

Reset Modernity! An exhibition at ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe

Run time: April 15 – August 21,
2016

Opening: April 15, 2016

Curators: Bruno Latour, Donato Ricci, Martin Guinard-Terrin & Christophe Leclercq

Scenography and Design Research:
Critical Media Lab Institute of
Experimental Design and Media
Cultures Academy of Art and Design
FHNW Basel & Paolo Patelli
A catalog at MIT-Press, editors Bruno Latour with Christophe Leclercq
In cooperation with the University of Sciences Po, Paris

Michel Serres once said that in the time of Galileo people were just as surprised by the startling news that the Earth had a "motion" as we are now by the additional news that it might feel "emotion" — and that such emotion is in part due to human activity! It seems that today we do not have to absorb the novelty of new lands in the expanse of space, but instead we face the challenge of finding new ways to understand the old land under our feet. This is challenge enough to be deeply disoriented ...

What do you do when you are disoriented? For instance, when... the digital compass of your mobile phone goes wild? You reset it. You might be in a state of mild panic because you lost your bearings, but still you have to take your time and follow the

instructions to calibrate the compass and let it reset. The procedure depends on the situation and on the device, but you always have to stay calm and carefully follow instructions if you want the compass to regain its ability to be sensitive to the signals sent by the arrays of satellites dispersed in the sky way above your head.

In this exhibition we suggest you to do something similar: resetting a few of the instruments that allow you to register some of the confusing signals sent by the epoch. Except what we are trying to recalibrate is nothing as simple as a compass, but is the most obscure principle of projection allowing us to map out the world, namely Modernity.

What we are convinced of is that Modernity was a way to differentiate past and future, North and South, up and down, progress and regress, rich and poor, radical and conservative. However, such a compass, especially at a time of ecological crisis, is spinning wildly without offering much bearing. This is the time for a reset. Let's pause for a while, follow a procedure and search for different sensors that could allow us to recalibrate our detectors, our instruments, to feel anew where we are and where we might wish to go.

Unfortunately, after you have done the reset you will not easily find your way since we cannot offer you a metric as straightforward as longitude and latitude. We have no vast array of satellites to send you signals and triangulate your position! Time to look for some other sort of ground, to invent some baseline,

some groundline. As the saying goes, it might be time to "touch base".

A reset is never just a question of pushing a button and waiting for the effect. It requires you to follow precise instructions, a procedure. The ZKM courtyard has been staged by the CML to give a sense of contained space and an experimental workshop, where six procedures are exhibited.

The first procedure deals with relocating the global. Everything today is supposed to be global, except that in practice no one has ever had a truly global view. You always see locally, from a situated place, through specific instruments. *Powers of Ten*, by Charles and Ray Eames, is the archetype of the global, unsituated and "god-like" scientific vision of the world. The installation *Wall of science* by Peter Galison contrasts with this representation by providing a more realistic vision. It documents a series of experiments where science cannot be understood as coming from nowhere.

This is followed by a second procedure, which proposes to be either outside the world or within it. It deals with this very peculiar way in which the Moderns believe that they apprehend their surroundings: the rigid division between subject and object. Jeff Wall's piece *Adrian Walker*, artist, *drawing from a specimen in a laboratory*, carefully stages an observer gazing at a situation from a single point of view and separated from his object of study. And Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, in their movie *Leviathan* offer a multi-sensorial experience, which is not centred on the human perspective.

One of the strange things about the ecological mutation is that there is no outside anymore: everything that was out, in the environment, in nature, is now back in, and it weighs on our shoulders. In such a context it is difficult to feel the 18th century version of the sublime. Humans have grown too big and their souls have shrunk too small! Suddenly they feel responsible for everything just at the time when they have become part of a geological force over which they have no control. In this regard Fabien Giraud's use of radioactive paper taken from the Fukushima forest highlights this perverse feedback loop between a tsunami, a nuclear explosion and a contaminated territory.

Likewise, the fourth procedure directs our attention to a new way of occupying a territory. How could the Moderns absorb the discovery of limits at the time of the Anthropocene without falling back on the notion of borders and identities? This theme is especially relevant in the works of the collective of architects *Folder* who interrogate the limits of the Italian nation state as it is challenged by climate change. In a different vein, Pierre Huyghe's work *Nymphéas Transplant (14-18)*, explores a part of a tenuous territory, an eco-system contained within a fragile membrane.

The fifth procedure addresses the notions of politics and religion. Jean-Michel Frodon curates a list of movie excerpts interrogating the crossing between political and religious speech, while Lorenza Mondada and her collaborators address the reactions of the public to Obama's speech in Charleston. This procedure

explores the possibility of being secular in a new sense.

The sixth procedure deals with a shift in perception from technology as object to technology as project. Thomas Thwaites in his *Toaster Project* recomposes one by one the operations necessary to create a daily object. The «hype» provided by technology constantly hides the thousands of choices we should be able to make to fight the idea that there was a single front of irreversible modernization.

Yes, the overall experiment may be fairly disorienting at first, but after waiting a bit you might feel that you have regained some ability to reorient yourself. No guarantee, of course: this is an experiment, a thought experiment, a Gedankenausstellung. And thus, fortunately, it can fail!

Artist list:

Lisa Bergmann & Alina Schmuck
Bureau d'Études
Hicham Berrada
Kees Boeke
Emma Charles
Tacita Dean
Albrecht Dürer
Charles and Ray Eames
Folder (Marco Ferrari, Elisa Pasqual, Alessandro Busi, Aaron Gillett),
Pietro Leoni, Delfino Sisto Legnani,
Alessandro Mason, Angelo Semeraro
& Livia Shamir)
Jean-Michel Frodon and Agnès
Devictor
Peter Galison
Fabien Giraud
Sylvain Gouraud
Pierre Huyghe
Andrés Jacque / Office for Political
Innovation
Pauline Julier
Armin Linke
David Maisel
John Martin
Anne-Sophie Milon & Jan
Zalasiewicz
Lorenza Mondada, Nicolle Bussien,
Sara Keel, Hanna Svensson and
Nynke van Schepen
Ahmet Ögüt
Véréna Paravel and Lucien Castaing-
Taylor
Matteo de' Pasti
Sophie Ristelhueber
Philippe Squarzoni
Simon Starling
Thomas Struth
Sarah Sze
Thomas Thwaites
The Unknown Field Division (Liam
Young and Kate Davies)
Johann Philipp Veith
Jeff Wall

Bruno Latour is an anthropologist, philosopher and sociologist who has worked for thirty years on an anthropology of the Moderns. He has published numerous books, including "We Have Never Been Modern" (1991) and "An Enquiry into the Modes of Existence" (2012). He is now director of the médialab at the university Sciences Po Paris.

The exhibition design is developed by Critical Media Lab, Institute of Experimental Design and Media Cultures (IXDM) at the Academy of Art and Design FHNW in Basel.

The exhibition catalogue is published by The MIT Press. An international symposium as well as a series of workshops will also be part of the show.

The show will take place from April 16 to August 21, 2016. It will take place within the framework of the GLOBALE, a polyphone event extending over 300 days to commemorate the 300 year anniversary of the city of Karlsruhe (June 20, 2015 - April 2016).

The ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, which is a foundation under public law, is to facilitate—in its capacity as an institution for research, cultural promotion and education—a comprehensive exploration of the arts and media technology, in particular, in the fields of image, music, word, and the interrelationship of art and science. Peter Weibel has been the Chairman of ZKM since 1999.