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The Vergegenkunft Archive / A Futuristic Archaeology

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A note to the reader:

The following pages only contains the essay “The *Vergegenkunft* Archive / A Futuristic Archaeology” from Jane Philbrick’s exhibition manual *Everything Trembles* [page numbers in brackets]. Also included are the first nine pages from the book. The PDF document containing the artist’s scanned handwritten pages of the essay can be available at The Museum of Sketches – Archive of Public Art: adk@adk.lu.se.

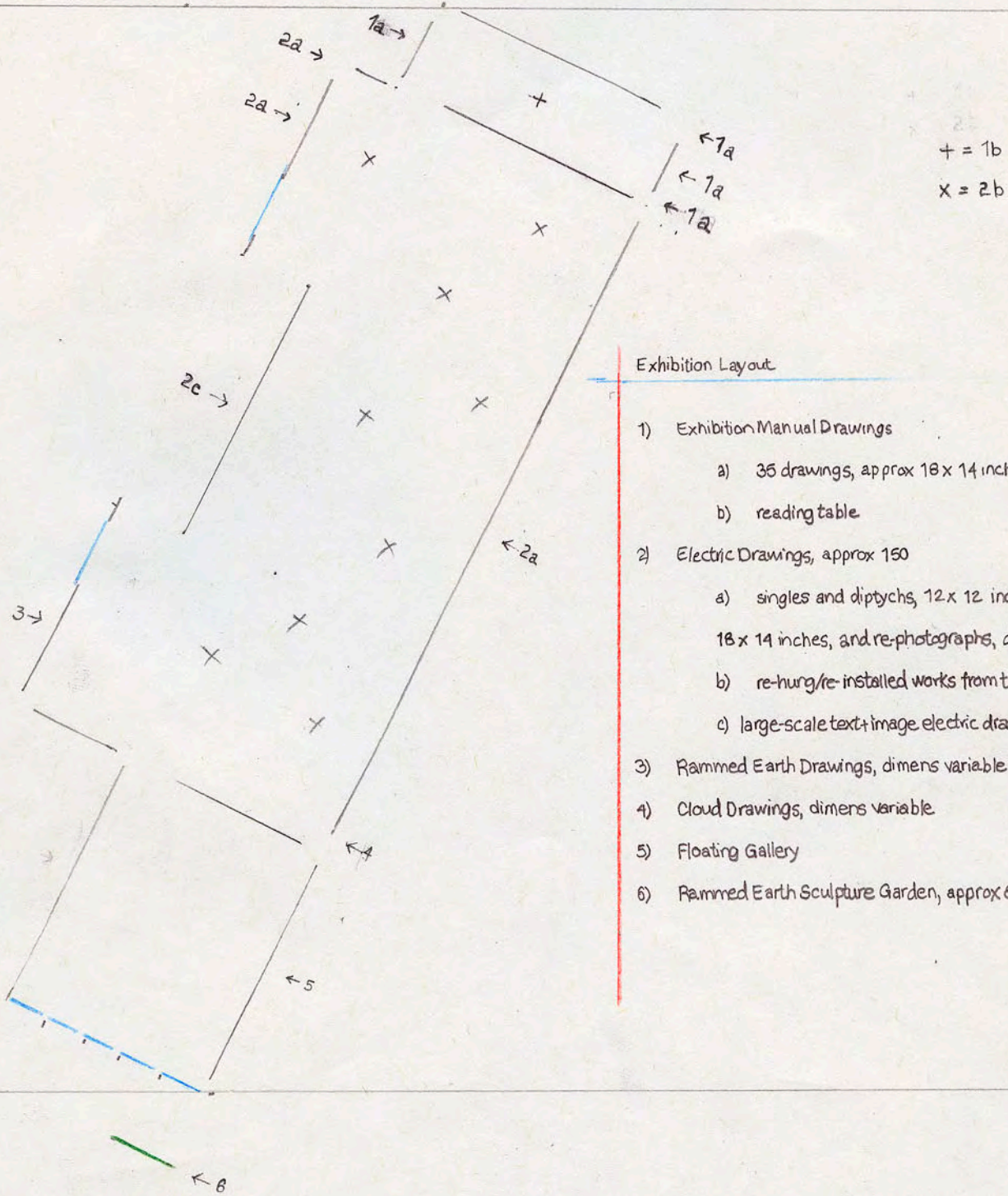


STUDIO
EXHIBITION MANUAL

Skissernas Museum 2009

35 pages • 50 drawings
9 3/4 x 7 1/2 in / 24.7 x 19.0 cm
drawing dimens variable

CENTER FOR ADVANCED VISUAL STUDIES, MIT, CAMBRIDGE, MA 02139, MADE BY HAND
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Exhibition Layout

- 1) Exhibition Manual Drawings
 - a) 35 drawings, approx 18 x 14 inches
 - b) reading table
- 2) Electric Drawings, approx 150
 - a) singles and diptychs, 12 x 12 inches and 18 x 14 inches, and re-photographs, dimens variable
 - b) re-hung/re-installed works from the Collection
 - c) large-scale text+image electric drawing
- 3) Rammed Earth Drawings, dimens variable
- 4) Cloud Drawings, dimens variable
