REINTERPRETING
A MODERN
WUNDERKAMMER

The Dreyfus-Best Collection
at the Kunstmuseum Basel

Master Thesis

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Introduction

“The return of the cabinet of curiosities may express a desire to build connections between past and present and between collectors and artists. Formerly, the collector, the arranger of world, was not considered an artist but rather an amateur – ‘one who loves’ according to the etymology. On the other hand, artists ever since the Renaissance identified themselves as creators of works ex nihilo, or ‘out of nothing.’”

Christine Davenne

Since its emergence during the Renaissance period, the typical 16th century cabinet of curiosities is construed as a distinct display of an encyclopaedic collection comprising different kinds of objects of dissimilar origin and diverse materials. According to Christine Davenne, the cabinet has returned in the 21st century. This presumption is supported by several other authors and scholars, who are examining the current state of the Wunderkammer and possible explanations for its reappearance, particularly in the museum context. Following Davenne’s statement, connecting the past and the present might be one of the most significant characteristics of the modern cabinet, and at the same time, an important incentive for its reappearance. While the cabinet’s return can be attributed to a certain sense of nostalgia and fascination for its aesthetic allure, it is also the appeal of juxtaposing the most unlikely objects regardless of time and space. Today, the notion of the Wunderkammer even exceeds the real world and applies to visually interconnected spaces such as the World Wide Web, where its collection principles are pursued virtually. In consequence, the concept of the Wunderkammer has been designated as contemporary phenomenon.

While our non-systematic age allows for the parallel existence of the most contrasting elements irrespective of time and space, the return of the cabinet of curiosities could be also symptomatic of a shift back to an exclusive insight into a private collection. Because the 16th century Wunderkammer was mostly housed in the collector’s private home, it was accessible by invitation only. With the rise of the museum in the 18th

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1 Davenne 2012, p. 6.
2 Koeppe 2002.
3 Davenne 2012, p. 6.
4 E.g. Grinke 2006 and Kaden 2012, amongst others.
century, however, all art treasures were brought from private ownership to the public. The cabinet of curiosities thus was, and still seems to be invested with an enigmatic aura of exclusivity. The current ‘boom’ of private museums certainly accounts for the success of showing the formerly unseen to the public. At the same time, today’s shift towards privatized museums is reminiscent of the historic connection between the private cabinet and the emergence of the museum. The particular interactions between private collections and the public realm have therefore been of continuous interest for many scholars analysing recent developments in the art world.

In 2014, the travelling exhibition For Your Eyes Only: A Private Collection, from Mannerism to Surrealism showcased a significant part of Ulla and Richard Dreyfus-Best’s private art collection at the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation in Venice and the Kunstmuseum Basel, curated by Andreas Beyer. After her husband’s death in 2004, Ulla Dreyfus-Best has continued her collecting activities nonetheless. Despite the Dreyfus-Best’s active roles within the art world as passionate patrons and collectors, their collection has never been on public display before and is usually set in the couple’s private home near Basel in Switzerland. The Dreyfus-Best’s extensive collection of artworks and artifacts ranges from the 12th to the 21st century. Most of their possessions are installed in their own hallways and rooms (Fig.1), with no reference to any thematic or chronological order. Initially based on her husband and his family’s inheritance, the collection has continued to grow based on subconscious decisions and personal taste, as Ulla Dreyfus-Best explains. The exhibitions in Venice and Basel could be considered a first attempt to ‘untangle’ the haphazard arrangement of works and objects by developing a separate exhibition concept. Instead of recreating the installation at the Dreyfus-Best’s home, the exhibition curator relied on a more or less chronological order and thematic groupings.

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8 According to the Private Art Museum Report, more than one third (35%) of private museums have over 20,000 visitors per year. Therefore, the number of visitors attending private museums are similar to public institutions; Private Art Museum Report 2016, p. 6; p. 11. On the boom of private museum and personal-collection museums: Baumgardner 2015; Marks 2015; Ratnam 2013.
9 E.g. Alberge 2010; Baumgardner 2015; Barrett 2014; Gnyp 2015; Marks 2015; Ratnam 2013; Reyburn 2015; and Wong 2014, a.o.
10 The exhibitions entitled For Your Eyes Only: A Private Collection, from Mannerism to Surrealism were held at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice (Italy) from 23/05/2014 until 31/08/2014; and at the Kunstmuseum Basel, Basel (Switzerland) from 20/09/2014 until 04/01/2015. The exhibition curator Andreas Beyer is currently Professor for Early Modern Art History at the art historical institute at the University of Basel, Switzerland.
11 Preuss 2014.
12 Ibidem.
Reinterpreting a Modern Wunderkammer

Introduction

Figure 1: Stairwell at the Dreyfus-Best estate
Figure 2: Installation view For Your Eyes Only: A Private Collection, from Mannerism to Surrealism at Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, 2014 (Room 1)

Figure 3: Installation view For Your Eyes Only: A Private Collection, from Mannerism to Surrealism at Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, 2014 (Room 3)
of the works (Fig. 2 & 3). Apart from exhibiting a tidied and more manageable version at the museum, in comparison to the usual arrangement at the Dreyfus-Best’s house, the curator still had to deal with the wide range of objects and artworks – in terms of dating, themes and artistic genres. Such a diverse collection thus raises a lot of questions. Privately displayed, the objects have the collector’s identity and personal taste as common denominator. However, as the collection is transferred into the public realm it requires the curator’s ability to ‘translate’ the collection for the public eye. Instead of leaving out the odd and possibly disruptive artifacts, such as a narwhale tusk or a bronze figurine of unknown origin (Fig. 7), the curator decided to include them as part of an intricate web of thematic references. While some of the collector’s items seem misplaced at first sight, they are actually the most revealing and meaningful in the context of the exhibition and, of course, also highly symbolical for the exhibition’s and the collection of Ulla and Richard Dreyfus-Best.

A closer examination of the exhibition For Your Eyes Only unfolds three interrelated aspects: First, the exhibition is exemplary of the increasing dissemination of private collections in the public museum context. This has ramifications on an institutional level, including certain reassessments for the collector and the public. Secondly, due to the haphazard nature of the omnium gatherum that is the Dreyfus-Best collection, authors have proposed an analogy between the Dreyfus-Best collection and an early modern cabinet of curiosity, calling it an “exemplary, modern Kunst- and Wunderkammer”. Beyond the conceptual comparison to a Wunderkammer, the collection’s transition into the public realm correlates with the historical shift from private cabinet to public museum. In turn, the historic background of the cabinet offers a new perspective on the current shift towards the increasing accessibility of private collections for the public. Lastly, the proposed link between the Dreyfus-Best collection and a cabinet of curiosities would imply that certain consistencies in terms of structure and arrangement should be upheld, even when publicly displayed. Therefore, a comparative analysis between the characteristics of a Renaissance Wunderkammer and the exhibited collection could serve as starting point for the theoretical investigation of the exhibition’s ordering structures and its curatorial concept.

14 Ibidem; see also Beyer 2015; and Preuss 2014. Moreover, a research paper on this particular topic – the analysis of the Dreyfus-Best collection as acclaimed modern Wunderkammer in its private setting – was handed-in by the author of the present thesis in January 2016, titled A 21st Century Wunderkammer. The Dreyfus-Best’s Contemporary Cabinet of Curiosities in the context of the research seminar ‘Early Modern Cultures of Collecting’ at Leiden University.
These three particular aspects serve as essential cornerstones, as it is the present thesis’ aim to analyze the Dreyfus-Best collection in the context of the exhibition *For Your Eyes Only* in Basel. The following chapters try to outline the underlying structures of the Dreyfus-Best collection’s transition from the private into the public realm of the Kunstmuseum. Therefore, the main research objective is to unfold the ways of curatorial reconceptualization in order to understand how a private collection is made understandable and intellectually accessible for the public by means of particular structures and concepts of order. In particular, the Dreyfus-Best collection’s similarities to a Renaissance *Wunderkammer* call into question whether structures, similar to the latter, were implemented in the curatorial concept of the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum. Furthermore, the thesis submits an alternative approach to reinterpreting the exhibition concept by applying Michel Foucault’s account on the Renaissance *episteme*, in order to compare the applicability of the Foucauldian ordering principles to the basic structures of the museum-exhibition.

In *The Order of Things*, first published in 1966, French philosopher Michel Foucault introduces an analytical approach to reformulate the basic settings of scientific activity throughout five centuries, from the Renaissance period to modern times. Instead of a successive history of science, Foucault examines the different periods as individual time spans whose transitions are characterized by ruptures rather than continuity. Consequently, he proposes to re-read history and therefore rethink the given origins and connections between historical events and set chronologies. He introduces the *episteme* as a set of ordered but unconscious ideas, which determine what is regarded as accepted knowledge in particular periods and times. Accordingly, the concept of the *episteme* counts as “unconscious, but positive and productive set of relations within which knowledge is produced and rationality defined.” Three major *epistemes* are distinguished: the Renaissance, the Classical and the Modern episteme. Each *episteme* stands for a specific period during which specific knowledge and rationalities were produced. The transitions from one era to another comes, moreover, with “the complete rewriting of knowledge”, indicating that the individual changes entailed also a novel approach to

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15 The author chose to focus on the exhibition in Basel only due to the limiting factors of the present thesis. Moreover, the discussions on the exhibition between the author and the exhibition curator Andreas Beyer were limited to Basel, because of the Basel University’s close proximity to the museum, as well as the involvement of several interviews and lectures held at the Kunstmuseum Basel during the exhibition *For Your Eyes Only*.

16 Foucault 2005.

17 Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 12; see also Foucault 1972, p. 191.
knowing and thinking.\textsuperscript{18} Each \textit{episteme} corresponds to one major paradigm shift and is characterized by discontinuity and incommensurability. As Foucault states: “In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one \textit{episteme} that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice.”\textsuperscript{19} As Eileen Hooper-Greenhill has argued, the particular ordering structures that Foucault attributes to the Renaissance \textit{episteme} correspond to the characteristics of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century cabinet of curiosities.\textsuperscript{20} The significant role of resemblances and specific forms of similitudes for both entities allow for a close comparison of the two. Introducing the Foucauldian Renaissance \textit{episteme} in the context of the \textit{Wunderkammer} could thus offer new insights when examining the Dreyfus-Best collection as cabinet in its public setting.

The historical and theoretical framework even the path for the thorough analysis of the curatorial concept. The particular challenges encountered by curator Andreas Beyer will be reevaluated through the structures of the Renaissance \textit{episteme} – revealing how the hidden relationships and the similitudes, which were inserted in a seemingly thematic narrative, could be alternatively interpreted as an elusive \textit{Wunderkammer}.

In order to get a general understanding of the state of the art, the first chapter examines current debates on the interactions between private art collections and the public realm. Accordingly, literary sources on the history of collecting are reviewed in order to demonstrate the ongoing topicality of the \textit{Wunderkammer} and its reappearance today. Furthermore, academic contributions on the collection and museum’s ordering structures are analyzed.

The interactions between the private and public realm have been a central aspect when examining the origins of the museum. Although these interrelations have been academically acknowledged in a historical context and in connection with the alleged boom of personal-collection museums, it is argued that the curatorial standpoint of this transition has been fairly neglected.\textsuperscript{21} Therefore, the second chapter analyses the current opposition of private and public displays, with a view to classifying the Dreyfus-Best collection within the current shift in the museum-landscape. At the same time, these changes will be analyzed from a historic point of view. Lastly, the second chapter

\textsuperscript{18} Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 12.  
\textsuperscript{19} Foucault 2005, p. 183.  
\textsuperscript{20} Hooper-Greenhill 1992, pp. 12ff.  
\textsuperscript{21} Baumgardner 2015; Marks 2015; Ratnam 2013.
discusses the transitional aspects when private collections enter the public realm, trying to disclose the challenges, which the curator generally encounters when ‘translating’ the private for the public.

The following chapter is devoted to an extensive analysis of the Dreyfus-Best collection and the exhibition For Your Eyes Only at the Kunstmuseum Basel, since neither its private setting, nor its public display has been thoroughly investigated. After some methodological remarks the collection will be examined in its private surroundings, as well as in the exhibition context based on photographic documentation of both the Dreyfus-Best estate and the Kunstmuseum Basel. A particular focus lies on the first room (Fig. 2). The ‘official’ curatorial concept will be traced and examined to provide an insight into the thematic orders proposed by the curator. As a result, a few of the implemented themes will be outlined in more detail.

The closing chapter aims to go beyond the thematic and chronological order proposed in the previous chapter, implying that there could be another ordering structure, inspired by the Wunderkammer, which could explain the more intrinsic interrelations and correlations between the individual objects through their arrangement. Particular emphasis put on to the curatorial challenge of bringing the private into the public. It will be discussed how subjective personal taste can be made accessible for the public without a one-to-one replica of the Dreyfus-Best’s installation of their home or the total loss of what makes the collection so intriguing in the first place. Here, Foucault’s Renaissance episteme comes into play, highlighting the similarities and resemblances of the different objects, beyond a thematic or chronological approach. It is submitted, that due to these ‘hidden relationships’, implemented by the curator, the concept of the private Renaissance Wunderkammer is able to operate also in the public realms of the museum. To support this claim, another private collection will be investigated as well. In 2010, the German collector Thomas Olbricht has opened his collection to the public. The so-called me Collectors Room in Berlin does not only include Olbricht’s own contemporary collection and changing, temporary exhibitions but also an Early Modern cabinet of curiosities – a genuine Wunderkammer. Moreover, in 2010, an extensive part of the Olbricht collection was presented at the Kunsthalle Krems entitled

22 The author’s request to visit the Dreyfus-Best estate has not been answered thus far. Therefore, the analysis is based on the Kunstmuseum’s photographic archive including detailed reproductions of the Dreyfus-Best estate and its collection as well as the exhibition’s installation views. The present research uses a selection of these materials also as its referencing illustrations.

