

CUR^ATORIAL ARCHIVES IN CUR^ATORIAL PRAC^TICES

MICHELA ALESSANDRINI



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**INTRODUCTION:
THE CURATOR IN ABSENTIA, OR WHAT
CURATORIAL ARCHIVES REVEAL ABOUT
CURATORIAL PRACTICES**

MICHELA ALESSANDRINI

It was back in 2013 that I first heard about the acquisition of Harald Szeemann's archives by the Getty Research Institute (GRI) in Los Angeles. I had known very little about his archives until I came across the book *Individual Methodology: Harald Szeemann*¹ by Session 16 of the École du Magasin. As a participant of the same curatorial program in Grenoble, I remember the discovery of this publication in the students' library as fundamental for the research on curatorial archives I embarked on right after, and that is still ongoing. Having access—albeit indirectly—to Szeemann's personal notes, sketches, and correspondence, initially gave me a glimpse of his personality and intentions as a curator, which eventually led me to a much wider and richer understanding of the man and his work. Considering the growing number of studies and publications on the history of exhibitions and curatorial discourse, the increased attention given to archives as a tool to understand curatorial methodologies comes as no surprise. Nevertheless, at present, these

archives are primarily used as documentation by specialists, definitely not as independent sites mirroring and contributing to the world's—and not just the art world's—organization.

A curatorial² archive is much more than a curator's archive; it is also an instrument and working place for the curator and/or the institution that hosts the archive. This publication aims to promote the idea that curatorial archives should be considered not only as resources for objective research, but also as systems or operational structures where curatorial visions are set out. In other words, a place where practice is expressed and takes shape; a *salon* where it is possible to enter into discussion with individual and collective methodologies. Here I intend to consider curatorial archives as extensions of the curator and his/her methodology. The potential of these para-curatorial tools lies in the fact that they are both the origin and the resulting witness of a complex process³ and could be used as an apparatus to better understand wider curatorial dynamics.



An archive exists between two places; it is a crossroads where personal and professional, subject and object, past and future, undefined and definitive inexorably merge. Exhibition views, plans, sketches, notes, correspondence with artists and art professionals, speeches, administrative files all gather together for a yet-to-be-told story that intertwines the curator's private life and professional practice. An archive is a space where the curator thinks, works, and puts fragments together in order to create new narratives. Yet, like a ghost, it somehow lingers in time. To be in this archive is to think alongside the curator, through—and despite—his/her absence: *in absentia*. The outcome of considering this accumulation of material is significant for the future history of art and exhibitions, possibly an open and plural one, especially as it reveals a lot about our society and its mechanisms. Curatorial archives appear to be fundamental in shaping a curatorial discourse. Nevertheless, a methodology for their exploration has yet to be imagined, and a cohesive bibliography on this specific matter was still missing when I started this research. If much has been said about artists' and art critics' archives, serious consideration of curatorial archives is still lacking at present. I embarked on

this series of interviews hoping to contribute to filling this gap and finding connections between a curator's personal approach to archives and exhibitions, i.e. in terms of building structures and conceiving the display of various materials and works.

Curatorial Archives in Curatorial Practices is not intended to give a comprehensive overview, but an accurate one based on the experience of curators I have come across in the last five years. Some of them I know well; others I wanted to meet because I felt their understanding of archives would add valuable reflections to this project. I visited and went through many of their archives, others I have only seen in pictures or glanced briefly. In this publication, theory interweaves with practice, and memories mingle with ideology and conjectures. Different generations of curators regularly encounter curatorial and archival tools, which they use and question accordingly. The variety of content and approaches inevitably reflects the constellation of personalities and practices that helped me map out this issue. In fact, when I look at the ensemble of interviews gathered here, I picture a chorus of ethical viewpoints and behaviors. This colorful and multifaceted landscape is reflected in



the heterogeneity of archive types that have been portrayed and crystallized in each interview's heading. If some of the current trends related to curatorial archives emerged in a natural way during our discussions, analysis of the similarities and differences among the curators' reactions is complicated. Generally speaking, most of them were reluctant to the idea of taking care or simply keeping their own archives. Others had a clear sense of how pivotal the archive is to their practice and the reason for this. Some of them were keen to show their emotional attachment to it. Basically, one would be tempted to say that curators who care more about their archives are those who have a strong sense of authorship of their exhibitions and a clearly defined, individual, creative position. On the other hand, curators who are relieved to let go of the archive's weight by entrusting it to art institutions, appear to be those with greater focus on collective action than personal behaviors. Going through curators' archives and engaging in a conversation with them felt like an anthropological journey, one that ends where it began: at the core of our times, caught up with the obsession to document the ephemeral; in the need to order, to take care, to curate the huge amount of data that we produce; and, in the social and

political strategies that this mechanism implies or reveals. Interestingly, however, interviews began with the question "Do you have an archive?", and most of the curators answered "No, I don't" without hesitation. I then realized that what I meant by archive was something different to what they had in mind. In fact, most of them did not have a systematic archive of their professional activities, but I was not looking for that either. In my opinion, only what is unclassified, transitory, ambiguous, and left behind can truly speak of what remains unspoken. Consciously dealing with the past and doing so with respect for the ephemerality of a curator's activity is as rare as it is precious. Indulging in archival study, contemplation, and reactivation while these ensembles are still fluid and alive appears to be a suitable approach, in contrast to the heavy establishment-run, traditional idea of how to keep an archive, collect the past, and freeze the present by conveying static forms of representation.

QUESTIONS

A response in the negative was also a clue to understanding that most curators do not have time to archive. Most do not even have an



assistant to deal with it, at least not in a way that would go beyond merely storing and classifying. What would be the point of letting someone else archive one's professional life, losing the intimate connection with data? Or maybe this work should be done by someone else in order to be legitimate and not self-representative? Both positions seem valid. Their conjunction proposes a sketch for an emerging professional figure yet to be instated: the curatorial archive's curator—a hybrid position intersecting research, storytelling, curating and archiving, challenging the traditional role of the gatekeeper, and guaranteeing flexibility to these combined structures.

Curating curatorial archives is one issue among many others brought about by these interviews. Many questions were raised, yet remain unsolved or for further discussion, namely:

- How do curators understand, create, and use archives? What are the old and new ways of conceiving, structuring, curating, and displaying archives? (G. Carmine, H. Hanru, H. U. Obrist)
- What testimony of our time can an archive offer to future generations of curators,

researchers, and intellectuals? How can we benefit from the sensitive elements that can be found in archives while they are still active and in the form that their owner and creator imagined for them? Should we be afraid of talking about emotions when discussing curatorial archives? (C. Bertola, C. Lauf, P. Rigolo, M. Borja-Villel)

- What is the role of art institutions in this process of meaning creation? How can the ephemeral nature of the curatorial media be translated into a non-static tool within the private and public archival system? And more generally, how are personal archives transformed when they go to institutions? How do institutions use their curators' archives? (V. de Bellis, C. Esche, A. Karroum, V. Kortun, B. Vanderlinden, M. Borja-Villel)
- What are the boundaries between documentation and artworks, archive and collection, personal and public, freelance and institutional, that we should consider when approaching the issue of curatorial archives? Can the archive be a tool for rediscovering individual methodologies to be transformed into collective thinking? (F. Barenblit, F. Manacorda, V. de Bellis, S. Hapgood, V. Kortun)



- What is archive fetishism, and how can we contextualize archives' economic value? Is memory being commodified? Is there a commodifiable memory? How important is oblivion? (F. Barenblit, M. Borja-Villel, L. Benedetti, C. Esche, J.-H. Martin, F. Manacorda)
- How do curatorial archives participate in the reactivation of exhibitions as a “curatorial paradigm”?⁴ How can they contribute to reactivating previous exhibitions? (L. Benedetti, V. Misiano, H. U. Obrist, B. Vanderlinden)
- What are we missing in terms of understanding and organizing current knowledge about curatorial disciplines? What do we want to save from our own times, and are we ready to undertake the work necessary to achieve this? (S. Hapgood, J.-H. Martin, V. Misiano, V. Kortun)

In general, I have the feeling that our era's claim for oblivion is unprecedented, and that's understandable. Remembering has never been more important in making the untold and marginal the focus of caring, and yet it has also never been a more painful and heavy exercise to

undertake. Sympathy and attention need to be promoted by a collective act of selecting what is to be remembered.

At the conclusion of the interviewing process it was clear that even choosing not to do something is to make a choice. Neglecting the issue of the curatorial archive could have long-term consequences, but times are propitious to take proactive action and heighten awareness. I have tried to imagine the future of curatorial archives together with the curators who generously let me begin the conversation with them. Only time and comprehensive research on sharing curatorial archives will reveal how their potential might be expressed in the future, and to what kind of future they will contribute.



Michela Alessandrini is a PhD candidate at Université Bordeaux Montaigne with a thesis on personal, collective, and institutional curatorial archives. She is a consultant for research and editorial projects at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, as well as an independent curator and advisor for private and public archives and collections.

FOOTNOTES

1. Harald Szeemann: *Individual Methodology*, ed. Florence Derieux (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2007).
2. "What is the curatorial exactly? Maria Lind makes it clear that 'the curatorial' is not analogous to 'curating,' the latter of which she considers to be the 'technical modality' of the work of the curator. The curatorial, on the other hand, appears to be a methodological impetus, a way of thinking about one's practice that can center on art but also exist beyond it. Lind defines 'the curatorial' most succinctly when she claims that it is 'a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth, that strives to create friction and push new ideas.'" Maria Lind, cited in Jens Hoffmann, "Curating Between the Lines," *Critique d'art* [online] no. 41 (Spring-Summer 2013). <http://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/8314>
3. Ibid.
4. Terry Smith, unpublished interview by Michela Alessandrini, February 2016.



**PREFACE:
THE ART OF ARCHIVING**

PHILIPPE ARTIÈRES

Archives have made a compelling entry into contemporary art over the past fifteen years. Choosing to adopt Michel Foucault's concept in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* rather than the stricter definition used by international cultural heritage committees, artists throughout the world, individually or collectively, have developed practices and entire series of works that either transform documents into archives, or consist of collecting traces, objects or testimonies. Alternatively, they use archives as an artistic practice or construct their oeuvre as a unique archive. From conceptual art to performance, very few fields in contemporary art have resisted the "allure" of the archive.¹

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, this omnipresence has been interconnected with a very strong social demand and what appears to be a desire to keep records of the past, which have been claimed by groups (mostly political, professional, sexual, or ethical) with

more or less constituted identities or visibility. Archival holdings have therefore been formed as part or independently from traditional archival institutions: associations have been founded to conserve, bring to light, and reproduce these new archives. This appropriation of memory has taken unprecedented forms—videos, digital data, libraries, objects—differentiating itself from the distinctions of documents, objects, works. Social demand has fueled an interest in artworks raising the issue of the archive and its truths.

Major cultural institutions, such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris, have also started to build artwork archives, in parallel with the regulatory archive collections from public institutions which are destined, in France, for the National Archives. The Kandinsky Library is exemplary from this point of view, with a collection that includes the archives of artists, magazines, and collectives. Artists donate or sell their archives in the same way that



writers and social scientists (philosophers, sociologists, historians, or anthropologists) began to do in the late 1980s. We can still remember the moment when Guy Debord or André Breton's archives were placed on the market.

The intention of this book is to offer the hypothesis that, while major archives continue to be established, a less well-known and promoted—yet equally important—type of archive is growing, the curator's archive. Through a series of interviews, Michela Alessandrini offers us the opportunity to read the thoughts and opinions of curators from all generations, women and men with different cultural backgrounds, living and working in various distinctive ways. This is also an opportunity to reflect on the content of these archives, and how closely connected they are to curating.

In the mid-1980s, the archive world in France was taken aback by the name given to an institution: Institute for Contemporary Publishing Archives (IMEC). This archival collection was created to encourage interest in traces left by the essential yet neglected world of publishing, and by the singular connection between author and

publisher. The relationship is similar to that which brings artists together with two main figures in the art world, whose roles sometimes overlap, that is, the gallerist and the curator. According to art historians, curators are newcomers to the contemporary art world—the fifth element after the artist, gallerist, critic and the collector (public or private). Curators' archives are part of this complex setup. They are even sometimes confused with those of other specialists, such as critics for example. It is interesting to read—particularly in Hou Hanru's interview—how the exhibition's archive fuels a meta-discourse that inspires a full range of publications, courses, and workshops on the art of exhibition-making. In Deleuzian language, this would appear to be a knowledge construct that uses a discourse which finds its inspiration in curators' archives. Archives, in this sense, extend the curator's gesture, and fix a moment in time, with joint consequences. On the one hand, curators create an oeuvre—Hans Ulrich Obrist has more than 300 international curatorial projects; Barbara Vanderlinden claims her archivist work as an artwork (“an authentic work”). On the other hand, exhibitions can now be replicated endlessly, as these archives produce



both a discourse, which provides art theories, and the possibility of re-staging. Several years after the original exhibition, even when the curator is no longer present, thanks to these documents, and in the manner of choreographic archives, we will be able to replay exhibitions—a practice that, until recently, had only been used in archaeological reconstructions.

Through archiving, the curator becomes a reliable authority. These archives also contribute as much to the creation of resources for the historical documenting of contemporary art as to the functions of the art market, which puts the artist and the curator in competition with one another. To avoid such competition, more artists are curating their own work, for example Haris Epaminonda or Thomas Hirschhorn, with exhibitions that involve the occupation of a space, rather than the display of artworks. Furthermore, artists are curating the work of their contemporaries and others (Philippe Parreno showing works by Tino Sehgal, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, John Cage and Merce Cunningham as part of Palais de Tokyo's project *Carte Blanche*, 2013).

The interviews gathered here involve personalities of different age groups from around the world. This diversity raises certain issues. The relationship that curators have with their archives is influenced by two important factors; the first, as with Jean-Hubert Martin, questions belonging—or not—to an archival culture. In this case, the act of archiving is a totally assimilated practice; it is a *habitus* which has become a style. Classification, which was initially an impersonal—almost mechanical—gesture, has gradually evolved to the point of becoming an activity in itself, the library being the space where it takes place. Rather than a morbid fetishization, this accumulation becomes another kind of documenting, the continuous writing of a personal living encyclopedia. Study plays a key role in the development of this practice, and the relationship to archives is also largely determined by the contemporary historical context of globalization and digitization. Since the beginning of the 1990s, we have changed our way of thinking about archives. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, we entered what Édouard Glissant has defined as the “Era of Chaos.” The very notion of archives has been profoundly affected: pre-1989, archives were localized, personalized, in other

words rare; they are now proliferous, multiple, plural, non-material... While they used to be small private treasures, to some extent, self-portraits like Szeemann's archives, they have become commonplace. Manuel Borja-Villel, with his project *The Archives of the Commons* at Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid, says it all when talking about the Red Conceptualismos del Sur: curators' archives are part of a much wider network that questions the notion of artworks and individual practices in favor of working collectively, allowing art and politics to mix.

When reading this panorama of perspectives and practices, it is possible to understand what could be defined as the archives of our times, namely—and this is not anecdotal—the proliferation of art archives that are no longer confined to places or people but are being shared by curators. Records of a multitude of gestures and ideas are brought together, some relating to administration, others to art. Far from being obstacles to the making of future exhibitions, they are the rocks—not the bridge—which enable the crossing of the river. They only make sense because they are a series, designing a new art, the art of archiving.

Philippe Artières is a historian and the research director of the CNRS at the Interdisciplinary Institute of Contemporary Anthropology of the EHESS-Paris. He has long been the president of the Association pour le Centre Michel Foucault, is a co-founder of the association Sida-Mémoires, and curated the project *Bureau des Archives Populaires du Centre Pompidou* in 2017.

FOOTNOTE

1. Translator's Note: Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); originally published as *Le Goût de l'archive* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1989).



INSTITUTIONAL CURATORIAL ARCHIVES

THE INBOX ARCHIVE

FERRAN BARENBLIT

In September 2015, Ferran Barenblit was appointed director of Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), having previously been in charge of CA2M Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo de Comunidad de Madrid (2008-15), where he developed an extensive program of exhibitions, education activities, and publications. From 2002 to 2008, he was the director of the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica in Barcelona, working with a number of Spanish and international contemporary artists, including Christian Jankowski and Ester Partegàs. He has twice curated Espai 13 at the Fundació Joan Miró (1996-98, 2000-1), and from 1994 to 1996, was an assistant curator at the New Museum, New York. Barenblit's freelance curating includes the international exhibitions *Standards of Reality* (Otis College of Art & Design, Los Angeles, 2005), and *Irony* (Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 2001).



MACBA Library Transfer, 2007

MACBA Historical Fonds © Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona
 Courtesy Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA)

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ARCHIVE IN MACBA, AND WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF IT?

The archive was conceived ten years ago as a repository for everything that was not part of the collection but needed to be kept. That is my understanding at least: if you have the piece, then you need the document; the two are linked. That is the very beginning of the archive. The document helps to contextualize the work in the collection, but this is not its only role: it is also a space for understanding, it can add layers of knowledge that the work of art cannot contain—history, memory, testimonies, and circumstances. Therefore the archive is mainly to keep everything that's needed to retrace history and go back to the conditions in which art content was created and operated. Unfortunately, this has also generated a kind of fetishism evident within the art market. Only fifteen years ago no one would have paid to acquire a document. Now, owning the document has become very important.

IS AN ARCHIVE A KIND OF COLLECTION IN YOUR OPINION?

There is a big difference between an archive

and a collection. In a collection, every single item that is acquired has to make sense in terms of the whole. Sometimes works are not acquired in order to keep the balance of the collection. I don't think that this could happen with an archive. The bigger the archive, the better it is.

YOU UNDERSTAND THE ARCHIVE AS A PLACE WHERE HISTORY IS KEPT, NOT AS A PLACE WHERE CONFLICT OR TENSIONS CAN EMERGE. AM I RIGHT?

Conflicts do emerge, but only when you have enough archived material. They can appear afterwards, but this is much more related to the research based on it, to the uses that an archive may have more than to its very essence.

DO YOU SEE THE ARCHIVE OPERATING AS A SYSTEM WHERE ITEMS WORK TOGETHER?

For me that is a collection, not an archive. A collection is a system where the action of adding an artwork or object can change the meaning and reading of other items. As far as I'm aware, that



doesn't happen with an archive, but maybe I am wrong. My thinking is pre-fetishization: the nature of archives is not as delicate as that of collections.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ARCHIVE THEN?

The archive is at the very center of the museum's mission. It is related to a very precise geographical and temporal context and gives deeper understanding not only of how art was and is produced, but also of how it was imagined, received by the community and the critics from a historical point of view.

AS A DIRECTOR, ARE YOU INVOLVED IN THE DIALOGUE CONCERNING THE ARCHIVE AND THE VISION BEHIND ACQUISITIONS RELATED TO IT?

When we are offered donations to the archive, yes, I am; otherwise, the most important decisions in these cases concern more technical and historical arguments. We are in a very important moment now. We will be acquiring paper documents for several more decades; then, donations and

acquisitions to our archive will be digital. We will save a lot of resources as a result of the digitization process. I think that the most interesting thing that we produce today is correspondence, and we make that in digital format.

HOW DO YOU INTEND TO OPEN MACBA'S ARCHIVE TO THE PUBLIC?

I think we can do it in many ways. We can display documents in archival exhibitions, on the ground floor of MACBA's Study Center; or within exhibitions, as we did in the library for *Gelatina Dura* (2016-17) and for *Miserachs Barcelona*, (2015-16) (works by Xavier Miserachs and an exhibition of his archive); or through the documents that are now available digitally. But in the end the problem is that we do not always have permission to show the archives.

WHAT ABOUT ACQUIRING CURATORIAL ARCHIVES? IS THAT APPROPRIATE IN YOUR OPINION, IS IT SOMETHING THAT YOU HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT?

I was very enthusiastic when we were offered



Manel Clot's archive. He is a person of reference for my generation and has left his archives on USB sticks, somewhere between the physical and the digital. We should actually increase that curatorial part of the archive. We will have to think of a method of archiving emails and similar digital documentation.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL ARCHIVE?

I keep all my notebooks, I write one every six months. Otherwise I am not nostalgic, and I am afraid I have no time to archive. Nevertheless, I have backed up all my emails—sent and received—since I had my first email account in 1996. In my previous job, my inbox had only 2 GB of memory; therefore, every six months I had to archive my emails. I no longer need to do this but I continue to organize them according to the sender's location: all emails are classified by place, not by subject. I still archive once a year, but I also have shortcuts for the daily triage. So yes, my emails are organized. My library is the library of MACBA. Every week we receive books, and most of them I send to MACBA's library straightaway. In my office I keep what is important for me at

the moment. I always read on paper, I do not read e-books if possible, but this does not make me attached to objects at all.

SO YOU DO THINK THE ARCHIVE IS A PLACE OF THE PAST?

Yes, I do.

DON'T YOU SEE THE ARCHIVE AS A PLACE WHERE THE PRESENT IS AT WORK?

