In the Labyrinth of the Contemporary Condition:

The Labyrinthine as Curatorial Topos of Postwar Modern in the German Art World Between 1945 and 1968

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"In Kassel begann der Kunstsommer," a newsreel film from 1959[1] announced, and immediately characterized the *documenta II* exhibition as a "labyrinth of modern art," where "it is up to oneself to find a way through contemporary art."[2] The combination of modernist complexity and a spectacular show—the newsreel depicted it as a social event accompanied by light jazz music, where a young crowd dip their feet in the basin of the Picasso sculpture *Les Baigneurs* (1956)—was the success formula of the most iconic exhibition in postwar Europe: *documenta*, founded in Kassel in 1955. The period newsreel is but one example of how the image of the labyrinth was frequently used to represent *documenta*, especially during its second installment in 1959.

Fig. 1. Still from newsreel film on *documenta II*. UFA Wochenschau 155/1959, July 14, 1959, Bundesarchiv, Filmothek.

The labyrinthine has been identified as a curatorial model behind artist-curated exhibitions that are based on total installations in a ludic, neo-Dada vein, such as *Dylaby* (1962) and *HON – en katedral* (1966).[3] But the announcement of the labyrinth just a few years earlier with *documenta* is an overlooked aspect of the exhibition histories of the era. As such, the labyrinth in this case can lead to an expanded understanding of the otherwise well-documented *documenta* and its double identity as authoritative institution associated with rational documentation *and* curatorial *Gesamtkunstwerk* in itself. That is, *documenta* as a labyrinth between institution and

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anti-institution that leads to the highly labyrinthine understanding of “the modern,” and even “the contemporary,” in the postwar era.

Using the theme of the labyrinth in *documenta II*, I will suggest a trajectory around the labyrinthine in the postwar era—from the postwar restoration of modern art to 1968. I will focus on Werner Haftmann (1912–1999), co-curator and “chief ideologist” of *documenta*, and his ideas of modern art, which dominated the period and its development of new exhibition formats. In the combined analysis of two different temporal exhibitions and the inauguration of a new museum, I hope to illuminate the interplay of the themed, curated exhibition of contemporary art and new art institutions oriented towards the contemporary, and how curatorial models were proposed and exchanged, including the labyrinthine conception of the postwar present. The following analysis will focus on the character of exhibitions as expressions of the contemporary condition: both as popular events in their time, aimed at gaining recognition in an era where modern art was brought to fore in the scene, and as reflexive interpretations of their contemporaneity in a context characterized by new beginnings and latency, or, in the words of Haftmann: utopian futures and contemporary fears.

Corresponding with the preferred aesthetic of the time, the notions of the labyrinth and the characteristics of the labyrinthine are rather abstract and appear as metaphorical topos more than as a concrete motif. According to Hermann Kern (1941–1985), who has documented the cultural history of the labyrinth in writings and curatorial projects, the labyrinth has emerged since prehistoric times in three forms: as a literary motif of a difficult, unclear, and confusing situation, as a pattern of movement in a ritual dance, and as a graphic figure.[4] Where ancient societies saw and reflected themselves in collectively produced labyrinths where a path is followed ritualistically, the maze with its individual choices attracts the modern mind as a “profane, modern incarnation and as the ‘breaking open’ of the closed labyrinth image.”[5] Indeed, the postwar era was obsessed with closed rooms and the possibility of breaking out of them, as we shall see.

Exhibitions of the past are a complex matter to study, since they are characterized by the contrast of the presence of the show and the obvious absence after their closure. In the case of *documenta*, reception has been substantial in the form of critical scholarship and reconstructive renditions, not to mention the persistent reflection on the curating of the contemporary spurred by the exhibition’s current editions. The Darmstadt exhibition *Zeugnisse der Angst in der Modernen Kunst* is almost completely absent in the literature, despite the initial success of the exhibition and the central position of the Darmstädter Gespräche. Neue Nationalgalerie is famous in the history of architecture as Mies van der Rohe’s late work, but has not been brought substantially into the discussions on the curatorial visions of the 1960s or the new art historical focus on institutions and exhibitions (as of 2018 the museum is under restoration and

will open again in 2020). These cases reveal that the art history of exhibitions remains highly selective, and this includes the emerging field of exhibition histories.

documenta II: between authoritative guide and labyrinthine adventure

Documenta developed as a conglomerate of many influences and actors. Like any other exhibition, it was the product of a specific time, geographical situation, local interests, and art world mechanisms; its success formed the impression of being at the right moment at the right time—a momentum that it has upheld since. The title itself signaled a certain special status. As *documenta* historian Harald Kimpel deduces, to the authoritative "Dokument" was added an "a" for a better, more modern sound, a "c" to give a certain intellectual flair and international feel, and the contemporary use of the lowercase letter was somewhat sound with the neologisms of the consumer society.[6] The image it projected was all modern, and conscious of its new appearance. The vision of the first edition initiated by Arnold Bode, together with Haftmann, among others, was to create the first international exhibition of modern art in Germany since 1927, as Haftmann declared in the catalogue.[7] This was a clear corrective to the persecution of modern art during the reign of National Socialism.

