

## Abstract

It is common practice in art periodical publishing to retrace one's steps, to rethink trajectories, to revise the impact the periodical has had on art, art history, and criticism. Occasionally, going back relates to a mere sense of accomplishment: a celebration offered against the ephemeral and precarious nature of the art periodical. At other times, it has to do with memory, with the untangling of topical stories and a reminder of their influence on the contemporary art field. Ultimately, reflecting on the past is often intertwined with considerations of the future, legacy, immortality, and the enduring impact one leaves behind.

Reading the anthologies and anniversary issues published by two contemporary art periodicals –*October*, *Afterall* – alongside those of *Artforum*, *e-flux* and *The Exhibitionist*, the article aims to understand the ways through which periodicals develop their own legacy and review their hegemonic position in Western art histories to produce more inclusive narrations.

## keywords

CAMILLA SALVANESCHI  
OCTOBER  
AFTERALL  
ARTFORUM  
E-FLUX  
THE EXHIBITIONIST  
CONTEMPORARY ART  
ART PERIODICALS  
MEMORY  
AFTERLIFE

# Afterlives:

## On the Art Periodical's Return through Anthologies and Special Issues

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The term 'afterlife'<sup>1</sup> was first used in the late sixteenth century in reference to 'a later period in one's own life'. Today its meaning also extends to 'an existence after death', and to what may be considered 'a period of continued or renewed use, existence, or popularity beyond what is normally primary or expected'.<sup>2</sup> It often has religious connotations: a continuation of the soul's life in heaven or its reincarnation into other living beings.<sup>3</sup> In this latter case, however, it involves rewards for prior behaviour, with the afterlife representing a way of prolonging one's life after the death of the body, evoking notions of hope, immortality, and return. It may thus be understood as an answer to the transitory nature of life and a way to establish the merits and meaning of one's own existence. All living beings move relentlessly towards death and for this reason often dwell on what will be left after their passing: a new life or another kind of trace of existence? Preparing the afterlife, then, becomes an act of the living: a self-reflexive and self-corrective exercise that helps one forge a path to eternity, if not in body then in memory.

Despite its canonical associations with human life, the soul, and religion, the term has also been related to periodical publishing and archival practices. The most notable study is Janice Radway's 2011 article 'Zines, Half-Zines, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change'. Here, the communication studies scholar argues that with their do-it-yourself approach grounded in the idea of challenging mainstream institutions and narratives, zines are a highly ephemeral medium with small print-runs and short lives. However, over the years, zinesters have adopted a number of strategies such as the creation of archives, websites,

<sup>1</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to Gabriele Guercio. With the series he curated at Juxta Press (Milan), he drew me towards this fascinating topic and inspired the metaphorical usage that is made of the term 'afterlife' in this article. Feedback from the anonymous reviewers has greatly helped to improve the text.

<sup>2</sup> This definition of the term 'afterlife' comes from Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary. See the link: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/afterlife>. Accessed May 2023.

<sup>3</sup> For a philosophical elaboration of the term and meaning of 'afterlife', see: Yujin Nagasawa, Benjamin Matheson (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Afterlife* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

and book collections that have extended their rhetorical and social impacts into the future, often after the publication itself has ceased circulation.

While these ideas have inspired some of the reflections presented here, this article is neither concerned with zines nor with the afterlife proper; rather, its focus lies on the paths taken by the art periodical as a living entity capable of writing its own memory and fighting its own ephemerality.<sup>4</sup> The aim is to understand how preparing for the afterlife, through self-reflection and self-historicisation, has contributed to the periodical's historicisation and its shift from document to monument. Similarly to zines, this passage may take multiple forms: archival collections, websites, exhibitions, anniversary issues, and anthologies. The article will lay greater emphasis on the latter two, both of which serve to oppose the periodical's intrinsic ephemerality – determined by the subsequent coming out of newer issues – and legitimise it as a tool for the recording of art history.

Anniversary issues aim to contrast with a periodical's temporality, slowing down its velocity of publication and moving against contemporary society's forgetfulness. In terms of format, they usually maintain the periodical's typical design and layout. They rarely reprint articles and contributions from the past, and instead privilege an approach that establishes links to the past while engaging with present problematics. Collections of already printed articles are normally repurposed in anthologies, which change the form of the periodical to grant it a more established and memorable aesthetic. This means substituting the 'unprecious formats, flimsy covers, and inexpensive paper stocks' (Allen, 2011: 1) with hardcover, embossed titles, dust jackets and more refined paper. As will be argued, both kinds of publications emerge as a celebration of the enduring versus the precarious nature of the art periodical as such. At other times, they are related to the periodical's memory, untangling topical stories they were able to catch, chronicle and publish, and establishing a trace of their impact on the contemporary art field and its history. And last, but not least in importance, these volumes are often related to the future, providing recurring opportunities – every ten or twenty years, for example – to allow the periodical to revisit its own activity, to adjust it by giving voice to unheard histories, and to adopt more inclusive approaches.

This article begins by analysing the specific temporality of the periodical, which is comprised by both accelerations and suspensions. Indeed, as a way of looking backwards and returning to what has been, these collections help retrace the periodical's steps, rethink its trajectories, and show its impact on art, art history, and criticism. The second part of the article will examine different revisionist approaches adopted by art periodicals to create their own legacy while still extant, considering periodicals like *Artforum* (1967 –), *e-flux* (2008 –) and *The Exhibitionist* (2009–2016), and with a focus on two major cases: *October* (1976 –) and *Afterall*

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the article, and in particular in the first section, I have adopted to term periodical as a neutral definition for both magazine (mainstream) and journal (more academic).

(1998 –). Diverse in editorial mission, structure, and content, these two latter magazines, within a few decades distance from one another, have revisited the editorial practices of the critical art periodical and reconfigured their relationship with contemporaneity and global art more generally. As it will be argued, moments of revisitation and reconfiguration have emerged from these periodicals returning to themselves, both looking back to evaluate their past and examining the future. The two case studies have, in fact, adopted different strategies for the creation of their own legacies, at times choosing introspective approaches, at others monumentalising ones. Since they have both obtained dominant positions in the art system, looking at them comparatively and with respect to other periodicals will encourage reflections on magazines' self-positioning in the power structures of art and on the contradictory roles they play within them.

Art will be touched upon only tangentially, since it is not the primary scope of this article. The analysis of these collections will be bound up with their materiality as printed objects, with their intellectual history, and with the chronological contexts from which they emerged. Rather than providing a comprehensive picture, the examination aims to reflect upon the ways in which these celebratory volumes can contribute to the periodical's shift from ephemera to memory, bringing to light both its successes and its weaknesses.

## **The art magazine: between document and monument**

The contemporary art periodical is 'issued at regular intervals and exists across a span of time' (Allen 2016a: 12). It usually consists of writings about art and reproductions of artists' works. These contents are often preceded by a noticeable number of advertising pages that represent the symbolic and real capital of the publication (Sheikh 2015). Since the 1960s, the contemporary art magazine has been positioned amongst the highest stakeholders of the art system (Eşanu and Harutyunyan 2016), on a par with biennials, fairs, galleries and museums, and its power to increase the market value of the artists and works published in its pages has, since then, been widely debated (Buchloh 1976; Walker 1976; Graham 1999; Allen 2020).

As 'cultural intermediaries' (Bourdieu 1984: 365) or gatekeepers of the art system (Eşanu and Harutyunyan 2016: 3), magazines are able to guide our understanding of art by privileging particular artists or movements within the becoming of art itself. This ability is granted first and foremost by their intrinsically periodic temporality, which makes the periodical a highly ephemeral medium. In essence, each issue is rendered transient by the coming out of a new one, which allows it

both to engage with art's perpetual flux by remaining current and up to date, while also bestowing it with an open form (Beetham 1989). Existing in a consecutive progression, all the issues of a periodical are part of a sequence. Each issue of the magazine may thus be understood as a single episode of a longer serial history. In the case of the art periodical, this is art history.

