

Abstract

This article looks at three case studies to probe into the fruitful relation between art exhibitions and the publications that follow from them. Phaidon's *Exhibitions That Made Art History* are examples of the weightiness of exhibitions' reception, and useful to analyse the ploys with which exhibition histories impact the construction of art histories. A couple of *Mousse* magazine issues help to expand the possibilities of documentation, criticise the reliance on images and ponder if rhizomatic histories can be woven from a plurality of voices. The exhibition catalogue of *When Attitudes Become Form* (2013) serves to unpack exhibitions' "aura" and the possibility of thinking beyond their (un)repeatability. Following the idea that publications cannot be regarded as neutral evocations of exhibitions, the article traces the ways in which these two platforms of display intertwine to create exhibition histories. ●

Resumo

Este artigo aborda três estudos de caso, a fim de investigar a produtiva relação existente entre exposições de arte e as publicações que delas resultam. Os volumes *Exhibitions That Made Art History* da Phaidon exemplificam o impacto da receção de exposições, e são aqui usados para analisar os mecanismos através dos quais a história das exposições influencia a construção de histórias da arte. Os dois números da revista *Mousse*, que são também abordados neste artigo, permitirão expandir as possibilidades da documentação de exposições, criticar a nossa confiança nas imagens, e ponderar de que forma histórias rizomáticas dos eventos expositivos se podem ou não tecer a partir de uma pluralidade de vozes. O catálogo da exposição *When Attitudes Become Form* (2013) servirá como base para desmontar a "aura" da exposição e para podermos pensar além de sua (ir)repetibilidade. Perseguindo a ideia de que as publicações não podem ser consideradas evocações neutras de exposições, o artigo examina de que forma estas duas plataformas diferentes de exibição se articulam na criação de histórias de exposições. ●

Peer Review

João Carvalho Dias

Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Portugal

Pedro Lapa

Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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THE PUBLICATION AS EVOCATION EXHIBITION HISTORIES' PRINTED MATTER

CATALINA IMIZCOZ

Visiting Lecturer, MRes: Exhibition Studies, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London; Phaidon Press, Editor – Art and Photography
catalopezimizcoz@gmail.com
catalinaimizcoz.com

There is a non-straightforward and yet deeply necessary relationship between exhibitions and the publications about them. The bond, in turn, touches upon several of the nodes that make the research field of exhibition studies a fertile one: it primarily has to do with exhibitions' documentation, but also with their reproduction and repetition, with their reception, and the way they are archived and historicised. The following question is therefore germane to the field: how do publications truthfully and productively depict exhibitions?

Governed by diverse conventions of time, exhibitions are intrinsically provisional whereas publications are, if not the exact opposite, at least considerably more permanent. Even if both involve the dissemination of work – creating platforms for the audience to encounter it – an exhibition is conceived as an unstable entity whereas a publication is produced to be self-contained and durable. These non-aligned temporalities affect the way exhibitions come down in history: the nuances or variances with which the narrative that traverses an exhibition can be conceived by its curator and then arise in a spectator's mind is difficult to translocate into a publication that is geared towards presenting the event as a *fait-accompli*. The stories told by each of these platforms are bound to be different, inevitably conditioned by their ontology.

Space-wise, exhibitions build a narrative where fragmentation and dispersion is inevitable – of course, in each particular case to a different extent – while printed matter most commonly takes us from word to word, line to line, page to page. In general terms, it could be said that books build linear and self-standing narratives and, conversely, the narratives of exhibitions are inherently discursive and digressing. How can a book communicate this fragmentation? To what extent is it important to show the dispersion, rather than synthesising it?

