

The Author-Curator as Autoethnographer

By

Rui Mateus Amaral

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Abstract

Curators, like artists, have developed a signature that distinguishes their practices. Facilitating this phenomenon is the curator's exercise of self-reflexivity, which renders the exhibition as a form of personal expression, and the curator as an author. This thesis locates two particular author-curators, Harald Szeemann and Ydessa Hendeles, who have extended self-reflexive curating to new levels by incorporating personal items, documents, and artifacts into their exhibitions, thus investing the work with an autobiographical quality. Acknowledging that the individual is constituted by culture, this thesis seeks to draw out the cultural significance of these undertakings. To demonstrate this, exhibitions by Szeemann and Hendeles will be viewed through the lens of autoethnography—a form of research and writing that combines personal and collective experience. This thesis proposes a new way of addressing introspective exhibitions, identifying them as a form of cultural analysis, and aligning the practices of their producers with those of autoethnographers.

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For my mother and father.

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Images of Ydessa Hendeles' exhibition *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)* and *SameDIFFERENCE* are courtesy of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation.

Introduction

Since the ostensible demystification of the curator in the late 1960s,¹ curators have come to develop what art historian Hans Dieter Huber describes as “something like a signature, a specific style, a specific image, a name that can be associated with specific curators and their respective work.”² What has made these particular designations visible is the exhibition, a form which, much like that of the work of the sculptor, the post-modern curator has shaped and assembled into an expressive gesture. The thematic and methodical consistency of exhibitions is what has constituted an individual practice, and consequently has occasioned the reframing of the curator as an author.³ Since this interpretation of the author-curator is widely maintained, Nicolas Bourriaud observes that it is no longer a question as to “whether or not you are an author as a curator, but which kind of author are you.”⁴ Within this range of possible authorial identities is a branch of subjective exhibition making that has driven the notion of thoroughly self-reflexive

¹ Demystification is a term that was applied to curating by Seth Siegelaub. In an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist, he describes it as an endeavour to be conscious of actions. See Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating*, 130.

² Hans Dieter Huber, “Artists as Curators-Curators as Artists?”

³ Consistently, the curator of the latter half of the twentieth century has been connected to auteur theory. *Auteur* is the French word for *author*. The theory emerges from a group of film critics who in the early 1950s created the *Cahiers du Cinéma*. In this collection of writings, the critics argued that films are reflections of the director’s personal vision. François Truffaut captured this argument in his 1954 essay “Une Certain Tendance du Cinema Français.” Thus, exhibitions have also been interpreted as reflecting the personal vision of the curator. Auteur theory and the work of the curator have been linked to Michel Foucault’s essay, “What is an Author?” in which Foucault defines authorship as “a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses.” Harald Szeemann is considered the first auteur-curator. See O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, 97; Hoffmann, “A Certain Tendency of Curating,” 137–42.

⁴ O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture*, 97.

curating to new heights. Accordingly, the demarcation between professional identity and self-identification has become blurred by these endeavours.

Collapsing professional and personal identity are Harald Szeemann and Ydessa Hendeles, who have made of exhibitions an introspective practice by way of drawing on memory and personal objects as the impetus for exhibitions. Certainly their creative sensibility and mode of production lend Szeemann and Hendeles' exhibitions both a personal and sentimental quality, which can be interpreted, as Mieke Bal has observed, "as an autobiographical discourse in the first person, with varying degrees of narcissism."⁵ But such a reading is two-fold; it may also elude the exhibition's potential to be transformative by way of the author-curator's vulnerability. Widening the scope of this reading, the following question can be posed: since individual identity is constituted by culture,⁶ is it possible that the autobiographical dimension of Szeemann and Hendeles' exhibitions also propose a cultural analysis? In other words, how can these exhibitions be addressed in a way that exposes the cultural by acknowledging the autobiographical? This thesis argues that an *autoethnographic* reading of curatorial praxis—in the case of Szeemann and Hendeles—offers an analysis of *self* and *culture* that is meaningful to the

⁵ Bal, "Exposing the Public," 531.

⁶ In his book, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), James Clifford historicizes the notion that "a self belongs to a specific cultural world," which he states has become a truism. To accomplish this, Clifford calls upon Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980) which argues that subjectivity is "not an epiphany of identity freely chosen but a cultural artifact,' for the self maneuvers within constraints and possibilities given by an institutionalized set of collective practices and codes." A native language is an example of this. It is a verbal and written code that connects various people together. The native language one learns to speak becomes a component of identity formation, which is not singular, but plural since various other people can decipher and communicate with this code. Therefore, the process of forming an identity is comprised of various codes, which are already in use and become acquired over time through experience. By analyzing an individual, various cultural references can be deciphered.

author-curator and to others. As follows, this study considers the performative work of Szeemann and Hendeles within the framework of autoethnography.

Firstly, what is autoethnography? It is a form of qualitative research and writing that has emerged from a fracture within the field of ethnography. As a postmodern subject who cannot trust the overarching narratives to give a full account of their experience, the autoethnographer analyzes (graphy) personal experience (auto) in relation to cultural experience (ethno), often articulated through text in the first person.⁷ Since autoethnography does not preclude personal narrative, it is highly applicable to Szeemann and Hendeles' introspective form of exhibition making. Leading proponent of autoethnographic studies Carolyn Ellis notes, the researcher moves “backward and forward, inward and outward”⁸ between the personal and the social. From this motion, she continues, “distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition.”⁹ Consequently, the autoethnographic study is an arrangement of various layers of consciousness, which offers both an autobiographic and ethnographic account of what it means to be alive within certain social and political conditions. This deepens the viability of autoethnography to be tested along Szeemann and Hendeles practices, since the author-curators have acknowledged that their thematic concerns stem from an inquiry into what it means to be alive at particular time.¹⁰ That which has been inscribed on a single person's life—both trauma and triumphs—comes forward in autoethnographic writing, and once transcribed and connected to a much larger

⁷ Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 37. Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, *Handbook of Autoethnography*.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Bentley Mays, “Bears,” 93.

condition, moves to the level of collective wounds and memory. Hence, the blending of personal and cultural experience possesses the potential to be cathartic both for the researcher and reader of the study.¹¹

Drawing on items that have acquired emotional value, both for the author-curator and for others, the exhibitions under consideration look to summon the past as a means of foregrounding the present by way of these objects' arrangement. In connecting past and present through such objects, Szeemann and Hendeles' exhibitions are explorations into the human psyche and the ways in which an object can perform as storyteller of particular dispositions. This thesis analyzes specific strategies that Szeemann and Hendeles employ in order to mobilize their voices, and the ways in which other voices may be articulated in their undertakings.

Various aspects of these exhibitions and of the author-curators have influenced the decision to assess their practices. Firstly, although various author-curators operate within contemporary art, Szeemann and Hendeles are among the most visible figures that have collapsed the distance between professional and personal identity. This explains why the exhibitions under study have been previously read as autobiographical accounts. Certainly the positioning of these particular curators is singular because, for the most part, curators operate within the context of institutional power where self-reflexivity is reserved for the work of artists, and not curators. Therefore, Szeemann and Hendeles are also united by their independence from the institution, each having established their own respective institutions in which they can operate as they choose.

¹¹ Custer, "Autoethnography as a Transformative Research Method," 9.

Invested in art's function as a transformative and civilizing force, both Szeemann and Hendeles have constructed the terms in which they see that art can fulfill this role. In 1969, Szeemann became the first independent curator after he resigned from the Kunsthalle Bern and established the *Agentur für geistige Gastarbeit* (Agency for Spiritual Guest Work) later that year.¹² The agency was an autonomous network of collaborators led by Szeemann, who would develop and execute temporary exhibitions for various institutions and spaces, maintaining what Daniel Birnbaum describes as a “genuine belief that art exhibitions were spiritual undertakings.”¹³ In 1988, Hendeles founded the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, a private museum where she, as Robert Fulford explains it, “chooses and buys all the art it contains, designs all the exhibitions and runs the entire institution on her own.”¹⁴ Setting their own terms has afforded Szeemann and Hendeles the freedom to experiment with their practices in ways that challenge curatorial and institutional conventions, as the exhibitions discussed below exemplify.

Finally, author-curators Szeemann and Hendeles form an intersection between local and international perspectives. In consideration of this thesis being prepared in Toronto, the inclusion of Hendeles, who is based here, connects this document to the context in which it is being produced, resonating on a local level. The inclusion of Szeemann, who primarily worked in Europe, demonstrates that these curatorial inquiries are not bound to a particular geographical site, or time, since forty years exist between the

¹² Daniel Birnbaum, “When Attitude Becomes Form,” 58. From my readings of Szeemann’s texts, I have observed that Szeemann refers to spirituality in the secular sense, and not from within a religious framework. Secular spirituality maintains and emphasizes various aspects of humanity such as empathy, forgiveness, and responsibility.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴ Fulford, “On the Neurological Path Through Ydessa’s Museum.”

exhibitions of this study. These perspectives also align themselves with the history of the author of this document, who is a European immigrant to Toronto, and who remains engaged with both sites, as well as committed to summoning up the past to interpret the present.

This thesis is formed of three main chapters. The first focuses on Szeemann's intimate exhibition of his late grandfather Etienne Szeemann's personal collection of objects and documents, staged in the author-curator's former apartment in Bern, Switzerland in 1974. Entitled *Grossvater—ein Pionier wie wir (Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us)*,¹⁵ the exhibition marks a turning point in Szeemann's career, because it is here that he explored new ways of making exhibitions by directing his gaze inward to consult his own emotions, memories, and visions. Becoming introspective, Szeemann set out to visually reinterpret the life of his grandfather, an immigrant to Switzerland who became an accomplished coiffeur and collector. Norman K. Denzin's notion of *interpretative autoethnography* is utilized in this chapter as a framework by which to grasp Szeemann's curatorial actions and to uncover the multiple layers of consciousness possibly embedded within Etienne Szeeman's objects, and consequently within Szeemann's exhibition.

¹⁵ As Joanna Szupinska notes, *Grossvater* "has been briefly cited numerous times as evidence of the curator's adventurous style—his brave willingness, on the heels of international acclaim, to make small, personal exhibitions of non-art objects." This exhibition is one of Szeemann's least documented and analyzed. For this reason, Szupinska's analysis of *Grossvater*, Sharon Lerner's translations of Szeemann's exhibition leaflet, and Annemarie Monteil's interpretation of the exhibition have been crucial to my research. See Szeemann, "Grandfather," 25-30; Szupinska, "Grandfather: A History Like Ours," 31-41; Monteil and Szeemann, "Grossvater," 380-3.

