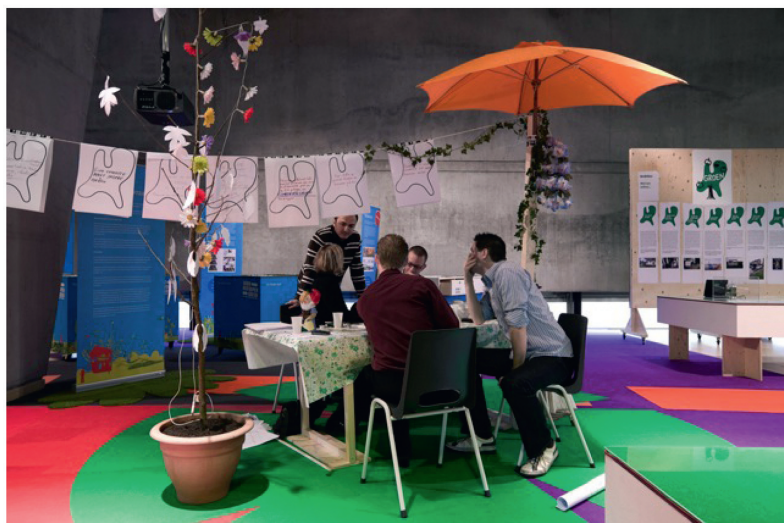


CARMEN MÖRSCH, ANGELI SACHS,
THOMAS SIEBER (EDS.)

CONTEMPORARY CURATING AND MUSEUM EDUCATION



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In the context of critical museology, museums are questioning their social role, defining the museum as a site for knowledge exchange and participation in creating links between past and present. Museum education has evolved as a practice in its own right, questioning, expanding and transforming exhibitions and institutions. How does museum work change if we conceive of curating and education as an integrated practice?

This question is addressed by international contributors from different kinds of museums. For anyone interested in the future of museums, it offers insights into the diversity of positions and experiences of translating the »grand designs« of museology into practice.

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Preface

This volume grew out of the international conference *Contemporary Curating and Museum Education* at the Zurich University of the Arts, which was organised by the MA in Art Education: Curating & Museum Education.¹ The integrated understanding of curation and education is the leitmotif of the MA program, which is situated between the three key areas of teaching, research and the museum. At the heart of the course is the critical confrontation with the contexts of contemporary curation and the museum. The aim of the course is to promote a reflexive praxis which integrates the two fields of curation and art education. We work towards this objective in our practices of teaching, research, and in our curatorial and education work. Through this comprehensive approach, we hope to contribute to the generation of a discourse and theory which is based on the negotiation of diverse experiential contexts and traditions of knowledge.

Since the beginning of the professionalisation of museum work, curation and education have stood in a hierarchical relationship to one another, whereby curation comes first, and education then does its best to smoothly communicate the content of the former to the largest possible audience. This static arrangement was never undisputed and, particularly in the last two decades, has begun to shift: the boundaries between the two fields are becoming more permeable. One factor that has contributed to this development is that museums are interrogating their role in the knowledge society in diverse ways. According to this perspective, visitors are always also potential 'prosumers', and the diversity of voices of networked learning communities stands in opposition to the claim to validity of specialist expertise. Apart from their strong focus on the objects, museums are oriented towards society, towards their users. They present themselves as sites of knowledge exchange, and as the stage of a participation-based linking of history with the present.

1 | From the autumn semester 2016/17 the master's program will bear the name Master of Arts in Art Education Curatorial Studies.

Additionally, the insights provided by critical museology have contributed to an understanding of museums as historically constructed agents which are able to make powerful interventions in the social fabric, which are never neutral, but rather always positioning themselves socially through their activities. They therefore have the responsibility to carry out this positioning in a conscious and sound fashion, and to draw practical conclusions from this process.

Corresponding with this, the specific forms of knowledge and practices of museum and gallery education are becoming increasingly relevant. For its part, since the 1990s, the field of education and learning in exhibitions and museums has increasingly ceased to understand itself solely as a service, but rather is recognising and realising its potential as an autonomous practice of cultural production at the intersections of knowledge transfer, cultural education work, artistic-performative processes and sometimes also as activism. From this perspective, education and outreach work evolves into a critical practice which interrogates, expands and alters exhibitions and institutions.

Currently, the marked shifts of the operational paradigms and imagined functions of museums remain restricted predominantly to the conceptual level. In the institutional reality, the associated expansions of space and activities are occurring gradually: they range from interactive exhibitions which offer the possibility of incorporating knowledge into the displays at different points, to acting on thematic suggestions for exhibition and education practice, right up to collective forms of curation. For a long time now, these developments have not been restricted to the Euro-American axis: right now, specifically in the Global South, we are seeing the emergence of ground-breaking combinations of curation, education and community liaison, as part of attempts to decolonise the traditionally Eurocentric gallery and museum context.

