

[Detail] La Brea, Sunset, Orange, De Longpre, 1999. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches. ©Ed Ruscha.

Hera Büyüktaşçıyan

Arie Amaya-Akkermans

If there is one constant in the fabric of Istanbul, it's interruption. In this irregular, gigantic mass of over 2000 square kilometers, buildings not only appear and disappear, but with them entire populations, histories, and memories can shift, recede and vanish permanently. On the corner of the intersection between Halaskargazi and Ergenekon streets stands a hotel built in the 1990s on the site of the old Pangaltı hammam of which there are no traces or references. The hammam, or Turkish bath house, whose foundation date or history is unclear, was demolished with the promise that it would be eventually restored ... and then it simply disappeared. The only evidence of it is a small black and white photograph from the 1970s on the Internet where it is possible to see the hammam's vaulted dome. This simple story exemplifies a trend. In the course of Turkey's wars of independence and the transition from the decline of the Ottoman Empire to the birth of the Turkish republic, not only did the names of the streets change in the historical neighborhood of Pangalti, but with them everything else eventually faded from view.

When artist Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, a native of Pangaltı, set eyes on the site of the hammam in 2013 to attempt to visualize what has been completely erased, it wasn't just that there were no instructions or legal documents to help make sense of what the building might have looked like or contained, but there was also no site to excavate. Is it possible to reconstruct something out of nothing? At PiST/// Interdisciplinary Project Space, down the street from the physical site of the hammam, Büyüktaşçıyan recreated the bath house in a peculiar way. It wasn't an architectural site as much as it was a mental space. and therefore, a function of the imagination coextensive with the uncertainties of deep memory. Without measures or dimensions, the final result was a space of intimacy that, through movements and smells, restaged the hammam as a social space, and therefore, as a site that has to be navigated by the body. In this project of speculative archaeology, aptly titled In Situ (2013), the artist proposed the tentative question: How can one reconstruct something in such a way that putting it into position becomes a way to invent, to create, to start, to found?

What is the difference between finding and founding? Or, how is something found if it was never founded? In Situ, Büyüktaşçıyan's deceptively simple installation, consisting entirely of soap, became a treasure map for something not locatable except through empathy and sensorial experience, while at the same time, infinitely divisible and movable. Digging out the absent history of Armenians and Greeks in Istanbul, Büyüktaşçıyan is not presenting a finished archaeological site where all the elements have been found, excavated, interpreted, and placed in the specificity of a temporal framework, but rather, she is addressing the methodological impossibility of continuity in history by the absence of references. At the narrative limit of the artifact-the minimal unit of concrete meaning in archaeology-the task is not to found the wholeness of a site without putting an emphasis on the singularity of the object, but instead is to focus on the most general qualities of spatiality and recognize the human function of spaces: a network of both active and passive symbols that, in their totality, overcome the whatness of the earthly object. These symbols found reality as a field of inter-subjective recognition.

Little did Büyüktaşçıyan know that during the course of her exhibition, in the late spring of 2013, a sudden turn of events in Istanbul would lead her—and the entire city—to reconsider the physical and social fabric of the city due to another cycle of interruptions that would draw new internal borders inside the already convoluted topography of the city. Protests in the nearby Gezi Park, a 15-minute walk from Pangalti, escalated into a nation-wide movement and became the first serious crisis of authority in post-dictatorship Turkey. When these protests met with a violent response, a thought process similar to that of *In Situ* became a political reality: makeshift barricades against police violence were erected throughout the country with the raw materials of the urban fabric itself, unleashing new historical disjunctives, that, to this day, remain open-ended and have transformed the country's political arena into a viscous territory of uncertainty. How do repressed streams of thought foam up to the surface and produce a misrecognition between history and subject?

