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Art on the Internet and the Acceleration of the
Capitalist Logic of Exhibitions“

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THESIS STATEMENT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Art institutions show an increasing interest in advancements in technology such as big data, machine learning, and global connectivity. In line with this development, museums and other stakeholders (such as galleries, Kunsthallen, offspaces, etc.) are adopting these new technologies into their programs, from open online classes, freely-accessible online collections, and vast digital archives to social media channels, interactive guiding systems, and new modalities of visitor engagement. In some cases, the use of new technologies in the museum not only aims to enhance but also to reinvent the existing exhibition practices, through additional content, a different narration, or forms of interaction. These dynamics open up an intriguing debate on what it means to use digital media in the exhibition context.

My personal experience of working with exhibitions and creating digital tools for art interpretation has prompted this MA thesis. I especially became interested in the multifaceted dynamics around the use of new technology when conducting research for the exhibition *AESTHETICS OF CHANGE. 150 Years University of Applied Arts Vienna* (December 15, 2017 – April 15, 2018). It was, as the title suggests, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the University of Applied Arts Vienna that this exhibition outlined theses for the future of society, education, and art, and advocated for a reorientation in these fields. By focusing on current and visionary research in science, technology, engineering as well as the humanities, combined with contemporary artistic positions, curators Gerald Bast and Peter Weibel set out to create an interactive

exhibition experience. As part of my involvement, I learned how to code and created a digital guide for this exhibition.

From this project, I observed that besides the prevalent acclaim and excitement about new technologies in the museum space, many questions surrounding the interrelationship between the digital and exhibitions remain vague. These questions range from the general objectives behind expanding exhibition spaces online to more specific questions about form and content: Who is being addressed? What implementations of digital tools are to be expected from the museum in its role as an educational institution? In which ways is commercial success a motivation for museums to use new technologies? In what ways do digital tools and social media change the behavior of exhibition visitors? How are new technologies challenging current exhibition practice?

1.2 THESIS STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION

“The exhibition,” as Dorothea Hantelmann and Carolin Meister argue, “appears to be one of the central places where values of our societies are brought together and cultivated in their respective relationships.”¹ Following Hantelmann and Meister, exhibitions as such play an essential political and social role within societies, not only through what is exhibited but also, or more importantly, through their very structure. Not only does the curator’s choice, contextualization, and framing of objects have an impact on visitors, but so do forms of mediation and education in the exhibition context. Consequently, one could argue, if the structure of exhibitions is changing (for instance by expanding digitally), so too are their social and political meanings.

¹ Dorothea von Hantelmann and Carolin Meister, *Die Ausstellung. Politik eines Rituals* [The

Alternatively, the cultural scientist and curator Nora Sternfeld suggests that social and political changes influence the structure of exhibitions. “Above all, social upheavals have brought about massive structural changes in the museums,”² she states in her book *The Radical-Democratic Museum* (2018). Sternfeld describes how neoliberal tendencies since the 1980s have transformed the museum towards an economic and de-democratized institution. Even though stakeholders—museum professionals, scholars among others—are debating participation, diversity, and innovation, it is mostly competition, profitability, and attendance that drive the line of action in museums today. This paradoxical development creates an environment in which, among other factors, technological changes play a key role as the Internet, or digital media in general, seem to offer an instrument to bridge that contradiction. This enormous multiplicity of (cultural) possibilities with which the Internet provides us, as well as its consequences, is a major subject in Felix Stalder’s recent publication *The Digital Condition* (2016). He argues that “referentiality, communality, and algorithmicity have become the characteristic cultural forms of the digital condition because more and more people—in more and more segments of life and by means of increasingly complex technologies—are actively voluntarily and/or compulsorily participating in the negotiation of social meaning.”³ While it could be argued that the “digital condition”—or rather the increasing number of people who are actively participating in the negotiation of social meanings today—might lead to a loss of power for established institutions (in the case of this study: museums and other gatekeeping stakeholders such as Kunsthallen, auction houses, galleries, etc.), Stalder instead makes the point that “identifiable actors and their projects do indeed [still] shape our collective

² Cf. Nora Sternfeld, *Das radikaldemokratische Museum [The Radical-Democratic Museum]* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 15. Orig.: “Vor allem aber haben gesellschaftliche Umbrüche massive strukturelle Veränderungen in den Museen mit sich gebracht.”

³ Cf. Sternfeld, *Das radikaldemokratische Museum [The Radical-democratic Museum]*, 125.

existence.”⁴ He argues further that “we can see very clearly that as the center of the established institutions shaped by the affordances of the previous condition are crumbling, more economic and political projects are rushing to fill that void with new institutions.”⁵ In addition, Stalder notes that these new players are not necessarily creating new structures or a different framework, but are instead accelerating already existing structures that, in some cases, go back to the 19th century and the arrival of bourgeois’ and democratic societies. These dynamics have profound political implications, which put us at a crossroads between post-democracy and the Commons. Stalder states that elements that appear to be illogical, contradictory and maybe even ironic, are the core of what is at stake within the digital condition of our time: a concentration of power among the few on the one side (the stake holders) and a widening participation among the many on the other side (the visitors). In the museum context this can be exemplified through the paradoxical situation in which stakeholders are calling for participation, diversification, and innovation as well as the strengthening of market-oriented, cost-efficient and profit-focused character of the museum. As described by Hantelmann and Meister as well as Sternfeld, exhibitions have always communicated values of bourgeoisie and democratic societies, not only through objects but through their structure: the ritual of the visit, the wording of exhibition-related texts, the programming by a few for many, and the suggestion of a collective history, a collective taste or a collective knowledge that is experienced by the individual. By implementing digital strategies and hence allowing more actors to participate in the negotiation and communication of these values, museums too stand at the frontier, as described by Stalder. Although new protagonists are taking more active roles and

⁴ Felix Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, Trans. Valentina Pakis (Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press, 2018), 7. Orig: Felix Stalder, *Kultur der Digitalität* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2016), 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*

institutions are trying to open up by appropriating empowering language and participatory strategies, the medium of the “exhibition” and the structure of its institutions remain unchanged. Therefore, the medium “exhibition” rarely gains any new perspectives by crossing over to the digital.

My thesis aims to uncover these dynamics by analyzing and contextualizing a sample of ten exhibition projects limited to the digital space. Following Felix Stalder’s definition of “the digital condition,” I argue that online exhibitions—in museums and beyond—do not constitute a new era of museum practices that democratize the institution, but are instead an acceleration of already existing structures and methods that pre-date the digital era and correspond to capitalist structures. Stalder claims that we now stand at a crossroads⁶ that can go either way: top down or bottom up⁷. I argue that museums stand at this crossroads as well, which is why I understand this thesis as a call to action to reflect upon our own position in the field and how to contribute to a qualitative practice.

By mapping out the field of online projects within and beyond the institutional framework, I seek to make visible how information technology is accelerating established power structures in the field of exhibition making instead of reinventing

⁶ “Post-Democracy and commons can be understood as two lines of development that point beyond the current crisis of liberal democracy and represent new political projects. One can be characterized as an essentially authoritarian system, the other as a radical expansion and renewal of democracy, from the notion of representation to that of participation.” Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 127.

⁷ In this preface, which was released in July 2018, two years after the German publication, Stalder comments on how the situation has become more critical: “I traced some aspects of these developments right up to early 2016, when the German version of this book went into production. Since then a lot has happened [...]. What has become increasingly obvious during 2016 and into 2017 is that central institutions of liberal democracy are crumbling more quickly and dramatically than was expected. The race to replace them has kicked into high gear. [...] Over the last 18 months, the imbalances between the two trajectories have become even more extreme because authoritarian tendencies and surveillance capitalism have been strengthened more quickly than the commons-oriented practices could establish themselves. But it does not change the fact that there are fundamental alternatives embedded in the digital condition. Despite structural transformations that affect how we do things, there is no inevitability about what we want to do individually and, even more importantly, collectively.” Stalder, “Preface to the English Translation,” in Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, ix.

them. By deconstructing the rhetoric of empowerment appropriated by the art market and art institutions, this thesis sets out to contribute to a critical reading of digitization efforts and acceleration dynamics, situating it within a neoliberal context.

Questions that lead to this argument are: (1) How does curation online and digital exhibition making change the historically-acquired identities of exhibitions? (2) If the nature of the industrialized museum is to operate in increasingly corporate fields, to respond to mass markets, and to offer simulacral experiences (Rosalind Krauss), what is the nature of the digital museum? (3) If it is true that the digital is not a new era but an acceleration of already existing structures (Felix Stalder), in what ways do online exhibitions aim to extend the exhibition space? (4) How are existing structures in physical space being reproduced or even accelerated online and in the digital spaces? In the following chapters, I will explore these questions and answer them.

1.3 IMPORTANCE OF TOPIC AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The last three decades have seen a growing trend towards online projects in museums. A large number of projects sprouted, conferences on this issue came into being, and experts established themselves. Such new technological possibilities are interesting for scholars and authors, as well as artists, curators, and museum professionals. While some research has been carried out on digital art history⁸, the curating of new media art⁹, and the usage of social media in museums¹⁰, there are only a few studies that question the implications of digital media on exhibition practice (see

⁸ Cf. Lev Manovich, "Data Science and Digital Art History," *International Journal for Digital Art History* 1 (2015) 12–35.

⁹ Cf. Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010)

¹⁰ Cf. Simon A. Frank, *Kulturmanagement und Social Media: Neue interdisziplinäre Perspektiven auf eine User-generated Culture im Kulturbetrieb*, (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015); Isabell Fiedler and Olivia Harrer, "Das kommunikative Museum" (PhD diss., University Vienna, 2017).

“1.4. Prior Research on Topic”). In the following, I’ll briefly present three examples of how the digital has been integrated into institutions and beyond. All three examples raise questions, emphasizing the importance of a critical approach to new developments instead of reproducing blind enthusiasm toward new technologies.

After the release of Pokémon Go, a popular mobile app where users have to catch augmented digital monsters in real life, the Philadelphia Museum of Art created a specific Pokémon event during its “Pay What You Wish” hours in 2016. Attendance went up 25% in comparison to the same time the previous year.¹¹

In 2017, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art launched the Chatbot “Send Me SFMOMA” in order to “bring transparency to the collection while engendering further exploration and discussion among users.”¹² Upon texting a keyword to a specific number, the bot would reply with a random image of an artwork from the collection, with the aim to make visible 95% of artworks from the collection that are not on display. This tool gained huge popularity; by the first week more than 2 million messages were sent to SFMOMA causing the system to break down at times.¹³

Bringing together all paintings by Flemish artist Johannes Vermeer is the goal of a virtual reality app developed by the Mauritshuis Museum in the Hague together with *Google Arts & Culture* in late 2018. The app, titled “Second Canvas Mauritshuis,” invites visitors in a virtual gallery space to explore the Vermeer paintings by zooming in and out. For the app, all 18 museums and private collections who own works of Vermeer were willing to provide high-resolution images of the artworks. The initiators

¹¹ Cf. Nadja Sayej, “American Art Museums Cautiously Embrace Pokémon Go,” *The Guardian*, July 19, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/jul/19/art-museums-pokemon-go>.

¹² Jay Mollica, “SFMOMA.org,” last modified June 2017, <https://www.sfmoma.org/read/send-me-sfmoma/>.

¹³ Cf. Dale Berning Sawa, “Send me a masterpiece: the museum texting its artworks to anyone who asks,” *The Guardian*, July 21, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/jul/21/send-me-a-masterpiece-san-francisco-museum-of-modern-art-texting>.

are proud to have accomplished something that would never be possible without technology, since “some of the 17th-century paintings were too fragile to travel, while some were in private collections, and the Gardner’s was lost¹⁴,” as Emilie Gordenker, director of the Mauritshuis, explains.¹⁵

From these three examples, the first raises questions about marketing strategies, timing, popular culture, and spectacle, but also about new forms of visitor engagement such as participation, gamification, and community building. The second model challenges the limitations of collections and archives, while at the same time engaging with copyright questions. It also brings up issues such as community building, visitor engagement and in the end, marketing measurement. The third case is a realization of an “imaginary” museum, some sort of utopia close to André Malraux’ concept of the *musée imaginaire*. Most of these questions have not yet been discussed in a scholarly context. There is still very little scientific understanding of how digital media is challenging exhibitions and who is benefiting from its presence. This thesis provides an opportunity to broaden our knowledge in regards to the usage of digital media in art exhibitions and how online projects extend the exhibition space. This is not only important in order to foster a critical usage of new media and technologies, but also because all of this is occurring in an already contested field:

The museum is one of the most conspicuous of the institutions whose roles are under inquiry. Its public role is changing in response to the new theories of representation which situate art and its functions in a larger semiotic environment together with strong economic and social demands which are unique to today’s Western culture. As a result, the public museum, like the university and the church (all of which are what Althusser called “ideological state apparatuses” like

¹⁴ By stating that the ‘Gardner’s was lost’, director Emilie Gordenker refers to the theft of 13 works of art from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston in 1990. Among the stolen art works that had originally been purchased by art collector Isabella Stewart Gardner was *The Concert* by Vermeer.

¹⁵ Cf. Nina Siegal, “Want to See All the Vermeers in the World? Now’s Your Chance,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 2018, <https://nyti.ms/2zBDXbp>.

the family or the school), is under fierce and sometimes violent contestation over who controls its agenda and what its fundamental purpose is.¹⁶

It seems of utmost importance that museums never become or, if they already are, stop being empty containers of marketing spectacles further indulged through technology, but instead, become aware of their history and develop into the democratic and open organizations of knowledge production and transmission that they were dreamed to be. As new technologies are already shifting the structures of institutions, as Stalder demonstrates, this might be the key moment to ask those questions and foster deeper discussions.

1.4 PRIOR RESEARCH ON THE TOPIC

The research that forms the groundwork for this thesis includes a consideration of publications that engage with museology, museum studies, and curating. The aforementioned scholars Nora Sternfeld and Dorothea Hantelmann offer especially helpful insights into these fields of study. Sternfeld's research deals with the curating and mediation of art while considering political implications and questions of power and representation. In her book *Das radikaldemokratische Museum [The Radical Democratic Museum]* (2018), she seeks to redefine the museum by updating approaches to museology, mediation, and the culture of remembrance. Together with Natalie Bayer and Belinda Kazeem-Kaminski, she published the anthology *Kuratieren als antirassistische Praxis [Curating as Anti-racist Practice]*, which offers a critical analysis of as well as strategies for an anti-racist curatorial practice. Both books have been published in the series *curating. exhibition theory & practice* by the Vienna-based

¹⁶ Bruce W. Ferguson, "Exhibition Rhetorics. Material Speech and Utter Sense," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 177.

research collective *schnittpunkt. exhibition theory & practice*¹⁷. Their research, events, exhibitions and discussions have been very influential to my thesis as well.

My research has profited from reading Dorothea Hantelmann's considerations on exhibitions, especially the anthology compiled by her and Carolin Meister, *Die Ausstellung. Politik eines Rituals* [*The Exhibition. Politics of a Ritual*] (2010). Based on the fact that visual art and exhibitions receive an increasing amount of media and discursive attention, they demonstrate that the significance of the format of the exhibition lies in creating a ritual, in which hegemonic values are rehearsed and performed. Moreover I draw from essays such as Tony Bennett's "The Exhibitionary Complex", which pays particular attention to social and societal aspects of the exhibition practice and the museum institution in the 19th century, as compiled in the reader *Thinking about Exhibitions*, published 1996 and edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne. Claire Bishop's "Radical Museology" also provides important ideas on how to rethink museums in the 21st century. She discusses the economic pressure that museums today are facing and points to creative solutions implemented at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Museo Nacional de Reina Sofia in Madrid and the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova | +MSUM in Ljubljana.

