Screen Cultures 1970s–1990s in Basel and Beyond

Video and Net Initiatives

SCHÜREN

Stefanie Bräuer, Lucie Kolb (eds.)

Screen Cultures 1970s–1990s in Basel and Beyond:
Video and Net Initiatives

Stefanie Bräuer, Lucie Kolb (eds.)

SCHÜREN

2 Participation in Net Cultures

3 Providing Access

Stefanie Bräuer, Lucie Kolb

CONTEXTUALIZING AND PRESERVING SCREEN CULTURES
Transversal Perspectives on the 1970s–1990s in Basel and beyond

In this volume, we explore a media vernacular shaped by bottom-up initiatives that emerged in response to mass media, spanning from the late 1970s and 1980s through the 1990s, with an outlook toward contemporary and future practices of participatory video and net art production and distribution. While centered around Basel, Switzerland, the essays in this volume adopt a translocal perspective and consistently look beyond this location to broader developments.[1] Focusing on video and net art in conjunction with activism, the research presented here transcends media boundaries to engage with the wider field of screen cultures. In a narrow sense, screen cultures refer to broadcast television as one of the dominant mass media,[2] but this merely functions as a cultural background hum to which the practices examined here respond, with video, for example, being understood as counter-TV.

The medium of the screen examined here operates in a transitional space between analog and digital technologies. In our understanding, screen cultures are situated at the intersection of video and net art and activism: A range of practices that create spaces for exchange and are grounded in technologies of recording, editing, and sharing, as well as in communication platforms such as bulletin board systems and the early Internet.

More importantly, we adopt a metaphorical understanding of the screen – considering not only its material dimension as a technical apparatus but also its function as a site of both production and dissemination. This orientation foregrounds a process-based approach attentive to infrastructural, social, and pedagogical aspects. For us, screen cultures signify media practices that assume multiple roles, presenting a broad and flexible concept not reducible to any single dimension.

Our interest lies in zones of crossing, critique, and dissemination – infrastructural practices, institutional critique, and cultural studies – as fields where art crosses into other modes of cultural production and publishing. We examine the movements that transverse art and adjacent fields of practice, as well as the spaces in which they unfold. Where do these practices originate, and in which direction do they evolve? And who participates in building the infrastructures that support this mode of production – who provides access, and what motivates them?

1 The term translocal, introduced in migration studies as an alternative to transnational, captures the connections between people or entities across national borders while emphasizing their grounding in specific local contexts. Cf. Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee, "Voices of the Governed. Towards a Theory of the Translocal," *Organization* 18/3 (2011): 323–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508411398729; Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

2 See Richard Butsch, *Screen Culture. A Global History* (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2019); Jeremy G. Butler, *Television: Visual Storytelling and Screen Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

Looking at the social aspect of how practitioners networked translocally, even a brief introduction focused on just two associations and one festival based in Basel offers valuable insight, though it can only begin to capture the broader picture. The *Videogenossenschaft Basel* (VGB), now called *point the vue*, was founded in 1979 by individuals from diverse fields, including fine arts, journalism, social work, and art education. Their aim was to pool resources in order to finance what was then a costly infrastructure for video recording and editing.[3] The VGB was comparable to similar video collectives elsewhere, such as *MedienOperative Berlin*, *Medienpädagogik Zentrum Hamburg*, *Medienwerkstatt Freiburg*, *Container TV Bern*, and *Videoladen Zürich*. While each emerged from local contexts, they shared a sense of belonging to a broader international movement.

The videos produced by VGB were made *by* and *for* a local community of activists and primarily served as tools for discussing political issues such as urban development and environmental activism. Over the course of the 1980s, video art became increasingly important within this landscape of grassroots initiatives. Another relevant association, *VIA*, was founded in 1988 by graduates of the video program at Basel's art and design school. Like VGB, *VIA* aimed to facilitate shared access to production infrastructure – but with a clear focus on video art from the outset.[4] A number of local media companies emerged from these collaborative contexts. Notable among them are *Tweaklab* (founded in 2000) and *iart* (founded in 2001), both of which specialize in interactive media installations. The *Film- und Videotage Basel* festival, launched in 1985, incorporated interactive stations for a few iterations from the mid-1990s onward. It presented film and video works, the latter both as single-channel pieces and as multi-monitor installations, at the cultural center *Kaserne*. Inspired by *Ars Electronica* in Linz (established in 1979), and *Transmediale* in Berlin (which began in 1988 as *VideoFilmFest* and morphed into a media arts festival), the festival also featured computer-based works in curtained alcoves where visitors could engage interactively with narratives – such as Margarete Jahrmann's and Max Moswitzer's CD-ROM *Golden Frisbee* from 1995.[5] A shared thread across VGB, *VIA*, and the *Film- und Videotage* festival was their strong emphasis on bottom-up community building which, to some degree, affected what topics were chosen and what stories were explored. Also noteworthy were *xcult*, an online portal launched by Reinhard Storz in 1997, which functioned as a curated and indexed archive of video and net art projects and texts,[6] and the *VIPER* festival, held in Basel from 2000 to 2006 which, following earlier iterations in Kriens and Luzern, shifted its focus from film, video,

3 Urs Berger and Reinhard Manz, "Die Videogenossenschaft Basel (VGB) und point de vue," in *Filmfrontal. Das unabhängige Film- und Videoschaffen der 1970er- und 1980er-Jahre in Basel*, exh. cat. Kunsthalle Basel, ed. Urs Berger et al. (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2010), 131.

4 Irene Schubiger, ",La vidéo, je m'en balance'. Die ersten zwanzig Jahre Schweizer Videokunst: Künstlerischer Schwung versus kunsthistorische Trägheit," in *Schweizer Videokunst der 1970er und 1980er Jahre. Eine Rekonstruktion,* exh. cat. Kunstmuseum Luzern, ed. Irene Schubiger (Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2009), 156–66, n. 29.

5 Stella Händler et al., *Programmübersicht 11. Film- Und Videotage Der Region Basel* (Basel: Zbinden, 1995), 45.

6 Fanni Fetzer, "Cyberminiaturen mit Sprengkraft. Interview mit Annette Schindler und Reinhard Storz," *Du. Die Zeitschrift Der Kultur* 711 (November 2000): 48.

and performance toward net art and interactive installations.[7] Later physical spaces where sharing and exchange came to play an important role included *[plug:in]* (2000–11), which hosted the *Festival der elektronischen Künste Shift* (2007–2011), and its successor, the *House of Electronic Arts* (2011–).

Connected to this brief insight into translocal networks is the aspect of skill development: What were the environments in which one could acquire the necessary skills for creating video or interactive experiences? The *Schule für Gestaltung Basel* (Basel School of Design) was crucial not only in fostering skill acquisition but also in cultivating critical perspectives on digital technologies and incubating new professions and fields of practice.[8] Particularly important in this regard was the aforementioned video class founded by René Pulfer and Enrique Fontanilles in 1985. One graduate of the 1992 video class, Barbara Strebel, became co-founder of *L@den*, a community space that operated between 1995 and 1997. Through independent workshops, *L@den* provided the public with opportunities to learn the basics of coding or software use. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, several programs at Swiss art and design schools were launched to offer structured frameworks for engaging with digital technologies. These included *Critical Curatorial Cybermedia* (CCC) in Geneva, *Studienbereich Neue Medien* in Zürich, and *Medienkunst* in Aarau. Since then, these programs have been integrated into broader curricula in visual communication and fine arts, demonstrating both the ongoing relevance of critical digital media practices in design education and the importance of media art in the domain of fine arts.

This volume seeks to outline and discuss screen cultures that have shaped such media practices at the intersection of video, net art, and activism. It maps where these practices originate, and in which direction they evolve, and traces who participates in building the infrastructures that support this mode of production and what motivates them.

The volume is structured in three sections: (1) *Critical Video Publics*, (2) *Participation in Net Cultures*, and (3) *Providing Access*. The contributions follow a timeline from the late 1970s and 1980s, moving through the 1990s, and culminating in what today continue to be highly relevant questions of access.

The first section, *Critical Video Publics*, examines the evolution of video as a medium deeply intertwined with political activism, institutional critique, and cultural production. It looks at how video shifted from grassroots, countercultural practices to gaining legitimacy within artistic, educational, and curatorial contexts. Emphasizing the medium's role in shaping and reflecting

7 Gabriel Flückiger, Siri Peyer, and Fred Truniger, "From a Debate over a Playground to the Meeting Point for Swiss Video Art: The International Film, Video, and Performance Festival VIPER," in *Minor Cinema. Experimental Film in Switzerland*, ed. François Bovier et al. (*SubTexte* 18) (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2020), 362–75, here 373–4.

8 The opposite perspective was also voiced and demanded – namely, that the school should adapt its courses to meet market needs. Mischa Schaub, who was teaching at HyperStudio Muttenz at the time and later founded HyperWerk at the school in 1999, described the call for new study programs in 1995 as follows: "The education should be better. … I am firmly convinced that there are good conditions for designing interactive media in Switzerland. I see it as the central task of our schools to maintain and develop this new market in Switzerland by offering appropriate training." Cyrill Locher, "Bildschirm, Bleistift und Papier. Die visuelle Gestaltung der Bildschirm-Bilder. Interview mit den Designern Christoph Frey, Mischa Schaub und Alexander Stephan," *Hochparterre* 8/5 (1995): 37 (translated by the authors).

socio-political structures, the section highlights video's function as both a tool of resistance and a subject of critical discourse. Dominique Rudin's essay offers historical context by describing video groups of the 1970s and 1980s as leftist, grassroots "counter-TV" initiatives characterized by democratic self-organization and collective production. One such example is the *Medien-Operative Berlin*, where those involved participated in the production of video tapes. Rudin argues that the relationship between socio-political activism and video is shaped by (trans-)local structures. His article illustrates the complexity of these structures and concludes by expanding the lens to include U.S. perspectives – highlighting how contemporary media environments are shaped by American corporate platforms. Also in the first section is Melissa Rérat's contribution, which focuses on *VIDEO*, an exhibition held in 1977 at the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva and at STAMPA Galerie in Basel. Through close readings of the exhibition's poster, catalog, and unpublished archival materials, Rérat explores how a diverse group of actors collaborated to realize this two-part show across two locations. Her analysis reveals that at the time video art was undergoing a process of legitimization in which discourse played a central role. By combining approaches from the sociology of knowledge and art, she integrates textual and contextual analysis to nuance and correct historical narratives of this video exhibition.

By the late 1980s, questions of legitimation were less pressing. As Julie Lang demonstrates in her contribution to the first section, video had become established not only in activism but also in artistic and educational settings – such as through the work of Sylvie and Chérif Defraoui in Geneva since 1974. Lang focuses on *Sous-sol*, a curatorial initiative at the École Supérieure d'Art Visuel in Geneva in 1987, which later evolved into the media art program *Critical Curatorial Cybermedia* in 2001. Her analysis of two *Sous-sol* exhibitions, *Hyperbate* (1990) and *Services* (1994), suggests that video played an important role as both a witness and an agent in the transformation of curatorial practices. Drawing on post-structuralist, feminist thinking and critical theories of difference, these exhibitions marked a shift toward questions of representation, placing institutional critique and cultural studies at the heart of curatorial discourse in the 1990s.

The second section, *Participation in Net Cultures*, explores how emerging digital and physical infrastructures in the 1990s facilitated new forms of grassroots communication, collaboration, and cultural production. It highlights how mailbox networks, bulletin board systems, and temporary media spaces enabled participatory practices that extended earlier traditions of counter-publics and democratic media access. Emphasizing the social dimensions of technology, the section foregrounds the interplay between activism, art, and education in shaping inclusive, decentralized networks.

The second section begins with Lucie Kolb's contribution, which builds on Lang's by examining exhibitions as infrastructures for education, organization and production. Kolb investigates how publics were created

through print, video, and mailbox networks linked to temporary, curated physical spaces. Focusing on *Copyshop* (1992) by BüroBert in Cologne, a space that brought together artistic and activist screen cultures such as *Paper Tiger TV* and the mailbox network *ComLink*, she highlights how these efforts shared a commitment to grassroots democratic control over means of communication, which resonates with the participatory ethos of *MedienOperative* Berlin. The continuity of these counter-public strategies into the 1990s is traced by Loredana Bevilacqua in her contribution to the book's second section. She examines the use of bulletin board systems and mailbox networks in Switzerland and beyond between 1985 and 1995, which were most often user-generated, privately hosted, and self-financed. Bevilacqua complements Rudin's analysis by offering a broader view of translocal net cultures within the same time frame. She explores the motivations of those involved, the issues that were central to them, and the debates surrounding content moderation. She also discusses the intertwined issues of participation and access to technology, framing them as socially shaped.

The second section concludes with Stefanie Bräuer's interview-based contribution, centered on *THEswissTHING* and *L@den* as examples of physical spaces in Basel that provided access to a self-administered mailbox network and the Internet. As a node of *THE THING* – a mailbox network focused on contemporary art and cultural theory founded in 1991 – *THEswissTHING* fostered discussions around art and net art. In the interview, one of the initiators, Barbara Strebel, talks about how she transitioned from an art to an activist context and how her work in the physical spaces of *THEswissTHING* and, later, *L@den* involved providing participatory and educational infrastructure.

The third and final section, *Providing Access*, shifts the focus to the urgent need of providing access to video, net art, and activist practices, as well as creating and maintaining infrastructures for accessing research data. It highlights the importance of infrastructural care, archival stewardship, and sustainable access strategies for screen cultures that often exist outside institutional collections. By focusing on metadata, repositories, and memorial institutions, the section underscores how the politics of access are deeply embedded in both technical systems and cultural responsibility.

Tabea Lurk's contribution examines the library, specifically the Mediathek at the HGK FHNW Basel, as a memorial institution. Her analysis begins with the difficulties of preserving and maintaining access to what are by now historical materials and reframes the focus from production to reception. She describes a transition from a "community of practice" to a "network of care," where infrastructural stewardship – such as maintaining a research repository for archiving and publishing – becomes central. The overarching issue of ensuring long-term accessibility remains a key concern.

Philipp Messner explores another dimension of archiving: descriptive metadata. Using Barbara Strebel's private archive of *THEswissTHING* as a case study, he examines how metadata – critical for discoverability – can be

designed to reflect the networked nature of such a project. In the form of a practice report, he presents the development of a standards-based data model and advocates for the use of semantic technologies in archival contexts. These technologies make it possible to expand the classic idea of archival description towards a more comprehensive contextualization of archived documents.

Together, the diverse methodologies presented by the contributors reflect the heterogeneity of the screen cultures discussed. As editors, we felt it essential to preserve this diversity of perspectives, resisting any effort to homogenize typologically distinct approaches. Investigating screen cultures as infrastructural, social, and pedagogical practices necessitates such a transversal approach. We believe that cutting across traditional boundaries – whether disciplinary, methodological, cultural, or institutional and integrating insights from multiple viewpoints – offers a richer understanding of the participatory production and sharing of video and net-based initiatives from the 1970s to the 1990s and illuminates the infrastructures that continue to shape these practices today.

This volume contributes to the fields of art history, media studies, visual arts, library and archival practices, science and technology studies, as well as to the history of virtual networking, sociology, and discourse studies. It brings together different – and often seemingly separate – discourses on counter-media practices, infrastructures, and their archiving. These overlapping zones are especially relevant because screen cultures can only truly be understood by examining the practices they involve – meaning not just the production of content, but also the creation of publics, forms of self-organization, collective infrastructures, logistics, and strategies of archiving. With a transversal approach to critical video publics, participation in net cultures, and the provision of access, the book offers a transdisciplinary methodology needed to map those practices in which art crosses over into other modes of cultural production and publishing.

The work presented here results from the project *Lokale Videonetzwerke* (local video networks), initiated by video artist Piet Esch in collaboration with media studies scholar Stefanie Bräuer, and carried out from 2021 to 2022 with support from the Christoph Merian Foundation, *Memoriav*, and the BLKB Foundation. A related outcome is a collection of videos housed in the repository of HGK FHNW's Mediathek, led by Tabea Lurk.[9] Most of the contributions in this volume are based on talks given at a symposium at HGK FHNW's Critical Media Lab in October 2022.[10]

The book also stems from the SNSF-funded project *Sharing Knowledge in the Arts* (2023–2027), which investigates open access practices with a focus on *THEswissTHING*. The project has gathered extensive data – including documentary and archival material on *THEswissTHING* – and conducted

9 See the collection of videos in the Mediathek database related to the video network project https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/front/#/de/bestaende/35 (last accessed August 21, 2024).

10 See https://criticalmedialab.ch/networking-video/ (last accessed August 21, 2024).

video-recorded interviews with involved artists, curators, and theorists, using oral history to contextualize the material. The resulting research data is made publicly accessible through an open database in HGK FHNW's Mediathek.

By connecting these two projects, the book builds a bridge across different screen cultures. It situates itself in the broader mission of the Critical Media Lab, examining the intersections of design, media, art, and technology and asking how revisiting counter-media practices since the 1970s might inform and inspire today's critical media practices, especially in relation to experiments with radical open access and self-organized open-source infrastructures.

Starting from video and net art and activism, we ask: What can today's practitioners and researchers in art, design, and archival work learn from the countercultural open access movements of the 1970s, '80s, and '90s? What kinds of artistic approaches to self-organized, open-source infrastructures have been tested – and contested? By addressing these questions, we hope to contribute to ongoing discussions and scholarship around sociotechnical imaginaries of accessibility and openness in the sharing of knowledge in the arts.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to the authors who contributed such thoughtful and inspiring pieces to this volume. Also many thanks to François Bovier, Michael Hiltbrunner, and Federica Martini for their critical and insightful reviews. We also warmly thank Bram Opstelten for the meticulous translations and copyediting, Martin Golombek for the careful graphic design and typesetting, Annette Schüren from Schüren Verlag Marburg and the Swiss National Science Foundation without whom this project would not have been possible.

Critical Video Publics

Dominique Stéphane Rudin

Video Groups and Leftist Counterpublics of the 1970s and 1980s

A Historical Survey of Switzerland, Europe, and North America

Video activism, urban movements, and the leftist, anti-establishment milieu can certainly be studied within national contexts, but they can only truly be understood in their formation and development as transnational phenomena. The radius of reception and communication within the anti-establishment scene was transnational – this was evident in aesthetic references in graphic design, music, linguistic style, and fashion; in the awareness of the issues and concerns of social movements; and in milieu-constituting discourses on such subjects as interiority, experience, and authenticity.[1]

What follows is a historical survey that begins with the 1968 movement in Europe, traces the social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, and ultimately circles back to the American counterculture of the 1960s. Along the way, we will outline networks and influences in leftist-alternative media work using video and small film formats, with the goal of introducing readers to an era marked by a utopian yet critical and productive engagement with (new) media production tools as instruments of social change.

During the Cold War era – particularly in the 1960s – the relationship between lived reality and mediated reality was being fundamentally redefined. Whether it was the Vietnam War, the first space orbits and the moon landing, or the world of music and popular culture: events and their media reception – now not just through sound (radio had been broadcasting “live” for decades) but increasingly through images – were brought ever closer together in time thanks to the rise of television.

Accordingly, one of the most striking innovations of the so-called “New Social Movements” was their relationship to visual media and its accelerated modes of distribution and reception. A close, reciprocal connection between the political and sociocultural phenomena of the long 1968 era and visual media is widely accepted within historical research.[2] As Kathrin Fahlenbrach noted in her study of the way protests were staged visually in print media,

> The self-understanding of social movements in the Federal Republic of Germany underwent a decisive shift with the student and youth movement of the 1960s. Visual communication became a key tool for reinforcing collective identities, serving as a primary resource for protest and mobilization – and fostering strong individual commitment among participants and sympathizers alike.[3]

1 For a more in-depth discussion, see the monograph by Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft – Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

2 One of the first German-language accounts on the subject was written by Wolfgang Kraushaar: “1968 und Massenmedien,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 41 (2001): 317–47, https://library.fes.de/jportal/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/jportal_derivate_00023623/afs-2001-317.pdf.

3 Kathrin Fahlenbrach, *Protestinszenierungen – Visuelle Kommunikation und kollektive Identitäten in Protestbewegungen* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag 2002), 20.

In research, television has been – and continues to be – viewed as a key resource for reinforcing and legitimizing social movements, even though many, particularly those involved in counterpublic outreach, were critical or dismissive of the medium.[4] At the same time, television had the capacity to *amplify* the concerns and protests of social movements – either in near real-time or, in the case of live broadcasts, virtually simultaneously. Localized and particular acts of protest and conflict in cities such as Paris, Berlin, or Zurich quickly became national or even international media events, contributing to the emergence of transnational (counter-)publics.[5]

To see with one's "own eyes" and hear with one's "own ears" was no longer limited to being physically present in the street – the street now existed virtually anywhere a television set was switched on. All it required was someone operating a camera in the midst of events and the footage making it onto television – this new distribution machinery that could transport urgent issues, provocative actions, and memorable slogans straight into the living rooms of a (Western) television audience.[6]

Unsurprisingly, television attracted both criticism and aroused desires, be it from authorities, political parties, or indeed social movements. In her study of the interplay between public broadcasting institutions and protest movements of the 1960s, Meike Vogel demonstrated that, ultimately, the still-young medium of television itself was also strengthened due to the consistent need to defend its institutional and journalistic independence in its coverage of social movements and the extra-parliamentary opposition.[7]

The relationships and interactions between protest movements and public broadcasting – both television and radio – in Switzerland still warrant more in-depth research. What is well documented, however, is how Swiss public television served as a platform for protest and provocation, how it became a repository of material for leftist-alternative political video productions, and how videos were often explicitly produced in critical distinction from television broadcasts and formats.[8]

The following reflections and observations are based on my dissertation *Video Heterotopia*, in which I explored forms of what Kathrin Fahlenbrach has described as the "reinforcement of collective identities" within social movements in Switzerland – movements engaged in urban, housing, and cultural politics. My sources were audiovisual media – videos and, to a lesser extent, small film formats (Super 8) – which were both expressions and

4 Exemplary in how it draws out contrasts between "Big TV" and video work: Garleff Zacharias-Langhans, *Bürgermedium Video – Ein Bericht über alternative Medienarbeit* (Berlin: Volker Spiess, 1977), 16–7.

5 Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, "Der Transfer zwischen den Studentenbewegungen von 1968 und die Entstehung einer transnationalen Gegenöffentlichkeit," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie*, 10/4 (2000): 485–500.

6 How public broadcasting contributed to networking the youth center movement in the early 1970s and gave even small initiatives in West German provinces national exposure is described in: David Templin, *Freizeit ohne Kontrollen: Die Jugendzentrumsbewegung in der Bundesrepublik der 1970er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 169–84.

7 Meike Vogel, *Unruhe im Fernsehen – Protestbewegung und öffentlich-rechtliche Berichterstattung in den 1960er Jahren* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 303.

8 Dominique Rudin, *Video Heterotopia – Linksalternativer Videoaktivismus in der Schweiz 1970–1995*, dissertation, University of Basel, 2014, https://doi.org/10.5451/unibas-007104807.

constituent elements of a *counterpublic sphere*. This counterpublic sphere manifested itself on one hand in critical media theories,[9] and on the other in the development of its own production and distribution infrastructure. Both stood in deliberate contrast to the established mass media (TV, radio, and high-circulation press publications), as well as to their ideological foundations and aesthetic forms.

The conceptual approaches of this counterpublic drew heavily on early Marxist-informed media theories and the media practices of the interwar labor movement.[10] A defining feature of these media projects was their (at times) grassroots-democratic, collective mode of production. Participants adopted a generalist approach, acquiring broad and practical expertise in handling media production tools. Cooperatives were generally regarded as the appropriate legal form of organization.

2 THE BEGINNINGS OF VIDEO ACTIVISM IN WESTERN EUROPE AND SWITZERLAND

In the French-speaking world, the utopian potential of video as a medium – promising novelty, even revolution – was seized on early and closely linked to visions of a "new society."[11] One of the first video groups in Europe to identify as "political" was *Vidéo Out*, founded in 1969 in Paris by Swiss native Carole Roussopoulos-de Kalbermatten (1945–2009) and her husband Paul.[12] Their work supported, among other causes, the gay rights movement and labor struggles in the French Jura.

Despite the early adoption of video technology in the lively Paris scene of the late 1960s – including by prominent filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard, who, as legend has it, was the first person in France to purchase a video camera – it must be noted that few video groups dedicated to counterpublic discourse emerged in the Romandy, the region of Switzerland culturally heavily influenced by neighboring France. Notably, none were as active or comparably involved – either qualitatively or quantitatively – in urban and housing politics as those in the German-speaking part of the country. However, the first Swiss video documents did originate in the experimental and avant-garde art scenes of the 1960s. A range of these early works is preserved

9 Key theorists included Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Baukasten zu einer Theorie der Medien: Kritische Diskurse zur Pressefreiheit* (Munich: Reinhard Fischer, 1997) [originally published in *Kursbuch* 20 (1970)]; Enzensberger was heavily influenced by Walter Benjamin's "radio theory" laid out in various texts around 1930. Written in critical opposition to Jürgen Habermas (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* [Neuwied: H. Luchterhand 1962]): Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972).

10 For example: Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1980), originally published in 1936–1939 in various versions; Willi Münzenberg, *Erobert den Film! Winke aus der Praxis für die Praxis proletarischer Filmpropaganda* (Berlin: Neuer Deutscher Verlag, 1925).

11 See, for example, Alex Ganty, Guy Milliard, and Alfred Willener, *Vidéo et société virtuelle – Vidéologie et utopie* (Paris: Tema-Editions, 1972).

12 A selection of videos from 1970 to 1976 was published on DVD: Hélène Fleckinger, ed., *Carole Roussopoulos: Caméra militante – Luttes de libération des années 1970*, (Geneva: MētisPresses, 2010).

in the media library of the *Fonds municipal d'art contemporain de la Ville de Genève* (FMAC), including a small number of "politically interventionist" tapes, which will not be discussed further here.[13]

Collectively organized and politically interventionist video work was far more prominent in Germany and German-speaking Switzerland.[14] One of the first so-called media collectives in the German-speaking world was the *Medienpädagogik Zentrum* (m.p.z.) in Hamburg, founded in 1973 with the initial aim of doing political video work for educational settings. This soon expanded to include topics from the fields of labor unions, urban politics, feminism, and various other issues central to the new social movements. In practice, this often meant providing a kind of "service" to organizations and groups with whom the videographers had common ideological ground.

This approach drew criticism. By the late 1970s, conceptual rifts ran through the West German scene. A key debate – especially between m.p.z. and the *Medienoperative Berlin* (M.O.B.), founded in 1977 – centered on product-oriented versus process-oriented filmmaking, and more broadly, on the concepts of *counterpublicity* versus *operativism*. M.O.B. accused the Hamburg group of treating media work merely as a tool – or product – for public outreach, rather than as an integral part of social experience and (self-)critique. This implied a broader critique of political representation: those affected by an issue were often insufficiently involved in representing their own concerns. The alternative proposed was to place the means of media production and the related practical knowledge directly into the hands of those affected, empowering them to speak for themselves. For "operative" media groups, the creation of a counterpublic was seen as secondary – or even fundamentally impossible.[15] By around 1980, however, this debate had largely lost momentum. In practice, the main priorities – video lending, collective work processes, supporting third parties in media production – and challenges such as distribution and reach united more than they divided.

Starting in the mid-1970s, an increasing number of German-language publications appeared that focused on collectivist political video work.[16] This surge in publishing activity marks the point at which the medium truly arrived at the heart of the German-speaking alternative milieu. The publications were

13 The FMAC collection includes nineteen videos preserved as part of the archiving project "Vidéos socioculturelles de Suisse romande 1970–1985." The project was associated with "Stadt in Bewegung" video archive in German-speaking Switzerland (collection accessible at the Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Zurich, https://www.bild-video-ton.ch/bestand/signatur/F_Videos). These archival efforts from the late 1990s were coordinated by Memoriav, the association for the preservation of Swiss audiovisual heritage.

14 Pioneers emerged in West Germany as early as 1968. See the account by Wolfgang Stickel, *Zur Geschichte der Videobewegung – Politisch orientierte Medienarbeit mit Video in den 70er und 80er Jahren am Beispiel der Medienwerkstatt Freiburg und anderen Videogruppen und Medienzentren in der Bundesrepublik*, thesis, Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg i.B., 1991, https://monoskop.org/images/6/65/Stickel_Wolfgang_Zur_Geschichte_der_Videobewegung_1991_2014.pdf.

15 For a more in-depth discussion, see Stickel, *Zur Geschichte der Videobewegung*, 90–4.

16 Examples: The anthology *Alternative Medienarbeit: Videogruppen in der Bundesrepublik*, edited by Margret Köhler (Opladen: Leske, 1980), includes general introductory texts and numerous self-descriptions of film and video groups in West Germany. The anthology *Alternative Medienarbeit mit Video und Film*, edited by Gerhard Lechenauer (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979), was intended for video and filmmakers "who do not or not exclusively view their media practice within the realm of so-called professional media production" (back cover); it includes detailed address lists (as of spring 1979) for West Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Zacharias-Langhans' aforementioned *Bürgermedium Video* from 1977 focuses on "free video work" and "video in education."

heavily oriented towards videographic practice and the formation of networks (primarily within West Germany) and were likely read by interested circles in Switzerland as well. It was during this period – the latter half of the 1970s – that the most important leftist-alternative video groups in Switzerland were founded: *Videoladen Zürich*, the *Videogenossenschaft Basel*, and *Container TV* in Bern.

3 THE VIDEO MOVEMENT AS A TRANSNATIONAL PHENOMENON WITH A LOCAL FOCUS

Over the years, there was an ongoing – if fluctuating – exchange of ideas and concepts between video groups in German-speaking Switzerland and West Germany. This occurred through occasional meetings, journals, and the circulation of video tapes, from which rental copies could be made for local video libraries. Accordingly, catalogs published by video collectives often include productions by other domestic and international groups, as well as recordings of television broadcasts.[17] Tracing the flow of knowledge and practices that crystallized in video collectives and their productions reveals the outline of a generally loose, yet unmistakably transnational network.

At the same time, leftist video activism primarily focused on local problems, issues, places, movements, organizations, and individuals. Although there is a close correlation between local current events and alternative media work, there is no automatic or deterministic relationship between the two. In the case of Basel, for example, the anti-nuclear power movement – which was a defining social movement in northwestern Switzerland – barely made a mark on politically interventionist video and film work. In the context of resistance to the planned nuclear power plant in Kaiseraugst, very few videos were produced. The only production I am aware of is *Kaiseraugst Nie!* (1984). This video was shot by the group of the same name with support from the *Videogenossenschaft Basel* (VGB). The group identified with a new, more militant generation of anti-nuclear activists in the 1980s, distinguishing themselves from older organizations such as Gewaltfreie Aktion Kaiseraugst (Nonviolent Action Kaiseraugst).[18]

The reasons why the anti-nuclear power movement had so little resonance in local video work would need to be explored elsewhere. Here, we can only speculate that political video work in Basel tended to address topics that received little or no attention from mainstream media, in contrast to the broadly supported anti-nuclear power movement. It's also important to note

17 For example, the 1980 "video lending program" of the *Videowerkstatt Bornheim* in Frankfurt a.M. (VGB/point de vue Archive). A striking snapshot: *das andere Video – Zehn Jahre politische Medianarbeit*, a "joint rental catalog of media centers and video groups" (Freiburg i.B.: Medienwerkstatt Freiburg, 1984).

18 *Kaiseraugst Nie!*, by "Kaiseraugst Nie" (Domenico Bellanova, Armin Biehler, Gaby Streiff, Sus Zwick) and VGB, CH 1983/84, video, approx. 55 min. The tape is held in the video collection of Medienwerkstatt Freiburg (i.B.) and in the "New Media Collection Baselland" of the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports of the Canton of Basel-Landschaft. ca. 55 Min.

that the VGB, the most active video collective in the area, was heavily engaged with video as a medium for creative expression. The focus on politically interventionist media work was less pronounced than, for example, in the case of the Zurich-based *Videoladen*.[19]

The founding of the Basel studio collective *VIA AudioVideoFotoKunst* in 1988 can also be seen in the context of an artistic and experimental interest in video. Nevertheless, it would be an oversimplification to associate Zurich exclusively with political video work and Basel with experimental, artistic production. While the *Videoladen Zürich* was indeed strongly rooted in the "community media" ethos (more on that below) and in urban policy activism, this does not mean that no experiments were undertaken on the banks of the Limmat. Conversely, the Basel video scene was clearly engaged in leftist-alternative counterpublic media work. This is evident in a number of productions – for instance, *Es herrscht wieder Frieden im Land* (1981),[20] about the autonomous youth center in Basel in 1981; the critical take on Basel's cultural policy in *Honigkuchenpferd* (1983);[21] or *Unsere Rosenau* (1987),[22] a documentary about an emergency housing development located between the city slaughterhouse, Flughafenstrasse, and the French border.

In the context of audiovisual, city-focused counterpublic media work in Basel, mention must also be made of the *Quartierfilmgruppe Kleinbasel* (Neighborhood Film Group Kleinbasel). Rather than shooting videos, they produced Super 8 films on issues related to traffic and housing policy, such as the controversial expansion of the inner-city traffic corridor Feldbergstrasse, the transformation of Bärenfelserstrasse into a residential street, or tenant struggles along the Unterer Rheinweg.[23]

At times, there were intense debates between small format filmmakers and videographers over the respective advantages and disadvantages of each medium. However, in the case of the *Videogenossenschaft Basel* (VGB) and the *Quartierfilmgruppe Kleinbasel*, there were no fundamental hostilities—after all, Urs Berger, a central figure in the Quartierfilmgruppe, was also a founding member of the VGB.[24]

Nonetheless, the two media formats differed fundamentally. Among the most significant advantages of video over (small format) film were practical

19 The formal and aesthetic weight of video approaches was also emphasized in the retrospective *Sichtweisen – Points de vue* on December 5, 2009, at the Stadtkino Basel, marking the thirtieth anniversary of the cooperative, renamed "point de vue" in 1994. Artistic and experimental videos in the VGB's output were also highlighted in Markus Kutter, *Medienstadt Basel?*(Basel: Kirschgarten-Druckerei, 1985), 113.

20 *Es herrscht wieder Frieden im Land*, by Reinhard Manz and Claude Gaçon (VGB), CH 1981, video, 30 min., Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Vid V 019.

21 *Honigkuchenpferd (Zuckerguss als Sachzwang)*, by Reinhard Manz (VGB), CH 1983, video, 53 min., Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Vid V 035.

22 *Unsere Rosenau,* by Claude Gaçon (VGB), CH 1987, video, 20 min., Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv, Vid V 065.

23 These include: *Im Juni 1977 wurde den Mietern am unteren Rheinweg 44, 46, 48 und an der Florastrasse 36, 38, 40, 42, 44 die Wohnung gekündigt* (CH 1977, Super 8, 20 min., private archive), its sequel *Mir bsetze* (We Occupy) (CH 1979, Super 8, 62 min., private archive) and *Mir schloofe hindenuuse* (We Sleep out Back) (CH 1978, Super 8, 35 min., private archive) about the heavily trafficked Feldbergstrasse and its planned expansion (City Ring). *Unseri Wohnstrooss* (Our Residential Street) (CH 1981, Super 8, 100 min. [short version 45 min.], private archive) documents the creation of one of the first traffic-calmed streets in Basel, Bärenfelserstrasse in Kleinbasel.

24 Retrospectives and self-portraits of both groups and their protagonists are found in: Julia Zutavern et al., *Filmfrontal: Das unabhängige Film- und Videoschaffen der 1970er- und 1980er-Jahre in Basel* (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2010), especially pages 119–39.

considerations – for example, video's higher light sensitivity, which made it possible to shoot in relatively poor lighting conditions. Most of all, the speed of the new technology was emphasized. With video, the "long wait between exposure and development" inherent in film was eliminated, as journalist Garleff Zacharias-Langhans noted in his 1977 "report on alternative video work" entitled *Bürgermedium Video* (*Citizen's Medium Video*). He further linked the "superiority of video technology" to its enabling role: "both institutional and especially independent political education work with media only began to gain international significance when video technology became available as an appropriate tool."[25]

Zacharias-Langhans linked this relevance to the fact that video was about "processes of awareness and communication" rather than a need to create "well-edited" products.[26]

4 THE BEGINNINGS IN NORTH AMERICA: THE BROTHERLY KISS OF MAO AND MCLUHAN

The terminology of "consciousness," "process," and "communication" used by Zacharias-Langhans points back to a complex ideological context – at times inconsistent, yet influential – comprising Marxist and cybernetic elements that underpinned the ideas and practices of audiovisual counterpublic media work. Before the medium came to be burdened with a negative image in the 1980s due to its association with depictions of violence and pornography, video also enjoyed a positive reputation in the leftist, anti-establishment scene in the 1970s, especially among its tech-savvy segments. It was regarded as a medium of immediacy and reflection, as a grassroots democratic tool of expression, even as a technical symbol for the utopia of a new egalitarian social order made possible by more democratic communication technologies.[27]

Television, as the new leading medium of the time, formed the historical backdrop for this perception: video promised to redress asymmetries in audiovisual representation by enabling anyone to produce television and present their own concerns on TV – at least in principle.

With the introduction of video technology to the mass consumer market in the late 1960s, it was embraced by the U.S. counterculture (more precisely: by its tech-savvy subgroups) as a forward-looking medium heralding a new, electronic, multidirectional, and networked era of communication and information. The video groups that emerged in North America at the time were united in their experimentation with collective forms of working and in their desire to democratize audiovisual communication. Yet they differed in background and objectives.

25 Zacharias-Langhans, *Bürgermedium Video*, 19.
26 Ibid.
27 See, for example, Ganty, Milliard und Willener, *Vidéo et société virtuelle.* Or various articles in the American video journal *Radical Software* (1970–1974), http://www.radicalsoftware.org.

In Canada, from 1967 to 1980, the National Film Board of Canada ran *Challenge for Change*, a pioneering program for participatory media practices. Its aim was to provide underprivileged communities with filmmaking and video tools to document their living conditions, articulate social and political concerns, and bring them to the attention of a wider public.[28] *Challenge for Change* was not only the world's first program of its kind in the realm of community media – it also had a global impact. For instance, in London, where the Zurich-based anthropologist Heinz Nigg became acquainted with the concept and subsequently introduced it as a lecturer in urban ethnology at the University of Zurich in 1979–1980.[29] A significant portion of the raw footage for the well-known video *Züri brännt* (1980–81), about the youth movement and the 1980 "Opera House Riots" in Zurich, was produced in that ethnology course.[30]

Compared to *Challenge for Change*, many groups within the U.S. alternative media movement had a more autonomist or libertarian orientation, explicitly aiming for a transformation of media politics. The asymmetrical media apparatus of television – dominated by three major national broadcasting corporations (ABC, CBS, NBC) – was to be disrupted and, from a cybernetic perspective, brought back into systemic-democratic balance. According to early video pioneer Deirdre Boyle in her autobiographical account *Subject to Change*, the only power viewers had over television in the 1960s was "the power to turn it off."[31]

Video collectives saw the expansion of local and regional cable TV networks as an opportunity to produce citizen-oriented programming – both in content and form – free from traditional restrictions. So-called "guerrilla television" groups attempted, in part, to secure airtime on major stations (e.g., the trailblazing *Videofreex* at CBS), but above all, they placed their hopes in the public-access cable system of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), operational from 1970, as the launching point of a media revolution – television by, about, and for the people. The U.S. alternative TV movement took its name from Michael Shamberg's 1971 publication *Guerrilla Television*.[32] The back cover blurb makes no pretense of modesty: "This book is the first of a kind. It tells how we can break the stranglehold of broadcast TV on the American mind." Nothing less than "true democracy" was the goal of this emerging media ecology through the new mediums of video and local citizen television.

Shamberg co-founded the *Raindance Corporation*, which launched *Radical Software* (1970–74), the first magazine devoted specifically to video as

28 Heinz Nigg and Graham Wade, *Community Media: Community communication in the UK. Video, local TV, film, and photography* (Zurich: Regenbogen-Verlag, 1980). Wade also published a study of five British video collectives titled *Street Video: An Account of Five Video Groups* (Leicester: Blackthorn Press, 1980).

29 Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker, and Ezra Winton, eds., *Challenge for Change: Activist documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

30 An early sociological analysis of the unrest surrounding the Autonomous Youth Center in Zurich, 1980–1982: Hanspeter Kriesi, *Die Zürcher Bewegung: Bilder, Interaktionen, Zusammenhänge* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus Verlag, 1984).

31 Deirdre Boyle, *Subject to change: Guerrilla television revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), XIII.

32 Michael Shamberg and Raindance Corporation, *Guerilla Television* (New York: Holt, 1971).

a medium.[33] In *Guerrilla Television*, Shamberg drew on an article by Paul Ryan published in *Radical Software*,[34] which itself referenced Marshall McLuhan's assertion that future global conflicts, in blurring the lines between military and civilian spheres, would take the form of guerrilla-style information wars: "World War III is a guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation."[35]

The early video countermovement was rooted in a blend of concepts from cybernetics (feedback-based information systems) and guerrilla warfare (unpredictability through tactical versatility).[36] At its root, the Guerrilla Television vision around 1970 was a symbolic fusion, as it were, of Marshall McLuhan and Mao Zedong.[37] The hope shared by the video pioneers behind this discursive liaison was to create a new, better societal – and ultimately global – order on the "blue marble," whose fragility had only recently been captured in photographs taken by the Apollo missions. As video and cable television began to reorganize the (Western) media landscape, and as the ARPANET laid the technical foundations for the internet starting in 1969, the early "tech hippies" saw in these new media the promise that humanity could overcome the deep ideological divisions of the Cold War. They envisioned a global village brought together through communication technologies that would expand consciousness, deepen reflection, and enable self-regulation via feedback systems. However, the path toward this goal was mapped out as a (guerrilla) struggle – in a symbolic sense for alternative media collectives, but in a literal one for some radicals.[38]

5 SUMMARIZING OUTLOOK

Fifty years on, any cursory assessment of this legacy remains deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, video and networking as media technologies seem to have lost all traces of their once-revolutionary aura. They've become the background noise of mundane, everyday applications. And yet, the omnipresence of the (smartphone) camera continues to occasionally yield a remarkably revolutionary impact. One need only think of the Arab Spring or the Black Lives Matter movement of the 2010s – both accompanied by photographs and videos of key events shared en masse online.

33 The name Raindance Corp. was an ironic play on the still-active U.S. think tank RAND Corp. (Research and Development).

34 Paul Ryan, "Cybernetic Guerilla Warfare," *Radical Software*, I/3 (1970): 1–2

35 Marshall McLuhan, *Culture is our business* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 66.

36 Military "guerrilla" concepts and the genealogy of "guerrilla communication" tactics are laid out in: Hagen Schölzel, *Guerillakommunikation: Genealogie einer politischen Konfliktform* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013). For an introduction to the West German reception of Maoist thought, see: Sebastian Gehrig, Barbara Mittler, and Felix Wemheuer, eds., *Kulturrevolution als Vorbild? Maoismen im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 2008), especially the introduction by sinologist Wemheuer.

37 On the reception of rural guerrilla tactics from the "Third World" for subversive urban strategies based on the example of Rudi Dutschke and the West Berlin 1968 movement, see: Detlef Siegfried, *Sound der Revolte: Studien zur Kulturrevolution um 1968* (Weinheim: Juventa Verlag, 2008), 258–59.