The second chapter considers a pairing within the first passage of Hendeles' exhibition *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)* (2003), staged at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, Germany.¹⁶ The pairing consists of Hendeles' *The Teddy Bear Project* (2002) and artist Maurizio Cattelan's sculpture *Him* (2001). The *Partners* exhibition foregrounds Hendeles' unique contribution to curatorial discourse, articulated as a *curatorial composition*. Spanning over three thousand various family-album photographs (a few of which show Hendeles and her parents) and recovered teddy bears, *The Teddy Bear Project* and *Him* call into question ideas around memory, power, obsession, loss, and recovery. Employing Grace A. Giorgio's notion of bearing witness and enacting memorial, this chapter investigates the ways in which the few personal elements and didactics incorporated in the archive identify the exhibition as having an autobiographical nature, but may also allude to a loss in Hendeles' life which propels a need to belong. In this yearning to identify and be identified, I ask, does Hendeles propose an analysis of a condition that is much larger than her own?

The final chapter is a reflection on what has unfolded within the pages of this document, as well as offering a projection of how to move forward with this research. This thesis is presented as a gesture towards extending autoethnography's methods into the curatorial field, and in turn, reframing a particular form of curating as performing

¹⁶ The main scholar on Hendeles' work and on this particular exhibition is Hendeles herself. In addition to providing *Notes on the Exhibition*, Hendeles has written a doctoral thesis on her curatorial methodology, which is grounded by the exhibition discussed in this thesis. Other scholars have analyzed *Partners* in relation to film (Mieke Bal), memory and trauma (Anja Bock) and the archive (Xiaoyu Weng). In 2004, filmmaker Agnès Varda created the film, *Ydessa, The Bears and etc.* All of these analyses have been valuable to my research. See Hendeles, "Curatorial Compositions,"; Bal, "Exhibition as Film," 71–93; Bock, "Exhibiting Trauma"; Weng, "The Archive in Exhibition Making," 70–89; Varda, *Ydessa, The Bears and etc.*.

autoethnography—an association that has produced no scholarship as of yet. This thesis also seeks to propose a new way of interpreting the author-curator’s role in the field of cultural production, as well as within the Ethnographic Turn¹⁷ in contemporary art that continues to expand.

¹⁷ See Kosuth, “The Artist as Anthropologist,” 107–28; Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” 171–204; Alex Coles, *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*; Schneider and Wright, *Anthropology and Art Practice*; Wilson-Goldie, “The Stories They Need,” 204–10.

Literature Review

Autoethnography is a self-reflexive, discursive research method that emerged out of postmodernism in the 1980s, and from what has been described as a social, political, and cultural “crisis of confidence” in the West, which in anthropology is known as the “crisis of representation.”¹⁸ In both cases, notions of truth and authority were disrupted, opening up the possibility for various marginalized and oppressed groups of people to seek liberation and reclaim their right to represent themselves. Master and universal narratives were questioned, institutions and systems of belief were fractured, and epistemological concerns were raised. Theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard captures this shift precisely when he notes, “Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of authorities: it refines our sensitivity towards differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's parology.”¹⁹

For anthropology, the crisis considers the development of ethnography within the context of hegemonic repressive systems, and how ethnography would mutate in a socially and politically shifting world where, as James Clifford remarks, the “West could no longer present itself as the unique purveyor of knowledge about others.”²⁰ The crisis of representation can be linked to the publishing of Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's diary, *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (1967), for as Clifford Geertz

¹⁸ Lawson and McCauley, “Crisis of Conscience,” 201–23; Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*; Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*; Ellis and Bochner, “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity,” 733–68.

¹⁹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.

²⁰ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 22.

puts it, Malinowski “made of ethnography an oddly inward matter, a question of self-testing and self transformation, and of its writing a form of self revelation.”²¹ Within Malinowski’s diaries, which were intentionally separate from the research documents, the ethnographer’s personal conditions and the conditions of the study were taken into account, thus emphasizing that these studies were closer to interpretations rather than objective truths. On the shoulders of Malinowski, *ethnographic memoirs*²² or *confessional tales*²³ began to take form, and reflexive ethnographies became more widely practiced.²⁴ As Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner note, at this time scholars from various social sciences began to question “what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics.”²⁵ The emergence of a reflexive turn in anthropology out of which autoethnography develops has been called into question by Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont, and Amanda Coffey, who argue that since its beginning ethnography has considered various voices and methods, and to position this reflexive turn as a discontinuity in the history of ethnography is inaccurate.²⁶

Among the proponents of autoethnography, Deborah Reed Danahay and Ellis agree that one of the earliest pieces of writing to introduce autoethnography was David Hayano’s *Human Organization* (1979), where Hayano defines it as a cultural study

²¹ Geertz, *Works and Lives*, 22.

²² Tedlock, “From Participant Observation,” 69–94.

²³ Van Maanen, “An End to Innocence,” 1–35.

²⁴ Ellis and Bochner, “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity,” 733–68.

²⁵ Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview.”

²⁶ Atkinson, Delamont, Coffey, “Ethnography: Post, Past and Present,” 460–71.

conducted by an anthropologist who studies his or her “own people.”²⁷ Hayano’s description of autoethnography lends itself to an examination of the possible ways Szeemann and Hendeles perform cultural analysis from within their own culture. Rather than studying and “describing the lives of those other than ourselves,”²⁸ as anthropologist Tim Ingold puts it, autoethnography is defined by its *insider* perspective and status. The term has since been described and employed by various producers of knowledge, including anthropologists, sociologists, and literary critics. Yet, as is often the case when an idea passes through multiple hands, its meaning has been subtly displaced. This effect is even more pronounced as the term gains variations across different disciplines: ethnobiography,²⁹ personal ethnography,³⁰ and auto-observation.³¹ Ultimately, these recontextualizations—or the mutable quality of the method—have been a cause for concern and criticism. Charged in this way by both autobiographers and social scientists, autoethnography has been rendered as too aesthetic and emotional to be an ethnographic study, or too theoretical and analytical to constitute autobiography. It is assumed by their critics that autoethnographers do insufficient amounts of fieldwork; they do not spend enough time looking beyond themselves and their own cultures.³² Other critics report that autoethnographies are composed of biased data and that autoethnography devolves into narcissism.³³ Certainly, writing in the first person risks moving toward biased information

²⁷ Hayano, “Auto-ethnography,” 99.

²⁸ Ingold, “Why Anthropology is *Not* Ethnography,” 69–92.

²⁹ Legeune, *On Autobiography*.

³⁰ Crawford, “Personal Ethnography,” 158–70.

³¹ Adler and Adler, “Observational Techniques,” 377–92.

³² James Buzard, “On Auto-Ethnographic Authority,” 61–91; Fine, “Towards a People,” 41–60; Delamont, “The Only Honest Thing,” 51–63.

³³ Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer,” 171–204.

and narcissistic tendencies which make the work easy to dismiss, but as various scholars of autoethnography assert, *successful* and *effective* autoethnographic studies are composed of complex narratives and powerful metaphors that interweave multiple voices.³⁴ Thus, the autoethnographic study although written in the first person, accounts for personal and social observations, which direct the study away from narcissism.

Extending the differences between various forms of autoethnographic writings, Leon Anderson, citing Atkinson, Delmont, and Coffey's position, proposes that two forms of autoethnography exist, *evocative autoethnography* and a new form he describes as *analytic autoethnography*.³⁵ Anderson suggests that the analytic autoethnographer is an immersed participant in the culture of study, but maintains self-awareness of his or her participation in an academic community as a scholar and researcher. Although analytic autoethnographies account for both personal experience and the experience of others, the study is shaped by empirical data that aims to interpret and represent a culture in a way that is much more general and connected to a broader social context. In other words, Anderson suggests that the autoethnographer apply a lens that views culture more objectively.

In "Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà vu All Over Again?" which responds to Anderson, Norman K. Denzin maintains that his notion of analytic autoethnography reestablishes the distance between the observer and the observed. He expresses further that Anderson is promoting a return to an ethnographic methodology (connected to the

³⁴ Ellis, *The Ethnographic I*, 252–5.

³⁵ Anderson, "Analytic Autoethnography," 373-95.

Chicago School) that appears dated and fails to address the “crisis of representation” from which reflexive ethnography manifested, and which autoethnography responds to. Denzin summarizes his position, stating, “Ethnography is not an innocent practice. Our research practices are performative, pedagogical and political. Through our writings and talk, we enact the worlds we study.”³⁶ Denzin is committed to autoethnography insofar as it can be personally and culturally meaningful both for the researcher and reader of the study. Such research is vulnerable, introspective, and political, an orientation that can more readily challenge and reconceptualize what it means to be represented, and what it could mean to represent others in a cultural study. Ultimately, Denzin characterizes Anderson’s position as unproductive, as it undermines autoethnography’s critical integrity which so many scholars (including Denzin) have worked arduously to justify.

³⁶ Denzin, “Analytic Autoethnography, or Déjà vu All Over Again?” 422.

Methodology

Autoethnography offers one possible lens through which to view Szeemann and Hendeles' curatorial endeavours, as it mitigates the distance between autobiography and ethnography, thus revealing that the researcher can produce work that is both vulnerable and critical. Its applicability proceeds from the fact that both cultural producers employ the exhibition as a vehicle for reflexivity and self-expression, which is akin to autobiography. Autoethnography destabilizes the perception that self-reflexivity is self-serving. Since the individual is constituted by culture, working from self-knowledge can be analogous to working from the knowledge of others. It follows that the acts of exercising self-reflexivity and textualizing personal experience into a readable form have the potential to be altruistic.

There are, however, limitations to the application of this lens. Firstly, Autoethnography is a field of research that is hard to pin-down. As Ellis and Bochner advise, there are over forty similarly situated terms for autoethnography.³⁷ Consequently, autoethnography is wide ranging and can be difficult to critically apply. For this reason, two distinct interpretations of autoethnography are being employed within this thesis, one per case study. Although various other mutations within the field could have been situated within Szeemann and Hendeles' exhibitions, choosing to focus on two autoethnographic approaches gives each one of these approaches the breadth to be as coherent as possible. A second area of difficulty for autoethnography is the validity of sources. One of the primary sources of data for autoethnographic studies is the memory of individuals, and

³⁷ Ellis and Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity," 739.

this dependence on material in which fact and fiction are often blurred can undermine the validity of the study.³⁸ Lastly, presenting oneself as the representative of a particular way of being in the world also risks generalizing the experience of others, which contradicts the very basis of autoethnography as it emerged from the cultural critiques of the 1980s.³⁹

Indeed, the exhibitions of curators such as Jan Hoet, Axel Vervoordt, or Chantal Pontbriand could have been included here, but the pairing of Szeemann and Hendeles offers a commingling of the international and local, male and female, historical and contemporary, and the upper and working class. I will treat each of their exhibitions as an object of study. The formal and conceptual qualities of the exhibition will be analyzed in relation to the author-curator's own methodology and the historical, social, and political context from which Szeemann and Hendeles' forms of expression have been articulated. These conditions are given meaning within their exhibitions, but they are drawn out further within Szeemann and Hendeles' respective chapters. Attending to the contexts in which each exhibition was created has necessitated inquiry into the circumstances of 1970s Bern, Switzerland, and the Holocaust, but I will draw them out further. Research towards all of these analyses incorporates the mining of archival materials, participant observation, and documentary analysis, in addition to library and Internet research of primary and secondary documents.