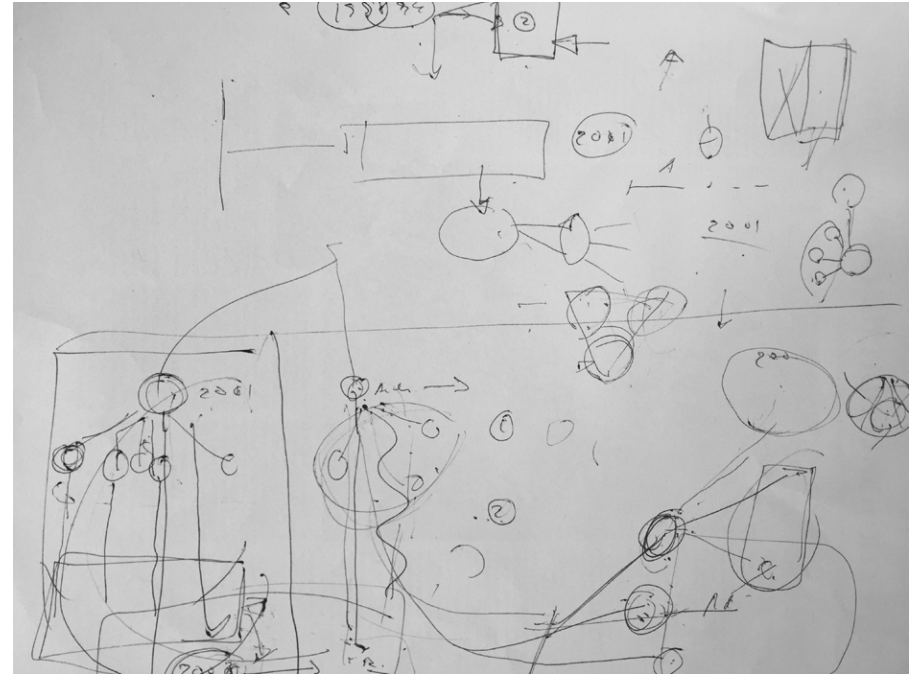
Yes, I do, but the present soon becomes the past.



THE POLITICAL ARCHIVE

MANUEL BORJA-VILLEL

Manuel Borja-Villel is the director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid. Borja-Villel has also directed Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona (1990–98) and Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA, 1998–2008). He has curated solo exhibitions of some of the most important artists of the last century, including Lygia Clark and James Coleman, and directed thesis exhibitions such as *The End(s) of the Museum* (1995), *Craigie Horsfield: The City of the People* (1996), *Antagonisms: Case Studies* (2001), *Art and Utopia—Limited Action* (2004), *Be-Bomb: The Transatlantic War of Images and all that Jazz, 1946-1956* (2007), *A Theater without Theater* (2007), *Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back?* (2010), *Playgrounds: Reinventing the Square* (2014), and *Really Useful Knowledge* (2014), among others.



Manuel Borja-Villel's sketches
 Photo: Michela Alessandrini, 2017
 Courtesy Manuel Borja-Villel

THE MACBA STUDY CENTER IS A PLACE WHERE THE ARCHIVE AND THE LIBRARY OF MACBA ARE LOCATED AND, SOMEHOW, MIXED AND SHARED WITH THE PUBLIC IN VARIOUS WAYS. TELL ME HOW IT STARTED, AND THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THIS INITIATIVE.

I was still directing the Fundació Tàpies: it was our intention to work politically and to engage with the city of Barcelona. For example, we did a project that was called *Craigie Horsfield: The City of the People* back in 1996—a time of general consensus when everybody was happy about the city and its decisions. We therefore wanted to create a space for negotiation where this scenario could be discussed with activists and collectives that did not quite fit into this image. In 1998-99 we were considering the anti-globalization demonstrations and had to deal with the way Barcelona looked after the Olympic games with the speculation, the real estate, and the tourism. We wanted to escape the idea of the museum as ornamentation for the city. We also wished to be critically engaged in thinking about agency and creating a space for intervention. At

MACBA we organized the seminar “La acción directa como una de las Bellas Artes” [Direct Action as one of the Fine Arts], and out of it we conceived a series of workshops that became an “active” bridge between the institution and the city, to the point that workshop participants became very involved in the anti-globalization demonstration that took place in Barcelona on June 22-27, 2001. Later on, the agencies developed into working groups, some of which were organized by Paul B. Preciado on queer issues or studies related to the body; others were on economy, therapy, critical studies, etc. Between 2001 and 2006, we were fully involved in the process of conceiving the MACBA Study Center based on two areas from the same agency: the idea of radical education, and the archive that Mario Tronti talks about, that is, the archive of the ones who have no voice, not the archive telling the official History. In 2005 we decided to create a stable program, the PEI (Independent Studies Program). The idea was to initiate an autonomous structure, independent from the changes that very often affect museums, self-sustainable, and politically engaged. At least that was the original idea, for the global crisis came, and it is obvious that we did not succeed in bringing complete autonomy to the program.



THEN YOU LEFT MACBA...

Yes, a couple of years after the Study Center opened. But this shift in my professional path actually gave me the possibility to develop the project at Museo Reina Sofía. The crisis in 2008, the municipal government in 2011, and the Occupy movements brought many changes that affected the structure of the independent program as we developed it for MACBA. The background was also different: MACBA was and still is very rooted and related to the city of Barcelona; Museo Reina Sofía is a broader institution—it is a national museum. We still kept some elements of that idea but we had to transform it into something more global. We called it “Laboratorio de imaginación social” [Laboratory of Social Imagination], and now we call it “Instituto de Imagination Radical” [Institute of Radical Imagination]. The idea is to imagine new forms of institutional organization and social critique of institutionality. The Institute of Radical Imagination is starting to self-organize with groups in Italy, Greece, Croatia, Spain, and Turkey. It is still developing, like a nomadic university, not wishing to be identified with an institution, and has to do with issues such as property, pedagogy,

the role of the artist, the forms of activism, etc.

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE TO YOU?

An archive is a memory, or it is the lack of memory. Archives should stay where they are born; therefore, we think it is more thoughtful to build a network and let them remain where they are. That is what happened with Red Conceptualismos del Sur, which is a collective initiative bringing together a set of researchers and artists from Latin America and Europe, founded in 2007 to reflect on the uses and politics of archives, and to work on the organization and constitution of some of the most important artists’ archives in South America.

Institutions are very fragile. Once you leave the institution your work can be lost very suddenly; therefore, we try to imagine other forms of organization, which are at the same time autonomous and sustainable, linked to us, but independent. We are also working on a network of archives with L’Internationale; it is ongoing.

AND THE “ARCHIVES OF THE COMMONS”?



In the “Archives of the Commons,” which is another initiative that we are supporting at Museo Reina Sofía, everything is accessible to everybody and there is not one way of cataloguing. The idea is to extend the Museo Reina Sofía's paradigm of the “Museum of the Commons” and apply it to the organization and conservation of the countless types of archives, which proliferate in the social field, and are essential to organizing and making accessible the experience and historical perception of the present.

At Museo Reina Sofía, we are also developing the institutional archive. The traditional part concerns areas of predilection: the 1930s (*Guernica*, the authoritarian regime, discussions about the popular, the role of the artist, the civil war in Spain, exile, memory linked to history, etc.), or the 1960s-70s, because a lot of artists started to work with archives back then. We are developing this part of the archive in creative commons, and we try to digitize, to create a structure where the importance is not on the idea of property but sharing knowledge and questioning the rules of archiving. The second group of archives that we have are those produced by Museo Reina Sofía itself. These are organized according to rules that

are not ours but those of the administration, but we can still push to make them totally available to everyone. We are working on creating a system that considers all the elements of archive-making within an institution, with all the voids and the silence that, for instance, oral communication implies. We come from a position of institutional critique but things have changed a lot since the 1960s-70s; we have to think of new systems.

IS YOUR OWN ARCHIVE—AND THOSE OF OTHER MUSEO REINA SOFÍA CURATORS’— FILED AND INTEGRATED INTO THE INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVES?

Yes, they are. I am very poorly organized on this level and I do not have much time, but everything is on my computer and everybody can consult it, for it does not belong to me: it is owned by the administration and they take care of saving data that I produce as the director. The question is not to have the documents, but to understand the rules that inform them. As Derrida said, an archive is both the space where it—the archive—is kept, and the rules that govern it, which are not neutral at all by the way. How to introduce other behaviors



into this system is the real challenge. How to change the machine is the real question: how to tell the story of the machine and its effectiveness, its silences, its rules.

INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVES HAVE BEEN USED A LOT RECENTLY TO CELEBRATE THE INSTITUTION AND ITS HISTORY, WHAT IS YOUR POSITION ON THAT?

This use of the archive, the one that is intended to give glory to the institution, enlightens no one, indeed: it is the opposite. It brings shadows. It definitely seems the wrong way to go for me. Archives should be used to de-monumentalize the institution, not just to document or to celebrate its history, which is very problematic and very naive too: we cannot pretend that the documents will be able to unveil the truth, for they have their own complex logic and genealogies. That is why we contribute to the Red Conceptualismos del Sur or the Institute of Radical Imagination, to create hybrid institutions that question themselves every time, not to become a caricature of oneself... that is what happens often to those institutions that use the archive for self-celebration.

WHAT IS THE ARCHIVE OF THE FUTURE GOING TO LOOK LIKE IN YOUR OPINION?

I have no idea what an archive will be in the future, because history is a struggle. Some institutions' way of archiving is about making sure works or documents do not lose value, and about property, but we know that the more you share the richer you are, so we would be better going in the other direction. I think that everything should be available to everybody; knowledge should be shared as much as possible, which is the idea of the "Archives of the Commons."

DIGITIZATION SEEMS TO BE THE BIG ISSUE NOW IN INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVES, AS IF IT IS ENOUGH TO OPEN AN ARCHIVE TO THE PUBLIC, TO MAKE IT NAVIGABLE OR TO RAISE ARCHIVAL AWARENESS.

It is much more complex than that, of course. We need to create a structure, not only digitize—a program that would allow us to change the law. Copyright companies did not care about the archive in the past, but now it appears they are



making a big deal of it. It is an important fight, which is going to get bigger in the future. To have documents available is the key. Also, there is no memory of the in-between, and we should find new ways of capturing and distributing it. We keep making exhibitions and they basically disappear like ephemeral buildings that lasted a few weeks during Louis XIV's time. We do not have the tools for keeping this memory; it cannot be in a traditional archive.

DO YOU HAVE A PERSONAL ARCHIVE?

Even if I have been dealing a lot with archives throughout my career, I do not have a personal archive of my own professional activities. I do not file anything, not even family photos, but I wish I did. I am not a good archivist; I have lost many things when moving from one place to another. I have left the archives produced as director at the institutions where I have worked; I have kept nothing that is not strictly personal. I think we are living in a historical period which is similar to the fourteenth century, prior to the discovery of America, with the Protestant wars spreading everywhere in Europe. At that time, it was clear

that things were changing radically, such as the role of the artist and of the intellectual in general. It was the beginning of modern times. The way we think of memory and archives has a lot to do with the written but very often we are concerned with the non-recorded. We are in the process of changing and will have to learn how to deal with the archiving of what is not written. We tell stories differently: the role of the intellectual is changing again. The tools that we are using are not our tools anymore. The future will have little to do with what we are currently thinking and how we are thinking it.



THE LEFTOVER ARCHIVE

CHARLES ESCHE

Since 2004, Charles Esche has been the director of the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. He is also the editorial director of Afterall Journal and Books based at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, London (1999-). In 2015 he was the co-curator of the Jakarta Biennale, *Maju Kena, Mundur Kena: Bertindak Sekarang* [Neither Forward nor Back: Acting in the Present]. He co-curated *Le Musée Égaré* (Toulouse and Oslo, 2016-17); the 31st São Paulo Biennial (2014); *It doesn't always have to be beautiful, unless it's beautiful* (National Art Gallery of Kosovo, 2012); the 6th U3 Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia (Ljubljana, 2010); the 2nd and 3rd Riwaq Biennales (Ramallah, 2007 and 2009); the 9th Istanbul Biennial (2005); and the 4th Gwangju Biennale (2002).



Living Archive: The Street. A Form of Living Together, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2005-6

Photo: Peter Cox, 2005

Courtesy Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR ARCHIVE IS RELEVANT TO YOUR PRACTICE?

I don't have an archive really, maybe because I am not that much attached to objects. I have a library of books and a number of photographs that I have taken more or less by chance since I got my first digital camera in 2000 or 2001. I also have certain documents that I have collected almost randomly: some in Edinburgh, others here in the Netherlands. But I have nothing like an archive in a systematic sense at all, and that is probably because I honestly find it presumptuous. I do not think it is necessary for posterity. My archive is in my emails anyway. If someone wants to research it, he/she could go through my emails in the Van Abbemuseum inbox and find everything there. I do not want to self-historicize. This feels to me to be the wrong way to go in curating. I am sure that I could have made better use of the archive in my own practice, but it has never interested me. The pivotal element of curating is how you structurally form the question. If you cannot change the questions that you are asking in each project, then basically you just repeat yourself. In that sense, the archive can also be a limitation, because you

adopt things that have worked in the past and apply them in the future. The best challenge is to find the right approach to the conditions in a given context—the environment, the people, the resources. That interests me more than applying a set of criteria coming out of the archive and fitting them into a new situation. I see that I miss some possibilities linked to the archive in doing this—because I cannot make easy connections between the past and the future—but I also find it very liberating.

BUT YOUR BRAIN IS AN ARCHIVE, ISN'T IT?

Yes, and you cannot avoid remembering. But sometimes I try to fight that archive as well. I try not to let my past experiences influence me too much—including not working with artists I know too well. I follow Walter Benjamin's view of history: that it is not about constructing things the way they really were but picking them up in a moment of danger, as they flash up before you. I like the archive to speak to me from the present through what I randomly remember, organically. This is the most useful way for me: perhaps going through a text I have previously written or a note



I took and then letting something pop out suddenly because of its relevance to the way I am thinking today. It's better than keeping tight narratives of my past—to be honest Google is as good as any archive in this regard. Of course, allowing material to flash up as in Benjamin's "moment of danger" is against traditional (art) history, and it is only one way to work. My use of the archive is therefore organic and undisciplined, which is 50% good, 50% bad.

DO YOU APPLY THE SAME DEFINITION TO THE ARCHIVE OF THE VAN ABBEMUSEUM?

Although I am not sure how healthy individual narratives are, conversely I do think that an archive is very important for an institution. A museum is a product of society; it records a social memory, something collective and shared. No one has the right to deprive societies of that. In war, we repeatedly see that one of the conquerors' first acts is to destroy or steal the archive of an occupied people—from eleventh-century Scotland to twenty-first-century Iraq this pattern repeats. The archive (or memory) of the institution changes the

way we understand society, even to the extent of creating society as such, as a resistance to the neo-liberal belief that there are only "individuals and families." An institutional archive makes us more than those individuals, forces us to contemplate what we share and not only what divides us or sets us in competition. At the Van Abbemuseum, we try to look back to the museum's own previous exhibitions and to the history of certain social narratives in our region that have touched the museum. From 2005 to 2009, we ran a project called *Living Archive*, where we looked directly at the archive of the museum and its relation to the art world and to political and economic events. I think we were one of the first museums to do that. For instance, we opened up the files of the correspondence between directors and gallerists, to see the extent to which the latter were controlling acquisitions. We looked at issues of ownership, gender balance, whether or not historical changes were reflected in the museum at the time. It was also possible to look at the relationship between artists and the institution itself, for example Hans Haacke refusing to exhibit because he did not want to be associated with Anselm Kiefer, or the museum's relationship with the City Council and the pressure that democratic politics put on



a museum to popularize its policies, and so on. Also, in 2008 we completely reconstructed an exhibition curated by Rudi Fuchs as accurately as we could. I think that was also one of the first times an exhibition was replayed, and it's a fashion that has since caught on. Learning from our past allowed us to better understand the institution and its present; we were able to integrate the knowledge from the *Living Archive* into our permanent collection displays after 2012. These things are part of the museum's history—not the story of its individuals but the way it related to its environment.

WHAT WOULD YOUR DEFINITION OF AN ARCHIVE BE?

The archive is what is left over. An archive can be more or less complete, depending on how much remains and how much has been destroyed. When I first came to Eindhoven, I wanted to know about the period of the Second World War, when the Van Abbemuseum was open and there was a National Socialist government in the Netherlands. There was very little documentation, so we asked people what they remembered. We learnt that

the actual archive was probably burned to avoid recriminations, so we had to rely on memory and what survives. Maybe, ironically, that is the best kind of archive! The way our current European society obsessively records everything in image and document is unhealthy. We should leave it to chance and memory. What then survives does so because it remains valuable to the next generation—and what it is lost, remains to be unearthed, speculated about, and constructed again—perhaps incorrectly but according to the needs of the present. And that is OK. There's a video by Rabi Mroué called *The Old House* that is very important to me; it talks about how we need to remember that we forget and forget that we remember. The archive can fight against this and can freeze something that would be more useful if it were in movement.

THE RESEARCH-TOOL ARCHIVE

VINCENZO DE BELLIS

Vincenzo de Bellis is a curator at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, where he has organized the exhibitions *Nairy Baghramian: Deformation Professionnelle* (2017–18); *I Am You, You Are Too* (2017); and more recently, a survey exhibition of Mario García Torres (2018). In 2015 he curated *Ennesima, An Exhibition of Seven Exhibitions on Italian Art* at the Triennale di Milano. Prior to his tenure at the Walker Art Center, he was the artistic director of MiArt: Milan International Modern and Contemporary Art Fair (2012–16). As part of his undertaking at MiArt, together with Massimiliano Gioni and the Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, he co-organized the projects: *Sarah Lucas, Innamemorabiliamumbum; Cine Dreams;* and *Liberi Tutti*. From 2009 to 2016, de Bellis was the founding director and co-curator of Peep-Hole Art Center in Milan. In 2010 he was a guest curator at Museion, Bolzano, and the curator-in-residence at the Fondazione Pastificio Cerere in Rome in 2011.



Installation view of *L'archivio corale: Lo spazio di via Lazzaro Palazzi, l'esperienza dell'autogestione e AVANBLOB* [A Choral Archive: The Via Lazzaro Palazzi Space, the Experience of Self-Management and AVANBLOB] in *Ennesima. An Exhibition of Seven Exhibitions on Italian Art*, Triennale di Milano, Milan, 2015-16

Photo: Roberto Marossi, 2015

Courtesy Vincenzo de Bellis and La Triennale di Milano, Milan

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR ARCHIVE.

I only started a real archive very recently, perhaps a couple of years ago. Before that, the documentation of my research was much more casual. Later, the more the projects grew in size and multiplied, the more necessary it became to archive them. My personal archive is made up of my library and my computer. It was hard to bring my library to Minneapolis, so I had to leave it in Milan. Nevertheless, I scan all the things that I know I will need for the next months, and I store them on the computer. The latter is organized by “artist.”

The approaches that have distinguished me as a curator are the attention I give to the exhibition and institutional formats, as well as the close contact I have when I work with artists. I'm not a big supporter of thematic exhibitions. For example, *Ennesima*, which I curated in 2015 at the Triennale di Milano, is a show that tries to avoid in every possible way the traditional idea of a group exhibition. I think that few group shows succeed, and I'm convinced that even fewer are really necessary. That is why I have preferred to

focus on individual shows that can support and promote the artist's work. As a result, my archive consists of “nominative” folders that combine all the documents that I find about the artists that interest me. In general, I catalog everything that I can use immediately, though not in a systematic way. My archive comes from a spontaneous and temporary need, so there are no traces of my research as a whole, only of some fragments that have helped me develop it. The entire foundation of my theoretical research, which comes together only to a minor extent in my exhibitions and that I cultivate mostly for personal reasons, is not collected in this archive. So far I've been involved in the fieldwork and the immediacy of the project, so I've had little time to dedicate to research. Just like my work, my archive develops directly from work with the artists.

THE ARTISTS IN YOUR ARCHIVE ARE EXCLUSIVELY THOSE THAT YOU HAVE WORKED WITH?

No, there are lots of files for artists I have not yet collaborated with, but whom I would love to. For example, Jimmie Durham participated in



Peep-Hole sheet #10 by donating paper copies sent through his old fax machine, and I have obviously collected all this material in his folder. Just by chance, as soon as I got to the Walker Art Center, I was asked to organize a show on Jimmie Durham (*Jimmie Durham: At the Center of the World*), which started at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles before moving to the Walker in the second half of 2017, and after that to the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Rmai Modern in Saskatoon, Canada. For this project, I inherited an archive of information that had already been put together by the institution that hosted the first show, the Hammer, although I could also consult the “Durham” file in my own archive. It was a personal retrospective, so the documents available are particularly useful.

MAYBE ONE DAY YOU WILL WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH A GROUP SHOW, AND AT THAT POINT, YOUR ARCHIVE WILL SURELY CHANGE ITS SHAPE TOO.

Without a doubt. A curator’s archive is connected to the kind of work we do, to the approach and methodology that we develop. From my

master’s class at CCS Bard in New York onwards, I have always kept track of my activities. I consult the bibliography and lecture notes that I studied back then frequently. For instance, Peep-Hole originated from a course on alternative spaces—obviously adapted to the Italian context, which was quite different from that in New York in the 1970s.

THEREFORE, YOUR ARCHIVE HELPS YOU WITH RESEARCH MOSTLY.

