

To collect or not to collect, that is the question:
the in-terms contradiction of contemporary art museums

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Introduction

“The difficult debate of the ‘contemporary’”

My experience at the Reinwardt Academy in Amsterdam started in August 2011. The motivation that led me to enroll in the master in Museology was a strong interest in the relations between museums and society, together with a concern towards the role that art, in general, and contemporary art, in particular, perform within this relations' system. Contemporaneity is the center of my curiosity. The incessant process of investigating new tendencies in society represents a fascinating practice for me, especially when such trends are related to the art system and the museum world. Thus, during the master in Museology I have had the chance to encounter and analyze phenomena within the field of museums and society, in relation to both societal changes and developments of museum theory. Since the beginning of the course, I have been intrigued by the meaning and value of museum theories such as musealization and contemporary collecting. At the same time, I have been questioning the applicability of such theories to the contemporary art field and, as a consequence, the position occupied by contemporary art in museums and, in particular, collections.

On the 15th of June 2012, an article published by the Dutch magazine *MetropolisM* offered me a weak signal to start the research. The topic was the world of art fairs, but the reflection touched museums as well: “Visiting art fairs is like hearing your parents having sex” – was written – [...] “Art fairs are now performing some of the functions of the museum or the independent art space [...] with works that surpass the possibilities of the conventional gallery booth, showcasing outsize sculptures, video projections, installations, [...] and performance art” (www.metropolism.com, accessed: December, 3, 2012). While referring to Art Basel 2012, the article highlighted the tendency for contemporary art to be more frequently exhibited in spaces which do not have any specific aim of collecting and which are exclusively focused, instead, on a showing practice. The existence of a similar phenomenon supported my urge of reflecting on functions and roles of museums in relation to contemporary art. So, I started to analyze the current trend of seeing contemporary art best exhibited outside of the museum space, in places that perform some of the museum functions but are not focused on collecting practices. Apart from the economic world of art fairs and galleries, these spaces are generally art festivals, exhibition platforms or, in other cases, they are proper non-collecting institutions. The latter, especially, caught my attention.

Within museum theory, non-collecting institutions do not find a well-established place. Museum theory traditionally deals with institutions that perform three particular functions: preservation, communication and research, and that are therefore profoundly linked to the presence of objects and to the domain of history. As a consequence, the term 'contemporary art museum' seems to be a contradiction in itself: how can it be possible to collect something that is contemporary, i.e. that has not yet endured the test of time? The research conducted in this thesis aims at adopting a critical approach towards the field of museums and contemporary art by combining art theory and museology in order to discuss, and eventually solve, the dichotomy between contemporary art and museums. The thesis's body is structured in three main chapters, which follow the evolution of the research's process. The starting point is the exploration of contemporary art's meaning, in order to go beyond a definition that is exclusively based on historical canons, and towards an understanding of contemporary art as the act of performing the present within a specific topological inscription. Next, the applicability of museum theory to contemporary art will be assessed by paying particular attention to museums' functions, museum theories such as musealization and contemporary collecting, and by exploring current definitions of museums. Lastly, it will follow the analysis of historical roles of non-collecting institutions in the field of contemporary art, with a focus on alternative methods to traditional collecting practices. The research will also attempt to investigate new approaches towards meanings, functions and roles of collections. In fact, within non-collecting institutions the concept of collection is not completely absent: collections are not meant according to their traditional classification where the physical presence of objects is key, but in a more conceptual way through the use of documentation and archives. The latter will be finally named as the appropriate manner to deal with the three-dimensional identity of contemporary art, i.e. with the value of context, concept and process.

Method

The methodology adopted to conduct this research is both conceptual and empirical. On one hand it is related to the discussion of concepts developed within museum theory and on the other hand it relies on experience and observation (e.g. collection policies' analysis and interviews with museum professionals). At the basis of this choice there is the aim to verify the applicability of theory into practice, i.e. the applicability of museum theory to the practice of dealing with contemporary art. The research has been structured around a main hypothesis: the existence of a dichotomy between contemporary art and museum theory, furthermore suggested by the in-terms contradiction "contemporary art museums". Such hypothesis has been formulated as a consequence of the observation of contemporary art museums' functioning, meaning the way museums perform their three traditional functions of collecting (including preservation and conservation), communicating (including exhibition and education) and researching in relation to contemporary art. Preliminary information gained through review of sources such as press has confirmed a certain predominance of non-collecting practices for institutions that deal with contemporary art. Besides, interviews with museum professionals of collecting institutions and professionals from the field of museology have highlighted both the existence of practical problems in dealing with contemporary art and the possibility and/or necessity to reinterpret meaning, function and role of collecting.

In principle, contemporary art has been approached from a double perspective: within historical canons and beyond them. The historical definition of contemporary art has been explored through an excursus within art history. However, the preferred definition of contemporary art has been related to its performative nature meant as contemporary art's dominant quality. Theories of performances have been used to formulate this definition. The analysis of museum theory has been conducted through literature review, collection policies' analysis and interviews with professionals. The latter have been selected from collecting institutions and from the field of museology. Interviews' results have been analyzed and consequently integrated within the thesis' body. Finally, an attempt to trace the history of non-collecting institutions has been made through the analysis of available literature on the topic, press and interviews with professionals working in non-collecting institutions. For a series of practical reasons, the interviewed professionals of both

collecting and non-collecting institutions have been selected from the Dutch museological area, although the results of the investigation could be applicable to an international area as well.

Terminology has represented a crucial aspect of this thesis. Due to the complexity of the topic, a conscious choice has been made in relation to the words to use in the text. In particular, words such as performativity and theatricality have been chosen to refer to the dominant quality of contemporary art; the term 'contemporary art museum' has been often substituted with the more appropriate English word 'gallery'; and the term 'museums definitions' has been preferred to the form in the singular – 'museum definition' – with regards to the manifold, and not always unequivocally established functions of museums.

1.

“Contemporary art: a contemporary definition”

*“There are three times:
a present time of past things;
a present time of present things;
and a present time of future things”
(Saint Augustine)*

Introduction

What does contemporary art stand for? In order to lay the basis for the discussion conducted in this thesis, this chapter tries to define contemporary art beyond the margins of historical canons and within a philosophical dimension. Terminology is the starting point of the analysis. In particular, the meaning of the term modern, postmodern and contemporary are investigated together with that of modernity, postmodernity and contemporaneity. It follows the attempt to define contemporary art: firstly, within art history, i.e. in relation to social phenomena and economic factors; secondly, in accordance to its performative and theatrical nature, i.e. dominant contemporary quality.

Modern, Postmodern, Contemporary. Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity

The adjective ‘contemporary’ is often characterized by difficulties of definition and understanding. The origin of this struggle may be sought in the lack of adequate time distance to the subject under analysis. The presence of time distance, in fact, generally results beneficial to the analysis and interpretation of any kind of phenomena, enabling the researcher to find out those sources, witnesses, dynamics, causes and consequences that determine the development of something since its origins. Furthermore, when the adjective ‘contemporary’ accompanies the term ‘art’, both the definition and its understanding become even more complicated. The general idea on

the definition of contemporary art is the reference to living artists and “no idea about contemporary art is more pervasive than the idea that one can – even *should* – have no idea about it” (Smith, 2009: 1). Provocation, equivocal assumptions, doubt, and cynical questions are the most familiar contours of art today. To some extent, it almost seems like not all contemporary art looks ‘contemporary’ and some of it, does not actually look like art at all. Contemporary history therefore appears like an oxymoron: distinguishing a pattern within the flow of the contemporary events is truly problematic. Already in 1964 Arthur Danto said that “to see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld¹” (Danto, 1964: 580).

In vernacular English, ‘contemporary’ is often synonym of ‘modern’, with the result of some conflation of the terms ‘modern art’ and ‘contemporary art’ in popular thinking. However, the cause of this clash does not lay exclusively on the level of language, but it is also dependent on the relationship that art has with history and chronological periodization. The discourse on modernity, postmodernity and contemporaneity is deeply debated within academia as well as amongst art professionals. Many theorists have undertaken the challenge of defining the borders, if borders really exist, between the three abovementioned art historical periods. Nonetheless, no distinct definition can be acknowledged in an exclusive way and many scholars incorporate contemporary phenomena within modernity or postmodernity. While, for instance, the French anthropologist Marc Augé refers to contemporaneity with the term “supermodernity” (Augé, Jacob, 1999), the Marxist sociologist and political philosopher Antonio Negri describes contemporaneity as “situated in postmodernity”, highlighting the lack of a precise determination of the end of modernity and the beginning of postmodernity. The latter is, in fact, better identified by Negri as an extension of modernity, i.e. “hypermodernity” (Negri, 2008), generated as a consequence of the capitalistic power’s diffusion. In this regards, “contemporaneity is the only way to express the eternal will to resistance and freedom” (Negri, 2008: 29). Another example that pinpoints both the general identification of contemporaneity with the term ‘modernity’ and the difficulty of its definition is the 1864 illustrious formulation of Charles Baudelaire: “La modernité, c’est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l’art, dont l’autre moitié est l’éternel et l’immuable.” (“*modernité*, that is, the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, the other half of which is the eternal and the immutable”) (Mayne, 1964: 12).

However, despite the struggle of defining these historical periods in a strict way and according to univocal parameters, attempts of chronological periodization and division have been made also in relation to modernism and postmodernism as well as to Modern art and Postmodern art. Thus, from an art historical point of view, remarkable is the distinction that the American art

¹ In 1984 Howard Becker identified the definition of art with the set of interactions between people and objects within different systems. He therefore introduced the concept of ‘artworld’, i.e. “all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art” (Becker, 1984: 34).

historian Douglas Crimp makes in his *On the Museum's Ruins*. The beginning of modernism², Crimp says, "is often located in Manet's work of the early 1860s, in which painting's relationship to its art-historical precedents was made shamelessly obvious" (Crimp, 1995: 48). On the contrary, Crimp continues, "one of the first applications of the term postmodernism to the visual arts occurs in Leo Steinberg's "Other Criteria" in the course of a discussion of Robert Rauschenberg's transformation of the picture surface into what Steinberg calls a "flatbed", referring, significantly, to a printing press. This flatbed picture plane is an altogether new kind of picture surface, one that effects, according to Steinberg, "the most radical shift in the subject matter of art, the shift from nature to culture" (Crimp, 1995: 47). Moreover, a similar perspective on Modern art is that of the art critic, media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys, who in *The Topology of Contemporary Art* recognizes the fundamental notion of Modern art in creativity, i.e. the act of eradicating traditions, breaking with conventional systems and destroying old art. According to Groys, in fact, the practice of the historical avant-garde was based on the formula "negation is creation" (Groys, 2008: 70).

A historical definition: contemporary art between social phenomena and economic factors

A remarkable reflection on the relationship between contemporary art and historical periodization has furthermore been made by the 2004 symposium held at the University of Pittsburgh with the title *Modernity ≠ Contemporaneity: Antinomies of Art and Culture after the Twentieth Century*. Symposium's aim was to discuss common tendencies and specific features of modernity, postmodernity and contemporaneity with an explicit focus on art. The result of this debate has been the formulation of three antinomies that seem to govern contemporary life and, as a consequence, contemporary art practices. The first antinomy is strictly dependent on the phenomenon of globalization in relation to: hegemonic action towards multicultural manifestations, control of time in the face of increasing asynchronous temporalities, and abuse of both natural and virtual resources. The second antinomy is related to the inequity between people and social classes, that grows together with the continuous tension between domination and liberation's drives. Finally, the third antinomy is represented by the economy of spectacle, representation and immediate communication of both images and information, within closed and extremely specialized communities of interests (Smith, 2008). Once more, these three antinomies make evident the problematic and manifold nature of contemporaneity as historical period, in general, and contemporary art as historical phenomenon, in particular. In the attempt of formulating a coherent definition, some scholars such as Alexander Alberro identify contemporary art as the result of a

² In 1997, Referring to the 1960 Clement Greenberg's "Modernist Painting", Arthur Danto quotes Manet as the first modernist painter and he furthermore says about modernism: "Modernism in art marks a point before which painters set about representing the world the way it presented itself, painting people and landscapes and historical events just as they would present themselves to the eye. With modernism, the conditions of representation themselves become central, so that art in a way becomes its own subject" (Danto, 1997: 7).

series of happenings of previous periods (Alberro, 2009). Others, such as curator Nicolas Bourriaud, carry on the idea of contemporary art as an altered continuation of modern art (Bourriaud, 2009). Others, again, such as the art historian Kitty Zijlmans, approach the genesis of contemporary art as a worldwide phenomenon, linked to the emergence of a multitude of modernities in reaction to the past and to the dynamics of the Western world (Zijlmans, van Damme, 2010).