23 Foucault 2005.

24 Schopppmann et al. 2010; Preuss 2010; Wensowsk 2010; Befler 2012; and Gnjyp 2015.
In a very similar way to the Dreyfus-Best exhibition the Kunsthalle Krems included various works from different epochs. Through this comparative approach the similarities and differences between two modern Wunderkammern are highlighted, allowing for a more extensive insight into the role of the curator and the solutions for handling the transition of a modern Wunderkammer from private and public. This raises the question whether the cabinet of curiosities could ultimately be considered as exhibition concept.

To conclude, the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel, showcasing the private collection of Richard and Ulla Dreyfus-Best, exemplifies specific issues emerging from the transition of a private collection into the public realms of the museum. The research and prospects presented here investigate the following key questions: To what extent are the curatorial approach and concept of the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel similar to the structures of a Renaissance Wunderkammer? Beyond the exhibition’s chronological and thematic order, what new insights offer the Foucauldian Renaissance episteme?

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25 The exhibition, titled Oblicht Collection. Lebenslust & Totentanz was held at the Kunsthalle Krems (Austria) from 18/07/2010 until 07/11/2010. The exhibition title loosely translates to ‘joy of life and dance of death’ (transl. by the author).
1. Current Debates

The present thesis seeks to unfold the exhibition *For Your Eyes Only* and the issues surrounding it. The discrepancies between the Dreyfus-Best’s private display at their own home and the public ‘inside view’ at the Kunstmuseum Basel will be used as starting point in analyzing *For Your Eyes Only* as an exhibition, which is embedded in more general current debates as well as in a historic context.

While the exhibition catalogue addresses the Dreyfus-Best collection and the exhibited pieces directly,\(^{26}\) a few magazine and newspaper articles, published in the context of the exhibition at the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation in Venice, as well as the second show at the Kunstmuseum Basel, provide only short reviews.\(^{27}\) Even the more lengthy ones don’t go beyond content-related information about the exhibition and the collectors.\(^{28}\) Only Stefania Maria Maci’s article takes the exhibition in Venice as starting point to examine the wall texts in relation to the modalities used to communicate foreign art to a Western audience.\(^{29}\) Due to the different thematic focus, however, Maci’s findings are not further relevant to this thesis.

The limited amount of specific literature discussing the exhibition itself makes it necessary to include other aspects. The Dreyfus-Best collection and its re-arrangement at the Kunstmuseum Basel thus need to be examined from a different set of perspectives. The introductory chapter already mentioned the specific circumstances of the exhibition, such as a shift towards the increasing popularity of private collections in the public realm, as well as the historical past of collecting. The historic view on collecting establishes an interesting link between the ambiguity of the private and the public, just as today’s debates, but also offers the opportunity for the close examination of the underlying structures of the historic collection and therefore an opportunity to compare these structures to the exhibition in Basel. Accordingly, the following paragraphs provide a broad overview of the current debates surrounding the key issues of the exhibition *For Your Eyes Only* and the Dreyfus-Best collection. In order to approach these key issues most effectively, a subset of literature has been selected and divided into three central

\(^{26}\) Beyer et al. 2014. 
\(^{27}\) E.g. Becker 2014; Fluri 2014; Spirgi 2015; Suter 2014, a.o. 
\(^{28}\) Preuss 2014. 
\(^{29}\) Maci 2015, pp. 135ff.
topics: the interaction between private art collections and the public realm (1.1), the history of collections (1.2), and its ordering structures (1.3).

1.1 Interactions Between Private Art Collections and the Public Realm

The topicality of private art collections entering the public realm has increased remarkably in recent years. The large amount of literature found on this subject is one indicator, while the Private Art Museum Report shows that the actual number of private collections and private museums has risen over the last couple of years. One of the earliest accounts on museum management, published in the late 19th century by G. Brown Goode, broaches the issue of the private collector in the context of the public museum. Following Goode’s article, however, the private collector enters the public realm only as museum-founder. Also in more recent debates, the private collector’s role as museum-founder remains a reoccurring topic. Scholars have noticed the return of personal-collection museums and authors such as Julie Baumgardner, Thomas Marks or Niru Ratnam have even called out a “global boom” of private museums. Subsequently, Elina Moustaira discussed the increasing privatisation of museums, with a particular emphasis on the differences between private and public collections from a legal standpoint.

Marta Gnyp delivered a comprehensive account on the increasing growth of private museums entitled The Shift. Art and the Rise to Power of Contemporary Collections. Gnyp has taken the recent paradigm shift in the art world under close examination, focussing on contemporary art collectors and the founding of private museums only. Although the author investigates the interaction between private art collections and the public realm only in the broadest sense, Gnyp has dedicated a whole chapter to issues concerning public display in private museums. Not only applicable to private museums but also to private collections, her chapter provides insights into topics such as visibility, exchange and interdependencies of the works on display and the respective parties.

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30 Private Art Museum Report 2016. A clear differentiation between a private collection and a private museum and the collector’s respective role has not been made or properly applied by many of the authors discussed in this chapter, so far. Due to their interchangeable characteristics, the following paragraphs will discuss the private collection and the private museum as similar and partly transferable entities. However, more detailed differentiations will be discussed in Chapter 2 (Private vs. Public Display).
31 Goode 1895.
32 Baumgardner 2015; Marks 2015; Ratnam 2013.
33 Moustaira 2015.
34 Gnyp 2015.
involved. Moreover, the *Private Art Museum Report*, the first global study on the setting of privately founded contemporary art museums, provides empirical evidence for a current global boom of private museums and a general shift towards an increased public accessibility of private collections.

Even though all of the accounts mentioned so far include valuable observations for the purpose of the present study, they remain limited to the extend that the authors either focus on the collector as museum-founder or on private museums only. Furthermore, the majority of the publications discussed above are exclusively based on collections and museums of contemporary art, in the context of which the private art collection is generally discussed as founding part of a museum.

Some authors have not only observed a shift towards more public accessibility of private collections but have also tried to critically analyse the underlying reasons. The *Private Art Museum Report* argues that private museums are able to fill a gap, mostly in countries with limited institutional infrastructures, since the founders of private museums are able to compensate for the lack of public funding. Julie Baumgardner, in contrast, suggests that museums are private investments aiming to showcase personal holdings. The author bluntly points out: “The rich buy art. And the super-rich, well, they make museums.”

Self-representation and tax benefits are thus two of the main reasons to found a private museum according to Baumgardner. Similarly, Dayla Alberge’s article for *The Guardian* refers to the controversial aspects and problematic nature of private museums as mere status symbols. Whether the sheer quantity of these “ego-seums” will overshadow the quality of public institutions also in the future, remains to be seen, Alberge concludes. Moreover, Christopher Knight looks at the negative consequences and conflicts of interests, which private museums and private collections on public display are both causing. He claims that the consumerist focus of private collections ultimately weakens the art museum because the emphasis has shifted to the collector’s ability to buy art. The title of the article is therefore Knight’s main message: “Private collections should stay in the living room – with their owner’s ego.”

Looking at the issue from a greater distance,
Scott Reyburn illustrates how the shift in the art world has mainly caused an overall imbalance: while the world’s richest collectors are getting richer, publicly financed museums are running out of financial means.\(^{42}\)

Beyond these critical accounts, a few scholars have also dealt with the specific interactions and challenges between private and public collections – two core concerns of this further research. For instance, in 2015, the fourth TEFAF Art Symposium focussed on the interaction and cooperation between private and public collections.\(^{45}\) Thomas Marks, opening speaker of the symposium and editor of *Apollo Art Magazine*, briefly addressed the historical link between private collections and the public realm by stressing how this relationship has developed over the last centuries. Marks pointed out that a private collector with a certain public audience in mind is not a novelty, since many museums – historically speaking, as well as today – have been established due to the founder’s own wish to make their private collection accessible for the public. The historic foundation of the collection, however, is not further elaborated upon.\(^{44}\)

Moreover, Marks claims that the general public is largely unaware of the discreet collaborations between private collectors and public institutions, such as temporary loans, for instance. Only public auction sales of well-known works have had an impact on the public consciousness, while there is no awareness about the consequences when artworks in private ownership are placed on public display. On the other hand, Marks also identifies a certain shift in the art world, mentioning the “private museum boom”, as well as museum exhibitions wholly drawn from one private collection.\(^{45}\) In cooperation with the Courtauld Institute, the A.G. Leventis Gallery hosted a symposium in 2014 entitled ‘Going Public: Challenges and Perspectives in the Display of Private Collections’.\(^{46}\) Special emphasis was put on the significance of the transition from private to public, that is, the private collection entering the public realm, as loan, temporary exhibition or museum. Curator Katy Barrett’s brief summary of the symposium for

\(^{42}\) Reyburn 2015.
\(^{44}\) It is only Julie Baumgardner, who introduces the historic past of private museums in her article in order to exemplify how the “overwhelming majority” of privatized or single-funded museums within all of the museum landscape are well within the historic past of the museum itself, specifically in America; see Baumgardner 2015.
\(^{45}\) Marks 2015.
Apollo Magazine, questions whether these transitions are in any way limited and what specific issues are at stake when the private goes public. Barrett claims, therefore, that either the ‘personal’ aspect of the private collection is lost when it specifically defers to public values or, on the contrary, the public appeal revalues the private.47

Both symposia, including Thomas Marks and Katy Barrett’s contributions acknowledge the existence of a transitional moment from the private to public realm and try to analytically approach the issues such transitions entail. However, their discussions lack further research and depth regarding the transition’s particular setting, such as the curatorial impact, for instance. The question how this transition is structured is not sufficiently taken into consideration. Only Ryan Wong’s article for Artslant on curating private collections touches upon the role of the curator. Wong, however, only discusses the curatorial aspects and the relationship between the public museum and private contemporary collections from an ethical angle. He investigates what issues arise when a curator caters to the needs of a public museum and a private collection at the same time and whether this could be considered reprehensible or unethical. Although Wong answers to the question of how private and public collections are dealt with from a curatorial standpoint, he does not examine the curator’s impact on the transition as such.48

What all of the current debates on the interactions between private art collections and public domain have in common is their acknowledgement of a general shift in the art world that correlates with the increasing number of publicly accessible private collections and private museums. While several authors approach this shift descriptively49, others have tried to reveal the reasons for the rise of private museums and the increasing entry of private collections in the public realm and have critically disclosed the conflict of interests at stake.50 Although some contributions on the specific interactions and challenges between private and public collections are available,51 they seem to lack a more analytical concept on how these interactions or challenge could be approached.

47 Barrett 2014.
48 Wong 2014.
50 E.g. Baumgardner 2015; Alberge 2010; Knight 2010; and Reyburn 2015, a.o.
51 E.g. Marks 2015; and Barrett 2014, a.o.
1.2 History of Collections: From Private *Wunderkammer* to Public Museum

Authors such as Thomas Marks and Julie Baumgardner have highlighted the correlation between today’s private museum boom and the tradition of privatized museums.\(^{52}\) Moreover, Marks has stated that the interaction between private and public collecting spaces is nothing new, implying that today’s shift from private to public can be compared to the similar movement of when the private Renaissance *Wunderkammer* gradually opened its doors for the public and laid the foundation for the rise of the public museum.\(^{53}\)

In order to understand and comprehensively trace the Dreyfus-Best collection’s transition from its private installation to the public presentation at the Kunstmuseum Basel, the historical developments of collecting and displaying have to be examined first. General literature on the emergence and characteristics of the *Wunderkammer* needs to be considered, such as Horst Bredekamp’s *Antikensehnsucht und Maschinenglauben* or Arthur MacGregor’s *Curiosity and Enlightenment*, for instance.\(^{54}\) Amongst these different academic accounts there is a broad consensus on how the cabinets of curiosities progressed into what could be considered the basic concepts of today’s public museum. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, for instance, emphasises the particular setting of the collections’ presentation in the 16th century as closed spaces with limited access to visitors. Over the course of the late 18th and the early 19th century these limitations were increasingly dismissed as Hooper-Greenhill notes, and as a consequence the public museum arose.\(^{55}\)

Many scholars, such as Hooper-Greenhill and Paul Grinke introduce the cabinets of curiosities and the museum as consecutive and opposing concepts.\(^{56}\) Due to their constitutive differences, Henning Ritter has claimed that the concepts of the *Wunderkammer* and the museum are fundamentally different; according to him, any form of modern coexistence is therefore not possible, meaning that a *Wunderkammer* cannot be exhibited in the realm of the museum.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{52}\) Baumgardner 2015; see also Marks 2015.

\(^{53}\) Marks 2015.

\(^{54}\) E.g. Bredekamp 2000; MacGregor 2007; Grinke 2006; and Davenne 2012 a.o.


\(^{56}\) Hooper-Greenhill 1992; and Grinke 2006.

\(^{57}\) “Die Wunderkammer verträgt sich nicht mit dem Museum.” (Ritter 2014, p. 27; and pp. 234ff).
Paula Findlen introduces the term *musaeum* as “an epistemological structure which encompassed a variety of ideas, images and institutions.” Elaborating on the museum’s etymological development, Findlen exemplifies how one term complies with different concepts of knowing, perceiving and classifying. Over the course of time, the parameters of the *musaeum* and its specific “language of collecting” have changed constantly, meaning that the 16th century *Wunderkammer* is based on the same linguistic starting point as the institutionalized museum. However, their respective structures are constitutively different and have developed other characteristics. Yet, Samuel Quiccheberg (1529-1567), a Flemish physician, artistic advisor to Albrecht V., the Duke of Bavaria, and author of the first treatise on museums, has merged the concept of the *Wunderkammer* and the architectural exhibition-structures of museum already in 1565 with his *Inscriptions vel tituli theatri amplissimi*. His detailed delineation of the ideal museum includes an extensive inventory and a proposal for the specific arrangement of the museum’s artifacts, highlighting the pragmatic value of collecting, attaining and transmitting knowledge. In the context of Quiccheberg’s treatise, the term ‘museum’ must be considered in its 16th century significance. Nonetheless, his early account unites the *Wunderkammer’s* collecting practice with a distinct form of showcasing the artifact – a form that conceptually might even allude to the basic structures of some museums today. While it has been suggested that the structures of the cabinet of curiosities are distinctly different from the modern museum, Ritter’s claim that today the *Wunderkammer* and the museum cannot coexist appears to be rather untenable considering the many forms of modern cabinets of curiosities are still existent in today’s collector and museum’s practice.