38 Michael Goddard, *Guerilla Networks: An Anarchaeology of 1970s Radical Media Ecologies* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018). On left-wing terrorism in West Germany: Petra Terhoeven, *Die Rote Armee Fraktion: Eine Geschichte terroristischer Gewalt* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017). Also recommended: Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967–1977* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001), esp. 359–414.

However, reactionary movements such as Islamic fundamentalism – think, for example, of the so-called Islamic State (IS) – also use video and the internet intensively and effectively for propaganda purposes.

The once utopian promise of the new media now seems thoroughly exhausted; they have been reduced to mere instruments serving entirely divergent political agendas. Frequently heard laments about the democracy-eroding effects of filter bubbles and echo chambers also paint a bleak picture of today's new media reality.[39] At the same time, access to information – including competing worldviews – is historically unprecedented in its scope.

The current communication-technology ecosystems are undoubtedly confusing; many subsystems appear ideologically sealed off, and the tone is often unforgiving. But in a way, these phenomena aren't so different from the pub talk, Marxist study groups, or the party-affiliated press of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What is historically new with the rise of the internet is the permanent cacophony of competing opinions and allegations of fact.

New media have not made the world a better place – but they have made its confusion and widespread, irreconcilable polarization unmistakable. In one sense, this is a gain, because the overwhelming evidence argues against simple solutions and longings for salvation. Yet the obvious overcomplexity of the world and of the problems facing its more than eight billion people leads many around the globe to crave ever simpler answers. What some consider a solution, others see as the very heart of the problem. In the internet age, confrontations between perspectives, values, and judgments of people who are fundamentally foreign to one another are quotidian and inescapable. "L'enfer, c'est les Autres [sic]" ("Hell is other people"): It's painful to accept that – perhaps more than ever before – this hell is also ourselves.[40]

39 For a critical view on this: Christoph Kappes, "Menschen, Medien und Maschinen: Warum die Gefahren der 'Filter Bubble' überschätzt werden," in *MERKUR: Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken*, 66/754 (2012): 256–63.

40 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis clos* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 93.

Melissa Rérat

Discourses as Actors in Networks

A Contribution to the History of the Exhibition VIDEO (Geneva/Basel, 1977)

This article develops an aspect of my doctoral dissertation in art history, submitted in late 2020 and published in 2022.[1] In it, I examined the various terms – such as *art vidéo* ("video art"), *vidéo artistique* ("artistic video"), *vidéo-art*, and *objet vidéo* ("video object") – used in the 1970s to describe video and its status within the French-speaking art field. As a conceptual framework, I drew on the theory of the social construction of reality by sociologists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, as well as several concepts from Pierre Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art* (consecration, cultural capital, position, and position-taking).[2] The combination of the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of art made it possible to bring together textual and contextual analysis. The material subjected to close reading consisted of archival materials and publications, supplemented by a few short interviews. Exhibition catalogs and posters, articles, flyers, working documents, and correspondence were considered as engines of artistic legitimization. From this perspective, they participate in networks just as much as human actors and institutions, as will be further discussed.

This article addresses the role of discourses within the network that enabled one of the seminal video art exhibitions in Switzerland. *VIDEO* was not the first video exhibition in Switzerland – two video exhibitions were organized by the group Impact in Lausanne in 1972 and 1974.[3] The pioneering role of *VIDEO* lies in the fact that it was the first event dedicated to video art curated by curators rather than by artists. In this regard, it follows in the footsteps of the first museum exhibition of video art in the French-speaking world, *Art/Vidéo Confrontation 74*, held three years earlier at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.[4]

From Friday, April 22 to Sunday, May 1, 1977, the exhibition *VIDEO* took place at the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva. It was shown in the contemporary art gallery, which the museum shared with the Association Musée d'Art Moderne (AMAM) **FIG. 1**. Conceived by AMAM with support from Adelina von Fürstenberg and Eric Franck, *VIDEO* offered an overview of international video production. A parallel event was held from April 12 to June 6, 1977, at STAMPA Gallery in Basel.

The following questions serve to guide the analysis: What materials were used to promote the *VIDEO* exhibition? Who was involved in organizing it? What influence did the network on both sides of the "Röstigraben" (the linguistic-cultural divide between French- and German-speaking Switzerland) have on the final product? How did the discourses interact with the institutions and actors within the network?

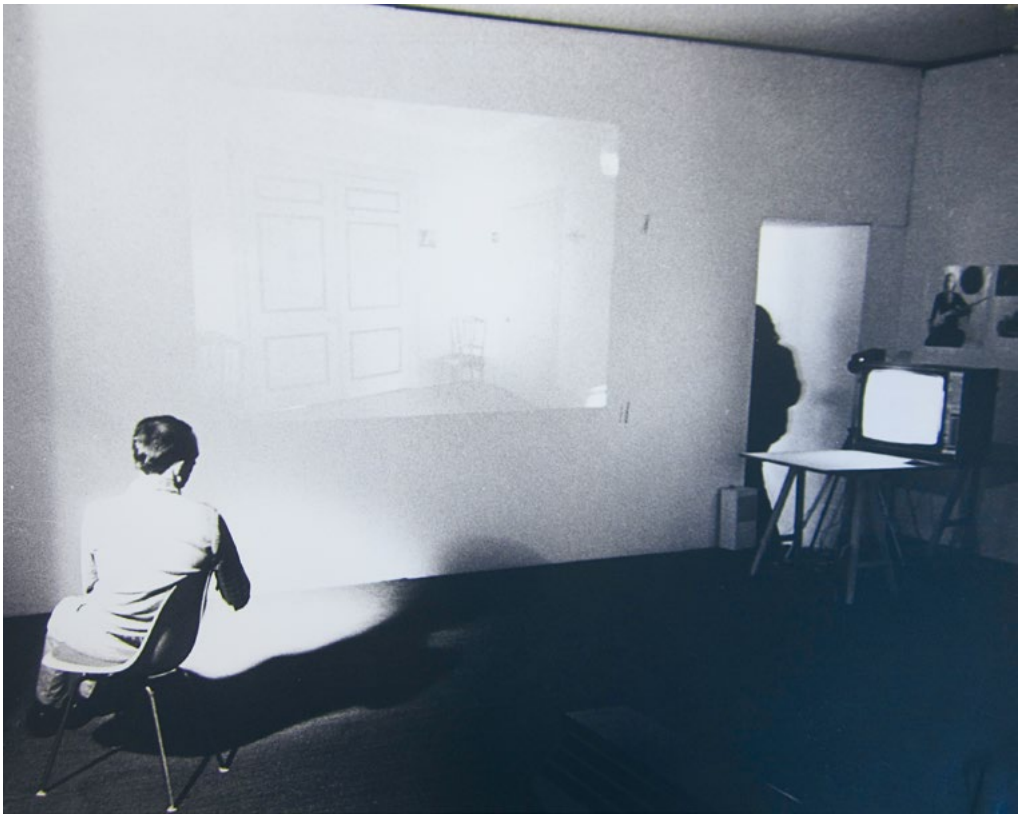
1 Melissa Rérat, *Les Mots de la video: Construction discursive d'un art contemporain*, The Workshop. Art History and Museum Studies (Bern/Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2022). Also available as open access e-book: https://doi.org/10.3726/b19624.

2 Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Harmondsworth/London/New York: Penguin Books, 1991 [1966]); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996). See also Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2008 [1982]).

3 See François Bovier and Tristan Lavoyer (eds.), *Impact Action/Film/Vidéo 1972; Impact Art Vidéo Art 1974: New Forms in Film 1974* (Lausanne: ECAL/Circuit, 2015); *IMPACT ART VIDEO ART 74 – 8 jours video [sic]*, exh. cat. (Lausanne: Musée des arts décoratifs/Galerie Impact, 1974).

4 *Art/Vidéo Confrontation 74*, exh. cat. (Paris: *A.R.C. II*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, 1974).

1 Photograph of the AMAM contemporary art gallery, from *Salle d'art contemporain: Réalisation Association Musée d'Art Moderne*, opening brochure, [February 1975], dossier 340.B.1/213, Geneva, Archives de la Ville de Genève, Fonds Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH), CH AVG, 340. Photographer unknown © Association des Amis du MAMCO.



2 ***VIDEO*, photograph of the exhibition at the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva, Apr. 22 – May 1, 1977, dossier "Marc Camille Chaimowicz," Geneva, Centre d'Art Contemporain, archival collection, photo library. Photo: Egon von Fürstenberg © Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva. Courtesy Cabinet Gallery London.**

The article begins with a detailed analysis of the poster for the Geneva exhibition and the exhibition catalog. The findings of this examination are then linked to a study of the context that led to the Geneva exhibition and a second event in Basel. Finally, the article summarizes how the combination of textual and contextual analysis contributes to the historiography of *VIDEO*.

VIDEO: THE POSTER

On the poster, AMAM, the Musée d'art et d'histoire, and the event dates are prominently highlighted in large, bold typeface.[5] Adelina von Fürstenberg and Eric Franck are listed as organizers in very small print at the bottom of the poster. The STAMPA Gallery is not mentioned. The layout mimics a tube television: the center represents the screen, and the rectangular section on the right suggests the control panel typically found on such devices. The exhibition title *Video*, in lowercase, appears in the bottom left corner. The lettering consists of horizontal streaks, reminiscent of video interlacing or the flickering on cathode ray tube screens. The same striped pattern is visible across the screen surface. In the spaces between the stripes, the event dates are printed in regular type. The poster lists eight programs, an opening reception, a video library (open on a specific day as a substitute for a program), a video performance by Marc Camille Chaimowicz **FIG. 2**, a panel discussion led by Michaël H. Shamberg, a concert by Giuseppe Chiari, and video installations by Daniel Buren, Jean Otth, VALIE EXPORT, and Peter Weibel. On the right-hand side of the poster, the contents of the eight programs are described in standard font. The layout may evoke the closing credits of a film. The amount of information presented – in much smaller type than the title – suggests that the poster also functioned as a program, flyer, or even invitation card. This is confirmed by the text printed on the back of the poster:

> The board of the Association Musée d'Art Moderne is pleased to invite you to the opening of VIDEO: Installations, Video Cassettes, Documentation, on Friday, April 22, 1977, at 8:30 p.m., at the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Rue Charles-Galland, Geneva.[6]

From a distance, the large-format poster prominently draws attention to the title, the AMAM and the museum, and the event dates. The names of Eric Franck and Adelina von Fürstenberg fade into the background due to the small font and

5 *VIDEO*, poster of the exhibition, Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Apr. 22 – May 1, 1977, Geneva, Archives de la Ville de Genève, Fonds Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH), 340.H.12.4/1.

6 "Le comité de l'Association Musée d'Art Moderne sera heureux de vous accueillir au vernissage VIDEO : installations, vidéo-cassettes, documentations le vendredi 22 avril 1977 à 20 heures 30 au Musée d'art et d'histoire rue Charles-Galland Genève." *VIDEO*, poster of the exhibition.

marginal placement, which could imply that they were not responsible for the entire event but only for specific segments. i.e. the above-listed events and installations **FIG. 10**. The emphasis on AMAM and the Musée d'art et d'histoire can be explained not only by their roles in organizing the exhibition – AMAM as the project's initiator and the museum as the venue – but also by their cultural capital. Through this layout, the exhibition benefits from the status of these two institutions. In other words, the poster highlights the entities with the highest degree of consecration: the Musée d'art et d'histoire embodies the ultimate authority in the arts, while AMAM appears as a younger entity that provides a legitimate framework for contemporary art practices. Alongside this symbolic capital, there is also financial capital, as AMAM's board consists of patrons and wealthy collectors.

VIDEO was the first official event dedicated to video artists for both AMAM and the Musée d'art et d'histoire. Due to the novelty of the works on display, the exhibition brought a breath of fresh air into the museum and gave the AMAM association hope that it might attract younger members: "… the board believes that this is a very important project for AMAM, one that will appeal to a new public."[7]

An undated poster layout **FIG. 3** from the STAMPA Gallery archives attests the involvement of Gilli and Diego Stampa in designing the Geneva communication materials. This layout appears to be the original draft, which was later translated into French in Basel. Several traces of German phrasing on the printed poster point to this origin – for example, the misspelling of AMAM as "Association de Musée d'art moderne" instead of the correct "Association Musée d'art moderne"; the use of periods in dates to separate day and month; and the capitalization of month names.

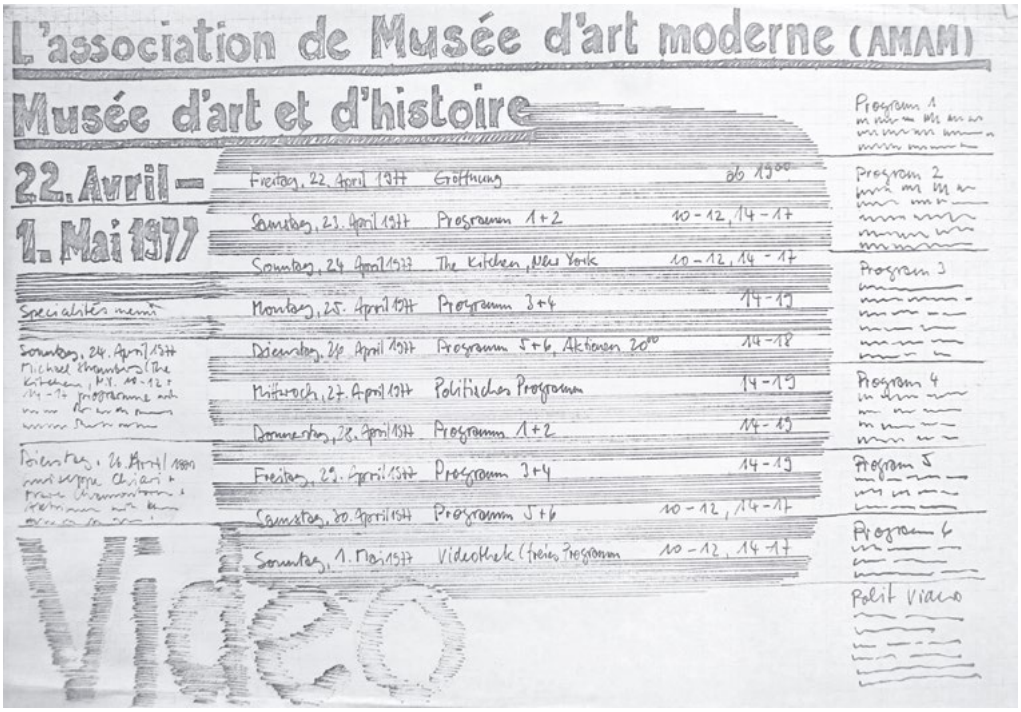
VIDEO: THE EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

The cover of the exhibition catalogue **FIG. 4** reprises the image of a television monitor.[8] Unlike the poster, however, the screen is now black and serves as a background for white text that imitates an electronic dot-matrix display. The word *VIDEO* is repeated seven times, followed by the names AMAM and STAMPA, and then the months and year of the exhibition. As with the poster, the visual design of the catalogue departs from a traditional Beaux-Arts aesthetic, instead drawing inspiration from electronic visual culture. What stands out is the way roles are presented in the catalogue compared to the poster – or to later publications issued by the Centre d'Art Contemporain.[9] On the cover, "Stampa

7 "… le comité est d'avis qu'il s'agit d'un projet très important pour l'AMAM qui verra ainsi venir à elle un nouveau public.," minutes of the board meeting of the AMAM Association, Nov. 10, 1976, Geneva, Archives de la Ville de Genève, Fonds Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH), CH AVG, 340.H.12.1/4.

8 *VIDEO*, exh. cat. (Geneva/Basel: AMAM/Stampa, 1977).

9 For example, Andrea Bellini (ed.), *Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève – 1974-2017* (Geneva/Dijon: Centre d'Art Contemporain/Les presses du réel, 2017); Nicolas Frei, *Centre d'art contemporain/Genève 1974-1984*, ed. Adelina von Fürstenberg (Geneva: Centre d'Art Contemporain, 1984).



3 **Design for the *VIDEO* exhibition poster [1977], Basel, archives of STAMPA Gallery © STAMPA Gallery, Basel.**

4 ***VIDEO*, exhibition catalog, cover (Geneva/Basel: AMAM/Stampa, 1977). © Association des Amis du MAMCO.**

5 ***Video-Veranstaltung*** **flyer, STAMPA Gallery, Basel, Nov. 26, 1976, Basel, archives of STAMPA Gallery**
© STAMPA Gallery, Basel.

– Basel" appears directly below "Association Musée d'Art Moderne – Genève," effectively taking the place that the Musée d'art et d'histoire occupied on the poster. Also notable is the explicit mention of the two cities, situated on either side of Switzerland's linguistic divide. The significance of the Stampas becomes even clearer on the copyright page:

> This publication was issued on the occasion of the exhibition *VIDEO*, organized by the Association Musée d'Art Moderne (AMAM) at the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva, and by STAMPA, Basel, April–May 1977.
> The organizers thank the management staff of the Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva, as well as Ms. E. Abensur, Ms. K. Lillaz, and Mr. A. L'Huillier for having made this exhibition possible.
> Coordinators: Adelina von Fürstenberg, director of the Centre d'art contemporain, Salle Patiño, Geneva, and Stampa, Basel.
> Organizers: Eric Franck, Adelina von Fürstenberg for Geneva, as well as René Pulfer, E. Hauswirth, Stampa, for Basel.[10]

The management of the Musée d'art et d'histoire is thanked for providing the exhibition spaces. As for Adelina von Fürstenberg, the imprint mentions two roles, namely organization in Geneva with Eric Franck, which is consistent with the information on the poster, and coordination alongside the STAMPA Gallery. In addition, new parties involved are named: the Centre d'Art Contemporain – directed by Adelina von Fürstenberg – as well as the patrons Ena Abensur, Kitty Lillaz, and André L'Huillier, three art collectors and AMAM board members. On the Basel side, René Pulfer and E. Hauswirth are mentioned as organizers. The former is a prominent figure in the Swiss video scene. Since 1973, he had focused his practice on video art and new media – subjects he taught from 1985 to 2014 at the School of Design (Schule für Gestaltung) of the Allgemeine Gewerbeschule and later at the Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW. Erhart Hauswirth was a Basel-based designer who was active from the 1950s to the 1980s in the fields of video, television, and film. Like Pulfer, Hauswirth also participated in various pioneering video projects that were presented under the direction of the Stampas in their gallery and at Art Basel **FIG. 5**.[11]

The exhibition catalog for *VIDEO* comprises seven contributions in German, English, or Italian, all accompanied by a more or less literal

10 "Cette publication a été éditée à l'occasion de l'exposition VIDEO réalisée par l'Association Musée d'Art Moderne (AMAM) au Musée d'art et d'histoire, Genève et par STAMPA, Bâle. Avril-Mai 1977. Les organisateurs remercient la direction du Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève ainsi que Mme E. Abensur, Mme K. Lillaz et M. A. L'Huillier pour avoir rendu possible cette exposition. Coordinateurs: Adelina von Fürstenberg, responsable du Centre d'art contemporain, Salle Patiño, Genève et Stampa, Bâle. Organisateurs: Eric Franck, Adelina von Fürstenberg pour Genève, et René Pulfer, E. Hauswirth, Stampa, pour Bâle," *VIDEO*, inside front cover.

11 Including *Videoabend*, STAMPA Gallery, Basel, Mar. 31, 1976, and *Video-Veranstaltung*, STAMPA Gallery, Basel, Nov. 26, 1976.

translation into French **FIG. 6**. None of the authors was a member of the AMAM association or an employee of the Musée d'art et d'histoire or the Centre d'Art Contemporain. Martin Kunz was an art historian and had been director of the Kunstmuseum in Lucerne since 1977. Barbara London founded the video art collection at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and had overseen it since 1970. Peter Weibel was an Austrian artist who organized various festivals and actions in Vienna and would later be involved in the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz and head the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe. Hugh Adams was a London-based art critic who wrote for the magazine *Studio International*. Maria Gloria Bicocchi was at that time curator of the video archive of the Venice Biennale and director of Art/Tapes/22, a video production company founded in Florence in 1972. Fulvio Salvadori worked as an art critic and would go on to author numerous texts published by the Centre d'Art Contemporain. Michael H. Shamberg was one of the collaborators at the New York art center The Kitchen. The catalog concludes with an article by Erhart Hauswirth, which does not follow the translation concept and whose layout takes up the monitor screen image **FIG. 7**.[12] Of all these authors, only three were involved in the exhibition. Weibel presented videotapes in programs 1 and 6, as well as an installation that he created together with VALIE EXPORT. Shamberg was involved through the loan of videos produced by The Kitchen and moderated a discussion panel. Maria Gloria Bicocchi was also involved in the loan of works.[13]

The catalog contains neither an introduction nor closing remarks. Each article addresses a specific topic: the situation of video art in a country, parallels to certain aspects of contemporary art, or the experiences of a particular institution. The resulting impression is one of a loose sequence of completely self-contained texts, written independently of one another and of the exhibition – and certainly before its planning – and then compiled together. It can therefore be concluded that the authors were selected not only for their professional positions but also based on prior position-takings – i.e. for texts they had already written and whose contents could be linked to *VIDEO* in an accompanying publication. The selection of these authors is clearly aimed at completeness, both relating to the professional fields represented and to the countries in which they were active. In other words: the key figures of the international video art networks of the 1970s were brought together in this small publication. The catalog project thus seems to have slipped from the hands of its publisher, the AMAM association, and to have detached itself from the exhibition and the association - undoubtedly due to the involvement of the STAMPA Gallery and its network.

The fact that the Basel gallerists Stampa, who continue to be influential in the contemporary art scene, were highlighted on the front cover of the catalog directly beneath AMAM fully contributed to the legitimization of the event. Put differently, their cultural capital complemented that of the Musée

12 Erhart Hauswirth, "video… wiedergabe… entsteht…," *VIDEO*, 42–4.
13 Frei, *Centre d'art contemporain*, 53–8.

Cette publication a été éditée à l'occasion de l'exposition VIDEO réalisée par l'Association Musée d'Art Moderne (AMAM) au Musée d'art et d'histoire, Genève et par STAMPA, Bâle. Avril-Mai 1977.

Les organisateurs remercient la direction du Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève ainsi que Mme E. Abensur, Mme K. Lillaz et M. A. L'Huillier pour avoir rendu possible cette exposition.

GE Biblioth. d'art et d'archéologie
1063297081

Coordinateurs: Adelina von Fürstenberg, responsable du Centre d'art contemporain, Salle Patiño, Genève.
et
Stampa, Bâle

Organisateurs: Eric Franck, Adelina von Fürstenberg pour Genève,
et
René Pulfer, E. Hauswirth, Stampa, pour Bâle.

Editeurs: Association Musée d'Art Moderne (AMAM).

Distributeurs: AMAM, case postale 322, 1211 Genève 3
STAMPA, Spalenberg 2, 4051 Bâle.

Photo-composition et impression: Atelier Poésie Vivante, Genève.

© by the authors, 1977

2'207'153
77/5461

video... wiedergabe... entsteht...

E. Hauswirth

video... explosion...
video..sehen..und..immer..wieder..sehen...
video..kommt..aus..einem..tragbaren..apparat..
welcher..bildsignale..aufnimmt..auf..einem...
magnetband..speichert..und..auf..einem...
bildschirm..sendet....des...magnetband...
ist..aufgerollt..in..einer..Kassette..und...
diese..hat..die..grösse..eines..buches...

die..aussenwelt..ist abgebildet und abgehört...
und..kann..von..hand..zu..hand..gereicht...
werden...

video... wiedergabe... entsteht...
auf... einer... bildröhre...
die... aussenwelt... wird.... in.... ihr...
reproduziert..... sie... wird....
geschrieben.... durch.... eine.... lichtsonde....
in.... einem... luftleeren.... glaskolben...

auf..... einer..... leuchtsteffschicht...

video... ein.... elektronensignal.... auf... einer....
photoelektrisch...empfindlichen..glasröhre..

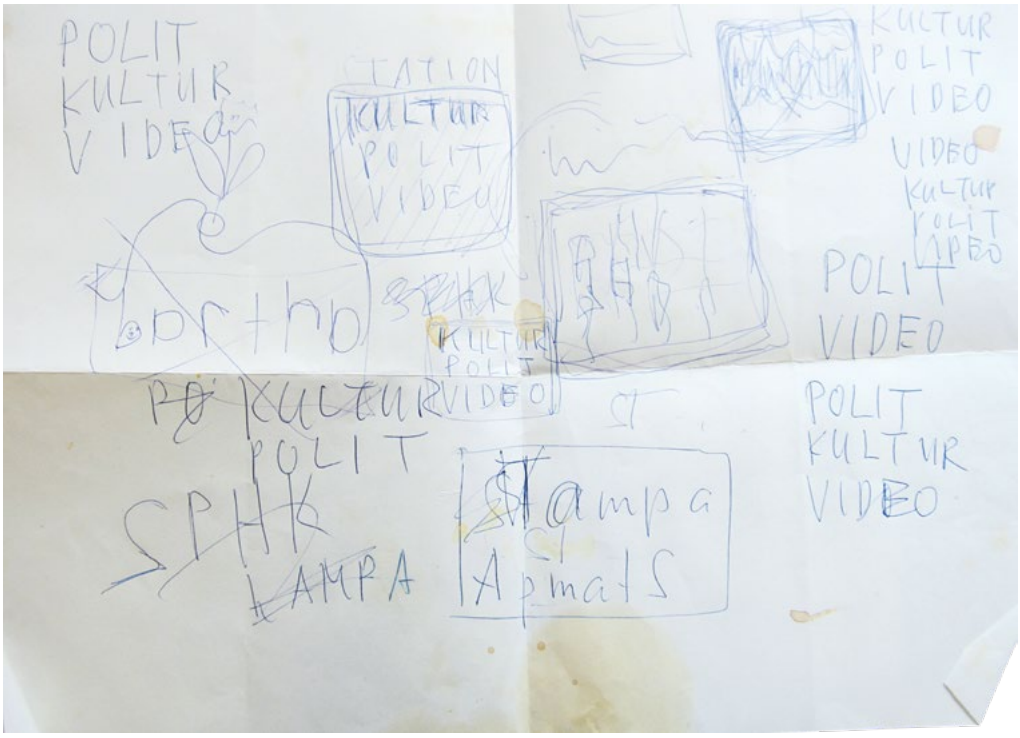
video... speicherbar.. auf.. einem.. elektromagnetischen...
band.....

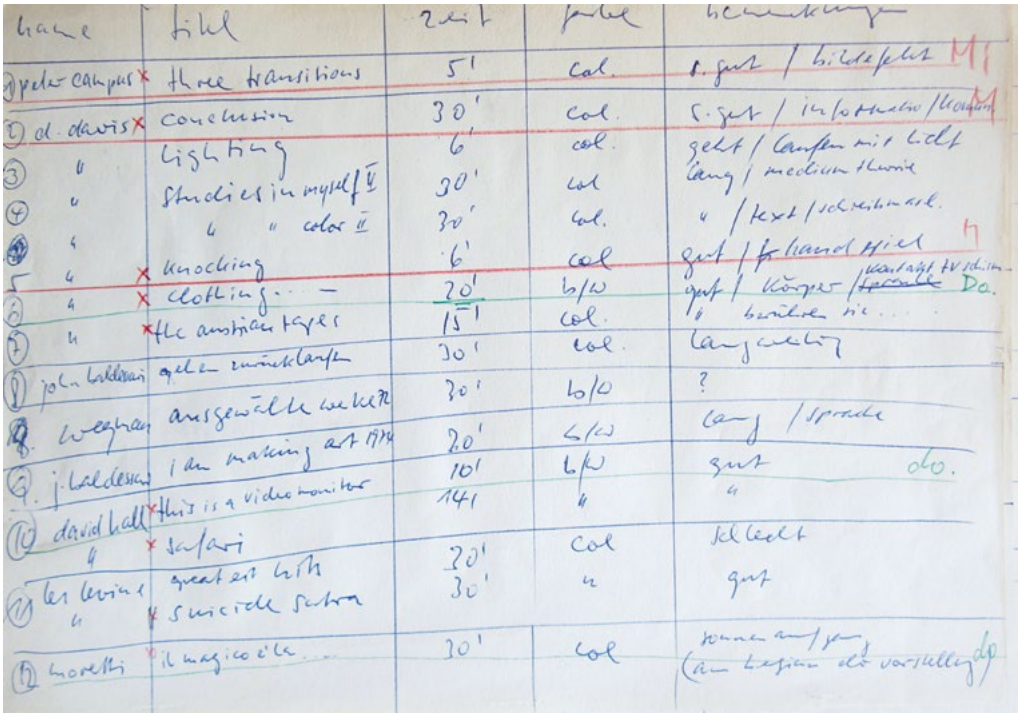
video...reproduzierbar..auf...einem...genormten.....
fernsehempfänger....

video... ich... sehe... video...
25... und.. mehr.. bilder.. pro... sekunde...
25... und... weniger... bilder... pro... sekunde
linienstruktur...wechselnde...intensität...
umwandlung...licht...elektrizität...licht...

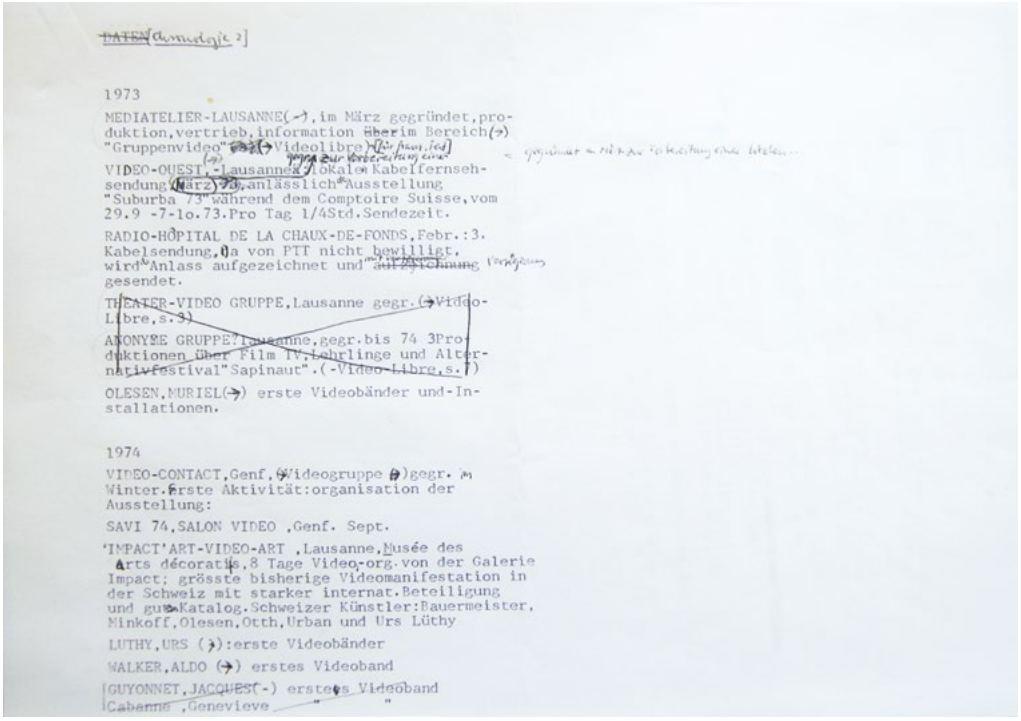
6 ***VIDEO*, exhibition catalog, copyright page and contents (Geneva/Basel: AMAM/Stampa, 1977). © Association des Amis du MAMCO.**

7 ***VIDEO*, exhibition catalog, article by Erhart Hauswirth, 42-3 (Geneva/Basel: AMAM/Stampa, 1977). © Marulla Hauswirth and Association des Amis du MAMCO.**





8 Preparatory notes for the *VIDEO* exhibition [1977], Basel, archives of STAMPA Gallery © STAMPA Gallery, Basel.



DATEN [chronologie ?]

1973

MEDIATELIER-LAUSANNE(→),im März gegründet,produktion,vertrieb,information überim Bereich(→) "Gruppenvideo" (→ Videolibre) [für franz. Text]

VIDEO-OUEST,-Lausanne,(→) lokalen Kabelfernsehsendung März 73,anlässlich Ausstellung "Suburba 73" während dem Comptoire Suisse,vom 29.9 -7-1o.73.Pro Tag 1/4Std.Sendezeit.

RADIO-HÔPITAL DE LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS,Febr.:3. Kabelsendung,da von PTT nicht bewilligt, wird Anlass aufgezeichnet und aufgezeichnete gesendet.

THEATER-VIDEO GRUPPE,Lausanne gegr.(→Videolibre,s.3)

ANONYME GRUPPE?Lausanne,gegr.bis 74 3Produktionen über Film TV,Lehrlinge und Alternativfestival"Sapinaut".(-Video-Libre,s.7)

OLESEN,MURIEL(→) erste Videobänder und-Installationen.

1974

VIDEO-CONTACT,Genf,(Videogruppe →)gegr. im Winter.Erste Aktivität:organisation der Ausstellung:

SAVI 74,SALON VIDEO ,Genf. Sept.

'IMPACT'ART-VIDEO-ART ,Lausanne,Musée des Arts décoratifs,8 Tage Video-org.von der Galerie Impact; grösste bisherige Videomanifestation in der Schweiz mit starker internat.Beteiligung und gut Katalog.Schweizer Künstler:Bauermeister, Minkoff,Olesen,Otth,Urban und Urs Lüthy

LUTHY,URS (→):erste Videobänder

WALKER,ALDO (→) erstes Videoband

GUYONNET,JACQUES(-) erstes Videoband

Cabanne ,Genevieve " "

9 Chronology page, manuscript of the *VIDEO* exhibition catalog [1977], Basel, archives of STAMPA Gallery
©STAMPA Gallery, Basel.

d'art et d'histoire. While the *VIDEO* poster celebrates the Geneva fine arts consecration entity par excellence, while at the same time giving a platform to a young institution for contemporary art, the catalog cover pays tribute to two young consecrating institutions of contemporary art – one in Geneva, the other in Basel. This division reveals the intent to appeal to different target audiences. The poster, directed at the public at large in the Geneva region, seeks to instill a sense of dependability by referencing their Musée d'art et d'histoire. The exhibition's catalog or accompanying publication, on the other hand, was intended for a professional audience beyond Geneva, one that was interested in contemporary art or video and might have been put off if the Geneva Musée d'art et d'histoire were given too much prominence. Absent from the poster, the Stampas occupy a place of honor in the catalog – not only on the cover but also on the copyright page, where they are listed among the organizers and distributors of the publication **FIG. 6**.

The missing acute accent in the title *VIDEO*, which recalls the German spelling of the term, along with the mention of "Basel" on the cover, points to the involvement of Stampa and to the event in Basel. A reading of the texts on the cover and the copyright page suggests that *VIDEO* is an exhibition jointly realized by AMAM and the STAMPA Gallery, both at the Musée d'art et d'histoire in Geneva and in Basel. The broad thematic focus of the exhibition publication, combined with the bilingual format of the texts, was thus intended to allow for the reuse of this book at the exhibition in Basel. Unfortunately, no correspondence with Adelina von Fürstenberg can be found in the archives of the STAMPA Gallery. However, there is evidence there of considerations for adapting the Geneva project for Basel, both with regard to the video content **FIG. 8** and to excerpts from the exhibition catalog manuscript that were set aside during publication **FIG. 9**.[14]

14 *VIDEO*, poster design in German, undated; preparation notes, undated; exhibition catalog manuscript. Basel, archives of the STAMPA Gallery.

AT THE INTERSECTION OF GENEVA, BASEL, AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

The AMAM association was founded in 1973 by Geneva-based collectors and enthusiasts of contemporary art, with the following objectives:

> … to promote the establishment of a Museum of Modern Art in Geneva, to examine the modalities of its foundation and operations, to receive artworks on loan or as donations in order to present them to the public, and more generally to broaden understanding of contemporary art.[15]

Eric Franck and Adelina von Fürstenberg were specially tasked by AMAM with organizing *VIDEO*. While Franck was a board member of AMAM at the time, Adelina von Fürstenberg was not a member of the association. As a major figure in the Geneva art scene, she founded the Centre d'Art Contemporain in 1974 while still studying social sciences at the University of Geneva. This center, initially housed in the Simon I. Patiño Hall at the Cité universitaire, faced numerous financial difficulties and had to relocate five times within fifteen years. Eric Franck, for his part, had initially been deeply involved in art patronage as an investment banker and film producer; from 1977 to 1979 he supported the Centre d'Art Contemporain. In 1977, Eric Franck left the financial sector to dedicate himself entirely to the arts, first at the Galerie Maeght in Zurich and Paris – which led to his resignation from the AMAM board in 1978 – and later at his own gallery, which he opened in Geneva in 1982.

The STAMPA Gallery in Basel contributed CHF 2,000 toward the total CHF 4,000 cost of producing the *VIDEO* exhibition catalog and organized its distribution in collaboration with AMAM. On a practical level, Art/Tapes/22 provided a number of tools and pieces of equipment. The exhibited works were loans from the artists themselves, as well as from The Kitchen and the Castelli/Sonnabend Gallery in New York, the STAMPA Gallery, and the archive of contemporary art at the Venice Biennale (via Art/Tapes/22) **FIG. 10**. These collaborations made it possible to present in both Geneva and Basel the most important international practitioners of video art – primarily from North America – and to juxtapose or relate their works to those of Swiss artists such as Jean Otth, Muriel Olesen, Gérald Minkoff, and Urs Lüthi.

Surprisingly, neither the minutes nor the internal documents of the AMAM association, nor official announcements or the French-speaking Swiss

15 "[…] promouvoir la création d'un musée d'art moderne à Genève, d'étudier les modalités de sa création et de son fonctionnement, de recevoir en dépôt ou sous forme de don des œuvres d'art aux fins d'être exposées au public et, d'une manière générale, de promouvoir la connaissance de l'art contemporain," Article 2 of the statutes of the AMAM association, Oct. 30, 1973, Geneva, Archives de la Ville de Genève, Fonds Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH), CH AVG, 340.H.12.1/3.

press, mention any involvement of the STAMPA Gallery in the exhibition. According to the AMAM archives, which are held in the collection of the Musée d'art et d'histoire in the Geneva city archive, there is no indication of active participation by the STAMPA Gallery. There are no documents attesting to a division of roles between the Geneva and Basel actors. Nor is there any evidence of an exchange between AMAM and the Stampas. This leads to the assumption that it must have been Adelina von Fürstenberg who leveraged her connections with the STAMPA Gallery – something confirmed to me by the people involved.[16] Other AMAM association archive materials, held in the archive of the Association des Amis du MAMCO, provide further information. There is a single, but telling document: a double invitation card to *FILM VIDEO MUSIK AKTIONEN*, which took place from mid-April to early June 1977 at the STAMPA Gallery **FIG. 11**.[17] A second version of the *VIDEO* event was shown in Basel in two parts: the first part, from April 12 to May 6, was largely a reiteration of the Geneva exhibition; the second part, from mid-May to June 6, expanded upon it by integrating works especially from European artists represented by the STAMPA Gallery. As in Geneva, the Stampas organized evening events with several artists: a performance by Marc Camille Chaimowicz, presentations of works by Weibel and Nam June Paik as well as by VALIE EXPORT, and film installations by James Collins, who had not participated in the Geneva exhibition. Special flyers were produced for these events **FIG. 12**.[18]

It should be noted that the collaboration with Geneva was not mentioned in STAMPA Gallery's communications, i.e. in its flyers, whereas the Basel press did reference AMAM and the exhibition catalog. An article in the *Basler Zeitung*, for instance, highlights the contributions of the Basel exhibition in comparison to the Geneva event, such as the presentation of numerous actions and performances, the freedom for the audience to choose which videos to watch, and the provision of documentary materials.[19]

VIDEO NETWORKS: BETWEEN INTERNATIONALISM AND THE *RÖSTIGRABEN*

VIDEO originated from a project idea by AMAM, which took concrete form in a national or even international publication and in two local exhibitions. It represented an important milestone in the history of video art, both in Switzerland and on a European and international level. Thanks to the connections of Adelina von Fürstenberg, Gilli and Diego Stampa, and René Pulfer with the Castelli/Sonnabend Gallery, Art/Tapes/22, and The Kitchen, the catalog and

16 Email correspondence with Gilli and Diego Stampa (January 2020) as well as with Adelina von Fürstenberg (February 2020).

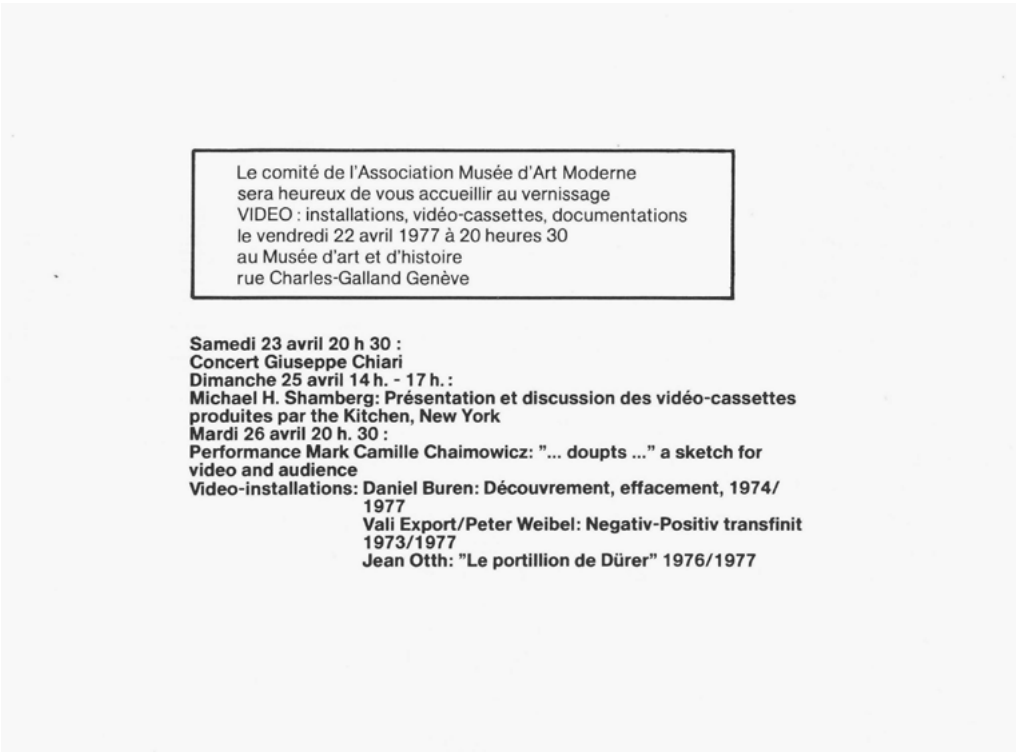
17 *FILM VIDEO MUSIK AKTIONEN*, invitation cards for the exhibition at STAMPA Gallery, Basel, Apr. 12 – Jun. 6, 1977, Basel, archives of the STAMPA Gallery.

18 *FILM VIDEO MUSIK AKTIONEN*, invitation cards for the actions and installations, STAMPA Gallery, Apr. 12 – Jun. 6, 1977, Basel, archives of the STAMPA Gallery.

19 Hans Jürg Kupper, "Neues Medium Video. Stampa informiert," *Basler Zeitung* 104 (May 17, 1977): 37.

the selection of works offered an overview of the international video and performance scene. It is important to point out that the international network was more strongly highlighted by the organizers and more clearly perceived by the press and by posterity than the translocal Geneva–Basel network. The Stampas were involved in the project from the beginning, and their contribution went beyond the simple adaptation of a Geneva project. However, the division of roles within the project remains ambiguous and varies depending on the discourse, medium of communication, and the actors who commented on it. Added to this are the post-event narratives constructed by the involved actors, the media, or during the archiving process.

