: The Fine Arts Edition*. Liming is a cultural tradition or term that denotes sharing food and drink while doing nothing, a sort of hanging out. This event at the MFA brought together several of Boston's most influential artist activists to have a conversation about the arts in the African Diaspora, social change, and decolonization. Intelligent Mischief created a space for a conversation by establishing these preliminary questions: What is a black arts renaissance, given the colonial histories of black people in the Americas? And how does it relate to the current political moment? Presenters included Kenneth Bailey, founder of Design Studio for Social Intervention whose mission is to share design tools with communities of color to help them take on complex social problems like violence, food deserts, climate change, and school closings; Cierra Michele Peters, a curator and DJ whose practice spans a variety of media and cultural contexts; Anthropologist Amah Edoh, who studies how "Africa" as a category of thought is produced through material practices across African and non-African sites. Edoh's work is centered on the makings of black African subjectivities, namely: how are black African bodies imagined, made, interpreted, lived in, and how is this made visible through creative practice; and Aisha Shillingford, originally from Trinidad and Tobago, an artist, trainer, facilitator, and social change strategist who has been living in Boston since 1998. Other speakers were Christlene DeJean, a Boston native of Haitian descent who serves as the Boston cultural agent for the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture; Terry Marshall, founder of Intelligent Mischief, also born in Boston but with tight family connections to Barbados where his family originates; and Ping-Ann Addo, an associate professor at UMass Boston and scholar-curator in

the area of socio-cultural anthropology with experience in Tongan/Pacific Islander material culture and migration to New Zealand and the U.S..

Beyond Conflict organized the second of the three community nights: “New American Identities: Experiences of Subjective Belonging.” It was described as follows: “As cities across the United States face many profound challenges around the legacy of racial discrimination, segregation, and inequity, there is great urgency to understand the deeply personal experience of belonging and inclusion. In the midst of facing the worst global refugee crisis since the end of WWII, the essentiality of inclusion – or the feeling of ‘belonging’ – is of outmost importance in the refugee experience” (MFA “Beyond Conflict” n.p.). Furthermore, the event organizers questioned: “How can the MFA and other cultural institutions accept and welcome refugees, and work towards developing strong, supportive networks within our communities?” (ibid.). The event featured two speakers: Beyond Conflict CEO, Tim Phillips, a conflict resolution and reconciliation expert, and Beyond Conflict Innovation Fellow Mike Niconchuk, whose current research focuses on the embodied implications of forced displacement and migration, exploring issues of stress, trauma, and social inclusion through the lens of neurobiology and neuroscience. Together they discussed how insights from the behavioral sciences could be applied to create stronger, more inclusive, communities.

Lastly, UMass Boston held a ‘tertulia’ on the topic of “Translating Immigrant Experiences.” The Spanish word tertulia refers to an informal or formal social gathering or conversation, a space for sharing writing and ideas regarding current affairs, but often with literary or artistic overtones. Isabel Gómez, an Assistant Professor in the Latin American and Iberian Studies Department, and Anastasia Thanos, an undergraduate student of International Relations and Spanish, presented the event. Their event description on the MFA Website stated:

“How do the languages we speak determine or expand our identities? As our world grows more complex and more close-knit through immigration, exile, travel, digital communities, and all movements across spaces and cultures, our language identities are also expanding. Yet the United States continues to perform an insistent, if unwritten, “English-only” policy, an ideology that may be growing more entrenched” (MFA “UMass Boston” n.p.). The presenters included students and faculty who shared readings, translations, and responses to questions of language and identity. Members of the public were invited to share their own stories relating to the topic. In light of the argument of this chapter, it should be noted that the three programs described above, as well as each of the participants in the community gallery programming, served as a collaborator to the *Club Americano* project. These collaborators and the content they brought to the exhibition connected the objects and the ideas of Helguera’s museum mining project to related issues, which certain communities surrounding the museum face in their day-to-day lives. The collaborators’ participation thus extends the network that represents the social space of the work out into the world beyond the confines of the museum. That said, their topics of conversation are deeply intertwined with the exhibition’s theme of the formation of American identity in that they also personally respond and react to the issues and concerns the project raises. I’d like to note that one main differentiator between “creative participation” and “collaborative participation” and is that for the latter, Helguera was not present nor did he initiate the projects, rather it was the Museum of Fine Arts and its curator Liz Munsell who served as the organizer and host.