When talking about contemporary art, in fact, an additional point needs to be made in relation to the concept of Western and non-Western art. In general, the definition of what is historically modern, postmodern and contemporary depends on the fact of embracing certain aesthetic conventions that reflect parameters of Modernism, Postmodernism or Contemporary, as recognized by the Western world. In their *World Art Studies* Ketty Zijlmans and Wilfrien van Damme introduce the concept of world art studies in order to push the definition of art outside the Western borders, without however limiting this definition only to the non-West. World art studies has to be intended in reference to its inclusiveness rather than to its possible exclusiveness, “being concerned with art in all its manifestations across time and space and paying attention also to the topics of what has been suggested might be called global art history” (Zijlmans, van Damme, 2010: 4). The latter is a term introduced by Hans Belting in his 2006 *Contemporary art and the Museum in the Global Age*. In this text the art historian stresses the necessity to enlarge the understanding of art, switching from the contemporary to the global. With global art he aims at considering a broader context, that “invades the place of former ethnic production” (Belting, 2006: 20) as well. In his survey for a museum conference at the Vatican in December 2006, Belting declared that in the last fifty years, a lot of redefinitions of art production have been suggested: “There was the great rebellion in the 1960s, which some understand as the rise of a second modernity. Classical exhibition art, staged in the “white cube,” was devalued, and performance became one of the art world’s major activities. In a next step, we saw the introduction of new media such as video installation and so on. But such turns usually happened in the Western art world while now newcomers from the former “third world” are taking the lead in the course of events. At least, nothing of similar importance in terms of its impact on the market is present in the West. Take only the Chinese invasion and its hot acclamation by Western collectors” (Belting, 2006: 21).

The contemporary artistic practices of China and non-Western countries are taken into consideration from other scholars as well, such as Jonathan Hay who in his paper *Double Modernity, Para-Modernity* highlights the concept of double modern and para-modern in relation to the art of China and Africa when compared to the Western art world (Hay, 2008). In particular, contemporary Chinese art is concurrently shaped within different yet interconnected places that drastically change their meaning when artists, curators or other professionals interact with them. In an essay dedicated to contemporary Chinese art, art historian Wu Hung suggests the development

of a sort of spatial model for contemporary Chinese art, derived from the draw of the abovementioned interactions within spaces. This could become helpful to interpret a burgeoning “international contemporary art” in today’s world, able to comprehend also local and national brands of contemporary art. Hung furthermore explains how the terms modern and contemporary in Chinese culture “indicate two different ways to contextualize this art, one temporal and diachronic, the other spatial and synchronic” (Hung, 2008: 292). Postwar Chinese art, for instance, distinguishes itself from Western models because of sociopolitical events such as the Cultural revolution and the Tiananmen incident which caused a sort of “pattern of rupture” with Western art. Chinese art became a sort of global phenomenon around the beginning of the 1990s, when Chinese contemporary artists appeared in both the Forty-fifth Venice Biennale and mainstream Western art magazines. At that time Chinese contemporary art started to be decontextualized from the sociopolitical happenings of China and re-contextualized in a different sociopolitical setting, which determined a reconstruction of Chinese contemporary art’s definition and identity. On one hand, this caused the recognition of Chinese contemporary art by a global audience and on the other hand the erasure of the earlier historical significance of this art which, in forms such as performance, site-specific art and installation, it is meant to carry on certain specific social schemes of China.

The freedom of art from patriarchal and non-Eurocentric ideals is what Arthur Danto, in his famous *After the End of Art*, associates with the end of art history, i.e. not the end of art in itself but, instead, a synonym of emancipation and development (Danto, 1997). Explicative and descriptive definitions of contemporary art are clearly based on art history as the main reference system. In her 2009 publication *What is Contemporary Art?*, Terry Smith offers an overview and a comprehensive historical definition of the contemporary art tendencies gained during her travel, in 2000, between Australia, the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States. According to the author, there are three core meanings of the term ‘contemporary’: the immediate, in relation to a sort of “present tension”; the contemporaneous, as the process of “coming into being at the same time as other beings, including other art”; and the cotemporal, as “coexistence of different temporalities, of different ways of *being* in relation to time [...] what is to be *with* time” (Smith, 2009: 2). Smith refutes the possibility of talking about contemporary time, since this would presume a sort of unity. Indeed, the reality of today is populated by a manifold series of temporalities, respectively linked to elements such as, for instance, place, subjectivity or sociality and undoubtedly related to the here and now. We therefore talk about contemporaneity (Smith, 2009).

After minimalism and conceptualism no well-defined art styles have reached such a prominence to be candidate as dominant styles of the period³. In the aftermath of this crisis,

³ In this regards, Danto says that contemporary art “designates less a period than what happens after there are no more periods in some master narrative of art, and less a style of making art than a style of using styles” (Danto, 1997: 10).

contemporary art takes the shape of installation, large-scale photography, video and digital projection and the word 'contemporary' means being out of time rather than being with time. Nonetheless, within this condition of being out of time, quite different ways of making art and communicating it take place. Inside the international panorama of contemporary art, Smith's historical analysis identifies three main currents. The first one "manifests the embrace [...] of the rewards and downsides of neoliberal economics, globalizing capital, and neoconservative politics" (Smith, 2009: 7) and embraces different trends. One of these trends is named "Retro-sensationalism" and includes those artists such as Damien Hirst and others yBas (young British artists), Julian Schnabel, Jeff Koons, in the United States as well as Takashi Murakami in Japan. A second, parallel, tendency existing within the same scene since the 1980s, is strictly linked to the role and action of modern art institutions – often labeled as contemporary art institutions – which try to adapt contemporary art tendencies to a modern story. Artists who can be included in this so-called "Remodernism" are, for instance, Richard Serra, Jeff Wall and Gerhard Richter. In addition, a combination of the two trends is eventually recognizable in the work of certain artists such as Matthew Barney, as well as architects such as Frank Gehry, Santiago Calatrava and Daniel Libeskind and culminates into what the author defines as a sort of art tsunami with the name of "Spectacularism" or "Spectacle Art and Architecture". The second current is determined by the postcolonial turn and it includes "a plethora of art shaped by local, national, anticolonial, independent, antiglobalization values (those of diversity, identity and critique)" (Smith, 2009: 7) and circulates within the range of, for instance, biennales, festivals and so on. Moreover, from 1989 the shift from modernity to contemporaneity occurs as reaction to economic and political changes due to globalization and capitalism. Some artists therefore engage themselves within practices related to public involvement and participation on a double level: either by developing sustainable relationships with the environment or by exploring the possibilities and the communicative structures of electronic media. The third current is eventually the result of a mix of characteristics of the two others, coming into existence after a generational change and being especially focused on the potentialities of media and virtual communication (Smith, 2009).

Nevertheless, another element to take into consideration for the definition of contemporary art is the world of auction houses and, as a consequence, the art market. The latter, in fact, represents one of the key factors in determining "brand art", i.e. successful art and, to some extent, often synonym of contemporary art. In order to understand the public-sale systems, in his 1984 *Art Worlds*, the American sociologist Howard Becker introduced six simple statements which help to clarify the mechanism behind the definition of successful art⁴. " (1) Effective demand is generated by people who will spend money for art. (2) What they demand is what they have learned to enjoy

⁴ In 2008 in his *The \$12 million Stuffed Shark* Donald Thompson explores as well the reality of the art market through a historical excursus of art dealers' action and auction houses' development, particularly stressing the concept of contemporary art as brand art.

and want, and that is a result of their education and experience. (3) Price varies with demand and quantity. (4) The works the system handles are those it can distribute effectively enough to stay in operation. (5) Enough artists will produce works the system can effectively distribute that it can continue to operate. (6) Artists whose work the distribution system cannot or will not handle find other means of distribution; alternatively, their work achieves minimal or no distribution” (Becker, 1984: 107). The first time that the word ‘contemporary’ appeared in the art market’s scene was in the 1960s in relation to some African art which did not clearly match the criteria of the Western modernism. However, specific departments for contemporary art have been established at least a decade after the term ‘contemporary’ was used for the first time, e.g. the early 1970s for Sotheby’s and the late 1980s for Christie’s. Auction houses have definitely come up beside modern and contemporary art museums in the mechanism of institutionalization of contemporary art, i.e. the process of transforming contemporary art into Contemporary Art. Nonetheless, museums undoubtedly experienced some difficulties in dealing with the contemporary nature of contemporary art, in relation to constraints such as cultural diversity, increasing inequity and asynchronous temporalities (Smith, 2009).

The definition of a specific market for contemporary art came into existence after World War II in the United States and exactly when contemporary American art started to be treated on a par with early modern European art. An important event was, for instance, the \$ 30,000 sale of Jackson Pollock’s *Autumn Rhythm* after the artist’s death in 1956 to the Metropolitan Museum. In the same year Sotheby’s New York had its first “Post-war Contemporary Art” sale. At that time the term ‘contemporary’ universally meant ‘modern’ and a more clear division in historical sections happened only around the 1990s, when auction houses developed the tendency of dividing their sales into sequences such as: impressionist, modern, postwar, and contemporary. Andy Warhol is worldwide recognized as the artist that determined the switch from modern to contemporary art and his works are generally included into the sales designated “postwar”. However, the logic of the market is just one of the many aspects stimulating the creation of contemporary art and to establish its value. Another important factor is, for instance, the circuit of biennales, festivals and contemporary art spaces. Here “alternative” contemporary art finds its privileged channel of diffusion, moved by a critical reflection on the advanced economies of the contemporary world. This is what Carlos Basualdo has called “new geographies of culture” (Basualdo, 2002), i.e. the proliferation of places that represent alternatives to museums and continuously enlarge the perception of the contemporary thinking about art. Indeed, confusion about meaning and identification of what contemporary art is, appears within the museum setting as well. Already for a long time museums struggle with the distinction and identification of modern and contemporary art. More than fifteen years ago, in his Mellon Lectures, Arthur Danto highlighted this issue, by stating that such a distinction between modern and contemporary art became clear in the New York’s art world between the 1970s and 1980s and that museums such as MoMA had to deal with the fact

that that modern art they were exhibiting had lost its contemporary relevance⁵. Furthermore, today, the responsibility of modern art museums is to decide whether or not they are going to acquire contemporary art – that is not modern – making the turn towards contemporaneity, or if they will keep their focus on modernity, becoming a historical museum of modernism (Danto, 1997). In 2000, with the publication *Modern Contemporary: Art at MoMA since 1980* the museum tried to find an answer to this issue by considering contemporary art as the natural prosecution of its modern narrative and thus subject of collection.

In regards to the importance of such historical justification and canonization, significant is the statement that the art critic, historian and philosopher Donald Kuspit makes in his recent essay *The Contemporary and the Historical*: “there has always been more contemporary than historical art – or, to put it more broadly, there has always been more contemporaneity than historicity – but this fact only became emphatically explicit in modernity” (www.artnet.com Accessed: May, 17, 2013). The attempt of art history to control contemporaneity and the flow of events, by trying to substitute its incidental character with prefixed systems of value, is eventually torn apart by the nature of contemporary art itself, i.e. that of continuously establishing new systems of value within a constantly changing scenario. Indeed, until this point the debate on the contemporary art definition has been conducted in a historical perspective but a deeper analysis reveals much more. What happens, in fact, when we do approach contemporary art in a more philosophical way, and we do appreciate its performative character and, therefore, real contemporary relevance?

