

**Collapse and Recovery:  
Failure as Curatorial Strategy in dOCUMENTA (13)**

**Kevin Buist**

Master Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the Masters in Visual Critical Studies

Kendall College of Art and Design,  
Ferris State University

May 2018

## Abstract

This thesis considers three failed artworks at dOCUMENTA (13) and the various attempts at recovery and recuperation made by Artistic Director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. dOCUMENTA (13) was the 2012 iteration of Documenta, a major contemporary art survey exhibition that takes place every five years in Kassel, Germany. The narrative and theoretical underpinnings of three failed elements of dOCUMENTA (13) provide ways of considering the nature and limits of the power wielded by this kind of art institution. Artist Kai Althoff's letter of withdrawal from the exhibition, displayed in lieu of his artwork, demonstrates the conflicting interplay between artistic autonomy and curatorial intent, pushing institutional critique into new, ethically questionable territory. The loan of El Chaco, a meteorite that was to be transported from Argentina to Kassel by artists Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolas Goldberg, was canceled amid accusations of colonialism. The failed loan demonstrates incommensurability between Object-Oriented Ontology and anti-colonial praxis. Finally, the attempt by Christov-Bakargiev to censor Stephan Balkenhol's *Man in the Tower*, a public sculpture that was not part of dOCUMENTA (13), illustrates the limits of the curator as meta-artist, and the exhibition as Gesamtkunstwerk. This analysis problematizes the way the curator has assumed an auteur position within major survey exhibitions, whereby they wield enough power to not only recover from organizational failures, but to re-contextualize and integrate failures into a broader curatorial strategy. What are the implications of employing a curatorial strategy that attempts to succeed at failing? This research examines cases where this approach effectively recuperates failure into the thematic goals of the exhibition, cases where this approach is ineffective, and analyzes the difference between the two as a way of arriving at a more complete understanding of how exhibitions exert power and make meaning.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	2
List of Illustrations .....	4
Acknowledgements .....	5
Introduction .....	6
Chapter One: Letter of Resignation: Curatorial Gesture Overrides Artistic Retreat .....	18
Chapter Two: The Missing Meteorite: The Irreconcilable Subjectivities of People and Rocks ..	32
Chapter Three: An Interloper in the Tower: Censorship as Curatorial Gesture .....	49
Conclusion .....	59
Figures .....	62
Bibliography .....	65

### **List of Illustrations**

(Figure 1) “A letter to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev by Kai Althoff, May 24, 2011. Exhibited on the initiative of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and with the permission of the artist.” Photograph used with permission by *Contemporary Art Daily*.

(Figure 2) Promotional image of El Chaco meteorite provided by Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolas Goldberg, used with permission from the artists.

(Figure 3) *Man in the Tower*, 2012, by Stephan Balkenhol. Public domain photograph accessed from Wikimedia Commons:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sankt\\_Elisabeth\\_Kassel\\_documenta\\_13.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sankt_Elisabeth_Kassel_documenta_13.jpg)

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not be possible without the guidance and advice of Dr. Karen Carter. I would also like to thank Diane Zeeuw, Brad Yarhouse, and Susanna Engbers. I am grateful for feedback from Adam Forrest, Paige Young, Alyson Rodriguez, and Mary Sjaarda. Thank you to my lovely wife Kelly. Thanks to ArtPrize. Very special thanks to Dr. David Rosen. Dedicated in memory of Arnold Bode, a local boy made good.

## Introduction

dOCUMENTA (13), the 2012 edition of the renowned German contemporary art exhibition, displayed the work of 194 artists, spent over 30 million euros, and drew over 900,000 visitors to the small industrial city of Kassel during its 100-day run.<sup>1</sup> Critical reception was positive. It was, by most accounts, extremely successful. Citywide exhibitions are ambitious endeavors, however, and some elements inevitably fail to come to fruition in the way the organizers intend. This research examines three failures within dOCUMENTA (13)—an artist's withdrawal, a failed loan, and a failed attempt at censorship—as a way of understanding the nature and extent of dOCUMENTA (13)'s power to make the recuperation of failure into a curatorial strategy.

Recurring international survey exhibitions of contemporary art are the primary places where the dominant positions of fine art discourse are proposed, debated, and codified. These large exhibitions began in the nineteenth century and have grown in importance since, particularly in the mid to late twentieth century. Early examples, such as the Venice Biennale, grew out of the traditions of salons, Grand Exhibitions and World's Fairs. Documenta<sup>2</sup>, arguably the most influential of these exhibitions today, was founded instead as a way to repair the wounds of World War II. It was founded in 1955 by Arnold Bode, a painter and professor from Kassel. His goal was to reconnect Germany with modern art, particularly European art of the

---

<sup>1</sup> "Retrospective: dOCUMENTA (13)," Documenta, accessed April 8, 2018, [https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta\\_13](https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_13).

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the recurring exhibition generally as "Documenta," while "dOCUMENTA (13)" refers specifically to the 2012 edition. Each edition has a unique way of treating capitalization and numerals in its name, with the "d" typically lowercase. This convention traces back to Arnold Bode's admiration of the Bauhaus, and their refusal to use capital letters as a way of flattening hierarchies. The capitalization of the letters following the d in the 13<sup>th</sup> edition is unique to that year.

preceding twenty years, which had been labeled degenerate and banned by the Nazis. The first Documenta was a retrospective of the major modern art movements of the first half of the 20th century,<sup>3</sup> and it coincided with The German National Garden Show, “for which beds of roses were planted on the rubble heaps left over from World War II.”<sup>4</sup> It was the first exhibition of modern art in Germany since the Degenerate Art show in Munich in 1937, an exhibition in which Nazi propagandists invited the public to mock avant-garde art.<sup>5</sup> Surprised by its initial success, Bode and the other organizers decided to hold a new Documenta every five years. With each edition, Documenta takes measure of current art world trends and assembles a group exhibition that makes a case for where things are headed next. The artists, theories, and curatorial strategies highlighted during each Documenta have enormous influence on the art world at large. The thirteenth edition of Documenta, examined here, took place in 2012. Arnold Bode organized the first four exhibitions, but each edition since has been curated by a different artistic director, with the thirteenth edition led by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, an American born curator active in Italy and the United States. A distinct visual identity accompanies each iteration; the thirteenth edition was referred to as dOCUMENTA (13), a design decision that allowed for the name to function as a distinctive brand mark even when rendered in different fonts.<sup>6</sup>

This examination of dOCUMENTA (13) is divided into three chapters, each corresponding to a single artwork emblematic of a different type of organizational failure and attempted recovery. The title, “Collapse and Recovery,” is a translation of the German phrase

---

<sup>3</sup> “Documenta: About,” documenta gGmbH, accessed April 8, 2018, [https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16\\_documenta\\_ggmbh](https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16_documenta_ggmbh).

<sup>4</sup> “Retrospective: documenta,” Documenta, accessed April 8, 2018, <https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Alice Rawsthorn, “A Symbol Is Born,” New York Times, (June 3, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/arts/04iht-design04.html>.

*Zusammenbruch und Wiederaufbau*. This notion harkens back to Documenta's origins as an attempt to use art to heal the wounds of war. It was embraced by Christov-Bakargiev because it embodied both Kassel's use of art as a strategy to recover from the near total destruction of World War II, as well as other sites that informed the thirteenth edition and hosted peripheral programming, such as Kabul, Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> The first chapter concerns a letter from artist Kai Althoff to Christov-Bakargiev, displayed in lieu of the artist's work, explaining the artist's choice to withdraw from the exhibition (Figure 1). The second chapter explores the implications of a failed attempt by artists Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolas Goldberg to transport a 37-ton meteorite from Argentina to Kassel as an artwork (Figure 2). The third chapter discusses the failed attempt by Christov-Bakargiev to censor an artwork that was not part of dOCUMENTA (13), *Man in the Tower*, a sculpture installed in a Kassel church tower by Stephan Balkenhol (Figure 3).

Documenta is widely considered to be the most influential of the biennials, triennials, and other recurring international contemporary art exhibitions that determine which artists, curatorial approaches, and theoretical trends are relevant in the art world at a given historical moment. These exhibitions wield enormous power to set the terms of the discourse surrounding art and how it relates to current political, philosophical, and economic conditions. In order to better understand this power, this research explores the ways dOCUMENTA (13) fell short of its own lofty goals and the pressures placed on it by art history. What did it set out to do that it ultimately failed to achieve? What can the failures of such an enterprise reveal about the ways in which it sets the terms for contemporary art discourse? dOCUMENTA (13) used deliberate rhetorical and conceptual strategies to internalize and neutralize failure. Focusing on the apparent failures

---

<sup>7</sup> "Retrospective: dOCUMENTA (13)," Documenta, accessed April 8, 2018, [https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta\\_13](https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_13).



of dOCUMENTA (13) reveals a paradox: the exhibition explicitly attempted to embrace withdrawal, refusal, and failure as a part of its curatorial strategy, which led shortcomings to be integrated into the whole and highlighted rather than glossed over. Failure has been embraced as an artistic strategy by the avant-garde for some time, whereby artists react to and integrate conditions outside of their control. Christov-Bakargiev's embrace of failure as a curatorial strategy utilizes this avant-garde tendency as an institutional tool, which distorts it from its rebellious artistic origins. This research considers the implications of this institutional strategy on curatorial practice and contemporary art discourse more widely.

The purpose of investigating the failures of dOCUMENTA (13) is two-fold. First, it reveals the way large recurring exhibitions make meaning and control the discourse around contemporary art by examining the nature and limits of the type of power such institutions wield. Examining three apparent failures, rather than successes, reveals the way Documenta reacts to, and recovers from, unforeseen challenges. This analysis considers the way the power and influence of an exhibition arises from a complex interplay of both internal and external factors, rather than a simple hierarchy.<sup>8</sup> The second purpose in evaluating three failures within dOCUMENTA (13) in particular is that Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, in her role as Artistic Director, deliberately embraced a narrative of failure and retreat and sought to integrate it into her curatorial strategy. Rather than hiding away shortcomings as potential embarrassments, two of the three artworks discussed in this analysis were given pride of place despite failing to materialize: one as physical ephemera displayed in a prominent exhibition space, and the other as the opening anecdote of Christov-Bakargiev's catalogue essay. Failure, in the case of

---

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 92-95.

DOCUMENTA (13), was not a hidden dimension of the show; it was embraced and even exploited to support the thesis of the exhibition.

Christov-Bakargiev's catalogue essay leads with the notion of failure, which begins by stating, "art is defined as much by what it is, as by what it is not; by what it does, or can do, as by what it does not, or cannot do; it is defined even by what it fails to achieve."<sup>9</sup> In lieu of singular theme or concept, Christov-Bakargiev sets out four positions, described as conditions in which artists and other subjects find themselves, which the exhibition intends to reflect and consider:

1. Under siege. I am encircled by the other, besieged by others.
2. On retreat. I am withdrawn, I choose to leave the others, I sleep.
3. In a state of hope, or optimism. I dream, I am the dreaming subject of anticipation.
4. On stage. I am playing a role, I am a subject in the act of reperforming.<sup>10</sup>

The notions of "under siege" and "on retreat" were particularly useful to Christov-Bakargiev as she sought to internalize and even promote programming failures as opportunities to contemplate these themes. Later in the essay, Christov-Bakargiev positions the inevitable shortcomings of the exhibition this way, "DOCUMENTA (13) in Kassel is intentionally uncomfortable, incomplete, nervously lacking—at every step, one needs to know that there is something fundamental that is not known, that is invisible and missing—a memory, an unresolved question, a doubt."<sup>11</sup> This research explores the implications of this strategy and what happens as it plays out in three distinct circumstances. If it is the goal of the exhibition at the outset to embrace failure and retreat, and this embrace is successfully executed, does this success negate the intended embrace

---

<sup>9</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time," in *Documenta 13: Catalog I/3, The Book of Books*, ed. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Chús Martínez, Franco Berardi (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

of failure? Put another way, is it possible to succeed at failing? Failure is, by definition, not something one can succeed at doing.