The anthology *Thinking about Exhibitions* was published more than twenty years ago by the Anglo-American academic publisher Routledge. Other than recognising the exhibition as a key player in contemporary culture, the editors play with establishing an analogy between an anthology and an exhibition, defining both as “collections of discrete entities compiled for purposes of validation and distribution” (Greenberg et al. 1996, 1). They anchor the centrality of exhibitions in the postmodern context, positing them as discursive structures. In their definition of exhibitions and anthologies, they replicate Michel Foucault’s understanding of the discursive as a system of dispersed statements transforming into a critical debate. They put forward that exhibitions “establish and administer the cultural meanings of art” (ibid., 2) and demand that their histories, structures and socio-political implications be analysed, theorised and written about. They delimitate their territory against what is considered, with Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff as references, museum culture. They state that the difference between the fields will have to do with the focus that is put on temporary exhibitions, on understanding instances of crises, of exploring the architectural politics and especially, unpacking the experience of exhibitions outside museum spaces.

The field has gained traction in the last couple of decades by focusing the historian’s effort on the time and place where art meets its public. Rather than looking at the individual artist, this field of research builds on art history by analysing the plethora of agents and factors that influence the public presentation of art; and as a consequence, the field is rooted in the sociological, political and economic factors that interplay in art historical narratives.

Arguably an offspring of New Art History and, in particular, its imbrications with semiotics, exhibition studies follows on the footsteps of radical art historians – who have insisted on the interconnectedness of three considerations that define their object of study: an artwork’s representational structures (intrinsic and extrinsic), the viewing subject that creates meanings out of it, and the historical context. Similarly, semiotics’ encounter with art history introduced new areas of debate among which we find “the problematics of authorship, context, and reception” (Bal and Bryson 1991, 174). Exhibition studies propounds new ways in which to tackle those areas. *Thinking about Exhibitions’* extensive bibliography includes Umberto Eco’s essay “A Theory of Expositions” published in 1967. The Italian semiotician addresses the “meaning” of the Expo 67 world fair by tackling, among other issues, architecture and design as acts of communication. He describes the entrance, the walls, the images, the decoration and the interiors, and the different ways in which these elements communicate a message – it can be considered, alongside the well-known articles by Brian O’Doherty “Inside the White Cube” (O’Doherty 1999), as a crucial starting point for the field.¹ Eco introduces the idea that there is a way in which an exposition exposes itself.

The layers implicit in exhibitions’ constitution and the complexity of synthesising these into the kind of linear narratives that structure publications, is what this article will look to probe into. Because of the impermanent nature of its

¹ This research focuses on contemporary exhibition studies literature, looking at books and magazines published since the field’s inception as an academic or research venture. Historical examples – with Denis Diderot’s reviews of the French Salons as pioneers – are outside of the scope of this investigation.

object of study, exhibition histories' reliance on publications as a form of evocation is inevitable. Historically necessary and yet intrinsically inadequate, this genre of printed matter will adopt many forms and be traversed by a range of problematics.