- 5) Floating Gallery
- 6) Rammed Earth Sculpture Garden, approx 8 feet high

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO INIGO, CLARA, DANIELLA, ALDO, AND LANCE

EXHIBITION MANUAL

BY

FUNCTIONAL (SCIENTIFIC) TRUTH:

JANE PHILBRICK

ARTIST RESEARCH AFFILIATE

CENTER FOR ADVANCED VISUAL STUDIES

THE TOP OF A STORM CLOUD IS POSITIVELY CHARGED, THE BOTTOM IS NEGATIVELY CHARGED. THE NEGATIVE ELECTRONS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CLOUD DRIVE AWAY THE NEGATIVELY CHARGED ELECTRONS ON THE GROUND IMMEDIATELY BELOW. THE POSITIVE ELECTRONS ON THE GROUND ATTRACT THE NEGATIVE ELECTRONS IN THE CLOUD ABOVE, CAUSING LIGHTNING TO STRIKE.

Floating Sculpture

Electric Drawings

"SCIENCE SEEKS FUNCTIONAL TRUTH," MICAH KIMO JOHNSON, POSTDOCTORAL FELLOW,
DEPARTMENT OF BRAIN AND COGNITIVE SCIENCES, MIT

Rammed Earth Sculpture

Garden

SKISSERNAS MUSEUM
(MUSEUM OF SKETCHES)
ARCHIVE OF PUBLIC ART
LUND UNIVERSITY

2009

FUNCTIONAL (SCIENTIFIC) TRUTH:

THE TOP OF A STORM CLOUD IS POSITIVELY CHARGED, THE BOTTOM IS NEGATIVELY CHARGED. THE NEGATIVE ELECTRONS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CLOUD DRIVE AWAY THE NEGATIVELY CHARGED ELECTRONS ON THE GROUND IMMEDIATELY BELOW. THE POSITIVE ELECTRONS ON THE GROUND ATTRACT THE NEGATIVE ELECTRONS IN THE CLOUD ABOVE, CAUSING LIGHTNING TO STRIKE.

