

Navigating the Intersection of Nature, Technology, and Art in a Post-Digital Odyssey

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My research during the *Post Digital Intersections* project delves into the complexities of the post-digital era, specifically examining the nuanced intersections between new and old media, digital and analog, in the realms of art and curation. Originating in the early 2000s, the term "post-digital" has witnessed a transformative trajectory, marked not only by technological advancements but also by a paradigmatic shift from resistance to an assimilative approach. Central to this exploration is to observe the fusion between human and non-human participants, an amalgamation that exists not only within the creative process but also within the curatorial domain.

Under the guidance of art critic and curator Annick Bureau, my collaboration with the artist Dorian Bolca aimed to challenge the post-digital narrative, resulting in a carefully curated commissioned art piece that seeks to intricately engage and provoke essential inquiries that serve as catalysts for a dialogue between the art professionals and the broader public. The purpose of our collaboration was to cultivate an academic discourse that transcends conventional boundaries, fostering a profound exploration of the intersection between contemporary artistic expression and the evolving post digital landscape. Another aim of my research was to observe how the activist scope is being brought to the attention of the public within the curatorial in the context of a post digital exhibition or artwork and to determine how further discussions are created.

My curatorial take on the project centered around the curatorial constellation and its ability to unite the old working patterns, and to move beyond the need to separate the digital from the non-digital, after the recent disenchantment with the new media practices, thus moving forward to a more homogeneous way of portraying the post digital and ensuring an open and relatable experience for the audience.

My research was based for the most part on the work of Beatrice von Bismarck, author of *The Curatorial Condition*, who proposes the term constellation when defining the *curatorial*, the term suggesting a coming-together of human and non-human agents, how they relate to one another and how those relations are established. The author's

perspective offers a broad view into the participating elements and relations, such as its digital and non-digital parts but also it offers the possibility to research how the relations between the elements within the constellation are created, most importantly the viewer and the post digital artwork. In many ways, the process of working on this project represented a comprehensive practical experience of von Bismarck's work.

In the realm of the curatorial, the ensemble of "human and non-human agents" extends beyond the conventional frame of artworks, artists, and curators. It's a convergence that includes not just the creators, but also critics, designers, architects, employees, the public, mediation tools, architecture, spaces, information, and discourses. The argument advanced here, with a focus on the curatorial, seeks to divert prevailing discourse along a unified trajectory. This stands in stark contrast to earlier definitions that compartmentalized the curator's role as one belonging to a singular entity, be it an individual curator or a collaborative curatorial team. Such compartmentalization, the argument suggests, tends to subjectify the curator or their role, a perspective the current discourse aims to transcend.¹ The progression within the art world over the past two decades has redefined the exhibition as a concept, which in turn became a cultural product, the result of an expansive accumulation of factors and not just a room that houses exhibits: „Exhibits find themselves in new juxtapositions, entering into relations with altered spaces and social, economic and discursive contacts encountering, many different, more or less, familiar humans and non-humans.“² The experience withing the *Post Digital Intersections* project was “curated” in the same spirit – this initiative seamlessly united six talented artists with an equal number of emerging curators, fostering a collaborative environment where the collective goal was to conceive an exhibition that aligned with the project's overarching vision. Our collective effort later created the final form of the exhibition, titled “THIS IS NOT MY YOUTHOPIA!”.

To achieve this vision a unique approach was required. Through a series of intensive sessions marked by dynamic brainstorming, spirited debates, and mentorship courses, we worked on refining the conceptual intricacies of each artwork. The collaborative endeavor not only crystallized the artistic concepts but also took into account the many layers of the curatorial operations – or the curatorial condition, as Beatrice von Bismarck defined it – takes into account three main components: “constellation”, “transposition”, and “hospitality”. These three components, when conjoined contribute to the cultural product and they each target different layers of the process of the exhibition making.

For example, the “constellation” is described as the interconnected relations between the components of the exhibition, including artworks, artists, curators, viewers, and the space. The connections are in a continuous process of transformation and

¹ Beatrice von Bismarck, *The Curatorial Condition*, Sternberg Press, London, 2022, p. 14.

