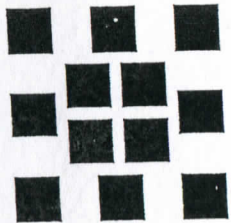


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# CROSSKICK

EUROPEAN ART ACADEMIES HOSTED BY GERMAN KUNSTVEREINE  
A FORMAT LINKING ART EDUCATION AND CURATORIAL PRACTICE

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In recent years, curatorial knowledge and practice have been undergoing a boom within the discourses of art criticism and art theory. As this terrain is increasingly explored, all the more varied are the views on the competencies, tasks, conditions, and perspectives that might be at issue. The spectrum stretches from administration, organization, and communication on the one hand, and an activity that is equal to the creation of art in terms of status and possibilities. If, as in this publication, the attempt is made to relate the curatorial to artistic education, this results in realms of intersection with the current discussion about definition and perspectives of "artistic research," both as a form of practice and as an education program. Parallels are not only evident in graduate programs in curatorial studies, which complement the overall offerings at institutions of higher education; both forms of practice are marked by the synthesizing orientation towards various forms of practice in the cultural field. The attempt in the following to grasp a transmedia, transdisciplinary approach with the concept of the curatorial rather than the concept of "artistic research" seeks to avoid hierarchical or monolateral relationships between the media, disciplines, or professions.<sup>1</sup> Above all, however, the linkage of curatorial and artistic education allows us to see the art school as an art site in the sense of a space of negotiation where it is possible to explore notions of what an "artist" or artistic work is. In this context, the points of contact between curatorial and artistic education present themselves as processes within which various methods and forms of knowledge are exchanged and their power to grant significance can be negotiated. Furthermore the curatorial seeks to strengthen a realm of engagement that understands itself less in text bound terms, but particularly as a space that can be configured socially, temporally, and discursively.

Crucial to these considerations is that the realm of the curatorial has always been pervaded and formatted by different, in part competing methods and forms of knowledge. Artists, art "mediators," and theoreticians intersect here in their tasks, ways of working, and goals, sometimes cooperatively, sometimes competitively. All sides claim the authority to define the form of artistic presentation, the conditions for presenting things to see, and the relations that are associated with this. Clearly designating presentation as a realm that is foreign to art, entailing that the tasks of artists and curators necessarily have to run separately, veils for one thing the fact that both curators as well as artists, their audience, and the variously participating institutions are part of the art field that they constitute. On the other hand, it also fails to acknowledge that presentation and self-presentation are constitutive moments for art works in general, indeed are the very thing that makes artworks different from other things in the general field of phenomena. Both from a sociological point of view, that understands works of art as "social media" that are produced for a beholder,<sup>2</sup> as well as from the standpoint of philosophical aesthetics, which emphasizes art's presentational mode,<sup>3</sup> art presentation can be understood as something that complements its own constitution as an aesthetic

<sup>1</sup> I explore "artistic research" and its potentials as well as its limitations in the context of the Bologna process in "Work, Projects, and Art Education. Notes on Artistic Research," in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Researcher: The Academy and the Bologna Process*, ed. Dieter Lesage and Kathrin Busch, *AS Mediatijdschrift* 178 (2007).

<sup>2</sup> See on this Niklas Luhmann, as quoted in Juliane Rahantich, *Ästhetik der Installation* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002), 90.

object, if not being its necessary condition. If with Martin Seel we assume that it is specific to works of art that they "present themselves in such a way that we can find something of them presented," this addresses an iconic difference as described by Gottfried Böhm according to which an image shows always both itself and what it depicts.<sup>4</sup> Seel emphasizes the mode of presenting itself as inscribed in the artwork and characteristic for it, which also indicates that the act of presentation as it comes to bear in exhibitions necessarily raises the questions of who or what in addition to the art work can participate in its presentation, and in what form.

This framework exposes the continuity of a conflict that has been taking place around the social appearance of art ever since the beginning of the exhibition system. When it comes to processes and techniques of presentation, at stake here is first and foremost participation in decision-making and processes that determine the fact of appearance itself as well as its form. Artists thus enter into competition with other artists, but also with all other actors in the art field that are concerned with the presentation of art. The competitive exchange between roles, sites, and means—consider merely the interplay among the various sites for showing art—has defined the public presentation of art from the very beginning. This interaction does not only gain relevance with the dawn of modernity in reaction to artists' suffering from exposure, which Oskar Bätschmann attests to the "exhibition artist" since the nineteenth century. It is rather an integrated component of exhibition practice and theory in general.<sup>5</sup> At disposition is nothing less than creating the premises and conditions for art to come into its own as a special kind of presentation directed at an audience.

