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MIOUSSE

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MARIA EICHHORN

(A)
LANGUAGE, LABOR, LIFE:
MARIA EICHHORN
BY Richard Birkett

In 2014 and 2018, two large-scale presentations of Maria Eichhorn's work spanned her practice from the late 1980s to the present day. *Zwölf Arbeiten / Twelve Works (1988–2018)* (2018) occupied the two floors of the Migros Museum in Zurich, and, as the title suggests, comprised a survey of twelve works produced over a thirty-year period. *Maria Eichhorn* at Kunsthau Bregenz in 2014 likewise made use of the entirety of the institute's three exhibition floors, and presented work that encompassed a similar period of production from the late 1980s on. In this instance, however, only four works were exhibited, one of which was newly produced for the occasion. In keeping with Eichhorn's approach to troubling the line between the temporality of art's production and the temporality of the context of its presentation, each of the three existing works exhibited in Bregenz—*Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft* (Maria Eichhorn Public Limited Company, 2002), *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices* (1999/2005/2008/2014/2015), and *Curtain (Denim) / Lectures by Yuko Fujita, Mika Ohbayashi, Hildegard Breiner* (1989/1997/1998/2014)—are partly constituted by the necessity for future addition or supplementation, and therefore resist the retrospective gaze.

As Eichhorn had done in response to a number of previous exhibition invitations, at Kunsthau Bregenz the drive to look back and survey her practice was shifted instead onto the format of a publication. The artist produced with curator Yilmaz Dziewior a 566-page catalogue raisonné covering the period from 1986 to 2015.¹ The book followed a previous survey publication produced by Eichhorn in 1996, "substituted" for an exhibition at Kunstraum München, titled *Abbildungen, Interviews, Texte 1989–96* (Reproductions, Interviews, Texts 1989–96). This publication is itself listed as a work within the catalogue raisonné, as are the earlier publication and catalogue contributions *34 Reproductions and 35 notes* (1990) and *36 Reproductions and 18 notes* (1992), each of which combines reproductions of previous works by Eichhorn with descriptive notes and photographs by the artist. The word "survey" holds particular meaning within the grammar of contemporary art and art history; here, across a series of entangled encounters between institutional and artistic agency, between the ordering of representations and the "thing itself" of the artwork, it is both an action undertaken by an external curatorial gaze and one of an artistic practice self-identifying as a series of texts to be informed, transformed, combined, and associated.

Perhaps due to the prominent and institutional consequential nature of a number of Eichhorn's key works—from the aforementioned *Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft*,

which on the occasion of documenta11 (2002) established a public limited company under the artist's name, the shares of which are owned by the company itself; to *5 weeks, 25 days, 175 hours* (2016), an exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery in London wherein the gallery staff, at Eichhorn's request, withdrew their labor for the entirety of the exhibition run while remaining on full pay; and *Rose Valland Institute* (2017), which under the auspices of documenta 14 (2017) founded an institute for research into and documentation of the expropriation of property formerly owned by Europe's Jewish population—critical responses to the German artist's practice often emphasize its singular interventions into material and institutional conditions. Underpinning this interventional character is the inception or re-designation of organizational structures, whether a joint stock company, a denomination of labor time of a group of art workers, or a research institute. Often overlooked, however, in the reception of these new or reconstituted structural forms is the work's grounding in a critical engagement with language and semiotics as much as with material or bureaucratic conditions. In fact, a central thread throughout Eichhorn's work since the late 1980s has been its simultaneously playful and incisive employment of the irreducible complexity of language as a system of order and lack, presence and absence.

In an interview with Dziewior that introduces the Bregenz book, Eichhorn refers to the three existing works exhibited at the Kunsthau and their particular open-ended qualities—the constant accumulation of corporate documents, a growing library of short films of sex acts, and an ongoing lecture series by anti-nuclear power activists and physicists presented in front of the eponymous curtain:

"A lexicon [. . .] can never be completed, it is continually being supplemented or extended. Corporations' activities produce almost inexhaustible amounts of documents and data, which accumulatively multiply. In contrast, artworks are perceived as singular, as non-multipliable, rather more as historically transformable agents of insight. The *Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft*, consisting of processes of exchange and documentation, is devised to endure and age like a Renaissance painting. The series of lectures accompanying *Curtain (Denim)* is in turn conceived to be endlessly continued, even beyond the supposed nuclear era, because the associated problems will remain for thousands of years [. . .] The essence of language is its continual transformation. For the poststructuralists, the unconscious is structured like a language in which individual elements

are continually exchanged, circulated, and transformed. The term “curtain” linguistically implies curtains in the entirety.²

Eichhorn highlights that the nature of the works as “temporally unlimited” is established in the “thing itself”: the “lexicon,” “corporation,” “curtain.”³ These terms signal a material changeability and multiplicity. Rather than denoting a static individual thing, they exist as categories that by their very nature are also accumulative frames. In Eichhorn’s conception, even “curtain” operates as a vessel, staging, or backdrop for possible activities or contextual characteristics, including lectures (*Curtain (Denim)* and *Curtain (Orange)* [1989/2001/2006]); film screenings (*Curtain (Brown)* [1989/1995/2002] and *Curtain (Red)* [1989/1995/2002/2015/2019]); and architectures (*Curtain (Yellow)* [1989/1992], *Curtain (Anthracite)* [1989/2001], and *Curtain (Pink)* [1989/1991]). The “thing itself” is never static, but “continually being supplemented.” But in that, in this instance, the “thing” is also an artwork. It attains a singularity, becomes a bearer of knowledge that endures while being continually historically recontextualized. The question of material and temporal finitude becomes suspended within textuality.

The Bregenz catalogue raisonné is chronologically ordered. Each entry is accompanied by extensive information, including the work’s exhibition history, a list of publications in which it is cited, descriptive notes on the work, and comprehensive materials lists, including in some cases other participants, contributors, and producers. Repetition occurs within and across entries, as some works reconstitute existing projects or make use of distinctive, re-employed methodologies. The titles of Eichhorn’s works are often descriptive of the content (whether material, textual, or procedural) and are therefore then recursively echoed in its materials list and following descriptive synopses. Despite the ordered space the book creates, the information is at times overwhelming—necessarily so, given the complexity of the materials, processes, and temporalities that make up works such as *Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft*. The form of the catalogue becomes something akin to a mise en abyme. It illuminates the density and multiple scales of Eichhorn’s practice, as well as particular—while often non-sequitous—taxonomic relations that might go unacknowledged in works encountered individually. Examples include a recursive use of color as a marker of repetition and difference in *Two Water Pistols and Four Polyester Pistols* (1988), *Six Bottles with Colored Water* (1990), and *Canvas / Brush / Paint* (1992/1994/2015); the frequent production of unlimited editions across Eichhorn’s career, beginning with *Four Sentences, Their Words Ordered Alphabetically* (1989);⁴ or the repeated punning on the artist’s own surname (“Eichhorn” deriving from the German word for “squirrel”) in *Project to reintroduce red squirrels (*Sciurus vulgaris*) to the park at Villa Medici and Villa Borghese, Rome* (2000), *Eichhorn Dumpster* (2013), and *Squirrel Cage* (2014).