This research addresses a gap in the literature on Documenta and similar contemporary art survey exhibitions. The influence of these exhibitions is well documented, and so is the rising influence of superstar curators, both of which are touched on. What is missing is a careful analysis of the way dOCUMENTA (13) embraced retreat and failure from the outset, and the wide-ranging implications and contradictions of this strategy. Understanding the way an agenda-setting exhibition can pivot around failures and integrate shortcomings into its wider message is essential to understanding how these institutions exert influence and make meaning. Christov-Bakargiev used an apparently humble position—embracing failure—to capture, claim, and repurpose events that occurred outside of her curatorial control. The objective is to understand how exhibitions like this make meaning, particularly when plans fall through, when failures are repurposed, and when the strategy of embracing failure reaches its limit.

The first chapter examines a letter of withdrawal sent from German artist Kai Althoff to Artistic Director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (Figure 1). The letter, along with two nearby works, functioned as an entrée to this grand international exhibition that prompted the viewer to consider failure, retreat, and nothingness. Althoff's recusal was genuine, which shows that the choice to display the letter by Christov-Bakargiev demonstrates that the creative agency of the artist is in a state of struggle with the curator. The chapter explores how the role of the curator replaced the artist as the ultimate auteur in contemporary exhibitions, arranging and juxtaposing individual artworks in service of a larger vision. This trend in contemporary art survey exhibitions is rooted in the history of Documenta itself, particularly Harald Szeemann's

Documenta 5, which was staged in 1972.<sup>12</sup> American land artist Robert Smithson dropped out of that edition, opting to present a text for the catalogue instead. Smithson's pioneering installations laid the groundwork for how exhibitions themselves came to be read as critical forms, not just artworks. The chapter then tracks the rise of institutional critique and its eventual integration into broadened curatorial practice, a phenomenon James Voorhies calls New Institutionalism.<sup>13</sup> In this approach, which is evident in Christov-Bakargiev's dOCUMENTA (13), the institution absorbs the critique of the artist, putting artists to work toward the larger experiential goal of the exhibition. Institutional critique is eventually replaced by auto-critique. Christov-Bakargiev's display of Althoff's letter, however, moves beyond the synthesis of New Institutionalism, and creates a new antagonistic paradigm where the curator is critiquing the artist rather than the other way around. Attention is then given to Althoff's contentious relationship with another curator, Laura Hoptman, who curated his 2016 retrospective at MoMA. Hoptman published an interview transcript with Althoff in that exhibition's catalogue that echoed the emotional tone of the withdrawal letter. In the exchange, Althoff cuts to the heart of what it means to be a curator, insisting to Hoptman that he does not want to be remembered.<sup>14</sup> In a show of their power, curators Hoptman and Christov-Bakargiev, along with the art history they had the privilege to write, succeeded in committing Althoff's actions to public memory despite his protests. Returning to dOCUMENTA (13), the chapter considers the artworks placed near Althoff's letter in order to argue that the curator is the ultimate creative voice in this type of exhibition. She had the ability arrange and layer artworks and artifacts in service of a larger vision. The canvas for

---

<sup>12</sup> Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 27.

<sup>13</sup> James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood. The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968* (Cambridge: MIT Press Ltd, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Kai Althoff and Laura J. Hoptman. *Kai Althoff - And Then Leave Me to The Common Swifts*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 145.

this work is the neutral white gallery itself, a space that transforms whatever is placed in it, no matter how mundane.<sup>15</sup>

The second chapter is a sustained look at the failed loan of El Chaco (Figure 2), a 37-ton meteorite the artists Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolas Goldberg attempted to transport from Northern Argentina to dOCUMENTA (13) for the 100-day run of the exhibition. Like Kai Althoff's withdrawal, the failed loan was highlighted by Christov-Bakargiev as illustrative of the themes of the exhibition, in this case as the opening anecdote of her catalogue essay.<sup>16</sup> The chapter lays out the origins of the loan project, beginning with previous work by Faivovich and Goldberg in the region, through to their work with Christov-Bakargiev to secure permission to move El Chaco. The process was contentious, leading to heated debates in the provincial government and press. Permission was granted, but the controversy led a group of anthropologists and members of the Moqoit tribe, who are indigenous to the region, to issue a statement condemning the project as a colonialist gesture. In the face of this opposition, the artists canceled the loan. The project was meant to be a critique of the colonial theft of the meteorites, yet it was undone by accusations of colonialism.

The failed loan is examined through several critical lenses. First, the project can be seen as a continuation of Duchamp's strategy of the readymade, an artwork that consists of a pre-existing object which is declared to be art without being altered in any other way. The chapter explores how this strategy has been accepted by institutions, which play a vital role in validating what was once a rebellious gesture, alienating artistic labor in the process.<sup>17</sup> In her catalogue

---

<sup>15</sup> Brian O'Doherty, "The Gallery as a Gesture" in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, "The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time," 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> Boris Groys, *Going Public* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 122-24.

essay, Christov-Bakargiev implores the reader to consider the situation of the failed loan from the perspective of the meteorite. Speculating on the experience and subjectivity of the rock itself draws on notions of Object-Oriented Ontology. This line of thinking holds that non-human things have an unknowable and inaccessible interiority that recedes from our observation, language, and thought about them.<sup>18</sup> For Christov-Bakargiev and philosopher Graham Harman, this non-anthropocentric approach is a way of flattening hierarchies and humbling the human position along with all the other objects in the universe. The political implications of this strategy are complicated, however, and the chapter investigates how Object-Oriented Ontology struggles to reconcile itself with anti-colonial movements. Christov-Bakargiev positions the failed loan as a conflict between the Moqoit people and the meteorite, rather than a conflict between the Moqoit people and the artists. While this approach succeeds in flattening both ontological and political hierarchies, it runs the risk of leaving colonialism's negative effects in place by simply ignoring them. In the end Christov-Bakargiev concludes that it was only through the resistance and subsequent failure of the loan that we were able to arrive at a position where the subjectivity of the meteorite could be fully considered.<sup>19</sup>

The third chapter investigates a failure that was not recuperated in the same way as the first two, a failure of presence rather than absence. St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church sits in central Kassel near the main dOCUMENTA (13) venues, but it was not an official site. Instead, church leaders staged a show of the German figurative sculptor Stephan Balkenhol, including a very visible figure of a man with outstretched arms perched in the bell tower titled *Man in the Tower*, 2012 (Figure 3). It was easy to assume that the sculpture was part of dOCUMENTA (13), and

---

<sup>18</sup> Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2015), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012): 292.

this confusion led Christov-Bakargiev, other Documenta officials, and even the mayor of Kassel to pressure the church to remove the sculpture from the tower. The church refused, and the sculpture remained during the entirety of the exhibition and beyond. The chapter examines Christov-Bakargiev's opposition to the sculpture in two ways. First, the Christ-like figure and its placement in a church presented a challenge to the non-anthropocentric ethos presented by dOCUMENTA (13). The Biblical narrative places humanity at the center of God's creation as image-bearers of the divine. *Man in the Tower* literally and figuratively elevated man, challenging Christov-Bakargiev's desire to flatten the hierarchies that separate humans and objects.<sup>20</sup> The second form of opposition to the sculpture concerns the power of the curator in a citywide exhibition like dOCUMENTA (13). The curator becomes a meta-artist, utilizing individual artworks in service of her vision. The inability to remove *Man in the Tower* suggests that this meta-artistic practice reaches its limit when it seeks to articulate a vision by means of reduction. The chapter provides background on how the curator came to occupy such a central position. As transparency around the work of the curator increased, the role incorporated more individual creative license.<sup>21</sup> The exhibition as artwork leads to a discussion of the exhibition as Gesamtkunstwerk, or total work of art. This approach integrates everything into the experience of exhibitions, beyond just the artworks presented. The environments, people, and uncontrolled elements of the city itself become part of the show.<sup>22</sup> Christov-Bakargiev's approach reached its limit because her attempt to embrace chaos and flatten hierarchies ran up against one

---

<sup>20</sup> Christoph Baumanns, "Stephan Balkenhol in Sankt Elisabeth," in *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen: Der Streit Um Die Kirchlichen Begleitausstellungen Zur Documenta*, ed. Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern (Paderborn: Schöningh Paderborn, 2014), 45.

<sup>21</sup> O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Boris Groys, "Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk," *e-flux journal* no. 50 (December, 2013), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/50/59974/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/>.

contingency she could not tolerate: an artwork that insisted that God gave humanity a special place in the hierarchy of the universe.

Each story of failure in this research is also a story about how power is wielded and put on display in large survey exhibitions of contemporary art. The way this jostling for creative control is interpreted owes something to Michel Foucault, particularly his writings about power in *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction: Volume I*. For Foucault, power is a collection of interconnected force relations, and the process by which they challenge, reinforce, and reverse one another. This interplay forms a dense web of interconnections through which power is distributed. These conflicts crystalize over time to form institutions and other hegemonies.<sup>23</sup> In each of the three cases discussed in this research, Foucault's formulation of the non-hierarchical nature of power provides a useful lens for unpacking the complicated interplay of forces at work. Foucault's work is not applied specifically to each case, but instead provides a framework upon which power relations function. The institution of dOCUMENTA (13), with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev as creative head, repeatedly found novel ways to assert its power in the face of opposition and unforeseen circumstances. In most cases, Christov-Bakargiev's will was done, but in a way that was forced to adapt to and recuperate failure.

This research reveals how powerful recurring exhibitions make meaning by shedding light on failure and strategies employed when things do not go as planned. Focusing on failure, rather than success, paints a more honest portrait of dOCUMENTA (13) and exhibitions like it. Kai Althoff's letter to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev demonstrates that exhibitions arise from a complex struggle of competing intentions of artists and curators, yet the curator has the final say. The story of the failed loan of El Chaco shows that even well-meaning attempts to critique

---

<sup>23</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 92-93.



colonialism can fall victim to the very same pitfalls the project is attempting to address. *Man in the Tower* demonstrates that even if we concede that the curator is the ultimate artist, and the city is her canvas, there are limits to this position. In all, the success, power, and influence of DOCUMENTA (13) can best be understood by examining closely the ways that it failed.

## **Chapter One**

### **Letter of Resignation: Curatorial Gesture Overrides Artistic Retreat**

Organizing a sprawling exhibition like dOCUMENTA (13) relies on the timely output of many artists around the world, so it is not uncommon for some projects fail to materialize. This chapter examines the implications of one such failure, the resignation from the exhibition by German artist Kai Althoff (b. 1966). The situation is noteworthy not so much because of Althoff's withdrawal, but because of Artistic Director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's response. Her choices to place Althoff's letter of resignation (Figure 1) in a prominent position revives and extends a decades-long struggle between the competing creative visions of artist and curator.

When visitors entered the Fridericianum, the main museum venue of dOCUMENTA (13), they were met by a nearly empty gallery containing only a curious breeze and glass vitrine displaying the handwritten letter. While the venues used from one Documenta to the next vary, the Fridericianum is constant, always serving as a central hub and starting point for the exhibition. The classical stone building was once a library, until it was badly damaged during the Allied bombing campaigns of World War II. The facility's reconstruction and rebirth as an art museum mirrors the reconstruction and reintroduction of modern, global, post-war culture to Kassel and the whole of Germany. For this reason, the work placed in the Fridericianum museum for each Documenta takes on particular significance as the geographic and conceptual center of the exhibition. This was particularly true during dOCUMENTA (13), when the central rotunda of the museum contained a collection of small artworks and artifacts that Christov-Bakargiev named The Brain. All of the disparate themes explored in the massive city-wide exhibition were

present in The Brain. Without being explanatory or didactic, The Brain still functioned as a key to the whole of dOCUMENTA (13).<sup>1</sup>

The rotunda containing The Brain, however, was not the first thing visitors encountered when they entered the Fridericianum. Christov-Bakargiev laid out the exhibition so that visitors were required to walk through several galleries before reaching the rotunda, the first of which was nearly empty save for a vitrine containing the aforementioned letter from the artist Kai Althoff to Christov-Bakargiev, dated about a year before the exhibition opened. In four and half pages of tortured prose, Althoff apologizes profusely and asks Christov-Bakargiev to relieve him of the obligation of completing the artwork he was meant to produce for the exhibition. He writes, "...at this point I need to ask you, if you would free me from fulfilling my prior agreement to participate in next year's documenta as I feel that the things lying ahead of me will crush me."<sup>2</sup> He goes on to explain that he already agreed to other commitments, and makes clear that the obligation was taking a profound psychological toll. At one point Althoff uses language that could be found in a suicide note, stating, "All of this is due possibly to my great doubt of how to continue with myself, how to continue life..."<sup>3</sup> He pledges to Christov-Bakargiev that he will not mention his withdrawal to anyone, explaining that he will go so far as to deny ever being invited to participate in dOCUMENTA (13) to anyone, including those who had heard rumors that he was preparing work for the show. He speculates that he will never be invited to another Documenta again, while repeatedly emphasizing his deep admiration for Christov-Bakargiev and

---

<sup>1</sup> Some works in The Brain gallery included several Bactrian Princesses (stone miniatures from Central Asia dating from about 2000 BC), Lee Miller's self-portrait taken in Adolf Hitler's bathtub, melted glass objects recovered from the Lebanese Civil War, a small rock and its exact duplicate by Guiseppe Penone, and many others.