With the advent of the Internet, scholarly interest in the virtual museum emerged. Within an academic debate that came to prominence in the 1990s, discussions

¹⁷"schnittpunkt. exhibition theory & practice [schnittpunkt. ausstellungstheorie & praxis] is an open, transnational network for active participants as well as those interested in the fields related to exhibitions and the museum. As a non-institutional platform, schnittpunkt presents its members with the opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange, information, and discourse." "Mission," schnittpunkt, accessed October 22, 2018, <http://www.schnitt.org/mission>.

of virtual museums and virtual exhibitions arose.¹⁸ Annette Hünnekens offers an overview of different positions in this field in her publication *Expanded Museum. Kulturelle Erinnerung und Virtuelle Realitäten* (2002). She investigates various international digital projects to show how museums expand into virtual space by using participative and interactive strategies as places of memory and “social memory.”¹⁹ The anthology *Museums in a Digital Age* (2009), edited by Ross Parry, brings together a series of essays that discuss significant developments of digital heritage research. This collection of various authors’ writings provides an overview of the most up-to-date research that has been conducted in the field, and at the same time helps to explain museums’ current usage and expectation of digital media.

There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the question of how the introduction of digital media in exhibitions is changing the role of curating. The book *Curating Immateriality. The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems* (2006) edited by Joasia Krysa, investigates how the site of curatorial production has been expanded in the past years while emphasizing the “shift from mechanical reproduction to that of cybernetic systems in relation to the political systems.”²⁰ Emerging from current artistic practice, the authors Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook ask how the roles of curators and audiences can be redefined in light of new media art’s characteristics in their book *Rethinking Curating. Art After New Media* (2010).

¹⁸ See for example: Erkki Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” in *Museums in a Digital Age*, ed. Ross Parry (London: Routledge 2009), 121-135.

¹⁹ “Social remembrance” (German: „Soziales Gedächtnis“) is a term coined by the German art historian Aby Warburg with reference to Maurice Halbwachs’ concept of “*mémoire collective*” (English: “collective memory”). It describes social references to the past, such as routines, practices, significant objects, as well as different forms of remembering.

²⁰ Cf. Joasia Krysa, “Introduction,” in *Curating Immateriality, The Work of the Curator in the Age of Network Systems* (New York: Autonomedia 2006). Krysa is referencing Bill Nicols’ essay “The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetic Systems” (1988) in which he considers how cybernetics transforms cultural production.

In 2016, the Germany-based magazine *KUNSTFORUM International* published two issues on the phenomenon of the “postdigital.” Its authors discuss how digital technologies have an impact on contemporary artistic creation in terms of content, form and material, and how they shape all artistic production, reception, and distribution processes. Moreover, *KUNSTFORUM*’s issue *publish!* (2018), which focuses on publishing as artistic practice, considers digital media as a form of publishing and touches on questions of distribution outside of institutions. They open up a discourse that is also relevant to this thesis, namely how alternative forms of distribution (knowledge, commodities, etc.) help to engage new audiences.

From March 3 until June 17, 2018 the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden dedicated an exhibition to the question of *Exhibiting the Exhibition. From the Cabinet of Curiosities to the Curatorial Situation*. In the accompanying publication, Moritz Scheper’s essay *Off-Site Museum? Perspectives for Exhibiting in the Digital Age* makes an important claim by pointing to the Kunsthalle as an example of a more dynamic institution (in contrast to rigid and collection-bound museums) that can more easily cross over into the digital paradigm.

Following an interdisciplinary approach, it has also been important to be in conversation with related disciplines that debate similar questions of digitization such as archival studies, media studies, history, and sociology. Especially formative are publication projects such as *The YouTube Reader: On the Logic of the Digital Archive* (2010) (edited by Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau) and *Unlike Us Reader: Social Media Monopolies and Their Alternatives* (2013) (edited by Geert Lovink and Miriam Rasch), which framed my broader understanding on current discourses surrounding the Internet and digital media in general. Marxist theory as well as theoretical positions that

are critical of capitalism and investigate (post-) digital dynamics are other important theoretical anchors of this project. They frame my understanding of capitalism's entanglement with digital practices. Nick Srnicek's *Platform Capitalism* (2016) and Byung-Chul Han's *Transparenzgesellschaft* (2012) also represent this line of thought. While Srnicek discusses the increase of platform-based businesses since the 1970s and how they are changing the mechanisms of contemporary capitalism, Han examines the illusions and dangers associated with the paradigm of transparency. Similarly, feminist perspectives on technoscience, such as the writings of Donna Haraway and Judy Wajcman, are important intellectual resources for this study.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that most scholars dealing with online exhibitions, apps, etc. focus on marketing or art mediation. Although many case studies exist, only a few essays offer a theoretical framework and reflect on the meaning of art exhibitions "expanding online."

1.5 RESEARCH APPROACH OR METHODOLOGY

This thesis is informed by the social history of art and cultural studies. It asks for social conditions of productions rather than formal and stylistic characteristics, and it considers theory an important strategic resource. By using methods of analysis from the field of cultural studies, such as contextualizing, establishing relationships, and asking questions about power, this thesis is able to reveal capitalist structures in a seemingly empowering and democratic field.

Moreover, this study follows interdisciplinary and intersectional perspectives. It builds on discourses in other fields of study such as political theory, cultural studies,

Marxist theory, and feminist as well as queer theory. By drawing on approaches of postmodernism that question representation and build on the notion of the socially conditioned nature of knowledge, this study aims to critically question digital strategies in relation to those mechanisms.

One of the main theoretical anchors of this thesis is Felix Stalder's aforementioned book *The Digital Condition* (2016/18). He suggests that the societies of the (transatlantic) West find themselves in a new condition, namely the "digital condition." Stalder names three key constituents of this condition: first, the use of existing cultural materials for one's own production; second, the way in which new meaning is established as a collective endeavor; and third, the underlying role of algorithms and automated decision-making processes that reduce and shape massive volumes of data. Stalder also considers the political connotations of this new culture and points to the opposition of post-democratic tendencies to a culture of Commoning as present in digital culture today, which is the core argument of my thesis:

"Post-Democracy and commons can be understood as two lines of development that point beyond the current crisis of liberal democracy and represent new political projects. One can be characterized as an essentially authoritarian system, the other as a radical expansion and renewal of democracy, from the notion of representation to that of participation"²¹

He describes developments as post-democratic, which indeed foster participation, but at the same time reinforce hierarchical decision-making capacities at a level where participation is excluded. There is a separation between social participation and institutional exercise of power. The Internet concentrates power among few corporations, while genuinely claiming to widen participation. For example, many platforms are based on closed standards that prevent users from communicating beyond

²¹ Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 127.

the boundaries defined by the providers. Users have no control over the conditions under which they navigate. Commercial social networks consolidate a power gap between their use on the surface and the underlying infrastructure.²² According to Stalder, the culture of digitality also includes the development of a new mode of production, for which he introduces the concept of commons, based on the work of other theoreticians. This concept states that in principle equal rights are united voluntarily in pursuit of common goals: the use of common interests, the management of common resources and the maintenance of practices, norms and institutions arising from them. Commons are therefore different from traditional market-oriented institutions, but also from bureaucracies that are organized through hierarchies, including public institutions such as museums. The latter want, at least in their claim as democratic institutions, to serve the totality of the society, while commons are directed primarily inwards to their members, thus smaller communities.²³

This duality is key to my thesis, as in the exhibition context these dynamics and contradictory developments play out very visibly, as we will see as we proceed. Due to capitalist history (or nature), exhibitions tend to be post-democratic (we will see in chapter “Investigating exhibitions’ identities” how market mechanisms and exhibition practice are colluding).

A second theoretical anchor is Rosalind Krauss’ seminal essay “The Cultural Logic of the Late-Capitalist Museum” (1990). In this essay, she describes the logic behind museum “trends” and dynamics that she witnessed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which she calls “cultural logic of the late capitalist museum” with reference to

²² Cf. Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 11-57.

²³ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

Frederic Jameson.²⁴ Her argument creates links between the conditions of museums as cultural institutions undergoing transformation of their place within the urban space and within the global processes of late capitalism. She considers the way minimalism is being used as the aesthetic rationale for altering the alleged “preindustrial museum” into the “industrialized museum,” which reacts to the mass market and turns to industry as its model of capitalization. She concludes by giving predictions for late capitalist museums. Basically, she detects a profound shift in both the increasingly corporate nature of the contexts in which museums operate and their identity.

Between the two references mentioned above, I set out to establish the theoretical framework of this study that serves as a foundation for the following exhibition analysis. To answer the question of the digital expansion of exhibitions and its meaning, this thesis is devoted to the analysis and contextualization of online exhibitions. Its aim is not to create a new discourse or to rewrite existing ones, but rather to promote the opening of dialogue instead of shutting it down. I seek to employ an archaeological-genealogical perspective to sketch an online landscape and to position online projects in a broader context.

1.6 LIMITATIONS AND KEY ASSUMPTIONS

The thesis follows three avenues of argumentation: (1) First, it gives an overview of the variety of recent online exhibition projects that are either connected to museums and collections or independent thereof. (2) Second, by establishing a genealogy from early museum endeavors in the 17th and 18th century to contemporary

²⁴ In 1991 Fredric Jameson, an American literary critic and Marxist political theorist, published “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, in which he offers an analysis of the current postmodern condition. – Rosalind Krauss, “The Cultural Logic of the Late-Capitalist Museum,” *October*, Vol. 54 (Autumn 1990), 4.

practices it contests the claim that with the introduction of digitization a new era has begun and shows how online exhibitions are a continuation of already existing structures and dynamics. (3) Finally, it demonstrates how most digitization efforts fit into a capitalist narrative instead of improving or reimagining institutions and their existing structures of power.

It is key to this study to understand the political realm in which exhibitions operate. Therefore, this thesis acts on the assumption that exhibitions cannot be detached from social and technological changes. It examines how power relations and control are expressed in the contemporary forms of online exhibitions and in the context of network technologies.

It is important to stress that this study does not set out to demonstrate a single stringent line of development. Neither does it try to give a comprehensive overview of digitization practices in the museum context. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, the argument follows a selective approach to unfold a broader perspective on online dynamics. Consequently, this work concentrates solely on online exhibitions—exhibitions that are limited to the digital space—and excludes classic analogue exhibitions from its analysis. It compares the different ways in which digital and online tools are used to expand exhibitions. It is not concerned with new media art, post-Internet art or other art forms using information technology. These limitations provide a frame to situate online exhibitions as they relate to the museum discourses.

The following chapters are structured in two parts, introduced by a theoretical discussion about “the digital condition” of exhibitions, an analysis of selected digital exhibition projects, and the attempt to establish a genealogy that contextualizes ongoing dynamics in this field. Following Rosalind Krauss’ arguments in her essay on the late-

capitalist museum, the first part reflects on the political realm of exhibitions in general, its capitalist tendencies today, and how digitization is accelerating those dynamics. At the same time, it considers a clear differentiation of the terms in question: exhibition, museum, and curating; online, Internet, digital media, etc. In the second part, I set out to map the field of online exhibitions today by analyzing current projects and contextualizing them within already existing practices.

INVESTIGATING EXHIBITIONS' IDENTITIES

“The foundation of innovative, future-oriented museum work is a continuous reflection of its institutional conditions and the questioning of the role of museums in the 21st century.”²⁵ These are the introductory words to the international conference *The Art Museum in the Digital Age*, held in early 2019 at Belvedere 21 Vienna, as stated by the conference committee²⁶ on the museums’ website. It is based on the assumption that in order to learn about our position today, it is equally important to reflect upon the journey that brought us here. It is not only relevant to critically examine contemporary practices but also to reflect on the past, to analyze the actions of previous generations and to create links between historical events and contemporary phenomena. Following this line of thought, Martha Ward states: “Comparison with the past two centuries may be our best and perhaps our only means of throwing into relief the peculiarities of our own practices, thus making them available for critical analysis.”²⁷ For this reason, this chapter starts with a definition of exhibitions by looking at the history of the medium. Drawing on an extensive range of sources, this chapter searches to unfold the political dimensions of exhibition projects while focusing on capitalist tendencies today, and to question how digitization is impacting its political and economic spheres. It examines if and how digitization is changing the historically acquired identities of exhibitions.

²⁵ The conference *The Art Museum in the Digital Age* was held from January 9-10, 2019, organized by Johanna Aufreiter, Christian Huemer, Ralph Knickmeier, Florian Waitzbauer (Österreichische Galerie Belvedere), Johanna Drucker (UCLA), and Hubertus Kohle (LMU München), https://www.belvedere.at/art_museum_in_the_digital_age.

²⁶ The conference committee consisted of Johanna Aufreiter, Christian Huemer, Ralph Knickmeier, Florian Waitzbauer (Belvedere Wien), Johanna Drucker (UCLA), and Hubertus Kohle (LMU München)

²⁷ Martha Ward, “What’s Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?” in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, 464.

2.1 THE RITUAL EXHIBITION

“I see the exhibition more as a diagnosis than a prognosis”

Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 148.

The term *exhibition* refers to “a public display of works of art or items of interest, held in an art gallery or museum or at a trade fair.”²⁸ This definition, of course, is very general and leaves out any political and social implications that museums surely have and that will be discussed as we continue. Nevertheless, it already includes one very important notion of the exhibition that is relevant until today: Exhibitions are public.

In order to understand why this is such an important distinction, it is insightful to revisit the first forms of public exhibitions in the 17th and 18th century and in particular the Paris Salon²⁹ on the initiative of Louis XIV. The scholar and art historian Martha Ward notes that “the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were also when our modern usage of the word ‘exhibition’ developed. Though not exclusively used for art, it did refer generally to showing publicly.”³⁰ Prior to that, collections were owned by a privileged few and consequently access was limited to their families, friends, and business partners. Of course the public was familiar with fine art as well, but their

²⁸ Angus Stevenson (Ed.), *Oxford dictionary of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 613.

²⁹ Ward, “What’s Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?” 451. —The Paris Salon first took place in 1663 in order to display works of art of recent graduates of the École des Beaux-Arts Paris. The following salons took place irregularly with a break between 1704 and 1725. It was not before 1737 that the Paris Salon was held regularly and publicly. Initially, and until the French Revolution in 1789, only members of the Académie were admitted to show their works of art.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 454.

experience was limited to certain festivities and administered by clergy and nobility. There was however no public discussion about the quality and the function of art.