³⁸ Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, *The Handbook of Autoethnography*.

³⁹ Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture*; Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*.

Harald Szeemann | Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us

Documenta V,⁴⁰ titled *Questioning Reality—Image Worlds Today* (1972), was conceptualized by Szeemann as an encyclopedic “100-Day-Event” that combined conceptual art, and what art critic Hilton Kramer describes as “tableaux, live performances, films, lectures, soap-box orators” and non-art objects from various fields of inquiry and production.⁴¹ Within the large-scale exhibition were thematic sections, one of which was realized as *Individual Mythologies*. To artists and critics it became the most polarizing aspect of the exhibition on account of Szeemann’s vested interest in the artist’s creation of systems and signs that are made unknowable to others. Florence Derieux points out that, according to Szeemann, “art history must focus on ... intense intentions [rather] than on masterpieces.”⁴² In this sense, Szeemann was calling for the curator’s analysis of political, social, and cultural gestures, rather than assuming the role of a connoisseur. The section called *Individual Mythologies* presented intimate temporary museums, such as Marcel Broodthaers’ *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968–1972), that gave expression to the artist’s own internal universe.⁴³ Moved by Broodthaers’ personal museum and artist Daniel Spoerri’s *Musée Sentimental* (1976),

⁴⁰ Documenta is a large-scale exhibition that takes place once every five years in Kassel, Germany. Local artist and professor Arnold Bode founded Documenta and its first edition took place in the summer of 1955. The ongoing exhibition was conceived as a means to reunite Germany with international artistic practices that had been deemed degenerate by the Nazi’s in World War II. Previous to Szeemann’s position as “general secretary” of Documenta V, Bode and a twenty-six-member board of directors had organized each exhibition. Szeemann was the first to exercise total freedom of expression as artistic director. Since then, a new artistic director is appointed for every iteration of Documenta, thus the exhibition becomes reinvented.

⁴¹ Derieux, “Press Coverage,” 149.

⁴² Derieux, *Harald Szeemann*, 8.

⁴³ Aubart and Pinaroli, “Interview with Tobia Bezzola,” 28.

where the intensity of the artists' inner visions were revealed to disconcerting effect, Szeemann's gaze shifted inwards to unearth his own lunacies which would manifest in a much more refined, idiosyncratic form of expression as the *Museum of Obsessions*, of which Szeemann confessed, "exists only in my head."⁴⁴ The *Museum of Obsessions* is a curatorial concept that took on the qualities of an art institution but on Szeemann's terms. The museum was imaginary, unfolding outward from his obsessions. It was not a fixed entity; it would emerge in the form of exhibitions in both unusual and conventional locations such as shop windows, palazzos, and *kunsthalls*. Added to this, the museum was also not defined by a specialization in any artistic category—it was both encyclopedic and sentimental. Ultimately, Szeemann's museum gave his notion of *Individual Mythologies* a physical and metaphysical capacity, what he articulates as a "spiritual space in which an individual sets those signs, signals, and symbols which for him mean the world."⁴⁵

Szeemann's immersion in and analysis of his personal visions of the world counters his previous position as the artists' *accomplice*, a position in which he sought to "bring the intensity of the experience with artists into the framework of the museum."⁴⁶ Prior to the formation of the *Museum of Obsessions*, Szeemann—interested in the authenticity of feelings—performed his practice much like a sociologist who observed the lives, work, and beliefs of artists, analyzing and translating their *attitudes* into exhibitions

⁴⁴ Obrist, *A Brief History*, 92.

⁴⁵ Richter, "Artists and Curators as Authors."

⁴⁶ Müller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, 20.

that captured the ambivalent nature of their art.⁴⁷ His engagement with artists, particularly Etienne Martin and the artists whose work was included in the *Individual Mythologies* section, would eventually propel Szeemann toward the discovery of his authentic attitude and pivot his practice toward the articulation of his personal ideas. Curator Daniel Birnbaum suggests that at that time, Szeemann was investigating how a “deeply ‘egocentric’ universe could ever be communicated in a language shared by many.”⁴⁸ Autoethnographers conduct a similar investigation, which seeks to resolve the ways personal experience can speak to a cultural condition, or way of being. Denzin’s notion of *interpretative autoethnography* offers insight into the ways in which personal memories, feelings, and epiphanies can be unearthed from objects and documents in order to restage lived experience.⁴⁹ A re-presentation in a new context constitutes a reinterpretation according to Denzin, and perpetuates new meanings and readings of an individual life or experience and consequently enacts a translation of the singular into the plural. Applying interpretative autoethnography to Szeemann’s exhibition following Documenta V may reveal how Szeemann was able to reconcile individual and collective experience, and create a spiritually centered space.

Szeemann’s exhibition following Documenta V took the form of a personal museum for his late paternal grandfather, Etienne Szeemann, a coiffeur and collector. *Grossvater—ein Pionier wie wir* (Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us, 1974) was staged at

⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁸ Birnbaum, “When Attitude Becomes Form,” 58.

⁴⁹ Denzin, “Interpretative Autoethnography,” 124.

Galerie Toni Gerber in Bern, Switzerland, three years after his grandfather passed away.⁵⁰ The exhibition space was particularly unusual, but fitting seeing as Gerber's gallery was an apartment that had previously been Szeemann's home. He presented his grandfather's possessions—hairstyling instruments, personal advertisements, furniture, a stamp collection, monetary bills, and his memoirs—as the evidence of a life that had been lived and actively documented.⁵¹ Curator and former assistant to Szeemann Tobia Bezzola maintains that this exhibition was experimental, and truly a new turn in the exhibition-maker's practice, in part because the object's relationship to three-dimensional space and to other objects was highly considered and scrutinized.⁵² Possibly referring to projects by artists Broodthaers and Spoerri, Szeemann asked himself, "How [does one] imitate the artist who installs his sculptures in an exhibition space in such a way that the object conveys information beyond its historical significance?"⁵³ Szeemann would concede that each object requires dimensional breath, and that this spatial breathing would give form to what he called "poems in space."⁵⁴ *Grandfather* embodied this poetic designation, which was applied to the exhibitions that would follow.

A personal text accompanied the exhibition, which described his grandfather's life and illuminated these objects' histories and their potential meaning. Reflecting on the act of exhibition making as a way of representing lives, Szeemann noted,

⁵⁰ Pinaroli and Roalandini-Beyer, "Harald Szeemann's Biography," 197.

⁵¹ Szupinska, "Grandfather: A History Like Ours," 31.

⁵² Aubart and Pinaroli, "Interview with Tobia Bezzola," 29.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 30.

When I visit memorial sites, and also in the making of my own exhibitions, I have always been fascinated by the problem of how to artistically represent a life through the display of objects. A one-to-one reconstruction of [Etienne Szeemann's] home would not have sufficed here. Only in a guided form could my grandfather's own order be shown.⁵⁵

This statement, which is included in what reads as a four-page eulogy corresponds to Denzin's notion of epiphanies as "the interactional moments and experiences that leave marks on people's lives,"⁵⁶ which is exactly how autoethnographies begin to take form. From events such as a death, the autoethnographer follows various methods of recollection in order to retell and reconstruct experience. Typically these methods include fieldwork, mining of personal documents and artifacts, and conducting interviews.⁵⁷ In Szeemann's case, the collection he inherited from Etienne Szeemann became the source from which he could piece together his grandfather's life.

Included in Etienne Szeemann's collection were stamps, badges, stitches, monetary bills, and collectible rifleman cards, as well as personal writings. Etienne Szeemann's autobiography, *To begin with God and to end with God is the best way to live*, along with the published accounts of his wanderings through Europe in *The Master Hairstylist Journal*, were presented within the exhibition.⁵⁸ In his text, Szeemann describes the process of encountering and organizing his grandfather's collection: "His home at Ryffligässchen 8 was an overflowing lodge that began as three, and later became two, rooms. At the clearing of it in 1971 [...] I took everything that reminded me of my grandparents. For years, I had found this house worthy of exhibit, as a visualization of a

⁵⁵ Szeemann, "Grandfather," 28.

⁵⁶ Szupinska, "Grandfather: A History Like Ours," 31.

⁵⁷ Anderson and Glass-Coffin, "I Learn by Going," 65.

⁵⁸ Szeemann, "Grandfather," 25.

history, as a testimony to a lifestyle.”⁵⁹ That Szeemann did not exhibit his grandfather’s home as a readymade, nor try to reproduce the context that these objects were discovered in, enacts what Denzin describes as the interpretative quality of autoethnography. He states, “[T]he life story becomes an invention, a re-presentation, a historical object often ripped or torn out of its contexts and recontextualized in the spaces and understandings of the story.”⁶⁰ The removal of his Szeemann’s grandfather’s objects from their personal site into Szeemann’s former apartment places his grandfather’s story within a new physical and metaphysical⁶¹ frame from which his life is retold and its meaning rediscovered. That is, Etienne Szeemann’s life is now abstracted by the fact that his grandson assumes the role of reinterpreting his life, selecting and omitting certain objects, documents, and placing them within new conditions. This displacement directly implicates Szeemann, centralizing his voice as narrator and endowing the exhibition with a narrative structure. Such a narrative structure seems to be a common formal attribute of exhibitions. As Boris Groys explains, “Every exhibition tells a story, by directing the viewer through the exhibition in a particular order, the exhibition space is always a narrative space.”⁶² Perhaps this is what Szeemann was referring to in his notes when he remarks, “Only in a guided form [the exhibition] could my grandfather’s own order be shown.”⁶³ Szeemann arranged Etienne Szeemann’s collection into various visual compositions that embodied

⁵⁹ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁰ Denzin, “Interpretative Autoethnography,” 126.

⁶¹ Here *metaphysical* is referred to as an abstraction.

⁶² Groys, “On the Curatorship,” 44–5.

