

**Jacob Lund**  
**Exhibition as Reflexive Transformation**

**Abstract**

Taking Forensic Architecture's project *Triple-Chaser* as its point of departure the article is a theoretical exploration of the role of exhibition in contemporary aesthetic and artistic practices. It claims that works of art are capable of producing a reflexive transformation of our non-artistic everyday lifeworld (cf. Juliane Rebentisch) and argues that the act of exhibition, of making visible or perceptible, is a decisive element in such a reflexive transformation of the non-aesthetic and non-artistic social reality that the art work addresses or in which it embeds itself. The act of exhibition makes something/the work present but, at the same time it creates a distance, precisely because the appearance of the work has been arranged and addressed to someone/us; what is exhibited is given as having been organised and deliberately made available to appear to us (cf. Tristan Garcia). This distance installs a difference, a pensive image in the language of Jacques Rancière, which is what allows for reflexive transformation. When Forensic Architecture, for instance, make use of reenactments in their investigations of human rights violations, real space is turned into a model of itself, and a negotiation of what it means can begin. An agency like Forensic Architecture, however, operates in a number of different forums to communicate and exhibit their investigations, of which the forum of art is but one as they consider each forum, i.e. place of exhibition, as a distorting lens of its own kind. A decisive aspect of what then still makes their work—and many other contemporary practices that expand their field of operation beyond the dedicated spaces of art—*aesthetic* is a certain mode of exhibition or exposition and address, which invites the addressees to take part in a process of sense-making.

**Keywords**

Exhibition, Aesthetic Practice, Artistic Practice, Political Aesthetics, Political Art, Forensic Architecture, Juliane Rebentisch, Jacques Rancière

# Exhibition as Reflexive Transformation

Jacob Lund

## I.

In response to an invitation to participate in the 2019 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the London based research agency Forensic Architecture carried out a research project called *Triple-Chaser*, the story of which they presented in partnership with Laura Poitras' Praxis Films as a video investigation that premiered at the biennial.<sup>1</sup> In November 2018 US border police fired tear gas grenades at civilians. Photo documentation shows that many of those grenades were manufactured by the Safariland Group, which is owned by Warren B. Kanders, then also vice chair of the board of trustees of the Whitney Museum of American Art. *Triple-Chaser* is a Safariland manufactured grenade and the investigation of Forensic Architecture consisted in training computer vision classifiers to detect the canisters of this tear gas grenade among the millions of images shared on the internet, using digital models and photorealistic synthetic environments. As part of their research, they also exposed Kanders' connection to the violence committed by the Israeli military against Palestinians in Gaza, through the US bullet manufacturer Sierra Bullets, as well as—at the request of Decolonize This Place who led weeks of protest against Kanders' connection to the Whitney—the use of Safariland products by police during civil unrest in Puerto Rico in 2018. Due to the lack of action by the Whitney in response to the allegations against Kanders, Forensic Architecture withdrew from the biennial along with several other artists. Five days later Kanders resigned from the museum's board of trustees following the protests and Forensic Architecture rescinded their request to have their work withdrawn from the exhibition. A couple of weeks further on, when the *Triple-Chaser* tear gas grenade was used by police against Black Lives Matter activists across the US, Kanders announced that he would divest Safariland of crowd-control products divisions, including those that sell tear gas.

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The video is publicly accessible at the website of Forensic Architecture where the project is also described in more detail: <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/triple-chaser>, accessed October 2021. My description is lifted from the website which also links to the media coverage of the project.

Forensic Architecture, *Triple-Chaser*

During the process of training a 'computer vision' classifier, bounding boxes and 'masks' tell the classifier where in the image the Triple-Chaser grenade exists.

© Forensic Architecture/Praxis Films, 2019



Forensic Architecture, *Triple-Chaser*

Using the Unreal engine, Forensic Architecture generated thousands of photorealistic 'synthetic' images, situating the Triple-Chaser in approximations of real-world environments.