A detailed analysis of the discourses and texts helps to complete the history of *VIDEO*. Since the exhibition was produced and received in two different language regions, it makes sense to consider not only the official exhibition catalog, but also various communication media, comparing them with one another and with written and oral archival materials. The narrative and historical constructions of the organizers, editors, and institutions can thus be compiled and nuanced, revealing a network that is far more complex and dynamic than it appears at first glance.



10 ***VIDEO*, exhibition poster, front and back, Geneva, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Apr. 22 – May 1, 1977, dossier 340.H.12.4/1, Geneva, Archives de la Ville de Genève, Fonds Musée d'art et d'histoire (MAH), CH AVG, 340, © Association des Amis du MAMCO.**

FILM
VIDEO
MUSIK
AKTIONEN
12.4.–6.5.77

stampa
spalenberg 2 ch – 4051 basel
tel. 061/ 25 79 10 / 25 40 62

öffnungszeiten:
dienstag – freitag 14.00 – 18.30
samstag 10.00 – 17.00

dienstag, 3. mai 20.00 **giuseppe chiari**
klavierkonzert

chiari ist 1926 in florenz geboren.stud. mathematik und musik. chiari gehört der new yorker fluxus-bewegung an.

mittwoch,4. mai 20.00 michael h. shamberg
the kitchen, center for video and music, new york
zeigt und erklärt das neueste videotape von **vito acconci,** the red tape, 1976
140 min.

freitag, 6. mai 20.00 michael h. shamberg zeigt und diskutiert folgende video-kassetten aus der produktion von: **the kitchen, new york robert ashley, terry fox, ralph hilton/ robert wilson, nancy holt, bill viola, lawrence weiner.**

stampa spalenberg 2 4051 basel tel. 25 79 10

eintritt fr. 5.–

11 ***FILM VIDEO MUSIK AKTIONEN*** **flyers , front and back, STAMPA Gallery, Basel, Apr. 12 – Jun. 6, 1977, Basel, archives of STAMPA Gallery © STAMPA Gallery, Basel.**

FILM
VIDEO
MUSIK
AKTIONEN
12.4. – 6.6. 77

stampa
spalenberg 2 ch – 4051 basel
tel. 061/ 25 79 10 / 25 40 62

öffnungszeiten:
dienstag – freitag 14.00 – 18.30
samstag 10.00 – 17.00

ideo video video video video video video video video video vide

donnerstag, 26. mai 20.15 alberto moretti, douglas davis, david hall, urs lüthi, arnulf rainer, antonio dias, giulio paolini, alighiero boetti,alberto pirelli, michele sambin,taka iimura

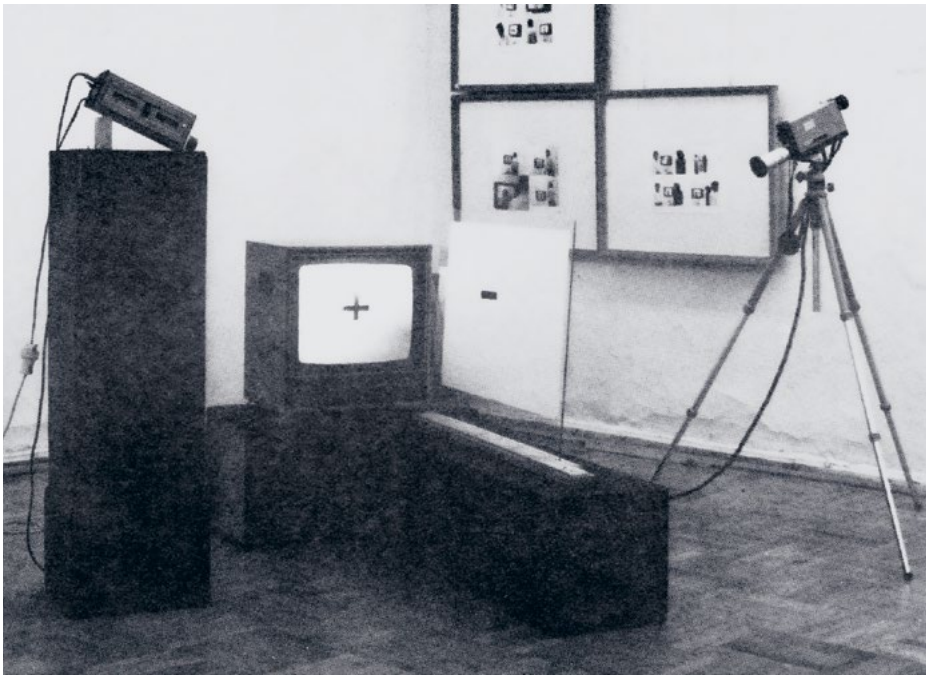
mittwoch, 1. juni 20.15 peter campus, douglas davis, richard landry, joan la barbara michael harvey, jean otth, hannah wilke, jochen gerz, tina girourard

freitag, 3. juni 20.15 richard kriesche, valie export, peter weibel

stampa spalenberg 2 ch 4051 basel tel. (061) 25 79 10

eintritt fr. 5.–

deo video video video video video video video video video video



nam june paik
zeichungen, objekte, video-kassetten

peter weibel
video-kassetten, videografiken 1969 – 77

ausstellung: 12.5. – 25.5. 1977

donnerstag, 12. mai 20.30
peter weibel zeigt filme und video-kassetten

eintritt fr. 5.–

stampa
spalenberg 2 ch – 4051 basel
tel. 061/ 25 79 10 / 25 40 62

öffnungszeiten:
dienstag – freitag 14.00 – 18.30
samstag 10.00 – 17.00

foto: epistemische videologie (1974) demonstration 1, p. weibel

12 Flyers for the presentations and exhibitions of Nam June Paik, Peter Weibel, and VALIE EXPORT during the *VIDEO* exhibition, front and back, STAMPA Gallery, Basel, Apr. 19 – May 25, 1977, Basel, archives of STAMPA Gallery ©STAMPA Gallery, Basel.

valie export
19.4. – 7.5. 77

körperkonfigurationen 1972 – 76
video – projekte und – realisationen
video – kassetten 1973 – 1977

eröffnung: dienstag 19. april 20.00
valie export ist anwesend

stampa
spalenberg 2 ch – 4051 basel
tel. 061/ 25 79 10 / 25 40 62

öffnungszeiten:

dienstag – freitag	14.00 – 18.30
samstag	10.00 – 17.00

Julie Lang

Representations That Matter

Exhibiting Video in a Pedagogical Context at the Sous-Sol Program in Geneva

This paper focuses on the role of video in one of Europe's first curatorial study programs, Sous-sol.[1] Founded in 1987 by Catherine Quéloz at the École Supérieure d'Art Visuel de Genève (ESAV), this educational program sought to open spaces conducive to developing reflective practices around "the exhibition" and the questions it raises. Through various events, including exhibitions and video screenings, this teaching unit took an explicit stance on instituted and instituting culture and discourses. By developing a pedagogy that engaged with international reforms in the teaching of art practices and art history, the program aimed to explore both theoretically and practically the discursive and ideological implications of exhibitions.

In this context, I describe how video – and more generally, the moving image –has become a means of establishing a politics of visual and social representation that gradually extends into the realm of exhibition practice. First, I intend to show how video from initially being featured in an exhibition, has developed into a central medium for articulating a politics of the gaze. Shown not only in exhibitions but also screened as part of seminars in the projection room, video functioned both as artwork and as educational material. I argue that this dual use is critical for conceptualizing a broader politics of representation grounded in post-structuralist and feminist psychoanalytic thought. As a mode of representation, the moving image – especially through its links to mass culture and cinema –is particularly suited to questioning the power structures that govern mainstream representations. Second, I examine how video gradually became central to developing new exhibition formats that generate critical discourse around exhibition-making itself. I suggest, then, that video is used in two distinct ways: as a material trace of interviews or encounters to explore new curatorial methodologies, and as a medium for producing critically engaged archives and feminist histories. Here, video mainly functions as a recording tool, integrated into the pedagogical and curatorial process – especially in the creation of oral archives. As such, video aligns more with alternative documentation and archiving – or indeed teaching material – than with autonomous artworks meant to be exhibited as purely visual representations.

Based on this, I argue that video plays an active role in developing both a critique of representation *and* critique of the exhibition. Focusing on the issues of representation and staging shared by screen culture and exhibition-making, I aim to demonstrate how incorporating video into a curatorial study program can highlight a Swiss and transatlantic network of ideas and artistic practices that, since the 1980s, have shaped a distinct form of institutional critique informed by critical theories of gender, race, sexual orientation, and the broader concept of difference.

1 The term "curatorial studies" was first used, as a translation from English, to officially describe the program in 1998, implying from the outset a critical and reflexive approach to exhibition practice, as distinct from museology or museography programs. I discussed the history of Sous-sol's terminological development and its relation to the art school hosting it in Julie Lang, "Apprendre des *cultural studies* pour se former aux pratiques de l'exposition: le programme Sous-sol (1987-1999)," in Frédéric Elsig and Lada Umstätter (eds.), *L'enseignement des arts à Genève du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Chêne-Bourg: Georg éditeur, 2024), 275–98.

For Sous-sol, the main challenge during the 1990s was to develop a place for studying and practicing what an exhibition is – an endeavor that inherently demands a reflexive approach. Studying what is at stake in an exhibition encourages a critical approach and the exploration of new ways of looking at exhibition practices. The notion that a curatorial program should serve as a platform for developing critical thought and practice is also a defining feature of the Museum Studies course developed by the Independent Study Program (ISP) at the Whitney Museum in New York, where Catherine Quéloz received her training.[2] Since 1980–81, the program invited a wide range of artists and theorists to share their experiences, methodologies, and theoretical frameworks, and its unprecedented pedagogical approach made it an international catalyst for individuals engaged in questioning and debating the museum, the exhibition, and their discursive and representational implications.

Sous-sol distinguishes itself from other early exhibition training programs, such as the École du Magasin in Grenoble, which was founded in the same year and affiliated with the Centre National d'Art Contemporain (CNAC). While the Grenoble program emphasized a professional orientation, it focused on developing a forward-looking approach through exhibitions of young artists' work. A few years later, in 1992, the University of Rennes 2 launched a master's program called *Métier de l'Exposition et Médiation Culturelle*, linked to the art history department. The pedagogical goals of this university course centered on aligning practical training with the institutional demands of museums, familiarizing students with the concrete steps involved in producing exhibitions.[3] Within the landscape of these pioneering curatorial studies program, Sous-sol's unique status as an exhibition space within an art school (literally located in the school's basement) created a productive environment for critically revisiting modernist notions still promoted by art history and institutional exhibitions up to the 1970s. These include the myth of originality, the logic of singularization, and the building of a canon.[4] Given the ongoing need for an art school to renew the artistic practices they teach in response to current artistic concerns, an art school

2 In 1987, the Museum Studies Program was subdivided into Curatorial Studies and Critical Studies. All students attended a weekly seminar on "social and cultural theory", which provided a theoretical and pedagogical framework for developing critical thinking. See *Independent Study Program: 40 years* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2008).

3 From 1990 onwards, a number of institutions followed in the tracks of these early, French-speaking courses in exhibition studies and practice, including Bard College in New York and the Royal College of Arts in London (both in 1992), the Jan Van Eyck Academie in Maastricht and the De Apple Foundation in Amsterdam (both in 1994), and Goldsmith University in London (in 1995). For an initial chronology of curatorial programs, see Bellini Andrea, "Curatorial Schools," *Flash Art*, 2016, https://flash---art.com/article/curatorial-schools/ (accessed Oct. 3, 2024).

4 Over the years, the program has included a number of critical readings that question and revisit modernist notions, such as the anthology by , and the seminal work by Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 1985), as well as feminist critiques of the notion of canon by Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1981) and Nanette Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission," in Joan Hartman and Ellen Messer-Davidow (eds.), *(En-)Gendering Knowledge. Feminists in Academe* (Knoxville: The University of Tennesse Press, 1991), 222–36.

provided an ideal setting for a program that invited artists to challenge exhibition methodologies.[5]

EXHIBITING MEDIA CRITIQUES OF REPRESENTATION

The first exhibition to display video, among other artworks, at Sous-sol was *Hyperbate* (November 15 to December 16, 1990). The exhibition brought together works by then internationally renowned artists who used "an existing repertoire of cultural images and the rhetorical forms of the everyday to expose, deconstruct – more recently, to play with or simply subtly shift – the ideological motifs present in mass culture."[6] The works presented employed a wide range of artistic strategies to decode visual symbols linked to mass culture and mass media. The aim was to encourage reflection on the socio-political discourses and connotations shaping mass-mediated images. By hijacking mass culture's codes and visual languages – whether those of cinema, advertising, merchandising, or television – the artists interrogated dominant systems of representation. For example, Cindy Sherman's photographic works deconstruct the gender stereotypes perpetuated by cinema; Barbara Kruger and Felix Gonzalez-Torres appropriate the visual language of advertising in their posters; Jenny Holzer intervenes in public and commercial spaces with wearable text pieces like caps; and numerous video works shown on monitors **FIGS. 1-2** extend this critical approach within the moving image.

The exhibition was deliberately framed as a space of confrontation between divergent critical perspectives. The press release speaks of a "displacement of urgency,"[7] which may also be understood as a displacement of critique. This becomes particularly evident when examining the selection of video works. Those dating from the 1960s – by artists such as Vito Acconci, Hans Haacke, Matt Mullican, Robert Morris, and filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, were largely concerned with conceptual investigations of the moving image and its dynamics. In contrast, works from the 1980s reflect a turn to toward critiques of representation more directly engaged with identity politics, including issues of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. For example, Martha Rosler's video *Vital statistics of a Citizen Simply Obtained* (1977) explores sexism in the medical field and its broader social and political implications from a female perspective. Dan Graham's *Rock my Religion* (1982-84) uses the history of rock 'n' roll to reflect on the fragility of gendered norms in the Western system of representation; Dara Birnbaum, through several videos

5 As noted by J. Burle, the dean of the art school (in "un nouvel espace de travail," n.d., ca 1987) and by C. Quéloz (in "Atelier: médiatisation," n.d, ca 1987), Archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'Art et de Design Genève, 2-002).

6 "… utilisent un répertoire d'images culturelles existant ainsi que les formes de la rhétorique du quotidien pour mettre à jour, déconstruire – plus récemment jouer avec ou simplement déplacer subtilement – les motifs idéologiques présents dans la culture de masse," Catherine Quéloz, "Introduction," in *Hyperbate* exh. cat. Geneva, Sous-sol (Nov. 14 – Dec. 14, 1990) (Geneva: Sous-sol, 1990), 9 (author's translation).

7 Press release of the exhibition *Hyperbate*, 1990, archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève, 2-014.

1 ***Hyperbate*** **(exhibition view), Geneva, Sous-sol (Nov. 15 – Dec. 14, 1990), archives Sous-sol/ CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève, 2-014. © Claudio Merlini**

2 ***Hyperbate*** **(exhibition view), Geneva, Sous-sol (Nov. 15 – Dec. 14, 1990), archives Sous-sol/ CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève, 2-014. © Claudio Merlini**

produced between 1983 and 1987, questions the stereotypical roles assigned to women on television; and Bruce Nauman's *Violent Incident Man/Woman Segment* (1986) stages scenes of violence that critique gendered social conditioning. Taken together, the exhibition presents a range of artworks, that in one way or another, appropriate a mass medium, using the "displacement" of perspective to reveal how images are ideologically constructed.

This critical reconsideration of visual representation – aligned with the concerns of the "Pictures Generation,"[8] has been central to artistic discourse in New York since the mid-1980s, where most of the artists featured in the exhibition are from. A key milestone in this context was the New Museum's 1984 exhibition *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* (1984), widely regarded as a foundational moment in the articulation and theorization of issues of representation.[9] The exhibition approached its subject through the lens of *difference* – of viewpoints and of identities – challenging prevailing assumptions of neutrality or universalism. To explore these questions through a Lacanian framework, guest curator Kate Linker assembled a group of artists whose work interrogates visual representation, among them Dara Birnbaum, Victor Burgin, Judith Barry, Hans Haacke, Mary Kelly, Silvia Kolbowski, Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Martha Rosler, and Jeff Wall. Still and moving images both featured prominently. A parallel film and video program, curated by American film critic and curator Jane Weinstock, included films by Yvonne Rainer, Jean-Luc Godard, Dara Birnbaum, Martha Rosler, Stuart Marshall, and Valie Export. The most straightforward contribution came from Craig Owens, whose catalog essay "Posing" explored the interrelationships of representation, the moving image, and sexual identity – especially in relation to the hetero-patriarchal and colonial gaze.[10]

While *Difference* helped position the New Museum as a key platform for a new generation of artists engaged with representation, it also stood out for its curatorial vision. As art historian Rosalind Deutsche observed,

> *Difference* was different from other feminist exhibitions of its day: it was a manifesto show that drew together the work of artists engaged in a politics of representation associated with psychoanalytic and poststructuralist discourses on subjectivity in visual representation ….[11]

8 This term is used to describe a group of artists who were playing with representational imagery and references to mass media. It was originally linked to the 1977 exhibition *Pictures* curated by Douglas Crimp at Artists Space. Two years later, Crimp wrote a seminal article that helped theorize a generation concerned with prioritizing the power of image-making through processes such as quotation and reframing. See Douglas Crimp, "Pictures," *October*, no.. 8 (1979): 75–88.

9 For an article analyzing the New Museum's exhibition politics in relation to the New York art scene in the 1980s, see Juli Carson, "On Discourses as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics," in Griselda Pollock and Joyce Zemans (eds.), *Museums After Modernism. Strategies of Engagement* (Boston/Oxford/Carlton: Blackwell Publishers, 2007), 190–224.

10 Craig Owens, "Posing," in *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality*, exh. cat., The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (Dec. 8, 1984 – Feb. 10, 1985), The Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago (Mar. 3. – Apr. 7, 1985), Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (July 19 – Sep. 1, 1985) (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 7–18.

11 Rosalyn Deutsche et al., "Feminist Time: A conversation," *Grey Room*, no. 31 (Spring 2008), 34.

Deutsche highlights the distinctive nature of the *Difference* exhibition in its commitment to theorizing representation through artworks that critique ideological structures – particularly those related to sexual and gender identity.

The exhibition was grounded in a feminist model which "sought to theorize how those [existing] institutions constituted a symbolic to which men consciously had access but from which women were psychologically barred because they were sexually marked within it", rather than actually creating feminist practices as counter-institutions, as Juli Carson points out.[12] Acknowledging this conceptual grounding of the exhibition enables us to understand the singular role of the moving image as a privileged medium for problematizing the ways representations perpetuate and perform stereotypes associated with sexual and gender identity.[13]

To expand and deepen the theoretical issues raised by the artworks on display – and in light of the pedagogical context, *Hyperbate* also served as an occasion to bring together a set of texts for discussion in the seminar that accompanied and helped prepare the exhibition.[14] Most of these texts engage directly with poststructuralist and feminist theories of visual representation. This approach closely aligns with what was first consolidated in the 1984 volume *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* – arguably the first publication to combine these discourses in 1984 into the first publication (to my knowledge) to mix these approaches, in order to formulate a new understanding of representation in both art and in exhibitions.[15] This volume includes key essays by French semiologist Roland Barthes and poststructuralist philosophers Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault (central to the reception of French Theory in the United States), a reprint of British critic and filmmaker Laura Mulvey's influential essay on the question of the gaze, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (1975) essays by Kate Linker and Mary Kelly on Freudian and Lacanian theories, and a collection of texts by art critics such as Craig Owens, Benjamin Buchloh, Douglas Crimp, Rosalind Krauss, Lucy Lippard, and Abigail Solomon-Godeau.

More than a cross-disciplinary collection of critical writings, the volume – published by the New Museum in the same year as the *Difference* exhibition – played a defining role in shaping the aesthetic discourse of the 1980s, particularly in the United States. As the first in the "Documentary Sources in Contemporary Art" series, it contributed to the revitalization of

12 Juli Carson, "On Discourses as Monument: Institutional Spaces and Feminist Problematics," 217. In the great debates of the 1980s this approach was often described as "constructivist" (as opposed to "essentialist").

13 As demonstrated, for example, by various contributions in Lucy Reynolds (ed.), *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image* (London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Hila Peleg and Erika Balsom (eds.), *Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving Image* (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 2023).

14 These texts are Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism," in *The Anti- Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Press, 1983), 57–82.; Roland Barthes, "La mort de l'auteur," in Barthes, *Le bruissement de la langue: essais critiques IV* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984), 61–67.; Crimp, "Pictures" (as in n. 8); Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," *October*, no. 15 (Winter 1980).; Rosalind Krauss, "Photography's discursive spaces" in Krauss, *Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Mythes* (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 1985), 131–50.; Michel Foucault, "La bibliothèque fantastique," in Gérard Debray-Genette et al., *Travail de Flaubert* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1995), 103–12.

15 Brian Wallis, *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984).

American art criticism, along with journals such as *October* and *Art in America*, where feminist and poststructuralist frameworks became key to interpreting a new generation of artists engaged with the notion of difference.[16] It is this nexus of artistic, curatorial, and epistemological transformation – centered in 1980s New York – that pervaded the *Hyperbate* press release.

From a curatorial point of view, at Sous-sol, it was not so much a question of considering the exhibition of video art in terms of its future potential – where the aim would have been to legitimize an already well-established international video art scene that had been since the mid-1970s[17] but of seeing it as a privileged way to examine cultural issues through the lens of visual representation. The exhibition is not considered as a fixed object, but as a space for ongoing reflection, extended by the debates it provokes (both during and beyond its presentation). As Catherine Quéloz observes about *Hyperbate*: "The exhibition is first and foremost a place for discussion, which continues through debates and essays that go far beyond the presentation of the works ... so that the exhibition no longer appears as a conclusion, but rather as a point of departure"[18] – a point from which to question the construction of knowledge itself, including the idea of a universalising point of view.

ENTERING THE SCREENING ROOM AND POSITIONING THE MOVING IMAGE

Beyond the exhibitions, the problematization of the gaze (linked to that of representation) was developed in Sous-sol specifically within the framework of a seminar unrelated to exhibitions and entitled "Feminist Practices in the Arts." Launched in early 1992, just over a year after the *Hyperbate* exhibition, the seminar was attended by Marcia Hafif (1992), Yvonne Rainer (March 1993), Martha Rosler (September 1994), and Judith Barry (December 1994). While the first offered a feminist reading of the history of modernist painting, the next three focused on the moving image. Yvonne Rainer introduced a feminist theory of cinema based on the concept of "herstory" as opposed to "history" – a concept notably developed by Casey Miller and Kate Swift and central to American feminism[19] – based on a selection of her films from 1972 to 1990 (which would then be screened publicly at Sous-sol). Martha Rosler presented a selection of several video works exploring the intersections of gender, culture and classes, including *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975), *Domination and the*

16 The concept of difference, and how it is developed by feminist theory and postmodernism, is discussed in the book by Sarah Ahmed, *Differences that Matter. Feminist theory and postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). which inspired the title of this paper.

17 Geneva has played a particularly important role in this respect, with the creation in 1985 of the Semaine Internationale de la Vidéo, one of the first video art events of its kind in Europe.

18 "L'exposition est avant tout le lieu d'une réflexion qui se prolonge à travers débats et essais ouvrent bien au-delà de la présentation des œuvres ... de sorte que l'exposition n'apparaissait plus comme un aboutissement, mais plutôt comme un point de départ." Catherine Quéloz et al., "Catherine Quéloz. Entretiens avec les curateurs," in Jean-Marc Poinsot (ed.), *C'est pas la fin du monde. Un point de vue sur l'art des années 80* (Rennes: Centre d'histoire de l'art contemporain, 1992), 115 (author's translation).

19 See Casey Miller and Kate Swift, *Words and Women* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

Everyday (1978), *Secrets from the Street: No Disclosure (*1980), and *How Do We Know What Home Looks Like?* (1993). Last but not least, Judith Barry, who explored the status of the image in western and contemporary society through the mediums of theatre, film and video, questioned the collective imagination linked to different power structures.

In addition to the three exhibition rooms situated in the basement of the art school building, Sous-sol shared a black-box projection room with the Film Department, where this seminar took place. The screenings were always accompanied by a selection of texts proposed by the guest artists and the Sous-sol teaching and student team. As the title of the seminar suggests, the politics of the gaze was a subject of examination, particularly by feminist critics in the 1980s beginning with the aforementioned seminal text by Laura Mulvey, which questioned how visual representations perform gendered identities and roles, highlighting for the first time the mechanisms of domination of the phallocentric gaze in relation to cinema.[20] At the crossroads of film theory and psychoanalysis, the latter was extended by Griselda Pollock's less resonant essay "Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practices – a Brechtian Perspective,"[21] which analyses female representations in film and audiovisual media. It is the closing chapter of Pollock's 1988 book *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art*, in which she sets out to identify sexual politics as foundational to modernism and the notion of the art historical canon.[22] The question of the gaze and difference is also explored by French-educated feminist philosophers and psychoanalysts Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, who have become reference points for thinking and questioning the construction of history (of art) and representations, and whose texts were also read in this seminar.[23] The moving image, accompanied by a selection of feminist texts, is a way of understanding and problematizing how visual representations re-enact specific, normative roles associated with sexual and gender identities, as well as a way of reflecting on history in relation to the medium of film, cinema, and video.

Beyond being presented as artworks or for their cinematographic qualities, films and videos viewed in the black box become pedagogical material for problematizing the notion of the gaze and voicing a feminist critique of representation. In terms of teaching methods, whether in relation to the *Hyperbate* exhibition or to the seminar on "Feminist practices in the Arts," we are looking at a reading group format inspired by feminist pedagogies as a collective way of producing a critical analysis of representations.[24] The

20 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 6–18.

21 As Mira Shor pointed out in her article "Backlash and Appropriation," in Norma Bourde and Mary Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s History and Impact* (New York: Abrams, 1994), 248–63.

22 Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (London/New York: Routledge, 1988).

23 Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en n'est pas un* (Paris: Minuit, 1977) or Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris: Des Femmes, 1974).

24 As described by Linda Nochlin in her first Feminist Art History course at Vassar College in 1969 (see Linda Nochlin, "Starting from Scratch: The Beginnings of Feminist Art History," in Norma Bourde and Mary Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art* (as in n. 21), 130–39.

practice of collecting references is a way of developing a new way of looking at art, history, and moving images. At Sous-sol, this process of gathering and exchanging went hand in hand with the translation of texts and the building of a library in an attempt to establish and consolidate new research perspectives, which were still less formalized and accessible than the canonical ones in the early 1990s. To understand the significance of this gesture, it is important to remember that in Geneva at the time, international books and journals in a broader sense were not easily accessible and, if at all, could only be in places such as the ECART Gallery or the Library of Art and Archeology.[25]

INVESTIGATING REPRESENTATIONS AS AN EXHIBITION POLITICS

While the development of a feminist politics of the gaze was initially related to moving images, from 1994 onward this critical politics of representation became a central curatorial tenet for exhibitions. As the presentation brochures for Sous-sol stated:

> It is no longer just a question of learning the rudiments of designing and organizing an exhibition, but also of questioning the process itself, its validity; trying not to blindly follow and imitate the routine already established by the institutions, but to develop alternative practices. [Through the exhibition, the aim is] to question the power relations that underpin the politics of representation: who represents whom? who is represented? What history are we referring to?[26]

Sous-sol encouraged its participants to question and problematize the power relations that run through the exhibition space and the way discourses are deployed or expressed within it. Its special status as a pedagogic program for exhibition studies made it a privileged space for experimenting with the politics of representation. In this way, it made a pioneering contribution to the emerging field of curatorial studies. This reflexivity is linked to a change in the status of video within the program: rather than as contributing to a visual politics of representation (with and through images), it came to be considered as a – sometimes exhibited – tool for developing a politics of representativity

25 See Melissa Rérat, "Entretien – Catherine Quéloz," in Sybille Omlin and Dora Imhof (eds.), *Kristallisationsorte der Kunst in der Schweiz. Aarau, Genf, Luzern in den 1970er Jahren* (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015), 227.

26 "Il n'est plus seulement question d'apprendre les rudiments de la conception et du montage d'une exposition, mais aussi de questionner le processus lui-même, sa validité ; tenter de ne pas suivre aveuglément et imiter la routine déjà établie par les institutions, mais développer des pratiques alternatives. [par l'exposition, il s'agit] d'interroger les relations de pouvoir qui fondent la politique de la représentation : qui représente qui? qui est représenté? À quelle histoire se réfère-t-on?," Course brochure 1996–1997, p. 67, archives HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève (author's translation).

(who is represented and how). In other words, it became a central medium for investigating artistic milieus, rethinking institutional routines in terms of exhibition policy, and documenting these alternative proposals.

PRODUCING VIDEO ARCHIVES AS TRACES OF CONVERSATIONS

This use of video was experimented with for the first time in an exhibition at Sous-Sol that ran from 4 May to 3 June 1994. The travelling project with the full title *Services: The Conditions and Relations of Service Provision in Contemporary Project Oriented Artistic Practice*, sought to take stock of an artistic turning point, the arrival of so-called "project-oriented" practices that are contextual to the exhibition in which they take place.[27] As Andrea Fraser writes in her introduction to the exhibition:

> It appears to us that related variously to institutional critique, productivist, activist, and political documentary traditions, as well as post-studio, site-specific, and/or public art activities, the practices currently characterized as project work do not necessarily share a thematic, ideological or procedural basis. What they do seem to share is the fact that they all involve expending an amount of labor which is either in excess of, or independent of, any specific material production and which cannot be transacted along with such production. This labor, which in economic terms would be called service provision, as opposed to goods production, may include the work of the interpretation or analysis of sites both in and outside of cultural institutions, the work of presentation and installation …, the work of public education ….[28]

In order to respond to the way in which these new and diverse practices questioned the economies of artistic work and the organization or definition of artistic work itself, the two organizers, Helmut Draxler and Andrea Fraser, initiated a collective collection of archival documents and various materials.[29] The participants were invited to contribute to the historical research, whose documents would constitute a major part of the exhibition.

27 The exhibition took place at the Kunstraum of the University of Lüneburg (Jan--Feb.1994), then travelled to the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart (Mar–Apr .1994), Kunstverein München (May, 1994), Sous-sol (May–Jun, 1994), Depot in Vienna (Sep–Oct, 1994), and probably Hasselt (Belgium).

28 Andrea Fraser quoting the proposal of the project: "Session One: Introductions, Saturday 22.01.1994," in Eric Golo Stone (ed.), *Services Working Group* (Vancouver: Filip, 2021), 41–42.

29 The discussions were organized around four main themes: "serving institutions," "serving audiences," "serving communities," and "serving art and artists." For more information on how they functioned, see Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggenig, *Games, Fights, Collaboration. Das Spiel von Grenze und Überschreitung* (Lüneburg; Ostfildern-Ruit: Kunstraum der Üniversität Lüneburg; Cantz Verlag, 1996).

Correspondence, theoretical texts, press articles, tracts, questionnaires, work contracts – the aim was to bring together all kinds of materials relating to this transformation of practice and the problems faced by artists and curators.[30] Archival documents could be taken from the wall to be read or photocopied, and were discussed collectively in the exhibition space. Doing research and conceiving the exhibition as a collective was important because it served to question the curator-author model, dominant since the 1960s, and the authority of the gaze it represented.[31]

Conceived as a platform for examining the artistic ecosystem inherited from the post-1945 period, the exhibition brought together artists, curators, writers, and educators from across the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland. Many of the documents on display related to forms of institutional critique, particularly directed at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum – institutions that have been under pressure from artists' groups since the 1970s.[32] Many of the critiques (particularly the feminist and Afro-feminist ones) raised against these iconic New Yorkers institutions, put forward the idea that art, like the personal, is political.[33] Resituating the ideology of supposed neutrality and universalism within the framework of a patriarchal and Western canonical art history, the critiques focused on the question of representation, this time in terms of representativity, i.e. the lack of visibility of artists and viewpoints within cultural institutions. 1980s institutional critique was also fueled by the development of alternative art spaces, which provided fertile ground for curatorial experimentation and the development of new exhibition strategies.[34]

In its iteration at the University of Lüneburg in January 1994, where it inaugurated the Kunstraum project, *Services* brought together a group of figures interested in the renewal of institutional critique, including Renee Green, Martin Guttmann & Michael Clegg, Susan Cahan, Judith Barry, Christian Philipp

30 Documentation related to site-specific practices, including problems of remuneration encountered, was included in exhibitions such as "Culture in Action" in Chicago, "Project Unité in Firminy," "Sonsbeek" in Arnhem, "Skulptur Projekte Münster," or "Kontexte Kunst" at the Neue Galerie in Graz and the. There is also documentation about experimental economic models (see the "Artist's Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement" created in 1971 by Seth Siegelaub and Robert Projansky), Archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève, 2-021-22.

31 In 1989, Nathalie Heinich and Michel Pollack described this model as a new position in the cultural field dubbed the "exhibition author" (see Nathalie Heinich et Michael Pollack, "Du conservateur de musée à l'auteur d'expositions: l'invention d'une position singulière," *Sociologie du travail* 31, no. 1 (1989): 29–49.). I would like to highlight the patriarchal dimension of this model, which persisted and dominated until the end of the 1980s, initially embodied by Harald Szeemann, and continued by such male curators in Europe as Pontus Hultén, Jean Leering, Jean-Christophe Ammann, Jan Hoet, and Rudi Fuchs.

32 Displayed were, among others, documents from Woman Artists in Revolution and the Art Workers Coalition, letters from Women in the Arts, the Women's Art Registry, the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, the Creative Women's Collective, the Guerilla Art Action Group, Art & Language, and the Ad Hoc Committee of Women Artists, correspondence of artists and art historians such as Lucy Lippard, Greg Sholette, and Hans Haacke with the respective directors of the MoMA, the Guggenheim, the Whitney Museum, and articles, including one by Nancy Spero on the exhibition policies of the Whitney Museum. Archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève, 2-021-22.

33 As noted by Laura Cottingham, "The Feminist Continuum: Art After 1970," in *Bourde and Garrard, The Power of Feminist Art* (as in n. 21), 276. This formulation is an update of the leading feminist slogan of the 70's, "the personal is political."

34 For more on the subject, see Julie Ault (ed.), *Alternative Art New York 1965–1985* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Lauren Rosati and Mary Anne Staniszewski (eds.), *Alternative Histories. New York art Spaces 1960 to 2010* (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 2012); Pauline Chevalier, *Une histoire des espaces alternatifs à New York – De SoHo au South Bronx (1969-1985)* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2017).

Müller, Fred Wilson, Ute Meta Bauer, Ulrich Bischoff, Jochen Becker, Iwona Blazwick, Stephan Dillemuth, Renate Lorenz (Büro Bert), and Fritz Rahmann. Their collective discussions for the exhibition were filmed and archived.[35] In Geneva, the video recordings were shown on monitors in the exhibition space (alongside the archival material), and some of them were translated into French for the exhibition **FIG. 3**. The discussions were expanded through a smaller working group – including Judith Barry, Stephan Dillemuth, Draxler, and Andrea Fraser – and recorded in audio format.[36] Here, video extended and constituted a trace of the activation of exhibited archives, is also as a means of contributing to a history in the making, through the creation of new archives. The objective was not simply to "show" (in the sense of making visible), but to engage collaboratively. This can be understood as a way of documenting the "alternatives to institutional routine" that are being explored (to use Sous-sol's terminology). In other words, what was emerging was a curatorial approach that went beyond the exhibition as a *form* (or format) and, instead, sought to understand the institution itself as a *material*.[37]

EXHIBITING AND DOCUMENTING INTERVIEW PRACTICES

In terms of exhibition practice, the experience of *Services* has allowed the idea to develop that the means of art (and of the exhibition) was a way or an opportunity to reflect on the very structure of the space hosting the exhibition. As Catherine Quéloz noted:

> By converting the exhibition space into a pedagogical site (as a place of research, of study, of debate), *Services* emphasizes, by an effect of mise en abyme, the specificity of its context of reception. On the other hand, it perturbs and derails the conventions of exhibition by working precisely on the means of presentation, by placing the accent on "reading" at the expense of "seeing" ….[38]

In the tradition of institutional critique and Andrea Fraser's work, an exhibition culture emerged that used documented archives and conversations to reflect on how exhibitions work. This includes their relationship to their context, particularly the specificities of an exhibition space in a pedagogical context.

35 Originally, the transcripts of the discussions were published in *October*, no. 80 (Spring 1997):117–148. These typescripts of video tapes and recorded conversations were recently republished in Eric Golo Stone (ed.), *Services Working Group* (Vancouver: Fillip, 2021).

36 Photographic documentation of the discussion shows microphones on the table.

37 I would like to thank Lucie Kolb for this insight, which refers to a curatorial tendency of the mid-1990s and early 2000s that she and her colleague described in Lucie Kolb and Gabriel Flückiger, "(New)Instiution(alism)," *On Curating*, no. 21 (December 2013).

38 Catherine Quéloz, "The School as Specific Site," in von Bismarck, Stoller und Wuggenig (eds.), *Games Fights Collaborations* (as in n. 29), 198.

3 ***Services*** **(exhibition view), Geneva, Sous-sol (May 4 – June 3, 1994), archives Sous-sol/ CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève, 2-021. © Claudio Merlini**

In other words, the aim was to consider the exhibition space and the conditions under which art or objects are (re)presented, as well as how the school functions as an institution.

This idea was pursued and developed with the project *Hors-sol. Réflexion sur les pratiques de l'exposition*, less than a year later (March 16 – April 27, 1995). Invited by the Shedhalle art space in Zurich with its three curators, Ursula Biemann, Renate Lorenz, and Sylvia Kafehsy, *Hors-sol* was about physically and symbolically relocating Sous-sol activities. It was about transferring pedagogical methodologies, in order to reflect on the conditions of the exhibition in relation to the structure in which it is presented. To this end, the curatorial team of Shedhalle and the teaching and student team at Sous-sol brought together a group of art historians and artists, including Philipp Ursprung (Kunsthalle Palazzo Liestal), Beatrice von Bismark, and Ulf Wuggenig (curators at the Kunstraum of the University of Lüneburg), Bernard Fibischer (Kunsthaus Zürich), Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser and, Judith Barry (linking to the experience of *Services*), Olivier Mosset (ESAV), and Markus Mäder (Lucerne School of Applied Arts). Common to all these individuals was a concern with "researching the various ways in which the notion of the exhibition has been thrown into crisis in recent history, from modernism to the present."[39] A questionnaire was developed by the seminar attendees to investigate different positions and models of exhibition practices.[40] *Hors-sol* was not considered a finished or static product but a working process, an inquiry in which the catalogue was seen as "an extension of the discussion rather than its memory."[41] Judith Barry raised the question of authority (of the gaze) and the way it is (re)played out in the exhibition space. Forming "dissident spaces" (the title of her catalogue essay) implies "threatening the assumed neutrality of the exhibition space itself."[42] While Béatrice von Bismarck examined the relationship between art space and pedagogy based on the example of Lüneburg, Sylvia Kafehsy, Ursula Biemann and Renate Lorenz each discussed the feminist exhibition politics they were developing through various exhibitions at the Shedhalle. Sylvia Kafehsy referred to the need to decentralize curatorial responsibility to question exhibitions emphasizing career, competition, and individual expression.[43] Ursula Biemann stressed the crucial issue of the type of representations (formed, carried, and made visible by the exhibition) that

39 Press release of the exhibition *Hors-sol*, Verein Shedhalle, Swiss Social Archives, Zurich, AR 711.20.80. Invitations to take part in the conversations were also sent out, notably to the Kunsthalle and the F+F Schule für Kunst und Design. Archives Sous-sol/CCC - Critical Curatorial Cybermedia archives, HEAD - Haute École d'Art et de Design Genève, 2-024.

40 Document "Questionnaire adressé à un organisateur d'exposition," archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'Art et de Design Genève, 2-024.

41 Mentioned by Catherine Quéloz in a letter, archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'Art et de Design Genève, 2-024.

42 Judith Barry, "Andere Räume/Les espaces dissidents," in *Hors Sol. Réflexions sur la pratique de l'exposition*,exh. cat., Zurich, Shedhalle (Mar. 15 – Apr. 27, 1995) (Geneva/Zurich: Sous-Sol/Shedhalle, 1997), 81.

43 The ongoing conversation was formalized into an interview and published in the catalogue of a subsequent exhibition: Sylvia Kafehsy, "entretiens avec: Sylvia Kafehsy," in *environ 27 ans (peut-être un peu plus…). pratiques artistiques et féminismes,* ex. cat. Geneva, Palais de l'Athénée (Feb. 20 – Mar. 22, 1997), (Geneva: Palais de l'Athenée, 1997), 106.

must, above all, not be "static."[44] For Sous-sol, the notion of "relocation" or "displacement" (used by Catherine Quéloz as the title of her contribution to the catalogue) means questioning exhibition practices in relation to specific contexts. Moreover, it means questioning their ideological context and, by extension, the politics of representation.[45]

Here, the conversations were again recorded by means of a video documentation system.[46] More than mere documentation of interviews conducted or a trace of conversations, video is in fact the result of the investigation. The video plays a double role: creating an archive and offering critical points of view on the conditions of the exhibition. The (use of) video recordings were made and used on a regular basis in the exhibitions shown at the Shedhalle during these years. *Game Girl* (which focused on a critical survey of the wishes and hopes projected onto biotechnology and genetic technology), *Aussendienst. Positionen in Theorie und Praxis zur postkolonialen Diskussion* (which looked at cultural belonging, ambivalence, and identity), and *Gewerbeschein Künstlerin – Ein Projekt zu Pornographie und Prostitution in der Shedhalle* (which addressed prostitution and pornography in terms of representation and criminalization) were all about presenting on-site research based on archives, texts or film clips, and conducting interviews, some of which were shown in the exhibition space **FIGS. 4-5**.

Video thus became a witness to, and actor in, a shift in exhibition politics that foregrounded questions of representation, with the ambition of transforming cultural and educational structures. Video documentation is a way of reactivating or reworking the archive, and a way of producing the histories that exhibitions help to write through their display. This perspective opens up possibilities for thinking of video as a tool for documenting interviews as a feminist strategy, as would be the case in a later exhibition at Sous-sol titled *environ 27 ans (peut-être un peu plus…). Pratiques artistiques et féminismes* (February 20 – March 22, 1997). Conceived by three students of the program (Martine Anderfuhren, Pauline Boudry, and Anne-Julie Raccoursier), the exhibition was based on eight video interviews conducted with eight women in New York, Stuttgart and Zurich who were developing feminist discourses in their artistic or curatorial practices. Chosen for their different activities and feminist positions in the art world, they included Julie Ault, Ute Meta Bauer, Ursula Biemann, Laura Cottingham, Renée Green, Sylvia Kafehsy, Gülsün Karamustafa, and Martha Rosler. The aim of the exhibition was to show and at the same time historicize the way in which feminist struggles have transformed artistic practices over the last thirty years. The exhibition brought together archival material such as catalogues of exhibitions held in Europe and the United States since 1970 and a variety of artistic and activist documents

44 Ursula Biemann, "entretiens avec: Ursula Biemann," in *environ 27 ans (a*s in n. 43), 92. That same year, Sous-sol set up a thematic reading group entitled "Representing the Other" (*Figurer l'Autre*), in which the notion of difference and identity was central to the question of representation.

