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# Theater, Garden, Bestiary : A Materialist History of Exhibitions

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HAL Authorization

This volume both gathers and expands on the results of the research project “Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions” held at ECAL/University of Art and Design Lausanne, and proposes to draft a history of exhibitions sourced from a wide corpus reaching beyond the framework of art institutions. It undertakes a transdisciplinary history, at the nexus of art history, science studies, and philosophy, exploring the role the exhibition played in the construction of the conceptual categories of modernity, and outlines a historiographical model that grasps the exhibition as both an aesthetic and epistemic site.

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# Theater, Garden, Bestiary

## *A Materialist History of Exhibitions*



*Tristan Garcia &  
Vincent Normand (eds.)*

Theater, Garden, Bestiary  
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of Exhibitions*

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## Foreword

*Stéphanie Moisdon, head of the MA Program in Fine Arts,  
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This collective volume is the outcome of *Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions*, a joint undertaking by HES-SO/University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland and ECAL/University of Art and Design Lausanne. This research project, which operated as part of ECAL's MA Program in Fine Arts from November 2015 to March 2017, brought together about twenty guest speakers (art historians, historians of science, artists, philosophers, and theorists) and fifteen student researchers.

This volume both gathers and expands upon the results of this research project, and seeks to draft a history of exhibitions sourced from a wide corpus reaching beyond the framework of art institutions. As such, it charts a singular trajectory within the emerging field of the history of exhibitions, which is currently becoming a discipline in its own right. The many events, conferences, symposia, academic publications, and journals that have emerged in the last ten years attest to this, so much so that the exhibition now constitutes a historical object from which the historiography of art is being reformulated. The exhibition has thus become a privileged entry point for grasping the conceptual, aesthetic, social, and political stakes of the contemporary practice of art.

The specific aim of this project was to undertake a history of various apparatuses and forms of exhibition throughout Western modernity by adopting a radically transdisciplinary method, employing the resources of art history and art theory, of course, but also science studies, anthropology and philosophy. As part of ECAL's active involvement in theoretical research, this project has allowed the student researchers to comprehend and appropriate the anthropological, theoretical, and political structures that determine the public horizon of their practice, namely the exhibition of their work. Further, it has served as a platform, within the structure of an art school, for reconsidering the relations between art and science.

Research in the field of visual arts is still a rather undefined matter. Long divided between academic scientific methods and creative practices, it is now finding other forms of interaction, collaboration, interlocution, distribution of qualifications, experiences, and resources. In this sense, *Theater, Garden, Bestiary* shows how research can be undertaken in a new manner in an art school, drawing as much from the experimental freedom of artists as from the transversality of thought systems. This approach has led the

student researchers to consider the consequences of their research by situating them in other worlds than their own and by encouraging them to seize a plurality of tools, voices, and skills. This ambitious project, initiated and supported by a university of art and design, draws its singularity from such a contemporary vision, which consists of capturing in the history of exhibitions (which is only beginning to be written) a fundamental transformation of the notions of form and apparatus, as well as a creative deployment of disjunctions, the type of which inevitably surrounds any experimentation.

The salient feature of the Research Program initiated almost ten years ago within ECAL's MA Program in Fine Arts is to avoid considering either artistic practice or theory of art as exclusive territories of knowledge, and to strive to explore their relationships to objects, techniques, narratives, and processes, so as to favor collaborations and encounters, and to develop for student researchers situations of participant observation. In this way, the student researchers involved in this project (from ECAL as well as other schools in the HES-SO network) have obtained a glimpse of the vastness of the history of exhibitions as a field of study, as far more than a matter of "professionalization" relating to art institutions, to the constraints of museography, or to the new jobs that curatorial studies try to delimit. Collaboration, at the heart of the dynamics of this project, must be understood in the strong sense as a redistribution of skills, allowing for a double movement from art to the social sciences and from the social sciences toward art.

All of these fascinating questions provide the ground for this collective work which, we hope, will find other audiences and other uses, and will allow a better grasp, beyond the specific interest of art institutions, of the extent to which exhibition is a transversal figure. This volume constitutes a first attempt at initiating a truly materialist history of exhibitions, one contrasting the conditions of experience of art with the anthropological and epistemological frameworks of modernity at large. As such, it explores the role of the exhibition in an expanded geography of the conceptual frontiers that have historically shaped the space of art and continue to structure it today, and will certainly constitute a crucial contribution to the emerging discipline of the history of exhibitions.

I am thankful to HES-SO/University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, the director of ECAL Alexis Georgacopoulos, the head of Research and Development Davide Fornari, Tristan Garcia, and Vincent Normand for this remarkable work, to the speakers who participated in the research project, the authors of this volume, as well as the student researchers, and I am certain that this book will serve as a window into the ambitious research projects undertaken at ECAL on the practice, theory, and history of contemporary art.