Yes, but I must say that when I work with young artists, the archive comes from my own work, whereas if it’s about established artists, it has already been developed. In the first case, the archive is a trace; in the second one, a working instrument. Peep-Hole continues to follow up the evolution of the artists it has chosen to present, trying to use the archive not only as a documentation center for possible researchers, but also as a support tool for artists. In fact, not having the economic resources to write books about them, we like the idea of following and documenting their career. Asking them to send us material about their work and the exhibitions that include them is a way to guarantee the continuous updating of



their personal oeuvre, and indeed to preserve our own history as well.

DOES THE DOCUMENTATION OF
EXHIBITIONS AND ACTIVITIES
PRODUCED BY PEEP-HOLE REMAIN
WITH THE ORGANIZATION, OR IS IT
PART OF YOUR PERSONAL ARCHIVE?

It's hard to separate the two archives. Ideally everything is part of one communicating archive. But it is important that, institutionally, exhibition archives stay in Peep-Hole, because Peep-Hole's history is collective, not just mine. I can make copies if it's necessary.

THIS OVERLAPPING COMES FROM THE
FACT THAT PEEP-HOLE IS AN INSTITUTION
THAT YOU CO-FOUNDED AND CO-DIRECT.
AT THE WALKER ART CENTER, YOU HAVE
TO HAND OVER ALL THE DOCUMENTATION
THAT HAS BEEN PRODUCED. FROM THE
EXCHANGE OF EMAILS WITH THE ARTISTS
TO THE MOST ADMINISTRATIVE PART,
EVERYTHING WILL BECOME PART OF THE
INSTITUTION'S ARCHIVE.

That's how it works in American institutions: when you go, you have to leave everything you have produced. But it's clear that you can keep your own archive regardless. I'm quite adamant about this issue: whatever belongs to MiArt is MiArt's; whatever belongs to Peep-Hole is Peep-Hole's; and whatever is mine is mine. What I produced at the Triennale as a guest curator is "my story"; that's why the archive is with my documents. However, it doesn't change the fact that the Triennale is filed as "their story." A personal archive consists of documents that are different from those that make up an institutional archive. Although they are based on the same story, they tell different things precisely because they are based on different choices and needs. For example, starting from the first interactions with the artists up until the point at which the show goes to the administrative phase, into the hands of other people in the team, I send emails from my personal address, not from Peep-Hole's. If you looked for the preparatory phase in the institutional archive, you wouldn't find that part there, and vice versa; you wouldn't find the next phase in my personal mailbox. Obviously, at the Walker Art Center I work with the official email address so that everything can be kept in the institution.



THIS MEANS YOU WILL HAVE TO
CAREFULLY CHOOSE WHAT MATERIAL
FROM THIS NEW DOCUMENTATION
YOU WANT TO KEEP IN YOUR PERSONAL
ARCHIVE.

Yes, but I have to say I have always done that. Particularly, I have always collected everything related to criticism and press, because I see it as a way to make up for the fact that I have never cared much for catalogs. From MiArt I only kept the press material; I don't have other documentation.

AT AN INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL, HOW
DO YOU IMAGINE ARCHIVES WILL BE
PRESERVED IN THE FUTURE, AND FOR
WHOM?

I believe that one of the fundamental missions of an institution is to archive history, in both senses of the word archive: to make it available through an archive, but also to go beyond. The fact that one of the seven formats shown at *Ennesima* was the archive proves how much I care about creating documentation, a testimony, a way of writing history.

From the point of view of the exhibition, there are as many ways to share an archive. It all depends on what kind you want to talk about. Showing an artist's archive without the work is not a good solution. For a museum, however, it is normal that an archive consists mostly of documentation.

CAN AN INSTITUTION'S ARCHIVE BE
CONSIDERED A COLLECTION?

Certainly, why not. If I were the director of a big museum, I would like to bring together a series of archives alongside the collection. I speak mainly of the artist's archive, that of the collection, and that of the institution. Of course, the artist's archive and that of the exhibition must be treated in a completely different way. All these archives together tell the story of what I imagine to be the museum of the future.

IN YOUR OPINION, COULD A CURATOR'S
ARCHIVE THAT HAS NO APPARENT
CONNECTION TO THE INSTITUTION
IN QUESTION NEVERTHELESS BE PART
OF IT?



Yes, absolutely. Curating has to become a subject of study by institutions. We have to be careful not to mythicize the curator, because it seems to me that this has happened too much. I don't think everything has to be preserved, but it should all be remembered. Of course, every institution should be responsible for maintaining and giving access to the archives of curators that, in one way or another, have contributed to the evolution of the institution itself. There should be an archive on the history of exhibitions that all the museums in the world could share virtually. The archive of an institution's exhibitions tells us a lot about a society during the time when they were conceived and produced, and often holds information that can change the perception of history. Such an archive should not only be preserved, but also exhibited.

AND THAT'S ALWAYS TRICKY. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST SATISFYING WAY OF PRESENTING THE ARCHIVE?

Through publications and the internet. They are the best media available at the moment to distribute the documentation produced in an exhibition.

However, I'm quite skeptical about the reactivation of a show. When I recreated *AVANBLOB*, within the exhibition of the Via Lazzaro Palazzi Group's archive in *Ennesima*, it was because the show could be considered not only as a turning point for the group, but also, and above all, a work of art. Additionally, it appeared to me as an example of the way in which they had to work together as a group. Therefore, it was important that this mythical exhibition was integrated with the other shows, together with a timeline of the events and developments of the group. The archive of the Via Lazzaro Palazzi Group didn't exist before it was shown at *Ennesima*. I also wanted to have documents and analog material on display, and not just digital, because printed matter was characteristic of their generation; it's impossible to organize a show about the 1970s that is completely digital. The analog part must be digitized, but above all, preserved and exhibited if possible. The original is what defines an archive. The book and the PDF are not the same thing. Perhaps everybody should have access to the PDF, to guarantee the appropriate dissemination of knowledge, and fewer catalogs should be printed, so that the status of the book as an object is somehow respected for its own rarity. Precisely because there is a digital

format for research, printed matter should be more appreciated. The catalog is, without a doubt, the best way to document an exhibition, but if we make too many copies, they are easily wasted. Institutions should only produce catalogs for the shows that require them and when it makes sense. When curators put up an exhibition, they know in their hearts if it will be relevant or not. When I conceived *Ennesima*, I reflected on an editorial project precisely because I thought it could be an influential show capable of bringing forth crucial questions. If I organized a group show based on the Walker Art Center's collection, though, a catalog would not be necessary, because it would only be one exhibition among many others about the same collection. In this case, it would be more appropriate to make a good and efficient website that can reach out to all the people that do not have the opportunity to go to Minneapolis. We should reevaluate the digital resources of institutions; for example, the digital function of exhibitions and collections. Correct use of virtual technology doesn't replace the physical experience of visiting the show, but can help propagate the knowledge provided by that exhibition.

THE TWO EXPERIENCES, REAL AND VIRTUAL, SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED BECAUSE THEY ARE PROFOUNDLY DIFFERENT.

And it's the institution's responsibility to keep this from happening through an adequate use of digital tools. Furthermore, the catalog doesn't really replace experiencing the exhibition; nevertheless, we invest a lot more in catalogs, which are sometimes useless, than in a comprehensive website. I believe that catalogs are documentation tools, and therefore archiving instruments that are very valuable. An archive preserves and gives meaning to the past, using the current media and taking into account the present context.



THE ORPHAN ARCHIVE

VASIF KORTUN

Vasıf Kortun is the chairman of the Foundation for Arts Initiatives. Between 2011 and 2017, he served as the founding director of Research and Programs at SALT—an institution that hosts an extensive archive on modern and contemporary art and architecture from Turkey. Kortun was the director of Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, Istanbul (2001-9); director of Proje4L Istanbul Museum of Contemporary Art (2001-3); chief curator and director of the 3rd Istanbul Biennial (1992); and co-curator of the 9th Istanbul Biennial (2005), as well as of the 6th Taipei Biennial (2008). Between 1994 and 1997, Kortun worked as the director of the Museum of the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.



Archive Dreaming, SALT Galata, Istanbul, 2017

Photo: Mustafa Hazneci, 2017

Courtesy SALT

THE FIRST TIME WE MET, WE TALKED ABOUT SALT'S ARCHIVE, DO YOU REMEMBER? NOW LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR OWN ARCHIVE.

Oh God. Do you mean my own personal archive?

WELL, YOUR REACTION IS ALREADY AN ANSWER! IT SEEMS THAT EVERY CURATOR HAS A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO HIS/HER ARCHIVE...

Sure, it's true. I did keep certain things early on and quite diligently, but I came to believe that archiving one's self is perverse. It is presumptuous to imagine a place for yourself outside the trash bin of history. There may come a time when your practice is neglected, and you cannot be both the object and the subject of interest. The focus of curating is not the curator. That being said, I have kept things that I thought should be kept and it is a solid base of material. This was up to the 1990s, and then I became more and more negligent. One does not keep a copy of each letter sent out. Nowadays everything is automatically archived and is not necessarily relevant. The challenge is

shifting away the noise and the junk, not to keep but to keep throwing away. The "archivable" changed in the mid-1990s when we moved from dial-up to broadband. Before then, you had to complete everything in one go. Everything had to be much more deliberated, unambiguous, and provident. Looking at old emails and letters, I realize we would organize an exhibition with one letter: compressed intelligently, it would be substantial and compelling. In 2013 we staged three exhibitions at SALT, one of which I had organized back in 1993 and was considered a landmark exhibition in Turkey.¹ I had kept the documents of that project very carefully, because I knew it was momentous. So there is always a hierarchy among what's kept. You don't store everything and there may be things you prefer to be left alone, missteps, in order to avoid being judged on those. Filters are always in place. Everything is online now. I gave away my archives and library to SALT and they take care of it, both physically and digitally.

SO YOU DON'T HAVE AN ARCHIVE IN YOUR PRIVATE SPACE?

Only a few books I am reading at the moment.



My bookshelf is pretty below par, with grey boxes stuffed with cables, old hard drives, printer paper, small presents and art given by friends, notepads, a lantern, a glass funnel and some gauze, passports and receipts, and a few books. I have no attachment to objects. I do not own anything. Everything goes to SALT.

IS THAT FOR A PRACTICAL REASON,
OR BECAUSE YOU IDENTIFY WITH
THE INSTITUTION?

I guess it has to do with a sense of scarcity of local resources we had when I was growing up. Libraries and individual collections had a public aspect for me, visiting a friend or a relative would also mean raiding the bookcase. Before 1990 not much literature on art existed. I decided more than twenty-something years ago that it should all end up in an institution, and I began to collect beyond an individual need, pedagogically, in an organized way. Most of the materials I donated to the institution were not even quirky or idiosyncratic. They came from me but not all of it is specific to me.

TELL ME ABOUT SALT'S PUBLICATION
OF THE ARCHIVES OF VOTI—UNION
OF THE IMAGINARY. WAS THAT YOUR
INITIATIVE?

Not only me. Actually, the VOTI archive was never intended to be in the form of a printed book. We were supposed to remain a closed group, to encourage honesty. At the end of the 1990s, when I was back in Istanbul, it was one of the few things that kept me alert. We were all around the world. It was part of a daily ritual: I would go to the bakery in the morning, come back, turn on the computer, dial-up and hear the comforting sound of the modem connecting to the internet, and check who had written on the forum. It was our way of keeping in touch with the world. As curators, none of us had an institutional position or even a full-time job. We wanted to use it to transform exhibition practices and institutions. I had always relished the idea of keeping this memory intact somehow and making it into a book. I tried to keep as much as I could during that time and printed out some of the materials and scanned or saved the others, but I was still missing a lot. We collaborated with VOTI's archivist Susan



Hapgood, who was also one of the editors of the book. She came up with additional materials but did not have the entire documentation either. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev was one of the first VOTI people I met face to face in Venice in 1999. We discussed the idea of issuing it as a Documenta publication, but the time frame would not allow it. The crucial contributor was Robert Fleck. He had printed and stored everything in his summer-house in France. From A4 printouts we went back to the digital and reconstructed the discussion threads. The publication was the resurrection of this naive and untarnished time of curating. We thought it was important to revisit that time and regenerate some of VOTI's major discussions.

TO REVISIT PREVIOUS TIMES IS WHAT
ARCHIVES—PERSONAL, INSTITUTIONAL
AND/OR COLLECTIVE—ALLOW US TO DO.

FOOTNOTE

1. *It was a time of conversation* is an archive and research project. It revisits the story of three exhibitions that took place in the first half of the 1990s in Turkey: *Ellİ Numara: Anı/Bellek II* [Number Fifty: Memory/Recollection II], *GAR* [Railway Station], and *Küreselleşme-Devlet, Sefalet, Şiddet* [Globalization-State, Misery, Violence]. In 2012, SALT visualized the research in the form of an exhibition at SALT Galata in the Open Archive. This was followed by a more developed presentation of the exhibition at SALT Ulus in 2013.



THE NON-INSTITUTIONAL ARCHIVE

ABDELLAH KARROUM

Since 2013, Abdellah Karroum has been the director of Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar. He is the founder and artistic director of L'appartement 22, an experimental collaborative space for exhibitions and artists' residencies founded in 2002 in Rabat, Morocco; and of *Le Bout Du Monde* art expeditions, a long-term project that has taken place in different locations around the globe since 2000. Karroum has organized and co-curated numerous international exhibitions and programs for various institutions including CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, where he worked from 1993 to 1996; the 2006 DAK'ART Biennial of Contemporary African Art; the 3rd Marrakech Biennale (2009); and the 2012 Biennale Benin. In 2012 he co-curated La Triennale in Paris, *Intense Proximity*, with Okwui Enwezor. His research and writing on curating and creating art institutions continues through his involvement in institutional and non-institutional projects worldwide and more specifically in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.



Abdellah Karroum's archive
 Photo: Michela Alessandrini, 2017
 Courtesy Abdellah Karroum

LET'S START WITH A STRAIGHTFORWARD QUESTION: WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF AN ARCHIVE?

For curatorial archives, it is the physical or digital information that connects me with the memory of the art experience, of production, display, and context. In the case of L'appartement 22, the archive is a tool to share its history and, through it, understand art and how it is made at certain moments and locations. It is also a kind of index, a personal system connecting different ideas, realized and not yet realized.

HOW DID L'APPARTEMENT 22'S ARCHIVE DEVELOP AND WHAT IS ITS FUTURE?

L'appartement 22 is not an institution, but a place that enables the production of artistic projects. It comes from a need to create and produce experiences. To experience art we need something to be physically present. For me, the first stage is always to look at the artist's archive, to know about his/her projects, to connect this memory to the current situation, and therefore understand what can be made, using our knowledge of the past in the present.

The archives that we have at L'appartement 22 predate our own work with the artist; they actually come from his/her studio and from previous experiences. A studio visit always involves the curator looking at traces produced by the artist, with a view to sharing this production through methodologies that can keep the initial idea clear and solid until it reaches the viewer in an exhibition or a book. As a curator, you help an artist to create something new. The information in the archive does not necessarily reflect the real experience, but offers key elements for understanding it.

WHY DO WE NEED TO KEEP DOCUMENTATION ABOUT SOMETHING THAT IS EPHEMERAL AND TRANSIENT LIKE AN EXHIBITION?

I think that what remains is important for two reasons: to expand the action beyond the place where it happened, and to extend it into the future. Projects need to be available; they have to have the capacity to be reactivated by others in the future for example, to exist in a space that is larger. L'appartement 22's projects are proposals for society and its potential change, so their effectiveness



is not immediate. Every project has to be active for a long time to actually reveal its true potential. The project is a starting point; it develops over time. But this is possible only if we retain the memory of how the action first took place—the archives of L'appartement 22 were built up in this way. In order to do that, you have to create something physical and publicly available. I need to see something that exists on paper, and that it is made of presence and absence at the same time. We want to share information on how things happened, also because we do not have a publication very often after the project. At L'appartement 22, we work with a number of young artists who likewise have no publications; therefore, it is important to have documentation on them and to share this with professionals and the wider public. In a way, I would say that I owe the initiative of opening L'appartement 22 to younger artists; it was a way of creating an independent space that was devoted to their promotion. The encounters I had and the quality of projects I came across made me decide on creating this much-needed space in 2002. I wanted to share those expressions of beauty with audiences. I had no specific reference in terms of creating an institution; the idea was to fill a gap in

the cultural landscape. We need to keep in mind that at the time Morocco was in the first years of its strategy of political transition. From the 1980s onwards, the country was officially represented in international exhibitions, but only established artists of the older generation were included; younger artists had no space within the powerful system of influence—probably due to the fact that the Makhzen, the government, had been fighting student movements and new ideas for decades. In the 1960s, Moroccan artists were of course traveling, and they also had their own intellectual network (as, for example, Mohammed Melehi in Mexico being invited by Mathias Goeritz to make a public sculpture).

Sometimes I share this documentation with my colleagues. The majority of exhibitions that I have curated internationally have involved collaboration with other professionals, in order to verify the relevance of a project through discussion and confrontation.

**TELL ME ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL
PROCESS OF ARCHIVING, YOUR
NOTEBOOKS FOR EXAMPLE.**



Every project starts with a note. Even the notebook I often used for L'appartement 22 is part of the *White Book Project* that started with me taking notes, which I still have somewhere in the archive, because I wanted to remember the initial idea and the first layout. Then some other versions and rewritings made sense to me, but they needed to be edited before being made public. When you write something, it is already public. You know that you cannot control it; it no longer belongs to you. If you write it, it is to read it again in the future, because otherwise you would forget it: you are not going to stay the same person but evolve over time. I do not like to write down my speeches and talks for example, because I will never speak the same, but I do take notes to help me in the future to use the past, even with a new approach to it.

DO YOU GO BACK TO YOUR NOTES THEN?

Definitely. This is why I need to go to Fez and spend some time in my office, where all my books and archives are. I usually do that when I am commissioned to write a text, it is a construction site, a *chantier*. I edit the text written in the notebook

to complete the idea, explain it, give examples, and once it is entered into the book, I make a reference in the notebook, and if it is published, I erase it. Publication is the validation of a number of ideas. Publications are collectable objects, and they are made of statements. What stays in the notebooks are the leftovers, but also parts of a discourse that I still have to make, and they are waiting to be used somehow. Sometimes I take notes to help me take better notes in the future. Sometimes it is to help me remember ideas. Or it is just for myself, if I know that something is never going to be published as it is.

WHAT DO YOU NOT WRITE ABOUT?

I don't always write. Sometimes I use the phone, and I lose a lot of stuff by changing my phone and external drives. I have not been writing much by hand recently—for sure I have a lot of notes in my phone now or on social media platforms. I don't know how effective they are or even if they make an impact. Everybody can instrumentalize them, if they are not official, which is often the case with social media—look what has happened with protests in northern Morocco and how the machine



of power has manipulated very strong messages from bloggers around the country.¹ You can do nothing about that. The only thing that you can do is not to write on social media, but create an actual text and publish it on more reliable platforms. The publication *L'appartement 22 (2002-2008)* for example, was not written in book format, but was instead an edited collection that used notes as the basis for documenting my story of a place I created as a curatorial laboratory. I intentionally did not want to write a literary narrative, but I very much wanted to publish texts as they were drafted at the moment of encounters and as they were shared with audiences digitally, in posters and on the walls of exhibitions at L'appartement 22. My intention was to offer the original reading format of the curatorial idea, with enough effort given to connecting the artists' expression and the viewers' experience of reading.

FOOTNOTE

1. This interview took place when there were many other examples of appropriation of user information by Facebook (and other platforms) during the American presidential election (2016), and the United Kingdom European Union membership referendum (2016).



PERSONAL CURATORIAL ARCHIVES

THE INVISIBLE ARCHIVE

CHIARA BERTOLA

Since 1999, Chiara Bertola has been the chief curator at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice. She was also the artistic director of Hangar Bicocca in Milan from 2009 to 2012. Bertola founded the FURLA Art Prize and curated it until 2015. Together with Michelangelo Pistoletto, she was a founding member of *Love Difference - Artistic Movement for an InterMediterranean Politic* (1996–98). She curated the Venice Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), co-curated the 15th edition of the Rome Quadriennale (2008), and was president of Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, Venice (1996–98). She has organized many international exhibitions featuring leading contemporary artists such as: Ilya Kabakov (2003), Remo Salvadori (2005), Kiki Smith (2005), Georges Adeagbo (2008), Mona Hatoum (2009, 2014, 2015), Christian Boltanski (2010), Marisa Merz (2011), Surasi Kusolwong (2011), Carsten Nicolai (2012), Haris Epaminonda (2014), Jimmie Durham (2015), and Giovanni Anselmo/Elisabetta Di Maggio (2017). Group shows curated by Bertola include *Terre Vulnerabili* (2010–11), a four-part evolving exhibition at Hangar Bicocca, Milan.



Cups collection

Photo: Chiara Bertola, 2018

Courtesy Chiara Bertola

DO YOU THINK THAT A CURATOR'S PERSONAL ARCHIVE IS A USEFUL TOOL?

I once heard someone define the archive as a “paper mirror,” because it reflects the working methods, interests, private and public relationships networks, and even the feelings and affections of an individual. Furthermore, an archive can certainly tell us something about the curator’s personality, but I do not believe curators themselves should take care of their archives. At least, I have chosen not to. I don’t doubt that there is a logic in everything I have accumulated in my archive over the years, but I cannot really see it clearly... and maybe it is better that way. Personally, I prefer to irrupt into places where my presence is not expected, whereas I get bored if it is.

AND DO YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR ARCHIVE?