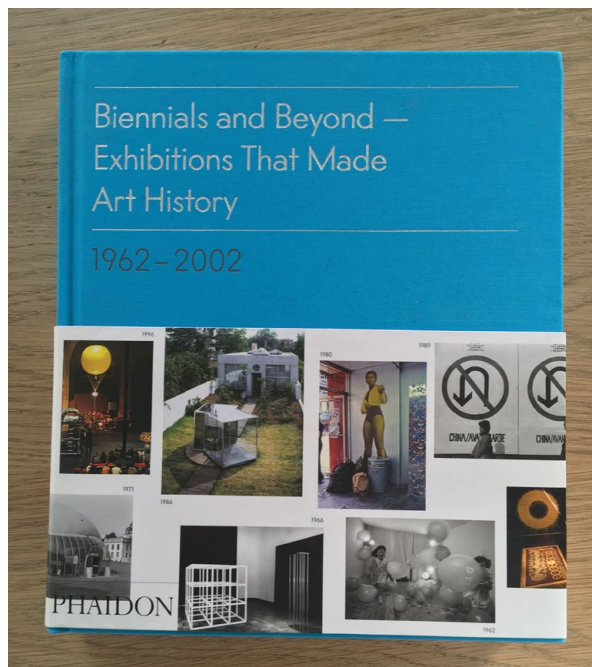
Exhibitions that made art history

The plethora of art books that now populate museum libraries and bookshops the world over were once the result of illustrated publishing's new-found ability to make art accessible to wide audiences. Its reproductions could be rendered so true to life that the public could almost dispense from having to go see the original – a case in point are publishers like Phaidon and Thames and Hudson, which in the mid-twentieth century inaugurated an era when the public could appreciate a full-page colour reproduction alongside gatefolds of its most prominent details in a mass-produced and relatively cheap book. Some of the publications that register the exhibition are both a continuation and a step-aside from this modern industry.

This category of books fosters representation values. By merging approachable texts with images, the volume facilitates an appreciation of the artwork that matches that of the spectator in the museum. When art historian Bruce Altshuler authored two of the first Anglophone volumes of exhibition histories, was he trying to provide a similar representation system? To what extent can the act of visiting an exhibition be depicted on the page, and what tools need to be employed in order to convey this experience editorially?

Altshuler's *Salon to Biennial* and *Biennials and Beyond*, published by Phaidon in 2008 and 2013 respectively, observe a linear method, tracing a historical progression through fifty exhibitions that took place from the mid-nineteen century to the present day. Individual chapters focus on a single show that is presented through a concise introduction, a summary of key information, and a recollection of primary sources. Images include varied installation shots and reproductions of related ephemera, while textual sources range from transcripts from the exhibition's press release and curatorial texts that accompanied the project, to reviews and articles published at the time it took place (Figs. 1 and 2).

The emphasis lies on recovering materials from the time of the exhibition – in the preface, this method is accounted for by arguing that unveiling such material can enrich or, conversely, problematise our understanding of contemporary art and its recent past. Providing the reader with content that is in its majority undigested, these books' histories are reconstructed through compilation. The unearthing of documentation is a historiographical method in itself, but here it underpins an opportunity to bring a plurality of voices to bear, a multiplicity that is in line with exhibitions' fragmentary nature.



This means that, for example, Freeze exhibition (London, 1988) is depicted with both images of YBAs during the installation process as well as the opening night – the former conveying the do-it-yourself ethos that gave birth to the exhibition, while the latter reveal the accelerated process that would kick off then and soon after establish London as a creative capital. Similarly, two articles are published alongside: the first, from the Guardian and dated 13 September 1988, declares the show’s success and the city’s new role in the art market; whereas the second – a piece by Liam Gillick writing two years afterwards – inquisitively tries to unpack how the urban conditions, UK politics and London’s new galleries, can help understand the conundrum that really gave Freeze its visibility. The reception of exhibitions becomes as weighty as its conception, and the volumes balance these forces by mixing sources that give prominence to one and the other.

Notwithstanding this plurality of viewpoints, Altshuler’s publications are also symptomatic of the drawbacks of linear histories of exhibitions. The volumes’ subtitle, *Exhibitions that Made Art History*, leaves little room outside of the narrow trajectory distilled in Western art historical canons. In the preface to the 2013 volume, Altshuler mentions “art-making by members of marginalised groups, and activities in non-Western nations and postcolonial societies” (Altshuler 2013, 7) as a delineated and separate entity. The author explains that even if some such exhibitions were included, the main thread of the books follows Western canons. The “other” shows would seem to disturb the progress – progress here being a loaded term that cannot be separated from ideas of development and its modernist implications.

Figs. 1 and 2 – Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions that Made Art History: Volume 2: 1962-2002*, Phaidon Press, 2013. Photo credit: the author.

² Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, New York, Abrams, 1994. *Salon to Biennial* also bears a modern time-frame yet it is published as part of the two volume series, where the second volume includes contemporary art exhibitions.