Resistance to a master narrative is an act of political foundation in the form of a pendulum: the void left by a crisis of authority can trail-blaze in any direction, and is often fraught with manifold risks subject to the contingencies of new political cosmologies with different simultaneous starting points and destinations. This primeval void, abysmal and unbound, resembles the surging deep water of the Biblical narrative of creation; it is a world pregnant with possibility but as yet suspended, dangerous, precarious and unpredictable. Hera Büyüktaşçıyan, the dedicated surveyor of Istanbul's unreadable palimpsest, is no stranger to metaphors of water: they have dampened the pillars of her work since the very beginning. For Büyüktaşçıyan, discovering streams of water, real and imagined, subterranean and surface, carrying histories and the abeyance thereof, has been a platform for researching transmission, mediation and movement, but also destruction, disappearance and loss. As the two parts of Istanbul lie in different continents separated by enormous bodies of water, Büyüktaşçıyan's practice is beset by the necessity to translate the anxiety of sea-faring to the drier land of memory.

She is now a resident of Heybeliada, one of the Istanbul's Prince Islands, some 30 km from the mainland. Orthodox Christianity survived here for hundreds of years after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, and in modern times Heybeliada is also a site of displacement and population exchange. Büyüktaşçıyan travels back and forth between territories that are historical, cultural, mythical, and theological. Her 2014 exhibition The Land Across the Blind merges the journey of Byzas of Megara-a mythological character credited with the foundation of Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul) in 667 BC when he sailed across the Aegean Sea-with the history of the islands as places of exile where political dissidents were blinded with iron rods and thrown into monasteries for the rest of their lives, and the contemporary anxieties of a city in the eye of the storm. Istanbul sits on a tectonic fault line that has destroyed the city several times in its history, and it is also now the site of a bitter internal conflict between modernization, restoration, and more recently, the intermediate station in a dangerous journey of migration that has seen millions displaced from the ongoing and interminable war in Syria.

Büyüktaşçıyan's Dock (2014), set on an old found wooden table doubling as a base, resembles the small docks on the islands, from which travelers make the daily journey between the Prince Islands and the mainland, but it is a dock on which it is not possible to stand. The eerily moving planks reproduce a condition of instability: the journey of Byzas through the Aegean, the impossibility of finding safety on the land today, the perilous journeys of migrants through the ages, life in a collapsing polity during moments of transition, or the constant sense of interruption between the logic of self and story in the shifting emotional landscapes of Istanbul, never at rest. As the work was being shown in 2015 at one of the city's iconic institutions, Turkish nationalists marched in the direction of a ceremony commemorating the centennial of the Armenian genocide. It was a bitter reminder of the many violent chapters of Turkish history that have been repressed and erased, not only from buildings and national monuments, but also from the memory and imagination of the present day. Büyüktaşçıyan's reference to contact with the water is a way to leave these gaps open, and to make them visible.

Aquatic memory, as Turkish curator Başak Şenova phrased it, is a pivotal mechanism in Büyüktaşçıyan's work to let cultural artifacts and specific moments in time not only appear, but also occupy a surface. This surface, however, is not vet an absolute space; its contours are not defined and its mass and volume are not subject to the shape of the container. In this manner, the residual materials of history become invasive and consolidate without solidifying. There are always questions. There are always doubts. There are always new possibilities for memory to appear in unexpected places, to pour over empty rooms and penetrate the walls in between chambers, to turn narratives from fact to a porous truth that spills on itself. Solid structures become dissolved through minor gestures, in particular drawing, affecting their gravity and stability and become floating monads in a conceptual ecosystem where there is no possible closure, not even in symmetrical forms. Finitude and infinity are presented, not as a dichotomy, but as parallel systems of meaning. Familiar objects-photographs, buildings, bridges, balconies—implode and become complex synthetic propositions.