Not exactly. Following my recent move—which was a very useful selection exercise, I must say—I found among my belongings a dossier with letters from artists and colleagues—particularly, two folders of correspondence with Giuseppe

Caccavale and Ilya Kabakov that I still haven’t reread. It seems absurd, but I cannot find the time. Although I know that going back through this folder, I will rediscover ideas that have been set aside and traces of my own thinking, my own practice. It would be very interesting, definitely, but I feel that I still need to be in the present, and have ideas that are contemporary to me, rather than looking back on my past.

WHAT IS THE CHARACTERISTIC OF A PERSONAL ARCHIVE THAT STRIKES YOU THE MOST?

I have realized how archives can be misinterpreted. In fact, only the archive’s author fully knows how to read it; others must interpret the gaps within it; this can sometimes create narratives that are not very fluid. Nevertheless, the intruder’s position is very beneficial for the archive. Transversal readings make it exist or re-exist every time. And it is exactly these unfamiliar, external readings that ensure the possibility to memorize, repeat, reproduce, and reinterpret. Derrida used to say that there is no archive without an “outsider.” The archive must be set in motion



to behave again as a storyteller. We can and we should subject personal archives to processes of decomposition and recomposition, discover unsuspected plots and connections. I like the idea that walking into an archive is a bit like taking a tour inside someone's head. I think of Elisabetta Di Maggio's latest installation, which we presented in a small closet room at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia Museum in Venice. Contemplating it was really like entering her mind: full of pieces of paper, objects, and drawings gathered together, laid out as notes for her works. The installation was a sort of *wunderkammer*! Maybe a person's head is just like a room of wonders, and the archive is the instrument that allows us to take a look inside. Even attics are unexplored archives; my collection of cups is an archive, an installation archive. This has to do with the strong relationship I have with objects; I cannot get rid of them.

BY WHICH YOU MEAN?

I am dedicated to accumulating objects; I consider them as the residue of activities, and I like them to be close to me. Things follow me, surround me, constitute the landscapes in which

I try to recognize and revive myself. The archive installation is also an extraordinary subject for self-representation. It is a work touched by the accumulation of time and life—a way to escape, sublimate, and survive within reality and against reality. In this sense, I believe that the work of Ilya Kabakov has deeply influenced me. I particularly think of the stories of his *Ten Characters*. The visual nature of the stories of the inhabitants of ten rooms in a common house demonstrates how, with an accumulation of objects, clippings, words, and sounds, a great deal of richness and beauty can be discovered—a lot of existence, life. But we have to be able to listen to these stories before they turn into trash. From beginning to end, Kabakov's work is focused to an almost obsessive level on everything that has been neglected, discarded, undervalued. Working with him and studying his work, I understood that he organized his paintings according to principles of the collection and classification of waste. In particular, while we were installing *The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away*, I realized his work is nothing but a way to preserve memories and question the value of life. Through trash, in fact, multiple memories that relate to everyone's own existence flow and



appear. I am indebted to what Ilya Kabakov has written and imagined by working with scrap and classifying waste, the big trash bin of humanity.

AND YOU, ARE YOU A GOOD CATALOGUER?
DO YOU TAKE PLEASURE IN ORGANIZING?

Not really! On the contrary, because of my very illogical and irregular lifestyle, I find it impossible to maintain order. Documents disappear, move on, so I do not want to impose control on them, hold them back. We keep all those objects to help us remember the events related to them. In general, we are obsessed with keeping a record, understanding the present through our past, producing testimonies of ourselves. Precisely for this reason, it seems unhealthy to me to impose an order and a “self-centered” eye. I prefer to work on something that has yet to come: the work of artists. However, it is the artists themselves who make me ask such questions: where will my work be when I am gone? How will it be transformed? Who will read it? And how will it be interpreted?

ARE THERE OTHER WAYS OF CREATING
AN ARCHIVE?

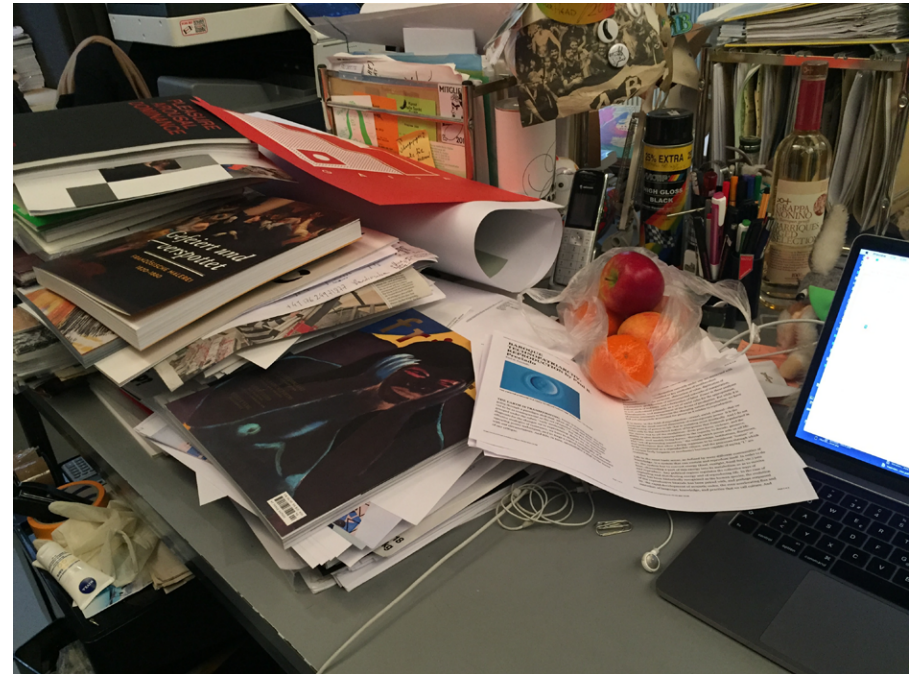
It seems to me that putting a book together is like making an archive. This is what I want to do now: break up a story and interrogate people, look for answers outside of myself.



THE TIME-AND-SPACE-CONSUMING ARCHIVE

GIOVANNI CARMINE

After working for several years as an independent curator and art critic—including projects and books with Norma Jeane and Christoph Büchel, as well as the temporary exhibition *Unloaded* (2002) in the former Swiss military bunkers in Oberschan—since 2007, Giovanni Carmine has been the director of the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen. He has curated shows by Swiss and international artists such as Ryan Gander, Mai-Thu Perret, Gedi Sibony, Loris Gréaud, Shahryar Nashat, Matias Faldbakken, and Navid Nuur. Carmine was the artistic coordinator of *ILLUMInations*, the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); co-editor of the accompanying Biennale catalog; and curator of Valentin Carron's Pavilion of Switzerland at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013).



Giovanni Carmine's desk at Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen

Photo: Giovanni Carmine, 2016

Courtesy Giovanni Carmine

YOUR ARCHIVE IS...?

My archive is a neglected archive. Basically, it is all dead matter; an accumulation of all the books sent to me by artists, institutions, and, co-workers, through which I have no time to browse. In the end, everything is piled up in the office at the Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen. There is neither time nor space to archive it, for very practical reasons. Of course, I have my own personal archive at home, which is the documentation of my independent activity.

AND HOW IS YOUR OWN ARCHIVE ORGANIZED?

I belong to the generation that grew up with the shift between analog and digital, so the first things I ever did I was not able to document as I do now with a mobile phone. Most of my archive is in boxes. In general, rather than reflect on what I do, I prefer to do it. I don't pretend to collect and organize everything that I have previously done. I don't think that would be an interesting activity for me, nor would it be of interest to anyone else. Very often, archiving becomes an act of self-promotion, and I don't like that.

DO YOU EVER CONSULT YOUR PERSONAL ARCHIVE?

I dive into the boxes when necessary. Most of the material is no longer used, and is a burden too. It takes up a lot of space, grows at a fast rate, is heavy, and gets damaged. It needs to be taken care of by someone. I'm thinking of removing the books that I no longer need to have in the Kunsthalle; they could be part of the resources of the libraries of Sankt Gallen and would be more useful there.

IS AN ARCHIVE SOMETHING ORDERED AND CATALOGUED IN YOUR EXPERIENCE?

Not necessarily, but it becomes interesting only when it is usable. It is important that [the archive] has a structure, whether catalogued or not. And above all, it is essential that other ideas, other knowledge come out of that material.

DO YOU EVER REUSE MATERIAL THAT YOU HAVE PRODUCED BEFORE IN ORDER TO IMAGINE OTHER PROJECTS?

Very rarely. I'm not sentimental. And when



I need to fish out some images, the computer does it for me.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF YOUR PERSONAL ARCHIVE?

I wouldn't have a problem giving it away, if I were asked to. Mobility forces me to reduce the weight of things I carry with me, and the spaces I live in do not allow for a large number of books. Everything has to be selected. I'm very pragmatic about this. I have to ask myself these questions, because the material keeps accumulating and I'm frustrated to see it static, and not be able to share it to generate other things. When an institution acquires an archive, most of the material is thrown away. I leave no marks in my books, they are kept intact, so they cannot be interesting; not even for the traces I could have left on them, from a curatorial point of view.

I think that 99.9% of the information available in our hyper-informed and computerized era is unreliable. Why should it be more interesting in the twenty-third century to reread my emails to artists than those of a banker working for the

Swiss government? An archive only becomes interesting when someone else works with it. With digital technology, many things are automatically archived. Many curators today are working for their image that will be posted online. This is also something fabricated that we will need to learn to recognize and analyze. There will be great access to curatorial material from the year 2000 onward, because everything is turned into images and disseminated. How do you actually archive this whole mass of information that we are producing? I think it will need a great deal of scientific analysis. There is a lot of material out there to help us understand and rebuild the artistic history of this period, but we have to see what we will do, what kind of stories we will tell from this.

Nevertheless, books will remain. They will resist water, magnetic storms, technological changes, and fires. We make a thousand copies and maybe a hundred end up in serious libraries; if we are lucky, and if they are well preserved, they will physically exist in a hundred different places at the same time.



WHY SHOULD A CURATOR'S ARCHIVE BE INTERESTING TO AN ART HISTORIAN?

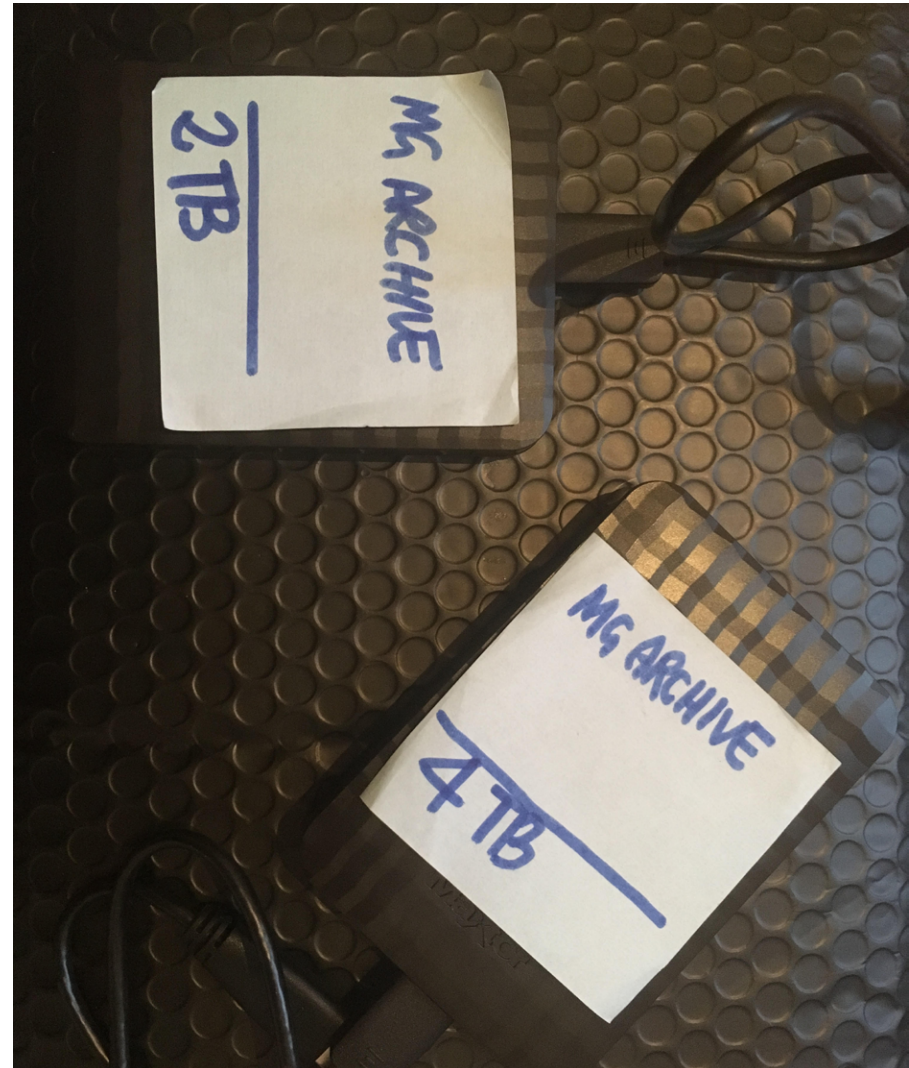
Much of the discussion related to art takes place within the exhibition site, both in the physical space of the show and in what is produced around it. If you don't know the exhibition system, it's difficult to even understand the rules of the art system. Exhibitions produce a lot of knowledge.



THE KNOWLEDGE-SEEKER ARCHIVE

MASSIMILIANO GIONI

Massimiliano Gioni is the artistic director of the New Museum, New York, where he has curated solo exhibitions by Paweł Althamer, Tacita Dean, Urs Fischer, Goshka Macuga, Carol Rama, and Pipilotti Rist. Since 2003, Gioni has also been the director of the Fondazione Nicola Trussardi in Milan, curating shows and public art projects by, among others, Allora and Calzadilla, Paweł Althamer, Fischli and Weiss, Cyprien Gaillard, Sarah Lucas, Paola Pivi, and Tino Sehgal. From 2000 to 2002, he was the US editor of Flash Art International. Along with Maurizio Cattelan and Ali Subotnick, he founded the Wrong Gallery in Chelsea, New York. Gioni was the co-director of Manifesta 5 (2004), and of the 4th Berlin Biennale (2006). He curated the 8th Gwangju Biennale (2010), and subsequently the 55th Venice Biennale (2013).



Massimiliano Gioni's hard drives

Photo: Roberta Tenconi, 2018

Courtesy Massimiliano Gioni



DO YOU HAVE AN ARCHIVE? IF SO,
WHERE IS IT LOCATED, AND HOW DOES
IT WORK? WHAT IS ITS STRUCTURE?

I am not sure I can really say I have an archive, as it is not fully organized and structured. I could say I have two separate tools that I often work with. One is a library, or more simply my collection of books, which at this point is divided between my apartments in New York and Milan, with some leftovers at my parents' home, and in my office. There are probably around 10,000 books or so—I am not really sure: I have not counted them. The libraries are divided into group shows and monographs, with additional sections for theory and art history, general interest, and literature. I spend a lot of time and energy buying and looking for books. Typically, the books are bought or collected in New York. Then I decide which ones to keep with me and which ones to send to Milan. The ones that I think I need to access more regularly stay in New York, of course. Periodically I send off a dozen or so boxes to Milan. I pay someone in New York to pack the boxes and then I work with a person in Milan to unpack them and put the books in the proper order on the bookshelves.

Unfortunately, at this point I have run out of space both in New York and in Milan, and I need to find some kind of alternative solution, which I am not really actively pursuing. The problem is that I firmly believe books read themselves and read each other, so I am against putting them in storage, because by keeping them in active service, so to speak, moving them around the house, stacking them in piles as I think about a project or setting them aside for future research, I believe they actually influence and expand each other. I say this half-joking: I know it is not true, but somehow I absolutely believe it. I think that the more books mingle with other books, the more they contaminate each other with knowledge, and the less I have to read them all, as they can somehow telepathically pass on their knowledge to each other, and to me.

The whole library thing is quite depressing because I keep buying and amassing books and a fair amount of time and money goes into packing and shipping things around, but then again the library seems to me to be absolutely mediocre and irrelevant, or anyway much worse than the effort I put into it would suggest. Mainly I keep books



and catalogs that I need for my research and so the library grows depending on which shows I am working on or which research I am focusing on at the time.

Then there is the proper archive which at this point is mainly digital, and which preserves some correspondence, primarily documentation of projects and exhibitions (with floor plans, checklists, budgets, etc.), ephemera, press, my own writing, and a few other things. A colleague and friend, Roberta Tenconi, works on the archive to organize and update it. I do not know exactly how many files it contains¹, but again I constantly remind myself that I forgot to file that email or copy that other document, so maybe I am just not systematic enough for these types of tools.

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE ARCHIVE? HOW DO YOU USE IT, WHAT IS ITS ROLE IN YOUR PRACTICE AS A RESEARCHER AND CURATOR?

The books and the library are fundamental. For each show, I buy and collect as many books as I can get my hands on, and in the case of group

shows, I can say that research using books and catalogs is as extensive as the research I do traveling or in studios. I remember reading somewhere that Flaubert amassed thousands of books as he was working on his novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, and for some reason that stayed with me. I guess it had to do also with the novel itself, which is such a parody of the quest for knowledge. And it is also useful to remember—with the help of Bouvard and Pécuchet—that most research is bound to be partial and fail...

As for the archive itself, I do not really use it much, unless I have to go back to look for something I have written and need to work on again or develop a bit further or republish. The other materials in the archive are mainly thought of as documentation of my own work, rather than as tools to make my own work.

DO YOU HAVE A DEFINITION OF THE TERM ARCHIVE, AND WHAT IS IT FOR?

I am not sure I have a definition of archive, beyond the common description of it as a collection of documents about a place, a person, or a



topic. In fact, I must say that I have grown a little bored with the notion of the archive as it has crystallized more recently in the discourse around contemporary art. There have been hundreds of great and not so great exhibitions and books about the concept of the archive in the last ten to fifteen years, and the notion of the archive has become a bit of a cliché. So, in fact, some of my largest shows, like the 8th Gwangju Biennale and the 55th Venice Biennale, or *The Keeper* at the New Museum, were—in a sense—a personal attempt to avoid speaking about archives, even though the exhibitions included massive collections of objects and artworks. Perhaps I am more attracted to the idea of the collection—understood as a personal accumulation of objects, artworks, images, and documents organized according to individual criteria—than to the notion of the archive, which is inevitably connected with the idea of a superior authority. In other words, the archive is the order of the state, of the law, of history, and I tend to gravitate more towards the personal, flawed, and precarious order established by the individual, his/her private cosmology.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE ARCHIVE?

Probably the Warburg Institute, for the way it has combined the personal, even tragic, adventures of its founder—Aby Warburg—and the openness and accessibility of a true great educational institution.

HAVE YOU EVER VISITED OR CONSULTED ANOTHER CURATOR'S ARCHIVE?

I was fortunate enough to work on a couple of occasions with Harald Szeemann's archive, with Ingeborg Lüscher—Szeemann's wife—first, and then with the Getty Research Institute (GRI) where the archive is now kept. With the help of Pietro Rigolo—who is a researcher working at the GRI on the Szeemann archive—I could explore some of Szeemann's material related to his unrealized exhibition about motherhood, as I was researching my own show titled *The Great Mother*. It was a very inspiring process, which led to a contribution by Rigolo in *The Great Mother* catalog but, more importantly for me, gave me license to embark on my own project. As I was thinking about a show looking at the iconography of motherhood, I was of course aware of Szeemann's unrealized project, but did not know much about it in detail and I was



concerned I could not do my own show with this heavy legacy hanging above it. So the work on the archive actually liberated me and allowed me to do my own exhibition, because I soon discovered that Szeemann's show was quite different from what I was envisioning, and, most interestingly, was not meant to contain any artwork or object that was typically recognized as such.

The first time I worked with Szeemann's archive was when I was studying his show *The Bachelor Machines* as part of my research for an exhibition of my own about art and technology (titled *Ghosts in the Machine*, 2012). At that time, I contacted Ingeborg Lüscher and she was so kind to share many details and pieces of information about *The Bachelor Machines*. She allowed me to borrow the incredible reconstruction of Franz Kafka's torture machine from the novel *The Penal Colony*, which Szeemann had commissioned for his exhibition in the 1970s. It is perhaps ironic that the object I borrowed from the Szeemann's archive was inspired by Kafka, whose writings have often described the daunting intricacies of bureaucracy, and of archives.

I have also visited Germano Celant's archive,

which is quite impressive—already in 1970, at age thirty, Celant was curating a major show on conceptual art based on his own archive. That gives you an idea of its wealth.

And having directed the Venice Biennale in 2013, I had the honor of spending some time in the Biennale's archive, which in a sense is the archive of archives, filled as it is with great correspondence, notes, and plans, from hundreds of curators, artists, politicians and much more. It should be a compulsory visit for anyone with an interest in art history. Like all archives, it is also a humbling experience, as it is a reminder that many came before you and many will follow, and that each name is nothing but a small speck of dust in history.

INDEED, I BELIEVE THERE IS A VISIBLE
RELATION BETWEEN A CURATOR'S
WAY OF ARCHIVING AND HOW HE/SHE
REALIZES A PROJECT. IF A CURATOR'S
PRESENCE SOMEHOW STAYS IN THEIR
DOCUMENTS AND OBJECTS, WOULD
HIS/HER ARCHIVE BE A WAY TO
UNDERSTAND THEIR PROJECTS BETTER?
WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO USE IT?