45 Press release for the exhibition *Hors-sol*, Verein Shedhalle, Swiss Social Archives, Zurich, AR 711.20.80.

46 Verein Shedhalle, Swiss Social Archives, Zurich, AR 711.20.80.

4 ***Gewerbeschein Künstlerin – Ein Projekt zu Pornographie und Prostitution in der Shedhalle*** **(exhibition view), Zurich, Shedhalle (Mar. 16 – June 19, 1995), Swiss Social Archives, Zurich, Ar 711.20.79. © Ursina Heldstab**

5 ***Gewerbeschein Künstlerin – Ein Projekt zu Pornographie und Prostitution in der Shedhalle*** **(exhibition view), Zurich, Shedhalle (Mar. 16 – June 19, 1995), Swiss Social Archives, Zurich, Ar 711.20.79. © Ursina Heldstab**

Despite the author's best efforts, the copyright holder of images [4] and [5], Ursina Heldstab, could not be contacted directly. If you are the rightful owner, please feel free to get in touch with the author.

(project documentations, magazines, cultural artefacts, postcards, music, television programs, press or conference images, posters, fanzines, books etc.), which the interviewees were invited to add based on their experience and knowledge of the history of feminist practices.[47] While these interviews still await screening, they have been transcribed and published in a catalog, accompanied by visual documentation. In this case, the medium of video is not only about questioning the politics of representation within the exhibition but also suggests a possibility of writing feminist art history *through* exhibitions. Here, video participated in a feminist curatorial strategy that was not only about reconstructing a past, but also about using the material to strategically reflect on the present and future.[48]

THE ROLE OF VIDEO IN DEVELOPING A FEMINIST POLITICS OF EXHIBITION

Focusing on the role of video in Sous-sol during its first decade offers a valuable perspective for examining a broader epistemological transformation during the 1990s – one closely tied to the emergence of a politics of the gaze and of representation. These concerns were central to the redefinition of the exhibition both as a pedagogical medium and as an object of study. Concentrating on video, then, not only prompts reflection on how curatorial practices have engaged with the politics of representation but also reveals the exhibition's potential as a tool for producing non-canonical histories. As stated explicitly in the Sous-sol's program from 1996 (one year after *Hors-sol*), the aim was to encourage a "rereading official history, leading to the development of alternative histories"[49] and "to revise an art history that represses, falsifies, forgets, and neglects."[50] From this perspective, a closer examination of video helps historicize forms of critical curatorial engagement whose broader significance has yet to be fully explored.

47 Archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'Art et de Design Genève, 2-030-31.

48 As art historian Amelia Jones describes it. Amelia Jones, "Sujets féministes versus effets féministes: exposer l'art féministe (ou serait-ce l'exposition féministe de l'art?)," in Federica Martini et Julia Taramarcaz, *Feminist Exposure. Pratiques féministes de l'exposition et de l'archive* (Lausanne; Martigny: art&fiction; Manoir de la Ville de Martigny, 2023), 77–110.

49 "relecture de l'histoire officielle conduisant au développement d'histoires alternatives," Program presentation document dated Sep. 10, 1996, archives Sous-sol/CCC – Critical Curatorial Cybermedia, HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève, 2-023 (author's translation).

50 "à réviser une histoire de l'art qui refoule, falsifie, oublie et néglige," course brochure 1996–97, 66, archives HEAD – Haute École d'art et de Design Genève (author's translation).

Participation in Net Cultures

Lucie Kolb

Practicing Political Publicness

Copyshop (1992/93)

Through a close reading of the 1992 exhibition *Copyshop* in Cologne, the paper investigates a site of applied media critique that both interrogated the nature of political public formation amidst a profound shift in media from print and video to net practices, and actively modeled such a public by bringing together diverse groups from the fields of art and politics.

Copyshop, which ran from November 1 to 29, 1992, centered thematically and conceptually on "(Gegen)öffentlichkeit und Gebrauchswert" ([counter-] publicness and use-value) **FIG. 1**. The exhibition responded to a fundamental crisis facing the radical left in Germany, and by extension, the very notion of counter-publicness in the wake of reunification, a period marked by the resurgence of reactionary attitudes and widespread violence against refugees. *Copyshop* also addressed the apparent decline of a cultural space historically shaped by letterpress printing, which, despite the efforts of numerous radio and video groups, continued to serve as the primary media framework for leftist counter-public discourse. In response to this dual crisis, *Copyshop* proposed a strategy that both interrogated and enacted critical media practice. Drawing on the Marxist concept of use-value – the capacity of a tradeable object to satisfy a need or serve a purpose – the exhibition reframed counter-publicness as a practice defined by its use in replacing the object of critique, rather than demanding alternatives.[1]

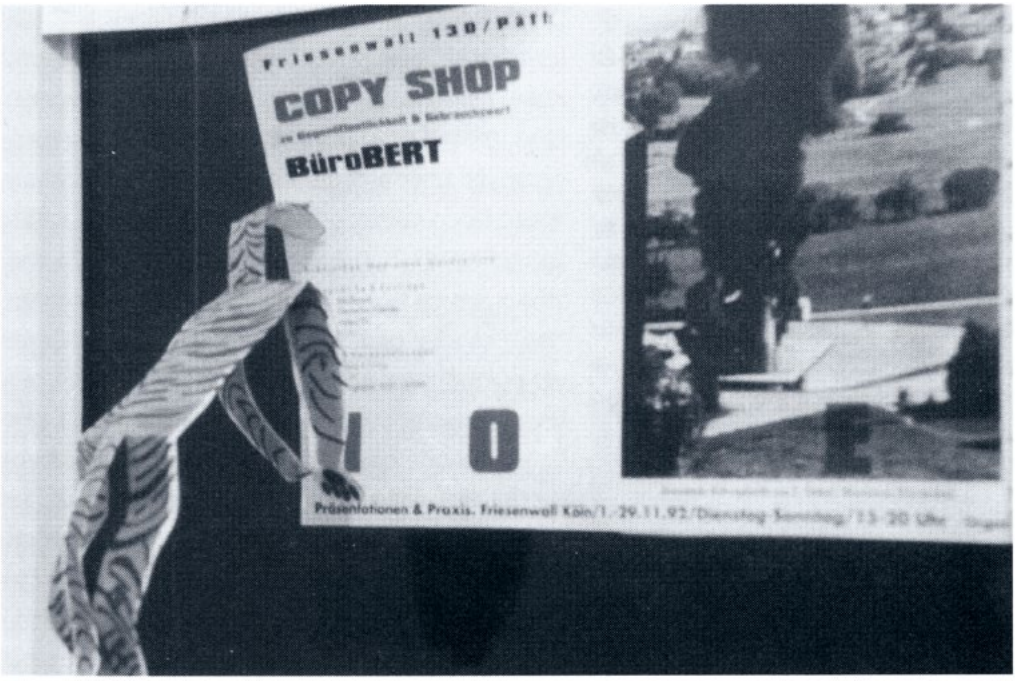
The exhibition was facilitated by the group *BüroBert*, which had started realizing projects in the art field and self-organized contexts in 1987.[2] In an announcement for a multi-media presentation as part of UNITn Presse, a lecture series at WUK Vienna, *BüroBert* was introduced as a production and organization site, with artists Jochen Becker and Renate Lorenz as the hard core, collaborating with rotating "specialists" across media such as video, publishing and installation.[3] *BüroBert*'s research-driven, project-based practice was deliberately fibrous and open-ended, seeking to respond to and influence contemporary social conditions through analytical frameworks, tactical media, and activist interventions.

For *Copyshop*, *BüroBert* invited artists whose practices extended beyond the art field, operating instead in non-artistic contexts such as *minimal club*, *Botschaft e.V.*, and *11 Wochen Klausur*, as well as political initiatives like *Infoladen LC26*, *Kritische AIDS-Diskussion*, and *Internationales Frauenaktionsbündnis*. *BüroBert* brought these groups together based on observed structural affinities between artistic and political endeavors: working in small groups; using former shops and other public or communicative spaces;

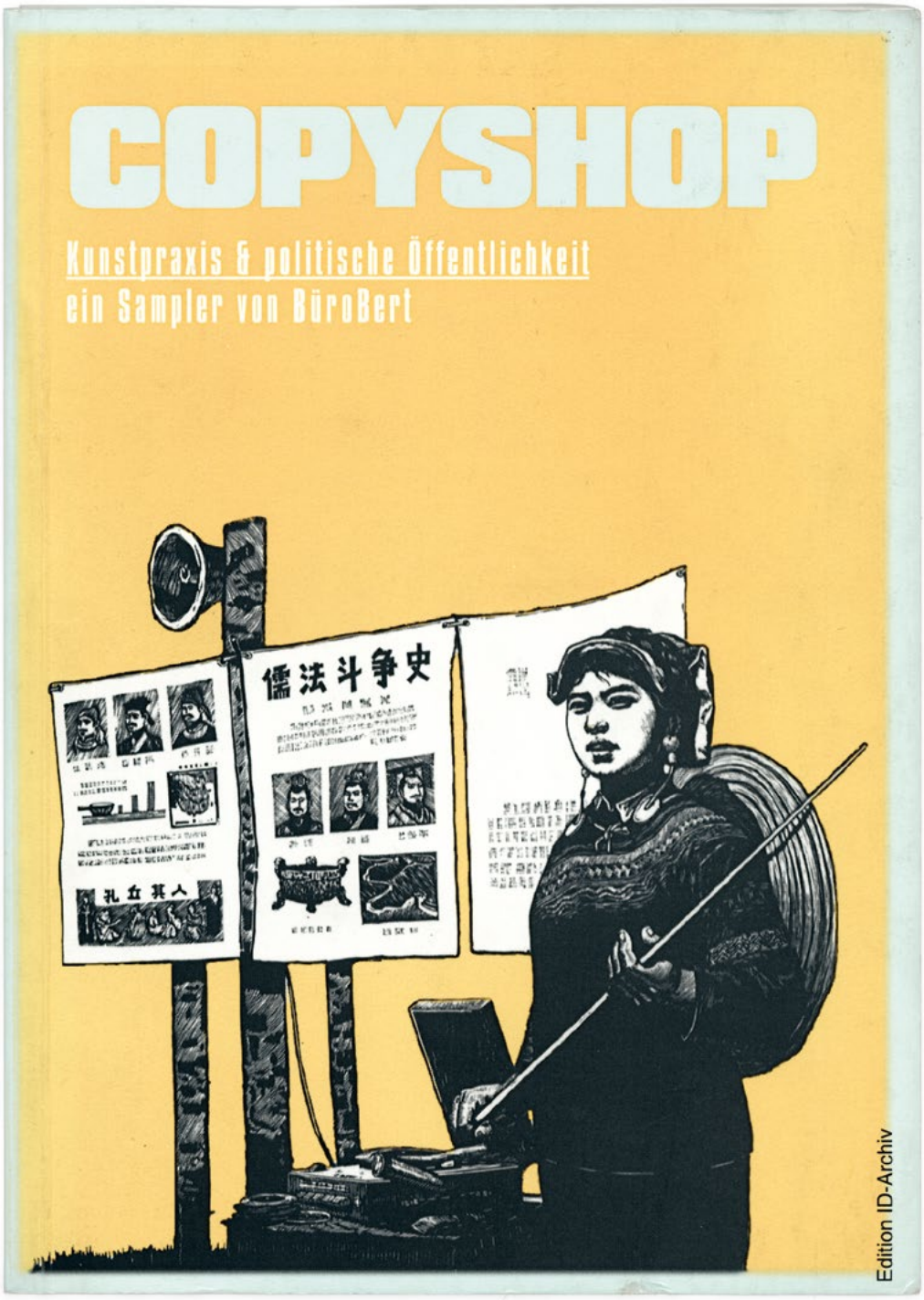
1 *BüroBert*, "Gegenöffentlicheit," in *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit*, ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993), pp. 22–30, esp. p. 22.

2 Further members of *BüroBert* were Mathias Antlfinger and Hans-Werner Kroesinger. Arnd Wesemann, "Büro Bert. Zufall und Alltag," *Kunstforum* 116 (1991), https://www.kunstforum.de/artikel/buro-bert/ (accessed January 24, 2025).

3 UNITn Presse WUK, 1993: http://www.vergessen.com/hilus/content/projekte/93_unit_n/presse/presse_buero_bert.pdf. (accessed January 24, 2025).



1 Poster announcing the *Copyshop* exhibition, *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit,* ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993), p. 147.



2 **Cover of the publication, *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit,* ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993).**

exchanging information through zines and bulletin board systems (BBSs); opening up insular, self-referential circles to broader publics; employing tactical media; and drawing inspiration from hip-hop and politicized pop music. By bringing together theory, art, and politics within an art space, *Copyshop* sought to draw transversal lines between formerly detached contexts, specifically the communication structures of the undogmatic/autonomous left and critical art discourses.[4] In his text, *Copyshop* participant Stephan Geene characterizes such an approach as a tactical occupation of a place in the art field, using it for the purpose of politicization and to counter the isolation of groups working in this area.[5] This approach parallels the practices of the *Medienoperative Berlin*, as discussed elsewhere in this volume.[6]

The exhibition presented scattered materials and archival displays, including a library stocked with books, magazines, videos, and audiotapes that fostered critical discourse on media and technology. There was a reading area with seating, a printer for copying, and a computer station providing access to the political bulletin board system *ComLink*. A wall newspaper documented different notions of art, the public, and the economy in the context of public art and gentrification. Visitors were also encouraged to add material and use *Copyshop* as a meeting space. The exhibition was accompanied by an extensive discursive program encompassing conversations, lectures on the "use-value" of bulletin board systems, on strategies of tv & video activism, as well as on genetic engineering and gender, and screenings of films on militant organization, Germany's colonial history, self-governed housing in Berlin, AIDS activism, and female menopause.

The primary source for this paper is *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit ein Sampler von BüroBert*, a book published in 1993 by Edition ID-Archiv (now ID Verlag) **FIG. 2**. Rather than serving as a conventional catalogue documenting the exhibition, the book can be seen as a continuation of the exhibition, exemplifying *BüroBert*'s project-based work mode, which had been materializing in different formats and sites – another iteration of the broader *Copyshop* project, extending and deepening its exploration of critical media practice and the formation of political publics.[7]

The publication is labeled a "sampler" – besides being a promotional music compilation, a sampler also refers to reusing parts of existing sound recordings such as a rhythm, melody, speech, or sound effects in a new

4 Lucie Kolb and Philipp Messner, "Lose Zusammenhänge – Kunst und Gegenöffentlichkeit um 1990," *Kultur & Gespenster* 20 (2019): pp. 58–69.

5 Stephan Geene, "Jeder November ist Anders (Copyshop)," in *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit* (as in n. 1), pp. 77–85, esp. p. 78.

6 See the essay by Dominique Rudin in this volume.

7 Other continuations of *Copyshop* could be found in the exhibition "Services" (1993) at Kunstraum Lüneburg (see the essay by Julie Lang in this volume), where *BüroBert* participated in one of the working groups on questions of project-based artistic work modes, see: Clegg, Guttmann, *BüroBert* (Renate Lorenz/Jochen Becker), Stephan Dillemuth, Draxler, Fraser, Cahan, Wilson, Green, Bauer, Bischoff and Blazwick, "Serving Communities," *October* 80 (Spring, 1997): pp. 128–9 and 140–8. Another example is the "Autonomie Kongress der undogmatischen linken Bewegungen" (1993) in Berlin, where various autonomist groups came together to discuss tactics in different working groups, one of which was *Copyshop*. See Annette Maechtel, *Das Temporäre politisch Denken* (Berlin: b_books, 2020), pp. 214–5.

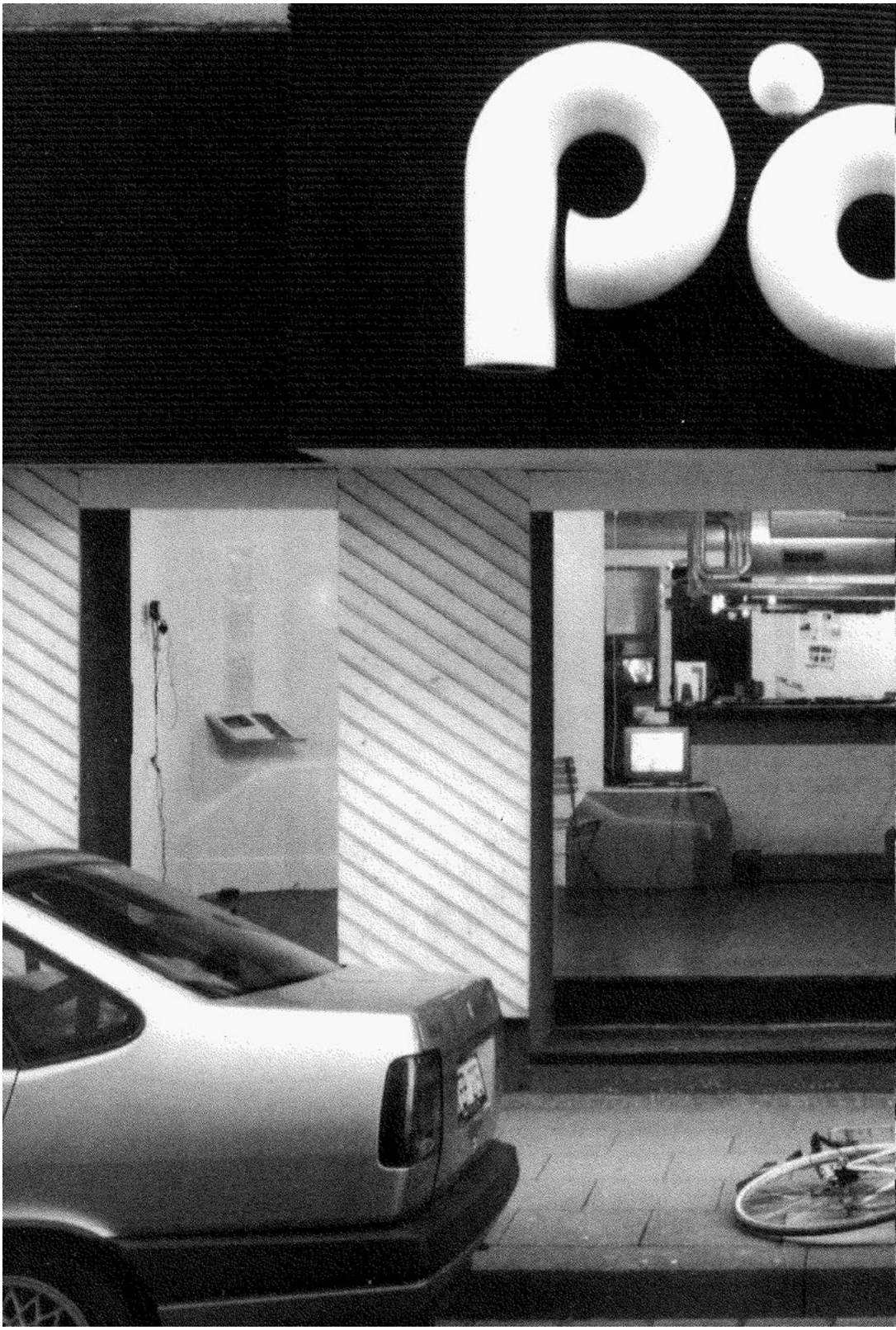
composition. By adopting this term, the book underscores its embeddedness within a production context shaped by the invited initiatives – a context it draws – samples – from, while also contributing to it. The book also includes a "Handapparat" or reference section, an annotated bibliography featuring theory books, exhibition catalogues, and political journals relevant to the project's research on political publics. In academic contexts, a "Handapparat" typically refers to a curated collection of readings reserved for a specific course or research group, made accessible for reference and study. These two framing concepts – the sampler and the "Handapparat" – situate the book at the intersection of pop culture and academia. Further, the book contains contact details and brief descriptions of all participating individuals and initiatives, along with short presentations of selected projects. Thus, it not only documents the gathered community of practice but also provides use-value for them and other readers to reach out, connect, and continue the collective work initiated by *Copyshop*.

In keeping with the logic of *Copyshop* – the publication being a materialization in book form of the broader *Copyshop* project, rather than an exhibition catalogue – the book offers little documentation of the exhibition itself. Closest to it comes a contribution by Stephan Geene, a participant involved in the project presentations, the conversations, and the "Handapparat." His text, titled "Jeder November ist anders" (Every November Is Different), includes documentary images of the exhibition, each briefly described. These images showcase the various sections, including the bar and computer station, the library, the project presentations, the copy machine, and the wall newspaper. Geene's contribution also includes a full list of the conversations, lectures, and film screenings that took place during the exhibition.

The decision to delegate documentation to one of the participants is significant. It reflects *Copyshop*'s recursive approach, with participants being actively involved in shaping and modifying the very infrastructure through which the project unfolded. This approach is echoed in the inclusion of Edition ID-Archiv – the book's publisher – as one of the participants in the exhibition. Edition ID-Archiv represented an important reference point for the history of counter-publicness, tracing its roots to the *Informationsdienst zur Verbreitung unterbliebener Nachrichten* (ID) (Information Service for the Dissemination of Suppressed News), a project founded in Frankfurt in 1973. The ID was a weekly paper that became one of the most important discussion platforms for the undogmatic left in West Germany during the 1970s.[8]

Another noteworthy choice in the publication is the use of images as paratexts – visual elements that frame the text or serve as backgrounds for chapter page spreads. The first such spread appears on the front endpaper, featuring a photo of the exhibition space taken by Maren Thode **FIG. 3**. The image depicts a street-level storefront with glass windows framed by white wooden

8 Kolb and Messner, "Lose Zusammenhänge" (as in n. 4), p. 66.



3 **Front endpaper of the publication *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit*, ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993). Photo by Maren Thode.**

Foto: Maren Thode

4 **Chapter 1 page spread in the publication *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit*, ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993), pp. 20–1. Photo by Ise Bosch.**

1

Foto: Ise Bosch

panels and topped with a black overhang bearing a plasticky logo that reads "Päff." In front of the space are paid parking spots – two cars are visible, one apparently ticketed – and several bicycles, some parked and others casually strewn, partially obstructing the view. Prominently displayed in the window is the word "Copyshop" in bold typeface, while a sign on the open door reads "open."

Opening the book with an exterior image of the space – offering a view from the outside looking in – establishes a contextual framework that resonates with *Copyshop*'s broader objective: to ground its practice in a local socio-political reality inseparable from its artistic production. The visual introduction underscores the project's understanding of "political publicness" as rooted not only in the discursive and activist frameworks represented by its participants, but also in the physical neighborhood surrounding the space and the people who interacted with it. This conceptual use of imagery reflects *BüroBert*'s editorial approach, which resists a strict separation between editing and design, instead favoring a collaborative process where visual and textual elements inform and shape one another.

POLITICAL PUBLICNESS

The second two-page background image, photographed by Ise Bosch, presents a close-up view of the interior space **FIG. 4**. It shows people who are standing at the bar, talking and listening, drinking, and smoking. Many wear jackets, suggesting that the space is cold. This image introduces the first chapter, which includes texts and conversations on counter-publicness, political publics, and *Copyshop* the exhibition. By centering people in an informal social setting, the editors underscore that any theoretical engagement with political publicness and any artistic or political practice aligned with it is grounded in a particular community of practice.

This connection between lived social experience and political theorization is further elaborated in Renate Lorenz's text "Kunstpraxis und politische Öffentlichkeit" (Art Practice and Political Publicness), which echoes the book's subtitle. Writing as a member of *BüroBert*, Lorenz outlines the partisan and operative strategies at the heart of *Copyshop*.[9] By employing the term political publicness (rather than counter-publicness), *BüroBert* deliberately shifts the emphasis away from opposition, criticism, and the demand for alternatives, toward strategies of transformation.

9 Renate Lorenz, "Kunstpraxis und politische Öffentlichkeit" in *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit*, (as in n. 1), pp. 7–19.

AN OPERATIVE APPROACH

In discussing media approaches, Lorenz draws on the notion of use-value, arguing that any media practice – whether in print, video, radio, or networks – must be understood and practiced as "media-in-use." Such a practice centers how a media is used, defining its value through the worth it holds for users, derived from their direct interaction with it. This perspective deliberately addresses users rather than consumers. For Lorenz, such use-value is linked to social struggles, and media practice should support these struggles through theory and the discussion and preparation of action strategies.

Examples include "Leserzeitungen" – newspapers created by and for readers – and bulletin board systems, both of which exemplify a recursive approach rooted in the legacy of DIY self-publishing. Such an approach involves strategically creating contexts in which discourse is socialized through distribution (examples offered include info shops, magazines, and networking meetings) ensuring both the longevity and organizational stability of the community of practice. Media, in this operational sense, is to be deployed in ways that generate political situations and can be carried forward into direct action. As *BüroBert* phrases it, "critique must set itself into a practical relation to what it attacks: it seeks to replace, rather than ask for replacement."[10]

In his contribution to *Copyshop*, Jochen Becker links this approach to tactical media practices which theorized media activity as a set of situated tactics embedded in physical infrastructure – however tenuously – within autonomous urban zones–, such as squats and self-organized cultural institutions.[11]

A PARTISAN ART PRACTICE

Lorenz locates *BüroBert*'s approach to artistic practice within the context of recent political struggles in the cultural fields of Germany and the United States – the geopolitical frame of reference for *Copyshop*.[12] She explicitly aligns the project with the protests against the exhibition and symposium "Deutschsein?" at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in 1993, thereby positioning *Copyshop* as a partisan intervention.[13] *BüroBert* was part of a group that organized protest actions during the opening and press conference and that blocked the symposium in response to its invitation politics. While the voices of refugees and other marginalized groups were notably absent, the symposium had invited an artist the group associated with the New Right.[14]

10 Ibid., p. 23.
11 Jochen Becker, "Activate. Taktische Medien," in *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit* (as in n. 1), pp. 148–69.
12 Lorenz, "Kunstpraxis und politische Öffentlichkeit" (as in n. 9) pp. 7–8.
13 BüroBert, *Deutschland fällt aus! Blockade der Kunsthalle Düsseldorf*, 1993, Society Out of Control – Resources & Archive, http://societyofcontrol.com/archiv/sdcommons/BueroBert_1993_Deutschland_faellt_aus.mpg (accessed January 24, 2025).
14 *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit* (as in n. 1), p. 7.

Lorenz situates this protest, and *BüroBert*'s work with *Copyshop*, in solidarity with a broader field of predominantly North American activism – particularly groups such as ACT UP, which advocated for people with AIDS through direct action and policy work, and WAC (Women's Action Coalition), which addressed women's rights through protests, sit-ins, and educational campaigns.[15] In the realm of art practice, Lorenz identifies similar forms of direct action in Martha Rosler's *If you lived here…* (1989), which invited homeless people to sleep within an exhibition space. For Lorenz, partisan practice also manifested through means other than practical action, as in Yvonne Rainer's film *Privilege* (1990), which addressed female menopause without distancing or evaluative framing, adopting instead a perspective that situated and politicized the personal.[16] Understanding art as a partisan and political practice, Lorenz argues, means recognizing that it does not operate from an external position of commentary. Rather, art is always already embedded within – and contributes to – the discursive and material production of societal reality.[17]

PAPER TIGER TV (PTTV) AND *COMLINK* (CL)

Building on the discussion of *BüroBert*'s theoretical positioning and its articulation of partisan art practice, this section looks at how these ideas were materialized through specific contributions to the *Copyshop* exhibition. It focuses on two invited projects that exemplify the intersection of screen culture and political intervention: the New York-based video activist collective *Paper Tiger TV* (1981) and the German political bulletin board system *ComLink* (1991). Based on those case studies, this section explores how *Copyshop* functioned not only as a discursive platform but also as a site for practicing political publicness.

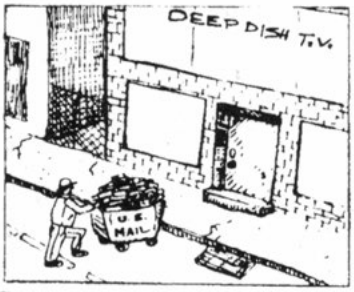
PAPER TIGER TV

Paper Tiger TV (PTTV) was a weekly show on Manhattan Cable's public access channel in New York City, part of a diverse slate of nearly 100 community-based shows **FIG. 5**.[18] Each episode critically analyzed a publication or media phenomenon, investigating its content, language, economics, and the backgrounds of its producers and funders. This approach sought to promote media literacy by exposing manipulative tactics in stories and advertisements.

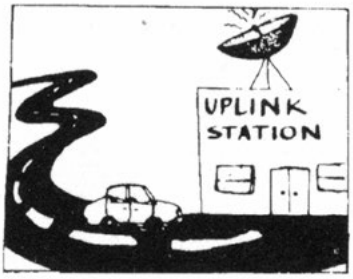
15 Ibid., p. 8.
16 Ibid., p. 13.
17 Ibid., p.7.
18 Dee Dee Halleck, "Paper Tiger Television," *Texte zur Kunst* 3 (1991): pp. 116–21.

(1) PEOPLE AROUND THE COUNTRY MAKE SHOWS...

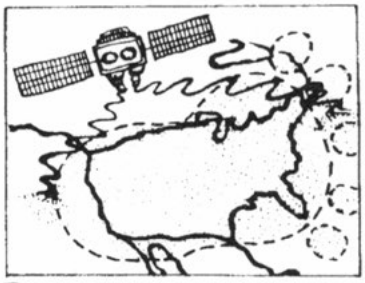
(2) THEY SEND THEM TO COORDINATING PRODUCERS —



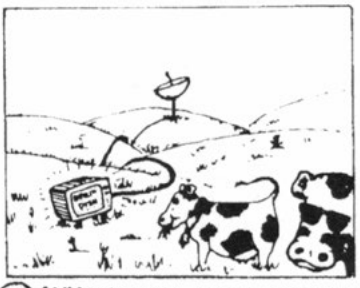
(3) WHO SEND THEIR COMPILATION TAPES TO DEEP DISH CENTRAL.



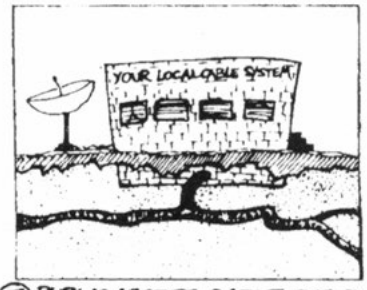
(4) WE TAKE 'EM TO AN "UPLINK" WHICH BEAMS THE PROGRAMS UP TO A SATELLITE —



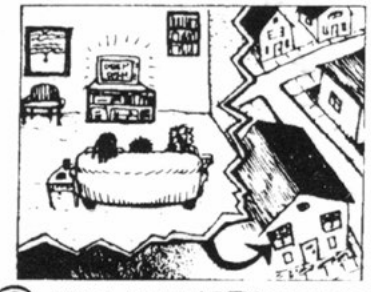
(5) THE SATELLITE BEAMS THE PROGRAM BACK TO EARTH IN A PATTERN CALLED A "FOOTPRINT."



(6) ANYONE WITH A SATELLITE DISH CAN RECEIVE THE DEEP DISH PROGRAMS —



(7) PUBLIC ACCESS CABLE SYSTEMS SEND IT OUT TO ALL THE SUBSCRIBERS IN TOWN—



(8) WHICH IS HOW DEEP DISH GETS TO YOUR HOME — TUNE IN TO DEEP DISH T.V.— FEARLESS T.V.!

5 Excerpt of a Paper Tiger TV manifesto, *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit*, ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993), p. 138.

PTTV pursued a partisan goal to "demystify the information industry" and built critical awareness as a step toward democratic media control.[19] Its production model embraced collective authorship by a changing group of producers, activists, artists, and academics. [20] With a deliberately handmade, low-budget look – visible crew, handwritten sets, and exposed "seams" – the show aimed to disrupt passive viewing habits and signal its difference to channel-surfers. [21] By using public access cable, PTTV created openings within corporate media for alternative and critical media engagement.[22]

In 1991, PTTV was prominently featured in the third issue of *Texte zur Kunst* (TzK), a magazine founded in 1990 in Cologne that reflected on the social and media conditions of art and theory production, with a particular emphasis on art engaged with social, political and historical contexts. Notably, there are multiple personal and intellectual overlaps between the contributors and reference frameworks of TzK and *Copyshop* – including figures such as Diedrich Diederichsen, Fareed Armaly, Oskar Negt, Stephan Dillemuth, Yvonne Rainer, and *minimal club*.

In the TzK issue's editorial, the editors stated their intention to not position themselves as intermediaries or transmitters of American activist practices – which they defined as a form of both theoretical engagement and practical action, with analysis entirely subordinated to its practical utility. Rather than uncritically replicating or showcasing such practices, their aim was to allow those practices to speak for themselves. They emphasized the importance of interrogating and critiquing the very modes of presentation through which such work is made visible.

Consequently, the editors published a lengthy text in English by PTTV founder and professor of communications at University of California Dee Dee Halleck, outlining their practice. In addition, TzK editor Isabelle Graw conducted two short interviews with PTTV members Chris Hoover and Simone Farkhondeh, which were translated into German. The distancing gestures evident in TzK's editorial, along with its language politics, are striking insofar as they mark a clear contrast to *Copyshop's* approach. *Copyshop*, after all, sought to build on PTTV's practice and saw itself aligned with their artistic and activist process. This different positionality is already indicated in *Friesenwall 120*'s contribution to the same TzK issue, which presented several page spreads of collages put together from selected PTTV video productions.[23]

Paper Tiger TV (PTTV) was not physically present in the *Copyshop* exhibition space itself but located a few meters down the street in the temporary project space *Friesenwall 120*, run by Stephan Dillemuth **FIG. 6**. Together

19 Mary Feaster, Linda Iannacone, "Paper Tiger TV Labor," in *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit* (as in n. 1), pp. 138–47, p. 138.
20 Ibid., pp. 138–147, esp. p. 139.
21 Isabelle Graw, "Tiger aus Papier? Kurzinterviews von Isabelle Graw" (two short interviews with Chris Hoover and Simone Farkhondeh, members of "Paper Tiger" and producers of the "Gulf Crisis TV Project)," *Texte zur Kunst* 3 (1991), pp. 126–33, esp. p. 132.
22 Ibid., 129–30.
23 "Collage des Raum Friesenwall 120," *Texte zur Kunst* 3 (1991): pp. 122–5.

with Dillemuth and Regina Maas from the Academy for Media Arts Cologne, *BüroBert* invited PTTV members Simone Farkhondeh, Mary Feaster, and Linda Iannacone to produce a new work for *Friesenwall 120* and be part of the event program of *Copyshop*.

For *Friesenwall 120*, PTTV created *TV Labor* (TV Laboratory), a hybrid of art show, info space, and TV studio. In line with PTTV's practice, *TV Labor* examined mass media coverage of immigration in both the US and the GDR through a multi-layered presentation: art installation, a video archive of PTTV's previous TV shows, and a library of US alternative print media. The TV studio served as an active production site, where over the course of two weeks PTTV collaborated with refugees and asylum seekers from Cologne and Düsseldorf to produce a new television show addressing the representation of migration and xenophobia in German media.

The show analyzed, dissected, and re-interpreted newspaper clippings, supplementing them with first-hand accounts and conversations with migrants. Using "video as a weapon," PTTV sought to intervene in the dominant media representation of migration and create new images of underrepresented or misrepresented groups. In its hybrid form – part art, part archive, part working infrastructure – *TV Labor* echoed *Copyshop*'s own practice of gathering, assembling, documenting, and connecting, embodying the simultaneity of analysis and instigating. This was particularly apparent in PTTV's choice to not limit their presentation to the art context, but to organize a screening at Café International, a local meeting place for migrants.[24] By presenting their new TV show within the everyday space of the participants' migrant community, PTTV aimed to embed their media critique within a concrete social context – one in which it could function as an active tool. This strategic relocation of their work into the lived environment of their collaborators illustrates an effort to construct a political public through participatory means. Overall, PTTV challenged the conventional one-to-many logic of video as a broadcast medium, reconfiguring it toward a more reciprocal and community-based form of engagement.

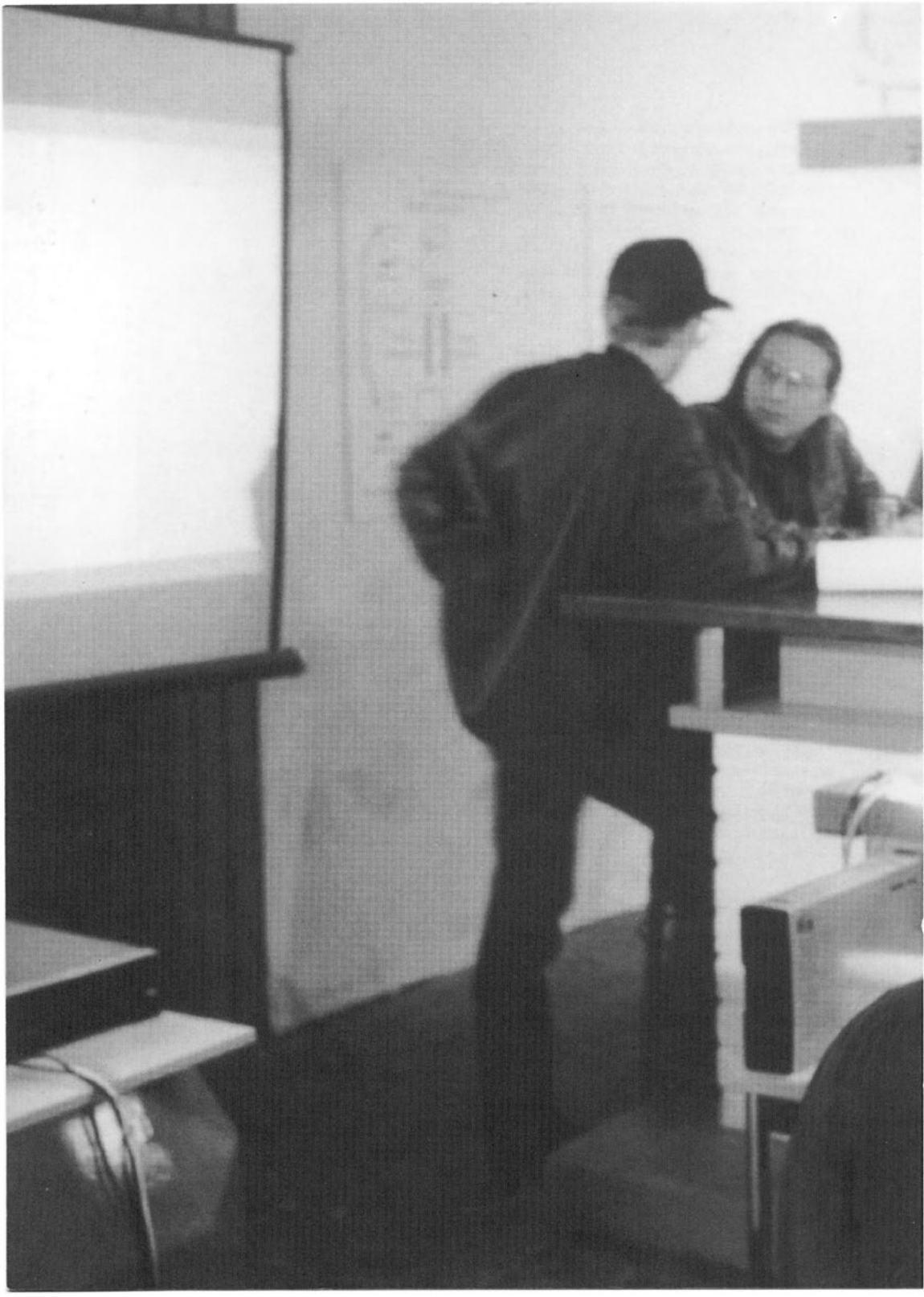
COMLINK

In keeping with its commitment to a recursive approach, the *Copyshop* exhibition prominently featured the German bulletin board system *ComLink* (CL) – a many-to-many-media whose recursive potential lay in its promise that every consumer could also be a producer, and vice versa **FIG. 7**. For *BüroBert*, CL's decentralization, the possibility of posting messages anonymously, the absence of an editorial board or competitive selection processes, and the lack

24 PTTV took part in Copyshop's discussion event "TV & video activism strategies" on Sunday, November 15, 1992 at *Copyshop*, together with German counter media protagonists Anke Gaiser (clipper düsseldorf) and Nobert Meissner (kanal x, Leipzig, hex TV cologne).

6 **Paper Tiger TV, Friesenwall 120, installation views, *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit,* ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993), p. 138. Photos by Stefan Dillemuth.**


Dialogue
AFTERMAGE
Smut



7 **Bar and access point to *ComLink* in the *Copyshop exhibition. Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit,* ed. BüroBert (Edition ID-Archiv, 1993), pp. 136–7. Photo by Renate Lorenz.**

3

Foto: Renate Lorenz

of deadlines or text-length restrictions, combined with the provisional and non-final character of the posts, made the bulletin board system "an ideal instrument of a functioning public."[25] *BüroBert* also emphasized CL's constant and economically "unproblematic accessibility" (requiring only a computer and modem rather than camera and sound equipment) and its capacity to facilitate exchange beyond the art field – or any single sociotope – as critical features for creating a public.

During the exhibition, visitors could use a computer with a modem installed on the bar counter to access and contribute to a thread titled "November Copyshop" in *Nadesdha* (CL), a forum for politics, environment, and culture within the CL network which ran from 1990 to 2015.[26]

CL also documented activity on its boards through diagrams and graphics displayed on posters, and provided literature on net culture for visitors to read and copy.[27] Beyond its presence as infrastructure in the exhibition, Sabine Ellersick, Andre Brimont and Boris Schmidt from *Nadeshda/CL* participated in a round table titled "Active Networks" on Friday, November 13, 1992, discussing ethical questions surrounding digital communication practices. In terms of content, the CL network, founded in 1990, was decidedly partisan, committed to grassroots journalism and concepts of left-wing counter-publicness. A volunteer editorial team sifted through incoming press releases, reports, user contributions, and material from the media, and made them available, sorted by section. In this form, CL was highly operative, with its decentralized structure distributing decision-making powers. Each city had its own box, which exchanged information with other boxes overnight. To safeguard against privatization and commercialization, each box was organized as an association. Even if one box went offline, the rest of the system continued to function.

While *BüroBert*, in their introductory text on counter-publicness, strongly framed the bulletin board system media as an ideal tool for creating a functioning public, two contributions – by Axel Diederich, publisher at Edition ID-Archiv, and Renate Lorenz – problematize this apparent idealization of the medium by outlining some of its limitations in terms of diversity, conventional thread architecture, accessibility, and moderation.

In his contribution "Mail oder 'Progressive Communications'" to *Copyshop*, Axel Diederich refers to a current study by the research group "Medienkultur und Lebensformen" (Media Culture and Ways of Life) at the University of Trier. The study revealed that the average age of bulletin board system users was 26, that 96% were male, and that most spend their leisure time engaged in education and learning. More than half were students in the

25 BüroBert, "Gegenöffentlichkeit" (as in n. 1), pp. 22–30, 24.
26 The thread content was not articulated in the *Copyshop* publication, nor was it accessible through the web archive of *Nadeshda* at the moment of writing this paper.
27 Stephan Geene, "Jeder November ist Anders (Copyshop)" (as in n. 1), 77–85, esp. p. 80.

hard sciences, and only 9% expressed an interest in culture or politics.[28] By introducing these findings, Diederich raised questions about what kind of space the bulletin board system actually constituted and who its users were.