# Introduction

*Tristan Garcia and Vincent Normand*

The history of exhibitions is currently having a boom, and its existence as an emerging discipline needs no further demonstration. Publications that started to appear in the early 1990s have been growing in number for fifteen years, as have specialized magazines.<sup>1</sup> In the institutional field, publishing houses are inaugurating specific collections,<sup>2</sup> museums are launching self-reflective research programs,<sup>3</sup> universities and art schools are offering courses on the study and practice of exhibitions,<sup>4</sup> and the re-materialization of exhibitions excavated from the past, re-exhibited as facsimiles by way of quotation, complete reconstruction, or partial remake has become a frequent phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> This renewed interest in the exhibition and its history promises a social history of art: that is to say, the analysis of the articulation of art history with the material, institutional, and cultural conditions of its production, such that exhibitions are now sites, complementary to books, in which art history is written. The contemporary focus on the exhibition and its history thus foregrounds the exhibition as both the space of affirmation of the identity of art, and the site from which the latter undertakes the reflexive archaeology of its own historical and institutional infrastructures. As such, the exhibition can be said to possess a position of hegemony among the artistic and academic forms of reflection on the ontological designation “art,” to the extent that, as Jacques Rancière once put it, contemporary art perhaps designates today above all a privileged form, namely, that of its *exhibition*.<sup>6</sup>

The exhibition thus appears as a particularly well-suited site for outlining a critical concept of contemporary art in general, for it constitutes a central resource for its art-historical and art-critical elaboration. However, the way its history is commonly written is mostly confined to art-historical markers alone, often limiting its narrative to the institutional events that have marked the history of cultural forms: emerging out of the old disciplinary field of the history of collections (itself coeval with the birth of the modern museum), it now takes on its contemporary forms and agents (namely, international biennials, curators, and artists). The systematic history of the exhibition—namely, the history not

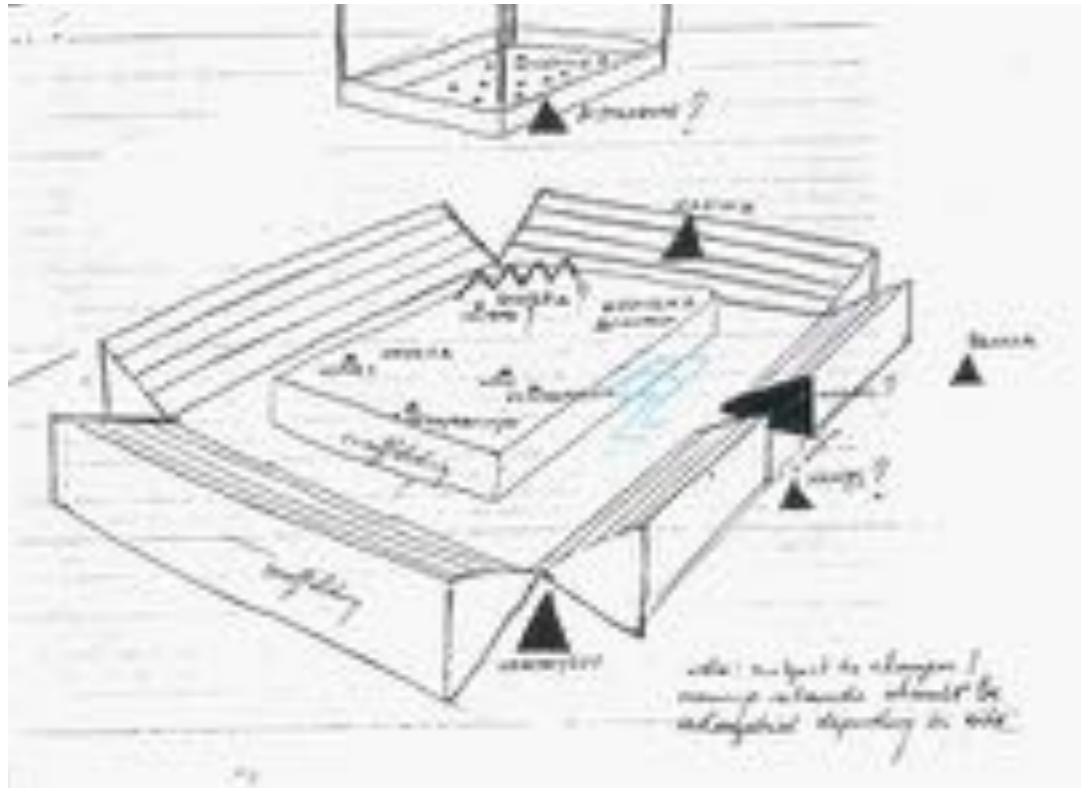
only of its institutional development, but of its conceptual and aesthetic function, within a wider account of modernity—remains to be written. This volume consists of a preliminary attempt at filling this lack.

## The Theater, the Garden, and the Bestiary

Although we recognize the importance of writing a social history of art, this volume is not an account of the historical processes through which the exhibition-form has become the main institutional mediator of the emergence of the contemporary concept of art, nor is it interested in tracing only its art-historical trajectory.

The very title of this volume serves as a clue to its intentions: it is an explicit reference to the exhibition “Theatergarten Bestiarium,” which took place in 1989 at the Institute for Contemporary Art, P.S.1 Museum in Queens, New York; Casino de la Exposición in Seville; and Confort Moderne in Poitiers, France. Based on research conducted by gallerist, curator, and art historian Rüdiger Schöttle, the exhibition derived specifically from his 1986 text “Bestiarium: Theater and Garden of Violence, War and Happiness,” itself expanding on a collection of essays titled “Psychomachia” which he began writing in 1979.<sup>7</sup> Schöttle’s initial aim was to detect the emergence of the figure of the modern spectator in the Baroque culture of seventeenth-century Europe, by grounding its political formation in the development of the theater stage and the architecture of Baroque gardens, which he framed as optical technologies that heralded nineteenth-century exhibition parks and modern dreamworlds.

Although this volume invokes the theater, the garden, and the bestiary simply as conceptual tropes, or symbolic sites of the modern imaginary, it is largely indebted to many of the theoretical intuitions at the origin of this exhibition. “Theatergarten Bestiarium” was a groundbreaking project, which ought to be put in direct dialogue with the work of a certain generation of art historians and critics active in the American context in the 1980s and 1990s



Preparatory drawing of "Theatergarden Bestiarium," MoMA PS1, New York, January 15–March 12, 1989. Drawing: Hans Sonneveld. Courtesy of Chris Dercon.