In his study on painters and the public life, Thomas Crow acknowledges the public's relation to art by stating that "visual art had of course always figured in the public life of the community that produced it."³¹ Examples of this include civic processions up the Athenian Acropolis, the massing of Easter penitents before the portal of Chartres cathedral, or the assembly of Florentine patriots around Michelangelo's David. Crow argues: "But prior to the eighteenth century, the popular experience of high art, however important and moving it may have been to the mass of people viewing it, was openly determined and administered from above."³² This meant that artists always had to satisfy their patron's needs while addressing a wider audience. Hence, the relationship between artists and patrons had a strong influence on most art objects at that time. The eighteenth-century salon broke with this hierarchical tradition and created an opening not only towards new audiences, but also in terms of who was in charge. No longer was the taste of a privileged minority the most important decisive factor; it was public opinion. Martha Ward follows this argument when she characterizes the exhibition as a medium in its own right: "What seems to turn the history of art's display into the history of its exhibition is precisely the intention to institutionalize the showing of art objects to this collectivity called the 'public.'"³³

As early as 1663, the *Académie royale de Peinture et de Sculpture* in Paris committed itself to decorating the hall in the Hôtel Brion with its works for its annual gathering in July. This is considered to be one of the first exhibitions installed for public

³¹ Thomas E. Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2000), 2.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Ward, "What's Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?" 454.

viewing, with no ecclesial or courtly purpose. However, among the academic artists this initiative was seen as an affront. They opposed the “mercantile character” of this presentation, namely that it resembled the offering of goods by artisans, which is why the showing of art in this context did not become an institutionalized formality. It was not until the 1730s that the public demanded a public exhibition from the academy. This led to a change of attitude towards the salon³⁴ and simultaneously marked the gradual but irreversible freeing of art from the commissioners on which it had depended so far: royal courts and churches. Motivated by public reputation rather than acquisitions, artists started to put work and effort into exhibitions and to compete against each other. By the middle of the 19th century, the idea of public participation in cultural property was established against the background of the autonomy or privatization of art. Finally, the salon meant not only an opening of art discourse for different social classes, who from then on participated in the discussion and production of fine art, but also an opening of the art market towards new groups of buyers, i.e. the bourgeoisie. Hence, modern exhibitions were one of the first manifestations of the public and public opinion, at a time when nation states, democratic institutions, and bourgeois societies were formed. Modern exhibitions also marked a site where the individual was put in focus. Crow states: “The institution was collective in character, yet the experience it was meant to foster was an intimate and private one.”³⁵ Ward too points out this “tension of public and private”³⁶ that was inherent in this first public showing of art. In the modern public exhibition therefore, starting with the salon, the “audience is assumed

³⁴ Cf. Oskar Bätschmann, *Ausstellungskünstler: Kult und Karriere im modernen Kunstsystem* [*Exhibition Artists: Cult and Careers in Modern Art Systems*] (Köln: DuMont 1997), 12-17.

³⁵ Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, 3.

³⁶ Ward, “What’s Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?,” 455.

to share in some community of interest”³⁷ and values, while addressing individual desires.

Hantelmann and Meister therefore argue that the exhibition is an emblem of the modern, bourgeois nation state and seems to be constitutional to democratic, enlightened societies as a form of public expression. For them, “the exhibition appears to be one of the central places where values of our societies are brought together and cultivated in their respective relationships.”³⁸ With reference to the emergence of museums in the 18th and 19th century, they name four key values and ideas that are communicated through exhibitions and were constitutive for societies at the time: 1.) The idea of a linearly progressing time, 2.) the value of individualism or the individual, 3.) the importance of the production of material objects, and 4.) the circulation of these objects in the marketplace. Considering these parameters and their implications, the autonomy of art seems to be a euphemism for its use by bourgeois democratic market societies, and the art exhibition marks the place where these social values are cultivated and reproduced. Similarly, Ward argues that with the maturation of the art market and of a consumer culture, the concept “‘exhibition’ had quite lost any specificity it might have had as a civic form or public arena.”³⁹ “In the mid-19th century, artists such as Courbet operated as full-fledged creative entrepreneurs, simultaneously acting as producers, documentarists, and salesmen of their own work and spectacularly soliciting

³⁷ Ward, “What’s Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?,” 455.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

the attention of the public.”⁴⁰ Under the premise of capitalism exhibitions have become extended market places.⁴¹

In this sense—and this becomes more visible throughout the 19th century as a result of the founding of many museums in this century⁴²—exhibitions were a hegemonic tool to preserve the power structures put in place at that time, namely the formation of nation states, the installation of democratic institutions and, last not least, the rise of capitalist systems. They were places where hierarchies and values were being communicated and identity was being negotiated. In exhibitions, the visitors were introduced to a set of values and ideas. Building on Michel Foucault’s analysis of the cultural shift that led to the predominance of prisons as the principal form of punishment and their role as disciplinary institutions of modern society,⁴³ Tony Bennett adds that “museums were also typically located at the center of cities where they stood as embodiments, both material and symbolic, of a power to ‘show and tell’ which, in being deployed in a newly constituted open and public space, sought rhetorically to incorporate the people within the processes of the state.”⁴⁴ Moreover, Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel note: “In their minutest details, museums reveal their true function in their morphology and organization, which is to reinforce the sense of belonging in some

⁴⁰ Martin Waldmeier, “‘I Propose, Therefore I Am’: Notes on the Art World’s Proposal Economy,” *The Exhibitionist. Journal on Exhibition Making*, Nr. 10 (October 2014), 29.

⁴¹ Cf. Krauss, *The Cultural Logic of the Late-Capitalist Museum*; Sternfeld, *Das radikaldemokratische Museum [The Radical-democratic Museum]*, Hantelmann and Meister, *Die Ausstellung. Politik eines Rituals [The Exhibition. Politics of a Ritual]*.

⁴² Cf. Karsten Schubert, *The curator’s egg. The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (London: RIDINGHOUSE, 2009).

⁴³ Bennett draws from Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Penguin Books 1977), 115-116. Tony Bennett, “The Exhibitionary Complex,” *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 78.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* It is important to note that through Bennett’s analysis it becomes visible how entertainment and experience have been key factors of exhibition practice from early on.

and the feeling of exclusion in others.”⁴⁵ For Bruce W Ferguson, an “exhibition is a strategic system of representations.” By that he means not only the objects of arts, but also everything from

the architecture which is always political, to its wall colorings which are always psychologically meaningful, to its labels which are always didactic (even, or especially, in their silences), to its artistic exclusions which are always powerfully ideological and structural in their limited admissions, to its lighting which is always dramatic (and therefore an important aspect of narrativity and the staging of desire) to its security systems which are always a form of social collateral (the choice between guards and video surveillance, for example), to its curatorial premises which are always professionally dogmatic, to its brochures and catalogues and videos which are always literacy-specific and pedagogically directional, to its aesthetic which are always historically specific to that site of presentation rather than to individual artwork’s moments of production.⁴⁶

He concludes that only through developing an understanding of the exhibition as an institutional expression, one can grasp “who speaks to whom, why, where and when and under what conditions.”⁴⁷

The above statements show us that exhibitions do not only mediate the tension between public and private, but also the conflicts between inclusion and exclusion. Museums and exhibitions are as much about identity politics as the formation of a collective. For Carol Duncan, exhibitions “are modern ritual settings in which visitors enact complex and often deep psychic dramas about identity, dramas that the museum’s stated, consciously intended program do not and cannot acknowledge.”⁴⁸ Hantelmann

⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art. European Art Museums and Their Public*, trans. Caroline Beattie and Nick Merriman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 112.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, *Exhibition Rhetorics*. 178-179. He further states that they “are narratives, which use art objects as elements in institutionalized stories that are promoted to an audience. Exhibitions act as the visible encounter with a public, which receives and acknowledges their import and projected status as important signs of important signs. The ‘voices’ heard within exhibitions—the number and kind of dead artists, the number and kind of women, the kind and number of media, etc.—constitute a highly observable politics, with representations as their currency and their measure of equality in a democratic process.”

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 188 “Only when museums are utterly articulate will anyone be able to understand what is authentically being said. Otherwise the exhibition as a speech performance will remain a loud monologue followed by a long silence, the silence that unfortunately reigns in most art institutions today, the sound of curatorial failure and audience disappointment.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 177.

and Meister also describe the exhibition as a ritual, but one in which the material attachment of subjectivity is exercised and refined. This applies to the bourgeois exhibition format, as it emerged in the 19th century. However, this also applies in a different way to the tendencies that have emerged since the 1960s to redesign the exhibition as an experimental space, as it has been since minimal art, and increasingly since the 1990s appears to mirror societal and economic transformation processes of the outgoing 20th century, which are under investigation in the following chapter.⁴⁹

Critics and artists opposed this development throughout the 20th century. Artists and writers such as Marcel Duchamp and André Malraux included their institutional criticism in their practice and both created new archetypes of museums different in form and line of argumentation but with conceptual similarities. Duchamp developed a museum in the form and size of a suitcase that only included reproductions of his own works: *Boîte-en-valise* (1941). It consists of 69 miniature replicas and reproductions of his work, as for instance mini reproductions of renowned pieces such as ‘The Large Glass’ and ‘Nude Descending a Staircase’ and a mini urinal.

André Malraux’ *Le musée imaginaire* (1947) (*Museum Without Walls* 1949) aimed to represent visual relationships and formal similarities on a global scale. Unlike a museum curator, the author of the *Museum Without Walls* did not have to face any historical, political, geographical, or spatial restrictions.⁵⁰ What Duchamp and Malraux have in common is that both didn’t necessarily understand the museum as a collection of objects but as a collection of ideas that cannot only be communicated through objects but also reproductions. This understanding prompts much discussion about the

⁴⁹ Hantelmann and Meister, *Die Ausstellung. Politik eines Rituals* [*The Exhibition. Politics of a Ritual*], 8.

⁵⁰ However, what in Malraux’ eyes seemed to be a ‘democratic model’ is rather a European imaginary of how the world can be organized that, in the end, reproduces structures of inequality through images.

significance of an “original” artwork. For them, there was no clear distinction between the original and the reproduction. Commenting on issues of museumization, they left the idea of the museum as a building with a defined space (maybe in the center of communities) behind and moved towards a very explicit notion of the museum as a means of communication. By focusing less on materiality and object-specificity, they proposed to refocus on contents and discourses instead of increasing material values.

In the second half of the century, conceptual and minimalist artists again questioned the space of exhibitions in its representation as much as its materiality and its sales character. Conceptual art in the 1960s aimed to find other circuits and alternative venues; it sought to dematerialize art objects and bypass cultural, and also commercial, institutions. For instance, in the spring of 1966, the 25-year-old gallery owner Seth Siegelauab abandoned his gallery in New York City. He understood print media as a suitable means of communicating and disseminating conceptual art, and at the same time as the most neutral way of presenting it, on the grounds that “you do not need walls to show ideas.”⁵¹ Instead, Siegelauab conceived the catalog as a significant source of information about an exhibition and finally put his idea of making an exhibition into book form with Douglas Huebler’s *Catalog-as-Exhibition* in November 1968. In 1973, the artist and writer Lucy Lippard wrote that

conceptual art, for me, means work in which the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or dematerialized.⁵²

The dematerialization efforts by (conceptual) artists can hence be seen as a further step towards different exhibition practices that are less object-focused and more

⁵¹ Seth Siegelauab in David L. Shirey, „Impossible Art – what it is“ in *Art in Americy* (May-June 1969), 39.

⁵² Lucy R Lippard, *Six years. The dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), vii.

discursive. As an antithesis to the bourgeois consumerist approach to art that was common in commercial galleries, artists began to create more ephemeral works, which are not to be sold and which exist outside of exhibition spaces. Through that they brought aesthetic issues together with social and political questions and tried to withdraw from the market.⁵³

This reaction is strongly connected to the development of the white cube as an emblematic setting for staging (modern) art in the 20th century. Brian O'Doherty is the first to describe and question these new ideological conditions that the above-mentioned artists are trying to oppose in his essay collection *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1986)⁵⁴. He recognizes a crisis in Western post-war art, linked to specific developments in the way that galleries and museums are run. In a commercial gallery “designed to accommodate the prejudices and enhance the self-image of the upper middle classes”⁵⁵, the white cube emerges as a product of a capitalist attitude towards art. White walls detach artworks from any historical or aesthetic context, very similar to sacred spaces, and hence make art works become ‘sacred’. The white cube fetishizes the art works and through that contributes to increase their (economic) value. Following 19th-century-Paris artists like Courbet, showing art publicly in a very specific manner became a necessary exercise for artists in order to increase their market value in the 20th century. It becomes visible how much capitalism and exhibitions are entangled and how, almost by definition, exhibitions follow a capitalist logic.

⁵³ Cf. Brian O'Doherty, “The Gallery as Gesture” in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 320-340.

⁵⁴ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube. The ideology of the gallery space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁵⁵ Brian O'Doherty, “Context as Content” in *Ibid*, 76.

2.2 THE LATE CAPITALIST EXHIBITION

“When did contemporary art become so desirable a category?”

Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 12.

We have seen how the exhibition became a means for public discourse throughout the 18th century and how this contributed to form democratic institutions, nation states and a public opinion. Further it was demonstrated how exhibitions became institutionalized throughout the 19th century, but also how market mechanisms became a driving factor of showing art publicly.⁵⁶ The exhibition had become a corporate arena, a market place. Although artists in the 20th century aimed to redefine this space through various strategies, in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s of the 20th century, the relationship between markets and exhibitions peaked and reached a new intensity. In 1986, the Venice Biennale extended its space around the Arsenale and thus visitor numbers exploded. In 1997, the *Solomon R. Guggenheim* opened its branch in Bilbao⁵⁷, starting a trend of Western institutions building franchises in the peripheries.⁵⁸ In 1999, Art Basel starts its project *Unlimited*, which embraced the industrial character of the exhibition space by filling it with huge art works that would not fit in the booths of the fair. In the same year, Larry Gagosian opened his first Chelsea gallery and therefore also moved to a former industrial complex that was vast in space and allowed different forms of presentation such as immense site-specific installations, which were formerly limited to public institutions rather than commercial domains.⁵⁹ Concurrently, museums

⁵⁶ Cf. Ward, “What’s Important about the History of Modern Art Exhibitions?” 455. See Also: Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, 2000, 3.

⁵⁷ Cf. Noit Banai, Lecture “The Global Museum,” University of Vienna, January 24, 2018.

⁵⁸ See for example the Louvre in Abu Dhabi, or the Centre Georges Pompidou in Metz. Today the Guggenheim Museum group consists of branches in Guadalajara, Las Vegas, Bilbao, Venice, Berlin, Vilnius, Helsinki, and Abu Dhabi.

⁵⁹ Cf. Johan Holten, “Exhibiting the Exhibition. From the Cabinet of Curiosities to the Curatorial Situation” [Ausstellen des Ausstellens. Von der Wunderkammer zur kuratorischen Situation], Johan Holten, ed., *Exhibiting the Exhibition. From the Cabinet of Curiosities to the Curatorial Situation*

are being rebuilt into socio-cultural centers, a development that begins with the Centre Georges Pompidou/Quartier Beaubourg⁶⁰ in the 1970s and 80s, continues with projects such as the Museumsquartier in Vienna (2001) and concepts like The Shed in New York City that opened on April 5, 2019.⁶¹

Prompted by *trends* and dynamics like these,⁶² Rosalind Krauss investigates the relationship between capitalism and exhibitions in her essay on the post-capitalist museum (1990). From the way Minimalism is being used she diagnoses a shift from the so-called preindustrial museum to the “industrialized museum.” She identifies similarities between the renewal of museums as cultural institutions and their role within urban space and the late capitalism as a globe-spanning process, and describes a far-reaching transformation in the identity of museums towards an increasingly corporately operating institution⁶³, which responds to the mass market and looks to industry as its model of capitalization:

And it also does not stretch the imagination too much to realize that this industrialized museum will have much more in common with other industrialized areas of leisure—Disneyland say—than it will with the older, preindustrial museum. Thus it will be dealing with mass markets, rather than art markets, and with simulacral experience rather than aesthetic immediacy.⁶⁴

Krauss argues that a deep encounter with art had become subordinated to a new register of experience: the disengaged hyperreality of its architecture, which created effects of disembodiment that, according to her, interrelated to the dematerialized flows of global

[*Austellen des Ausstellens. Von der Wunderkammer zur kuratorischen Situation*] (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2018), 21.

⁶⁰ Cf. Noit Banai, Lecture “The Global Museum,” University of Vienna, January 24, 2018.

⁶¹ The Shed is a center for performing arts, visual arts, and pop culture in Manhattan, NY. For a critical comment see Claire Bishop, “Palace in Plunderland,” *Artforum* (September 2018), <https://www.artforum.com/print/201807/palace-in-plunderland-76327>.

⁶² Krauss, *The Cultural Logic of the Late-Capitalist Museum*, 17.