As a format for the aggregation and ordering of knowledge, the catalogue raisonné holds a particular technical role within the discipline of art history. It follows the logic of what Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1966) terms the “system of elements” necessary for the establishment of order within classical thought, a “table [that] enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities

and their differences—the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.”⁵ Yet while the Bregenz publication fulfills the role of the “reasoned catalogue” proficiently, it unavoidably also exhibits an instability of categories, hierarchies, and syntactical structures hardwired into Eichhorn’s practice at micro and macro levels. In this regard, the catalogue begins to resonate more with Foucault’s reading of Jorge Luis Borges’s *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, cited in the Argentine’s essay “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins” (1942).⁶ Supposedly a “certain Chinese encyclopedia,” Borges describes the Emporium’s alternate taxonomy as a rejoinder to the notion of a universal language of categorization: “Animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.”⁷ For Foucault, in this taxonomy we are faced not just with “the oddity of unusual juxtapositions,” but the destruction of the “common ground on which such meetings are possible”:

“The animals “(i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush”—where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language? Yet, though language can spread them before us, it can do so only in an unthinkable space. The central category of animals “included in the present classification,” with its explicit reference to paradoxes we are familiar with, is indication enough that we shall never succeed in defining a stable relation of contained to container between each of these categories and that which includes them all: if all the animals divided up here can be placed without exception in one of the divisions of this list, then aren’t all the other divisions to be found in that one division too? And then again, in what space would that single, inclusive division have its existence? Absurdity destroys the *and* of the enumeration by making impossible the *in* where the things enumerated would be divided up.”⁸

Eichhorn’s catalogue raisonné includes five instances of works titled *Exhibition* presented at Galerie Barbara Weiss in Berlin, which form an aggregative chain. These exhibitions can be seen as a crucial point of intersection between Eichhorn’s practice of the late 1980s—which often saw the subtle dis-organization of linguistic and typological forms, including designations of objects and architectures—with specific and general institutional conditions, including particularly the structures through which work, value, and knowledge are defined. The first iteration took place in 1993, and the second two years later, titled with dates appended, *Exhibition from September 12 to October 28, 1995*. The third cited both new dates and the previous iteration: *Exhibition from September 9 to November 7, 1997 / Exhibition from September 12 to October 28, 1995* (1997). Eichhorn continued this chain of exhibitions and additive titles at biennial intervals until 2001. The sequence marked the first ten years of Eichhorn’s relationship with Barbara Weiss as her commercial gallery representation, and specifically with the space the gallery occupied on Potsdamer Strasse from 1992 to 2000—the last exhibition in the chain in 2001, held in

Barbara Weiss's new space, constituted a final breaking of the link between the iterative project and its spatial configuration. While all five exhibitions are listed as artworks in the catalogue raisonné, they are also accompanied by a list of other works that comprised each presentation—works that occupy dual status as the materials of each *Exhibition*, and as stand-alone works in their own right.

Exhibition (1993) exists as an outlier to the protocol Eichhorn followed for the following four exhibitions, but nonetheless served as a kind of prototype. In addition to *Exhibition*, eleven works are listed in the catalogue raisonné, some made in the years preceding the project, others specifically for the show. These works were located across four rooms of Galerie Barbara Weiss, in each case appearing as subtle additions or alterations that largely elaborated not on the spaces' function for the presentation of art, but for office work, research, and administration, including the complication of the participatory roles undertaken by artist, gallery worker, and visitor in relation to the categories of "work," "archive," and "information." The third room was itself titled as a work, *Working and Information Space* (1993), and used by Barbara Weiss as an office for the period of the exhibition, with materials listed of furniture, shelving, telephone, publications, and additional works by Eichhorn. These works-within-a-work-within-a-work included *Lectern* (1991), a specially made wooden lectern with glass top; *6 Leitz Ring Binders with a Total of 369 Items* (1993), with the six binders including research materials, sketches for ideas, and work-related correspondence from the artist's archive; and the conspicuously Borges-esque *Paper Weight with Stag Beetle*, *Paper Weight with Butterfly*, *Montes Mineral Water Bottle*, *Porcelain Pot*, *Shells*, *Credo Cutting Blade*, *Cloth*, *Musical Box*, *Tear-Off Notepad*, *Marble*, *Alphabet Letters in a Drawer* (1993).

Exhibition from September 12 to October 28, 1995 further extrapolated on its predecessor's staging as a "workshop, project office, and information space," with a combination of bespoke furniture, shelving, office equipment, and objects hovering between sculptural composition and intended use.⁹ Its forty-seven individual works, some of which appeared in *Exhibition* (1993), included references to earlier text-based wall and floor drawings by Eichhorn, in several cases presented as if to be replicated or added to (for example *Felt-tip Pens / Stool / Wall Text / 2 Wording Stencils* [1995]); arrangements of materials that implied imminent production (the component parts of *3 Rolls of Canvas / ABC Stencil / Yellow Cart / Prints by Fred Sandback / 2 Packets of Paper / 3 Boxes / Cardboard* [1995] lingered between the syntax of art making in a minimalist "ABC Art" mold and a set of materials for packing the Sandback artworks for shipping or storage); and items for visitor consumption and participation (including *6 Crates of Mineral Water (SPA) / 7 Glasses* [1995] and *Poker Cards / Card Table / 4 Chairs / Beer / Whisky* [1995]). The exhibition also included a number of works by other artists, either loaned to Eichhorn or already in her personal collection, such as photographs by Aura Rosenberg and a painting by John Miller.

