

The background of the cover is a photograph of a wooden crate filled with books and papers, with a red string tied around it. The crate is tilted, and the books are visible on the shelves. The text is overlaid on this image.

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# Curating Degree Zero Archive: Curatorial Research

**With Contributions by**

Felix Ensslin

Sabeth Buchmann

Sergio Edelzstein

Elke Krasny

Avi Feldman

Brian Holmes

Ellen Blumenstein

Dorothee Richter &

Barnaby Drabble (eds.)



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# Curating Degree Zero Archive. Curatorial Research

## Dorothee Richter & Barnaby Drabble

When we started a discourse on curating in 1998 with the conference “**Curating Degree Zero**,” we could not have imagined the intensity of interest in this subject in the coming years. In 2003 we wanted to re-examine the field together with Annette Schindler, but when we failed to organise enough funds, we changed the concept and concentrated on the archive, which originally should have just accompanied the symposium. This decision, half by chance and half out of a deeply felt interest in archival practices, proved to be valid, insofar that the archive grew and developed rapidly. **Curating Degree Zero Archive** was invited all in all eighteen times and therefore spatially reinterpreted and also extended eighteen times in different contexts. Our goal was to use the archive as a discursive situation; it was also presented in amazingly different ways, which made it visually alluring and convincing. We recognise that some reviewers did take this shininess as a problematic side of the archive, but for us the idea of stirring up discussions was the main focus. During the tour of the archive it became clear that the different ways to present it, a task that we handed over to our cooperation partners more and more along the journey, also created a discourse about spatial and visual representation, about interpellations through settings, and about ways to involve the public.

Finally, the archive as a body of publications, folders, CDs, invitation cards, and websites is now situated in the library of the Zurich University of the Arts, ready to be researched and re-interpreted. This publication and the upcoming ones related to the Archive want to play back into the written discursive mode and, in using the webjournal *OnCurating* for this undertaking, we want to make the material again internationally accessible.

The first issue related to the archive concentrates on **curatorial research**. Contemporary curating exists as a media conglomerate; the production of meaning is achieved through a combination of artworks, photographs, commentary, publications, design, gestures, music, film, press releases, websites, and interviews. It is situated in a specific political and cultural context. To analyse these complex situations we need a variety of approaches; for every project the combination should alter, it makes a bricolage of methodical approaches necessary. The undertaking to discuss curating on a profound level also inspired the conferences *Curating as a Glittering Myth*, *Curating as a Social Symptom*, *Curating as a Revolutionary Force?*<sup>1</sup> and *Curating Everything (Curating as Symptom)*.<sup>2</sup> In the symposia, and therefore also in this publication, we have invited contributions from Elke Krasny and Avi Feldman, two

candidates from the PhD platform, a cooperation between the Postgraduate Programme in Curating with the University of Reading, Department of Art.

The ironic title of the second conference, *Curating Everything*, already proposed reading the activity of curating as a social symptom. We presume that the contemporary urge for a curatorial position has an imaginary side: the wish to gain authorship and agency as an illusionary closure in an overall unsteady and precarious labour situation for cultural producers.

We would like to discuss curating in relation to changes in image production, changes in experiences of distance and modes of perception, changes in the conception of subjectivity and communities, changes in ways of the circulation of images, and changes in digital and material infrastructures. We would like to question curating with respect to topics of “race”, class, and gender. What can we propose as a critical attitude in curating achieved through ruptures, gaps, inconsistency, failures, and dissent? All contributors share an interest in political agendas in artistic and curatorial practices.

The articles we want to present here show exemplarily how curating can be discussed not so much as case studies, but as scientific analyses. As for every critical debate, the writers have clear positions; they are not uninterested or aloof in any way or “neutral” and instead centre their arguments around a specific urgency. This urgency is then argued throughout in depth. With these varieties of approaches, we hope to offer future researchers some trajectories, new perspectives, and “methods”—in the above-mentioned sense—of debating curating.

Two of the contributions in this first publication are centred on examples of artistic-curatorial practices. They have been specifically chosen because they are relating the art world as a space of representation and discussion in new ways to digital spaces; they change and questions formats and they also re-configure relations of artists, curators, and other experts.

**Felix Ensslin** developed his argumentation for our symposium *Curating as a Glittering Myth, Curating as a Social Symptom, Curating as a Revolutionary Force?*, and already the title of his contribution, “The Subject of Curating,” shifts in an ambiguous way between meanings: addressing on the one hand the subject that is hidden in the curatorial act (as curator or as addressee) as well as the inner kernel of curating, the topic of curating, what curating is about. Revolving around recent proposals of implied concepts of subjectivity made by curators and theoreticians, Ensslin strives towards a radical rereading through Foucault’s theory of power and Lacan’s four discourses to analyse the contradictory structure of curatorial practice.

**Sabeth Buchmann** uses Anton Vidokle’s complaint about art without artists to draw historical trajectories. She shows that the struggle against politically compromised role models and representation conditions could be observed from the perspective of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari. After all, the “curatorial system” that evolved from the 1960s shows that critique of power goes hand in hand not only with democratic-political strategies of self-empowerment, but also with the transversal dissemination and reterritorialization of power functions. In so far the institutionalised form of curating is an aspect related less to individual intentions and strategies as to structural frameworks. From my perspective, having discussed the shift of power from self-organisation to a hierarchical re-organising of the field with a specific interpretation of “curatorship”, Buchmann’s thoughts add to the

discussion of this shift that was based on institutional critique and therefore opened up new forms and structures of cultural production.

**Sergio Edelsztein** asks in his contribution, "Are Boycotts the New 'Collective Curating?'" He shows that censorship and boycotts have started to be intermingled in an uncanny way, not necessarily aiming at state powers but confusing the situation for local art communities. Whatever a boycott has been installed to target, the local reception often leads to a reduction in financial support, especially for critical art. He argues for re-establishing a differentiation of state power and ideological forces, which might be contradicting or fighting against the actual ruling system. He thus wants to evoke a deeper understanding of the historical and political situations.

As editors we believe that some of today's boycotts target indiscriminately an imagined "racial" group. By aiming at participating artists and hosting art institutions, some of the boycotts are conducted precisely against the parts of a society that actually offer critical voices a platform. With our roots in the German context, with its history of fascism and extreme ideological violence, we would like appeal to cultural producers to take this into consideration and to question calls for boycotts.

In her contribution "Feminist Thought and Curating," **Elke Krasny** addresses the gender politics of curating. She argues that feminist thought has historically emerged as politics, whereas curatorial practice has emerged as a distinctly cultural practice.

"Feminist thought provides the methods of analysis in working out how curating is responding to specific historic conditions and how curating does or does not address the social changes wrought by feminism within these specific historic conditions." Curating as a social practice is part of the historic conditions which feminism seeks to change. In her view, feminist thought relies on opening up, over again and again, both of these questions: What is feminist thought, and what does feminist thought do? The resistance to definition and to categorization opens up the potentials for ongoing questioning, considerable conflicts, transformation, and future change.

**Avi Feldman** undertakes, under the title "Performing Justice – From Dada's Trial to Yael Bartana's JRMiP Congress", to cross-read artistic/curatorial practice with legal aspects.

The "Trial of Maurice Barrès", created by Dada in Paris in 1921, serves as an early example of pioneering experimentation with aesthetics and politics. Again, these artistic actions to imitate and comment on society with its institutions have to be situated in the historical context, which brings up a relation to the Dreyfus Affair. In the essay, Feldman seeks to not only further explore the trial from a legal perspective, but relates it the specific historical and political circumstances, and also he draws conclusions to contemporary practices. In order to do so, he has chosen to focus on the first Congress of "The Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland" (JRMiP) created by Yael Bartana in 2012.

In this publication on researching curating, we would also show how an artistic/curatorial practice adds to a certain kind of curatorial knowledge production with its specific mix of visual, textual, and spatial media, and, as a new development, projects which take the digital space especially into consideration. All these different media components form a media conglomerate, to speak with Roland Barthes: specific mythological constructions. To conceive the digital space as part of a contemporary cultural public space, as a space of communication and conflict,

of a very specific cultural production, which one has to use, to react to it and to interfere with it.

This is shown in two totally different examples. One project is discussed by **Brian Holmes**: *The World of Matter* (<http://www.worldofmatter.net/>). This project shifts between a research project on natural resources and a series of exhibitions and meetings. It is multi-authored on the one hand, but can also be connected with some specific names, for example with the artist **Ursula Biemann**. Interestingly enough, Ursula was invited by us to our first Curating symposium, because she has acted as both curator (Shedhalle, K lt r etc.) and artist from an early stage onwards. Until now her position has shifted constantly and has developed into cooperating on a larger scale with researchers, activists, and artists. The outcome of the research and debate is often accessible on the Internet, and the projects are also presented in exhibitions and films. Brian Holmes discusses the project(s) from a philosophical perspective, relating the imaginary institution of society to utopian thinking. The question for Holmes is, *What do we invent, how do we see the world? How do we institute a new territory, a new reality?*

In the second project, an avatar of a curatorial subject reacts to cultural production in the imaginary (digital) space—but in an artistic intervention in the exhibition space. The “as such”, the doubling of “personalities”, the intrinsic confusion of identities that comes with the digital realm does its work: the figure of the curator is hijacked by artists. “The Curator and Her Double” is the title of the reflection by **Ellen Blumenstein**, when she invited the artist Ulf Aminde. In the spirit of Antonin Artaud and his concept of cruelty, which demands that one should relentlessly call into question one’s own *ideas about reality and [man’s] poetic place in reality* and force the spectator to do likewise, the “avatar” represents an attempt to become aware of those ideas oneself and to make them visible and palpable to visitors. This project, a collaboration between an artist (Aminde) and a curator (Blumenstein), sets out to champion the role of institutions, aiming at the imaginary digital space with its central artificial figure, the avatar of the curator.

Undoubtedly CURATING is a new discursive formation, as defined by Michel Foucault, which has rapidly developed since the 1970s. We are aware that we are also part of this instituting process, with the developing of an Archive, with the Postgraduate Programme in Curating at ZHdK, and with the PhD platform, a cooperation with the University of Reading and our various publications. This formation is instituted in hierarchical formations and power relations. Therefore we strive to open up processes, to question what instituting and de-instituting means, and to make our thoughts, struggles, and research accessible. As in all forms of cultural production, content and form are interrelated (but not the same), and it matters, as an ideological production, what one does, what one brings into existence.

To mirror our approach of teaching as practice with its impact on curatorial projects and possibilities, the last article by **Dorothee Richter** discusses a specific “pedagogical” attitude which is fundamental for the Postgraduate Programme in Curating she directs. She tries to show how this works as a practice that is intensely informed by theory which influences and reflects actual projects and attitudes. So curatorial knowledge production, understood as a complex offering of visual, spatial, theoretical, context-related and historically situated meaning production, is therefore based on concepts of theory as a practice—a deeply politically motivated construct. In this article she tries to formulate this based on the example of Gasthaus zum B ren / Museum B rengasse in Zurich—one of the curatorial experiments supported by the programme.

#### Notes

1 *Curating as a Glittering Myth, Curating as a Social Symptom, Curating as a Revolutionary Force?*, concept Dorothee Richter, Zurich 2014, Zurich University of the Arts.

2 *Curating Everything (Curating as Symptom)*, concept Dorothee Richter in cooperation with Alena Nawrotzki, Zurich 2015, Migros Museum fuer Gegenwartskunst.

**Dorothee Richter**, curator, since 2005 head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (MAS/CAS) [www.curating.org](http://www.curating.org) at the University of the Arts Zurich ZHdK (Co-founder and concept), she also co-founded with Susanne Clausen the "Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies, Practice-Based Doctoral Programme" a cooperation of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating and the Department of Fine Arts, University of Reading. From 1999 to the end of 2003, Richter was artistic director of the Künstlerhaus Bremen where she curated a discursive programme based on feminist issues, urban situations, power relation issues, institutional critique. She worked as a curator ever since. She co-curated numerous symposia. She co-conceived and coordinated the research and archiving project Curating Degree Zero (2003–2008) which explored critical and experimental approaches to exhibition making at the beginning of the millennium. PhD "Fluxus. Kunst gleich Leben? Mythen um Autorschaft, Produktion, Geschlecht und Gemeinschaft", publisher of [www.on-curating.org](http://www.on-curating.org) which presents current approaches to critical curatorial practice; In 2013 she finalised a film together with Ronald Kolb: „Flux Us Now! Fluxus explored with a camera.“ 2014–2015 artistic director of Gasthaus zum Baeren/ Museum Baerengasse, Zurich. At the moment she is working with Ronald Kolb on a digital archive/ film on Curatorial practice, a cooperation project of ZKM Karlsruhe and ZHdK.

**Barnaby Drabble** is a writer, teacher and curator based in Girona, Catalonia & Zurich, Switzerland. He was curator of contemporary art at the National Maritime Museum, London (2000–2004), initiating its program of temporary projects in relation to its collections and exhibitions. He co-conceived and coordinated the research and archiving project Curating Degree Zero (2003–2008) which explored critical and experimental approaches to exhibition making at the beginning of the millennium. He formed one half of the artistic/curatorial duo Drabble+Sachs (2001–2006) whose work focussed on issues of public-space, inter-disciplinarity, urbanism, intellectual property & civil disobedience. Currently he is managing editor of the Journal for Artistic Research (since 2010) and, as a critic and author, he regularly contributes to art magazines and publications. He holds a doctor of philosophy (PhD) in visual culture (Edinburgh College of Art, 2010). His ongoing research involves a focus on the public's role in the exhibition, sentimental approaches to museology and artistic responses to questions of sustainability and ecology. In 2005, together with Dorothee Richter he co-founded the Postgraduate Program in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts. Since 2009 he has been a faculty member of the MAPS program (Master of Arts in Public Spheres) at the Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais, in Sierre, where he also conducts his research.



# Curating Degree Zero Archive as a Research Resource

In 2011, the material collected during the touring exhibition was gifted to the Media and Information Centre (MIZ) at the Zürich University of the Arts (ZHdK). Since the opening of the University's new premises in the Toni-Areal in 2014, the archive is accessible as a permanent reference collection in the lower floor of the MIZ.

Zürcher Hochschule der Künste , Medien- und Informationszentrum MIZ,  
Pfingstweidstrasse 96, 8005 Zurich



# Curating Degree Zero Archive

## Dorothee Richter & Barnaby Drabble

The Curating Degree Zero Archive (CDZA) documents the work of over 100 contemporary art curators who are known internationally for their critical and experimental positions. This collection of exhibition documentation, gifted to the archivists by the curators themselves, contains, among other materials, catalogues, DVDs, magazines and ephemera. In this way the archive presents a representative cross-section of the critical curatorial discourse at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The project began with the three-day symposium “Curating Degree Zero”, organized in Bremen in 1998 by Dorothee Richter and Barnaby Drabble. Between 2003 and 2008, the two curators worked together again on the archive, which grew in size as it travelled to eighteen venues around the world as an exhibition and a program of live events and discussions.

In 2011, the resulting collection was gifted to the Media and Information Centre (MIZ) at the Zürich University of the Arts (ZHdK). Since the opening of the university’s new premises in the Toni-Areal in 2014, the archive is accessible as a permanent reference collection on public display.