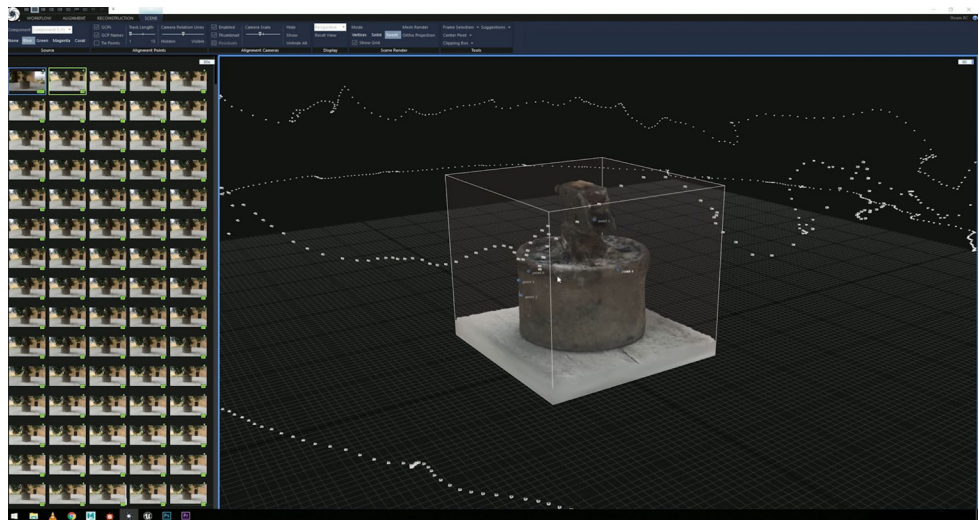
© Forensic Architecture/Praxis Films, 2019



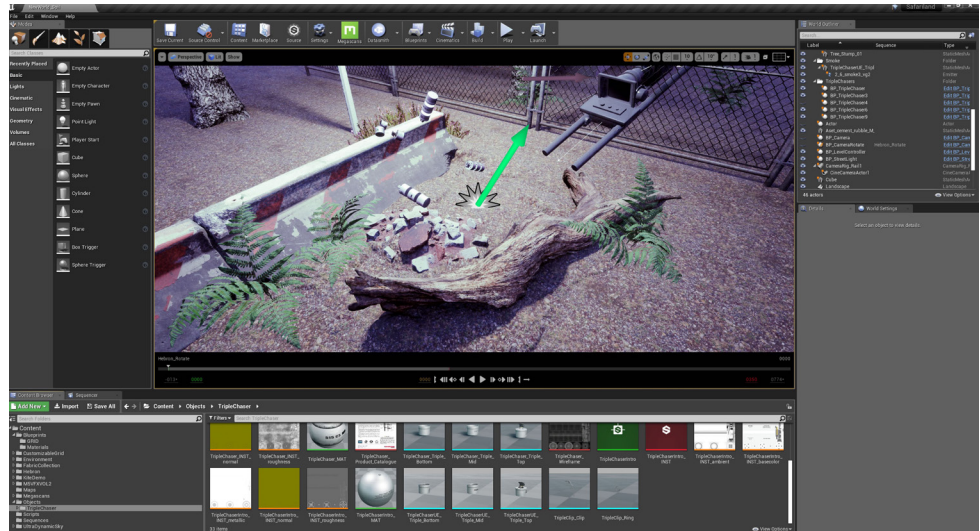
Forensic Architecture, *Triple-Chaser*

Forensic Architecture asked activists around the world to find, and film, examples of the Triple Chaser grenade. They used photogrammetry to turn those images into a precise 3D model.

© Forensic Architecture/Praxis Films, 2019



Forensic Architecture, Triple-Chaser  
The Unreal game engine allows Forensic Architecture to set parameters for variables such as sun position, camera focal length, and dirt on the grenade.  
© Forensic Architecture/Praxis Films, 2019