Lorenz addressed new challenges inherent in the many-many model of the bulletin board system, where users could not only read and post, allowing for multidirectional communication streams, but also organize and categorize the posts. She asked: Who decides the order and sequence of the posts, and how is this decision made? How do prior knowledge of technical infrastructure or familiarity with social codes shape participation? In particular, Lorenz problematized how the sharing of knowledge in bulletin board systems was constrained by their "conventional architecture," i.e. the division into and naming of threads.[29] Threads named after political initiatives such as "Antifa" and "Women" were being used to segment discussions, hindering possible connections between anti-racist and anti-sexist interventions and discussions. Similarly, "art" was often relegated to a sub-thread under "Culture," thereby detaching it from explicitly political debates.

What emerges is a broader tension between categorization and connectivity. Bulletin board systems that replicate existing social and discursive divisions without interrogating them risk reinforcing the very separations that critical media practices aims to overcome. In this light, *Copyshop*'s approach gains particular relevance. Rather than mirroring established structures, it works transversally, connecting heterogeneous fields such as art, activism, theory and technology. Here, transversality functions as a political practice: one that deliberately unsettles inherited boundaries, forges unexpected connections, and enables transformation.

The questions raised by Lorenz also connect to the broader discussion culture and moderation practices in these digital spaces. This is obliquely touched on in a somewhat cryptic footnote by Stephan Geene.[30] Reflecting on why *THE THING*,[31] a New York based artists' network and bulletin board system used by many *Copyshop* participants, was not included in the exhibition. Active since 1991 as a platform for peer exchange among artists, *THE THING* became, in Geene's words, a place where "all practical-political options" put forward by users met with "astonished aggression" in the discussion threads. In other words, while skepticism toward combining political activism and art practice, as exemplified by PTTV, was expressed in TzK with a measured tone, the online exchanges on *THE THING* dispensed with such niceties. Sheltered by

28 Axel Diederich, "Mail oder 'Progressive Communications'?" in *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit* (as in n. 1), pp. 172–180, esp. p. 172.

29 Renate Lorenz "read me," in *Copyshop. Kunstpraxis & politische Öffentlichkeit* (as in n. 1), pp. 173–9, esp. p. 174.

30 "These conditions are difficult. Thus, the connection between the November project and the bulletin board system thing failed because all practical-political options provoked astonished aggression in the rest of the net. This was due to the fact that some of the network participants did not want to give up their self-assigned attributes of radical/left/utterly radical, and because their own options were already far too focused on involving a representative of the Federal Secretary Hack (affectionately called federal hack) or on the Galerie Buchholz (circumstances of life have significance)." Geene, "Jeder November ist anders (Copyshop)" (as in n. 27), p. 79.

31 https://the.thing.net (accessed January 24, 2025). See the interview with Barbara Strebel in this volume for a reflection on the Basel-based node of *THE THING*.

the relative anonymity of the internet, many users bluntly opposed precisely the kind of convergence of art and activism championed by *Copyshop*.

Together with *BüroBert* and Art in Ruins, Geene further specified and developed this criticism in the exhibition *trap* at KW Berlin in April 1993. The exhibition critiqued the conditions under which networked communication becomes detached from meaningful exchange. Featuring the publication *The Thing Interactivities* alongside a curatorial note reflecting on the project's shift from collective infrastructure to self-referential discourse, *trap* highlighted how communication can be reduced to performative signaling, where mediated presences shaped by institutional and political forces replace concrete action.[32]

These discussions complicate the idealized notion of bulletin board systems as inherently democratic vehicles for producing "a functioning public." Instead, they reveal that the formation of a political public relies on a complex interplay of media technologies, communicative infrastructures, social interrelations, and epistemic frameworks. The political potential of any media form depends on how access is structured, how participation is framed, and whose voices are included or excluded. Among these contributing factors, Diederich highlights feminist data ethics developed by the Mainz/Wiesbaden-based collective *Spinnennetzwerk* (Spider Network). This group formulated an ethical framework for digital space and online interaction that foregrounds users' control over the bulletin board system, their active involvement in its design and maintenance, and the sharing of digital resources – establishing these conditions as prerequisites for the emergence of a political public. For *Spinnennetzwerk*, technology serves as a tool to connect comrades across spatial distance and to facilitate communication; however, it cannot replace the political structures required for debate, discussion, organizing, and coordination. They locate the political potential of communication technology not in the volume of information circulated or the size of its audience, but in the degree to which it is embedded within a clear and shared political framework. This emphasis on infrastructural form, organizational practices, and collective maintenance echoes Lorenz's reflections on the political implications of discussion-thread architectures. Implicit in *Spinnennetzwerk*'s position is the necessity of thinking form/media and content together in the organization of political practice. Media cannot simply be deployed as neutral tools, but must be continuously negotiated, shaped, and operationalized in relation to a collective political agenda.

This approach resonates with PTTV's public access television strategies, which disrupted conventional viewing habits by inserting alternative content and making the means of production visible – symbolically inviting

32 In an e-mail exchange with the author, Geene outlined the technical and infrastructural challenges in working with *THE THING*. They could not get THE THING running at KW because of the telephone cable infrastructure and, all in all, the technical knowhow to set up the connection required knowledge not sufficiently present in their community (e-mail conversation with the author, January 2025).

viewers to become producers themselves. It likewise parallels *Copyshop*'s participatory model, which rejects the authority of a singular author in favor of collective documentation of shared practice.

Finally, Spinnennetzwerk's perspective aligns with *Copyshop*'s operative ethos by insisting that information only becomes meaningful when it leads to consequences and structures that enable action. As they put it, "information must already seek or point the way to action."[33] This stance articulates a form of applied media critique – one that calls for engaging with media from within practice, and for imagining how media can move beyond communication to become operational infrastructures for political organizing.

SITES OF APPLIED MEDIA CRITIQUE

By including components such as a computer with access to a bulletin board system, an onsite library, a seating area for meetings, a printer for reproducing materials and inviting visitors to add materials, *Copyshop* provided an infrastructure for exchange, sharing, and dissemination. This infrastructure occupied a space between exhibition, media lab, and info space, each operating on different temporal registers. While the exhibition itself unfolded over a four-week program, the production tools and the library extended beyond this moment, offering lasting resources for continued engagement. In this hybrid form, *Copyshop* bridged production and archiving, video activism and net practices, critique and transformation. Its spatial and temporal design thus functioned as a site of applied media critique: simultaneously reflecting on the material conditions necessary for creating a political public and furnishing the very means to do so.

Copyshop's methodology evolved into a more sustained form at the Shedhalle Zurich, where *BüroBert* member Renate Lorenz served as a curator from 1994 to 1997, alongside Sylvia Kafehsy. Under their direction, the Shedhalle became a site where the partisan and operational practices articulated through *Copyshop* were both institutionalized and expanded. Moving beyond the format of static exhibitions, the curatorial team transformed the Shedhalle into a platform for social and political engagement – a space for gathering, organizing, meeting, and producing, and experimenting collectively, while reconfiguring the relationship between art, activism, and institutional critique. Exhibitions such as *Game Girl* (1994), and *When tekkno turns to sound of poetry* (1994) extended *Copyshop*'s thematic concerns – particularly the intersections of gender and technology – and culminated in the second *Copyshop* publication (1996). The exhibition *Alt.Use.Media* (1997) furthered *Copyshop*'s media critique and educational approach through workshops, skill-based training in media activism, and the installation of an audiovisual project

33 Translated by the author, Spinnennetz (Mainz/Wiesbaden), as quoted in Diederich, "Mail oder "Progressive Communications"?" (as in n. 28), p. 177.

studio. These examples show how, in the mid-1990s, the Shedhalle functioned as an institutional formation committed to creating political publics, while also demonstrating how curatorial practice could function as a long-term infrastructure for critical engagement and collective action.

Copyshop can be seen as a precursor to the shift from exhibition to infrastructure by linking art practice and political action, presenting an interweaving of exhibiting, documenting, archiving and producing, while eschewing fixed hierarchies among these activities in favor of understanding them as interlinked modalities. This practice follows what might be called a "project-logic" – a contested yet inherently political and transversal mode of working. It is this questioning and rethinking of the exhibition format that builds the foundation of *Copyshop*'s applied media critique. Although *Copyshop* never explicitly addressed the exhibition as a format, it implicitly posed the question of how exhibitions might contribute to the creation of political publics: how they might support processes of collectivization, activation, and infrastructural experimentation. In this way, *Copyshop* functioned not only as a site of media critique but also as a significant contribution to curatorial discourse – testing and transforming the exhibition format from within.[34]

34 The author thanks Jochen Becker and Stephan Geene for their generous exchange and support with material.

Loredana Bevilacqua

“Almost an Ordinary Mailbox”[1]

BBSs and Virtual Networking Before and at the Beginning of the Internet Era
with a Focus on Switzerland, 1985–1995

INTRODUCTION[2]

Nowadays, terms like networks and net culture[3] seem to be inseparably tied to the internet. Over the past decade, various researchers have focused on a previously neglected history of networks that emerged before the "internet era," developing their own forms of networking, communication and file sharing. Important elements of this history are the *Bulletin Board Systems (BBS)*, known as *mailboxes* in German-speaking regions (terms will be used synonymously here), which existed before and partly alongside the spread of the internet. These systems will be the focus of this essay. As Kevin Driscoll posits, they can be read as the prehistory of social media.[4] Significantly for this investigation, they exemplify the "bottom-up" use of technology and decentralized networking. BBSs also served as early arenas for debates on netiquette, the dichotomy of openness vs. regulation of networks, and the limits of free speech. Yet for all their importance, they are often omitted from the grand narrative of ARPANET, military experiments, and the World Wide Web, leading to inevitable research gaps.[5] While BBSs and systems like Usenet have been the subject of (social) research for over two decades, they have received little attention from historians.[6] Several factors explain this: Besides the usual distance between a subject and its historicization, the preference for major success stories in historical computer research often sidelines alternative narratives.[7] Additionally, academic researchers, particularly those affiliated with universities, had early access to the modern internet and were therefore less likely to engage with BBS culture.[8] Researching this history also presents practical challenges: While early websites can generally be accessed through the *Internet Archive*, many mailboxes – especially their visual and aesthetic dimensions, have not been preserved and remain largely inaccessible as primary sources. Probably the largest archival collection of BBSs is *textfiles.org*, which mainly features content from the USA.

This essay examines the history and dissemination of mailboxes in Switzerland, focusing primarily on the German-speaking region due to the nature of the source material. This specific focus is based on the approach of

1 In reference to the article by Eric Hubacher, "Modem und Akustikkoppler," in *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*, no. 6 (1985): 53.

2 This essay was originally written in German.

3 Here – as per Gsöllpointner – understood as "a genre of activities around new information and communication technologies and the internet, ranging from the mediation of media competence through structured development work and the provision of technical means to actions explicitly aimed at the cultural, social, and political field with and via the internet" – with the caveatthat this concerns phenomena before the mass spread of the internet. See Katharina Gsöllpointner, "Medienkunst:Netzkunst:Netzkultur," in Salzburger Kunstverein (ed.), *100 Tage keine Ausstellung. Information. Reflexion. Diskussion*. http://www.katharinagsoellpointner.at/downloads/Medienkunst-Netzkunst-Netzkultur.pdf.

4 Kevin Driscoll, *The Modem World: A Prehistory of Social Media* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2022).

5 See, for example, Paolo Bory, *The Internet Myth: From the Internet Imaginary to Network Ideologies* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2020), https://doi.org/10.16997/book48.

6 Oliver Kiechle, "Ein gespaltenes Netz? – Das Usenet der 1980er-Jahre zwischen Regulierung und Anarchie," in *Zur Geschichte des digitalen Zeitalters*, ed. Ricky Wichum and Daniela Zetti (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2022), 131.

7 Doron Swade, *The History of Computing: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 123.

8 Kevin Driscoll, "Hobbyist Inter-Networking and the Popular Internet Imaginary: Forgotten Histories of Networked Personal Computing, 1978–1998," PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2014, 135–6.

"digital history as social history," following a regional historical perspective, as advocated by Malte Thiessen.[9] The goal is to explore the local impacts of a global phenomenon – one that can be compared to similar local impacts elsewhere. The timeframe from 1985 to 1995 provides a fitting framework. Around the beginning of this period, mailboxes began to gain a foothold in Switzerland; by 1995, their gradual decline had begun, coinciding with the broader adoption of the internet.[10] This timeframe allows for a thorough documentation of the rise, peak, and transformation of mailbox culture. The essay traces these developments by alternating between close analysis of specific examples and broader thematic comparisons to structure its narrative.

The following research questions will guide the investigation, which draws on historical source and discourse analysis of newspapers and magazines, a focused study of the computer magazine *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*[11] and, where available, materials from one of the few existing large BBS archives. Key questions include: How did mailboxes spread in (German-speaking) Switzerland? Who were the users – who had access, who operated these systems, and what activities took place within them? What opportunities and problems did these networks create within society? And finally, how do the Swiss developments compare with findings from other studies in Europe and the United States? Each section of the essay is dedicated to addressing one of these questions.

EARLY USE AND SPREAD

The history of digital networking before the internet era, particularly in relation to Bulletin Board Systems, began as an appropriation of technologies initially accessible only to elite organizations. In the late 1970s, ARPANET was launched, enabling American research institutions, the military, and universities to network geographically distant computers and send electronic messages.[12] However, at that time, neither the technology (nor, in most cases, the computers themselves) were available to private users. Nonetheless, in 1973, an initiative called the "Community Memory" set up what is widely regarded as the first computer-based BBS in a Berkeley record store. By linking

9 Malte Thiessen, "Digitalgeschichte als Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Perspektiven einer Regionalgeschichte der digitalen Transformation," in *Zur Geschichte des digitalen Zeitalters*, 2022, 73f.

10 Beatrice Tobler, "BBS Worlds. Looking Back at the Swiss BBS Scene of the 1990s," *WiderScreen* 2–3 (2020), http://widerscreen.fi/numerot/2020-2-3/bbs-worlds-looking-back-at-the-swiss-bbs-scene-of-the-1990s/, 1–2. For the beginning of the "internet boom" in Switzerland, see Peter Haber, and Jan Hodel, "Internet." *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz (HLS)*, December 20, 2018, https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/de/articles/048816/2018-12-20/.

11 This computer magazine and publication organ of the Swiss Computer Club (SCC), founded in 1980, was published under various names during the period discussed here and is referred to hereafter as *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*. From 1979 to 1980, the magazine appeared as *Hobby- + Kleincomputer*, from 1980 to 1988 as *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*, from 1989 to 1992 as *M+K Computer: das Schweizer Computermagazin*, and finally from 1993 to 1999 as *M+K Computermarkt: Fachzeitschrift für Computer und Kommunikation*.

12 See Beatrice Tobler, "Mailboxwelten. Zur unterschiedlichen Nutzung des Mediums Computermailbox," unpublished licentiate thesis, University of Basel, 1995, 22. Toblers work, in which she examined the use of mailboxes in 1995 as part of an ethnographic study, also serves as a valuable historical document due to the illustrations it preserved.

a teleprinter to a time-sharing computer system, the project provided "groups of people who had never used computers with levels of access to technology and information-sharing."[13] As microcomputers entered homes, computer enthusiasts came up with their own solutions for enabling electronic messaging and networking: Using data transmission, a home computer, suitable software, and a modem (initially often acoustic couplers[14]), enabled users to communicate from computer to computer via telephone lines. Bulletin Board Systems allowed private users to exchange files and messages. [15] Alongside Community Memory, one of the earliest examples was the CBBS (Computerized Bulletin Board System) by Ward Christensen and Randy Suess, launched in Chicago in 1978. A few years later, hundreds of BBS phone numbers were listed in the USA, and mailboxes were also set up in other countries; for example, the British magazine *Your Spectrum* listed 16 "amateur bulletin boards" in 1984.[16]

In Switzerland, the spread of mailboxes began in the mid-1980s, closely tied to the growing number of microcomputers in private households.[17] Mailboxes were hosted not on central servers but operated directly from the homes of system operators *(SysOps)*. The magazine *Mikro- und Kleincomputer* first covered data transmission in 1985, explaining the functionality, use of ASCII code for writing, and transmission protocols in a comprehensive article **FIG. 1**.[18] The following issue focused on acoustic couplers and modems. In an info box, the magazine defined a "mailbox" as follows: "Access to these electronic mailboxes is obtained by using a suitable modem; the mailbox itself is managed by a computer. In the mailbox, messages can be left that can be read by all other co-users or only a specific co-user of the box. (…) Almost like an ordinary mailbox!"[19] It is important, however, to put "almost ordinary" into perspective: While a physical mailbox was accessible 24 hours a day, electronic mailboxes faced limitations. High telephone costs meant that most users accessed them late at night when call rates were cheaper. Furthermore, access was exclusive – while one user was connected, others were locked out. To allow multiple users simultaneous access, SysOps had to set up additional modems and telephone lines, each requiring its own number.[20] In the early days, acoustic couplers with very low transmission rates (usually 300 baud per second) were affordable to home computer users. The article further noted:

13 Bo Doub, "Communitiy Memory: Precedents in Social Media and Movements," *Computer History Museum Blog*, February 23, 2016, https://computerhistory.org/blog/community-memory-precedents-in-social-media-and-movements/?key=community-memory-precedents-in-social-media-and-movements For a more in-depth discussion of the Community Memory project, see Doug Schuler, "Community networks: building a new participatory medium," *Communications of the ACM,* vol. 37 (1), (1994), 40–1, https://doi.org/10.1145/175222.175225, and Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the computer revolution* (Beijing: O'Reilly, 2012). Since this essay focuses on BBSs run on private computers, it does not further discuss the project.

14 Early modems like acoustic couplers converted digital data into analog signals and vice versa, allowing digital data to be sent and received over analog telephone lines.

15 Matt Nicholson, *When Computing Got Personal: A History of the Desktop Computer* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2014), 156.

16 Nicholson, *When Computing Got Personal*, 156–7.

17 Tobler, "Mailboxwelten," 23.

18 Eric Hubacher, "Datenübertragung." *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*, no. 5 (1985): 65–8.

19 Hubacher, "Modem und Akustikkoppler,"53.

20 SysOps did not need to be in front of the computer to receive calls on the mailbox; this worked via modems. However, the necessary equipment had to be operational.

1 **"Inserat im Mikro- und Kleincomputer."** ***Mikro- und Kleincomputer*****, no. 4 (1986): 9. Speicherbibliothek der ZHB Luzern, Signatur P.b. 1213.**

"Directly connected modems are usually just a dream for small computer owners in Switzerland and West Germany, as they are not available at affordable prices."[21] In West Germany, where prices for commercial modems remained high, technically skilled users often resorted to building their own. The Chaos Computer Club (CCC) published a guide for a homemade modem nicknamed the *Datenklo* ("data toilet"). The usage of these modems was – in theory – only allowed after inspection by the *Bundespost*.[22] In Switzerland, do-it-yourself guides were not common in the examined sources. Although a Swiss branch of the CCC claimed to have existed since 1980, it did not formally constitute itself until 2005 and had not been publicly active.[23] Modem approval and licensing in Switzerland were also under the control of the Post, Telephone, and Telegraph Administration (PTT).

In 1986, the *Computer Anwender Club* ("Computer User Club") was the first to promote its own "24h mailbox" in an advertisement.[24] in the following issue, an article mentioned that the editorial team had received a list from the Zurich company Secom with almost 60 mailbox addresses.[25] However, the article did not explain how this list had been compiled. This is relevant because mailboxes were not only used by private individuals or clubs – their success also made them attractive for commercial use.[26] Technology historian Matthias Röhr identifies four distinct types of mailbox use, which are also evident in Switzerland: Private individuals running mailboxes as hobby projects; internal company mailboxes (e.g., accessible to field staff); public company mailboxes; and large, commercial or subscription-based mailbox systems.[27] In early 1987, *Mikro- und Kleincomputer* already reported the existence of over a hundred mailboxes across Switzerland:

> They are mostly operated by clubs, less often by businesses. Even less common and still in development are boxes that enable international connections. Since all mailboxes are operated with specific software, users face the challenge of learning how to use them and creating their own documentation from the user manuals of their preferred mailboxes. What is offered in the mailboxes, mostly at 300 baud, is still very meager and often even silly. It reminds one of the heydays of amateur radio. One may find "funny jokes" in mailboxes, such as: "What's the cleanest river in the world? The Rhine [the name is a homophone of the German word "rein," meaning "pure"], it was chemically cleaned." The writer of

21 Hubacher, "Modem und Akustikkoppler," 51.
22 Matthias Röhr, *Der lange Weg zum Internet: Computer als Kommunikationsmedien zwischen Gegenkultur und Industriepolitik in den 1970er/1980er Jahren* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2021), 311.
23 See FAQ of the Chaos Computer Club Switzerland, https://ccc-ch.ch/faq.html.
24 "Inserat 'Neue Clubs'." *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*, no. 3 (1986): 91.
25 "Computer Splitter." *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*, no. 4 (1986): 9.
26 Tobler, "Mailboxwelten," 24.
27 Röhr, *Der lange Weg zum Internet*, 312–4.

> the "joke" even commented on his punchline: "ha, ha, ha." Only the PTT is happy – its meter ticks and ticks. We recommend readers focus on a few select boxes. A good starting point is the mailbox run by PIM in Schaffhausen (…) or the very active PC club at the Swiss Reinsurance Company …. These boxes also offer many programs for "downloading."[28]

The critical remark about the Swiss PTT highlights the persistent issue of high connection costs – which also explains the lack of international mailbox connections. This was a common issue across countries. Researchers note that in the early days, BBSs were primarily used for local networking, especially due to financial and technical limitations. In West Germany, figures from the counterculture scene around the CCC took an ambivalent view of private mailboxes in terms of its ability to create a decentralized and accessible communication landscape: "On the one hand, there was a broad consensus that privately operated mailboxes were useful and desirable. On the other hand, more politically engaged actors in the scene didn't believe that the information and discussions on most of the boxes offered much added value."[29] As Beatrice Tobler notes, in the 1980s BBSs focused primarily on computer-related content and software distribution. Only in the 1990s did the range of topics diversify, leading to the emergence of distinct "virtual communities."[30]

An examination of mass media coverage – in particular by the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ) and the *WochenZeitung* (WoZ) – reveals contrasting approaches to the topic of mailboxes in the period leading up to 1990.[31] The NZZ did not feature significant reporting on the private use of mailboxes. They appeared exclusively as professional tools for remote content retrieval or as part of advertisements.[32] Even five years later, this framing remained prominent, but some new aspects had emerged: For example, in an article on intergenerational use of new media accessing a mailbox from home was described as a routine activity – even for older individuals – "within the emerging information society."[33] Additionally, the newspaper reported on early forms of artistic engagement with computer systems , such as the "Fernsehspiel" project on *3sat*, which allowed viewers to connect to a digital 3D location via a computer mailbox.[34] As far as for the NZZ, the treatment of the mailbox topic during this period appeared largely uncritical. By contrast – though perhaps unsurprisingly – the *WoZ* took a markedly different stance: In 1985,

28 *Mikro- und Kleincomputer*, no. 1 (1987): 17.
29 Röhr, *Der lange Weg zum Internet*, 315.
30 Tobler, "BBS Worlds, 4. http://widerscreen.fi/numerot/2020-2-3/bbs-worlds-looking-back-at-the-swiss-bbs-scene-of-the-1990s/.
31 All issues from the years 1985, 1990, and 1995 that contained articles or content with the keywords *BBS* or *Bulletin Board System, Mailbox* and *Usenet* were examined.
32 See, for example, Remo Vock, "Computer 85: 6. Schweizer Messe für Informatik," in *NZZ*, no. 127, June 5, 1985, 65.
33 Gerald A. Straka, "Alte Menschen und junge Medien. Einstellungsmuster zu neuen Kommunikationstechniken," in *NZZ*, no. 146, June 27, 1990, 65.
34 "Mind-Maschinen," in *NZZ*, no. 219, September 21, 1990, 82.

the newspaper's critical engagement with computer technology sparked an intense, year-long debate. The immediate trigger was a controversy over sending "dominance technology" (in the form of computers) to Nicaragua, which led to broader questions about the paper's own approach to computerization and the acquisition of devices for its editorial office.[35] Although the decision ultimately favored acquisition, the tone remained skeptical, as illustrated by the following argument advanced by one of the paper's editors, still in the context of the Nicaragua solidarity debate: "As much as the joy of tinkering and the pleasure in technology may inspire the motivation of the individual information worker: There is no technology that avenges itself so bitterly on tinkerers as computer technology."[36] Subsequently, mailboxes were directly mentioned in *WoZ* reporting on the February 1985 Videotex hack carried out by the Computer Chaos Club, as well as, in a short announcement in 1990 about the launch of *La macchina,* a "social-ecological-ethical mailbox."[37] Otherwise, computer-related discourse in the *WoZ* was generally framed in terms of rationalization, or focused on the health risk of screen work.[38]

DURING THE "BOOM": USER DEMOGRAPHICS, DEBATES, AND CONTENT

What the *WoZ* only hinted at is confirmed by other sources: In the early 1990s, mailboxes had a somewhat ambivalent reputation. They were often associated with "computer freaks," perceived as "breeding grounds for computer viruses," and their operators, the so-called SysOps, were frequently equated with hackers.[39] While it is true that mailboxes served as communication platforms for computer subcultures like crackers,[40] and that some SysOps did have ties to hackers, this image was often exaggerated or misleading. Beatrice Tobler describes this reputation as a superimposed projection.[41] She points out that SysOps were "user elites" with extensive computer know-how, mostly men who "who often invested their spare time, and occasionally their holiday budgets, into maintaining and running these communication systems."[42] In 1992, the magazine *Mikro- und Kleincomputer* devoted a two-part report to the topic of

35 Stefan Howald, *Links und bündig: WOZ Die Wochenzeitung. Eine alternative Mediengeschichte* (Zürich: Rotpunktverlag, 2018), 69–75. The computer debate was also closely linked to questions of political orientation and decision-making structures of the WoZ (70).

36 Urs Zwicky, "Geilheit nach Computern?" in *WoZ*, no. 33, August 16, 1985, 6.

37 Ad in the Computer section of the "Kleininserate" for the mailbox *La macchina*: *WoZ*, no. 18, May 4, 1990, 22; in the examined material, the mailbox is no longer mentioned, and it included no other information on the subject.

38 See, for example, Karin Rossbach, "Millionen von Versuchskaninchen," in *WoZ*, no. 33, August 17, 1990, 4–5.

39 See Roland Kiefer, "Die Mailbox wird erwachsen (1)," in *M+K Computer*, no. 3 (1992): 25, and Tobler, Beatrice: *Mailboxwelten*, 21.

40 Gleb J. Albert, "Subkultur, Piraterie und neue Märkte: Die transnationale Zirkulation von Heimcomputersoftware, 1986-1995," in *Wege in die digitale Gesellschaft. Computernutzung in der Bundesrepublik 1955-1990*, ed. Frank Bösch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 274 and 277. "Crackers" were predominantly male teenagers who aimed to crack the copy protection of software – especially games, with aim of modifying and circulating them (274). See also Patryk Wasiak, "Telephone networks, BBSs, and the emergence of the transnational 'warze scene'," in *History and Technology* 35, no. 2 (2019): 177–194.

41 Tobler, *Mailboxwelten*, 21. Recent works show that many attributions were subsumed under the term *hacker*; according to Julia Gül Erdogan, it initially referred even to those who programmed excessively. See: Julia Gül Erdogan, *Avantgarde der Computernutzung. Hackerkulturen in der Bundesrepublik und in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 81–2.

42 Tobler, *Mailboxwelten*, 21.

mailboxes, with the explicit aim of "rehabilitating" them.[43] The author, himself a BBS operator, pushed back against the portrayal of mailboxes as the "source of all evil"[44] in the spread of malware. It included a guide to using and operating BBSs, with advice on hardware and software. It returned to the topic of expensive modems and, without actuallydiscouraging self-construction, warned readers about the heavy fines they would incur for selling and using non-PTT-approved modems in the wake of the Switzerland's new Telecommunications Act (1992): "So hands off bargain offers with which some dealers try to sell off remaining stocks of now illegal 'export models'!"[45] Although the high quality of hobby-operated mailboxes was highlighted, the article also discussed the network *ILink*, which at the time consisted of 21 mailboxes. *ILink* had emerged to bring order to what was often a chaotic amateur landscape. It aimed to ensure the quality of information through a strict selection process.[46] The private Swiss BBS culture likely reached its peak around 1994/95, after which it gradually started to decline.[47] In terms of usage, access, and acceptance, the landscape during its heyday can be summarized as follows: Based on unofficial lists, Tobler estimates that there were around 400 to 500 active BBSs in Switzerland in 1994.[48] That same year – relatively late in the BBS cycle – *Mikro- und Kleincomputer* launched its own box. The editorial team had previously searched for a local "freak" to help set it up. Besides functioning as a shareware portal, subscribers could also use it to discuss computer-related questions and play games together.[49]

In 1994, the US-magazine *Boardwatch,* which focused on the BBS scene, published a comprehensive list of 390 Swiss BBSs. This list (partially including duplicates with multiple phone lines) was compiled by a young Zurich computer science student who also operated the *Warehouse BBS*.[50] Of these systems, 57 were located in Romandie (French-speaking Switzerland) and 11 in Ticino (Italian-speaking Switzerland), while the remaining 322 mailboxes were based in German-speaking cantons. The aforementioned diversification of the BBS landscape, a development also observed by Petri Saarikoski in his study of Finnish BBS culture,[51] was clearly reflected in the list: It still included numerous computer user mailboxes, such as the *Amiga Microbox* or the *IBM PC Club*, and quite a few erotic-oriented mailboxes like *Sexy BBS*, *HotBBS*, and – presumably – *Bunny BBS*. BBSs served as platforms for a broad range of interests and identities: the *Teacher Mailbox* supported educational networking; the *Mountains and Rowing BBS* catered to leisure communities;

43 Kiefer, "Die Mailbox wird erwachsen (1)," 25 (part 2, "Die Mailbox wird erwachsen (2)," was published in 1992: *M+K Computer*, no. 4 (1992): 5–9.
44 A similar observation is also found in Driscoll, *The Modem World*, 21.
45 Kiefer, "Die Mailbox wird erwachsen (1)," 25–6.
46 See ibid., 26.
47 Tobler, *BBS Worlds*, 10.
48 Ibid., 4.
49 Thomas Haller, "VGA Planets – Ein Spiel erobert die Schweiz," in *M+K Computermarkt*, no. 10 (1994): 63–4.
50 Brian Gallagher, "Swiss List," in *Boardwatch Magazine*, March 1994, https://archive.org/details/Boardwatch1994-03.
51 Petri Saarikoski, "The Rise and Fall of BBS Culture in Finland, 1982-2002," in *WiderScreen* 2-3 (2020) http://widerscreen.fi/numerot/2020-2-3/the-rise-and-fall-of-bbs-culture-in-finland-1982-2002/, 35.

and the *ExYugoNet BBS* provided a space for people from former Yugoslavian countries to connect. Also listed is *HIVNet ZH*: In the U.S. and beyond, BBSs played a vital role in disseminating information on HIV/AIDS.[52] Networks for queer groups, such as *GayNet*, were also featured, albeit on a different list.[53] Tobler, in her research, examined the Christian mailbox *Life-BBS*, the West German mailbox *FEMAIL*, and the *Chaos Box* **FIG. 2**, which operated at the intersection between leisure and computer technology and was, at least by some users, associated with the cyberpunk movement.[54]

While these examples illustrate the presence of women and minorities in the pre-internet digital world, it is essential to view them in proportion to the broader user base. As Kevin Driscoll has pointed out in the U.S. context, such participation, though significant, was not representative of the mainstream. The typical BBS user was overwhelmingly young, white, and male – a pattern echoed in Switzerland.[55] The *Boardwatch* list includes the names of most SysOps, and among the 390 entries, only one clearly female first name appears. Although some SysOps used pseudonyms, the gender disparity remains stark. Saarikoski's Finnish survey found 94.4% of BBS users were male, further confirming this imbalance.[56] The marginalization of women in this "modem world"[57] stemmed from a variety of factors – from entrenched general gender roles to traditionally male-dominated computer subcultures gender roles to exclusionary, male-dominated computer subcultures.[58] Nonetheless, counter-examples did exist: feminist networks such as *FemNet* represented deliberate, female-led efforts to claim space within this digital terrain.[59] In the examined newspaper sources, the (Swiss) mailbox scene was addressed across several social fields as emerging practices in a changing media world – for instance, as platforms through which "new partners [were] sought in mailbox networks;"[60] or as a political tool in wartime. In 1995, the *Alternative Information Network (AIM),* introduced in Bern, connected 70 journalists in the former Yugoslavia through a BBS infrastructure, with the goal of providing independent reporting free from state propaganda.[61] Legal questions also surfaced around BBSs and their content. One case involved a Zurich mailbox suspected of distributing illegal material, specifically, further investigations had shown, child pornography. This incident raised urgent questions about liability.[62] A journalist covering the case argued against holding SysOps accountable for content

52 Driscoll, *The Modem World*, 163.
53 Tobler, *Mailboxwelten*, appendix, 156.
54 Tobler, *BBS Worlds*, 8-9.
55 Driscoll, *The Modem World*, 193.
56 Saarikoski, "The Rise and Fall of BBS Culture in Finland," 6.
57 Term borrowed from Kevin Driscoll's eponymous book, here describing the entirety of people using and operating mailboxes.
58 See, for example, Gleb J. Albert and Julia Gül Erdogan, "Zwischen Staat und Markt. Computer-Subkulturen in Ost und West," in *Deutschland Archiv*, March 17, 2022, https://www.bpb.de/themen/deutschlandarchiv/506278/zwischen-staat-und-markt/.
59 Tobler, *Mailboxwelten*, appendix, 82.
60 Ernest W. B. Hess-Lüttich, "Wie werden wir uns morgen verständigen?" in *NZZ*, no. 200, August 30, 1995.
61 "Informationsaustausch in Ex-Jugoslawien. Kommunikation über Computer-Mailbox," in *NZZ*, no. 62, March 15, 1995, 5.
62 David Rosenthal, "Riskante Autobahnfahrten. Juristisches Neuland in den neuen Datennetzen," in *NZZ*, no. 232, October 6, 1995, 77.

2 Tobler, Beatrice. *BBS Worlds: Looking Back at the Swiss BBS Scene of the 1990s*, 9 (see fn. 10, image provided with kind permission by the author).

uploaded to their systems: “Given today’s data volumes, it is undoubtedly unreasonable for operators to check them for practical reasons. Every mailbox and internet provider would constantly have one foot in jail if they were generally responsible for the data stored on their computers. (..). And should a mailbox operator be allowed to check private mail (…)?”[63]

MAILBOX NETWORKS AND EARLY DEBATES ON NETIQUETTE AND REGULATORY MECHANISMS

According to Matthias Röhr, the term *mailbox network*[64] refers to a unique aspect of the “modem world”: “The driving force behind these networks of multiple boards was often the users’ desire to exchange messages and participate in discussions beyond their own board or area code without increasing their phone bills.”[65] New software allowed autonomous message exchange between multiple mailboxes, ideally at night. This enabled communication not only within their own BBS but also with others across a wider network. FidoNet,[66] created as an alternative to Usenet, became very popular in the 1990s. These networks and their radically decentralized organization – they were composed of thousands of privately operated mailboxes, so-called “nodes” – enabled a new kind of freedom in digital communication.This decentralization created open spaces for networking and exchange that often bypassed societal gatekeepers and institutional scrutiny. However, this same freedom also made such platforms vulnerable to misuse: the circulation of pornographic or racist material, and increasing exploitation by extremist groups, especially the far-right.[67] These tensions – between openness and abuse – foreshadow contemporary challenges in digital resp. net culture and online moderation. In response, early forms of regulatory mechanisms emerged, particularly concerning the responsibility of SysOps for public discussion areas hosted on their mailboxes. For example, FidoNet had its own policy early on.[68] Both the English original and a 1994 German translation remain accessible via the now-archived website of the United Fidonet of Switzerland (UFS).[69] Under the section “Users,” the policy states unequivocally: “The SysOp is responsible for the actions of any user if they affect the rest of Fidonet. (If a user is harassing, the SysOp is

63 Ibid.

64 An example of a mailbox network is the research subject of the anthology, *The Thing* (including the Swiss node *THEswissTHING*). This art mailbox network used the commercial software TBBS.

65 Röhr, *Der lange Weg zum Internet*, 273-274.

66 For the history of FidoNet, see, for example, Manuel Castells, *Der Aufstieg der Netzwerkgesellschaft*, 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2017) (vol. 1 of the trilogy *The Information Age. Economy - Society - Culture*), 56.

67 See, for example, Erdogan, *Avantgarde der Computernutzung*, 112–3; Driscoll, *The Modem World*, 22–3; Ivo Furman, “Studying the influence of Bulletin Board System technologies on the communication culture of pre-internet Turkish-speaking online communities: a socio-technical approach,” in *New Perspectives on Turkey* 53 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2015.18, 55ff.; and Gleb J. Albert,“Antikommunismus als Bindeglied: Computerspiel-Piraten auf beiden Seiten des Eisernen Vorhangs am Ende des Kalten Krieges,” in *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung* (2021): 245–66.

68 For example, the FidoNet Policy Document from 1989, available at http://www.textfiles.com/bbs/FIDONET/policy4.txt.

69 Almost all connected mailboxes were allegedly run by members of the “Cost-Sharing Association” UFS. See https://www.fidonet.ch/f_region30.htm.

harassing). Any traffic entering Fidonet through a given node is assumed to be from a user if not from the SysOp, and the SysOp is responsible for it."[70] Understandably, some networks – such as *ILink* – required rigorous checks before allowing a mailbox to join. According to a surviving *NodeList* (a directory of Fidonet-connected BBSs sorted by region and country, a little over 170 mailboxes (excluding duplicates) in Switzerland were part of the network and, at least in theory, subject to the aforementioned rules.[71] Ivo Furmann notes that Fidonet regulatory framework was stricter than that of networks such as Hitnet in Turkey.[72] In Hitnet, moderation efforts seemed focused more on filtering out "off-topic content" – contributions deemed irrelevant or excessively long – rather than on scrutinizing or restricting problematic content. Instead, the community or individual users would sometimes take on the responsibility of content moderation:

> On the other hand, the actual contents of the discussion threads were usually not moderated. For example, when a participant posts anti-Semitic humor, the community, rather than the moderator, intervenes to take action against the offensive content. While moderators do not warn the offender about the contents of their contribution, some community members post replies – such as 'Irkciliga Hayir! Her ne nedenle ve niyetle olursa olsun…' ['No to racism! No matter the reason or intention …] – to the offending post, effectively silencing the conversation.[73]

Tobler suggests that the emergence of such *netiquettes* was inspired by internet protocols, especially Usenet.[74]Developed in 1979 by students at Duke University (and still in operation today), Usenet created a network of *newsgroups* or discussion forums built on ARPANET, often called "Arpanet for the poor," because it provided and extended access beyond a few elite universities. Its basic principle was a cooperative network that should function without hierarchies.[75] However, Usenet was not as accessible to home computer users as BBSs, which probably led to the creation of Fidonet as a grassroots alternative. Even so, Usenet remained largely a playground for "college students, academics, researchers, and other internet insiders," as Driscoll noted, and did little to expand the overall user base.[76] Nevertheless, there were striking

70 Translation of the German FidoNet regulations; the English version from 1989 has practically the same wording: https://www.fidonet.ch/f_policy4.htm.
71 FidoNet Nodelist for Friday, December 3, 1993. http://www.textfiles.com/fidonet-on-the-internet/n1993/nodelist.337.
72 Furman, "Studying the influence of Bulletin Board System technologies," 55; it is further explained that Hitnet used FidoNet-compatible software but did not adhere to the moderation guidelines.
73 Furman, "Studying the influence of Bulletin Board System technologies," 55.
74 Tobler, *Mailboxwelten*, 50.
75 Kiechle, "Ein gespaltenes Netz?", 127.
76 Kevin Driscoll, *The Modem World*, 183-184. Kiechle's essay questions this observation; how permeable Usenet actually was for home computer users would be an interesting question.

parallels, as pointed out by Oliver Kiechle: Most news servers in 1984 were "managed by enthusiasts in their spare time," who often used their employers' computers and phone budgets (not always with the company's knowledge) to access the internet.[77] Usenet grew rapidly, making moderation both essential and time-consuming. As a result, the initial model gave way to hierarchical oversight, in order to keep newsgroups with "controversial content or low user numbers" out of regular data traffic. In response, users bypassed "censorship" by creating alternative connections (via multiple home computers) and establishing their own discussion hierarchy. Under the banner of free speech, this led to a flood of spam, racist posts, and abuse throughout the mid-1990s.[78] In short, both BBSs and Usenet grappled with the same tension: openness vs. regulation and defining the boundaries of free expression in the digital space. As the ongoing debates about platforms like X (formerly Twitter) show, these issues are even more urgent today.[79]

CONCLUSION

Addressing our initial questions, a clear portrait of Switzerland's preinternet mailbox era emerges. The proliferation of mailboxes was driven chiefly by the rise of home computers, the enthusiasm of hobbyist programmers, and a broad desire for participation. Although operators and users were predominantly male, women also took part. In the 1990s, mailbox types diversified, hosting networks devoted to everything from political activism to leisure interests. While private mailboxes were never used widely, they did carve out a niche existence, at least in terms of representation in the mass media. Nevertheless, what began as a grassroots technology eventually migrated into the corporate sphere. Early critiques that mailboxes offered little real value can be challenged: though the content may have ranged from the mundane to the "banal" (much like modern social media), BBSs – and especially interconnected BBS networks – enabled entirely new modes of communication. They provided crucial spaces for free networking, self-expression and knowledge sharing.[80]

Yet these very strengths also created challenges: in a decentralized communication system, questions of moderation, regulation, and operator responsibility arose almost immediately. Unlike in West Germany – where the Chaos Computer Club dominated the countercultural discourse – Swiss mailboxes were less frequently tied to overtly oppositional movements, even if occasional hacker associations did surface.

Future research might examine additional media or delve into various computing subcultures to uncover alternative viewpoints or outcomes. In

77 Kiechle, "Ein gespaltenes Netz?" 135.
78 Ibid., 137.
79 Ibid., 138-140.
80 For example, the sharing of knowledge in the arts. See the essays by Stefanie Bräuer and Lucie Kolb in this volume.

particular, a broader comparative study of preinternet communication platforms – such as Usenet, BBSs, and the staterun Videotex service (which also featured chat functions)[81] – could yield further insights, especially beyond the German-speaking part of Switzerland that this essay primarily addresses.

At this point, I would like to highlight the fundamentally bottomup nature not only of mailboxes and BBSs, but of the earliest microcomputers themselves – shaped by countercultural movements and a grassroots struggle for technological access. As computer historian Paul Ceruzzi observed:

> "The social forces driving AOL and the bulletin boards were the ancestors of the forces driving Facebook, Twitter, and similar programs in the twenty-first century. As with the invention of the personal computer itself, these forces drove networking from the bottom up, while privileged military and academic agencies drove networking from the top down. Today's world of networked computing represents a collision of the two."[82]

In *The Modem World*, Kevin Driscoll describes an enduring model for virtual, shared spaces – one that genuinely pursues decentralized communication rather than replicating data monopolies. Indeed, the radical decentralization that once defined BBS networks, with their thousands of independent nodes, lives on in today's federated platforms like Mastodon and the Fediverse. While no system is immune to the spread of problematic content, this structure prevents any single actor from controlling the entire network.