[https://www.zhdk.ch/miz\\_curating](https://www.zhdk.ch/miz_curating)

Initiated by Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter, the archive was developed in partnership with the following venues, collectives and institutions:

**Plug-in (Basel), Centre d’Art Contemporain Geneva, Künstlerhaus Bremen, O.K Centrum für Gegenwartskunst (Linz), Spike Island Art Space (Bristol), Halle für Kunst (Lüneburg), International Project Space (Bournville), Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art (Sunderland), Artlab at Imperial College (London), Sparwasser HQ (Berlin), Edinburgh College of Art, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti (Milan), Festival der Künste & Museum für Gestaltung (Zürich), INSA Art Space (Seoul), Association Drash & Point Éphémère (Paris), Rakett (Bergen), West Cork Arts Centre (Skibbereen) and Galerija Miroslav Kraljevic, Zagreb.**

The Archive consists of material gifted by the following curators, artist-curators and collectives:

Arts Initiative Tokyo, Rosanne Altstadt, Amasté, Artlab, Anthony Auerbach, B+B: Sophie Hope & Sarah Carrington, Marius Babias, Basekamp, Ute Meta Bauer, Lorenzo Benedetti, Tobias Berger, Ursula Biemann, Beatrice Von Bismarck, Blok, Lionel Bovier, Tim Brennan, c a l c, camouflaged, Ele Carpenter, Daniela Cascella, Vaari Claffey, Barbara Clausen, consonni, Copenhagen Free University, CRUMB, Alice Creischer & Andreas Siekmann, D.A.E: Peio Aguirre & Leire Vergara, Catherine David, Joshua Decter, Clémentine Deliss, Claire Doherty, Barnaby Drabble, Sergio Edelsztein, Eichelmann, Faiers & Rust, EIPCP, Octavian Esanu, Jacob Fabricius, Elena Filipovic, Fiteiro Cultural, Freee, Mark Garry, Sönke Gau, Catalin Gheorghe, GMK, David Goldenberg, Horst Griese, Frederikke Hansen, Kent Hansen, Maria Hlavajova, Justin Hoffmann, Manray Hsu, Andrew Hunt, Per Hüttner, Instant Coffee, International 3, K&K, Christoph Keller, Alexander Koch, Annette Kosak, Holger Kube Ventura, Kuda.org, Kuratorisk Aktion, Daniel Kurjakovic, Simon Lamunière, Kelly Large, Maria Lind, Locus +, Chus Martínez, Bernd Milla, Elke aus dem Moore, Nina Möntmann, Heike Munder, Lise Nellesmann, Tone Olaf Nielsen, Hans Ulrich Obrist, NEID, Paul O'Neill, Marion von Osten, Sarah Pierce/The Metropolitan Complex, Planet22, Tadej Pogacar, Prelom, Aisling Prior, Protoacademy, Catherine Queloiz, Reinigungsgesellschaft, RELAX, Dorothee Richter, Maria Riskova, Stella Rollig, Sabine Schaschl-Cooper, Annette Schindler, Katharina Schlieben, Eva Schmidt, Trebor Scholz, Marco Scotini, Yukiko Shikata, Nathalie Boseul Shin, Gregory Sholette, Joshua Simon, Lisette Smits, Reinhard Storz, Bettina Steinbrügge, Szuper Gallery, Toasting Agency, TNC Network, Attila Tordai, Trinity Session, Mark Tribe, Unwetter, Value, Sencer Vardaman, Yvonne Volkart, Stevan Vukovic, Gavin Wade, Florian Waldvogel, Cristine Wang, Astrid Wege, Lee Welch WHW, Jan Van Woensel, Ina Wudtke, Florian Wüst, Tirdad Zolghadr, Tal Ben Zvi.

The following pages provide impressions of a selection of the venues to which the archive travelled and the Archive in its final resting place at the University of the Arts in Zurich.



**Curating Degree Zero Archive in Basel**  
31 January – 8 March 2003

[plug.in]  
St. Alban-Rheinweg 64, Basel  
[www.iplugin.org](http://www.iplugin.org)

With generous support of:  
Migros Kulturprozent & Birsig Stiftung

Production: Centre d'Art Contemporain Geneva  
Exhibition Design: Elektrosmog, Annette Schindler,  
Wolfgang Hockenjos, Patrick Parisi

The organisers wish to particularly thank [plug.in] for their work on the initial production of the archive, and the initial design of the website.





**Curating Degree Zero Archive in Bremen**  
8 August – 15 September 2003

**Künstlerhaus Bremen**  
Am Deich 68/68, Bremen  
[www.kuenstlerhausbremen.de](http://www.kuenstlerhausbremen.de)

Exhibition design: Elektrosmog, Barnaby Drabble,  
Dorothee Richter  
Additional Design: Hops Bornemann  
Developed with support of: Kulturstiftung des Bundes

With the additional program  
**Short Presentation and Discussion  
on Critical Curating**  
with Barnaby Drabble, Helmut Draxler, Frederikke  
Hansen, Dorothee Richter, Stella Rollig,  
in Cooperation with the art project “No Man is an  
Island”, GAK Bremen





**Curating Degree Zero Archive in Lüneburg**  
12 February – 6 March 2005

**Halle für Kunst**  
Reichenbachstr. 2, Lüneburg  
[www.halle-fuer-kunst.de](http://www.halle-fuer-kunst.de)

Installation designed and re-interpreted by  
Reinigungsgesellschaft (Martin Keil and  
Henrik Mayer)

With the cooperation of the University Lüneburg





**Curating Degree Zero Archive in London**  
27 May – 26 June 2005

**Artlab at Imperial College, London**  
Installation design and archive re-interpretation  
by Artlab, Jeanine Richards and Charlotte Cullinan.

Discussion Event: 6th of May 2005  
"Curating is part of my practice"  
at Serpentine Gallery, The Sackler Centre of Arts  
Education  
with Henrik Schrat, Paul O'Neill, Lise Nelleman and  
Artlab, Jeanine Richards + Charlotte Cullinan





**Curating Degree Zero Archive in Korea**  
20 December 2006 – 4 February 2007

**Insa Art Space**  
Arts Council Korea, 90 Wanseo-dong, Jongno-gu,  
Seoul, Korea  
[www.insaartspace.or.kr](http://www.insaartspace.or.kr)

Display and re-interpretation  
by Sasa(44) & MeeNa Park

Opening talk and discussion 4pm December 20th





**Curating Degree Zero Archive in Croatia**  
29 October – 15 November 2008

**Galerija Miroslav Kraljevic**  
Zagreb, Croatia  
[www.g-mk.hr](http://www.g-mk.hr)

Curators Ana Janeski and Ivana Mestrov invited the Curating Degree Zero Archive to Zagreb. The installation of the archive in the Galerija Miroslav Kraljevic in collaboration with the group of young curating students and designed by Dora Budor & Maja Cule.





# The Subject of Curating – Notes on the Path towards a Cultural Clinic of the Present<sup>1</sup> by Felix Ensslin

## Introduction

The first question regards the locution itself: who writes or “speaks” here. While I have curated art shows, both collaboratively and on my own, I am not speaking from the perspective of a practitioner; rather, I want to approach the question from a philosophical and psychoanalytic perspective or, more pointedly, from the perspective where this necessary but uneasy partnership is conjoined. The question I have posed for investigation is the question concerning the subject of curating. Now, this is not a search for a full empirical description of what is entailed in curating, e.g. a knowledge of displays, a view of what art history has been, is or might be, knowledge of materials, cultures, and networks of people and institutions, the search for the new or a new perspective on the old, tools for mediation between a possibly enthusiastic but unschooled public and professional standards of judgement, mediation between what might be pressing issues of the day and the long view, institutional management and fundraising—to list only a few of the abilities and activities that might be entailed in actual curating. Curating is not a kind of Fregean name to which we then find a finite or possibly dynamically finite, i.e. changing with the times, list of propositions that define the content of that name. When I ask what the subject of curating is or could be, I ask in a certain philosophical tradition or, more accurately, in a tradition of questioning, redefining, shifting, and deconstructing this tradition. This also means that I still think posing such a question can lead to meaningful results. This would be contrary, for example, to the stated judgement (and claimed practice) of the curator of a recent show in Kassel called *Speculations on Anonymous Materials*, Susanne Pfeffer, who wrote in her curatorial statement: “The element of individual creation takes a back seat and the transfer of images and objects into the world of art becomes irrelevant as such.” She claims that, “Over the last two decades, the relationships between image and text, language and body, body and space, subject and object have changed rapidly,” and that we organize art and thought no longer along the paradigm of identity and difference but as elements of an infinite network.<sup>2</sup> The cognitive side of this network, she goes on, can engage only in a kind of varying speculation, which, I suppose, is meant to say that it can no longer identify, conceptualize, ascribe, or produce something like a subject position.

The search in which I am engaging, as will hopefully become clear, while not being deaf to the reasons that make speculative realism such a hot property in the ideas market, particularly in the cultural field and the art world, assumes that something like a subject necessarily is involved when we speak not only about art in

general but also more specifically about curating. If only, in order to present a moment, such a subject immediately calls for or even produces its own “working through”, its own deconstruction and a shift in its very condition, it will in one way or another be involved with identifying, categorizing, naming, that is, in opening a field that stretches a subject from and to an object, that defines image through space and space through image and that needs to answer the question regarding the relation between image and language, even if any such answer is followed by something like its own dismantling or reconfiguration.

### Again: Restarting with Post-structuralism

Sigrid Schade and Dorothee Richter have argued for transferring Wolfgang Kemp’s conception that the “viewer is in the image” to the idea that the “viewer is in the exhibition.”<sup>3</sup> However they also want to recognize what they call a “post-structuralist displacement” of this notion, namely by recognizing that the subject of the viewer is produced (or as they add: excluded) in part by the very interpellation of the experience of the exhibition itself. They call on Althusser and Lacan to justify this idea, implying a kind of *après coup* temporality or *Nachträglichkeit* which depends on an efficacy, a *Wirksamkeit*, of discourse rather than on a kind of expressive or self-creative ontology of “anonymous materials” to which both the discourse and the objects it circles around are only insignificant matters or secondary phenomena. My search for the subject of curating is more akin to this later search for the subject of the exhibition or the viewer than to a discourse that assumes that an ontology of networking and materialist realism, and be it the speculative kind, already has answered once and for all the question of the subject as irrelevant. However, the stakes between these two positions are not trivial and it is not simply a question of having the right theory or being on this or that theoretical bandwagon.

### Material Networking and the Subject

Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, in their book *Rethinking Curating: Art after new Media*, have argued that approaches that are traditionally more in tune with the art world—and post-structuralism can be said to belong to this category—have failed to adequately include phenomena such as new media art.<sup>4</sup> They claim that network-based work organized around behaviour they, along with Steve Dietz, call “interactivity, connectivity and computability”<sup>5</sup> and descriptions such as “centralized”, “decentralized”, or “distributed”<sup>6</sup> have had difficulty entering into the theoretical and practical considerations of institutions and curators. While they at the same time argue that distinctions along the lines of media are perhaps becoming obsolete, because “it would seem that no matter the form of the artwork, the medium never matters as much as the context,”<sup>7</sup> and even state that “some theorists have declared that we are now post-media,”<sup>8</sup> they seek refuge by shifting from substantives to verbs, by calling on a focus on what is done rather than what is made or represented. While this is, like the speculative realist position, also a call to consider networks of activity rather than a subject of discourse as the relevant reference for the question of curating, here the subject still does not disappear by a kind of theoretical fiat as happened in the self-explication of the exhibition *Speculations on Anonymous Materials*. While the latter, if philosophically stringent, would finally need to argue for some kind of self-selection process of anonymous materials—if that is not simply meant to be a metaphor—Cook and Graham argue that even within network-based new media art a kind of power rests with a gate-keeper function, and be it only as that of the administrator of a mailing list or audience-produced file sharing site.<sup>9</sup> Thus, I want to look first at the issue of power and its relation to our search for the subject of curating with reference to Foucault.

## Foucault

The fact that curating can be studied at universities shows that—if possibly only by institutional pragmatism—curating is inscribed into a field of science, albeit an interdisciplinary field. Thus, any search for the question of where the subject of curating could be situated might well be located either within the Discourse of the University and/or within a power/knowledge regime of what Foucault has termed the “will to know.”<sup>10</sup> The will to know produces a kind of selection process among utterances, where those that are deemed “serious speech acts”, as Rabinow and Dreyfus have termed them, are spoken by and within a context of somebody who is qualified by other actions to speak this utterance.<sup>11</sup> The main gateway to this qualification is science, which by producing what is possible to be said, what is serious and what isn’t, what counts and what doesn’t, exercises a will to knowledge. This will to knowledge has two sides that correspond to the two sides of what it means to be a subject: “There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.”<sup>12</sup> With Foucault I would argue that where there is power there is a subject. In his postscript to Dreyfus’ and Rabinow’s book that introduced Foucault to a larger English-speaking audience in the 1980s, Foucault writes that he is interested in how “in our culture, human beings are made subjects.” He differentiates three ways in which this happens:

Objectification through scientific discourse—e.g. the speaking human being becomes objectified through linguistic discourse, the active or working human being through the discourse of economics, or the very living human being through the discourse of biology or natural history.

“Practices of separation or division” that function both internally and externally, such as those produced by medical or criminological or sociological discourse with divisions such as “healthy – crazy”, “good guys – tough guys”, “employed – non-employed”.

Self-subjectification through discourses such as sexuality where a subject is produced that at the same time it is forced to relate to itself as “having” a sexuality and as being the subject of a necessary and complex objectification.<sup>13</sup>

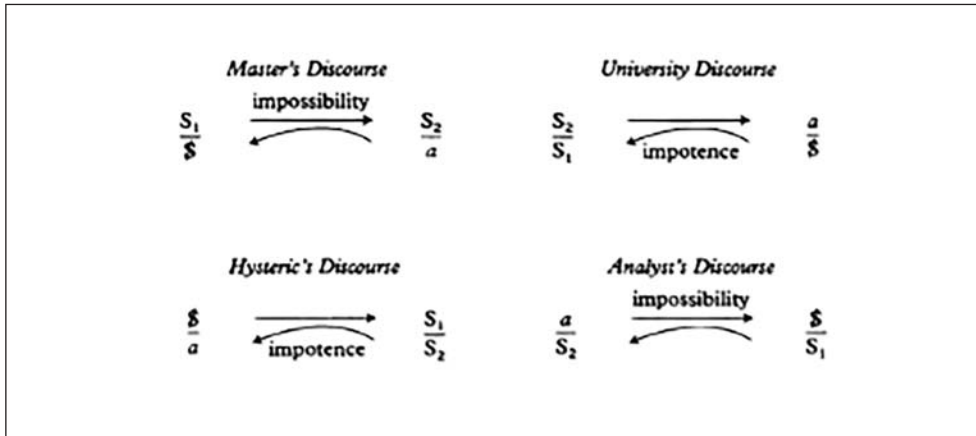
This is not the place to go into the many problems and debates that have sprung up around these positions of Foucault. The only reason I mention Foucault at all is the realization that the prominence of the “networking paradigm”—supposedly a signpost for the de-subjectification of productive processes in society in general and in the art field in particular—proves no such thing. Power emerges beyond either violence as a means of coercion or an already established consensus—institutional or otherwise. Power, as Foucault notes, presupposes a “free subject” on which it can work not in order to force directly—like violence—, or assume identification—like consensus—but to open a field of possibility, of producing options and choices which, of course, at the same time exclude others, prohibit, make ridiculous or impossible, or mark as non-serious any utterance or production outside that field opened by power. Clearly the subject of curating, whatever it is, can be found within this range of activities. Power, Foucault argues, engages by “a mode of action upon the actions of others,”<sup>14</sup> not by coercion or force.

The subject of curating appears on both sides of what Foucault tells us a subject is. In order to speak from a position that would make an utterance or an action part of a curating process, subjections and dependencies have to be realized. These can be those involved in the institutional frame of exhibiting, publishing, selecting, or those involved in gaining credentials, organizing the scientificity or legitimacy of such utterances or actions. At the same time the subject of curating

him- or herself, however willing to renegotiate and put into question any such stance, will come to speak from a position of conscious self-identification—of identity. Even Susanne Pfeffer signed the curatorial statement on “anonymous matter” with her own name. Thus, before we move to the four discourses of Lacan we can hold fast that whatever the subject of curating might be, it is a subject of the will to knowledge that organizes the regime in which we live. One might even go so far as to say that the expansion of curating beyond the confines of the caretaking of museum collections is the pathway along which the will to knowledge has extended its network of subject-production within the process of a globalizing world. The very democratizing elements—the free spaces, the explosion of new media, the predominance of post-colonial discourses—are both testimony and effect of this will to knowledge.