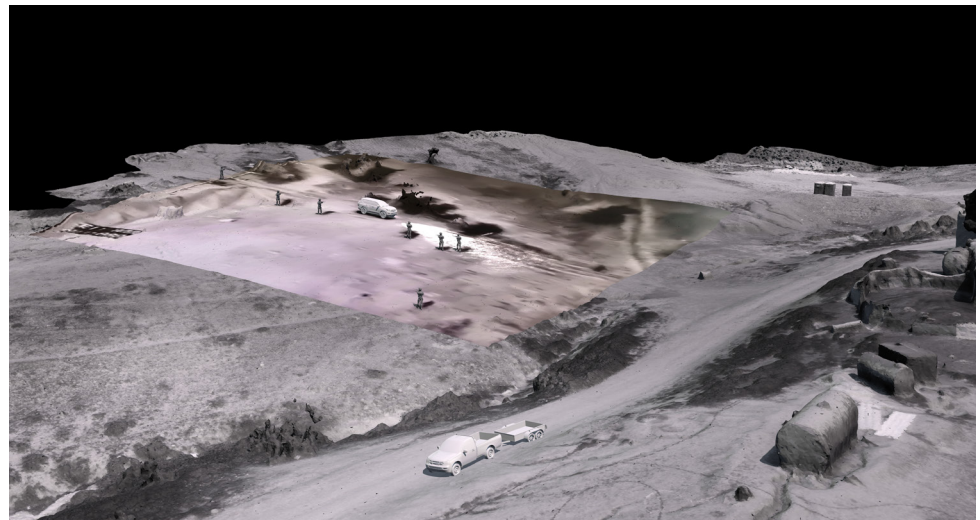
Forensic Architecture, Triple-Chaser  
Using the Unreal engine, Forensic Architecture generated thousands of photorealistic 'synthetic' images, situating the Triple-Chaser in approximations of real-world environments. Coloured 'masks' tell the classifier where in the image the Triple-Chaser grenade exists.  
© Forensic Architecture/Praxis Films, 2019



Forensic Architecture, The Murder of Halit Yozgat.  
77sqm\_9:26min  
A composite of Forensic Architecture's physical and virtual reconstructions of the internet cafe in which the murder of Halit Yozgat on 6 April 2006 occurred.  
© Forensic Architecture, 2017



Forensic Architecture, Killing in Umm al-Hiran  
Projecting thermal footage from a police helicopter establishes the spatial relationship of figures and vehicles, reflected in a photogrammetry 3D site model.  
© Forensic Architecture, 2018



The *Triple-Chaser* case raises a number of questions about the relationship between art, aesthetics, society and reality in contemporary practices and the function of exhibition in this relationship. Forensic Architecture is an agency that does not identify itself as “merely” comprising artists but is composed instead of an interdisciplinary team of architects, filmmakers, artists, scientists, coders, journalists and lawyers. The practice of forensic architecture consists in the production of architectural evidence in the form of building surveys, physical or digital models, animations, video and maps of various forms, and in the presentation of this evidence in juridical, political and—as in the case of *Triple-Chaser*—artistic forums.<sup>2</sup> With reference to the etymology of the term “forensics” that originates from the Latin *forensis*, which means “pertaining to the forum”, they regard their practice as a mode of public address.<sup>3</sup> It is also, as stressed by the founder and head Eyal Weizman, an *aesthetic* practice “because it depends on both the modes and the means by which reality is sensed and presented publicly”.<sup>4</sup> Following Bruno Latour, the architect and theorist understands aesthetics as “the ability to perceive and to be concerned”.<sup>5</sup> Even though Weizman calls each forum, including that of art, for instance the Whitney, a distorting lens of its own kind,<sup>6</sup> politically and socially engaged artistic practices as well as the kind of aesthetic practice undertaken by Forensic Architecture necessarily involve an exhibitionary dimension as part of their public address. What Forensic Architecture tries to avoid, however, is to be in the hands of a single one of any of these forums.<sup>7</sup> Therefore the Whitney exhibition was not restricted to the museum’s dedicated exhibition rooms. Not complying with the structures set up by the Whitney as a platform for presentation, the exhibition took also place in the lobby, online and with Decolonize This Place friends demonstrating in front of Warren Kanders’ townhouse in Greenwich Village.