Exhibition (1993), *Exhibition from September 12 to October 28, 1995*, and the following sequence of three biennial exhibitions shared, on the surface, significant DNA with Rirkrit Tiravanija's *Untitled (Still)* (1992–2011), a project widely cited in discourse around relational aesthetics in the 1990s. Held at 303 Gallery in New York, *Untitled (Still)* involved the moving of the entirety of the contents of the gallery's "backstage," including the director's office, into the exhibition space. The storeroom became a kitchen, and Tiravanija

cooked curries and pad thai for visitors to eat communally, seated in the gallery. But whereas Tiravanija's work is located in the gesture of leveling opaque, hierarchical spatial and social boundaries through the mediating force of cooking and eating food together, Eichhorn's exhibitions notably invested in the re-signification—or perhaps, more accurately, the willful catachresis—of environment, of object, and of notions of work and use. As a visitor entering *Exhibition from September 12 to October 28, 1995*, one would have been confronted with a dense confusion of seeming category errors, a sense of each work as in an in-between state, or as yet undefined in its status. A folded red curtain (the work's caption told us it had also been dry-cleaned), the fabric of the work *Curtain (Red)*, was presented in a cardboard box as if recently shipped, or to be shipped. A white lacquered footstool, commissioned from a carpenter based on an existing design, was captioned as both "prototype" and "unlimited edition." One work alerted us to a more telling point of reference than Tiravanija's relational practice. *Books* (1995) comprised a collection of books available to purchase, and derived from a previous work in which three friends of the artist were asked to select book lists (*bibliography 1-2, 53 books and 3 journals for sale / Literaturverzeichnis 3-4, 46 Bücher und 1 Zeitschrift zum Kauf / Verkauf*, [1994/1995]).¹⁰ One of the books included in the collection was Laurie Parsons's *Untitled*, which was published anonymously in a small run in 1993 as part of a group exhibition at MuHKA in Antwerp and comprised an exact duplicate of the artist's personal diary available for exhibition visitors to take away. Not only does the work correlate in methodology with an untitled work by Eichhorn created for the group exhibition *Backstage* in 1993,¹¹ which entailed a printed and bound collection of Eichhorn's own texts and notes, but it also resonates more broadly with Eichhorn's practice in its generation of a radical openness that is simultaneously delimited by the destabilization of categories, the complication of notions of identity and sameness (in both textuality and selfhood), and the discomfort of exchange within the production, presentation, and circulation of art.

Exhibition from September 12 to October 28, 1995 was accompanied by an invitation card¹² with a blank white front; for the following exhibition in the sequence, *Exhibition from September 9 to November 7, 1997 / Exhibition from September 12 to October 28, 1995*, the front of the invitation card held an alphabetical list of works included in the 1995 exhibition, color coded according to which ones had subsequently been sold by the gallery. The 1997 exhibition itself replicated exactly the previous show, but without the works present that had since transferred to private or museum collections. Eichhorn's exhibitions at Galerie Barbara Weiss in 1999 and 2001 followed the same pattern with both the methodology of the invitation card and the contents of the exhibition. The procedure gradually imposed a new order onto the group of works and their spatial arrangement—namely that of the art market, and the desire of collectors and institutions to engage in the ownership of Eichhorn's work. This order was tracked, tabulated, and color coded on the invitation cards; regardless of the location of a work, either in the gallery space or in a collector's home or storage facility, it remains part of the overarching *Exhibition* work. This persistent container raises logistical and semantic questions regarding the terms of property ownership (does a work purchased by a collector actually "belong" to them if it is simultaneously a component of a larger artwork?), but also as to the status of the

works themselves as “insight[s] into previous, current and future projects by Maria Eichhorn.”¹³ In Foucault’s words, “We shall never succeed in defining a stable relation of contained to container between each of these categories and that which includes them all.”¹⁴

In their respective poststructuralist challenges to the Western modern episteme, both Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida drew significantly on a critical address of the work of eighteenth-century French philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac. His sensationalist philosophy, built on John Locke’s empiricist conception of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, held that all ideas, principles, and abilities stem from direct sense experience of the world. Thought may proceed only by means of language, the affixing of signs to sensory impressions. The mental operations of memory and imagination enable the recall and ordering of sensations—memory requires the mediation of signs to revive past perceptions, whereas imagination can operate without. The precise matching of signs to their signifieds through means of a “well-made language” (as Condillac attempted to define it in his own proto-psychological science) sanctioned against “seeking what we cannot find” to instead “find what is within our grasp.”¹⁵

As historian Jan Goldstein has described, Condillac’s philosophy held considerable sway in bourgeois French society into the early nineteenth century, and particularly influenced the shifting politics of the French Revolution (1789–95). The revolutionary bourgeoisie feared the “disordered imagination” of the newly autonomous and enfranchised working citizen, and employed Condillac’s principles of a “well-made language” in the form of a mass pedagogy, a resignification of “the environment of everyday life for the express purpose of altering the mental furniture of everyone”¹⁶ through a matrix of new practices and institutions within revolutionary society: a series of national public festivals intended to “seize [. . .] [the] senses,”¹⁷ beginning with the 1793 Festival of Reason; the wearing of special clothing by public officials; the renaming of city streets; and the adoption of a new Revolutionary calendar. However, in the aftermath of the Jacobin Republic, Robespierre’s Cult of the Supreme Being, and the associated Terror, the bourgeoisie gradually turned against Condillac’s ideas as fatally flawed and incapable of articulating a stable individuated self. In Foucault’s analysis, the following post-French Revolution emergence of “man” as the object of science in Western modernity—importantly redefined by Sylvia Wynter as *Man2*, or *homo-oeconomicus*, in awareness of the earlier origins of the over-representation of Western bourgeois man as “if it were the human itself”¹⁸—of the drive to articulate sociological and psychological types in response to the “threats” and “needs” that arose around an enfranchised citizenship and industrializing society, was both determined by circumstances and exists as an “event in the order of knowledge.”¹⁹

While Foucault sees Condillac’s philosophy as a key marker of the “reign of the episteme” in classical thought, Derrida critiques the role of the sign in the philosopher’s writings on language, ideas, and rhetoric as a disorganizing lever.²⁰ Condillac understood the origin of language as a “contestation of precedence and need”²¹—a continual return to a prelinguistic practical knowledge through a chain of metaphor and analogy wherein the sign must always refer back to the absent object and be identical with it, if it is to mean—and accordingly saw frivolity or uselessness in the signifier, particularly the written, that fails

to lead back to the origin. Need in itself is frivolous, requiring the direction of desire to relate it to an object and thereby “mobilize it, moralize it, subject it to the law, fix it in an order.”²² But desire also supplies the sign to the object, “which can always work to no effect,” creating frivolity.²³ In *The Archeology of the Frivolous* (1973), Derrida finds in Condillac’s notion of frivolity the articulation of need without an object, without the directing force of desire, offering an opening onto a radicalized conception of desire not derived from need. The written sign disconnected from an object becomes a “need to desire” and indicates a “flight” from the fundamental concepts of Western metaphysics: “No longer is desire the relation with an object, but the object of need. No longer is desire a direction, but an end. An end without end bending need into a kind of flight. This escape sweeps away the origin, system, destiny, and time of need.”²⁴