Installation view of "Theatergarden Bestiarium," Confort Moderne, Poitiers, France, September 30–November 29, 1989. Courtesy of Chris Dercon.

(around the journal *October*, for the most part)—namely, the inscription of modes of visibility ungrounded by modernist and postmodernist art in the “scopic regime”<sup>8</sup> of Western modernity, and in a broader genealogical account of the articulation between art forms, regimes of opticality, culture, and politics.<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, one of the concepts at the origin of the research project that led to the publication of this volume is directly borrowed from this critical moment: Tony Bennett’s “exhibitionary complex.”<sup>10</sup> In his eponymous text, Bennett argues that the development of the public art museum needs to be read in parallel with that of a vast array of modern institutions that, by operating as interconnected sites, triggered the development and circulation of new disciplines (history, biology, history of art, anthropology) and their respective discursive objects (the past, evolution, aesthetics, man). Crucially, Bennett understands the museum as an “exhibitionary apparatus,” that is to say a space of biopolitical circulation in which visitors adopt the point of view of power, through the internalization of an idealized and ordered perception of themselves. By inscribing the museum in a broader account of the epistemological and political templates of modernity, the concept of the “exhibitionary complex” implies that the exhibition apparatuses of modernity belong to a system of institutions in which regimes of visibility and modes of subjectivity are articulated. As such, any critical description of the nature and function of the exhibition must take into account its affiliations to a set of other apparatuses, discourses, and technologies that together form a flexible but coherent network.<sup>11</sup>

Although Bennett’s text focuses on mid-nineteenth-century museology and the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, we contend that his concept remains a valid theoretical model for the research this volume gathers. By juxtaposing our research with this concept rather than merely aligning ourselves with it, we have intended to critically use Bennett’s concept in our attempt to inscribe the exhibition within a wider account of Western modernity. Using an expanded concept of the exhibition allows us to isolate the historical construction of a set of aesthetic, epistemological, and ontological scripts, which enables us to grasp the implicit contracts encoded in the exhibition format: conditions and frameworks that, despite the postmodern narrative of ends (of history, of ideologies), have remained active in the background of history and continue to work out the space of art and knowledge, and as such ought to be excavated.

## Form and Apparatus

Yet, the specific “genus” that is the format of the exhibition is not that simple to identify, probably because of the tenuousness and impurity of its ontological ground: decidedly not autonomous, often deemed merely a “frame,” both media and medium, neither a stable and collectible object, nor entirely the product of a studio practice, it is always a more or less transparent combination of these elements. In virtue of this impurity, the exhibition has been a critical resource shared by disciplinary fields as diverse as history, visual and cultural studies, anthropology, and art theory. The way this critical resource has been used in academic and artistic contexts could be schematically mapped according to two predominant vectors: the gradual advent of the exhibition as a *form* in its own right (itself parallel to its idealization and autonomization), and the emergence of a critical discourse about the exhibitionary *apparatus* and its ideological infrastructures.

Throughout the course of its advent as a *form*, the exhibition has been mobilized by modern artists and contemporary art historians as a privileged vector for critical reflection, on the one hand, on the conceptual foundations of the space of art and, on the other hand, on the articulation of this space with the systemic conditions of modernity (its economic, historical, technological, and political dimensions).<sup>12</sup> This process of critical reflection on the structural foundations of art, of which Marcel Duchamp’s work is commonly depicted as the originator, has found one of its last manifestations in the canonical gesture of institutional critique, namely the transformation of the intangible (social, ideological, and economic) frameworks of the institution of exhibition of art into the material of the artwork. In light of this process, the exhibition appears as a form allowing, on the one hand, a critical reflection on the conditions of aesthetic experience and, on the other hand, its formal recomposition in a medium accommodating various kinds of representations. In other words, considering the rise of the exhibition as a critical form, the tendency of modern art to reflect its conditions of production appears to have produced its correlate, namely, *the gradual transformation of the exhibition into the prime material of art.*

In contrast, in the fields of history, museum studies, anthropology, and art theory, the exhibition can be said to have been mobilized not as a form but

as an *apparatus* allowing for a critical analysis of the conditions of production and reception of art and other cultural artifacts. In these disciplinary fields, in which the analysis has largely focused on the museum as a central institutional site of conservation and display, the Foucauldian notion of *dispositif* has been something of the order of a theoretical model: by focusing on the productive functions of the exhibition as a relay of power and knowledge, these analyzes make it a privileged vehicle of subjectivation whose metahistorical ramifications institute it as an apparatus, that is to say, as a site of materialization of the modern episteme, the concrete stage on which a new experience of knowledge emerged.<sup>13</sup> In this critical tradition of social sciences, prime attention is paid to the exhibitionary apparatuses of modernity as *spatial structures determining the social inscription of objects*.