⁶³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

capital.⁶⁵ In addition, Nora Sternfeld describes how neoliberal tendencies since the 1980s have transformed the museum towards an economic and de-democratized institution. In the end, she states that “the demand for social relevance has led to systematic structural and institutional management strategies that increasingly caused institutions to become economized and therefore also de-democratized.”⁶⁶ Polemically speaking, the society of the spectacle in an age of experience has caused the death of the audience and is now desperately seeking for relevance “within the space of the institution itself, in which the promise of the museum as public space becomes increasingly encroached upon by hollowed-out forms of the ‘public’ interactivity, or spectacle.”⁶⁷ Krauss’ prognosis of museums becoming sites of mass markets and experience similar to ‘Disneyland’ is stunningly accurate, as Sternfeld’s diagnosis of museums being ‘hollowed-out forms of spectacle’ almost 30 years later confirms.

What drives museum practice today is “less a concern of collection, a history, a position, or a mission than a sense that contemporaneity is being staged on the level of ‘image’: the cool, the photogenic, the well designed, the economically successful.”⁶⁸, argues Claire Bishop in her book *Radical Museology*. Museums have moved “from static-monolithic to the dynamic-temporized”⁶⁹, postulate Graham and Cook. By this they mean that “the pressures on the modern museum have moved from traditional gatekeeping connoisseurship, exhaustive collecting, and linear historical displays to

⁶⁵ Cf. Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology, or, What’s ‘Contemporary’ in Museums of Contemporary Art?* (London: Koenig 2013), 5

⁶⁶ Sternfeld, *Das radikaldemokratische Museum [The Radical-democratic Museum]*, 15. – Orig: “Die Forderung nach gesellschaftlicher Relevanz ist also seit den 1980er Jahren durch gezielte strukturelle und institutionelle Managementstrategien zunehmend ökonomisiert und damit eigentlich entdemokratisiert worden.”

⁶⁷ João Ribas, “Curating as Spatial Resistance,” in: *The Exhibitionist. Journal of Exhibition Making*, no. 11 (July 2015), 29.

⁶⁸ Bishop, *Radical Museology*, 12.

⁶⁹ Graham / Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 199.

responsiveness and inclusiveness.”⁷⁰ Museums are no longer centers of exhaustive research, grand narratives and (slow) contemplation; they are—as Krauss prognosed and Sternfeld confirmed—defined by temporary exhibitions, events and spectacles. Recurring calls for cuts, privatization, increased efficiency, and greater accountability have forced cultural and educational institutions and their proponents to orient themselves toward a globalized marketplace, and in the process reinvent the ways in which they work. Consequently, they have increasingly come to resemble that very marketplace.⁷¹ Behind a rhetoric of participation, we find that it is mostly competition, profitability, and attendance that drive the line of action in museums today. While, on the one hand, institutions call for inclusiveness, openness, democratization and participation, no other institution is so involved with capitalist power structures. Not only does the spectacularization of the museum visit play into the hand of capitalism, but so do its structures, content-related decisions, its involvement with the art market, tourism, etc. This can be seen as the result of “an unexamined museological tradition of functioning for a wealthy class” that is in “urgent confrontation with contemporary demands for social relevance from a renewed democratic impulse.”⁷² It is also the result of the complex paradoxical situation that is the core of this thesis and has been pointed out before and will be discussed as we continue. It is the reason why a critical reading of digital practices should be on top of our agendas in order to not blindly implement digital spaces in the museum and exhibition context without understanding its implications.

In her study about participatory art, Claire Bishop states that “even though participatory artists invariably stand against neoliberal capitalism, the values they

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Martin, “‘I Propose, Therefore I am.’ Notes on the Art World’s Proposal Economy,” 29.

⁷² Ferguson, “Exhibition Rhetorics. Material Speech and Utter Sense,” 177.

impute to their work are understood formally (in terms of opposing individualism and the commodity object), without recognizing that so many other aspects of this art practice dovetail even more perfectly with neoliberalism's recent forms (networks, mobility, project work, affective labour)."⁷³ The artists' intentions backfired; this is also what is at stake with digitization practices at the museum. The efforts that museums invest in democratizing their institutions—not recognizing that the values they instill in their practice are conflicting—are at risk of coinciding even more perfectly with neoliberalism's recent forms, some of which are based on the technological changes that museums embrace in order to sustain their values.

2.3 THE DIGITAL EXHIBITION

“Communication tools don't get socially interesting until they get
technologically boring.”

Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody:
The Power of Organizing without Organizations*
(New York: Penguin, 2008), 105.

To begin this chapter, it is necessary to slightly detour and investigate the terminology in question: The term “digital” originates from the word “digit” and means that values are represented in numbers. “Digitization” means all processes in which analogue values are converted into digital ones through electronic data processing systems.⁷⁴ Colloquially, the term “digitization” has also been used as a synonym for digital transformation.

⁷³ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), 277.

⁷⁴ Angus Stevenson (Ed.), *Oxford dictionary of English*, 489-490.

Whereas the Internet can be defined as “a global computer network providing a variety of information and communication facilities, consisting of interconnected networks using standardized communication protocols,”⁷⁵ the term “online” is generally understood to describe something that is available on or performed using the Internet or other computer networks. This is to say that the words “online” and “digital” cannot be used interchangeably, rather “digital” is a broader general term that also includes “online.” Another distinction that should be considered is the relationship between online and virtual. Virtual describes something that does not “physically exist as such but is made by software to appear to do so.”⁷⁶ Most of the time it refers to the computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional image or environment.

With this terminology in mind, it is worthwhile to investigate the short history of digital media in the exhibition space. With the advent of the Internet and digital media in general, many areas of life changed. In the 1990s there was euphoria and an enormous spirit of optimism towards digitization. Knowledge became more accessible and shareable. The Internet suddenly made it possible for many people to speak and to be heard. People who would otherwise never have had the chance to meet each other formed networks, some of which became very powerful.⁷⁷ These dynamics had a lasting impact on our society and are often characterized as the determining condition of our times. It is widely held view that we therefore “live in a cognitive, or informational, or immaterial or knowledge economy.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Angus Stevenson (Ed.), *Oxford dictionary of English*, 914.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1984.

⁷⁷ I am referring here, for example, to the Arab Spring, a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across the Middle East in late 2010, or #metoo, a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault that spread virtually in September 2017, but also of gaming communities or other groups that exchange ideas online and develop a strong social cohesion that can result in both actions of empowerment and hate speech.

⁷⁸ Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, (Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press, 2016), 37.

These rapid changes are having a serious effect on museums and exhibitions as well. In his essay “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” Erkki Huhtamo states that “the debate about use of electronic tools inside museums began with the personal computer, which made it affordable to integrate electronic information into the museum setting, and intensified with the advent of the Internet, which makes it possible to access vast amounts of information regardless of where you are.”⁷⁹ The early museum websites were established around 1995, which made information about museums accessible from home for the first time. Primarily, at this moment, they had a representative character and served to prepare the public for a visit to the museum; yet they already envisioned sharing the museum’s very content online with a broader audience through digital reproductions—in line with the thinking of Duchamp, Malraux, Siegelau or Lippard. Experiments with net art and virtual exhibition projects on the Web 1.0 bear witness to these early dynamics.⁸⁰ “Aware of the need for radical changes in the concept and the roles of art, a radical re-thinking of the relationship between exhibition spaces, exhibits and spectators/visitors was needed” explains Huhtamo with respect to early online projects.⁸¹ So, with the first wave of digitization in the 1990s (Web 1.0) many museum professionals were hoping that digitization would be a means to overcome criticism of exhibitions, including how they communicate top down, suggest historical linearity, as well as fetishize objects and their commodification. In 1999, Jorinde Seijdel wrote: “The more new media and public spaces, the more vital and omnipresent the exhibition.” She expressed the sentiment that was quite common at the time: an excitement for new media, the illusion of democratization similar to the excitement

⁷⁹ Erkki Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” Ross Parry, ed., *Museums in a Digital Age* (London: Routledge, 2009), 121.

⁸⁰ Further reading: Annette Hünnekens, *Expanded Museum. Kulturelle Erinnerung und virtuelle Realitäten* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2002); Erkki Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” Ross Parry, ed., *Museums in a Digital Age* (London: Routledge, 2009), 121-135; Andrea Bandelli, “Virtual Spaces and Museums,” *Ibid.*, 148-152.

⁸¹ Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” 123.

described by Walter Benjamin in *The Art Work in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*.⁸² With the turn of the millennium, changes in the way websites were designed and used took place and reframed the Internet.⁸³ Web 2.0 put user-generated content, usability (ease of use, even by non-experts), participatory culture, and interoperability for users (meaning a website can work well with other products, systems, and devices) at the center of the debate. At the same time, it didn't change the euphoria towards the democratic potential of digital media. User-generated content instead of digital storefronts and multimedia interfaces instead of static text were even more packaged with a rhetoric of democratizing communication, wherein anyone would be able to create and share content online.⁸⁴ For museums, this meant that different contents could be transmitted through different channels and platforms, hence a multiplicity of possibilities. Apps and websites could promote and present the institution but also its collection and staff; they could distribute audio guides, documentary videos, and online lectures, games to interactively engage with the audience and target groups such as children and students, digital collections and image databases, discussion forums, and so on. As Erkki Huhtamo reminds us though, the technical possibility of such channels are only half the story: "Our modes and routines of communicating and interfacing with multimedia data-bases are cultural, historical and ideological issues as well."⁸⁵ So not only was the medium of communication changing, museums had to adapt their strategies, communication, and contents as well. This is the much more difficult task at hand that museums and its staff were not prepared for. At the same time, another interesting notion regarding the inclusion of

⁸² Jorinde Seijdel, "The Exhibition as Emulator" in: Sarah Cook, *Information* (London: Whitechappel Gallery, 70).

⁸³ Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 53. – Cf. "Big data not only changed digital front- and backend, but also jumpstarted a major shift in capitalism." Ibid, 41.

⁸⁴ Cf. Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 53.

⁸⁵ Huhtamo, "On the Origins of the Virtual Museum," 131.

digital strategies in museums stands out: The exhibition visitor, unlike the member of a film or theater audience, but rather like the Internet navigator, is treated as an individual, usually alone or part of a small (and private) family unit.⁸⁶ Browsing the Internet is not a collective experience, neither is the museum visit—but both need the collective as a reference. This might be the reason why especially museums felt so comfortable adopting their program to digital media and using information technology for exhibiting. What we should take away from this section for the following analysis is an understanding of how museums embraced information technology which might also be a systematic occurrence.

⁸⁶ David Joselit, "Introduction. Markets and Networks," *October*, vol. 125 (2001), 24-28.

MAPPING EXHIBITIONS ONLINE

Traditionally, as could be demonstrated in the first part of this thesis, exhibitions were a means to shape (bourgeois) values of societies and have always been interrelated with capitalism—within the past thirty years these values became more and more predetermined by neoliberal ideologies.

Although the following analysis and description are limited to exhibitions available solely online, they nevertheless depend on the exhibitions before. Their identities are solely based on the existence and history of exhibitions. Otherwise we wouldn't need to call them exhibitions. They could be just regular websites, as exhibitions are, according to Graham and Cook, “nothing more than lists, collections of links.”⁸⁷ Their definition suggests that the digital limits the exhibition to a certain form and gets rid of the specificity of this medium. That said, Graham and Cook point out two characteristics of this form that contradict traditional exhibition practice and in that respect underline their definition: First, “it fits the nature of many-to-many communication”⁸⁸, whereas in the exhibition space we are confronted either with a one-to-many (curator-to-audience) or a many-to-one (artists to visitor) situation⁸⁹. Second “list by list compilation brings us to an archive-like situation, to a story about keeping and retrieving information,”⁹⁰ whereas museums are about more than their archives and access thereto.⁹¹ These contradictions, however, also create potentials and it should be

⁸⁷ Graham / Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 70.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Olia Lialina, “cheap.art,” *Rhizome*, last modified January 19, 1998, <http://rhizome.org/object.rhiz?1026>, cited in Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 70.

considered if online exhibitions could be more than mere lists. Communicating many-to-many, for example, could lead to a culture of Commoning as described by Stalder and referenced earlier. Also the handling of information in a more archival but also public way could emphasize Commoning as a cultural technique. Accordingly many museum professionals were hoping that with the help of digitization, criticism of exhibitions including how they communicate top down, suggest historical linearity as well as fetishize objects and their commodification (see chapter 2.2), could be opposed. Visualizations of complex systems, the presentation of a larger number of objects regardless of size and location, participation of groups who are otherwise not in speaking positions, different ways of storytelling, and methods of gamification are some of the new possibilities at stake. “Aware of the need for radical changes in the concept and the roles of art, a radical re-thinking of the relationship between exhibition spaces, exhibits and spectators/visitors was needed” explains Erkki Huhtamo with respect to early online projects.⁹² Digital media offer tools to rethink the exhibition space and as digital tools become integrated in the process of exhibition making and online exhibitions are being developed, it should be asked if the new media-related possibilities will reinforce the exhibitions values or if they are an opportunity to overcome their status as a bourgeois utterance.

Nevertheless, with reference to Stalder’s definition of the *digital condition*, it can be stated that information technology is mostly accelerating established power structures in the field of exhibition making instead of reinventing them. Commoning efforts are being opposed by post-democratic dynamics; Stalder creates the image of a crossroads, a momentum in which crucial decisions have to be made. These suggestions

⁹² Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” 123.

render a critical reading of digital practices all the more pressing in order to understand the implications of appropriating digital spaces in the museum and exhibition context.

To give a better understanding of how post-democratic and Commoning tendencies play out and oscillate in online exhibitions, I describe and analyze digital efforts in the museum context using four categories. In a first step, I consider projects that literally broaden the exhibition space. These include projects based on and initiated by museums or established exhibition spaces such as Kunsthallen, which use the Internet and online spaces to expand the real space of the exhibition. They do so in order to include elements in the presentation that would not be possible to show in “real life” and, thus, to engage new visitor groups and to enable participation. It is noteworthy that such projects are more common as interpretive media than for art production. “In the art world, the new media of Websites, hand-held media devices, podcasts, and accessible databases are much more frequently encountered as interpretive media than as art media.”⁹³ Examples of this category are the *Digitorials* of the Frankfurt Städel Museum and the *KHM Stories App* of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, but also innovative museum databases that are used for exhibitions or installed in exhibitions, such as the *Rijksstudio* of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. In addition, there are ambitious projects that are not limited to just one institution but try to synthesize content from many and to algorithmically sort through the vast amount of data provided. These include the *Google Art Project* or the European-funded equivalent *Europeana*.

In a second step, I introduce platforms that operate independently of existing institutions but consciously imitate their structure in order to acquire their status. Very

⁹³ Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 161 – By interpretive media they mean media specifically used in the exhibition context to guide visitors through the exhibition, e.g. booklets, audio guides, and games.

often emancipatory movements, like the *International Museum of Woman*, use this form, and produce projects that are the digital translation of art associations. They are run by independent curators who can thus inexpensively realize their projects without real estate such as *peer to space*.

Lastly, the third group of projects focuses on online-exclusive content. If the first group translates existing content into the digital and the second category is formally based on the first in order to appropriate institutional spaces, then the third group deliberately tries to find content for the digital form. They explicitly seek online spaces with all their medial peculiarities; they are digital off-spaces, so to say. These include projects such as Kadist's *One Sentence Exhibition* or *Addendum*, the curatorial project *#exstrange* by Marialaura Ghidini and Rebekah Modrak, the platform *Off Site* Project which hosts projects such as the ZIP Gallery and the Google Maps Residency, as well as the *Screensaver Gallery*.