The second *documenta* was expanded to feature 392 participating artists from 36 countries, where the first exhibition comprised of 148 from 6 European countries. In its second iteration, two new orientations in the overall curatorial framing appeared: a zooming in on the present as well as a more international focus. As the subtitle "Art since 1945" spelled out, the exhibition was not so much about art historical *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (the first exhibition was dedicated to "Art of the 20th Century" as a rehabilitation of modernism and an art historical lesson for postwar society), but as a foray into the present. Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel have stated that *documenta* gained a status as *Gegenwartsbewältigung*—a working with the present that stretches far beyond the exhibition itself: "Since 1959 every *documenta* functioned from the beginning as an occasion for public reflection on the state of contemporary culture and its social condition; commenting on the exhibition tied the critique of the event with general diagnosis of the era."[8]

This *Gegenwartsbewältigung*, which implies the active mastering of the present as well as the more distanced critical reaction, is a productive way to understand the *documenta* as well as the general launching of new curatorial visions of the era.

The art of *documenta II* is often characterized as a triumph of high modernism, and of Haftmann's thesis of abstraction as a universal artistic means—a "world language."[9] Haftmann stated at the opening of the exhibition that

"exactly this exhibition shows how the forms and feelings of modern art today stretches across the globe. It is the first model example of a world culture."[10] This is despite, in hindsight, that the exhibition, rather than a global representation, gave up "its Eurocentric image of the world in favor of a Northern Atlantic one," in the words of Walter Grasskamp.[11] The Danish director of the Louisiana Museum, Knud W. Jensen, wrote about his experience of visiting *documenta II* that abstraction was omnipresent: "Of 700 pictures the 685 were nonfigurative."[12] He continues, "the victory of the non-representational art was so absolute that it was now just to use the freedom, the disappearance of the norms and the unlimited possibilities of expression."[13]

Fig. 2. Exhibition view of Room 19 in Museum Fridericianum, documenta II, 1959. © documenta archiv/Günther Becker.

In the thinking of Haftmann, who acted as art historical authority and chief ideologist of the exhibition, abstraction was tied to the modern experience and its new scientific and philosophical horizons. Perspectival painting simply was not compatible with the modern worldview and the new depths of the contemporary nature and world cognition, as he wrote in the catalogue text.[14] Besides this connection to the more scientific worldview, abstraction was also set in a "spiritual adventure" characterized by new freedoms: "Modern culture is a very complex adventure, switching between the negative and positive poles of freedom."[15] As such, the *documenta* became a clear illustration of this spiritual adventure with its labyrinthine properties.

In their reconstruction of the components and structure of the exhibition, Kimpel and Stengel noted that the labyrinth became a topos around *documenta II*, to which the aforementioned newsreel also testifies. The labyrinthine is relevant for both in the spatial staging of the exhibition as well as in a more symbolic way. Not least, it is directed towards the overwhelming ambition and scale of the exhibition as such and the experience for the visitor in the "labyrinth of modern art."

"Who walks in here can easily lose his orientation, who embarks on the adventure of modern art is threatened with mental confusion in the whirlpool of collapsing forms and colors, who cannot withstand the visual temptations runs into the danger of getting lost in the order of rooms and corridors, space flights and passages, stairs and cabinets, ramps and bridges."[16]

From *documenta*'s well-known staging of art in a heterogenic order of spaces it is easy to recognize this characteristic. Due to the proceeding restoration of the Fridericianum, it was possible to use more space and coordinate the structure. This classic museum building, which had housed the art collections of the Hessian landgraves, was a ruin after the bombings of World War II, but also an open frame to be filled in in new ways. For the next *documenta* edition (1964), Arnold Bode would introduce the notion of the "100-day museum" as a new kind of art institution. This museum, which was from the start based on

the art historical theses of Haftmann and the spatial staging of Bode, balanced between sober guidance and being an aesthetic statement in itself. According to Kimpel and Stengel, “while the exhibition presented itself as a guide through the labyrinth of contemporary art, it also became a labyrinth itself, where a Minotaur waited around every corner.”[17]

If we try to recall some parts of the labyrinth of *documenta II*, we would encounter distinct sections as well as an overall structure. In its first series of rooms, the exhibition still featured a substantial presentation of prewar modernist masters, such as George Braque, Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee (including the work *Zerstörtes Labyrinth*, 1939), and Piet Mondrian. These rooms provided a modernist rhetoric of orientation for the viewer, as was apparent in the titles of sections such as “The pathfinders of sculpture of the 20th century.” This historical introduction illustrated Haftmann’s theories of modernist continuity expressed in his influential *Painting in the Twentieth Century* (1954; English edition, 1961), which argued for the contemporary triumph of modernist abstraction. And the exhibition showcased this. The present was unfolded in the subsequent sequence of heterogeneous spaces, described in the contemporary press as “levels, stairs, corridors and passages building up a many-roomed labyrinth,”[18] and a transformation of the Fridericianum into “a fascinatingly mad building,” where “surprising spatial views puts the visitor into the world of Prigoni and Piranesi”; a new baroque that is not limited to the spatial staging but also encompasses the exhibited works, which, at its best, appear as “an art of labyrinthine paradoxes and the courageous dissolution of all delimited forms.”[19]