Writing a history of the exhibition that intends to grasp the conceptual depth of its procedures requires navigating the fault line inherent to its double identity. This volume goes so far as to

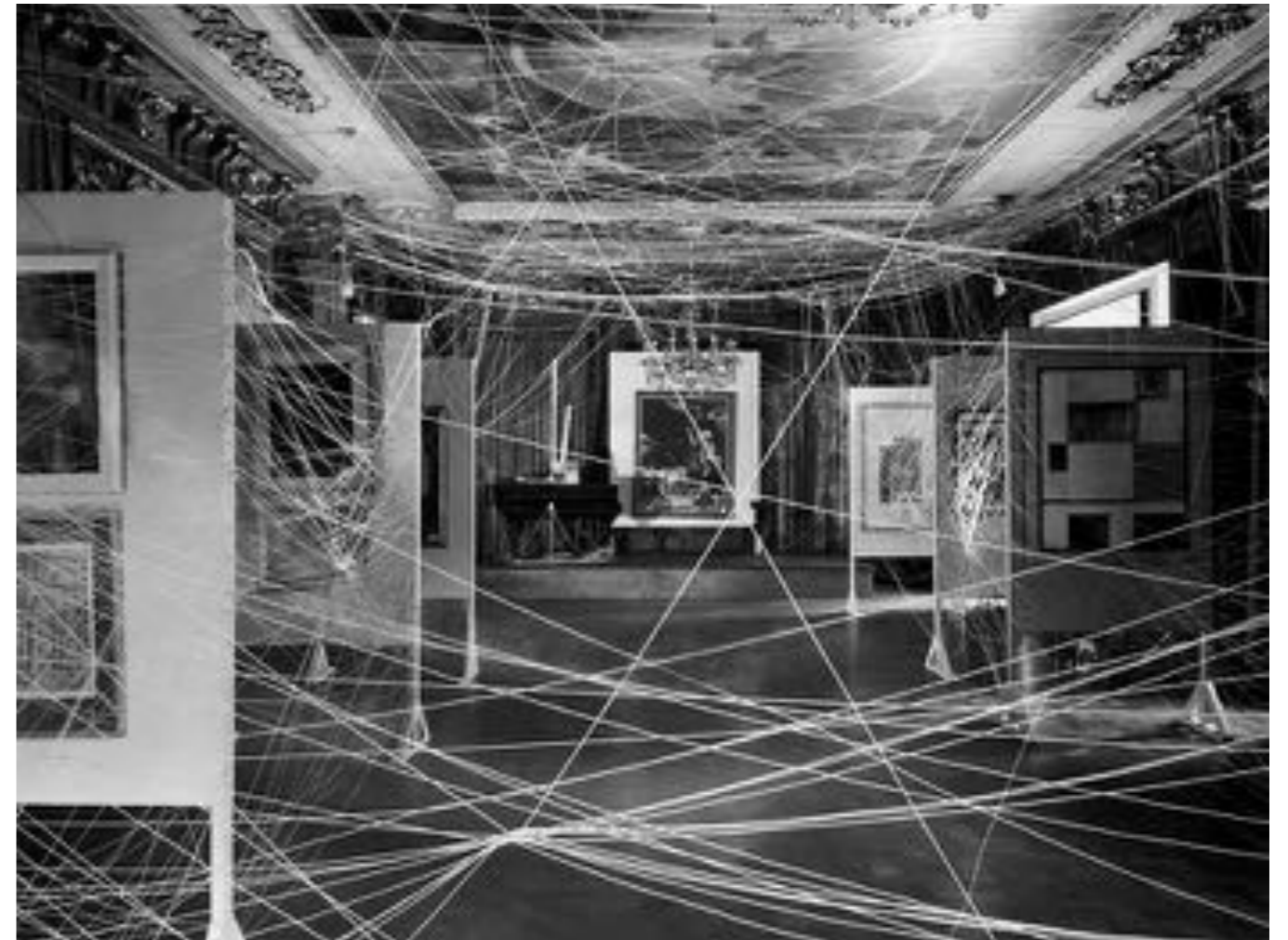
contend that the exhibition is ontologically defined by this *split identity*: it is both a *form* (as artists and curators shaped it) and an *apparatus* (as critical discourses revealed it). It is the space opened by this split that this volume intends to explore, so as to mobilize the exhibition neither only as a form, nor only as an apparatus, but as the product of their dialectical articulation, that is to say, as a generic object of modernity, a historiographical object in its own right.

### Clinic and Salon: A History of Limits

If Walter Benjamin, in his unfinished *Arcades Project*, saw no difference between the optical experience offered by a museum, a botanical garden, or a casino, it is because the exhibitionary complex is part of a series of technological, epistemological, and anthropological procedures shared by many optical technologies and modern cultural



Interior view of the east end of the court in the Pitt Rivers Museum, showing the nineteenth century Haida totem pole, ca. 1901. Photo: Alfred Robinson. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1998.267.269.3).



Installation view of "First Papers of Surrealism," Whitelaw Reid Mansion, New York, October 30–November 7, 1942, showing Marcel Duchamp's *His Twine* (1942). Gelatin silver print, 1942. Photo: John D. Schiff. © Philadelphia Museum of Art/Leo Baeck Institute/Association Marcel Duchamp/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019.

practices that, together, define modernity as a reform of vision. This volume proposes to consider the exhibition as a site particularly well equipped to deal with the ontological separations imprinted in the world by Western modernity: the distinct production of objectivity and subjectivity, of Nature and Culture, of epistemic objects and modes of spectatorship. The exhibition can indeed be seen as a site entirely situated in the space of mediation between the ontological designations of modernity: it has been historically structured both by the scientific *positivity* inherent of the logical-spatial order at work in the museum (and its predecessors: anatomical theaters, zoological gardens, and natural history cabinets, etc.) and by the *negativity* of modern aesthetic experience, or more precisely by modern art's tendency to critically reflect upon its own conditions of possibility.<sup>14</sup> Because of its institutional history, the exhibition consists of a specific scenography of the boundaries that cross and articulate the modern world, thus constituting a strategic point of access to them. Considering the position of the exhibitionary complex at the nexus of these boundaries, the role of the exhibition in the modern order of knowledge could be described as the outcome of the articulation of two central sites of modern experience: what Michel Foucault called the “clinic” and what Denis Diderot has reconstituted in his *Salons* (1759–81).