⁶³ Szeemann, “Grandfather,” 28.

themes that had been drawn out from specific diary entries.⁶⁴ In the exhibition leaflet, Szeemann identifies these themes as “Tree of Origin,” “Grandmother,” “Grandfather’s Roots in Austria-Hungary,” “Bern and Switzerland,” “Grandfather’s Occupation (the years of wandering and learning, his own businesses, his printed matter, honors and distinctions),” “Grandfather’s Relationship to Money,” “Grandfather’s Role Models,” “Grandparents’ homes,” “Grandfather’s Contribution to the Triumph of Beauty,” and “What the Others Say.”⁶⁵ Stacked books, mannequins, and photographs mounted on walls that were covered in Etienne Szeemann’s hairstyling advertisements visualized some of these themes. Visualizing other themes were wigs set on bust forms, hairstyling tools gently placed on furniture, and boxes piled on top of one another. The viewer moved through these compositions as if moving through chapters of Etienne Szeemann’s diary and consequently, his life. In many ways, Szeemann had come to construct his own *musée sentimental*. These configurations qualify that this project is no longer only Szeemann’s grandfather’s story, but Szeemann’s story *of* his grandfather. Szeemann affirms this act of transcription when he confesses, “A grandfather exists long after his death in the conversations about him, and also in his stories that are retold. This is only an exhibition.”⁶⁶

Szeemann’s project promises more than just being an exhibition. Its effects, which will be made visible below, are cathartic, as many autoethnographies tend to be, and also revealing of a collective presentness, where past and future meet and fold into one

⁶⁴ See Appendix A.

⁶⁵ Szupinska, “Grandfather: A History Like Ours,” 34.

⁶⁶ Szeemann, “Grandfather,” 29.

another—a quality that interpretative autoethnography values. Invested in transforming the autoethnographic project into a critical and performative practice that begins with biography but extends out to “culture, discourse, history and ideology,”⁶⁷ Denzin situates his method in relation to philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s term *universal singular*.

Paraphrasing Sartre, Denzin explains:

No individual is just an individual; each person is a universal singular, summed up and for this reason universalized by his or her historical epoch, each person in turn reproducing him or herself in its singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by universalizing singularity in his or her projects, the person requires simultaneous examination from both ends.⁶⁸

Coming into use in the early 1960s, the *universal singular* maintains that each individual reflects the conditions of their time, and that individuals express these timely conditions concretely and singularly. Indeed, Denzin employs Sartre’s concept to illustrate the researcher’s flexibility to move inward and outward between self and culture, past and present. What is questionable in Denzin’s appropriation is the use of the word “universal,” which infers regularities and generalizations. Since autoethnography is a postmodern field that has developed out of an “incredulity toward metanarratives,”⁶⁹ as Lyotard defines it, perhaps engaging philosopher Jean Luc Nancy’s *singular plural* is more fitting for its pointing toward a designation of the singular as mutual and coexistent like a community rather than the universe.⁷⁰ Thus, interpretative autoethnography asserts that what is *plural* about the individual and how these qualities are singularly articulated

⁶⁷ Denzin, “Interpretative Autoethnography,” 124.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxv.

⁷⁰ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 39–41.

be considered. In relation to historical time and space, what do Etienne's objects and Szeemann's text reveal? Conversely, what does the presentation of these objects offer if Szeemann's cultural conditions are taken into account? Szeemann's exhibition notes and European history will be useful to unpack this *singular plural* dialectic.

Etienne Szeemann was born in 1873 in Diósd, a small town outside Budapest, Hungary. The country was assimilated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire following a revolution that failed to democratize the country. This amalgamation incited a Germanization of the Hungarian public, forcing many citizens to emigrate for personal reasons and having lost their jobs due to industrialization.⁷¹ Etienne joined the emigration wave of 1880–1915, which is known as the “great economic emigration” from Hungary.⁷² This relocation is indicated in Szeemann's notes when he mentions that his grandfather had first stopped in Bern in 1897.⁷³ Etienne fell in love with Bern and with Swiss culture in general, eventually settling there in 1904 after wandering through Hungary, Romania, Greece, Turkey, Vienna, Paris, and London.⁷⁴ In his text, Szeemann describes his grandfather's journey as a pursuit of capitalist ambitions that “allowed the dream of the ‘poor, hungry, boy that loved Switzerland above all’ to become a reality.”⁷⁵ In 1919, Etienne Szeemann gained status as a Swiss neutral citizen. During this time, Switzerland's population included a significant percentage of foreigners who, like Etienne Szeemann, had wandered through Europe in search of a similar dream, eventually

⁷¹ Várdy, “Hungarian Americans,” 120.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Szupinska, “Grandfather: A History Like Ours,” 35; Szeemann, “Grandfather,” 27.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

establishing themselves as Swiss citizens when the Swiss were still open to such possibilities.

The Switzerland of the 1970s had shifted from Etienne Szeemann's image of it as being a country open to immigrants, since immigration was no longer being encouraged after World War II.⁷⁶ In the 1950s and '60s, Switzerland began to draw in foreigners for temporary manual labour such as construction and factory work; these foreigners were referred to as *guest workers*.⁷⁷ The oil crisis in 1973 deprived these workers of employment, deeming their efforts valueless and resulting in their deportation back to countries such as Italy and Spain.⁷⁸ Following his resignation in 1969 from the Kunsthalle Bern, Szeemann established the *Agentur für Geistige Gastarbeit* (Agency for Intellectual Guest Labour or Agency for Spiritual Guest Labour).⁷⁹ The formation of the agency speaks not only to Szeemann's desire to emancipate himself from bureaucracy in pursuit of creative freedom, but also of the shifting politics of Swiss culture. The frustration and resentment toward immigrants affected the exhibition-maker in a personal way. Reflecting on the intensity of the situation, Szeemann remarks, "A political party was even founded to lower the number of foreigners in Switzerland. I was attacked since my name was not Swiss but Hungarian. In response, I founded the *Agentur für Geistige Gastarbeit*, which was a political statement since the Italian, Turkish, and Spanish

⁷⁶ "Switzerland Faces Common European Challenges"; Bains, "European Immigration Since 1945," 184.

⁷⁷ D'Amato, "Switzerland: a multicultural country," 133.

⁷⁸ "Switzerland Faces Common European Challenges."

⁷⁹ Szupinska, "Grandfather: A History Like Ours," 39; Birnbaum, "When Attitude Becomes Form," 58.

workers in Switzerland were called guest workers.”⁸⁰ Although not an immigrant himself, but the child and grandchild of immigrants, Szeemann’s empathy became fully realized by the formation of the agency (in spite of its overtones) and the *Grandfather* exhibition.

Szeemann’s exhibition title *Grandfather: A Pioneer Like Us* demonstrates his political sensibilities, as it positions his grandfather as a pioneer and the embodiment of a generation whose ambitions, heartbreak, and accomplishments have made the present possible. To be sure, without the efforts of this generation, Szeemann’s would not exist. By staging this exhibition as the work of the *Agency for Spiritual Guest Labour*, Szeemann also attempts to redeem the status of the guest worker by identifying himself as one and tracing his grandfather’s journey from “poor, hungry, boy” to small business owner to world traveller and collector. Szeemann articulates his grandfather’s triumphs:

He narrated his own life through stories, and even preserved them in his memoirs. I have included everything here, for even you should know what snake fat is good for, how to dress the hair of an emperor, how to throw marble cake from the window of a train, what to do when jealous colleagues, in the middle of the night, build a brick wall over the door of your business, and finally, what ethics are.⁸¹

Etienne Szeemann’s objects are not merely charged with sentiment, nor do they attest only to his life. They are embedded with Swiss and European politics pertaining to immigration and with the various other lives that have shared the experience of wandering, dreaming, working, and overcoming. In this way, Szeemann’s exhibition fulfills what Denzin explains is interpretative autoethnography’s “commitment to a social justice agenda—to inquiry that explicitly addresses issues of inequity and injustice in

⁸⁰ Obrist, *A Brief History*, 88.

⁸¹ Szeemann, “Grandfather,” 31.

particular social moments and places.”⁸² Joanna Szupinska’s reading of the exhibition, “Grandfather: a history like ours,” proposes that Szeemann’s choice of guests to the exhibition deepens his socio-political gesture. To opening night, Szeemann invited Etienne Szeemann’s affluent clients in addition to his own colleagues and artists—a list that included Christian Boltanski, Sigmar Polke, Mario and Marisa Merz, as well as Michael Buthe, Katharina Sieverding, and Udo Kier.⁸³ Szeemann describes this interlacing of social classes as “an almost orgiastic night in my grandparents’ furniture”⁸⁴—an analogy that curator Ralph Rugoff similarly makes of group exhibitions. Rugoff suggests, “A great group exhibition asks its audience to make connections. Like an orgy, it brings things together in stimulating and unpredictable combinations.”⁸⁵ Although the exhibition was not necessarily a group show, the audience’s presence, their sitting “among the furniture as props and elements,” became part of the exhibition itself.⁸⁶ As Szupinska notes, referencing Szeemann, “[I]t was not until the room filled with these characters that the objects took on their multifarious meanings.”⁸⁷ This sentiment refers to the prevalent mistreatment of immigrants by Bern gentility of the 1970s. When Szeemann left Paris with his family and moved back to Bern, he searched for an apartment, eventually finding one owned by an aristocratic elderly woman, Mme. de Meuron. Szeemann recalls their exchange: “ ‘What did your grandfather do?’ she asked. My answer: ‘But you know him. His is maître-coiffeur.’ ‘And your father?’ Same answer.

⁸² Denzin, “Interpretative Autoethnography,” 125.

⁸³ Szeemann, “Grossvater,” 380.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Rugoff, “You Talking to Me?” 44.

⁸⁶ Szupinska, “Grandfather: A History Like Ours,” 40.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

‘And you are a museum director. What disorder!’ ”⁸⁸ Szeemann continues, “But despite what to a member of the ancient regime was obviously a scandalous defiance of genealogical predestination, we got the apartment.”⁸⁹ In light of this exchange, Szeemann capitalized on the fact that his grandfather’s life and his restaging of it as an exhibition formed a point of intersection between two socially, economically, and politically disparate groups who, if for only one night, transgressed the social boundaries of the time. Szeemann composed his exhibition as an analysis of Swiss culture, deeming it fractured and divided by native and immigrant, working and upper class, older and newer generation. Conducting what has been described as an orgiastic experience where these tensions are both heightened and reconciled, the exhibition acquires a humanizing quality for its ability to create a passageway between Szeemann and his grandfather, as well as a bridge connecting opposing forces at the time. As Denzin notes of autoethnography, “[U]nder this framework we teach one another.”⁹⁰ By way of creating a situation of temporary inclusivity, Szeemann also took the opportunity to teach his audience through the exhibition. And, as Jean-Christophe Ammann remarks, “He had great confidence in art’s ability to point society down new paths.”⁹¹

Etienne Szeemann’s drive to rise above his beginnings, visualized and intensified by Szeemann’s presentation of his archive, is precisely a testimony to transgression and transformation. Reflecting on the exhibition, Annemarie Monteil remarks that Szeemann

⁸⁸ Szeemann, “Grandfather,” 18.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Denzin, “Interpretative Autoethnography,” 139.