Given the historical links between early modern cabinets of curiosities and the origins of the museum, several scholars have implied that the *Wunderkammer* therefore

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59 Ibidem.
60 The original title of Samuel Quiccheberg’s treatise, first published in Munich in 1565: “Inscriptions vel tituli theatri amplissimi, completentis rerum universitatis singulas materias et imaginex eximias. ut idem recte quoque dici possit: Promptuarium artificiosarum miraculosarumque rerum, ac omnis, rari thesauri et pretiosae supellectilis, structurae atque picture, que bis simul in theatre conquiri consultantur, ut eorum frequenti inspectione tractationeque, singularis aliqua rerum cognitio et prudentia admiranda, cito, facile ac tuto comparari possit. autore Samuele à QUICCHEBERG BELGA”.
English translation (transl. by Meadow et al. 2013): “Inscriptions or Titles of the Most Ample Theatre That Houses Exemplary Objects and Exceptional Images of the Entire World, So That One Could Also Rightly Call It a: Repository of artificial and marvellous things, and of every rare treasure, precious object, construction, and picture. It is recommended that these things be brought together here in the theatre so that by their frequent viewing and handling one might quickly, easily, and confidently be able to acquire a unique knowledge and admirable understandings of things. Authored by Samuel QUICCHEBERG FROM THE LOW COUNTRIES (Meadow et al. 2013, pp. 60ff).
61 Grinke 2006, pp. 10ff.
still exists.\textsuperscript{62} Paul Grinke and Ben Kaden even propose a kind of ‘revival’ of the cabinet of curiosities in the context of this century’s non-systematical age characterized by ‘mismatching’ and ‘crossover’.\textsuperscript{63} It seems no coincidence that the curator of the exhibition in question of the present research, Andreas Beyer, has used the latter term repeatedly.\textsuperscript{64} Christine Davenne’s publication approaches different types of cabinets of curiosities throughout Europe, illustrating how widely different the concept of the \textit{Wunderkammer} can be conceived of and how it has been re-adapted since the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. Among a few exemplary Renaissance cabinets, Davenne also lists contemporary exhibitions and individual artworks as modern manifestations of the cabinet of wonders.\textsuperscript{65} Gabriele Beßler, moreover, has taken the \textit{Wunderkammer} as concept to examine perceptual phenomena at large, such as contemporary stage areas.\textsuperscript{66} Beßler has also proposed that, in order to apply the concept of the \textit{Wunderkammer} to contemporary manifestations, it must be comprehensively unfolded first. The concept is only adaptable if one understands what early modern collections of curiosities implied historically and still implies today.\textsuperscript{67}

Following the exhibition catalogue and several reviews, the Dreyfus-Best collection can rightfully be compared to a modern cabinet of curiosities.\textsuperscript{68} The analogy between the collection’s transition into the public realm of the Kunstmuseum Basel and the historical shift from private cabinet to public museum supports this proposition too. The historical correlation therefore serves as starting point for a theoretical analysis of the ordering structure and curatorial concept of the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel.

Since authors such as Davenne, Grinke and Kaden encourage the idea of the general survival/revival of the cabinets of curiosities\textsuperscript{69}, a comparative analysis will position the Dreyfus-Best collection and its exhibition situation within the different forms of \textit{Wunderkammern}, which are present today. In this context, both Marta Gnyp and Gabriele Beßler refer to Thomas Olbricht’s collection, which is housed in its own purpose built

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{62} Grinke 2006, p. 12.
\bibitem{63} Grinke 2006; Kaden 2012, p. 29.
\bibitem{64} Beyer et al. 2014, p. 14; Beyer 2015.
\bibitem{65} For example: \textit{Archive Box 1} by Ron Pippin, 1998 or \textit{Personnes} by Christian Boltanski, 2010, whose installation was exhibited at \textit{Monumenta} at the Grand Palais Paris, France, 2010; see: Davenne 2012, p. 210; p. 217.
\bibitem{66} Beßler 2012.
\bibitem{67} \textit{Ibidem}, p. 14.
\bibitem{68} Becker 2014; Beyer et al. 2014, p. 14; Preuss 2014, p. 25; Suter 2014.
\bibitem{69} Davenne 2012; Grinke 2006; Kaden 2012.
\end{thebibliography}
private museum – the *me Collectors Room* – in Berlin, Germany, since 2010, as a contemporary example of a modern *Wunderkammer*. While Gnyp investigates the collection’s characteristics in the light of the private museum boom,70 Beßler examines the exhibition spaces as a form of modern cabinet of curiosities.71 It is however Olbricht’s temporary exhibition *Lebenslust & Totentanz* at the Kunsthalle Krems in Austria, which is based on similar premises like the Dreyfus-Best collection at the Kunstmuseum Basel. Also the exhibition catalogue and a few articles suggest that the arrangement in Krems could be considered a *Wunderkammer*.72 These similarities allow for a comparative study in order to investigate the modern cabinet as possible exhibition concept.

### 1.3 Ordering Structures

As Samuel Quiccheberg observed in this treatise *Inscriptiones vel tituli theatri amplissimi*, the 16th century cabinet of curiosities, such as Quiccheberg’s ideal museum-theatre, is constituted by a particular order.73 To the untrained eye often appearing as chaotic and haphazard, scholars have tried to enclose the *Wunderkammer*’s structures between beyond the artefacts’ obvious and visible connections. Based on these specific structures, Koji Kuwakino’s article on Quiccheberg draws a comparison between the arrangement of the collection and the *ars rhetorica* and *memoria*, suggesting that beyond their similar proposals in execution of form as modified amphitheatre, the *Inscriptiones* could be considered an instruction manual for a memory theatre such as Giulio Camillo’s (1480-1544) *Il Teatro della Sapientia* (1530).74

While Horst Bredekamp identifies the cabinet’s general order as a sequence of themes and interests, namely forms of nature, antique sculpture, artworks and machines75, others divide the age of the *Wunderkammer* into two successive phases: the 16th century cabinet of emblematic order and the classifying cabinet of the mid-17th century.76 Particularly William B. Ashworth has linked the 16th century cabinet to an emblematic way of thinking and creating knowledge. His proposal concurs with Michel

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70 Gnyp 2015.
72 Schoppmann et al. 2010; Preuss 2010; Wiensowski 2010.
73 Meadow et al. 2013.
74 Kuwakino 2013, pp. 306ff.
75 Bredekamp 2000.
76 E.g. Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Bennett 1996, a.o.
Foucault’s position in *The Order of Things*, where Foucault suggests that after 1650, people abruptly ceased to think in terms of associations and similitudes as ordering principles and started to look at their collections in other ways.  

The structures of the 16th century *Wunderkammer* have been linked to the Foucauldian Renaissance *episteme*, evoking specific forms of similarities, thus forming correlations and interdependencies between objects and things. In particular, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill revives Foucault’s theories and applies them in a more pragmatic way to describe the 16th century *Wunderkammer* and thereby also the origins of the museum. Explaining how the world and all its things were conceived of as being infinitely related in many different ways, Hooper-Greenhill stresses the Renaissance *episteme*’s inherent hidden relationships, comparable to the emblematic way of thinking proposed by William B. Ashworth. The interrelated concepts of both the emblem and *episteme* will serve as theoretical foundation to examine the Dreyfus-Best collection in the context of the exhibition and analyze its specific order and structure as presented at the Kunstmuseum Basel.

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77 Ashworth 1996, pp. 35f; Foucault 2005.
78 Foucault 2005, pp. 20ff.
79 Hooper-Greenhill 1992, pp. 11ff; Ashworth 1996.
2. Private vs. Public Display

The brief outline of current debates has shown how broad the discussions are when the private exhibition context is confronted with the public. Although most accounts largely agree on the fact that the museum-landscape is shifting, there is a lack of detailed discussion as to why and how. This chapter’s aim is to provide answers to these questions by having a closer look at three crucial aspects concerning the opposition of private and public display. From a general standpoint, the following paragraphs will discuss the vastly changing museum-landscape (2.1), the historic shift from Wunderkammer to the birth of the museum (2.2) and finally, the transitional aspects of the increasing displacement of private collections into the public realm (2.3). These three aspects each allow for comparisons and conclusions to be drawn on the Dreyfus-Best collection.

2.1 The Vastly Changing Museum-Landscape Today

It has been widely acknowledged that the museum-landscape has changed remarkably during the last decade. The respective figures confirm this assumption: as the Private Art Museum Report states, a fifth of present private museums were founded within the last five years and there are currently more than 300 private contemporary art museums worldwide. This raises the question as to why this is the case. What are the reasons for the rapid increase of private collections on public display?

The Private Art Museum Report offers a quite optimistic explanation for the growth of private museums. According to the report, private museums are able to fill a gap, particularly in countries with limited institutional infrastructures. By contrast, more critical voices have suggested that reasons for the founding of private museums may include mere self-representation and tax benefits. Due to the remarkable increase of private museums, there is, moreover, a potential danger that quantity will ultimately overshadow the quality of public institutions. With limited funds, Dayla Alberge notes, public institutions are likely to suffer even more from private museums because prospective loans are included in the collector’s own public display.

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80 Private Art Museum Report, p. 3; p. 5.
81 Ibidem.
82 Baumgardner 2015.
83 Alberge 2010.
From a more neural point of view, Marta Gnyp illustrates how the rise of private museums correlates with the growing income of Ultra High Net Worth Individuals, since their increasing financial strength enables great investments like the establishment of personal museums or acquiring exhibition spaces. Moreover, private collectors can greatly profit from public exposure of their collections. Public visibility has become the main goal for private collections, establishing high artistic and market values, which is in turn highly profitable for the art market. Interviewed by Gnyp, some collectors have indicated that opening a private museum is a question of additional space, social exchange, education and the gesture of sharing with the public. Although these motivations do not directly reveal the reasons for the growth of private museums as such, they provide an adequate explanation for the founding of these exhibition spaces. Contrary to Baumgardner and Alberge’s standpoint, however, Gynp argues that despite the fact that many collectors are actually owners of private museums, they do not fail to engage or collaborate with public museums and institutions. Private and public efforts do not necessarily have to be in conflict. The author notes:

“A private space that presents exhibitions and engages with the public brings to mind a comparison with public museums. Collectors are aware of this contextualization and position themselves in relation to public institutions. Some collectors stressed that they do not have the intention to compete with public museums but use their private space only to add a personal vision.”

Accordingly, the private and public realm is expected to go hand in hand. As philanthropists, many private collectors take their role very seriously by actively lending and donating artworks to museums. The Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) estimated that private individuals donated more than 90% of American art collections held in public trust. Consequently, private ‘interferences’ into the public museum context can take on different forms. Personal holdings can be put on public display through loans (temporary or lifetime), temporary exhibitions and through private exhibition spaces such as the collector’s private estate or, of course, private museums made accessible for visitors.

84 Gnyp 2015, p. 206.
85 Ibidem, pp. 213ff; p. 237.
86 Ibidem, pp. 208ff.
88 Gnyp 2015, pp. 220f.
90 AAMD 2007, p. 1; see also: Private Art Museum Report, p. 7.
Most of the accounts discussed thus far are limited to the extent that they lack comprehensive terminological clarifications. There is no clear distinction between private museums and other forms of private collections on public display, for instance. While most accounts focus on private collections entering the public realm as newly founded private museums, there is no actual terminological conformity: authors either concentrate on the collector as museum-founder or on private museums only, while they do not directly convey that, most of the time, the collector as museum-founder is concurrently the founder of a private museum.\footnote{E.g. Goode 1895; Baumgardner 2015; Marks 2015; Ratnam 2013, a.o.} Moreover, most authors focus on private collections and museums of contemporary art.\footnote{E.g. Gnyp 2015 and Private Art Museum Report 2016, a.o.} According to the Private Art Museum Report, a private (contemporary) art museum must meet five requirements: it must be owned by a private individual; that person must be known as an art collector and display some of his/her collection in the institution; the museum must have a physical space; the museum must be publicly accessible, and the collector must still be alive.\footnote{Private Art Museum Report 2016.} According to this definition, the private collection is the backbone of a private museum. It is important to note, however, that by contrast, a private collection entering the public realm only temporarily is not necessarily part of a private museum.