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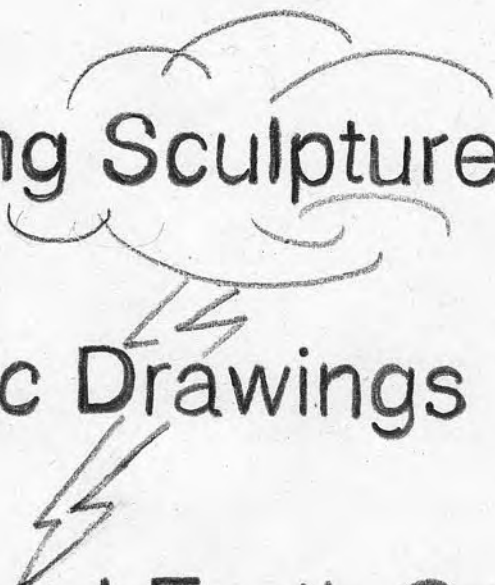
EXHIBITION MANUAL

BY

JANE PHILBRICK

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MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
CAMBRIDGE

Floating Sculpture



Electric Drawings

Rammed Earth Sculpture
Garden

SKISSERNAS MUSEUM
(MUSEUM OF SKETCHES)
ARCHIVE OF PUBLIC ART
LUND UNIVERSITY

2009

EXHIBITION MANUAL

ACCOMPANIES THE EXHIBITION

EVERYTHING TREMBLES

SKISSERNAS MUSEUM, LUND

6 SEPTEMBER – 8 NOVEMBER 2009



LUNDS
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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

ELISABET HAGLUND

THE SKETCH

MEG ROTZEL

INCOMPLETE ARTIFACT

KATHARINE CHU

THE VERGEGENKUNFTARCHIVE / A FUTURISTIC ARCHAEOLOGY

JENS ARVIOSON

RAMMED EARTH SCULPTURE GARDEN

ELECTRIC DRAWINGS

FLUORESCENCE

MACHINING ART

KATHARINE CHU

THE COPY

FLOATING SCULPTURE: CHAOS AND CURVATURE

MARCO GUALTIERI

NOTHING BUT THE REAL THING: CONSIDERATIONS ON COPIES, REMAKES, AND REPLICAS
IN MODERN ART

LYDIA BEERKENS

THE ALCHEMY OF CREATIVITY

CHARLES MARSHALL

FLOATING SCULPTURE: THE USE OF STABILIZED MAGNETIC LEVITATION
MARKUS ZAHN

SHAPE DEFINES FUTURE. FUTURE DEFINES SHAPE
ENNO LENZMANN

ON MEAN CURVATURE FLOW
ENNO LENZMANN

SCULPTURE FLOTTANTE I: A GEOMETRIC STUDY
YOSSI FARJOUN AND BENJAMIN SEIBOLD

SCULPTURE FLOTTANTE II: SOUND OF THE EVOLVING SHAPE
YOSSI FARJOUN AND BENJAMIN SEIBOLD

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

CONTRIBUTORS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Jane Philbrick's "Everything Trembles"-exhibition deals with and emerges out of the specificity of The Museum of Sketches – Archive of Public Art: namely, engaging the *process* an artwork is involved in through the puzzles of "what constitutes an artwork," "what is a museum," and "what is public art."

Essentially, Philbrick uses the museum as a resource to explore the lives of images in general and their connectivity, as well as investigate what the museum and its collection in particular are about. Put it slightly different, Philbrick affirms through her sustained rapport with the museum what W.J.T. Mitchell answers to his question of "what do pictures want?" that "above all they would want a kind of mastery over the beholder."¹

Philbrick's exceptional curiosity – her persistent *inquisitiveness* of images – lies in art objects and what *ideas* of themselves they intrinsically own, of what they can *become* (the intrinsic quality that animalizes the image into something else than what it "visually" and "objectively" is). Thus, it ultimately is a matter of how "to make the *relationality* of image and beholder the field of investigation" in her laboratory of imagination.² At some point in this triangulation of relations – i.e., image/image, image/beholder, and museum/image/beholder – she removes some of the very "thingness" of an artwork that is habitually taken for granted when encountering artworks. However, removing the thingness is just an appearance (a theoretical apparition), as it happens without actually getting rid of any object: it is only the "original," the "completed," and the "finished" object that is displaced through the multiplication of versions.³ This idea has some affinities with the difference between sculpture and installation art, as explained by art historian Alex Potts: "It is almost as if the thingness of the traditional sculptural object has been turned inside out, so it resides in the framing that encloses and focuses the viewer's looking, rather than in an object isolated within the arena of display."⁴