⁹¹ Ammann et al, “Interview with Co-Curators,” 136.

had referred to this exhibition as a “response to Documenta.”⁹² Acknowledging Szeemann’s intention she adds, “[T]he sector in [Documenta V] with the dangerous title *Individual Mythologies* does indeed find its subtle and deeply humane complement here in Bern. Szeemann shows a way in which the acute uncertainties of the young generation [...] can be approached in a simple and humane manner, and he does so without patronizing.”⁹³ What Monteil points to is precisely what Szeemann sought to resolve: how to translate an egocentric system of signs and symbols into an expression that is understood by many. By way of this translation—which Szeemann’s exhibition is an example of—a culturally meaningful and transformative space is produced.

⁹² Szeemann, “Grossvater,” 381.

⁹³ Monteil, “Grossvater,” 383.

Ydessa Hendeles | *The Teddy Bear Project*

Ydessa Hendeles is arguably one of the most enigmatic figures working in contemporary art today, since she fulfills various art-world personas that include artist, curator, avid art collector, scholar, and former art dealer.⁹⁴ These various roles are perhaps what make people perplexed by her work, but it is also her refusal to define herself through one of them that makes Hendeles and her practice a compelling subject of study. This simultaneity recalls what Homi Bhabha's describes as *in-betweenness*, a space where singular and cultural identities are perpetually shifting and being defined and redefined by "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference."⁹⁵ The in-betweenness of Hendeles invites an autoethnographic reading of her work, since the autoethnographer, as Reed-Danahay suggests, is a "boundary crosser."⁹⁶ Autoethnography itself occupies an in-between position as having incorporated both elements from autobiography and ethnography. Therefore, the autoethnographic *raconteur*⁹⁷ must move between these two poles, capturing both the general and the

⁹⁴ In 1980, Hendeles opened the Ydessa Gallery in Toronto, a commercial space committed to exhibiting the works of Canadian contemporary artists, including Jeff Wall, Rodney Graham, Liz Magor, Jana Sterbak, Ken Lum, John Massey, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Kim Adams, Sandra Meigs, and Noel Harding. The gallery closed in 1988 due to Hendeles' ambition and new realization that her project was not a commercial vocation, but a philanthropic one. That same year Hendeles opened the doors of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation in downtown Toronto. The foundation remained open for 25 years, closing in 2012. During this period Hendeles exhibited and curated artworks and non-art objects from her personal collection. At this time Hendeles' work also began to be exhibited internationally in cities such as Munich, Marburg, New York, Berlin, and Gwangju. In 2012, Hendeles presented the exhibition, *THE BIRD THAT MADE THE BREEZE TO BLOW*, her first exhibition as an artist-curator whose medium is exhibitions, at the Johann König gallery in Berlin.

⁹⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1–2.

⁹⁶ Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography*, 3.

⁹⁷ *Raconteur* is French for *storyteller*.

specific. That said, Hendeles' exhibitions are often interpreted as intensely personal and autobiographical, claims that are justified when we consider that many of the objects presented in her exhibitions belong to her; that an exhibition such as *Marburg! The Early Bird!* (2010) was presented in the city where she was born; or that she is the only daughter of two Jewish immigrants to Canada who survived the Holocaust, the trauma of which gets replayed and recontextualized in many of her exhibitions. But if Sartre's *universal singular* dialectic is to be trusted as inflected above via Nancy's *singular plural*, or by way of Clifford's synthesis of the two when he notes that "the idea of individuality is articulated within worlds of signification that are collective and limited,"⁹⁸ then the lens by which to view Hendeles' work must be adjusted, refocused ethnographically as well as autobiographically. Adopting and maintaining in-betweenness while reading Hendeles' work may allow access into her mind, as it presents the viewer with a privileged means for understanding a new method of exhibition-making, as well as revealing an individual and cultural analysis that responds to what it means to be alive.

In this light, *The Teddy Bear Project* is exemplary for its appearance in multiple contexts (Toronto, Munich, Shawnigan, and Gwanju) and for its site specificity as an installation with Hendeles' larger exhibition *Partners* (see figs. 4 and 5). Hendeles' method of working site specifically corresponds to her notion of the *curatorial composition*, which is deemed by her as "an innovation in curatorial methodology."⁹⁹ While this method of working is particular to Hendeles, it is also aligned with earlier practices such as Szeemann's, whose thematic group exhibition model combined art and

⁹⁸ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 92.

⁹⁹ Hendeles, "Curatorial Compositions," 6.

non-art objects. While Hendeles' curatorial compositions include art and non-art objects as well, her exhibitions gain another dimension in their connection to place. That is, not only do these disparate objects enter into partnership with one another, they are also individually and collectively partnered with the physical and historical place in which they are displayed. This idiosyncrasy ensures that each component of the composition bears no resemblance to its previous iteration. Thus, Hendeles transforms the composition into its own autonomous object.

An important component of the curatorial composition is the *Notes on the Exhibition*, which, much like how a musical score corresponds to a piece of listened music, provides a visual annotation of the experience. Rather than producing a text that gestures towards the exhibition's larger conceptual arch, Hendeles composes detailed notes on each object in the order of their appearance, guiding the viewer literally and conceptually through the exhibition. Like a musical score, the exhibition is structured in phrases, themes appear and then reappear again, and moments of crescendo and diminuendo evolve throughout. A state of in-betweenness is also maintained in this respect: just as a musical phrase may recall a variation of itself from an earlier moment, so too the interrelationships between artworks are not confined or determined by their position within the composition. Referring to artist Giulio Paolini's *Mimesi* (1975–76), which begins the second passage of the *Partners* exhibition, Hendeles writes,

Mimesi initiates the centre passage of *Partners*. It continues the notion of reflection that was introduced by the self-portrait reflection of Arbus in the mirror. As well, there is a perpetuation of doubling, as occurred in the antique toy, *Minnie Mouse Carrying Felix in Cages*, along with the duality of the presence and

absence of Felix.¹⁰⁰

In her notes, Hendeles articulates that *Mimesis* recalls similar ideas of reflection, mimicry, and doubling, which are introduced earlier in passage one of *Partners*. In this way, following the exhibition notes does not necessarily mean that the viewer assumes a linear path, and that the works previously viewed recede from the viewer's memory. Rather, the exhibition is accumulative and dispersing at the same time. In place of simply mimicking the exhibition, the notes reveal Hendeles' thought process, which is as flexible as it is fixed. Ultimately the notes, as Hendeles suggests, "vee[r] away from the exhibition's path even as [they] follo[w] it,"¹⁰¹ inviting the viewer to consult his or her own thoughts on ideas of power, loss, images, and memory.

The Teddy Bear Project's placement in the larger exhibition, *Partners* (2003), at the *Haus der Kunst* in Munich, Germany, speaks powerfully to the materialization of the curatorial composition, as well as to its potential to be read as an autoethnographic study for its site specificity and Hendeles' personal connection to Germany and the Holocaust. *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)'s* staging in a neoclassical structure that was formerly known as the Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art) draws our attention to its site specificity. Paul Ludwig Troost, Adolf Hitler's preferred architect, built the museum as a return to architectural classicism, which provided the appropriate stage for Hitler's propagandist speeches.¹⁰² Hitler also performed the role of curator by selecting work by German artists who glorified his politics. Work outside these parameters was considered

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰² For information on the history of the Haus der Kunst and the "Critical Reconstruction" project, see the Haus der Kunst website.

degenerate. Hendeles describes the invitation to curate a show from her collection for the Haus der Kunst as “an opportunity to create an exhibition in dialogue with the history of the museum and a venue for my voice in the country in which I was born.”¹⁰³ Given this invitation and Hendeles’ connection to the Holocaust, *Partners* enacts an inversion of power seventy years after the museum’s construction as a Nazi monument. Here, Hendeles assumes the position of curator, selecting and arranging the works for the Haus der Kunst, a role once occupied by Hitler, whose policies attempted to prevent Hendeles and her generation from existing. For this reason, Hendeles’ exhibition can be understood as a personal and cultural reading of this space. Invested in diagnostic interpretation, historical narrative, and site specificity as embodiments of her curatorial method, Hendeles responded to the invitation by deepening the museum’s *critical restoration* initiative that aimed to return the structure back to Troost’s original plan.¹⁰⁴ This restorative process consisted in uncovering hidden windows and skylights, stripping paint, and removing structural additions that had been made to the space beyond its original design. Hendeles went so far as to produce copies of Troost’s original sets of doors to re-historicize the structure.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the museum is treated as a compositional element, one that becomes mobilized by Hendeles through the critical restoration process. Restoring the Haus der Kunst to its original form allows the site to move to the level metaphor by way of the objects that get placed within it. The partnership that emerges between object and site catalyze memory and meditations on the present.

¹⁰³ Bock, *Exhibiting Trauma*, 31.

¹⁰⁴ “Munich Museum Has Work of Sad-Looking Hitler.”

¹⁰⁵ Hendeles, “Curatorial Compositions,” 34.

The curatorial composition also considers the employment of art and non-art objects, such as, in this case, teddy bears, family album photographs, and sculpture by Maurizio Cattelan. *The Teddy Bear Project* is comprised of over three thousand vernacular photographs sourced by Hendeles on *eBay*, the most commonly used Internet auction platform that features various items for sale such as clothing, jewelry, cultural paraphernalia, furniture, photographs, and more. A considerable number of the photographs were acquired from Germany, but as Hendeles articulates, the collection also includes photographs from the “United Kingdom, America, Croatia, Serbia, Samoa, Japan, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, Russia, Bulgaria, Austria, Hungary, New Zealand, Spain, Portugal, Estonia, France, Italy, Israel, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and Canada.”¹⁰⁶ Uniting these images is the motif of the teddy bear, a twentieth-century cultural childhood signifier that exudes innocence, vulnerability, companionship, and safety.¹⁰⁷ Within Hendeles’ archive are various typologies that have been arranged by her into their own compositional form. Bal identifies certain typologies therein, which include “one child, two children, twins with teddy bears; soldiers, sailors, hunters with teddy bears; women, dressed or naked, with teddy bears; children aiming sometimes adult-sized rifles at small teddy bears. Bears in strollers or baby carriages, group portraits with a teddy bear, or babies competing with teddy bears in size and cuteness.”¹⁰⁸ In each of these photographs the teddy bear appears as a child’s alternate

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁷ There is a dispute as to who invented the teddy bear first. Morris and Rose Mitchcom created the teddy bear in 1902 in the United States. However, in Germany that same year, Margaret Steiff and her nephew Richard also created the teddy bear.