The art periodical's role in the making of art history was recognised as early as the 1970s by British art critic John A. Walker, who wrote that 'because of their periodicity, [art periodicals] are single issues devoted to contemporary art which provide 'snapshots' of art at particular moments. The back runs of such magazines themselves constitute a history of art, albeit an unrefined one' (1976: 45). Exclusions as well as biases are two fundamental aspects that ought to be considered in such a narrative and are often as important as the snapshots collected. Any history of art provided by an art periodical, as in the cases described here, is a mediated history, for which the periodical becomes the transmitter of certain moments. This is especially the case when that which is being transmitted is a 'best of' collection published by the periodical itself. Nevertheless, returning to Walker, what is being acknowledged by the author is that the sum of the pictures provided by the art periodical, which metaphorically represent its issues, exemplify the periodical's existence as both ephemera (able to crystallise and carry in time the structure of a certain present caught in its contingent ambience) and memory (which contains in its pages the history of art's evolution).<sup>5</sup>

This tension between the document meant to pass and memory was discussed, in historical terms, by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in which he argued that:

history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorise' the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments (1972: 7).

One of the main aspects that emerge from this paragraph is the crucial passage that needs to be undertaken for the document to become monument. This is represented either by the passage of time, or by the institution writing a history. With the periodical, as Walker argues, this passage often feels automatic, with its becoming in time granting its durational and historical character. Indeed, thanks to the periodical's temporality, the document is published in the present, but as it is published it becomes part of what philosopher Peter Osborne defined the 'historical present' (2013: 22). This shift occurs when the document becomes the monument.

<sup>5</sup> Even though the reference is to the art magazine, most of the issues debated here may be applied to other types of magazines, in fields as disparate as politics, economics, philosophy and culture.

<sup>6</sup> Translation by the author.

At stake are both immediacy and duration. But if duration transforms the periodical's tense from present to past, then perhaps Foucault's passage of history may be excised in its entirety. Arguably, the periodical's tension between ephemera and memory may be exemplified by the definition given a few years later by Jacques LeGoff, who claimed that 'The document is a monument' (1977: 46). The 'document/monument' is history from the moment at which it is published. If applied to the art periodical, this understanding interprets every issue not through their ephemerality, but through their permanence as printed and material objects.

LeGoff continues, stating that the overlapping of document and monument is the result of 'the effort made by historical societies – whether purposefully or not – to impose on the future that given image of themselves' (1977: 46).<sup>6</sup> This image certainly considers the art periodical's issues under the rubric of Walker's snapshots. But it also involves that of the anthologies, exhibitions, readers, and anniversary issues published by periodicals in order to construct a specific historic and future image for themselves. Often functioning as 'best of' collections, these special publications aim to present the most impactful articles published over previous years, but they also include the collaborations and networks they have activated. As such, they often stage *ad hoc* interventions by artists and invited contributions by the most renowned critics and scholars. These volumes, then, become an instrument to display the periodical's identity, tracing what it has been doing, what trends it has identified, what it has engaged with, and what it has initiated. Specifically, one aim of these celebratory volumes is certainly to provoke a reaction in their readers, one that has to do with community, belief, and agency. They manifest the reasons why the periodical was first entrusted with its gatekeeping and documenting function and articulate how it intends to move into the future. This entails that these volumes are not only about art's chronicling; rather they are about how the periodical has positioned itself as a dominant voice for art, how it has interpreted it and how it will continue moving *with* it. Accordingly, anthologies and special issues, similarly to archives, become simultaneously 'vehicles of memory' and 'visions of the future', through which the periodical revisits its past and moves into a new epoch, adopting processes of mediation, revisionism, and appropriation.

## **On return, revisionism, and the risks of closure**

The preparation of an anniversary issue or anthology volume entails a process of return, revision and re-contextualisation. The difficulty stands in the choice of which histories are more relevant for the periodical and which represent the field

of art as such. Due to the restricted space, not everything that has been published can return in the anniversary issue or anthology. In fact, it would be neither useful nor productive to attempt to do so. Contemporary art periodicals have adopted diverse strategies in response to this problem. Similarly to the archive, they not only look backwards, but also forwards, engaging with multiple temporalities at once (Ernst 2013; Ernst 2015).

Moving from past to future while existing in the present is one of the periodical's temporal peculiarities. It seems to move along a linear trajectory, although as Victoria Horne puts it, there is nothing 'tidy nor linear' about the periodical (2021: 2). Indeed, with the coming out of issues at specific intervals, the periodical is determined by events and pauses and by repetition and difference, bringing more complexity to an otherwise chronological concept of time. This entails that the linear is an insufficient model for representing its temporal connotations. In a 2020 article by W. J. T. Mitchell on the present tense and its implications at the time of the pandemic, the art historian argues that representations of time invoke 'three elementary geometric figures': the line, the circle, and the point (2020: 388). The line represents time's movement towards the future; the circle entails the dimension of repetition and return; the point, the smallest of the three, symbolises that imperceptible instant of the 'now'.

According to Mitchell, if merged, the three figures form the spiral or vortex, which 'combines the properties of line and circle and converges to a point' (2020: 389). That point is a moment of temporal suspension. He posits it between Georg Kubler's metaphor of the 'lighthouse' which 'is dark between flashes: it is the instant between the ticks of the watch: it is a void interval slipping forever through time: the rupture between past and future' (1970: 17), and Walter Benjamin's description of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920). This figure, standing still at the centre of the painting, is to Benjamin the 'Angel of history', whom, while 'turned towards the past' is catapulted into the future (1969: 249). The instant in which the Angel perceives the truth of history as a single catastrophe, while moving towards the storm of progress, is the centre of Mitchell's vortex, the *epoché*. This is the 'moment of indecision between the light and the darkness, between confusion and revelation' (Mitchell 2020: 387).

Arguably, these three geometric figures may also be associated with the temporality of the periodical. The line represents its trajectory from past to future, the circle epitomises the periodicity and the reoccurrence of the issues, while the dot indicates the issue itself in the moment of its becoming public. These three figures coexist without spiralling until the periodical turns towards itself to prepare its anthological, commemorative volumes. When it does so, it enters its own *epoché*. It is a moment of pause in which the periodical slows down its temporality – that

<sup>7</sup> Jens Hoffmann, interview with the author, 12 October 2021. For a description of the volume, see 'October: from critical hegemony to potential obsolescence' in the present article.

is otherwise always in acceleration – to look backwards, to return to itself with introspection. With the publication of these volumes at specific historical moments of the periodical's history, whether with round numbered issues – fifty or one hundred – or demarcating a new decade, the periodical is preparing itself for a new epoch. Such anthologies become turning points in its history. Time is stopped for self-examination, revisionism and the writing of its cultural memory. This writing is not intended to become a factual report of the past; rather it is the construction of a 'myth': one which serves the periodical when positioning itself amongst other stakeholders in the art system. It has to justify the reasons why it has been chosen by the audience as an art mediator, and why their community of readers should continue to trust it.

As a consequence, revisionism becomes a rather complicated and dangerous task. Feminist studies scholar Claire Hemmings cautions historians against the use of 'naïve revisionism' which 'helps construct master narratives [. . . with the effect] of closing down and fixing the past' (2007: 72). Indeed, this kind of revisionism poses the risk of reinstating fixed perspectives; an issue which the periodical, with its anthologies and anniversary issues, has inevitably had to circumvent. As milestones in the periodical's history, these celebratory volumes contribute towards reinforcing the art periodical's dominance within the art system's arena, while asserting its function in the communication and sedimentation of art. From its naturally open and continuous temporal form, the periodical, through its celebratory volumes, closes itself in a process of self-definition and legitimisation, and in doing so, becomes a monument, inevitably less flexible and less open to change.