In this inside out-situation, there is a shift of focus from the suggestion of a fixed, stable, and finished artwork, to an awareness of its openness [p. 39] and unfinishedness. Thus it breaks down the barrier between the artwork itself and its audience, prompting viewers to actively engage with what they behold. From this premise, as a framing of "Everything Trembles," I will present a few thoughts on the exhibition and its relation to The Museum of Sketches, by connecting the dots between "processes," "artwork," "sketch," "model," "museum," and "museum audience," in a fairly unsystematic way.

The Issue of Process

We have to start with the core issue of process. In his essay "The Work Itself," Howard S. Becker asks what "the work of art itself" means. He problematizes the concept as being concerned with the internal structures of an artwork, and/or what it expresses outside itself. The artwork "itself" is business as usual

for art historians, musicologists, literary scholars, and so on, but only seemingly as they rarely take interest in the process behind what is *ultimately* judged as the work itself, the endpoint of a linear production process. The same applies to art museums in general, as they focus on what seems to be definite artworks. What Becker then brings to light, is the empirical reality of what he terms “The Principal of the Fundamental Indeterminacy of the Artwork.”⁵ For example, he shows that more than often there are “versions of the same thing,” the piece never achieves its final state of being, or, it is in-between in a stage from one piece to the next.⁶ Pierre-Michel Menge similarly focuses on the sculptor August Rodin’s major strategy in his artistic career, as rooted in the unfinished and its combinatorial resources; Rodin begins, reuses pieces of finished works, and questions the idea of the finished artwork.⁷ It is always a play with “defective creation, hybrid assemblages, and plural creation,” and “completeness, uniqueness, multiplicity, plurality.”⁸

Although, the unfinishedness does not destroy the assumption of the existence of individual works of art. The work “itself” exists as a thing that momentarily makes us pause, be absorbed in, and thus forget its attachments. But it is always framed within a context, as a permanent condition of instability in its ergon/parergon-dynamic.

For what it appears, we cannot, ultimately, have a completed artwork, but only processes. By definition, The Museum of Sketches *is* this major strategy. Ragnar Josephson, the founder of the museum, wrote the book [p. 31] *The Birth of the Work of Art* in 1940 – the museum’s manifesto. Noteworthy, his discussions address the successive transformations towards completion, even though the finished work of art is simply not there. Everything is intertextually and intermedially woven together, and the result (the work itself) is made peripheral. Josephson engages fully in the creative process, showing how base-material and finished work can relate to one another.

The specific vocabulary Josephson uses might therefore be of interest to be presented, as it reveals a great deal of an artwork’s wobbly way of becoming one. He begins with what he calls the “transformed model,” an artist’s discovery of his or her own idea in the act of copying. From there, “the creative moment” appears as, e.g., movements and gestures in the sketches that suddenly lead to solutions, the illuminating moment. But the different, possible paths the work then goes through, are identified in an *form-to-form* relation as:

- The “displacement,” “break-out,” or “escape”: a main thought is turned into a secondary theme or vice versa;
- The “crossing”: a fusion or contamination of two or more models into a new whole, or a more traditional and classical crossing of a contemporary style with a foreign or older model.

Simultaneously, things occur in the relation between the *content* of an image (the signified, or the iconic level of meaning) and its *form* (the signifier, or the plastic level of meaning), by:

- The “filling-in”: when form becomes content;
- The “rearrangement”: the reorganizing and restructuring of content into form. A literary source or a story as model that is given shape, but in its visual shape comes from prior models of the artist’s own or other’s production. Here, Josephson uses the metaphor of a stage director for how the artist creates;
- The “cohesion”: the search for unity and harmony by way of testing details.