## II.

If the Western modern art museum was founded on the separation of its exhibits from their ritualistic and everyday functions, granting them autonomy by disconnecting them from the social reality surrounding the museum, then how are we to think of contemporary artistic and aesthetic practices like Forensic Architecture that constantly move beyond the forum of art and perforate its borders? A case such as *Triple-Chaser* seems particularly suited to lend itself to Lucy Steeds’ suggestion—with reference to Walter Benjamin’s notions of *Ausstellbarkeit* and *Ausstellungswert* in “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility”—to analyse art based on its exposability, understood as “its capacity to produce *sociopolitical entanglement*”.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to most modern art works, a contemporary art work is often

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Eyal Weizman, *Forensic Architecture: Violence at the Threshold of Detectability* (New York: Zone Books, 2017), 9 and 64.

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Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*, 65. Apart from the etymological connection between forensics, *forensis* and *forum*, it is worth noticing that we not only use the word “exhibit” for an object that is shown to the public in a museum or gallery. It also designates a thing used as evidence in a juridical context.

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Ibid., 94. The notion of aesthetics involved in the practice of Forensic Architecture is elaborated theoretically in Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics: Conflicts and Commons in the Politics of Truth* (London: Verso, 2021).

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Ibid., 95. Not least Bruno Latour’s article “From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik, or How to Make Things Public”, seems to have been a major influence on the conception of the overall project of Forensic Architecture, in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ZKM exhibition catalogue edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005), 4-31.

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Eyal Weizman, “Forensic Architecture”, online lecture as part of the series *Architectures of the New Curatorial* at the Royal College of Art London, December 10, 2020.

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Weizman, *Forensic Architecture*.

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Lucy Steeds, “Exposability: On the Taking-Place in Future of Art”, in Tristan Garcia and Vincent Normand, eds., *Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019), 75-84, in particular 75 (italics in the original).

distributed across different instantiations, elements and appearances. In socially engaged art practices, for instance, the events by which the work of art becomes public may be distributed across time and space: social interactions in physical spaces with and without an audience; online and offline texts, films, photos, interviews and different kinds of documentation that function as an integral part of the work rather than “extra-diegetic” re-presentations of it.<sup>9</sup>

As I will try to argue in the following, the moment of appearing, of becoming visible, is a fundamental part of the creation and the production of the art work. The ostensive, which entails the act of showing, displaying, exhibiting and demonstrating something, is an indispensable part of the manifestation of any art work—contemporary as well as modern—and hence a condition for its being perceived and experienced. This is not yet, however, what makes the thing being shown art or an aesthetic object, be it physical or not. What makes it artistic or at least aesthetic is a certain openness with regard to the meaning or signification of the thing that appears, which ignites a process of reflection that ultimately is a negotiation of the world and how we live in it. In other words, there is a decisive difference between exhibition as presentation of an object or phenomenon “as it is” (non-artistic) and exhibition as presentation of an object or phenomenon as an object of reflection that ignites a process of sense-making or renegotiation of the meaning generally attributed to the object. The latter is a socialising image practice which creates what Weizman calls an “open verification” where “[v]erification relates to truth not as a noun or as an essence, but as a practice, one that is contingent, collective, and poly-perspectival”.<sup>10</sup>

We live in a time when artistic and aesthetic practices resist the categories of modern art theory, when traditional genres of art have been dissolved in all kinds of hybrid forms, and when art increasingly destabilises the border between art and non-art in endeavours to address urgent questions about climate change, migration, violence, human rights, decolonisation, racism, sexism, and so on.<sup>11</sup> The destabilisation of the border between art and non-art, between art and political reality, of course also involves the ways in which these practices are exhibited and our art theoretical notions of “exhibition”. In Kim West’s reading of Jean Davallon, “an exhibition creates a separate symbolic space, but one featuring ‘real’ objects rather than representations [...] the exhibited objects always retain a connection to their ‘external’ reality, transcending their adherence to the exhibition’s symbolic dimension”.<sup>12</sup> My point is that the double-articulation of the objects as real and symbolic through an exhibitionary act is a decisive element in making a negotiation of reality possible. The act of exhibition makes something/the work present but, at the same time it creates a distance, precisely because the appearance of the work has been arranged and addressed to someone/us; what is exhibited

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See Kim West, “Concepts for the Critical Study of Art Exhibitions as Media”, in *Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions*, 45-55: especially 48: “the complex of apparatuses in relation to which exhibitionary apparatuses today achieve their definition is the network of digital media, understood in a wide sense: as the matrix of ubiquitous, interconnected devices and platforms, which forms a global infrastructure of shared information standards and ideals, synchronised with the production models of contemporary capitalism, imposing its rhythms and demands on social, cultural, and political life”.