An example of this may be found in Jens Hoffmann's *The Exhibitionist – Journal on Exhibition Making* (2009-2016), a biannual publication with an emphasis on the curatorial and on exhibitions. Its objective was to create a wider platform for the discussion of curatorial concerns, and to actively contribute to the formation of a theory of curating. Accordingly, in its design, *The Exhibitionist* was reminiscent of a student notebook, with a softcover, black and white printing, and staple binding. For the journal's legacy, however, the editor moved in a completely different direction. Instead of proposing a collection of the most important articles or commissioning new ones that would resurrect past perspectives using contemporary approaches, Hoffmann chose to reprint – in a monolithic volume with a softcover and dust jacket – the entire print run of the journal titling it *The Exhibitionist: The First Six Years* [Fig. 1]. The red cover with the white text, while recalling the twelfth issue of the journal, emulated the design of *October Journal's* first anthology.<sup>7</sup> The dust jacket instead referred to the previous issues' covers, which mirrored, in turn, those of the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1951 –).



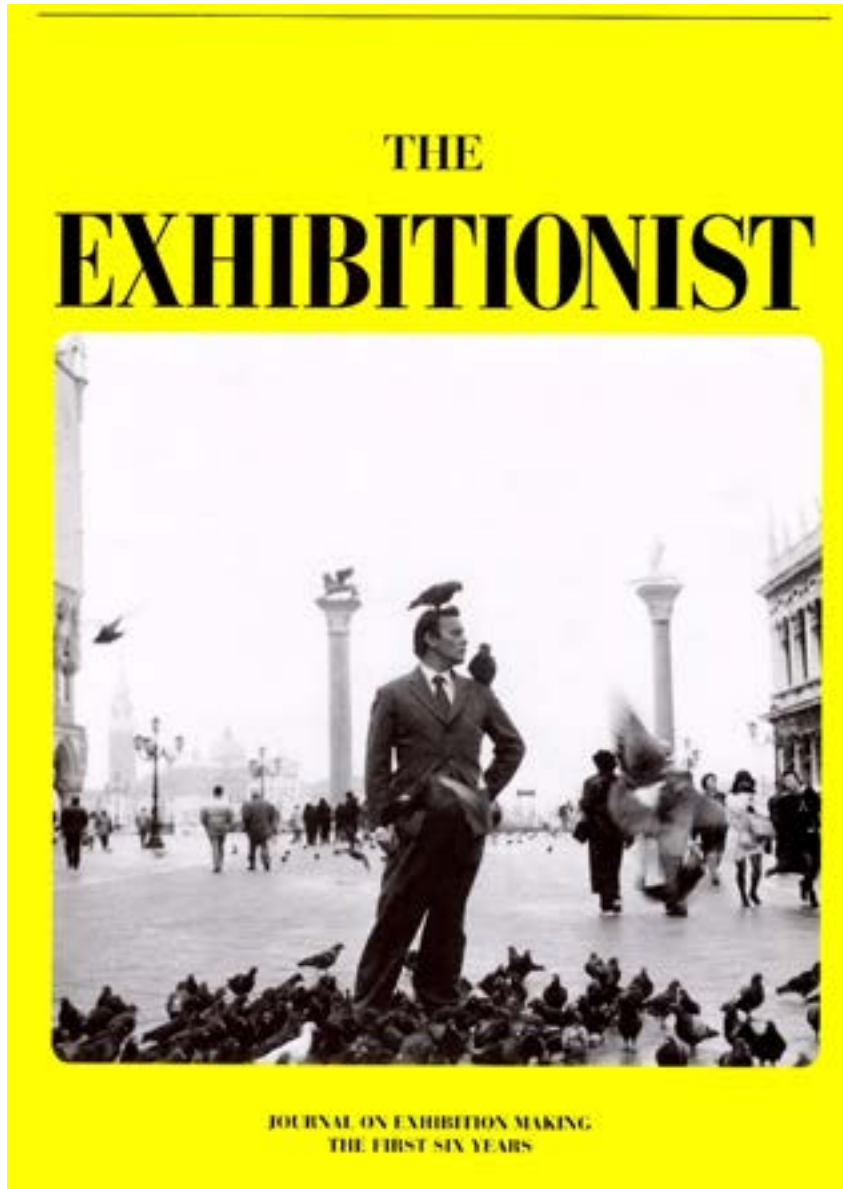


Fig. 1 – *The Exhibitionist. Journal on Exhibition Making. The First Six Years*, ed. Jens Hoffmann (2016). Cover. Courtesy: The Exhibitionist Archive

While the entire reprint of the periodical was possible due to the small number of issues published – in this case twelve – the choice of not revising and selecting proves equally decisive. It is a bold claim regarding the foundational importance of the publication for art history and exhibition studies, offered not through fragments and traces from its archives, but in its entirety. Similar choices have been made by several other art periodicals. In *The Exhibitionist*, in fact, the height, the overall mass, and the encyclopaedic aesthetic of the volume all aim to move against

<sup>8</sup> Despite the volume's subtitle 'The First Six Years', the journal was discontinued. The volume marks its history and the closure of the publication.

<sup>9</sup> After the first twelve issues of *The Exhibitionist*, Hoffmann considered transforming the journal into an anthological series. Email conversation, 10 April 2019.

<sup>10</sup> After a few years Hoffmann launched a new online periodical titled *Duchamp's Socks*: [www.duchampsocks.com](http://www.duchampsocks.com). Accessed May 2023.

<sup>11</sup> Italics in original.

<sup>12</sup> 'About', *e-flux*, [www.e-flux.com/about](http://www.e-flux.com/about). Accessed April 2023.

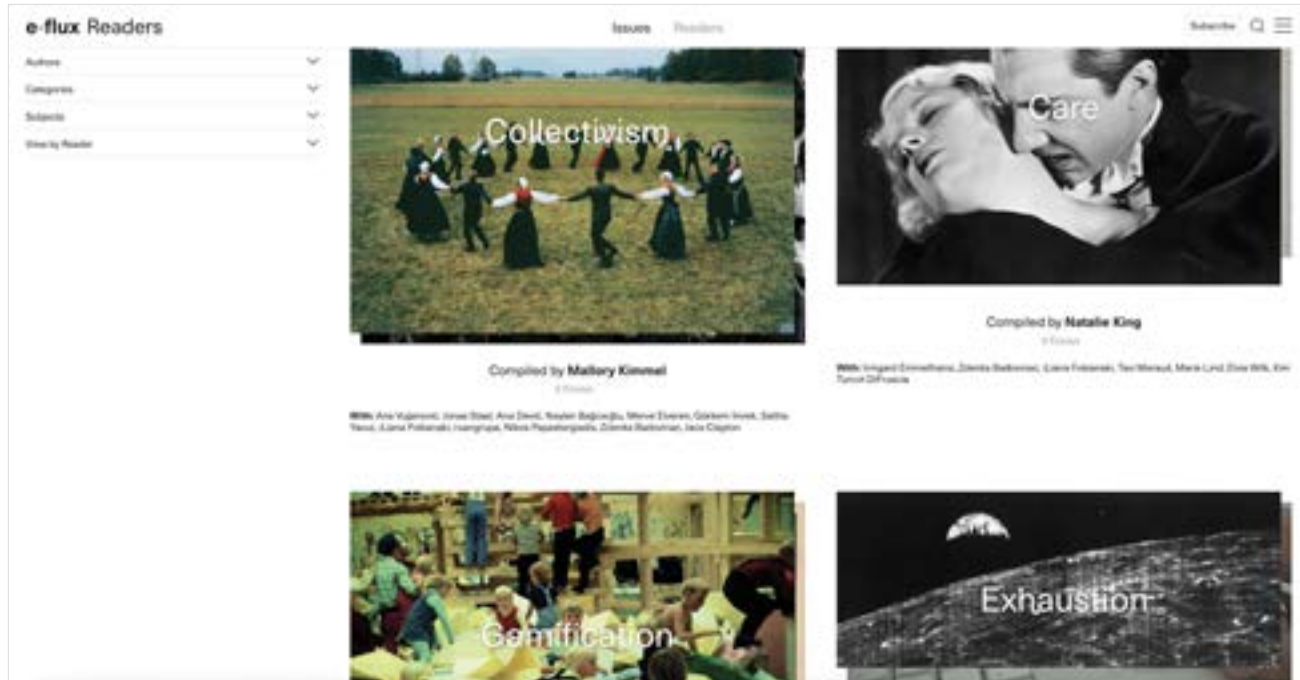
the precariousness of the periodical publication<sup>8</sup> and reinstate its position amongst the most relevant journals in the field of art.<sup>9</sup> This choice was possibly motivated by the growing number of similar publications, or inspired by the example of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's *The Book of Books* for dOCUMENTA(13), in which the series of *100 Notes* published in the two years preceding the exhibition was collected in a single volume (2010–2012). Uniting single issues in one book defies the periodical's temporality while attempting to find a new practice, for which the anthology simply becomes a binder rather than a way of creating a new narrative. Everything in this case is memory, and nothing should be excluded or left behind. With this monumental publication, however, it is as if the journal ran out of steam. Returning to itself, or better not doing so, seems to have closed it.<sup>10</sup>