³ Even if photographs of shows will become more common as technology progresses, there is an interesting contrast with a precedent publication, *Die Kunst der Ausstellung*, published in Germany in 1991. It includes one, if any, reproductions of artworks per chapter – the majority of images are of installation views. Interestingly, the only chapter that does not include an installation photograph has a double page spread with small reproductions of artworks that are arguably presented in a similar way to how artworks would be arranged on the wall, stressing a reading of the artworks next to one another.

⁴ Accessible through <http://catalogueexpositions.referata.com/wiki/Bienvenue>. Last accessed September 2018.

A third publication by Bruce Altshuler shares the characteristic of mapping a continuous history of exhibitions. *The Avant-garde in Exhibition* was published in the US in 1994 and outlines the dynamics of the modern period exclusively.² Highlighting the idea of a network and its importance in the generation of debates, Altshuler explains that avant-garde movements depended on confrontation and that the realm where these encounters took place was the exhibition. However, in this book, the artists and their original artworks remain at the forefront of the analysis, even if the exhibitions are used as the editorial backbone. The illustrations included are, for the most part, reproductions of artworks interspersed with portraits of important figures. It is only sporadically that an installation photograph appears.³ The modernist approach takes on a redoubled expression here, relying on the linear timeline – where progression is singled out as a value, and development from one show to the next is expected – but also subordinating the use of art exhibitions to tell the story of individual artist genius. This publication not only shows the risks of any linear narrative, but also calls into question the extent to which histories of exhibitions can fit the linear model at all. Do they not demand instead a rhizomatic model? Can a vertical, escalating story, where the next exhibition is presented as surpassing the previous one, be acceptable today?

The research project “Histoire des Expositions: Carnet de Recherché du Catalogue Raisonné des Expositions du Centre Pompidou”, that ran from 2010 to 2014, puts together the exhibition history of the institution – a linear history in a more constricted frame – and was published digitally.⁴ Two features are worthy of mention: the indiscriminated inclusion of shows, following the logic of the catalogue raisonnée which is indifferent to the importance of each exhibition but instead provides a complete account of all the existing ones; and a plurality of timelines presented to be read simultaneously, mapping a criss-cross of agents and authors, locations and markets.

Examples like these reveal the ploys with which exhibition histories can impact the construction of art history. Altshuler’s Western-centred subtitle pumps energy into an existing canonical vision, as does the selection of shows that fills the books’ pages. Linear recounts of historic progression reaffirm modernity’s hegemonic paradigm. And yet the plurality of voices that are brought to bare insert nuances, generate disruptions and allow the reader to enter the fragmentary world of the exhibition.

Two issues of *Mousse* magazine

Polyphony is the strategy at play in issue number 51 of *Mousse* magazine. Published in December 2015-January 2016, it presents photographs of shows that took place during the decade that spans 1985 to 1995 – the last years before exhibitions started to have an online presence through gallery and museum websites. The images

are compiled thanks to the suggestions of a variety of contributors, generating a random and yet multiple and rich collection. There is a simple but powerful resort to compiling the history of a decade using just photographs, allowing these to mix and visually connect to one another, creating new, maybe inexact, but nonetheless compelling, narratives and histories (Fig. 3).

The photo issue assembles pictures that survived from the time when exhibitions occupied a more ephemeral condition, one that the editors argue was then replaced with the possibility of browsing through an exhibition online. It is interesting to re-think the extent to which installation photographs are being taken for granted today and what their full impact is in the way exhibitions are experienced. Twenty years later, photographs and photographers have not only become ubiquitous, but there is also a vast range of platforms where these can be instantly made public. The magazine instead frames a time when these images were not part of the publics' appreciation of an exhibition, which retained the aura of a non-reproducible event: "viewing a show would mean, quite simply, visiting it", states the editorial.⁵ Being embedded in a society that produces images of almost every situation, it is becoming impossible to imagine what the difference in appreciation would be if our encounter of an exhibition was not mediated by photographs – those we can see before going, those we can produce during our visit, and those that remain available after we exit the space.