Admittedly, private museums and other forms of public display of private collections, such as temporary exhibitions, loans or donations, share a similar basis: the collector’s motivation to share his or her artworks with the public. Yet, as Gnyp has suggested, the different reasons for sharing are not that single-sided and standardly cooperative.\footnote{Gnyp 2015, pp. 208ff.} The public display of private collections, irrespective of its specific form, can cause conflicts of interests and imbalances within the museum-landscape. While Christopher Knight acknowledges that museums would not exist if it weren’t for private collections, he proposes that, instead of temporary “vanity exhibitions” of private collections, long-term loans, while having the same effect, are more desirable, as they show artworks, which are otherwise not publicly accessible. The author closes by stating that it is for these particular reasons that some public institutions, such as the Museum for Modern Art in New York, have established policies to ensure that private collections cannot be exhibited as such.\footnote{Knight 2010.}
Instead of long-term loans or donations, setting up a private museum has become the model nowadays.\textsuperscript{96} Though, private loans, regardless of their duration, are still perceived as ambiguous.\textsuperscript{97} Raising different concerns, Thomas Marks notes:

“There’s certainly been a lot of clamour in recent years as to, on the one hand, whether collectors have some kind of duty to make artworks accessible, and on the other about what a museum’s ratification or stamp of approval for a private collection does to the autonomy/independence of that institution, and to the market value of the art.”\textsuperscript{98}

In conclusion, despite all critical views on the public display of private works, there are arguably still significant differences, which were not fully taken into consideration. There are a lot of different ways and reasons for private collectors to entrust their artworks to the public, having all their positive and negative aspects. The ambiguousness of the private collector’s involvement in the art world cannot be solved: both the collector and the public museum act in mutual interdependence. This becomes particularly evident when looking at the Dreyfus-Best collection. Based on this chapter’s findings, the collection clearly sets itself apart from a private museum. As temporary travelling exhibition, presenting one private collection as such, the shows in Venice and Basel could be understood as “vanity exhibitions” in Knight’s sense.\textsuperscript{99} Exhibiting Richard and Ulla Dreyfus-Best’s personal taste in art is not necessarily unproblematic. On the one hand, Ulla Dreyfus-Best is member of different foundation boards, amongst others of the Kunstmuseum Basel and the Guggenheim Foundation, which gives her significant joint decision-making power.\textsuperscript{100} On the other hand, museums greatly benefit from the collector due to temporary loans and regular donations. Whether Ulla Dreyfus-Best has ever considered opening her house for the general public or building a private museum is unclear. Instead, the collector explained in an interview with German magazine \textit{Du} her keen interest in sharing her artworks with renowned museums because she wants to ensure that the collection remains accessible. Collecting to her is a privilege and sharing

\textsuperscript{96} Reyburn 2015.
\textsuperscript{97} E.g. Marks 2015; Baumgardner 2015, a.o.
\textsuperscript{98} Marks 2015.
\textsuperscript{99} Knight 2010.
\textsuperscript{100} Spirgi 2015.
her works of art is a fundamental part of being a collector.\textsuperscript{101} “Artworks are loans for life”, Ulla Dreyfus-Best stated in another interview.\textsuperscript{102}

The museum-landscape is currently undergoing some significant changes due to the interaction between private and public stakeholders, who are linked and ultimately rely on each other. The give and take process between collector and museum can, moreover, be considered a historic given: starting in the Renaissance period, collectors were an essential part in founding today’s museum concept. The following chapter will further elaborate on the historic aspects of collecting.

2.2 Historic Aspect: From Private to Public Exhibition Spaces

Many of the critical or at least sceptical contributions on the recent private museum boom suggest that the resulting imbalance is something fairly novel. Recent articles titled ‘Private Collectors Get Into the Museum Business’\textsuperscript{103} or ‘Art collectors build museums to let public see private hoards’\textsuperscript{104} seem to suggest that the involvement of private collectors in the public museum sector is a new phenomenon. The historic context of the private collection as the museum’s predecessor is most of the time only insinuated if not simply overlooked. Especially the link between the current shift and the historic development from \textit{Wunderkammer} to museum has only been mentioned by a couple of authors.\textsuperscript{105}

In the following paragraphs it is argued that there are constitutive similarities between the shift occurring by the end of the 18th century and again today, particularly in terms of certain ruptures and imbalances, which, in each case, were caused by the fundamental changes of the private entering the public realm. The \textit{Private Art Museum Report} has emphasised the strong correlation between the historic background of private collections and cabinets and Europe’s highest percentage (45%) of publicly accessible private museums worldwide.\textsuperscript{106} A more detailed presentation of the \textit{Wunderkammer} and its development could allow for a better understanding of today’s issues between private and public display. The following paragraphs will thus provide a brief theoretical

\textsuperscript{101} Ich empfinde mich durch die Tatsache, dass ich sammeln kann, als privilegiert, und ich will auf keinen Fall, dass Kunstwerke für immer in einer Privatsammlung verschwinden und nicht mehr zugänglich sind – ich finde das asozial. Aus diesem Grund leite ich an renommierte Museen und Ausstellungen aus; für mich ist das eine Selbstverständlichkeit, auch wenn ich dann die Bilder vermisse.” (Kaiser 2010, p. 79).
\textsuperscript{102} “Kunstwerke sind Leihgaben auf Lebenszeit. Punkt und fertig!” (Spirgi 2015).
\textsuperscript{103} Reyburn 2015.
\textsuperscript{104} Alberge 2010.
\textsuperscript{105} E.g. Marks 2015 and Baumgardner 2015.
\textsuperscript{106} Private Art Museum Report, p. 20.
overview of the Wunderkammer’s development from the 16th century until the birth of the museum in the early 19th century.

Originating in Germany in the 16th century, the term ‘wundercammer’ was first mentioned by Count Froben Christoph of Zimmern (1519-1566) in the Zimmerische Chronik (1564-66), a family chronicle describing the lineage of the Swabian family Zimmern.107 The term reappears in Samuel Quiccheberg’s (1529-1567) Inscriptiones vel tituali theatri amplissimi in 1565.108 According to Beßler, it was Quiccheberg who observed that in the German region the term Kunstkammer, referring to artful objects only, was outdated. Wunderkammer instead applied to a repository of wondrous and curious things.109 Other terms such as studiolo, theatre or musaeum were commonly used to describe a physical space, where the collected objects were arranged and studied.110 These different notions can be brought together through their spacial dimension and architectural reference, serving, moreover, as metaphor for ordered structures, such as information and ideas. Kuwakino notes how “orderly physical spaces could form the basis for the organization of knowledge”.111 Starting in the 16th century, the organization and display of knowledge arose from either representational or humanistic aspirations. For this purpose, special rooms were installed where all kinds of artistic, natural, wondrous and curious objects were placed. The collector’s key objective, to attain a comprehensive, encyclopedic collection, reflected the image of the collection as a microcosm referring to the macrocosm that is God’s creation.112 The cabinets were considered to be models of “universal nature made private”.113 Although individual objects were precious for what they were, their true value seemed to lie in their specific arrangement. Until the 17th century these cabinets were understood as entity, in which endless interrelations between objects were made. Embedded in fixed locations, resemblances and similitudes determined the principal order of the Renaissance Wunderkammer.114 As MacGregor observed: “From a structural point of view, cabinet

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107 Koeppe 2002.
108 On Quiccheberg: Meadow et al. 2013, see also Beßler 2012, p. 78.
109 Beßler 2012, p. 78. According to this definition, the present thesis will mainly use the term Wunderkammer. In this context, the Kunstkammer on the other hand is regarded synonymous to the Wunderkammer, despite Quiccheberg’s potential objection. Since the latter however, particularly implies the curious and wondrous, the term is considered more accurate in the context of this research.
111 Kuwakino 2013, p. 303.
112 Beßler 2012, p. 15.
113 Hooper-Greenhill 1992, p. 78.
collections were not merely the products of contemporary styles of thought but represented, rather, their physical embodiment.”

On the verge of the 17th century these ‘irrational’ cabinets were taken apart because their structures couldn’t be understood anymore. Curiosity was set aside to bring true order to the haphazard Wunderkammer. A second collecting practice emerged from new Cartesian worldviews. Through measurements and hierarchical series, a classificatory table served as basic structure of knowledge. Instead of resemblances, the classical mind set things apart, differentiated and separated. Based on the century’s system of scientific thought, comparative studies became the collector’s main tool to organize and classify the chaos of collections. According to Hooper-Greenhill, the ruptures of the French Revolution “created the conditions of emergence of a new ‘truth’, a new rationality, out of which came a new functionality for a new institution, the public museum.”

The overall restructuring caused by the French Revolution lead to the decision that a museum should be created in the galleries of the old royal palace of the Louvre in Paris. In 1793, it opened its doors to the public for the first time. Until then, Bennett argues, collections in the Wunderkammer of the 16th and 17th century were presented in “socially enclosed spaces to which access was remarkably restricted.” Over the course of the late 18th and the early 19th century however, these limitations were increasingly dismissed. As Bennett illustrates: “The closed walls of museums […] should not blind us to the fact that they progressively opened their doors to permit free access to the population at large.” Particularly in the case of the French Revolution this meant that formerly enclosed properties were brought into a public domain: on the one hand, the

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115 MacGregor 2006, p. 11.
117 Ibidem, p. 16; see also Bennett 1996, p. 99.
118 Davenne 2012, pp. 15f.
119 It is important to note that there are earlier examples of more or less institutionalized museums before 1793. Private collections were made accessible through universities (for example the Amerbach Collection, Basel, in 1671; or the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in 1683), by academies (for example Bergamo, in 1780), or by churches and monasteries. In the context of the French Revolution, Hooper-Greenhill describes the conditions that facilitated the emergence of the institutionalized museum, which enabled the museum to function as a new disciplinary technology, producing new structures of knowledge, which, for the most part, encompass the main objectives of museums before 1793. Since Hooper-Greenhill follows the Foucauldian notion of ‘effective history’, which is characterized by ruptures rather than successive historical events, the present thesis chooses to follow her account, acknowledging that her singular focus excludes several earlier examples of museums, which were established before the French Revolution. Hooper-Greenhill 1989, pp. 63ff; see also Tzortzi 2016, pp. 15-17; MacGregor 2007, p. 41; and Bennett 1990.
121 Bennett 1990.
122 Ibidem.
vast collections of the aristocracy and the royal family were confiscated; on the other hand, a large amount of material and treasuries were later accumulated as trophies and war indemnities as Napoleon conquered Europe. More broadly, the government of the First Republic decided to take the various disciplines apart and re-allocate them in specialized individual collections in Paris: the scientific at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, the artistic at the Louvre, and the architectural at the Musée National des Monuments Français.

In sum, the evolution of collecting is characterized by two major changes: First, what the 16th century considered a microcosm of God's creation, where a singular physical space held all collected objects, ordered by resemblances and similitudes, was taken apart in the 17th century in order to reclassify its contents into individual orders and disciplines; even more so with the rise of the museum by the end of the 18th century. Second, with the museum’s consolidation, the collections were finally accessible for the public. Admittedly, the cabinets were never fully enclosed spaces, since guests and other collectors were sometimes invited like the engraving of Ferrante Imperato’s (c. 1525 – 1615) Museo would suggest (Fig. 4). However, the very concept of the museum entails public accessibility and serves as a new and communally benefitting technology to discipline and educate the people. These ruptures have contributed to characterizing the different forms of collecting throughout time as something disparate. Consequently, cabinets of curiosities are marked by imbalances, for instance, because of their limited accessibility, forging an “elitist culture of collectors and scholars”.

Both historical turning points, which have changed the collections’ display methods and accessibility, are based on similar premises as today’s shift in the art world. The current ruptures and imbalances caused by the increase of private collections on public display are a reoccurring feature of structural changes due to newly emerging cultures of collecting. Yet, a crucial difference between now and then lays in the epistemological value that is attached to contrasting extents. While the structural changes of the Wunderkammer began with the production of knowledge, today it could be considered the other way round: knowledge production is neither the starting point of collecting nor an obligatory side effect, meaning that nowadays the collection

124 Davenne 2012, p. 16.
126 Davenne 2012, p. 16.
Figure 4: Frontispiece for Ferrante Imperato, Dell’Historia Naturale (Naples 1599)
The figure on the right, holding a stick and pointing at the ceiling seems to explain something to the two men standing on his right and left. The other figure near the window could be interpreted as Ferrante Imperato himself, as he listens to the stories his guests are being told about his Museo.

might serve the public in terms of creating new knowledge – however, not necessarily.

Nonetheless, while critics have partially acknowledged that the present shift is structurally related to the collection’s historic development, they mostly ignore the similarities in terms of the resulting imbalances. Has the label “elitist culture of collectors” ever been as topical as today? Taking the private into the public domain, whether in the context of a Renaissance cabinet of curiosities or today’s temporary loan, comes with a kind of inequality. At the same time, it is often overlooked that the collecting practice is ultimately characterized by continuity, despite all (re-)occurring changes. As Hooper-Greenhill points out:

“The accumulations and exposition of objects can be seen as an enduring activity with a long history, although the identities and uses of these accumulations have been subject to abrupt changes. […] ‘[C]ollections’ and ‘museums’ take in contingent identities according to shifts and reversals in both the relation of forces and the random play of events.”

To conclude, referring back to the development from *Wunderkammer* to museum from today’s point of view can facilitate the understanding that, on the one hand, changing collecting practices can bring the existing system out of balance. Whereas cabinets of curiosities and the museum are mostly introduced as consecutive and opposing concepts, they are united by the continuity of collecting on a more general level. On the other hand, it is therefore possible to explain why currently similar shifts from private to public exhibition spaces can be considered a reoccurrence. In a similar way, Davenne proposes that the wondrous and curious were never fully erased and were always considered, in one way or another, to serve as an alternative way of thinking. In this context, she considers the emergence of Impressionism or even Cubism as modern phenomena of a continuous confrontation with the curious.\(^{128}\)

Following Davenne’s account, the *Wunderkammer* remains a relevant concept and can still count as useful approach to current collections and exhibitions. To that end, the *Wunderkammer* can be appropriated in modern times. As long as the cabinet of curiosities is understood as a continuing concept, the comparison between the Dreyfus-Best collection and a modern form of cabinet of curiosities can be upheld. The historic development from private to public exhibition space has shown, moreover, that displays intended for the private realm are differently structured than for a public audience. Just like the museum’s reorganization in the late 18\(^{th}\) century, the Dreyfus-Best collection had to undergo some structural changes. It is therefore important to note that the collection’s transition to the Peggy Guggenheim Foundation and the Kunstmuseum Basel entailed a restructuring process in order to make the unapproachable approachable and understandable for public. The following chapter will have a closer look at the ‘translation process’ and will examine a practical concept as to how the transition can be approached from a curatorial standpoint.

### 2.3 Transitional Aspect: Making the Private Understandable for the Public

The previous paragraphs have illustrated how historical shifts in terms of order and accessibility have defined today’s museum-landscape. Furthermore, it has been argued that current changes, which made private collections more public than ever, strongly

\(^{128}\) Davenne 2012, pp. 24ff.
correlate with the long history of collecting. While several authors have appealed to today’s transition of private collections going public, the practical means to ensure that the artworks and objects on show are understood in the right, or at least in the intended way have not been analysed comprehensively so far. Personal wealth needs to be showcased in a way that the public can grasp the idea of collecting, as well as the fundamental differences between showcasing the collector’s artworks in his or her own living room or at a museum. Transitioning a collection between the private and public domain is the main challenge for the museum, curator and collector. Barrett reveals the issues at stake when the private goes public: “In ‘going public’ is the personal lost in the hunt for public value, or is it public appeal which gives such private collections a new validity?”