¹⁰⁸ Bal, “Exhibition as Film,” 78.

confidant, a sports team's mascot, a soldier's cherished possession, and a hunter's accomplice (see figs. 6 and 7). For each one of these conditions, which is connected to a specific and collective identity within the archive, the teddy bear acquires emotional value, seeing as it was originally acquired and distributed to fulfill human need.¹⁰⁹

Amid the archive is a particular photograph that may otherwise go unnoticed in the vastness of the project, which relates specifically to Hendeles. The majority of the photographs are without captions, but this one is accompanied by a didactic component that reads, "Jacob and Dorothy Hendeles, survivors of the Holocaust, with their daughter, Ydessa, born Dec. 27, 1948."¹¹⁰ Hendeles is seen in a baby carriage with her own teddy bear. From these clues the following critical information can be gathered: (a) Hendeles was born in 1948, three years after World War II; and (b) Hendeles' parents were Holocaust survivors. Since the teddy bear is said to have been created approximately in 1902, Hendeles' birthdate of 1948 may bookend the tumultuous period that all the photographs were culled from: the first half of the twentieth century, a period that is defined by the West by two world wars.¹¹¹ Reviewing the personal photograph of Hendeles with her teddy bear and interpreting the supporting caption, a viewer might ask whether Hendeles' own relationship to her teddy bear was the impetus for *The Teddy Bear Project*.

¹⁰⁹ Hendeles, "Curatorial Compositions," 22–9.

¹¹⁰ Varda, *Ydessa, The Bears*.

¹¹¹ Hendeles, "Curatorial Compositions," 37

Hendeles' project opens to an autoethnographic reading, as she captures a cultural phenomenon through a personal lens, or, conversely, uses the singular to express the plurality of cultural experience. In 2004, French filmmaker Agnès Varda directed the film *Ydessa, the Bears and etc.*, in which Varda spends time interviewing Hendeles about *The Teddy Bear Project* while also documenting viewers' responses to the work. When Varda asked Hendeles about the project's starting point, she replied, "I'm missing this whole generation. This sense of visual roots, and all the mythologies that go with family albums, where you imagine what was missing. So all heirlooms, all treasured items that don't have commercial value, but have personal value, have great meaning to me. And that is the source of *The Teddy Bear Project*."¹¹² The children of Holocaust survivors (those who had been ghettoized and or endured the trauma of concentration camps) may potentially share Hendeles' view, since documentation and traces of a life before the Holocaust rarely exist.¹¹³ Jews who were placed in ghettos and then moved to concentration camps were stripped of their material possessions. The exodus and destruction of meaningful objects during this time is reflected in Wladysław Szlengel's 1943 documentary poem, "Rzeczy," which translates to "Things."¹¹⁴ In his poem, Szlengel traces the path of Jews and their objects from the streets to their final disappearance. As Rafael F. Scharf describes it,

¹¹² Varda, *Ydessa, The Bears*.

¹¹³ "I have very few pictures of myself, and there's little before the war. I was part of the generation that was not supposed to exist, so I've tried to imagine what it was like before. What do I know and what do I want to know? This whole project is a question: What does it mean to live today, in this moment?" Hendeles quoted in Bentley May's article "Bears."

¹¹⁴ For the English translation of the poem, see, Aaron, "Bearing the Unbearable," 43–5.

In Szlengel's imagery, it is not people who walk that path but the inanimate Jewish possessions of which their owners were gradually stripped: tables, chairs, trunks, bundles, suitcases and bedding, dresses and pictures, pots and pans, carpets, jars and kettles, books and knickknacks...As they are driven from place to place the possessions get fewer and fewer and fewer...¹¹⁵

Given these circumstances that were witnessed and transcribed into poetry by Szlengel, Hendeles' family's tracelessness, which is also the experience of other families, points to a loss, a death that constitutes her inheritance of a truncated history and feeling of rootlessness.

Hendeles' choreography between loss and life unfolds within the archive. It takes on the qualities of a memorial site where memories emerge and where multiple histories and ruptures intersect and disperse. Presented uniformly in matted black frames, thousands of photographs line the walls of two gallery spaces from floor to ceiling. Their display evokes a "columbarium, with closely stacked boxes containing ashes of the dead."¹¹⁶ Indeed this connection to death is not incidental, as death has always pervaded the nature of photographs. Writer Susan Sontag has referred to death as a photograph, and literary theorist Roland Barthes equates the photograph with theatre and its tendency "to be lifelike" via tableaux and make-up, which once suppressed, ultimately reveal a moment "that has been": a death.¹¹⁷ As stated in the previous chapter, death and loss have

¹¹⁵ Scharf, "Literature in the Ghetto," 37.

¹¹⁶ Varda, *Ydessa, The Bears*.

¹¹⁷ See Sontag, *On Photography*; Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 32–3.

been identified as the catalyst for epiphanies, which are life-transforming moments that become starting points for autoethnographic writings.¹¹⁸

Photography's connection to death naturally raises questions about how an individual bears witness to loss, and how this act connects the individual to others.

Autoethnographer Giorgio takes up Chikako Kumamoto's reading of philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's *Eloquent I* in order to work through this question. She proposes that thinking through the *Eloquent I* enables one to "draw connections between memory as our data to the cultural concepts and expressions of bearing witness and enacting memorial."¹¹⁹

Giorgio further argues that when writing autoethnographically, both through recollection and absent memory, the writer assigns meaning to individual and collective experiences. Transcribing memory, which is also referred to as memorialization, makes it possible to "bear witness to the lives and struggles of those who came before us."¹²⁰ Memorialization clears a space for the past to be recalled, and for the present to be reconsidered. Giorgio first points out that the Western notion of self—as formulated through the philosophies of René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, and David Hume—is romanticized as an *I*, and is believed to be an autonomous, resolved, fixed, and a unitary entity. Autoethnography refutes these assumptions, asserting that the self is dependent on others, therefore plural, unresolved, and unfixed. Citing Kumamoto, Giorgio suggests, "We can never claim the totality of one's self unless submitting to someone else's gaze and that human knowledge

¹¹⁸ "When I was a child, I was an autodidact. Each day I would cross the lawn on the way to school, and would figure out something else. Something else made sense to me. I loved that feeling of Ah, HA!—the feeling of epiphany when something fell into place and made sense." Hendeles reflecting on her childhood in Bentley May's article, "Bears."

¹¹⁹ Giorgio, "Reflections on Writing," 415.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 407.

depends on trusting the witness of others.”¹²¹ Here, the Western notion of *I* is replaced with a self-consciousness influenced by multiple others, the *Eloquent I*. Kumamoto, interpreting Bakhtin, devises three *I*'s in relation to the other: *I-for myself*, how one perceives and understands one's own values; *I and the other*, seeing oneself in relation to the other by assuming the other's perspective (empathy); and *Other-for-me*, others seeing oneself as them, and in turn seeing oneself as others. Perhaps Kumamoto's three *Eloquent Is* could be more effectively described as a loop where oneself returns to oneself, but with an intersubjective understanding of self. Kumamoto likens this process to Donna Qualley's definition of reflexivity as “the act of turning back to discover, examine and critique one's claims and assumptions in response to another encounter, idea, text, person, or culture.”¹²² This loop is highly mutable; once activated, it produces self-knowledge that is multidimensional and ever shifting.

If, as Giorgio states, writing autoethnography preserves memories for others to witness,¹²³ then Hendeles' exhibition format enacts Kumamoto's loop, while simultaneously creating a space for others to see themselves as intersubjectively conscious beings. The process, which is enacted by Hendeles begins as follows: employing personal photographs as memory data, Hendeles initiates the loop by way of presenting her self-knowledge, the *I for myself*, the understanding that she is the only child of Holocaust survivors and that she was the keeper of a teddy bear as a child. Hendeles' photograph included in the archive confirms this. In this initial phase,

¹²¹ Kumamoto, “Bakhtin's Others,” 73–4.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 72.

¹²³ Giorgio, “Reflections on Writing,” 407.

emotional memory, as that which has been directly experienced, is activated. The accumulation of thousands of photographs of other people with their teddy bear enacts the second phase of the loop, *I and the Other*—a gesture of empathy where Hendeles reconsiders herself in relation to the experience of others. This phase activates absent memory, “memories that one may not even have within oneself but knows” through the others’ artifacts and stories.¹²⁴ In this phase, Hendeles’ loss of her family albums and her compromised sense of “visual roots” looks to the documentation of other lives that may reveal something about her own. After all, is this not the reason why people study family albums, so as to arrive at some knowledge of themselves by those that have come before? In the case of *The Teddy Bear Project*, Hendeles interweaves multiple lives, the teddy bear being the point of intersection for these experiences. *I and the Other* becomes physically articulated by the placement of her personal photographs in the archive. Lastly, Hendeles metaphysically projects herself within the lives of others, thus activating the third phase of the loop, *Other-for-Me*. In this final stage, the personal and cultural coalesce into one; Hendeles’ particular memories are transformed into collective ones. Her personal photographs are subsumed by the other images, whereby she is witness to the experience of others and these others are witnesses to Hendeles’ experience. Thus, the archive assumes the stature of memorial, where the viewer witnesses the past, which in turn anchors the present.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 418.

Autoethnographic writing as memorialization is as equally invested in the present as it is in calling up the past.¹²⁵ Constructing sites (such as *The Teddy Bear Project*) where collective memory is organized into an archive forges new pathways of grasping the present. Sharing her own experience of walking through Hendeles' project, art writer Gillian Mackay notes, "[I]t was like being in a hall of mirrors where they [the teddy bear photographs] were multiplying endlessly."¹²⁶ Mackay's metaphor is fitting given the reflexive process previously described in terms of a loop, as well as the mirror's utilitarian function of reflecting an image of the viewer back to them. By undertaking her own reflexive loop, Hendeles prepares a site where viewers can enact their own transformations. As Bal describes it, "[T]wo galleries, covered from floor to ceiling confine and hold the visitor in an intimacy with unknown people, most but not all of whom must be dead by now."¹²⁷ The anonymity of so many represented bodies, added to the fact that indeed many of these people have now died, casts these images as human absences and ghostly presences that invite viewers to consider themselves within the circumstances pictured in the photographs. Like a hall of mirrors that reflects, refracts, and distorts one's image, Hendeles' vast arrangement of vernacular family album photographs presents the viewer with an opportunity to see oneself as someone else.

Hendeles avails this opportunity to the viewer by drawing on dualities that are emotionally resonant: loss and recovery, fear and safety, power and powerlessness. The mobilization of these dynamics rearticulate Dutch curator Rudi Fuch's *couplet* device in

¹²⁵ Ibid., 406.

¹²⁶ Varda, *Ydessa, The Bears*.

¹²⁷ Bal, "Exhibition as Film," 78.

which startling, analogies are staged.¹²⁸ If Hendeles' uniform and systematic arrangement of photographs speaks to loss, longing, and death, then the actual teddy bears also presented within *The Teddy Bear Project* speak to recovery and reconciliation.