It might be my Catholic upbringing or some kind of romantic inclination, but I am afraid that, to me, archives always come with more than an intimation of mortality: in other words, they speak of the passing of time, of the vastness of history, of the ephemerality of each life. In that sense, they can also offer a sublime experience of vertigo as archives make us stand on the precipice of time. I know this sounds a little kitsch (and indeed there is always the risk of falling into sentimentality and kitsch when working with archives): there are plenty of questionable artworks inspired by archives, but, to me, archives have more to do with these feelings of mortality than with the aura or the energy of the person who created them.

WHAT IS THE INTEREST IN LOOKING
AT A CURATOR'S ARCHIVE, IN YOUR
OPINION? WHAT KIND OF AUDIENCE
WOULD YOU LIKE IT TO BE ACCESSIBLE
FOR?

I am not really sure if anyone will need or want to access my files in the future. Perhaps a student working on a thesis about an exhibition of mine, but that is already a presumptuous

thought. Maybe that is why I am not even sure if my archive is any good or if it is useful: I have very few expectations about posterity or perhaps I am nervous and uncomfortable with the slightly narcissistic idea of personal archives. Or again I simply wish I were better at organizing one.

FOOTNOTE

1. There are 348,579 files (April 2018).



THE MEMORY-KEEPER ARCHIVE

HOU HANRU

Since 2013, Hou Hanru has been the artistic director of MAXXI, the National Museum of 21st Century Arts in Rome. From 2006 to 2012, he worked at the San Francisco Art Institute as director of Exhibitions and Public Programs, and as chair of Exhibition and Museum Studies. He also co-directed the first World Biennial Forum (Gwangju, 2012). Hanru has curated and co-curated numerous exhibitions including *China/Avant-Garde* (1989), *Cities On The Move* (1997–2000), the 3rd Shanghai Biennale (2000), the 4th Gwangju Biennale (2002), the French and Chinese Pavilions at the Venice Biennale (1999 and 2007 respectively), the 2nd Guangzhou Triennial (2005), the 2nd Tirana Biennial (2005), the 10th Istanbul Biennial (2007), *Global Multitude* (Luxembourg, 2007), the 10th Lyon Biennale (2009), the 5th Auckland Triennial (2013), and *Cities Grow in Difference*, the 7th Shenzhen/Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture (UABB) (2017-18).



The Living Theatre Archive, 1947-2000. Installation view of the exhibition *Non basta ricordare* [Remembering is not enough] curated by Hou Hanru, MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome, 2013-14
 Photo: M3Studio, 2013
 Courtesy Fondazione MAXXI, Rome

DO YOU HAVE AN ARCHIVE?

I have many archives, basically one for each of my projects. In the old days, it was easier to make an archive because there was more physical material such as slides, paper documents, faxes, letters, etc. Up to 2000, I have kept the documentation for every step of the projects' evolution: the research, the technical and administrative parts, the press, photographic documentation, the project itself. After 2000, things became much more chaotic: everything is on my computer, there are many emails to go through and they can be lost easily. I can save about 80% of the material but, still, I am always surprised to see how digital facilities make life more complicated. There's a bigger quantity of files but less time to put them in order anyway, so it is much more confusing. I don't have an assistant who can look after these things and I archive everything myself whenever I can. I have a system, but it is far from being ordered and precise.

WHERE ARE YOUR PHYSICAL ARCHIVES KEPT?

At the moment they are in Paris, San Francisco, and in Rome, the places where I live and work. The *Cities On the Move* archives are currently in the Asian Art Archive in Hong Kong and are being digitized. There is also material in China, but very little.

INTERESTINGLY, YOU HAVE YOUR ARCHIVE ON YOUR LAPTOP, RATHER THAN AN EXTERNAL HARD DRIVE. IT IS AS THOUGH YOU ALWAYS NEED YOUR ARCHIVE TO BE WITH YOU WHEN YOU ARE WORKING IN YOUR OFFICE, TRAVELING OR AT HOME, EVERYWHERE AND AT EVERY MOMENT, READY TO BE USED.

Yes, I always work on and use my archives. I mostly produce presentations and papers from them, which happens very frequently, and is the reason I need to have everything available. However, I am not obsessed by this idea. I do not want them to be a monument to myself, and they are not meant to be comprehensive. I remember where things are, so I can go and pick up a document in San Francisco if I really need it. That said,



I have an archival index that is quite practical. In this way, I have a list of every text, catalog, and exhibition that I have produced.

WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT AN ARCHIVE IS?

For me the archive is a tool I can always go back to. It is a memory-keeper. I do not consider my archive as a collection of objects. Of course, some really beautiful things may be kept in it, as is the case with art critic and curator Kim Levin. For many years, she collected all the invitation cards she received and then showed them alongside her notes and sketches written on the back of the cards at Kiasma, Helsinki, in 2009.

WOULD YOU BE COMFORTABLE SHOWING MATERIAL FROM YOUR ARCHIVE?

If others would like to use it then I would agree, but I would not personally show it. Archives are objects you can think about and look through. I find pleasure in digging into them, but I do this very rarely because I don't have time for such activities. I have explored the idea of having a

website with my own professional records, for me to understand them more clearly by giving them some sort of order, and to allow younger people to discover these archival sources. I have not managed to do it so far; it requires a lot of time.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE! I HAVE DISCOVERED
THAT THE MAJORITY OF CURATORS
PROCRASTINATE WHEN IT COMES TO
TAKING CARE OF THEIR OWN ARCHIVES.
BUT LET US TALK ABOUT THE WAY
YOU DEAL WITH ARCHIVES AT THE
INSTITUTION YOU ARE DIRECTING,
THE MAXXI IN ROME.

This institution is very special because it was conceived not only as a museum but also as a research center. We document all the museum's activities. We also have documentation of the construction phase of the building, a lot of images of the whole development of the institution. We have very well-organized archives and our team carefully documents every step of the exhibition-making process, especially through photographs and videos. Also, we publish an annual report, in which you can find the cultural program of the whole year with a description.



WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE WAY OF EXHIBITING THE MUSEUM'S ARCHIVE?

It depends on the needs and purposes of the exhibition's documentation that one wants to show. Archives have many forms and functions: sometimes they are for research; they are also objects that can be aesthetically appreciated, for example Carlo Scarpa's archive we have here at MAXXI. There are hundreds of cigarettes boxes, where he noted down his ideas in drawings. I showed them in my first exhibition here in 2014, the title was *Non basta ricordare* [Remembering is not enough]: more than 200 works by seventy artists and architects in dialogue with each other and with the space, emphasizing the profound vitality of the museum's collection. The idea was to show that a collection, or an archive, is not just meant to be remembered but can be reactivated to create new meanings. This is the show in which the archive and the artworks were most integrated.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE COLLECTION AND THE ARCHIVE?

The materiality of documents and artworks is probably what makes archives and collections similar. For some artists, research documents are part of the work itself; therefore, it is very difficult to find the dividing line. This says a lot about the way artists use categories—if we think about the artist Huang Yong Ping and the solo exhibition he had here at MAXXI in 2014-15: the role of the archive was not to simply be documentation of his research, but also to appear as art itself.

THE ARCHIVE IS NOT ABOUT ILLUSTRATING SOMETHING.

It is about proving the diversity of ways in which we can look at facts. It is a political question: building archives also means to construct the mind of the institution. There is an organic combination of different elements and layers that make up the institution that one can find reflected in the archive, and that escapes the definition of Truth with a capital T.

THE ARCHIVE HAS TO QUESTION THE INSTITUTION ITSELF.

Absolutely. There is a lot of evidence in the



archive and politicians take advantage of this very often to impose their own visions. Archaeology is such an important discipline, because knowledge is based on history. Facts lie in the archives; that is why they are so important for the establishment. Manipulating facts leads to the manipulation of truth, and to power. As a museum director, I have the responsibility to always question the material we have in the archives and in the collections. If the institution wants to keep on being a place that makes sense, then it must maintain the freedom to question what exists at the very core of its ideology, to deconstruct by looking back to the past. A good institution is always a living one; it has to challenge its own structure and ideology.

THE NOTION OF THE ARCHIVE IS
UNDERGOING AN IMPORTANT SEMIOTIC
TRANSITION. WHAT FEATURES SHOULD
WE KEEP AND IMPLEMENT FOR THE
FUTURE?

That is an interesting question. Now there is a new “archive fever” encouraged by the establishment using the archive to justify certain professional behaviors and to avoid risks. When

you own the archive, you basically own the authority to say: “what I do is to represent the Truth.” I accept that art historians can be interested in digging into archives but I am skeptical of colleagues who do so in an obsessive way, for they become technocrats bound to these materials. I hope that in the future people will understand the anxiety behind this attitude and overcome it.

I HAVE THE FEELING THAT THIS FEAR IS
PART OF OUR TIME. MY GENERATION HAS
A DESIRE TO PUT IN ORDER THE HUGE
AMOUNT OF INFORMATION WE HAVE
ACCUMULATED, ALONG WITH WHAT WE
HAVE INHERITED FROM THE PAST, MAYBE
HOPING TO MAKE SENSE OF IT.

Yes, you need security. This is part of a global tendency conceived by governments and the main economic system: control through a culture of fear. I hope that people will be able to fight this feeling. We are so obsessed by the idea that we should do the right thing that sometimes we forget the importance of being wrong.

I HOPE SO TOO.



THE AFFECTIVE ARCHIVE

CORNELIA LAUF

Independent curator and art historian Cornelia Lauf holds a PhD from Columbia University and began her career at the Guggenheim Museum, New York. Over three decades, she has edited publications and produced exhibitions for institutions in Europe and the United States. Recent projects include *Wall to Wall: Carpets by Artists*, (Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, 2016); a traveling exhibition on certificates of authenticity by artists (De Vleeshal, Middelburg, traveling to the Drawing Center, New York, and SALT Beyoğlu, Istanbul, among other venues, 2011–12); and extensive publishing and editorial work in the field of artists' books. Lauf is currently working on a publication on Emilio Prini, as well as projects devoted to craft by artists, in Baku, Azerbaijan, and the Middle East. She advises private collections in the United States and specializes in custom-commissioned contemporary artworks, produced in collaboration with heritage artisans.



Cornelia Lauf's library in Rome

Photo: Oberto Gili, 2017

Courtesy Cornelia Lauf

WHAT DOES THE WORD ARCHIVE MEAN TO YOU?

My life in boxes.

IS YOUR ARCHIVE A FAMILIAR PLACE, CLOSELY CONNECTED TO YOUR LIFE?

Definitely. I have been dealing with other people's archives since I was in graduate school, but I am not very good at organizing myself. I hate to look backwards, even though I worry about the past all the time.

HOW IS YOUR ARCHIVE ORGANIZED?

My university teaching is organized chronologically in folders and spiral binders. I also have a section for IUAV (University of Venice) master's theses. I am particularly proud of that, because supervising a thesis and steering somebody's thoughts, helping to shape ideas, is the part of being a curator that I enjoy the most. Working with less well-known artists I can help them find the best way to exhibit, and to present their biography and bibliography. I have a lot of documents from

artists at the beginning of their career, because for some reason I prefer to shape art history from the start rather than adding my perspective to an already established situation.

IS THIS APPROACH REFLECTED IN THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ARCHIVE?

I have been collecting artists' invitation cards since the 1980s until the internet arrived and took over. Invitation cards were a key form of art-making and there were not a lot of people interested in ephemera at that time. Steven Leiber is the only other person that I have met who was keeping and archiving them. Well, there was also Maurizio Nannucci. In the 1980s, a lot of artists used to make beautiful gadgets, pens, party invitations, and so on. Those are the kinds of objects that I would be interested to show if I were asked to. I have one of Keith Haring's first sweatshirts, club posters, club invitations that bear witness to the whole art world from the underground and East Village vantage point. These are the items that I have collected and that can be found in my archive. I have also kept all my correspondence with artists, alongside documentation of the exhibitions



I worked on and the texts that I wrote. At that time, biographies were not available online, so you had to request them from the gallery or help the artist to write one. I have all of Rirkrit Tiravanija's slides when he was handwriting the labels himself, and they are really delightful because you can see the personality of the artist. I am from the age of the slide, a fascinating document that enables us to see the development of creative thinking at the beginning of the artist's career—which photographer they chose to work with, what they included in their biography and how they structured it, which artworks they selected, and so on. I tried to collect material on these people to make a record of that time. I did the same for Joseph Kosuth as I set up his archive. When I met Joseph, a lot of the material was in garbage bags, and there was no order in the library. I set up the archival system with two people: Susan Hapgood and a woman named Carol, very nice—I forget her last name. We put everything in acid-free boxes and envelopes, created a theoretical framework for his archive, and purchased all the materials and equipment, like electric tape readers, the Xerox machine, and so on. I took care of the archive for approximately twenty years, supervised the macro-structure, and

hired newly graduated art historians like Avery Lozada to work with it—also very good artists such as Lucky Debellevue, Gavin Brown, Tom Beller. A variety of people went through Joseph's archive. I had the idea of collecting his writing in a book for MIT press; I asked David Freedberg and Joseph Connors, who were working with me at Columbia University, to write scholarly essays on Joseph's work and put it into an academic art historical context. I personally wrote his first biography. So if my own archive was neglected, one can say that I have worked on archives that made art history. My role as an art historian has always been that of a weaver; I have always been very good at weaving people or cultural moments together.

WHAT PART OF YOUR ARCHIVE DO YOU MOST PREFER?

I would say the letters that I received from artists, and the personal objects that my first husband Joseph Kosuth made for me, because they are so poetic. Also the letters from my relatives sent to me as a young art historian, and my old notebooks from 1979 onward with all the notes I took about the exhibitions I visited and the people I met,



like Paloma Picasso and Gerhard Richter. Those records are funny to find because they recreate the era. I am in favor of keeping the material how it is found rather than organizing it by some kind of abstract code. To this end, filming and photographing archives is a good idea. I was taking documentary photographs before the “selfie” era. These documents capture art history. I was always aware I was living art history, and I captured all those meetings as much as I could. A lot of them are just about social life but that was where art history was being made. Part of my archive includes the menus of the dinners I used to organize for friends, the bill from Gino de Dominicis’ 12-people table, invitations to parties given by the intelligentsia of New York, Belgium, San Casciano, etc. Anyway, organizing my own archive also makes me incredibly sad. It is very painful sometimes.

YOU MAKE NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN YOUR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ARCHIVE, IT IS ALL ONE; THERE ARE MANY INTERCONNECTIONS, YES?

Exactly. My professional life was my personal life, and this is mirrored in the archive. Real

life is the material for poetry, literature, and art. I think this is the essence of living somehow: we have to look at the past. The internet gives us the illusion that we do not need to look back to what happened previously in art history; that is why comparisons between modern and contemporary art are so poor. Some curators do not even wish to work with living artists as it means knowing about their lives, their behaviors, and thoughts too, and this can be difficult to do.

DOES BEING A WOMAN AFFECT THE WAY YOU DEAL WITH ARCHIVES?

Definitely. I was the first woman in my family to get a PhD, and I am sure that I would have had a different education if I were a man. There was no tradition of women in my family obtaining doctorates, but my mother was tremendously supportive, as were my grandparents. I was also mentally predisposed to helping other people, to take care of them—the female trait of nurturing. That’s why I don’t take care of myself in the same way I do with other people. That’s a failing. Men are much more used to being in charge, progressing. Even speaking professionally, men and women



are very different and are still treated unequally.
I love being a woman, having a mind and body
that goes from giving birth to creating climates
for the production of art.



THE VISUAL ARCHIVE

JEAN-HUBERT MARTIN

Jean-Hubert Martin joined the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris as a curator in 1971, and was part of the team that established the Centre Pompidou in 1977. After serving as director of Kunsthalle Bern (1982-85), he was in charge of museums in Paris, Dusseldorf, and Milan from 1987 to 2006. During this time, he curated important exhibitions which significantly modified museology theory and practice, especially *À Pierre et Marie*, a participatory exhibition (1982-84), *Magiciens de la terre* (1989), *Art et publicité* (1990), *Altäre* (2002), and *Africa Remix* (2004). He developed his views in memorable biennales like the 23rd São Paulo Biennale, *Universalis* (1996); and the 5th Lyon Biennale, *Partage d'exotismes* (2000). He continues to develop his practice as an independent curator for internationally acclaimed exhibitions: *Théâtre du Monde* (Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania and La Maison Rouge - Fondation Antoine de Galbert, Paris, 2013), *Carambolages* (Grand Palais, Paris, 2016), and the upcoming *The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas* (Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow, 2021).



Jean-Hubert Martin's archive
Photo: Michela Alessandrini, 2016
Courtesy Jean-Hubert Martin

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE FOR?

To find out what memory has forgotten.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ARCHIVE?

I would say that there are two archives: the first one is made of leftovers. I am a curator and I believe my task is not to write but to make exhibitions. Of course, during this process you write letters, notes, and this is what remains after the exhibition is over. I hate to throw things away, maybe because I am a museum curator (*conservateur* in French, the one who keeps and preserves), and fortunately I have a house in the countryside in southern France where I can store them. This is what we might call the passive archive. Then there is a second one, the active archive. Having worked very closely with artists that I have followed for decades, I wanted to create a database of information about the lectures, shows, and texts I made for them. I therefore keep artists' files in a filing cabinet in the attic, and I fill them with everything I can find about those artists (press articles, invitation cards, ephemera, etc.). There is no systematic filing of those documents; they are

organized randomly, but each file is devoted to a single artist. It is very easy afterwards when I look for something about a specific artist and need to use this material, which is original and very lively and leads to surprising, unsolicited connections. This happens for artists whose careers I follow closely or even for those whom I hardly know and who might interest me for future exhibitions. It is like an intellectual family for me. Maybe I could add a third archive, which has evolved more recently when my exhibitions started to be included in art history and exhibition histories: the exhibitions' archive, which I keep on my laptop or record on DVDs. I use this material when people ask me questions about my past and present curatorial activities, about my vision on transhistorical and transcultural exhibitions, and so on. There has been a lot of interest in it recently.

WE COULD SAY THE ARCHIVE IS AN INSPIRING BASE FOR THINKING THAT HELPS YOU NAVIGATE THROUGH QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT FOR YOU AS A CURATOR.

Yes, definitely.



ONCE YOU TOLD ME THAT WHEN YOU DO SOMETHING, CURATORIALLY, YOU AREN'T ONLY SPEAKING FOR YOURSELF BUT FOR AN ENTIRE GENERATION OF ARTISTS AND COLLEAGUES WHO WERE NOURISHED BY THE SAME CULTURAL ATMOSPHERE AS YOU WERE—A KIND OF “COLLECTIVE SUBJECTIVITY” AS I STARTED TO CALL IT. DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR ARCHIVE CAN BE A PLACE FOR COLLECTIVE MEMORY?

I think so. I grew up with artists such as Christian Boltanski, Robert Filliou, Annette Messager, Daniel Buren, Bertrand Lavier, Gérard Titus-Carmel, Alain Fleischer, Braco Dimitrijević, Gina Pane, and Sarkis and was very influenced by some of them. I have a particular way of thinking that belongs to a certain time, and you cannot escape that. Nevertheless, I try to see in terms of broader history and I have to thank my background for this.

I THINK THAT WHAT YOU ARE DOING COMES FROM ANOTHER TIME AND CONTEXT.

Exactly. My experience of art originated in the 1960s, so my thinking comes from that time.

DO YOU THINK THAT THE WAY YOU UNDERSTAND ART IS REFLECTED IN THE STRUCTURE OF YOUR ARCHIVE? I KNOW THIS MAY BE A TRICKY QUESTION SINCE YOU ARE THE ONE WHO BUILT THIS PLACE SO IT'S DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO BE OBJECTIVE. I AM ASKING, BECAUSE WHEN I VISITED YOUR ARCHIVE, I COULD CLEARLY SEE THE PARALLELS BETWEEN THE WAY YOU CURATE EXHIBITIONS, YOUR VISUAL THINKING, AND THE WAY YOU HAD ORGANIZED DOCUMENTS AND OBJECTS IN THE MAIN ROOM OF YOUR HOUSE, YOUR DESK, YOUR GRANDFATHER'S COLLECTION, YOUR LIBRARY, YOUR FATHER'S LIBRARY, YOUR ART OBJECTS, NOTEBOOKS, AND YOUR COLLECTION OF POSTCARDS.

You are right... this is the environment in which I live and work, it must be the place where my vision is seen. Except for the monographs,



I classify books according to geographical criteria; it is my way of mapping the items and making them available for my personal research. It took me some time to understand that this was the most practical way for me to deal with the accumulation of catalogs, objects, and documents. This place is my memory, and it does work like my memory, geographically, somehow.

THE ARCHIVE ALSO REFLECTS YOUR WAY OF THINKING THEN. IT WORKS AS AN EXTENSION OF YOUR MEMORY AND YOUR SENSIBILITY FOR OBJECTS FROM DIFFERENT TIMES AND PLACES.

Sure.

THERE IS A STRONG SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE WAY YOU ARCHIVE AND HOW YOU CREATE... AND THE LINK IS YOU, OF COURSE. BUT I CAN SEE THIS BECAUSE I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH YOU EXTENSIVELY OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, AND TO KNOW YOUR APPROACH BY OBSERVING YOU.