The revolutionary moment of 1789–95 occurred in the name of a liberated individual subject, but one the bourgeoisie constructed as sensorially anchored within the foundations of well-made science in order to ward off the “deceits and beguilements” of the imagination. In the Republic’s festivals, renovated calendar, and central schools—the establishment of the power within public institutions and disciplinary techniques to increase the possible utility of individuals—we see the “productive” relationship between the senses and the imagination, between need and desire. In Derrida’s flight, where desire is an end in itself, there is the refusal of this stable, useful, interior self of Western modernity: “Need, desire and imagination are divorced from their dependence on notions of subjectivity as self-identity.”²⁵

In 1999 Eichhorn presented the project *May Day Film Media City* at Portikus in Frankfurt, with a retrospective publication on the project published in 2003. The exhibition opened on April 30, and, against the backdrop of May Day demonstrations in the city and internationally, it constituted what curator Angelika Nollert described as “a form of software, a pool of materials, that invites recipients or users to engage with it and to deal with it.”²⁶ Establishing the Portikus gallery as an “editorial office,” across the course of the exhibition Eichhorn initiated a series of events and projects, with contributions by a number of individuals invited by the artist, gradually populating the space with materials and documentation. This chain of aggregation loosely followed in its themes the concatenation of the exhibition title: “May Day,” “Film,” “Media,” and “City.” Yet beyond this organizing principle, interconnections between the different elements were seemingly not governed by any overarching criteria other than the possibilities opened up by the location, time, and resources of the exhibition, recast as a period of research and production. A program of events, publicized in a “reader” and on the exhibition invitation and poster designed by Eichhorn, began with a planned performance by pioneering drum and bass DJs Kemistry & Storm—a May Day dance party that had to be cancelled and replaced by recordings of the duo after the tragic death of Kemi Olusanya (Kemistry) a few days before the exhibition opened. Talks and workshops followed on the topics of the alphabet, typography, and graphic design by artist Irene Hohenbüchler and design historian Emily King; and on the history of the libertarian press by sociologist Bernd Drücke. These events left behind particular traces for exhibition visitors to engage with, including CDs, slides, books, and, in the case of

Hohenbüchler's workshop, directions for designing one's own typographic characters. Alongside these materials, a computer with internet access and a printer enabled further research and production.

Four projects undertaken by Eichhorn in collaboration with others during and after the period of the exhibition also manifested either within the space or within the later exhibition publication. *Video Recordings of May Day Demonstrations* (1999) comprised documentation of the 1999 May Day marches in Frankfurt and Berlin, including interviews with labor activists. The first four 16mm films of *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices* (1999/2005/2008/2014/2015)—*Eyes*, *Breast Licking*, *Cunnilingus*, and *Lips*—were shot and made available to be viewed by visitors on request. An "Architectural Guide to Frankfurt/Main" centered on research into ten sites within walking distance of Portikus, from the Jewish Cemetery to a used car dealership, resulting in photo and text synopses of their sociohistorical status. And Eichhorn conducted interviews with Marie-Theres Deutsch, an architect who codesigned the Portikus building that stood from 1987 to 2004, and Karin Hartung, a long-serving Portikus employee.

Nollert's overview of the exhibition in the publication *May Day Film Media City* emphasizes both the nature of these component parts as "fundamentally open to expansion" and an underlying relationship to Portikus's status as administratively part of Städelschule, including its nominal role in the art school's teaching program. The "work in progress" character of the project was elaborated through the involvement of Städelschule students in research and workshops, and even as actors in *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices*. But *May Day Film Media City* did not present itself as a curriculum. Rather it was a series of inquiries into the boundaries that govern the organization and deployment of knowledge and experience—boundaries that, given the location of the exhibition, are perhaps unavoidably haunted by the critical legacies of the Frankfurt School, of the 1848 Revolution, of the remains of the neoclassical library of 1825 that gives Portikus its name,²⁷ and of Goethe's 1815 statement to the city councilors that "a free spirit befits a free city [. . .] It befits Frankfurt to shine in all directions and to be active in all directions."²⁸ Within Hohenbüchler's typographic alphabets, the lexicons at work in both the aggregative methodology of DJing and the visual and textual isolation of sexual practices, and the encyclopedic approach of the architectural guide, one can detect the imprint of what Foucault termed "intermediary forms of a composite and limited universality" born out of the classical belief in an absolute Encyclopaedia—the "possibility of a language that will gather into itself, between its words, the totality of the world."²⁹ In the nineteenth-century advent of modernity, Foucault sees thought and knowledge no longer as such an accession to the absolute, but as a marker of human limits, and this finitude as the essence itself of knowing. He portrays emerging conceptions of life, language, and labor as the roots of the human sciences that come to replace the Western classical order, identifying an analysis that extends from "what man is in his positivity (living, speaking, laboring being) to what enables this same being to know (or seek to know) what life is, in what the essence of labor and its laws consist, and in what way he is able to speak."³⁰

In *May Day Film Media City* (a medley of terms that notably serve as analogues for labor, language, and life), the forms of lexicon, Encyclopaedia, and alphabet are employed not as tools of the universal—as an eternal perfection

of learning and faculties—nor as indicative of the space of representation bent toward the single corporeal gaze of "man" as the "object of knowledge and [. . .] a subject who knows." Rather, Eichhorn sees the lexicon or encyclopedia as putting a term "into an extended context [. . .] creating a potentially infinite informational space [. . .] Similarly to continually transforming language, a lexicon is always in a state of becoming."³¹ It is this notion of becoming, the suspension of finitude toward alterity, that is at play when Hohenbüchler speaks of working with "all different kinds of script so as to give each author something like a visualized voice of [their] own,"³² and when Nollert reflects on Eichhorn's selection and ordering of the ten architectural sites in the guide to Frankfurt without revealing any system or rationale, stating instead that in fact, "some of the items presented here no longer exist."³³