In 2014, when Büyüktaşçıyan traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the Jerusalem Show VII, curated by Senova, she discovered the Patriarch's Pool, also known as Hezekiah's Pool, in the middle of the Old City-one of the most politically contested territories in the world-an abandoned area which used to hold the city's water supply, part of a complex system of water sewages, cisterns and tunnels dating back to the classical world. In the course of Büyüktaşçıyan's research, she came across the 19th century book The Recovery of Jerusalem written by British archaeologists Sir Charles William Wilson and Sir Charles Warren, with extensive source material on the aqueducts of Jerusalem. From there the large installation The Recovery of an Early Water (2014) was born, guestioning the way in which water can carry and reveal, but also obscure. From a political point of view, the artist's access to the site which has been barred to the local population by the Israeli authorities, reinserted a void, a space which is neither public nor private, into the public domain. From its abeyance, the site of the Patriarch's Pool resurfaced temporarily from the maneuvers of the Israeli occupation.

How does one reactivate a dormant space? Büyüktaşçıyan performed a similar task during the 14th Istanbul Biennial in 2015, when she took over the reading room at the Galata Greek Primary School, one of the schools of Istanbul's Greek community, now no longer in operation. Here she displayed an archive of books and memorabilia from the original students of the school before the Greek exodus, alongside her piece From the Island of the Day Before (2015) that consisted of 668 covered notebooks, the exact number of original students, and a number of drawings of islands, both real and imagined. But the true effect came with the reading series Islands Speaking that extended throughout the biennial and brought a number of speakers to discuss "islandness" as a metaphor-for the self, for colonialism, for political violence, for poetry, for translation. An aural aspect to the extended gesture was introduced: the acoustic articulation of the Greek language inside the room bringing back to life traces of something which had been thought extinguished from Istanbul, enabled the concreteness of live speech to penetrate not only psychic but also physical space.

Back at the Patriarch's Pool in Jerusalem, Büyüktaşçıyan was faced with the challenge of how to bring the water back to the pool. During the journey to Jerusalem, she looked into fabrics used in construction sites throughout the city and the type of semi-transparent materials that hung from above crates, which she later incorporated into the installation as a kind of double entendre: we are either sheltered by the tent of the sky or swallowed by the abyss of water, of time, or of oblivion. Are the waters above or below? The artist's research seems to suggest an ambiguous answer. When we operate in territories so fragmented, it's difficult to discern what history is and whether it isn't a rather reactionary gesture to insist on memory as such omnipresence. Nevertheless, historical reconstruction flows within a horizon of the future, grounding the present through symbols of continuity, linking up change and upheaval of the here and now, not as interruptions or mutations, but as the completion of earlier cycles that have been abetted. Since that point onwards, imagining bodies of water, suspended and in motion, has become codified in Büyüktaşçıyan's work as a mechanism to both interpret and challenge discontinuities.

In her second artist book, Ayp, Pen, Kim (a reference to the first three letters of the Armenian alphabet), published for the occasion of her participation in the Armenian pavilion at the 2015 Venice Biennale, Büyüktaşçıyan draws, in borrowed images and words, a vivid picture of her relationship to the Armenian language as a Greek-Armenian living in Istanbul, a territory which is considered by both communities somehow void, or whose place in the hierarchy of meaning has been eroded. In the book she recounts her arrival as a child to the Pangalti Mkhitaryan School, founded by the Mekhitarist monastic order (a congregation of Benedictine monks of the Armenian Catholic Church) in 1825 and through turbulence and extinction, serving the Armenians of Istanbul. The relationship between Hera Büyüktaşçıyan and the 18th century monk Mkhitar of Sebaste, would not be limited to her school years. While conducting research in Venice, and walking around vaporetto stations, she came across the notice for San Lazzaro Island, where the Mekhitarist order was founded, and she began a new journey between Istanbul and San Lazzaro.

The island, a crucial point in the transmission of the Armenian language, became a reference in Büyüktaşçıyan's archipelago of unfinished structures. Being a "mnatsort,"—the remnant of something that has been lost or that has disappeared—as a monk in San Lazzaro pointed out to her, is a direct reference to the Armenian genocide, and calls on her to occupy different temporal frameworks simultaneously.