I agree with you. I am the connection among this group of objects. As I further develop my ideas for the exhibition at the Pushkin Museum in 2021, I understand that among the thousands of possible connections and analogies between the items of the museum's collection, the only tools I have to make something out of these resources are my sensibility and my brain. And if my memory fails, I can always go back to books and get lost; that's the path to serendipity.

ALL PARTS OF YOUR ARCHIVE, WHEN YOU WORK WITHIN IT, ARE ACTIVATED BY YOUR PRESENCE—YOU CAN JUMP FROM A BOOK TO AN OLD LETTER AND THEN BACK TO SOME IMAGES ON YOUR LAPTOP...

Absolutely, it is a living place. And it is perfect for all the things you cannot find on the internet. We tend to think that we can find everything there, but it is not true. Anyway, I really like Pinterest as a database for images; it has fascinating themes that I can explore and be inspired by.

LIKE THE SECTION WITH MANUSCRIPTS FROM THE MIDDLE AGES?



Indeed! But at the same time, the miniatures interest me more for my visual thinking than for display, because they are very difficult to include in exhibitions.

WHICH PART OF YOUR ARCHIVE DO YOU PREFER, OR USE THE MOST?

The artists' files, definitely. What I called the active archive. I feed it like a plant. I have a small folder here in Paris, and I throw in everything I want to bring to the countryside house, in order to fill the attic files unremittingly. This is for the physical part of it. I have a special file on my laptop too, which I call "Les affinités insolites classées" [Classified unusual affinities]: this is where all my obsessions and favorite themes are. To give you an idea of such themes: *Caché dévoilé* [Hidden, Unveiled], *Corps cyclades guitar* [Bodies, Cyclades, Guitar], *Coulures couleurs taches* [Drips, Colors, Stains], *Déformation corporelle* [Body Deformity], *Esprits ombres fantômes* [Spirits, Shadows, Ghosts], *Nuage fumée* [Cloud, Smoke], *Pilosité* [Hairiness], *Postérieur* [Backside], *Rhyparographies* [Still Lives], *Super héros* [Superheroes], *Vent drapeaux* [Wind, Flags].

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOUR POSTCARDS COLLECTION IS THE FORERUNNER OF YOUR LAPTOP FILE?

Maybe. At the beginning, it all started with postcards of artworks. I wanted to focus more on the aesthetic features of these objects that we can find everywhere. I have an entire set of sunsets, sex-related scenes, ethnographic scenes, monochrome cards with captions, Mona Lisas, flowers, and so on. I like the popular humor and culture they represent. I have a taste for the vulgar. The aesthetics of postcards changes according to the cultural and political climate, you can see it clearly as you go through my collection: it would have been impossible to find a postcard making fun of the Mafia in Palermo twenty years ago, but of course increased tourism changed everything. Sometimes it is more complicated for me to find postcards that I would want to make part of the collection, sometimes less.

WHAT PHRASE BEST DESCRIBES THE FEELING OF WORKING IN YOUR COUNTRYSIDE HOUSE, SURROUNDED BY YOUR BOOKS, BY THEIR CULTURAL POTENTIAL?



I would say the freedom to navigate, to stimulate connections by the simple fact of walking around and grabbing a book or looking at a picture. Sometimes when I lay down there, I have the feeling that all this enormous knowledge around invades me.

AND THE PLACE WHERE WE ARE RIGHT NOW, YOUR PARISIAN APARTMENT, IS THE PLACE FOR DAILY WORK. WHEN YOU NEED TO BE MORE FOCUSED YOU GO SOUTHWARDS.

Here I keep the books and documents I need to work on a daily basis. When the project is done, I take everything to the other place, where things find their final destination. The two spaces coexist in my practice; they have complementary uses.

ONCE YOU TOLD ME THAT ORGANIZING THINGS SATISFIES YOU.

Completely. I love to classify. I applied to the École des Chartes (a *grande école* for archivist-paleographers) because there was no school for museum curators in France in the early 1960s, but

I was not successful. Therefore, I basically applied the same obsession within museums, starting from École du Louvre through my directorships in France and abroad. I like things to be classified and easily accessible.

IS IT A PURELY FUNCTIONAL APPROACH?

No, it is more than that. The act of classifying reflects a mechanical way of dealing with things. It is relaxing and reassuring, and it is much easier than thinking. Thirty years ago, I had three libraries: for ancient, modern, and contemporary art monographs. Then I organized them according to alphabetical order, and this allowed all kinds of connections between artists of different times and spaces, appearing to share the same shelves of a unique library.

WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO OBJECTS?

I love them! I am amazed how important they are in our lives and the affective power they have. Daniel Spoerri made an *action/événement* (at that time the word performance did not exist) where he

would sit with a selection of his stuff and ask people to come and exchange their own objects, and explain to him why those objects were important to them. A great palette of affection, intimate histories, and marvelous memories came out of that work, through the simple act of explaining to the Other, putting in words what one feels for an ordinary object. Objects, including works of art, are great communicators. I call them “indirect messengers,” because they really link people by carrying information. This fascinates me. Interpretation changes according to the times, but objects stay the same.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF YOUR ARCHIVE?

You have made me think a lot about my archive, more than I did before meeting you. I realized that for a long time I did not care much about it. For sure I cared about the archive in the sense that I didn’t neglect or underestimate its function, but I never thought of building my own archive and preserving the stories it could tell. It was only after *Magiciens de la terre* that I understood how important it was to keep the memory of the exhibitions I was making and how valuable this could be for others. I asked all

those working on the show to transfer their archives (notes, documents, correspondence with artists, etc.) to the Documentation Department of the Centre Georges Pompidou, now called the Kandinsky Library. This show was quite exceptional and I knew it was going to have huge repercussions. Before the 1990s, I used to believe that not everything should be kept—think of the letters we wrote during the making of the show: when you had read and understood the message in it, you trashed the letter without even thinking that it could have been precious. I once threw away a letter from Claude Lévi-Strauss—I regret it so much! Nowadays, I am aware and keep material for those who will need to use it one day. Going back to your question, there are several ways for my archive to exist in the future. I think the best would be to donate part of it to an institution, where people could easily have access to it.

IS YOUR ARCHIVE USEFUL, IN YOUR OPINION?

I’ve always thought that art history is a *science molle*, a soft science, and not even a science to be honest. I mean it is very subjective and largely



based on individuals and personalities working in art. When you first contacted me, I was very impressed by the thesis you are developing: the curatorial archives as a way to understand the exhibition through the personal memories and knowledge of the person who put it together, the curator. I guess that providing access to a set of tools like those we find in an archive would really make art history more relevant and distinct in the future. There are a lot of secondary histories and forgotten artists in my artists' files, waiting to be rediscovered. Using firsthand material accumulated by a curator along his/her professional path could give valuable insights about the exhibitions he/she has made, and the contextual reasons for making them. At the same time, I am absolutely convinced that we cannot keep everything; it is impossible and dangerous...

WHY WOULD THAT BE DANGEROUS?

Because memory has to be selective. You cannot grasp the totality of facts and documents about a whole period of time. We have to create ideas and interpretations, not to make enormous encyclopedias of events and notions. The past is past, and it cannot be revived. In the 1970s many

art professionals wanted to start documentation centers and collect information about contemporary art. I have always been doubtful about this approach, and concerned: who was going to explore the material? The internet made these efforts even more problematic. It is utopian to keep everything, and even if we could, the question is what to do with it. We have to make choices. *Il faut les tripoter quoi* [we must play with them]!

BUT DON'T YOU THINK THAT IT'S NOT FOR US TO MAKE THE SELECTION? PERHAPS FUTURE USERS OF THIS MATERIAL WILL MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICES, WHICH IS ONLY POSSIBLE IF WE GIVE THEM EVERYTHING.

Maybe, but we cannot do this practically. Also, a lot is temporarily lost and then discovered afterwards! This is the nice part of oblivion, that it is reversible.

DON'T YOU THINK THAT WE WILL LOSE SOMETHING WHEN YOUR ARCHIVE IS MOVED TO AN INSTITUTION, IF THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS? WHAT WILL WE LOSE?



Me, of course! And you cannot revive me
once I am dead, it is life, you know... we become
something else.



THE INTIMATE ARCHIVE

VIKTOR MISIANO

Viktor Misiano has been the curator of contemporary art at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow (1980–90), and director of the Center for Contemporary Art (CAC), Moscow (1992–97). In his independent practice, Misiano was part of the curatorial team for *Manifesta 1* (Rotterdam, 1996), and curated the Russian participation at several biennials including the 3rd Istanbul Biennial (1992), the 46th and 50th Venice Biennales (1995, 2003), the 1st Valencia Biennial (Spain, 2001), the 25th and 26th São Paulo Biennials (2002, 2004); the Central Asia Pavilion at the 51st Venice Biennale (2005); and *Progressive Nostalgia: Art from the Former USSR*, Centro per l'arte contemporanea (Prato, 2007). In 1993, he was one of the founders of the *Moscow Art Magazine*, and remains its editor-in-chief. In 2003 he also co-founded *Manifesta Journal*, a Journal of Contemporary Curatorship (Amsterdam/Ljubljana). His most recent curatorial project is a large-scale multidisciplinary initiative: *The Human Condition* (2015-).



Viktor Misiano's archive in Moscow with Manouche

Photo: Viktor Misiano, 2017

Courtesy Viktor Misiano

WHAT RELATIONSHIP DO YOU HAVE
WITH YOUR ARCHIVE? HOW IS IT
CONSTITUTED? WHAT KIND OF
ARCHIVE IS IT?

“Tell me what kind of archive you have, and I will tell you what kind of curator you are.” I try to see curators as pre or post-professional entities; that is to say, their relationship with the artist should be, in my opinion, more than professional. On the contrary, it’s a human relationship, a friendship. Therefore, I don’t have a large archive of the artists I have worked with. When I plan an exhibition, I prefer to see the locations, contact my friends, browse through the catalogs of my colleagues. I don’t have an archive like Harald Szeemann and Kasper Koenig had. I remember that Koenig’s office at Portikus was full of files, and that every box was labeled with the name of an artist. Looking at the walls of his studio provided a panoramic view of European artistic life in the last three decades...

Instead, the way I work does not assume the existence of an objective archive. To me, the personal memory of the encounter with the artist is

no less important than his or her portfolio. I’m not very interested in collecting material. I only keep what is essential: a few catalogs of major shows that are treasured as a fetish or souvenir of personal experience. The rest, I donate to libraries. Having all the documentation about an artist and their development becomes important if I have to organize survey or retrospective exhibitions. In that case, I obtain the material; otherwise, in general, I can do without.

My archive is very private and intimate; it’s my personal memory. I would say that my archive is, above all, existential. My exhibitions are documented in a methodical way in order to protect the copies of the catalogs, especially if there are only a few left. I have a very dialogic, reflective rapport with the exhibitions that I have organized, and with the corresponding material. This allows me to interpret the meanings that emerge after a certain time. What I do now seems to me like a break from what I did before, even if I realize that I sometimes quote myself. These paradoxes appear when you reflect on your past, on the matrix that is revealed throughout your career. Your inner structure, your curatorial spirit, the internal logic of your work,



which predetermines your process without you being aware of it; all of this is visible, in retrospect, if you look at your personal archive. Looking at an archive reveals preannounced confirmations.

DO YOU HAPPEN TO MAKE EXHIBITIONS BASED ON THE ONES YOU HAVE ORGANIZED IN THE PAST?

Sure, although unconsciously. I have noticed that there are two important aspects to my work: the first one is the experimentation between art and society, which generates projects where art is a lived experience. The second one is the *plaisir du texte* [pleasure in text], the *plaisir de l'image* [pleasure in image], that comes from my academic education in art history, my fascination for the autonomy of art and images as a value in itself; sensual, imaginative, objective. I'm a curator who oscillates between a sociological and conservative approach. I recently happened to invite an artist to develop a work that had already been done for one of my exhibitions in 2001. In this case, I quoted myself. Even if context and subject matter are very different, the work that the artist made fourteen years ago is still appropriate; it has a new value in the conceptual drama,

but not in the visual one. We always take something from the past when we formulate the present.

WHAT IS THE TEMPORAL DIMENSION OF THE ARCHIVE?

I believe that the drama experienced by the curator is similar to that of the theater director or music performer: we are destined to disappear. Unfortunately, what we do cannot be reproduced. The exhibition is an ephemeral medium, bound for oblivion. Of course, there are videos and pictures, but how can you see a work by Luca Ronconi or Peter Brook on television? The archival document is a trace that does not replace the experience, in the precise moment, in the precise room, in the precise conditions. In an exhibition, everything is very contextualized. For this reason, I don't believe much in the power of the archive to create a memory. I realize it is important to preserve these traces to testify and facilitate the researcher's work, but above all I feel that the archive is important for myself. Moreover, if I'm presenting the material it contains, I can give a complete testimony; it is by far the most authentic way to revisit the archive. When, instead, one of my historical exhibitions is

studied and taken up again by other people, it activates a mechanism of de-contextualization that is impossible to control. At this point, the archive belongs to someone else. Quite often, the material is exploited, and not reviewed in a critical way, but just appropriated... and this is regrettable. My archive belongs to the archives of other people.

DOES THIS CONCERN YOU?

It is not that it worries me; rather, it suggests a certain skepticism towards the obsession with archives. There are a few curators that collect everything to a tee; they are obsessed with preserving everything. I have realized that a complete archive is utopic. Behind this archival effort I see personal ambition, the desire for eternity, to outlive time itself, prolong your own existence. I believe that the archive, rather than being an extension of our own existence, from the moment it is opened, constitutes the existence of other people.

THIS DESIRE TO SURVIVE DEATH, TO LEAVE TRACES OF OUR EXISTENCE IN ORDER TO CONTINUE LIVING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S MEMORY, IS PART OF HUMAN NATURE...

Absolutely! But if we have done great things, these remain the same... no matter in what form. You are not the only one that collects your own traces; these exist independently from you—In people's memory, in the archives of the institutions where you have worked, in researchers' theses, in the memory of your contemporaries. Obviously you can't be indifferent to this issue, but personally, I try to keep what I like to preserve and what will be useful for my work, not what will be useful to a future archivist.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO YOUR ARCHIVE?

Having lived through the 1990s, the social chaos of the post-communist and post-Soviet transitional period, I saw how state and institutional archives were destroyed. The pain of seeing how historical memory was debased has been a trauma, the realization of barbarism. Because of this, I have kept a lot of things, documents that are not about my projects: letters, testimonies, and photographs. This was a moral and cultural obligation. I knew that if I hadn't taken care of them myself, many things would have disappeared. In



the 1990s, I collected invitations to exhibitions because I realized that all the initiatives that were emerging at that time were very fragile, and they would not have been able to preserve their own memory. The context pushed me in this direction. I had this instinct because the archive was at risk. I have recently given away this collection to the archive of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, and the NCCA in Moscow. In normal times, we shouldn't be aware of the archive; it should be part of the everyday life of a society. We shouldn't worry about archives. If we do, it means we're in a moment of crisis and social breakdown—an exceptional moment. Or when we go through a personal crisis we have a specific concern for our own history; it's a sort of narcissism, exaggerated ambition, or neurosis. When our energy is focused on archiving rather than taking action, it means we have a problem.

WHAT IS YOUR POSITION REGARDING THE REACTIVATION OF PAST EXHIBITIONS?

I think it's a worthwhile experience. Society does not move forward through original discoveries, but through the reinterpretation of past

experiences, and those that are forgotten and in the archives. In Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* [In Search of Lost Time], one of the characters surprises his friends with beautiful hats. They ask him: "But where do you find all these beautiful hats?" And he answers: "I do not find them, I keep them." The idea of the *new* is something that has already existed in the past, but it has been forgotten and thus constitutes the present's foundation. Exhibitions that reenact the past reflect this logic, and it's extremely important that they exist. When you bring out the past, it makes sense if you create something new; otherwise it's only a copy. If you only have the desire to relive the past, this effort will not be successful. On the contrary, there is a risk of exposing fetishes, corpses.

The exhibition is unrepeatable; it must renew itself, create a dialogic relationship with the present, be anchored to the current atmosphere. It must create a new experience. To take something back from your personal archive or from others', and to propose something again, emulating the original exhibition, is equivalent to giving a very simplistic interpretation of the concept of reenactment.



WHERE IS YOUR ARCHIVE LOCATED?

On the computer! I try to digitize everything that I can use for my work. Otherwise, it is at the office in Moscow or in my home in Puglia. I am well-organized. I take care of it—although less and less, as time goes by. At the beginning of my career, when I was an independent curator, I was even more systematic, out of necessity and for fear that those things would get lost. Now the idea of the archive has entered ordinary professional life. This doesn't trouble me. Having said that, I believe the archive is always with us, that it never leaves us. Everybody is his or her own archive.



HARALD SZEEMANN'S ARCHIVE

PIETRO RIGOLO

Pietro Rigolo earned his PhD from Università degli Studi di Siena/Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane in 2011. His dissertation analyzed Harald Szeemann's activities in Ticino, with a focus on the history of Monte Verità. His research focuses on modern and contemporary art, history of exhibitions, and curatorial studies. In 2013 Rigolo joined the Getty Research Institute (GRI) as the subject expert in the team cataloguing the Szeemann archive. He is the co-curator of *Harald Szeemann: Museum of Obsessions* (GRI and Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Kunsthalle Bern; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Castello di Rivoli, Turin; Swiss Institute, New York, 2018-19), and one of the editors of *Harald Szeemann: Selected Writings* (GRI, 2018)—the first English anthology of the curator's writings.



Objects owned by Étienne Szeemann (Harald's grandfather) and presented in the exhibition *Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us*, 1974. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2011.M.30) Photo: Pietro Rigolo, 2017
Courtesy The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS
OF HARALD SZEEMANN'S ARCHIVE
AND WHAT IMAGE OF THE MAN DOES IT
REFLECT? HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE
HIS APPROACH TO HIS ARCHIVE?

I think the most striking characteristic of the Szeemann archive is its size. It is fair to say that no other curator has ever amassed such a wealth of material—a library of 28,000 volumes, over 40,000 photographic items, about 4,000 boxes of archival material. This somehow grew out of necessity, given his choice to live in Ticino, and therefore not having access to substantial research resources, but also from Szeemann's own determination in constructing the archive as a mirror to his own character and his status in the art world. Therefore, through the archive we have a multifaceted image of Szeemann: the revered art world insider, the exhibition maker, the intellectual, the researcher; the hoarder.

His approach to the archive and the way he was using it was, from what I could gather by studying it and talking with his collaborators, both systematic and whimsical. There was a plan and a system in place: everything received by mail was

kept, from important correspondence with artists, to invitations from obscure galleries, to charities' pleas for donations around Christmas time. And everything has its place. Of course there was no catalog, no "finding aid," but everything could be retrieved and had a specific place in the building. At the same time, for Szeemann it was particularly important to have a space in which all the material was easily accessible and visible: therefore, he avoided drawers and closed boxes, everything was on open shelves, easily reachable without the use of ladders. I believe in the idea of an archive as a path through the forest (think of Armand Schulthess), as a garden if you like, where you can take a stroll and pick a few flowers or just smell them. From various accounts, it seems that much of Szeemann's thinking was conducted in this way, walking around in those rooms and picking up what the archive was offering. That's what I mean by a whimsical, playful—magical, if you like—way of using it.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE HOW THE ARCHIVE
LOOKS NOW IN COMPARISON WITH ITS
PRESENTATION AT FABBRICA ROSA IN
MAGGIA, SWITZERLAND, WHERE IT WAS
ORIGINALLY KEPT?



The archive now looks very different, in terms of housing and facilities. The experience of navigating it is also substantially different. First of all, when in Maggia it was a private archive, and using it was subject to the agreement of Szeemann first, and his family afterwards. They were always extremely generous, but they could not offer the level of availability that is provided by a research institute, and that would not have been desirable, being as it was a space for work and cultural production. Now it is open to every researcher, for an indefinite time, and this of course opens up other possibilities for research and engagement with it.

I was visiting the Fabbrica Rosa from about 2008 to 2010. First of all, it was freezing. Encounters with the material were somehow more spontaneous, casual and random—meaning I spent a lot of time there, I had a lot of fun, but I also missed a lot. I was researching for my dissertation, with no money and no time to waste, so I was always in a hurry, and anxious about missing out so much. My experience here in Los Angeles has been totally different: working as an archivist I have developed an ongoing relationship with the material, a relationship that became also more intimate and

tactile. It's no longer only about the content of the paper, but also about its materiality, conditions, and housing.

HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO ORGANIZE THE ARCHIVE AT THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, AND WHY? IN WHAT WAY DID SZEEMANN USE THE ARCHIVE AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING WITH IT NOW?