The procedural activity in these different stages relates to “order,” “accumulation,” “simplification,” and “intensification,” even when it occurs [p. 32] from one work to another, e.g., in the developmental history of the artist, how an earlier work affects the next one, or in specific, individual works. “Attention” and “distraction” could be added as equally vital parts. Josephson argues that the stages in the process are traceable, since the succession of decisions is visually documented in what he believes is an unbroken, linear production process. We can see what the artist once saw and made, and deduce the same decision-making as he or she once did. *You only have to look!*

There is an uncertainty, though, hovering in his argumentation, where the decision-making really takes place: as a trace within the images? Did the image itself make the decision? Is it to be found in the relation between images as / see them? Can the image tell me what the change is based on, besides what emerged from it? Whatever the question may be, it is based on “determinacies in the picture,” but also on those gaps, constitutive blanks, and places of indeterminacy in “the line of junction between the viewer and the work” which is the “constructive character of the art work’s incompleteness.”⁹ Therein lies the power of imagination in the creative process and in the beholder’s later reception; it is what Josephson’s discourse about the creative process uncovers, but is quite *silent* about – and which Philbrick plays with.

The Exhibition – A Laboratory of Imagination

Fixed on the “activities” described above, Philbrick extends these beyond the familiar “images in conversation” within the creative process of an individual artwork, as an invitation from the museum exhibitions and its depositories for her – then passed on to the museum audience – to be actively part of a creative dialogue, and not necessarily solely on the terms of the images. Either she delves into a specific image and asks what other images it hides within itself, or she discovers previously unobserved image relationships by happenstance, because “they are there.” The result of this creative dialogue with the museum – an excavation based on its own terms and its resources – is a *suspension* of that inevitable linear narration towards an end or completion Josephson had in mind in his conception of simultaneity of past, present, and future.

Philbrick’s “field research” into the museum’s focus on the creative process, is her *Electric Drawings*-series, her participatory research into the laboratory of ideas, investigating both the creation and the [p. 33] recreation of transformed models. The project can be seen as materializing out of the depositories to

explore Josephson's vocabulary, introduced in the language of the exhibitionary spaces. In snapshots that frame disparate objects of all kinds in the collection from their found positions – mostly three-dimensional figurative models – the works come into sight as choreographed and dialogically designed, but only as suggestions of displacements, crossings and rearrangements of ideas – even if impossible, improbable, or uncanny indications of belonging together: ironic, funny, creepy, resembling, diverging.¹⁰

In processing this “found” creative process, there is a cutting into that dialogue, where Philbrick recreates it with the play of copying through a *reverse engineering*. Handmade photocopies (the electric part) are made from the snapshots on handmade paper, which then are presented with objects from the collection – either as found compositions or as singular objects – and archive photographs. The original model (which is what and where?) is yet again destabilized through the spaces between, and transformed into an infinite number of connections, due to how the museum audience move around and senses the involvement from all parts. Here, the issue of “unfinishedness” is released as open conversations, open invitations, and dialogical calls (a few of them made concrete by Philbrick).¹¹ However, the production of the new is also a description of its own process.

Clashes of ideas: creativity, plurality, multiplicity, mystery, play, seduction, virality, vitality; electric drawing against electric drawing against model against model against photograph against photograph sparkles of a want to be heard and to say something, at audience-confrontation; to be ordered, accounted for, to be imagined.

What comes to mind is the phrase and genre painting “conversation piece.” [p. 34]



The dialogical pieces that perhaps are most concrete and abstract, are those that emerges from Marta Pan's modernist *Floating Sculpture* (1961). Here Philbrick confronts the Pan-sculpture, she listens and responds to what other artworks, versions, images, and senses can be pulled out of it. Again, the "meeting point" or conversational aspect is important, especially those found in spaces and distances, a spatiotemporal exchange on several levels: essentially between works, and between works and audience. *Floating Sculpture* (2008–09) is a contemporary version of Pan's sculpture, where the property of floating transforms into levitation. Referencing, copying, quoting, being a transformed model, the object in itself is in essence "process." The twelve red balls, their black framings with magnetic levitation devices, and black support all "hover" between concepts of painting–sculpture, and object–artwork. From where it is placed in the gallery window on the second floor, it is experienced at one point from far-off outside, as an ordinary giant painting (black with red spots); but when inside it is revealed as magnetic levitation.