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Eyal Weizman, “Open Verification”, *Becoming Digital*, e-flux Architecture (June 2019): <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/becoming-digital/248062/open-verification/>, accessed October 2021. See also Eyal Weizman (in conversation with Jacob Lund), “Inhabiting the Hyper-Aesthetic Image”, *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 61-62 (2021): 230-243: 236ff.

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Oliver Marchart, for instance, states “[A]rtistic practices have emerged for which it is more important to be connected to political practices than to art institutions themselves, which in turn, necessarily changes our concept of the public sphere—and of the institution as well”. *Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019), 144.

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Kim West, “Concepts for the Critical Study of Art Exhibitions as Media”, 45. West’s observations are based on Jean Davallon’s *L’exposition à l’œuvre: Stratégies de communication et médiation symbolique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999), 11.

is given as having been organised and deliberately made available to appear to us.<sup>13</sup> This making present of our distance to the object installs a difference and an indeterminacy with regard to its status and meaning. In the language of Jacques Rancière the object becomes a pensive image in a zone of indeterminacy between passive representation and active operation, between non-art and art.<sup>14</sup> The creation of such difference and indeterminacy is what allows for a reflexive transformation and questioning of the status quo, of hegemonic, authoritative narratives about the world and what is.

For a while now we have been thinking about exhibitions as events through which (most) art becomes known.<sup>15</sup> “[E]xhibitions of art are, by virtue of their visible prominence, structurally intrinsic and perhaps psychologically necessary to any full understanding of most art. Exhibitions can be understood then as the *medium* of contemporary art in the sense of being its main agency of communication—the body and voice from which an authoritative character emerges”, claims Bruce W. Ferguson.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Kim West stresses that exhibitions are the media of art’s public realisation: “as media, art exhibitions should be conceived of as *affirmative in their mediating functions*. They are the spatial and technical arrangements through which artworks are publicly realised”.<sup>17</sup>

The question then is what constitutes an exhibition? Does it have to take on a more or less institutionalised form, in a space or at a site dedicated to art, like the ones Ferguson writes about? What is the relationship between the work of art and its exhibition? Are they still distinguishable? When does the exhibition of a work of art begin? When does a work of art become “an object of appreciation” (in the terminology of George Dickie’s institutional theory of art)?<sup>18</sup> I am in many ways sympathetic to Ferguson’s analogy between an exhibition of art and an utterance or a set of utterances and to his proposal to see the art exhibition as the speech act of an institution, but what I am after here is not “how art serves exhibitions as their very element of speech”.<sup>19</sup> I am interested in ‘the public realisation’ of art both within and beyond the authoritative art museum institution as I see the work of art as being inescapably bound to an act of exhibition, a making-public. In other words, the exhibitionary element is an integral part of the very conception of the work of art. It is not something that is added later. It is produced through the work of art’s mode and structure of address.

As James Voorhies remarks in relation to Carsten Höller’s exhibition *Experience* at the New Museum in New York 2011-2012:

Höller’s exhibition demonstrates the fugitive position a critical attitude faces in the midst of globalised contemporary art, an industry that reduces the potency of critique through absorption and the need to produce experiences for generating capital. It also demonstrates that critique cannot ascribe such an obvious cause-and-effect rela-

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Tristan Garcia, “Neither Gesture nor Work of Art: Exhibition as Disposing for Appearance”, in *Theater, Garden, Bestiary: A Materialist History of Exhibitions*, 181-194: 183.

14

Jacques Rancière, “The Pensive Image”, in *The Emancipated Spectator* [2008], trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2009), 107-132.

15

Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne (eds.), “Introduction”, in *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

16

Bruce W. Ferguson, “Exhibition Rhetorics: Material speech and utter sense”, in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, 175-190: 176.

17

Kim West, “Concepts for the Critical Study of Art Exhibitions as Media”, 45.