The transitional aspect of making the private understandable for the public is considered a challenge as the controversial nature of the exchange between private and public, which Barrett insinuated above, could partly be traced back to failed transitions. Surely, it is the effort of various stakeholders, such as collectors, curators, institutions and sponsors, to facilitate the shift from private to public. Their specific involvement varies from case to case. Although all of these different positions and their impact have not been analysed, the present research proposes to focus on the role of the curator only.

To use the words of Ryan Wong: “The liaisons between the world of collection and the exhibition are curators.” In his article, Wong discusses the curator’s role, reflecting upon the consequences for the curator’s involvement with both public museums and private collections. He raises concerns about conflict of interests of curators entrusted with public institutions that are too closely involved with donors and collectors. These considerations are put into perspective when Wong notes that partnerships between curator and collector are indeed alarming but have also created a more fluid border for museum sovereignty. He concludes:

“Collecting, then, might be seen as its own sort of curatorial project. In the past, collecting shaped taste. Today, with the growth of these programs and open relationships with museums, such partnerships might seem a natural part of the way the system functions.”

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129 E.g. Baumgardner 2015; Marks 2015; Ratnam 2013 a.o.
130 Barrett 2014.
131 Wong 2014.
132 Ibidem.
The collector’s participation in the museum business has had its consequences – the current private museum boom being one of them. This, however, does not free the curator from his function to find a way to link the collector’s vision with expert knowledge and awareness for the public when he is tasked with curating an exhibition. With regard to the Dreyfus-Best collection and For Your Eyes Only, curator Andreas Beyer has played an important role in combining his art historical expertise and the collectors’ personal taste with the subject to present a selection of artefacts in a new context. In close collaboration with Ulla Dreyfus-Best, it was also Beyer’s proposition to put the collection on public display.\textsuperscript{133}

The transition from a private to public exhibition setting is ultimately characterized by strategies of placement.\textsuperscript{134} The formerly enclosed needs to be laid out in order to make it understandable for the public. By making something intelligible for a general audience, the curator has to implement narratives in form of a story, chronology, different themes or groupings in order to guide the visitor through the exhibition. The private is made understandable for the public by referring to the latter’s existing knowledge – a recognition effect – or, for instance, by appealing to the visitor's sense of esthetics.\textsuperscript{135} To a certain extent, the intention and obligation to educate the public can have an impact on the transition’s final formulation. As Gnyp has illustrated, private collectors who open their own museum may have educational aspirations.\textsuperscript{136} In addition to specific educational programs, such as workshops or guided tours, an exhibition needs to convey some kind of message, which the visitor is able to extract.

In sum, the curator is responsible to impose a certain order on something yet unordered, subjective and personal. While collectors cannot always explain why they collect what they do, it is the curator’s mission to find a reasonable context for the individual works of art and reveal their epistemological force to a public audience. In analysing the Dreyfus-Best collection in its private and public setting, the specific transitional aspects will be outlined, aiming to gain detailed insight on the constitutional differences between both display settings as well as an understanding of the curatorial concept, implemented at the Kunstmuseum Basel.

\textsuperscript{133} Beyer 2015.
\textsuperscript{134} Moser 2010, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{135} Barrett 2014.
\textsuperscript{136} Gnyp 2015, pp. 210ff.
3. Analyzing the Dreyfus-Best Collection

The following chapter seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of the Dreyfus-Best collection and the exhibition *For Your Eyes Only* at the Kunstmuseum Basel. So far, neither the Dreyfus-Best collection, nor its public display has been investigated thoroughly. After presenting the methodological approach adopted for the present analysis, the collection is examined in its private setting as well as in the context of the exhibition. As to the latter, particular emphasis is put on the first room (*Fig. 2*), because of its exemplary character for both the collection and the over-all exhibition concept. Further, the ‘official’ curatorial concept will be traced and examined with a view to providing an insight into the chronological and thematic order through which the objects were arranged.137 Accordingly, a few of the implemented themes will be discussed in more detail.

3.1 Methodological Approach

“If the significance of an individual work is determined anywhere, then it is by the place that it is assigned among other works.”138 Deborah J. Meijers’ statement on exhibition making points out how the individual work of art can only gain significance in relation to the objects surrounding it. Equally important, however, is the space in-between the objects and the overall exhibition situation, including factors such as architectural features, room layouts and introductory texts, to name just a few.139

The following paragraphs will briefly outline all of these significant variables, which constitute an exhibition as a whole. In order to facilitate the analysis of the Dreyfus-Best collection it is proposed to follow Stephanie Moser’s article ‘The Devil is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge’.140 The article could function as a methodological instruction manual, on how to approach and analyze museum exhibitions and displays most effectively and accurately. Moser’s analytical method provides an encompassing view by dividing all given facts of an exhibition into individual variables. She submits the following categories for analysis: architecture,

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137 Beyer 2015; Beyer et al. 2014.
139 Moser 2010.
140 *Ibidem.*
location, setting; space; design, color, light; subject, message, text; layout; display types; exhibition style; audience and reception. In order to apply these principles in the next part of the present study, Moser’s approach will be shortly illustrated.

First, the architectural setting and the surroundings of the exhibition’s location as such are considered. The physical reality, architectural presence and the exhibition’s location all convey messages about the content. Architecture has its own iconography, which creates corresponding expectations for the visitor. The different types of museum buildings, for instance, can create certain prospects. It is important to examine whether the display inside relates historically and culturally to the architectural site and whether the style of the building emphasizes a cultural contrast between the custodian of the collection and the objects on display.

The space in which exhibitions are laid out has a fundamental impact on how the display is perceived. The spaces determine how the visitors walk around and how they experience the exhibition. The sizes and shapes of the exhibition spaces are defining factors, since they constitute direction and, depending on the site, divide the exhibition into different parts and subparts. Different types of spaces can also correspond to different parts or types of exhibitions.

Design, color and light determine how the exhibition is perceived from the inside. Similarly to the architectural settings, the features of the exhibition’s interior can either reinforce or contradict the exhibition message and the cultural status of the artifacts on display. Moreover, the way design schemes esthetically relate to the objects on display can, in the best case, trigger associations that underline the implemented storyline. Display furniture, specific color schemes and the use of light all create an atmosphere on a visual and even emotional level.

The next category – subject, message text – refers to the textual accompaniments of an exhibition. One needs to consider the style of writing and how this can affect the over-all perception. As ‘didactic aids’, the textual components of an exhibition can even impart meanings of objects, depending on how they are written and for whom. The aim of text used in the exhibition needs to be analyzed, whether it is written in an

143 Ibidem, pp. 24-25.
informative, descriptive or interpretive way. This gives also an indication as to the type of audience that is targeted.\textsuperscript{145}

In order to generate meaning, the different components of an exhibition are laid out in a specific manner. The layout conveys the exhibition’s structure and spatial distribution. Through strategies of placement whole collections can refer to a specific narrative that the exhibition intends to render. As Moser states: “The distribution of the components of the display and their relationship to each other is in itself a narrative that visitors subconsciously ‘read’ when they move through an exhibition.”\textsuperscript{146} Moreover, determined by the layout, associations or alignments between objects can construe the overall message of the exhibition.\textsuperscript{147}

Throughout the history of exhibiting works of art, different display types have contributed significantly to the way an exhibition was and still can be defined. They can, furthermore, function as interpretative aids as means to contextualize the objects on display. The wide range of different types of display not only includes original artifacts, but also reproductions, graphics models, audio-visuals or interactives, for instance.\textsuperscript{148}

More generally, the exhibition as such normally refers to a specific type or style. Moser explains: “Establishing the nature of this style is critical to any museum analysis.”\textsuperscript{149} The distinction between idea-oriented or object-led exhibitions determines the exhibition’s focus on either a thematic exhibition or showcasing a collection. Other types are didactic, exploring or esthetic styles of exhibiting.\textsuperscript{150}

Lastly, the ways in which the visitor engages with the displays and defines them need to be analyzed. Audiences are a part of defining the displays and are therefore examined closely in visitor studies.\textsuperscript{151}

Together, these factors all form an intricate web of formal relations. With these analytical tools, Moser illustrates how displays can generate meaning and therefore function as “key epistemic devices”.\textsuperscript{152} As the specific ways of displaying the Dreyfus-Best collection, both in the private and public domain, have created their individual system of meaning-making, Moser’s methodological approach for analyzing both settings is very suitable.

\textsuperscript{145} Moser 2010, pp. 26-27.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibidem, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibidem, pp. 27-28.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibidem, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibidem, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibidem, pp. 28-30.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibidem, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibidem.
Although she focuses, to a large extent, exclusively on museum exhibitions her methodology applies to other forms of displays too. In the case of the Dreyfus-Best’s installation at their private estate, the different variables should not necessarily be read as intentional choices or conscious implementations, but as basic means to interpret the collection’s initial position. A brief comparative analysis can highlight the constitutive differences between the collection’s displays at home and at the museum. Since the present study focuses on the collection’s order and its underlying ordering structures in particular, neither the textual components, nor a visitor study will be included. It is therefore suggested that only the categories architecture, location, setting; space; design, color, light; layout; display type; and exhibition style will be taken into account. The narrative and message of the exhibition will, moreover, be discussed in Chapter 3.3 (Thematic Structures).

Due to the sheer size of the Dreyfus-Best estate and the large number of artifacts installed, the analysis will mostly focus on one room. Although the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel incorporated only about 70% of the total works of art, even then, the works had to be shown across five large rooms of the museum. In order to compare both the private and public realm, three recurring works of art were chosen as the analysis’ common denominators. They are installed in the Dreyfus-Best’s living room (Fig. 5) as well as in the first room of the exhibition: Le brûle-parfum (1885-1890) by Odilon Redon (Fig. 6), a 12th century Aeolipile (Fig. 7), and René Magritte’s Le Bouquet tout fait (1956) (Fig. 8). By contrasting the installation methods of the private and public setting, newly implemented structures can be revealed. At the same time, the transitional aspects of bringing the private into the public can be illustrated.

3.2 Analysis

3.2.1 The Collection

As private collectors, Ulla and Richard Dreyfus-Best have stored a great part of their artworks at their own home and therefore Ulla lives surrounded by their acquisitions.

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153 It must be added that because of the lack of textual components and no public accessibility to the collectors’ estate, it is impossible to examine both of these categories at the Dreyfus-Best’s private home.

154 Beyer 2015.
The collection thus relates directly to its owners. The spaces in which the collection is kept are essentially average sized rooms in a one-family house. From the stairwell (Fig. 1) to the living room (Fig. 5), all living areas in the house are hung with works of art, resulting in a more or less equal distribution of objects per room or area. The furniture and features follow the rooms’ function: the living room includes a velvet corner sofa and additional seating, a coffee table, a small dresser and a fireplace. However, it is unclear whether the functionality also corresponds to its true utility – the antlers on the sofa would suggest that this seating accommodation is not used regularly.\footnote{Or the antlers might have been placed there for the purpose of the photograph.} The decoration style in the living room is rather conservative and antiquated. In addition to the furniture, other details such as lamps and candleholders are old-fashioned too. The walls and ceiling are covered with green velvet wallpaper, whereas the remaining features, such as curtains or additional furnishing correspond to this color scheme. The use of color also evokes associations of an antique salon, rather than a contemporary living room. The large window on the left side of the room serves as main light source. The only artificial light is attached to the large painting in the middle of the room. At least during the day, the natural light does not single out any of the works, which are thus more or less equally accentuated. The distribution of the paintings and artifacts on the
front wall is virtually symmetrical: in the middle a large-sized 17th century painting by Jacob Isaacsz. van Swanenburg (1571-1638) is flanked by two smaller painting in the style of Giuseppe Arcimboldo (c. 1526-1593) and Odilon Redon’s *Brûle-parfum* (Fig. 6). Underneath Van Swanenburg’s painting of the underworld four small-format drawings are installed. On a wooden dresser in the corner of the room a 12th century bronze sculpture of a so-called *Aeolipile* (Fig. 7) is displayed. On the right wall a Venetian vitrine with miniature books and a painting after Monsù Desiderio (c. 1593-1644) are displayed. A Narwhale tusk, René Magritte’s (1898-1967) *Le bouquet tout fait* from 1956 (Fig. 8) and two small drawings embellish the right wall. Apart from these works, there are a few smaller artifacts hung on the walls or set above the fireplace. All in all, the installation is mostly limited to works hanging on the walls. Accordingly, the walls are rather crowded, as the works are hung close to each other without disclosing any kind of recognizable pattern, apart from the symmetrical arrangement on the front wall. The display style is clearly object-led and corresponds closest to the tradition of the salon-hang, which refers to an especially narrow array of works.

There is no apparent narrative or order that would elucidate the composition of works with regard to the function of the living room or create any formal or thematic interrelations between the works. Only the symmetrical arrangement of the front wall includes a male and female profile in the style of Arcimboldo, facing each other, while Jacob Isaacsz. van Swanenburg’s painting hangs in-between them. The three drawings below Van Swanenburg’s painting are arranged as individual, symmetrical grouping with two mirroring red passe-partouts flanking a slightly bigger centerpiece. Apart from a few similarities between the works as to painter, dating or depiction, the room appears to be led by dissimilarities and oppositions. The display seems random and guided by the collector’s taste only. At the same time, the installation’s arbitrariness alludes to the wonderous and is far from what one expects a living room to be. The antique furnishings of the room and the exhibition style render the objects even more curious.\textsuperscript{156} The entire arrangement of furniture and artworks seems highly artificial. It seems hard to believe that somebody would actually live in this room by sitting down on one of the antique seats, which results in an exhibition-like feel. As consequence, it would appear to be a logical conclusion that the installation at the Dreyfus-Best estate could be adopted as such when entering the public domain. The analysis of the exhibition in the following paragraphs will, however, reveal a completely novel arrangement at the museum.