Ivo Furman's study of Turkish BBS culture underscores another key point: alternative usages, technological "workarounds", often arise where resources or access are scarce.[83] Indeed, as shown in this essay, mailboxes and their organizing principles stand as a prime historical example of a grassroots initiative that took root in private spaces – bedrooms, basements, and garages – and from there extended into virtual, economic, and political realms, among others. This history challenges purely technologicaldeterministic narratives and the simplistic dichotomy of technology versus society.

In an era defined by heated debates over net culture, free speech, and the unchecked power of artificial intelligence, the story of BBSs offers a vital counterpoint: we are not passive victims of overwhelming technologies. As communities, we remain fully capable of shaping these platforms – and must continuously renegotiate how we interact with them.

81 Luca Thanei, "Videotex." https://blog.nationalmuseum.ch/2020/12/videotex/.
82 Paul E. Ceruzzi, *Computing: A Concise History* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2012), 154.
83 Ivo Furman, Ivo. "Studying the influence of Bulletin Board System technologies on the communication culture of pre-internet Turkish-speaking online communities: a socio-technical approach." *New Perspectives on Turkey* 53 (2015): 37–69, https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2015.18.

Stefanie Bräuer

Screen Cultures in Translocal Networks around 1995

Interview with Barbara Strebel

SB Welcome, Barbara, to the Critical Media Lab. I'm happy that you could make the time this afternoon. To start our conversation, I'd like you to introduce yourself – thank you.[1]

BS My name is Barbara Strebel. I am here because I am a founder of a community network that was originally initiated by artists, I was the system operator of a bulletin board system (BBS) which was part of *THE THING* network in 1994. I have a transatlantic background, trilingual, studied social anthropology. My parents went as academics for research to the United States, back and forth. I integrated into different cultures. My family is based in Basel, and my great grandmother had a bookstore in the 1920s. I think there is some correlation between seeking knowledge and making access possible and creating infrastructure for knowledge exchange that's somehow inherent in my family background. So, my degree from the University of Michigan was not accepted in Basel, and I decided to stop cultural anthropology and do visual anthropology. And there was a pioneering *Videofachklasse* in Basel, *Audiovisuelle Gestaltung*.[2] We were still doing analog editing, VHS. Digital was just emerging.

SB When did you graduate from the Videofachklasse?

BS 1992, although it wasn't a degree then. I left video, because I didn't want to do editing in dark rooms and showing my videos at festivals, in dark rooms. I started computing – telecommunication was important for my generation. Beyond just telephone or video, computer networks became *the* innovation. Also, I was working at the time. I worked as part of a research project right across the street from the *Videofachklasse* at CIBA-Geigy. Because of my background with languages and anthropology, I ended up in a group focusing on tropical medicine, which included diseases such as river blindness and malaria. I was a data typist. I learned how to spend 8 hours in front of a computer. I was not scared of computers; I had the endurance of computing. I wanted to liberate myself.

SB What was *THEswissTHING* in the beginning?

BS It was a computer in my room that was hooked up to the telephone. I bought a secondhand computer – computers were expensive at the time. I got a modem from Wolfgang Staehle. This connection goes back to 1988: Back then I had worked in New York in a gallery. I was very mobile in New York. As a young

1 This is an abridged and edited version of an interview with Barbara Strebel that took place in Basel on May 30, 2024, see https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/ink/detail/zotero2-6050652.G96F9Q6E (last accessed 3 July 2025). This and all following footnotes were added by Stefanie Bräuer.

2 The video class *Fachklasse Audiovisuelle Gestaltung* was founded by René Pulfer and Enrique Fontanilles in 1985. Urs Berger and Reinhard Manz, "Die Videogenossenschaft Basel (VGB) und point de vue," in *Filmfrontal. Das unabhängige Film- und Videoschaffen der 1970er- Und 1980er-Jahre in Basel*, exh. cat. Kunsthalle Basel, ed. Urs Berger et al. (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Verlag, 2010), 137.

26-year-old, you could enter different cultural groups. I was on the Upper East Side. I was on the Lower East Side, I was at the Rockefellers delivering artworks, I was in the Tribeca area when it wasn't Tribeca and there was a gallery there on White Street. *THE THING* was started by Wolfgang Staehle on White Street inside the Newburg Gallery. Wolfgang was a German artist who went back and forth between New York, Art Köln and Art Basel. And I felt kind of, yeah, this is right. I felt comfortable with these people in Tribeca. We would meet at Art Basel. He's a media artist. Obviously, I was interested in new technology and video. And so one day he told me that they're doing this funny thing in his basement and it's called *THE THING*. And I was like, well, what is that? It's something. It's nothing. It's anything. We don't know where it's going. So through the informal friendships and meetings such as Art Basel …. Hospitality was important, I always had a summer party because it's my birthday during Art Basel and everyone would love to come and sit in a garden and be out of the whole hustle and bustle. I had this niche where John Armleder would come and gallerists like Anthony Reynolds who represented Steve McQueen and Mark Wallinger. These are all people that were politically engaged also, making social public statements within the art world. Anyway, it was great to be able to be a host. And that's also how probably the trust and the sharing began.

This diagram shows the initial BBS, FidoNet node, how this was probably explained to me in 1994 when I went to Art Köln **FIG. 1**. Art Köln was the meeting place in November 1994, and this was one of the first times that we met with the other nodes. Otherwise, it was just my contact with Wolfgang. And then I had this amazingly complicated manual, TBBS was the name of the software. So this is kind of how the protocol would look: 42 : 1001 in New York. That's like the first node of the FidoNet which transfered packets every 24 hours to Düsseldorf. This was Jörg Sasse. And then *THE THING Cologne* started afterwards, that was Michael Krome of Schipper & Krome Galerie. Berlin – Ulf Schleth. And Vienna, that was Helmut Mark and Max Kossatz. These are all artists that wanted to have an informal discussion on a bulletin board system and do pranks and jokes and have banter. It was fun. It was like going to a bar.

And then I had the fifth node. I wanted to find colleagues in Switzerland, and I went to Zurich and obviously to Paranoia City, which published Hans Widmer's *bolo'bolo*, a book about communal living. Also, I went to the Shedhalle and I thought that it would be an obvious partner. And their response was: no computers. I don't know what it was. In Switzerland, there was the *Fichenaffäre*, or Secret files affair; people had cold feet about computers. There was a need to Do-it-yourself, DIY. And it was not easy. The BBS manual was very difficult. It was 300 pages. It was cryptic. But I think it was through the other nodes that I got help, through *THE THING Vienna*. Bulletin board systems were something that happened in the eighties and nineties that came out of informal networks that were from node to node. You still had to have a

network of trust. You'd have to be responsible and maintain and moderate it. So I was a system administrator of the bulletin board system.

SB Which situation did you find in Basel when launching the physical space of *THEswissTHING* in 1995 – which infrastructures did you help create?

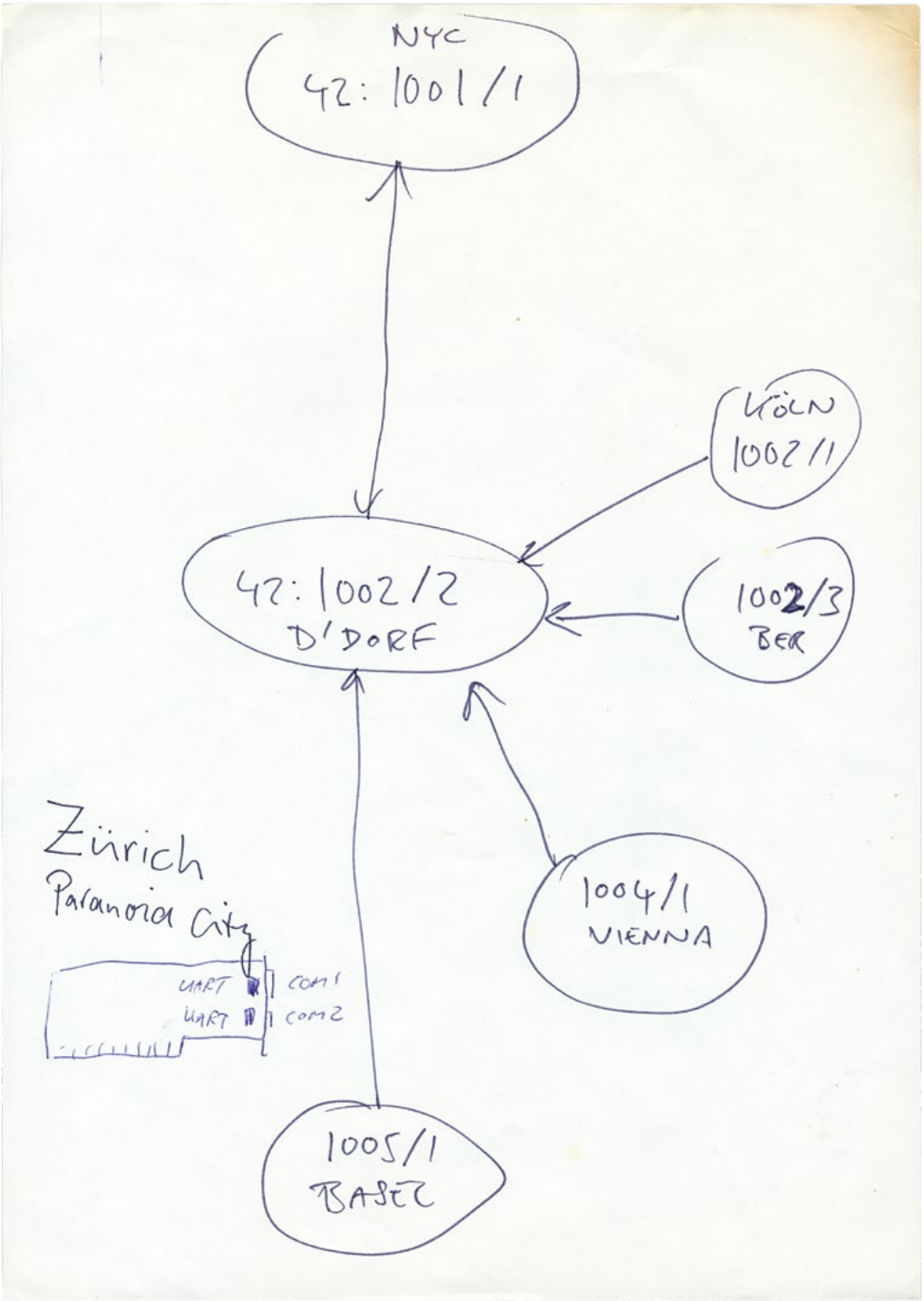
BS All of this was at a moment of transition, FidoNet was just at the end. In 1995, TCP-IP which was a new protocol, came along, and that's when the Internet really started to burst. This new system was much more horizontal and so it was the end of bulletin board systems and then certain nodes of *THE THING* decided to become Internet service providers. *THE THING* in Frankfurt was very active but then decided to opt out. That was Andreas Kallfelz. And *THE THING* Berlin stopped because there were other networks that were more popular. Someone at work came up to me, we started a GmbH. You'd have to become an Internet service provider to get the Internet. Only *SWITCH* could do that at the *Rechenzentrum*, the data center at the University of Basel. And so I did the content and created the public space. In the basement there was the server. You have to get a computer and a modem and then the computer needs a table, and you need a room and you need the connection and they had to drill up the street from the data center and get a generator in case of energy drop-outs. It took weeks and months and then finally on the 12th of May 1995, we could open at St. Johanns-Vorstadt **FIG. 2**.

SB What was the space at St. Johanns-Vorstadt like?

BS In the old town, right around the corner from the university and from the Predigerkirche, across the street from where Froben had his printing press and where the works of Erasmus and Thomas More's *Utopia* were printed. It was kind of an interesting location with a lot of history. It was on the tram line. So there was a lot of circulation, and it was central. And for the opening, you'd have to actually send stamped paper copies to people's houses. The street level was important. The space was an old shop, quite narrow, wood, two levels, staircase, and then a view on the Rhine. I had special tables made because it was a narrow, awkward space and a normal kitchen table wouldn't have worked. These special tables I could organize in a V- and L-shape. The chairs were red, the tables were wood, and the computers were just big Macs **FIG. 3A-B**.

SB Who got together at St. Johanns-Vorstadt?

BS People came from the university. There were a lot of journalists. People who passed by. Everyone was kind of curious, what is this thing? Cultural workers, graphic designers. You could log into the bulletin board system, but you could also have Internet access. A lot of maintenance was required to



1 **Tech concept network overview, analog note, original, 1994, Barbara Strebel archives/*THEswissTHING*, A03.01.**

2 Flyer for the opening at St. Johanns-Vorstadt 18 on May 12, 1995, printed matter, 1995, Barbara Strebel archives/*THEswissTHING*, A01.06.

THE swiss THING

THE swiss THING schafft einen öffentlichen Raum für alle, die den elektronischen Puls der digitalen Kultur ertasten wollen. Es vernetzt die Schweiz mit dem internationalen Computernetzwerk THE THING.

KünstlerInnen, AutorInnen und Publikum finden den Einstieg in die weltweite Zirkulation von Bildern, Texten und Tönen, in die sich neu entwickelnden Formen privater und öffentlicher Kommunikation.

THE swiss THING beteiligt sich konzeptuell sowie technisch an Produktionen und Publikationen auf dem Netz. Es steht als Ort der Recherche und der Diskussion für Projekte offen.

Wie funktioniert THE swiss THING?

THE swiss THING ist sowohl ein virtueller Raum auf dem Netz, als auch ein konkretes Lokal mit öffentlichen Computerterminals, die @LOUNGE und ein Büro.

Über die normale Telephonleitung kann sich jeder mit einem Computer via Modem in den kollektiven Datenraum von THE swiss THING einwählen: und schon stehen alle Türen offen. Eine Vielzahl von internationalen Foren lassen die BenutzerInnen an Diskussionen, Symposien und Ausstellungen interaktiv teilnehmen. Auch ein breites Angebot vom lokalen Inhalten findet hier seinen Platz.

Internet:

Selbstverständlich bietet THE Swiss THING auch Zugang zum gesamten Internet für alle an. Über eine äusserst benutzerfreundliche Oberfläche ist der Einstieg ins Netz einfach und schnell. Die Software wird in verschiedenen Sprachen angeboten.

E-mail mit privater Adresse
NetNews
WorldWideWeb
Telnet/FTP/Gopher

@LOUNGE

Für Interessierte ohne eigenen Computer steht die @LOUNGE offen. Hier laden Terminals zur spielerischen Entdeckung der Netzwelten ein und hier werden Einführungskurse in Computernetzwerke gegeben, für alle, die im virtuellen Raum nicht den Boden unter den Füssen verlieren wollen.

Die @LOUNGE ist auch ein Ort der Recherche und des Austauschs interessierter Gruppen.

Die @LOUNGE ist geöffnet:
DI-FR 13-20 Uhr
SA 13-17 Uhr

Preise:*

Anschlüsse (privat):	
THINGNET	30.-/Monat
THINGNET/INTERNET I (Email/NetNews)	55.-/Monat
THINGNET/INTERNET II (Email/NetNews/Gopher/ WWW/FTP/Telnet)	75.-/Monat

@LOUNGE:	
THE THING Users	10.-/Std.
BesucherInnen	20.-/Std.

*Stand Mai 95, Änderungen vorbehalten

THE THING
St.Johanns-Vorstadt 18
CH-4056 Basel
tel 061-262'08'30
fax 061-262'08'31
modem 061-262'08'32

THE THING

Art & Communication International

THE THING ist ein internationales Computernetzwerk für Kultur. 1991 gegründet, hat es zum Ziel, neue Formen der künstlerischen und kulturellen Kommunikation, Produktion und Distribution zu erforschen und zu realisieren. Im Vordergrund steht nicht die Technik, sondern der kulturelle Kontext ihrer Anwendung. THE THING ist in einem dynamischen Prozess, dessen Richtung nicht festgelegt ist, sondern durch die Interaktion aller Beteiligten bestimmt wird.

Was bietet THE THING an?

THE THING umfasst ein weites Spektrum digitaler Kultur: Wechselnde Foren zu aktuellen Themen der Kultur, Symposien, Ausstellungen im virtuellen Raum, Projektentwicklungen, Archive (Text, Ton, Bild) und elektronische Zeitschriften.

An wen wendet sich THE THING?

THE THING wird getragen von Leuten aus allen Bereichen der Kultur: KünstlerInnen, AutorInnen, VeranstalterInnen, StudentInnen, JournalistInnen und anderen Interessierten. Es wendet sich an alle, Individuen wie Institutionen, die an den Neuerungen der Kultur und ihren Veränderungen durch die technologische Entwicklung interessiert sind.

Wie funktioniert THE THING?

THE THING ist ein internationales System von vernetzten Mailboxen (Thingnet). Eine Mailbox ist ein Computer, der über die normale Telephonleitung von anderen Computern angewählt werden kann. Die Mailbox bildet einen kollektiven Datenraum, in dem alle BenutzerInnen Nachrichten lesen und hinterlassen können. In diesem Raum gibt es öffentliche und private Bereiche.

From THE THING World Wide Web Site, New York:

"THE THING promotes a wide ranging dialogue and exchange of information among artists and other professionals and seeks to encourage and provide a forum for the free expression and development of new ideas and theoretical discourse within its diverse membership. THE THING is many things to different people, ... the extent of its activities grows in proportion to personal interactivety with it."

Knotenpunkte von THE THING:

N.Y.C.
Köln
Düsseldorf
Frankfurt
Hamburg
Berlin
Wien
Stockholm
Basel
Moskau
Amsterdam

3 Brochure, *THEswissTHING*, printed matter, 1995, Barbara Strebel archives/*THEswissTHING*, A01.08.

4 Excerpt from the program of *Welcome to the Wired World: Ars Electronica 95,* Linz, 1995, printed matter, Barbara Strebel archives/*THEswissTHING*, A13.01.

do both. And I was teaching people just how to navigate. There was a lack of general knowledge. There were so many demands from people and different expectations. I was entertaining a lot of press, and festivals were calling and asking, and I gave talks at the Kaserne and elsewhere and did a lot of workshops. I was invited to the *Ars Electronica* in June, "Welcome to the Wired World," **FIG. 4** which was very important for me. And that is where I actually met all of the people from *De Digitale Stad Amsterdam*, from the *Internationale Stadt Berlin*. I met Geert Lovink. Derrick de Kerckhove was a speaker. Mark Tribe, the founder of Rhizome, associated with *THE THING*. Wolfgang Staehle had *Der Stand der Dinge* at the Ars Electronica, a joking reference to the Fischli and Weiss piece *Der Lauf der Dinge*, and then everyone met there. I had a community, and I wasn't alone trying to explain the Internet to everyone but had found my common peers.

SB What was the *L@den* in the beginning and what was the physical space like?

BS The *L@den* was on the other side in Kleinbasel, on the Bläsiring, and there was a small neighborhood grocery store there that was vacant. And around the corner there was an emerging media collective as called *0.1 Media Lab*.[3] It consisted of a video artist, audio, sound designers, and CD-ROM makers. And we thought about affiliating with them, to create a loose association. So I moved in with *THEswissTHING* in 1995. We got long aluminum tables from the exhibition "Hello_World" at the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich. We got Internet access through Datacomm. We had six computers, sponsored at the time by Ingeno. The *L@den* was on the street level, a large 200 square meter space with storefront windows.

SB Who came to the *L@den*?

Kleinbasel had a totally different groove from Grossbasel. The kids would be running around in the garden and people would go shopping and you'd have the odd person walking by with their baby stroller and saying, "This is interesting." Also, it was a bit precarious. Particularly in Switzerland it was important to have a public space. I think Eastern Europe was very progressive towards digitalization and they were way ahead of us. In Switzerland there were certain people who knew, kind of computer nerds, but it wasn't socially distributed and politically supported. Also, a lot of people thought the Internet was purely commercial, while other people thought it was a community network. There was a lack of understanding. Therefore, it was very important to have a public space. And the art school teachers decided that they would give workshops.

3 The journalist Ralf Michel described the media lab as an audiovisual workshop, which consisted of a post-production facility with digital video and audio editing stations. See Ralf Michel, "Surf'n Switzerland: Besuch in Drei Internetcafés in Bern, Basel und Zürich," *Hochparterre* 8, no. 10 (1995): 27.

SB Who frequented the workshops?

BS The technical HTML workshops were usually attended by people who were really at the forefront of understanding that there was a technology and skills to be learned. One teacher was Catherine Walthard, she's now teaching at Hyperwerk. There was Reinhard Storz. He was a teacher of theory, and then there was Robert Piencikowski from the Paul Sacher Foundation. You know, odd people. People were coming from music theory and from philosophy. At one point, I went to Tactical Media at Next 5 Minutes in Amsterdam. Then there was *Metaforum* in Budapest; Geert Lovink and Diana McCarty were the ones who got us all together. And so I was able to invite them to Basel to give workshops – like Walter van der Cruijsen, who started desk.nl and who was part of *THE THING* in Amsterdam, and Max Kossatz. And they gave a workshop in May 1996 on HTML, and people came to that workshop. We were doing pragmatic workshops. And Geert Lovink came with his *BILWET Agency*. And then Eva Grubinger, she created a net bikini and made patterns available. How do you make a bikini on the Internet? It was a bit cheeky and feminist, and her project was called *C@C*, *Computer Aided Curating*. And Gereon Schmitz, he was part of the *Internationale Stadt* with Joachim Blank. The group *HILUS* came from Vienna, that was Herwig Turk and Gebhard Sengmüller and Eva Wohlgemuth.[4] They're still active as artists. It was great. I mean, Basel is basically in the middle of Europe. In fact, a lot of it came from geographically being in the center of Europe and being able to adapt to different schedules. And then you'd have to find a place where people could spend the night. That was the hard part because we didn't have a budget for that. All of this was on a shoestring **FIG. 5** **FIG. 6**.

SB Please describe your own role regarding *THEswissTHING* and the *L@den*. Do you describe your practice as art or as a curatorial practice?

BS I don't know how to define curatorial. I always associate that with a white cube space. I created infrastructure, made connections, created links. I think that's really important – to create links and to do it all in a social way. I see myself as an idealist, facilitator, enabler, festival maker, activist. I went from wanting to be an artist to becoming an Internet activist. *Metaforum* in Budapest was important, that's where you would meet all the radicals, such as Heath Bunting, the Internet activists and artists. So I moved from the art crowd to the activists. But many people were doing both at the same time. For example, Heath Bunting, who was a founder of *cybercafe.org*, then he started *Irational* and he worked in this place called *Backspace* in London, which was sponsored by a company that was doing web design and streaming.

4 The author Villö Huszai gives a comprehensive overview over the different activities in 1995 and 1996. See Villö Huszai, "Basels Ambulanter Salon," *Du. Die Zeitschrift der Kultur*, no. 711 (November 2000): 21–3.

THE THING

Konferenzen / Festivals mit Beteiligung von TT.ch (B. Strebel)

- **The next Five minutes:** Tactical Media, Amsterdam & Rotterdam 18. - 21. Jan. 96
- **Metaforum II:** No Borders, Budapest 8. - 10. Okt. 95
- **Ars Electronica:** Brucknerhaus, Linz 20. - 23. Juni 95
- **THE THING** trifftsich in Wien: TTNYC-TTAT-TTCH Feb. 95
- **THE THING** Treffen, ART Köln: NYC, Köln, Düsseldorf, Wien, Berlin u.a. Nov. 94

Vortragsreihe zu Projekten im Bereich digitaler Medien beim TT.ch, Basel

- **Walter von der Cruijsen**: Desk.nl, ZKM und **Max Kossatz**: TT vienna, HILUS 28 Mai 96
- **Geert Lovink:** Agentur Bilwet, Mediamatics, "Der DatenDandy", "Medien Archiv" 23. Feb. 96
  Konferenz: Next 5 Minutes, A'dam; Interface 3; Metaforum I/II, Budapest; Memesis, Ars Electronica
- **Eva Grubinger:** C@C, computer aided curating, Berlin/ Köln 10. Dez. 95
- **Gereon Schmitz:** Internationale Stadt, Berlin; Int'l City Federation 12. Nov. 95
- **Wolfgang Staehle:** The Thing, New York 9. Nov. 95

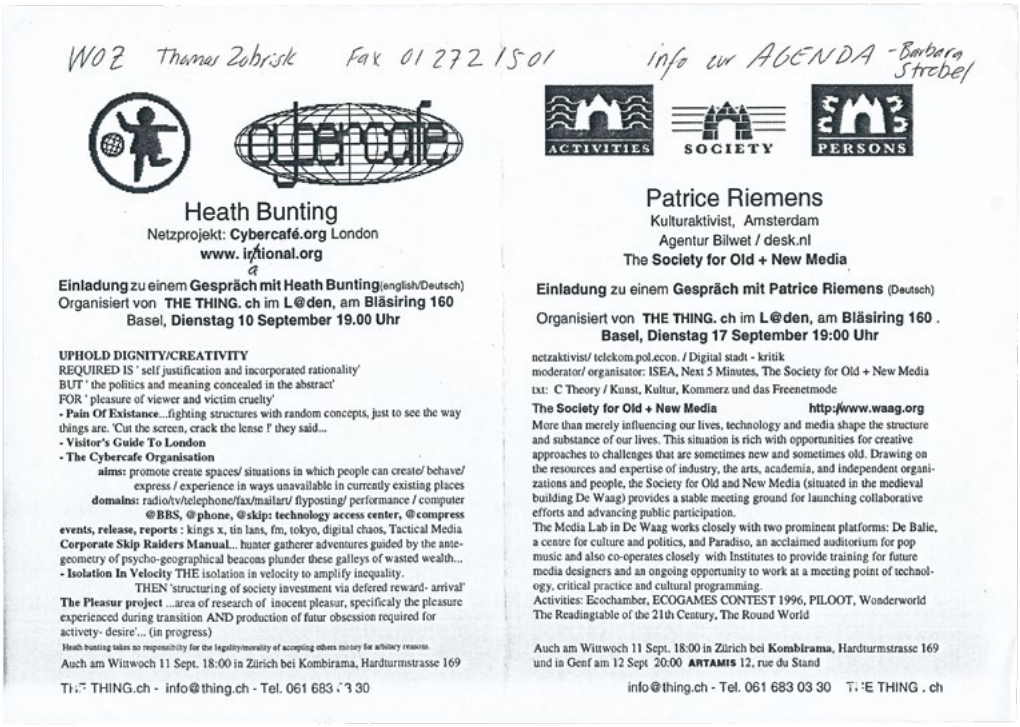
Vorgesehene Projekte

- **mini multi media** Redaktion: *rest* ab Aug. 96
  Edition kleiner Multimediawerke von KünstlerInnen, SchriftstellerInnen und MusikerInnen
- **Private Investigation** Kooperation mit des Ausstellungszyklus "Private Investigation" Aug 96
  von der Filiale Basel
- **Telecom Netzpolitik,** Diskussion, mit-organization: F. Truniger/ B.Strebel
  VIPER, International Film und Vieo Festival, Luzern 19. - 25. Okt. 96
- **INBETWEEN** ca. Nov. 96
  Ausstellung/Internet Installation: I. Kleiterp, Bildhauerei, A'dam/ P. Wenger, Video, Basel
  in Kollaboration mit: Calc, Spain/ Scopo, Basel / The Thing.nl/ch
- Künstlergruppen-Projekte am Internet: **ALMA**, **YACH,** Zürich Herbst 96
- **P.O.BOX**, Internationales Austellungssystem ab 1997 - 2000
  Kunstaustellungen im Modell (Box): mobiler Museumsraum. 15 Städte/ 90 KünstlerInnen Texte,Video,
  Klangarbeiten etc. parallel am Netz. Coproduction S. Boisserée/J. Mutzenberg (GE)

- **CNS, Center for Networking Strategies** ab Hebst 1996
  CNS ist eine unabhängige, im Internet angesiedelte Organisation. Ziel ist es im Zukunftsmarkt Telekommunikation / Vernetzung Synergien sowohl im oekonomischen, als auch kulturellen Bereich auf internationaler Ebene zu erzeugen. Dieser Ansatz spiegelt sich in der Trägerschaft von CNS wieder: Fünf Organisationen aus fünf Ländern = desk.nl,Amsterdam- Internationale Stadt, Berlin THE THING, Basel - New York - Wien). Die Verangenheit der Netzaktivitäten hat gezeigt, dass in unterschiedlichen Ländern nahezu zeitgleich ähnliche Konzepte und Projekte entwickeltwerden. CNS ist eine Plattform, über die zeitgemässe Strategien im Bereich des anspruchsvollen "contentprovidings" durch intensives Kollaborieren innovativer und effektiver als zuvor gestaltet werden sollen.

THE THING.ch Bläsiring 160 4057 Basel - CH Tel. +41-61-683 03 30 e-mail: info@thing.ch

5 Overview projects and collaborations, 1996, printed matter, Barbara Strebel archives/*THEswissTHING*, A01.16.



WOZ Thomas Zobrist Fax 01 272 1501 info zur AGENDA - Barbara Strebel

ACTIVITIES SOCIETY PERSONS

Heath Bunting

Netzprojekt: **Cybercafé.org** London
www. irational.org

Einladung zu einem **Gespräch mit Heath Bunting**(english/Deutsch)
Organisiert von **THE THING. ch** im **L@den**, am **Bläsiring 160**
Basel, **Dienstag 10 September 19.00 Uhr**

UPHOLD DIGNITY/CREATIVITY
REQUIRED IS ' self justification and incorporated rationality'
BUT ' the politics and meaning concealed in the abstract'
FOR ' pleasure of viewer and victim cruelty'
- Pain Of Existance...fighting structures with random concepts, just to see the way things are. 'Cut the screen, crack the lense !' they said...
- Visitor's Guide To London
- The Cybercafe Organisation
aims: promote create spaces/ situations in which people can create/ behave/ express / experience in ways unavailable in currently existing places
domains: radio/tv/telephone/fax/mailart/ flyposting/ performance / computer **@BBS, @phone, @skip: technology access center, @compress**
events, release, reports : kings x, tin lans, fm, tokyo, digital chaos, Tactical Media
Corporate Skip Raiders Manual... hunter gatherer adventures guided by the ante-geometry of psycho-geographical beacons plunder these galleys of wasted wealth...
- Isolation In Velocity THE isolation in velocity to amplify inequality.
THEN 'structuring of society investment via defered reward- arrival'
The Pleasur project ...area of research of inocent pleasur, specificaly the pleasure experienced during transition AND production of futur obsession required for activety- desire'... (in progress)
Heath bunting takes no responsibility for the legality/morality of accepting others money for arbitary reasons.
Auch am Wittwoch 11 Sept. 18:00 in Zürich bei Kombirama, Hardturmstrasse 169

THE THING.ch - info@thing.ch - Tel. 061 683 03 30

Patrice Riemens

Kulturaktivist, Amsterdam
Agentur Bilwet / desk.nl
The **Society for Old + New Media**

Einladung zu einem **Gespräch mit Patrice Riemens** (Deutsch)

Organisiert von **THE THING. ch** im **L@den**, am **Bläsiring 160** .
Basel, Dienstag 17 September 19:00 Uhr

netzaktivist/ telekom.pol.econ. / Digital stadt - kritik
moderator/ organisator: ISEA, Next 5 Minutes, The Society for Old + New Media
txt: C Theory / Kunst, Kultur, Kommerz und das Freenetmode

The Society for Old + New Media **http://www.waag.org**
More than merely influencing our lives, technology and media shape the structure and substance of our lives. This situation is rich with opportunities for creative approaches to challenges that are sometimes new and sometimes old. Drawing on the resources and expertise of industry, the arts, academia, and independent organizations and people, the Society for Old and New Media (situated in the medieval building De Waag) provides a stable meeting ground for launching collaborative efforts and advancing public participation.
The Media Lab in De Waag works closely with two prominent platforms: De Balie, a centre for culture and politics, and Paradiso, an acclaimed auditorium for pop music and also co-operates closely with Institutes to provide training for future media designers and an ongoing opportunity to work at a meeting point of technology, critical practice and cultural programming.
Activities: Ecochamber, ECOGAMES CONTEST 1996, PILOOT, Wonderworld
The Readingtable of the 21th Century, The Round World

Auch am Wittwoch 11 Sept. 18:00 in Zürich bei **Kombirama**, Hardturmstrasse 169
und in Genf am 12 Sept 20:00 **ARTAMIS** 12, rue du Stand

info@thing.ch - Tel. 061 683 03 30 THE THING . ch

6 Heath Bunting/Patrice Riemens (Talks at the *L@den*), 1996, printed matter, Barbara Strebel archives/ *THEswissTHING*, A04.15.

SB Were there any gender-specific tasks? Can you tell us more about the involvement of women, what roles they had.

BS In Basel, there was a lot of sexism. There were no women, with few exceptions – Catherine Walthard, for example, who made CD-ROMS. I was very appreciated internationally as being one of the few women involved. They were so delighted, and they encouraged me a lot. I was kind of a hostess, because I moved many times in my life, almost every two years I was somewhere else. I was adapting often and speaking different languages and not being just in my little niche .... In the early 90s I had responsibilities, and I was running around and doing workshops at the same time. I guess this multitasking was important – that I was able to do different things and to create infrastructure and create a nice ambiance. I got a coffee machine sponsored. I was very happy about that. I got the tables. The guys, they didn't do that.

SB I'm curious about net criticism,[5] the critique of the Internet and developing alternatives. What role did that play in your work?

BS Well, that's what it was all about. It was about starting with something that was totally open source and self-organized, to avoid big monopolies. There was no Adobe, there was no Netscape, there was no Steve Jobs. Net criticism was the subtitle of the *Medien Zentralkomitee* proceedings number two of Nettime.[6] Nettime was one of the major online meeting hubs where people contributed and posted and exchanged ideas across Europe. Geert Lovink was one of the founders of Nettime with Pit Schultz. And that's where I met activists and got an attitude. I met Timothy Druckrey, Mark Dery, Richard Stahlman, I met the hacktivists from Amsterdam. There was an aspiration to make one's own network that was not based on *WIRED* magazine. There was a very strong sentiment against *WIRED* magazine which kind of had an information monopoly.[7] I was invited to London for this talk called *Anti with E*, which was then one of these big Nettime kind of meetings with Matthew Fuller. Heath Bunting had organized it. When I went to London, I shared my ticket with *Artamis* and someone named Villö Huszai who wrote about my network and my work. *Artamis* was a group in Geneva, which was also parallelly providing access and workspaces for young artists. They had this squat that was legalized later. Patrice Riemens who was one of the founders of the *De Waag Center for Old and New Media* in Amsterdam, went to Geneva and talked about the experience with pirate radio

5 For a detailed investigation of net criticism around 1995 with a focus on the net scene in Vienna, see Clemens Apprich and Felix Stalder, eds., *Vergessene Zukunft. Radikale Netzkulturen in Europa* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012).

6 Geert Lovink and Pit Schultz, eds., *Net Criticism* (ZK Proceedings, 1996), https://nettime.org/nettime/DOCS/1/toc.html (last accessed 1 July 2025).

7 Clemens Apprich contextualizes the rejection of *WIRED* magazine as a shared attitude amongst actors of net culture particularly in Europe who deployed networked communication technologies for creating alternative publics aside from mass media, but also aside from a California-centered, techno-liberalist discourse driven by *WIRED*. Clemens Apprich, *Vernetzt – Zur Entstehung der Netzwerkgesellschaft*, Digitale Gesellschaft 8 (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 43, https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839430453.

in Amsterdam, and they were excited. A lot of this was about navigating new grounds and doing something positive and not getting in trouble for doing pirate radio or for having an Internet cafe.

SB Which role did open source play in this context?

BS The Internet is based on the open-source movement. I was questioning the fundamentals of computer programs, that they were already limiting in the options they offered. Everyone wanted to use as much open source as possible, low end, low tech – making art without using proprietary software and all of those expensive programs. Getting second-hand computers. You needed to share for that. I would go to people's houses and configure modems and give them a diskette. I made interfaces. I was learning by doing, for example, by creating the logo and the interface for *THEswissTHING* together with Martin Thüring.

SB How did the collaboration within your network happen?

BS Based on friendship and trust and personally knowing each other. I think in my generation, internationalism became doable, and mobility was doable. I grew up in a transatlantic family situation. People were moving. And I think internationalism and the mobility of the nineties were a joyful celebration of freedom. And there was a *Freiraum*.

SB I think that's a wonderful note to end on. Thank you, Barbara.

Providing Access

Tabea Lurk

Permanence as a Driver for Access

On the Transfer, Acquisition, and Consolidation of the Digital Holdings of the Video-Genossenschaft Basel as a Resource for the Public, Research, and Teaching

Around 2020, *Point de vue*, the successor organization of the *Video-Genossenschaft Basel* (Video Cooperative Basel, here referred to as *VGB*), decided to make a substantial selection of 92 videotapes permanently, and as freely as possible, accessible online. The now digitized works of art and video culture date from its founding in 1979 to 1998. As a partner and platform for continuing online access, it selected the Mediathek at the Academy of Art and Design Basel (HGK) of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW).[1] The collection is now embedded in the estate *Videonetzwerke*, like the underlying research project.[2] Here, further contextualizing materials are continuously being added, such as video interviews With regard to the *Videonetzwerke* collection and the *VGB* holdings, for example, the interviews, which Piet Esch and Stefanie Bräuer conducted with former participants of *VGB* and their circles, and newly emerging resources, e.g., from teaching, that deal with this collection. This text presents the perspective of the Medithek on the collection, the project, and the questions that typically arise in the context of collection transfers and acquisitions.

Because such transfer processes – particularly in the field of contemporary art and culture – can hardly be viewed independently of those affected,[3] the text also considers multiple viewpoints. This represents the dynamics between the various interests of data owners, funding bodies, and the public,[4] as well as the interests of videographic actors and audiences, of research and education, and of different generations, systems, and contexts. At the same time, the *VGB* collection serves to illustrate how the achievements of historical video cultures – discussed in this volume through the lens of "screen cultures". Focusing on the future, the text considers, what happens, when works of art that were created from a subcultural, anti-institutional perspective – with the explicit aim of undermining hierarchies and power structures and fostering grassroots democratic permeability – are in the end, in fact, taken over by collecting, memory-preserving institutions. To explore this, the text presents three perspectives.

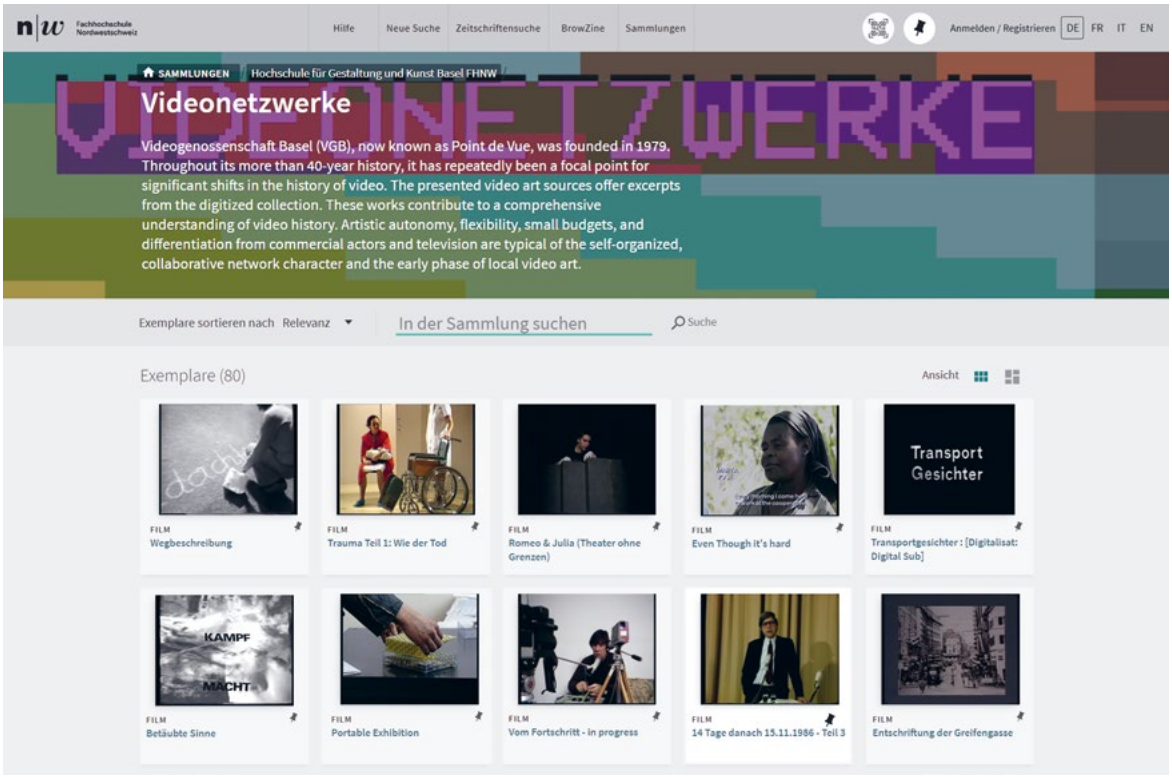
Chapter One addresses the transformation of historical screen cultures from an archival perspective. Aspects related to collecting and consolidation are highlighted – rather than the often-discussed socio-cultural implications. The focus of the text is on the organizational frameworks surrounding the *VGB* collection of the *Videonetzwerke estate*. With the transfer to the Mediathek, an archival stakeholder takes the place of the former cooperative practice and production community and, in doing so, renders the proximity to surrounding

1 https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/.

2 The *VGB* estate is available online at https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/collection/videonetzwerke. The physical tape archive is still held at *point de vue* (https://www.pointdevue.ch/de).

3 Since many videographers (copyright) and filmed individuals (privacy rights, possibly related rights) are still alive and/or use and viewing contexts remain active, various matters need to be clarified by those responsible before any content is published online. Consent to publication (rights of (re)use), in particular, frequently depends on communication with and the memory culture of the rights holders.

4 Funders and sponsors, such as cantonal governments (university performance mandates), as well as cultural and patronage actors, exert influence through statutes, institutional or funding-related guidelines. Increasingly, they stipulate that sponsored outcomes must be made freely accessible to the general public.



1 Screenshot view of the collection of *Videonetzwerke* (video networks) in the swisscovery FHNW library catalog.

collections visible. Through this contextualization, networks of friendship become visible – networks that connect the existing sources, the key figures responsible for the transfer, and the newly added *Videonetzwerke* collection, thus placing them on a broader foundation. The new digital environment stabilizes the cultural-historical, thematic, and personal narratives embedded in the works and in the relationships of the involved actors. In this way, the online publication counters gaps in memory.