Büyüktaşçıyan often recalls correcting people when they interrogate her on her life as an Armenian in the "diaspora" or "exile." She insists that being an Armenian in Istanbul is not the diaspora, but is the very center of Armenian life. Her works from Venice, shown at a library San Lazzaro where Lord Byron had once learnt the Armenian language, *Letters from Lost Paradise* (2015) and *The Keepers* (2015), are informed by the poet's work and life, and his role in the liberation of Greece. As a transnational community, it would be difficult to conceive of this multilayered reflection on Armenian life as an ode to nationalism, yet Büyüktaşçıyan is certainly informed by the politics of Romanticism.

So many different types of islands: Heybeliada and the Prince Islands in Istanbul, and inside Istanbul the mysterious island of the Mkhitaryan in the center of a triangle between the neighborhoods of Osmanbey, Pangaltı and Nişantaşı. Then there is the island of San Lazzaro in Venice with its centuries-long Armenian print and library, or islands inside islands: The monastery of Halki, at the top of Heybeliada, with its theological school closed by the Turkish government in 1971. Then there are the less obvious islands: microcosms of urban violence and gentrification, the unstoppable waves of migration that do not reach their destination island, or the disappearance of minority languages and publications in Istanbul under the weight of Turkification. "There is no world, there are only islands", writes Jacques Derrida, making reference to the difficulties of intersubjectivity and human communication, so that we have lost the world as a common space in which we hear one another. However specters remain, we still vaguely recognize the shadows of the "other" trying to address us from an audible faraway.

This aspect of inhabiting the world spectrally is present in the characters, mythological and otherwise, who inhabit Hera Büyüktaşçıyan's realms of thought and imagination. They are perhaps lost on the Cartesian plane of tangible geography, but they simultaneously occupy other places. Speaking from island to island, digging out what is buried deep below the streams of visible water, they return to the world not as a site of redemption but of endless foundation. Their suspension then becomes the active site of a master narrative that writes out the world from underneath and surfaces up only fragmentarily through leakage and contradiction. In her most recent intervention - When things find their own cleft (2016), at the Alt space in the restored Bomonti beer factory in Istanbul, in close geographical proximity to the psychic space of the Pangalti hamam—Büyüktaşçıyan creates a tear through a newly built wall, out of which a stream of red bricks flows from the past and interrupts the seamless flow of the exhibition space, revealing hidden histories of erasure and displacement, trapped in between the mute walls of the new city. This discreet leak, quietly pouring over the new structure, becomes an ineffable territory of resistance, always fluid, always in movement, always pointing elsewhere.



Up From Contemporaneity; Or, Why Do Curators Talk Like That? (Part 3)

John Rapko

The philosopher Hegel famously remarked that the owl of Minerva flies at dusk. Minerva is among other things the goddess of wisdom, and Hegel's dictum asserts that knowledge, self-understanding, and wisdom are always retrospective, and that we can gain understanding of ourselves in a comprehensive and stable manner only with regard to our pasts and what we have already lived through. It is only when a period is drawing to a close that one might be in a position to grasp the shape of a period: What processes and forces shaped the period? Who were its decisive figures? What assumptions, beliefs, and worldviews did its bitterest adversaries share? Whose work will be seen as setting the terms for seriousness, and which seemingly central figures will vanish without a trace? But correlatively, on Hegel's account, we are blocked from understanding ourselves in our contemporary environment. The problem then, as Kierkegaard remarked, is that we understand our lives backwards, but must live them forwards, without a secure and comprehensive understanding of the situations and problems out of concern for which we act.

In the mid-1980s, the leading intellectual question was the nature of the very period we were in. The easy questions were: Are we in a new artistic era? (Yes.) Is it rightly called "the postmodern"? (Yes, again.) Are there different kinds of postmodernisms ... Are there different ways of self-clairvoyantly inhabiting this period, and are these ways of different value? (Yes.) et cetera. The problem arose in trying to characterize the different ways of being postmodern, and in offering reasons for preferring one way to another. Generally, the many and the wise considered the preferable kind of postmodernism to be "critical," and the less preferable to be "conformist." Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and other intellectuals offered different versions of this distinction. In the 1990s the questions concerning postmodernism faded without any consensus on their answers in place. The urgency of the guestions had appeared to be a product of the Cold War. The need for a practical conception of non-conformist postmodernism had come to seem a recent version of a long-term ideological project: to provide some tangible evidence that the capitalist liberal democracies of the West fostered a kind of artistic freedom, and with it a broad menu of free lifestyles that were suppressed and unavailable in the communist, authoritarian East. So there had to be something artistically viable and vibrant and expressive of individual freedom after the end of modernism.