**Lacan’s Four Discourses**

With this determination of the subject of curating as a subject of the will to knowledge, I want to turn to Lacan and his four discourses in order to explore how they might help in answering our question. I want to argue that we can attempt to see with the four discourses that the subject of curating is caught in two paradoxical or schizophrenic positions, namely between the Discourse of the Master and the Discourse of the Hysteric on the one hand, and between the Discourse of the University and the Discourse of the Analyst on the other. In my final section, I want to begin to discern if the idea of what I would like to call a cultural clinic of the present could be made to work as means to operationalize and think the second position, between the University Discourse and the Analytic Discourse, as a proper place for the subject of curating.



The Four Discourses of Lacan<sup>15</sup>

<b>The places are those of:</b>		<b>The terms are:</b>	
<u>agent</u>	<u>other</u>	$S_1$ , the master signifier	
<b>truth</b>	<b>production</b>	$S_2$ , knowledge	
		$\$$ , the subject	
		$a$ , surplus jouissance	

Fig. 2: Places and Terms in Lacan’s Discourses<sup>16</sup>

Lacan’s discourses are a complex instrument of analysis, and I will not be able to unfold it here in full. However, let me give a short introduction how he intro-

duces them in Seminar XVII “The Other Side of Psychoanalysis”.<sup>17</sup> He thinks of the discourses, which show the relationship between agent, object, truth, and what Lacan calls “surplus jouissance”, as “lien social”, i.e. as social bond determining inter- and intrasubjective relationships. While he disclaims any reading that would determine a historical series, it is equally clear that the Master Discourse represents the social bond of traditional Western, i.e. patriarchal, societies. It hides the fact that the bearer of power is itself a “castrated” subject ( $S_1$ ), i.e. one not fully present either to himself or in the signifier that represents him or her. Nevertheless, its command as one brings all others, the knowledge and skill, to work ( $S_2$ ) thus producing surplus jouissance for the prestige of the master. The Hysteric’s Discourse is in a sense the one most closely connected to the master both because it permanently questions the identity between the subject of the master and his or her representation, thus foreseeing the master to legitimate him- or herself through the production of reasons for his or her position and commands (i. e. knowledge) but also because the truth of the hysteric’s desire, namely the jouissance derived from such delegitimizing questioning, would run empty if the master failed or vanished. The University Discourse serves the master as its truth while claiming to speak only from a position of knowledge. Everything without exception becomes the object of research and analysis and nothing that cannot claim the status of such knowledge is allowed to stand as valid. Through such a practice, the product of this discourse becomes castrated subjects who are unable to claim subjective truth for themselves outside of the products of the “will to knowledge.” In the Analyst’s Discourse, the agent is precisely the drive object that cannot be fully contained either by the master and his social representations or by knowledge in its legitimizing function. Its truth is that there is other knowledge, knowledge of the unconscious (savoir) opposed to and different from the knowledge of the will to power (connaissance). The split in knowledge itself sustains the split in the subject which thus can find its bearing only through a kind of proper name for its desire, a new  $S_1$  in the place of the product.

If we return to the question of the discourse of the curator and my claim that this discourse can be shown to be caught in two conflictual positions “in between” two of Lacan’s Discourses, the first such conflict is easy enough to see. Regarding the institutional framework of curating, the subject of curating is a subject of the Discourse of the Master. What is at work here is repression and power, whether in the agent position as  $S_1$  or in the object position as  $S_2$ .  $S_2$ , the artists, the writers, even to an extent the audience, works for  $S_1$ , the institution, and its representative, the curator. The product is a surplus value, symbolic or even real capital for the institution and the curator. A freelance curator might find herself in the position of  $S_2$  herself, her knowledge used to produce prestige for the master—the institution to which she was given temporary access. However, the nature of the art field dictates that this is countered by the position of the curator as “hysteric”, representing and enabling institutional critique, the inclusion of hitherto excluded media or artists or geographical regions in the process of questioning the master, the traditional collecting principles of a museum, etc. The product will be new knowledge  $S_2$ , which while unable to exert change on the level of “truth”, i.e. the motive for the process of such questioning between “hysteric and master”, will then be included into the functioning of the institution, the sponsor, the art-historical set-up etc. The actual effect of this double existence of the subject of curating in the Discourse of the Master and the Discourse of the Hysteric is to legitimate the very institution and power-structure that supposedly is questioned by processes of institutional critique by the expansion of the canon or by the inclusion of different media or geographical areas. As Hans Belting has argued in a somewhat different context both the exhibition *Primitivism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* at MoMA in the middle of the 1980s or even the much more radical *Magicians of the Earth* at the Centre

Pompidou in 1989, recently restaged at the same place, are good examples of this.<sup>18</sup> But of course this double inclusion goes much further into the nook and cranny of the everyday process of confrontation with the institutional framework of curating and is not preserved for the powerful institutions just mentioned. Structurally, this happens even when a curator is asked to work in an off-space temporarily funded by a state agency or a sponsor.

### **Between the University Discourse and the Analyst's Discourse**

Much more interesting, and relating back to the point I was trying to make with Foucault, is the second paradox or juxtaposition between the University Discourse and the Analyst's Discourse. The legitimating function of knowledge, which holds the place of agent in the University Discourse, has not been weakened by the process of multiplication and diversification of curatorial practice that we have witnessed in the last decades (and that have had historical precursors in many ways, but that is another issue). What legitimates the subject of curating is knowledge, even if it might be knowledge of the new or new knowledge up to now excluded from the purview of what counts within the arts and the art world. In fact, this very process of expansion, of exercising curatorial practice to include what has been excluded—also a process set in motion by the hysterical position that produces new knowledge—strengthens both what is in the position of truth and what is in the position of product in the University Discourse. It does not change the role of the master whom the University Discourse serves, nor does it avoid producing “castrated subjects”, i.e. subjects that are forced to express themselves in the ways that this process has legitimated and brought about. Categorization, cataloguing, archiving—all of these are processes that bring objects, people, and practices under the purview of the University Discourse. Professionalism—here we find the link to the will to knowledge—can only be verified through the castration of expressing and through operating within the terminology and categories given the status of “serious speech acts”. To be clear, this is not to say that nothing happens in this process. Just like the Hysteric's Discourse allows for the expansion of existing logics to a wider category of phenomena, the University Discourse allows for the inclusion of ever more objects of consideration. But, and here we return to the question of the subject of curating, what the University Discourse must exclude is the idiosyncratic, the subjective proper, intuition, style, and the impossibility to say it or say what “it” is.

I want to now begin a detour towards the Discourse of the Analyst. These first thoughts on the subject of curating are part of a larger project on which I have been working off and on, in spurts, for a few years now, namely the idea of developing a concept of a cultural clinic of the present as a kind of antidote towards the logic of the University Discourse. My final aim in this article would be to develop an idea of how the subject of curating while not being able to avoid its inclusion (and therefore castration) by the University Discourse also has a place in the interstices between the Analyst's Discourse and the University Discourse. But in order to sketch this idea, I will first have to outline what I would like to call the cultural clinic of the present.

### **The Cultural Clinic of the Present**

The reference here to the clinic is less to the institution that Michel Foucault described in its development in the nineteenth century—though no usage of the term can avoid this connotation—but rather serves to point towards something like a “praxis”, a practice. This use of the clinic refers back to the recliner into which an outpatient settled rather than to the hospital bed to which he was tied. It also



implies the *clinamen*, the little swerve of the smallest atomistic particles with which Epicurus and Lucretius saved nature and thus man from total determination by natural law. As a first approach, we can juxtapose the clinic as implying practice of something like “theory” or “contemplation”, drawing on the distinction between the theoretical life and the life of praxis that we can already find in Aristotle. Since for Aristotle these two are joined by a third kind of activity closer to practice or *praxis*, but not identical with it, namely to *poiesis* or making, my claim for the cultural clinic as *praxis* means for it to be distinguished from this side as well. Thus, clinic refers preliminarily to a practice that is neither purely theoretical nor engaged in *poiesis*.

When we think of the psychoanalytic field and the usage of the term clinic therein, another specification can be made: clinic is neither simply diagnosis nor simply cure, neither simply aetiology nor simply nosology or symptomology. Rather, in psychoanalysis all these epistemic spheres are connected within the clinic—separable for epistemic reasons only at the cost of a separation from the practice that the clinic itself is. It is for this reason that in the end, while engaging with the teaching and writing of others, each practicing psychoanalyst has to develop his own theoretical framework, his own theory as it were, intrinsic to his or her practice and beyond what he or she either learned from others or will transmit to others as knowledge. Maybe the practice of the subject of curating or the practice that makes curating a subject position is similarly a practice that only finds its place fully, when each practitioner develops his or her own theory intrinsic to his practice, a kind of interdependent double that is not separable on the empirical or ontic level.

With this observation we can begin to travel down the road of another association conjured up by this inseparability—which, I would like to point out, is not necessarily the same as “unity”. This association leads us to the field of aesthetics and the question of critique. Starting with the Romantics—for example Friedrich Schlegel’s “universal poetry”<sup>19</sup>—critique became an operation that could no longer be fit easily into a pre-given subject-object-relation. The critique of an artwork came to be understood not simply as the subjective apprehension—cognitive or affective—of a given work. Rather, critique became an element within what Walter Benjamin—referring to the early Romantics—called a “medium of reflection.”<sup>20</sup> Thus critique became a process by which the artwork itself was completed—never once and for all, but over and over again. Starting from this point of view but against its tendency to dissolve in the medium of an “eternal conversation”, from the real of both the artwork and the truth which critique could develop from within, Benjamin later developed a paradigmatic understanding of “critique” as a practice which laid bare the “truth content” of a work without dissolving it completely within the reflection that accomplished this task. Rather, the truth content is a kind of object-cause propelling forward the critique and transcending the historical confines of *poiesis*—the making of the art-work. *Poiesis* would be related to what Benjamin called the “Sachgehalt”, that is “material content” or “subject matter” of an artwork, while its “truth content” or, more literally, its “truth matter” was the object-cause of critique.<sup>21</sup> Science would be what could objectify the first but maybe not the second. The second, the truth content, might appear only in the practice of critique—or curating—or not appear at all.

Thus, the cultural clinic of the present towards which this article wants to make a small contribution is both a tautology and a leap. It is a tautology to the degree that we consider art a cultural phenomenon and its presence—or presenting—through critique a practice. Thus, cultural clinic refers to practice twice if we

remember that “clinic” also refers to a domain of practice or *praxis*. But in the repetition, the two elements become conjoined by a leap over historical and disciplinary boundaries: namely precisely critique and clinic. Mediated through the *tertium comparationis* of the term *praxis* we have thus joined aesthetics and psychoanalysis. At the same time, however, the question of how to understand practice becomes even more urgent and pressing.

### Realism, Constructivism and the Space of Truth

Alain Badiou has made the observation that today there are two options within philosophy and within the wider cultural field. One he calls “democratic materialism” and defines its axioms with the statement: “There are only bodies and languages.”<sup>22</sup> Embodied within this axiom, one could argue, are two possibilities that in some ways define the trajectory of European philosophy. On the one hand there is the tradition of realism, embodied in the epistemological mantra that knowledge is achieved through the “*adequatio rei et intellectus*”, i.e. the adequate alignment of the thing known and its linguistic or symbolic representation in the mind. On the other hand there is the tradition of constructivism, which holds that the linguistic or symbolic element produces the object known and it is thus a process of construction—be it transcendental as with Kant, dialectically ideal as with Hegel, or confined to the systematic elaboration of a specific medium as in much of sociology, system-theory or theories of performativity. Realism understood in this way holds sway today over fields of inquiry such as evolutionary genetic biology or hard-core cognitivism of the Daniel Dennet kind. Constructivism can be found in neo-Kantian approaches to symbolic structures as much as in theories of performativity of the Judith Butler kind.

Against this, Badiou sets another path of philosophy, namely the path that is based on the axiom that “there are only bodies and languages, except that there are truths.”<sup>23</sup> This approach, set against the “democratic materialism” which I have just described, he somewhat polemically names “materialist dialectic”.<sup>24</sup> Now, I want to set aside for the present purposes Badiou’s own mathematical ontology by which he means to oppose the supposed determinacy of the real, which is thought by the realism and constructivism of the democratic materialist approach, with the real indeterminacy that opens up the space for truth. Instead, I want to use Badiou’s differentiation in order to take a step back to Lacan. From Badiou’s perspective, and from the perspective of the speculative realists I spoke about in the beginning, this may be rather a step backwards—in the wrong direction, as it were. However, it is also Badiou who coined the saying that after Jacques Lacan no philosophy is possible that has not passed through the eye of a needle that is Lacan’s psychoanalysis. And my step back returns to this eye of a needle, in order to look for the conjunction of cultural critique and the clinic. For Lacan, the truth is a surplus of language that acts in the body. It is not grounded in a mathematical ontology but in the very process of adequation between *rei*, the things, and *intellectus* understood as knowledge or proper understanding. The process of producing categories is an indispensable element of any form of critique and practice. It is what marks the appearance of a subject—also in the practice of curating, I would argue.

### Psychoanalysis Places this Object in the Body/Body-Event

I want to make this clearer by approaching a passage in Lacan’s *Seminar XI* that implicitly refers to the philosophical problem of the relation of bodies and language. The implicit background of Lacan’s elaboration about the problem of an “adequation between things and intellect” is this: from Parmenides through to Plato, philosophy sought to ground knowledge of things in knowledge of the origin,

the *arche*. Being is *one* and being is what is available through *logos* for thought. This was Parmenides' answer. Plato sought to place the *arche* in the Ideas. But Aristotle opened up another dimension for philosophy, by no longer wanting to clarify the origin but rather the conceptual framework by which things are apprehended or known. "Being is said in many ways" is his famous dictum and his endeavour was to clarify the ways in which that happened, how language is able to produce epistemically guaranteed statements about things that are, about being.<sup>25</sup> Famously, one cornerstone of those clarifications was what became known as the "categories".<sup>26</sup> On the basis of this categorical clarification both realist and constructivist or nominalist traditions were built, but this is not my point here. Rather, with the help of Lacan I want to return the categories to the place from which they sprang. "*Kate-gorein*" means to accuse or rather to indict or to charge someone. Aristotle takes this term from the courthouse, because for him it is clear that the courthouse (as an institution, if not in all its dealings) is a place of justice and truth. It is before this background that Lacan takes up the scholastic adage of truth or true knowledge being "*adequatio rei et intellectus*" by pointing out that *rei* is not just a case of *res*, things, but also of *reus*, which is the term for the accused before the law.<sup>27</sup> The conformity of knowledge (of the accused) with the charge that indicts him and the indictment that charges him: this is the dimension of truth that Lacan wants to point out in his transformation of the epistemological ground rule of *adequatio rei et intellectus*. We can lay aside all the connotations of *fatum*, or fate, that are conjured up by this return to the categories as the process of indictment and look at it in a more technical, i.e. clinical sense. To conform one's knowledge—*connaissance*, i.e. imaginary knowledge under the synthetic function of the ego—with the signifier under which the subject must assume its place is, of course, impossible. It is this very impossibility that produces a remainder, an object-cause in what Lacan calls the real. This object-cause is never neutral or simply put aside; rather, it is what insists and what cannot be integrated in the imaginary unity of *connaissance*. To be under indictment—under the categories of the symbolic—is what produces an impossibility, namely the impossibility of being unified within the proper representations effected by the imaginary, the Ego. What carries this impossibility is the object-cause, the remainder that insists.