Bernd Drücke's talk on the libertarian and anarchist press, accompanied by a library of print publications and a computer terminal to access the media online, focused on the possibilities for free, open, uncensored access generated by increasing internet availability in the late 1990s. Intersecting with both the video footage of May Day demonstrations and interviews with activists, and the address of textual communication in Hohenbüchler's and King's events, an emphasis on the attempt to create a space of freedom within hegemonic structures of communication becomes apparent. Yet in Eichhorn's deployment, this is less a question of replacement of one structure of discursive exchange with another, and rather a struggle with the very notion of freedom itself as bound within structures of signification and subjectification. Likewise, while *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices* appears to find enumerative order in acts of sexual desire and pleasure, it is notably a desire uncoupled from the specific identities or subjectivities of the participants and relocated to the conditions of production of the artwork and its reception. Each time the work is shown, new films documenting different sexual practices are produced; when exhibited, the work requires the 16mm projector to sit dormant in the exhibition space until a visitor requests to watch a specific film. The manifestation of the visual representation of sex acts is dependent on both institutional and individual interest and desire, as tightly bound productive forces. As Eichhorn highlights, however, the work itself "doesn't necessarily demand active involvement nor does it require the viewers' participation. The visitors' awareness of its structure and mode of operation is sufficient to engage with it."³⁴

In the staging of *May Day Film Media City*, appropriately located in an exhibition space hidden behind the facade of a neoclassical portico, we might fancifully read an echo of the revolutionary Festival of Reason in 1793, during which the cathedral of Notre Dame was converted into a temple of reason, inscribed with the edict "To Philosophy" and housing a ceremony culminating in the appearance of an opera singer dressed as Liberty. The endeavor sought to break the stranglehold of Catholic idolatry and to assert the earthliness of abstract ideas. Goldstein quotes a journal of the time: "We must never weary of telling the people: liberty, reason, truth are abstract entities. They are not gods, for properly speaking, they are parts of ourselves."³⁵ While there was no such cultish theatricality to Eichhorn's Portikus project, there was the sense of a telling, an informing, that was simultaneously immersed in excess. What is at play is the role of language and signification in what Foucault describes as "the relations between the



01



02

03



Freitag, 30. April 1999, 23 Uhr
Kemistry + Storm (Metalheadz, London)
Bass-Relief

"A way of carving or moulding. In which the break beat stands out from the general surface. Our style is uncompromising, upfront, intense. The rough with the smooth. Two halves of one alter DJ".
Warm up: Stephan Enders (Soul Club, Frankfurt/Main)
Eintritt: 10 DM

Samstag, 1. Mai 1999, 3 Uhr
Radiofeature mit Kemistry + Storm
Night Groove

Im Anschluß an ihr Set im Portikus geben Kemistry + Storm ein Interview in *Night Groove* und legen dort auf. *Night Groove* ist eine Radiosendung für elektronische Musik mit DJ-Sets und Studiogästen sowie mit Interviews, Veranstaltungshinweisen, Platten- und Videospieldarstellungen auf hr XXL und hr3. hr XXL-Frequenzen: 90.4 Frankfurt, 90.7 Limburg, 93.6 Fulda, 93.9 Marburg, 99.4 Gelnhausen, 100.1 Kassel, 101.4 Wiesbaden, 105.5 Wetzlar und auf allen bekannten hr3-Frequenzen. Die Kabelfrequenzen von hr XXL und hr3 können unter Tel. 0130/0555 erfragt werden.

Samstag/Sonntag, 15./16. Mai 1999, 11 – 14 Uhr und 15 – 18 Uhr
Seminar und Workshop mit Irene Hohenbüchler
Buch-Staben

Irene Hohenbüchler spricht über Schrift als kulturgeschichtliches Phänomen und stellt ihre Schriftentwürfe vor (Irene Chicago, Irene Berlin, Irene Schrift, Irene Irish). „Ich arbeite in meinen Textkonglomeraten mit vielen verschiedenen Schrifttypen, um jedem Autor eine Art 'Stimme' zu verleihen. D.h. jeder Autor wird mit einem bestimmten Schriftzug 'porträtiert'. Um die persönliche Sprache (von mir und meinen Schwestern) zu visualisieren, werden selbst erzeugte Schriften verwendet, die sich im Namen oft auf einen Ort beziehen, der zur Zeit der Erstellung wichtig war.“ Ausgehend von ihrer eigenen Praxis entwirft sie mit den Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmern des Workshops ein Alphabet von A – Z. Teilnahmegebühr: 50 DM, ermäßigt 20 DM; Anmeldung bis zum 5. Mai 1999 im Portikus

Samstag, 15. Mai 1999, 20 Uhr
Vortrag von Emily King
New Faces: type design in the age of desk-top publishing

"Type design was once the province of a circle of professionals working under the auspices of the corporations responsible for the industrial manufacture of typesetting systems. In the last decade all that has changed. New technologies introduced in the late 1980s have made it possible to design and set type upon relatively inexpensive equipment that can sit upon a desktop. As a result the activities of type design and typesetting have been allowed to escape traditionally defined professional bounds. The purpose of this talk is to offer a partial map of the broad and unevenly textured territory of contemporary type design and to indicate ways in which to interpret newly emergent typographic form".
M. Eichhorn, Portikus - Ausstellung Nr. 93, 30. April - 15. Juni 1999
Schöne Aussicht 2, D - 60311 Frankfurt/Main, Tel: 069-60500830, Fax: 069-60500831
täglich außer Montag 11 - 18 Uhr, Mittwoch 11 - 20 Uhr

Sonntag, 30. Mai 1999, 17 Uhr
Text- und Bildvortrag von Bernd Drücke
Zwischen Schreibtisch und Straßenschlacht?