5.9 Social Context

When thinking of the physical space or venue, it is necessary to consider the placement of *Club Americano* inside the relatively modestly sized Bernard and Barbara Stern Shapiro Gallery (Gallery 231) and the role it plays in the contextual framework of the *Club*. Gallery 231 is located in the Wing for the Art of the Americas, a new addition to the museum that was added and opened to the public in 2010. It lies at the heart of the grand neo-classical Beaux-Arts architecture of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, a building that was originally opened to the public in 1909. How does the location relate to the work specifically? Is it supporting, contrasting, or distracting, and does it provide a place of critique, embracing or even affirming certain ideals and ideas that the work of art presents? Although some of these details describing the history of the venue or an object in the exhibition may seem like a digression or distraction from the main focus of this investigation, it is important to note that this is all part of how Helguera's work is perceived and interpreted. The location where an artistic project is presented to the public matters and it helps form a contextual framework that becomes part of the work itself. In the case of *Club Americano*, the location and physical place of the project is one of the important layers that form the artwork. The physical space of the work we now understand to be the exhibition and its relational object-network and the various spaces that encompass it: Gallery 231, the Wing of the Americas, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Roxbury and Back Bay neighborhoods, and Boston, MA, which of course is centrally located in historic New England, the colonial birth place of 'America.' All these components are part of the networked artwork and together form the "physical space" or venue of *Club Americano*.

Gallery 231 had each of its four walls painted a deep burgundy red to underscore the intimacy of the space and echoed the other salon style galleries elsewhere in the museum. Both

the wall color and the salon style hanging arrangements reference nineteenth century ‘salons.’ A more specific reference *Club Americano* makes is to nineteenth century university clubs and gentlemen’s lounges that were mostly white, male, “members only” exclusive clubs that were first formed in the eighteenth century in England for aristocratic men and other elite members of society which gained in popularity throughout the nineteenth century. Helguera’s intention is to invert the exclusive nature of ‘the club’ by welcoming in the public. He stated to the Creators Forum: "To me, *Club Americano* is not an exhibition. It is meant to be a social and cultural space within the museum with the attributes and qualities of the conventional university club, only that this is a club open to everyone.... It conjures up an America without borders and divisions, only with shared histories and cultural traits. And it is through the events we will present that we hope that the public will be able to experience some of these relationships" (qtd. in Shi n.p.). A welcoming sentiment, certainly, although it can be argued that by holding the Club at the Museum of Fine Arts, an imposing nineteenth century neo-classical building that is itself a symbol of exclusivity, power and wealth, is at some level an ironic gesture. The Museum does offer free entrance on Wednesday nights when the public is invited in without paying the normal adult cover charge of \$25, which is a deterrent to many.

In order to consider the venue that the MFA provides, it is useful to briefly look at its history as well. By the mid-nineteenth century, Boston was a bustling city and an important financial center, instrumental in financing many of the nation’s railroads and infrastructure programs, including highways and sewage systems that allowed for the city life to expand to neighboring towns. It is in this environment of wealth that the concept of Boston’s upper-class Brahmins developed. Originally denoting the highest social caste in India, Brahmin as a term was first applied to the Boston elite by Oliver Holmes in an article in *Atlantic Monthly* magazine

in 1860, where it referred to the wealthy upper class of New England. Brahmins could generally point to aristocratic British descent or claimed to be descendants from the puritan colonists who arrived on the original *Mayflower* or *Arbella* ships that were used to transport colonists from London and The Netherlands to the 'New World.' According to literary historian Peter Field: "the term *Brahmin*, then, most accurately conveys their class consciousness, their social connection to the mercantile elite, and their status as one of the first coterie of professional intellectuals in American history" (14). He further denotes that "patronage of the arts became wealthy Bostonians' civic virtue, as eastern Massachusetts rapidly emerged as the intellectual capital of the country" (15). They combined their British heritage with an emphasis on the Puritan values of hard work, education, and thrift. The establishment of educational institutions (Harvard University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston Latin School, and many of New England's well-known prep schools), hospitals, and also cultural institutions such as museums, including the MFA, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, were all founded by Brahmins who considered it part of their civic duty. Exclusive social clubs such as the Wednesday Evening Club depicted in Sargent's *Dinner Party* were an important part of maintaining an elitist social network that sustained business and investment practices, wealth retention, and 'aristocratic' bloodlines through strategic marriages. The only way to become a Brahmin was to marry into a Brahmin family.