² *Ibid.* p. 11.

together they create meaning. The second component, “transposition” represents the transformative act of bringing elements together, and the last one, “hospitality”, implies the curator's role in creating an open and engaging environment.³ As part of a larger team including experts, curators, and artists many challenges arose. We needed to take into account every detail, to foresee all the possible risks. Some of the questions that were raised during the beginning of the project were: How could we make sure that all the artworks would fit the central narrative? More so, how do we quickly develop a trust-based relationship with an artist that we just met? And lastly, how do we make sure that us as curators manage our roles as mediators between the artworks and the public?

The progress that we all made separately soon developed into a form of what von Bismarck describes as the transpositioning. During the extensive brainstorming sessions between all the artists and curators involved we managed to create a homogenous structure of the exhibition that fit the individual requirements of each curator and artist, whilst also progressing separately. However, that's where the real stakes were. Dorian's perspective looked very promising from the start; its complexity was challenging on many different levels. The integration of living slime mold in a sculpture needs a specific theoretical framework, which was a challenge in itself, given that despite its name, slime mold is not a mold, fungus, or plant. The crossroads of organic and technological realms, caused along the years an array of challenges to curatorial practitioners. The curation of works involving living organisms necessitates a delicate balance between ethical considerations and aesthetic intentions. As a curator, the main challenge was to address questions surrounding the environment and well-being of the biological entity involved, transcending traditional aesthetic concerns. Moreover, the curatorial approach had to tap into uncharted territories when grappling with the symbiosis of organic and technological actors. The organic element introduces a dynamic component to the curatorial process, and the behavior of a living organism, such as slime mold, no matter how small or self-reliant, can progress in unpredictable ways. The curatorial challenge lies not only in shaping the narrative of the artistic creation but also in allowing for the autonomy and agency of the biological component.

During the first discussions I had with Dorian, I was amazed to see his dedication and diligent research abilities. It was fascinating to see him working at his study, his desk full of sketches and different calculations, notebooks full of scribbled potential titles for the artwork, numerous petri glasses sitting on top of each other and bags full of inactive slime mold. During our collaboration we had to go over all the potential concerns, such as the mold's preferred environment, the amount of light we could afford to allow near the art piece, worries regarding electrical measures and so on. Another vital aspect was the ways in which the visitors would interact with the

³ *Ibidem.*

artwork and how we can better curate their experience. After many discussions the final form of the artwork was established and the production work begun.

The sculpture's structural foundation is crafted a metal skeleton engulfed in transparent silicone, granting it an organic aesthetic. Embedded within its design are addressable LEDs, introducing an interactive dimension to the piece by simulating a pulsating effect. To ensure the public's understanding of the concept, Dorian decided to integrate integrates motion sensors, an Arduino system, infusing a dynamic quality that responds to the movements or engagement of the audience. The underlying metal structure provides stability and support to the entire composition, that could withhold two digital tablets which are strategically placed, offering viewers a unique perspective into the sculpture's concealed interior. Within its structure, resides a petri dish containing slime mold, that remains hidden from direct view. The intrigue deepens as visitors can observe the live activities of the slime mold through the tablets, displaying real-time video streams captured by two digital microscopes, without actually being able to see the mold itself. The dimensions of this sculptural installation measure 2.35 meters in height and 1.10 meters in width, creating a visually impactful presence. Through the harmonious fusion of organic aesthetics, technological components, and biological elements, this artwork invites an immersive and multisensory experience for the audience. One of the final concerns was to preserve the integrity of the mold – the common decision was to remove the petri dish from inside the art piece after the opening, to put to rest any remaining ethical concerns, whilst the tablets would play a recorded version of the mold's movement.

In conclusion, my work conducted during the project open new pathways of research in regards to the multifaceted nature of the post-digital paradigm, with a particular focus on the challenges and implications inherent in curating artworks that integrate living organisms. The juxtaposition of organic and technological actors within the curatorial framework prompts a reevaluation of human relationships with the environment, technology, and living entities. As such, hybrid art piece not only challenges traditional curatorial methodologies but also fosters a fertile ground for cultural and curatorial activism, encouraging dialogues that transcend the boundaries of artistic expression to engage with broader socio-ethical considerations.