In *Stedelijk Studies* issue two – published in 2015 and devoted to mapping exhibition studies' present condition – an essay titled "Documenting the Marvellous" sheds light on a similar problematic from a historiographical perspective: the extent to which researchers' cling on documentation and its availability to write a history of exhibitions.⁶ Even if primary sources are a challenge common to every historian, this article unpacks the particular relationship between three-dimensional and temporary exhibitions, and the two-dimensional but permanent photographs that document them. Author Madeleine Kennedy suggests a revision of the historical relevance that is conferred to exhibitions due to the existence and quantity of material that is available about them. Kennedy's case in point is the canonical Surrealist show of 1938: because the exhibition was thoroughly documented – the artists themselves were conscious of the importance of recording the show and tracing the public's experience – it has come to occupy a disproportionately central place in history compared to other Surrealist exhibitions. The last section of this article raises similar questions about the catalogue *When Attitudes Become Form*, published in 2013 by Fondazione Prada.

Experience, documentation and history all intertwine around *Mousse* 51. The issue is put together thanks to the suggestions submitted by a pool of collaborators (writers, artists, curators, critics, historians). The unsystematic histories that are woven from this plurality of voices inevitably carry a level of chance that shakes up exhibition studies canon. Instead of ticking the boxes, these compilations can shed light on new shows and sometimes even address historical absences (Fig. 4).

⁵ *Mousse Magazine* 51. *Exhibitions 1985-1995*, December 2015-January 2016. Editorial, last accessed March 2019, <http://moussemagazine.it/mousse-51-out-now/>.

⁶ Madeleine Kennedy, "Documenting the Marvellous. The Risks and Rewards of Relying on Installation Photographs in the Writing of Exhibition History". *Stedelijk Studies Exhibition Histories* 2, 2015.



Fig. 3 – *Mousse Magazine* issue #51 *Exhibitions 1985-1995*, 2015. Photo credit: the author.



Fig. 4 – *Mousse Magazine* issue 51 *Exhibitions* 1985–1995, 2015. Photo credit: the author.

Mousse 61 (December 2017–January 2018) shares this characteristic of disturbing the canons by assembling its list of exhibitions using the recommendations of a pool of contributors, and also bears strong ties to the idea of compilation and polyphony discussed above. Centred around exhibition design and architecture and the way these display-systems have permeated art practices, the issue presents thirty clusters of exhibitions, grouped together because they employ a similar or relatable design. Drawing imaginary venn diagrams within these clusters and also between them, the magazine presents itself as a mood-board but it is also a strong testimony to the rhizomatic possibilities of the field. It weaves histories that oppose hierarchy, work beyond binaries – canonical and experimental, central and peripheral, commercial and institutional – and are multiple and diverging (as opposed to just progressing linearly) (Fig. 5).

With the text element pushed to the end of each cluster – in what seems like a gesture against the proliferation of spoon-fed explanations in wall texts – each one starts by presenting a series of images that follow one another and are connectable by more or less apparent links. For example: Sir John Soane Museum’s unfolding *Picture Room* is paired with Goshka Macuga’s replica of it (2003), and juxtaposed with the seminal shot of Daniel Spoerri’s tilted room in “Dylaby”, the 1962 psychedelic exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. The next spread shows a full-bleed image of Lina Bo Bardi’s mid-century exhibition design at Museu de Arte de São Paulo, Brazil, which is followed by a 2015 re-enactment of Bo Bardi’s display structure in an Australian contemporary art gallery. It is only then that text appears, to first caption and then expand on the visual threads connecting the cluster of images. The editorial structure foregrounds the images and what they convey in



Fig. 5 – *Mousse Magazine* issue 61 *On Display*, 2018. Photo credit: the author.



relation to the spaces' composition: it is less important to know who is the artist is or what is the name of the venue – the visual element, an exhibition's arrangement and the way it occupies the room, is the telling part (Fig. 6).