3.1 EXHIBITION SAMPLE #1: MUSEUMS

Since the invention of digital media and the Internet, museums and curators made efforts to experiment in these fields and to include them in their exhibition practice (see chapter 2.3). The idea of virtual exhibitions is particularly exciting in the museum context, where the separation between the real object and its virtual reproduction is so clearly comprehensible. Online tools and spaces literally offer an expansion of the exhibition space: more space for information, for images, for narrations—for content. The following three examples demonstrate how institutions make use of this new space to present their program and collections:

Digitorial is an online tool for art mediation created by the Städel Museum Frankfurt. The name is a pun consisting of the words digital and “tutorial,” as it is a digital tutorial to prepare for the museum visit. Launched in 2015 and awarded with the *Grimme Online Award*⁹⁴ in the same year, it provides a preparation in form and content for prospective visitors, compiled by the curators of each exhibition together with the art communication department, and also includes organizational information such as opening hours, ticket prices, and access details. Users find *Digitorials* of current and past exhibitions permanently online, forming a chronological archive. Available in German and English, the project is sponsored by the Aventis Foundation⁹⁵.

Digitorials are simple websites for PC and mobile, conceived as one-pagers⁹⁶ that offer key pictures, quotes, audio, and visual content related to the exhibition narrated in an intriguing way. The texts are rather short and descriptive in character and use very accessible language, simple but not banal. By clicking, longer text passages appear and allow for more detailed information on the exhibition. The visual appearance of the website is well structured, easy to perceive and intuitively navigable. It contains interactive and animated elements that let the website appear less static and are supposed to encourage users to engage (to click, to stay, to respond, etc.). The small animations draw further attention to details and help to strengthen the narrative or argument. Another feature at the end of each *Digitorials* are the “Insider Tips” where users find selected topics to pay careful attention to during the museum visit.

The museum states on its website: “The digital mediation tool offers multi-faceted insights with informative texts, entertaining audio sequences and

⁹⁴ The Grimme Online Award has been presented since 2001 by the Grimme-Institut. It honors German-language online offers that are aimed at the general public. <https://www.grimme-online-award.de>

⁹⁵ “The Aventis Foundation is a non-profit foundation headquartered in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Established as the Hoechst Foundation in 1996 with foundation assets of DM 100 million, it was renamed the Aventis Foundation in 2000. The Aventis Foundation is an independent foundation with legal capacity under German civil law. It finances the projects it promotes and its administrative expenses with the earnings generated by its foundation capital. The Aventis Foundation supports projects in the areas of art and culture as well as science and higher education.” <http://www.aventis-foundation.org>

⁹⁶ In the digital context, one-pager means a website that consist of only one site and can entirely accessed through scrolling (without clicking through different sites).

lots of pictures.”⁹⁷ The *Digitorials* are meant to be accessible from everywhere, from home, the café next door, or on the way to the museum. Thus, the tool is not compulsory for the museum visit itself, but rather aims to increase the visitors’ curiosity towards the original works of art. It does not contain any exhibition views or a full list of objects that are included in the exhibition. All of this is only available in the museum space.

One feature of the platform that is accessible from outside of the museum is the button to share *Digitorials* on social media via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The information button forwards users to the online shop where exhibition merchandise and catalogue can be bought online. One can only speculate whether tools like this make the museum visit obsolete in the end. More to the contrary, online tools seem to help to keep the exhibition (or exhibiting institutions) present as it can be found in online searches and digital archives. In this sense, *Digitorials* are not only very clever tools for art mediation that are increasingly popular when it comes to digital storytelling, but they are also a very effective marketing tool.

Also, *Digitorials* specifically target “influencers”⁹⁸—traditional ones such as art teachers, tourist guides, and hotel managers, as well as new ones such as bloggers, Instagrammers, and YouTubers. Through providing an overview of the exhibitions’ content, influencers can get quick insights to share with their audience. This causes another noteworthy multiplying effect in terms of marketing.

KHM-STORIES BY KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM WIEN
<https://www.khm.at/erfahren/kunstvermittlung/app-khm-stories/>

⁹⁷ “Das digitale Vermittlungstool bietet facettenreiche Einblicke mit informativen Texten, unterhaltsamen Audiosequenzen und jeder Menge Bilder.” “*Digitorials*,” Städel Museum, accessed January 4, 2019, <https://www.staedelmuseum.de/de/angebote/digital>.

⁹⁸ “Individuals who have the power to affect purchase decisions of others because of their (real or perceived) authority, knowledge, position, or relationship. In consumer spending, members of a peer group or reference group act as influencers. In business to business (organizational) buying, internal employees (engineers, managers, purchasers) or external consultants act as influencers.” <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/influencers.html>

In 2016, when the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien launched its application *KHM Stories*, a considerable number of museum applications had already been on the market. Most museums had developed apps that helped visitors plan their visit, provided audio tours free of charge directly on the visitor's phones, or put images and label texts of objects online. Some museums had experimented with gamified content (see projects below), but most apps were developed in marketing departments, where digitization efforts often start.⁹⁹ Websites and social media are often part of the marketing departments' agendas, so early in the trend of digitization, apps were usually considered marketing tools instead of distributors of content.¹⁰⁰ *KHM Stories* however was conceived by the art mediation team. It sought to develop an app that not only redistributed already existing content, but one that created additional educational value and delivered a unique, app-only experience.¹⁰¹

The app provides users with thematic guided tours through the permanent exhibition on topics such as "Magic" or "Love Kills," or specifically for children "How to Look for Monsters." The tours guide visitors through the whole museum. "Love Kills," for example, has seven stops in five different parts of the building and the collections. Images of the museum's interior lead the way and explain visually how to find the next stop on the tour. At each of the stops, audio sequences as well as additional images and texts tell the story of the image and how it fits in the overall tour. All the texts are solely written for the app; they do not mirror exhibition texts or other content available on websites, brochures, etc.

⁹⁹ Cf. Marianna Mondelos, "Wie/so kuratorisch handeln im Social Net? Kultureller Wandel angesichts von Digitalität" (Master Thesis, University of Applied Arts Vienna, 2019).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 57.

¹⁰¹ "Wie kann zeitgemäße Vermittlungsarbeit aussehen? Wie kann man möglichst gut auf die Bedürfnisse verschiedenster Besuchergruppen eingehen? Warum kommen Menschen ins Kunsthistorische Museum Wien und mit welchem Gefühl gehen sie wieder nach Hause? Das sind Fragen, die uns Kunstvermittlerinnen und -vermittler des Kunsthistorischen Museums schon länger beschäftigt hatten, als die junge Wiener Firma vienom mit einer vielversprechenden Idee an uns herantrat: ein Vermittlungstool für Smartphones, das Besucherinnen und Besuchern von 8 bis 99 Jahren ganz neue Möglichkeiten bietet, die umfangreichen und vielfältigen Sammlungen des Kunsthistorischen Museums zu erkunden. Auch die Geschäftsführung war von der Idee begeistert, und so ging im März 2016 unsere Kunstvermittlungs-App *KHM Stories* online. Ein intensiver Arbeits- und Entwicklungsprozess von über einem Jahr ging dem Release der App voran. Neben vienom waren daran 16 Kolleginnen und Kollegen aus der Kunstvermittlung (Projektleitung: Larissa Kopp, Rolf Wienkötter und Manuel Kreiner) sowie viele andere Abteilungen des Museums (IT, Visuelle Medien und Corporate Design/Grafik, Kommunikation und Marketing) beteiligt." Larissa Kopp, Manuel Kreiner, Rolf Wienkötter, and Andreas Zimmermann, "KHM Stories – mit einer App durchs Museum," *neues museum. die österreichische museumszeitschrift*, no.17-3 (Juni 2017): 54.

By asking questions and inviting visitors to explore, the app encourages them to engage with the permanent collection in a dialogical way—similar to guided tours. The simple layout helps navigate not only through the museum, but also through the app and its contents. The tours are available in four different languages (German, English, Turkish, and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian), for adults as well as for children specifically. The app addresses an audience that visits the museum more than once, who comes back and is interested in discovering the collection from a different perspective. At the moment it contains nine guided tours.

RIJKSSTUDIO BY RIJKSMUSEUM AMSTERDAM
<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio>

Rijksstudio is an ambitious digital project that was conceived in the early 2000s by the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. In the process of renovating, the museum shut down for almost ten years. Within this renovation process it aimed to digitize all the collection's objects with high-resolution images, with the intention to make them publicly available. With the goal of digitizing up to 1,000,000 objects until 2020, this was seen as a pioneering effort within the museum community. Digitization initiatives of that scale at the time simply did not exist, with projects like *Europeana* or *Google Arts & Culture* (see chapter 3.2) still years away. In 2012, one year before the museum re-opened,¹⁰² *Rijksstudio* was launched. The website is a very extensive online archive of the collection that is permanently available to the public with a few additional functions. What makes it outstanding and a “cultural digital heritage benchmark”¹⁰³ to its creators is the deliberate approach towards copyright. Users are not only able to search for art works online, but also to download high-resolution images of the art works and to appropriate them, free of charge. Users are invited to interact with the images without any rules or constraints. Pictures

¹⁰² For the official press release see: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/press/press-releases/rijksmuseum-opens-following-ten-year-transformation>.

¹⁰³ Peter Gorgels, “Rijksmuseum Mobile First: Rijksstudio Redesign And The New Rijksmuseum App,” talk on April 21, 2018, given at MW18: Museums and the Web, Vancouver, BC, <https://mw18.mwconf.org/proposal/rijksmuseum-mobile-first-redesign-rijksstudio-the-new-rijksmuseum-app/>.

have a Creative Commons “0” status,¹⁰⁴ which means they can be modified and disseminated in practically any way. They can, for example, be printed at home and hung above one’s living room couch, printed on coffee mugs for private use or even commercial sale, used for research purposes and commercial publications; the list is almost endless. As a form of transparency, users are asked to share their own creations with the museum and the public through uploading images again to *Rijksstudio*. To celebrate this open approach, each year the Rijksmuseum awards the *Rijksstudio* Award¹⁰⁵ to “the most creative” creations. “It’s really a fundamental belief of the management at the Rijksmuseum that sharing is the new having,” said Cecile van der Harten, who is responsible for Rijksmuseum’s image department and has been leading its digitization efforts for the past ten years.¹⁰⁶

When browsing *Rijksstudio*, users are able to search for specific art works, as well as for periods, techniques, materials, and even colors. Search results can be classified according to the same categories: period, technique, material, color, etc. Users can save their favorite images to their own collections and share them with friends via social media (Pinterest, Facebook, Instagram). Images can be downloaded and manipulated and, then again, uploaded to the archive. To encourage this form of interaction with the collection, the Rijksmuseum prepares sets of specific groups of images (e.g. “boats in the collection,” “oil paintings,” or “Jan Vermeer”) which function as mini-exhibitions of sorts but without any textual contextualization or narration. Visitors are equally invited to cluster images and create their own sets that, if permission by the user is granted, are shown on the landing page next to the museum’s curated sets and can also be found through the search tool. An example of this is the set “White” that was published “45min ago” on December

¹⁰⁴ Creative Commons is an international organization that offers standard copyright licenses to simplify the exchange of knowledge and creative property. See: <https://creativecommons.org/>.

¹⁰⁵ The *Rijksstudio* Award is an annual international design competition. “The Rijksmuseum invites members of the public to draw inspiration from the Rijksmuseum collection, download images from *Rijksstudio* and use them to create their own artwork. Anyone can take part and all art forms and interpretations are allowed, from design, decorative arts and applied arts to fashion design, photography and video.” <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio-award>.

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Heyman, “A Museum at the Forefront of Digitization,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/14/arts/international/a-museum-at-the-forefront-of-digitization.html>.

23, 2018. It contains paintings white embroidery, ceramics, or portraits of women wearing white dresses.¹⁰⁷

This associative engagement with the artworks can also be found in gamified tools like “Match my Masters,” which is sort of a personality test as familiar from tabloid magazines, which after answering a few questions, presents viewers with their favorite masterpieces. The structure of the website is very simple to use and didactically intuitive. As of December 2018, *Rijksstudio* holds 652,671 art works and 96,944 sets compiled by museum staff and website users. From the simple language in use, the multiplicity of functions (high-quality images, information, etc.) it can be concluded that the website aims to be interesting to researchers worldwide, as well as to art lovers, school classes, designers, and creatives.

Looking back to the former chapters, it can be argued that balancing, or better, negotiating contradictory characteristics seems to be a major struggle in exhibition making: public vs. private, collective vs. individual, exclusivity vs. inclusiveness, or, with Stalder, post-democracy vs. Commons: “The poetics and politics of exhibitions are interrelated and interdependent.”¹⁰⁸ With the German artist, filmmaker and writer Hito Steyerl one could ask whether the museum is a battlefield¹⁰⁹ on which identity, collectivity, and democracy are contested. Today, this fight can be found in the contradiction between the democratic opening, on the one hand, and capitalist market interests as well as spectacularization, on the other hand. These contradictions are often expressed in the digitization strategies of exhibitions, alternating between post-

¹⁰⁷ “White – Collected Works of Sloane Nota,” Rijksstudio, accessed December 23, 2018, <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/79475--Sloan%20Nota/collections/white?ii=0&p=0>.

¹⁰⁸ Ferguson, “Exhibition Rhetorics. Material Speech and Utter Sense,” 185.

¹⁰⁹ Hito Steyerl, “Is the Museum a Battlefield?” Video lecture held in the context of the 13th Istanbul Biennial, March 2013, <https://vimeo.com/76011774>.

democratic tendencies and commons¹¹⁰. This becomes visible by analyzing the examples stated above.

Rijksstudio, for example, enables users to interact with the collection in various ways and to rethink the relationship between users/visitors and the collection. Through this, it initiates debates about copyright and that also connect to Stalder's comments on Commoning. Like DJs remix sounds,¹¹¹ users of *Rijksstudio* are invited to mix and match images to create their own exhibitions. By uploading images again, users can also be co-authors of presented art works. On the other hand, it exploits the users' creativity and can be seen as an extreme form of commercializing and capitalizing the collection while seeming transparent and empowering. Sharing is the new having, as the museum management put it, and engagement is one of the key factors in the sharing economy¹¹². Sharing economy means the distribution of goods by sharing, exchanging, renting, or giving as well as providing services. More and more people around the world are enthusiastic about this idea, which is often based on a consumption- and growth-critical attitude. Important goals are a better usage of existing capacities, reduction of resources as well as consumption and more social contacts and cohesion in society. Although many approaches were initially socially motivated, the public discourse is currently dominated by big commercial service 'platforms' in the transport and tourism sectors such as Uber and Airbnb, who are strongly criticized for exploiting workers and cities. This is an example that Stalder also references when explaining the digital

¹¹⁰ "Post-Democracy and commons can be understood as two lines of development that point beyond the current crisis of liberal democracy and represent new political projects. One can be characterized as an essentially authoritarian system, the other as a radical expansion and renewal of democracy, from the notion of representation to that of participation", Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 127.

¹¹¹ I borrowed this metaphor from Felix Stalder, who claims that DJ culture is one of the forerunners of the digital conditions forms such as referentiality. Cf. Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 60.

¹¹² For a critical reading of this concept, see: Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*, and Arun Sundararajan, *The Sharing Economy. The End of Employment and the Rise of Crowd-Based Capitalism*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016).

condition: “In such cases, terms like ‘open’ or ‘sharing’ do little more than give a trendy and positive veneer to hyper-capitalistic structures.”¹¹³

Similarly, *Digitorials* offer their users deeper insights to their exhibitions but at the same time use them for marketing purposes. Users are invited to share content on social media and the ‘influencer’ becomes an important figure, which again points to the contradictory effects of digitization projects: on the one hand providing tools that democratizes the access to knowledge and on the other making profit from selling the data gained through the first step.