<sup>2</sup> "Documenta 13: Kai Althoff," *Contemporary Art Daily*, accessed April 9, 2018, <http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2012/06/documenta-13-kai-althoff/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

her vision for the exhibition.<sup>4</sup> The display was mounted with the permission of the artist, according to the label on the case, but the letter makes it clear that Althoff did not compose the text as a conceptual artwork meant for display. The letter's position in the exhibition, and its relationship to nearby works, are not accidental, and serve as an example of both the nature and extent of Christov-Bakargiev's power as curator to contextualize and even override artistic intent.

Althoff was not the first artist to withdraw an artwork from Documenta and have it replaced by a text. The conditions surrounding Robert Smithson's withdrawal from documenta 5, in 1972, were less emotionally distraught but no less severe. Smithson's rebellion against the vision of curator Harald Szeemann provides a useful way to think about the power relations at play between Althoff and Christov-Bakargiev. Szeemann's documenta 5 was titled *Questioning Reality—Image Worlds Today*. The show was criticized by a number of featured artists who published a petition in Artforum objecting to the way their work was classified. They took issue with the way Szeemann included mass media and pop culture imagery along with contemporary art—including pornography, sci-fi and advertising—and grouped objects by theme. The objecting artists, including Smithson, thought his "theme concept" was too strong and detracted from their work.<sup>5</sup> Smithson went a step further than others and pulled his work from the exhibition entirely, providing a text for the catalogue instead. Szeemann included the statement in the catalogue, despite the fact that Smithson characterized the curator's approach as "cultural confinement."<sup>6</sup> Smithson did not like the way that museums created neutral spaces that took the

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(S)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016): 27.

<sup>6</sup> Harald Szeemann, *Documenta 5: Befragung Der Realität, Bildwelten Heute* ; Kassel, 30. Juni Bis 8. Oktober 1972, Neue Galerie Schöne Aussicht, Museum Fridericianum, Friedrichsplatz (Kassel: Verl. Documenta, 1972).

charge out of artworks, rendering them inert. He compared the blank galleries of the museum to jail cells for art.<sup>7</sup>

Smithson's thinking at the time was in large part a reaction against "Art and Objecthood," an influential 1967 essay by Michael Fried which was critical of minimalism. Fried disliked the way recent works by artists like Donald Judd and Tony Smith seemed so dependent on their surroundings and the viewer's position within the space. Fried claimed that they were better understood as objects in a theatrical arrangement rather than self-contained modern artworks. The viewer could only have an experience with the work by moving among these objects, creating a theatrical process.<sup>8</sup> Although it was intended as a criticism, Smithson and other artists embraced Fried's notion of theatricality. For Smithson, this meant extracting natural materials from outdoor non-sites and placing them in the gallery, along with documentation and maps tracking these displacements. According to James Voorhies, writing in *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968*, Smithson's non-sites were the first example of an artist thinking of the exhibition itself as a critical form. His collections of maps, artifacts, texts, materials, and containers had to be moved through and taken in bit by bit, requiring the viewer to connect the dots.<sup>9</sup> The theatrical interaction with objects in the exhibition space became the heart of the work.

Voorhies draws a line from Smithson's innovation of the exhibition as critical form to the influence this had on artists—and eventually curators and institutions—in the subsequent decades. This manifested as institutional critique, where artists like Andrea Fraser and Mark Dion made work that dismantled the authoritative veneer of the art institution by manipulating

---

<sup>7</sup> James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood. The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968* (Cambridge: MIT Press Ltd, 2017): 21-22.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967)

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-28.

the tropes of display and interpretation. By the early 2000's this approach began to be welcomed by institutions that were increasingly self-critical in their curatorial approach. Voorhies refers to this shift as New Institutionalism, arguing that institutions of all kinds began to be regarded with renewed faith. Exhibitions were used as a multifaceted critical form that placed an emphasis on creating situations for spectators, while leaning less on the authority in individual art objects. The paramount concern of New Institutionalism was not the art object, but the interplay between art, spectator, and institution. Curators, not just artists, began to play a crucial role in questioning the methods and goals of the institution. Curatorial practice began to mirror that of conceptual artists from the 70s to the 90s. To differential institutional critique from New Institutionalism, Voorhies says, "Whereas institutional critique generally pitted artists against the institution, on a temporary basis confined to exhibition parameters and catalogues, New Institutionalism absorbs this mode of inquiry as a continuous form of autocritique from within the very borders of the institution."<sup>10</sup>

Kai Althoff's letter of resignation, put on such prominent display, is an example of an anti-institutional gesture fully absorbed into the institution. Voorhies' description of New Institutionalism describes a powerful and deliberate institutional strategy that embraced autocritique as a way of maintaining and projecting integrity. Institutions were able to maintain their authority and benefit from the edgy critique of that authority provided by artists. The art/audience/institution triumvirate relied on deep collaboration, where the antagonism of institutional critique was replaced by the production of an experience that employed many skillsets, with artists as just one team member among others. Christov-Bakargiev's inclusion of Althoff's letter, however, is something beyond New Institutionalism. The collaborative work

---

<sup>10</sup> Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood. The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968*, 72.

toward a cohesive experience is gone, replaced by a new kind of antagonism. Institutional critique was characterized by artists agitating against monolithic institutions. New Institutionalism saw the peaceful integration of these critiques into more varied institutional practices. The display of Althoff's letter represents a third state of relations between artist and institution, one in which the curator assumes an antagonistic position *against the artist*. Rather than institutional critique, Christov-Bakargiev's gesture is an example of a curator engaging in a form of artistic critique, a curator's critique of the artist. Put another way, the letter is a way for the institution to lay bare the failures, fears, and inadequacies of an individual artist in service of an institutional goal. The letter demonstrates, perhaps better than a completed artwork ever could, the notion of a subject "on retreat" that Christov-Bakargiev articulates in her catalogue essay.<sup>11</sup>

Christov-Bakargiev's critique of Althoff was not generalized toward the tendencies of artists as a whole, instead it was specific and personal. The letter is tinged with genuine shame, and yet it ended up on display at the curator's bequest. Because this exhibition of failure is so personal, it is worth taking a closer look at Althoff's track record as an artist and his relationship to another institution. Four years after dOCUMENTA (13), Althoff mounted a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Titled *Kai Althoff - And Then Leave Me to The Common Swifts*, the exhibition was organized by curator Laura Hoptman. The show happened, Althoff did not withdraw, but the catalogue makes clear that the situation was precarious. Instead of an essay, Hoptman published a remarkably contentious interview she conducted with the artist. Hoptman probes Althoff about why he includes grotesque and jarring imagery in his otherwise

---

<sup>11</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time," in *Documenta 13: Catalog I/3, The Book of Books*, ed. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Chús Martínez, Franco Berardi (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 35.

delicate and muted figurative paintings. Althoff bristles at Hoptman's characterizations of his work and the dialogue quickly devolves into insults. He tells her she is blind and that what she postulates about violence and beauty are her ideas, not his. Hoptman snaps back with a defensive and fairly accusatory tone, saying,

I am most certainly not blind: I am just emphatically not you. You find it very hard to consider ideas that are different from yours, or from your fantasies of what a discussion of your work would contain. Your refusal to admit your work's multiple effects on others would be interesting, if it wasn't so disingenuous.<sup>12</sup>

Althoff responds that he does care what other people think, just not Hoptman. He accuses her of acting like a schoolteacher who expresses pride in measured tones but is ultimately committed to the statutes and institutional formalities of the school rather than caring for the student. He reveals that he had wanted to invite children and others who know very little about art to provide texts for the catalogue but was not allowed, adding, "I am very sure that I would have cherished quite some of what [they] would have told me, and held it in my heart forever—like a true revelation."<sup>13</sup>

Hoptman asks Althoff what he is afraid of. He refuses to answer and instead asks her which of his works she likes best. At this point the text shifts onto another plane with Hoptman essentially pausing the transcript of her conversation with Althoff in order to address the reader directly regarding Althoff's insulting tone. "Calling me 'blind' is both wrong and too strong a negative statement," Hoptman notes in the parenthetical passage, "given not only my role in this enterprise, but my career as a whole, which has been based on looking at things." If she were blind, Hoptman reasons, what would be the point of asking which of his works she likes best?

---

<sup>12</sup> Kai Althoff and Laura J. Hoptman. *Kai Althoff - And Then Leave Me to The Common Swifts*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016), 62.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.



Why would anyone want to continue to read this dialogue? She concedes that he can be critical, but insists there is no place for “schoolyard insults.”<sup>14</sup> This passage is a remarkable demonstration of the curator’s power over the artist in this situation. She challenges and prods him in the exchange, but only she has the power to have the last word in the catalogue by amending her argument after the fact and outside of their exchange. Switching back to the transcript, Hoptman tells Althoff that he is afraid of his work being simplified, which is more frightening to him than it being misunderstood. “Too much explanation kills the mystery,” she says, “categorization extinguishes your extreme individuality. Your war might be against art history as much as against curators.”<sup>15</sup>

The interview ends with Hoptman finally answering Althoff’s question about which of his works she likes best. She gives a long answer in thoughtful curatorial prose, tracing her first encounters with his work in the 1990s through to the present day. After gamely answering the question, she returns it to him and asks, “What are your favorite works? The ones you would like to be remembered by?” Althoff responds, “I do not want to be remembered.”<sup>16</sup> By telling Hoptman this, Althoff strikes at the heart of the curator’s purpose. Even a contemporary curator like Hoptman is ultimately in the business of remembering, and helping audiences see and remember the meaningful objects and images created in a given historical moment. Hoptman’s role is to write art history, and Althoff’s role in this relationship is to be an art historical subject. The dialogue with Hoptman reiterates the same point made by the letter in the case in the nearly empty gallery in dOCUMENTA (13): both point to a breaking point at which the desires of the artist and the curator can no longer be reconciled into a harmonious collaborative project. Their

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 145.

clashing goals are still integrated into a single display, but it is one of struggle, in which the curator's will ultimately wins out. In both cases, art history was written by curators despite the artist's desire to be forgotten.