Mary Anne Staniszewski's book *The Power of Display* (1998) deals specifically with the way exhibitions were staged, installed and designed throughout the twentieth century in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. By presenting exhibition design as an aesthetic medium and a loaded element of institutional rhetorics, the volume identifies the history of display as one that should inform the way art comes down in history. Staniszewski's book grounds exhibition design as a precedent to thinking about exhibitions as complex semiotic networks. In the same way as *Mousse Issue 61*, it opens the possibility of analysing the "visual ways of story-telling" (Bal and Bryson 1991, 175) that intertwine in exhibitions.

Fig. 6 – *Mousse Magazine issue 61 On Display*, 2018. Photo credit: the author.

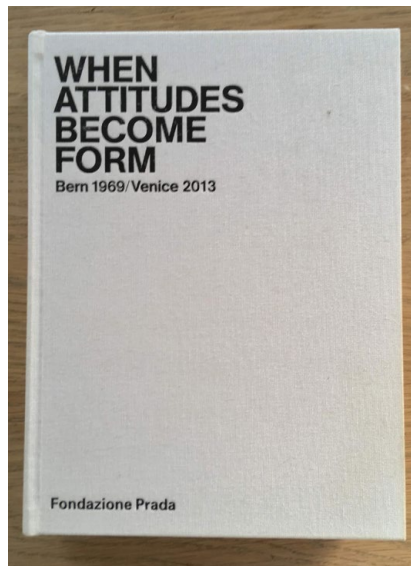


Fig. 7 – Germano Celant et al., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, Fondazione Prada, 2013. Photo credit: the author.

When Attitudes Become Form, Bern 1969/Venice 2013

The catalogue published alongside the reconstruction “When Attitudes Become Form” that Fondazione Prada presented in 2013 (Celant et al. 2013), functions as a matryoshka doll of “remembering exhibitions” – a concept coined by Reesa Greenberg in 2009.⁷ The volume evokes the exhibition that evoked the exhibition. As such, it provides grounds to reflect on the exhibition’s “aura” and the extent to which its temporary nature and (un)repeatability can be challenged (Fig. 7).

On black, tinted backgrounds, the first three hundred and sixty pages reproduce photographs of the well-known 1969 exhibition. The images document the empty space, the flow of the artworks being created, the moments of intensive activity and the in-between pauses, the finished display, the audience’s arrival and the opening night. There are images showing each one of the rooms and multiple shots of almost all of the artworks on display. Both space-wise and time-wise, the sequence is exhaustive.

In the short introduction to this first section in the book, there is a credit listing the archives of seven different photographers who shot the exhibition at different moments. That the installation process was documented as thoroughly is in line with the shift taking place during the 1960s – when many of the artists started to conceive of the gallery as a space of experimentation and production – which in turn triggered Harald Szeemann’s curatorial vision: to invite the artists to replicate their working methods inside the *kunsthalle*. Their understanding of the installation moment as integral to the work calls for the accompanying recording and registering of it. So in a way, the documentation reproduced in the 2013 catalogue is not only an archival treasure but a cornerstone of the seminal show. As Christian Rattemeyer’s study of this exhibition states: “Szeemann would seem to loom large behind these documentary endeavours: he invited Bélios to film the artists working in the galleries and Shunk’s photographs became a part of his personal archive, rather than remaining at the *kunsthalle*” (Rattemeyer 2010, 40).