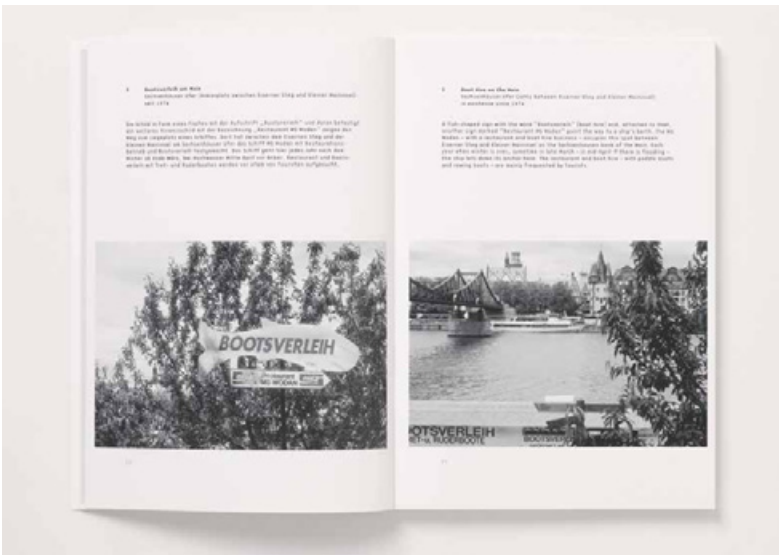
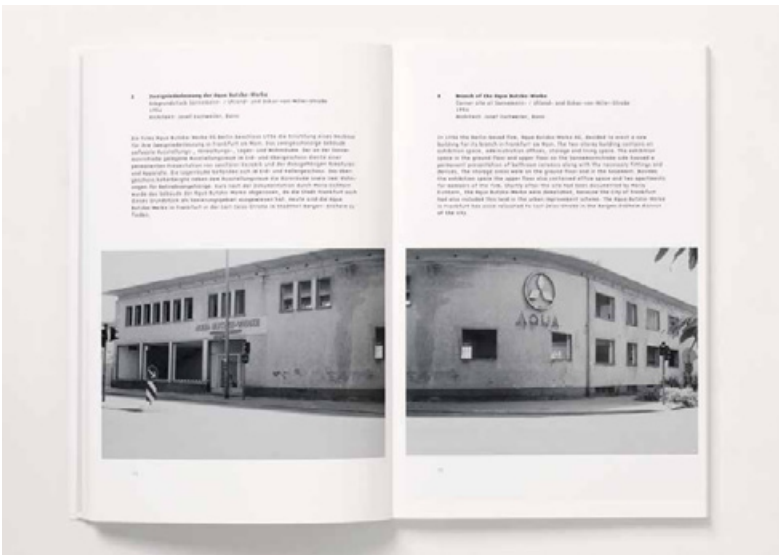
Zwischen Schreibtisch und Straßenschlacht? Unter diesen Titel stellt Bernd Drücke sein Buch über Anarchismus und libertäre Presse in Deutschland. Er untersucht darin anarchistische, linksradikale Periodika wie *Graswurzelrevolution*, *Schwarzer Faden* und *Interim*. In seinem Vortrag sind neben Inhalten und Hintergründen einzelner Zeitschriften auch Aspekte wie Layout Thema, denn die anarchistische Presse entwickelt immer auch ihre eigene Ikonographie. Im Mittelpunkt steht die aktuelle anarchistische Presselandschaft.

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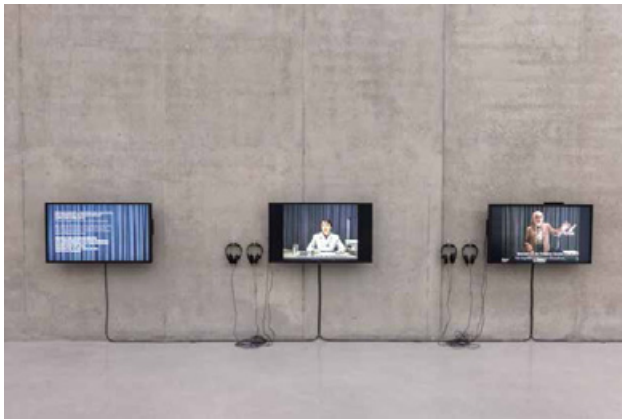
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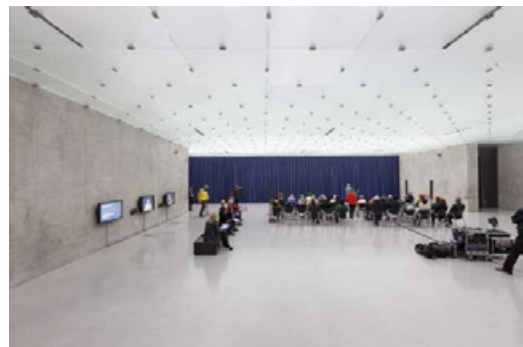
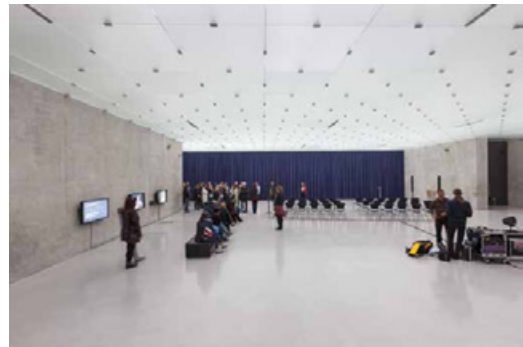


カーテン (デニム) / 藤田祐幸氏、大林ミカ氏 による講演 / *Curtain (Denim) / Lectures by Yuko Fujita, Mika Ohbayashi, Hildegard Breiner, 1989/1997/1998/2014.*
Maria Eichhorn exhibition view at Kunsthau Bregenz, 2014. © Maria Eichhorn and Kunsthau Bregenz. Photo: Markus Tretter