Towards a philosophical dimension: the performative nature of contemporary art

According to Boris Groys and his *Topology of Contemporary Art* “Today, the term ‘contemporary art’ does not designate art that is produced in our time. Rather, today’s contemporary art demonstrates the way in which the contemporary as such shows itself – the act of presenting the present. In this respect contemporary art is different from Modern art, which was directed toward the future and it is different also from Postmodern art, which was a historical reflection on the Modern project. Contemporary ‘contemporary art’ privileges the present with respect to the future and to the past” (Groys, 2008:71). In addition: “what differentiates contemporary art from previous times is only the fact that the originality of a work in our time is not established depending on its own form, but through its inclusion in a certain context, in a certain installation, through its topological inscription” (Groys, 2008: 74). The latter therefore comes to be a

⁵ In *After the End of Art* Danto precisely says that “somewhere between then and now a distinction emerged between the contemporary and the modern. The contemporary was no longer modern save in the sense of “most recent,” and the modern seemed more and more to have been a style that flourished from about 1880 until sometime in the 1960s. It could even be said, I suppose, that some modern art continued to be produced after that--art which remained under the stylistic imperatives of modernism--but that art would not really be contemporary, except again in the strictly temporal sense of the term” (Danto, 1997: 11).

peculiarity of contemporary art which produces the thematic organization of contexts in a way that transcends the degree of the single artistic object⁶. In an interview published by ARTMargins in February 1999, Boris Groys traces a synthetic route of the development of the installation practice in art, from Eastern European artists who used installation to visualize a sociopolitical system of society, to a series of artists from East Asia, Cuba and other countries, especially the United States, that started to work with this medium in an always more extensive way. These artists initiated alternative collections-installations within museums – a collection within a collection – going beyond the already existing collections into which they could not be included for a series of reasons, e.g. dimensions and categorization (www.artmargins.com Accessed: February, 21, 2013). They eventually surpassed the museum space to populate the urban scenario of metropolitan life, where the use of art in itself comes to be object of exhibition.

Installation can therefore be defined as the quintessential art form: “the installation is for our time what the novel was for the nineteenth century” – Groys claims – “The novel was a literary form that included all other literary forms of that time; the installation is an art form that includes all other contemporary art forms” (Groys, 2008: 77). The acknowledgement of installation as leading form of contemporary art is justified by emphasizing its eclectic character and the fact that it demonstrates a certain selection and a certain logic of inclusion and exclusion, with the specific aim of telling a new, different story all the time. The installation space can combine different types of images and objects of contemporary culture, e.g. drawings, paintings, photographs, videos, films, recordings, texts, objects and so on. Its material support is the space itself which can take the shape of a museum, a gallery, as well as a private home or a public building. Thus, it is difficult to compare installations with each other while the site-specific participatory relationships installation/viewers guarantee that they never exist twice, representing instead an always “new” work. If not, one should create a new installation as place of comparison and this implies that there is no outside position towards installation, “installation is in itself, [...] a space of decision making” (Groys, 2008: 78). Besides, installation is both a symbol of lifestyle culture and a sort of non-place. In fact, if from one hand installations recreate *ambients* that include the audiences and stimulate their perceptions and senses, from the other hand they are completely different from the places that they constitute⁷. To say it also with Bourriaud, installations can additionally be intended as cognitive tools, places of meeting and encounters, i.e. sort of convivial spaces. While, in fact, the role of installations is that of working in postproduction, in reference to the practice of re-elaborating contemporary instances of material culture within a specific space, the audience is invited to take part in the construction of

⁶ A similar observation on contemporary art is made by Nikos Papastegiadis. For him, in fact, the importance of the context in contemporary art is generated by the fact that installation exists as a sort of mapping, which creates pathways throughout the networks of contemporary life, in a logic of placement and displacement (Papastegiadis, 2008).

⁷ On this purpose, in their 2003 publication *Installation Art. The New Millenium*, De Oliveira, Oxley and Petry label installations as heterotopias. According to Michel Foucault, heterotopias are “something like counter-sites, a kind of effective enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites which can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (Foucault, 1967: 3).

meaning (Bourriaud, 2002), becoming effective part of the work. The nature of installations is therefore mainly collaborative and they are often referred to as 'projects', a term that reminds to the characteristic of process, i.e. a sort of never ending work-in-progress (de Oliveira, Oxley, Petry, 2003).

The convivial value of installation together with its project-based quality, emphasizes the performative and theatrical nature of contemporary art. In fact, by becoming active participant of the work, the viewer changes the work itself all the time, in a different and not reproducible way. In his work *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, Norberg-Schulz refers to "Environmental Character which is the essence of place" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980: 7). This, in combination with space and architecture generates 'lived space' (Norberg-Schulz, 1980: 11) holistically experienced by the individual. Place therefore becomes "a qualitative, total phenomenon which we cannot reduce to any of its properties" (Norberg-Schulz, 1980: 7). In a 2005 article entitled *Embodying the Site: the Here and Now in Site-Specific Dance Performance*, Victoria Hunter explores the concept of the 'here and now' in the creation of site-specific dance performance. Hunter explains how the simple act of entering a space engages people in an interactive process that she calls "transaction". The latter is a conscious practice of interactions with the space: an inside/outside interface occurs like a sort of corporeal exchange between the site and the individual. In fact, the site-specific audiences bring to the performance's site an external corpus of information through which the interaction with the work is shaped and that completely modifies both the space and the work in itself. On this purpose, Hunter observes that "The final performance outcome presents a collaboration between the choreographed 'there and now', as their actual real-time lived experience of the site feeds into the performance on a moment-by-moment basis. The embodied work is then absorbed by audience members while they are simultaneously engaged in their own corporeal experiencing of the here and now resulting from being in the place of performance. [...] the final resonances of the site, the work, and the ephemeral place of performance are internalized and carried with the audience members, consigned to memory and surfacing occasionally as a remembered 'there and then' in a series of future 'here and now' moments⁸" (Hunter, 2005: 380). The space of installation, performance, and exhibition, is therefore filled with the presence of actors, e.g. active audiences⁹ that, to say it with Judith Butler, make such space public (Butler, 2011), but also contemporary and not reproducible at the same time.

⁸ For Michael Shanks, the production of meaning in site-specific performance is generated through the "friction" (Shanks, 2013: 38) of site and scenography. Performance's characteristic is that of quickly disappearing, i.e. of being a phenomenon with a short, circumscribed, temporality: hence the parallelism with archeology as science that works with remains. However, in Shanks' perspective, the role of the audience seems subordinated to the power of the performance itself which "can embody, enact, illustrate and indicate without, however, any need of an audience" (Shanks, 2013: 39).

⁹ The idea of a strict connection between audience and place of site-specific works is also recently validated by scholars such as Joanne Gleave. Gleave stresses both the action of change actuated by the audience of a performance on the performance itself and the immersive experience provided by site-specific works which transform the audience from viewer to participant and actor (Gleave, 2011).

A remarkable example in this regard is the installation *The Maybe*, a performance enacted in March 2013 at MoMA in New York. The famous actress Tilda Swinton was reposing in a glass box for the whole day in the exhibition space and the audience could observe her sleeping. At a first look, the visitors of the museum that had the chance of experiencing and taking part in the performance were merely spectators. In fact, they were invited to observe the actress' sleep and the only allowed action for them was to move around the glass box to follow Swinton's movements during her sleep. However, a deeper analysis reveals that through their presence, observation, and participation, the MoMA visitors made the installation possible, contributing to the creation of the piece. MoMA said in a statement, "An integral part of *The Maybe's* incarnation at MoMA in 2013 is that there is no published schedule for its appearance, no artist's statement released, no museum statement beyond this brief context, no public profile or image issued. Those who find it chance upon it for themselves, live and in real-shared-time: now we see it, now we don't" (www.abcnews.go.com Accessed, June, 6, 2013).

The performativity, i.e. contemporary relevance, of an artwork is therefore determined by the immediacy of its interaction with both the context and the people that take part in it. Interactions consequently generate an exchange of information between the space, the work and the active audience or, to say it with one word: interactions generate networks. Lastly, one could argue that contemporary art is synonym of *installation* and *performance* – where installation is the *act of installing* and performance is not to be necessarily meant as performance art, but as the *act of enacting and embodying the space* – able to generate a chain effect of participatory actions and exchanges in a specific, circumscribed temporality, and followed by the establishment of networks. At this point, a stimulating question is spontaneously raised: how do collecting institutions deal with this definition of contemporary art and what is the role of collections in this regards?

Conclusions

The definition of contemporary art can be approached from a both historical and philosophical point of view. In the first case, contemporary art is coincident with those manifestations that can find a precise collocation in art history and whose beginning and characteristics are linked to economic and sociopolitical phenomena developed from the end of the 1980s onwards, in the globalized world. In the second case, contemporary art is not coincident with the creation of specific products, but with the practices, discourses and attitudes that complement them. When approached within a philosophical dimension, contemporary art is coincident with installation and performance: it is a site-specific action of engagement and active participation enacted through art. What happens in the aftermath of this action, and if/how it can be preserved, communicated and researched will be the next inquiry of this thesis.

2.

“Museum Theory and Contemporary Art: processes, definitions and developments”

*“You can be a museum or you can be modern,
but you can’t be both”
(Gertrude Stein, 1947)*

Introduction

Starting from the approach adopted before towards the definition of contemporary art, i.e. preferring its performative nature, this chapter investigates the dichotomy that exists between such a definition and some fundamentals of museum theory, with a particular attention to the traditional museums’ function of collecting. First step of the discussion is the analysis of the process of musealization and its relation to contemporary art; second stage is the examination of museums definitions and contemporary art preservation which links the theoretical discussion to the practical work in the museum field. It follows the analysis of a series of information gained from the study of collection policies and interviews with museum professionals of four institution in the Netherlands: Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam and Museum de Fundatie in Zwolle/Heino. This leads up to the issue of collecting contemporary art and to the theory of contemporary collecting. Finally, the analysis of the latter and its confrontation with the performative nature of contemporary art suggest a critical rethinking of museums functions: in particular, with regard to contemporary art, documenting is shown to perform a vital role.

The process of musealization

One of the central pieces of the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is Picasso’s portrait of Gertrude Stein. The painting was donated to the museum by Stein herself in 1947, and it was the first of Picasso’s works to enter the Metropolitan’s collection. On this

occasion, at the question on why she did not give the painting to the MoMA¹⁰, Stein's cryptic explanation was that a museum can be either a museum or it can be modern, but it can't be both (Tinterow, Stein, 2010). Already in 1947, this statement stressed a certain dichotomy between contemporary art – at that time referred to as modern art – and museums (as a museum of modern art would have been a contradiction by definition¹¹). Indeed, by substituting the term modern with contemporary, the same statement can be applied to contemporary art museums. One could therefore say: you can be a museum or you can be contemporary, but you can't be both. In fact, since the eighteenth century, museums have displayed works that have withstood the test of time and contemporary art, by definition, has not withstood the test of time: the historical period that it covers is from now on (Fox, 2005). Electing artworks as museum-worthy means, amongst others, qualifying them as objects that need to be preserved for what Philip Fisher has called “the future's past”¹². This past is that of art history and implies that artworks that enter museums collections are projected into the future and recognized as role players of a predicted history. Besides, one could argue that museums that collect contemporary art perform a role similar to that performed by the art market for contemporary works: collecting and pricing such works is like betting on their importance in the future (Altshuler, 2005). In 2001, on the occasion of the 7th Istanbul Biennale, the Scandinavian duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset provided a clever and ironical reference to Gertrude Stein's statement. The artists showed a white cube building coming out of the ground; above a door there was the sign “TEMPORARY ART”. Through a simple visual joke, these words defined what the work was: the absence of the first three letters to form the word ‘contemporary’ suggested that the building was a contemporary art museum (Smith, 2009). Did this artistic intervention constitute a mere provocation? According to the definition of contemporary art given in the previous chapter, one could argue that the term contemporary is semantically close to the term temporary, and that contemporary art should not be permanently collected. But how would museum theory deal with such criticism?

Within museological research, the contemporary component yields some interesting issues that need to be taken into account. One of them is related to the process of musealization. The *Key Concept of Museology* edited by André Desvallées and François Mairesse and published through ICOM, provides the following definition of musealization: “From a strictly museological point of view, musealisation is the operation of trying to extract, physically or conceptually, something from its natural or cultural environment and giving it a museal status, transforming it into a

¹⁰ “The Museum of Modern Art in new York was originally grounded in the principle that, to be both a museum and be modern, it must not hold works of art in its collection once they have attained a certain age” (Weiss 2005: 48).

¹¹ Stein's view is still not a dead one. In 1999, Ernst Gombrich said: “I think that a museum of modern art is a contradiction in terms. Museums used to exist to preserve the treasures of the past and to save them”. Quoted in Putnam, J., (2001), *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, New York: Thames and Hudson, p.184.