The MFA was originally chartered in 1870 by a board of trustees comprised of twelve Bostonians chosen from the Boston Athenaeum and other civic organizations. The directive of the group was "erecting a museum for the preservation and exhibition of works of art, [...] as well as, making, maintaining, and establishing collections of such work [...] and affording instruction in the Fine Arts" (Melton 8). The group was gifted a parcel of land by city officials in

the Back Bay area that now is known as Copley Square where, after a number of financial and logistical challenges, it first opened its doors in 1876 with a collection of 5,400 objects. The collections rapidly expanded through many donations and were thought of as “Boston’s public art collection” (Melton 12); eventually, a much larger location was needed. The museum trustees then purchased twelve acres of land used for hosting rodeos and circus tents between Huntington Avenue and Frederick Law Olmstead’s *Emerald Necklace* in 1899. In 1909, the then already encyclopedic museum home to over 110,000 objects moved to its current location and into its imposing Beaux-Arts style building. Its current collections hold nearly half a million works of art and ranges from ancient Egyptian mummies to Renaissance masterpieces to works made by local and internationally renowned contemporary artists. It is the fourth largest museum in the country. In 2010, the museum opened an expansion, the four-story “Art of the Americas” wing including the Bernard and Barbara Stern Shapiro Gallery (Gallery 231) where *Club Americano* was installed. It is worth noting that in 2011 the West Wing of the Museum was also transformed with new galleries for contemporary art and social and learning spaces, yet the Club was intentionally staged in the “Americas” wing, providing an additional layer of meaning to the central question of what it means to be an American posed by Helguera’s exhibition.

One common critique of the Museum is that it is “elitist” and ignores the people in the immediately surrounding neighborhoods. For many years, the entrance on Huntington Avenue that faces the Roxbury neighborhood and a neighborhood called Mission Hill was closed off, apparently “a cost cutting measure” in 1990 (Melton 77). At that time, the main museum entrance was located on the west side of the building in a new contemporary addition by famed architect I.M. Pei. In 1995, the incoming museum director, Malcolm Rogers, restored the Huntington Avenue façade “as a gesture of welcome to the inner city communities among which

the museum is located” (ibid.) and opened its doors. This relocated the main entrance to the south side of the museum while reserving the I.M. Pei entrance for school children and large group visits. One resulting problem is that the façade is imposing and intimidating, and with its large circular driveway exudes the air of a landed country estate, more home to the aristocrats who built it than to the neighbors across the street. The current MFA director, Matthew Teitelbaum, has endorsed a strategic plan for the museum to continue to make efforts to be more inviting to everyone, including neighborhood residents, and they have held food truck events on the circular driveway and the lawn now includes colorful Adirondack chairs to try to ‘soften’ its austere first impression (another unintended irony since the Adirondack chair was invented in 1903 to provide comfortable seating for Thomas Lee, its inventor, who needed outdoor seating for his summer home in the Adirondack mountains in upstate New York).

Such details are all part of the social context that the MFA as a physical space brings to Gallery 231, where *Club Americano* took place. The Museum’s history of rich collections and its legacy of wealth are of course part of what makes the museum such an extraordinary place to visit. It certainly provides a sharp contrast to Urbano, the small non-profit community art space where *Librería Donceles* was held. Both installations were social engaged artworks that brought local community members in to the institution in creative and inclusive ways, expanding the authorship of the work from the artist to those who participated in its creation. This chapter has thus addressed both projects and the many “spaces” that comprise these two works of art – at once material, physical, temporal, and social – arguing that they are connected to one another in myriad ways. The relational nature of the pieces – at least when considered in the realm of their socially interactive components – are clearly identifiable as socially engaged artworks. It is once we add their material components, including the bookstore and the gallery exhibition of historic

objects that the nature of the projects assumes a dimension more suitably described in terms of a network. It is through the venue, events, and participants, in combination with the objects in *Librería Donceles* and *Club Americano*, that new connections are revealed and come together to form a relational form, a “network.” It is, in fact, through their networked configuration that they reveal an extended mode of social practice art, in the process revealing how history, culture, and identity are formed through a dynamic collective network of mutually interconnected parts (objects, venue, ideas, events, people)

CONCLUSION

The dissertation has argued that the networked artwork serves as a powerful visual tool that generates new models to explore and understand our hyper-connected networked age. Their fluid, dynamic, relational forms offer new ways to frame and reframe existing works, expanding the work of art's relation to the world in which they begin to find their critical relevance. In part, it is the very expansive nature of the works that proved the most challenging in terms of putting these works into words and finding some measure of their effect. Indeed, as our Preface intimated, one central question encountered throughout the research has been: What constitutes the work? In particular, with some frequency we found it necessary to ask: Where is the boundary of the work? And then to ask: What is part of the work and what is *not* part of the work? The works addressed in the chapters often included aspects of their exhibition that are generally considered as existing outside the scope of the work as such, including wall texts, press releases, archival documents, television ads, historic objects, public programs, works by other artists, reproductions. What the work 'is' included the materials used to create the work, the spaces that displayed them, and the visitors to the exhibition. The artist him or herself was frequently present in the work, making, and performing within the context of the work, thus becoming a part of the networked artwork as well.