## Restlessness in the pursuit of memory

Against the naïve revisionism postulated by Hemmings, political theorist Victoria Browne proposes one that is 'restless', meaning 'active, reflexive, and receptive' (2014: 68).<sup>11</sup> She believes that only such an approach will generate alternative historical narratives and avoid transforming history into a finished product without the possibility of change. This restless revisionism is adopted by other kinds of periodicals, albeit often without the intended results. A particularly interesting case is that of the online art journal *e-flux*, established in 2008 by Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle, and Brian Kwon Wood. Coming out 10 times a year, the journal publishes writings and reflections on art, film, history, technology, and politics.<sup>12</sup> As of 2009, one year after its launch, *e-flux* gave rise to the first of a series of *Readers*. The volume, this time in print, aimed to 'highlight the topical thread that ran throughout the first eight issues of *e-flux journal*'. Nevertheless, as stated in the 'Editors' Note':

While it is our hope that the essays included here can begin to give a sense of how varied the concerns and urgencies being engaged today are, we also expect that certain consistencies and overarching issues will emerge through them, and help us shape the forthcoming editions of the journal (Aranda et al 2009: 6).

While the timeframe of a year is rather short for historical considerations of both art and the journal's developments, it becomes clear that looking at the publications' past, returning to it constantly, almost incessantly, becomes both a monumentalising and research practice for *e-flux*.



Against its current total of 139 issues (as of October 2023), *e-flux Journal* has collated over eighty online *Readers*. [Fig. 2] These are no longer printed, however, and are proposed directly by readers through open calls<sup>13</sup> that help the editors investigate the most relevant strains of discourse today. This participation of the audience acts on three disparate levels, all three of which are equally crucial. The first has to do with the rhizomatic nature<sup>14</sup> of periodical publication, for which every issue can be accessed, read, and ordered according to the interests of its readers (Beetham 1989). The second, related, plays with the magazine's reception, with the audience becoming the key through which the periodical as ephemera is transformed into memory, showing that monumentalisation can move beyond the materiality of print and exist in the digital. In this case, memory is constructed through a process mediated by readers who are not passively provoked into choosing a certain history, but who rather make it themselves, in collaboration with the journal's editors. The third level, finally, pertains to the periodical and its capacity to act as an anticipatory tool with regards to the main concerns of the present. Each *Reader* collects around seven/eight articles on a specific theme, transforming the collection into a newly edited issue of the journal whose temporality has been mixed and matched, but that remains nonetheless relevant to the present and to the excavation of forgotten and neglected histories. This practice plays with the entire history of the publication simultaneously. Unlike the anniversary

Fig. 2 – *E-flux Readers* Webpage, screenshot (2023). Courtesy: e-flux.

<sup>13</sup> See the Call for Readers published by e-flux on 18 July 2022: <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/479340/call-for-e-flux-journal-readers/>. Accessed May 2023.

<sup>14</sup> I have borrowed the term 'rhizomatic' from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a way to engage with the publication from multiple points, emulating the way in which thought can be envisioned. See *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

issues and anthologies that have a recurring periodicity, *e-flux's* online format grants it an almost infinite temporality. Through the *Readers*, the journal's chronological ordering of time in the past, present, and future is compressed into what Wolfgang Ernst calls an 'ecstatic temporality', in which the publication continues existing within the website's present, well beyond its temporal reach (2017: 9). With *e-flux*, like the *Exhibitionist*, there is no suspension of time. Yet this does not mean that the editors never enact a revisionist approach to the construction of their own memory; on the contrary, instead of adopting one that is singular, closed, and institutional (with a series of publications in print that seem to have different durations compared to that found online), the editors choose one that is plural, open, and collective. Through the *Readers* they evidence how the legacy of a periodical is neither exemplified by its materiality nor by the likes of a single editor, but by the memories of the communities that have spent time with it. What emerges is a 'decentralised' and 'networked' form of art historical narration, one that is multiplied and expanded in as many directions as the journal's (and art's) spaces, temporalities and readerships. Promises for the future remain un contemplated as they would be in more formal periodicals like *Artforum*, which, in its over sixty years of existence, has proved capable of returning to itself to examine its own legacy and purpose, both through anniversary issues and an anthology.

Founded in 1962 in San Francisco by Philip Leider and John Coplans, *Artforum* has since been published ten times per year. Artist Ed Ruscha gave it its distinctive 10½ x 10½ inch (ca. 27 x 27 cm) square format, together with its bold and condensed logo. When it transferred its offices to New York in 1967, it presented itself as a serious and committed platform for art criticism. In its pages, contrary opinions and conversations by critics such as Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss (influenced by the formalist methods of Clement Greenberg) would take place alongside writings by artists such as Lynda Benglis, Sol Le Witt, and Robert Rauschenberg, creating a dynamic and engaged space for contemporary art. It is this tension that Amy Baker Sandback aimed to highlight in the 1984 anthology *Looking Critically: 21 Years of Artforum Magazine*. The 342-page hardcover volume's dustjacket is a collage of the magazine's covers presenting a selection of articles and reviews from *Artforum's* first two decades of existence. According to the editor, these stressed the magazine's 'immediacy', its capacity to anticipate artistic trends before they 'had been defined by a body of criticism' (1984: ix). The design of the volume intends to sustain the 'continuity' of the publication.

The decision to leave the republished texts unrevised, to adopt their original layout whenever possible and to contain them within a hardcover, reinstates the articles' as well as the magazine's passage from document to monument, from ephemera to memory, and, of course, from past to present. Articles such as Brian O'Doherty's

'Inside the White Cube', Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood', and Rosalind Krauss's 'Sense and Sensibility', were printed alongside several artists' contributions by Daniel Buren, Lucinda Childs, Dan Graham, Joan Jonas, and others, becoming sites for comprehending art's evolution and its current state. Despite displaying a 'rare consensus' between the contributors to the magazine (1984: ix), nothing in the volume's narrative, contents or layout questions its relevance or capacity to represent the contemporary. Revisionism becomes here a selection of the most important moments of the magazine, in remembrance of a myth that led *Artforum* to become one of the most important and contested periodicals in the second half of the last century.