Whereas the levitation-version exists as a here-and-now artwork, the audio installation has taken the shape of Pan's sculpture, reshaped it into mathematics and "evolved" into a future version transposed into the auditory sensory realm. All things considered, it is not only about the process of *the work itself*, but the process of *sensing* the process as a beholder-listener, and then deciding on whether the work is in each one of the pieces, or in the combination of all. (Then again, all different stages of Philbrick's transformed models – what becomes her "new originals" – are shown as equal parts of the artwork as "the work itself.")

With the outdoor piece *Rammed Earth Sculpture Garden*, I see an opportunity to briefly comment on the complex that museums are. Although, I will completely leave out some issues concerned with process and creativity (e.g., its making), I think the sculpture – as a site-specific object in the sculpture garden – addresses and performs what museums do. And it explicates the very core of The Museum of Sketches as the museum *tells what it shows*, assuming that it, through its unique way of presenting their objects, actually shows the covert technology of museums in general. (The museum is concerned with showing what other museums put out of sight.) *Museography* is the concept art historian Donald Preziosi uses to explain the relationship between (art) object, beholder, and museum (i.e., the exhibitionary space), which is a [p. 35] critical term of how narratives, statements, and truths are framed and created in museums.¹² It is the technology museums use to act like a theatre stage and tell history from one perspective only, and where the visitor is centred as a unity in a telling order within the museological space.

Just as the museum object comes to serve as a perspective or window on history and evolution of styles, attitudes, values, or peoples, and on the wondrous diversity of human existence and expression, so also does the new modern social subject itself come to be constituted as an anamorphic perspective on the bits and pieces of its own life and experience.¹³

Museums are stagecraft, as they use the space to organize and construct time and history dramaturgically. As a rule, objects in exhibitionary space behave as a “wholeness” of the past. This improbability makes the spatiotemporal construct an illusion, a fabrication of history. But considering where the *Rammed Earth Sculpture* is placed, in the sculpture garden below the gallery window, one cannot *see* but only *experience* the path it takes from objecthood to artwork. Observed from the level of the garden it is perceived as an eccentric object among the sculptures: walls with vegetation around. Is it art? But the change of perspective when looking at it from the gallery window alters the perception, aesthetically, and the object becomes another sculpture among the others. It is a reverse of staging and forging spatiotemporality compared to ordinary museography, and what I would call a “transparent performance of the museum.” It is the museum that converts the object into art. The paradox is, wherever you are as beholder, the sculpture is in another place; but you can be at the same place where the garden-object is. As the museum audience *re-*moves itself from *outside* to the *inside* of the museum, the position and point of view is not the only change, but both object and audience have transformed. This learning of what the *Rammed Earth Sculpture Garden* at one time was, but cannot exactly become again, is the real target showing the spatiotemporal illusion in ordinary (art) historical exhibitions.

(Since the museum exhibits sketches and models for public art, there are naturally a lot of ideas that have not been realized “out there,” but still exist as ideas within the walls of the museum of what could have been – or sometimes what once was, as a public artwork can be removed. Therefore, [p. 36] an exhibition such as this that explicitly deals with the museum is not complete without an unrealized artwork. A proposed fluorescent room installation would have been a piece of nine fluorescent lights, with a luminosity calibrated to the number of visitors, to either brighten or dim with the fluctuating crowds.)