Appropriating the visual codes of a nineteenth-century natural history museum, Hendeles places individual bears and groupings of bears inside vitrines, rendering them cultural specimens (see fig. 8). In addition to acquiring thousands of photographs for her archive, Hendeles went so far as to locate the actual teddy bears of select images, and placed the teddy bear next to its image. Just as the viewer is confronted by absence and loss, the retrieval of these teddy bears meet the viewer with reunification and closure. In her film, Varda explains the history of two specific bears: "These two bears belonged to two brothers from Ottawa, photographed in 1908, who then drifted apart. It's extraordinary that Ydessa found the bears in two different cities. They are together again, presented with the original photos."¹²⁹ Indeed, this feat is extraordinary and attests to Hendeles' rigour. It also imbues the project with feelings of safety and reassurance. In this way the photographs, in spite of incarnating what has been lost, also respond to recuperation and protection of their subject matter. Hendeles visualizes a world where safety is regained and where everyone, whether they are from Canada or Samoa, a prostitute or child, possesses a teddy bear. As she explains it, "I created a fantasy world, a world in which everybody had a teddy bear. Everybody felt secure, and everybody had happy lives."¹³⁰ Hendeles extends

¹²⁸ Ibid., 77. Hendeles often works closely with polarities and juxtapositions in her work. Exhibition titles such as *My Culture/My Self*, *SameDIFFERENCE*, and *Predators & Prey* point to examples of this.

¹²⁹ Varda, *Ydessa, The Bears*.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the illusory sense of security even further by including Cattelan's taxidermy dog that sleeps by a chair between the vitrines (see fig. 9). Describing the artwork's placement, Hendeles notes, "My problem in contextualizing and doing respect to this [the taxidermy dog] was to make a dead dog look alive."¹³¹ Hendeles succeeds in animating the dog by locally placing it in a nineteenth-century natural history museum *mise en scène*, while contextualizing it in a twenty-first century project. This is further corroborated by the fact that the sleeping dog is placed next to an empty chair, suggesting that the security guard has stepped out, and that the dog has stepped in as the guardian of this place—a role that demands loyalty and protection, which so many dogs embody in their daily lives.¹³²

Perhaps it is anticipated that the vastness of the archive would overwhelm the viewer, but also slow them down within the gallery space. Staircases and mezzanines are custom-built into the exhibition to invite viewers to take the time to inspect each photograph from floor to ceiling (see figs. 10 and 11). Added to these are hanging light fixtures and custom wall lighting. A feeling of multiplication and endlessness is imbued within this setting, as in Mackay's evocation of a Hall of Mirrors. Curator Massimiliano

¹³¹ Hendeles and Goni, *The 8th Gwangju Biennial*.

¹³² Hendeles' solution to her predicament is characteristic of her practice. "Reading works through the frame of several contexts alters the discourse between the artist and the curator, making the partnership more intense while taking it to a new metaphorical plane. This dialogue is of the greatest importance to me, since I think of the artists who make the works I include as my primary audience. Again, it is a dialogue in objects rather than words. I intend to reflect back to the artists an empathetic reading of their works as well as additional interpretations and insights that emerge from the way the works are presented." Quoted from Hendeles, "Curatorial Compositions," *The Exhibitionist* 5 (January 2012).

Goni has described the archive as the work of an obsessive, maniacal, and stereotypical “collector,” and this depiction Hendeles in turn shapes and positions within her work.¹³³

If the two gallery spaces that house *The Teddy Bear Project* evoke a sense of infinity and obsession, then the counterpoint to this experience is the appearance of nothingness and meditation. The gallery space that directly proceeds the archive is sparse: only a pair of tall, nonfunctional doors that correspond to Troost’s original visualization of the *Haus der Kunst* come into view, as well as the clothed back of a small, kneeling figure whose identity is concealed from this angle (see fig. 12). Referencing cinematic devices, Bal describes this transition from the intimacy of the archive to an almost empty gallery space as “a sharp cut between one episode and the next.”¹³⁴ Here, Hendeles also devises dichotomies using space. As the viewer approaches this diminutive figure, Bal remarks that the viewer performs “the kinetic equivalent of a zoom-in, from long shot to close-up.”¹³⁵ When the viewer turns they are met with the mustached face of Hitler whose body has been truncated to the size of a child (see fig. 13). The sight of this familiar face, whose image remains taboo for many people, especially those directly affected by the Holocaust, appears jarring. This is characteristic of the work of Cattelan, an art-world prankster known for employing irony and sarcasm to subvert authority and address issues of identity and death. The level of shock for the viewer is heightened by Hendeles who has positioned this sculpture cinematically, and conceptually reunited Hitler with his Haus. Rather than resuming his position of power from within this place, he is now presented as powerless.

¹³³ Hendeles and Goni, *The 8th Gwangju Biennial*.

¹³⁴ Bal, “The Exhibition as Film,” 80.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

His hands are clasped together in front of him, his face slightly vacant and melancholic. He is placed in this minimal setting, which is physically a dead end within the exhibition's path. Hitler is without a teddy bear. He remains alone, vulnerable to those whose gaze descends upon him. Like the image of Hitler's face, his physical position is familiar to the viewer; it invokes impotency, the seeking of redemption, and an appeal for forgiveness. These are states most people can relate to, having seen them depicted in catholic iconography, or in having personally faced similar predicaments. It is as if Hendeles is probing the viewer to ask him- or herself, Do I forgive *Him*?¹³⁶ Do I see myself in *Him*, and does he see himself in me? This combination of sacred imagery and terror builds a sudden pressure, one that, as Bentley Mays articulates, either "summons us to extend hearts or hands to the victim of misunderstanding and hostility we see kneeling before us,"¹³⁷ or satisfies a longing for retribution. From this dead end the viewers' only way out is to retrace their steps back, entering the archive once again, but this time moved by the sight of another cultural icon who, like the teddy bear, promised safety by generating fear.¹³⁸ As Bentley Mays concludes his reading of Cattelan's work within Hendeles' composition, he notes, "For us, as for Christ, as for Hitler, as for the myriad people photographed with teddy bears, there is only one way out; the way we entered the world in the first place, and how we shall exit it: from nothingness, and back into it."¹³⁹

¹³⁶ *Him* is the title of Maurizio Cattelan's artwork.

¹³⁷ Bentley Mays, "Bears," 97.

¹³⁸ For the most part teddy bears do not generate fear, but the mammal that the teddy bear is based on can be terrifying if encountered in the woods.

¹³⁹ Bentley Mays, "Bears," 97.

Questioning what it means to be alive today, Hendeles first looks to her personal history. From there she moves outward into the world. Departing from personal objects that trigger memory, such as family album photographs, Hendeles finds a connection to a much larger context, leading her to the worlds of popular culture and contemporary art, where she discovers that others share similar experiences. This extension of oneself into the lives of others enables a bonding that redefines the self. This process has been rearticulated in this thesis as a reflexive loop, and guided by the work of autoethnographer Giorgio, wherein the understanding of self alters and shifts when a single life interweaves with multiple lives. What were once individual memories are now collective ones. For Hendeles, the loop is enacted through the exhibition form, which opens up a space for the viewer to enact his or her own reflexive loop. Gathering and mining the evidence of cultural phenomena—the teddy bear, family album photographs, images of Nazism—Hendeles devises an encounter where the extremes embedded within these icons can be felt and contemplated. While these objects are highly suggestive in themselves, contextualizing the work in a historically charged site intensifies their qualities. The staging of connections and contrasts between objects, images, and site is an artistic strategy that can destabilize and reinforce the viewer's position relative to time, to others, and to themselves. Moving through Hendeles' reflective narrative reveals what may be taking place inside her head, but also what lingers in the minds and feelings of others, and how these fissures that Hendeles locates can reflect back to the viewer what they may not yet know about themselves. Hendeles, by marshaling cultural evidence, proposes that late-twentieth century Western culture dwells within extremes, and extremes dwell within culture—their

intensity being drawn out when people congregate with one another. Hendeles submits that one can only understand safety from knowing fear, powerlessness from being powerful, and recovery from being lost.



Figure 4. Ydessa Hendeles, *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, 2002
6,000 family-album photographs; antique teddy bears with photographs of the bears with their original owners and related ephemera; mahogany display cases; eight painted steel mezzanines; six painted steel spiral staircases; sixteen painted portable walls; hanging light fixtures and custom wall lighting, 4.9 x 23.7 x 9.4 m.
From the exhibition *Partners*, 7 November 2003–15 February 2004 (Haus der Kunst, Munich)
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation
Photograph: Robert Keziere



Figure 5. Ydessa Hendeles, *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, 2002
6,000 family-album photographs; antique teddy bears with photographs of the bears with their original owners and related ephemera; mahogany display cases; eight painted steel mezzanines; six painted steel spiral staircases; sixteen painted portable walls; hanging light fixtures and custom wall lighting, 4.9 x 23.7 x 9.4 m.
From the exhibition *Partners*, 7 November 2003–15 February 2004 (Haus der Kunst, Munich)
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation
Photograph: Robert Keziere



Figure 6. Ydessa Hendeles, *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, 2002 (detail).
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation



Figure 7. Ydessa Hendeles, *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, 2002 (detail).
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation



Figure 8. Ydessa Hendeles, *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, 2002

6,000 family-album photographs; antique teddy bears with photographs of the bears with their original owners and related ephemera; mahogany display cases; eight painted steel mezzanines; six painted steel spiral staircases; sixteen painted portable walls; hanging light fixtures and custom wall lighting, 4.9 x 23.7 x 9.4 m.

From the exhibition *sameDIFFERENCE*, 9 March 2002–16 May 2003 (Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto)

Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation

Photograph: Robert Keziere



Figure 9. Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled*, 1998
Taxidermied dog, 21.6 x 61 x 35.6 cm
From the exhibition *sameDIFFERENCE*, 9 March 2002–16 May 2003 (Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto)
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation
Photograph: Robert Keziere



Figure 10. Ydessa Hendeles, *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, 2002
6,000 family-album photographs; antique teddy bears with photographs of the bears with their original owners and related ephemera; mahogany display cases; eight painted steel mezzanines; six painted steel spiral staircases; sixteen painted portable walls; hanging light fixtures and custom wall lighting, 4.9 x 23.7 x 9.4 m.
From the exhibition *sameDIFFERENCE*, 9 March 2002–16 May 2003 (Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto)
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation
Photograph: Robert Keziere



Figure 11. Ydessa Hendeles, *Partners (The Teddy Bear Project)*, 2002

6,000 family-album photographs; antique teddy bears with photographs of the bears with their original owners and related ephemera; mahogany display cases; eight painted steel mezzanines; six painted steel spiral staircases; sixteen painted portable walls; hanging light fixtures and custom wall lighting, 4.9 x 23.7 x 9.4 m.