Thus, if we return to the beginning of this section we can summarize this position as follows: there are languages and bodies, yet the bodies as represented entities in knowledge (*connaissance*) carry within them a lack, something that is not embodied in/by them, but rather covered up by the specular image of the body, the imaginary. There is thus also a third term beyond language and body, just as with Badiou there was the third, namely truth. But is the object-cause, the remainder, itself truth? This concept of truth does not simply mean knowledge, if knowledge is predicated on the complete adequation between things and language. But truth is also not simply this remainder that makes it impossible to produce closure between language and things so as to produce knowledge. Rather, this remainder is a kind of cause, an object-cause, which can be the cause of a praxis which is the elaboration of truth as a different kind of knowledge, *savoir*, symbolic knowledge or in psychoanalysis: unconscious knowledge. Praxis "is the broadest term to designate a concerted human action to treat the real by the symbolic"<sup>28</sup>—this is the way Lacan in *Seminar XI* sums up what for him the originally Aristotelian term *praxis* means. Lacan speaks of the clinic, of course. It seems to me that what Lacan is referring to is the Freudian term of *Durcharbeiten*, working-through.<sup>29</sup>

If the clinic is a practice in this sense, then we now can say: *the clinic is the symbolic working through, the elaboration of a truth*. If we also remember the short mention of Benjamin's elaboration of the romantic notion of critique, where it is no

longer simply embodied in the “reflexive medium”, but rather itself both lays bare and takes up an object-cause beyond the “subject matter”, the “material content” of an artwork, we can see how this practice of critique can well be described by the same structure. Since critique produces the “truth content” rather than simply adequately describing or representing it, this kind of critique can also be thought of as a *symbolic working through of something real*.

### How to Think this Working-Through?

The answer to this question lies with the later Lacan and his rewriting of the modalities of thought and action: the contingent, the necessary, and the impossible. Democratic materialism deals with the imaginary duality of necessity and possibility: the laws of nature and the structure of the fantasies that govern our social space are experienced in the register of necessity. Lacan re-writes *necessity* as that which does not cease, as *that which does not stop writing itself*.<sup>30</sup> We can find in this the law of bodies as the laws of nature, but also the law of the fantasy: it is that which does not stop writing itself, producing in every change the same result, governed by an imaginary elision of its own object-cause. In the realm of politics, it appears as the language that speaks of causes of action with “no alternative”. Reforms are organized around this paradigm: necessity is that which does not stop writing itself. At the same time—and contradictorily—what is upheld is the language of possibility within the register of optionalism and liberal choice. The society of control, as Deleuze has called it, makes everyone an entrepreneur of his own existence, the ego driving a ceaseless arrangement and rearrangement of its objects. Be all that you can be and never miss anything while you’re at it: the gadgets of our information age are only so many symptoms of this culture of possibility that is governed by its neighbour, necessity without alternative.

However, Lacan introduces another way of thinking about possibility by rewriting *contingency* as *that which stops not writing itself*. This contingency is not the product of available options that are at the same time governed by a social and natural necessity that knows no alternative, but is related, rather, to impossibility, i.e. to that which does not stop not writing itself. Contingency is realized, when a piece of the impossible—of that which does *not stop not writing itself*—turns into an elaboration of something that stops not writing itself.

We can recognize in this new formulation what we have earlier called a *practice*. The practice of the clinic is easily recognized in this: what happens in psychoanalysis is that something impossible stops in some way being impossible. But this does not imply a sudden full realization of the impossible—as in the *passage à l’acte*. Rather it is *something of the impossible* that is realized, that “stops not writing itself.” The object-cause, the partial drive is picked up and elaborated in a different symbolic mode offering just a partial, but real, satisfaction.

We can also recognize in this what we have said of *critique*. If critique is the realization—or completion—of the art-work, as the Romantic tradition has it, then it is so only in this mode: something partial of it—let’s call it with Benjamin its “truth content”—is elaborated into the contingent mode of the present. But never as a totality—and never as the realization of the aesthetic illusion—but rather as the *Schein* or illusion that moves from the imaginary to the symbolic. This is what Zupančič has called the “real of an illusion.”<sup>31</sup> I can’t go through her entire argument here, but it can be summarized as follows: the condition of subjectively assuming the position of a practice is an illusion, namely the illusion of the totality of the symbolic practice itself. This illusion does not mean—as it would in the imaginary register—the promise that the fantasy finally gets realized. But rather, that in

order to subjectively relate to the practice, the subject has to choose it without exception, and that means without basing it on the fantasy of exception. Without exception: this is the term for the universality embedded in every practice. Yet this universality is precisely embedded in a *practice*: it is not a representable universal nor a regulative ideal, but a practical universalizability, a becoming universal. It ties the object-cause to a symbolic dimension, knotting together as it were the body and language, by registering a subjective position in relation to the symbolic dimension that falls outside the given world of democratic materialism and its offers of necessity and optionalistic liberal possibilities. It is a subjective position not on the level of conscious knowledge, imaginary *connaissance*, but on the level of *savoir*, unconscious symbolic knowledge, precisely because it has to be chosen against the evidence of necessity and the promise of possibility within the culture of democratic materialism. Practice thus is related to a fundamental shift in the subjective position that can be mediated by the knowledge of the Ego but only through opening to the register of impossibility as real, the very register the culture of democratic materialism forecloses.

If we return from this to the question of the clinic and critique, to the question of the cultural clinic of the present, we need to ask what follows for the conceptualization of these terms. First it is of particular importance to mark the distance this approach has from all hermeneutic practices, but also from all forms of discourse analysis that simply aim at the historicization of the objects of inquiry. They both, too, have their roots in the Romantic tradition but they either develop on the basis of a kind of Hegelian spirit, *Geist*, which provides an ideal horizon of unification of particular practices and acts of interpretation or, in discourse analysis, completely separate them from what Benjamin called the “truth content” by way of reducing objects of interpretation simply to their “material content” relating them to a particular historical *episteme*. Against this, each action within a practice we have developed on the model of the clinic and critique is singular. It has no horizon of unification—for it excludes the imaginary function of unity—but stands in a relation to truth that is never completely presented and presentable. This is the subjective side of a practice: it relates to its symbolic dimension as a totality that is not representable, not present. Conversely, it aims to interpret or better to take up, develop, envelop, produce from the truth content, precisely the lack of the totality that appears in different cultural phenomena within the present scope of democratic materialism. It picks up that which “does not stop not writing itself” in an act in order to produce from it that which “stops not writing itself.” It transfers the impossible to the possible, but by adhering to the split within possibility itself. The possible thus produced and developed is never inscribed within a horizon of full realization or, more psychoanalytically speaking, full satisfaction. Its object is partial just as its object-cause is partial. This means first, that—as I have stated earlier—this transfer from the impossible to the possible is not a *passage à l’acte*, a blaze of truth and glory, unifying being and language in a momentary realization of totality. Secondly, it means that a cultural clinic is not concerned with meaning, but with truth. Certainly, the register of meaning—the imaginary unity of experience—is never absent from any act that is a practice; but practice works through meaning to realize a measure of what is, within meaning, signified as impossible.

### **The Subject of Curating Considered in the Light of the Cultural Clinic of the Present**

What follows from this sketch of the cultural clinic for the subject of curating? Well, certainly that it is not one. But, just as importantly, that it is not many, either. Catchwords like “interdisciplinarity”, the shifting costumes of scientific and cultural identifications, the simple presence of multiplicity, difference, geographical

inclusion, ironic repetition, or a posture of openness against closure and plurality over and against dogmatism does not yet mark this subject. It is neither one, nor many, for it appears in the specific ways in which it knots together the experience of an impossibility with the registers of the University Discourse, with the questioning of the master that is the lot of the hysteric and with the institutional *realpolitik* of the master discourse itself. This impossibility is not simply an identification of something left out: women, post-colonial subjectivities, new media art, etc. It is quite possible to engage any of these exclusions on the level of science or in the *pas de deux* of the master and the hysteric. This impossibility appears e.g. when an attempted categorization does not fit the practice or object one has selected. It appears when the need to legitimize within the Discourse of the University silences a language and a thought, a project or a doubt that permeates any attempt to symbolize an experience that has not had yet its time. It appears wherever something resists the many ways in which bodies and languages circulate within materialist democratic consumerism. It appears as resistance to the demand for mediation, *Vermittlung*, recognisability. It appears in a need to show something that does not fit any given narration, neither political, nor scientific, nor biographical. Making the space for this contingent necessity is the mark of this subject. But this is not a call for authenticity. The real of truth is realized only in pieces, part-objects, breaks, sentences that are non-sequiturs, never fully, and never as a whole. Certainly it appears in a kind of resistance to the narcissistic recognition of being recognized rather than answered.

The subject of curating is not, as tempting as this may often be, a subject of the master, but neither is it a subject of the university. It is, like the artist him- or herself, or like the analyst, a subject of a *praxis*. This has far-reaching consequences for the issue of legitimation. The point is not to resist “professionalization” or the Discourse of the University: the point is to not use it as a legitimating force but in order to sharpen one’s eye and one’s ear, one’s skin, and one’s body to what is impossible within the discourse of science and its place in materialist democratic culture. This is not an easy task: the entire history of aesthetics has been a history of illusions created by the attempt to integrate the other of reason into the purview of reason itself, the other of universality into universality itself, the other of finite materiality into infinite thought itself—or, more recently, vice versa. Inclusion fails to keep open the difference between science and practice. Practice articulates, and does so in the end without justification. In order for this not to lead to obscurantism, a celebration of irrationality or simply back into a kind of humanism of meaning and culture, every subject of curating has to organize itself around not only the doing but the thinking. The subject of curating can be located where its actions are: i.e. selecting, processing, documenting, localizing, contextualizing, and re-contextualizing, etc. Its actions are at the same time paralleled by an attempt to develop a theory of those very actions and within those activities. A subject of curating appears not only in the locations, connections, and presentations, not only in institutions or anti-institutions, not only in the realm of appearance itself, but in the discourse he or she produces. The difference will be how and to what extent this work is “true”, i.e. works out a subjective impossibility in relating what is being said to the Discourse of the Master and, more importantly, the Discourse of the University. There might be silent artists, though less and less so it seems, for their silence will be heard or seen or felt or brought to experience in some manner. But a silent curator refuses or denies the subject position that he or she is in. Thus, the issue is, what can break this silence. You will laugh, no one has ever heard of a silent curator! But chattering [in/about] the new mode, the newest trend, the newest discovery, the hip stuff, the counter-hip hip stuff: that is not breaking a silence. Thus, to the question what will break it, there will not be one answer but only as

many answers as there are subjects of curating. But for this to be heard, maybe one needs to leave the university. This implies that the subject of curating needs its own place of speech. Not only the university, not only the institutions of art, not only the venues of publication or the net. But, like psychoanalysts, a place where one can listen to oneself in the ears of other subjects of curating, not in order to gain anything but simply to register in oneself and the other if something of the truth that is impossible appears. If the university is to be made a place for curating, its disciplines and registers, then it can succeed only if it is doubled, countered, by what I want to call anti-institutions, little sects of curator subjects. This does happen. But it is important to realize that what is at stake is not networking, ideas exchange, or alliances. But a space where something can be heard that only those can hear that have no need to understand or to mediate it. Thus, while those anti-institutional groupings of subjects of curating exist, it might be useful to realize the conditions of its necessity—and impossibility.

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**Felix Ensslin** is a philosopher, curator, dramaturge and director. Among other exhibitions, he curated *Berlin Noir* at Perry Rubenstein Gallery in New York and *Zur Vorstellung des Terrors - Die RAF-Ausstellung* ("Regarding Terror: The RAF Exhibition" with Ellen Blumenstein and Klaus Biesenbach at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, and at Kunstmuseum Graz) as well as *between two deaths* at ZKM Karlsruhe (with Ellen Blumenstein). He is co-editor of the series *subjektile* (formerly *diaphanes*, now *Turia + Kant*) and founding member of *pli - Psychoanalyse nach Lacan* ("pli - Psychoanalysis According to Lacan"; Stuttgart, Hamburg, Berlin, Paris, München). *Aesthetics of the Flesh* is his most recent publication (as co-editor; release date is November 2014, Sternberg Press). Since 2009 he is a Professor for Aesthetics and Art Education at Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart.

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## Notes

**1** A version of this article was presented as the keynote address of *CURATING: Glittering Myth, Social Symptom, Revolutionary Force? A Conference on Curatorial Knowledge Production* on November 15, 2014 at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste.

**2** cf. Susanne Pfeffer, *Speculations on Anonymous Materials. Exhibition Booklet*, 3, accessed December 2, 2014, <http://www.fridericianum.org/files/pdfs/733/booklet-speculations-on-anonymous-materials-en.pdf>.

**3** Sigrid Schade and Dorothee Richter, "Ausstellungen-Displays," in *Ausstellungen als Kulturpraktiken des Zeigens*, Das Neue Ausstellen (Ruppichterorth: Kunstforum-Verl., 2007), 59.

**4** Beryl. Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010).

**5** *Ibid.*, 6.

**6** Here the authors cite Alex Galloway. *Ibid.*, 57.

**7** *Ibid.*, 83.

**8** *Ibid.*, 5.

**9** cf. *Ibid.*, 82f.

**10** Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1 The Will to Knowledge* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990).

**11** Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 1. publ. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 48–58.

**12** Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 1. publ. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 212.

**13** cf. *Ibid.*, 208.

**14** *Ibid.*, 221.

**15** Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan : On Feminine Sexuality : The Limits of Love and Knowledge : Book XX*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1998), 16.

**16** *Ibid.*, 17.

**17** cf. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (New York ; London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007).

**18** Peter Weibel and Andrea Buddensieg, eds., "Contemporary Art and the Museum in the Global Age," in *Contemporary Art and the Museum: A Global Perspective* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz : [Distributed in the] U.S.A/North America, D.A.P., Distributed Art Publishers, 2007), 27f.

**19** Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 1991), 31.

**20** Walter Benjamin, "The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism," in *Selected Writings. Vol. 1 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael W. (Michael William) Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap, 2004), 132ff.

**21** Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," in *Selected Writings. Vol. 1 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael W. (Michael William) Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Belknap, 2004), 297–360.

**22** Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: The Sequel to Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2008), 1ff.

**23** *Ibid.*, 4.

**24** cf. *Ibid.*, 1–9.

**25** cf. Aristotle, "Metaphysics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

**26** cf. Aristotle, "Categories," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 1*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

**27** Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian Thing," in *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink, 1 edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company,



2007), 361.

**28** Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1981), 6.

**29** cf. Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Vol. 12* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1958), 144–56.

**30** For Lacan's rewriting of necessity, contingency and impossibility see for example Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 94.

**31** Alenka Župančič, *Ethics of the Real: Kant and Lacan* (London: Verso, 2011).

# Curating with/in the System

## by Sabeth Buchmann

“Art without Artists?” It was under this alarmist title that, two years ago, the artist and e-flux co-founder Anton Vidokle criticized curators for claiming the status of artists and critics in an inadmissible manner. His finding was not new. It had already been a topic of discussion in the late sixties, when the curator and critic Lucy R. Lippard was accused of using the exhibitions she designed after the manner of the Concept Art of her day to stylize herself as an artist who regarded other artists merely as a medium.<sup>1</sup> The polemic set forth by her colleague Peter Plagens in *Artforum* was a response to the first of the so-called “numbers exhibitions” Lippard staged between 1969 and 1973 in various locations and named after the size of the respective town’s population: 557,087 (Seattle Art Museum, 1969), 955,000 (Vancouver Art Gallery, 1970), 2,972,453 (Centro de Arte y Comunicación in Buenos Aires, 1970) and c. 7500 (California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, 1973). The exhibition catalogues were loosely bound bundles of 5x8-inch index cards designed by the participating artists and exchanged and supplemented by new ones from one venue to the next. This flexible and modular exhibition and publication model points on the one hand to the predilection—typical of Concept Art at the time—for mundane information design as well as non-hierarchical compilations and the equal value of objects, idea sketches, texts, drawings, photographs, etc. On the other hand, the catalogue texts, presented in the typewriter style typical of Concept Art, were integrated into this system of artists’ contributions, and the degree to which they thus lost their special status was equalled by the degree to which the distinction between artistic and curatorial stances and methods was in fact subject to negotiation.