In this context, the work that is to be done in the realm of the curatorial also can be seen as variable in its classification. At issue in the most fundamental sense is a work of combination. Before an exhibition can present an artistic position, a historical age, or an issue of artistic design, it first consists of a constellation of objects, actors, and differently defined spaces, aesthetically, socially, discursively, or functionally. Objects, actors, and spaces are the materials that curatorial practice brings into association, providing them with alternative or additional contexts through the perspectives formed by various methods and forms of knowledge. In this respect as well, curatorial work, artistic and academic techniques, methods, and interests overlap. If as Martin Seel writes, the material of artworks is not neutral, but predominantly already contaminated with meanings and notions,<sup>6</sup> painterly acts of constellation and curating practices resemble one another in that they both work with already loaded materials—even if the one uses support materials and color, while the other uses artifacts, people, discursive contexts, and spaces. Techniques of collage, montage, and assemblage illustrate an even more obvious proximity to the curatorial. From the standpoint of scholarship, for example, Jean-François Chevrier, an art historian and member of the advisory team at documenta X, curated by Catherine David in 1997, picks up these similarities when he describes his own

<sup>4</sup> See Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens* as well as Gottfried Böhm, "Die Wiederkehr der Bilder," in *Was ist ein Bild?* (Munich, 1994), in particular 29–36.

<sup>5</sup> Early forms of conflict in the way art was presented can already be found in the self-organized exhibitions of artists in the Renaissance. On the exhibition possibilities of that period, see Georg Friedrich Koch, *Die Kunstausstellung: Ihre Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1967), 96–123.

<sup>6</sup> See Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens*, 174.

<sup>7</sup> See Jean-François Chevrier, Franck Hofmann, and Jens E. Sennewald, "Montage et argumentation/Erfahrung als Denkbewegung im Ausstellungsraum. Deux entretiens" in *Erfahrungsräume – Configurations de l'expérience*. Transversale 2, ed. Kerstin

exhibition practice as a mix of compositional and assembly techniques, thus naming the purposeful and the contingent aspects of curating.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, a concept of artistic work that is directed at the act of constellation reflects the dissolution of the unified artist subject and the liberation of artistic labor into social, economic, and discursive systems of reference, as can be traced since the 1960s. But the change in the definition of artistic work processes in its curatorial form goes beyond replacing the trio of author, artwork, and creation with that of producer, work, and production. Instead, on this basis the figure of a manager of information, objects, spaces and discourses, people, and resources can become established in the current art field, whose work consists in assemblage, and whose product can be described as a temporal-spatial context.

In this field of presentation and constellation, constituted by intersections, appropriations, and transgressions among artists, academics, curators, and other mediators, the traditional distribution of roles loses relevance. Not only is a curator no longer indispensable to make art visible as such, as Boris Groys had postulated.<sup>8</sup> It is also not satisfactory to introduce the position of a "middleman" to the art field, as suggested by Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen in reference to Fernand Braudel in analogy to the field of economy,<sup>9</sup> since this also represents an a priori ascription of roles. Even while inhabiting an intermediate realm, the middleman takes on a proxy position that disconnects the process of presenting from art and artists themselves. If the processes of art's becoming public as well as the necessary activities of constellation can be carried out by both artists as well as academics—who traditionally occupy the professions of exhibition and museum curators—it seems obvious to understand the roles "as" artist, curator, or academic as less "naturalized." Instead, we need to see them as contingent on the actual activities, the competencies used, positions taken in the art field, and their status. In this sense, the realm of the curatorial, as a dynamic web of relationships, offers the possibility of subverting and rededicating the conventions according to which certain forms of production, work, or the social position of the artist are tied and distinguish it from that of the other professionals in the art field, through transformed ascriptions, connections, and evaluations. To the same extent, conversely, it also allows for the continuous renegotiation of the status of academics, the expectations placed on them, or the conditions of their work in relation to those of artists. What results for both sides is a potential of decision and definition that can be employed against demands for efficiency and economy in the realm of the university, the art market, or the corporation.