Access at the Getty Research Institute, as in most research institutes housing archival material, is mediated by an online database listing what is to be found where, and through this tool it is possible to request the material you want to consult. It is no longer possible to take a stroll through the archive, but we have followed the original arrangement in organizing the database, so in a way it mimics how the archive was laid out at the Fabbrica Rosa. The way the material is organized here developed from studying and mapping the Fabbrica itself. Different series were created, according to the disposition of the material in the different rooms. For example, upstairs in the Fabbrica's fax room the material was organized in



binders, chronologically following the sequence of Szeemann's projects. This became the Project Files series, whereas the material contained in manila envelopes and boxed in the famous Villa Jelmini wine boxes downstairs, which was organized alphabetically by artist's name, became the Artists' Files. In a way, I think the role of an archive repository should just be to keep the material safe and available. So we are doing that, which is quite a demanding task in itself. But we are also a research center; therefore, we organize seminars, we teach classes, we conduct oral history interviews, we have organized an exhibition that will travel to four countries between 2018 and 2019—featuring also the reconstruction of the 1974 Szeemann show *Grossvater*—and on the occasion of the exhibition we published two books, the catalog and the first anthology of Szeemann's writings in English. After this first, years-long phase, in which the archive has been taken care of and put in the spotlight, in the following decades it will still be open for research and new projects. So the right question would not only be what we are making out of it, but what the entire research community will make out of it. That remains to be seen.

WHY IS SZEEMANN'S ARCHIVE SO RELEVANT FOR ART HISTORY AND EXHIBITIONS? WHAT DOES A CURATORIAL ARCHIVE TELL US ABOUT A CURATOR'S ACTIVITY AND VISION, AND HOW CAN WE USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

The archive was, as I have said, a way for Szeemann to offer a portrait of himself; to organize knowledge, and—consciously and paradoxically—it was the permanent legacy of a man who always worked with an ephemeral, temporal medium. From it we have a complete picture of the man and of the curator: his interests, his obsessions, his method, his ideas and values. It is the most striking example I have encountered of an archive which delivers such a clear image of its creator, and that is due in part I believe to the fact that this process was consciously carried out for decades and in part to the amount of space, time, and resources he poured into it. This is why this archive is so relevant for the study of curatorial practice, the history of exhibitions and art history in general. Then, on top of that it is a source of unique material documenting some of the most significant events



of the post WWII art scene, and offers unique and important collections on specific subjects, such as Alfred Jarry, pataphysics, and the history of Monte Verità.

I feel the curator and the arena in which the curator positions his/her activities have been constantly renegotiated and in flux in the last few decades. We are now in an age of “total curation,” where our food, our music, our afternoon at the spa, everything is curated, and maybe with diminishing care for our planet and its inhabitants. The Szeemann papers offer not only his vision of what a curator is: his position shaped our understanding of the curatorial—at least of what it was at a time that is now seen as foundational for the discourses we are trying to develop today.



EXHIBITIONS' REACTIVATION AND EXHIBITED ARCHIVES

THE POLYPHONIC ARCHIVE

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

Hans Ulrich Obrist is the artistic director of Serpentine Galleries, London, and co-founder of the research project 89plus. Prior to this, he was a curator at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Since his first show *World Soup (The Kitchen Show)* in 1991, he has curated more than 300 exhibitions. Obrist has lectured internationally at academic and art institutions; is a contributing editor to *Artforum*, *AnOther Magazine*, and *032C*, as well as a regular contributor to *Mousse* and *Kaleidoscope*, and writes columns for *Das Magazin* and *Weltkunst*. In 2011 he received the CCS Bard Award for Curatorial Excellence and in 2015 he was awarded the International Folkwang Prize for his commitment to the arts. Obrist's recent publications include *Mondialité*, *Conversations in Mexico*, *Ways of Curating* and *The Age of Earthquakes* with Douglas Coupland and Shumon Basar.



The Hans Ulrich Obrist Archive, 2017

Photo: Joseph Grigely, 2017

Courtesy Hans Ulrich Obrist and Joseph Grigely



WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF AN ARCHIVE?

The archive is a place where many layers of documents of all types—analogue and digital—lie, where an accumulation of material is systematically displayed. I think that there is not just one archive; there are many together.

WHAT KIND OF ARCHIVES HAVE YOU BUILT UP OVER THE YEARS?

I have several archives: an archive of my books, of my own publications and those of others, archives of music, and architecture. There is the archive of my interviews, 2600 hours so far, most of them filmed, some of them audio, but also minicassettes. An archive of photographs—I take photos every day—and I also keep photographs by artists. Then there is an archive of my notes, sketches, and drawings that were partially published in Paul Chan's book. In fact, there is an archive for each project: *Cities on the Move*, *Do It*, for each specific exhibition. An archive is always many archives, a multitude of archives in my case.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU USE YOUR ARCHIVE, IF YOU DO?

I do not want to look back too much. For me the urgency is to focus on my next project. I do not spend much time archiving, although I do have a nighttime collaborator, Max Shackleton, who works for me through to 6 am and does most of the archiving of my digital interviews. I am convinced that if you look back too much and become your own archivist, you can create a situation where you block the future.

YOU SAID THAT THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WOULD BE THE CENTURY OF ARCHIVES.

I don't want to work with my archive but with other people's. That is the reason why I did the *Interarchive* project on artists and curators' archives. No one was taking care of them; they were not being activated. It is only when someone dies that archives are taken into institutions, Harald Szeemann's archive for example. It would be more intelligent to do this during a person's lifetime. There are so many amazing archives out there.



I ALWAYS FEEL A SENSE OF URGENCY,
A NEED TO DEAL WITH ARCHIVES
WHILE THEIR CREATORS ARE STILL
ALIVE. WITHOUT THEIR STORIES
AND THEIR PRESENCE IN THE
ARCHITECTURAL SPACE OF THE
ARCHIVE WE MISS SO MUCH.

Exactly! We lose their input when they are gone. In this sense, when I said that the twenty-first century will be the century of archives I was expressing a wish. An institution taking care of living archives is very desirable, and not only for curators' archives: I would like to save the archives of architects, scientists, novelists, and poets too.

HOW DO YOU IMAGINE THE ARCHIVE OF
THE FUTURE TO BE?

I think there will be movement back and forth between analog and digital. The future of the archive is a hybrid where negotiations can happen and multidimensionality takes place. We tried to address that with my exhibition on Cedric Price and Lucius Burckhardt at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2014. I think it is important to bring

the archive to life. In the digital age, we have an increased desire for the live experience. In my opinion, there is no hierarchy between the digital and the analog; the two are complementary. Rem Koolhaas' project *Charrette* for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was a very interesting way of creating a compromise between the digital and the analog. There you could see not only the collection the curators had chosen to show but also find the other part, the "hidden" collection and navigate your own way through it. Every visitor could also see sections of the archive that are usually invisible, and visit an imaginary museum. In this sense, the *Charrette* submission for the MoMA Expansion and Renovation Project was very much ahead of its time. Rem Koolhaas was not even a finalist in the competition but his was the most radical project.

WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE OF
REACTIVATING EXHIBITIONS BASED
ON THE USE OF ARCHIVAL MATERIAL?

With *Take me, I'm yours* in Paris and Rome, we didn't want to restage the exhibition in the same way it had first been presented in London



in 1995. That would have been too nostalgic, and I am not interested in remaking my own exhibitions. Instead, we wanted to give it a new life; we presented a completely new version based on the rule that each work in the show could be taken away. I have built up archives as depositories of these instructions: they can be used over and over again. These exhibitions are also to be replayed. They can be dormant, but they are never dead, never finished. Every day I wake up and I know that *Do It* is out there, which is a nice feeling.

BUT YOU ALSO WORK WITH EXHIBITIONS THAT SEEM TO BE FINISHED, CONCLUDED, LIKE THE HOTEL CARLTON PALACE EXHIBITION YOU ORGANIZED IN 1993. DO YOU THINK THAT PROJECT COULD BE RESTAGED FOR INSTANCE?

Definitely not, because it was an experience: I would need to live again for three months in a hotel room, ask artists to come and place or realize works in my room, and have conversations with every visitor. I made a show at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden in 2014 with pictures of the original project taken by Pierre Leguillon, but

it was more like showing an artwork based on the exhibition. Erwin Panofsky said we should use the past to reinvent the future. All my exhibitions are concerned with establishing the rules of the game. Exhibitions grow organically, so you do not have to reconstitute them because they never stop. They are live entities.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE EXHIBITION *RÉSISTANCES* AT THE LUMA FOUNDATION.

I see this as another way of activating the archive. I hope that it's going to extend Koolhaas' initiative for the Venice Pavilion, where the archive was made accessible and the visitor was in conversation with it. Jean-François Lyotard's *Les immatériaux* [The Immaterials] and *Résistances* are a different story, because we are not trying to curate an exhibition based on an archive but on an idea that Lyotard could not realize. It is somehow an exhibition curated by a dead person. *Les immatériaux* explored the digital network age in which we live, but also a lack of resistance in the super fluidity of communication highways. Towards the end of his life, Jean-François Lyotard, the eminent philosopher, said that he wanted

to curate an exhibition about physical resistances and what happens to them in the digital age. Back then, Philippe Parreno was a student at the École des Hautes Études and participated in one of Lyotard's seminars. That is where he said publicly that he wanted to realize this project... but, unfortunately, he died before he could make it. So we are going to realize it, Daniel Birnbaum, Philippe Parreno, and I.

ARE YOU USING SOME ARCHIVAL MATERIAL FOR THIS EXHIBITION?

There is very little archival material about this project. We looked into what Lyotard was saying about it to his friends or students. We had to extrapolate, which is also an interesting endeavor. Lyotard's idea is a kind of constellation from which we then developed the show. We started to record the conversations for a film about this project three years ago. I work slowly—my projects are slow, my archive is slow, even if I lead a fast life, I speak fast, and everything about me seems to be fast. *Do It* is an ongoing archive that I have been developing over the last thirty years, *Cities on the Move* lasted five years, etc. I am interested in this

long duration dimension, which is also where my interest in the archive comes from. I am making exhibitions as *répertoires*, from which the project can be restaged. My exhibitions can be restaged in fifty or a hundred years, without me, without the artist, just by following the discourse. I want them to be brought back to life constantly. They evolve, grow, and breathe. That's why they cannot be just documented, they have to be movable partitions. I want my exhibitions to survive without me: in this sense, I want to contribute to a *répertoire*. I am interested in developing archives for exhibitions to be played and replayed.



THE REACTIVATING ARCHIVE

LORENZO BENEDETTI

Lorenzo Benedetti is the curator of contemporary art at the Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, Switzerland (2017-). Previously, he was the director of De Appel arts centre, Amsterdam (2014-16), and of De Vleeshal Art Centre, Middelburg, the Netherlands (2008-14). Benedetti curated the Dutch Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), and in 2005 founded the Sound Art Museum, Rome. He was the director of Fondazione Volume! in Rome, and curator of the Marta Herford Museum for Art, Architecture and Design, Herford, Germany. He has been guest curator at the Kunsthalle in Mulhouse, France, and professor at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht.



CARL ANDRE ROBERT BARRY DOUGLAS HUEBLER JOSEPH KOSUTH SOL LEWITT ROBERT MORRIS LAWRENCE WEINER, also known as *The Xerox Book*. Originally published by Siegelau/Wendler in 1968. Republished in December 2015 by Roma Publications, Amsterdam, in collaboration with De Appel arts centre and Stichting Egress Foundation, on the occasion of the exhibition *Seth Siegelau: Beyond Conceptual Art* at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Photo: Roger Willems, 2015
 Courtesy Lorenzo Benedetti, Roma Publications, De Appel arts centre, Stichting Egress Foundation, and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

LET'S TALK ABOUT REACTIVATING EXHIBITIONS AND ARCHIVES.

It is difficult to reactivate something that belongs to a different historical context—unlike cultural tendencies, which reappear. In my opinion, we can only talk about reactivating an exhibition if the works from the original show are displayed again, and probably, even in the same place. The number of works involved defines the degree of reactivation. Therefore, reactivating an exhibition means to experience the difference between how a show was made the first time and how it is made now. We need to consider this temporal distance when we observe the production parameters. Another interesting thing to consider is that we are involved in archival workmanship: there is a recovery of historical material, and a new presentation. Moreover, reactivating guarantees the possibility of celebrating the original exhibition, and it has a defined margin of success. A remake exhibition has a historical value that changes the initial value of the exhibition. The remake becomes, more often than not, something fake. Either you position the historical parameter which you want to recreate as close to the original as

possible, or you reinterpret the subject—the same theme, but readapted for the current generation. Whatever the historical background, associating the contemporary with another contemporary, that is no longer the original contemporary, becomes useless. Historically, there is a paradox, an ambiguity. In any case, it is inevitable that the origins of the exhibition will be distorted by reactivating it.

CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI SAID THAT THE ARCHIVE IS DESTROYED BY STORING TOO MUCH. HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN REACTIVATIONS THAT INVOLVE ONE OR SEVERAL ARCHIVES?

I participated in the re-edition of Seth Siegelaub's book, the *Xerox Book*, as part of the exhibition *Seth Siegelaub—Beyond Conceptual Art* in December 2015, at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. The interest in remaking his book, as part of the exhibition, is so that it can be redistributed. The book has been reactivated, in fact, because it has been remade in an identical way, 1:1, with the same kind of paper, and is available to purchase at a moderate price. This seems to me to be a remake that is



very close to the original. Actually, we have only recently started to pay attention to archives. For a long time, institutions preferred to get rid of them, and a lot of the information available on historical exhibitions was lost. Through the documentation we can actually go back to the way in which the work was installed, and the protocols that were used at other times in the history of exhibitions. Exhibitions are always a means of investigation for the history of art, because when you make an exhibition, you create contexts.

WHAT KIND OF AN ARCHIVIST ARE YOU?

Most of the exhibitions I have curated were for institutions, so the documentation did not stay with me. I have to say that I do not believe that an exhibition is something closed, with a beginning and an end. An exhibition is not a single project; it is always connected with other shows I have organized, and others that are not mine. An exhibition opens up like a rhizome. Between thinking about the show and making it happen, there are many moments that communicate with other ideas and situations. The archive of the things I do is made up of the documentation of

these moments related to artists, themes, places, or contexts. As far as I'm concerned, research is always porous. The past is reopened to us with new perspectives. This is a Warburgian idea that I completely agree with. To me, an archive is not a closed collection, because I use it to recreate other things. The internet has revolutionized the way we document and remember; emails are now a big part of archives. But the material is more fragile, and in the future there will be a big problem related to amnesia.

PERHAPS THAT IS WHY THERE IS SUCH AN INTEREST IN ARCHIVES NOWADAYS.

In my opinion, archives are not just a current obsession. The idea of an archive changed in the 1990s, with the arrival of the internet. At present, archives occupy an important space in conceptual practices. In the beginning, the internet was a great novelty because it enabled the exchange of all kinds of information. Nowadays, the amount of data is excessive, so there is an interest in archives of a different kind, a different nature. In the future, a lack of storage will reduce the amount of digital information available. This doesn't mean



that paper was more secure, because as we have seen, it was not stored; it was disposed of because it occupied too much space. Here at least digital has an advantage: it does not take up too much physical space.

WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU ARE
INTERESTED IN THE DISCUSSIONS
RELATED TO ARCHIVES?

Archives do not concern me from a historical point of view but as a way to understand our relationship with form, and the dynamics that appear with them at certain moments. I have an interest in earlier curators who at different times and contexts have experimented with the exhibition format: from Alfred Barr and Alexander Dornier to Harald Szeemann. I am definitely interested in the origin of things.



THE COLLECTED ARCHIVE

SUSAN HAPGOOD

Susan Hapgood is the executive director of International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP), New York, senior advisor to Independent Curators International (ICI), and founder and director of the Mumbai Art Room. She was ICI's director of exhibitions, developing and managing the exhibitions program for seven years until 2010. She has worked in a curatorial capacity for institutions including the Guggenheim Museum, the New Museum, and the American Federation of Arts. The exhibitions she has curated and co-curated include *FluxAttitudes* (1993), *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art 1958-62* (1994), *Video Divertimento* (1997), *Slightly Unbalanced* (2008-10), and *In Deed: Certificates of Authenticity in Art* (2011-12). She participated in the development of VOTI—Union of the Imaginary, an international forum founded in 1998 and formerly existing as an online site for discussion among contemporary art curators.



Desk and archive area in Susan Hapgood's apartment, 2017

Photo: Susan Hapgood, 2017

Courtesy Susan Hapgood



TELL ME ABOUT YOUR ROLE IN THE
VOTI—UNION OF THE IMAGINARY
PLATFORM.

I was invited to join VOTI as the *archivista*. I was initially introduced to the project by Jordan Crandall, who was working with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Carlos Basualdo to get VOTI up and running. Earlier in the 1990s I had been involved with the first digital arts foundry, äda'web, and was really interested in the way digital formats could intersect with contemporary art. As someone with an MA in art history, with strong writing and organizational skills, I was in charge of enrolling new members, making general announcements, keeping the activities documented as much as I could, acting as an administrative overseer. This experience did not last that long, about one year or so, but during that time, VOTI was quite active, with a whole range of different discussions and voices from all over the world. VOTI eventually came to an end due to lack of participation. Some time later one of the VOTI members, Vasıf Kortun, then-director of SALT in Istanbul and Ankara, wrote to ask me about the archives.

ROBERT FLECK KEPT A LOT OF THE
DOCUMENTATION, DIDN'T HE?

He had most of it actually. He had printed everything out in hard copies. Luckily we were also able to recover some files from an old server, with the help of Wolfgang Staehle, who had hosted VOTI on his very early digital platform, *The Thing*, for free. But technology changes very fast and some of VOTI's records were gone forever by then. Other VOTI members had also saved material; I had some paper archives, so did Carlos. After about six months of corresponding with many of the people involved, I finally gathered a pretty comprehensive body of documents together.

DID YOU AND THE OTHER VOTI
MEMBERS HAVE THE FEELING THAT
YOU WERE BUILDING THE BASIS
FOR CONTEMPORARY CURATORIAL
DISCOURSE BACK THEN?

No. It just felt like a very futuristic platform for communication that was exhilarating, exciting for everybody. We were not thinking of the future: we were making use of a technology that was



nascent and still only beginning to be used by the general population; email was not quite a daily tool for at least a few more years. The web was a novelty for everybody, and the connections it allowed were just dawning on all of us. The forum was a listserv, which was a kind of email software that allowed a group of subscribed members to be addressed at once, instead of writing to each person individually. I do not think that anybody was looking ahead to the future; in fact, nobody was censoring, there was a refreshing degree of informality. Well, probably some people were thinking of posterity, but not the majority of us.

THERE WERE SOME ATTEMPTS AT SELF-REPRESENTATION THEN...

We tried to structure the conversations around certain topics more than around people, in order to avoid that. Some people were pontificating perhaps and trying to push the conversations in self-serving directions, but generally speaking, we were all excited by the new format and free in expression. We could hear voices from all over the world, and confront one another with different opinions and experiences.

HOW DID PEOPLE REACT WHEN YOU AND SOME OF YOUR COLLEAGUES DECIDED TO PUBLISH THESE EXCHANGES IN A BOOK?

We sought permission from all VOTI members. Most people agreed and were happy about it, a few did not answer, only one said no. The lapse of time seemed to erase worry about any lack of privacy the book would bring about. But in addition, there was a bond among us, even if some of VOTI members never met in person. Vasif Kortun approached me with this idea of the publication, and we launched it during the Istanbul Biennial. There was also the notion of organizing a summit to somehow revive it, but that plan sort of fizzled out. Vasif was definitely the force behind getting the publication going. Hans Ulrich Obrist, Carlos Basualdo and Jordan Crandall—the first three VOTI founders—were very supportive. As *archivista*, I readily agreed to step up and collaborate, working with an amazing team that included our co-editor, November Paynter, who really spearheaded the publication through to the end.



WHAT IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH ARCHIVES? ARE THEY SOMETHING THAT YOU PARTICULARLY CARE ABOUT?

I have worked for many institutions with important archives, like the Sperone Westwater Gallery and the Guggenheim Museum. Also being trained as an art historian, and as an avid researcher, I fully understand how archives are crucial for the future of this discipline. So yes, I definitely care about archives. As a curator, I am pretty sloppy with my own projects: I do keep all of my papers and digital files but they are filled with a lot of ancillary junk, too. A lot of my own early curatorial records were in boxes that got damaged by water years ago, because I had stored them in a basement that was flooded.

While I love researching in archives, maybe I am not so good at making them, especially making my own. Which also explains why I did not have that much archival material for VOTI when my colleagues came and asked me. Generally speaking, curators are overworked and it is usually very difficult to find the time to organize personal papers and make them available for other people

to look through. Most of the time my archival materials are condensed into publications that accompany exhibitions, and by then I am interested in the next project rather than in organizing the old papers and computer files.

CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF A SHOW YOU HAVE ORGANIZED STARTING WITH AN ARCHIVE?

Cornelia Lauf and I co-curated an exhibition called *FluxAttitudes*: it started in a small non-profit institution called Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center in Buffalo in 1991, and then, a year later, the New Museum asked us to present it. At the second venue, we ended up displaying some of what might be considered archival material—we showed our correspondence with many of the artists while we were curating the second presentation. We had some really interesting discussions with Fluxus artists about artworks' value, equity, and money. There was a low budget for the exhibition at the New Museum, and there was no insurance for exhibition loans, so we wrote to the artists in the show about this, asking them to declare that their loans had zero valuation. Not



surprisingly, this made the artists really angry, and some of them refused to participate, getting into an interesting discussion about institutions, about how Fluxus was sometimes sidelined and how unfair it was to ask this of them. We understood, but we felt we had been very upfront about the situation. We decided to exhibit the correspondence, or what you might call archival material, in the show.