The works by Evans, Starling, Odell, and Helguera have multiple and, at times, thousands of 'objects' that are included within the scope of a single work of art. As the work spreads out across time and space, present and past, the global and the personal, the provisional and the permanent, digital and analog, are all constellated in the work. However, these contradictions or tensions within the work do not function as a series of binaries but rather exist as a complex web

of interconnectedness, where information, ideas, and physical forms overlap, double, and continuously loop in and out of a networked whole. A key component that these projects have in common is that they are *temporary* conglomerations of objects, ideas, sound, images, and visual ephemera; they are exhibitions whose physical form is dismantled after their period of public display has ended and the ‘objects’ return home to the studio, the archive, storage, or even the “pile.” Since each work is presented in this particular configuration only once, each installation is unique. Ultimately, the focus of the work is not on the individual ‘objects’ (or nodes) but rather the relationships between the ‘objects’ (the edges) and the way these nodes and edges relate to the whole (a dynamic, relational form).

What, then, does the work of art and its exhibition offer to network discourse that is different? And how might we begin to distinguish each of the artists included here? I would argue that what remains unique is that each project approaches networks in a singular manner. The way in which Franklin Evans explores the history of painting, while also making tactile the interconnectedness of ideas and objects through images and their reproduction, is inherently very different from Simon Starling’s approach, whose networks extend beyond the physical objects in the gallery and go out in to the world and become conceptual in nature. Odell in her object selection, documentation, and presentation uses a distinct archival mode, while Helguera’s exhibitions are positioned firmly in the field of social practice. The networked artworks offer diversity, expansiveness, and creativity. Taking a prompt for the ways in which the artist him- or herself is included in the work, the relational nature of these works is not simply transactional or abstract; rather it is intellectual, physical, and *embodied*. Lastly, what they offer most uniquely is an *experience* of a network rather than an abstract, two-dimensional reductive *image* of a network.

The networked artwork with its emphasis on fluidity rather than stability, its favoring of mutation, multiplicity, and connectivity over a presentation in a fixed, finalized form that exists in a singular time and place, continues to entice me. The projects examined in this dissertation have opened up new ways of seeing not just these specific works of art but contemporary culture and history as well. History itself emerges as a dynamic relational form that is in active dialogue with these works; rather than a tangential ‘thing of the past,’ history exists as part of what constitutes the work in the present day. It is significant in this context that many of the projects push at the edge of what an exhibition is and how the exhibition form relates to the work of art, especially when the two merge. One of the most intriguing and creative outcomes of this research for my work as a curator as well is the realization that we can expand our existing understanding of artworks to a wide range of disciplinary practices, including painting, sculpture, archival art, and social practice, mirroring the ways in which networks have also emerged across wide range of disciplines. At the same time, it is important to note that the artworks examined here generate their own critical form, their own theory of networks, and their own exhibition form.

Another ambition for this dissertation in the way in which our understanding of the work allows us to look beyond our current moment and look back historically at earlier works of art, works that can now be rethought through the lens of networks. At the same time, the work should also allow us to look ahead, so that we might begin to understand the emergence of new works that further address and expand the intersection of artwork and network. One area for further exploration suggested by the dissertation is the notion of “event as network” in which networks are related to certain characteristics of events: emergence, temporary convergence, congealing, and redistribution. Recently, new forms of networks are emerging in social sciences

and computational sciences that also suggest that most networks are not independent but are rather infused with other networks, suggesting the emergence a new third form, a type of conglomerate or meta-network that forms as smaller networks intersect, overlap, and interlace. The concept of dynamic and adaptable ‘meta-networks’ could become the most appropriate organizing construct that captures the interconnected, interdependent, and complex networks created by the work of art. Alternately, their multilayered structures can act as independent networks and at the same time become part of an interconnected network that encompasses others again. As network technologies continue to develop and change our world, one can only assume that works of art will not simply change along but actively respond, critique, and further transform these changes.