Hence, museum visitors become authors, curators, artists, and data sets themselves. Following Roland Barthes, the “death” of the original author has been of concern among scholars for decades¹¹⁴, but such concerns are even more critical in the digital condition, in times when digital reproductions, co-creations, and meme culture¹¹⁵ are globally shared via social media. While a break within economic, geographical, and social hierarchies within the museum can be witnessed as the collections become accessible to local curators as well as to school classes, students, and scholars from afar, it can even more sharply demonstrated how institutions, in the guise of openness and democracy, reinforce market mechanisms and contribute to the “normalization of post-democracy.”¹¹⁶

KHM Stories, on the other hand, shares the level of innovation in terms of access to the collection. The app lacks most of the functions that are common in museum apps: redirection to ticketing and the online shop, general information on the museum, etc.

¹¹³ Stalder, 173.

¹¹⁴ Roland Barthes, „Der Tod des Autors“ In: Roland Barthes, *Das Rauschen der Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2005), 57–63

¹¹⁵ For a better understanding see: Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013). (German translation by Yasemin Dincer: Limor Shifman, *Meme. Kunst, Kultur und Politik im Digitalen Zeitalter*, Frankfurt 2014).

¹¹⁶ Stalder, 146.

Marketing purposes are clearly not in the foreground of this project and, in comparison to *Digitorials*, less visible, or better: reduced to qualitative content. It is an interesting example of digital storytelling for the sole purpose of discovering the collection anew without setting out to reinvent the exhibition format.

Moritz Scheper states that even if we admit that “exhibitions have been altered to conform to our technically and communicatively highly equipped environment, it is nonetheless true that the exhibition format itself has barely been impacted by this wave of digitization.”¹¹⁷ By that he means that while digital media might change the way of communication between institutions and audiences, it barely affects the way exhibitions are conceived or used. The exploration of such technologies, understood as the adaption of new technological infrastructure to exhibition purposes, does increasingly occur within the institutional system, but it is almost never applied to exhibition practice itself. What is changing might be the relationship between the institution and the audience—most likely towards an exploitation and marketization of visitors. In this context, Daniel Marcus proposes

To resist the encroachment of capital in the present climate means harnessing the museum’s resources against the logic of productivity, elevating time-insensitive activities above the “proper” (i.e., productive) use of space.¹¹⁸

In other words, Marcus urges museums not to adopt to new technologies too fast but to use their potential to come up with something different: maybe slow, maybe unproductive, maybe ineffective, maybe non-profit, online as well as offline. For

¹¹⁷ Moritz Scheper, “Museum Off-Site? Perspectives for Exhibiting in the Digital Age [Museum Off Site? Perspektiven des Ausstellens im digitalen Zeitalter],” in Johan Holten, ed., *Exhibiting the Exhibition. From the Cabinet of Curiosities to the Curatorial Situation [Austellen des Ausstellens. Von der Wunderkammer zur kuratorischen Situation]*, (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2018), 210.

¹¹⁸ Daniel Marcus, “Proposal for a Museum,” SFMOMA Open Space Blog, December 6, 2012, cited in João Ribas, *Curating as spatial resistance*, 32.

instance, this could be a translation of all contents to Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian as done with *KHM Stories*.

3.2 EXHIBITION SAMPLE #2: DATABASES

Digital media makes it possible to display objects together that would otherwise be impossible to assemble in one shared space due to geographical, financial, political, or spatial restrictions. Visionary exhibition concepts, such as those of Malraux or Duchamp in the first half of the 20th century (see chapter 2.1) became viable through digitization. “There is no doubt that the vogue for virtual museums received a powerful impetus from the emergence of the World Wide Web and particularly from its beginning transformation into a multimedia environment with the introduction of the Mosaik browser in 1991. Yet the idea did not originate with the WWW,”¹¹⁹ states Erkki Huhtamo. He references Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility* (1935-36, orig: *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seinen technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*), Douglas Crimps essay *On the Museum’s Ruins* (1980), André Malraux’ *The Imaginary Museum* (1947, orig: *Le musée imaginaire*), and traces emergence of exhibition design as a new medium within the avant-garde movement, citing László Moholy-Nagy (*Domestic Pinacoteca*, 1924), El Lissitzky, Friedrich Kiesler (*Telemuseum*, 1926). All of these thinkers reacted to the challenges posed by new media technologies, as did museum professionals, curators, and artists facing the emergence of the Internet. Today projects that work with immense amounts of data such as online collections are confronted with similar challenges as the artists stated above and build on their experiences.

¹¹⁹ Erkki Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” 121.

GOOGLE ARTS & CULTURE
<https://artsandculture.google.com/>

Google Arts & Culture is an online platform that opens up its partner museums' collections to the public. Users can access and explore high-resolution images of artworks, take virtual tours through the museums' galleries, learn about the collections and objects, and compile their own virtual collection. As with *Rijksstudio*, users can also download images. The "walk-through" feature of the project uses Google Street View technology, and partner museums were able to handpick one oeuvre to be captured as a gigapixel image. In 2018, *Google Arts & Culture* was very popular among social media-users with its "Art to Selfie" project, through which users could upload selfies and an algorithm would match their face with famous portraits in art history.

Google Arts & Culture is basically a massive archive handled by algorithms. When browsing through it, users have the possibility to sort search results by color, material, a "flame" (indicating the objects level of popularity), and date. The platform organizes digital objects by topic or characteristics and provides corresponding galleries of images (e.g. "Boats," "Dutch paintings," and "Medieval glassware"). Also, partnering institutions and users are invited to contribute their own collections and online exhibitions/narrations. Algorithmically compiled image galleries are often presented together with texts sourced from Wikipedia. Institutions and users can create their own stories and narratives and can present them in article-like online exhibitions. Although there are professionally-curated online exhibitions by Google employees as well, most of the content is provided by the participating institutions and the users. Google does not produce much content but rather provides the infrastructure (servers, search engines, frontend, and backend web-design). All of the exhibitions, professionally-curated as well as individually made, are presented equally. It is not obvious who the authors are, and whether the presented contents have been researched by experts. The visual presentation is rather sleek, but the site's architecture tends to be confusing. There are many options to navigate through

the collections, moreover, the purpose of the whole project is not immediately clear.

Google Arts & Culture was launched on February 1, 2011 by Google with the title *Google Art Project*. Originally 17 international museums, including the Tate Gallery, London, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, and the Uffizi, Florence, were part of the initiative. For the choice of the first partner organizations and its underlying Eurocentrism, the project was heavily criticized. By 2012, however, Google was able to attract 151 more museums from over 40 countries. Today, more than 32,000 works of art are available on the platform, and the website works in 18 languages.

EUROPEANA

<https://www.europeana.eu>

Europeana is a platform funded by the European Commission, to collect, discover, and give visibility to Europe's cultural heritage.¹²⁰ It is remarkable that all of this was conceived before Google started its global art initiative (see previous project).

Europeana provides access to various content types provided by the participating European institutions. The decision as to which objects are digitized lies with the organization that owns them. The digital copies are not stored on a central computer, but remain with the respective cultural institution and its network. *Europeana* only collects the thumbnail images and context information (metadata) of the available objects, which is searchable on the website. These searches produce a link, which redirects to the page holding the original object. The developed material is not subject to any copyright, so it can

¹²⁰The whole project started in 1997 as GABRIEL, an initiative of the *Conference of European National Librarians*. In 2005, European politicians expressed their vision that further development ought to be a joint effort to create a comprehensive virtual European library with access to the cultural heritage of Europe in digital form. *Europeana* aims to bring together many existing digitization initiatives of cultural heritage in order to join forces and avoid duplications. From 2007 on the project was funded by the European Commission. The website launched in 2008, with 1,000 partnering organizations Europe-wide and 4.5 million digitized objects (at this point almost 50% came from France). In 2010 the milestone of 10,000,000 digitized objects was already surpassed. This virtual and cultural archive of Europe is accessible in over 27 languages.

be freely used for scientific or educational purposes. For using the website it's not necessary to create an account and one cannot sign up. All content is constantly and permanently stored and accessible. Topics and contents range from fashion, sport, and newspapers to archeology, paintings, and ceramics.

From *Europeana*'s front webpage, four subsections appear: Collections, Explore, Exhibition, and Blog. Within the Collections and Explore sections, users can browse and search through all the accessible data freely. Results can be categorized by artist, technique, material, colors, source, topic, period, etc. Each object's page offers the possibility to share it via social media and download the high-resolution image, and it contains details and metadata of each document including date, size, and provenance.

The Exhibition section contains various online exhibitions, curated by the institutions or *Europeana*'s employees. Users cannot put together online exhibitions, which makes the website less interactive and engaging, but is supposed to guarantee the quality of the content due to the fact that scholars and experts produce the content. *Europeana*'s online exhibitions make certain topics easily accessible. They are not one pagers and stories linearly told, rather they contain several chapters, of which the last chapter is always a credit section. All of the exhibitions' chapters are shown on the first page of the exhibition, after which each chapter is each presented on its own page and accessible through clicking.

Europeana's visual appearance in general is very clearly structured and offers an intuitive approach to browsing and searching through the archive. On the start page is a large search box in the center and not much more, similar but not as radical as the original search box in the Google search. In contrast, *Google Arts & Culture* does not provide such a clear articulated search box and it is surprisingly complicated to find orientation on their start page. However, when accessing *Europeana*, it becomes immediately clear that this website is first and foremost a search engine, whereas Google Art & Culture resembles an (exhibiting) medium in and of itself, a publishing house of sorts with a less clear structure.

The differences between *Europeana* and *Google Arts & Culture* are easy to grasp. Whereas the former is a publicly funded non-profit-project designed to make knowledge accessible, the latter is conceived by one of the world's largest corporations that makes profits by selling the data of its users. By comparing *Europeana* to *Google Arts & Culture*, another noteworthy detail stands out: Although *Europeana* is a large-scale project funded by the European Union¹²¹, most of the partner institutions are also represented on *Google Arts & Culture*, sometimes even with the same content. This might have several reasons: first, it would not correspond to the inclusive *Europeana* mentality to limit content only to one platform and not share it otherwise. Second, it is noticeable that the partner institutions are not prominently represented on the website, whereas they have a very strong appearance with logos on *Google Arts & Culture*. With *Europeana*, it is even a bit complicated to find information on individual institutions. Google might be less attractive content wise (search function and exhibition content are not as high-quality), but Google works better as a marketing tool with its virtual tours in Google Street View, and surely with its connection to the Google search engine, while *Europeana* does not show up in Google search when looking for the institutions collections individually. Thus, it is significant that while *Europeana* fosters a careful but open use of data (data is not centrally stored, institutions can decide about when, what and how to share), institutions still willingly give their content to Google. This leads to meta-questions about data storage, online monopolies, and ownership. For example, what happens if significant platforms such as Google start to introduce pay models and stop sharing content and knowledge freely?¹²² Will access be limited to a

¹²¹ The EU covers 50 to 100% of the costs incurred in the partner institutions, for example personnel costs, costs for training and logistics, etc.

¹²² For further reading on this question see Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism*.

privileged few? In the guise of making knowledge accessible, an authoritarian system might decide who will have access to data. Who is making sure that data is securely stored? What does data security mean in this context?

Another problem with platforms such as *Google Arts & Culture* is their Eurocentrism. As algorithms are neither neutral nor objective, but rather reproduce prejudices inherent to the people who code them, algorithms reproduce equally historical stereotypes, power relations, and in this case, an art historical canon that favors male and Eurocentric art.¹²³ Artists, museums, and works of art with the most Google searches are favorably positioned on the website. Thus by only browsing, visitors are more likely to come across canonic artwork than to discover less prominent pieces of art. This certainly reproduces a Eurocentric and sexist discourse. Speaking with Stalder's terminology, one could argue that *Europeana* represents a Commoning approach while *Google* rather supports post-democratic tendencies—while the popularity of *Google* shows a tendency of “eroding the commons”¹²⁴ from institutional side, even if structures are in place.

3.3 EXHIBITION SAMPLE #3: INDEPENDENT PROJECTS

The Internet allows people to be heard outside of institutional frameworks. Independent curators and artists can make their own exhibitions online and thus attract attention. They are less dependent on being chosen by a few and can—hierarchically spoken—act upwards. This is because, “web 2.0 allows anyone to do (what) has only

¹²³ For further reading see Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of oppression: How search engines reinforce racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

¹²⁴ Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 172.

been possible with a little knowledge (or professional training).”¹²⁵ So artists and independent curators are using the Internet—and digital media in general—as a platform to publish and spread their content beyond institutional frameworks. By using the term *(online) exhibition* to describe their publishing activities, they attempt to inscribe their practices in an institutional tradition while using completely different media to bypass institutional gatekeepers.

PEER TO SPACE

<http://www.peertospace.eu/onlineexhibitions/>

peer to space is a German-based curator collective that, according to their website, aims to connect strategies of peer-to-peer networking with “ideas of space, freedom and openness to artistic expression.”¹²⁶ *peer to space* is active at the intersection of virtual reality, digital art, and as well as physical manifestations of contemporary art. The project was launched in 2010 by Tina Sauerländer and Maja Block, and is currently run by German curators and scholars Peggy Schönege and Tina Sauerländer. Sauerländer and Schönege understand *peer to space* not as “an actual place,” but a concept that “occupies other spaces to realize exhibitions and further projects related to art dealing with the world we live in now.”¹²⁷ Hence the collective organizes physical as well as online/virtual exhibitions. Since its founding in 2010 in Berlin a large number of physical exhibitions and six online exhibitions have been realized, two of which are still accessible as websites online. Whereas the first few case studies depicted projects that function very much as an archive, it is apparent in this example that the curators do not necessarily use the medium ‘website’ for its archival character, but rather for its representational function.

When accessing the website, visitors are confronted with the title, a comparatively long text, the list of artists and credits, very similar to the wall text at the beginning of other institutional exhibitions. For example, the exhibition *Claiming Needles. Positions of Contemporary Embroidery Art*, on

¹²⁵ Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 45.

¹²⁶ Quoted from their website: <http://www.peertospace.eu/>

¹²⁷ Ibid.

display December 2018, consists of a title, followed by credits, an introduction text and images of the presented art works. By clicking on the art works, shorter object texts appear. These are all on one page, accessible through scrolling down. Some simple animations put emphasis on the online character of the exhibition and also add post-internet-aesthetics in the layout. Apart from that, they have a rather traditional layout and lack interactive elements that experiment with the characteristics of the medium and engage with users, which in other institutional and independent projects are surely present. There are no considerations about the specificity of the space and how to make use of functions that are not available in physical exhibitions. The online exhibitions are reminiscent of exhibition brochures and are very similar to documentations of institutional exhibitions online.

INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN
<http://exhibitions.globalfundforwomen.org/>

The *International Museum of Women* is similar to *peer to space* with regards to appropriating space. Initially founded in 1985 by volunteers in San Francisco, by interacting with its audience through talks and workshops, it was transformed into a virtual (web-only) museum in 2009, when an initiative to build a 120,000 square feet space failed. So when capital was running out, they decided to continue their work without real estate in an online environment that is openly accessible to anyone with Internet skills and in possession of according infrastructure, and use the Internet as the democratic and equally accessible space that it was intended to be. This is important because this project represents many online projects that speak for marginalized groups.

Although the museum is not very active anymore, it seems important to note that most of the online exhibitions have a focus on emancipatory projects for subaltern women exposed to multiple layers of discrimination. The exhibitions exist as individual websites that compile galleries of images, texts, and videos on certain topics such as “Muslim Women.” The websites function as curated content platforms. Formally, there are no similarities to real space exhibitions.