It was against this background that, a few years ago, we began organising panels under the title *Contemporary Curating and Museum Education*, at which international experts have given presentations and discussed current issues in curation and education work. Right from the beginning, we planned to bring together these considerations – which are mostly aimed at specific types of museums – in the form of a large conference. This was intended to enable a precise perspective on examples of putting interpretations of the ‘big concepts’ into practice, and focused on one question which is key for our teaching and research: how does museum work change when curation and education are understood as a single, integrated concept?

The conference was opened with a panel on the so-called ‘educational turn in curating’, within which some fundamental considerations on the entanglement of curation and education work were developed, under the banner of a transformative form of praxis. On this foundation, the conference was structured around the diverse types of museums, in order to account for the fact that, to a certain extent, they have different histories, audiences, goals and practices

of collecting, curation and education. The comparison between museums of art, architecture, design, ethnography, history and culture was intended to facilitate a reflection on whether and to what extent the strategies and demands formulated for the institution of the museum in general mean different things for the different types of museums, but then also, which challenges apply to all, and can thus be tackled collectively.

The presenters we invited included representatives from both the theory and praxis of curation and museum education who design and carry out their work in one way or another under the banner of this integrated thinking. The aim was to carry out the discussion on the foundation of a shared interest in connecting curation and museum education. We were hoping for the most precise possible consideration of detailed issues, which can only develop if this shared fundamental interest is present. The latter also connects the essays in this collection. Unlike at the conference however, this publication is structured according to thematic focuses which came out of our evaluation of the conference, the reading of the essays and the ensuing discussion. This structure, less thematic than programmatic, accounts for the fact that, in the essays gathered here, the potential for change in the museum as an institution which is offered by an integrated practice of curation and education can be related to diverse forms of display, operational paradigms and functions. Against this backdrop, we have assigned the essays to the four chapters *Curating and Museum Education as Expansion of the Display*, as *Expansion of the Museum*, as *Social Intervention* and as *Decolonisation*, which are each accompanied by an introduction. We would like to propose these categorisations as heuristic propositions, which are intended to support a contextualisation of contemporary practices of curation and education, both in the internal debates in the field and within social developments. In this sense, this volume is addressed on the one hand to the specialist audience; on the other hand, in the context of an internationally growing number of courses on curation and museum education, it aims to provide introductory knowledge and material for on-going discussions.

This volume was conceived by the head and two members of the teaching staff of the Master of Arts in Art Education Curatorial Studies at the Zurich University of the Arts. We have invited a selection of the speakers from the panels and the conference to develop their presentations into contributions on the themes of this volume, and we would like to express our gratitude for their essays and articles. Special thanks goes to Nora Landkammer, vice head of the Institute for Art Education at the Zurich University of the Arts and a lecturer in the master's program for the extremely productive collaboration. Nora conceived and ran the section at the conference on the ethnographic museums, and also oversaw the editorial work for the chapter in this book *Curating and Museum Education as Decolonisation of the Museum*. This thanks extends to the entire institute, which under the direction of Carmen Mörsch is a close partner

at the intersection of research and teaching, and contributes substantially to the discussion and formation of the discourse in our field. A warm thank you also goes to Hannah Horst, a research assistant in the MA in Art Education, who provided significant support with her great commitment in organising and making the conference and the book happen. Lastly, we would like to thank the Zurich University of the Arts for their support of our work and this project, which aims to facilitate an analysis of the current state of the discussion, and at the same time, hopes to open up new perspectives on where the discourse at the intersection of curation and education can go from here.

The Editors

Carmen Mörsch, Angeli Sachs, Thomas Sieber

Introduction

Angeli Sachs

“The space of the museum encloses like a frame and places something on display. It divides an interior from an exterior, closes off this interior inside of itself and envelops it with value.”¹ This is the sentence with which Roswitha Muttenthaler and Regina Wonisch open their book *Gesten des Zeigens* (*Gestures of Showing*). And though their investigation is related to the “representation of gender and race in exhibitions”, the theoretical approaches which they have developed for their analyses of exhibitions are transferrable to other contexts. In the exhibition, the display of the museum is intensified, and there is never a neutral “gesture of showing”. For that is where, as Sabine Offe puts it, “the interpretive intentions of exhibition-makers, meanings of that which is exhibited and the interpretive speculations of the viewer”² come together. Thus, a “relational network” emerges which determines the “reception” of the contents of the exhibition.

It is not without reason that, referencing the work of Mieke Bal, Muttenthaler and Wonisch refer to “exhibitions as speech acts”.³ In her theoretical work, Bal goes beyond the usual definition of the museum, and is interested in the metaphorical use of the idea of the museum, which she refers to as a “particular form of discursive behaviour, the posture or gesture of exposing”.