The choice to display the letter demonstrates the curator's power, even while wearing the sheep's clothing of humility, the exhibition begins by showing what did not work. This curatorial sleight of hand is worth considering further, and it is not without precedent. In 1969 Lucy Lippard staged a show in Seattle titled "557,087." Rather than shipping artworks and installing them in the gallery, she made and installed work on behalf of absent artists based on their instructions. Critic Peter Plagens said at the time that her hand created a total style for the show, which ultimately made Lippard the artist. During the second incarnation of the show in Vancouver in 1970, a catalogue was produced that included typed index cards where Lippard spoke frankly about the exhibition's failures and shortcomings. For example: "[D]ue to weather, technical problems and less definable snafus, Michael Heizer's piece was not executed in Seattle; Sol Lewitt's and Jan Dibbets's were not completed..." and so on. This had the effect of calling into question the notion of perfection that was common with exhibitions of minimal and conceptual work at the time. Lippard used the catalogue to demonstrate that the messiness of life is not separate from art and the production of exhibitions.<sup>17</sup>

Christov-Bakargiev's choice to display the letter echoes Lippard in the way it prioritizes the creative will of the curator over the artist. Both illustrate a trend where mega-exhibitions themselves have transformed into one big artwork where the curator is the ultimate auteur, arranging artworks as component parts. Individual artworks are treated as material that the curator, in her meta-artistic role, uses to make the show. This shift was gradual, and institutions

---

<sup>17</sup> O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)*, 14-15.

have a knack for framing and theorizing their actions as inevitable outcomes of art historical progress. Exhibitions are deliberate about opening themselves up for criticism, but even critical engagement takes place within the parameters set forth by the exhibition itself.<sup>18</sup>

dOCUMENTA (13) was assembled by Christov-Bakargiev as a meta-artwork, like other exhibitions, but with the additional inclusion of artifacts like Althoff's letter, which was not an artwork at all. This non-art artwork, despite its contentious status, nevertheless played an important role in the curatorial composition of the exhibition. It is instructive to consider the neighboring works placed near Kai Althoff's letter, as they deeply affect the audience's consideration of this artifact. The gallery with the letter also contained Ryan Gander's invisible installation *I Need Some Meaning I Can Memorise, (The Invisible Pull)* 2012. Gander worked out a way to silently move a noticeable breeze through the gallery, pushed by hardware hidden behind a false wall. The wind was not overpowering, but it was unmistakably present. While it seemed to be a nearly empty gallery, the space was very much occupied. Gander's work filled and altered the entire gallery at once in a very direct and physical way. What at first seemed like a conceptual trick was in fact fully material. Air is matter, the piece altered that matter, which then physically interacted with the viewer's body. By approaching nothingness then remaining physically present, Gander's work heightened the lack of a thing which is the subject of Althoff's letter. The letter, after all, is a material artifact that presents a narrative about a thing that does not exist: Althoff's contribution to dOCUMENTA (13). The label on the case containing the letter, crucially, did not use italics to denote the title of an artwork, it simply offered a description of the artifact. Gander presented an artwork in the space without an apparent physical artifact, while Althoff (through Christov-Bakargiev) presented a physical artifact without an artwork.

---

<sup>18</sup> John Miller, "The Show You Love to Hate" in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 272.

While visitors read Althoff's heart-rending words and felt Gander's breeze, they also heard the faint echoes of Tammy Wynette's voice from an adjacent gallery. Ceal Floyer's sound work, *'Til I Get It Right*, 2005, was situated in the next gallery where it played an infinite loop of a clip from Wynette's 1972 song "'Til I Get It Right," repeating only the words "I just keep on / 'til I get it right." Floyer's work references failure and persistence in a way that echoes the raw emotional honesty of Althoff's letter. Wynette's song, even in this truncated form, elicits a particular brand of melancholy that runs through much of Country Western music. The singer laments her misfortune and heartbreak even while admitting her complicity in it. The tone of this solemn and soulful resignation found harmony with Althoff's letter. Althoff knew it was his fault he failed to complete the work. In the letter it is clear that he wanted nothing more than to avoid breaking Christov-Bakargiev's heart, but he knew he would do it anyway.

Floyer's sound piece adds another dimension to Althoff's letter: *'Til I Get It Right* is a work that relies on sampling. Floyer's use of sampling is remarkably spare compared to the layering employed by DJs, or even by other artists who use the technique like Christian Marclay. Earlier Christov-Bakargiev's role as meta-artist was characterized as auteur, but she could just as easily be called a DJ. To build the exhibition she sampled both compositions (artworks) and incidental fragments (the letter), layering, blending, and juxtaposing them into a master composition. This DJ metaphor could apply to any curator of a group exhibition, but Christov-Bakargiev's actions take the comparison a step further. The letter was a genuine act of withdrawal, not intended for public display. Exhibited at the initiative of Christov-Bakargiev, it echoes the forced appropriation technique employed by DJs, sampling bits of audio that were never intended to be part of a larger musical composition.

Althoff's letter was contained in a small glass case, but beyond that, the two galleries housing Gander and Floyer's works appeared at first to be empty. This apparent emptiness draws attention to the pristine quality of the galleries themselves. If Christov-Bakargiev is engaging in curatorial composition, blending artworks and artifacts into a meta-artwork, then the gallery space itself is the ground on which this composition is formed. In his influential 1981 essay "The Gallery as a Gesture," Brian O'Doherty analyzes the phenomenon of modern gallery environments where "All impediments except 'art' were removed."<sup>19</sup> In a departure from the crowded salons on the 19<sup>th</sup> century, galleries of the 20<sup>th</sup> century became empty and white, allowing for well-spaced lines of art objects to be displayed at eye level. The minimal white space itself became charged, bestowing its sanctifying effect on anything placed within it. The floor became a pedestal, the ceiling a sky, and the walls a neutral ground. Art became whatever was put in the space. It changes what is placed in it, but it never changes. The minimal white gallery is a "zero space, infinitely mutable."<sup>20</sup>

O'Doherty identifies Yves Klein's 1958 Paris exhibition *The Isolation of Sensibility in a State of Primary Matter Stabilized by Pictorial Sensibility* as a key moment in the evolution of the minimal white gallery as a charged, transformative space. Klein painted the outside of the building blue and the inside white. After guests entered, they were served blue drinks. The blank white space became his image of mysticism, a place of transformation. Klein included an empty display case in the otherwise empty gallery. Anything placed in it would have been instantly elevated to the status of an artifact worth considering, even if it would have, in all practicality, been nothing more than a trinket within a trinket. Klein's show was far from the last to consider

---

<sup>19</sup> Brian O'Doherty, "The Gallery as a Gesture" in *Thinking About Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (London: Routledge, 1996), 321.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

the gallery itself as a form to be considered critically. As similar experiments played out over the following decades, each added to and strengthened the white cube's transformative power. Of work like this, O'Doherty says, "the space socializes those products of 'radical' consciousness, the gallery is the locus of power struggles conducted through farce, comedy, irony, transcendence, and of course, commerce."<sup>21</sup>

The totalizing effect of the gallery is one element that forms Paul O'Neill's observation that exhibitions function like immersive landscapes. They surround us and provide background, even though we can only partially perceive them. They are a container for objects and images while also containing the viewer. The objects, according to O'Neill, are not the primary medium of the exhibition, the substance is the space as a whole, the entire environment the objects help create. "An exhibition is a temporary, architectonic structure that possesses potential planes of interaction for the viewer," says O'Neill, which he describes as, "(1) surrounding the viewer who moves through it, (2) interacting only partially with the viewer, and (3) containing the viewer in its space of display."<sup>22</sup>

The white space has a way of assimilating the work within it, no matter how fringe it is, into the social context it creates. O'Doherty quotes the artist Daniel Buren, who understood what a contradictory situation this was when he said, "How can the artist contest society, when all his art, all art, 'belongs' objectively to that society?"<sup>23</sup> No matter how unlikely, unforeseen, or even unintentional an art object might be to begin with, once it is placed in the totalizing space of the white gallery, it becomes a feature of that physical and discursive reality. Christov-Bakargiev putting the letter on display nullifies and reverses the original communicative intent of the

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>22</sup> O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> O'Doherty, "The Gallery as a Gesture," 330.

artifact. The letter was a genuine admission of failure on Althoff's part, but by placing it in a tidy glass vitrine in a pristine white gallery, Christov-Bakargiev transformed it into a component of her own curatorial composition.

In the following chapter, this transformative recuperation of failure leaves the white cube of the gallery to navigate the complexities of public space, identity, and the subjectivities of objects themselves.

## Chapter Two

### **The Missing Meteorite: The Irreconcilable Subjectivities of People and Rocks**

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Artistic Director of dOCUMENTA (13), invited Argentine artists Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolas Goldberg to transport one of the world's largest meteorites from rural Argentina to Kassel, Germany to serve as a readymade artwork. Despite its inclusion on the printed wayfinding maps distributed at the exhibition, the 37-ton meteorite, named El Chaco, never arrived (Figure 2). A sculpture mimicking an empty plinth went on display in front of the Fridericianum Museum instead. In the months leading up to the installation, scientists and members the indigenous Moqoit people of Northern Argentina composed a letter protesting the planned loan of the meteorite. In the face of this opposition, the artists and curator canceled the loan. Rather than gloss over this failure, Christov-Bakargiev opted to highlight the drama surrounding the failed loan by recounting the anecdote in the opening paragraphs of her catalogue essay, foregrounding the failure in much the same way that Kai Althoff's letter of resignation was given pride of place inside the Fridericianum. In the essay, she invites readers to consider the situation from the point of view of the meteorite, asking whether this rock—having traveled untold distances already—might want to travel a bit more.<sup>1</sup> This position draws on notions of Speculative Realist philosophy and Object-Oriented Ontology, relatively recent philosophical trends that seek to extend subjectivity and interiority to non-human things. This explanation of the gesture did not assuage critics of the loan, who worried the

---

<sup>1</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, "The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time," in *Documenta 13: Catalog I/3, The Book of Books*, ed. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Chús Martínez, Franco Berardi (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 30-31.



entire project was an elaborate way for the German state to steal a natural artifact with spiritual and cultural significance, not to mention its value as a tourist attraction. The incident demonstrates the incommensurability between Object-Oriented Ontology and anti-colonial praxis. If natural resources themselves become subjects, how is this reconciled with the competing subjectivities of people who claim those same resources as a material component of their land and identity?

The quest to bring El Chaco to Germany began in January 2010, when Christov-Bakargiev first contacted Faivovich and Goldberg about the work they had been doing in a meteorite field known as Campo del Cielo in Northern Argentina.<sup>2</sup> The artists' work in the region began in 2006 when they made a video with El Chaco. As the massive stone sat motionless in its provincial park, one would make futile attempts to move it while the other laid on top. This video began a long and multifaceted project with the region and its meteorites.<sup>3</sup> Faivovich and Goldberg were particularly interested in the displacement of the meteorites, many of which have been stolen by collectors and tourists or claimed by colonial authorities and taken to scientific institutions. At Portikus Gallery in Frankfurt in 2010, with the support of Documenta, they showed *Meteorit El Taco*, a project that involved reuniting two halves of another Campo del Cielo meteorite named El Taco. El Taco is smaller than El Chaco, and at the time of its excavation in 1962, it was cut in half. The larger half was transported to a climate-controlled room at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC. The other half was left outside in the garden of a planetarium in Buenos Aires. Loans were arranged to transport both halves to Germany, where they were placed together in an empty gallery with a small gap between them.

---

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolás Goldberg, *Chaco* (Köln: Walther König, 2012), 48.