¹² Fisher, P., (1991), *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in the Culture of Museums*, Ney York, Oxford University Press, p.6. Similar connections between art history and the museum object have been made by Donald Preziosi in his 2003 *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums, and the Phantasms of Modernity*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, p.18-19.

musealium or 'museum object', that is to say, bringing it into the museal field" (ICOM, 2010: 50, www.icom.museum, accessed: September, 1, 2012). But what do the words museal and musealium precisely mean? A renowned statement of 1967 by Theodor Adorno says that "the German word museal [museumlike] has unpleasant overtones. It describes objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the process of dying. ... Museum and mausoleum are connected by more than phonetic association. Museums are like the family sepulchers of works of art" (Adorno, 1967). The definition of Adorno, quite severe in tone, qualifies both museums and museum objects with a negative connotation; however, according to further developments in the museological field, the terms musealium and musealization are not associated to the object's death. On the contrary, their meaning and function are related to a process based on the attribution of meaning, where museums act as both interpreter and facilitator, and the object's role is that of carrier of information.

The term musealium for museum objects was coined in 1969 by the Czech museologist Zbynek Stránský who made explicit the difference between objects and museum objects: they are coincident from an ontological viewpoint, but different from a semantic one (van Mensch, 1992). In fact, according to Peter van Mensch, a museum object is definable as such because of the transfer from its original context (primary context) to a new, museum based reality (secondary context). "A museum object is not just an object in a museum. It is a collected (selected), classified, conserved, and documented object. As such it has become either a source for research or an exhibit when put on display" (van Mensch, 1992: 111). In this respect, collecting can be defined as the decision "to remove certain objects from the onward flow of time and to bestow upon them a permanent existence" (Meijer, van Mensch, 2011: 18), i.e. to musealize them. This is what Peter van Mensch and Leontine Meijer-van Mensch define as "*transfer of culture*" from the past to the present and the future (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2011). Moreover, according to Jan Dolak¹³ the definition of museums is strictly dependent on the definition of the musealization process: "A museum is a permanent, non-profit institution open to public which deals with musealisation" (Dolak, 2008: 1). In addition, "(...) musealisation, as a scientific process, necessarily includes the essential museum activities: preservation (selection, acquisition, collection management, conservation), research (including cataloguing) and communication (via exhibition, publications, etc.) or, from another point of view, the activities around the selection, collection and display of what has become musealia" (ICOM, 2010: 51, www.icom.museum, accessed: September, 1, 2012). According to the ICOM Statutes, adopted during the 21st General Conference in Vienna, Austria, in 2007: "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible

¹³ PhD, Head of UNESCO Chair of museology and world cultural heritage of Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University, Brno, Republic of Czech. Intervention at the International Academic conference "MUSEOLOGY – MUSEUM STUDIES in the XXI century: issues of studies and teaching" in Saint Petersburg, 2008.

heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM, 2007). One may ask whether this definition is exhaustive: whether it comprehends and clearly defines what a museum is.

Museums definitions and preservation of contemporary art

The debate around museums definitions is complex and, obviously, a never ending process¹⁴. The reasons lay in the fact that museums are institutions that deal with material culture and their focus is subject to continuous changes, which evolve together with the phenomenological developments of society. A recent publication edited by Ann Davis, André Desvalées and François Mairesse extensively treats the question of museums definitions by giving voice to several theorists and professionals of the museum field¹⁵. Despite some differences in the choice of the words meant to formulate them, the series of definitions suggested in the publication present a common denominator: museums are generally defined around the unavoidable occurrence of collections (Davis, Desvalées, Mairesse, 2010). However, is collecting an essential museum's function each time? And furthermore, are museums' purposes always clear with regard to contemporary art? An interesting example in this regard, is an article by Andras Szanto published in 2011 in *The Art Newspaper* that analyzes the mission statements of leading US art museums, pinpointing how confusing is their purpose: “Just as striking is the eclecticism of the mission rhetoric. Words describing core functions – collect, educate, exhibit, preserve – do stand out, understandably. However, only the word art appears more than 60 times – that is, at least once per mission statement. No other word comes close. Statistically speaking, the words are more likely to be different than similar. The fractured rhetorical landscape may reflect a fragile consensus about the purposes of art museums” (www.theartnewspaper.com, Accessed: September, 7, 2012). Besides, proceeding through a syllogistic observation and keeping the focus on contemporary art, the process of musealization and, consequently, the definition of ‘museum’ suffer from some limitations. A spontaneous and immediate question might be: Is it possible in the first place to collect, i.e. to musealize, something that is ‘contemporary’? The first obstacle in doing so could be an insufficient distance in time regarding the subject of analysis that is ‘contemporary’ and the consequent risk of freezing the evolution of this contemporary component in itself, while executing the process of musealization. But a major problem is undoubtedly related to the concept of preservation. Is it possible to preserve contemporary art at all? Does not the artwork change

¹⁴ In this respect, François Mairesse says: “[...] we must admit that an overly strict definition of museum would only clarify a small area of the many dimensions of this lively and promising institution when we consider that the main feature of the museum is its driving force, not its external characteristic” (Mairesse, 2010: 58).

¹⁵ Davis, A., Mairesse, F., Desvalées, A., (2010), *What is a museum?*, Verlag Dr.C. Muller-Straten Munchen Kunzweg, 23, 81243 Munich, Germany and the International Committee for Museology of the International Council of Museums, 2010. Definitions of museums in this publication are suggested by: Gary Edson, André Gob, Lynn Maranda, Marc Maure, Tereza M. Scheiner, Tomislav Šola, Bernard Deloche, Jennifer Harris, Ivo Maroevic, Olga Nazor, Andres Sansoni, Martin R. Schärer, Marc Maure.

fundamentally into a non-contemporary object? Preservation, together with communication and research, constitute the traditional pillars of museology. In the case of a practical and in some situations cognitive impossibility of preserving and subsequently collecting contemporary art, the fundamentals of the contemporary art museum (i.e. gallery) are questioned.

In 2005, the publication *Collecting the New* edited by Bruce Altshuler¹⁶, tackled the topic of collection and preservation of contemporary art through an anthology of texts of researchers and museum professionals from worldwide renowned institutions. In one of this essays, research scholar Glenn Wharton clarifies the responsibilities of conservation as follows: “As defined by the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), conservation is the profession devoted to the preservation of cultural property for the future. According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1984, the task of conservator-restorers is to comprehend the material aspect of objects of historic and artistic significance in order to prevent their decay. [Additionally,] A 1983 definition of conservation offered by the United Kingdom Institute for Conservation (UKIC) defines conservation as the means by which the true nature of an object is preserved. [...] In fine arts conservation, the integrity or true nature of the object is linked to both the “artist’s intent” and the original (authentic) appearance of the work” (Wharton, 2005: 164). The mission of conservation is therefore that of safeguarding the object’s integrity, a practice that appears problematic in relation to contemporary art for a series of reasons. One of them is, for instance, the fact that contemporary art’s objects are often made by materials subject to deterioration and/or conceived to be deteriorated over time. In this case, the artists’ will is the main term of reference for conservators, who have to prioritize such will to the mere object’s sake. The delicate role of contemporary art conservators can be therefore better understood through cases such as, for instance, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam that after the death of Barnett Newman came into conflict with the artist’s recommended conservator who used a paint roller to repair a work. In another circumstance, a section of fat in a Joseph Beuys sculpture was replaced after it melted in an overheated showcase in 1977. In this process the artist was not consulted and this was unfortunate since Beuys, whose works incorporated the degeneration process many times, might have accepted the melted fat as integral part of the work (Wharton, 2005).

Other examples are represented by the wide range of contemporary artworks that belong to the field of media art and therefore use technological supports that quickly become obsolete. This last point is especially evident in works such as videoart installations, which present a series of issues in relation to both conservation and subsequent reinstallation. In the abovementioned anthology, the destiny of technology-based art is widely discussed and a significant point is risen: duplication is a strategy of conservation and documentation is key for reinstallation. In this regards,

¹⁶ Bruce Altshuler is director of the program in Museum Studies at the Graduate School of Arts and Science of New York University.

remarkable is a statement of the videoartist Bill Viola, who writes: “In a world where the conditions are constantly changing as new systems replace the old (the consumer’s nightmare), where material recorded on older formats may not be able to be played or recovered (the conservator’s nightmare), the key to survival seems to lie with an endless cycle of reproduction – *copying as preservation*” (Iles, Huldish, 2005: 76). In fact, in technology-based art the deterioration process of the support’s materials can only be postponed, but not completely stopped and such risk obviously represents a problem for collecting institutions, i.e. museums. Furthermore, the scarcity of new-media art in museum collections is often cause of a sort of crisis of collection and hence of cultural memory. In fact, the nature of such works makes it difficult to collect them; they are, at the same time, quite easily replicable and artists’ main concern is to make them accessible rather than rare (Dietz, 2005). But do reproduction and reinstallation represent an issue for media art only?

Benjamin’s argument of aura and its Duchampian contra-theory of aura’s expiration can offer an answer to this question. While in 1936 Walter Benjamin stated the difference between original and copies, consisting in the lack of an aura in the works mechanically reproduced (Benjamin, 1936), Marcel Duchamp stated the contrary. He firstly proved how editing and repeated representation are not peculiarities of video installation only, and secondly demonstrated that reproduction reinforces artworks in general, since their aura essentially falls away after a decade as a consequence of the change of context in which the artwork has been produced (Iles, Huldish, 2005). In other words, one could argue that after ten years of ‘reposing’ in a museum collection an artwork is not contemporary anymore. Besides, this assumption is practically experienced by several museums of modern art and galleries in relation to the practice of installations re-installment.

Contemporary art and museums: only practical issues?

A series of interviews with museum professionals – i.e. directors, heads of collections and curators – conducted between January and March 2013 in the Netherlands, pointed out how the distinction between modern and contemporary art in museums is neither unequivocal nor distinct. The issue of collecting and preserving contemporary art appears especially delicate in relation to installations. The museums considered are Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam and Museum de Fundatie in Zwolle/Heino. The first three museums have been selected according to the vastness and importance of their collections, named as collections of both modern and contemporary art¹⁷. In particular, Stedelijk Museum, whose reopening after a decade signed one of the most important

¹⁷ Boijmans collections include also old art.

cultural events of the year 2012 in the Netherlands, owns the most renowned collections of modern art and design of the country. The reason for the temporary closing down of the museum has been due to building's refurbishment and, supposedly also to collections' reinterpretation, with the dual aim of: focusing especially on contemporary art in new acquisitions and bringing the museum to the top, again – i.e. giving it that international prominence that it had apparently lost, together with a connotation as museum of the future. Already in 2008 the museum had begun its revision process on a policy level. The aim was to bridge the collection of modern art – backbone and historical reference – with the contemporary tendency of exhibition making, in order to avoid the risk of becoming a mere exhibition machine. According to the museum's head of collection and presentations Nicole Delissen, both elements are considered essential for the core entity of the museum. A division between the two may exist on a content level but not on the level of the museum action in itself. The dichotomy between collection and exhibition as that between modern and contemporary art is considered apparent and not concrete, since the museum works on both elements. These are diversified in the collection policy exclusively for practicality (Delissen, 25-10-12). The fourth museum is finally an interesting example of the mix of old, modern and contemporary art collections, in part showed within a Middle Age building: Kasteel het Nijenhuis in Heino¹⁸. The latter represents a special ground for the reflection on the definition of contemporary art, other than offering examples of installations of both modern and contemporary artists coexisting within the same space, i.e. the museum's sculpture garden.

According to both interviews' outcomes and collection policies' analysis, the division between modern art and contemporary art in the abovementioned museums is equivocal and in some cases, vague. In the four museums, the general definition of contemporary art is shaped within historical borders and around phenomena that have embodied global relevance. Besides, the eventual division between modern and contemporary artists within the collection is made according to historical denominators. The latter can be related to whether or not the artist is alive, or to the contemporary relevance of his/her artistic practice in relation to the museums missions. The current Stedelijk Museum's attitude towards contemporary art is, for instance, the fact of defining collection areas within the globalized contemporary art world: more precisely, the fact of being artists driven and involved in some social concerns such as gender debate and geographical connections (Stedelijk Museum Collectieplan, 2013). Van Abbemuseum's collection policy, is focused on the three principles of 'agency', 'transparency' and 'dissemination' which are referred to as principles to be translated into all layers of the museum organization – both artistic content and operation (Van Abbemuseum Collectieplan, 2013). The policy plan furthermore addresses three specific areas, i.e. art and history, art and economy, art and identity. According to the director Charles Esche, contemporary art is identified as a consequence of world wars, globalization and

¹⁸ A big part of the collection is also exhibited in the Palace a / d Blijmarkt, in Zwolle.