Central to the exhibition were some giant canvases, which were staged as iconic highlights of the show’s aesthetic vision. These included the Roberto Matta: *Being With* (1946), a 2.2 x 4.5 meter painting in a combination of surrealism and abstract expressionism opening up a vaguely architectonic space suggesting expressions of inner as well as external worlds, and the more immediate *dasein* of Ernst Wilhelm Nay: *Freiburger Bild* (1956). An especially prominent position was given to Jackson Pollock, the labyrinthine painter par excellence, whose drip paintings were quickly characterized in this way. In a review titled “Jackson Pollock: The Infinite Labyrinth” (*Magazine of Art*, 1950), critic Parker Tyler described the paint surface as a “series of labyrinthine patinas”[20]—even if Pollock’s labyrinth did not provide a planned right way through it. Rather, “a Pollock labyrinth has no main exit any more than it has a main entrance, for every movement is automatically a liberation—simultaneously entrance and exit.”[21]

The labyrinthine route through the Fridericianum ended on the top level, under the roof, where small loft spaces with a system of walls presented a hanging of the youngest artists. In an affirmative reading this could be described as “a highpoint of a labyrinthine staging of contemporary art,

where factual information, physical immersion and emotional overwhelming alternated,"[22] even if some commentators also saw this top-floor hanging as a way to stow away some of the younger artists.

The most obvious staging of the labyrinthine was possibly the sculpture exhibition in the ruins of the Orangerie, which formed its own labyrinth, effectively composed by the old sooted ruins and the new rectangular white walls. According to Kimpel and Stengel, this created an "Open-Air-Labyrinth," where "the white brick walls created a rhythm over the surface to a varied structure of narrow cells and passages, of fragmented spaces and opened presentation situations with long axes for the gaze, surprisingly blocked perspectives and widening planes."[23] This famous curatorial staging was described by Grasskamp as "open-air white cubes,"[24] in an attempt to imbue modernism and its preferred exhibition space everywhere, but was also part of the labyrinthine adventure where the sculptural works can be encountered as Minotaurs around the corners.

Fig. 3. The sculpture exhibition in the Orangerie illuminated by night, documenta II, 1959. © documenta Archiv/Günther Becker.

The labyrinth that appeared at *documenta II* was a meeting between clarity and chaos in a crystalized rendition of the era's *structure of feeling* between new, expanding horizons and overwhelming threats.[25] If abstraction was taken as a "world language" of the contemporary world, this world was not yet perceived as clearly defined and easily accessible, but as a complex labyrinth. The exhibition design expressed this in the spectacular setting of the ruins of the Orangerie and the white walls, and the monumental hanging of giant canvasses by Matta, Nay, and Pollock, creating both a labyrinthine environment and modernist mastery.

Zeugnisse der Angst in der Modernen Kunst: a labyrinth between utopia and angst

As *documenta* achieved a position as an exhibition event with a special authority of and appeal to the contemporary condition, similar aims were pursued elsewhere amidst the backdrop of the postwar period, with art exhibitions that were both contenders and connections to the *documenta*. One such case is the exhibitions and meeting held in Darmstadt from 1950 to 1975 as *Darmstädter Gespräche*. The first edition was held in 1950, under the title *Das Menschbild in Unserer Zeit* (*The Image of Man in Our Time*), and took art as a point of departure spurred by two events. Firstly, its questioning of the representation of man and his world in art was inspired by art historian Hans Sedlmayr's critique of abstraction as a dehumanizing spiritual loss, as expressed in his book *Verlust der Mitte* (*Loss of Centre*, 1948).[26] This text was itself a labyrinthine motif in the ancient sense, where the labyrinth is a way into the center of a circle. In this cultural climate, the conservative Sedlmayr represented a contrast to the advocates of modernism, like Haftmann and the artist Willi Baumeister, whose book *Das Unbekannte in der Kunst* (*The Unknown in Art*, 1947) presented modernism as a spiritual answer to the modern

world, which was close to Haftmann's adventure for the spirit. Secondly, the discussions, which featured Theodor W. Adorno, Baumeister, and Sedlmayr (Haftmann was invited but not able to participate) in "the first major art history conference in postwar West Germany"[27] took current inspiration from the exhibition of the Darmstädter Neue Sezession corresponding with the talks.[28] This was a presentation of the human figure in contemporary art with a focus on abstraction, which was received as controversially modern.

Fig. 4. Views of *Zeugnisse der Angst in der Modernen Kunst*. Page spread from Karl Schlechta (ed.), *Angst und Hoffnung in unserer Zeit* (Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanstalt, 1965), 173–174. Photo: Kristian Handberg.