The texture of the half that had been stored inside for the previous five decades stood in sharp contrast to the half that had weathered the elements.<sup>4</sup>

El Chaco, currently the second largest meteorite ever discovered, was found in 1969 by an American scientist named William Cassidy. On a meteorite scouting mission, Cassidy was alerted by a local about a sizable crater. The shape of the crater allowed him to calculate the impact and find where to dig for the rock. It was not fully excavated and weighed until 1980, when it was left on a stack of railroad ties near the crater. An American meteorite collector named Robert A. Haag tried to steal it in 1990 by loading it onto a truck and driving it to the United States. He was stopped at the Argentine border and forced to return the rock. Shortly after, new laws were put in place to protect the meteorites. In 1998 El Chaco was given a new pedestal and the site became a park.<sup>5</sup>

In May 2011, Faivovich, Goldberg, and Christov-Bakargiev met with local authorities, including a representative of the Moqoit people, who are indigenous to the Campo del Cielo region. At the time, all parties agreed to the loan. The meteorite was to be moved in February 2012 on a truck meant to carry tanks, then transported by boat to Germany in time for the June, 2012 opening of dOCUMENTA (13). While their initial meetings were promising, official permission still needed to be given from provincial authorities, who had to amend the laws governing the meteorites of Campo del Cielo to allow the loan. On December 29, 2011, there was a heated debate in the Chambers of the Deputies of Chaco Province. Some of the legislators who participated later described the debate as one the most important ever undertaken by the legislative body. The transcript, published by Faivovich and Goldberg in their book *Chaco*, is

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>5</sup> Faivovich and Goldberg, *Chaco*, 48-50.

full of political intrigue and fierce arguments for and against the loan. The final vote had to be taken twice, with the motion to allow the loan finally passing with a tie-breaking vote by the chairman.<sup>6</sup>

In an email to Christov-Bakargiev dated January 13, 2012, Faivovich and Goldberg noted that the invitation to exhibit El Chaco in Kassel was opening up a “rich debate.”<sup>7</sup> They warned that the controversy surrounding the project had taken on a political dimension. The opposition party, according to the artists, had started a campaign against the loan, including rumors and misinformation.<sup>8</sup> Concerned and sometimes outlandish op-eds and letters to the editor began to appear in local newspapers. People worried that the rock would be stolen by Germany, just as many natural and cultural treasures—meteorites in particular—were stolen by Europeans in the past. Some worried the boat carrying the rock would sink. One writer, making ominous reference to Germany’s past, noted that since the time of Hitler scientists were interested in esoteric stones, especially El Chaco.<sup>9</sup> The more delicate matter was that the tribes in the region were becoming worried. The artists were well aware they were dealing with the perception that every meteorite to leave the region in the last 200 years had never come back. “As we always knew and discussed,” the artists wrote to Christov-Bakargiev, “a main aspect of this artwork is about restoring respect and karma by reversing the route of Colonialism.”<sup>10</sup>

The conceptual dimensions of the work were not effectively communicated to the concerned locals. A letter to the editor in the local newspaper *Norte*, by Victorio Tomassone of Resistencia titled, “The Meteorite, No” questioned how the meteorite could be considered art at

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 52-55.

<sup>7</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook*, 80.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>9</sup> Faivovich and Goldberg, *Chaco*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook*, 81.

all. “Art? What does a big lump of minerals have to do with art? According to the first definition of art in the encyclopedia, it is ‘the creation by man using any means imitating or re-creating nature.’ Can anyone introduce me to the creator of this meteorite?”<sup>11</sup> Another reader suggested that the government make exact copies of El Chaco, and have them paraded around Europe, an inadvertent reference to the American conceptual artist Vija Celmins, who creates perfect hand-painted replicas of small stones as sculptures, displaying them with their originals.<sup>12</sup>

The undoing of the project was precipitated by a statement issued on January 16, 2012 titled “Letter of experts in Cultural Astronomy: move to Documenta 13, in Germany, the meteorite ‘El Chaco’ does not respect the right of indigenous peoples,” from Argentine anthropologist Alejandro Martin Lopez, along with other scientists and members of the Moqoit people. Martin Lopez claimed the loan violated a mandate in Argentina’s constitution meant to safeguard aboriginal cultures. According to the culture and customs of the people of the Chaco region, the meteorites are important landmarks with social, historical, and cosmological significance. “In their cosmovision,” says Martin Lopez, “the El Chaco meteorite, considered an important instrument for connecting heaven and earth, is essential for the life of men.” The statement goes on to say that the meteorites in the region are very important to non-aboriginal people as well, and that theft and attempted theft is a sore spot due to colonial history. The statement also takes issue with something that came up in some of the letters opposing the loan published in newspapers: the insurance value of the meteorite. DOCUMENTA (13) originally communicated this sum as a way of demonstrating that all professional care was being taken. Martin Lopez’s statement points out that the very notion that the meteorite could have a

---

<sup>11</sup> Faivovich and Goldberg, *Chaco*, 185.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

monetary value is absurd. The overriding argument of the opposition statement, however, was directed against the colonial nature of the gesture. “We firmly believe that this project implies a deeply colonialist attitude, wherein the artists’ desire is to link themselves with the wealth and valuables of the Chaco.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite maintaining official permission to execute the loan, ten days after Martin Lopez’s statement, Faivovich and Goldberg sent an email Christov-Bakargiev requesting that the loan be canceled due to the controversy it was generating. The artists did not want their intentions to be further misrepresented.<sup>14</sup> Their elaborate, years-long project intended to critique the history of colonial theft had been undone by accusations of colonial theft.

The saga of the failed loan ended with a twist, when a different organization of Moqoit people, the Moqoit Council, wrote a letter a few weeks later on February 8, 2012, to the governor of Chaco Province expressing their disappointment with the cancelation of the loan. Referring to the writers of the opposition statement, the Council wrote,

We feel that our identity has yet again been usurped by their writing to the organizers of documenta stating that the original authorities of the Moqoit people do not accept the temporary transfer of the meteorite to the most important art exhibition in the world, which is a completely unprecedented lie that causes great harm to our people.<sup>15</sup>

When dOCUMENTA (13) opened four months later, the site on the Friedrichsplatz where El Chaco was meant to sit featured a new work instead, *The Weight of Uncertainty*, 2012, a plain iron block fabricated by Faivovich and Goldberg. The block weighed 3,544 kilograms, a

---

<sup>13</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook*, 81-82.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>15</sup> Faivovich and Goldberg, *Chaco*, 196-97.

figure representing the difference between the two times El Chaco had been weighed, first when it was excavated in 1980, then again when it was nearly stolen by Robert A. Haag in 1990.<sup>16</sup>

The failure to bring El Chaco to dOCUMENTA (13) rests both on Faivovich and Goldberg as artists and Christov-Bakargiev as curator, and the roles of artist and institution blend together in strange ways. The project can be understood as a variation of Marcel Duchamp's readymade, a pre-existing object that becomes an artwork not through material transformation, but through a declaration that it should be read as art. Who was attempting to cast this Duchampian magic trick on El Chaco, the artists or the curator? Boris Groys, in his essay "Marx After Duchamp," unpacks the tangled labor relations between artist and curator now that Duchamp's readymade is a century-old, institutionally accepted mode of artistic production and no longer a rebellious gesture. During the 20th century Duchamp helped break the connection between the artwork and the labor of the artist's body. With the readymade, art was no longer an extension of the artist's body that lived on after death, instead the artist was dead even while he was alive. Art could be produced in industrial, alienated ways.<sup>17</sup> Duchamp's revolution was analogous to the communist revolution, in that they both sought to confiscate and collectivize private property, whether real or symbolic.<sup>18</sup> These two revolutions part ways, according to Groys, in that the readymade shows that the artwork is no longer an accumulation of artistic labor, but instead represents the freedom from the need to perform any labor at all. For the readymade to become a reliable artistic strategy, however, the artist's ability to declare an object a work of art had to be accepted and integrated into the strategy of the institution. In one sense the immaterial labor of turning a mundane object into an artwork is transferred from the artist to

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>17</sup> Boris Groys, *Going Public* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 122-23.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 124.

the institution, whose legitimizing stamp is needed to complete the gesture. But the artist is not off the hook. According to Groys,

The Duchampian revolution leads not to the liberation of the artist from work, but to his or her proletarianization via alienated construction and transportation work. In fact, contemporary art institutions no longer need an artist as a traditional producer. Rather, today the artist is more often hired for a certain period of time as a worker to realize this or that institutional project.<sup>19</sup>

Groys wrote “Marx After Duchamp” in 2010, two years before the loan of El Chaco fell apart, but his point about artists being left to handle “alienated construction and transportation work” is particularly prescient here. Faivovich and Goldberg’s labor, or attempted labor, was performed in service to Christov-Bakargiev’s larger vision. Groys claims that the logic of the readymade still applies in a case like this, only it is the artist’s body and labor that become the readymade, anointed as an artwork by the institution and its ultimate auteur: the curator.<sup>20</sup> In the case of El Chaco, only the attempted transportation labor was sufficient for it to become a primary narrative and thematic element of dOCUMENTA (13), the rock did not need to move an inch.

Christov-Bakargiev begins her catalogue essay, “The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time,” by ruminating on what the failed loan of El Chaco means. What if we look beyond the conflict with the opponents of the loan and ask what the meteorite wants? It traveled a long way; would it want to travel further? Does the rock have rights, she wonders, and if so, how are those exercised? What condition would the temporary displacement have caused for the meteorite itself? She asks, “What kind of collision does the proposed motion to Kassel and arrest of that motion by the claims of place produce for

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 126-27.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 129-30.

documenta? What kind of cosmic dust links Argentina and Kassel in this collision of absence, or absent collision?”<sup>21</sup> Christov-Bakargiev is careful to avoid re-litigating the decision to cancel the loan, but in a passage that seems to take a swipe at the opponents of the loan, she claims that a problem today is conservative patrimony, the sense that cultural heritage cannot be shared.<sup>22</sup>

El Chaco, and the story surrounding its absence, was for Christov-Bakargiev indicative of the way she hoped dOCUMENTA (13) would sit at the intersection of art, objects, and history. She did not want the exhibition to be seen as an attempt to read historical conditions through art. “Rather,” she says, “it looks at moments of trauma, at turning points, accidents, catastrophes, crises—events that mark moments when the world changes. And it looks at them insofar as they are moments when relations intersect with things, moments when matter comes to matter...”<sup>23</sup> Christov-Bakargiev insisted that dOCUMENTA (13) not put humans at the top of a hierarchy of animate and inanimate beings. The exhibition sought to humble itself before the multiplicity of objects—humans being only one type—with which we share the universe. It was a way to learn that we have only one way of being in and processing the world, acknowledging that there are many others. Christov-Bakargiev’s goal was to join progressive thinking, which tends to be very anthropocentric, with ecological thinking that de-centers humanity. “dOCUMENTA (13) is driven by a holistic and non-logocentric vision that is shared with, and that recognizes, the knowledges of animate and inanimate makers of the world.”<sup>24</sup>

This approach to art, one where objects are given autonomy through our speculation about their alien—but very real—subjectivity, is central to the way Christov-Bakargiev hoped

---

<sup>21</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, “The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time,” 30-31.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



DOCUMENTA (13) would be read. Art needs to be looked at phenomenologically, she claims.

Artworks express and have expression, and the expressiveness of objects might be more than just our projection/anthropomorphizing of them. It may be that material and visual expression itself is a universal quality shared by all objects, and we are merely participants in this unimaginably complex exchange. The subject/object dichotomy breaks down. Toward the end of her essay Christov-Bakargiev says,

[W]hen an artwork is looked at closely, it becomes, as in meditation, an ever more abstract exercise, a thinking and imagining while thinking, until the phenomenology of that viscous experience allows the mind to merge with matter, and slowly, possibly, to see the world not from the point of view of the discerning subject, the detached subject, but from within so-called objects and outward: I am the ball, the ball is me. We are a ball. I am an artwork. How strange my makers are!<sup>25</sup>

Returning briefly to the notion of the alienated artistic labor of transportation at the behest of the institution, completed or not, it is worth noting that Christov-Bakargiev's essay does not characterize the central conflict as one between the will of the Moqoit people and the will of the artists, but instead the conflict is between the will of the Moqoit people and the will of *the rock itself*. The artists, after all, were "hired ... as worker[s] to realize this or that institutional project,"<sup>26</sup> as Groys would say. Christov-Bakargiev intended for this breakdown between subject and object to give way to a "viscous" state where we can wonder along with things rather than wonder about things. As attractive as this might sound, it is not altogether surprising that this approach did not assuage criticisms that the loan was an exploitative and colonialist endeavor. Even if humans are only one type of object among many, sharing the universe without hierarchy, it is difficult to argue for the rights of a rock in opposition to the rights of people.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 38-43.

<sup>26</sup> Groys, *Going Public*, 126-27.