In our current century, the place of the question of postmodernism has been re-occupied by something now called "contemporary art." Attempts to characterize the distinctive features of contemporary art are beset by the same questions, the same sort of alternative conceptions, and the same sense of interminable debates that beset the earlier attempts to characterize postmodernism. There's no consensus on when contemporary art began, but we do imagine we know a thing or two about it. Like the ideological phantasm of postmodernism, it comes after modernism, but unlike modernism or postmodernism, it is "global." That is, it's a kind of art that no longer finds its home only in the major Euro-American or North Atlantic cities, but also in the smaller cities and towns of every continent. Contemporary art inherits the most securely established characteristics of postmodern art: its eclectic and hybrid guality, its easy acceptance of new technologies as artistic media, and indeed its refusal to exclude any perceptible material as a possible vehicle of art.

In previous issues of AQ I attempted an entrée into this new art through one narrow passage: the public speech and writing of its most visible representatives, that small number of curators who roam the earth deciding upon themes and choosing exemplary artists for the world's biennials.¹ Analyzing their opaque manner of speech and mountebank-like presentation. I argued that these characteristics were symptomatic of various cognitive blind spots and deficiencies. In the first column, I argued that this notorious opacity is an inheritance of a good deal of art world obscurantism in the twentieth century, and that the distinctive quality of the curators' discourse was the result, in part, of two factors: first, the curator must meet many, not obviously reconcilable, demands from various constituencies, including museum professionals, critics, academic historians of recent art, local money-bags financing the shows, and of course the millions simply thirsting for the latest in the arts. The curator is like a member of the intelligentsia of the tourist industry, who has to wear the mask of P. T. Barnum pretending to be an intellectual. A second factor is negative: the curators' discourse does not take place in the presence of the works themselves, and is not well placed to initiate a process of collective self-education and self-clarification about the works that are shown. In the second piece, I noted that the curators work with no articulate conception of artistic process, and seem to share unreflectively in the easy relativism of contemporary intellectual life, in particular in its manifestation in the art world as a practical conception of a work of art as whatever any individual artist declares to be such. With this conception, the questions of what makes someone an artist (is it more than declaring oneself one?), and more importantly, why anyone else should accept this stipulation of the honorific term "art" to anything whatsoever, never arise.²

There are signs that the owl of Minerva may be stirring with regard to the curator and these ideologies. Terry Smith, the art historian who has written most extensively in English, attempting overviews of recent art that highlight the role of the curator, has recently lamented that curators are no longer leading the way. In 2011, an ominously named organization called Independent Curators International hosted a conference in New York, with the equally ominous title "The Now Museum." Leading curators and historians of contemporary art gathered for a discussion called "Contemporanizing History/Historicizing the Contemporary." (Discerning readers will recognize that I am not making these titles up in a feeble attempt at mockery. Nor, alas, is it likely that they were produced by some academic-jargon-generating computer program.) The proceedings induced Smith to write a short book in 2012, titled Thinking Contemporary Curating.³ In it Smith claims that we have recently entered a new and unhealthy phase of contemporary art wherein "[c]urators are fading as agenda setters."⁴ Smith attempts therein to answer the question "What is contemporary curatorial thought?"⁵ The italicization of the term "contemporary" is meant to prepare the reader for the claim that the distinctive feature of contemporary curatorial thought is that



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Blind Leading the Blind, 1568. Tempera and oil paint, 33 x 61 inches. Courtesy of the Internet

it addresses and orients itself to the exhibition of something called "contemporaneity." The book purports to explicate this term, to distinguish the valuable kind of contemporaneity from its debased kinds, and to survey a range of exhibitions that successfully took up the challenge of exemplifying the valuable kind. This book has been followed recently by the publication of a volume of Smith's interviews with 10 curators and thinkers, *Talking Contemporary Curating*, wherein a number of the interviewees address the question of contemporaneity.⁶ If the owl is roosting after a short flight, perhaps it is on these books. So, what is this contemporaneity that has allegedly shown itself to be the obscure target of a curatorial thought, and so accordingly a central concern of contemporary art?