The following editions of *Darmstädter Gespräche* included *Mensch und Raum* (1951), led by the architect Otto Bartning and featuring Martin Heidegger, *Mensch und Technik* (1952), and *Angst und Hoffnung Unserer Zeit* (1963) with the complimentary exhibition *Zeugnisse der Angst in der modernen Kunst*. As the most ambitious initiative, this exhibition was to cover one hundred years of art in one hundred fifty works relating to the theme of fear and its reactions. Like Bode's *documenta* (Bode was a Kassel-based artist and designer), it was curated by a local artist, Bernd Krimmel (b. 1926), supported by an advisory committee featuring Haftmann alongside Werner Hoffmann of Vienna's Museum des 20. Jahrhundert, Willem Sandberg of the Stedelijk Museum, and Peter Selz of MoMA. To be sure, this was a network of key protagonists in the transnational movement of curating modern art at that moment. The curatorial vision was to "put our own angst into question. …Thus the works must be of our time. We can expand the space of time to our century but no further back,"[29] as stated in the foreword of the catalogue—a focus very similar to the "Art of the 20th Century" concept of the first *documenta* and the new museums of modern art.

The key text of the catalogue, Haftmann's "Utopie und Angst," unfolds a bigger panorama on the "complimentary driving forces"[30] *utopia* and *angst* in (modernist) art history. The text used impressions of contemporary works by Asger Jorn, Nay, and Pollock (described as "the drama in the turbulent labyrinths of his pictures"[31]), and the utopian "pathfinders" Mondrian and Paul Klee, along with other artists such as James Ensor and Giorgio de Chirico. This presented modern art as the continuous working out of a new image of reality inside a different frame of reference, with the turnover of the reproductive to abstraction as a crown thesis. Haftmann also pointed towards a specific configuration of utopian futures and contemporary fears characterizing the era: "In the image of a culture, utopia and angst are complimentary phenomena. This insight gives us the key to the obviously unsolvable contradiction in our modern culture that narrows our questioning on the simultaneously working presence of future-optimistic calling and from angst. They even stand complimentary: if we speak about utopian future projection, so we do also speak about contemporary angst."[32]

This precise articulation of the postwar sensibility—between futuristic projections and Cold War angst—leads the way

into the exhibition. If *documenta* was a celebration of abstraction as a world language and a corrective to the Nazi oppression of modernism, even if staged as a labyrinthine adventure, *Zeugnisse der Angst in der modernen Kunst* was a darker, less expansive kind of *Gegenwartsbewältigung*. In the introduction to the meeting, it was expressed that the present was not characterized by future optimism (this was only found in the totalitarian East) and stood in the shadows of a Nazi past motivated by "too much fear and too much hope."[33] Within this context, it would be appropriate to characterize the exhibition as labyrinthine. The setting was the ornate Jugendstil complex of Mathildenhöhe, built as an exhibition venue for the Darmstadt Artist Colony in 1908. The exhibition was set up in four halls, each one of irregular proportions that gave the impression of a maze.

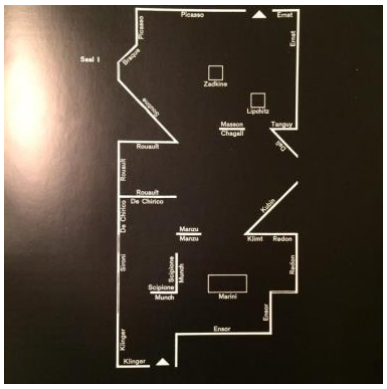

Fig. 5. Floor plan of the first hall, exhibition catalogue, 115. Photo: Kristian Handberg.

The disposition of artworks presented a journey through symbolism, expressionism, and surrealism, and was dominated by more figurative strains of modern art. This differentiated the show from the more abstract focus in the historical surveys in the first *documenta* exhibitions. The floor plan and exhibition photos show irregular rooms and surprising juxtapositions of the works. The first hall featured Max Klinger, Edvard Munch, James Ensor, and Odilon Redon, together with Picasso and Ernst, thus representing the range from symbolism to surrealism. The second hall was dedicated to expressionism, while the third, in an oblong, sequenced structure, showed works depicting the human figure, from Kokoschka and Schiele, to Bacon and Moore. The fourth hall had a predominantly contemporary focus, showing Giacometti, Dubuffet, Matta, and Jorn, and concluded with Pollock. Apart from possibly Umberto Mastroianni's sculpture *Hiroshima* (1958), the direct reference to the contemporary threats was avoided in the contemporary section by following the high modernist preference for the non-referential. Instead of an established art historical order or a sober overview, the exhibition seems to have offered a meandering path through the nocturnal side of modern art, with a labyrinthine diagnosis of the present as well as the past as difficult, unclear, and confusing.