To better understand this breakdown, it is worth looking more closely at Speculative Realism, and Object-Oriented Ontology in particular. In their introductory essay to *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, editors Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman claim that philosophical trends including Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Deconstruction, and Postmodernism are all anti-realist. These approaches emphasize language and are mostly inward ways of looking at the subject. When humanity is always the focus, all of philosophy is nothing but a correlate of human thought. This approach—according to Bryant, Srnicek and Harman—is hitting diminishing returns and is unprepared to address pending ecological disaster and the new ways we are interacting with inhuman technological intelligence. A new breed of Speculative Realist thinkers are turning away from textual analysis in order to investigate the nature of reality independent of human thought.<sup>27</sup> Continental philosophy was stuck for a long time in a paradigm of correlationism, according to the Speculative Realists. Correlationism is the idea that we only have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and we therefore can access neither thinking nor being independently of one another. From within the trap of correlationsim, we are unable to speak consistently about reality apart from human thought and language.<sup>28</sup> Object-Oriented Ontology, according to Graham Harman, breaks away from this in two ways. First, objects have an internal reality that is totally inaccessible to us, even though it is just as deep and complex as the internal reality of humans. Second, the relationship between a human and the world is just a particular case of one object interacting with another, and not something that exists at the center of all inquiry. The authors give the example of fire (an object) burning cotton (another object), which is just one way fire

---

<sup>27</sup> Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: Re.press, 2015), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

interacts with cotton. While a human (an object) looking at cotton (another object) is one way a human interacts with cotton. These interactions are different only by degree, not by type.<sup>29</sup>

Christov-Bakargiev commissioned Graham Harman to write an essay for the dOCUMENTA (13) catalogue titled, “The Third Table.” In it, Harman references Arthur Stanley Eddington’s 1929 story of two tables, his idea that a writing table was actually two tables at once, one defined by language and the humanities, and the other a physical object consisting of atoms and particles. Harman argues that Eddington’s two tables—the humanities table and the science table—are both false models for the same reason. Each is “equally unreal” since they both rely on forms of reductionism. One table is reduced down to atoms and quarks, while the other is abstracted to the realm of language and its effects on humans. The real table is a third table that simply exists and is not reduced either way.<sup>30</sup> The table has a deeper reality that goes beyond its interactions with humans or other objects. It cannot be reduced to just an idea, and to reduce it to a collection of atoms would be to consider atoms as objects while losing sight of the table. The problem with Eddington’s tables is that one is nothing but its effects, and the other is nothing but a group of particles. “The world is filled primarily not with electrons or human praxis,” says Harman, “but with ghostly objects withdrawing from all human and inhuman access, accessible only by allusion and seducing us by means of allure.”<sup>31</sup>

Hypothetical tables are one thing, but a 37-ton meteorite that simultaneously functions as an object of cultural heritage, a scientific specimen, and a readymade artwork is quite another.

Returning to the introductory essay in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and*

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>30</sup> Graham Harman, “The Third Table,” in *Documenta 13: Catalog I/3, The Book of Books*, ed. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Chús Martínez, Franco Berardi (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 540.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 541.

*Realism*, the authors admit that the question of how speculative realism interacts with politics remains largely unresolved.

If the basic claim of realism is that a world exists independent of ourselves, this becomes impossible to reconcile with the idea that all of ontology is simultaneously political. There needs to be an aspect of ontology that is independent of its enmeshment in human concerns. Our knowledge may be irreducibly tied to politics, yet to suggest that reality is also thus tied is to project an epistemological problem into the ontological realm.<sup>32</sup>

Put another way, when one digs deep enough into the subjective, unknowable interiority of inanimate objects, politics no longer apply.

Harman anticipated that Object-Oriented Ontology might be perceived to be incompatible with the politics concerning identity and the legacy of colonialism. In “Objects and Orientalism” he defends his philosophy against a potential argument formed from Edward Said’s crucial 1978 book *Orientalism*, which problematized and dismantled Western colonial assumptions about other cultures. For Said, the mythical notions of the Orient and the Occident were not objects that existed of their own accord but were invented by the West for political purposes. The way the Western world invents a stereotypical identity for the “other” is always a power relationship. The West did not just find the Orient, they subjected it to a process of Orientalization. They were able to define it by dominance, while the Orient was not allowed to define itself.<sup>33</sup> Harman is sensitive to Said’s concern about stereotypes, and both writers agree about the destructive and dehumanizing effects of colonialism. Harman’s issue with Said is his claim that geopolitical classifications of people and places are human constructs and are therefore not real. Following this line of thinking, people will say individuals are real, but a construction like “India” or “France” cannot be considered to exist as an object. But Object-Oriented Ontology holds that

---

<sup>32</sup> Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1979), 5-6.

objects can have vastly different sizes and can be made of complex constituent parts. “Against this dreary traditional taxonomy,” says Harman, “object-oriented philosophy holds that every real object is both substance and aggregate simultaneously.” There is no privileged layer of individuals that is more real than the larger or smaller conglomerates of parts.<sup>34</sup> Said is concerned about Western domination of the Middle East, and Harman does not dispute that. His concern is Said’s anti-realist approach in making his arguments.<sup>35</sup> Said holds that the West constructs an exotic stereotype of the Orient to obscure truth and assert power. Object-Oriented Ontology agrees, since it holds that such a construction can never truly access the full reality of a thing. Harman’s case is that there is an exoticism in everything, and every object—from countries to meteorites to quarks—has a mysterious and inaccessible dimension. Said wants to protect the nuance of different cultures and individuals from the harm of stereotypes, but Harman thinks the cost of this is too high, because an atomized conception of things does not make them more real than objects that are made of components.<sup>36</sup> “If at first it seems that object-oriented thought defends the sort of exoticism, realism, and essentialism that Said most disdains,” argues Harman, “this turns out not to be the case at all. By globalizing the exotic to cover all corners of reality, the object-oriented philosopher removes the exotic from the realm of imperialistic thrill-seekers.”<sup>37</sup>

Harman’s call to equalize everything by exoticizing everything parallels Christov-Bakargiev’s desire to flatten hierarchies and challenge the subject/object dichotomy. In a statement prepared for the dOCUMENTA (13) website regarding the failed loan, she explains

---

<sup>34</sup> Graham Harman, “Objects and Orientalism,” in *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*, ed. Ming Xie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014): 128

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 135-36.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 137.

the intent of the El Chaco loan by saying it was meant to repeat and reverse the route of colonial theft, celebrate material and spiritual heritage of all people, and “suggest that there is no single centre, no ‘north’ of the world, but that every particle and point is always simultaneously in the middle of the middle of the middle of the universe.”<sup>38</sup>

The failure of the loan suggests that the flattening, universalizing effect of Object-Oriented Ontology does not empower others the way Christov-Bakargiev and Harman hope it will. In a biting critique of both the curator and the philosopher, Svenja Bromberg points out that turning toward objects and their alien-ness runs the risk of sidelining groups that have been oppressed because of class, gender, race, and other divisions. These people were never given the privilege of being subjects in the first place, so claiming that moving everything toward objectification is an emancipatory strategy seems like a bad joke.<sup>39</sup> Claiming that every person, every rock, every tribe, and every nation is each its own object with a deep, ultimately unknowable interiority sidesteps the damaging hierarchies of colonialism, but ultimately leaves them unchallenged. It is true that El Chaco exists apart from our perception of it and apart from the language we use to describe it. It is true that this rock predates Earth itself, and that the history of the entire human species is dwarfed by the timescale of its galactic lifetime. But it is also true that the brutal legacy of colonialism cannot be dealt with by looking beyond it into the deep, cosmic past.

As observed previously, Christov-Bakargiev frames the conflict of the failed loan as one between the Moqoit people and the rock, rather than between the Moqoit people and the artists. This recalls Harman’s insistence that an object, in the way he uses the term, can describe

---

<sup>38</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook*, 83-84.

<sup>39</sup> Svenja Bromberg, “The Anti-Political Aesthetics of Objects and Worlds Beyond,” *Mute*, (July 25, 2013), <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anti-political-aesthetics-objects-and-worlds-beyond>.

complex but nevertheless cohesive things that are made of smaller parts, including people. Can the Moqoit people be considered an object in this sense? In theory, perhaps, but in practice, no. Recall that the opposition to the loan was not a universally shared position among the Moqoit. The Moqoit Council opposed the opposition, and lamented the cancelation of the loan, claiming that the will of their people had been usurped.<sup>40</sup> Christov-Bakargiev asked what the rock wanted, posing a question that we are unable to answer, thereby highlighting the alien subjectivity of an unknowable object. If we accept her framing of the conflict—rock verses people—we also must acknowledge that the desires of both the rock and the Moqoit people are ultimately both unknowable. According to one letter, the Moqoit people opposed the loan as a brazen act of colonial theft. According to another letter, the Moqoit people supported the loan as a chance to connect their region to a global exchange of ideas and goodwill. Both are true at the same time.

In an addendum to an interview about the El Chaco loan, Christov-Bakargiev says that if we look beyond the conflict “you might unexpectedly tune in to the vibrating sensibility and desires of El Chaco and discover something incommensurable with our human schemes and forms of imagination.” In context, we have to conclude that she is looping both colonialism and movements against colonialism under the label of “human schemes.”<sup>41</sup> This comes off as both insulting and technically correct. On the timescale of the rock, all of human history is a relatively recent flurry of activity. She concludes that it was only through this irresolvable tension with the custodians of the meteorite that we were able to get to a place where we could listen to El Chaco, where its “vibrating sensibilities” could be fully considered.<sup>42</sup> After all that went into the

---

<sup>40</sup> Faivovich and Goldberg, *Chaco*, 196-97.

<sup>41</sup> Christov-Bakargiev, *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook*, 292.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

planning of the loan, Christov-Bakargiev concludes that the full potential of the project was only realized in its failure.



## Chapter Three

### An Interloper in the Tower: Censorship as Curatorial Gesture

dOCUMENTA (13) occupied many prominent buildings facing the grassy Friedrichsplatz in central Kassel, with one notable exception: St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church. The modern cathedral, rebuilt after the original was lost to Allied bombing, features a minimal bell tower with a large golden orb visible in its open belfry. For the duration of dOCUMENTA (13), and for several weeks preceding the opening, a life-sized sculpture of a man with outstretched arms stood atop the shimmering ball. The Christ-like figure, titled *Man in the Tower* (2012), was the work of prominent German sculptor Stephan Balkenhol (Figure 3). Passersby could easily assume that the figure was included in dOCUMENTA (13), but it was not, and this confusion became a source of controversy. The church worked with Balkenhol independently to produce an exhibition that ran concurrently with dOCUMENTA (13), of which *Man in the Tower* was only the most visible work, the rest having been installed inside the church. The visibility and content of the sculpture was so troubling to artistic director Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and other leaders of the Documenta organization that they tried in earnest to have the sculpture removed. The church and the artist refused, and the figure remained visible in the bell tower for the entirety of dOCUMENTA (13) and beyond. The story of Kai Althoff's letter of resignation and the failed loan of El Chaco both demonstrate the pervasive, totalizing power of an institution like dOCUMENTA (13) and a curator like Christov-Bakargiev. This power can recuperate and reverse programmatic failures, rendering them instead as successful illustrations of curatorial themes such as withdrawal and retreat. The attempt to censor Balkenhol's

unauthorized sculpture, however, is a different sort of failure, one which demonstrates both the limits of the institution's power, and the limits of the institution's strategic attempt to self-consciously embrace its own failures. Christov-Bakargiev's strategy worked to deal with the unexpected absences of artworks, but it came undone when an artwork was unexpectedly present.

The conflict between St. Elizabeth's Church and dOCUMENTA (13) began brewing in early 2011. Bernd Leifeld, the managing director of the Documenta organization, met with representatives of St. Elizabeth's Church, including the leader of the local Catholic Diocese. When he learned of the plans to place one of Balkenhol's sculptures in the church tower, Leifeld asked the church to reconsider. The church refused to accommodate this request but offered to meet with Christov-Bakargiev in order to work together to find ways to compromise. The church leaders suggested that the building could become a site of official dOCUMENTA (13) programming of some kind. Leifeld and Christov-Bakargiev did not take them up on the offer. Instead, another Documenta executive accused the church of being free-riders for wanting to gain attention due to the prestige and high-quality art dOCUMENTA (13) was planning to draw to the city, comparing it to the way some commercial galleries latch on to the exhibition despite having no formal connection. The church leaders, on the other hand, felt that offering a place of quiet reflection inside the church was a service to visitors. They also felt it would be absurd to leave such a prominent location devoid of art.<sup>1</sup>

*Man in the Tower* was installed May 4 and 5, 2012. The Documenta organization immediately demanded that it be dismantled. Balkenhol and the church leaders again refused.