Internet's viral diffusion, as well as an effect of the end of the ideological battle between capitalism and socialism after 1989 (Esche, 05-02-13). By contrast, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen distinguishes the so-called 'classic modern art' of the early twentieth-century from the production following the World War II, although the label of 'postwar art' includes also some artists named as contemporary as well. Besides, special attention is given to media art (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Collectiebeidsplan, 2013-2016). The acquisitions' choices are mainly depended on and justified through the museum's history and its relation to the city of Rotterdam: i.e. a curator for contemporary art was assigned to the museum just in 1962-63, after the bombing and consequent reconstruction of the city (Mertens, 13-02-13). Lastly, Museum de Fundatie's collection is built around a private collection, i.e. the Dirk Hannema collection¹⁹, which constitutes both the starting point and the basis of the acquisition choices (Museum de Fundatie Collectieplan, 2013). What the museum currently collects depends on collaborative projects and specific exhibitions conceived in relation to the museum's mission (Keuning, 09-01-13).

Within these selection strategies, installations are especially perceived as challenging and, at the same time, tricky realities. In particular, during the abovementioned interviews with museum professionals, it appeared that two museums out of four, i.e. Museum de Fundatie and Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, have experienced main practical problems in relation to the maintenance and eventual re-exhibition of installations. The sculpture garden of Museum de Fundatie, for instance, hosts a series of installations of living artists that have been acquired according to specific occasions of cooperation with other parts. An interesting example is the installation *Ins Blaue* of the Dutch artist David Bade, that the museum acquired in collaboration with the pop festival Lowlands. Each year, during the three days of festival the sculpture becomes a central piece at the entrance of Lowlands and for the rest of the year it is hosted at the castle het Nijenhuis. In this regard, the museum director Ralph Keuning has highlighted the eventuality of dealing with practical problems of materials' preservation in a period of about ten years, as in the case of another installation of the UK artists Heringa / Van Kalsbeek's: *Prolong*. The latter is a sculpture bought in conjunction with the Dutch organization Mojo Concerts and its fabric appears already in a non-optimal condition (Keuning, 09-01-13). Similarly, according to the junior curator of modern and contemporary art Noor Mertens, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen has recently experienced some issues related to the reinstallation of artworks from the collection. Core problem is the lack of accurate documentation and the museum staff has therefore found it difficult to make decision regarding materials and or technological supports, e.g. in the specific case of videoart (Mertens, 13-02-13). Thus, one could argue that such practical problems effect the relationships that museums have with installations and, more generally, with contemporary art on a theoretical

¹⁹ Dirk Hannema was director of Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam in 1921 and collector. In 1958 he moved his collection into Kasteel Het Nijenhuis and in 1964 he donated it entirely to the Hannema-de Stuers Foundation (<http://www.museumdefundatie.nl> Accessed: June, 30, 2013).

level as well. Many of the practical difficulties experienced by museums that collect technology-based works are, in fact, those presented by contemporary art in general. As previously said, aside from the ephemeral or volatile materials that might be used to make them, contemporary artworks are often conceptual in nature, or coincident with experiences or happenings. They can be even recreated and altered for successive installation and adapted to the spatial constraints of a new venue. After de-installation, what remains of the works is the documentation material that complements them, as a sort of instructions and information for the reconstruction, i.e. reinstallation. As Justin Graham and Jill Sterett²⁰ state, these works “require what we refer to as an institutional memory; that is, an accurate account of the *experience of the art* from which it can be faithfully re-created at any time in the future”²¹ (Graham, Sterett, 1997 in www.cool.conservation-us.org, accessed: August, 25, 2013).

Several debates, conferences and research projects have been developed around the theme of conservation and preservation of contemporary art. One of these projects is that conducted in the Netherlands by INCCA (International Network for the Conservation of Contemporary Art), culminating in a symposium held in Amsterdam in 1997, with the title *Modern Art: Who Cares?*²² and followed by a publication. In the latter, deputy director and chief conservator Carol Stringari observed that the conservation concerns of temporary installations and performance art are related to the issue of what the buyer, e.g. the museum, is purchasing; this includes also the right to reinstall the work. During this process the collector, e.g. the museum, acquires both installation materials and documentation about the installation. Conservation can therefore be meant as documentation’s archiving (Stringari, 2005). In the case of absence or non-accurate presence of documentary information, the re-installation process becomes problematic and it might cause the final alteration of the work’s properties, i.e. the inevitable change and damage of the work. Nonetheless, the destruction of an artwork is not always followed by the total disappearing from memory. Reproduction and reconstructions, as well as photographs and other documented witnesses of the works can persist through time, offering the chance of reenacting the memory of the original work and/or creating a new narrative on it. The concept of lasting, in fact, is

²⁰ Already in 1997 Justin Graham and Jill Sterett offered guidelines for the preservation of technology-based art in *An Institutional Approach to the Collection care of electronic Art*.

²¹ One could argue that the recreation of the *experience of the art* is a rather difficult practice; to some extent even impossible. How can we, in fact, recreate an experience in the exact same way this has previously occurred? Graham and Sterett’s theory of recreation has to be interpreted in a flexible manner: in the respect of the evolution of the artworks themselves, i.e. considering their possible and/or mandatory changes over time; even accepting their eventual disappearing.

²² A second step and an update on the theme of conservation and preservation of contemporary art has been subsequently developed in the 2010 symposium “Contemporary Art: Who Cares?”, once more organized by INCCA at KIT (Royal Tropical Institute) in Amsterdam. (<http://www.incca.nl/contemporaryartwhocares>, Accessed: May, 3, 2013). The two symposia certainly proved the necessity of discussing the topic from a scientific viewpoint in relation to conservation and preservation techniques. Nonetheless, by inviting experts and professionals from the fields of museology and the humanities they also provided the chance to reflect upon the meaning of contemporary art in a more philosophical way. Lately, on June 27th 2013, a seminar focused on the impact of digital works in museums, on their management and preservation has been organized in the New Institute in Rotterdam by the Digital Art Force (DAF). (<http://www.li-ma.nl/en/2013/05/digital-art-force/#sthash.9nqIRXqw.dpuf>, Accessed: June, 30, 2013).

not necessarily related to the physical preservation of an artwork but, instead, to the continued appreciation by a big group of people, i.e. to its reputation (Becker, 1964): this is, perhaps, what can make artworks contemporary all the time²³. In terms of contemporary art – meaning installations and their performative aspect – documentation is not only a key factor for re-exhibiting, but its function seems even being coincident with that performed by collections. In other words, with regard to contemporary art, documenting seems becoming synonym of collecting.

Nevertheless, within museum theory, collection and documentation are two distinct functions and preservation can be identified as their common denominator. As previously mentioned, however, museum theory does not deal exclusively with object's preservation but with the wider mission of transmitting culture from both past and present to the future (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2011). The present, in particular, is the object of one of the most recent theories of museology: namely, contemporary collecting theory.

Contemporary collecting and contemporary art: what, when, and how to collect?

Introducing contemporary collecting is key for the analysis conducted in this thesis; it can be linked to contemporary art on a double level. In fact, if from one hand the discursivity around the theory of contemporary collecting for museum objects is a twenty-first century phenomenon²⁴, with regards to contemporary art the practice has a much older tradition – private collectors and galleries have always collected contemporary art in a time that was contemporary to the making of the work. From the other hand, the applicability of the theory to contemporary art, meant as installation and performance, rises some issues.

Unlike retrospective collecting practices, based on a certain time distance with the object to collect, contemporary collecting is related to those elements of contemporary culture that have a value in the present and might be therefore considered valuable also for the future. Historically, museums have always had a strong orientation on retrospective collecting: they used to respect an incubation period in order to create a sort of intellectual distance to the object to collect (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2011). According to Peter van Mensch and Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, “as to art, such an attitude may have serious financial consequences. If you wait too long,

²³ Reenacting the memory of an artwork is of course something else than recreating it in its original form, i.e. how the artwork appeared the first time that it was performed/installed. The memory of an artwork implies also the “letting go” of that original form, in favor of a new, different experience of the artwork.

²⁴ The discourse on contemporary collecting started to gain international acknowledgement at the beginning of the twenty-first century, although the first projects had been initiated already by the end of 1970s. In November 2007, delegates from nineteen countries gathered for the conference *Connecting Collecting* at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the Swedish museum network Samdok. The latter was founded in 1977 by the museums of cultural history who wished to cooperate on the collection of material geared to the present day. (<http://www.sverigemuseer.se/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/3494.pdf> Accessed: July, 4, 2013).

the work may be too expensive to buy” (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2011: 22). The difficulty of establishing the value of a contemporary artwork can be considerable on both economic and art historical point of view but private collectors and galleries have always been inclined to take the risk of buying contemporary art; by doing so, they contribute to the first stage of musealization. In fact, mostly due to the rather short life cycle of many contemporary artworks, museums that acquire contemporary art can specifically choose which aspect of the work they are going to preserve in relation to their collecting purpose. Thus, the data carried from the artwork varies according to whether the artwork is acquired directly from the artist or from a third part e.g. a private collector (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2011).

In an interview of January 1999 for *ARTMargins*, Boris Groys discusses the art museums’ logic of collecting, stressing developments and changes of focus over the last centuries. At the question “Does the collection shape the museum, or is it on the contrary the museum that determines the collection?” Groys replies with the following argument: “The art museum established itself as a collection of originals. It was conceived as a collection of objects that were not simply examples of something, but absolutely unique. For example, the Mona Lisa is in the museum not because it may serve as an example of a woman's portrait. The portrait of Mona Lisa represents only itself. In this sense the art museum differs sharply from other collections. A museum of natural history, for example, is not a collection of unique originals but a collection of examples. If a dinosaur is exhibited in such a museum, this dinosaur is merely an example of an entire species. The same is true for the library where one book is collected as an example of a much larger number of printed copies of the same volume. In the 20th century, there is a rupture in the understanding of the art museum, a rupture connected with Duchamp's ready-made and similar operations that employed examples from a series as unique objects. This rupture could arise only because initially the art museum was conceived as a collection of unique originals.” (www.artmargins.com Accessed: February, 21, 2013).

Such a shift in the rationale of collecting can be simultaneously seen in the diversification of art museums during the last decades of the twentieth century: while former nineteenth century art museums were restored, such as the Nationalgalerie in Berlin (re-opened in 2001), new museums were created to fill the gap between old and modern art collections, such as the Musée d’Orsay in Paris (opened in 1986), and the Neue Pinakothek in Munich (opened in 1981). At the same time, while an always bigger emphasis was given to the distinction between modern and contemporary art and a mix of different criteria was employed to legitimize the differentiation between collections, completely new museums were established to house the newest developments in art such as Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart (Berlin 1996), Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art (Helsinki 1998), Palais de Tokyo, and Site de Création Contemporaine (Paris 2001) (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2010). Furthermore, starting from the twentieth century, with a process

launched by the avant-garde – from Malevich's *Black square* that stated the impossibility "to paint the fat ass of Venus" anymore (Groys, 2002: 27), to Duchamp's *Fountain* and beyond – museums do not collect what they should collect, according to their own criteria, e.g. uniqueness, but what, according to these same criteria should not be collected – i.e. the advent of reproductions and reconstructions within the art museum's walls. Such an attitude is linked to what Groys refers to as "the self-contradictory expression 'Museum of Contemporary Art'" (www.artmargins.com Accessed: February, 21, 2013). The latter reflects the practice of historical representation that compels museums to collect objects which represent certain historical periods, including the contemporary one (Groys, 2008).