\textsuperscript{156} Moser 2010, pp. 25f.
Figure 6: Odilon Redon, *Le brûle-parfum* (1885-1890)
Figure 7: St finishing Lagerensis, Aeolipile (c. beginning of 12th century)
Figure 8: René Magritte, *Le Bouquet tout fait* (1956)
3.2.2 The Exhibition

The Kunstmuseum Basel owes great parts of today’s public art collection to the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Amerbach Kabinett. Its collection had been enhanced by several great donations from the Council and private donors and has been publicly accessible since 1671. Since 1936, the collection of the Kunstmuseum moved into its own purpose-built, three-storey building, where the works of art are still showcased today.\textsuperscript{157}

Comparing the architecture of the museum and its permanent collection to the exhibition \textit{For Your Eyes Only: A Private Collection, from Mannerism to Surrealism}, a few contradictions are unfolded. The 20\textsuperscript{th} century building encounters a very classic display style, traversed by a wide range of paintings, which not necessarily correspond to the monumental, yet simple and light building of the Kunstmuseum. However, the entrance to the temporary exhibition (Fig. 9) operates as passageway from the bright museum architecture to the darker display adopted for this particular show. The museum’s usual display of its own collection is clearly contrasted by the exhibition style of \textit{For Your Eyes Only}, emphasizing that the presentation comprises artifacts, normally not exhibited in the museum.

On the second floor, the exhibition area is distributed over five consecutive rooms. Due to the more or less similar sizes of the rooms, there is no division into primary or secondary display spaces. This unity highlights the fact that the exhibition consists of one collection and should only be understood as such. The entrance (Fig. 9) is clearly marked as starting point of the exhibition as it literally opens the doors to the first room. Topped off by Arnold Böcklin’s (1827-1901) \textit{Shield of Medusa} (1887), the entrance presents an introductory text in German, French and English. When walking into the first room of the exhibition, a barrier blocks the visitor’s direct view (Fig. 10). This ‘membrane’ reminds the viewer yet again that he/she is not entering a part of the Kunstmuseum’s public art collection but a private collection instead.\textsuperscript{158} The barrier depicts the salon at the Dreyfus-Best’s home in its true size as reference to the origin of the works.

\textsuperscript{157} Just recently, the Kunstmuseum Basel opened an additional museum complex on the opposite side of the street and is connected with the main building through an underground tunnel. Basel architects Christ & Gantenbein have built the extension mainly to house the temporary exhibitions. It therefore disburdens the main building, which will now concentrate exclusively on showcasing the Kunstmuseum’s rich collection. In 2014, the collections as well as the temporary shows were all housed in the original building. Accordingly, the following analysis will not take the new building into consideration. On the history of the Kunstmuseum see: Mendes Bürgi et al. 2011.

\textsuperscript{158} Beyer 2015.
As the visitor walks around the barrier, he/she is able to see the entire first room (Fig. 2) and its arrangement of works. Apart from the barrier, there is no additional decoration in the room, neither seats nor freestanding showcases or bases. In the middle of the room, Jeff Koons’ (*1955) *Wrecking Ball* (2002) is hanging from the ceiling. For security reasons, small metal wire fencing surrounds the installation. Other than that, the artworks and objects are all hung and installed on the walls. Decoration is very low-key and simple, emphasizing above all the installation of the objects. Prominent are only the differently colored walls, which range from red, like in the first and second room, to two different shades of blue for the fourth and fifth. Only the third room has very simple white walls. The colors of the walls are, however, not used as neutral backdrops. The different colorings were chosen to elicit a specific response from visitors. The red walls in the first exhibition space evoke associations of something historical and significant.\(^\text{159}\)

At the same time, having all walls painted in red, alludes to a playful way to unify the otherwise highly diverse works of art exhibited in this first room. The lighting throughout the exhibition changes, depending on what is exhibited. The light in the first room is dimmed, since there is no main light source. Individual spots for each object are installed, singling out each work against the otherwise dark background. In essence, the sparsely lit room creates a distinct and intriguing atmosphere. As Moser has suggested “darkly lit rooms […] can promote a sense of wonderment and serve to define objects as mysterious and intriguing.”\(^\text{160}\)

As for the display of the individual works, there is no obvious pattern. All works of art are hung in regular intervals, yet, not always on the same height. The objects are not directly associated with each other via a particular formation. Only the sidewalls each display a painting by Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741-1825) and are thus echoing each other. On the left wall a cluster of framed bone reliquaries are paired with a few of Ben Vautier’s (*1935) slogans. On the back of the photographic barrier, a *gobelin* showing a unicorn in a virgin’s lap (c. 1561) is installed underneath a ‘unicorn horn’, a widespread Renaissance artifact, which was considered proof of the existence of unicorns, while the tusk actually belonged to Narwhales. Else, there are no directly visible interrelations between the objects. Chronology, textual or formal features are more or less disregarded in the first room – similar to the situation encountered at the Dreyfus-Best’s living room.

\(^{159}\) Moser 2010.
Figure 9: Installation view For Your Eyes Only: A Private Collection, from Mannerism to Surrealism at Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, 2014 (Entrance)

Figure 10: Installation view For Your Eyes Only: A Private Collection, from Mannerism to Surrealism at Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, 2014 (Barrier in room 1)
The other rooms follow more obvious thematic orders, such as the underworld and witchcraft, heads and skulls (Fig. 3) or a room entirely dedicated to surrealist paintings. In contrast, the layout of the first room does not give any indication as to the connection between the objects or their central focus (apart from the collectors they have in common). Consequently, it is only the first room, which does not directly relate to one main theme or period. Yet, due to the esthetic features, such as the coloring of the room, the lighting strategies and the wide range of artworks, the exhibition, and above all the first room, allude to the notion of the curious without directly copying an exemplary setting of a Renaissance cabinet, for instance.\(^{161}\) The curious character of the display features is thus introduced as a means to raise awareness of the collection’s wide-ranging diversity and the usually privatized setting of the Dreyfus-Best collection.

As there are no additional display types used in the exhibition, the display of the artworks stands on its own. The exhibition style corresponds to an object-led presentation, designed to encourage the visitors’ engagement with the objects and their exploration throughout the rooms.\(^{162}\) At the same time, the exhibition is constructed as an esthetical display of artifacts and thus highlights the visual impact of each object. In essence, each object is given its individual space without the need to compare it to the works next to it, therefore emphasizing the unparalleled beauty and unique nature of each individual artwork.

### 3.3 The Exhibition’s Thematic Structures

Although the means of display have been analyzed above, the curator’s take on the exhibition in terms of the exhibition’s storyline has not been examined yet. What was characterized above as heterogenic and discontinuing is part of the curatorial concept. The following paragraphs investigate the ‘official’ narrative, which Andreas Beyer has implemented at the Kunstmuseum Basel, linking the exhibition analysis with the curator’s intentions.

According to Beyer, the exhibition’s main storyline is that of a kind of Mannerism, not restricted by a specific time, epoch or space.\(^ {163}\) Mannerism, in this context, is to be understood beyond its origins in the 16\(^{th}\) century Italian Renaissance as

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\(^{161}\) Moser 2010.

\(^{162}\) Ibidem, p. 29.

\(^{163}\) Beyer 2015; Beyer et al. 2014.
powerful habitus rather than a mere style. It refers to the fact that art ultimately is derived from art, continuously referencing itself and highly self-reflexive. For Beyer, Mannerism is a means to structure the diverse works of art under one common principle. Acknowledging the Dreyfus-Best collection’s characteristic diversity, the exhibition’s aim is to find coherency in the collection’s contingency: hidden relationships and Mannerist references between the artworks are supposed to come to light.\textsuperscript{164} In the first room the curator mostly abandons the traditional chronological arrangement and aims to reveal correspondences between the exhibited objects without referring to a specific date, genre or provenance. The exhibition display is in this sense ahistorical and emphasizes the continuity of art and their references to each other, rather than attributing the objects to singular art historical periods.\textsuperscript{165}

The references are mostly thematic. While Mannerism is the overall guiding principle, the curator has issued several key themes that determine individual rooms (heads and skulls, surrealism etc.) but are also spread across the exhibition spaces as a web of references. As the analysis has shown, these themes are not particularly obvious. Although the title of the exhibition includes a textual reference to the styles of Mannerism and Surrealism, the further thematic ordering structures reveal themselves only at second sight – or maybe even on a subconscious level only. Beyer’s retrospective view on the exhibition, presented in 2015 at the University of Bielefeld, explains how the first room appeals to many of the recurring themes throughout the exhibition. Jeff Koon’s centerpiece called \textit{Wrecking Ball}, is, indeed, a red wrecking ball hanging from the ceiling. The term ‘wrecking’ refers to the practice of taking stranded goods that were washed ashore. The inflatable pool toys hanging from the sculpture allude to this notion as well. Looking deceptively like common plastic toys, the sculpture is actually made out of polychrome aluminum and rubber-coated stainless steel. Koon’s sculpture introduces two main aspects to the exhibition: on the one hand, the beauty of illusions and, on the other hand, the Dreyfus-Best collection as symbolical ‘shore of images’.\textsuperscript{166} Corresponding to the idea of the shore, the left wall exhibits Johann Heinrich Füssli’s \textit{The Shipwreck of Odysseus} (1805-1810). Further stranded goods include the two narwhale tusks, one of which is displayed in the left corner next to the bone reliquaries and the other above a woven wall hanging, depicting a maiden with unicorn. The 16\textsuperscript{th} century tapestry thus

\textsuperscript{164} Beyer 2015.
\textsuperscript{165} Meijers 1996, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{166} Beyer calls it a “Bilderstrand”, Beyer 2015.
refers to the myth of the unicorn and its alleged existence, as the analysis has already pointed out. Similar to the unicorn’s horn, the right wall displays Not Vital’s (*1948) bronze deer antlers, which, in turn, exemplify the Mannerist gesture of the artificial competing with the natural form of things. The Füssli painting next to the antlers – *Romeo and Juliet* (1809) – refers back to the Füssli’s *Odysseus* on the other wall. As “line of beauty”\textsuperscript{167}, Johann Heinrich Füssli’s paintings are distributed across all of the exhibition rooms as one of the common themes. Refering to the continuity of art and its lasting preoccupation with its own motives, Magritte’s *Le Bouquet tout fait* (1956) incorporates Sandro Botticelli’s (1445-1510) *Primavera* (c. 1458), the Allegory of Spring. The self-reference of art is, moreover, inscribed in the bronze *Aeolipile*, whose inscription turns the automaton into a talking depiction of its own maker, as it reveals “The artist Stefanus Lagerensis made me”.\textsuperscript{168} Beyer illustrates how the hollow bronze sculpture was placed above fire and filled with water through a hole in its back in order to set the kneeling figure in motion.\textsuperscript{169} Whether the *Aeolipile* was originally used as toy or as commodity is unclear. Further, its mystery and uniqueness corresponds to Odilon Redon’s *Le brûle-parfum* through associations of steam, smoke and the mysterious. At the same time, Man Ray’s (1890-1976) *Gift* from 1921, a bronze cast of a common flat iron, which due to a row of nails coming out of the iron’s underside makes it non-functional. The usually heated object of utility formally refers to the bronze *Aeolipile*. Exemplifying the surrealist way of alienation, Man Ray’s flat iron illustrates the Dreyfus-Best’s fascination for surrealism and thus, the exhibitions other main focus. Beyer describes the contrast between the *Aeolipile* and the surrealist iron as two paradigmatic extremes of the exhibition: one a medieval automaton, the other a playful comment on the integrity of art – concurrently interlinked through their formal similarities, but above all, contextualized as programmatic part of the Dreyfus-Best collection.\textsuperscript{170} The analysis of the first exhibition room has shown how the curator implemented a wide range of associations between the individual objects through the Mannerist concept. As a consequence, all artifacts are arranged in order to echo each other and reveal their self-referential quality.

\textsuperscript{167} “Line of beauty” refers to the esthetical art theory, originating with William Hogarth (1697-1764) in the 18th century; see: Beyer 2015.


\textsuperscript{169} Ibidem, pp. 15ff.

\textsuperscript{170} Beyer 2015.
Thus, the Mannerist narrative sets out to emphasize art’s self-awareness as such and its continuity throughout time and space.\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{171} Beyer 2015.
4. A Private Wunderkammer for the Public Eye: Challenges and Solutions

The implementation of the thematic structures, as Andreas Beyer laid out himself, illustrate the way he identified the heterogeneity of the Dreyfus-Best collection as initial challenge. His proposed solution is to apply a Mannerist concept, emphasizing the ‘l’art pour l’art’ stance, which the Dreyfus-Best exemplifies in all its diversity.

The final chapter proposes to take a step back, intending to reinterpret the challenges given by the collection’s installation at the Dreyfus-Best estate. Based on these findings, the present thesis submits an alternative reading of the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum – a reinterpretation of For Your Eyes Only. The following paragraphs go beyond the thematic structures proposed in the previous chapter, suggesting that there could be another order present, inspired by the Wunderkammer. Michel Foucault’s account on the episteme is taken into consideration in order to conceptualize theoretically the newly suggested approach to the Dreyfus-Best collection. As the previous chapter has exemplified, an integral part of the curatorial concept is defined by specific interrelations between the individual artifacts, which reinforce the Mannerist narrative. The present chapter will argue, however, that these ‘hidden relationships’ rather allude to the Wunderkammer of the 16th century and thus also to Foucault’s notion of the Renaissance episteme. The reinterpretation of the exhibition For Your Eyes Only thus suggests rereading the existing display setting as a modern Wunderkammer rather than a Mannerist gesture.

By implying that the curatorial concept could actually be based on the structures on a 16th century cabinet of curiosities, the question is raised whether the ordering structures of the Wunderkammer could be considered an effective exhibition concept in general, particularly when collections are ‘translated’ from private to public realm. Through a comparative analysis between the Dreyfus-Best collection and Lebenslust & Totentanz, an exhibition held in 2010 at the Kunsthalle Krems showcasing German collector Thomas Olbricht’s works of art, a brief outlook will be given as to the Wunderkammer’s usefulness as exhibition concept.