---

<sup>1</sup> Christoph Baumanns, "Stephan Balkenhol in Sankt Elisabeth," in *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen: Der Streit Um Die Kirchlichen Begleitausstellungen Zur Documenta*, ed. Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern (Paderborn: Schöningh Paderborn, 2014), 45.

Following the installation, there were two attempts to resolve the conflict. The church proposed a roundtable discussion, which was rejected by Documenta management. A second written invitation for a meeting from the church went unanswered by Documenta leadership. On June 20, 2012, nearly two weeks into dOCUMENTA (13), the church met with Kassel's Lord Mayor Bertram Hilgen, Cultural Affairs Officer and Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Documenta organization. Hilgen shared Christov-Bakargiev's concern, feeling that Balkenhol's sculpture in the bell tower would impede dOCUMENTA (13) and cause confusion, with visitors likely assuming that the work was part of the broader exhibition occupying the rest of Kassel. Hilgen went so far as to claim that the church's actions were evidence of self-serving motives, pointing out that it would most likely not stage such an ambitious exhibition at any other time. The previous month, Hilgen had rejected the invitation to attend the opening reception of the Balkenhol exhibition, in a show of solidarity with the dOCUMENTA (13). Disappointed by Lord Mayor Hilgen's lack of support, the church reasserted what they felt was their right to display the art they wished despite opposition.<sup>2</sup>

Christov-Bakargiev's fervent opposition to *Man in the Tower* had two aspects. First, the sculpture was a literal and figurative elevation of man within an exhibition that strove to be non-anthropocentric and non-hierarchical. Second, the work stood as a challenge to Documenta's claim over Kassel as the tabula rasa upon which the artistic director was meant to have authority to enact her total vision.

In an essay regarding the conflict over the disparate views of anthropocentrism embodied by St. Elizabeth's Church and dOCUMENTA (13), Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern notes that while Christov-Bakargiev's catalogue essay asks us to think along with the inanimate objects that make

---

<sup>2</sup> Baumanns, "Stephan Balkenhol in Sankt Elisabeth," 46.

up the world, she does not say precisely how this is possible. He also levies criticisms against other comments made by Christov-Bakargiev in an interview where she spoke of democracy for dogs and strawberries, claiming that this insistence on decentering the human point of view ran the risk of slipping into parody.<sup>3</sup> In fairness to Christov-Bakargiev, in the interview Meyer Zu Schlochtern is most likely referring to, she says the question is not whether to give strawberries the right to vote, but to question how a strawberry could demonstrate its political intent.<sup>4</sup> Speculative realism is speculative, after all. Christov-Bakargiev and other dOCUMENTA (13) leaders were explicit about the thematic clash presented by *Man in the Tower*. The exhibition's move against anthropocentrism was central to their argument when they asked the church to remove Balkenhol's sculpture. The controversy quickly got picked up by the local media, with juicy scoops and sharp opinions on both sides. Letters to the editor in local newspapers criticized the inconsistency of Christov-Bakargiev's non-anthropocentric position, pointing out the large permanent statue of Friedrich II in Friedrichsplatz which apparently was not an issue.<sup>5</sup>

For Meyer Zu Schlochtern, Christov-Bakargiev's opposition to *Man in the Tower* is evidence of Christov-Bakargiev's failure to reckon with the implications of a Judeo-Christian worldview. In the Christian and Jewish traditions, humanity is not simply a part of the cosmos, people are created in God's image, and God has a covenant with humanity. Central to this point of view is the belief that God acts within historical narratives, and the human condition contains a hole that can only be filled by a living relationship with God. In Genesis God gives humans the

---

<sup>3</sup> Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern, "Um Anthropozentrik und Öffentlichkeit," in *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen: Der Streit Um Die Kirchlichen Begleitausstellungen Zur Documenta*, ed. Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern (Paderborn: Schöningh Paderborn, 2014), 12.

<sup>4</sup> Kia Vahland, "Über die politische Intention der Erdbeere," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 8, 2012, accessed April 8, 2018, <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/documenta-leiterin-carolyn-christov-bakargiev-ueber-die-politische-intention-der-erdbeere-1.1370514>.

<sup>5</sup> Meyer Zu Schlochtern, "Um Anthropozentrik und Öffentlichkeit," 12-14.

command to subdue the Earth. Critics of religion often see this as an excuse for exploitation, but for Christians it begins a conversation about the best ways to approach humanity's centrality to creation. For Christians, anthropocentrism is not a pejorative. Instead, the Biblical emphasis on humanity challenges us to reconcile the human centrality in creation with God's sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> While there could be space for the spiritual in Christov-Bakargiev's cosmology—one that extends subjectivity to rocks and strawberries—it is difficult to reconcile this ontological position with the unique relationship between God and humanity described in the Biblical narrative.

The second point of contention was not about the content of the unauthorized sculpture, but about whether it had the right to be there at all. The power of the curator in an exhibition such as dOCUMENTA (13) has been documented in the previous chapters. Christov-Bakargiev's ability to use individual artists' works as material for her own curatorial meta-artwork was so potent that it even made use of works that failed to exist. But does this power extend to the whole city? If the exhibition occupies and transforms all of Kassel, and the curator is the auteur/meta-artist, does it follow that the whole city is then under her aesthetic and conceptual control? Can an artist truly manipulate material—be it physical, social, or political—without the option to reduce, remove, and erase?

In *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Paul O'Neill describes these vast curatorial projects as the curator's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a German word meaning a total work of art or ideal artwork. The term was popularized by Richard Wagner when he described the way musical theater should be a perfect synthesis of all art forms. The large group exhibition, according to O'Neill and other theorists, is a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with the curator occupying

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

ultimate creative role instead of an artist.<sup>7</sup> In orchestrating a Gesamtkunstwerk, the curator is responsible for contextualizing, synthesizing, and when necessary, removing, elements in order to create an all-encompassing, complete artwork.

Writing in his book *Ways of Curating*, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist warns against the notion of a curatorial Gesamtkunstwerk. He claims there is a danger that exhibitions can be seen as the curator's Gesamtkunstwerk, with curator as auteur. Artists should not be used to illustrate a point, according to Obrist. Exhibitions should rise out of conversations and collaborations with artists, and their input should always steer the process. Obrist rejects the idea that curators have become artists and insists that they should instead follow artists.<sup>8</sup> That may be the ideal, but Christov-Bakargiev's actions fall well outside Obrist's conception of how artists and curators should relate.

In Paul O'Neill's account of how the curator ascended to the position of orchestrating the exhibition as Gesamtkunstwerk, he references conceptual theorist and collector Seth Siegelaub. Starting in the late 1960's Siegelaub talked about the way the practice of making exhibitions was becoming demystified. Institutions began to reveal what went into the process of creating exhibitions, the curators began to show their hand along with the artist.<sup>9</sup> Siegelaub claimed that the work of art was split into two parts. There was primary information, which was the essence of the piece, and secondary information, which was how one became aware of the piece and the way it was presented. The thing itself was different from the information about it. Production and representation/mediation became totally intertwined. But eventually, the curator began to

---

<sup>7</sup> Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016): 28.

<sup>8</sup> Hans Ulrich Obrist and Asad Razā, *Ways of Curating* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 32-33.

<sup>9</sup> O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)*, 19.

become “remystified” because she was the ultimate insider. The institutional process of curation was transparent, but the creative will of the individual curator was not.<sup>10</sup> Exhibitions began to incorporate works from many styles and periods together. Traditional museum taxonomies were replaced by the taste-making of the individual curator, who was able to reorganize disparate things to create new subjective truths.<sup>11</sup> The demystification of the role of curator began as a rebuke of the opaque systems of the art world, but now transparency of the process is a given. Curators now understand that they have a very prominent position, so the key term is visibility. Their actions are visible by default, and not unmasked as a rebellion against the status quo. Curators are expected to act with transparency whenever possible. O’Neill calls this state of assumed transparency “supervisibility.”<sup>12</sup>

Christov-Bakargiev’s display of Kai Althoff’s letter and her choice to publish email archives relating to the failed loan of El Chaco demonstrate that she embraced the supervisibility of her role. But supervisibility backfired when it came to *Man in the Tower*. When an act of erasure is needed in the process of assembling an exhibition as a Gesamtkunstwerk, a dangerous element of the autonomy of the curator emerges. Artists delete, omit, and alter material by means of reduction, but does censorship belong in a curator’s toolbox?

In his essay “Entering the Flow,” Boris Groys delves into Wagner’s theories of the Gesamtkunstwerk to more precisely map the concept onto contemporary curatorial projects. Wagner claimed artists of his time were egoists who primarily made things for rich people, following fashion. He proclaimed that artists in the future would need to make things for and about everyone, becoming communists instead of egoists. The self would need to be renounced

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 34.

for the collective. This theme appeared in Wagner's musical theater work, where an artist hero would performatively sacrifice himself for the collective—then the collective would dissolve. It existed only for the work, and a new collective and a new sacrificial hero would form for the next Gesamtkunstwerk. Groys ties this collective style to avant-garde movements that appeared a century later, like Andy Warhol's Factory and Guy Debord's Situationist International, collectives formed around charismatic leaders that incorporated a vast array of material and social forms—then inevitably dissipated. Today this phenomenon can best be seen in curatorial projects.<sup>13</sup>

Harald Szeemann, curator of documenta 5 and the figure largely responsible for curators beginning to be seen as auteurs, was fascinated by the idea of Gesamtkunstwerk and curated an exhibition titled *Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk* (or “The Tendency to Gesamtkunstwerk”) in 1984. The difference between a traditional exhibition and a curatorial Gesamtkunstwerk, according to Groys, is that in a traditional exhibition only the works on display truly matter, not anything else. The objects are presented as being important and eternal. Szeemann ushered in a sharp break from this traditional notion of what an exhibition should be. In the curatorial projects of Szeemann and those following in his footsteps (like Christov-Bakargiev), the objects are situated in real space and contingent upon it. All objects in a curatorial project serve a common purpose determined by the curator. All types of work are included, the spaces themselves become a part of the exhibition, as well as the people there to look at the work. Objects lose their autonomy in service to a particular end.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Boris Groys, “Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk,” *e-flux journal* no. 50 (December, 2013): <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/50/59974/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



Curatorial projects inhabit and are contingent upon their surroundings and this is key to understanding how art institutions function. According to Groys, “every curatorial project demonstrates its accidental, contingent, eventful, finite character—in other words, it enacts its own precariousness.”<sup>15</sup> It is easy to see Kai Althoff’s letter of resignation and the failed loan of El Chaco as ways that the curatorial project of dOCUMENTA (13) enacted its own precariousness. Those were two projects that genuinely failed, and Christov-Bakargiev opted to highlight rather than hide those narratives that demonstrated the extent to which dOCUMENTA (13) was contingent on forces outside its control. The curatorial Gesamtkunstwerk, as described by Groys, combines that demonstration of precariousness with a charge to extend our reading of the exhibition to everything that constitutes our experience of it. The curatorial project as Gesamtkunstwerk can only be experienced from within, unlike artworks, which we experience from outside.<sup>16</sup> In this way, *Man in the Tower* presented a situation where one aspect of the exhibition as Gesamtkunstwerk was turned against the other. Christov-Bakargiev committed to creating an exhibition that was contingent on the chaos and unpredictability of the world surrounding it, including the unruly will of artists and the competing subjectivities of human and non-human actors. But to truly follow through on this would require her to accept and integrate all contingencies, not just the ones that served to emphasize her thematic goals. Christov-Bakargiev was attempting to demonstrate the humility of the curator, showing that even this all-powerful auteur is still subject to the whims of unpredictable and sometime incomprehensible forces. *Man in the Tower* was the one contingency that could not be tolerated, however, because it infected the citywide Gesamtkunstwerk with an idea that undermined the demonstration of

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

precariousness upon which this curatorial approach depends. *Man in the Tower* declares the existence of a holy, universal hierarchy with a special place for humanity. The appearance of a Christ figure could not be both accident and divine providence. The figure in the bell tower could not represent both humanity's vulnerability to incomprehensible forces and humanity's centrality to God's plan. Faced with this conflict of incommensurate ontologies, Christov-Bakargiev decided that the man had to be removed.