The modern museum (and with it, the various apparatuses of exhibition of the living that have emerged throughout scientific modernity) is a place characterized by the dialectical reversal it imprints in the “life” of objects: acting as a global isolator, it de-animates previously animated entities by uprooting them from their “milieu,” and reanimates “dead” objects by over-determining their signification and projecting them in a restricted field of attention. As such, the modern museum is an apparatus operating through what might be called “denaturalizing cuts,” creating the silent space of an exchange put to death, de-animated, and reanimated by a set of synthetic mediations. In this regard, the museum opens a space of visibility similar to the one Foucault—in his archaeology of medical perception—identified in the clinic, whose mode of observation he elevated to the rank of anthropological truth determining the modern experience of knowledge in general.<sup>15</sup> By articulating what can be seen (of a symptom, of an object of knowledge) and what can be said of it, the clinic

consists of a tool of veridiction which, after successive processes of objectification, culminates in a regime of visibility that finds its vanishing point in the subjectivity of the observer. The clinic can be said to define the “triangle of truth” in which modern science found its geometry: the limits erected in Nature, by delimiting epistemic objects in the world, indeed traverse Nature, but also cross through the interior of the subject, the body of the observer, its social space, and ultimately the modern psyche. The modern museum ought to be described as a site of spatialization of such clinical procedures: it is a mediating interface between the interiority of the viewer and an ordered projection of the contents of a world pictured as its outside. Spectatorship in the denaturalized space of an exhibitionary apparatus such as the modern museum thus involves a decision which consists in the negotiation of an always deepened chasm, a gap on both sides of which subjects and objects are constantly redistributed. As such, the modern institutions of exhibition of Nature can be described as agents and indexes of a modern politics of vision, and of the procedures of production of objectivity to which they are harnessed: as sites dedicated to the alignment of operations of objectification with the production of subjectivity, in which new modes of individuation emerged.

As for the exhibition of art, it is now common to designate the painting and sculpture salons (“Salons de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture”) organized at the Louvre from 1725 to 1789 as the onset of the history of exhibitions. However, it is rather in Diderot's *Salons*, the nine texts he wrote about these exhibitions between 1759 and 1781, that we may find their full conceptual and aesthetic function, beyond their mere institutional relevance. It is indeed with Diderot's *Salons* that a crucial feature of the first public art exhibitions emerged: the growing, reflexive thematization by the artwork of its exhibition. The *Salons* indeed constitute a space of *scopic crystallization*<sup>16</sup> where new attention began to be paid simultaneously to the inner geometry of the paintings' pictorial plane and their relationship with surrounding artworks, spurring a revolution both in aesthetics and criticism: for the reader of Diderot's *Salons* as for the spectator of the exhibitions they documented, a new polarization emerged between attention and distraction (constitutive of what Jürgen Habermas called “the new public space of bourgeoisie”), a polarity within