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172 Foucault 2005.
4.1 Challenges

The analysis of the installation at the Dreyfus-Best’s home has illustrated how diverse their collection is. In the living room an array of different works from different artists and periods are displayed, with no reference to their potential correlations or specific reason for their attributed placement. The artworks’ common ground resides in the collection’s link to its collectors: Ulla and Richard Dreyfus-Best have chosen the works and arranged them in their private home according to their own taste and desire. Consequently, the collection, when put on public display, needs to have more in common than just its owners. In order to transition the private collection into the public realm of the museum, the curator is confronted with two particular challenges. According to the present study, the curator needs to make sure that the public is able to grasp the idea of collecting and is aware of the constitutional differences between a private collection and the public presentation of the latter. Moreover, the curator has to establish a narrative throughout the exhibition, creating coherence and continuity by means of an overall storyline. The main objective is to find a way to combine the epistemological functions of a private collection on the one hand, with a methodological approach to structure the exhibition to create and display knowledge, on the other.

With regard to the Dreyfus-Best collection, the curator had to ensure that, first, the private collection would still convey the feeling of an ‘inside view’ by giving the public the feeling of an exclusive glimpse into the private home of the collectors. Further, Beyer had to find a suitable solution to untangle the obscure web of interrelations without destroying the entity of the collection as such. Finding a methodological structure that has a narrative is thus the second step in identifying a suitable way to make a private collection understandable for the public.

4.2 Solutions

Having outlined the challenges the curator encounters when transitioning to a private collection into the public domain, the following part will offer an alternative approach to Andreas Beyer’s proposition of a Mannerist narrative. The exhibition analysis has illustrated how, similar to the display setting at the Dreyfus-Best’s home, the first exhibition room didn’t reveal a distinct order at first sight. While the arrangement of the works is noticeably different from the private setting, the installation at the
Kunstmuseum Basel displays the works of art as individual artifacts; their singularity is thus emphasized. At the same time, the title of the exhibition as well as the curator’s comments have shown how the storyline has successfully brought the heterogenic collection together as a whole by uncovering the underlying correlations between the works of art by referring to the concept of a continuous Mannerism, regardless of time and space.

Based on the notion of ‘hidden relationships’ already outlined in Chapter 3.3 (*The Exhibition’s Thematic Structures*), an attempt to reinterpreting the exhibition suggests using Michel Foucault’s account on the *episteme* as starting point. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault has introduced the *epistemese* as distinct ways of knowing at a specific time in history, examining their characteristics and distinctive properties. He subdivides the production of knowledge into three specific *epistemese*, each referring to a specific period throughout history: the Renaissance, the Classical and the Modern Age.\(^{173}\)

Until the end of the 16\(^{th}\) century, resemblances played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. As the Renaissance *episteme* is introduced, its close correlation to the 16\(^{th}\) century *Wunderkammer* becomes apparent: resemblances and similitudes determined the principal order of the cabinet.\(^ {174}\) These key characteristics are also included in the Renaissance *episteme* and directly refer to its leading principles. The *Wunderkammer*’s interdependence of microcosm and macrocosm are, moreover, an integral part of Foucault’s observations on the Renaissance *episteme*.

> “As a category of thought, it [the microcosm] applies the interplay of duplicated resemblances to all the realms of nature; it provides all investigation with an assurance that everything will find its mirror and its macrocosmic justification on another and larger scale; it affirms, inversely, that the visible order of the highest spheres will be found reflected in the darkest depths of the earth [...]. In an *episteme* in which signs and similitudes were wrapped around one another in an endless spiral, it was essential that the relation of microcosm to macrocosm should be conceived as both the guarantee of that knowledge and the limit of its expansion.”\(^ {175}\)

This description of the micro- and macrocosm and their impact on the order of the *episteme* allude to the basic characteristics of a 16\(^{th}\) century cabinet. Just like the Renaissance *episteme*, the *Wunderkammer* is ruled by spatial arrangements of interrelating objects in order to produce and mirror the knowledge of the 16\(^{th}\) century. The fact that

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\(^{175}\) Foucault 2005, p. 34.
cabinets are ordered by similarities rather than differences is fully in line with Foucault’s account on the structure of knowing. As Foucault’s Order of Things has shown, knowing corresponds to resemblances, sameness, links and relationships.\textsuperscript{176}

The basic structure of knowing can be divided into four different forms of similitudes: conveniencia, aemulatio, analogy and sympathy; the latter including antipathy as its counterpart.\textsuperscript{177} While conveniencia is used to describe things that are put in close proximity to each other, aemulatio refers to the same principle but without the need for direct adjacencies. Instead, as Hooper-Greenhill explains, aemulatio entails that “things with no apparent relation of juxtaposition may in fact answer each other from a long way off.”\textsuperscript{178} Analogy can give rise to an endless number of references based on one single starting point. Lastly, sympathy and antipathy both describe a movement and are characterized by their balancing ways of putting things together while simultaneously isolating them in order to prevent their total assimilation.\textsuperscript{179} As these principles are inscribed into the Renaissance episteme, they are valid for describing the Wunderkammer as well. In fact, these four forms of similitudes can be used as analytical tools to find and describe the cabinet’s underlying ordering principles.

When tracing the ordering structures of the Wunderkammer, the notion of ‘hidden relationships’ is particularly significant. William B. Ashworth examines the influence of emblematic connections, which “infiltrated virtually every aspect of Renaissance culture.”\textsuperscript{180} Ashworth introduces the emblem in connection with Conrad Gesner’s (1516–1565) Historia animalium, a four-volume account on natural history published in Zurich between 1551 and 1558.\textsuperscript{181} Throughout these volumes Gesner describes various animals by assembling as many facts on the respective animals as possible. Instead of a mere description, Gesner describes the animals as culturally embedded creatures. For Gesner’s humanistic approach, natural history meant the understanding of “the intricate web of relationships that interconnect humans and animals”.\textsuperscript{182} In this respect, the structures in Historia animalium correspond to the Renaissance episteme: the abundance of animal-facts is hard to trace and has often resulted in skepticism and rejection from a contemporary standpoint. Ashworth continues by pointing out how the order of other
accounts on natural history, such as Ulisse Aldrovandi’s (1522-1602) *Ornithologiae* (1599), the first published part of his *Historia animalium*, a thirteen-volume encyclopedia of natural history, continued to arrange facts, fables and illustrations in an emblematic way to reveal as many interrelations as possible.\(^{183}\)

Although Ashworth introduces the emblem as a way of thinking and ordering in the context of natural history, the associative network these interrelations bring forward can also apply to the order of the *Wunderkammer*. The Renaissance *episteme* suggests that the abundance of similarities were structured through emblematic connections and associations on a material, formal and textual level. What seems to be a haphazard disorder, actually complies with the revelation of “hidden truths”.\(^{184}\)

During the 16\(^{th}\) century, Foucault’s Renaissance *episteme* thus corresponded to a specific way of knowing based on resemblances and the four types of similitudes. Moreover, emblems structured the abundance of similarities the *episteme* evoked. It is therefore argued that the concept of a 16\(^{th}\) century *Wunderkammer* is a fitting equivalent to the ordering principles of the Renaissance *episteme*.

With regard to exhibition concept, the *episteme* is considered a fitting notion due to its initial aim to create knowledge through a web of similitudes. Especially the principles of *aemulatio* and *analogy* are essential principles because they can create coherency and interrelations between the individual works on display. By referring to the objects’ resemblances, a correlative web can be laid out allowing the curator to adopt a general narrative throughout the exhibition as a means to provide orientation for the viewer. Due to the *episteme*’s similarities to a cabinet of curiosities, an exhibition mainly based on resemblances and emblematic references could enable the curator to construe said exhibition as a modern *Wunderkammer*.

In the case of *For Your Eyes Only*, the thematic structures in the first room are exemplary for what can be considered ‘hidden relationships’. The analysis of the exhibition has illustrated that the leading Mannerist narrative can be linked to a series of thematic ‘interventions’, such as the playful notion of the wreck, the collection as shore of images or the steam/smoke reference, for instance. These themes, taken by the curator as a tool to interlink certain objects and paintings across the exhibition spaces,

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\(^{183}\) Ulisse Aldrovandi’s work *Ornithologiae boc est De avibus historiae libri XII*. was first published in Bologna, in 1599; see also: Ashworth 1992, p. 33.

\(^{184}\) Ibidem, p. 23.
stand out and to emphasize the artworks’ similarities and resemblances without superimposing order as a strict succession of things. Insofar, the structure corresponds to Foucault’s account of *aemulatio* and *analogy* rather than *convenientia*, the ‘convenient’ way of placing things in direct conjunction to each other. Virtual lines can be drawn from one object to another without coercive spacial proximity. These invisible lines interconnecting the otherwise heterogenic collection are the hidden relationships, which ultimately create their own narratives. The viewer needs an additional set of information, such as an introductory text for instance, which, in this case, is given at the entrance (Fig. 9), in order to disclose the correlations between the works of art. As soon as the hidden relationships reveal themselves, more knowledge on the exhibited objects is brought forward. After all, the *episteme* creates knowledge by definition.

Objections as to the subjectivity of superimposing hidden relationships can be disproven, although artifacts such as the *Aeolipile* have shown that, sometimes, prior knowledge must be available in order to reveal emblematic connections. Ashworth illustrates that the emblematic approach has been dismissed repeatedly as subjective and idiosyncratic. In the case of Gesner’s *Historia animalium* these prejudices emerged from misconceptions and general lack of understanding. From an outside standpoint, the Dreyfus-Best collection could be criticized as disperse and idiosyncratic as well. Yet, the hidden relationships revealed by material, formal and thematic similarities beyond the mere surface of the objects render the ‘Renaissance *episteme*’ valid – even in a contemporary collection such as the Dreyfus-Best’s. This demonstrates, furthermore, that the idea of the *episteme* does not necessarily have to be adopted as concept by a curator or a comparable position, but also succeeds as a method to reveal unique orders, such as the Dreyfus-Best’s arrangement at their home, for example.

So far, the *episteme* has been described as tool to theoretically underline the thematic interrelations Andreas Beyer has created for the exhibition. This part argues that the overall setting of the exhibition could be reinterpreted based on the Foucault’s Renaissance *episteme*. The exhibition’s interrelations between the artifacts are not altered. The alternative reading of For Your Eyes Only intends to provide a different guiding principle than Beyer’s Mannerist approach. The exhibition analysis has already revealed

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186 This argument has been made in the context of the author’s research paper A 21st Century Wunderkammer. The Dreyfus-Best’s Contemporary Cabinet of Curiosities.
how many of its dispositions refer to the cabinet of curiosities. A principal narrative referring to a modern *Wunderkammer*, it is argued, would render the private collection more meaningful in the given setting.

The Kunstmuseum’s architectural features clearly set the temporary exhibition apart from their permanent collection. Referring to a *Wunderkammer* in the title of the exhibition, for instance, could have better contextualized the private collection as such and created a relationship with the Kunstmuseum’s starting point as Basilius Amerbach’s *Kunstkammer*, arguably one of the first private collections that has come into the state’s public possession in 1671. Further, introducing the *Wunderkammer* as guiding exhibition concept enables the curator to refer to a private setting, thus stressing that the artifacts on display emerge from a private collection as well.

While the decorations are sparse, coloring and lighting invoke an atmosphere, which Moser has described as promoting “a sense of wonderment” and serving “to define objects as mysterious and intriguing”. What is more, the analysis has outlined that first exhibition room uses the notion of the curious. The exhibition’s main characteristics therefore compare to the concept of the *Wunderkammer*. It is important to note, however, that, on the one hand, the curator has neither recreated the Dreyfus-Best’s private display setting, which also has been described as cabinet and is also characterized by an emblematic setting, nor, on the other hand, did the curator take the history of the *Wunderkammer* literally by installing the works of art in a setting reminiscent of Ferrante Imperato’s frontispiece (Fig. 4), for instance. There are no wooden showcases or an overly full display present in the exhibition. Instead, the curator has chosen modern display methods, which he pairs with the red walls’ historic effect and the dimmed light as direct reference to the object’s intriguing qualities. It becomes apparent that based on the premise that *For Your Eyes* could be reinterpreted as *Wunderkammer*, the curator’s choices in display and layout concurrently provoke a modern feel. While the underlying ordering structures at the Dreyfus-Best’s home could be considered true to a 16th century cabinet of curiosities, the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum is, in a sense, an updated version of a *Wunderkammer*. Marked by resemblances and similitudes, the Renaissance *episteme* still applies to this modern version of a cabinet of curiosities. And

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187 Tzortzi 2016, pp. 15f; see also: Mendes Bürgi 2011.
189 Moser attributes historic wooden cabinets as a tool to define the exhibited objects as curiosities; *Ibidem*, pp. 25f.
Despite its formal contradictions, the modern setting goes hand in hand with the ordering structures and the historic insinuations of a Renaissance *Wunderkammer*.

This alternative approach to interpreting the guiding narrative has shown how applying the Foucauldian concept of the Renaissance *episteme* can reveal hidden relationships. According to Foucault, the main ordering structures are resemblances and similitudes, explaining, in the museum context, the intrinsic interrelations and correlations between individual objects through their arrangement. The principles of the *episteme* underline the collection and exhibition as entity, rather than an incoherent set of artworks.

As Davenne has illustrated, the curious as narrative has never been fully erased from the art historical discourse.\(^{190}\) Therefore, re-introducing a modern version of the cabinet of curiosities can work as historical and educational reference and yet, as something totally ahistorical, familiar and intriguing. The Foucauldian approach is in this context presented as solution to the transitional challenge by directly signalizing the Dreyfus-Best collection as private collection. Further, Foucault’s *episteme* functions as tool to theoretically support and characterize the Dreyfus-Best’s heterogenic collection through similarities, and thus as coherent entity.

The exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel can be understood as a literal ‘cross-over’.\(^{191}\) A web of emblematic correlations between the individual artworks across the rooms is thus created. The resulting effect of the exhibition renders the curious and unapproachable (in both senses of the latter word) something orderly and coherent. Therefore, the inner logic of the collection is able to turn visible through the exhibition concept and the curatorial interference. The inner logic of the collection, this alternative approach has argued, is that of a modern *Wunderkammer*, marked by emblematic links and the emphasis of similarities. When approaching the *For Your Eyes* by means of Foucault’s Renaissance *episteme*, the exhibition thus reveals itself through its interrelations in a very similar way the *Wunderkammer* has operated in the 16\(^{th}\) century.