From the exhibition *sameDIFFERENCE*, 9 March 2002–16 May 2003 (Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation, Toronto)

Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation

Photograph: Robert Keziere



Figure 12. Maurizio Cattelan, *Him*, 2001
Polyester resin, clothing, leather boots, human hair, 60 x 38.1 x 58.4 cm
From the exhibition *Partners*, 7 November 2003 – 15 February 2004 (Haus der Kunst, Munich)
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation
Photograph: Robert Keziere

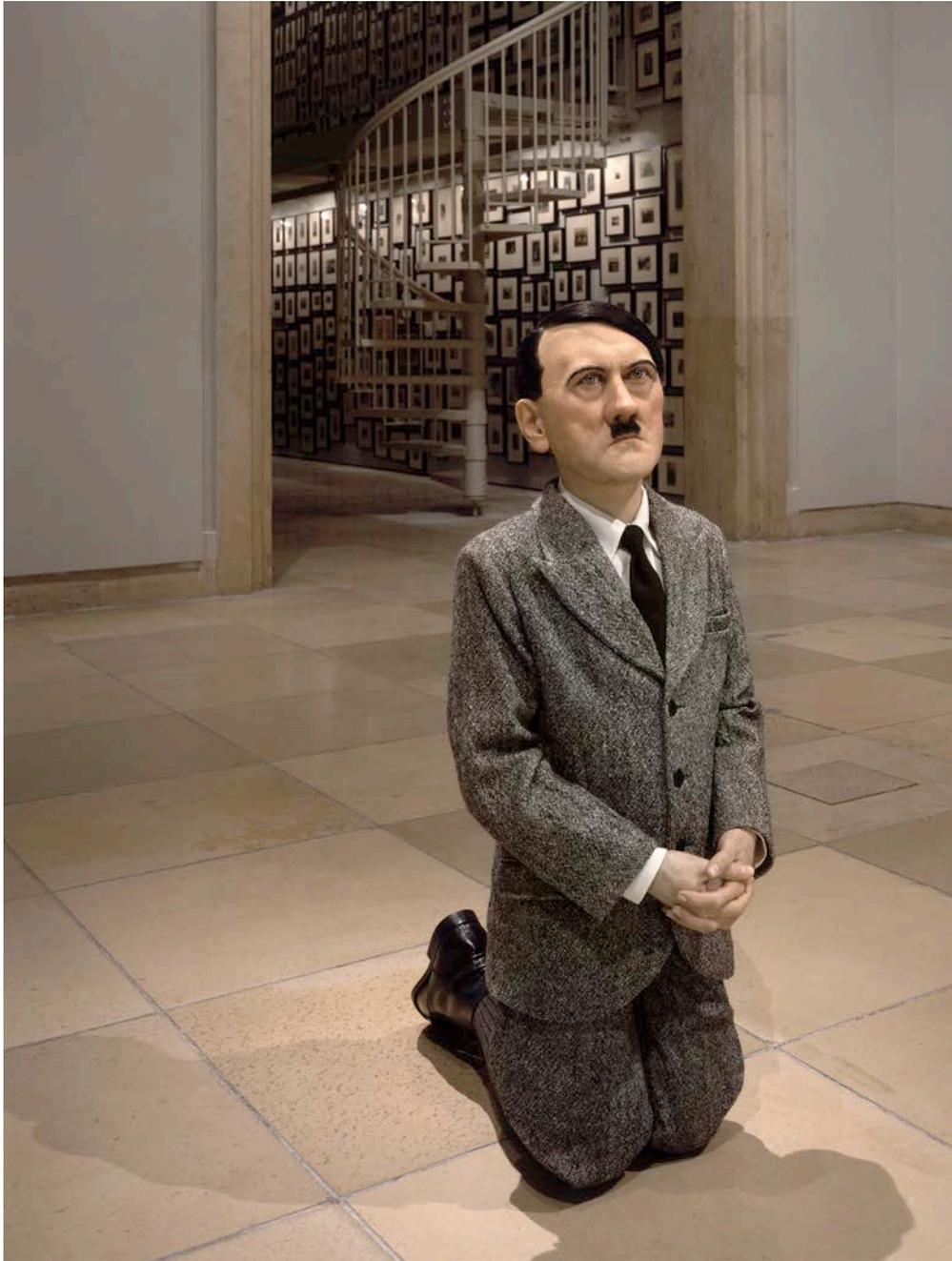


Figure 13. Maurizio Cattelan, *Him*, 2001
Polyester resin, clothing, leather boots, human hair, 60 x 38.1 x 58.4 cm
From the exhibition *Partners*, 7 November 2003 – 15 February 2004 (Haus der Kunst, Munich)
Collection of the Ydessa Hendeles Art Foundation
Photograph: Robert Keziere

Conclusion

As author-curators, Szeemann and Hendeles have developed processes that use both personal objects and site specificity in order to engage with ideas of self-reflexivity, especially as those ideas connect to the autobiography that is implicit in their work. Acknowledging that the exhibitions have been produced for an audience, and that individual identity is enmeshed in culture, I have argued that autoethnography—which combines both the personal and the social through writing—has informed the ways in which these exhibitions account for cultural experience as much as the personal. Through the lens of autoethnography, my readings of Szeemann and Hendeles' exhibitions demonstrate that beginning with self-knowledge, each of the author-curators has transformed personal objects, documents, and images into metaphors that articulate particular histories and perspectives familiar to many. This transformation is made possible through the staging of dichotomies between objects and people situated within specific social and political circumstances. Thus, these exhibitions move to the level of self- *and* cultural analysis, which works to reframe the self-reflexive author-curator as autoethnographer.

The association between the work of author-curator and a form of ethnographer has been suggested before. Curator Okui Enwezor has asked, “[M]ight the travel of the curator—in which he [or she] scours the global scenes of contemporary art in search of artistic forms and signs through various embodiments in objects, systems, structures, images and concepts—be propelled by a similar sense of intellectual vertigo that afflicts

the ethnographer?”¹⁴⁰ Building on this vein of inquiry, Francesco Bonami has suggested that “the curator is now a kind of visual anthropologist—no longer just a tastemaker, but a cultural analyst.”¹⁴¹ Certainly, these associations are valuable, but they are located within the discourse of biennials in which the curator realizes a large-scale exhibition that is representative of geographically diverse artistic practices. In this respect, the culture under observation is that of artists. That is, the curator-as-ethnographer observes and identifies global trends in artistic production. Thus, said exhibitions risk overlooking the nuances inherent in these diverse artworks, such as the political and social conditions that have propelled their production.¹⁴²

The author-curator as autoethnographer goes beyond that paradigm, extending his or her research beyond art and working with personal and cultural objects, artifacts, and documents. They operate within the conditions of the study, thus accounting more precisely for the personal, social, and political. This thesis is a gesture towards opening up the conversation pertaining to the curator as ethnographer, one that is less taken up in the discourse surrounding the Ethnographic Turn in contemporary art, which has been identified through *artistic* practices by Joseph Kosuth, Hal Foster, Alex Coles, Arnd Schneider, Christopher Wright, and most recently, Kaelan Wilson-Goldie.¹⁴³ In beginning this conversation and putting forth the author-curator as autoethnographer, this thesis has

¹⁴⁰ Okui Enwezor as quoted in Schneider and Wright, *Anthropology and Art Practice*, 6.

¹⁴¹ Bonami, “Statement,” 32.

¹⁴² *Les Magiciens de la Terre* (1989), curated by Jean-Hubert Martin is interpreted as one of the first “curator as ethnographer” exhibitions, which was criticized for homogenizing the artworks within in it. From this exhibition, transcultural curating emerged. See O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, 54–60.

¹⁴³ See Kosuth; Foster; Coles; Schneider and Wright; Wilson-Goldie.

also proposed a new way of analyzing exhibitions that are told in the first person and which may appear at first as sentimental and autobiographical accounts.

Applying autoethnography to curatorial praxis has yielded valuable results; it has contributed to curatorial discourse, the Ethnographic Turn, as well as research in the field of autoethnography—this at a time when this method is also being explored in other disciplines.¹⁴⁴ Reflecting on the needs and limitations of autoethnography, Holman-Jones, Adams and Ellis state, “[W]riting continues to be the primary way of knowing in many areas of the academy, but we need to find ways to emphasize and appreciate non-text-dominant ways of knowing and representing research.”¹⁴⁵ The research presented in this thesis is a response to such a calling in that constructing exhibitions is a visual, three-dimensional and performative practice, which, as evinced by Szeemann and Hendeles, embodies autobiographical and ethnographic research. As is the case with their undertakings, the exhibition is the dominant mode of representation that is *supplemented* by a form of text. Hence, my research could be integrated into an autoethnographic inquiry that questions and seeks out interdisciplinary ways that autoethnography can be practiced.

Projecting into the future, my research can be extended to broaden and refine the proposition put forth in this thesis. Firstly, although I address the work of North American and European points of view, it can continue to develop with the inclusion of non-Western art practices and paradigms, an inquiry and concern that is echoed by scholars of

¹⁴⁴ See Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, *The Handbook of Autoethnography*.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 674.

autoethnography as well.¹⁴⁶ Secondly, my inquiry can be extended to consider contemporary artists who have employed the exhibition as an artistic medium, artists such as Danh Vō, Fred Wilson, Kader Attia, and Douglas Coupland. Within this expanded view, the use of the exhibition as a form of personal expression possibly suggests that the author-curator performs as an artist in their own right. Therefore a sub-narrative emerges that would be valuable to pursue in further research.

Lastly, my research has identified a curatorial impulse that up until this point has been under-analyzed in relation to other curatorial models. Now that this mode of curating has become visible, how can other curators apply it? Certainly, as stated in the introduction, the author-curator has developed a particular style and signature, which, like artists, distinguishes their practice. As evidenced in their respective chapters, Szeemann and Hendeles' practices are representative of this phenomenon for their unique ways of producing exhibitions. Although maintaining singular professional identities, what other author-curators can take from this model is the courage to look inward and to trust that individuality is expressed within systems of meaning that are aggregate. Curators can therefore translate self-knowledge into information that is culturally meaningful and not self-serving; the exhibition—as Szeemann and Hendeles utilize it—becomes the site where self and culture can interchange.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

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Appendix A: Harald Szeemann Images

Figure 1. Installation view, *Grossvater*, Galerie Toni Gerber, Bern, February 16-April 20, 1974, by Harald Szeemann.

<http://www.grupaok.com/jsz-writing/>

Figure 2. Installation view, *Grossvater*, Galerie Toni Gerber, Bern, February 16-April 20, 1974, by Harald Szeemann.

<http://www.grupaok.com/jsz-writing/>

Figure 3. *Grossvater—ein Pionier wie wir* (1974), A partial view of the apartment-wide installation. Photo: Balthasar Burkhard © Harald Szeemann Archive.

<http://media.virbcdn.com/files/d2/FileItem-43082-HSzVersion10.pdf> (page 30)