Chapter Two centers on the balance between access and responsibility. It asks what happens when the viewing of these works of video art are no longer primarily steered and regulated by the creators themselves, as was the case in the early years. Instead, visibility is now organized by an institution that seeks to make the works as freely accessible as possible under the premise of scientific data management.[5]

The reciprocal relationship between video cultures and archival practices functions particularly well in the field of historical video and screen cultures, in part because many video (and video art) pioneers – often out of necessity – were highly technologically adept. The diversity of formats and the relative short lifespan of videotapes encouraged the development of their own storage, migration, and archiving structures.[6] On the other hand, the environment of scientific data management proves to be compatible because its processes are conceived cyclically,[7] with art-historical hierarchies in academic settings being replaced by production practices and the associated logics, demands, and, to some extent, creative freedoms of the artists. The research environment of the new custodian, the Mediathek, thus offers not only technical advantages and requirements for the sustainable operationalization of data but also introduces semantic, ethical, and cultural value discourses that resonate well with the original ethos of video and screen cultures.[8]

Chapter Three attempts to contextualize the preceding considerations and outlooks on the future. In doing so, the idea of archiving as a living practice takes center stage. Research data archives and collections such as the Mediathek are today expected not only to be publicly accessible but also to be capable of connecting to diverse publics that are not necessarily academic. Participation, inclusion, and the principles of open science again play an important role. This recalls the aims of early video and screen cultures, which likewise sought to appropriate not only aesthetic and technical, but also media and institutional spaces.[9] Possible ways of implementing the conceptual effects addressed in this context are particularly evident in the field of the

5 See the position and reflection paper of the Swiss National Science Foundation: *Research Infrastructures in Switzerland Reflection and discussion paper*, ed. SNSF Presiding Board (2023), Bern. Available online at: https://www.snf.ch/media/de/BIiJK4zZlEcq0xIU/SNSF-White-Paper-on-Research-Infrastructures.pdf.

6 Cf. the comments of Johannes Gfeller, who has followed and shaped the development of video (art) restoration from its tinkering beginnings in the late 1970s to its professionalization after the turn of the millennium: https://www.rebelvideo.ch/portraits/johannes-gfeller/. Also see the exhibition catalog Irene Schubiger et al. (eds.), *Schweizer Videokunst der 1970er und 1980er Jahre: Eine Rekonstruktion* (Geneva: JRP/Ringer, 2009).

7 https://forschungsdaten.info/themen/informieren-und-planen/datenlebenszyklus/.

8 Here one could think, for example, of the American journal *Radical Software* (1970–74): https://www.radicalsoftware.org/e/index.html.

9 https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

Mediathek's collections of performance art. As a field directly adjacent to historical video cultures in Basel, a short digression into this other collection segment is in order.

Overall, the topic thus spans a kind of triangle between the *VGB* as a historical actor in Basel's video and screen cultures, the Basel School of Design and later Academy of Art and Design (HGK) of FHNW, and its Mediathek as collecting institution. While the HGK appears here as a teaching, educational, and research institution, the Mediathek in this constellation assumes the role of managing the university's digital research data (data stewardship) and of fostering quality and continuity. Since all three entities are non-corporeal, the backgrounds and premises described may appear somewhat abstract. At the same time, this illustrates how structural considerations can lead to the implementation of specific workflows and forms of consolidation which, in turn, enable vibrant cultural practices and articulations – and, most importantly, remain oriented around the people, the actors, at their center.

Regarding current archival theory, it becomes evident that the still-rumbling archives (Wolfgang Ernst) are currently becoming more consciously aware of their (grassroots-) democratic origins. The liberalization of access and the continued rethinking of the archive beyond thresholds of access, toward society, participation, and inclusion re-establishes a kind of connectivity, which, is stabilized from the outside. This supports the cyclical transmission of values from one generation to the next, which fosters the tangible social need for a culture of remembrance as a living practice. If the now-online-accessible works of video art and -culture of the *VGB* – considered as individual works – take a back seat in this text compared to the other essays in this volume, this is not meant in an archive-centric sense. Rather, this distance may serve as a reminder that, for many video art works, various – often involuntary – technical tinkering had to occur before they arrived at the form in which they are perceived today.

SCREEN CULTURES IN TRANSITION

When reflecting on the nature of the historical networks of video art and screen cultures in Switzerland – or more specifically here in Basel – from today's perspective one is most likely to think of concepts such as networking, communal viewing, sharing, and participation. Hardware and know-how were jointly acquired, set up, shared, and knowledge about specific forms of use and production practices was passed on among one another. Knowledge and practice communities emerged. Societal organizational forms such as cooperatives and/or associations underscored then – as they do now – the

commitment to self-organized collectivity.[10] Applied more generally to the early days of video art, the concept of "seeing" encapsulated in the medium's name "video" (from Latin "*videre*") can thus also be understood as something shared, as a communicative strategy of providing something to see. In other words, "video" – "I see" – not only individualized from the perspective of the first-person singular, of the nerd or the viewer, but always also in the plural: as a collegial process, a collective practice and organization of events (performance/screening, broadcast), or cast into exhibitable work formats such as installations.

Conceptually, the video communities can therefore be understood as dialogical counterparts. Technically and in terms of content, they did possess a certain sense of mission, but especially in the case of artistic works, they often sought physical proximity, exchange, and collectivity.

COLLECTING AS AN EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL MEDIATION AND IDENTITY FORMATION

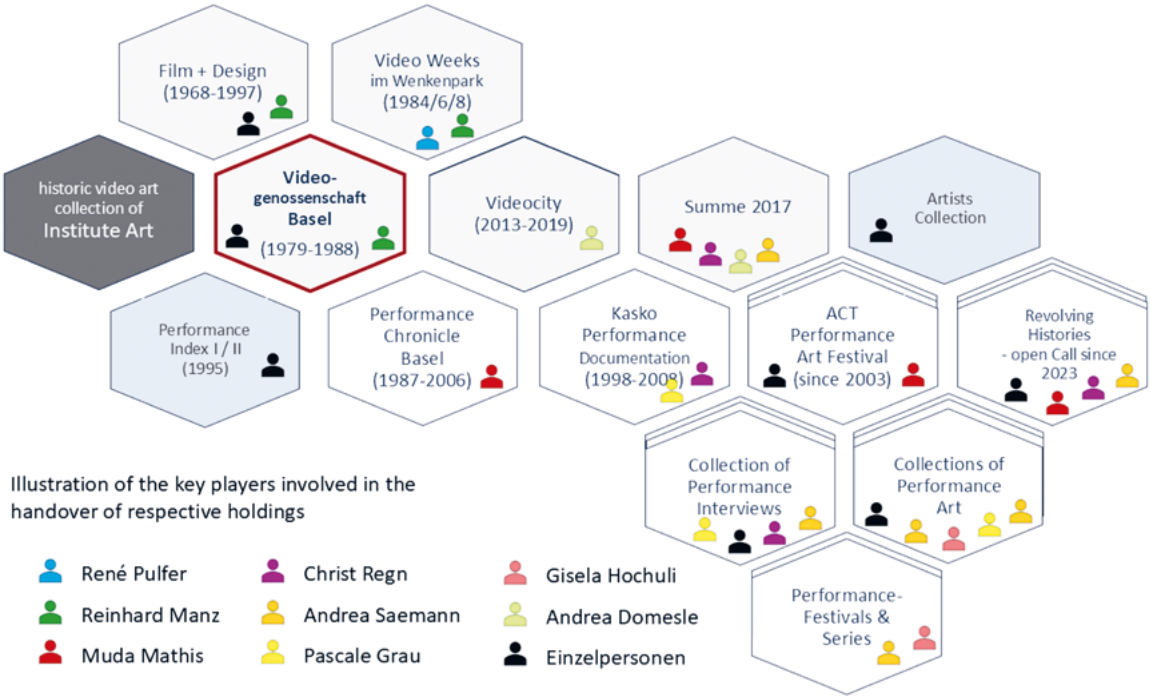
Looking at the collection history with a focus on key individuals underscores, on the one hand, the communal and collective nature: "collection" in Basel usually refers to a communal body of collected work, a kind of kaleidoscope of perspectives – though this should in no way diminish the actual efforts of the individuals here referred to as key figures. On the other hand, **FIG. 2** clearly shows that the collection of the *VGB* provides an important, previously missing puzzle piece in a gradually condensing and therefore changing image of Basel's videographic past.[11]

Communal viewing and discussion of the works of others as well as collecting activities have always also contributed to the identity formation of the respective groups. Whether as an effect of the then-new possibilities of copy (and zine) cultures, as a technical necessity against obsolescence, or as an anti-hierarchical practice of appropriation, the network-based collecting of early subcultural and artistic video actors has many facets.

Part of this history and culture is being preserved by the Mediathek in its video collections. As outlined following, René Pulfer, Reinhard Manz, and Muda Mathis play a decisive role in building up this collection.

10 Cf. Pablo Müller, "Ökonomien selbstorganisierter Kunstinitiativen. Zwischen pragmatischem Agieren und Handeln," in *Unabhängig, Prekär, Professionell. Künstlerische Selbstorganisation in Der Schweiz*, ed. Rachel Mader and Pablo Müller (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2023), pp. 173–91.

11 The collection history of museum-related and patronage actors, such as galleries – particularly Galerie Stampa – is not addressed here.



2 Schematic representation of the relationships between selected collections of the Mediathek. Collection clusters are identifiable. Behind the front tile are fragmented and smaller sub-collections.

RENÉ PULVER AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ACADEMIC COLLECTION OF VIDEO ART IN BASEL

It is hard to imagine the early artistic and design-oriented video communities in Basel without René Pulfer. As an artist and curator,[12] Pulfer was one of the pioneers of Swiss video art. Beginning in 1980, he organized film and video programs; in 1985, he established the video class at what was then the School of Applied Arts, before it was transferred to the Institut Kunst (today Institute Art, Gender, Nature) and eventually integrated into the Academy of Art and Design of FHNW. When the so called "Fachklasse" (degree course) in Audiovisual Art was still housed in the Baerwart school building by the Rhine (until 2014), Pulfer led the Institut Kunst and began collecting tapes of the internationally emerging video art for the university, making them accessible – alongside books – through the Institute's media library (Mediathek). In 2015, parts of the collection that already had been transferred from VHS to DVD were consolidated along with the other institute libraries at the Dreispitz campus and handed over to the new/old Mediathek. While the retention of the departmental name is still understood today as a historical legacy and a continuation of the institution's archival mission, the DVDs from René Pulfer's collecting efforts that were still readable at the time were directly digitized and made accessible internally within the university (via login) through a newly developed research and viewing system. Following the analog model, the resulting "Integrated Catalog" (InK 1.0) combined the digital art sources with the bibliographic references from the library's holdings of books, journals, and other media. Thus, from the very beginning of the Mediathek, curatorial, artistic, mediating, and scholarly contents have always seamlessly merged.

Even though different technological and legal framework conditions prevail today,[13] the defining aspects of the Basel video and media art scene have been preserved: the friendly relationships among its members, the combination of personal commitment and strategic networking – sometimes financial, sometimes institutional – the sharing of knowledge, and the networking (see below). In this context, alongside René Pulfer, Reinhard Manz must also be mentioned.

12 In the realm of curatorial work, René Pulfer's involvement in the video program of documenta 8 (1987) deserves particular mention.

13 Until 2019, this data could be accessed free of charge and freely as Open Data from Swissbib (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swissbib). When this source dried up due to licensing reasons with the transition to SLSP-AG, *InK 2.0* was launched (https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/ink). Although it is no longer allowed to index SLSP book holdings, it does include various other digital university sources as well as external digital media collections of the Mediathek, which can now be searched together. Currently, *InK* 3.0 is under development, optimized for artistic ePubs, research data, and educational resources. The digital special collections received so far by the Mediathek, with a clear reference to the topic of Screen Cultures, are listed here. For this development, see also the 2017 activity report of the initial years: https://doi.org/10.26041/fhnw-1302.

REINHARD MANZ AND THE POTENTIAL OF VIDEO ART AS A MEDIATOR AND NETWORKING INSTRUMENT

Reinhard Manz was an independent film and video pioneer. As critical observer, gifted networker, and a supportive instructor, in 1985, he was a founding member of the *Video-Genossenschaft Basel*, and served on the board of the cooperative for many years. Same in his position at the Academy of Art and Design Basel he was an active and initiative colleague, often quietly operating in the background. He was, among other things, a lecturer at the Institute of Visual Communication at the HGK (now Institute Digital Communication Environments). From Mediathek's point of vie he played a central role in the transfer of collections of early film- and video art, such as *Film + Design 1968–1997* (transferred in 2019),[14] VGBs Videonetzwerke (transferred in 2024), and *Videowochen im Wenkenpark 1984, 986, 1988* transferred in 2017/2018).[15] These projects and transfers were mainly possible thanks to many years of careful storage, cataloguing and preservation.

Reinhard Manz was involved in the development of all three collections from the outset. In 1984, 1986, and 1988, he co-organized and supported documentation of the *Videowochen im Wenkenpark*. In this format, invited international video artists – mainly from the U.S. – came for about a week to Riehen (near Basel) to do workshops, interviews, readings, and seminars with local artists. In retrospect, the *Videowochen* appear like a kind of video summer school *avant la lettre*. Together, they explored both technical and artistic questions, and possibilities of the then completely new and still largely inaccessible video technology. The video-documented exchange of ideas and the resulting works still show the artistic potentials and relevance of the medium.

A similar situation applies to the collection for the teaching module *Film + Design.* At the time this collection was created, Reinhard Manz was an assistant in Peter von Arx's graphic design class at the School of Design. The digitized materials are based on multiple recut 16mm film segments, which to this day bear witness to the close relationship between experimental film, video, and – particularly compelling in the Swiss context, given the tradition of the so-called "good form"[16] – (graphic) design. Without the painstaking restoration work of Reinhard Manz and his reconstruction of provenance, this collection would not have become accessible.

14 The digital collection of *Film + Design* is accessible online at: https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/amp/search/zotero2-2545256.3JZWF892. The physical tape collection is preserved at the Cinémathèque suisse (Penthaz). For the accession of the collection to the Mediathek, see: https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/#/de/bestaende/28. An earlier monograph by Peter von Arx was published as: Peter von Arx, *Film und Design: Erklären, Entwerfen und Anwenden der elementaren Phänomene und Dimensionen des Films im gestalterischen Unterricht an der AGS Basel, Höhere Schule für Gestaltung*. (Bern: Paul Haupt Verlag, 1983).

15 The digital collection of the *Videowochen im Wenkenpark* is accessible online at: https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/amp/search/zotero2-2545256.VC83GM36. For the accession of the collection to the Mediathek, see: https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/#/de/bestaende/5. See also the monograph by René Pulfer, Reinhard Manz, and René Bauermeister: *Video Rewind: Videowochen Im Wenkenpark 1984, 1986, 1988* (Basel: Christoph Merian Verlag, 2013).

16 Uta Brandes, entry on "Good Form," in Michael Erlhoff and Timothy Marshall (eds.), *Wörterbuch Design: Begriffliche Perspektiven des Design* (Berlin/Boston: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2008), pp. 184–6. (online: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-7643-8142-4).

Last but not least, the delivery of the *VGB* at the *Videonetzwerke* project seems familiar. Here Reinhard Manz co-managed and maintained at the VGB stock for many years prior to their transfer. Although he did not live to see the completion of the project and the data were ultimately handed over by Piet Esch, the memory of Reinhard Manz is thus deeply inscribed in the history of not just the Mediathek.

MUDA MATHIS, THE GENERATIONAL TRANSFER, AND THE EXPANSION OF THE FIELD OF ARTISTIC VIDEO FORMATS

Another key figure and a bridge to the then younger generation is Muda Mathis. She studied under René Pulfer in the second Basel *Videofachklasse* (video masters class) and founded the production studio *VIA* together with other graduates in 1988. Like the *VGB*, the *VIA* is a cooperative association that is self-organised and run by its members. As a lecturer at the HGK, around the turn of the millennium, she helped establish the cross-institutional performance art festival *ACT* (since 2003).[17] together with lecturers from other Swiss art schools. Until 2017, she collected the video materials, pictures, and documents documents for the Basel branch of this swiss-wide festival which is mainly organized by the students themselves. Since then, the stock of the ACT festival has been continuously updated and expanded.

Due to the ephemeral nature of performance art, video plays a special role. Today classical formats such as video performances, performance for the camera, and other genres continue to span the artistic spectrum and suggest an affinity with early video cultures. In addition to *ACT*, Muda Mathis also transferred the video documentation collection *Performance Chronical Basel 1987–2006* (2016/2017) to the Mediathek.[18] This compilation emerged from two research projects. While the related text- and image-based knowledge has materialized in the two publications *Floating Gaps* (2011)[19] and *Aufzeichnen und Erinnern* (2016), the corresponding online collection was later expanded into the open, i.e. continuously growing, collection. Based on the experience of *Performance Chronical Basel* und their huge network Muda Mathis established together with Andrea Saemann, Chris Regn, Sabine Gebhardt Fink, Lena

17 The website of the *ACT Performance Festival* is at: https://www.act-perform.net/. An impression of the artistic diversity is given in the publication: Darren Roshier and Marion Ritzmann, *Act: Twenty Years Building Bridges* (Basel: Existenz und Produkt, 2023). The digital collection of the *ACT Performance Art Festival* is only partially available online. As a nationwide festival organized in a largely self-directed manner by students from art schools, the Mediathek's cataloged holdings focus so far on Basel (entire run). In addition, there are documentation fragments from Zurich and Bern, which are accessible internally. In particular, the public holdings from 2017 onwards are accessible via the Performance Portal: https://performance.sammlung.cc/grid/de?search=&collections=5%2C.

18 The digital collection of the *Performance Chronik* is available online at: https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/#/de/bestaende/6, and on the community platform at: https://performance.sammlung.cc/grid/de?search=&collections=1%2C. The physical tape holdings are preserved at *Via*, with Muda Mathis. For related book publications, see n. 14. And the community website: https://www.performancechronikbasel.ch/.

19 Muda Mathis, Margarit von Büren, and Sabine Gebhardt Fink, *Floating Gaps: Performance Chronik Basel (1968-1986)* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2011). As a kind of follow-up volume: Margarit von Büren et al., *Aufzeichnen und Erinnern: Performance Chronik Basel (1987-2006)* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2016).

Eriksson, and Margarit von Büren the groundbreaking exhibition on performance art, *Bang Bang* (Tinguely museum 2022) and the later renamed collection (today called *Revolving Histories*). The Revolving Histories Collection is collectively[20] organized and curated. Here again, the Mediathek plays the role as host and facilitator. Today, *Revolving Histories* is the largest collection and most comprehensive collection of Swiss performance art, which is directly available online. For this reason, a dedicated research portal was created at https://performance.sammlung.cc, where other collections on performance art such as the collection of *Kaskadenkondensator* (Kasko) Basel,[21] several projects with dedicated video interviews of performance artists such as *Perf en Bref*,[22] art projects like *Doce en Diciembre*,[23] *Partout*,[24] and *Together Elsewhere*,[25] research projects on archiving strategies of performance art like *Archives of the Ephemeral*,[26] and others as well as individual collections of third parties were integrated.

CATALOGING AS AN INSTRUMENT AND BASIS FOR CONTINUITY

As previously mentioned, the *VGB's* video art and culture collection fits seamlessly into the profile of the media library's collection and complements it. The *VGB* tapes are divided into seven areas: In addition to the topics socio-political issues (16 works), documentary film (20 works), and fiction (6 works), there are also art video/experimental film (33 works), music (6 works), and theater (4 works). As was typical for early video cooperatives, which were easier to address as a group than the (still) lesser-known artists. The structure of the collection includes some productions that are characterized as commissions (7 works).

Even though these classifications were assigned at a later date, they still reflect the self-conception and reference frameworks of their then-active participants and of the now partly historical, anti-establishment discourse

20 https://revolving-histories.ch/.

21 The *Kaskadenkondensator* (Kasko) Basel collection documents Kasko's digital sources, with a particular focus on video. Memoriav supported the digitisation of the two video sections. Included are also flyer and programme announcements. Online available at: https://performance.sammlung.cc/grid/de?collections=60

22 The *Perf en Bref* collection results from an collective artistic research, involving interviews, discussions and a lecture performance. The project was presented in collaboration with far° – festival des arts vivants Nyon. 37 video interview from Olivia Jaques, Marinka Limat, Chris Regn, Darren Roshier, Andrea Saemann and Martina-Sofie Wildberger with others are online available at: https://performance.sammlung.cc/grid/de?search=&collections=59%2C .

23 *Doce en Diciembre* «Doce en Diciembre» documents an exchange project between 12 women artists from South America and Switzerland. The collection comprises 18 videographic documentations of performances and an moderated video program. Online: https://performance.sammlung.cc/grid/de?collections=55.

24 The *Partout* collections documents performances, experimental exchange and discussions of more than 30 performance artists from different places around the world, which met in Lausanne and Basel from 2nd to 11th October 2020. Online available at: https://performance.sammlung.cc/grid/de?collections=62

25 *Together Elsewhere* is a monthly performance series organized by Pavana Reid (PAB - Performance Art Bergen) and Gisela Hochuli (PANCH - Performance Art Network Switzerland). It is streamed live online by the Mediathek of the HGK FHNW Basel and then archived. The project started in July 2021 and present until now about 50 Issues. Online available at: https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/events/togetherelsewhere

26 *Archives of the Ephemeral*, was a research project on archiving and institutional entanglement of performance art. Research documents, performances and lectures of the closing symposium are online available at https://performance.sammlung.cc/grid/de?collections=11.

surrounding video production and cultures: at the center of *VGB* were artistic perspectives, which, however, mostly diffused into other areas of activity and did not stop at public (urban as well as rural) or institutional spaces such as *Kaserne Basel*, *Theater Basel*, and others. **FIG. 3:** tries to illustrate artistic engagements and contributions to previously named fields of activity. However, the content and artistic styles are often so similar that it is sometimes difficult to draw clear distinctions between them.

The titles of the tapes highlight the topicality and often the sociocultural grounding that was generally typical for the communities of early video cultures.[27] In addition to the standard metadata, such as the title, authors (including those operating anonymously or collectively) and the year, various technical aspects can also be assessed in terms of the content. Therefore, **FIG. 4** correlates the year of production with the different tape formats of the videocassettes.[28] Even today, this information still conveys something of the [technical] progress (german "Vom Forschritt"),[29] as Reinhard Manz expressed this in 1990. As board member and artist, Reinhard Manz created the "Vom Fortschritt" entitled piece of (now) video art piece for the *VGB* general meeting, for discussing the succession of camera generations and the inherent format changes in video tape cassettes.

While in the context of art and exhibitions, the technical aspects are generally regarded as a means to an end, in preservation and digital archiving, particular attention is often paid to all technical matters.[30] Therefore, the varying runtimes illustrate that different target audiences and forms of presentation were addressed. Alongside clip-like spots lasting three minutes, there are half-hour videos and productions with tape lengths of up to 60 minutes. Multi-part works have also been documented. These also play a role in providing accessibility and playback on digital devices. If the original tape formats are further correlated with the chosen production languages, the sphere of influence and international networking of the *VGB* members and their associates become apparent.[31]

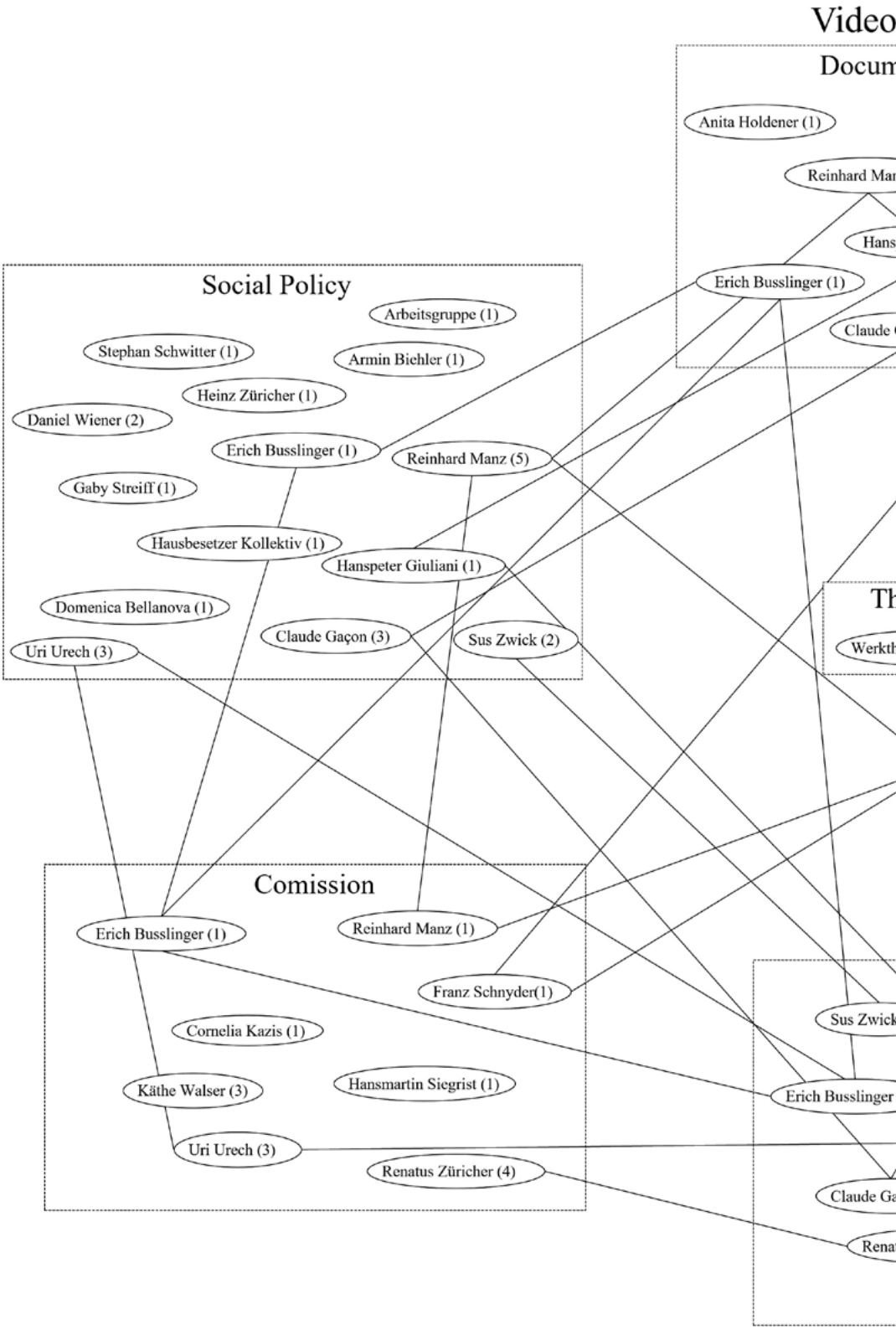
27 A well-selected compilation of key sources on the subject can be found at: https://monoskop.org/Video_art.

28 The original tapes in the following formats were transferred for further use into formats such as VHS, Betacam SP, U-Matic LB, Digi Beta, U-Matic HB, Digital Sub, and Digibeta: Japan Standart 1 (10 Bänder), open reel ½" (1 tape), VHS (1 tape), U-Matic LB (26 tapes), U-Matic HB LB (1 tape), U-Matic HB (29 tapes), Digibeta Beta (1 tape), Betacam SP (20 tapes), Akai 1/4 Zoll (1 tape), Hi8 NTSC (1 tape), and 1 inch C (1 tape). Fig. 4 shows the usage and allocation in the *VGB* estate.

29 Artistically, Reinhard Manz explored the topic in his video essay "Vom Fortschritt" (produced in 1990, U-matic HB SP, 3'30", https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/amp/detail/zotero2- 4820753. ABFS8I5J). For the diversity of formats, see also: Heinz Nigg, *Rebel Video: die Videobewegung der 1970er- und 1980er-Jahre London - Bern - Lausanne - Basel - Zürich* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2017).

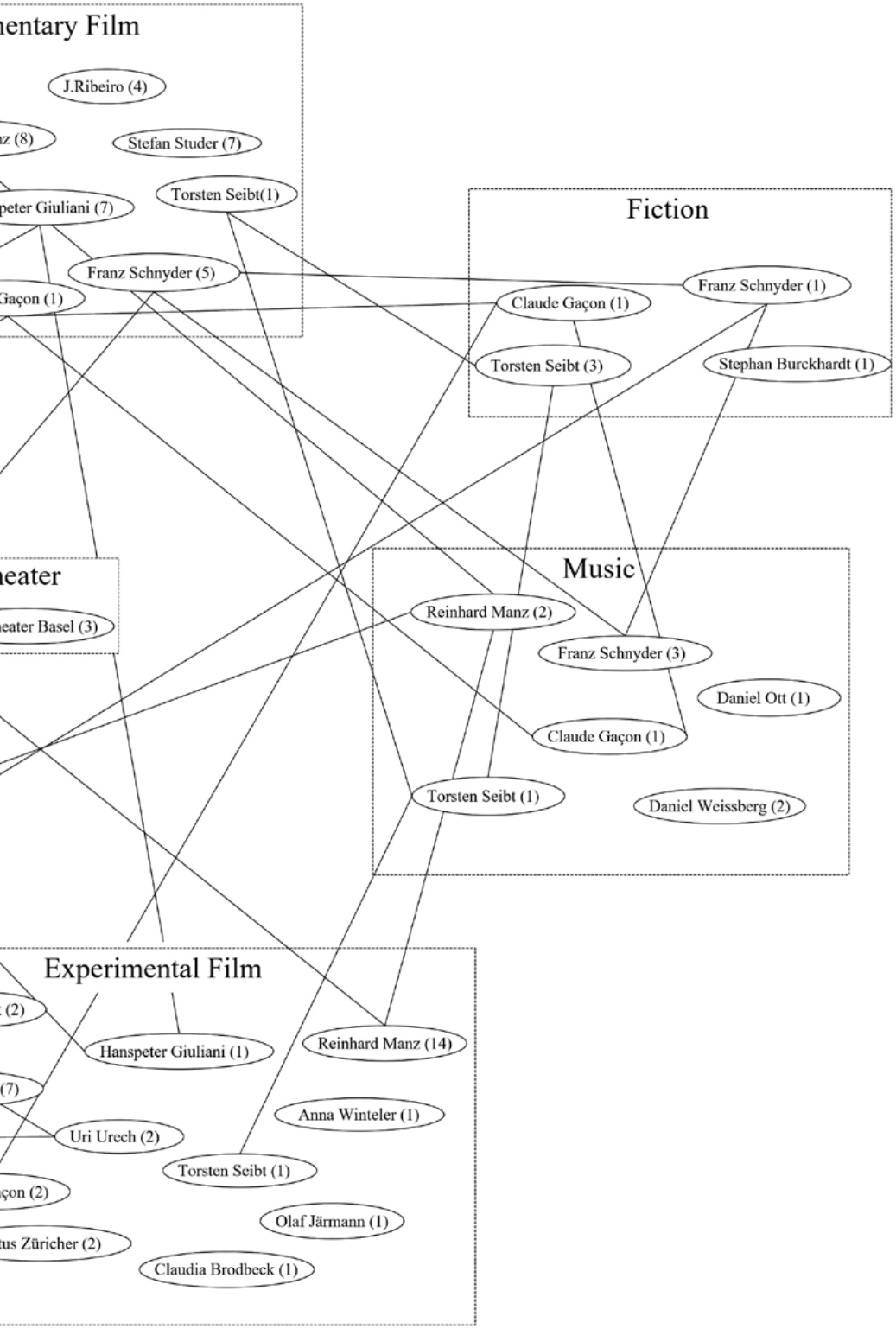
30 An excellent example is the *Petit Guide* of the institution that also funded this project, Memoriav: https://memoriav.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Guide_Film_Video_DE.pdf.

31 In addition to the national languages – French (3) and German (72, including Swiss German) – there are 3 works in English, 1 in Japanese, and 5 in Portuguese, four of which are bilingual.



3 Schematic view on artistic engagements and contributions to field of activity.

networks


entary Film
J.Ribeiro (4)
z (8)
Stefan Studer (7)
Torsten Seibt(1)
peter Giuliani (7)
Franz Schnyder (5)
Gaçon (1)
Fiction
Franz Schnyder (1)
Claude Gaçon (1)
Torsten Seibt (3)
Stephan Burckhardt (1)
heater
heater Basel (3)
Music
Reinhard Manz (2)
Franz Schnyder (3)
Daniel Ott (1)
Claude Gaçon (1)
Torsten Seibt (1)
Daniel Weissberg (2)
Experimental Film
(2)
Hanspeter Giuliani (1)
Reinhard Manz (14)
(7)
Anna Winteler (1)
Uri Urech (2)
Torsten Seibt (1)
çon (2)
Olaf Järmann (1)
us Züricher (2)
Claudia Brodbeck (1)

Originalformat	Akai 1/4 Zoll	Japan Standart 1	Japan Standart 1	Offenspule 1/2"	Japan Standart 1	VHS	Japan Standart 1	U-Matic LB	U-Matic HB	U-Matic LB	U-Matic LB	U-Matic LB	U-Matic HB LB	U-Matic LB	U-Matic HB	U-Matic LB	Betacam SP	1 Zoll C	U-Matic HB
Anzahl	1	1	7	1	1	1	1	7	1	6	2	3	1	4	5	2	1	1	1
Jahr	1979		1980		1981		1982	1983		1984	1985	1986		1987		1988			

Originalformat	U-Matic LB	U-Matic HB	U-Matic HB	U-Matic HB	U-Matic HB	Betacam SP	U-Matic HB	Betacam SP	Digibeta Beta	Betacam SP	U-Matic HB	Betacam SP	Betacam SP	Betacam SP	Hi8 NTSC	Betacam SP
Anzahl	2	1	3	6	10	3	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	3	1	4
Jahr	1989		1990	1991	1992		1993			1994		1995	1996	1997		1998

4 List of tape formats used by year and number of tapes

As indicated above, individuals' commitment to collecting is indispensable for identity formation and establishing reference points. This is particularly evident in the early years. However, this attachment can become a sensitive issue when it comes to generational succession. Who will look after the collected memories after death? Institutions are often consulted during estate planning. Notably, in the case of the *VGB* and the previous collections, the actors themselves consulted the media library and ensured the continuity of the collection during their lifetime. This enabled rights to be clarified and other important matters to be arranged while this was still feasible.

As the following observations illustrate, attitudes are changing. What used to be a secret known shall now be made accessible to a wider public. Wherever possible, digitized resources shall be visible online, so that the memory and appreciation of past generations is preserved. In this context, institutions act as intermediaries between rights holders and society at large, implementing the intergenerational contract.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTINUATION AND CONSOLIDATION

The public visibility of sources is based on listings, indexes, catalogs and/or on websites. Inventories make the systematically recorded works searchable. Depending on the context, these lists may have a special, politically enshrined protective function. Examples include the UNESCO World Heritage Lists[32] and the Swiss Inventory of Cultural Property of National and Regional Significance (KGS),[33] which, in accordance with the Hague Convention (1962), are to be protected first and foremost from the effects of armed conflicts, natural events, and other dangers.

Even though the collections of the Mediathek are not yet listed on any cantonal cultural heritage register, they are now declared in the inventory listing of MEMORIAV.[34] MEMORIAV is Switzerland's national network for the preservation of the country's audiovisual cultural Heritage. This association financially supported the archiving and mediation of the *Videonetzwerke* project. Therefore the *VGB* collection is accessible on the so called *Memobase* research platform.[35] While display is operated by Mediathek via the *Integrated Catalog* (*InK*), the artworks of the collection are also indexed in the national

32 https://whc.unesco.org/. In 2017, for example, the Basel Carnival was added to UNESCO's representative list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (cf. https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/de/home/kulturerbe/immaterielles-kulturerbe-unesco-lebendige-traditionen/immaterielles-kulturerbe-unesco-in-der-schweiz/repraesentative-liste-des-immateriellen-kulturerbes/basler-fasnacht-.html).

33 https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/de/home/baukultur/archaeologie-und-denkmalpflege/inventare/kgs-inventar.html.

34 For the association MEMORIAV, cf. https://memoriav.ch/. The holdings of *Video-Genossenschaft Basel* can be found at: https://memobase.ch/de/recordSet/hgk-004. The so-called inventory project of MEMORIAV is explained here: https://memoriav.ch/de/projekte/inventar_inventaire_inventario/.

35 Memobase is a national collection portal that makes audiovisual cultural assets from various Swiss institutions centrally findable and networks the respective hosting institutions. For the *Videonetzwerke*, see: https://memobase.ch/de/start.

library system of the Swiss Library Service Platform (SLSP, see **FIG. 1**).[36] The option exists to add other mediation contexts.

However, online accessibility only arises relatively late in the archival processing chain.

INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFER

The terms on which works of art find their way into a collection, sources enter an archive/estate, and/or data are added to a library differ. In addition to mandatory deposits (e.g., in archives, dissertations, etc.) and paid purchases, there are forms of accession and acquisition such as (permanent) loans or donations. With the last, the cost structure is initially less visible to outsiders. However, the expectations toward the data-receiving institution are all the more tangible: Owners, administrators, rights holders, etc., generally expect the receiving institution to henceforth stand up for them or for something in areas where they themselves (no longer) can or wish to do this.

This was also the case with *VGB*: Following internal selection and rights clarification, *point de vue* transferred its collection to the Mediathek as a digital data collection in the form of a simple depositing donation. The handover hard drive was returned after the copying process. At this situation, called (pre-)ingest, the files were automatically indexed, transcoded, tagged with technical and descriptive metadata, and all of it is written into a database. Here data were merged with the content metadata recorded in the meantime, integrated into the Mediathek's catalog system, and prepared for long-term storage and publication.[37] This way, the Mediathek can later guarantee the permanent online accessibility of the works and fulfill the expected service in return for the cost-neutral transfer.

CLARIFICATION OF ACCESS REGULATIONS

The legal situation regarding reuse was not affected. Because authors rights are tied to individuals and their decisions, they and the rights of usage, which differ in our legal framework, cannot be automatically transferred. From an

36 https://fhnw.swisscovery.slsp.ch/discovery/collectionDiscovery?vid=41SLSP_FNW:VU1&collectionId=8177335930005518&lang=de.

37 Structurally, the procedure follows the model of the Open Archival Information System (OAIS), which was developed by NASA in 1969. In its generic form, it remains valid to this day and is recognized as an ISO standard (ISO 14721:2012). It states that the submitted data is initially treated as a package ("Submission Information Package", SIP), which after analysis and the addition of formal and preservation descriptions is converted into an archival package ("Archival Information Package", AIP). The technical management of this package is defined via preservation guidelines so that the package itself is only checked, but otherwise no longer accessed. Instead, a "Dissemination Information Package" (DIP) is provided for the actual users, which can be adapted to changing technological conditions. An example of such adaptations, induced by technological aging (obsolescence), would be the Flash format in the early 2000s, which has now largely disappeared from the market. Cf. Georg Büchler et al., *Referenzmodell Für Ein Offenes Archiv-Informations-System- Deutsche Übersetzung*, vol. 16 of *Nestor-Materialien* (2012), available online at: https://files.dnb.de/nestor/materialien/nestor_mat_16.pdf.

institutional perspective, the rights situation of therefore is often a particular concern, and possibly the highest risk for collection owners. For if works are not accessible, there is, on the one hand, a significant risk that no one will remember them once they finally enter the public domain 70 years after the death of the creators.[38] Only that which is known is missed when it is lost. On the other hand, at least one generation – even in times of shrinking resources – must finance the preservation efforts without being able to access the sources themselves.

Regarding the *VGB* collection at the Mediathek, the usage rights were carefully clarified from the outset. As the successor of *VGB*, *point de vue* took over the complete, non-exlusive members' access rights to all material and was therefore able to devolve them to the Mediathek. Here the artworks are visible but all rights stay reserved. Whatever happens to the works beyond individual viewing over the Internet – whether they are shown in exhibitions or at public events, whether and which images or audio-visual sequences may be used in publications, etc., and in what way – continues to be governed by copyright law, quotation law, and/or catalog law, by the artists and, up to 70 years after their death, by their legal successors. Only then does the protection against reuse expire. Distortions of content remain illegitimate even then. The term may be shortened or lifted by granting defined licenses, and the modalities of accessibility may be adjusted.

ACCESSIBLITY, VISIBILITY, AND TECHNICAL OPERATION

The transition to the Mediathek was particularly successful for the *VGB* because those involved were able to draw on their experience from the outset. At the same time, the immediate visibility and perceptibility of sources within the context of the arts is particularly important: However, the desire for visibility can be thwarted by the medium's fragility, complexity and accessibility. We have therefore prioritised the immediate visibility of digital resources at the *InK* interface. Various media players have been integrated into the detailed view of search results so that images, PDFs, audio files, video files, ePUBs and other files can be displayed immediately. Regarding access to recorded websites, interactive use is possible. The premise of artistic and creative media diversity and heterogeneity leads to continuous expansion and needs-based adjustments.

In the background, technical metadata elaborately transmitted along, structured storage routines are carried out, and processes for automated consistency and integrity checks (e.g., by means of checksums) are embedded

38 After the expiration of protection periods, works can, simply put, be used as intellectual creations without inquiry or payment of royalties. Referencing and naming of the author(s) is still appropriate. Cf. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gemeinfreiheit.

as part of preservation management.[39] All of this requires a performant technical infrastructure with complex media management, rights, and access management systems, as well as secure storage routines. Since universities are often required to retain their research data permanently, persistently, and, depending on context, in a verifiable way, they – including the Mediathek – are better positioned to develop or provide/host appropriate preservation systems than, for example, cantonal or privately run entities.[40]

In a cultural context, community spirit and open, inclusive exchange are understood as such. However, in the scientific context Mediathek as library of the Academy of Art and Design Basel, these concepts are discussed under the heading of open science. The following considerations demonstrate the striking similarities between the two.

FAIRness AS A BASIS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

What exactly needs to be done technically to enable open science is defined, for example, by the aforementioned FAIR principles.[41] The acronym summarizes features that promote long-term findability (F), accessibility (A), interoperability (I) – i.e., automated machine-to-machine exchange – and reusability (R). The principles recommend the use of standardized description systems (metadata,[42] authority data) and so-called persistent identifiers (Handle, DOI, ARK).[43] Findability should remain guaranteed even if the digital resource has been physically transferred to a different storage location.[44] The previously mentioned lists and directory structures, both cultural and political, can be referred back to here. Accessibility, on the other hand, refers to the definition of where and under what conditions works of art or (re-)sources can be consulted, viewed, or experienced: physically or digitally, openly or closed, permanently or temporarily. In addition to human readability, machine readability is also advisable for digital content. The latter facilitates machine-to-machine

39 On desktop systems, the sources take up about two thirds of the screen area; on mobile devices, they appear before the descriptive metadata.

40 *InK* provides such an infrastructure. In order to withstand technological change, it is implemented as a MACH architecture. MACH is an acronym where M stands for "Microservices" – modular and transparent programming facilitates the exchange and/or extension of software components. A for "API First" means that internal system communication primarily takes place via standardized interfaces. C for "cloudbased" methodologically characterizes the software components. H for "headless" means that different user interfaces can be implemented, which are then adapted to the specific interests or requirements of the target groups without affecting the quality or sustainability of the data base. For the application of MACH architecture in *InK*, see https://mediathek.hgk.fhnw.ch/front/#/static/system. The modular system offers freely reusable software, which can be viewed here: https://github.com/je4?tab=repositories. These are mainly the continuously updated media server components. For checking format obsolescence, see for example: https://www.loc.gov/preservation/digital/formats/sustain/sustain.shtml.

41 Mark D. Wilkinson et al, "The FAIR Guiding Principles for Scientific Data Management and Stewardship," *Scientific Data*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2016): p. 160018, https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18.

42 The so-called Dublin Core is particularly widespread, for which various crosswalks (mappings) exist. See: https://www.loc.gov/marc/dccross_20010312.html.

43 https://arks.org/.