18

Cf. George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

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Ferguson, 183-184.

tionship to its intentions. It should arrest the spectator's attention by modeling situations of strangeness and confusion that disrupt expectations without literally instructing how participation transpires.<sup>20</sup>

While I largely agree with Voorhies in this analysis, I would perhaps be more careful about differentiating too clearly between art and its exhibition or being made public. For instance, when he describes an approach that prioritises the spectator, and that “utilises the exhibition as a productive way to explore and expand what, where, and how art reaches its public”.<sup>21</sup> I argue that the exhibition-form is constitutive of the work of art as work of art—which is why “exposition” might be a more appropriate term than “exhibition” as the latter may be taken to refer perhaps to something pre-existing, i.e. a re-presentation or display. Any work of art has a structure of address—an *Appellstruktur* in the terminology of Wolfgang Iser—that informs the ways in which it can be received.<sup>22</sup> It is thus, in a fundamental way, addressing and exposing itself to a public of indefinite strangers.<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, the curator can make it address a public at another level and in any given context, but the first exhibitionary moment already occurs in and through the address of the work “itself”—a work of art always already involves an exhibitionary act in its initial address to someone: a you, an audience, readers, listeners, spectators, participants, collaborators. It is open to be “received” by anybody who is able to enter into its structure of enunciation, and who will actualise or concretise it.

### III.

What, then, has happened to art, and what is it that still qualifies the politically and socially engaged practices—of which 2018 Turner Prize nominee Forensic Architecture is an example—as artistic?

The past 20-30 years have seen thoroughgoing changes within art that have made it difficult to recognise its works as works of art in modern terms. Art can no longer be placed in specific genres and categories belonging to particular art forms; often it is no longer expressed in a delimited work, and is hard to distinguish from its surroundings and what is not art. Modern ideas about delimited works, a shared project and a shared progressive history, are no longer valid, or at least they are no longer monopolistic as conceptual framework for the work of art.<sup>24</sup> The concepts and categories that were developed to describe and analyse modern art seem to have lost their explanatory force in relation to the art that concerns and speaks to our contemporary times, which is why we to a large extent have replaced the term “modern art” with “contemporary art” to designate it. The emergence of contemporary art therefore necessitates a paradigm shift within art studies where the very notion of art is at stake, including the ways in which it is exhibited and the ways in which it involves a public.

During the transition from modern to contemporary art the relationship between artistic practice, sense-making, and the sociopolitical reality, in which art takes place and by which it is nourished, has undergone substantial changes. In order to catch up with contemporary art the disciplines of art history and aesthetics therefore have to revise a number of their traditional notions concerning, among others, the historicity of art, the category of work, artistic autono-

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James Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood: The Exhibition as a Critical Form Since 1968* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2017), 10.

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Voorhies, *Beyond Objecthood*, 12.

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Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *Die Appellstruktur der Texte. Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa* (Konstanz: Verlag der Druckerei und Verlagsanstalt Konstanz Universitätsverlag, 1970).

23

Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics”, *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 59-90.

24

Cf. Jacob Lund, *Anachrony, Contemporaneity and Historical Imagination* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019).



my and how these are interrelated. Such revision will help understand how contemporary artistic practices create meaning in relation to the non-artistic societal reality in which they operate, and how the otherwise highly diverse practices and works we designate as contemporary art function *as art*.

From the perspective of the theory, history and critique of art the social relevance of contemporary art is not only based on the urgent issues it raises: climate change, racism, human rights, and so on, but also on *how* these issues are raised and made public through an *artistic* generation of meaning. In contrast to a certain classical understanding of the avant-garde I do not see the aesthetic as becoming political through an art that lets itself dissolve in everyday life. The aesthetic is political precisely because of its ability to differentiate itself from the normally inconspicuous organisation of our everyday lifeworld and through such differentiation provoke us to critically reflect on this organisation—which is what makes a certain exhibitionary act of decisive importance.<sup>25</sup>