A completely different stance was taken by David Velasco in *Artforum's* most recent anniversary issue (September 2022), which marked the end of its sixth decade of existence. As stated by Gwen Allen, 'magazines not only embody collective ideals and goals, but also register conflict and schisms' (2011: 28). Some of these, such as Lynda Belglis's infamous dildo advertisement, create internal schisms, while others place the entire nature of the publication in question. At the time of Velasco's special issue, for instance, *Artforum* had been criticised by art critic Jerry Saltz for turning into a 'painfully exclusionary inside-baseball art-world *Vogue*'.<sup>15</sup> While this turn has its roots in the early 1970s, the blame for the magazine's transformation from a 'serious, semi-academic, long-form piety and criticism [...into a] luxury commodity to gallery advertisers' (2018) fell upon the publisher Knight Landeman. In his editorial, Velasco touched upon some of these criticisms, bringing to light negative facets of the publication that rarely emerge in these glorificatory volumes. Perhaps this was something owed to its readers, tired of scandals and overly market-oriented content, or perhaps the tide had changed.

Unlike his predecessors, Velasco adopts both a defensive and revisionist approach. In returning to itself, the magazine was able to actively revise its productive activity, proposing changes not only to its structure but to its very methodology. Remembering an anecdote from the years of Philip Leider's direction – something most of his predecessors had done before him – Velasco discusses the problem of art's autonomy in the wake of the market, which he ascribed to 'love'<sup>16</sup> rather than money and investment. Departing from what he calls a 'faggot sensibility', and distancing himself from the 'misogynist art world',<sup>17</sup> Velasco opens the curtains to the magazine's backstage, revealing preparatory conversations and introducing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of 'reparative critique' (2003) as an example of the magazine's new critical approach. The special issue here becomes a way for the magazine to lay itself bare, to rethink its format and structure, and to update its mission in accordance with the current moment. With a series of invited contributions and *ad hoc* interventions by artists, Velasco displays the magazine's strengths

<sup>15</sup> For Jerry Saltz's article 'I Love the New *Artforum*' (2 January 2018), see *Vulture's* website: <https://www.vulture.com/2018/01/wherever-the-new-artforum-is-headed-im-along-for-the-ride.html>, accessed October 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Italics in original.

<sup>17</sup> See Rachel Corbett's article 'As Women of the Art World Join Together to Condemn Sexism, *Artforum* Promises Change', *artnet news* (29 October 2017), <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/open-letter-condemning-art-world-sexism-following-allegations-against-artforum-publisher-1132031>, accessed October 2023.

<sup>18</sup> For an analysis of the journal's history and origins, see Gwen Allen, 'Art Periodicals and Contemporary Art Worlds, Part I: A Historical Exploration', *ARTMargins* 5, no. 3 (October 2016): 35-61.

through its affiliates, reinstating the magazine's ability to move alongside art, not just in terms of critique, but as a space where art is proposed and presented. The memory the magazine is attempting to construct and monumentalise is not so much about its past as it is about the present and the moment in which the issue is published. Similarly, memory, is not only concerned with the past, but with documenting and monumentalising the exact moment of the now in which the magazine exists.

## ***October*: from critical hegemony to potential obsolescence**

One periodical publication that in time adopted a similar dual approach to revisionism was undoubtedly *October Journal*, established in 1976 by Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson, and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. All three were art critics previously affiliated to *Artforum* who had grown tired of that magazine's close association with the market. According to Gwen Allen, '*October* was conceived as a form of counter publicity, which sought to contest the conditions of the mainstream art-world and its main vehicle of publicity, the art magazine' (2016b). This outdistancing was immediately evident in the periodical's materiality and structure. It had a quarterly periodicity, smaller dimensions than *Artforum* (22.8 x 17.6 cm), with a minimal layout privileging text over image, black and white images over colour, uncoated paper, and significantly, no advertisements. The cover mirrored the interiors. Title and index were printed on ivory uncoated paper, rigorously in black, except for the issue's number in red.<sup>18</sup>

At its launch *October's* editors wanted to associate the journal with the European theories that had been impacting contemporary culture, from poststructuralism to the Frankfurt School and feminisms. As manifested in the journal's subtitle *Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics*, these theories would enter a multidisciplinary arena that aimed to overcome *Artforum's* specialisms in art and criticism. Concerning art, *October* proposed in its pages new artistic practices that experimented with architecture, cinema, performance, and photography, which found little or no space in the pages of the canonical art press. Further relevance was bestowed through the publication of texts by artists engaged in conceptual and institutional critique like Daniel Buren, Trisha Brown, Lygia Clark, Louise Lawler, and Robert Morris. In many ways, *October's* approach placed it alongside those artist's periodicals like *Avalanche* (1970-1976) which had been contesting the established art press (Allen 2016). Yet it did not take long for the publication to obtain a hegemonic status itself, not in the artworld as was the case with *Artforum*, but in academia.

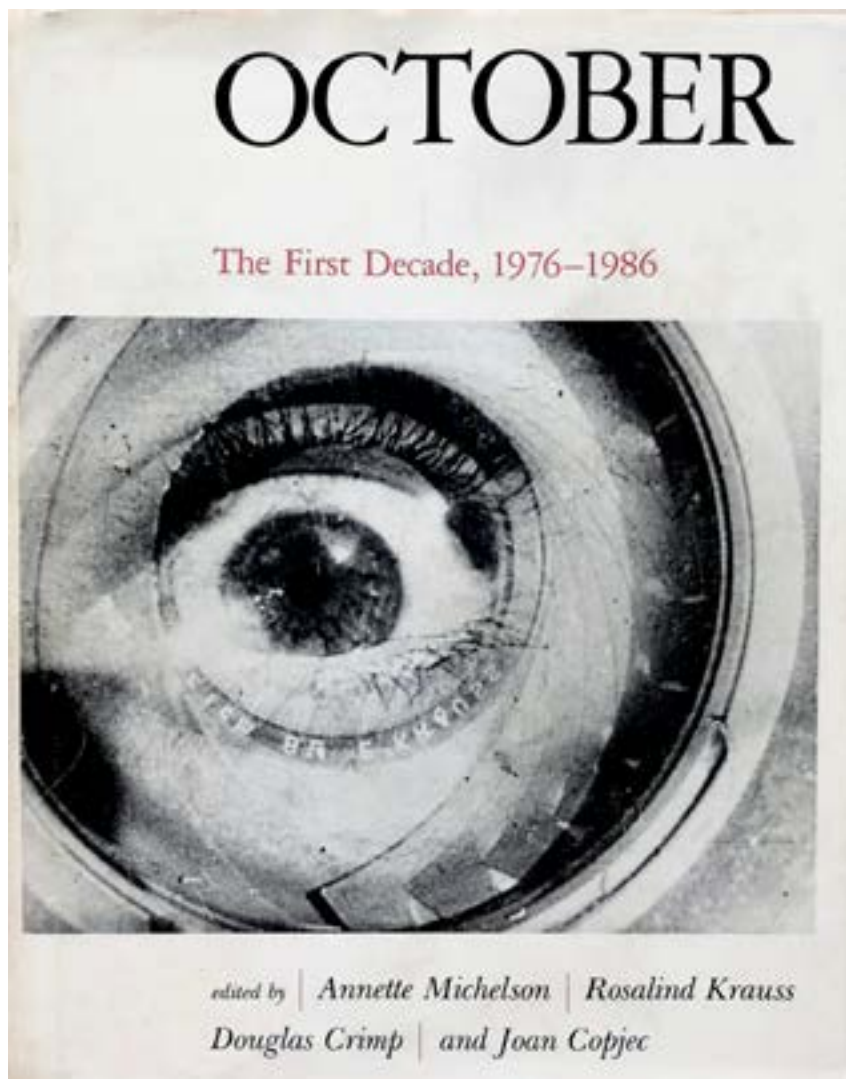


Fig. 3 – *October: The First Decade 1976-1986* (1988), eds. Annette Michelson, Rosalind E. Krauss, Douglas Crimp and John Copjec. Image on the cover: Dziga Vertov, *Man with a movie camera* (1929), still. Courtesy: *October Journal*.