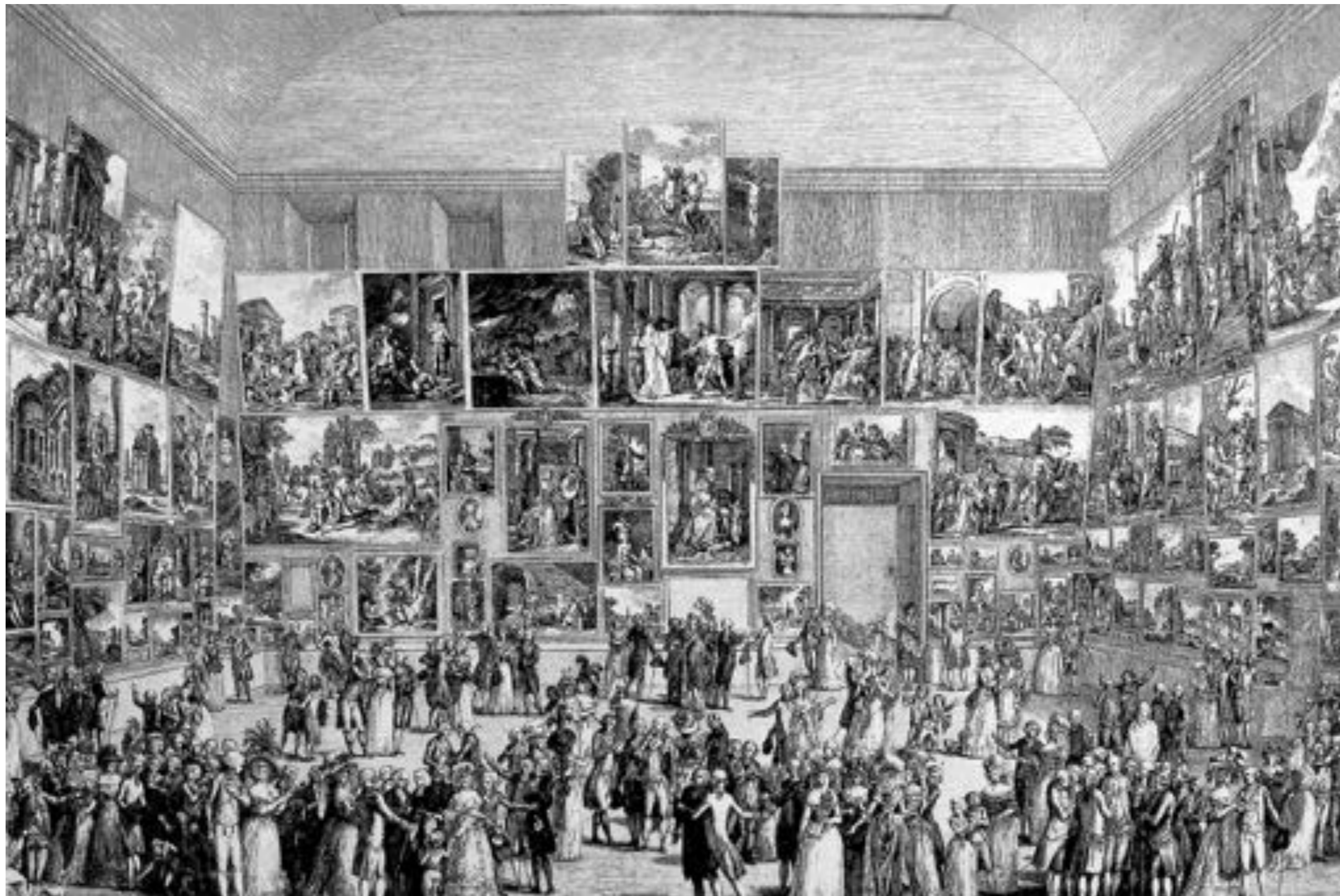


Interior view of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, showing displays of prehistoric skeletons, 1920. © California Historical Society Collection, Los Angeles.

which the figures depicted operate as vehicles of transgression of the implicit “fourth wall” separating the observer from the scenic device of the painting, finding his vanishing point in the eye of the spectator. This new solidarity between the artwork and the viewer, mediated by the new medium afforded by the public art exhibition is, so to speak, the “primordial scene” of the concept around which much of the theory of modern art crystallized, namely *theatricality*, this effect of quasi self-consciousness by the artwork of its surroundings, of its being observed, that Michael Fried, at the end of the historical trajectory of modernism, condemned as the destruction of the effect of absorption of the spectator's attention necessary to the artwork's autonomy. As such, Diderot's *Salons* can be seen as the outset of the aesthetic contract characterizing the modern experience of art, the starting point of the process by which the exhibition gave a spatial form to the aesthetic experience prompted by modern art.

Both “clinic” and *Salon*: this volume proposes to depict the objectivity underlying the exhibitionary

apparatuses of scientific modernity and the theatricality inherent to the history of the exhibition-form as two modalities of the same ontological fabric, participating in parallel (but reversed) ways in the symmetrical production of objectivity and subjectivity, objects and subjects. Be it through scientific apparatuses of exhibition of Nature or through the progressive advent of the exhibition as a form, the exhibitionary complex, between clinic and Salon, consists of a central device of the ways in which, throughout modernity, the subject has forged an image of itself by becoming the eyewitness (or spectator) of its own representations, knowledge, and modes of carving the world—of the frontiers it imprinted in the world, and in which a certain picture of the human sedimented. As such, the exhibitionary complex appears as a central site of the modern ontological engineering of subjects and objects. It is the historical unfolding of such a site that this volume thus intends to write, by describing its articulation with the ontological backdrop of modernity.



Pietro Antonio Martini,  
*Exposition au Salon  
de 1787, 1787*. Etching.  
© Bibliothèque  
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## Structure of the Book

At the onset of this volume thus lies the desire to grasp the concrete historical mediations by which the exhibition has become the privileged site of spatial representation of our scientific and aesthetic concepts. This book intends to explore two main lines of inquiry, each stemming from hypotheses formulated at the beginning of our research project.

Firstly, we wish to understand the role of the exhibition in the formation of the conceptual categories (or anthropological “Great Divides”) of scientific modernity, by exploring the positivist and objectivist forms of rationality that have historically coded the institutions of exhibition of Nature (anatomical theaters, natural history collections, and zoological gardens, etc.) and that have led to the progressive consolidation of the museological framework and of the gallery space. Here, we have considered the modes of relationality, the conditions of mediality, and the semiotic processes that these institutions have fostered within modern scientific culture, as well as the procedures of production of epistemic objects to which they are harnessed. This line of inquiry thus seeks to examine modern scientific exhibitionary apparatuses as sites within which new procedures of spatialization of knowledge have emerged.

Secondly, we wish to reconstruct the ways in which the exhibition of art, throughout modernism and postmodernism, has become both the ontological structure and aesthetic image of the modern experience of art, by exploring how the exhibition became, for the space of art, a privileged vector of reflection on its articulation with the classificatory categories of modernity. This line of inquiry explores how the modern experience of art has historically been the object of growing solidarity between the artwork and its stage, the exhibition space, outlining a critical history of contemporary art as the product of a process of excavation of its own structures of presentation. By tracing the historical transformations in the ontology of the artwork throughout the twentieth century, and by mapping it against an account of the aesthetic function of the exhibition space, we intend to explore what art *exhibits*, in order to understand the aesthetic and political dimensions of the articulation between the concept of art we inherit and the spatiotemporal medium of the exhibition.

The matter at hand is therefore to produce an epistemology of the exhibition as a mediating interface of modernity, polarized between the history of science and art history, so as to describe how the exhibition operated historically in what we may call the “anthropological matrix” of modernity: its activity of border production, the regime of its frontiers, the economy of its epistemological and ontological limits, the cartography of the divides that legislated its own scientific and artistic representations.