If *Zeugnisse der Angst in der modernen Kunst* did not match the all-encompassing documentation of contemporary art that *documenta* was claiming, it should be seen as an important exhibition in the era's self-definition of the contemporary condition and in the struggle between alternative locations vying for importance in the new geography of art. The powerful network of contributors crowned by Haftmann testified to this ambition. It was recognized as a significant exhibition nationwide, as expressed in a review in *Die Welt*, which declared Darmstadt a wunderkind of young culture that initiated one magnificent spiritual-artistic initiate after the other.[34] This prominence has not been maintained, as the importance of the Darmstadt meetings was seemingly waning with the entertainment culture of the *Wirtschaftswunder* and emergence of prestigious new museums in the bigger cities. The 1963 exhibition stands as an example of the attempts to

develop ambitious curatorial presentations in non-established forms, taking up a special dialogue with the present. It was the labyrinthine that was a viable characteristic of the exhibition, with its spatial structuring in the Jugendstil complex, its vast presentation of twentieth-century art, and, not least, its illustration of a contemporaneously typical *stimmung* of existential complexity between utopia and angst—all making it an "adventure for the mind" in the labyrinth of art and with plenty of fear-inducing Minotaurs, to paraphrase Haftmann's words on the *documenta*.

Fig. 6. Exhibition view of *Piet Mondrian*, Neue Nationalgalerie 1968. © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Zentralarchiv/Reinhard Friedrich.

Neue Nationalgalerie: the final modernist labyrinth?

The most prominent new museum building was inaugurated in the midst of the notorious year of 1968 (in itself a labyrinth of new roads and blind ways, utopias and fears) as the last work of Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969). The setting of the Neue Nationalgalerie in West Berlin was arguably the most labyrinthine place of them all in the era, easy to associate with walls and no exits. In his essays on the architectural configuration of Berlin, entitled *Berliner Labyrinth* (1993), Tilmann Buddensieg has viewed the order of the Neue Nationalgalerie as a "harmonious contrast" delimited by the terrace walls to the surrounding world of the labyrinthine city outside.[35]

The context of the Cold War division of Berlin, in which traditional museums were located in East Berlin, called for a Western response. Here, a modernist *Gesamtkunstwerk*—in form and content a stark contrast to state socialism—placed close to the Berlin Wall in the Kulturforum ensemble of cultural institutions, was a profound statement. The same could be said about the calling in of Mies van der Rohe as the "starchitect" of the postwar International Style and protagonist of the prominence of the prewar modernism of Bauhaus, which made a claim to the avant-garde heritage as well as the contemporary high-modernism as a universal language. Concurrently, Haftmann was selected as director, creating a combination of spatial design and modernist theory like Bode and Haftmann's collaboration at *documenta*, which presented its first result with the opening exhibition of Piet Mondrian. This time the architectural container was not a labyrinthine ruin, but an icon of modernism received as "The Parthenon of the 20th century" and a "Triumph of the right angle" in its "cool beauty and strict harmony."[36]

The building design was based on a two-story structure of an underground hall for the permanent collection and an overground hall for special exhibitions, under the giant gridded steel roof. This was a delineation of space that made it as much a *Kunsthalle* for changing exhibitions as a traditional, collection-based museum. The enclosed lower floor appeared as a 58 x 58 meter base for the twentieth century and the extrovert upper floor with its glass outer

walls a showcase for modern art. In the 8.5-meter-high halls the works were placed on a structure of hanging walls, which made the space transparent, like the building itself, but also carried labyrinthine potential. As referred to by Rosalind Krauss in her essay “The Grid, The /Cloud/, and The Detail,” some commentators have observed a “certain mysteriousness built into the plan, such as that the building is constructed without an approachable or knowable center and is in fact experienced as (to use these authors’ word) a labyrinth.”[37]

The experimental totality of the exhibition space, which exceeded the conventional proportions of the gallery space, made an overwhelming impression on the contemporary viewer, who often experienced it all as a total work of art. “The steel and glass hall of Mies van der Rohe is in its formal fulfillment so exclusive… that the oakwood hatstands appear as unfamiliar,”[38] wrote one reviewer. The building presented itself as an autonomous artwork and a monument to modernism, rather than as a functioning museum machine, as Buddensieg has stated.[39] The temple- or cathedral-like pretention of the work gave it, in some sense, the cult-like function of the ancient labyrinth, or at least the uncompromised license to create a design of modern art’s self-understanding. Mies himself stated that architecture was “not a play with forms,” but should be the driving force of civilization, and was able to be an expression of the innermost structure of its time: a statement proclaiming the role of *Gegenwartsbewältigung* for architecture.[40] According to architecture historian Detlef Mertins in his analysis of the “well-known but under-examined” Nationalgalerie, Mies “transformed technology into an architectural image that was at once technological, artistic, historical and cosmological. This image provides a stage—almost transparent—on which the homelessness and nihilism so central to the experience of modernity can be enacted as both a crisis and an opportunity for constructive self-fashioning.”[41] This was a drama reminiscent of the ones staged in Kassel and Darmstadt.