*October's* dominance over a certain type of art discourse was already clear by the time its first anthology was published by MIT Press. Titled *October: The First Decade 1976-1986*, the volume shows the authors, artists, networks, and themes that had made the journal in its first ten years.<sup>19</sup> In terms of design, the font, the use of black and white images, and the uncoated paper are maintained. The usual soft cover with textual elements is replaced by a lined red hardcover enclosed by an ivory dust jacket which confers a more permanent aesthetic. While on the hardcover the only embossed text is on the spine, the dustjacket displays the title, the names of the editors, and the closing still from Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a movie camera* (1929). [Fig. 3] The image shows the eye of a man reflected in the

<sup>19</sup> The volume became a model for *The Exhibitionist. The first six years*, as Jens Hoffmann recounted in an interview with the author on 12 October 2021.

lens of a camera, a usage with multiple meanings. Firstly, it evokes the journal's link to experimental cinematography and photography; secondly, it becomes a metaphor for the power of the critical medium itself to narrate histories self-reflexively and to create what is now considered contemporary art history; lastly, and related, the image plays with the volume's dual gaze: that of its editors and that of its readers.

As to be expected, the anthology begins with the editors' introduction, which reads partly as a posthumous manifesto that glorifies its practice and overall successes. The opening sentence 'But why *October*? Our readers still inquire' (Michelson et al 1987: ix) reconnects to the dual gaze of the cover image while offering the opportunity to glimpse the rationale behind the journal's birth and choice of nomenclature. A summary of art's evolution from the 1970s to the second half of the 1980s, when the modernist canon was questioned from all perspectives, served to justify the work of the journal as a 'necessary response to what was once again a consolidation of reactionary forces within both the political and cultural spheres'. *October*, then, was 'a forum for the presentation and theoretical elaboration of cultural work that continued the unfinished project of the 1960s' (Michelson et al 1987: ix), with 'unfinished' being the key word here. Indeed, the volume is built through a number of unfinished or developing themes that, according to the editors, need further investigation. Certainly, this thematic openness is one of the prerogatives of the periodical, which thanks to its periodicity enjoys the time to revise interpretations of certain topics while debates around them are still shifting. It is also a strategy to acknowledge absences and exclusions, sparing one's own practice from potential criticism.

Nevertheless, this championing of the periodical's malleability ostensibly opposes the volume's purposes and design. Indeed, while the periodical is meant to pass, the book is here to stay. The anthology becomes a way to monumentalise *October's* history through the selection and montage of its 'best of' articles, authors, and artists. Many of the texts reprinted in the anthology had run out of print and were thus made available again to the reader. The volume thus represented a means to defy the periodical's intrinsic ephemerality while legitimising it as an authority with art historical relevance. Not by chance were the texts chosen from the journal's most established and renowned contributors, including Georges Bataille, Georges Didi-Hubermann, Trisha Brown and Babette Mangolte, Sergei Eisenstein (whose film about the October revolution inspired the naming of the journal itself), and Yves-Alain Bois (who had been involved in the French theoretical journal *Macula*). Significantly, Bois had two of his texts reprinted in the volume, demonstrating not only *October's* willingness to be associated with the author, but also how close-knit their editorial enterprise really was.



While elitism was one of the main criticisms that had been directed at the journal, another was its Western-centrism (Allen 2016b). An attempt to engage with these critiques was made with the journal's second anthology, titled, in continuation, *October: The Second Decade 1986-1996*. The cover, this time in black, remains enclosed in a softcover with an image of Lygia Clark's 1968 work *Óculos (Goggles)*, engaging with the vision metaphor of the first volume while hinting at the editors' increasing attention towards female artists. With its title, returning thematic threads, and design cementing the first anthology, the editors propose a serialised story summarised over two special episodes. The anthology becomes a recurring narrative structure in which the journal represents itself as a consistent editorial enterprise. Many of themes identified in the first volume return, and within this return are found more avenues for analysis and investigation. Compelled by the geopolitical changes that attended the year 1989, the volume made a feeble attempt to move beyond its usual Western-centric gaze.

Three texts by African authors discussing the continent's philosophical scene were published in the section 'Postcolonial Discourse', introduced for the first time in this second volume. Manthia Diawara opens with a reading of V. Y. Mudimbe's philosophical theories, while V. Y. Mudimbe himself analyses the cultural relativism of Africa's perception through the work of African studies scholar Melville Herskovitz. Despite both texts being originally published together in issue fifty-five (Winter 1990), it becomes clear that, rather than fragments, the editors were attempting to stage the unravelling of a continuative discussion. Somewhat ironically, however, the result proves how confined was the space devoted to these perspectives in the preceding ten or twenty years of the journal's publication. While recognising that both volumes adopt a revisionist approach in which the journal returns to itself to re-evaluate its own doing, this remains on the level of memory preservation and self-historicisation, still contributing towards the construction of what Hemmings called 'master narratives' (2007: 72). As a site of memory, the anthology here becomes a way for the periodical to forge its own past to serve present interests. Memory then is not so much about absence and forgetfulness as about reiterating its power position within the writing and understanding of art.

Arguably, the moment in which the journal dropped its authoritative tone and reached its reflexive climax was with its 100<sup>th</sup> issue (Spring 2002). [Fig. 4] The artworld had evolved into a global art arena driven by capitalist dynamics, and digitisation had impacted reading habits in unprecedented ways. To this it should be added that a growing number of art periodicals were proliferating in every corner of the globe, with the relevance of the most established ones being questioned as a result. *October's* 100<sup>th</sup> issue, titled 'Obsolescence', was a reaction to this moment. The title was connected to a roundtable discussion in which the editors reviewed

Fig. 4 – *October*, Issue 100 (Spring 2002), cover. Courtesy: *October Journal*.



their own history while reflecting on the journal's present and future conditions. What emerged from the conversation was a general dissatisfaction with art criticism and the lack of a coherent public. The first – criticism – seemed to have fallen into an abyss governed by the market and the culture industry. The latter – the public – was no longer identifiable, as with globalisation and digitisation it had spread and expanded in numerous unforeseen directions (Allen 2016; Salvaneschi 2019). Despite the sense of nostalgia that often transpired from the contributions

of generations of art critics participating in the roundtable, this moment of the journal's history would prove as important as its establishment in the 1970s. Indeed, while the issue that followed the roundtable conveys a sense of uncertainty about the future, thereby showcasing the journal's precarity, significantly it was this very moment when the journal chose to monumentalise its history.