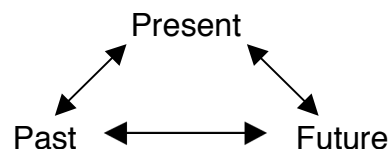
The *Exhibition Manual* gathers the surplus of conversations and ideas from the process of the exhibition. If the *Electric Drawings* are the field research, and the Pan-pieces and *Rammed Earth Sculpture Garden* are seen as artworks in themselves, then the *Exhibition Manual* is documentation. But it is also an artwork because it is hand-drawn and presented as sketches. All separate aspects from each artwork are part of each other; therefore, the manual is less an exhibition catalogue per se, as much as it is an idea of how things are created and a manual of how to perform the exhibition. Once more, the copy–original is played with, as the hand-drawn pages, a transformed model from different types of writings, prints, scrolls, are only available for distribution as a downloadable document.

The Time Machine

If Mitchell asked “what do pictures want?,” then perhaps the question Philbrick asks is “how do images behave?,” when confronted with their possible inherent want of changeability, of progression, and/or of exchanging ideas. One of the concepts that come to mind, when reflecting on the “Everything Trembles”-exhibition, is what the German writer Günter Grass invented to explain his own

storytelling: the neologism *Vergegenkunft*. It is a compound of *Vergangenheit* (past), *Gegenwart* (present), and *Zukunft* (future), to express a “mixed-up time.”¹⁴ This “paspresenture” exists on one hand only in the imagination; on the other hand, it is very much reality in the exhibition space, as a factual, tactile *Vergegenkunft*, adding a significant spatial quality to the temporal that makes the experience even more real. A museum visit is always about *seeing* things; additionally it is also a *bodily* experience of moving – the subject’s awareness of itself – which is an embedded process in the “Everything Trembles”-exhibition. It is never about images or objects alone, but to walk is to know and connect, as one principal element in creating the meeting point of things and audience, from which there is no beginning and no end. Everything becomes a stepping-stone from somewhere towards something, and therefore holds an idea that is not fixed, as a script of some kind. [p. 37]

The spatiotemporality of the *Vergegenkunft* can be visualized schematically as this, a rotational operation of a melting pot where the past and the future is ever-present with the here and now:



As a science fiction-theme of sorts, Philbrick investigate an archaeology of images from a present point of view, and projects them into a possible future, at some point even making physical contact with what lies ahead – *as an archaeology of the future of images*. It is what she sees and tries to amplify (Josephson’s “cohesion”) and create (and re-create) in the meeting of images. She undertakes a time travelling, exposing the mixed-up time that is always there in art museums. Think of the museum as a time machine, but instead of arriving in the distant future or past, you arrive in this *Vergegenkunft*. Art historian David Carrier has made it clear how this time travelling actually takes place in art museums, which demonstrates the power of such an institution:

“Art has no value in itself,” a museum director notes. True enough, but by making imaginative travel possible, works of art become treasures, like the precious things in the *Wunderkammer*. Paintings physically present here and now in the museum present the distant past, making imaginative time travel possible. This double character of visual art, its capacity to make present such faraway places or times in its imaginary, explains the exalted value placed upon it by princely collectors and their successors, public art museums.¹⁵

While Carrier has the solitary, individual artwork in mind, Philbrick takes this inbuilt aspect in art museums to another level by adding the dimension of space, since she focuses on The Museum of Sketches and its specific intense way of displaying sketches and models, where the individuality of an image has only a secondary place. As the museum displays the creative process in series, where possible, of sketches or models for each intended work of art, visually

and verbally, it may seem that there is only one way to see an artwork's genealogy, as a Darwinian evolution; but the way sketches and models are hung and positioned, it deliberately obscures a secured reading of them. The presentation of images always [p. 38] gives them the leeway to be seen or ready to be formed as *chimeras*.¹⁶ It calls for possible alternative readings, deliberate or undeliberate, hasty, successful or unsuccessful combinations. Moreover, what conditions this way of seeing possible connections between images, is that the artwork per se is never present in the museum; it is either there *in absentia* (i.e., the realized public artwork), or not at all (i.e., unrealized public artworks). Thus, the sketches and models inherently call to be connected with another image.