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT
DONATING YOUR ARCHIVE TO AN
INSTITUTION?

I have, and hopefully I will one day, but I have no idea where I would offer it. It would be great if the material—a lot of ephemera, correspondence, and documentation—that I have gathered could be useful to researchers, but it is becoming more and more difficult to get archive donations accepted by institutions because they have too many requests and of course physical archives take a lot of space. We will see, I am still making archives, not done yet!



THE SYMPATHETIC-MAGIC ARCHIVE

FRANCESCO MANACORDA

Artistic director of Tate Liverpool from 2012 to 2017, and former director of Artissima in Turin, Francesco Manacorda is a critic, independent curator, and visiting lecturer of Exhibition History and Critical Theory in the Curating Contemporary Art Department at the Royal College of Art, London. He worked in London as a freelance curator for four years and was later appointed curator at the Barbican Art Gallery, where he organized two large-scale group exhibitions: *Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art* (co-curated with Lydia Yee, 2008), and *Radical Nature—Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969-2009* (2009). His curatorial practice includes collaborations with many art institutions, among them, the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Serpentine Galleries, Lyon Biennial, T1 – Turin Triennial, and the Slovenian and New Zealand Pavilions at the Venice Biennale. He has collaborated with magazines such as *Domus*, *Flash Art*, *Frieze*, *Metropolis M*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Untitled*, *Art Review*, and *Mousse*.



Robert Smithson, *Asphalt Rundown*, 1969

© Holt-Smithson Foundation/Licensed by VAGA at ARS, New York
 Courtesy Holt-Smithson Foundation, Santa Fe

WHAT RELATIONSHIP DO YOU HAVE WITH YOUR ARCHIVE?

I'm a little anarchic in the arrangement of my personal archive, in the sense that I don't follow a precise methodology. On the other hand, I have had to leave the documentation with the last three institutions in which I have worked, so all the correspondence I had during those periods is no longer with me. There are different ways in which an institution can archive this material. Tate Liverpool keeps the correspondence from the last six months available for the curators, while earlier material ends up in the global archive.

I have accumulated a lot of things, especially in relation to the digital part. There's always less written material. What does it mean to keep documents today, when in fact everything is documented? The internet is an archive. It is also a great danger because we don't know how long it will last. We are in a very strange moment now, the rules are changing and we don't know what will come out of this movement.

As for me, I keep all my notebooks where I

write every day. They're not organized, but I know that I have them, and I don't feel like throwing them away because they are mnemonic traces that I might need to go back to one day. I also have the material that artists send me, books and catalogs, but not even these are in order. Concerning letters and paper documentation, I only have contracts and bureaucratic documents. I reread texts often, because I may have to further develop them, or give public presentations on certain past projects. This is a part of the archive that I use more than the one related to exhibitions. I wouldn't want to reactivate a project that is finished for me. I review the shows that I haven't yet organized, those that remain as a project, more so than the shows that I have already done. I see in them aspects that I can develop in a different context.

WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE YOUR ARCHIVE WILL BE LIKE IN THE FUTURE?

The main guideline I would like to use to organize my archive is to group together images and texts. Texts would be private and public, because you should have access to the curator's private documentation if you wish to retrace his/her



intentions. Therefore, the installation views, all the material gathered in the catalog, and all the texts that visitors have in order to immerse themselves in the show, for example the audio guide. In short, the entire structure of the exhibition and its presentation to the public.

IN WHAT WAY DO YOU THINK AN ARCHIVE CAN BE OPENED UP?

That's very hard to answer, because, in fact, an archive is a sort of potential discourse. It's practically impossible to open up an archive; it's like exposing all the expressions of a multidimensional situation in one room. From the "curatorial grammar" point of view, it's always very complex because you select only an infinitesimal part of the total potential of an entire archive, unless it's exhibitions such as *"If You Lived Here Still..."* (2009) and *If You Lived Here...* (1989) by Martha Rosler, or *Interarchive: Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Art Field* (2002) from Hans Ulrich Obrist's archive. However, even when an archive is shown as an accumulation of documents, its potential is not fully revealed. You cannot show all the possible worlds, the parallel

universes that it makes reference to in one single space. One example that I really liked was the one shown in *Ennesima*, an exhibition curated by Vincenzo de Bellis at the Triennale di Milano in 2015. The way in which he created and exhibited the archive of the Via Lazzaro Palazzi Group, in my opinion, worked rather well, because the data was made accessible on paper and in digital format. Additionally, a timeline that told the group's story was linked with another that explained what was happening at the same time in the national and international art world during those years. That has been the most convincing attempt to exhibit an archive that I have seen recently. De Bellis was able to create a hypertext that guarantees access to an archive in its entirety and at any moment.

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF AN ARCHIVE?

An archive is any potential vocabulary, any accumulation of sentences, or possibility of enunciation. There is an almost linguistic aspect in the arranging of materials, of knowledge: a composition of words, in space-related forms for an exhibition, and time-related for a discourse. To me, a museum's collection is an archive.



IT SEEMS TO ME THAT ARCHIVE AND COLLECTION ARE TWO CONCEPTS THAT ARE MOVING CLOSER TOGETHER.

Indeed! And you can see it in the way some institutions work, like the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid and the Tate Gallery itself, whose collection and archive are available online, on the same database, both equipped with the same information tools. This is something that was not possible not so long ago; it's a very recent evolution that is related to a broader idea of a collection. From the point of view of cultural hierarchy, but also from an economic viewpoint, archive and collection have never been so close, and in the future they will be even more so.

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS HAPPENING NOW?

Because there is an increasingly important movement, in my opinion also initiated by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, in which art is becoming less disconnected from the social sphere. Art is becoming less centralized. However, it is essential to tell the importance of

certain objects through the relationship that these interweave with other categories of objects.

A MORE COLLECTIVE RELATIONSHIP, A NETWORK OF REFERENCES... IS IT POSSIBLE THAT IN A WORLD WHERE EVERYTHING IS DIGITAL, FLUID, IMMATERIAL, WE ARE DEVELOPING A FETISHISM FOR THE OBJECT AND THE DOCUMENT?

Of course! And also because of sympathetic magic, that is, if a person has touched a certain object, it acquires its own properties. This is the reason why we might want to buy a dress that was worn by Madonna or a piano played by Elton John. This happens as a result of the digital era, but also of the democratization of access to the museums' archives and collections, which is related to the tradition of *Le Musée imaginaire* by Malraux. Photography was used by Malraux to put different cultures on the same level.

BEYOND THE FACT THAT A DOCUMENT WRITTEN BY HARALD SZEEMANN CAN BE "SEXIER" THAN A DIGITAL



TRANSCRIPTION, IN YOUR OPINION,
WHAT REMAINS OF CURATORS IN
THE DOCUMENTS THEY LEAVE BEHIND?
WHAT CAN WE DISCOVER ABOUT
THE CURATOR BY STUDYING HIS/HER
ARCHIVE?

The creative process and the relationship they establish with artists. A methodology that is possible to understand, even if only partially, from the exchange of letters; whether it be by post, fax, or email. Alternatively, all the conversations we have should be recorded, but you would need a maniacal attitude towards the archive to achieve it. If everybody behaved like this, the archiving process would be completely insane.

THIS ALSO IMPLIES A RECONSIDERATION
OF THE TEMPORALITY RELATED TO THE
ARCHIVE. HANS ULRICH OBRIST SAYS
THAT THERE SHOULD BE INSTITUTIONS
THAT INSTANTANEOUSLY DEAL WITH
ARCHIVES WHILE THEY ARE STILL
GROWING. THERE IS A FEAR THAT ALL
THE INFORMATION THAT EXISTS WHILE
THE OWNER IS ALIVE, WILL DISAPPEAR

WITH HIM OR HER FOREVER AFTER
DEATH. PERHAPS ARCHIVES SHOULD
ALSO BE REVIEWED FROM A SPATIAL
POINT OF VIEW. STEFANO BOERI
SUGGESTED ME THAT THE ARCHIVE OF
THE FUTURE WILL BE A MONUMENT.

The introduction to *L'Archéologie du Savoir* [The Archaeology of Knowledge] by Michel Foucault, says that the duty of the archive is to transform documents into monuments. The archive transforms the recording of a historical fact into the mnemonic instrument that helps a civilization find a narrative for its past. This is the monument. From a semantic point of view, the monument is a work of art, at least in a western society. It can celebrate a historic event or be a cultural trace that has been preserved from a past civilization. A monument is like a Stargate that opens doors to parallel universes, different potential enunciations. In a similar way, archives contribute to preserve the importance of a historical fact for a community. Is it the same situation for the archives we are producing today? I don't know. What is the drive that could make someone look at the archive of a curator, a scientist, or an artist?



PERHAPS IF WE COULD TAKE CARE OF
IT FROM THE BEGINNING, AN ARCHIVE
WOULD NO LONGER BE A COLLECTION
OF DATA THAT OPENS UP PERSPECTIVES
ABOUT THE PAST, BUT AN INSTRUMENT
CAPABLE OF OFFERING US A GLIMPSE OF
THE PRESENT IN DEVELOPMENT. THE
ARCHIVE WOULD CRYSTALLIZE LIVING
DATA OR INFORMATION FROM THE
RECENT PAST. AND MAYBE IT WOULD
BE ALIVE!

This is what happens in institutions. It doesn't
happen with collections or monographic archives,
but it looks like it's moving in this direction. We
seek to register the present, which, in my opinion,
is to register the future too, because the way
in which we will understand the objects that go
into an archive now has not yet been formulated.

IT IS A SPASM, MAKING EVERYTHING
ACCESSIBLE AND IMMEDIATE. WE TRY
TO UNDERSTAND WHAT HAPPENED
ONLY SECONDS AGO, BEFORE IT SLIPS
AWAY.



THE CONSCIOUS ARCHIVE

BARBARA VANDERLINDEN

Barbara Vanderlinden is an independent curator and the founding director of Roomade, Brussels. She has co-curated numerous exhibitions, including *Manifesta 2*, (Luxembourg, 1998), *Laboratorium* (Antwerp, 1999), *Revolution/Restoration* (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 2004), and the 2004 Taipei Biennial, *Do You Believe in Reality?* (Taipei Fine Arts Museum). More recently, she has served as professor of Exhibition Studies and director of the Exhibition Laboratory at the University of the Arts Helsinki, where she organized *Laboratory of Hearing*. Previously, she was a visiting professor and the initiator of the International Curatorial Programme 2001 at the Gwangju Biennale Foundation; associate professor of curatorial studies for the CCS Bard Master of Arts program in Curatorial Studies in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; and professor of Exhibition and Museum Studies at the San Francisco Art Institute (2005-7).



A 37 90 89, Beeldhouwersstraat 46 in Antwerp, ca. June 1969. Photograph from the A 37 90 89 archive

Photo: Maria Gilissen, 1969

Courtesy Isi Fiszman Archive, Brussels

WHAT DOES THE TERM “CURATORIAL ARCHIVE” MEAN TO YOU?

We could say that there is a distinction between curators' archives and those created by museum institutions that give us access to the memory and archives of preceding generations. I would like to think of the archive of the curator as a construct, a work created in the mind. In other words, the curator influences the record of creation; theirs are in some respect archives *ex-ante*, archives that document the present time and the near future. Whether or not the information or materials you decide to collect as reminders, and how you organize them is, in fact, a suggestion of what should be considered for future research and information that will affect the next generations. Such archives are in fact a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that is, they include all the necessary ingredients to create a memory to allow a future generation to feed upon, allowing those future generations to add to them. What you select or collect or what you exclude from the archive is part of the creation of this *Gesamtkunstwerk*, so it is an open form of creation whereby the present and the future co-create. The distinction between the institutional

and the curator's archive is one that focuses on the question of the authorship of this creation. The legal dimension of this is interesting because such *ex-ante* curatorial archives are, in fact, a co-creation whereby there is a co-authorship between the past, present, and the future. It combines an assessment from a previous perspective by eliminating and adding information and materials that could not have been known at an earlier date, with something selected or organized (designed) in advance or in anticipation of a future perspective. To me, the curatorial archive is very much creation in the flow between these authorships. This is something that I would like to stress about the curatorial archive: it is a co-creation between different authors across past, present and future, and like all forms of creation, it is authorship that should be copyrighted.

CAN AN ARCHIVE BE CONSIDERED AN AUTHENTIC WORK?

I think so; a curatorial archive is a form of composition, very much like an exhibition, and that is an authentic and original work. The way you select, order, and connect the material and



information contained in the archive, how you create a structure or database for this information is a personal statement. An example is a long-term archive project that I started in 1995 about A 37 90 89, the short-lived art and communication institute that appeared in 1969 in Antwerp. In 1995 I started to archive the information and material about this project in what was called *An Agenda of A*. The intention was to collect and archive the material and to activate it for the sake of future ideas. A 37 90 89 inspired me to create the institute Roomade which I founded and ran for ten years: it was my way of reading history and thinking about the future. So the A 37 90 89 archive was about creating a flow of ideas across half a century. It enabled me to think of the past and to project a future. In that sense, nothing is truly unique. All of what we do is in some way inspired by past and previous events, which, in turn, generates new ideas. In my opinion, the archive is crucial in that process, it is a way of creating a relationship with history. Through the process of archiving, and its capacity of connecting past, present and future, one can trace the *long durée* of art's development and articulate the gradual accumulations and transformation of

ideas. This is what I am interested in when thinking of the archive: it is a driving force in history and deals with the expression, preservation, and change of human ideas over time. For example, through his archive, Harald Szeemann's ideas continue, but it is also his archive that sustains the creation of new ideas about his work. I have always been interested in the archive's active role in knowledge production, because knowledge cannot technically belong to any specific time: it is a process between different combinations of time. In that sense, it is interesting to see the archive as central to our practice as a place and process from where to generate new ideas. I keep materials and information with one intention: to reactivate them. There is always an idea or story to pick up and continue in the archive. I keep it to imagine new stories. It is an idea of the archive that totally involves authentic creation.

DOES ARCHIVING HAVE A FINAL AESTHETIC RELATIONSHIP TO THE EXHIBITION ITSELF?

This is an interesting question in relation to curators' archives. Many curators have been



fueling the discussion about the archive in the work of artists, and the archive as artistic work today. Naturally, most of the artists' ephemeral works are experienced live, and only the archive can ensure their enduring life. Here the archives play a constitutive role, not merely as documentation, but also as autonomous works of art. They are source material about the ephemeral work, but also attest to the complex ways in which archives, and especially the images in them, have the ability to both freeze and extend an aesthetic experience in time. Similarly, one could argue that the curators' archives also push against the grain of documentation to constitute both a picture and a concrete body of documents and images that can be appreciated in the absence of an exhibition. In that sense, archives about previous exhibitions also concern the relationship between perception and information. So we could indeed speak of the "aesthetics" of the curatorial archive, something that is information but can also be experienced sensually in an exhibition.



**POSTFACE:
THIS, FOR THE SAKE OF EXHIBITIONS**

MERİÇ ÖNER

These days, to be a cultural institution without an archival agenda is a sign of being outdated. Whether it is a strongly pronounced urgency for preserving while producing, or the irrepressible fascination with digging beyond histories in circulation, the art historiographic impulse is currently building mountains of storage material—both physical and virtual. The practice is surely not revolutionary within the field since it is synonymous with the modern world, and the growing attention it attracts is far from accidental. As social and political updates on the direction of the world put pressure on the imagination of our shared futures, it becomes a duty to investigate clues from the recent past. However, as this publication amply demonstrates, there is—refreshingly—a lack of shared positions, let alone a consensus, on how and why this particular area, the curatorial archive, matters.

The inclusion of researcher Michela Alessandrini's conversations with nineteen international

curators on SALT's online bookshelf is contingent on the institution's practices. Archives collected and catalogued by SALT Research rest on the principle of becoming digitally available to anyone, anywhere, at any time; a measure that is actually counter to the prevalent exclusivity of intellectual labor, for instance, in academia. The fact that documents from certain fields, media, and periods remain in close proximity is not only a service to scholarly researchers, but also an invitation for everyone to pull out the one piece that pierces through the established grand narratives. The promise and potential are always there because, though they may not survive intact in all geographies, archives are not authorized content. They may suffer from poor insight in their cataloguing, but they will neither recompose nor exclude themselves to merely strengthen one view, one position, unlike written theses. This assertion of accessibility ensures that the archive is not to be perceived as a storytelling tool for a few but an investigative instrument for all. It is this that offers archives life beyond the events they register.



The major inspiration behind Alessandrini's research is the Harald Szeemann archive, which, paired with her intuition, has led Alessandrini to conduct a timely investigation into a number of contemporary archives with their individual or institutional bearers. The initiating effect of Szeemann's archive and library is not arbitrary. It could be considered an institution on its own—one that continues to define the potential of the curatorial. Alessandrini remarks that the importance of curatorial archives lies in the interweaving of the resources with those who generate them in practice. Fittingly, her research into the contemporary includes curators who have addressed art and its history in various capacities in the past few decades. Whether they have purposefully crafted their own archives or not, their contributions count as evidence of how curatorial work is maintained today, and it is both obvious and inspiring to read that there is no one way. What is unclear is whether there is ever a concern with the way the practice is instrumentalized, as is the case for so many others, not among those interviewed but in the world of exhibition-making at large.

While Istanbul was being hailed as a new

international art hub in the first decade of the twenty-first century, virtually every article on the matter would include the words *emergence* and *boom*—terms that are clearly redolent of corporate language. Indeed, this era can be defined as a phase of art consumerism. We should not confuse this with ongoing discussions about the dictates of the market; rather, it was one of the outcomes of a search for peripheral globalism. Yet the greater by-product, overlooked by many, is a constant celebration that takes the form of exhibitions in every other corner of the city with various *trends* informing various edifices, shopping malls and communal squares became spaces for exhibits. Much like the tranquilized beneficiaries of the world expositions in their heyday, the public is invited to and entertained by these ubiquitous displays. From food-related festivals to local design souks, the temporary now dominates the everyday. While the real art market continues to depend on conventional operations such as fairs, a high-paced, semi-financial cultural production economy is being built and maintained through student awards, young artist prizes, sponsored five-day art events and the like. Istanbul is not the exception but one prosperous setting among many simultaneously “happening” around the world—

a situation that has invoked the imagination of many authorities to intensify both the production and the polarization of cultural capital in the city. It would be comforting to dismiss the side effects of the established art circuit but such intricacies call for the following question: to what extent is the curatorial implicated in the *temporary* means of *cultural production* that is taking over the urban sphere?

Art historiography has the capacity to immediately dissociate itself from the shopping mall gallery scene and to prove such associations unworthy. Yet, exhibition-making is complacent about the notion of temporality and the ceaseless act of producing. The examples of festivals, souks, and the like rely on their formats to disrupt the long haul of cultural institutions' specific temporality, and now, increasingly their monetary and intellectual economies, in much the same way that a short-term home rental does to a hotel. What arises from the disruption is not an internalized corporatism that wishes to keep the hotel afloat, but an alert to the aptly standardized and more reckless impacts observed in the city by the former. In the same way that traveling is made easier and cheaper by home rental at the

expense of the accommodating neighborhood (which immediately caters to the visitor), the art-related *event* takes a toll on the institution and its future users. In the latter, the real danger lies in the institutions' docile alignment with the benefits of the temporary. Instead of encouraging fresh thinking to enable knowledge-making, they tend to upscale visual and material production. One way or another, the curatorial archive can be championed as the antidote to this oversimplification of the significance of exhibitions and their making. But one wonders will it be sufficient at this stage to strengthen that consolidated area of knowledge alone? Does the comprehension and therefore the practice and archiving of the curatorial still belong to the ways and times of Szeemann? Have exhibitions already become conventions and gestures of conservation, realities easily ignored as long as they now feed on and travel across exceptionally wider geographies?

It is not the substance of the archives that causes self-inflicted interrogation; it is what they refuse to substantiate. Exhibitions are spaces of limited encounters. The intelligent ones build environments out of layers of knowledge. In most cases, they rely on immediate public engagement.



Why and how something becomes an exhibition can only be attested to by the curatorial. However, the embedded system of their quantification leans more to their justification as the dominant format of exchange than the more urgent elaboration of current responsibilities. The habitual cyclical production of the *permanent* institution has been made the validation of its funding and therefore its main instrument for survival. Under these circumstances, one wish would be for the time-and-space-bending quality of the archive to work in two different directions. One is the obstinate recording and reciting of what hopefully is impactful in testifying to shared concerns—or even anxieties—of a chosen moment. The other is the promise of interstitial conversations initiated by non-professional wisdom that opens up a context beyond the confirmation of exhibitions. *Curatorial Archives in Curatorial Practices* brings both acts closer to our thinking. It also serves as a gentle reminder that, to the sites of cultural production, the archives are today what exhibitions were yesterday. Their habitual accumulation and growing capacity for monetizing operations needs to be considered immediately, broadly, and delicately by all those who already play a major part.

Meriç Öner is a trained architect and the director of Research and Programs at SALT. Focusing mainly on material culture in Turkey and its surrounding geographies, Öner works on programming with an eye to tackling the culture in question with a comprehensive and progressive approach. Her work circulates in the form of print and online publications, exhibitions, and public programs. She advocates for the establishment of physical and online platforms that present co-learning opportunities as SALT's main institutional responsibility, reaching beyond the act of classical exhibition-making.



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— Michela Alessandrini



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