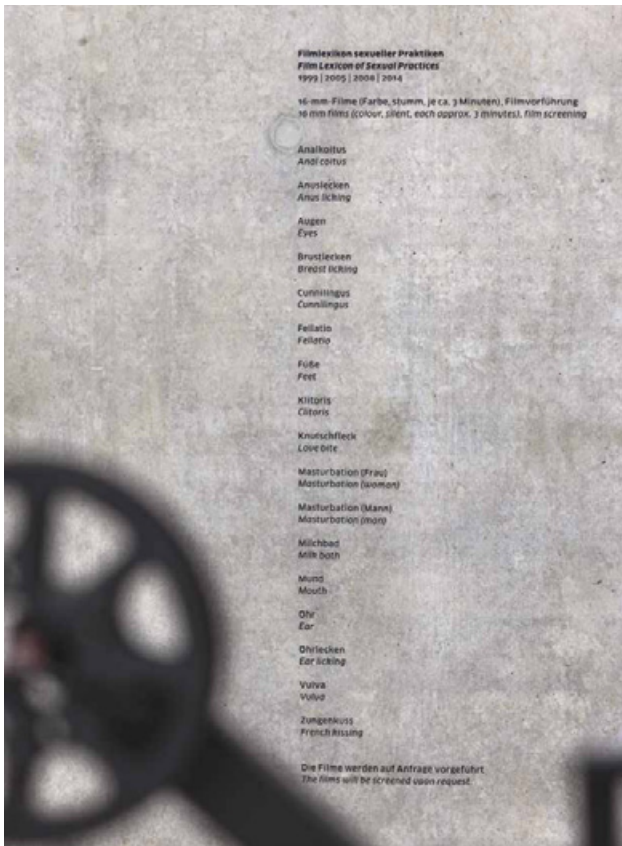




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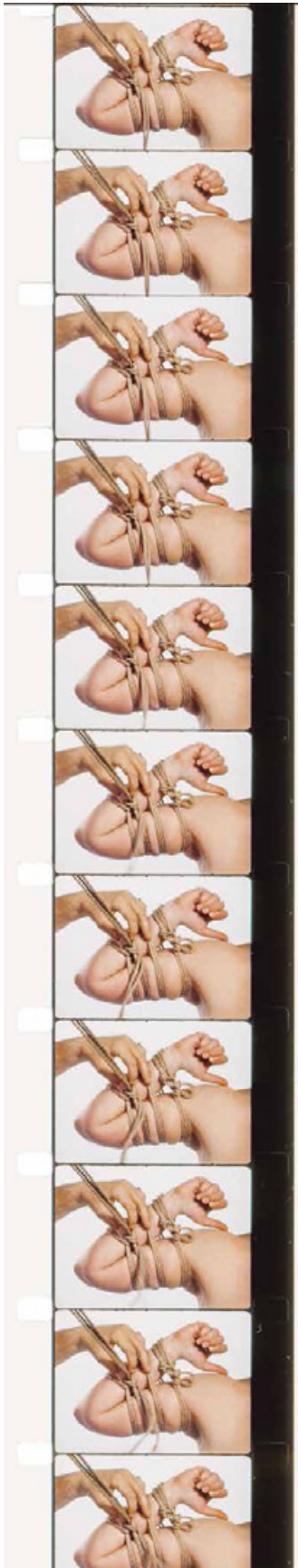


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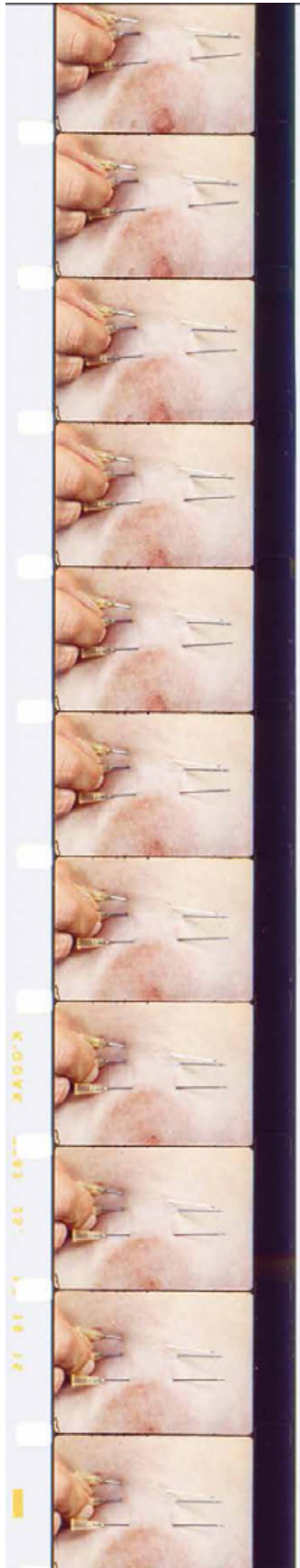


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**Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft |
Maria Eichhorn Public Limited Company**
2002, Documenta 11, Kassel
Sammlung Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven |
Collection Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

Gründerin und Vorstand: Maria Eichhorn; Aufsichtsrat:
Prof. Dr. Tilman Bezenberger (Vorsitzender), Charles
Esche (Stellvertretender Vorsitzender), Okwui Enwezor |
Founder and managing board: Maria Eichhorn; super-
visory board: Prof. Dr. Tilman Bezenberger (chairman),
Charles Esche (deputy chairman), Okwui Enwezor

Vorgänge, Materialien, Dokumente zur Gründung der
Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft
Notarielle Gründungsverhandlung und konstituierende
Aufsichtsratsitzung, Aktiengesellschaft, Gründungs-
urkunde, Satzung, Niederschrift über die erste Sitzung
des Aufsichtsrats, Bericht der Gründerin über den
Wegang der Gründung, Bericht der Mitglieder des
Vorstands und des Aufsichtsrats über die Prüfung des
Gründungsprozesses, Gründungsprüfungsbericht,
Anmeldung der Gesellschaft zur Eintragung im Handels-
register, Handelsregisterkarte, öffentliche Bekannt-
machung der Registeranmeldung, Vertrag zwischen der
Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft und Maria Eichhorn
zur Übertragung aller Aktien an die Gesellschaft

Events, materials, media on the formation of
Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft
Notarized incorporation and inaugural meeting of the
supervisory board, public limited company, memo-
randum of association, articles of association, minutes
of the first meeting of the supervisory board, founder's
report on the formation of the company, report of the
members of the managing board and the supervisory
board on the company formation audit, report on the
formation audit, company's application for entry in the
commercial register, commercial register card, public
announcement of the company's registration, agreement
between Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft and Maria
Eichhorn concerning the transfer of all shares to the
company

Text von Maria Eichhorn

• Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft: Aktiengesellschaft, Entwicklung, Funktionsweisen, Struktur und Bedeutung der Aktiengesellschaft, Kapitalaufnahme, Kapitalmobilität, Börse, Konzernverantwortung, Handel / Spekulation, Gesetz, Veröffentlichungsgebot, Mitbestimmung, Selbstbestimmung, Frage nach dem Wertbegriff, Wertbegriff, Geld, Ware, Kapitalgewinn durch Kapitalzerstörung (=auflösung), Wertakkumulation (=zuwachs, =steigerung) / Wertreduktion (=verlust), Öffentlichkeit / Zugänglichkeit eines Werks, Handelbarkeit / Nichthandelbarkeit, Besitzverhältnisse eines Werks, Copyright, Wissensbesitz, Bedingungen der künstlerischen Theorie und Praxis, Aufheben der Bedingungen=, 50.000 Euro in einhundert 500er Banknoten, Bankschließfächer, Safe, Sitzbank, Konsolie, Publikationen Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft / Maria Eichhorn Public Limited Company (Kassel, 2002), Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft (Eindhoven, 2007)

Text by Maria Eichhorn

• Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft: Joint-stock company, Development, function, structure and meaning of the joint-stock company, Raising capital, mobility of capital, Stock market, Corporate responsibility, Trade / speculation, Law, Legal obligation to disclose results, joint decision-making, Self-determination, The question of the concept of value, The concept of value=Money, commodity, Capital gain by destroying (liquidating) capital, Accumulation (increase, growth) of value / reduction (loss) of value, Public nature / accessibility of a work, Tradability versus non-tradability, the nature of ownership of a work, copyright, Ownership of knowledge, Conditions governing artistic theory and practice and the eliminating of such conditions=, 50,000 euros in one hundred 500 euro bills, bank safe deposit boxes, safe, bench, lectern, publications Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft / Maria Eichhorn Public Limited Company (Kassel, 2002), Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft (Eindhoven, 2007)