With this category we switch to a different type of online exhibitions. It is therefore obvious that other questions, concepts and terms are at play. Instead of asking for the relationship between the institution and the audience, the quest for an audience and the relationship to institutions is at stake. Questions of representation, accessibility, and searchability are prevalent. Similar to the comparison between *Google Art Project* and *Europeana*, *peer to space* and the *International Museum of Women* can be compared. They follow similar agendas as they both choose to use digital space instead of physical space for the reason of being more easily accessible. Whereas the latter proclaims a democratic model, *peer to space* oscillates between both sides. The curators at *peer to space* understand the Internet as a space that is relatively easily accessible and can be rendered useful, in contrast to traditional exhibition spaces that are usually administered by institutions and hard to access or other real estate properties where agents and owners act as gatekeepers. Online, curators can create space for themselves without asking for permission. In turn, they seek and gain visibility and attention from the same institutions that they bypassed in the first place. As discussed, online exhibitions tend to be a list of links and text, which circulate much faster than material objects. Google listings tend to be the new currency here (“if it’s not within the first 10 Google listings, it doesn’t exist”) and so I argue that they aim for titles, artists and contents that are “attractive” in terms of searchability and are hence more likely to be found through Google or other search engines. David Joselit argues that

the current challenge for artists and critics is not to forego engaging with information, but rather to resist the allure of its transparency in favor of tracking

its plasticity—in other words, the shapes of social governance and aesthetic speculation that its myriad overlapping channels assume.¹²⁸

It would be interesting to see projects that aim to resist transparency (for instance in form of searchability) and enable an engagement with the medium.

3.4 EXHIBITION SAMPLE #4: ONLINE ONLY

Digital media allow ideas and concepts to be brought into exhibition spaces that otherwise would be difficult to represent because of their immateriality. In these aspects, digitization relates very explicitly to discourses of dematerialization as they were led in the 1960s between conceptual artists around Seth Siegelaub and Lucy Lippard, who had a serious impact on how the medium exhibition was perceived. Confronted with dematerialized art practices, the artistic community came up with new formats and forms to show and communicate their works. Conceptual artists at the time were on a quest for new circuits of distribution. Curatorial gestures stepped outside gallery rooms and became relevant beyond institutional exhibition spaces (the outdoors, books, etc.). This tendencies became a threat to the exhibition format, but while the exhibition remained one of the most important forms of contemporary art practice, the understanding of the exhibition became to be more than a mere constellation of objects in a gallery space.¹²⁹ The transformation of understanding and meaning in the 1960s is an important foundation for digitization practices in the field of exhibitions and is the

¹²⁸ Joselit, *Conceptual Art of the Press Release*, 167-168.

¹²⁹ “However, according to art historian Irene Calderoni, this progressive dematerialization of art since the 1960s became itself the most serious and evident threat to the exhibition medium. While exhibitions continue to be one of the most important forms of contemporary art practice to this day, the conception that reduces exhibitions to specific constellations of objects in a gallery, and dismisses curatorial practices that operate outside of institutional exhibition spaces and museum architectures, has become obsolete in the face of dematerialized artistic practices.” – Regine Ehleiter, “The Exhibition as Catalogue. Suggestions for an Expanded Understanding of Display” [Die Ausstellung als Katalog. Anregungen zu einem erweiterten Verständnis von Display], in: Holten, ed., *Exhibiting the Exhibition. From the Cabinet of Curiosities to the Curatorial Situation*, 131.

reason why many scholars argue that art practices of that time have introduced “themes and motives that can be claimed to have prepared the way for future virtual museums.”¹³⁰ Virtual museums and digital outlets of exhibitions relay on an understanding of exhibitions that goes beyond just objects. Many of today’s projects tie in with this idea of dematerialization and alternative tracks when aiming to find new circuits of distribution and being eager to create immaterial spaces.

ONE SENTENCE EXHIBITION BY KADIST ART FOUNDATION
<http://ose.kadist.org/>

One Sentence Exhibition is a web-only-exhibition project by the Paris-based non-profit art organization Kadist. The exhibition structure is very simple to the end that each exhibition consists of one sentence, e.g. “The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.”¹³¹ Each word of this sentence links to one piece of digital information in the Internet that becomes embedded in the website. Every six to eight weeks, an international curator is invited to choose a sentence and select the accompanying links. As it is common for online exhibitions, this exhibition can be visited—almost without barriers—by everyone with access to the Internet. However, by appropriating notions of art-world-mechanisms (e.g. the star curator and the opening event and its exclusivity), it addresses a very specific and informed group of people. By deleting the links from the sentence after the duration of the exhibition and therefore limiting the time that the exhibition is available to the public, the project stresses the ephemerality of exhibitions in a Snapchat-like manner¹³². The fact that there is no further documentation but all names and titles stay visible on the website, creates

¹³⁰ Huhtamo, “On the Origins of the Virtual Museum,” 128. Similarly, art historian Eva Maria Stadler claims that she understands artist books as a preparation for digitization. Eva Maria Stadler, Vanessa Joan Müller, Sarah Bogner and Josef Zekoff, Luc Gross, Franz Thalmair, “Publizieren als künstlerische Praxis,” panel discussion on January 17, 2018 at Angewandte Innovation Lab Vienna, <https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/publizieren-als-kuenstlerische-praxis/>.

¹³¹ Curated by Xiaoyu Weng – <http://ose.kadist.org/>

¹³² Snapchat is an instant messaging channel that allows users to send short images and videos, which recipients can only view for a limited period of time (e.g. once for 5 seconds). It was first popular within a very young group of users (born after 1995). Instagram has copied most of Snapchat’s functions which made Snapchat less attractive for older generations, as they could use all of Snapchat’s functions within a platform they had already subscribed to.

additional mystery and secrecy around the past exhibitions in terms of exclusivity of contents. Moreover, it provokes FOMO (fear of missing out)¹³³, a concept that the art world's mechanisms are provoking a lot through exclusive events and its communication.

ADDENDUM BY KADIST

<https://addendum.kadist.org/>

Kadist also initiated the online project *Addendum*. *Addendum* simply consists of an extension that can be downloaded and installed to one's web browser for free. By implementing the extension to the browser, it replaces online-advertisements with "visual essays" by artists, commissioned by the gallery Kadist. The term visual essay refers to a series of eight to ten pictures created or collected by the artist throughout her/his research. Users will see the advertisements on the page they are viewing replaced by one image from the visual essay. On the next page they visit, the advertisements will be replaced by the second image in the essay.¹³⁴ *Addendum* hence redefines a space that is usually commercially used, to a space of artistic production and presentation. Instead of blocking advertisements and making the space invisible, as many users do, Kadist seeks to add artistic space to websites. By replacing each advertisement one by one, it becomes more visible how spammed users are with advertising content. Through this, the project comments not only on digital market mechanisms, but really points to it.

SCREENSAVER GALLERY

<https://screensaver.metazoa.org>

¹³³ "Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) represents a form of social anxiety to decide and stay undecided because one is compulsively concerned that one might miss out an opportunity or to make the wrong decision. Being frightened of making a mistake is identified as the key cause of the anxiety-driven youth, which do not want to position themselves. These attitudes were identified as elements of modern youth culture (zero tolerance generation) and FOMO is considered to be one of the 'first social media diseases,' an inevitable byproduct of the experience economy. A large percentage of youth is believed to be addicted to being on permanent stand-by, as Bernhard Pörksen (2014), a media scientist at the University of Tübingen, described." Ruth Mateus-Berr, "Applied Design Thinking LAB and the Creative Empowering of Interdisciplinary Teams," in Elias G Carayannis (Ed.), *Springer Encyclopedia on Creativity, Invention, Innovation and Entrepreneurship C12E*, (Berlin: Springer, 2013/2020), tbd.

¹³⁴ Cf. <https://addendum.kadist.org/>, accessed January 4, 2019.

Similar to Kadist's *Addendum*, *Screensaver Gallery* makes use of another mostly unused space. Via download, the curators Barbora Trnková & Tomáš Javůrek offer screensaver exhibitions that users can install on their personal computers. As soon as the computer goes into sleep mode, it starts showing one randomly chosen artwork that is part of the current online exhibition. Screensavers are a leftover solution from a previous technology¹³⁵. They are not necessary on modern, flat-panel LCD displays and in fact actually waste more energy than they save. Still, screensavers continue to be a familiar and ubiquitous occurrence, and reclaiming these simultaneously public and intimate spaces is a tempting idea. "Suddenly, when being inactive on your computer, the screensaver becomes a portal to the world of contemporary art", the curators Barbora Trnková and Tomáš Javůrek argue.

At the time this thesis is in the process of being written, the current exhibition is called *INHUMAN ART* and it brings together works by more than 40 international artists and collectives. Some of the works are simple videos that might have been produced for a different context as well, others are semi-fixed images that sometimes change through subtle motions. What seems astonishing is that only a few artworks are adopting classic screensaver formats, i.e. infinite but ever-changing loops that make sure that the image won't burn in. This is interesting, as it shows that the curators don't aim for a medium specific show but rather use the adopted space to show digital art works of all sorts that they (the curators) claim to be "primarily addressed to a non-human audience." They understand these artworks as a "result of mutual cooperation between human and inhuman entities".

¹³⁵ "Old CRT monitors had a problem known as 'burn in.' Any image displayed on the screen for a long time became 'burnt into' the screen. Even if you turned off the monitor completely, you'd still see a ghost image. This is particularly bad with images that don't change, such as interface elements. For example, the Windows taskbar may become burnt into the screen, as it just sits at the bottom of the screen and rarely changes. An old television displaying a news channel with a ticker along the bottom may end up with the ticker burnt into the screen. An ATM that displays a single image most of the time may also end up with burn-in. Essentially, the phosphors that emit light inside the CRT are unevenly worn down, leaving certain areas of the screen darker. Screen savers solved this problem by automatically activating when the computer wasn't in use. Screen savers display an animation that consistently changes, largely eliminating the problem of screen burn-in by ensuring that a single image isn't on-screen all the time." Chris Hoffman, "Why Screen Savers Are No Longer Necessary," How To Geek, last modified September 2016, accessed January 3, 2019, <https://www.howtogeek.com/128644/htg-explains-why-screen-savers-are-no-longer-necessary/>.

#EXSTRANGE

<http://exstrange.com/hello/>

The exhibition *#exstrange* took place from January 15 to April 13 2017 on eBay. Curated by India-based curators Marialaura Ghidini and Rebekah Modrak, over 91 artists, designers, collectives, and researchers worldwide were invited to present their objects and projects on the sales platform and put up 102 artworks for sale. Over the duration of the exhibition, each day one artist would try to sell one piece of art via the platform. Formal restrictions and geographical restraints such as national custom laws, which are inherent to the online platform formed the formal parameters of the exhibition and hence became part of the curatorial concept.

According to Ghidini and Modrak, the exhibition aimed to explore collective strategies of production and communication online: “At its core, *#exstrange* sought responses to the driving question: ‘What forms of encounters and types of relationships can take place in the realm of e-commerce beyond the seller-to-buyer transaction, the fundraiser-to-backer association, or the peer-to-peer swap?’”¹³⁶ While developing the project, the curators reflected “the commercial infrastructure that dominates the contemporary art world” and “the role that curating online might play within it.”¹³⁷ Instead of creating a new platform, Ghidini and Modrak aimed “to work with the properties and functionalities of an already existing online service.”¹³⁸ What was especially interesting to them was that eBay “is governed by the logic and language of commerce.”¹³⁹ eBay was founded in 1996 by the Iranian-American entrepreneur Pierre Morad Omidyar to foster an interactive model of person-to-person auction. At that time, it proposed a socio-economic system that aimed to bypass the ‘inefficiencies’ of trading in the ‘real world’. Today it is one of the leading online sales platforms with thousands of transactions daily. The gatekeeping

¹³⁶ Marialaura Ghidini and Rebekah Modrak, *#exstrange. Curatorial and Artistic Interventions on Ebay* (Michigan: Michigan Publishing, 2017), 4, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015087418771>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

strategies of the art market generally have an opposite approach, as the transparency and unbound distribution that the Internet sales sites offer is not very common.

Now, although #exstrange has shut down, a very precise documentation of every artwork is still online. An overview of all sales, no matter whether successful or not, can be viewed via a Google Map. All artworks are also documented in the publication *#exstrange. A Curatorial Intervention on EBay* (2017).¹⁴⁰

With *peer to space* and the *International Museum of Women* we have been discussing projects that choose online space for its accessibility. They leave traditional, physical exhibition spaces in favor of more time efficient means and hence create new digital spaces. With the last four examples we start looking into the fourth proposed category of projects that don't create new spaces but appropriate existing online spaces and platforms. To answer the question of this thesis, these projects are significant due to their relationship to the described conflict (post-democratic vs. Commons). I argue that this type of exhibitions acts in an awareness of the conflict and try to explicitly comment, redefine, ironize and engage with this situation. Kadist's *Addendum* does so by pointing to marketing dynamics online and rendering them useless. *#exstrange* uses an online selling platform to display art works not only with the intent to sell them but also to find an audience and experiment with the medium. *Screensaver Gallery* aims to redefine and occupy an outdated technology, similar to Off Space gallery's occupying abandoned spaces.

¹⁴⁰ Marialaura Ghidini and Rebekah Modrak, *#exstrange*, 4, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015087418771>.

What stands out is that most of these projects share an interest in the Internet as a space and as a medium, much more than in objects. In doing so they use displays as some sort of market place or, the other way around, market places as a display. They experiment with online platforms and existing tools to find new forms and new circuits of distribution. By doing so they follow a tradition of non-material and conceptual art works. This notion is, in my opinion, where it gets interesting. With their artistic practices, they do not only adopt technologies for exhibition making (as Moritz Schemper stated before) but come up with new forms of exhibitions (similar to Seth Siegelaub in the 1960s). They make a difference by not only posting things to the Internet, but aiming to reflect the medium by doing so and therefore—stressing Stalder again—represent the Commoning aspect of the digital culture: creating knowledge for smaller communities, not pretending to serve the society as a whole, and building a different infrastructure.

3.5 EXHIBITIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The question arises where are the limits, if we understand all kinds of artistic practices online as a new interpretation of the analogue exhibition or as an online exhibition? Is anything that is posted online a kind of exhibition? One could ask whether any presentation on the Internet can be understood as an exhibition, following the question: “What (means) curating in terms of new networked structures, database structures, and in increasingly technology-led society?”¹⁴¹ Is any practice in the Internet a curating practice? The following section shall shed light on this matter.

INSTAGRAM

¹⁴¹ Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 48. Cf. João Ribas, “Curating as Spatial Resistance,” 29.

With its focus on the distribution of images and communication through visual language only, *Instagram* has become the social media channel of the art scene but also an important site of art representation and art production.¹⁴² As such, it has become an expansion of exhibitions online and it is important to include *Instagram* in this study too. Some critics say that *Instagram* has changed how people engage with and consume art drastically. At the same time it is considered to be a space where young artists can easily present their artworks and get in touch with galleries and museum representatives. In many cases, *Instagram* replaces the portfolio or artist website as primary form of presentation.

The platform, owned by Facebook, functions as showroom and artist portfolio, but also as an arena for curators and other opinion leaders of the art world. At the same time, images posted on *Instagram* end up in the physical gallery space as art works. One example is Amalia Ulman's performance "Excellences & Perfections."¹⁴³ Between April and September 2014, the Argentine-born artist positioned herself as "Instagram Girl." Her project explored the many ways women present themselves online. The three-part performance work, entitled "Excellences & Perfections," used popular hashtags from celebrities on the popular social network that enabled Ulman to incorporate roles such as "cute girl," "sugar baby," and "life goddess". By September 19, 2014, the day on which Ulman released her final post of the project, the artist had accumulated 88,906 followers. It was only then that she revealed that her Instagram presence had been a work of art, a planned performance instead of a documentation of real moments. Today, the performance is archived in an online exhibition by Rhizome, a platform and archive for contemporary art engaged with digital technologies and the Internet, an affiliate in residence at the New

¹⁴² For further reading on artistic production and artistic representation on Instagram, see: Alfred Weidinger and Anika Maier, *Virtual Normality: The female gaze in the age of the Internet* (Wien: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2018).