Contemporary works of art are difficult to recognise as art under the perspective of modern aesthetic theory because at a formal, objective level they can neither be included under the tradition of a particular art form, nor do they limit themselves to the traditional artistic media, but instead assimilate new technologies and industrial modes of production, among other things, in the artistic practice—for instance when Forensic Architecture trains an algorithm to detect *Triple-Chaser* tear gas canisters while simultaneously shedding critical light on that very technology.<sup>26</sup> When they not only evade comparison with art of the past but also seem boundless in relation to their non-artistic outside and the non-aesthetic lifeworld, it in many cases becomes unclear what forms part of the work and what does not. These boundless works, which in particular began to appear in the 1960s—performance, fluxus, minimalism, conceptual art, et al.—do not enroll in the developmental history of the traditional art forms and they are no longer given as something *objectively* defined.<sup>27</sup>

Given that open and boundless works have made it impossible to connect artistic autonomy to the category of work, we need to revise our notion of artistic autonomy if such an idea is to maintain any usefulness in a critical understanding of contemporary art.<sup>28</sup> I subscribe to Rebentisch's analysis that the art theoretical answer to the question of the continuation of artistic autonomy in contemporary art lies in the coupling of the boundless form with the effects of art. This means that we have to move our focus from the work as an organic, distinct unity to the ways in which it interacts with its surroundings and experiencing subjectivities, and that we have to consider the specificity of the aesthetic as characterised by a particular relation between sense-making subjects and objects open to sense-making that mutually affect each other. The contemporary work of art depends on the subjects who take part in it, and it is, so to speak, not until in and through this participation that it is realised as work. The spectators thereby include their contemporary social reality in the structure of the work. In the process of sense-making they make their own associations and dissociations based on their particular spaces of experience.<sup>29</sup> An example of how the work is linked to

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Cf. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* [2000], trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), and Juliane Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst – zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2013); Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art* [2003], trans. Daniel Hendrickson with Gerrit Jackson (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012); and *The Art of Freedom: On the Dialectics of Democratic Existence* [2011], trans. Joseph Ganahl (Cambridge: Polity, 2016). These and the following points are heavily influenced by Rebentisch's work.

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Eyal Weizman (in conversation with Jacob Lund), "Inhabiting the Hyper-Aesthetic Image", 240.

27

Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst*, passim.

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For an analysis of autonomy and contemporary aesthetic practices, see also Sven Lütticken, *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice after Autonomy* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017).

29

Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, 1-23.

the specificity of the political moment of its realisation could be Tania Bruguera's *political timing specific art*. According to Bruguera,

Political-timing-specific art doesn't simply address the news cycle. It's also about understanding how, under certain circumstances, politics can define the aesthetic. This kind of art practice embraces the fact that the work will not have a stable meaning, because this is how politics operates—tackling perceptions as they unfold in real time and mobilising the emotional landscape these perceptions generate.<sup>30</sup>

The autonomy of art therefore has to be understood as something experiential: not to abandon the category of work but to redefine it as a dynamic process in which the aesthetic is no longer separated from the non-aesthetic as something objectively different, but where the aesthetic consists in a reflexive transformation of the non-aesthetic.<sup>31</sup> The work of art consists not only of its physical presence, but also of its senses and the values which are inscribed in it, and those in which it is inscribed. Politically-timing-specific it takes part in the unfolding of the present.<sup>32</sup>

Contemporary aesthetic practices thus also challenge the ways in which the sphere of art is traditionally granted autonomy. Discussing Rancière's philosophy of emancipation and the celebration of openness, indeterminacy and inefficacy in his account of the aesthetic experience, Sven Lütticken convincingly suggests that "the aesthetic is precisely the domain where a 'politics of the sensible' can unfold that is not to be judged exclusively or primarily by its degree of immediate social efficacy".<sup>33</sup> This, according to Lütticken, means that

'[a]esthetic art' is aesthetic practice to the extent that it questions and challenges the relative autonomy of art. The aesthetic is the constant questioning of art and, more precisely, of claims for art's autonomy, counteracting its reduction from persistent problem to ideological given. This is why the comfortable assumption that art is structurally autonomous ultimately leads to aesthetic attrition, as in a lot of late modernist painting. The aesthetic thus understood always returns to haunt limited conceptions or forms of autonomous art. If the aesthetic problematises the relationship of autonomy and heteronomy, then this means that an act or, beyond that, a praxis can be termed aesthetic insofar as it lets autonomy appear sensibly as a problem in a world where subjectivities and objectifications are profoundly entangled, where different agencies coexist and collide.<sup>34</sup>