This volume thus not only calls for an epistemology of the modern gaze, but for the description of its articulation to a history of forms, simultaneously exploring their modes of mediation and the ways in which these mediations ramified into the aesthetic realm, calling forth the reconsideration of what we mean, broadly speaking, by the relations between art and science. The structure of this book cuts across this question, and is articulated around three vistas on the exhibition, each navigating both apparatuses of scientific exhibition and forms of exhibition of art. As such, each chapter can be seen as a specific scale of description delving at a different depth into the complexity of the exhibition’s inner historical and conceptual stratification.

Chapter I, “Frame and Stage: Enclosing the Subject,” considers the apparatuses and forms of exhibition as spaces characterized by scientific, technological, and aesthetic operations binding the political and historical formation of the subject with the (epistemic or aesthetic) object against which it institutes itself. By exploring the exhibitionary complex either as a space from which to articulate anew aesthetics and politics (Kim West) or as a site defined by its “split identity” (Vincent Normand), this chapter considers the modes of knowledge construction specific to exhibitionary apparatuses such as anatomical theaters and zoological gardens (Rafael Mandressi, Filipa Ramos), and the ways in which the exhibition crystallizes certain central aesthetic features of the modern experience of art (Juliane Rebentisch, Lucy Steeds).

Chapter II, “The Site of Sight: Carving the Object,” explores the role played by apparatuses and forms of exhibition in the production of epistemic and aesthetic objects. By outlining the specificity of the exhibition in contrast to monstration and representation (Tristan Garcia), or by undertaking a “deep history” of the modes of seeing, showing and ordering that cross both the natural realm and

its scientific account (João Ribas), this chapter considers the modes of aestheticization, institutionalization, and dramatization of the concept of Nature (Olivier Surel and Charles Wolfe), the role of colonial capture and “necroaesthetics” therein (Anna-Sophie Springer and Etienne Turpin), as well as the continuity, or indivisibility, between the historical unfolding of the project of modern art and its space of exhibition (Stéphane Lojkine, Elitza Dulguerova).

Finally, chapter III, “The Exhibition-Form: Spatializing the Concept,” offers a critical horizon to the volume, by considering the exhibition as a site of spatialization of the conceptual and aesthetic dynamics of modernity, up to its consequences for the political economy of contemporary art. By exploring the specific case of Jean-François Lyotard’s 1985 exhibition “Les Immatériaux” as a project dedicated to exploring the concept of *sensibility* and as a lens through which to radicalize the question of aesthetics (Yuk Hui), by considering exhibitions as sites where the mediations that cross the social order can be made explicit (Anselm Franke), or by drafting a transhistorical account of exhibition formats as social rituals (Dorothea von Hantelmann), this chapter elaborates upon the role of the exhibition in the emergence of a generic concept of art (Jeremy Lecomte), the cultural logic of late capitalism (Sami Khatib), and the possibility of a historical ontology of contemporary art (Peter Osborne).

Between these chapters, four artist commissions are intercalated, and aim at enacting the conceptual and historical perspectives explored by this volume. Taking the form of what could be called “paper exhibitions,” in reference to the theoretical practice of paper architecture, they function as concrete clues on some of the formal and theoretical obsessions at the outset of this book.

Pierre Huyghe’s *Nymphéas Transplant* takes us back to a “primal scene” of modern painting and its relationship with the representation of the natural realm. It explores the Water Garden Claude Monet built and depicted in his series *Les Nymphéas* [*Water Lilies*] (1902–1926) during the last thirty years of his life. By reconstituting Giverny’s biotope inside aquariums that function both as random “core samples” of the garden and as optical devices allowing us to gaze at it, *Nymphéas Transplant* delves into the manifold animal, aquatic, vegetal, and mineral scales that swarm, blind to our presence, under the surface of the history of visual forms.



Visitor viewing siamang exhibit, Hall of Primates, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1965. Image #331007 © American Museum of Natural History Library.

In *Folded Cuts*, Etienne Chambaud probes the deep storage and the taxidermy workshop of the Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle in Paris. Navigating the taxonomic arrangement of specimens frozen in the expression of bare life, and using the very format of this book as a means for constructing continuities between heterogeneous species, it produces figures akin to the premodern monsters and chimeras that modern natural sciences have exorcized out of their system of description of Nature. Oscillating between a baroque and a modern gesture, namely the fold and the cut, it detects the persistence of the former in the latter, and the promise of the latter in the former.

With *Anamazon*, Pamela Rosenkranz undertakes an “anabasis,” a voyage up the river Amazon and what has become of its polysemy in the age of platform capitalism, and more specifically of its paradigmatic archetype, Amazon.com. It consists of a generic poetic system made from the alphabetical list of products available from the online retailer. From the deltas of an ecosystem that embodied

unchartedness in the modern imaginary to the lexicon of boundlessness and transcendence we find in the saturated information environments of online department stores, it traces the mechanisms of late-capitalist subjectivation, and addresses the plasticity of the philosophical and scientific meanings of Nature.

Finally, Fabien Giraud & Raphaël Siboni's *The Form of Not (Axiom)* explores the collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, known for its display based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. An artificial intelligence, trained on thousands of images of objects from the collection, is given the task of retro-engineering the evolutionary sequence displayed in the museum by imagining the morphological history that led to the formation of a specific artifact: Augustus Pitt Rivers's own sword. Consisting of a short catalogue of images approximating the state of ambient hallucination to which human cognition (and more specifically aesthetic experience) can be compared to, this exercise in artificial imagination concludes the book with a speculative archaeology of the mind.