¹⁴³ Ulman's performance has been archived and can be found here: <http://webenact.rhizome.org/excellences-and-perfections>

Museum.¹⁴⁴ The Instagram pictures are now exhibited on a regular basis in exhibitions and museums worldwide as digital prints mounted on glass.

A prime example of curators using *Instagram* as a space of artistic representation is Serpentine curator and author Hans Ulrich Obrist.¹⁴⁵ He does not post his own content or experiences, but rather asks artists to put something in handwriting, which he then posts with the caption quoting the writing and other appropriate credits. He has currently 245,000 followers, but is just one of many curator accounts that are popular. Articles such as “20 Art Instagram Accounts Every Art Lover Should Follow” or “Top 100 Art World Instagram Artists” pop up on a daily basis and present the accounts of artists and curators which are not to be missed.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Michael Connor, “First Look. Amalia Ulman—Excellences & Perfections,” Rhizome, October 20, 2014, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2014/oct/20/first-look-amalia-ulmanexcellences-perfections/>.

¹⁴⁵ Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Curating in the 21st Century,” Lecture at ‘me convention’, a collaboration between SXSW Conference & Festivals and Mercedes-Benz, September 16, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZd39rHB1Ag>.

¹⁴⁶ See, for example: <https://www.christies.com/features/Top-100-Art-World-Instagrams-Artists-8482-1.aspx>, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/madelaine-dangelo/top-8-art-world-instagram_b_10264604.html, <https://www.booooooom.com/.../20-best-art-instagram-accounts-i....>.

CONSIDERING THE ‘DIGITAL CONDITION’ OF EXHIBITIONS

As defined roles become blurry, anybody involved in the cultural field produces and selects content at the same time. “Thus within a fully integrated cultural system the audience becomes a producer, but only to consume their own participation as a product.”¹⁴⁷ Sara Diamond states:

In a world of peer-to-peer technologies and heightened exchange between individuals and collectives, and in a context where participants change media objects that are posted to peer-to-peer sites, the role of the artist as originator, and curator as interpreter are certainly challenged, if not made obsolete.¹⁴⁸

Steve Rosenbaum argues that the growth of user-generated content online amounts to a surfeit of information—a cultural TMI (Too Much Info)—constituted by overwhelming “content abundance.” There are too many emails, tweets, blogs, and uploaded videos, and insufficient time, or even people, to share or like them. Curating, Rosenbaum claims, is the solution to this exhausting condition.¹⁴⁹ What seems to be a lucky situation for Rosenbaum, is a risk in the opinion of Claire Bishop. She comments on these developments cynically: “In a world where everyone can air their views to everyone we are faced not with mass empowerment but with an endless stream of egos leveled to banality.”¹⁵⁰ In relation to participatory art she states: “This could be seen as a heroic narrative¹⁵¹ of the increased activation and agency of the audience, but we

¹⁴⁷ Sabeth Buchmann, “From Systems-Oriented Art to Biopolitical Art Practice,” (Oakland: UC Press, 2006), cited in: Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 59.

¹⁴⁸ Sara Diamond, “Silicon to Carbon,” (Alberta: Banff Centre Press, 2003), cited in: Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Curating*, 2010, 46.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Ribas, “Curating as Spatial Resistance,” 29.

¹⁵⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 277.

¹⁵¹ Nick Srnicek comments: “Let us be clear, though: this is not the end of ownership, but rather the concentration of ownership. Pieties about an ‘age of access’ are just empty rhetoric that obscures the realities of the situation. (...) Far from being mere owners of information, these companies are becoming

might also see it as a story of our ever-increasing [...] commodification of human bodies in a service economy (since voluntary participation is also unpaid labor).”¹⁵² The same might be true for the empowering rhetoric appropriated by art institutions. It appears to be a heroic narrative, but in the end, it is an acceleration of capitalist tendencies already so present in the art sector. In his essay “Conceptual Art of the Press Release” (2016) David Joselit notes with reference to art-world Instagram feeds, that “[the art world] adopted a neoliberal idea of perfect translation from the status of obdurate object-hood to the much more mobile medium of the text, which, like currency, is easily circulated and consumed.”¹⁵³ This form of translation has happened before through concept art, as could be demonstrated: “Art objects have now been included within the larger semiotic field of a ‘language paradigm’ or ‘linguistic turn’ and are transliterated as the equivalents of ‘texts.’”¹⁵⁴ With reference to the linguistic turn, “exhibitions [alike] can be considered to be like texts, [...], but they are also intertexts situated as moments of articulation within systems of signification of which they are but one.”¹⁵⁵ This is even truer for online exhibitions that consist mostly of hypertext¹⁵⁶. Looking at this inflationary used modes of translation, Joselit states that “the once radical proposal of conceptual art—that objects exist in transactional relation with text—has become business as usual.”¹⁵⁷

David Harvey strikes a similar note when he argues that “information technology is the privileged technology of neoliberalism. It is far more useful for

owners of the infrastructures of society. Hence the monopolistic tendencies of these platforms must be taken into account.” Snicek, *Platform Capitalism*, 92.

¹⁵² Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 277.

¹⁵³ David Joselit, “Conceptual Art of the Press Release, or Art History without Art,” *October*, vol. 158 (Fall 2016): 167-168.

¹⁵⁴ Ferguson, “Exhibition Rhetorics. Material Speech and Utter Sense,” 176.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Graham and Cook, *Rethinking Exhibitions*, 70.

¹⁵⁷ Joselit, “Conceptual Art,” 168.

speculative activity and for maximizing the number of short-term market contracts than for improving production.”¹⁵⁸ Digitization is playing right into the hands of these market mechanisms.

This supports the theory that online trends are an acceleration of already existing structures and do not change the exhibition as medium in a sustainable way. We have seen that the lack of such adaptation seems to be a specific characteristic of the institutionalized museum and seems less distinct in “off space” projects, but applies in this field as well.¹⁵⁹ The hypothesis of the acceleration of already existing structures is based on Felix Stalder’s thesis that digitization is a far-reaching, irreversible, social change that finds its beginnings partly in the 19th century and has increased exponentially since at least since the 1960s: “The rise of the knowledge economy, the increasingly loud critique of heteronormativity, and a fundamental cultural critique posed by post-colonialism enabled a greater number of people to participate in public discussions.”¹⁶⁰

He goes on to say that “in large part, the patterns and cultural foundations of these processes developed long before the Internet. Through the use of the Internet and the experiences of dealing with it, they have encroached upon far greater portions of all societies.”¹⁶¹ More and more dimensions of existence become fields of cultural conflict, and social action is embedded in increasingly complex technologies. The amount of

¹⁵⁸ David Harvey, cited in: Joselit, “Introduction. Markets and Networks,” 24-28.

¹⁵⁹ Moritz Scheper, “Museum Off-Site? Perspectives for Exhibiting in the Digital Age [Museum Off Site? Perspektiven des Ausstellens im digitalen Zeitalter],” 210.

¹⁶⁰ Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 2018, 13. Orig.: “Der Aufstieg der Wissensökonomie, die zunehmende Kritik an der Heteronormativität und eine fundamentale Kulturkritik durch den Postkolonialismus eröffneten immer mehr Menschen die Möglichkeit, sich an öffentlichen Diskussionen zu beteiligen.” Stalder, *Die Kultur der Digitalität*, 24.

¹⁶¹ Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 35. Orig.: “Die Muster und kulturellen Grundlagen dieser Prozesse entwickelten sich meist lange vor dem Internet. Durch die Nutzung des und die Erfahrung im Umgang mit dem Internet haben sie allerdings sehr viel größere Teile der Gesellschaft erfasst.” Stalder, *Die Kultur der Digitalität*, 58.

opposing, cultural projects, works, and references is rapidly increasing, which in turn has triggered a crisis of established forms and institutions. For Stalder, this doesn't mean an end of institutions; instead, he argues, new institutions are taking over and shaping this new environment. He analyses networks as an action space that empowers the interaction of larger groups. The pressure to initiate a hierarchical structure becomes obsolete. However, the new methods of organization are only thinkable based on technologies that are part of the Internet's infrastructure. Digital technologies and social action are inseparably interconnected. The 'culture of digitality' becomes dominant.

While one could argue that the "digital condition"—or the increasing number of people who are actively participating in the negotiation of social meanings today—might lead to a loss of power for traditional institutions (in the case of this study: museum and other gatekeeping stakeholders such as Kunsthallen, auction houses, galleries, etc.), Stalder rather makes the point that "identifiable actors and their projects do indeed [still] shape our collective existence."¹⁶² While "we can see very clearly that as the center of the established institutions shaped by the affordances of the previous condition are crumbling, more economic and political projects are rushing to fill that void with new institutions."¹⁶³ He further argues that these new players are not necessarily creating new structures or a different framework, but are instead accelerating already existing structures that in parts go back to the 19th century, when bourgeois' and democratic societies arose. He suggests that the societies of the (transatlantic) West find themselves in a new condition, the digital condition. Stalder introduces the aforementioned paradox of post-democratic tendencies on the one hand and Commoning-orientated strategies on the other that we are witnessing in digital

¹⁶² Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 7.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

culture today. This paradox consists of prevalent power struggles between monopolistic Internet corporations and a culture of open access, both offering starkly contradictory outcomes.

Through the investigation of current online projects, it became visible that by allowing a larger number of “objects” to be included in shows, online exhibitions push a faster circulation of content and enable a fluent interaction with visitors. Text easily circulates, and even more so does hypertext. This supports (remote) art sales and strengthens the art market, but it does not necessarily speak to the quality of content or lead to more democratic, diversified, and inclusive institutions. The examined online exhibitions oscillate between market-driven and community-oriented strategies, and the notion of curating becomes nebulous. Stalder has already pointed to this contradictory moment to which the digital condition has led, when he refers to the crossroads he sees our society confronted with. With regards to art institutions, Ribas suggests that a direction has already been taken:

“The populism that underlies the reframing of the curatorial reflects these conditions of the contemporary art institution under neoliberalism, in the form of the contraction of public space and the increasingly fading potential of the museum as a commons.”¹⁶⁴

With the analyses above in mind, Ribas’ statement can be confirmed. It could be demonstrated how, under the pressure of making profits, art institutions adopt information technologies with *good* intentions (making knowledge and art accessible for anyone) but for the *wrong* reasons (to increase visitor numbers and sales). Nevertheless, some projects outside of institutions demonstrate how digital territory can be explored differently.

¹⁶⁴ Ribas, “Curating as Spatial Resistance,” 29.

CONCLUSIO

Returning to the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this study, it has been shown that the power struggles between monopolistic Internet corporations and a culture of open access are also true in the museum sector. Current online developments do indeed accelerate and reinforce existing (museum) practices. They switch between a post-democratic market mechanisms and common-oriented efforts. Turning to what Graham and Cook stated about the remains of a dematerialization of material culture, namely an aesthetic of transmission, communication, and distribution, along with the first part of this study, namely a definition of exhibitions that is tied to the development of bourgeois societies and the rise of neoliberal and capitalist powers that culminated in market-oriented institutions by the end of the 20th century, it can be shown how the current use of online space for exhibition purposes is rather an acceleration of capitalist approaches that developed throughout the 19th century, gained intensity by the late 20th century, and is being hyper-aestheticized in current online exhibitions projects.

By considering the first part of this thesis that set out to contextualize current museum practice within the historic understanding of the museum, it is not surprising that the adoption of digital media, or information technology in the exhibition context, lead to an acceleration of capitalist structures. Digital media, or information technology as a whole, are—following Stalder—accelerating already existing structures rather than improving new ones, and we have learned how exhibitions follow by definition a capitalist logic. If we observe how information technology is challenging our institutions and putting them on a crossroads, it becomes even more important to not

indulge in blind technic optimism but to proactively question the potential of the museum as a commons. Let's take for example the *Europeana* project, which offers a high-quality platform or database. Or the Off Site Project that seeks to subvert the digital space in a critical way by being less convenient to access, and through nesting on the users' private computers.

It became clear that introducing a new medium to exhibition makers would change neither systems and nor institutions. Digital media do not have the quality or the power to break up long rehearsed patterns.

When people who are measured by sales numbers develop apps, the apps will not do much more other than improve the numbers. When a strongly Eurocentric view of the world prevails in institutions, the introduction of a new medium will not change that view, but rather tend to reinforce it. Only if the actors are conscious of their complicity and if it is their declared goal to change structures, digital media can support this change. Claire Bishop argues that

... the task today is to produce [...] a reassertion of art's inventive forms of negation as valuable in their own right. We need to recognize art as a form of experimental activity overlapping with the world, whose negativity may lend support towards a political project (without bearing the sole responsibility for devising and implementing it), and—more radically—we need to support the progressive transformation of existing institutions through the transversal encroachment of ideas whose boldness is related to (and at times greater than) that of artistic imagination.¹⁶⁵

Further steps in the expansion of exhibitions online should be taken with an awareness of this critical situation, with the goal being to embrace *Commoning* over *Post-democratic tendencies*, to *decelerate* and to *resist*, to *reinvent* and to *re-appropriate* (digital) spaces, to understand the processes of translation (which is certainly a result of

¹⁶⁵ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 284.

digitization, a creative process instead of as a loss) and finally, to embrace this process as a subversive tool in order to silence market mechanisms and reinforce democratic institutions.

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ABSTRACT

Art institutions show an increasing interest in advancements in technology such as big data, machine learning, and global connectivity. In line with this development, museums and other stakeholders (such as galleries, Kunsthallen, offspaces, etc.) are adopting these new technologies into their programs, from open online classes, freely-accessible online collections, and vast digital archives to social media channels, interactive guiding systems, and new modalities of visitor engagement. In some cases, the use of new technologies in the museum not only aims to enhance but also to reinvent the existing exhibition practices, through additional content, a different narration, or forms of interaction. These dynamics open up an intriguing debate on what it means to use digital media in the exhibition context. By mapping out the field of online projects within and beyond the institutional framework, I seek to make visible how information technology is accelerating established power structures in the field of exhibition making instead of reinventing them. By deconstructing the rhetoric of empowerment appropriated by the art market and art institutions, this thesis sets out to contribute to a critical reading of digitization efforts and acceleration dynamics, situating it within a neoliberal context.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Kunstinstitutionen zeigen ein zunehmendes Interesse an technologischen Entwicklungen wie Big Data und Machine Learning. Entsprechend dieser Entwicklungen nehmen Museen und andere Akteur_innen im Feld der Kunst (wie Galerien, Kunsthallen, Offspaces usw.) diese neuen Technologien in ihre Programme auf: Von offenen Onlinekursen, über frei zugängliche Online-Sammlungen und große digitale Archive, bis hin zu Social-Media-Kanälen, interaktiven Leitsystemen und neuen Arten der Besucherinteraktion. In einigen Fällen zielt der Einsatz neuer Technologien im Museum nicht nur darauf ab, die bestehenden Ausstellungspraktiken durch zusätzliche Inhalte, eine andere Erzählung oder Interaktionsformen zu erweitern, sondern sie neu zu erfinden. Diese Dynamik eröffnet eine spannende Debatte darüber, was es überhaupt bedeutet, digitale Medien im Ausstellungskontext einzusetzen. Durch die Analyse von Onlineprojekten innerhalb und außerhalb des institutionellen Rahmens soll in dieser Arbeit sichtbar gemacht werden, wie Informationstechnologie hingegen viel mehr dazu tendiert, etablierte Machtstrukturen im Bereich des Ausstellungsbaus zu beschleunigen, anstatt diese neu zu erfinden. Mit der Dekonstruktion der Empowerment-Rhetorik, die derzeit am Kunstmarkt und in Kunstinstitutionen verwendet wird, soll zudem ein Beitrag zur kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit Digitalisierungsbemühungen und Beschleunigungsdynamiken geleistet werden.