44 In the institutional context, the origin of the works also plays an important role: CIDOC CRM has long been considered one of the (meta)data schemas for describing the relationship between production (as an action) and provenance (as a socio-historical component), whereby the persons and actors involved and their roles can be formally described in terms of a so-called entity-relationship model (cf. https://cidoc-crm.org/).

exchange, which can occur via defined interfaces (e.g., REST, OAI-PMH) and protocols.

In addition to these technical aspects, the professional exchange among those working in the field plays an important role – a so-called "soft" or human factor. Cross-institutional collaboration can be reminiscent of the early video networks and ensures that the effort of continuous research on, and observation of, technical necessities is shared and remains manageable. Also people-affecting are the legal frameworks for access and consultation conditions (see above), which are technically identified through clearly stated and ideally standardized licenses.[45] This is the only way how future target groups can tell exactly which forms of (re)use are lawful (see above). Hence, it is advisable to release scientific findings and especially works of art during one's lifetime, for example through appropriate licenses and/or at least to clarify use — as was done in the present case.[46]

The last two aspects make it clear that, ultimately, it is still the human being who is at the center of all the activities. Humans are both the starting point and the goal of the efforts. Thus, it is still – or once again – a matter of how the technical proximity of digitally networked access can be meaningfully used to counteract human distance, and to bridge that which separates us through time, spatial-geographic distance, and other divides.

In recent years, it has thus become apparent that the archiving and publication of digital collection holdings not only shifts the relationship between producers and recipients in the archival context toward reception but also leads to an almost reciprocal opening. As external interest groups become more actively involved, the pressure on archives to open up increases. At the same time, certain tasks and responsibilities can be somewhat relieved, as not everything needs to be done within the institution itself.

In addition to the economies of consolidation hinted at above in relation to networking structures, there is the added benefit of utilizing the information and knowledge offerings of the community. What can be derived from the nature of research and dissemination cycles in the academic context finds its counterpart in sustainable "networks of care" in the preservation field.[47] Both can be reminiscent of the collective practices found in the early video networks as well as of academic information circles, the positive aspects of which are to be addressed here. Both are about the thoughtful sharing and preservation of knowledge. As a final aspect, however, we need to reconsider the issue of codetermination, which was an especially important principle in historical collective practices and is only gradually being

45 Widespread, for example, are the so-called "creative" commons (https://creativecommons.org/).

46 In the university context, the Creative Commons (CC) licenses play a special role because they support the principles of Open Science. CC licenses allow different forms of use in a modular system and belong to the internationally widespread licenses. They allow free, low-threshold accessibility, the technical operations necessary for preservation (e.g., text and image recognition, migration, etc.), and provide legal certainty for reuse.

47 Annet Dekker already developed this concept in 2018 in the context of her reflections on the preservation of net- and computer-based art. Cf. Annet Dekker, *Collecting and conserving net art: moving beyond conventional methods* (London: Routledge, 2018).

learned in the archival context. The CARE principles can provide helpful guidance here.

PARTICIPATION AS AN EXPRESSION OF CARE

The notion of care echoed in the term "Networks of Care," can be linked to the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance.[48] Aiming to prevent colonially appropriating, exploitative, and harmful data practices, they achieve this by establishing the premises of "collective benefit," "authority to control," "responsibility," and "ethics" as a decision-making matrix. Hence, the CARE Principles thereby intentionally prohibiting data misuse and serve as an ethical corrective to the technically oriented recommendations of the FAIR Principles.

Applied to the data ecosystem of the Mediathek, CAREfulness begins with open accessibility. Because the implications of the CARE Principles may not be as widely known as those of the FAIR Principles and because they offer broader interpretive leeway, the individual elements are discussed here in more detail.

COLLECTIVE BENEFIT

Perhaps the most important aspect of the CARE Principles, the "C" for "collective benefit" stands for the common good. It indicates the intended direction by demanding that access be granted regardless of origin, cultural background, institutional affiliation, or the privileges associated with them. At Mediathek and within the *InK*, we try to avoid the use of login requirements or other access restrictions. Identity-based login processes are only required for particularly protected internal content.

However, open access can be read in different directionalities, especially from an institutional perspective. While typically the focus lies on the reception perspective – i.e., the unimpeded access to sources and resources – the call for open access can also be understood as permeability in the opposite direction: into the archive. In this case, it is also about opening oneself, as a collecting institution, to third parties, minorities, the underrepresented, etc., who have not yet been able to adequately inscribe themselves or their works into the – still often patriarchal and hegemonic – historical narrative, but who wish to do so. This perspective leads to the second aspect of the CARE Principles: the question of power, power structures, and the structuring of power, for instance, through (digitally) normative standards.

48 Cf. Stephanie Russo Carroll, Edit Herczog, Maui Hudson, Keith Russell, and Shelley Stall, "Operationalizing the CARE and FAIR Principles for Indigenous Data Futures," *Scientific Data* vol. 8, no. 1 (April 16, 2021): 108. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-021-00892-0.

AUTHORITY TO CONTROL

The "A" in the CARE Principles stands for "authority to control." There are multiple dimensions to this concept too. On one hand, communities want to retain control over what is included and how access is defined. The importance of this demand – and how often this seemingly basic right has been disregarded – can be clearly seen in colonial contexts, for example. On the other hand, the concept of authority also plays a role in mechanisms of standardized regulation. Various directories that provide standardized entries for individuals, keywords, places, etc., and contribute to clear identification, are referred to as "authority data" or "authority files."[49] These data sets are usually maintained by selected, internationally recognized institutions such as the Library of Congress or the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek. They include the Integrated Authority File (IAF),[50] as well as Getty Vocabularies Art & Architecture Thesaurus (AAT), Cultural Objects Name Authority (CONA), and Thesaurus of Geographic Names (TGN).[51] While these institutionally curated authority files are subject to strict editorial control, there are alternative authority file directories used in research or community contexts that allow greater participation, such as ORCID,[52] and/or are maintained collectively, like the entries in Wikipedia or Wikidata.

Participation in descriptive processes is a central concern because it carries the potential for discrimination and exclusion. To reduce the power imbalance between the artists whose works are being collected and the collecting institution, the curators of the *Revolving Histories* collection, for example, were involved not only in the development of the cataloging interface but also in defining the descriptive key words. Terms were and continue to be categorized under headings like "References," "Genres," "Actions," "Materials," "Material Type," "Media," "Players," "Qualities," "Spaces," and "Themes," as shown along the right edge of **FIG. 5**. The vocabulary was applied to the documents in this collection during so-called tag-a-thons in small groups (typically pairs). After each tagging session, the group discussed in the plenum missing or redundant terms.

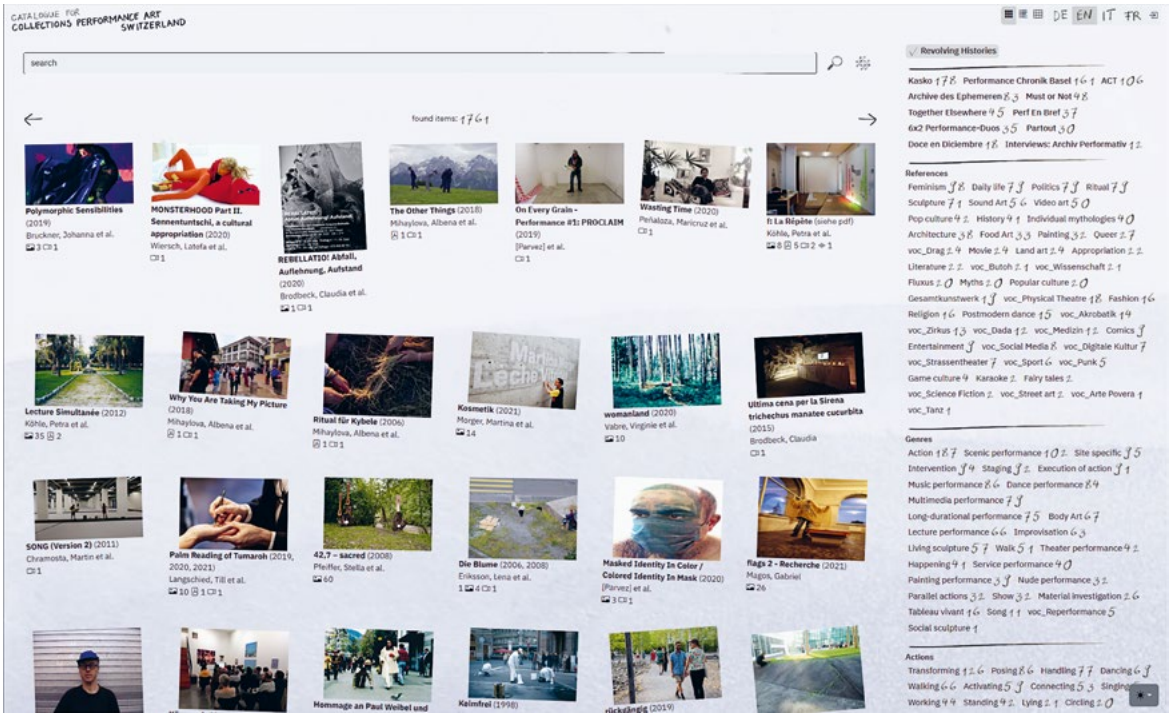
The question of appropriateness – here, of description – leads, within the CARE logic, to the next principle: responsibility.

49 Authority data are mainly used with regard to persons and/or subject headings. While the personal authority data of the Integrated Authority File (GND) allow the distinction between two persons with the same name as well as different spellings in various languages, biographical developments (e.g., marriage), and the use of acronyms, the standardization of terms and their usage contexts in internationally maintained directories supports multilingual searching.

50 https://gnd.network/Webs/gnd/DE/Mitmachen/DokuRegeln/dokumentationRegeln_node.html.

51 https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/index.html.

52 https://orcid.org/. Even though institutions can create ORCIDs for "their" researchers or automatically enrich them with their metadata, the decision-making authority lies with the researchers.



5 Screenshots of the current readout of the collectively curated vocabulary of collections performance art (performance.sammlung.cc/).

"Responsibility" is a core task in the archival context from the outset. Granting and restricting access seem as two sides of the same responsibility coin. Not all content is suitable for free, public access via the internet. While guidelines for sustainable data management in repositories speak less of responsibility and more of trust, the characteristics of trustworthiness appear especially helpful here. Lin et al. (2020) have, in turn, defined the TRUST principles to address environmental factors (soft criteria) for durability and reliability.

This acronym refers to the interplay of "transparency," "responsibility," "user focus," "sustainability," and "technology" watch.[53] Both the TRAC Metrics[54] of the Center for Research Libraries and the certification process of the Core Trust Seals[55] rely, too, on the concept of trust. Even the basic concepts of current network infrastructures call for trustworthiness, though they do so invertedly based on the principle of "zero trust." Infrastructure providers today must therefore assume that hostile attacks such as hacking, data theft, etc., no longer fail at the level of access control (logins, passwords). Consequently, the data must be protected within the system in such a way that it remains secure even if attackers are already behind the firewall, located in immediate proximity.

ARCHIVING AS A LIVING PRACTICE

Returning to the VGB estate and the initial thesis that accessibility guarantees permanence, it is noticeable that recent developments at the institutional level of archival discussions clearly demonstrate the need for archiving to be not only an ongoing but also living practice. Even though the situation in the mid-2020s appears to have changed compared to the 1970s and 1980s certain conditions still resemble one another. Starting with differences one might mention a) different historical terms, b) internet-based rather than tape-based formats of video and/or digital film, while at the same time game cultures gain importance, c) technically, the production and reception of video content

53 More specifically, "transparent" means that the task and scope of the repository should be clearly indicated. This includes explanatory notes on the terms of use of a) the repository and b) the datasets. In addition, the minimum retention periods and special circumstances that affect the data, such as information on sensitive data and their handling, should be indicated. "Responsibility" is demonstrated through the identification of metadata and curation standards, the commitment to compliance with and communication of these guidelines. It also includes the provision of search interfaces, data services, and interfaces. Finally, information on technical management mechanisms such as specific quality control mechanisms is desirable. "User focused": A user-centered perspective implies enabling the findability of data, their exploration, and (re)use. Use and access should be made as easy as possible. "Sustainability" means in this specific context uninterrupted, continuous access to the data, including associated risk mitigation mechanisms. "Technology" reminds to trustworthy repositories and should demonstrate technological capabilities/competencies and keep themselves regularly updated.

54 TRAC stands for Trustworthy Repositories Audit & Certification. Specific criteria and a checklist are additionally provided on the website (https://www.crl.edu/archiving-preservation/digital-archives/metrics-assessing-and-certifying/trac).

55 https://www.coretrustseal.org/why-certification/requirements/ (Last accessed October 3, 2022).

have become more closely linked, d) and not least various socio-historical disruptions need to be processed.

However, the similarities and differences remain surprisingly similar: On the one hand, technological developments such as the invention of mobile devices with complex onboard video technology have rapidly accelerated access to means and cycles of production and distribution. Added to this are communication services such as email, messenger apps, and various web formats (websites, blogs, social media, etc.), fundamentally simplifying global accessibility and circulation of videographic and artistic content. On the other hand, communication today appears in part even more customized: closed networks rely on "personal" suggestions rather than open, text-based inquiry.[56] Structured collecting (and cataloging) aimed at sustainability also still seems to be distributed among individual persons (as opposed to institutions) and has grown more complex. For when content is streamed in real-time to closed (social) networks, where it is then almost instantly – or after a standard retention period – deleted by the service without recourse to meaningful download options (resolution, watermarking, etc.), then the talk of a digital dark age feels more relevant than ever – we are talking about Ephemera 2.0.[57]

VIDEO COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL SCREENS

Taking this into account, the intersection of recurring interests within early video communities and the institutional objectives of preservation, as well as the alignment with the academic principles of accessibility and networking, reveals various potential avenues for long-term continuity. As a historical constant, the effects of visibility are still often associated with appreciation. What was once tied to the broadcast character of the video-based institution of television in early video cultures today resonates with the trust in global connectivity via the internet. Just as television once constituted an intangible societal institution – one that could be occupied, activated, questioned, ignored, and more – there remains a complex plurality of screen-based cultural expressions and practices that play with proximity and distance, participation and exclusion, identity formation and collective disintegration. Surprisingly similar, in this context, is the auratic distance, as it were, between the utopian idea of a materializing attention economy and the reality of what is technically, legally, and practically achievable.

Much like it quickly became clear in historical screen and video cultures that access to technology could not be separated from ownership

56 There is indeed a great deal of reading and viewing happening, but more extensive lines of argument presented through longer texts seem, in certain areas, to have been replaced by shorter formats (news tickers, headlines, headings). Though the sales volumes and markets of certain book sectors buck this trend.

57 A case in point is the archive of the nationwide Swiss performance festival *ACT*, which is documented by the students themselves and collected by the Mediathek. Since massive real-time documentation via social media has become commonplace – also to represent different locations and parallel occurrences (co-presence) – the scope and quality of the sources submitted have significantly declined.

structures, dependencies, and practical constraints, today's digital data and communication spaces continue to reflect the power dynamics of the technology-holding entities, infrastructures, and institutions. This is especially true for so-called "social" services, whose seemingly collective character is often subject to capitalized, neoliberal interests and increasingly influenced or dictated by political power calculations.[58] Not every virtual friendship proves robust or reliable enough in moments of crisis (such as system failure) to function like a trustworthy network and stand up for the other.[59] Scientific networks, too, are never entirely immune to manipulation and error.

Policies and the Institutional Understandings of Continuity

However, their policies, process definitions (such as peer reviews), and funding models are generally based on principles of transparency and traceability.[60] For that reason, they reject fake news and manipulative filters just as they formally prohibit net- or forum-based echo chambers, illegal data use, and irregular surveillance within forums or networks. Increasingly, the operators of these infrastructures are also aiming to limit system-based bias or make it transparent when identified.

In the first section of this essay, the connotation of "social" as it pertains to networked digital friendships was therefore contrasted with a concept of friendship that stems from an artistically driven, community-oriented approach to collaboration, often organized cooperatively (as with *VGB* and *VIA*). From an archival perspective, the impact and networking of these bonds of friendship were understood as the foundation for the collecting and accumulating activities that resulted in the digital holdings eventually transferred to the Mediathek to be made publicly available.

The advantages as well as the challenges associated with systematically involving external stakeholders in the context of digital university collections and archives have been outlined. Beyond the classical, often unidirectional understanding of outreach (from the archive into the communities), the networking strategies of the *VGB* and *VIA* that were constitutive of the collections served to identify the historical, cultural, as well as personal overlapping proximity between the video art circles in Basel and the performance art scene. In a further step, the *Revolving Histories* collection served to illustrate how valuable and sustainable a community's own curatorial care can be – particularly when that community is still able to shape the access and presentation of "its" works even after their formal transfer to the archive.

58 "Social" here explicitly refers to the use of the word in the standard term "social networks" for platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, as well as YouTube and Vimeo, where users who have created an account can usually contribute their own content free of charge. This content can be made visible either only to their circle of friends or worldwide, and with the support of the platform, the can be further disseminated by third parties. Due to the ease of use, popularity, and built-in automation, data volumes grow so rapidly that the content review must be automated. By contrast, many university infrastructures appear "exclusionary," as they restrict participation, upload permissions, etc., to university members and generally conduct case-by-case reviews.

59 Technological concepts of torrents remain exciting in this context.

60 On the role and criticism of peer review processes, see: Andreas Finke and Thomas Hensel, *Decentralized Peer Review in Open Science: A Mechanism Proposal*, arXiv, 2024, https://doi.org/10.48550/ARXIV.2404.18148.

The continued activation of this core group structurally recalls principles more commonly associated with the preservation[61] of intangible cultural heritage – such as repetition, remembrance, iteration, updating, or continuation[62] – the integration of the media library's collection activities within a university context also enables an alignment of archival practices with open life and research data cycles. While, academic publishing processes, which are typically guided by the FAIR principles, the anti-discriminatory imperatives of the art context were discussed under the concept or rather alignment of CARE principles.[63]

ACTIVATION AND ARTISTIC APPROPRIATION

In a long-term perspective, the ongoing evolution and activation of the archive suggest a vision of archival practice as something conceived to be living, determined, and open. This opens up new fields of action. The evolution of the *Revolving Histories* collection as well as the *Videonetzwerke*[64] collection were given as examples for continuation. Living forms of archiving point in many directions. They influence both the archives and the communities. They have the ability to influence specific modes of reception, and archiving but also artistic production. This can include the methods used to describe resources and the ways in which these resources are made available, including embodies activation formats.[65]

The influence and demands of the communities directly impact the evolving approaches to data curation.[66] Archives and long-term collections respond to the vulnerability of forgetting with the robustness of active discursive practices. That the empowering, community-driven strategies for appropriating archival practices have become increasingly relevant within the context of screen cultures is hardly surprising. After all, the ephemeral

61 Examples include research projects such as *Archiv performativ* (Pascale Grau, Margarit von Büren, and Irene Müller, 2010–2012), https://archivperformativ.zhdk.ch/ and the associated blog (https://archivperformativ.wordpress.com/); *Performance: Conservation, Materiality, Knowledge* (Hanna B. Hölling, Jules Pelta Feldman, Emilie Magnin, 2020–2024), https://performanceconservationmaterialityknowledge.com/events/revolving-documents/); and the long-term study *Performatorium* (Olivia Jaques, Marlies Surtmann, 2017–), https://performatorium.wordpress.com/).

62 In the context of intangible cultural heritage, languages, customs, and traditions are passed on from generation to generation in physical, sensually active (e.g., craftsmanship) or oral forms as practices or narratives. Cf. UNESCO, Intangible Cultural Heritage, *What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage?* (https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003), and Swiss Federal Office of Culture, *Immaterielles Kulturerbe UNESCO/Lebendige Traditionen*, n.d. (https://www.bak.admin.ch/bak/de/home/kulturerbe/immaterielles-kulturerbe-unesco-lebendige-traditionen.html).

63 When academic and archival stakeholders seek to prevent overly low-threshold functionalities such as uncontrolled posting, liking, further processing, and manipulation of archival content, the impression may arise that they are buying – at least to some extent – their infrastructural robustness against overly dynamic, situational, or opinion-based convictions or hypes by consciously sacrificing user-friendliness.

64 In addition to the interview project by Stefanie Bräuer and Piet Esch events at the Haus der Elektronischen Künste Basel, a symposium at the Institute Experimental Design and Media Cultures of FHNW, and this present publication might be mentioned as forms of continuation for the *VGB* estate in the *Videonetzwerke* collection.

65 A kind of reading of archival documents in an almost physical sense is exemplified by Rebecca Schneider's term "fleshy kinds of documents" (cf. Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains. Art and War in Theatrical Reenactment* (London/New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 33. For the "fleshy kinds of documents," see https://base.uni-ak.ac.at/showroom/n6d88tSbawNaoFVzdUggmL.

66 The Latin "curare" means to take care of, to nurse, to look after, and in the present context can be well applied to acts of friendly and responsible data stewardship.

nature of the material has been an inherent part of the medium and its cultural practices from the outset – be it the degrading film stock, the transition away from and abandonment of magnetic-tape-based electronic media (and their decay), or the shutdown of terrestrial broadcasting functions. Similarly, in performance art, the ephemeral – the (self-)dissolution – has always been (or still is) part of the understanding of the work or action.

Combining these two approaches yields to the following thesis: Networks of care and responsibility should not only exist within conservation and archival communities but should also be linked to artistic and cultural stakeholders as well as socially engaged groups. These groups, on the one hand, provide a necessary counterbalance to institutional responsibility. On the other hand, as demonstrated by the example of early video and performance art scenes, they can draw on established and resilient structures. A reciprocal opening of archives and communities – or a mutual rapprochement – therefore seem particularly promising for the future.

Philipp Messner

Archiving Networks

The Context-Oriented Extended Description of the Private Archive
of Barbara Strebel/THEswissTHING

THEswissTHING was a Basel-based project that existed from 1995 to 1998. At times, *THEswissTHING* operated a Bulletin Board System (BBS) or a web server and website. At the same time, it also maintained a physical location that functioned as a media lab, educational platform, and event venue. The project was the Basel node of the international artist network *THE THING*. In terms of content, it was also closely affiliated with the *Medien Zentral Komitee* (Geert Lovink, Heath Bunting, Gereon Schmitz, among others), which, starting in 1995, ran the critical discourse-focused mailing list *nettime-l*.[1]

The research project "Sharing Knowledge in the Arts" (SKitA), based at the Critical Media Lab of the Institute Experimental Design and Media Cultures (IXDM) of the Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW, investigates critical discourse-focused projects in Basel and beyond from the perspective of sharing and openness, and seeks to make the insights gained productive for the publication practice of research data.[2]

One component of the research project involves the description and evaluation of the archive of *THEswissTHING*, which is in the possession of Barbara Strebel, one of its founders. The aim was to develop a form that does justice to the networked nature of the project under investigation and to relate the specific physical and digital information resources to other contextual data in line with the research questions pursued here. The resulting data and metadata are to be published and archived as open research data wherever possible.

This essay is roughly divided into two parts. The first part introduces the basics of archival description as a form of contextualization, as well as the changes currently emerging in this area with the rise of semantic technologies. This is followed by a practice report that outlines the approach taken in the extended description of the Strebel's archive within the research project and identifies the challenges arising from the self-imposed task of providing the most comprehensive, non-narrative contextualization possible of the preserved material.

ARCHIVAL LINKED DATA

Archiving encompasses several subfields: in addition to the preservation of collection or archival materials in analog or digital form,[3] it also involves appraisal – that is, the necessary decision, in light of limited resources, about what should or must be preserved for the long term and what can be omitted. A third component is the organization of the materials and, finally, the description of the archival holdings in an appropriate finding aid. The

1 For the history of *THEswissTHING*, see the essay by Stefanie Bräuer in this volume.
2 "Sharing Knowledge in the Arts: *THEswissTHING* (1994–98)," SNF #215646. Online: https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/215646.
3 See the essay by Tabea Lurk in this volume.

finding aid specifies which documents are available and can be made accessible to users for consultation or delivered in digital form, as well as what kinds of information may be expected from them. Archival description, whose object (in contrast to bibliographic cataloging) is not primarily author-generated but rather process-generated information, focuses less on content itself and more on its informational potential.[4]

A key aspect of archival description is the communication of the processes that led to the creation of the documents, as process-generated information – and that is what archival material is about – can only be meaningfully interpreted when its context of origin is known. Description thus generates knowledge. This knowledge is captured in the form of structures and descriptive metadata.

Nowadays, industry-specific software solutions are commonly used for the description of archival material and, more broadly, for the management of archival holdings and related workflows. The descriptive metadata generated in the process of description therefore generally exists in digital form.

For data-driven research approaches in the humanities – grouped under the umbrella term "Digital Humanities" – this is not sufficient. To enable computer-assisted analysis of these datasets, the description data must not only be digital, but also structured, integrated, and interoperable, and it must be available in a machine-readable format. This requirement aligns with the FAIR principles for research data formulated in 2016. The acronym FAIR stands for Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable.[5]

Making highly heterogeneous data distributed across various institutions with their own traditions available in suitable formats represents a major challenge for archives and other organizations active in the field of cultural heritage. The potential benefit would be a significant improvement in the findability, accessibility, and usability of the respective holdings. This process of "datafication" or "FAIRification" thus concerns the core responsibilities of memory institutions, which ought to justify the considerable effort that it undoubtedly entails.

A central role in the interoperability of (meta)data is played by graph technology, which began to gain traction from the late 1990s onward, primarily due to the W3C standard Resource Description Framework (RDF). These technologies work with a model of data as nodes (entities) connected by edges (relationships). In RDF, graphs are stored as triples, with each triple representing a subject-predicate-object statement (with the predicate semantically defining the relationship between two entities). This type of Linked Data allows for navigation from one node to another and is particularly suited to mapping network-like relationships. By using unique identifiers and

4 Cf. Angelika Menne-Haritz, "Erschließung," in Marcel Lepper and Ulrich Raulff (eds.), *Handbuch Archiv* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 2016), 207–17.

5 Wilkinson, Mark D. et al. (2016): "The FAIR Guiding Principles for Scientific Data Management and Stewardship", *Scientific Data* 3, 160018. Online: https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18.

standardized ontologies – that is, formalized conceptual models and vocabularies – it becomes possible to create interconnected networks of entities and their relationships (Semantic Web).

Linked Data is therefore not a specific technology or tool, but rather a set of best practices for linking and, where appropriate, publishing structured data.[6]

Archival Linked Data is still a relatively new phenomenon.[7] Engagement with graph technology in the archival field remains largely theoretical. A major step forward came in November 2023, when the International Council on Archives (ICA) adopted Version 1.0 of the new archival description standard "Records in Contexts" (RiC).[8] In addition to defining the conceptual foundations for a network-based archival description (RiC-CM), the standard includes an ontology (RiC-O), which defines the vocabulary for encoding descriptive metadata as RDF graphs. The major innovation of RiC lies in extending the archival principle of respect for the provenance and internal organization of collections toward a comprehensive contextualization of archival material.[9] Whereas traditional forms of description represented this in the form of mono-hierarchical tree structures, graph technology enables multiple perspectives to coexist simultaneously.[10]

Adhering to recognized standards in archival description is essential for making metadata reusable by others. Accordingly, the FAIR principles also require that (meta)data conform to domain-relevant community standards.[11]

A standards-based descriptive practice is also fundamental to ensuring the long-term durability of descriptive metadata. It forms the basis for integrating that metadata into future information systems – an important aspect of archival work, which is by definition designed for the long term.

Shared norms and standards are equally important when descriptive practices are not viewed in isolation but in relation to other collections held by other institutions that may be connected to the described material. This becomes especially relevant in the context of meta catalogs, which allow users to search across institutional boundaries. Several such research infrastructures have already been implemented. However, achieving integrated search functionality across catalogs and search tools from different types of institutions (e.g., libraries, archives, museum collections) remains a major challenge. This is where Linked Data holds significant potential: to relate individual elements to one another, it does not require complete alignment between the respective descriptive practices. This aspect is of particularly

6 Cf. Seth Van Hooland, Ruben Verborgh, *Linked Data for Libraries, Archives and Museums* (London: Facet Publishing, 2015).

7 Cf. Asleigh Hawkins, "Archives, Linked Data and the Digital Humanities," *Archival Science*, vol. 22 (2022): 319–344.

8 International Council on Archives, Expert Group on Archival Description (2023): *Records in Contexts Conceptual Model, Version 1.0*. Online: https://www.ica.org/resource/records-in-contexts-conceptual-model/.

9 For the archival concept of provenance, see Philipp Messner, "Provenienzprinzip und archivisches Denken," *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der Deutschen Literatur*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2021): 149–56.

10 Cf. Tobias Wildi, "Die Erweiterung des Provenienzprinzips: Der neue Records in Contexts-Standard," *Archiv. Theorie & Praxis*, vol. 76, no. 3 (2023): 166–73.

11 Wilkinson (2016).

interest in the case of collections for which institutional responsibility is not clearly defined from the outset – as is often the case with archives of private provenance.

One such private archive is the archive of Barbara Strebel, which emerged from her activities related to the project *THEswissTHING* and whose extended description is one component of the research project.

PRACTICE REPORT

The research project hopes to gain insights from previously inaccessible archival material related to *THEswissTHING* regarding the project's publishing, infrastructural, and pedagogical activities as an early Swiss initiative, as well as more generally about the personal and organizational structures within the field of critical net activism in the 1990s.

To make the archive accessible, the material was first organized. In this case, that meant systematizing a partially applied preexisting order, allowing each document to be assigned to a dossier created either by project reference or thematic aspects. These dossiers were then grouped into broader categories. The project team was supported in this process by the archive's owner.

With a view to the envisioned later transfer of the private archive to a public memory institution, all documents were freed of metal and plastic elements and re-housed in acid-free or pH-buffered sleeves and boxes.

During this work, initial insights into the character of the archive were gained. One key observation was the explicitly referential nature of the documents preserved by Barbara Strebel. In terms of volume, photocopies of texts and printouts of information published online or via message boards make up a large part of the archive. By contrast, there are relatively few pieces of correspondence or conceptual documents. Also notable is the analog nature of Barbara Strebel's filing method. The decision back then to opt for a "paper-based data preservation" approach is significant for the archive and for documenting the history of *THEswissTHING*. It reflects a practice that deeply engaged with digital information transmission but relied entirely on analog methods for its preservation. Accordingly, particular attention in the process of archival description will be given to the specific materiality of the holdings, which is understood as a bearer of intrinsic information.

After completing the initial organization, the dossiers were cataloged in an Excel spreadsheet, including call number, descriptive title, date range, types of documents contained, and notes on involved individuals and corporate entities. This established a structure that enabled the systematic digitization of individual documents within the dossiers. The dossier call number, combined with a sequence number, serves to link each digital file to its physical original. To ensure the continued usability of the reorganized and re-housed

material by the archive's owner, the Excel data was also converted into a PDF document designed for easy readability.

It must be emphasized that this is a research project, not an archival project. While the description process considered the archive's potential usability for any memory institution that might later assume custody of the material, this was not the primary objective. The fact that the Barbara Strebel/*THEswissTHING* archive is not only of private provenance but also remains privately owned was the main reason that no archival evaluation was undertaken – except in the limited sense of removing duplicate copies. Additionally, not all dossiers were fully digitized as part of the project.

As part of the research project, the archival material is supplemented by additional sources. Of particular note are a series of video interviews with contemporary witnesses, as well as materials they contributed or that were collected by the research team. Also added were snapshots of the website www.thing.ch preserved by the Internet Archive in San Francisco[12] and messages of the aforementioned *nettime-l* mailing list,[13] which have been preserved and made accessible via a dedicated website. This material is to be linked with documents from the archive.

Building on the earlier reflections regarding a network-based and context-oriented approach to archival description, the project moved – following the conventional preliminary cataloging of Barbara Strebel's archive – toward developing a data model based on this specific collection. The new model was to facilitate an expanded form of description capable of representing relevant contexts and make it possible to describe additional information resources related to the history of "THEswissTHING" in a structured manner.

The first attempt at developing such a model was based entirely on RiC. It quickly became evident, however, that for an "expanded description" reflecting the network-node character of *THEswissTHING* and the resulting Barbara Strebel archive, additional ontologies would be necessary.[14] RiC, at its core, is a custodial standard that remains largely limited to the fundamental functions of institutional archives. However, it is possible to combine RiC with other standards to describe more complex relationships.

Since the custodial aspects of archival description played only a secondary role in the context of our research project, the team decided to develop its own data model based on the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (CIDOC CRM), supplementing it with RiC only for archival description in the narrower sense.[15] As a formal ontology, CIDOC CRM is inherently extensible

12 https://web.archive.org/web/19971201000000*/thing.ch.

13 https://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/index.html. Although this online archive is privately operated and the long-term preservation of its contents cannot ultimately be guaranteed, it is considered sufficiently stable within the context of the project – because of its structure, and because of the institutional affiliation of key actors involved.

14 See also Baptiste de Coulon, "Deployment of the Record in Contexts Standard for the Management of Collections at the SAPA Foundation," 2023 (pre-print version, English translation, Version 1.0). Online: https://doi.org/10.55790/journals/ressi.2024.e1511.

15 ICOM International Committee for Documentation, CIDOC CRM Special Interest Group (2024): *Definition of the CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model, Version 7.1.3*. Online: https://www.cidoc-crm.org/Version/version-7.1.3.

and supports the transdisciplinary approach of the research project. Originally developed for museum documentation, CIDOC CRM is designed to facilitate the integration, mediation of access, and exchange of structurally diverse information from the cultural heritage sector.

In practice, the SKitA data model uses CIDOC CRM to model events and actions, while RiC is applied to describe basic archival structural elements and the specific attributes of documents and their concrete digital or physical "instances" (manifestations/representations). This data model is implemented as a custom ontology in Wikibase. Wikibase is a set of extensions for the open-source software MediaWiki, originally developed for managing content on Wikipedia.[16] While Wikibase underpins the Wikidata knowledge base, it also supports the management of differently structured data. A Wikibase instance's data model is mapped to RDF, and queries are performed using the graph-based query language SPARQL. A significant advantage of using Wikibase in this project is its low-threshold nature and a style of description that makes the dual human- and machine-readability – characteristic of Linked Data – immediately tangible.

For technical and organizational reasons, permanent publication of the SKitA Wikibase instance cannot be realized within the scope of the project. As a result, the descriptive metadata created in this context does not meet the requirements for Linked Open Data. In order to nonetheless contribute to the open Semantic Web through SKitA, the project team decided that public figures and organizations involved in the examined contexts would primarily be entered into Wikidata and linked accordingly and any existing be supplemented. Integrating the open knowledge base offers two main advantages: first, the data entered there is immediately available for use by other projects; second, third parties have the opportunity to enrich the data and add their own insights. This additional dimension of openness – one that goes beyond the mere free (re)use of data to raise questions about discursive power and positions of authorship – is itself aligned with both the subject matter and the broader aims of the research project.

CONCLUSION

One of the major challenges in modeling a project-specific data model was building the relevant expertise. Due to the relative complexity of the topic and the limited time resources of the project members, this expertise remained unevenly distributed. This made it more difficult to develop a data model that was closely aligned with the project's specific research interests. A further

16 Online: https://wikiba.se. When setting up the project-specific Wikibase instance, the project could draw on the experience of the partner organization Rhizome, which operates an online archive of born-digital artworks based on this platform. See: Lozana Rossenova, *ArtBase Archive – Context & History: Discovery phase and user research,* 2017–2019, 2020. Online: https://sites.rhizome.org/artbase-re-design/docs/1_Report_ARTBASE-HISTORY_2020.pdf.

point of friction emerged between the methodological openness of artistic research and the indispensable reliance on norms and standards required for openness in information technology. However, this friction can also be seen as constitutive of the "SKitA" project, which not only relates the question of "other" forms of instituting to its object of research, but also perceives it as a methodological challenge.

From this perspective, efforts to loosen the boundary between research activity on the one hand and scholarly service on the other are by all means programmatic. The context-specific, "extended description" of the archive of Barbara Strebel and *THEswissTHING* is accordingly situated at the intersection between archival processing (as scholarly service) and evaluation (as research activity). The project thus not only investigates infrastructural activities but also attempts a productive interweaving of research and infrastructure work.

Loredana Bevilacqua studied history, sociology (BA) and cultural studies with a focus on history (MA) at the University of Lucerne, where she is currently a PhD candidate and research assistant to Ass. Prof. Gleb J. Albert and Prof. Dr. Patrick Kury. In her PhD dissertation with the working title "Zwischen Schreibmaschine, Familien-mitglied und Tor zur Welt: Home- und Personal Computer in Schweizer Privathaushalten, 1977-2007," she examines how, why, and for what purpose microcomputers entered Swiss households from the late 1970s onwards. Taking a cultural-historical perspective, her research focuses on how this technology transcended the boundaries of the private sphere, how digitality was generated in every-day life, and technology and the private realm – or society at large – mutually shaped one another.
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7203-9856

Stefanie Bräuer is an art historian and media studies scholar. She studied in Jena, Berlin, Basel, and Siena. After contributing as a research assistant to a project on ultrashort audiovisual forms in Basel and Lucerne (2014–17), she was a guest researcher at the German Center for Art History in Paris (2017–18). Her doctoral dissertation examined the use of oscilloscopic imagery in early 1950s experimental film (Schüren, 2024). She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Critical Media Lab of the Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW where she is conducting a historical network analysis of 1980s and 1990s video practice and net activism in Basel. At the Hochschule Luzern, she teaches courses on the history of audiovisuality, the theory and culture of digital media, and the media aesthetics of experimental practices in art, science, and technology.
https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7252-7489

Prof. Dr. Lucie Kolb has been Professor of Critical Publishing at the Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW since 2025. She is the principal investigator of the research project *Sharing Knowledge in the Arts,* a transdisciplinary collaboration developing a research database documenting net-critical and cyberfeminist practices from the 1990s in Basel and beyond. She was also the principal investigator of *Critical FAIRness* (2023–2024), an exploratory study on accessibility and re-use of research data in the arts. She studied Media Art and Fine Arts in Zurich, Basel, and Buenos Aires (BA, 2008), earned an MFA from the Zurich University of the Arts (2010), and completed a PhD at the Institute for Art and Cultural Sciences, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna (2017). Her publication *Study, not Critique* (Transversal Texts, 2018) examines forms of artistic practice through publications since the 1970s and reflects on their relevance for contemporary artistic research. She is co-founder of *Brand-New-Life* (2015), a multilingual open-access publication platform at the intersection of visual art, art criticism, and research.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0600-1894

Julie Lang is a PhD candidate and teaching assistant in the Art History Department at the University of Lausanne. She studied at the intersection of contemporary art history and the sociology of culture and media, with a master's specialization in "Sciences historiques de la culture," focusing on the development of visual and material culture. Her doctoral research explores the exhibition as a critical and pedagogical object, beginning with the first curatorial programs launched in the 1980s. She examines how these pedagogical experiments evolved and how issues of gaze, representation, identity, and visibility became central concerns. She recently contributed to the volume *L'enseignement des arts à Genève du XVIIIe siècle à nos jours* (Georg Éditions, 2024) and serves as co-editor-in-chief of the interdisciplinary journal *a contrario*. In 2023, she edited the issue *Résister en Démocratie. Éthique et politique de la formation des voix* (BSN Press).

https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6265-1157

Tabea Lurk holds a PhD in Art History and Media Theory, as well as an MA in Library and Information Science. She worked at the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe (DE) before teaching digital preservation and the archiving of early internet art at Bern University of the Arts (BFH) from 2006 to 2016. Since August 2015, she has served as head of the Media Library at the Basel Academy of Art and Design FHNW. Her expertise lies in digital archiving and open access publishing of contemporary art, with a focus on early video art and performance art documentation. She integrates participatory approaches into her practice, involving artists in the archiving process. Additionally, she actively contributes to various cultural networks and associations.

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9848-8136
https://portal.snf.ch/relationship-management/profile/5156/personal-data

Philipp Messner is a cultural scholar and scientific archivist. After many years at the UZH Archives, the central archives of the University of Zurich, he has been overseeing the public poster collection of the Basel School of Design since 2020. His archival practice focuses not only on the preservation of historical materials but also on securing their accessibility and addressing the future-oriented development of documentary heritage. As part of the research project *Sharing Knowledge in the Arts*, he explores multi-perspectival descriptions of archival material and related information objects, using the open-source software Wikibase.

https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2032-0741

Dr Melissa Rérat is currently a postdoctoral researcher (Return Grant, Swiss National Science Foundation [SNSF]) at the University of Basel (eikones – Center for the Theory and History of the Image). In 2023, she began her research project *The Role of Art Schools in the Construction of Art History as a Discipline* at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, funded by a SNSF Postdoc.Mobility Fellowship.

Previously, she was a scientific collaborator at the Swiss Institute for Art Research (SIK-ISEA) and taught courses on New Media and Video Art at the universities of Neuchâtel and Zurich. Her doctoral thesis in Art History and Sociology (defended in 2020, published in 2022) examined the social construction of video art through discourse in the 1970s. Earlier, she contributed to the SNSF DORE research project on *Crystallisation Sites of Swiss Art in the 1970s* (2011–14) and published *L'Art vidéo au féminin* (2014), a study on video art by women artists.

Her research interests include the history of art schools and art history as a discipline, including its intersection with sociology, the interplay between contemporary art, modern art, and their historiography, contemporary art in Central Europe, video art and new media, and gender in modern and contemporary art.

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0986-4302

Dominique Stéphane Rudin, Dr. phil., is a freelance historian and co-owner of a cultural agency based in Basel. He specializes in the history of audiovisual media. He completed his studies in History and German language and literature in 2006 with a thesis on propaganda films from the " Schweizerische Arbeiterbildungszentrale SABZ" (Swiss Workers' Education Centre) between 1931 and 1947. His doctoral thesis, *Video Heterotopia*, examined left-wing alternative urban video activism in the 1970s and 1980s. He conducted this research under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Regina Wecker, first as a scholarship holder of the National Centre of Competence in Research *Iconic Criticism* (NCCR *eikones*, 2009–11) and subsequently (2012–14) as a research associate in the *Sonderforschungsbereich 640* (Representations of Changing Social Orders) at Humboldt University in Berlin, where he was affiliated with the Chair for 20th-Century European History/Prof. Dr. Th. Mergel. Most recently, he contributed an article on urban socio-cultural and political free spaces in the 20th century to the new *History of the Canton and City of Basel*.

Published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Published by
Schüren Verlag GmbH
Universitätsstr. 55
D-35037 Marburg
schueren-verlag.de

Text ©The Authors 2025

Graphic design and typesetting: Martin Golombek (martingolombek.net)
Translations and copyediting: Bram Opstelten
Printing and binding: Livonia Print, Riga, Latvia

ISBN 978-3-7410-0722-4
DOI 10.23799/9783741007224
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons license. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0.

In this book, the authors explore a media vernacular shaped by bottom-up initiatives that challenged mass media from the late 1970s through the 1990s, with an outlook to contemporary and future practices of participatory production and sharing in video and net art. Embracing a translocal perspective, the book centers on Basel, Switzerland, while simultaneously looking beyond this specific location. Focusing on video and net art, as well as activism, the book crosses media boundaries to investigate the field of screen cultures. The authors understand screen cultures as the intersection of video and net art with activist practices: A range of approaches aimed at creating spaces for exchange, embedded in the technologies of capturing, editing, and disseminating analog and digital video, as well as in communication infrastructures such as bulletin board systems and the early internet.

9 783741 005183