In the late 1960s, Burnham rethought the creation and distribution process for works of art, while Foucault simultaneously introduced the concept of heterogeneous space and heterochronic time. In the 1970s, Krauss expanded the scope of painting and sculpture with her seminal essays “Grids” and “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.” Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari transformed associative thinking and information processing with their concept of the “plateau” and “rhizome,” which had wide reaching consequences in the arts. Reylea’s “object networks,” Bourriaud’s “relational form,” and Voorhies’ “exhibition as critical form” further set the stage for the concept of networked artworks to emerge in new ways. We know that the opening up of new experimental frameworks in relation to works of art can change the course of art history and art practice itself. But it begs the question: can the artwork as network also open up new possibilities for contemporary artistic practices? For instance, can it offer artists a new way to think about their work and provide new critical modes for its interpretation? Can it provide new opportunities for its manufacture, distribution, and exhibition? In addition to applying an

analytical, network model when looking at works of art already in existence, can the artwork as network model offer a new place for a work of art to *begin*? In closing, I hope to have contributed to different ways in which we not only ask these questions but begin to trace out their consequences. I'd like to cite Vitale once more: "Network models have been used to map the Internet, better understand social networks, predict crashes in markets and electrical grids, simulate crowd behavior, and design roadways to decrease congestion... All that was needed, in a sense, was a change in perspective" (12). It is my hope that in bringing together the diverse artistic practices of Franklin Evans, Simon Starling, Jenny Odell, and Pablo Helguera, as well as several influential thinkers and their ideas, I have presented an aesthetic model – the artwork as network – that contributes to such a "change in perspective."

ENDNOTES

¹ The project is described as follows: “Each packet is designed to self-destruct after a set amount of time; when it does, the ‘packet failure notice’ it returns describes the path it took. The visualization of the resulting data was created using place and route software from the semiconductor industry. These maps can be used to find security gaps or monitor the networks during wartime bombing raids. BBN (early ARPAnet) is the random scatter of green in the middle. Sprint is the organized star topology in purple near the top. AOL is a gray disconnected island in the lower center.” Source: www.isgtw.org/visualization/image-week-mapping-science

² Of course, in non-Christian traditions and many cultures across the globe, the perception that the world is part of an infinitely open and or interconnected space is actually the prevailing understanding of the universe and has been so for thousands of years. Galileo’s discovery was only particularly shocking within the binary order of the Judeo-Christian worldview.

³ Most of the New York studio materials were preserved with the intent to exhibit them at the time of Mondrian’s death in February of 1944. Harry Holtzman also created a film to document the studio. Based on Holtzman’s documentation, additional reconstructions in several subsequent exhibitions were created by the architect Jason Holtzman.

⁴ For more information on the specific details regarding these reconstructions consult Albrecht Barthel’s *The Paris Studio of Constantin Brancusi*.

⁵ The tape was a produced by the Dennison Manufacturing Company based in Massachusetts, now known as Avery.

⁶ Both artists were included in the important exhibition of contemporary sculpture curated by Massimiliano Gioni, *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, at the New Museum, New York in 2007.

⁷ Curiously, this context relates to the earlier discussion in Chapter One of Mondrian's 1942 *Boogie Woogie* painting as described in relation to the work of Franklin Evans: "Much of the [Diamond] collection was sold in a single Sotheby's auction on 4 November 2004, which included Brancusi's *The Kiss* (c. 1908) and the first Piet Mondrian 'Boogie-Woogie' painting *New York, 1941/Boogie-Woogie* (1941–42), which once sat beside *Bird in Space* in the Diamonds' apartment, and sold for \$21,008,000" (Starling "Titles & Notes" 32).

⁸ See <http://thesubmachine.net/2013/08/24/simon-starling-aug-2013/>

⁹ The dichotomy between the practical and philosophical consideration of an object runs through the entire project. On the one hand, the artist who considers each object in terms of materials, damage/wear/provenance, and production details such as production date, current availability and value/price describes objects in a factual manner. The final category of description for each object is its "use." The latter is inherently the most interesting category.

¹⁰ Foster's description closely echoes both my previous descriptions of networked artworks in the chapter on Simon Starling, as well as Bourriaud's description of Starling's work in his essay *Altermodern*. Additionally, it aptly describes *The Bureau of Suspended Objects* as it also produces forms "that are a part of it."

¹¹ A complete list of participating artists in this exhibition is included on the ICP website available at www.icp.org.

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