Integrating the curatorial into artistic education programs thus means not only marking the various aesthetic and academic techniques and methods that are linked to art's mode of presentation as possible components of artistic practice, but also of other professions in the art field. In their points of contact, overlaps, and intersections, their respective aims, possibilities, and limitations come to bear just as well as their relational and context-related conditions. Furthermore, the curatorial also introduces constellating components to art education to the extent that it requires the linkage of forms of work, roles, and positions with an awareness of their conventions and always already existing overlaps. With these premises, it

<sup>8</sup> See Boris Groys, "The Curator as Iconoclast," in *Bezalet: Proceedings of History and Theory 2* (April 2006).

<sup>9</sup> See Søren Andreasen and Lars Bang Larsen, "The Middleman: Beginning to Think About Mediation," in *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007).

is especially suited for an experimental approach to existing concepts of art and images of the artist.

The comparability that exists between the constellating activities, notions of creativity, and "immaterial" labor (as defined by Maurizio Lazzarato)<sup>10</sup> makes it possible to place demands in terms of objectivity and efficiency as they exist in the academic as well as in the economic realm on labor, and for which artists have taken on a model function, with respect to characteristics such as individuality, subjectivity, and originality, in order to interrogate the mutual accessibilities and exchangeabilities in this relationship. The curatorial constitutes the site for acting out changing constellations and contextualizations, but can also execute and represent them. The image of the artist, in turn, undergoes here an emphatic destabilization to the extent that it is only constituted in relationship to the tasks undertaken, their characteristics, and their acknowledgement. But here is precisely where being an artist can mark itself as an adopted role—the attributions of "artists as" are currently as numerous as they are divergent—with which social positionings can be occupied. While the current notions of "artists" extend to a broad cultural and social spectrum of activity, the idea of the genius has not yet fallen out of use, but it appears more equal in status and more processual in nature in comparison to other images of the artist. In the process of negotiation offered and visualized by the curatorial, being an artist can, and sometimes must, constantly reinvent itself. Only against this backdrop can an operative use of the image of the artist succeed, when, for example, it comes to dealing with current demands, model functions, and strategies on the part of academic and economic realms.<sup>11</sup>

The integration of the curatorial in artistic education also makes it possible to mark the art school as characterized by mutual takeovers, overlaps, and parallels. Here, the scholarly quality of scholarship can identify itself as an attribution—if, for example, philosophy counts as "art"—the appearances "as" can be tried out from different positions, image production and scholarly research can offer new perspectives for one another, forms of knowledge and methods in the approach to visual culture can be exchanged among the professions, disciplines, and media, or the roles of the students and teachers can begin to blur. The notion of the "ignorant schoolmaster," that Jacques Rancière introduces to replace understanding things already known with the inspiration to pursue the not yet known,<sup>12</sup> possesses significance in the context of the constant processes of renegotiating constellations of activities, roles, and their positions, as does the question of the specificity of the art school as a site in relation to all other sites in the art field. If experimental exploration is given priority over the exercise of skills and knowledge, the curatorial—as a processual form of practice and a site of negation that includes various positions in the art field in a continuous re-constellation—can possess a special relevance for artistic education.

<sup>10</sup> On the analogies between curatorial action, creativity, and "immaterial labor," see Beatrice von Bismarck, "Kuratorisches Handeln, Immaterielle Arbeit zwischen Kunst und Managementmodellen," in *Norm der Abweichung*, ed. Marion von Osten (Zurich: Edition Voldemyer, 2003). On Lazzarato's concept of labor see Toni Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Paolo Virno, *Umherschweifende Produzenten: Immaterielle Arbeit und Subversion* (Berlin: Id Verlag, 1998).

<sup>11</sup> The perspective of an operative notion of the artist as genius cannot be explored in detail here. On its use in connection to art training, see Beatrice von Bismarck, "Spiel im Spiel: Institution, Institutionalisierung und Kunsthochschule," in *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, ed. Nina Möntmann (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See Jacques Rancière, "The Emancipated Spectator," *Art Forum* (March 2007), and *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991).