The museum of modern art in Berlin was the epitome of an international movement to create a new kind of museum defined in the vision of modernity. More locally, it was also the realization of a long-standing vision of a museum for twentieth-century art in Berlin, dating back to Ludwig Justi’s displays of the contemporary collection in the Kronprinzenpalais from 1919 to 1933. In that case the exhibition pioneered the modernist ideal of white walls and single-row hanging, and introduced international art such as French impressionism into the national museum.[42] Haftmann’s vision for the content of the building was to create a “world gallery” (*Weltgalerie*) in obvious continuation of his theory of abstraction as a world language—the presence of foreign artists in a national gallery soon gave rise to the nickname *Internationalgalerie*. The exhibition program combined modernist masters with contemporary artists, even brought together in the tribute exhibitions *Hommage á Picasso. 45 Künstler ehren Picasso* (1973) and *Hommage á Schönberg* (1974). The curatorial model

proposed by Haftmann's Neue Nationalgalerie was one of transparency between past and present, both intermingling between collections downstairs and temporal exhibitions upstairs. However, the present evoked by Haftmann was soon perceived as out of joint with the time—a 1970 review spoke of the misery of the Nationalgalerie and it being neither a pantheon nor a labyrinth, but "a quiet, respectable churchyard of art."[43]

Fig. 7. Werner Haftmann in front of Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 1968. Photo: Reinhard Friedrich, Zentralarchiv, SMB.

No exit and no entry: the labyrinth after 1945

If the exhibition is an immanent rendition of the contemporary condition, this contemporaneity must be commented upon. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's *After 1945* (2013) makes just such an attempt, by identifying the feeling in Germany after World War II. He locates the ambivalent mood of the years after 1945 in three topoi recurring in the cultural production and thinking of the era: "No Exit and No Entry," "Bad Faith / Interrogations," and "Derailment / Containers." The combined effects of these three configurations would, according to Gumbrecht, be called "a 'labyrinth' or a 'maze.'"[44] This "labyrinth produced both a desire for departure and, at the same time, the fear that such a departure would entail departure from earth," and was characterized by a circularity as it had no "clear-cut goals one might achieve—or even points of departure."[45] Gumbrecht, a literary scholar, does not include exhibitions among his examples (Pollock is included as the only visual artist), but as this essay may indicate, the new exhibitions of modern art appeared as expressions of a related labyrinthine modern in the cultural landscape. Between contemporary fears and utopian futures, it was up to oneself to find a way through the labyrinth of modern art. In a certain sense the exhibition initiatives from the first *documenta* up to the realization of the new national gallery expressed the desire for a new beginning, overcoming the Nazi views on art and restoring modernism as a foundation for the contemporary (with the concurrent aim to contest the socialist realism of Eastern Europe); a role that obviously breaks with the silenced "new quiet world"[46] of the post-1945 decade. In such a reading the labyrinth actually leads somewhere, different from the "No Entry and No Exit" motif. However, the keynote of the works exhibited and the rhetoric surrounding them was rather that of an immanent one, as in Parker's characterization of Pollock previously cited, which makes the labyrinths even more complex.

From the analysis of the three cases it can be concluded that the "labyrinth of modern art" was a frequently circulated term and a conglomerate of central discourses in the era's art historical articulation of the modern and the contemporary. This is most evident in the case of *documenta*, with its takeover of the ruined Fridericianum, where later editions, like Harald Szeemann's very different *documenta V* in 1972, would have been an interesting addition. However, it is also important to compare with the less-remembered events, like the Darmstadt exhibition, to show the potentialities of this seminal era in modern

exhibition-making and draw parallels the newly built environments like Neue Nationalgalerie, which might test the reach of the concept labyrinthine, but also relate to the ideas about modern art and its presentation. The labyrinth of modern art was both an expression of the cultural situation and a way to break free of it—a condition that has also followed posterity's curatorial labyrinths.

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1. UFA Wochenshcau 155/1959, July 14, 1959, Bundesarchiv, Filmothek, accessed February 2018, https://www.filmothek.bundesarchiv.de/video/584345.
2. Ibid.
3. Lose Yourself! Symposium on Labyrinthine Exhibitions as Curatorial Model, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, February 3–4, 2017 (https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/events/lose-yourself-2), and this edition of Stedelijk *Studies*.
4. Hermann Kern, *Through the Labyrinth: Designs and Meanings over 5000 Years*, rev. ed. (1982; repr., Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2000), 27.
5. Ibid., 306.
6. Harald Kimpel, *documenta. Die Überschau* (Cologne: DuMont Verlag, 2002), 4.
7. Werner Haftmann, "Einleitung zum Katalog der documenta 1," in *documenta. Idee und Institution*, ed. Martin Schneckenburger (Munich: Bruckmann, 1983), 33. "Die Gedanke, heute eine internationale Ausstellung der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland zu veranstalten, liegt so nahe, dass er keine nähere Begründing zu erfordern scheint. Es ist nahezu ein Menschenalter her, dass mit der Dresdener Ausstellung von 1927 ein ähnliches Unternehmen hierzulanade versucht wurde, und von dem im letzten Jahrzehnt so mächtig ausgeweiteten Ausstellungsleben in den europäischen Ländern blieb Deutschland weitgehend ausgeschaltet."
8. Harald Kimpel and Karin Stengel, *documenta II 1959: Eine fotographische Rekonstruktion* (Kassel: documenta Archiv 2000), 7. "Seit 1959 fungierte jede documenta auch als Anlass zur öffentlichen Reflexion über den Zustand der zeitgenössischen Kultur und deren soziale Bedingungen; im Ausstellingskommentar verbindet sich Veranstaltungskritik mit allgemeiner Zeitdiagnose."
9. This slogan is associated with Werner Haftmann, even if the term itself stems from other sources, like Georg Poensgen and Leopold Zahn, *Abstract Art – A World Language*, 1958. See Walter Grasskamp, "Becoming Global: From Eurocentrism to North-Atlantic Feedback – documenta as 'international exhibition' 1955–1972," *On Curating: The Documenta Issue*, no. 33 (2017).