It is precisely here that the crux of a new curatorial spirit seems to manifest itself – the spirit that echoes in Vidokle’s article and that, as is exemplified (not only) by Lippard’s projects, bears a relation to the development of a “curatorial system” (Magda Tyzlik-Carver) beginning to make itself felt in the late sixties. What is meant here, more specifically, are collaborative practices organized in socio-technological networks and comprising not only art, but also—as proposed by Maurizio Lazzarato—interfaces of immaterial work and immaterial goods and extending to encompass the areas of education, knowledge, and information.<sup>2</sup> As will become evident in the following, Tyzlik-Carver’s definition of the term “curatorial system” bears similarities to Lippard’s exhibition models, which—in the spirit of the virulent critique of hierarchy prevalent in the late sixties—were directed against conventional principles of selection and ranking, and which reveal an interest in themes and discourses pertinent to art and related fields. For example, curators and critics like Lippard relativized their own power of decision and judgement and declared themselves collaborators of—and on an equal footing with—the artists: a shift prompted as much by the latter as by the former; after all, artists had begun to integrate curatorial and art-critical elements and discourses into their work, from work to text to exhibition. This phenomenon heralds the departure from rigid object forms in favour of the communicative situations and socially conceived

media praxis cited by Helmut Draxler in relation to post-conceptual practices around 1990,<sup>3</sup> which advanced to become a standard (however controversial) within a discourse and exhibition praxis of an anti-institutional nature. What is astonishing about Vidokle's statement, against this background, is his claiming of a standpoint supposedly outside the system and oblivious to this historical context.

The following will nevertheless take a closer look at whether, and in what respect, the ousting of artists criticized by Vidokle is foreshadowed in concepts such as the "numbers exhibitions", or whether Lippard's projects offer points of departure for a critical discussion of the present-day manifestations of the "curatorial system", which do without the trite recall of conventional role models. This question is also significant in the sense that Lippard's exhibitions were not isolated experiments. If there is mention here of parallels to contemporary manifestations of the "curatorial system", then it is also because her exhibitions bore a direct relation to her publicistic activities. The latter included the production of anthologies as well as a non-profit circulation operation bearing the name "printed matter" co-founded by Lippard in the mid-seventies. "Systemic" activities of this kind could be equated with the politics of publicity directed towards expanded publics, i.e. towards the accessing of a cultural milieu with limited purchasing power, and analyzed by Alexander Alberro in connection with the group around the legendary gallery owner Seth Siegelaub<sup>4</sup>—a praxis based on the assumption of a cultural primacy of information and communication media and encountered again today in enterprises such as e-flux. In the latter, however, it presents itself as an expression of an advanced network economy in which commercial and non-commercial activities merge (the latter including the exhibition and event spaces run by e-flux as well as an online magazine), and which can serve as an example of the degree to which the international goings-on in the areas of art, exhibition, and art criticism have meanwhile become interwoven.

It is thus difficult to explain the success of a globally operating enterprise such as e-flux outside the "curatorial systems" presently in the process of taking their gloves off with regard to what has long since become canonical critique of the anachronistic image of the (lone) artist. All the more astonishing is it that Vidokle—who definitely has a point with his attacks on presumptuous curator behaviour—wants to reverse this trend, which is part of the organizational form of e-flux. Precisely against the background of Lippard's projects, which deliberately relativized, combined, or reproduced traditional institutional roles and reinforced cooperatively conceived aspects of presentation, mediation, and distribution as opposed to author-centric forms, it proves questionable to want to disentangle artistic and curatorial concerns to the degree of unambiguity suggested by Vidokle. Such argumentation would merely amount to the suggestion of the solipsistic role conceptions that artists once revolted against, among other things with the aim of taking the curating business into one's own hands and thus challenging the curators' role.

This challenge was programmatically taken on by, for example, the exhibitions designed by Siegelaub in catalogue format such as *January 5–31 (1969)*, as well as by Lucy R. Lippard's exhibition and book projects. Conceiving of themselves as "organizer and editor", both exhibited a new understanding of the curator's role. What is more, as emphasized by Cornelia Butler, MoMA curator and the author of the main essay in the publication on the "numbers exhibitions",<sup>5</sup> Lippard's exhibitions were essentially a new type of non-thematic group show. However strongly influenced she was by the painting of the fifties and sixties, Lippard showed almost no paintings in her "numbers exhibitions". On the contrary, quite in keeping with (Post-)Minimalism and Conceptualism, the latter were dominated by sculpture in

the broadest—i.e. in the process-oriented, place-specific and temporary—sense, as well as photography, film, sound art, and text-based works.<sup>6</sup> In comparison to Siegellaub, who operated as the ally and dealer of a few exclusively male New Yorkers,<sup>7</sup> Lippard featured in her “numbers exhibitions” far greater and more heterogeneous constellations of works by artists living between the American East and West coasts as well as in Canada, Argentina, and the United Kingdom. In this respect, as Butler points out, Lippard’s projects approximated the type of group show also successfully staged by Harald Szeemann at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969 under the title *Live in your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*,<sup>8</sup> and thus offer a new perspective on his status as the originator of the contemporary, international group exhibition, a reputation that tends to be considered singular.<sup>9</sup> To the extent that the focus was primarily on attitudes, methods, and communicative situations rather than on the selection of a few big artist names, this then-popular group show format definitely exhibited non-hierarchical traits. Yet, whereas in the case of Szeemann this amounted to the elevation of the curator to the status of an “exhibition auteur”, Lippard positioned herself much more prosaically and modestly. In retrospect, for example, Lippard characterized her curatorial activities as that of a “compiler”<sup>10</sup>—a self-description that is to be considered against the background of her editing/publishing projects.

From 1964 onward, Lippard wrote for art magazines such as *Artforum*, where she served for a time as editor-in-chief, and *Art International*, where she had a regular column, but she increasingly questioned this role. Her work as a freelance curator, on the contrary, which came to dominate her activities from 1966 onward, offered her a means of shedding what she considered the parasitic role of art critic.<sup>11</sup> The degree to which she conceived of herself as an art producer—concurrently with her increasing emphasis on political activism (within the framework of the anti-Vietnam protests as well as labour-union and feminist agendas)—corresponds to the degree to which she rejected the art critics’ power of definition derived from their quasi-institutional status, but also the conventional conceptions of “connoisseurship”<sup>12</sup> and good taste. It was in this phase as well that she and John Chandler jointly published the essay “The Dematerialization of the Art Object” (1968). The text formulated the proposition—as popular and at the same time as controversial then as it is now<sup>13</sup>—that the traditional material-object paradigm was dissolving in favour of idea and process-oriented, temporary and ephemeral, science/scholarship-compliant, performative and communicative work forms. Characteristically, their often textual complexion—if not to say their morphology—is mirrored in the anthology Lippard published five years later: *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (1973). Entirely in the style of the Concept Art of the time, the book’s cover offers a summary description of its content: “A cross-reference book of information on some esthetic boundaries: consisting of a bibliography into which are inserted a fragmented text, art works, documents, interviews, and symposia.”<sup>14</sup> In analogy to the related aim of producing a fragmentary, but at the same time representative, selection and documentation of “so called conceptual or information or idea art”,<sup>15</sup> Lippard explains in the preface to *Six Years* that the book was about “widely differing phenomena within a time span” and not about a “movement”, and that there was therefore no “precise reason for certain inclusions and exclusions except personal prejudice and an idiosyncratic method of categorization that would make little sense on anyone else’s grounds.”<sup>16</sup>

Lippard’s proposal for a non-hierarchical compilation of texts thus integrates decidedly arbitrary and self-mocking elements—an aspect that can also be applied to the figure of the “compiler”. This is expressed in representative manner in the strategy Butler refers to as “curating by numbers”, which construes the act of curating as something vague and unoriginal, and hence freed of overloaded claims to

creativity. This, then, is also the attitude at the core of the reciprocal relationship between the critique of authorship, of the work and of the institution set up in her exhibitions, an approach designed to confuse conventional role models and competences □ and exhibiting certain similarities to the endeavours emerging at around the same time, as a conscious echo of the historical avant-gardes, to put concepts of the artwork conceived exclusively in aesthetic terms into a new perspective within the framework of media/episteme-based systems of depiction. The emphasis on the “technical reproducibility” (Benjamin) of the artwork manifest in the catalogue exhibitions and artistic magazine contributions thus went hand in hand with a programmatic dedifferentiation of the production and mediation professions. Lippard’s “numbers exhibitions”, however, adopted the role parodies popular in the art scene of the time<sup>17</sup> and applied them to the position of the curator.

Finally, shifts of this kind are also manifest in the intertwining of curatorial practices and art criticism of the kind (not only) Vidokle sees at work in the present-day exhibition system. According to Lippard, this intertwining was a logical deterritorialization of institutional terrains: “I began to see curating as simply a physical extension of criticism.”<sup>18</sup> Her book *Six Years* accordingly functioned as a publicistic counterpart to her “numbers exhibitions”—an analogy that corresponded to the creed of Concept Art (and that of Siegelau), according to which the distinction between a physical object and its linguistic proposition is merely functional (and not fundamental) in nature. From this perspective, the analogy between curatorial-publicistic productions and “dematerialized art objects” appeared entirely consistent. “It [*Six Years*] has also been called a ‘conceptual art object in itself’ and a ‘period-specific auto-critique of art criticism as act’.”<sup>19</sup>

What according to Vidokle can be interpreted as an inappropriate pretence of artistic-ness on the part of the curator is expressed in Lippard’s words as a balancing act. It does not represent an *a posteriori* attempt to elevate her book to an art object, but merely a reminder of its reception, which must be considered within the context of a climate in which the vision of the equality of everyone involved in art prevailed.<sup>20</sup>

This applies particularly to the manner in which Lippard linked the figure of the “compiler” to that of the “writer”.<sup>21</sup> To define curating as an act of writing and, conversely, writing as a form of curating bears a relation to the discourses on authorship that were particularly virulent at the time and are today a critical standard. Roland Barthes’ “Death of the Author” echoes in the dialectic of relativization and expansion of role and competence profiles represented by Lippard.<sup>22</sup> The figure of the “compiler” can be related to the activities of collecting, researching, archiving and translating that are based less on individual than on systemic authorship, activities of which artists, as we know, avail themselves to the same degree as curators and critics. According to Cornelia Butler, the figure of the “compiler” served to deprofessionalize one’s own praxis and to interweave the activities of the curator with that of the art critic. This self-image thus not only went hand in hand with a relativization of curatorial authorship, but also with an increase of power in the sense of an expansion of the zone of criticism in such a way as to help curating to more potency.

In Butler’s view, this reinterpretation of the curatorial is accompanied by the fact that artists, for their part, began foregrounding the work of making: “Calling paintings and sculpture simply ‘works’, reflecting making as a part of meaning. The products of exhibition-making were more commonly designed as ‘projects’, aligning the activity of the curator more closely with the production of artists”.<sup>23</sup> This

idea implies a certain equation of artistic and curatorial production with Marxist definitions of work<sup>24</sup> that puts Lippard's project in the context of a (post-)revolutionary concept of art, characterized at the same time by a shift away from self-contained work forms towards cybernetically conceived ones. Another aspect of this is, as conceived by Tyzlik-Carver, the revaluation of "immaterial activities" (from emotional work on relationships to performative actions, from service to management functions), which according to Beatrice von Bismarck "led to a revaluation of relational processes relative to autonomous products."<sup>25</sup>

In this context, the fact—pointed out by Butler—that the "numbers exhibitions" were "low-budget" projects comprising portable works and shown in small, peripheral, underfinanced institutions is relevant. For example, in connection with 2,972,453—the "numbers exhibition" conceived for the Centro Arte y Comunicación in Buenos Aires—Lippard spoke of the attempt to organize a "'suitcase exhibition' of dematerialized art that would be taken from country to country by 'idea artists' using free airline tickets."<sup>26</sup> Her "numbers shows" can accordingly also be considered in the context of the development which art theorist Michael Sanchez analyzes in connection with forms of network-based circulation prevalent today. The example he cites for this is the feedback-oriented website *Contemporary Art Daily*, which he considers a remediation not only of an art magazine but also of the group exhibition. At *Contemporary Art Daily*, he points out, the circulation of artworks and the functional principles of social networks overlap.<sup>27</sup> With reference to a text on the subject by Rainer Ganahl, Sanchez sees the historical conditions for this phenomenon in the curatorial practices prevalent around 1970. According to his train of thought, a decisive reason for the popularity of international group show projects like *When Attitudes Become Form* lies in the significant reduction in the price of airline tickets and the resulting higher circulation speed. Meanwhile, he observes, we observe an increase from "jet speed to light speed" and a "curating tempo" that has "sped up to rival that of the RSS feed."<sup>27</sup> Whereas in the context of the climate prevailing around 1970 it seemed logical for cooperation-minded curators and critics to avail themselves of seemingly "dematerialized" work forms—above all language as a medium allegedly independent of profit-oriented ownership claims—today such practices are accordingly returning as technically advanced media formats adapted to the advanced economy of social networks. Even if he argues his point in a manner entirely different from Vidokle, Sanchez deduces from this a totalisation of the curatorial which, in light of Lippard, however, should be put into perspective: after all, her reinterpretation of role models and competences is an expression of an effort to expose their problems and contradictions and to put the same up for discussion. In other words, Sanchez's theory that curating today encompasses social networks and life in general in addition to art objects sounds a bit as if everything were being jumbled together here in order to reproduce precisely that blend that is the target of his criticism.

In light of the anti-hierarchical implication of Lippard's figure of the "compiler", the question also arises here of its significance for Vidokle's finding according to which one reason for the devaluation of art criticism lies in the expansion of the curatorial. If viewed from this perspective, the figure of the "compiler" with direct-democratic qualities in the framework of contemporary curatorial systems—the figure whose guise artists and critics alike can slip into—would be at least as responsible for the degradation of artists and critics as the assignment of the aura of the "exhibition auteur", criticized by Vidokle, to the curator. The struggle against politically compromised role models and representation conditions could accordingly be observed in virtually picture-book-like manner from the perspectives of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari. After all, the "curatorial system" that evolved in the period

in question shows that the critique of power goes hand in hand not only with democratic-political strategies of self-empowerment, but also with the transversal dissemination and reterritorialization of power functions. This is an aspect related less to individual intentions and strategies as to structural frameworks.

Against this background, Lippard's considerable resistance to traditional forms of institutional legitimation can by all means be reconciled with the role she embodies of a locally and internationally connected and recognized art historian, art critic, curator, activist, and writer. Yet this does not suffice to regard the related feminist deconstruction of patrilineal positions of authority and power as settled. On the contrary, the question must be raised as to whether and how the accompanying substitution of the established dichotomies of production and reception, exhibition and publication, aesthetic and information-dualities that uphold the prevailing divisions of labour—appears today in the guise of a “curatorial system” that reorganizes power and hierarchy in a manner that seems unchallengeable because it purports to be institution-critical and direct-democratic. In view of the openly profit-oriented, market-share-grabbing networks, what this amounts to is a diametrical reversal of the strategies of “negotiation” which, according to Beatrice von Bismarck, picked up the thread of “the political orientation of institutional criticism around 1970” in order to counter the “competition aspect.”<sup>28</sup>

This attitude is also expressed in Lippard's feminist-activist espousal of the cause of underpaid “art workers” and structurally marginalized women artists that was to become the point of departure and reference for her firmly partisan art criticism. In the fourth and last of her “numbers exhibitions” –c. 7500 (1973, Valencia, California)—she presented exclusively women artists, thus responding to the criticism of those artists that she indeed wrote about them, but exhibited them only in isolated cases.<sup>29</sup> In the foreword to her book *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (1976), she confesses that the women's movement changed her relationship to life in general and to art criticism in particular on account of her newly acquired freedom “to respond to all art on a far more personal level. I'm more than willing to be confessional, vulnerable, autobiographical, even embarrassing, if that seems called for.”<sup>30</sup> It goes without saying that such intimate avowals were founded in the feminist conviction that the private is political—a conviction meanwhile corrupted in view of the omnipresent pressure to publish. Lippard untiringly gave verbal expression to the conditions of isolation, exclusion, and uncertainty under which, in her perception, a large majority of the women artists she wrote about in her compilations produced their work. The style of her art criticism thus appears to have been personally and politically motivated to equal degrees. Lippard took her politicisation as an opportunity to put her authority up for negotiation once again and to present herself as an autodidact. As she continued in her foreword, she herself had been compelled to learn the vocabulary of art criticism anew from the women artists' reports on their experiences so as to be able to convey an authentic language, i.e. one not based on traditional male-oriented patterns. With the aim of promoting and spreading such a language, Lippard spoke out, in a suspiciously essentialist vein, in favour of separate art schools, collections, museums, etc. Thanks to her curatorial concept of the “compiler”, she did not merely propagate the “three prominent exceptional women”,<sup>31</sup> but proposed a representative grouping that did justice to the multifariousness of the approaches pursued by women artists in her day. We undoubtedly have this form of discursive “curating” to thank for the fact that, not only in Lippard's own exhibitions, the proportion of women artists increased substantially, at least for a time.