In the analytical approach to contemporary artistic practices, there is therefore also a need to revise what we understand by the formal aspects of the work of art. The formal does not merely relate to a compositional manipulation of a number of abstract visual or physical properties within a closed and purely self-referential system. Many contemporary aesthetic and artistic practices—including Forensic Architecture and for instance different kinds of socially engaged art—operate

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Tania Bruguera, "Notes on Political Timing Specificity", *Artforum* 57, no. 9 (2019): <https://www.artforum.com/print/201905/notes-on-political-timing-specificity-79513>, accessed October 2021. See also Claire Bishop, "Rise to the Occasion", *Artforum* 57, no. 9 (2019): <https://www.artforum.com/print/201905/claire-bishop-on-the-art-of-political-timing-79512>, accessed October 2021.

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Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst*, 40-57, and Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

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Matthew Fuller and Eyal Weizman, *Investigative Aesthetics*, 221.

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Sven Lütticken, *Cultural Revolution: Aesthetic Practice after Autonomy* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017), 13-14.

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Lütticken, *Cultural Revolution*, 14.

through and with a highly complex formal system, which, in the words of Grant Kester, “is structured through somatic, social, physical and verbal interaction that is inter-subjective and also directed at specific institutional and discursive structures”.<sup>35</sup> Contemporary artistic creations not only integrate or include thematic areas of the non-artistic social lifeworld, but also formally open themselves up to these areas—for instance Jakob Jakobsen’s *Hospital for Self Medication*, an alternative to the official hospital that is open for experimentation in care and treatment—which means that the question of the relationship between art and non-art arises in a new way. The contemporary artistic practices in question here generate a special experience that relates reflexively to the experiences and perceptions that are attached to the different areas of our lifeworld in which they intervene or to which they relate.<sup>36</sup>

#### IV.

Challenges to conventional forms of presenting art and its ideas to the public, guided by ideologies of modernity, have become more and more fundamental since Robert Smithson’s non-sites in the 1960s. We therefore need to revise some of the basic notions and categories through which we understand art, in order to bring our theories up to speed with contemporary artistic and curatorial practice. On the other hand, we should not lose sight of the exhibitionary aspect of art as that aspect is still, I claim, one of the defining characteristics of art: when dissolved in the lifeworld, at best, art becomes activism (caring for how we live together), at worst, it becomes entertainment (addressing consumers rather than what Jacques Rancière would call emancipated spectators). The Latin root of the noun “exhibition”, exhibere, means “to hold out”. I hope to have demonstrated that the exhibition and making perceptible of the work is crucial to its ability to create a reflexive transformation of the non-aesthetic and non-artistic spheres of the lifeworld in which it embeds itself or at which it is directed. The act of exhibition is simultaneously making present and creating distance. This distance installs a difference, which makes reflexive transformations of our shared reality possible. When Forensic Architecture, for instance, to return to our point of departure, make use of reenactments in their investigations of human rights violations—and address these reenactments to a public—real space is turned into a model of itself, and a negotiation of how this reality should be perceived, and what sense to make of it, can begin.

The work presented in this article is supported by Novo Nordisk Foundation grant 0061314

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Grant Kester, “The Limitations of the Exculpatory Critique”, *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 53 (2017), 73-98: 97.

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Rebentisch, *Theorien der Gegenwartskunst*, 117f.

#### Author’s Biography

Jacob Lund is Associate Professor of Aesthetics and Culture and Director of the research program *Contemporary Aesthetics and Technology* at Aarhus University. He is also Editor-in-Chief of *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*. From 2015 to 2020 he was engaged in the research project *The Contemporary Condition* (funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research), which focused on the concept of contemporaneity and changes in our experiences of time as these might be seen to be registered in contemporary

art. The spring of 2022 he embarked on a new four-year research project on *Artistic Practice under Contemporary Conditions* (funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation). Lund has published widely within aesthetics, art studies, critical theory, and comparative literature on topics such as image-politics, subjectivity, memory, mediality, enunciation, and contemporaneity. His book *The Changing Constitution of the Present: Essays on the Work of Art in Times of Contemporaneity* is forthcoming with Sternberg Press in 2022.