With their diverse intents and editorial procedures, the two anthologies and the 100<sup>th</sup> issue function as lenses through which the journal can look back on itself, consider its accomplishments, and identify its failures. But while the anthology fights against obsolescence, passively marking *October's* contribution to art history, the issue, as a space for self-questioning, allows it to act. By highlighting its problems, it created awareness of the journal's precarious situation and commenced a collective task to revise, revisit, and repair its focus for the future from an ostensibly global perspective. This might be due to the different nature of the two kinds of publication, one permanent, with the objective of documenting the work done by the journal, the other impermanent, marked by the need to adjust and adapt to art's requests. All three volumes show that much still needs to be done. The first – the anthologies – demonstrate this in terms of art historical research; the most recent – the special issue – for the journal's very existence. What is certain is that the 100<sup>th</sup> issue marked the end of *October's* previous life and the beginning of its new one. To survive the crisis in its readership and in the function of art criticism, *October* was obliged to adapt to what is no longer a Western-centred artworld. It has done so feebly, as feebly as its willingness to adapt to these changes. Indeed, in the decade that extended from the second anthology to the 100<sup>th</sup> issue and beyond, the journal on only rare occasions attempted to provide content related to global histories of art and more often than not, it has chosen to reduce engagement with the contemporary and to focus instead on art history's canonisation.

## ***Afterall's* revisitations: An opening to new worlds**

The study of these multiple art worlds has become one of the stated aims of *Afterall Journal*. With a shorter and less publicised history when compared to *Artforum*, *e-flux* or *October*, *Afterall* has managed to position itself amongst the most influential Western art periodicals today. It was established in London in 1998 by Charles Esche and Mark Lewis as an attempt to free British contemporary art from the grip of the Young British Artists (YBA) and to propose a critical alternative to magazines like *Art Monthly* (1976 –) and *Frieze* (London, 1991 –).<sup>20</sup> Subtitled *Journal*

<sup>20</sup> For a short history of *Afterall Journal*, see Charles Esche, 'Foreword: Twenty Years On', *Afterall Journal*, 48 (Autumn/Winter 2019). See: <https://www.afterall.org/article/foreword.48>. Accessed May 2023.

<sup>21</sup> 'About', *Afterall*: <https://www.afterall.org/about/>. Accessed May 2023.

<sup>22</sup> *Afterall* recently launched the 'Afterall Art School platform', <https://www.afterallartschool.org/>; and the research mapping project *Black Atlantic Museum*, <https://www.afterall.org/project/black-atlantic-museum/>. Both accessed May 2023.

*of Art, Context and Enquiry*, *Afterall's* glossy design and bold format contributed to its immediate popularity. The journal is neither a critical art magazine – as testified by the adoption of the term journal – nor an academic publication proper. Structurally, it is part of a research and publishing organisation located at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London.<sup>21</sup> Its focus is on contemporary art and its relation to the 'wider social, political and philosophical framework within which art is produced' (Esche and Lewis 1999: 4). Articles are a mix between academic writings and essays by artists, curators, critics, educators, and writers. Each issue attends to the works of four or five artists. These are analysed in turn through multiple contributions to provide the reader with diverse perspectives on current artistic practices and their contexts of development.

The journal's approach is nicely explained in the editorial of its fifteenth issue (Spring/Summer 2007), in which it is stated that *Afterall* is 'committed to the work of artists [as the] starting point for a wide-ranging discussion about art' (Esche and Lawson 2007: 3). For the first time in its history, the journal returned to itself to see whether its initial ambition remained relevant for tracing art's shifts and evolutions. But as discussed, these reflective moments are also a demonstration of one's accomplishments and victories, especially in a moment in which social media had not yet modified the way in which news is circulated. In this sense, the issue occasioned the presentation of three new editorial projects through which *Afterall* began expanding its practice: the *One Work* series and the *Afterall Readers*. Both are connected to the journal, expanding its research without being a part of it. The former series offers reflections on a single work of art. The latter, the *Afterall Readers*, collects essays and other contributions around important contemporary art events. To this is added the online platform *Afterall Online*, which makes available the journal's previous publications.

The publication of the fifteenth issue also signalled a moment in which several periodicals, established between the late 1990s and early 2000s, had started expanding their editorial practices. The most obvious expansion, dictated by digital innovations, was that into the online environment (Ludovico 2012). But as this case so fittingly demonstrates, periodicals diversified in other directions too. In two decades, *Afterall* published four book series (2006, 2007, 2010, 2016), organised a wide array of events with international institutions, established one educational programme, and several research projects.<sup>22</sup> While all these activities are not exactly intrinsic to the journal, they have inspired its research activities and enhanced its local and global outreach, proving fundamental for its ability to perform editorial practices within a *plurality* of art worlds.

One book series that has proved particularly inspiring for such considerations is *Exhibition Histories*, which aims to understand the act of exhibiting as that of

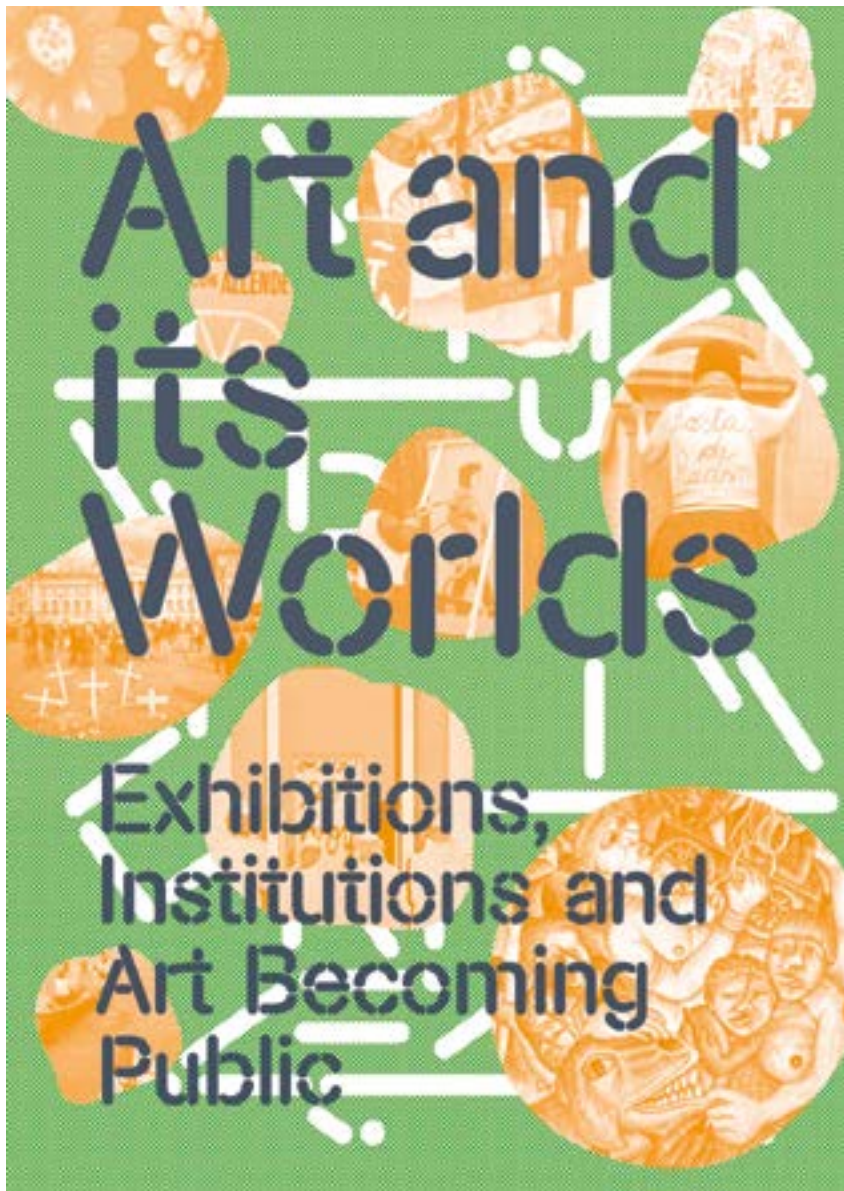


Fig. 5 – *Art and Its Worlds. Exhibitions, Institutions and Art Becoming Public* (2021). Cover design by Andrew Brash. Courtesy: Afterall.

making art public. It was initiated in 2010, a moment when exhibition studies and curating were flourishing thanks to the publication of innumerable volumes on the subject and periodicals such as *Cura Magazine*, *The Manifesta Journal*, *oncurating.org*, and *The Exhibitionist* were founded. But while all of these tended to analyse exhibitions from a single point of view – the curatorial – *Exhibition Histories* adopted multiple perspectives to fragment and reassemble single landmark exhibitions. This approach granted the opportunity to investigate the exhibition's

relation with artworks and the contexts in which they took place and to concurrently connect these to the journal's research practice. In the twelfth volume of the series, *Art and Its Worlds: Exhibitions, Institutions and Art Becoming Public* (2021) [Fig. 5], this connection is made explicit. The volume, in fact, functions also as an anthology of *Afterall Journal's* history, one in which it is possible to observe the expansion of the artwork's manifestation, not just in one exhibition but in a plurality of different worlds.