Disappointed by the way the (primarily male) concept artists clung to the mechanisms of the art market, Lippard would soon recognize the naivety of social

utopias—such as that of the non-hierarchical language—and how they in fact participate in power politics.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, it was evidently necessary to subscribe to such utopias in order to achieve the destabilization of institutional labour division and thus to expose the prevailing politics of exclusion and conditions of representation. Lippard's models of the proliferation and flexible diversification of role and competence profiles ultimately appear to correspond, to an extent, to present-day performance expectations. The same can be said of the reciprocity of de-hierarchization and power gain, as well as the revaluation of immaterial / devaluation of material work. And anyone who today speaks out on behalf of dispossessed and disenfranchised artists would be well advised to recognize the political potentials, but also the contradictions, of a "curatorial system" which, at least in Sanchez's view, may soon degrade power-crazy curators to an anachronistic footnote—unless of course they turn up again in the guise of the system administrators who, as was recently the case at the Berlin Biennale, arrange chairs in a circle and announce their visions of non-hierarchical cooperation in the framework of e-flux and *Contemporary Art Daily*.<sup>33</sup>

**Sabeth Buchmann** is art historian and critic, based in Berlin and Vienna, Professor of the History of Modern and Postmodern Art at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. Together with Helmut Draxler, Clemens Krümmel, and Susanne Leeb she co-edits of *PoLyPen*, a series on art criticism and political theory, published by *b\_books*, Berlin). Publications include: *Textile Theorien der Moderne. Alois Riegl in der Kunstkritik* (ed. with Rike Frank, Berlin: *b\_books*/ *PoLyPen*, 2015), *Hélio Oiticica, Neville D'Almeida and others: Block-Experiments in Cosmococa. London 2013* (with Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz), and *Film Avantgarde Biopolitik, Vienna 2009* (ed. with Helmut Draxler and Stephan Geene), *Denken gegen das Denken. Produktion – Technologie – Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticica*, Berlin: *b\_books*/ *PoLyPen*, 2007; *Art After Conceptual Art* (ed. with Alexander Alberro), Cambridge/ Mass.: MIT und Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König (Generali Foundation Collection Series), 2006.

### Notes

- 1 See Peter Plagens, "557,087", *Artforum*, November 1969, pp. 64–67.
- 2 See Magda Tyzlik-Carver, "Interfacing the commons: Curatorial system as a form of production on the edge", online at: <http://www.kurator.org/media/uploads/publications/essays/public-interfaces/tyzlik-carver.pdf> (accessed 1 July 2015).
- 3 Helmut Draxler, *Die Gewalt des Zusammenhangs. Raum, Referenz und Repräsentation bei Fareed Armaly* (Berlin: *b\_books*, 2007). Also see the project curated by Draxler in 1989/90 for the Museum in Progress, Vienna, "Message as Medium": <http://www.mip.at/persons/helmut-draxler> (accessed 1 July 2015).
- 4 Alexander Alberro, *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004).
- 5 Cornelia Butler, "Women – Concept – Art: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Exhibition", in idem et al., *From Conceptualism to Feminism. Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74* (London: Afterall, 2012), pp. 24–31. The foreword I wrote for that volume served as the basis for this essay.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 See Christian Rattemeyer et al., *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form'* (London: Afterall, 2010).
- 9 See Michael Sanchez, "Contemporary Art Daily", in Isabelle Graw, Daniel Birnbaum and Nikolaus Hirsch, eds., *Art and Subjecthood: The Return of the Human*



*Figure in Semiocapitalism* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2011), pp. 53–61, here p. 54. Sanchez refers to Rainer Ganahl for this attribution.

10 See Lucy R. Lippard, “Curating by Numbers”, *Tate Papers*, 12, 2009, n. p., accessible online at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7268> (accessed 1 July 2015).

11 See Lucy R. Lippard, “Introduction: Changing since Changing”, in idem, *From the Center, Feminist Essays on Women’s Art* (New York and Toronto: Dutton, 1976).

12 Cornelia Butler compares this outlook with that of Marcia Tucker. The entropic character of process-oriented art forms that dominated exhibition activities in the late sixties evidently also challenged institutionalized role profiles.

13 This criticism was aimed at the one-sided idealization of idealist, intellectual and rationalist concepts. See, for example, Pamela M. Lee, “Das konzeptuelle Objekt der Kunstgeschichte”, *Texte zur Kunst*, 21, 1996, pp. 120–29, here p. 126.

14 See Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years. The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) (previously published in New York: Praeger, 1973), cover.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

17 Frank Stella, for example, declared himself a “housepainter”, and Sol LeWitt an “office worker”.

18 See Lippard 2009 (see note 10).

19 *Ibid.*

20 The dedifferentiation of the work and its mediation that goes hand in hand with the normative, authoritative judgement also entails problems, as it derives its legitimation – as in Lippard’s case – by citing subjective preferences and a closeness to her chosen artists: how much more exclusive and obscure must such criteria have seemed in view of the in-group behaviour also characteristic of present-day networks?

21 See Butler 2012 (see note 5).

22 Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author” first appeared in print in no. 5/6 of the art magazine *Aspen* edited by Brian O’Doherty in 1967.

23 Butler 2012 (see note 5).

24 *Ibid.*

25 Beatrice v. Bismarck, “Kuratorisches Handeln. Immaterielle Arbeit zwischen Kunst und Managementmodellen”, in Marion von Osten, ed., *Norm der Abweichung* (Zürich and New York: Edition: Voldemere, 2003), p.88.

26 Quoted in Butler 2012 (see note 5); first appeared in Lucy R. Lippard, “Escape Attempts”, in Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer, eds., exh. cat. *Reconsidering the Object of Art* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1995), pp. 17–39.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

28 Bismarck 2003, (see note 25), p. 11.

29 See Alexandra Schwartz’s interviews with Mierle Laderman Ukeles and Agnes Denes in Butler et al. 2012 (see note 6).

30 Lippard 1976 (see note 11), p. 2.

31 On this subject, see Isabelle Graw, *Die bessere Hälfte. Künstlerinnen des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* (Köln: DuMont, 2003).

32 See Lucy R. Lippard 1995 (see note 26).

33 I am grateful to Søren Grammel for an illuminating discussion of this topic.

# Are Boycotts the New “Collective Curating?”

## by Sergio Edelsztein

Much has been said and written about the increasing internationalization of the art world. This text will focus on one specific manifestation of such internationalization: boycotts, whose effects are felt in the local sphere as well.

The cost of curating and producing institutional exhibitions and programs is rising dramatically, fostered by the rising cost of art itself (in many ways related to the trend in creating site-specific projects). Simultaneously, state funding is being cut dramatically, so the need for private and corporate sponsors is steadily increasing. “Luckily,” corporations and wealthy individuals who sponsor artistic production and presentation are, in spite of the financial crisis—or possibly because of it—wealthier than ever. (For example, during the 2008 recession the art market not only continued to surge, but in fact grew dramatically.) This internationality is fuelled by the increased participation of emerging economies such as those in the Persian Gulf, Latin America, India, and China that offer an alternative to West European and North American hegemony within the art market. In such places, small groups of economically powerful individuals build museums and initiate international art shows and fairs. These are often devoid of roots in the local culture and tradition, and disregard the basic human condition of the inhabitants of these places, which are often run by mildly dictatorial regimes or, at least, governments with poor human rights records. Thanks to the Internet and global television networks, people have a relatively clear picture of the internal politics, institutional mechanisms, and sponsors’ human rights records from anywhere in the world.

The increasing number of calls for boycotts in the art world stem from this reality, where we all feel at home anywhere in the world, and feel comfortable expressing ethical approval or reprobation about any issue. Dave Beech writes in “To Boycott or not to Boycott” (*Art Monthly*, Oct. 2014, page 380) that, “Artists who boycott large survey exhibitions represent the first serious challenge to the rise of the curator and the corporate sponsor that have shaped the neoliberal art institution. Putting aside the content of each boycott, therefore, we can say that the art boycott generally is a method for renegotiating the balance of power within art.” Boycotts epitomize the neoliberal art institutions, and while they effectively renegotiate the position of the curator, their effects in the long run are pernicious to art institutions at large.

Boycotts organized by artists typically oppose two entities: sponsors, characterized by what we might call “dirty money,” and institutions, as a protest against various curatorial and management decisions. I am currently working with an institution in Poland being boycotted by local artists who disapprove of the municipality’s handing it over to a private company to run. A museum in Israel is being boycotted in protest of the way the curator was fired. Most of these boycotts have a specific purpose: to remove an official or sponsor, or to protest bad management. In this text, I take the examples of more high-profile events that have rocked the

art world in the last couple of years, though naturally, motives, strategies, and results might also be interpolated into smaller, local events.

The issues surrounding boycotts in the art world are complex, raising questions that are entire worlds unto themselves. There's the "why" (is the issue burning enough?), the "whom" (in the case of local or international artists boycotting a local or international event), the timeline of "when," and of course "how." Though motivated by diverse reasons, the boycott process is relatively uniform: a petition is circulated and once there are enough signatories, if the demands have not been met, the boycott is called.

A boycott is nothing more than a withdrawal and is decidedly *not* a form of activism. The demands of a boycott are always both too specific, and not specific enough, depending on the scope of the reading. Questions such as "Whom are you punishing?" and "What price are you prepared to pay?" are seldom raised. Imposing one's moral judgment onto others and asking them to act upon it is a slippery slope that can easily, if not inevitably, lead to hypocrisy and double standards.

Last summer British critic JJ Charlesworth wrote:

*It's hard to decide what is worst about the idea of a cultural boycott [...] Is it that there's something inherently repugnant about artists and intellectuals – a demographic you might think was more committed than most to openness, freedom of expression and internationalism – trying to close down the artistic freedom of their peers, in order to make a political gesture of disapproval [...] Or is it that in campaigning for what is essentially a form of censorship, those calls for a cultural boycott contribute, unwittingly, to the now-familiar process of demonization of those states that we 'over here' disapprove of? Is it that in their obsessive focus on a particular country and its actions, campaigners for boycotts effectively reinforce the sense of moral superiority that always seems to attach to 'us' [...] over 'them'.*

This quote was taken from a response to the calls for boycotting Israel according to the BDS movement in general and the Cultural and Academic Boycott in particular. However, these remarks address relevant questions common to all boycotts. I should, however, note that I am the director of an art institution in Israel, and both as a member of this institution, and as a cultural practitioner, I am increasingly experiencing the effects of the BDS movement. I will not elaborate on this specific boycott nor on any of the events related to it—like the Mattress Factory case, the Creative Time one, or the São Paulo Biennial. I am not evading this issue because it's close and involves me, but rather because I think it is a unique case that does not belong in the same basket as the other boycotts.<sup>1</sup> Still, as the oldest and longest "boycott" movement, it has to be mentioned here as an inspiration for action and involvement, showing the way to other movements like a beam of light.

Below are summaries of a few relevant boycotts that highlight some developmental points relevant to understanding covert potentials and dangers. These descriptions are informed by the study Chen Tamir published in March on the website Hyperallergic called "A Report on the Cultural Boycott of Israel." (Tamir is a curator working with me at the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv and has been researching the progress of the BDS and other movements for some time.)

#### Case I: The 2014 Sydney Biennial

Before the opening of this event, a boycott was called targeting the Biennial's major sponsor, Transfield, a multinational corporation that, among other services like waste management and public transport, is involved in building and managing

Australia's offshore detention centres for asylum seekers. Illegal immigration from around the Pacific is one of Australia's major controversies. The boycott began with a statement signed by ninety-two artists, followed by much public debate. It spread to boycotting Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art because of its ties to Transfield and the Biennial. Eventually, the Sydney Biennial's Chairman of the Board, Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, who also was the CEO of Transfield, stepped down. Funding from Transfield will be discontinued after the next Biennial, which had initially been founded by the Transfield founder and former CEO, Belgiorno-Nettis' father.

What is interesting about this boycott is not only its high international profile, but the question of what made this year's Biennial, after over forty years of Transfield sponsorship, the one to be boycotted? Why now? Perhaps it's the result of a "snowball" effect spurred on by other international boycotts over the past two years.

#### Case II: Manifesta X, The Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, 2014

A few months before Manifesta's opening in June 2014, the Russian government passed anti-gay legislation that grants them the power to arrest suspected gay people, including tourists and foreigners, as well as the forbidding of gay "propaganda" and the adoption of Russian children by foreign gay couples. A petition was circulated, lobbying Manifesta to relocate. Around this time, Russian forces occupied the Crimean peninsula and essentially initiated the takeover of Ukraine. A second petition was circulated with the same goal of relocating Manifesta in protest of Russian aggression there. Manifesta responded with a statement that it would continue as planned with the belief that "the Biennial acts as a catalyst for local and international artistic life. [...] We believe cancelling the project plays directly into the current escalation of the 'cold war' rhetoric and fails to acknowledge the complexity of these geo-politics." A few artists withdrew, but the vast majority remained. The curators maintained that the show is "political in a larger context" and that displaying contemporary art in Russia is itself a strong statement for pluralism.

Artists withdrawing from Manifesta explained their decision in different ways. Nikita Kadan, for instance, withdrew because he felt Manifesta was a "project contributing to the ideological facade of Putinist Russia and its normalization on the international scene." The collective Chto Delat? decided to withdraw after a statement by chief curator Kaspar König denigrated any attempt to address the present situation in Russia by artistic means, demoting such to "self-righteous representation" and "cheap provocation" and thus effectively pre-emptively censoring them.

It is even possible, that in view of the changing political situation, the organizers may have felt some degree of relief that more politically engaged artists were leaving the show's checklist, for fear of state and police intervention and public reprobation. This raises some questions for the future: will artistic or organizational decisions be influenced by fear of artistic activism? Is Manifesta's decision to hold the next edition in Zurich—the capital of wealth and probably the last place in Europe where you can expect political turmoil to erupt in the next year and a half—a consequence of the St. Petersburg conflict?

#### Case III: The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi

In 2011, over one hundred and thirty artists signed a statement boycotting both the Louvre and Guggenheim museums over concerns regarding the abuse and exploitation of workers employed in the construction of these museums' franchises

on Saadiyat Island in Abu Dhabi. The boycott expressed that they would refuse to cooperate with the museums until they guaranteed the workers fair conditions, including hiring an independent monitor whose findings of the working conditions would be published. The artists formed a group called Gulf Labor, which has continued its work since. To date, little has changed on the ground, save for a slight improvement in working conditions that has impacted only those working on these specific construction projects.