Smith knows what contemporaneity is not: it is not rightly understood as a quality exhibited generally by contemporary art, particularly not a concern to be up to date. The concern to be of our moment is a concern for "the contemporary," whose only virtue seems to be that it is easier to pronounce than contemporaneity. Smith does not so much reason about problems with the contemporary, but rather just seems to inhale and exhale a fashionable academic atmosphere. He writes that "to me, this phrase [the contemporary] conjures a (nervously) conformist-or, at best, a (coolly) complicit-contemporaneity, a mood familiar to the fashion industry ... It is true that, at the margins, this is a mood scarcely distinguishable from genuinely contemporary *différance*, yet the difference increases as one slopes away from the other until it becomes huge, then total."7 Presumably with the use of the italicized différance, Smith is invoking the once-fashionable thought of Jacques Derrida, wherein the term indicated a quasi-conceptual operation of "differing and deferring" that was allegedly at work within any process of signification, or indeed any ascription of identity to anything whatsoever. To me, however, noting this does not lessen, but rather intensifies the sense that I am reading gibberish. Smith nowhere offers any analysis of conformism or complicity, nor suggests any reason for thinking that they are in every case detrimental to the practice of the arts. At other points, Smith indicates that, in practice, a concern for the contemporary is a kind of classifying operation, again without arguing that this is necessarily problematic, instead of simply being an aspect of everyone's muddling along in life. More pointedly, he suggests that in practice the contemporary is bound to a diffuse ideology of "presentism," wherewith phenomena are presented in abstraction from their pasts, and with an impoverished sense of their possible futures. Finally, his use of the term the contemporary somehow secretes the sense that the abstracted phenomena presented under this term are definitive of what is and what might be.

The authentic sense of "contemporaneity" emerges by contrast with its debased sense in "the contemporary." Rightly understood, contemporaneity involves the understanding and presentation of recent phenomena as saturated "with many different kinds of pasts, both as memories and expectations."⁸ Smith repeats this characterization a few times, but offers nothing else by way of theoretical explication. A problem that immediately arises for this characterization of the concept of contemporaneity is that it makes no reference to anything contemporary. Smith seems to acknowledge this, but does not seem to view it as problematic, as he goes on to suggest that an exhibition of even the earliest works of art, such as the 80,000-year-old engraved pebble found in South Africa's Blombos Cave could exhibit contemporaneity, if the pebble were exhibited in such a way as to induce a viewer's awareness of its pasts and the choices made in its production. But then the sense of contemporaneity simply collapses into something like "artistic process." If, in the end, all that Smith is claiming is that a good exhibition shows the process whereby the exhibited artifacts were created, then it's hard to see what all, or indeed any, of the fuss is about. Smith leaves unaddressed the question of why such a concern is the distinctive task of contemporary curators.

The only other route that Smith suggests to determine the nature of contemporaneity is through the characterization of it as the object of curatorial thought. So what are the right sort of contemporary curators addressing? Smith writes that "curating is the exercise of curatorial thought within the practical exigencies of making an exhibition."⁹ But since Smith characterizes curatorial thought as the exhibition of contemporaneity, his thought is moving in the smallest of circles: contemporaneity is the object of curatorial thought; the curators' exhibitions display contemporaneity; if someone curates, she is guided by the concern to address contemporaneity. The owl of Minerva has not budged.