It is interesting to think then to what extent do these archival photographs conform the exhibition, and whether they are an ever-present display platform in themselves rather than just a posthumous resource. They pose a challenge to the exhibition’s temporary nature: when the installation choreography is no longer being enacted, does this mean it ceases to exist or can it be understood as a lingering presence that materialises in the photographs that register it? Was it not a ghostly energy that endured within the *kunsthalle* as the public strolled through its rooms? And if the latter is possible, would it not then also be possible to say that “Live in Your Head. When Attitudes Become Form: Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information” is exhibited anew each time a public flicks through these photos? (Fig. 8). “To choreograph an exhibition is to envisage both an exhibition *in* a moment of time and the exhibition *of* a moment of time” (Copeland 2013, 20), explains curator

⁷ Reesa Greenberg, “Remembering Exhibitions: From Point to Line to Web”. *Tate Papers* 12, 2009. Accessed September 2018, <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/remembering-exhibitions-from-point-to-line-to-web>.



Mathieu Copeland in his analysis of a different exhibition that shared the ambition of removing the object from the centre of the display. The catalogue *When Attitudes Become Form* intersperses the images with plans of each room, enhancing the navigational possibilities of the material, which is laid out carefully and arranged to prompt a tour-like sensation. In so far as these pages enable the reader to undertake a virtual “walk through” of the space and installations, do they actualise a particular moment in time and straddle between their condition of documentary material and exhibitionary matter? (Fig. 9).

Differently, the pictures of Fondazione Prada’s reconstruction are centred on showing the old and the new, the way the space was adapted and the textures that resulted from the translocation. “To reprise an exhibition can be seen as an attempt to envisage its memory, to re-insert it in reality” (Copeland 2013, 22), materialising its legacy and allowing it to expand. Playing with the notion of unrepeatability, curator Germano Celant conceived a one to one organization of the space, a full-scale installation where the architecture becomes fluid and the core of the operation has to do with replicating the spacial dynamics and the relations between

Fig. 8 – Germano Celant et al., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, Fondazione Prada, 2013. Photo credit: the author.