And she investigates the “ambiguities involved in gestures of exposing; in gestures that point to things and seem to say: ‘Look!’ – often implying: ‘That’s how it is.’ The ‘Look!’ aspect involves the visual availability of the exposed object. The ‘That’s how it is’ aspect involves the authority of the person who knows: epistemic authority. The gesture of exposing connects these two aspects.”⁴

The insights of critical museology give rise to the demand to transform the museum into an arena of political action, in which conflicts can be made

1 | R. Muttenthaler & R. Wonisch, *Gesten des Zeigens*, p. 9.

2 | S. Offe, *Ausstellungen, Einstellungen, Entstellungen*, p. 62.

3 | See R. Muttenthaler & R. Wonisch, *Gesten des Zeigens*, pp. 38–40.

4 | M. Bal, *Double Exposures*, p. 2.

visible, articulated and worked through. In practice, the task for the museum is to become more permeable to the outside world, to no longer (solely) conceive of the public as precisely measurable in their needs for consumption and to seek to efficiently serve those needs, but rather, on the basis of dialogue, to address potential users who are motivated by the content of the museum, and to transform itself so as to enable a process of co-creation.

If this chapter aims to deal with the expansion of the display, this means that the curatorial conceptions that are presented here distance themselves from these gestures of showing, and activate the exhibition as a kind of space of agency. In contrast to other expansions of the museum, this happens in the exhibition space itself, and it happens in relation to the way things are exhibited there. “The space emerges”, as Beat Hächler explains in his *‘Ansätze zu einer sozialen Szenografie im Museum’* (Toward a Social Scenography in the Museum), “only through the entanglement of the conception of content, spatial design and social practice/action by the visitors.”⁵ In relation to the public, this means that the visitors are not reduced exclusively to the role of recipient, but that such an integrated understanding of curation and education, dialogue, interaction, participation and reflection becomes possible.

A pioneer in this field was the Netherlands Architecture Institute (Netherlands Architectuurinstituut – NAI), which transformed itself from an institute focused exclusively on research and architectural discourse into a ‘Museum of Architecture’ for everybody. In her contribution, the former chief curator at the NAI (and now program director at the New Town Institute and for Eindhoven in the Het Nieuwe Instituut) Linda Vlassenrood, who was responsible for this more strongly audience-oriented and socially-engaged program, describes the challenges of this ‘reaching out’ between specialist expertise and accessibility.

The Museum für Gestaltung (Museum of Design) in Zurich has long been known for its innovative exhibition practice. This was accompanied primarily by a transfer of knowledge. This changed in 2012 with the exhibition *Out to Sea? The Plastic Garbage Project*, curated by the director of the museum Christian Brändle and the curator and head of the Master of Arts in Art Education Curatorial Studies, Angeli Sachs. Franziska Mühlbacher was responsible for the integrated education and learning space. In their contribution, Franziska Mühlbacher, now curator for education, and Angeli Sachs, describe how in this project, a new kind of cooperation between the practice of curation and education was able to develop, and the ways in which this has transformed the education and outreach practice of the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich.

Andres Lepik (Director of the Architekturmuseum at the TU in Munich in the Pinakothek der Moderne, and previously curator of architecture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York) has critically engaged with a whole series

5 | B. Hächler, *Gegenwartsräume*, p. 139.

of exhibitions involving socially-engaged architecture. If the display design in the first exhibitions already supported the ideas of a ‘different’ representation of architecture, the exhibition *AFRITECTURE: Building with the Community* in 2013/14 in Munich sought actual dialogue with the visitors. Since participation played an important role in many of the exhibited architecture projects, according to Andres Lepik, this led to the emergence “of the idea of transferring this participation into the display of the exhibition, in order to stimulate the direct engagement of the visitor with the theme of the exhibition.”

In her essay ‘Education as Curatorial Praxis’, the curator and art educator at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig (Leipzig Gallery of Contemporary Art), Julia Schäfer, presents the principle of her curatorial approach, in which education and curation are thought together right from the start. She used the idea of a puzzle as a point of departure for the development of an experimental exhibition project in the new wing of the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig. *PUZZLE* (2010/11) was at that point her most comprehensive attempt to rethink curating and to do it differently. For this, they invited 48 teammates to arrange the collection display.

For Barbara Coutinho (Director of MUDE – Museo do Design e da Moda and Professor for Architecture at the Instituto Superior Técnico in Lissabon), in order to achieve a self-reflexive, inter-subjective form of participation, it is of fundamental significance to rethink exhibitions and their themes, curatorial discourse, exhibition design and aesthetics. In her conception of the “exhibition as an open discourse”, exhibitions must contribute to a new, holistic sensitivity and diverse forms of reading, instead of presenting a closed message. This curatorial approach demands an active role from every visitor, and encourages the public to create their own meaning, which affords them increased autonomy.