## Acknowledgments

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moment when it disappears." Jacques Rancière, "Rooms and Possible Scripts, Jacques Rancière in Conversation with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster," *artpress*, no. 327 (October 2006): 31.

- 7 See Chris Dercon, ed., *Theatergarden Bestiarium: The Garden as Theater as Museum* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).
- 8 The French semiologist Christian Metz coined the term "scopic regime" in order to distinguish cinema from theater in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1896). Martin Jay uses it to define the way we see the world through a technical apparatus and in conjunction with art forms.
- 9 For a publication gathering several authors affiliated with *October* on this matter, and representative of their project, see Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1987).
- 10 See Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations*, no. 4 (Spring 1988): 73–102.
- 11 For a study of this specific point see, Kim West, *The Exhibitionary Complex: Exhibition, Apparatus, and Media from Kulturhuset to the Centre Pompidou, 1963–1977* (Stockholm: Södertörns University Press, 2017).
- 12 See notably, Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Jean-Marc Poinsot, *Quand l'œuvre a lieu: L'art exposé et ses récits autorisés* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2008); Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History 1962–2002* (London: Phaidon, 2013); Elitza Dulguerova, *Usages et Utopies: L'exposition dans l'avant-garde russe prérévolutionnaire (1900–1916)* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2015); James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017).
- 13 See for example Susan Sheets-Pyenson, *Cathedrals of Science: The Development of Colonial Natural History Museums during the Late Nineteenth Century* (Kingston, ON: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988); Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and*

*the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1992); Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993); Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995); Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995); Tony Bennett, *Pasts Beyond Memory* (London: Routledge, 2004).

14 And whose history can be schematically traced from the first painting and sculpture salons held in the Louvre from the end of the seventeenth century to the advent of the white cube as a generic framework of appearance of art.

15 See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Routledge, 1991).

16 This term is developed by Stéphane Lojkine in *L'œil révolté: Les Salons de Diderot* (Paris: Jacqueline Chambon, 2007).

1 Among the many projects initiating a history of exhibitions, some seminal volumes stand as early examples of this discipline under formation: Bruce Altshuler, *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994); and *Salon to Biennial—Exhibitions That Made Art History, vol. 1: 1863–1959* (London: Phaidon, 2008); Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, eds., *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996); Mary Anne Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998); Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). In the flurry of recent publications on the matter of curating, we will simply set aside these: Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012); Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski, eds., *Cultures of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012); Maria Lind, ed., *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012). As for journals and magazines, see for example *On Curating*, self-described as "an independent international web journal focusing on questions around

curatorial practice and theory" established in 2008, or *The Exhibitionist*, established in 2009, featuring contributions by international artists and curators dedicated to their exhibition practice as well as to the history of exhibitions, demonstrating the recent movement of intense discursive reflexivity that characterizes the field. On that point, see the summary proposed by Jens Hoffmann in "Curating between the Lines," *Critique d'art*, no. 41 (Spring/Summer 2013): 73–85.

2 See for example the Exhibition Histories series published by Afterall in London.

3 See the program of the VanAbbemuseum in Eindhoven in the early 2010s and the research projects underway at the Centre Pompidou, Tate Modern, and MoMA.

4 To name just a very few examples, of note are: CSS Bard—Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; MFA Curating at Goldsmiths, University of London; Exhibition Research Lab at Liverpool John Moore University; or the now defunct Ecole du Magasin, Grenoble, France.

5 The most prominent recent examples of this practice are: "When Attitudes Become Forms: Bern 1969/Venice 2013," the reenactment of Harald Szeemann's seminal exhibition organized by Fondazione Prada in Venice in 2013; "Vides: Une rétrospective," a retrospective of empty exhibition spaces organized

at Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2009; and "Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918–1943" organized by Fondazione Prada in Milan in 2018.

6 "I try to see what art is doing there and the doing that makes art. When we talk about art, and contemporary art especially, we are not talking about something shared by the different arts, we are talking about a privileged form that is the way art is exhibited. There was a time when painting played this role. It wasn't only the art of the painters, of pigments put on a canvas, it was the art that exhibited art, that spoke its nature and its destiny. Today, it is the exhibition as such that has taken on this role. The role played by installation indicates that what *shows* art today is the constitution of a space, the arrangement of objects in that space. This means: the art exhibited nowadays shows that there is not really anything 'specific to art.' The rubbishing of contemporary art, the nostalgia for painting—this is the nostalgia for an art that exhibits the specificity of art in the Eucharistic mode of real presence. The exhibition is the place where what we see points up this problem: is there an art that exhibits art, or is what characterizes art for us precisely the absence of such an identifier of art? The exhibition presents this random deployment of art in relation to what is not art, this way of approaching the

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Pierre Ronzeaud, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2011); *L'Œil révolté* (Jacqueline Chambon); *Image et subversion* (Jacqueline Chambon, 2005); and *La Scène de roman* (Armand Colin, 2002). His next book is provisionally titled *The Enlightenment to Come*.

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JOÃO RIBAS is a curator and writer based in Porto. He was previously director of the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto, where he also served as deputy director and senior curator (2014–18), and was previously curator at the MIT List Visual Arts Center (2009–13), and the Drawing Center, New York (2007–9). Ribas is the winner of four consecutive AICA Awards for Best Exhibition (2008–11) and of the Emily Hall Tremain Exhibition Award (2010).

His writing has been published in various publications including *Artforum*, *Afterall*, *ArtNews*, *Art in America*, *frieze*, *Mousse*, *The Exhibitionist*, *Spike Art Quarterly*, and the *Guardian*, among others. His edited volume *In the Holocene* (Sternberg Press, 2014) proposes art as a form of speculative science.

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