However, is it possible to musealize the performative nature of contemporary art? According to the definition of contemporary art suggested in the former chapter a first, immediate, answer would be negative: contemporary collecting is the practice of collecting objects that have a contemporary use, i.e. that are used and have value in the present. Contemporary art is, instead, something that is made in the present, in relation to a specific topological inscription; it might have value in the present and for the future, but is primarily conceived as communicative means or, saying it with the *Arts & Architecture Thesaurus*²⁵ (1990), as communicative artifact. The *Arts and Architecture Thesaurus* makes a distinction between two categories of artifacts: artifacts with a utilitarian purpose and communication artifacts created according to aesthetic, symbolic, or conceptual principles. Objects with a primary utilitarian purpose become communicative artifacts after the process of musealization. Art is, however, a communicative artifact in itself – i.e. not created with a utilitarian purpose but with the aim of communicating a message, perhaps even constituting that very message. One could then argue that its musealization occurs on a different level. Which level? That of documentation.

According to Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, a very intriguing phenomenon linked to contemporary collecting is the tendency of going beyond the traditional museological collecting, in favor of a methodology based on archival collecting. With regard to contemporary art, where the context performs a crucial role, the *ex-situ* de-contextualization that has always been done with objects is disrupted, and institutions that deal with contemporary art become a sort of archives or, at least, engage with the archival method (Meijer-van Mensch, 28-02-13). In relation to contemporary artworks, in fact, the elements that are subject to the logic of collecting are context, concept and process rather than three-dimensional objects themselves. At this point, in order to better explain the last assumption, it is necessary to introduce one of the core models of museum theory which identifies objects as data carriers. The model²⁶ distinguishes three layers of data:

²⁵ The *Art and Architecture Thesaurus* is a controlled vocabulary that describes items of art, architecture and material culture. The project started in the late 1970s and its first publication was in 1990.

²⁶ *Object as data carriers* was first published in Mensch, P. van (1992), *Towards a methodology of Museology*, (PhD thesis, University of Zagreb, 1992).

physical properties such as material, construction and design, that determines the objects' *structural identity*; functional properties, i.e. utility, and significance, that determine the objects' *functional identity*; and the objects' relationship to their context, which refers to both physical and conceptual environment, determining the objects' *contextual identity*. Besides, the model includes the objects' information value as the result of a historical process which occurs in three stages: invention, referred to as *conceptual identity*, i.e. the idea of the maker; realization, referred to as *factual identity*, i.e. the realized objects with their *functional*, *structural* and *contextual identity*; and use, referred to as *actual identity*: the objects' accumulation of information, i.e. documentation (van Mensch, 1992).

Nevertheless, when trying to apply this model to contemporary art, such a distinction between the three stages of information's development, i.e. *conceptual identity*, *factual identity* and *actual identity*, might suffer from some limitations or, at least, they might need to be interpreted in a more interweaved way. In fact, in the particular case of contemporary artworks and as a consequence of what has been discussed in the previous chapter, *factual identity* and *conceptual identity* are deeply interlinked to each other: they both encompass a conceptual and contextual component that belongs to the performative nature of contemporary art. In addition, the *actual identity* of contemporary artworks does not necessarily imply the artworks' use as meant in the case of objects with a mere utilitarian purpose but could, instead, be referred to as that object's identity, i.e. data carried, in the moment of acquisition from either the maker, i.e. the artist – direct musealization – or a collector – second stage of musealization. To give an example, when an installation is conceived in the mind of the maker it has a certain shape which corresponds to an idea, to a concept – many times not even completely defined. This initial idea, is linked to a first, primary context: the mind of the artist. When the artwork is translated into a concrete form, taking a specific shape in the space, a secondary context appears, interacts with the work and changes it; this is the context of, for instance, the room into which the performance of the artwork's making takes place, where the artworks acquires a physical dimension: from the conceptual idea of the maker to a structure in the space. This structure, however, is itself often linked to a conceptual meaning and its shape is not always completely definite but is subject to change, mutation and interrelation with a third, fourth, fifth context and so on, where external parts, i.e. actors, intervene to interact with both previous contexts and initial concepts, modifying them again.

Contemporary artworks are therefore strictly depended on three elements. The first element is the context, i.e. where the artwork is made and/or installed and the place where the performative nature of contemporary art is experienced. The second element is the concept, i.e. the maker's idea and the artwork's dominant quality. The third one is the process, i.e. the artwork's development from the idea of the maker to its physical appearance, including the changes that occur both during and after installation/reinstallation practices and people interaction. Of course,

material objects are often part of contemporary artworks as well. However, they should be treated only as a component of the physical appearance of the work and/or a witness of what eventually remains of the work, together with documentary information – rather than the central elements to collect.

In the article *What is The Object of this Exercise?* Elaine Heumann Gurian discusses the relations between objects and museums. She states that the function of objects in museums has been changing over time and they are not at the heart of museums anymore. “It is both the physicality of a place and the memories and stories told therein that are important”. (Heumann Gurian, 2001: 26). Moreover: “Even in museums like Cleveland’s Rock and Roll Hall of Fame or the [...] Experience Music Project, it is the sound and performance of the artists that is the artifact much more than the stationary guitar that, say, Jimi Hendrix once used. [...] Institutions devoted to music or performance transform the notion of collections and certainly the notion of preservation” (Heumann Gurian, 2001: 26-31). Besides, objects and collections of items were not even the basis of museums of classical antiquity that, as temple of Muses, encompassed social or collective memory as their heritage. Museums’ focus on collecting objects as “carriers of memory” (Maroevic, 2010: 144) grew during the *Reinassance*. Afterwards, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a new revival determined the institutionalization of museums which changed, again, during the post-modern movement, e.g. with the appearance of the ecomuseum concept. For Ivo Maroevic²⁷ “The museum, in one of its future metamorphoses, can change its content and form. If a model, a copy, an allusion, a hologram or any other form can be considered as a reality that will substitute for the original object, museology does not need to limit itself to the form of the classical museum or to classical object [...] The transforming of context and the actualizing of meanings are the primary museum tasks” (Maroevic 2010: 147-149) The fact of being aware of the role performed by objects in contemporary artworks therefore appears as an issue of fundamental importance for both museum practice and theory: it requires an in depth critical thinking and a profound understanding of the three-dimensional identity of contemporary art – contextual, conceptual and processual – both *in situ* and *ex situ*, i.e. during the installation and re-installation practices.

It thus appears evident that, especially with regard to contemporary art, documentation performs a crucial role as it permits to “collect” – i.e. to gather evidences of – context, concept and process, of contemporary artworks²⁸. Hence, documenting could eventually be intended as synonym of collecting and archive as synonym of collection.

²⁷ Ivo Maroevic was professor of Museology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb.

²⁸ According to Bernard Deloche, the meaning itself of the word museality as “specific relation of man to reality” (Strànsky in Deloche, 2010: 116) involves a documentary function that aims at offering visitors an intuitive and sensory experience that does not necessarily require the involvement of physical objects (Deloche, 2010).

Conclusions

The data gathered from the study of collection policies and interviews with museum professionals have confirmed the occurrence of some practical problems for museums that deal with contemporary art. Issues are registered, in particular, in relation to reinstallation, i.e. conservation and preservation. As a consequence, in the specific case of contemporary art, the role of one of museums' core functions, i.e. collecting, is questioned. In fact, the in-terms contradiction 'museum of contemporary art' is generated when museum theory is applied to contemporary art with the same parameters used for collection, preservation, therefore musealization, of objects. In other words, a dichotomy between contemporary art and museum theory arises when contemporary artworks are treated as utilitarian artifacts and the contemporary art's dominant quality, meaning its performative nature, is ignored. However, this dichotomy can be superseded when certain fundamentals of museum theory such as musealization theory, distinction of museums functions or objects as data carriers' model, are applied to the philosophical dimension of contemporary art – to its performative nature – in a critical manner. This implies to consider the three-dimensional identity of contemporary art, i.e. its context, its concept and its process: not only as witnesses of contemporary artworks, but as integral parts of the artworks themselves. Hence, with regard to contemporary art, documenting performs the same role that collecting performs for utilitarian objects. But what could such a comparison, exactly, imply? The disappearing, changing or supplanting of the collecting practice? A paradigm's shift from collection to documentation? Answers to these questions will be found in the next chapter of this thesis, while analyzing roles and functions of non-collecting institutions.

3.

“New horizons: non-collecting institutions as museums of the future?”

*“To be or not to be, that is the question”
(Shakespeare, 1599)*

Introduction

Tracing a history of non-collecting institutions that deal with contemporary art is not an easy task: there is scant literature on the topic, except for information that especially regard the United States' territory. Besides, since no standards are established for the development of non-collecting institutions, their functions and roles are not unequivocal, i.e. they can take manifold shapes. The only factor that non-collecting institutions generally have in common is their engagement with the archival method, i.e. with documentation. This chapter therefore contextualizes non-collecting institutions that deal with contemporary art by giving an overview of United States' non-collecting museums and some examples in the Netherlands. Hence, documentation and archives are key: they result as the most suitable way to collect the performative nature of contemporary art, by respecting its profound link to the context. They furthermore represent new horizons for the development of museum theory, in regard to collecting practices.

Contextualizing non-collecting institutions: why not to collect?

What is a non-collecting museum? An article²⁹ of Rachel Hewitt published on *Chicago Art Magazine* on January, 6, 2012, defines a non-collecting institution as follows: “To state the obvious, a non-collecting museum does not have a permanent collection, nor does it deal in new acquisitions [...]. A non-collecting institution can focus its resources, funds, and staff on exhibitions, educational programming, and public outreach, allowing a more comprehensive interaction between the museum and the public” (www.chicagoartmagazine.com, Accessed: December, 3,

²⁹ The article with the title ‘Non-Collecting Museums’ was Part of *Best of Chicago Art Magazine*, originally published on December 10, 2010 (<http://chicagoartmagazine.com/2012/01/non-collecting-museums/>, Accessed: July, 27, 2013).

2012). Besides, although their main activity is related to the exhibition making, non-collecting institutions obtain, in some cases, the recognition as accredited museums.

According to Elaine Heumann Gurian "In the early 1970s the American Association of Museums (AAM) established an Accreditation Commission. As its members deliberated, they discussed whether groups of living things could be called collections and whether institutions that so 'collected' should be classified as museums. [...] The Accreditation Commission of the AAM next sought to determine if places that resembled collections-based museums but did not hold collections (i.e. places like not-for-profit galleries and cultural centres) were, for purposes of accreditation, also museums. In 1978, they decided that, in some instances, galleries could be considered museums because, like museums, they cared for, displayed, and preserved objects even though they did not own them. Ownership, therefore, in some instances, no longer defined museums" (Heumann Gurian, 2001: 27) and the role played by collections in museums was put under discussion. However, no copious literature on the topic of non-collecting institutions exist³⁰; and they do not even find a precise collocation within, for instance, ICOM statutes. As confirmed by some articles of American magazines such as the one mentioned above, or *ART LIES. A Contemporary Art Journal*, the format of a non-collecting institution is mainly adopted in relation to contemporary art. One could then spontaneously ask: why? And likewise spontaneous the answer would be: the performative nature of contemporary art as its three-dimensional identity based on context, concept and process, finds a more suitable dimension within exhibition platforms, rather than in museums. Additionally, with regard to contemporary art, a common phenomenon is the need of claiming a condition of "being alive" for contemporary artists, therefore aiming at being outside of the traditional museums' walls, i.e. outside of museums' collections. In the chapter entitled 'On the New' of his publication *Art Power* Boris Groys explains this last tendency with the following argumentation: "Given that we experience art history first of all as represented in our museums, the liberation from the new, understood as liberation from art history – and, for that matter from history as such – is experienced by the art world in the first place as a chance to break out of the museum. Breaking out of the museum means becoming popular, alive, and present outside the closed circle of the established art world, outside the museum's walls" (Groys, 2008: 23). After the emergence of the Modern museum, artists especially work for museums' collection, showing their will for being collected. "So if an artist says (as the majority of artists say) that he or she wants to break out of the museum, to go into life itself, to be real, to make a truly living art, this can only mean that the artist wants to be collected. This is because the only possibility of being

³⁰ In 2009, a thesis with the title *The Sustainability of Non-Collecting Contemporary Art Institutions* has been presented by Lim, Panf Hui of Teachers College, Columbia University. The research started from the assumption that non-collecting institutions defy the traditional definitions of art museums, since their focus is exhibiting art rather than collecting it. However, the research goal was exclusively to investigate the sustainability strategies of those institutions. "The three main strategies that emerged were the museum model strategy, the merger/affiliation model strategy, and the business-centered strategy. These strategies were evaluated based on their pros and cons and key factors that contribute to their success" (<http://www.artsadministration.org/node/2115> Accessed, July, 27, 2013). The institutions analyzed were US institutions.

collected is by transcending the museum and entering life in the sense of making something different from that which has already been collected” (Groys, 2008: 25). In other words, the more artists try to be outside of the museum space, the more they become subject to the logic of collecting. Groys’ argumentation therefore suggests additional ideas to reflect upon history, role and functions of non-collecting institutions.