10. Werner Haftmann, “Vortrag anlässlich der Eröffnung der 2. documenta am 11. Juli 1959,” in *documenta. Idee und Institution*, ed. Martin Schneckenburger (Munich: Bruckmann, 1983), 54. “Gerade diese Ausstellung zeigt ihnen, wie die Form und Empfindungsweise der modernen Kunst heute bereits um den ganzen Erdball reicht. Sie ist der erste Modellfall von Weltkultur.”
11. Grasskamp, “Becoming Global: From Eurocentrism to North-Atlantic Feedback,” 108.
12. Knud W. Jensen, “Indtryk fra Documenta II,” in *Louisiana 1959*, ed. Knud W. Jensen (Louisiana/Gyldendal, 1959), 61.
13. Ibid., 64. “Den genstandsløse kunsts sejr er så absolut, at det nu kun drejer sig om at udnytte friheden, normernes bortfald, de ubegrænsede udtryksmuligheder.”
14. Haftmann, 14. “Eine ganz neue und vertiefte Natur- und Welterkenntnis möglich war. Aus diese Umgestaltung des Ansatzes kamen die umstürtzenden Erkenntnisse der modernen Naturwissenschaft, die unsere gesamten Vorstellungen von Materie, Zeit und Raum verändern und in dem Technik unmittelbar zu unserem täglichen Leben in funktion treten. Aus ihr kamen die neuen Einsichten der Psychologie und Medizin in den Aufbau der Persönlichkeitsstruktur der Menschen und der Gattung. Aus ihren kamen eben auch die neuen Entwürfe und antwortenden Bilder der bildenden Kunst.”
15. Ibid., 15. “Die moderne Kultur ist ein sehr umfassendes Abenteuer, das zwischen den negativen und positiven Polen der Freiheit sich ereignet.”
16. Kimpel and Stengel, *documenta II 1959*, 8. Translation by the author. “Wer sich hineinwagt, kann leicht die Orientierung verlieren, wer sich einlässt auf das Abenteuer der modernen Kunst, wird mit mentaler Verwirrung in Strudel der auf ihn einstürzenden Formen und Farben bedroht, wer den visuellen Verlockungen nicht widerstehen kann, läuft Gefahr verloren zu gehen in der Abfolde von Sälen und Korridoren, Raumfluchten und Durchlässen, Treppen und Kabinetten, Rampen und Brücken.”
17. Ibid. “Während sich also die Ausstellung als Wegweiser durch das Labyrinth der Gegenwartskunst ausgibt, wird sie selbst zum Irrgarten, in welchem hinter jeder Ecke ein Minotaurus zu gewärtigen ist.”
18. Friedrich Bayl, “Die 2. documenta,” *Art International* 3, no. 7 (1959), quoted from Kimpel and Stengel, *documenta II 1959*, 64. “… den Werken ein Zeitgenössischen Raum zu Schaffen … Im Gehäuse des klassischen Friedericianums, in das er mit Stockwerken, Treppen, Korridoren, und Kompartimenten ein vielräumiges Labyrinth baute, Raum als Überraschung und Entdeckung und abwechslungsreiches Spiel …”
19. Kurt Leonard, “Gestalter und Gestikulanten,” *Die Kunst und das schöne Heim* 57, no. 11 (1959), quoted from *documenta II 1959*, 72. “Das ehrwürdige Museum Friedericianum… wurde durch eingehängte Rahmengüste in einen Faszinierenden Irrbau verwandelt. In lebendigem Gegensatz von Ruine und Provisorium schaffen Galerien, Brücken, schwebene Stege immer wieder überraschende Raumdurchblicke, die den Besucher in die Welt der Prigoni und Piranesi versetzen. Aber nicht nur die räumliche Anlage ist barock im Sinne eines leider nicht immer ganz erfüllten Pathos, auch viele der gezeigten Bilder, und natürlich gerade die auffälligsten, lassen sich in ihrer weitausgreifenden Gestik als neues Barock ansprechen – eine radikal malerische Malerei, und im günstigsten Fällen: eine Kunst der labyrinthischen Paradoxe und der kühnen Auflösung aller abgegrenzten formen.”
20. Parker Tyler, “Jackson Pollock: The Infinite Labyrinth,” in *Jackson Pollock: Interviews, Articles and Reviews*, ed. Pepe Karmel (New York: The Museum of Modern Art 1998), 66.
21. Ibid., 67.
22. Kimpel and Stengel, *documenta II 1959*, 10. “Höhepunkt einer labyrinthischen Inszenierung von Gegenwartskunst, in der sich sachliche Information, physische Bedrängung und emotionale Überwältigung abwechseln.”