## Conclusion

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev set out to organize a Documenta that embraced failure and retreat. Being appointed Artistic Director of Documenta is one of the most coveted positions in the international art world. The designation led to Christov-Bakargiev topping *ArtReview*'s "Power 100" list in 2012, an annual ranking of the most influential people in the art world.<sup>1</sup> Despite the obvious power of this position, she projected an air of humility, embracing and amplifying failures, explaining their place in her curatorial vision instead of hiding them. There is something conflicted about this apparent humility because it can only be articulated through a remarkably assertive strategy. It takes a lot of courage to highlight one's own shortcomings.

In the introduction Michel Foucault's writings on power relations were mentioned as a lens through which these three stories of failure and recuperation could be interpreted, and it is worth revisiting those ideas here. For Foucault, the way entities use power to relate to one another is not external or added on, it is always part of a thing. Power relations come from a constant and tumultuous disequilibrium between things. Power comes from below, above, and everywhere else, there is not a duality based on hierarchy. Major hegemonies and dominations are an aggregate of many smaller repeated force relations aligning.<sup>2</sup> The way power works is arrived at through many small decisions, often made without agency or a larger plan.<sup>3</sup> These pervasive enactments of power at all levels lead to constant acts of resistance, both big and small. "Where there is power," says Foucault, "there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this

---

<sup>1</sup> "2012 Power 100," 2012 Power 100, ArtReview, accessed April 15, 2018, [https://artreview.com/power\\_100/2012/](https://artreview.com/power_100/2012/).

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 94.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 95.

resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”<sup>4</sup> Resistance to power is an essential part of power relations. Resistance is not a separate thing from power, they are more like two sides of the same coin, always playing off one another. Foucault describes this ubiquity by saying, “These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary.”<sup>5</sup> This explains the way in which Christov-Bakargiev was able to claim ownership of the resistance to her curatorial project *as a part of* her curatorial project. There is no “outside,” the resistance has no position of exteriority. Christov-Bakargiev’s elevation of unplanned instances of resistance, such as Kai Althoff’s letter of resignation and failure of the El Chaco loan, are best understood as her act of resistance *against resistance*. She elected to put on display the complex web of power relations at play. In the case of El Chaco, she attempted to dismantle the idea that there is a binary power relationship between the colonial and post-colonial subject by resisting anti-colonial resistance. She did this not by stealing the rock, which would be the colonialist thing to do, but instead by using her power to display her apparent lack of power, thereby having the last word.

On the subject of Documenta and failure, it could be argued that the following edition, Documenta 14, could provide even more subject matter. The 2017 edition of the exhibition was unique in that it was split evenly between Kassel and Athens, Greece. Artistic Director Adam Szymczyk titled it “Learning from Athens,” and sought to connect two European Union countries with differences on several ongoing political crises, such as Eurozone finances and immigration. DOCUMENTA (13) was broadly considered to be a success, but the reception of

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 95-96.

Documenta 14 has been far darker. Its failures were more systemic, and at the time of this writing the full extent of those failures is still being litigated. Shortly before the exhibition closed, a story broke that the show went 5.4 million Euros over budget, due to unexpected costs related to the Athens portion and possible embezzlement. There is currently an expanding criminal investigation into the mismanagement of funds. The City of Kassel filed criminal charges against the chief executive of the Documenta organization, Annette Kulenkampff; Documenta 14 Artistic Director Adam Szymczyk; ex-mayor of Kassel, Bertram Hilgen (the same mayor who attempted to persuade St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church to remove Stephan Balkenhol's *Man in the Tower*), and current mayor Christian Geselle. Annette Kulenkampff agreed to step down from her post before her contract ends. Before she goes, she hopes to find the Artistic Director of Documenta 15, set to open in June, 2022.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Kate Brown, "Investigation of documenta 14's Shaky Finances Widens to Include Possible Embezzlement of Public Funds," artnet news, February 15, 2018, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/prosecutors-expand-investigation-into-documenta14-officials-on-the-suspicion-of-embezzlement-1224827>.

## Figures

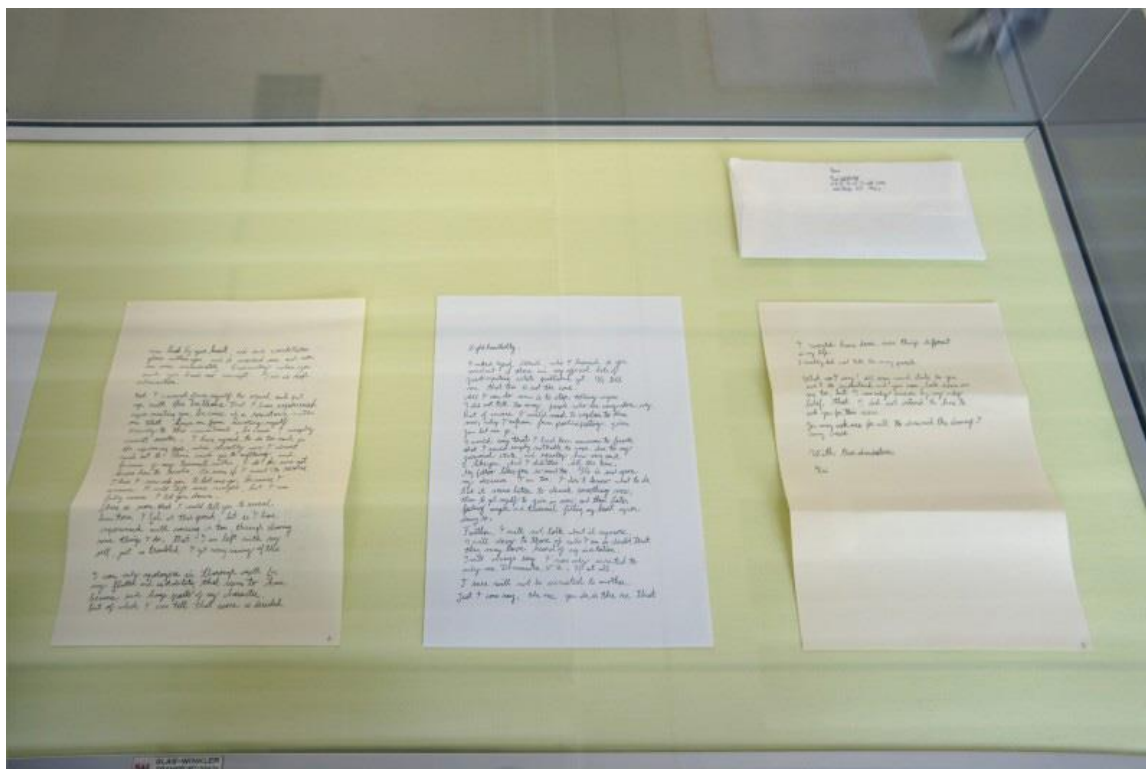


Figure 1. “A letter to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev by Kai Althoff, May 24, 2011. Exhibited on the initiative of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and with the permission of the artist.” Photograph used with permission from *Contemporary Art Daily*.



Figure 2. Promotional image of El Chaco meteorite provided by Guillermo Faivovich and Nicolas Goldberg, used with permission from the artists.



Figure 3. *Man in the Tower*, 2012 by Stephan Balkenhol. Public domain photograph accessed from Wikimedia Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sankt\\_Elisabeth\\_Kassel\\_documenta\\_13.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sankt_Elisabeth_Kassel_documenta_13.jpg)



## Bibliography

- Althoff, Kai and Laura J. Hoptman. *Kai Althoff - And Then Leave Me to The Common Swifts*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2016.
- ArtReview. "2012 Power 100." 2012 Power 100, accessed April 15, 2018.  
[https://artreview.com/power\\_100/2012/](https://artreview.com/power_100/2012/).
- Baumanns, Christoph. "Stephan Balkenhol in Sankt Elisabeth." In *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen: Der Streit Um Die Kirchlichen Begleitausstellungen Zur Documenta*, edited by Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern, 45-47. Paderborn: Schöningh Paderborn, 2014.
- Bromberg, Svenja. "The Anti-Political Aesthetics of Objects and Worlds Beyond." *Mute*, July 25, 2013. <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/anti-political-aesthetics-objects-and-worlds-beyond>.
- Brown, Kate. "Investigation of documenta 14's Shaky Finances Widens to Include Possible Embezzlement of Public Funds." *artnet news*, February 15, 2018.  
<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/prosecutors-expand-investigation-into-documenta14-officials-on-the-suspicion-of-embezzlement-1224827>.
- Bryant, Levi, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds. *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*. Melbourne: Re.press, 2015.
- Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. "The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time." In *Documenta 13: Catalog I/3, The Book of Books*, edited by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Chús Martinez, Franco Berardi, 30-44. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012.
- Christov-Bakargiev, Carolyn. *Documenta 13: Das Logbuch / The Logbook*. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2012.
- Contemporary Art Daily. "Documenta 13: Kai Althoff," Accessed April 9, 2018.  
<http://www.contemporaryartdaily.com/2012/06/documenta-13-kai-althoff/>.
- Documenta gGmbH. "Documenta: About." Accessed April 8, 2018.  
[https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16\\_documenta\\_ggmbh](https://www.documenta.de/en/about#16_documenta_ggmbh).
- Documenta. "Retrospective: dOCUMENTA (13)." Accessed April 8, 2018.  
[https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta\\_13](https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_13).
- Documenta. "Retrospective: documenta." Accessed April 8, 2018.  
<https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta>.

- Faivovich, Guillermo and Nicolás Goldberg. *Chaco*. Köln: Walther König, 2012.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood." *Artforum*, Vol. 5, No. 10, (Summer 1967).
- Groys, Boris. "Entering the Flow: Museum between Archive and Gesamtkunstwerk." *e-flux journal* no. 50 (December, 2013). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/50/59974/entering-the-flow-museum-between-archive-and-gesamtkunstwerk/>.
- Groys, Boris. *Going Public*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010.
- Harman, Graham. "Objects and Orientalism." In *The Agon of Interpretations: Towards a Critical Intercultural Hermeneutics*, edited by Ming Xie, 123-37. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.
- Harman, Graham. "The Third Table." In *Documenta 13: Catalog I/3, The Book of Books*, edited by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Chús Martínez, Franco Berardi, 540-42. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012.
- Meyer Zu Schlochtern, Josef. "Um Anthropozentrik und Öffentlichkeit." In *Kunst, Kirche, Kontroversen: Der Streit Um Die Kirchlichen Begleitausstellungen Zur Documenta*, edited by Josef Meyer Zu Schlochtern, 9-20. Paderborn: Schöningh Paderborn, 2014.
- Miller, John. "The Show You Love to Hate." In *Thinking About Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, 272. London: Routledge, 1996.
- O'Doherty, Brian. "The Gallery as a Gesture." In *Thinking About Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, 321-334. London: Routledge, 1996.
- O'Neill, Paul. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016.
- Obrist, Hans Ulrich and Asad Razā. *Ways of Curating*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.
- Rawsthorn, Alice. "A Symbol Is Born." *New York Times*, June 3, 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/arts/04iht-design04.html>.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Random House, 1979.
- Szeemann, Harald. *Documenta 5: Befragung Der Realität, Bildwelten Heute; Kassel, 30. Juni Bis 8. Oktober 1972, Neue Galerie Schöne Aussicht, Museum Fridericianum, Friedrichsplatz*. Kassel: Verl. Documenta, 1972.

Vahland, Kia. "Über die politische Intention der Erdbeere." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, June 8, 2012.  
<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/documenta-leiterin-carolyn-christov-bakargiev-ueber-die-politische-intention-der-erdbeere-1.1370514>.

Voorhies, James. *Beyond Objecthood. The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968*.  
Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017.