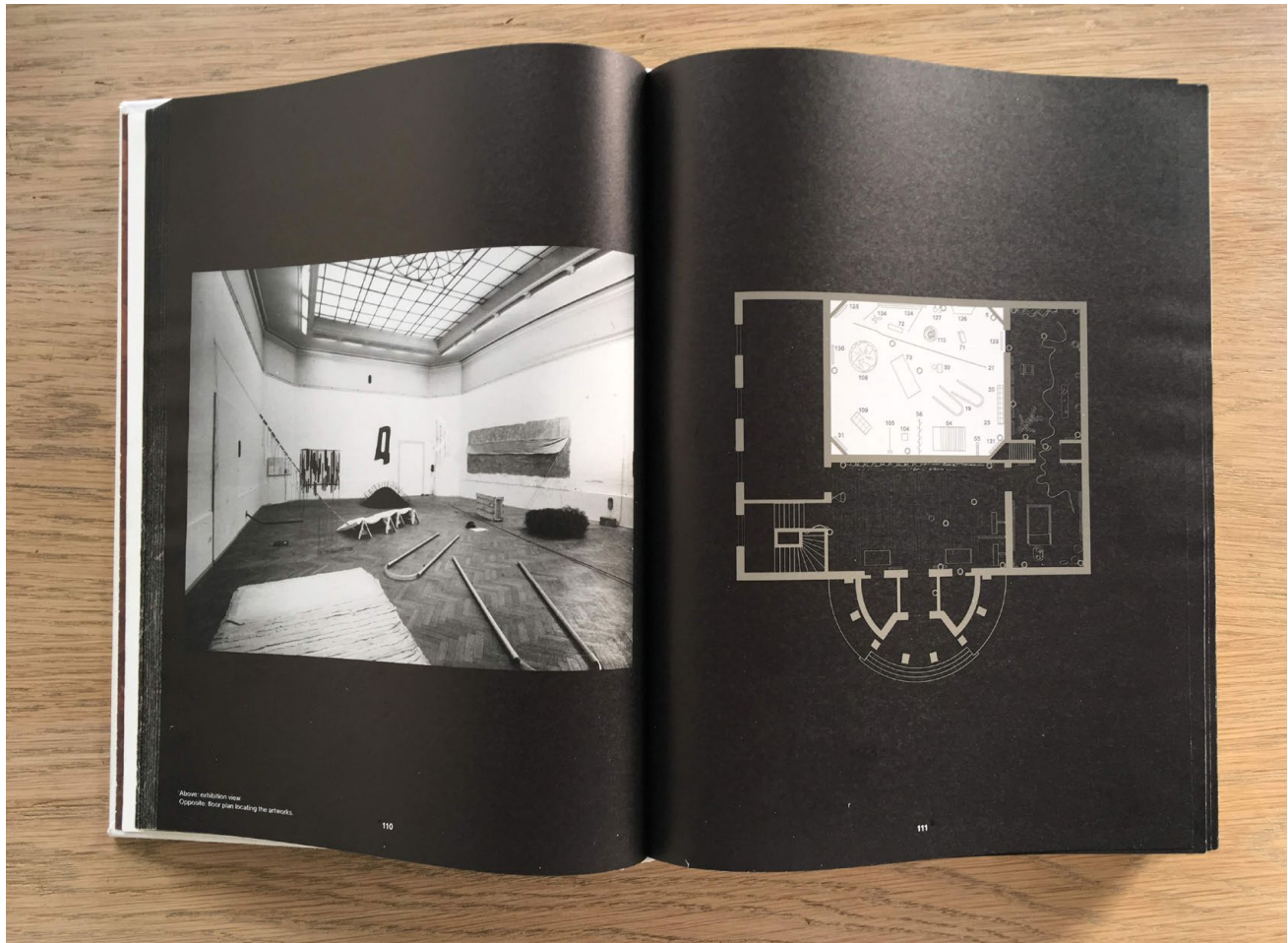


Fig. 9 – Germano Celant et al., *When Attitudes Become Form: Bern 1969/Venice 2013*, Fondazione Prada, 2013. Photo credit: the author.

objects as they lay in the rooms. Acknowledging the autobiographical motivation behind this endeavour, Celant characterises the exhibition as an act of memory and the catalogue as a (more objective) act of history. Even if sections of the publication like the Register – where a meticulous chart compares the artworks on display in both shows and provides a series of factual references – comply with this division, the story in photographs with which the catalogue departs blurs the boundaries.

Partisan histories

The question then is whether publications can be regarded as neutral evocations of exhibitions or if they are better described as two platforms that intertwine to write partial histories.

Exhibition studies fall under the larger umbrella of the discipline of art history. However, it is a new field that emerged concomitantly with the expansion of the

study of art – the field can be presented as a “global native”, since its birth following the events of 1989 make it inhabit a conception of the world where contemporary art canons can no longer be reduced to narratives of centres and peripheries. If this is the case, then enlarging the field’s disciplinary boundaries and geography of thought is pivotal to developing its full potential. Accessing a variety of art practices, those that are scattered around the world and convene to be represented under the exhibition form, is exhibition studies’ pull.

In constant dialogue with art history and its overwhelming Western scope, the histories of exhibitions carry a potential to upset those power dynamics. The printed matter that emerges to accompany exhibitions, and that which is published later on to revisit them, can engage with this potential – looking back, correcting, and threading in new histories. As Peruvian curator Miguel A. López stated: “We do not recover the past in order to make it exist as a bundle of skeletons, but to disturb the orders and assurances of the present” (López 2010, 20).

The publications analysed here present varied models that result in heterogeneous histories. Far from being neutral, they put forward editorial systems that have implications – underscoring multiple or single voices, choosing linear or rhizomatic narratives, spotlighting documentation and establishing its sway. In a field where the object of research is transient, what can and cannot be regarded as a productive depiction of it is a central question. This article has delineated the structures of some books and magazines in order to map the range of possibilities that are open to the exhibition historian; and has uncovered the motives and agendas behind each of these history writing exercises. The examples used here show that far from being neutral evocations, publications shape exhibition studies.

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