*Art and Its Worlds* presents itself with a sleek design, with a green, orange, and black softcover on uncoated paper. The green appears somewhat pixelated, superimposed by a collage of round orange images representing artworks, performances, and exhibition photos that are connected through a series of lines forming an unreadable pattern. These curated images and their connections seem to represent a sort of art constellation on which the many worlds represented remain disparate yet always joined. The title is embossed on the cover, designed with a logotype reminiscent of the connecting lines. Inside, the book is divided into three sections that resemble smaller self-contained or meta-books connected by underlying factors. The first is thematic and exemplified by the title 'art and its worlds', as described above. It relates to contemporary art after the late 1980s and early 1990s, a moment in which art moved beyond its Western understanding to become global. As such, it presents a proliferation of artworks, practices, and institutions that have opened new ways of thinking about art.

The second is structural and relates to connections between the journal and the volume. This is made clear in the timeframe of the essays anthologised. Seventeen out of thirty-three were previously published by the journal between the fifteenth and the forty-fourth issues, corresponding to the timeframe between 2007 and 2019. Nevertheless, while *Art and Its Worlds* reveals another kind of editorial procedure when compared to the cases analysed above, its practice of selection and addition had already been adopted by the journal for its twentieth anniversary issue (no. forty-eight) published in July 2019. This second aspect, involving the juxtaposition of new and past essays, situates the journal in a revised narrative, one that entails the modification of its temporality. The republished essays, rather than evoking a past time, as *October's* decade volumes had done, become present. The juxtaposition renews their life and impact, demonstrating their continued relevance for current art developments. It does so by creating new connections through a 'polyvocal' approach. The latter is intended as the 'dispersed agency... assumed in production and reception and through their chiasmus' (Choy et al 2021). This agency is shared between journal and volume, but also between past and present authorial voices.

The third and last factor that emerges within the pages of the anthology is concerned with ideas surrounding sharing and memory. Its introduction begins with a quote by *Chimurenga* which states that ‘History is the science of the state, while memory is the art of the stateless’ (Marsch 2015). *Chimurenga*, with whom the editors collaborated on multiple occasions,<sup>23</sup> is a ‘pan-African platform of writing, art, and politics’<sup>24</sup> founded in Cape Town in 2002 by Ntone Edjabe. Its overall aim is ‘to write Africa in the present and into the world at large’.<sup>25</sup> Thus, memory and its cultivation has always been one of *Chimurenga’s* underlying motives. Memory, in *Art and Its Worlds*, contains a dual connotation. On the one hand, it engages with *Chimurenga’s* ‘art of the stateless’ insofar as it adopts a more inclusive art historical approach, emphasised in the volume’s embracing of global histories and its willingness to include as many worlds as possible in its narration; on the other, it is related to the nature of the volume as a mnemonic and historicising device per se. In making the essays present, and reactivating them through other voices, revisitation is no longer a passive process. Instead, it is active and receptive. It brings in new perspectives to revisit and recontextualise memories that are still relevant for comprehending art’s becoming, all the while ‘enabl[ing] collective study’ (Choy et al, 2021).

It is noteworthy that *Afterall’s* expansion and openness towards neglected histories and geographies is a recent phenomenon. As editor Charles Esche acknowledges with the benefit of hindsight in the twentieth anniversary issue *Looking Back, Looking Forward: 20 Years of Afterall* (Autumn/Winter 2019) [Fig. 6], like most periodicals of its generation, the journal had historically traced a Western geography. It was only with the issue’s preceding five years, after 2014, that it truly managed to broaden its reach through institutional partnerships with organisations such as the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, *Chimurenga* and Asia Art Archive (one of the co-publishers of the anthology). These allowed the editors to broaden their focus to the geographies of Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America, thereby sensitising their practice towards decolonial theory and art’s expansion into this constellation of new worlds.

The reflections and methodologies presented in this issue are the direct predecessor to the volume *Art and its Worlds*, showing how the revisionist and polyvocal approach adopted by the journal has become part of its overall editorial practice. As this publication demonstrates, returning to one’s own history (even if seeking to monumentalise and historicise one’s own position within the writing of art) can foster an orientation towards the present and the future, and in so doing can allow for the adoption of more constructive practices. It is the moment of suspension opened up by the journal when it returns to itself and to the history of art it chronicled, its *epoché*, which grants it a unique opportunity to understand why and how its role has changed.

<sup>23</sup> *Chimurenga* collaborated with *Afterall* on one of the books of the *Exhibition Histories* series about Lagos’s 1977 festival of arts and culture: FESTAC’ 77. The volume published in 2019 was an attempt to restore a partially lost history through a collage of archival materials and photographs.

<sup>24</sup> ‘About’, *Chimurenga*: <https://chimurengachronic.co.za/about/>. Accessed May 2023.

<sup>25</sup> ‘The Chimurenga Chronic: A Future-Forward, Pan African Newspaper’: <http://chimurengachronic.co.za/>. Accessed May 2023.

Fig. 6 – *Afterall. A journal of Art Context and Enquiry*, Issue 48 (Autumn/Winter 2019).  
 Cover Illustration: Babi Badalov, *Art artist animal*, 2018, painting on fabric, 166.5 x 75 cm.  
 Courtesy the artist and Galerie Poggi, Paris.  
 Republished with permission from *Afterall*.



The volumes and editorial practices discussed throughout this article have aimed to highlight the ways editorial groups are revising and renewing their roles and histories. These actions are not only related to memory, to presence, but also to the periodical's afterlife, intended here not as something that moves beyond death but rather as an act of the living. Indeed, these anthologies and anniversary issues



restore the function of past articles, giving them a new life, and evincing a longing for immortality. The cases discussed do not provide a comprehensive survey of the many kinds of memories the periodical attempts to create; rather, they present some of the diverse processes of accumulation, memorisation, and revisitation adopted in the fight against ephemerality. *October* and *Afterall*, alongside *Artforum*, *e-flux* and *The Exhibitionist*, all chose different paths and media to narrate themselves and their relation to art; nevertheless, they have all engaged in this moment of suspension and revision as essential to their practice, either in terms of thought or through the preparation of a special collection. Some have adopted revisionism as a passive practice, reiterating hegemonic and historical narratives, while others have done so as an active process, constructing new and inclusive histories, keeping in mind art's becoming and the requests of their communities of readers. It can involve the repristination of past glories, the acknowledgment of moments of crisis, or the adoption of expansive and inclusive approaches. The suspended time offered by these specific editorial objects has offered the periodical the chance to move its gaze inwards, to understand its role and what shifts it must undertake to continue moving *with* art. This ability to analyse and detect art's movements is the underlying motive that holds it together, to, as Esche pertinently puts it:

discuss what art can mean in a world begging for transformation, and how artists can create images and environments that help us imagine a way out of current impasses and apparently immovable power structures. (2019).

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