By the end of the 1970s/beginning of the 1980s a conceptual critique of the art museum began and artists started to resist the institutions’ centrality in their work, progressively avoiding shows inside the traditional museums space, i.e. collections. (de Oliveira, Oxley, Petry, 2003). In a 2003 article³¹ Marti Mayo, who until June 2007 was director of Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (a non-collecting institution), identifies contemporary art’s link to the specificity of contexts as one of the reasons of non-collecting institutions’ diffusion. Besides, she traces a historical background of non-collecting museums in the United States, pointing out how their birth took place already from the 1930s, in parallel with that of three now-iconic museums of modern art: The Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum³². In 1930s the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago evolved into a non-collecting institution. In the same decade and, in particular, in 1936 and 1939 the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston (ICA Boston) and the Contemporary Art Center in Cincinnati (CAC) opened their doors as well. Afterwards, in 1948 the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (then known as the Contemporary Arts Association of Houston) was founded to show the new, contemporary art of the period. All these institutions adopted non-collecting practices, focusing instead on exhibition of art and design and developing, over the following years, educational programs through lectures, discussion groups and classes of all sorts, in order to “assist the public in understanding and valuing this often challenging and unfamiliar work” (www.artlies.org, accessed: July, 27, 2013). These three pioneers were later followed by the opening of other non-collecting institutions during the 1960s, e.g. the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania (ICA Philadelphia) in 1963, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (MCA Chicago) in 1967. Nevertheless, while at the end of the 1970s some institutions of contemporary art were established again as collecting museums, e.g. The New Museum of Contemporary Art in 1977, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (L.A. MOCA) in 1979, another institution assumed an experimental collection methodology. During her experience as curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art from 1967 through 1976, Marcia Tucker observed that new works by living artists were not easily included in the exhibition and collection structure of the traditional art museum. She

³¹ ‘Do Finders need to be Keepers?’ in *ART LIES. A Contemporary Art Journal*, Issue 41, Autumn 2003-2004 (<http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=150&issue=41&s=1>, Accessed: July, 27, 2013).

³² The three institutions “were founded [in New York] within ten years of each other: The Museum of Modern Art in 1929, the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1930 and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (then the Museum of Non-Objective Painting) in 1937. All were intended to show and collect the new work and to educate the public about the exciting and revolutionary developments of modernism. All were far less concerned with elevating public taste than with proselytizing about modern art and designs place in everyday life” (<http://www.artlies.org>, accessed: July, 27, 2013).

therefore decided to found, in 1977, the New Museum: “an exhibition, information, and documentation center for contemporary art made within a period of approximately ten years prior to the present” (www.newmuseum.org Accessed: July, 27, 2013). The experimental approach adopted by the New Museum was based on the practice of deaccessioning. Deaccessioning constitutes an integral part of ‘collection development’; a term, the latter that “is used to emphasize the dynamic nature of collections” (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2011: 19) and that, in the specific case of contemporary art, can represent a first, immediate, way to deal with its three-dimensional identity – i.e. with its relation to context, concept and process. However, other than collecting and eventually deaccessioning art after a certain period, the format of non-collecting institutions – e.g. the ones previously mentioned – often presupposes the complete absence of collections, at least the ones meant as collections of physical objects.

Aside from the US cases, in Europe such non-collecting institutions are frequently referred to as *kunsthallen*³³, or exhibition spaces; their origin, e.g. in the Netherlands, dates back to the 1970s³⁴. Hence, one of the most renowned platforms exclusively dedicated to contemporary art is De Appel arts centre founded in Amsterdam in 1975 as “leading platform for research and the presentation of contemporary art” (www.deappel.nl Accessed: July, 28, 2013). De Appel arts centre is focused on exhibitions, performances and educational programs – other than curatorial practices – and it keeps a detailed documentation of such activities into its archive. Another remarkable example is then Witte de With, Center for Contemporary Art, opened in Rotterdam in 1990 and dedicated to the exhibition, communication and development of contemporary art. However, despite their deliberate choice to avoid the constraints of collections, institutions such as De Appel arts centre or Witte de With constitute also a form – although alternative to collecting museums – of contemporary art’s institutionalization. They embody, in fact, a “specific” curatorial taste and a by-now-historical international recognition, that permits to designate them as two amongst THE institutions of contemporary art in the Netherlands.

Nevertheless, alternatives to these non-collecting institutions and born in the twenty first century are e.g. artists collectives such as the Eddie the Eagle Museum: an organization founded

³³ The German term roughly means “Art Gallery” and it is commonly used for non-profit organizations focused on art exhibitions making. In art history *kunsthallen* have often been scenarios for the launch of new tendencies in art: Kunsthalle Bern, above all, in 1969 hosted *When Attitudes become Form* “which went down in history for the curator’s radical approach to exhibition practice, conceived as a linguistic medium” (<http://moussmagazine.it/55vb-fondazione-prada/#sthash.LwRzDTuN.dpuf>, Accessed: July, 28, 2013). However, the phenomenon of *kunsthallen* is not especially investigated in this thesis.

³⁴ Another interesting example of dealing with contemporary art without collecting it in the traditional manner is suggested by festivals. In the Netherlands, the festivals’ culture is a very popular reality that groups together people of all ages. Festivals are usually focused on music and, in more specific cases, on contemporary manifestations such as the latest developments in art. This is the case of, for instance, the already mentioned Lowlands, a cultural festival of music, cinema, literature and art; the Sonic Acts festival which, from 1994, takes place in Amsterdam every two years with “a strong focus on contemporary and historical developments at the intersections of art, technology, music and science” (www.sonicacts.com Accessed: July, 30, 2013); or Today’sArt Festival: an international and multidisciplinary art and creativity festival that from 2005 takes place in The Hague every year. Festivals are often landing places and/or starting points of wider projects based on collaboration and sharing of information and resources.

in Amsterdam in 2010 by three fresh-graduated students of the Rietveld Academie: Arthur van Beek, Aukje Dekker and Sieto Noordhoorn. The unconventional museum, that borrows its name from the British ski jumper Eddie “the Eagle” Edwards who arrived last at the Calgary Olympics in 1988, complies with the following mission: “The Eddie the Eagle Museum encourages and presents all that is zealous and fearless. We are the sugar-daddy without money and by placing content in different contexts, we build bridges between various layers of society”. (www.eddietheeaglemuseum.com accessed: July, 28, 2013). As Sieto Noordhoorn states during an interview, museum’s ultimate goal is to promote the art of trying by means of freedom, collaboration and experimentation; operating, above all, outside the boxes of traditional contemporary art institutions – i.e. beyond the rules established by both art market and art history. The exhibitions-events organized, take place either in the museum’s space located in Amsterdam North – in a building that functions also as collective open-space studio for young creative professionals – or in the street: inside and outside of the city. Such events generally last not more than one day and afterwards, nothing is left. “Eddie the Eagle Museum’s collection is [in fact] the experience of art, and not the objects” (Noordhoorn, 28-02-13). Nothing, or ALMOST nothing is left, though: in the museum website, evidences of each exhibition-event are collected in the form of visual material, i.e. articles, images and pictures. The website is, therefore, the museum archive and the collection is documentation.

A similar principle is also driving force of Satellietgroep: another artists’ run initiative based in The Hague. From 2006 it explores, through the medium of art, the relationships that people, communities and environments have with water, in general, and the sea, in particular. Satellietgroep furthermore questions the institutional role of power in the attribution of meaning, i.e. musealization, with the question: “Who decides what?” in order to develop new concepts to deal with heritage in a sustainable way. In occasion of an interview, founding director Jacqueline Heerema explains the logic behind Satellietgroep. Heerema, who defines herself as narrative curator and the field of art as ‘a conceptual sanctuary’, states that ultimate goal of her work is not to collect objects but, rather, witnesses of how people deal with the world: “I do not collect objects, the material or tangible works remain property of the makers themselves. [...] So I collect the intangible” (Heerema, 03-07-13). How? Satellietgroep collects digital documentation of the works, e.g. texts, photos, videos. Besides, Heerema’s focal interest is towards a multi-layered approach, that she describes as structured in three concentric circles. This first circle is that of ‘art as object’, and refers to the tangible qualities of artworks. Artworks as objects have defined materials and shapes, like a statue or a painting. ‘Art and context’ is the second circle around the first, and refers to artworks that do not longer consist of a defined shape in space. Hence the object as material shape itself is dissolved in an environmental work of art and can be even made for that purpose. The third circle, encompassing the two others, is ‘art and audience’ and refers not only to conceptual arts, but also to the fact that objects exclusively defined by materials and shapes are

non-existent. Hence, the audiences' senses are evoked by intangible experiences (Heerema, 03-07-13). Other than confirming the previously given definition of contemporary art where context, concept and process are key, Heerema's methodology highlights, again, the importance of documentation as "the way" to collect the intangible nature of contemporary art. Satellietgroep's upcoming project is, in fact, directed to organize an archive/collection in order to be able to share its research with an international public as well. Documentation once more appears as the common denominator of non-collecting institutions' practice and the role of archives becomes crucial.

Archival methods and documentation: inspirational ways to collect contemporary art beyond traditional practices

Other than containing information about the history of an institution, archives are able to provide the documentation related to exhibitions-events that the institution organizes over time. Considering what said until this point about the performative, i.e. intangible nature of contemporary art, documentation comes to be not only the process of gathering information about an artwork, but also the system to eventually collect the artwork itself. In other words, archives offer a proper "collection" of contemporary art in a way that does not necessarily require the physical presence of objects. Hence, the term 'necessarily' highlights a non-*a-priori*-exclusion of objects from collections; on the contrary, in a sort of inverted perspective in the logic of collecting, objects are documents of the artworks and witnesses of the events: they represent only a part of the artwork, rather than its entirety.

Besides, the utility of the archival method for institutions that deal with contemporary art is noticeable not only on the level of practicality, but on the level of museum theory as well, since it provides an answer to the issue of collection, e.g. preservation, conservation, and musealization of contemporary art. In other words: the implementation of the archival method as collecting practice for contemporary artworks might solve the dichotomy between contemporary art and museum theory. In fact, according to Peter van Mensch and Leontine Meijer-van Mensch, "archives represent another form of *musealization*. The emphasis is on respecting the original context. [...] From a theoretical, practical and ethical point of view it is interesting to note that museums increasingly tend to adopt the archival method in their collecting policies, applying the *respect de fonds*³⁵ (= *principe de provenance*) principle for objects" (Meijer, van Mensch, 2011: 19). However, if we consider the archival method not only as a support system for collections but as collections'

³⁵ The concept of *respect des fonds* is defined by Michel Duchein as "to group, without mixing them with others, the archives (documents of every kind) created by or coming from an administration, establishment, person, or corporate body. This grouping is called the fonds of the archives of that administration, establishment or person" (Duchein, 1983: 64).

method itself, the documentation process might need to be developed in depth and according to the specificities of each artwork. In fact, in some cases, e.g. performances or media artworks, documentation as collection of information about the work would not be sufficient if made only at the final stage of the artwork's development. In order to consider documenting as synonym of collecting, the former should not be meant as a static and/or unmistakable process; rather, as a flexible and dynamic method to develop together with the artwork's evolvement. Without documentation of their creation, exhibition history, and experience, contemporary artworks cannot be collected, archived, or re-exhibited.