Learning from "Everything Trembles," the museum is a repository of *ideas* and of how these ideas can be and are used. The show is an archive of the future; it is an archive of what could have been the future; it is an archive of the past for me in the present to imagine an alternative future of the images. That is what creativity is. As much as it fascinates me, besides being a "laboratory of imagination," I do not only get exposed to the lives of images, but I get a glimpse into the heads of a plethora of artists.

My final words will be a quote from Menge, that locates why the present exhibition is about seeing, connecting, finding and responding to ideas, and experiencing possibilities of imagination, where "everything trembles."

Our interest in studies, drafts, sketches, outlines, and other preparatory states of the most admired works lies precisely in the access they seem to give us to versions of what could have been; they make available to us alternatives that enhance our knowledge and evaluation of what exists by a kind of probabilistic enrichment and bring us closer to the creative act considered as a labor process incarnated in the structure of the work.¹⁷ [p. 39]

¹ W.J.T. Mitchell: "What Do Pictures Want?," *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2005, p. 36.

² Mitchell, p. 39.

³ Actually, the removal of the "thingness" is quite different than what it seems to be. Nothing is removed really. What lies beneath Philbrick's work has more to do with obsessiveness with, desires of, and seeing endless possibilities in images. On these and related themes, concepts, topics, and ideas, cf. Mitchell.

⁴ Alex Potts: "Installation and Sculpture," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2001, p. 17.

⁵ Howard S. Becker: "The Work Itself," *Art from Start to Finish. Jazz, Painting, Writing, and other Improvisations*, Howard S. Becker, Robert R. Faulkner, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (eds.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006, p. 22–23.

⁶ Becker, p. 22.

⁷ Pierre-Michel Menge: "Profiles of the Unfinished: Rodin's Work and the Varieties of Incompleteness," *Art from Start to Finish. Jazz, Painting, Writing, and other Improvisations*, Howard S. Becker, Robert R. Faulkner, and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (eds.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2006, p. 50.

⁸ Menge, p. 50, 36.

⁹ Wolfgang Kemp: "Death at Work: A Case Study on Constitutive Blanks in Nineteenth-Century Painting," *Representations*, No. 10, (Spring) 1985, p. 107.

¹⁰ The most powerful compositions are those of figures that seem to be logically involved and absorbed in the same space, and unaware of its beholder as if originally made for it.

¹¹ A personal favourite artist represented with a few pieces in the electric drawing-installation, is the Swedish sculptor Frank Heyman (1880–1945). Dedicated through out his whole life to build a mystery temple (planned at Långö, Strömstad, on the Swedish west-coast) filled with sculptures to contemplate by. He was completely unknown then, and merely known within the museum today, since he died without realizing anything at all. He left behind almost a thousand sketches and models for his project; all his life he administrated an idea that only lives on in the depositories of the museum – and now is brought to life in new constellations, for a future imaginary life.

¹² Donald Preziosi: “Collecting/Museums,” *Critical Terms for Art History*, Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (eds.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996.

¹³ Preziosi, p. 285.

¹⁴ Gaffney, Elisabeth and Simon, John: “The Art of Fiction No. 124. Günther Grass,” *The Paris Review*, No. 119, 1991, p. 25.

¹⁵ David Carrier: “Art and Power. Time Travel in the Museum,” *Museum Skepticism. A History of the Display of Art in Public Galleries*, Durham and London: Duke University Press 2006, p. 40 (pp. 39–50). Regarding science fiction, time travelling in museums, the power and effect they seem to have upon us, see the short story “Exhibit Piece” (1954) by Philip K. Dick.

¹⁶ My use of “chimera” does not only refer to “figment of your imagination,” but as a composite, a hybrid – something new made of two or more parts.

¹⁷ Menge, p. 49. [p. 40]