### 4.3 The *Wunderkammer* as Exhibition Concept?

Intended as an outlook, the present chapter asks whether *For Your Eyes Only* has shown that the notion of the *Wunderkammer* can serve as general exhibition concept. The

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\(^{190}\) Davenne 2012.

question is raised whether an emblematic structure could be considered an established approach to curating exhibitions.

Due to the epistemological aspects of an exhibition as such, it has been argued that the concept of the *Wunderkammer* offers an alternative approach to meaning-making by illustrating hidden relationships underneath the obvious ordering structures, while emphasizing the overall entity given by the objects' origin or context. The charm of the curious would certainly suggest the return of the *Wunderkammer* in the 21st century as well as its continuing popularity.\(^\text{192}\) By introducing another temporary exhibition of a private collection, the present chapter will examine whether the *Wunderkammer* as exhibition concept can be upheld theoretically also in the context of other exhibitions. As a comparative study, the exhibition *Lebenslust & Totentanz* at the Kunsthalle Krems will be briefly presented in order to contrast its curatorial concept with the alternative approach to the exhibition of the Dreyfus-Best collection proposed above.

In 2010, Thomas Olbricht, a German collector based in Berlin, opened his private collection to the public. In his private museum, the so-called *me Collectors Room*, Olbricht displays his contemporary art collection as well as a genuine Renaissance *Wunderkammer*.\(^\text{193}\) Even though investigating his private museum would be highly interesting in context of the present study, the following paragraphs will focus on a temporary exhibition at the Kunsthalle Krems in Austria entitled *Lebenslust & Totentanz*, which showcased an extensive part of the Olbricht collection (Fig. 11). Based on the same starting point, the presentation of the Olbricht collection is very similar to the exhibition of the Dreyfus-Best collection at the Kunstmuseum Basel. Both exhibitions of private collections included various works from different epochs, suggestively corresponding to what the curators Wolfgang Schoppmann and Hans-Peter Wipplinger have identified as a collective visual memory.\(^\text{194}\) Based on the notion of collection as appropriation of the world,\(^\text{195}\) the

\(^\text{193}\) Schoppmann et al. 2010; Preuss 2010; Wiensowski 2010.  
\(^\text{194}\) Schoppmann et al. 2010.  
\(^\text{195}\) “Sammeln als Interpretation von Weltaneigung” (*Ibidem*, p. 6).
curators refer back to the history of collecting and, therefore, also to the tradition of the Wunderkammer. Past and present are brought together, thus following Hooper-Greenhill’s claim of the continuity of collecting.196

In terms of the exhibition layout, the Olbricht collection is displayed in a very similar manner as the Dreyfus-Best collection in Basel: colorful rooms and dimmed lights, yet no additional showcases or features, resulting in a clean and modern exhibition display. The rooms are, however, clearly marked by overarching themes, such as war, religion, love, lust, melancholy, grief and transience.197 Most of these sub-plots leave enough room for interpretation, resulting, also, in a web of interrelations throughout the exhibition. As main narrative, the curators explicitly used the notion of a modern Wunderkammer. According to Schoppmann and Wipplinger the exhibition seeks to incorporate the past and the present by playing with ‘deja-vu’ experiences.198 In the context of the exhibition at the Kunsthalle Krems, the private collection is made understandable for the public by referring to the latter’s existing knowledge.199 It

197 Schoppmann et al. 2010, p. 6.
198 Ibidem, p. 10.
199 Barrett 2014.
becomes clear that Schoppmann and Wipplinger’s objective is to play with a kind of recognition effect, showing that past and present are not fundamentally different but linked through collective memory. This can be considered the main difference between the exhibition at the Kunstmuseum and the Kunsthalle: while the Olbricht collection refers to something that already exists – the display of knowledge, the Dreyfus-Best collection establishes new interrelations, thus setting out to create new knowledge. Both exhibitions show that incorporating the notion of the Renaissance episteme results in traceable structures, whereas the notion of a modern Wunderkammer serves as comprehensive narrative to interlink the diverse objects of the collection. Certainly, the Wunderkammer cannot serve as narrative for any private collection that enters the public realm. Collectors, who follow an individual and distinctive pattern such as collecting one specific medium, period or artist, dictate already a specific ordering structure.

Yet, the Wunderkammer proves to be a valuable concept to provide an exhibition narrative for bringing the private collection into the public domain and facing some of the challenges that come with such a transition. It allows structuring the collection’s arbitrariness for the public, while at the same time maintaining or even embracing the personal dimension of the private collection. Exhibiting a private collection as a modern Wunderkammer highlights the curator’s intention to render the subjective and personal aspect of the collection transparent, thus preventing blurred lines between what is considered private and what public. The collector’s subconscious decisions and personal taste are contextualized through emblematic relations pointing out the interrelations between the works on display. In addition, the private collection is incorporated in the continuing tradition of collecting and displaying artifacts, by directly referring to the collection’s origins: the 16th century Wunderkammer.

To that extent, diverse collections, constituted by a wide array of works from different periods, artists and genres can be well structured by the means of Foucault’s Renaissance episteme. Highlighting the private collection’s similarities and resemblances through the concept of the Wunderkammer has been proven to result in intriguing ordering structures, unveiling art historical substance, while playfully appealing to the museum’s mission to display knowledge and pass it on to its visitors.

200 Schoppmann et al. 2010, p. 10.
Conclusion

At the beginning of the present thesis, it was argued that the Wunderkammer has returned in the 21st century. Today, in its every day use, the term Wunderkammer serves as a metaphor for any form of juxtaposition of the most unlikely things regardless of space and time. The alleged haphazard order of the Renaissance cabinet of curiosities reflects today’s dissolution of boarders and thus refers to the rapid dispersal of things nowadays. In the light of these observations, it seems as if the concept of the 16th century Wunderkammer remains topical as it stands for today’s chaotic yet highly interconnected world.

Whereas the lines between the private and public domain have been increasingly blurred in recent years, the discussion on the global shift of private museums has illustrated how and why the museum-landscape has drastically changed. The natural order of things has been thrown out of balance as private collections have progressively entered the public realm: a historical turnaround, as it would appear, considering that the public museum once arose from the enclosed physical spaces of the Wunderkammer. However, the discussion on the transition from private to public realm has illustrated several methods to reinstate a clear distinction between the private collection and the public realm in order to avoid criticism and to stay true to the continuing history of collecting.

Based on the concept of the Wunderkammer, two important interrelationships are formulated: first, the historical approach on the development of collecting and displaying has shown that the Wunderkammer constituted today’s museum. At least, it has been considered its origin. Second, it has been pointed out that the Wunderkammer entails very specific ordering structures, which have changed in the 17th century and again with the emergence of the museum. These ordering structures have been conceptualized in the context of the present research. The Dreyfus-Best collection has been repeatedly called a ‘Wunderkammer’, due to its unique setting at the collector’s own home, where the

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202 Davenne 2012, p. 6.
203 E.g. Baumgardner 2015; Marks 2015; Gnyp 2015; and Ratnam 2013 a.o.
204 Barrett 2014.
206 Ibidem.
great amount of artifacts have taken over every room of the house.\textsuperscript{207} Being exhibited for the first time in Venice and Basel, the curator had to face the challenges of transferring a personal collection to the public realm. Therefore, the curator had to re-structure an extensive part of the collection in order provide new insights on the objects and its interrelations. Andreas Beyer has done so by adopting a guiding narrative, which condenses the collection as entity through a resonating Mannerist gesture that highlights the continuity of art, rather than its diversity and seclusion.\textsuperscript{208}

The analysis of the Dreyfus-Best collection both in its private and public setting did, however, reveal that the Mannerist narrative could be, in fact, more fittingly replaced with by that of a modern \textit{Wunderkammer}. Using Michel Foucault’s account on the Renaissance \textit{episteme}, the present study has exemplified how the thematic structures in the exhibition correspond to the \textit{episteme}’s characteristic resemblances and similitudes.\textsuperscript{209}

Thus, an alternative approach to interpreting the exhibition \textit{For Your Eyes Only} at the Kunstmuseum Basel has been proposed by using Foucault’s theoretical construct. While Beyer’s Mannerist means to ‘translating’ Ulla and Richard Dreyfus-Best’s collection for the public did actually establish the many interrelations and references between the exhibited objects, the concept of Mannerism only reaches so far: the room with Surrealist paintings, for instance, stands more or less on its own, as there is no apparent affiliation with Mannerism. Accordingly, the title of the exhibition reveals the exhibition’s wide spectrum from Mannerism to Surrealism, implying a certain kind of discontinuity inherent to the private collection or at least no apparent overarching theme. In contrast, the analysis of the \textit{Wunderkammer} narrative has proven to be a fitting solution to exhibit the Dreyfus-Best’s heterogenic collection by not merely inserting hidden relationships between the artifacts but by actually making them the subject of the exhibition. In the light of the \textit{Wunderkammer} each room and object is included, while the narrative simultaneously illustrates the continuity of the Dreyfus-Best collection as such, as well as the continuity of collecting the curious and wondrous since the Renaissance. In that sense, the alternative approach presented above, might be considered the more comprehensive one.

\textsuperscript{207} Beyer et al. 2014; p. 14, see also Beyer 2015; and Preuss 2014.
\textsuperscript{208} Beyer 2015; Beyer et al. 2014.
\textsuperscript{209} Foucault 2005.
Whether its historic significance, its specific order or its guiding principles in the form of the Foucauldian Renaissance *episteme*, the *Wunderkammer* is the key notion of the present thesis. It has been argued that the cabinet could even be considered a general exhibition concept depending on the collection. Moreover, the emblematic approach to making exhibitions has been proven to be a transparent means to curate the private in the public realms and to generate new knowledge.

Based on these findings, the thesis has concluded that on a theoretical level the ordering structures of the *Wunderkammer* could be used as a general curatorial concept in order to exhibit particular types of private collections. However, a more practical outlook on its actual scope and its consequences is still outstanding. Further research must examine the *Wunderkammer*'s practical applicability as exhibition concept beyond its mere narrative, that is, for instance, the museum and curator’s particular way of laying out the *Wunderkammer* exhibition context. This begs the following questions: How does the curator implement the concept – historically or in a more modern and simplistic way? Does he unfold the historic background of the Renaissance cabinet of curiosities and its development in an introductory text, for instance, or is it the mere display that alludes to the curious? Are the emblematic correlations between the objects spelled out or does the visitor have to uncover them on his/her own? And is the epistemological effect, namely the production of knowledge beyond the visible in some way traceable or measureable? Also the concept’s impact on the exhibition institution in terms of visitor numbers, press attention and lastly, the visitors’ response would need further investigation. Existing research already points to the increasing popularity of the cabinet of curiosities in the realms of the museum.210 As Ben Kaden explains, nowadays the museum visitors like to experience a world of fascination instead of a school desk.211 Would that possibly imply that the disciplinary methods, which have been at work at the museum as a regulatory force since the institution’s emergence, have been loosened? To what extent has the museum thus turned into an exploratory laboratory in recent years?

The present thesis has presented a reinterpretation of a modern *Wunderkammer* as the study proposed to re-read the exhibition *For Your Eyes Only* at the Kunstmuseum Basel. The notion of reinterpreting has been applied in several ways: the Dreyfus-Best

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210 E.g. Kaden 2012; Bessler 2012; and Davenne 2012 a.o.
211 "Viele Menschen möchten die Welt als Faszinosum und nicht als Schulbank erleben" (Kaden 2012, p. 29).
collection, which has been described as modern cabinet of curiosities by the exhibition curator himself,\textsuperscript{212} has been reevaluated in the context of its public display. Instead of just simply concluding that the haphazard order of artworks found at the Dreyfus-Best’s home coincides with the characteristic of the Renaissance \textit{Wunderkammer}, the thesis brought forward a theoretical concept, which set out to untangle and order the collection and exhibition in question. To that extent, the modern \textit{Wunderkammer}, that is the Dreyfus-Best collection, has been reinterpreted and given a new overarching storyline. Consequently, the exhibition’s former Mannerist narrative has been reinterpreted as well, since its display setting was not taken apart but appropriated to fit the concept of the \textit{Wunderkammer}.

A quote by Christine Davenne at the very beginning of the present thesis has revealed that the cabinet of curiosities enables the simultaneity of the past and the present and sets out to build connections.\textsuperscript{213} The cabinet builds connections within its own domain, through resemblances and similarities, but also to its collectors, the artists involved, and today, maybe even the curator. “The collector, the arranger of world, was not considered an artist but rather an amateur – ‘one who loves’” Davenne stated. Ulla and Richard Dreyfus-Best’s true love for art and collecting has certainly defined both of their lives in some way – at least the installation and furnishings of their own home. As the collector’s counterpart, this study has discussed role of the curator. Similar to the artist who creates his works “out of nothing”, curators could be considered to do the same, as they transition the works from private to public imposing new ordering structures \textit{ex nihilo} – or at least \textit{ex congeria} – out of chaos. It comes to no surprise then, that the term ‘curator’ originates from the Latin word \textit{cura}, “which takes care” – incidentally the same etymology as ‘curiosity’.\textsuperscript{214}

\textsuperscript{212} Beyer et. al. 2014, p. 14; Interestingly enough, although calling the Dreyfus-Best collection an exemplary “modern Kunst- and Wunderkammer”, the curator did not put this association further in terms of his exhibition concept and chosen narrative. The detailed reasons are unknown to the author.

\textsuperscript{213} Andreas Beyer has used a very similar expression as he notes: “Solche unbekümmerten Richtungswechsel, eine vitale Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen, zeichnet eine Sammlung aus, die nur als Ganzes betrachtet werden will und nur so auch recht zu verstehen ist.” (Beyer et al. 2014, pp. 13f.)

\textsuperscript{214} Davenne 2012, p. 208.
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© Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin P. Bübler.

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