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There is something in the term “boycott” that does not reflect the unique anatomy of the “cultural” boycott. The artists boycotting the Sydney Biennial had agreed to participate in the event knowing very well that Transfield was its main sponsor (and had been since 1973). They must have known of the corporation’s commercial activities. Only towards the opening, after rallying support for their cause, did they take advantage of the PR build-up and announce their demand that the Biennial give up Transfield funds, or else they would withdraw. It is important to understand that the aim of these movements is not withdrawal *per se*, but the raising of social issues in an urgent, imminent situation. If artists refuse to engage right from the start—as would be the case in a consumer boycott, or in a worker strike—there would be no resonance whatsoever in their position. In this case, artists literally “used” the Biennial as a platform to raise the issues of immigration and the franchising of detention into private hands.

One thing is certain about the high-profile boycotts mentioned above: they succeeded in raising consciousness about important policy problems—and that is an achievement. But besides this, how can we weigh the consequences, successes, and downfalls of these boycotts? In the case of Manifesta, the political situation evolved while the show was still being organized, and artists had to react according to those developments. In terms of results, President Vladimir Putin couldn’t care less if some artists withdrew from Manifesta, and he probably would not have even noticed if Manifesta relocated or was cancelled in protest. Therefore, there was no possibility of negotiating the terms of participation. Artists withdrew from what they believed was a high-end showcase of a political regime that was quickly fading back into darker times.

The foreign workers in the Emirates are still working under slavery conditions, and the detention facility in Papua New Guinea is still in operation. Australian policy on asylum seekers has not changed at all. As an example of a “successful” boycott, then, whose aims were achieved? The Sydney Biennial boycott had no effect on government policy though it did jeopardize the future of the Biennial. The question remains of which corporations or individuals will support art events without the fear of being scrutinized and criticized for the ways in which they amassed their wealth? This issue will be crucial for the next Sydney Biennial.

When the Sydney Biennial controversy erupted, George Brandis, Australian Minister for the Arts, responded by directing the Australia Council to deny future funding to any exhibition or performance that “unreasonably” refuses corporate sponsorship. These are questions that every institution and exhibition might face as boycotting becomes more popular and institutions might need to reconsider their funding. Individuals and corporations that sponsor art events do this for the sake of public relations, but some also do it out of a genuine interest in and love for art (probably spurred by their chairpersons and important shareholders)—out of a real sense of responsibility to raise the cultural life of their country. If this is met by criticism, rather than a positive response, they will probably stop.

This discussion should be framed within a larger one about the characteristics of art funding and sponsorship. Philip Hammerton, an obscure English landscape painter from the late nineteenth century wrote: "The simple truth is that capital is the nurse and governess of the arts, not always a very wise and judicious nurse, but an exceedingly powerful one [...] For Capital to support fine arts it must be abundant – there must be *superfluity*." One need not be a Marxist scholar to know that no one made *superfluous wealth* by working with his or her own hands. The making of such fortunes necessarily involves exploitation and questionable practices.

Let us briefly consider the history of artistic patronage, leaving church and the monarchy aside to focus on private entrepreneurs. We can begin with Enrico Scrovegni from the fourteenth century, "heir to one of the greatest private fortunes ever put together in the West, whose commissioning of Giotto's masterpiece, the Arena Chapel frescoes, was an act of expiation for the notorious usury of the super-rich Reginald, Enrico's father," (Colin Platt *Marks of Opulence*, pg. 38) and fast-forward to the late nineteenth century American philanthropists Andrew Carnegie, J.P. Morgan, Andrew Mellon, John D. Rockefeller, and Cornelius Vanderbilt. The benefactors of the most prized American museums donated both money and their collections of art to public institutions. They and many more were colloquially called the "Robber Barons," a term coined by Mark Twain, denoting businessmen who "used exploitative practices to amass their wealth. These practices included exerting control over national resources, accruing high levels of government influence, paying extremely low wages, squashing competition by acquiring competitors in order to create monopolies and eventually raise prices." (Charles Dole) Joseph H. Hirshhorn, for whom the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C. is named, made his fortune mining the uranium that fuelled the United States' atomic arsenal during the Cold War. In the time Hirshhorn mined for uranium, from the early 1950s to 1960s, the U.S. arsenal grew from about 250 atomic bombs to 18,000 nuclear weapons. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no artist has ever boycotted the Hirshhorn.

Hirshhorn and his like were all also important art collectors. Many sponsoring corporations are headed by collectors, and almost all sponsoring individuals collect art. Yet, very few collectors are boycotted by artists in the context of sales, which of course, are a private interaction. In any case, the point is that looking for uncompromised private or corporate sponsorship is nearly impossible.

State funding allocated to art and culture in every kind of government, including those with a record of human rights abuses, exploitative colonialism, and even genocide, is earned through the taxes paid by the public (and also corporations) and therefore considered "cleaner" than private donations. Taking state funds for art is like drinking water from the tap, sending children to public school, or receiving social security or health services: a right of every citizen, and in any case, inevitable. However, it is imperative to understand the inherent connection between public and private spheres. Private funding comes in where public funding falls short. Furthermore, corporations, both historical and contemporary, made and make their wealth—whether exploiting the earth's resources, the working class, or the stock exchange—with the agreement and support of the government, and the regulators who turn a blind eye to their exploitative practices. Whatever these

individuals or corporations do, it is still the hegemonic power of the state that is responsible. They share a common and furiously defended interest.

The problem is that boycotts target the effects of hegemonic policies, but not its causes. This might be presented as a practical choice aimed at possible and immediate success, but in Giorgio Agamben's view this is emblematic of modernity and liberalization: "Causes demand to be known while effects can only be checked and controlled," he wrote. By the same token, boycotts target institutions and sponsors for their excesses, but almost never criticize the power that permits such excesses. Gulf Labor critiques labour conditions as they are dictated, not by the Guggenheim Corporation, but by the Tourist Development and Investment Company, a government branch responsible for building the infamous cultural complex of the Saadiyat Island by the contract and conditions imposed by the Abu Dhabi government. But the labour conditions on this "Island of Happiness" are by no means unique in the Gulf. Rather, they reflect the policy that built the Emirates from the start.

Returning to the topic of sales exemptions, no call was made to boycott the UAE as a country, especially not the Abu Dhabi Art Fair. We can only imagine the effect of the 2000 artists that have now signed the boycott refusing their work be shown and traded in this fair. *That* would surely have an impact.

The symbiosis of public and private funding is nowhere more evident than in the case of the Guggenheim boycott, a perfect mix of all possible worlds: institution and state, economics and politics, and private and governmental funding. It involves boycott, but also activism and unlike the other examples, it has developed and adapted its tactics. In *Manifesta Journal* No. 18 there are a number of articles on the issues of the Sydney and Guggenheim boycotts. Mariam Ghani, a member of the Gulf Labor Working Group offers some interesting insights:

Like most long-term boycotts the Gulf Labor campaign has undergone a number of shifts and has deployed a range of different tactics over the years following its public launch. Gulf Labor's most visible tactical shift came in fall of 2013, when we launched the *52 Weeks* campaign. Every week for a year, we are releasing one or more artist's projects. These projects call attention to some aspect of the conditions of workers on Saadiyat Island, the political context that enables their situation, and the problematic compact between the western institutions building on Saadiyat and their partners in Abu Dhabi; or they make links between the situation of the workers on Saadiyat and similar struggles by other migrants and workers in other places and times. *52 Weeks* represents a move from the strategic use of artworks (withholding them, or imposing conditions on their sale, production and exhibition) as an activist tactic, to an attempt to apply the same kind of pressure through the production and distribution of artworks that directly address or enact that activism.

Assessing the campaign from the two-thirds mark, it seems to me that *52 Weeks* and its many brilliant contributors have begun to re-imagine what a group like Gulf Labor can be and do—how an activist project based in a boycott might serve beyond that boycott, without abandoning it. *52 Weeks* is a reminder that a boycott can and should be the beginning of a larger conversation, rather than a means to shut down all dialogue around an issue.

What is interesting in Ghani's praise for the *52 Weeks* project is that it brings us back to the typical field in which artists have been addressing these issues in an active, practical, and constructive way. Since the 1960s, artists identified the

connections between art, institutions, politics, and capital as intrinsic to all artistic creation, turning it into the main subject matter of their works. Hans Haacke, Louise Lawler, Andrea Fraser, Daniel Buren, and Michael Asher, to name just a few, have worked towards a mode of art described as "Institutional Critique." Thirty years later, Fraser herself re-checks "the historic and present-day efficacy of Institutional Critique" and she finds a nostalgia for it as a now-anachronistic artefact of an era before the corporate "megamuseum" and the 24/7 global art market, when artists could still conceivably take up a critical position against or outside the institution:

Today there no longer is an outside. How, then, can we imagine, much less accomplish, a critique of art institutions when museum and market have grown into an all-encompassing apparatus of cultural reification? Now, when we need it most, institutional critique is dead, a victim of its success or failure, swallowed up by the institution it stood against.

From this point of view, it is plausible that by boycotting, artists are making an effort to withdraw from the art world, or at least from portions of it that they identify as offensive, criticizing it "from the outside." But, Fraser goes on to close this possibility too:

Just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us...it is because the institution is inside of us, and we can't get outside of ourselves. (Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," *Artforum*, 9/2005)

Hans Haacke wrote in 1974, "Artists, as much as their supporters and their enemies, no matter of what ideological coloration, are unwitting partners [...]. They participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame and are being framed." But boycotting artists do not always seek to make a difference in the art world, but outside it, using the art world as a springboard for this goal. At other times, as demonstrated by Ghani, the struggle starts from the art world but develops beyond it.

True activist art that addresses institutions and their sponsors is found today as well. Liberate Tate, a collective that aims at discontinuing BP's sponsorship of the Tate, has performed a number of interventions to heighten the pressure on museum officials. They belong to a large coalition of groups that target oil company sponsorship of cultural events in the UK, including Platform, Reclaim Shakespeare Company, Rising Tide, Shell Out Sounds, and others. Liberate Tate and similar groups such as Occupy Museums reclaim Institutional Critique's affirmative action, as do several other organizations, mostly to disrupt the swift, codified, and ritualized conduct of art institutions and their public, by engaging rather than withdrawing. Beech writes: "Institutional critique reverses the ethical charge of the boycott, using it as a rationale for participation rather than withdrawal."

Another contemporary instance that exemplifies how far art and its institutions have strayed from Institutional Critique since the 1970s involves the 2015 Venice Biennale. In his online statement, curator Okwui Enwezor explains the rationale for recreating a framework of events that took place during the 1974 Biennale that "was dedicated to Chile, as a gesture of solidarity toward that country in the aftermath of the violent coup d'état, in which General Augusto Pinochet overthrew the government of Salvador Allende a year before." Were the bloody



*coup d'état* in Chile to take place today, only calls for boycott—not solidarity, activism, or demonstrations—would be heard today, at the Biennale, and everywhere else. Just boycott.

Interestingly, perhaps even contradicting what was previously said, Ghani arrives at the same "activistic" position, and in her report draws a limit on withdrawal: "Ultimately, a boycott should be a tactic of last, not first, resort." She goes on, prescribing a three-part protocol:

- 1 - Public boycotts should be called only when private negotiation proves either impossible or fruitless.
- 2 - A boycott should be applied only when a boycott is likely to produce results. That is to say, a cultural boycott will work only if the creative work being withheld has significant and immediate value to the institution or government being boycotted. If that government or institution does not in fact need cultural products for a specific purpose in this specific moment, cultural workers have no leverage with that government or institution, and a boycott will not work.

This is true for boycotts aimed at government policy in general, as in the case with Manifesta, and is especially true of Israel. It is also true for institutions so far as they are not engaged in the imminent opening of a major project like, for instance, the Guggenheim. Ghani continues:

- 3 - If the boycott does not include a significant portion of the most visible cultural workers necessary to the immediate purpose or project of the government or institution, the boycott will not work. A public boycott should not be called until enough organization has been done to ensure a minimum of consensus around the goal and necessity of the boycott in the community most important to its success. If the demand behind a boycott is vague or diffuse, the boycott will not work.

This last point is of utmost importance, for this is where massive pressure, especially through social media and threats, becomes ugly. It is a slippery slope from there to censorship. To boycott is to withdraw, but to pressure fellow practitioners to join a boycott is censorship.

In an article published in *The New Republic*, titled "Are we Entering a New Age of Artistic Censorship in Europe?," Tiffany Jenkins brings a number of examples of recent boycotts and petitions that ultimately led to the removal of artworks and the decommissioning of theatre plays. A work by the Chapman brothers was taken down by the MAXXI Museum in Rome last summer, deemed paedo-pornographic by a children's rights group. Similarly, when the protests against a play titled *Exhibit B* grew fierce, the Barbican in London caved quickly, citing safety concerns. At the beginning of November last year, organizers of the *Le Mois de la Photo* exhibition in Paris gave in to a few letters of complaint, removing photographs by Diane Ducret of the artist cuddling and kissing her daughter. And in Germany earlier that year, the Museum Folkwang in Essen pre-emptively cancelled a planned exhibition of Polaroids by the French-Polish artist Balthus featuring a model called Anna who posed for him from the age of 8 to 16. Jenkins concludes:

There are important differences between the demands for censorship of the past and those of the present. Historically, those calling for censorship were often concerned that an artwork—perhaps of a sexual nature—would have a coarsening effect and a negative moral impact. Today's activists have a dif-

ferent rationale. They argue that they are the only ones who have the right to speak [...] Why have these recent demands to censor been so successful? It's worth reflecting on who is protesting, because this is also different from the earlier, top-down attempts to censor. [...] Many contemporary campaigners calling for boycotts are from the so-called liberal left who, it would seem, want art to show a world they wished existed, having given up on trying to change it.

Boycotts, and particularly their ability to censor, threaten to unleash a disdain and antagonism that is intrinsic—but repressed—within large sections of our communities, and above all, within the ruling classes and politicians. It is not a coincidence that the polemics surrounding the Sydney Biennial were followed by a substantial cut in the Arts Council budget. In our neoliberal capitalist system, the institutional art world (unlike the art market) could easily be viewed as a burden on society, a sector that can't justify its existence economically. Intrinsic but loud polemics like these are detached from the institutions and artworks taking over newspaper headlines and TV slots and inspiring the involvement of bureaucrats and politicians, especially if those polemics attack them directly as in the cases discussed here. Calls for censorship coming from prominent and respected members of the artistic community cue further attacks on the art world's legitimacy, responded to first and foremost with budget cuts.

However sympathetic we are towards the causes boycotts target, as they increase in number and visibility, regardless of their immediate success or failure, they will have a devastating effect on the legitimacy of the institutional art world. Smaller, "parochial" boycotts like those discussed above may cause the same effects in the local sphere.

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It is important to also address how boycotts and censorship have been shaped by contemporary social behaviour and social media. Facebook easily creates an illusion of collectivity and simplifies our ability to share our opinions and rally for support, and many websites easily disseminate petitions or calls for action. But beyond these, when analyzing the roots of the numerous boycotts, one must consider the culture of "rating" that informs our over-opinionated positions on just about everything. Through the use of websites such as Uber, Airbnb, and Hotels.com, humans are constantly asked to review their experiences. Airlines, restaurants, banks, and virtually every service asks us for our opinions. And we are also constantly being rated as users and as publics. For example, the Uber app asks consumers to rate their taxi drivers, but also asks drivers to rate their passengers. The goal is to eliminate unfitting drivers, but if one day you can't get a car to pick you up, just think what you may have done or said in a taxi yesterday. We are constantly pushed by the technological liberal complex to be opinionated even about things we don't care about, and to act upon those opinions in a way that can effectively alter other people's lives, without giving it much thought. Responsibility and accountability can so easily be sacrificed for compatibility.

Can curators envision an app called "Rate Your Sponsor" where institutions, artists, and curators rate the application process, money flow, and report procedures of different sponsors? It could be an ideal open platform for activists to upload the results of their research on the sources of sponsors' wealth, and for curators to use in exhibition and event production to potentially shield themselves from boycott. But why not also create the "Rate Your Artist" app where curators could fill in information according to their experiences working with specific artists,

rating the quality of the workflow, the reasonable-ness of the artist's demands, etc. Does he or she fly only in business class? What is their position on artist fees? We could even be able to view a list of petitions and boycotts the artist has endorsed. That way, we could work with artists with no record of boycott, or with a conceptual flexibility that would assure their commitment to participation under virtually any political stress and without their looking into the details of sponsors' activities.