In 'Enjoying the Gap: Comparing Contemporary Documentation Strategies'³⁶ independent curator and researcher Annet Dekker defines and compares the main documentation models applied to media artworks, showing how essential documentation is to catch the temporary and variable nature of media artworks. In particular, Dekker introduces a case study, i.e. a mixed reality game of the British performance art group Blast Theory³⁷, in order to demonstrate that the definition and implementation of documentation strategies needs to be adapted to do justice to the work at hand. Blast Theory investigates the impact of technology in the every-day globalized society, through the use of media art. A 2003 project entitled *Uncle Roy All Around You* is an example of a work that requires extensive documentation and different documentation strategies in the conceptual and production phases as well as in the preservation, archival and possible future conservation. The work is a mixed reality game that can be played both in the street of a real city and online, by players of a virtual city. Ultimate goal of the game is to find uncle Roy and to give to both physical and virtual players the chance to meet each other in person in specific locations; the latter suggested by uncle Roy himself. According to the complexity of the game, documenting this artwork, and therefore collecting it, appears quite difficult on both practical and theoretical level. However, by deconstructing the work in layers, it is possible to define three different documentation stages and to eventually collect the work respecting its performative nature, i.e. its contemporary dominant quality. The first stage is that of documentation as process, in which documentation is a tool for the development of the work. In this stage Blast Theory uses questionnaires, interviews, role playing exercises, paper tests, trails through the city, since the voice of the audience is considered as central element. The second stage is that of documentation as presentation, i.e. the creation of audiovisual material about the work in order to communicate it

³⁶ In Noordegraaf, J., Saba, C., G., Le Maître, B., and Hediger, V., (2013), *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives*, Amsterdam University Press, pp.149-170.

³⁷ Blast Theory is a group of artists that exemplifies the strategies used in Live Art. The latter stands for new performance cultures that respect no artform borders and understand no conceptual limits. More than an artform it is a strategy to express ideas. It is art without boundaries and categories instead heading for concepts of interdisciplinarity and collaboration that extend beyond the art world. Started in 1991 Blast Theory makes live events for theatres, clubs, galleries and the street. They collaborate with a variety of people: from DJ's to dancers, from digital designers to pop promo directors. Their projects have a social or political viewpoint and are ranging from gaming environments (Desert Rain) to kidnapping experiments (Kidnap). They ask questions about the ideologies present in the information that envelops us. (<http://nimk.nl/eng/archive/blast-theory>, Accessed: August, 5, 2013).

– this can take many forms such as notation, mapping, written description, photography, film, video. And the third stage is documentation for recreation in the future. This is the most complex stage because the recreation of the work will not be forever possible for obvious reasons linked to the evolution of technology-based materials, together with the performativity of the work that will always change. It is clear that museums do not generally take the challenge of collecting and consequently documenting works that require such difficult procedures of conservation. However, in the past decades some attempts have been made from, for instance, Forging the Future (FtF), formerly known as Variable Media Network (VMN)³⁸. VMN is focused on the content of the work and a first method it developed is that of encouraging the artists to develop works independently from the medium, so that the work can be translated once the current medium becomes obsolete. A second approach is that of developing questionnaires for the works that need to be preserved. This method is, of course, not exhaustive but it is helpful in order to capture the artists' desires (Dekker, 2013).

The example of media art's documentation is, of course, only one amongst the variety of procedures that can be applied to document, i.e. collect, contemporary art. Nevertheless, aside from the specificity of some cases and the attempts of certain institutions, a way to make documentation dynamic and suitable to the diversity of contemporary artworks can be to establish a strict collaboration with the makers, i.e. artists; to involve them in the process of works' documentation; and to eventually develop a methodology based on continuity³⁹. Approaching documentation as the appropriate way to collect the performative nature of contemporary art could therefore solve the dichotomy between contemporary art and museum theory, other than suggesting practical solutions to deal with the preservation of contemporary artworks. The strategy is a change of perspectives or, more precisely, an evolution of perspectives: from the object to the context. Hence, archives are meant as collections that house what, in reality, is collectable in a contemporary artwork: its documentation. In this respect, museums could finally collect contemporary art without incurring in any contradiction in terms: they should only implement the archival method as their collection method for contemporary artworks. But how would this influence non-collecting institutions that apply such archival method? Would they then be called museums to all intents and purposes?

³⁸ "The Variable Media Network proposes an unconventional preservation strategy based on identifying ways that creative works might outlast their original medium. This strategy emerged from the Guggenheim Museum's efforts to preserve its world-renowned collection of conceptual, minimalist and video art. The growth of the Variable Media has been supported by the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology, and subsequently promoted by the Forging the Future alliance. The aim of this diverse network of organizations is to develop the tools, methods and standards needed to rescue creative culture from obsolescence and oblivion" (<http://www.variablemedia.net/e/> Accessed: August, 5, 2013).

³⁹ However, as already mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis, the possibility of artworks' disappearing cannot be ignored. A methodology based on continuity implies the respect of the natural evolution of artworks. Thus, the artists' involvement in the documentation process does not deny the possibility of artworks' alteration both during and after future re-installations.

Redefining museums

When asked to define non-collecting institutions and eventually include/exclude them within museums definitions François Mairesse stresses the following point: “Let us just consider museums such as the Wallace collection⁴⁰ or the Musée de Chantilly⁴¹, that do not collect anymore. Would they not be called museums? To my mind, the museum phenomenon looks like a galaxy; it is not possible to define precisely its borders, as it depends on the point of view you would like to adopt. I do not trust borders... As a museologist, I believe that, if somebody calls something "a museum", it interests me. And I would be pleased to know more about the reasons he called something "a museum". This does not mean that I would have the same opinion, but at least, this means that for somebody, a certain phenomenon (organization, or whatever) is a museum. Actually, if you follow Latour, provided there are enough people to believe the same type of thing (or to abandon the idea of rejecting it), the term would start to become accepted as the correct definition. From my point of view, we are assisting to a specific moment of the museum life (as institution). The idea of the "post museum" as Eilean Hooper G. called it, starts to become more and more adopted by some people: less collections and more connections to people (such as books by Black or Conn, or reports such as Museums 2020). What's more, the Asiatic influence might be strong in the following decade (see *The Empty Museum* of Masaaki Morishita⁴²). This reminds me that the classical museum definition is not that old (late 18th century), and at that time, the museum was already very much divided (museum (of natural history) and art gallery). To my mind, the unification of the concepts was very much influenced by the birth of ICOM, that for the first time gathered art and science collections. For these reasons and many more, it doesn't bother me to see that some galleries with no collection policies would be called museums. But as far as I know, they could already become members of ICOM some years ago, as ICOM welcomes science centers and ecomuseums (that were conceived with no collection policies)” (Mairesse, 30-04-13).

It becomes clear that no museums definitions are exclusively grounded on the presence of collections, since such definitions embrace a variety of organizations with one constraint only: they have to be able to establish relationships with and within society and with or without the physical

⁴⁰ The Wallace Collection is a national museum which displays the works of art collected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the first four *Marquesses* of Hertford and Sir Richard Wallace, (son of the 4th *Marquess*). It was bequeathed to the British nation by Sir Richard's widow, Lady Wallace, in 1897 (<http://wallacecollection.org/thecollection> Accessed: August, 26, 2013).

⁴¹ “The Foundation for the preservation and development of the Chantilly Estate brings together the château of Chantilly, its park and its gardens, as well as the Great Stables, home to the Live Horse Museum. His Highness Aga Khan initiated its creation in 2005, and the French Institute has entrusted the foundation with the management of this heritage for a period of twenty years” (<http://www.domainedechantilly.com/en/who-are-we/institutional-introduction>, Accessed: August, 26, 2013).

⁴² This book examines the processes through which public art museums, as modern Western institutions, were introduced to Japan in the late nineteenth century and how they subsequently developed distinctive national characteristics. The author focuses on one of the most distinctive forms of Japanese museums: the 'empty museums' – museums without collections, permanent displays, and curators. Japan is used as a case study to show in general terms how the elements of modern Western culture associated with public art museums were introduced and transformed in the local conditions of non-Western regions (Morishita, 2010).

presence of objects⁴³. In this respect, they do not collect objects but interactions; they act as media between individuals and function as platforms for cultural exchange, i.e. contributing together to the process of attributing meanings instead of only establishing meanings themselves (van Mensch, Meijer-van Mensch, 2010). Moving the discussion back to contemporary art, this once more confirms the possibility of an upgrade of roles and functions of collecting; and the subsequent consideration of alternative methodologies to collect contemporary art, i.e. documentation within archives. By stretching the parameters of classical museology and adopting new perspectives, museums could really be defined outside the borders of their walls. By surpassing the traditional definition of collections and exploring the possibilities offered by documentation strategies, collecting contemporary art would not sound as a contradiction anymore. Both collecting and non-collecting institutions that deal with contemporary art would be called museums since both would not collect; or, to say it maybe better, since both would collect in a non-traditional manner. Contemporary art museums would therefore function as archives: they would literally BE living archives.

Conclusions

An inversion of perspectives is the landing point of this discussion; an improvement of the collecting's notion allows to define museums as boundless territories. Hence, documenting can be intended as collecting and archives/archival methods can be intended not only as support methodologies for collecting policies but as physical dimension of contemporary art's collections. In this regard, however, documentation has to be approached as a flexible and dynamic process that is guided or, in the first place, launched by artists themselves and consequently adapted to the specificity of each artwork. Museums can therefore "learn" from non-collecting institutions that are engaged with archives how to collect contemporary art while respecting contemporary art's three-dimensional identity, i.e. context, concept and process. The interdisciplinary character of museology therefore offers a solution to the dichotomy between contemporary art and museum theory, i.e. to the in-terms contradiction of contemporary art museums. With regard to contemporary art, museums do not collect objects; they rather archive that information, i.e. documentation, that permits to keep the artworks alive.

⁴³ In this regard, Tomislav Sola states: "Museum is not a place, it is a relationship between past and present, between what we have been and what we want to be. It cannot be isolated and limited to an institution and distributed to the masses. A museum is an idea, and yet it is a form – a form of relationship" (Sola, 2005: 13). Besides, according to ICOFOM "Museums are a tool in the service of people, giving answers to fundamental questions which they confront during their lives: identity, happiness, death, and wisdom" (Davis, Mairesse, Desvallées, 2010: 17).

Concluding remarks

At a first sight, contemporary art and museum theory might appear as opponents. The former's dominant quality which goes beyond historical canons and is coincident with performativity and installation, site-specificity, engagement and interaction, seemingly collides with the latter's comfort zone meant as history and inclination towards the objects' authority. Besides, according to the data gathered from the study of collection policies and interviews with museum professionals, museums that deal with contemporary art experience different kind of issues, especially related to preservation, conservation and reinstallation of contemporary artworks. In other words, they experience practical difficulties with collecting contemporary art. Such difficulties are furthermore strengthened on the level of theory, where contemporary artworks are treated as utilitarian artifacts and their performative nature is overlooked. The format of non-collecting institutions, i.e. platforms for exhibition and communication rather than collecting, might therefore appear beneficial for contemporary art – in such institutions the absence of collections is often counterbalanced by the presence of archives that contain documentation of the institutions' history and events. However, by approaching museum theory from a critical perspective and upgrading meanings, functions and roles of collections, the apparent dichotomy between contemporary art and museum theory as the in-terms contradiction 'museum of contemporary art' can be superseded.

In fact, the most suitable way to collect contemporary artworks is to transcend their physical appearance and, instead, to document their three-dimensional identity based on the value of context, concept and process. These respectively stand for: the place where the artwork is made and/or installed and the performative nature of contemporary art is experienced; the maker's idea and the artwork's dominant quality; and the artwork's development from the idea of the maker to its physical appearance, including the changes that occur both during and after installation/reinstallation practices and people interaction. In such circumstances, documentation is not mere assemblage of information about a work, but it appears as a possible way to "collect" the intangible and variable nature of contemporary art. Besides, in order to respect the specificity of each work, documentation strategies have to be dynamic and flexible, other than involve also artists' participation. Hence, a switch of perspective occurs: archives are not only support methods for collections' policies; they rather embody that sort of tangible dimension of contemporary art collections, i.e. their documentation's evidence. In this regards, a practical way to collect

contemporary artworks can eventually be the development of a protocol, i.e. a guideline, to follow during the archival process. The purpose of collecting and non-collecting institutions therefore becomes intertwined. If the museums' ultimate goal is to establish relationships with people and between people, either with or without the permanent presence of objects, both collecting and non-collecting institutions that deal with contemporary art should deserve to be called museums. "To collect or not to collect" then would not be a question. "To be a museum" instead, would become the challenge.

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