23. Ibid., 11. “Weisse Backsteinmauern rhytmisieren die Fläche zu einer abwechslungsreichen Struktur aus engen Zellen und Gängen, aus fragmentierten Räumen und offenen Präsentationssituationen mit langen Blickachsen, überraschend blockierten Perspektiven und sich weitenden Flächen.”
24. Walter Grasskamp, “The White Wall: On the prehistory of the White Cube,” *On Curating, Curating Critique* 9, no. 11 (2011), 88.
25. British culturlal historian Raymond Williams introduced this concept of an era’s different ways of thinking in 1954.
26. See Claudia Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall: Demarcating Culture in the Cold War Germanys* (London: I.B. Tauris) 2009, 37–39.
27. Ibid., 38.
28. Stadtlexikon Darmstadt website, accessed March 2018, http://www.darmstadt-stadtlexikon.de/d/darmstaedter-gespraeche.html.
29. Hans Gerhard Evers, “Vorwort und Nachwort,” in *Zeugnisse der Angst in der Modernen Kunst*, exh. cat. (Darmstadt: 1963), 8. “Unsere eigene Angst soll zu frage stehen. Weshalb fühlen wir sie, wie drückt sie sich aus, was ist sie uns wert, wollen wir sie annehmen oder wollen wir sie wie eine ansteckende Seuche durch geeignete Impfungen zum Aussterben bringen? Deshalb müssen die Werke unserer Gegenwart entstammen. Wir können die Zeitspanne auf unserer Jahrhundert ausdehnen, aber nicht weiter zurück.”
30. Werner Haftmann, “Utopie und Angst,” in *Zeugnisse der Angst in der Modernen Kunst*, exh. cat. (Darmstadt: 1963), 77–97, 87.
31. Ibid., 93. “Dann begegnen wir dem Drama Pollocks in den unruhigen Labyrinthen seiner Bilder.”
32. Ibid., 80. “Utopie und Angst sind also im Bilde einer Kultur komplementäre Erscheinungen.
Diese Einsicht liefert uns dem Schlüssel für die scheinbar unauflöslichen Widersprüchlichkeiten in unserer modernen Kultur, die sich in unserer Fragestellung verengen auf die gleichzeitig wirksame Anwesenheit von zukunftfreudigem Sendungsbewusstsein und von Angst. Sie eben stehen komplementär: reden wir con der utopischen Zukunftsprojektion, so reden wir zugleich von gegenwärtiger Angst.”
33. Karl Schlechta, ed., *Angst und Hoffnung in unserer Zeit* (Darmstadt: 1965), 5–9.
34. R. Krämer-Badoni in Der Welt, “Darmstadt bleibt ewig jung und ein Wunderkind … es ergreift eine grossartige geistig-künstlerische Initiative nach der anderen”, in Sabine Welsch & Klaus Wolbert (eds.), *Die Darmstädter Sezession 1919-1997. Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel einer Künstlervereinigung*, (Darmstadt: Institut Mathildenhöhe, 1997), 320.
35. Tilmann Buddensieg, *Berliner Labyrinth* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1993), 115.
36. *Spandauer Volksblatt*, September 15, 1968, and *Hamburger Abendblatt*, September 16, 1968.
37. Rosalind Krauss, “The Grid, The /Cloud/, and The Detail,” in *The Presence of Mies*, ed. Detlef Mertens (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 111.
38. “Mies blieb Mies und Pop blieb Pop,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, May 17, 1969. “Die Stahl-Glas-Halle von Mies van der Rohe ist in ihrer formalin Vollendung so ausschliesslich, dass schon die erwähnten Marmorscheinpfeiler (die Versorgungsleitungen enthalten) und die eichenen Garderobenständer fremd wirkt.”
39. Buddensieg, *Berliner Labyrinth*, 115. “Mies strebte eine Einheit der Räume mit den Kunstwerken an, die sich in ‘harmonischen Kontrast’ zur hinter die Terrassenmauern zurückgedrängten Umwelt stellte.”
40. Harald Dieter Budde, “Architektur für den Menschen,” *Die Andere Zeitung*, October 10, 1968. “In all diesen Jahren bin ich immer mehr zu der Überzeugung gekommen, dass Architektur kein Spiel mit Formen ist. Mir wurde die enge Beziehung zwischen Architektur und Zivilisation klar. Ich bin überzeugt, dass Architektur aus dem tragenden und treibenden Kräften

der Zivilisation kommen muss. Und dass sie – in ihrer Vollendung – ein Ausdruck der innersten Struktur ihrer Zeit sein kann."

41. Detlef Mertens, "Mies's New National Gallery: Empty and Full," in *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, ed. Paula Marincola (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 85.
42. Walter Grasskamp, "The White Wall – On the Prehistory of the 'White Cube," 85.
43. "Das Ehlend der Nationalgalerie," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 15, 1970.
44. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *After 1945: Latency as origin of the present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 154.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., 22.