Should one look to the curators themselves then for some explication of what is meant by contemporaneity? Smith does claim that it can be exemplified in different ways, and explicitly cites three exemplary ways from exhibitions around the year 2000: Kirk Varnedoe's attempts to link the present with the modernist past, Okwui Enwezor's attempts to display the post-colonial condition, and Nicolas Bourriaud's attempts to display the genre of contemporary art he influentially termed relational art. In the book of interviews, Smith repeatedly brings up the issue of how the particular curator's work exhibits contemporaneity. In one response, Enwezor declares: "I'm saying that the post-colonial constellation may be understood as one layer of contemporaneity. I think it's hard to define temporal or even spatial boundaries. I believe there is a close relationship between modernity, post-coloniality, and contemporaneity. And this alone can enable us to come to the point where we can have a radical sense of contemporaneity, of real being in the world."¹⁰ Aside from the use of the word "this" in the last sentence, I cannot see any reason that these sentences are presented in this particular order: they convey as little or as much read in any sequence. Consider, then, the last sentence: a basic problem is the unclarity of the reference of the "this." Most likely it is intended to refer to "a close relationship," but although Enwezor has previously sketched some conception of modernity and post-coloniality, the meaning of contemporaneity is again left wholly unclarified, and so too its relationship to modernity and post-coloniality. The phrase "real being in the world" is used as an explicative apposition to "radical sense of contemporaneity," but evidently this is an attempt to explain the obscure with the even more obscure.

Likewise, in another interview, the hyper-active Hans-Ulrich Obrist is asked: "is the connecting of culture the way you understand the idea of contemporaneity? If so, how do you actually curate contemporaneity-I mean you, personally?"11 Smith's way of phrasing the question pretends that there is some shared understanding of contemporaneity, and allows Obrist to proceed by describing his legendarily frenzied pace of curating and interviewing artists, without addressing the theoretical point. In his curating, Obrist sees himself as simply taking up ideas suggested by artists—in particular their unrealized projects-and facilitating their completion and exhibition. The stylistic effect of this conception is that in Obrist's speech and writing the distinction between thinking and name-dropping is abolished: "I grew up in the studio of artists [sic] Peter Fischli and David Weiss;""Among them were the curators Marie-Claude Beaud and Jean de Loisy, who subseguently invited me"; "In 2012, on a visit to LA, I had breakfast with the critic Kevin McGarry and the artist Ryan Trecartin" et cetera.¹² At the end of the interviews, Smith shares his own unrealized project of a creating a worldwide network that will include "a nomadic cohort of graduate students, young artists, curators, and activists" who will roam the earth "work[ing] on projects that explore connectivity, which I see as the biggest challenge to understanding our contemporaneity."¹³ On the evidence of Smith's writing there are a few other big challenges to understanding it.

Out of this brief consideration of these quite recent writings and interviews from the leading, internally prominent curators and the academics who are most intensively occupied with understanding their activities, one tentative conclusion suggests itself: the phantom term contemporaneity inherits the same charisma and persistent obscurity that the conceptual phantasm of a "critical postmodernism" had in the 1980s. Contemporaneity is a pseudo-concept generated by the cultural pressure upon curators, and members of the art world generally, to claim a specially privileged status by virtue to their intimate access to what's happening right now, and the sense of what's going to happen tomorrow emerging today. So another reason curators "talk like that" is their need to present themselves as the guardians of something that's enormously valuable to experience, but which is too elusive for the public to access independently of the curators. Alas, not only is the owl of Minerva not flying but the talk of contemporaneity has not even awakened it.

1) John Rapko, 'The Design Isn't Firm; Or, Why Do Curators Talk Like That?", SFAQ 20 2) The Anti-Genius, Or, Why Do Curators Talk Like That? (Part Two)",

4) p.144

5) p.17, italics in original
6) Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. 2015. New York: Independent Curators International
7) p.143

8) p.144 9) p.136 10) p.91 11) p.115 12) p.115

12) p.115, p.119, p.122 13) pp.137-8

³⁾ Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*. 2012. New York: Independent Curators International