Vorgänge, Materialien, Dokumente seit 2002

Aufsichtsratsitzungen, Jahresabschlüsse und Lageberichte, Beschlussfassungen des Aufsichtsrats, Hauptversammlungen, Niederschriften über die Hauptversammlungen der Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft, Verträge zwischen der Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft und Maria Eichhorn zur Übertragung aller Aktien an der Gesellschaft; Verträge zwischen Maria Eichhorn und der Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft zur Übertragung aller Aktien an die Gesellschaft; Körperschaftssteuerklärungen, jährliche Bescheide über Körperschaftssteuer, Solidaritätszuschlag und Vorauszahlungen des Finanzamts für Körperschaften III Berlin, Vereinbarung zwischen Maria Eichhorn und dem Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven

Events, material, media since 2002

Supervisory board meetings, annual accounts and reports, reports of the supervisory board, shareholders' meetings, minutes of the shareholders' meetings of the Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft, agreement between Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft and Maria Eichhorn concerning the transfer of all shares in the company, agreements between Maria Eichhorn and Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft concerning the transfer of all shares to the company, corporate tax declarations, annual decisions of the Tax Office for Corporations III, Berlin, concerning corporation tax, solidarity surcharge and advance payments, agreement between Maria Eichhorn and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

Orte, Institutionen

Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Notarkanzlei Klaus Mock, Berlin; ehemaliger Sitz der Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft; Mittelweg 50, 12053 Berlin (2007–2012); Sitz der Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft; Uferstraße 8–11, 13357 Berlin (seit 2012); Amt, Gericht Charlottenburg, Handelsregister, Berlin; Kanzlei des Aufsichtsratsvorsitzenden; Leibnizstraße 49, 10629 Berlin; Rechtsanwaltskanzlei Broich Bezenberger, Kurfürstendamm 59–60, 10707 Berlin; Dienstraum des Aufsichtsratsvorsitzenden; Juristische Fakultät der Universität Potsdam, August-Bebel-Straße 89, 14482 Potsdam; Industrie- und Handelskammer zu Berlin; Finanzamt für Körperschaften III, Berlin; Documenta GmbH, Kassel; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Bank in Eindhoven

Places, institutions

Museum Fridericianum, Kassel; Klaus Mock Notary Office, Berlin; former main office of Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft; Mittelweg 50, 12053 Berlin (2007–2012); office of Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft; Uferstr. 8–11, 13357 Berlin (since 2012), Charlottenburg District Court, Trade Register, Berlin; law firm of the chairman of the supervisory board, Leibnizstraße 49, 10629 Berlin; law firm Broich Bezenberger; Kurfürstendamm 59–60, 10707 Berlin; offices of the chairman of the supervisory board; Faculty of Law, University of Potsdam, August-Bebel-Straße 89, 14482 Potsdam; Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Berlin; Tax Office for Corporations III, Berlin; Documenta GmbH, Kassel; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Bank in Eindhoven

Courtesy: Documenta11, Kassel; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin



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- 1 *Curtain (Orange)*, 1989/2001/2006/2018, *Zwölf Arbeiten / Twelve Works (1988–2018)* exhibition view at Migros Museum of Contemporary Art, Zurich, 2018–19. Private Collection, Berlin. Photo: Stefan Altenburger
- 2–3 *May Day Film Media City* exhibition views at Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 1999. Photo: Wolfgang Günzel
- 4 *May Day Film Media City* (invitation card), 1999. Photo: Jens Ziehe
- 5–7 *Maria Eichhorn: May Day Film Media City / 1. Mai Film Medien Stadt*, catalogue cover (Frankfurt am Main: Portikus, 1999). Photo: Jens Ziehe
- 8–11 カーテン (デニム) / 藤田祐幸氏、大林ミカ氏による講演 / *Curtain (Denim) / Lectures by Yuko Fujita, Mika Ohbayashi, Hildegard Breiner*, 1989/1997/1998/2014. *Maria Eichhorn* exhibition views at Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2014. © Maria Eichhorn and Kunsthaus Bregenz. Photo: Markus Tretter
- 12–13 *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices*, 1999/2005/2008/2014/2015, *Maria Eichhorn* exhibition views at Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2014. © Maria Eichhorn and Kunsthaus Bregenz. Photo: Markus Tretter.
- 14 *Japanese Bondage* (filmstrip), 2015 from *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices*, 1999/2005/2008/2014/2015
- 15 *Needle Play* (filmstrip), 2015 from *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices*, 1999/2005/2008/2014/2015
- 16 *Vulva* (filmstrip), 2014 from *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices*, 1999/2005/2008/2014/2015
- 17 *Eyes* (filmstrip), 1999 from *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices*, 1999/2005/2008/2014/2015
- 18 *Mouth* (filmstrip), 1999 from *Film Lexicon of Sexual Practices*, 1999/2005/2008/2014/2015
- 19–24 *Maria Eichhorn Aktiengesellschaft*, 2002, *Maria Eichhorn* exhibition views at Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2014. © Maria Eichhorn and Kunsthaus Bregenz. Photo: Markus Tretter
- 25 *French Window*, 1993, *On taking a normal situation and retranslating it into overlapping and multiple readings of conditions past and present* exhibition view at Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp, 1993. Photo: Kristien Daem
- 26–27 *Militant* (stills), 2010
- 28 *Unlawfully Acquired Books from Jewish Ownership*, detail from *Rose Valland Institute*, 2017, exhibition view at documenta 14, Neue Galerie, Kassel, 2017. Unlawfully acquired books from Jewish ownership by the Berliner Stadtbibliothek in 1943, registered in Zugangsbuch J (accession book J); Zugangsbuch J (accession book J, 1944–45), Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin; *Evacuation of the library of the Rothschild family by the staff of Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg, Paris* (1940). Photo: Heinrich Hoffmann, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich
- 29–30 Library of books looted by Germans and purchased in 1943 by the Berliner Stadtbibliothek (Municipal Library of Berlin), from a case study for Maria Eichhorn's *Rose Valland Institute*, 2017. Courtesy: Zentral- und Landesbibliothek Berlin. Photo: Jens Ziehe

Unless otherwise noted: © Maria Eichhorn and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2022.
 Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Barbara Weiss, Berlin