These two apps together might be the essential tools for curators in the decades to come, as exhibition costs rise, resources shrink, political instability spreads, and artists' political positions become unpredictable. Of course, I am being cynical: I would never support nor use such hideous tools. But these examples illuminate the issues we as curators will have to confront.

A separate "Orwellian" solution was contemplated by artist Ahmet Özü, who proposes incorporating into institutions what he calls an "Intervenor," which he describes in "CCC – Currency of Collective Consciousness," in *e-flux Journal* # 62, as:

Artists, art workers, cultural workers, or academics who aren't normally part of the institutional decision-making mechanism, and who are aware of the sensitivities of the local context. They would have an officially acknowledged agreement that protects their work from financial and political interference. They would also have a right to vet all forms of communication before they go public. This would include announcements, press conferences, events, and statements. Also, they would not act according to pre-programmed agendas, concepts, exhibition schedules, or locations. Intervenors could leave when it is no longer possible to challenge the limits of structural change. Intervenors would be the protagonists who go beyond symbolic and harmless institutionalized critical agency. They would intercede if the institution reacted in an authoritarian or judgmental way to any public concerns.

In other contexts, the person performing this role existed. They were called the "Kommissar." But, in many ways the "awareness of the sensitivities of the local context," i.e. the need to "protect the work from financial and political interference," is a relevant concern that curators will have to address in their practice.

Curators will have to conceptualize not only the subject matter of an exhibition, its relevance to the art world and broader public, as is done nowadays in catalogue texts, press releases, etc. Curators will have to invest much more thought and research into applications for funding and the interpretation of projects in the public sphere engaging with artists' oppositions, ideas, and political concerns to ensure burning issues can be addressed among them and the public. Curators will have to act as mediators between artists and institutions, defending decisions regarding such issues in the same way, outside of the mediation already performed in advocating for an a project's artistic relevance. Hopefully, disagreement and criticism might be reined back in to the principles of institutional critique, in which artists found a worthy site of expression rather than a tool to be abandoned.

These are challenging times for curators, who will have to directly address the political or economic issues like those mentioned above in a fresh, creative, and active way, creating platforms for engagement and not for withdrawal while dealing with the dangers of political correctness—perhaps one of the worst kinds of censorship—and fight proselytising, condescension, colonialism, and the ignorance and social pressure that often fuel boycotts.

\*with thanks to Talia Heiman and Chen Tamir.

**Sergio Edelsztein** was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1956. Studied at the Tel Aviv University (1976-85). Funded and directed Artifact Gallery in Tel Aviv (1987-1995). In 1995 founded The Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv and has been its director and chief curator since then. In the framework of the CCA he curated seven Performance Art Biennials and five International Video Art Biennials - Video Zone. Also curated numerous experimental and video art screenings, retrospectives and performances events. Major exhibitions curated for the CCA include, among others, shows of Guy Ben Ner, Boaz Arad, Doron Solomons, Roe Rosen and Jan Tichy – and international artists like Rosa Barba, Ceal Floyer, Marina Abramovic and Gary Hill. Since 1995 curated exhibitions and time-based events in Spain, China, Poland, Singapore and elsewhere. Curated the Israeli participation at the 24th Sao Paulo Biennial (1998) the 2005 and 2013 Israeli Pavilion at the Biennale in Venice. Lectured, presented video programs and published writings in Israel, Spain, Brazil, Italy, Austria, Germany, China, the USA, Argentina etc. Writes extensively for catalogues, web sites and publications

### Notes

1 There are many reasons for that, but basically, the PACBI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott), as a branch of the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) is not a "bottom-to-top" movement, but rather the opposite. Its guidelines closely follow the Pan-Arabic rhetoric of the last fifty years, placing it as a hegemonic position versus another. Without clear aims or terms of engagement, this movement should be seen as a punishment rather than a boycott with realistic aims.

# Feminist Thought and Curating: On Method

## by Elke Krasny

What if there is a feminist turn in curating?<sup>1</sup> And if so, what is it and what does it do? Does it turn practices of curating and scholarship on the histories of curating into a feminist enterprise? Or, does it turn feminism into the subject of curatorial knowledge production? Or, does it turn to feminism in order to understand from a feminist standpoint what curating is and what it is that curating does? These questions raised here are central to my study of *The International Dinner Party in Feminist Curatorial Thought*.

### On Feminist Thought

My thesis examines *The International Dinner Party* within feminist curatorial thought. I turn to feminist thought in order to analyse, historicise, theorise, and practise curating. The conceptual framework, which I will lay out in this chapter, draws on feminist thought as a form of practice. Thought as practice is always situated in the concrete conditions specific to particular times and geographies. What is of interest to me throughout this thesis are the politics of feminist thought with regard to historiography, epistemology, and chronopolitics, and how the lessons gained from a critical understanding of these politics can be used to situate curating historically and theoretically.

What follows is first a conceptual framework of feminist thought. I will raise some key points here: feminist thought makes a claim to the non-monolithic; feminist thought is marked by paradox and contradiction to which it responds on a number of different theoretical, methodological, and practical levels; feminist thought expresses a pronounced resistance to be tied down by definition; feminist thought is in need of definition; feminist thought is in need of ongoing re/definition with regard to definition; feminist thought actively expresses resistance to categorization; feminist thought is characterised by the quest for transformation and the ongoing process of further differentiation from within; feminist thought engages in a historiographical project of writing, re-writing, reflecting, and questioning the processes of knowledge-making and the resulting knowledge production.

Secondly, I will proceed with mapping of some of feminist thought's paradigmatic historiographies. I seek to draw out how the key points raised above—ranging from the non-monolithic to ongoing processes of differentiation—are 'at work' in the already canonical or in the still emerging, yet already established histories and chronological narratives of feminist thought. What interests me are ways of relating critical insights gained from an understanding of feminist thought's historiographies to the writing of curatorial historiography. What is at stake here are the politics and power relations governing historiographic operations, and by extension the epistemological implications. I refer to Susan Archer Mann to stress the importance of such a historiographic approach. "The advantages of an historical approach are that readers can see how theories are constructed over time and how they often develop in response to concrete historical conditions as well as to

other perspectives and debates they engender."<sup>2</sup> With reference to the work of Marsha Meskimmon, such an historical approach needs to be troubled with regard to any underlying assumptions of a "progressive chronology."<sup>3</sup> In order to specifically locate feminist thought as responses to concrete historical conditions, it is necessary to continue working "against the grain of linear narratives of progress."<sup>4</sup> Meskimmon uses the work of Marxist feminist geographer Doreen Massey to reveal how "spatial differences are reconvened as temporal sequence."<sup>5</sup> In order to avoid the pitfalls of 'uncritical chronology,' one has to turn to "critical cartography."<sup>6</sup> My mapping of feminist thought's historiographies uses such a critical cartography as its method. There are important lessons to be gained from this with respect to curatorial historiography. In doing so, special attention will be paid to the chronopolitics at work within the concepts and operations used to construct such historiographies.

### The Opening Question/Opening the Question (Again)

I have opened this chapter with a question. The question was: What if there is a feminist turn in curating? By starting this chapter with a question, I am actually already deeply indebted to feminist thought's methods. I make myself part of feminist thought's legacy by activating the question as method. What is feminism? This question or questions similar to this have been raised and are still being raised over and over again. I would even go so far as to say that feminism is the question.<sup>7</sup> Posing the question of what feminism is, as I seek to demonstrate, leads to a strategic resistance to any merely descriptive or simply reductive definition. A feminist method, as one might argue, is the resistance to definition, the refusal to be tied down by any one monolithic and definitive definition. On the other hand, the question of what feminism is also pushes the need for ongoing processes of negotiating re-definitions and the quest for changing definitions. The question of what feminism is leads to establishing contours in order to avoid that feminism is too easily understood as some kind of indiscriminate form of attack, as a 'pick-as-you go' theory or a "particularly empty terminology, a critical stance without critique."<sup>8</sup> This is one of the constitutive paradoxes, or contradictions, actively challenging feminist thought. This also offered in the past, and continues to do so, a fertile ground for a large number of different strands of feminist thought, such as liberal, Marxist, socialist, or anarchist feminism,<sup>9</sup> or Christian, Islamic, Judaic, Hindu, or Buddhist feminism. Other strands of feminist thought include "psychoanalytic, care-focused, existentialist, postmodern, women of color, global, ecofeminist,"<sup>10</sup> poststructural, deconstructivist, intersectional, Black, Mestiza, postcolonial, decolonial, cross border, transnational, indigenous, urban immigrant feminism, queer, or transgender feminism. Considerable disputes, debates, conflicts, shared interests, and alliances within different strands of feminist thought point to another constitutive paradox. Schools, canons, labels, or strands of feminist thought cannot be neatly separated or definitively categorized. "To be sure this list of labels is incomplete and highly contestable."<sup>11</sup> Feminist thought therefore is also marked by a resistance to a labelling categorization and not only by a resistance to definition, which I pointed out earlier. Even though highly contestable, such categories are nonetheless useful tools in understanding the multiplicity politics and orientations at work within feminist thought. They also allow for an understanding of how these different strands of thought not only create productive debates and conflicts within feminism, but also sharing, crossings, and all kinds of intellectual exchange and movements that can actually lead to new associations and transgressions. Taken together, these activities nourish the ongoing transformation of feminist thought itself. And, as Rosemarie Tong states: "They signal to the public that feminism is not a monolithic ideology and that all feminists do not think alike."<sup>12</sup>

Turning now to curating, I will follow feminist thought's method and raise the following question: What is curating? Recent proliferation of theoretical discourse on and historiographic narration of curating clearly shows that this question has been raised in a number of publications.<sup>13</sup> And, having studied feminist thought, we come to see a paradox or contradiction at work. Curating chooses to resist definition. Curating seeks to change and expand how its past definitions are understood, what its current definitions are and what its future definitions might become. Yet, in order to be seen as a specific "area of knowledge,"<sup>14</sup> curating and curatorial thought are in need of some definition. And, I would like to add, such definitions are in fact helpful in order to make the (ongoing) transformations—which in fact often actively contest and transgress earlier models or definitions of what curating is—better understood. Therefore, the question also drives the need for specificity and for contours, as I pointed out earlier with regard to feminist thought. Again, it is a paradox that lies at the heart of curatorial thought. This paradox unfolds as follows: the desire to be understood as a specific area of knowledge and the desire to not to be tied down by restraining and narrowing definitions. This also offers fertile ground for a wide range of different approaches manifest in curating. These have not solidified into long-standing categories such as the ones I named with regard to feminist thought. Nonetheless, I will attempt to sketch out different strands that are to be discerned within contemporary curating. I will do so firstly according to perspectives taken up by curators, secondly according to historic periodisation and fields of artistic production, and thirdly according to sites where curators work. With regard to the perspectives employed, these strands are activist, critical, conceptual, discursive, educational, feminist, global, involved, post-colonial, Black America, Chicana, global, or transnational curating/curatorial thought. With regard to historic periodisation and fields of artistic productions, these strands can be named as follows: modern art, contemporary art, video art, installation art, performance art, conceptual art, postconceptual art, or digital and new media art curator. With regard to sites of work, these strands can be named as follows: museum, biennale, festival, gallery, education, public space, community-based, urban, village, or theory curator. Admittedly, such a list is unfinished and risks the danger of oversimplification. On one hand, curating/curatorial thought is prone to introducing such self-labelling in order to work out specificities, differences, and positions. On the other hand, curating/curatorial thought is very likely to resist such labelling as restrictive and reductive. Such (albeit tentative and preliminary) labelling categorizations are seen as helpful tools to understand the different politics and orientations at work within the emerging differences of curating. They also allow opposing and conflicting perspectives to be traced, as well as the emergence of productive dialogues and intellectual transgressions. This process of differentiation into a wide number of specific strands within curating points to the emergence of a new area of knowledge pointed out earlier. This area of knowledge is marked by the differences within. I want to return now to what Rosemarie Tong stated about feminist thought and use it this recitation and change to describe curating. "They signal to the public that 'curating/curatorial thought' (my change) is not a monolithic ideology and that all 'curators' (my change) do not think alike."<sup>15</sup>

Even though definitions run the risk of reductionism and oversimplification, they are, to a certain degree, necessary to arrive at differentiation and to achieve nuanced intellectual specificity. Even though feminist thought and curating tend to resist definitions, it is of importance to not end up with, as already stated before, a "critical stance without critique."<sup>16</sup> Even though it can be understood via feminist thought that curating also cannot be described by narrowly defined schools, naming different strands points to the complex historic and still ongoing processes of differentiation and self-transformation. In addition, such a practice of naming can

also be understood as self-chosen, self-identifying, self-labelling, self-positioning, or self-organising. With regard to the methods used in this study, attention is paid to the anti-monolithic or non-monolithic. This places the focus on working out paradoxes and contradictions as well as differences and specificities. Equally, the potential for dialogues, crossings, exchanges, and movements between different times, sites, and perspectives as provided by feminist thought is central to historicising, theorising, and practicing curating. What can be learned from studying feminist thought is to turn to the question yet again. I have raised the what-is-question. Now I will proceed with the what-does-question. What does feminist thought do? What does doing feminist thought imply? What does curatorial thought do? What does doing curatorial thought imply? Seen through the lens of doing, thought is a specific social practice. Susan Archer Mann emphasises "the social agency involved in theory production – how constructing theory is a social practice and a form of labor."<sup>17</sup> She also points out that "Feminism is not simply a body of thought: it is a politics directed toward social change."<sup>18</sup> I follow this line of thinking, that thought is a specific social practice, and want to underline its importance for both feminist and curatorial thought. While the political claim has been constitutive to the emergence of feminist thought, the same cannot be said about curating. While feminist thought can look back onto an historical claim of emerging out of the feminist movement(s) and being directed toward social change, the situation for the latter is quite different. Curating's beginnings did not emerge out of political movements or social movements, yet curating is part of (critically addressing) the politics of how art and culture are produced, shown, mediated, analysed, and made public. Curating cannot be understood without the concrete historical conditions of which they are a part. Therefore, I not only locate issues of politics and social change in feminist thought, but also understand curating and curatorial thought as always already profoundly entangled with political and social questions. It is specifically the feminist turn in curating that foregrounds how feminist thought needs to address the politics of curating. Feminist thought provides the methods of analysis in working out how curating is responding to specific historic conditions and how curating does or does not address the social changes wrought by feminism within these specific historic conditions. Curating as a social practice is part of the historic conditions which feminism seeks to change. As I have shown via Mann, Massey, and Meskimmon, feminist thought provides the tools to confront uncritical chronology and to activate critical cartography.

Feminist thought relies on opening up, over again and again, both of these questions: What is feminist thought and what does feminist thought do? I will put this method to use in order to approach and question curating. The resistance to definition and to categorization, another legacy of feminist thought, opens up the potentials for ongoing questioning, considerable conflicts, transformation, and future change. The resistance to processes of stabilizing via definition is to be discerned in feminist thought. This can be used in analysing curatorial practice to understand both such a resistance and processes of differentiation. Feminist thought has historically emerged as a politics. Curatorial practice has emerged as a distinctly cultural practice. In historical terms, it was bound up with hegemonic logics of collecting, conserving, categorizing, producing, representing, and mediating art and culture. Institutions like the museum, or exhibition formats like the biennale, are powerful expressions of representative and dominant models of culture. It was via feminist critique in the 1960s and 1970s that curating was confronted with its own hegemonic and exclusionary politics. It has also been via feminist critique and feminist practice that curating has undergone considerable changes since the 1960s and 1970s. While the first is by now well understood in museum studies and curatorial historiography, the latter still warrants future



research and thorough exploration. Looked at from this vantage point of critiquing hegemonic power, feminist thought is useful for the analysis of curatorial practice as an inherently social practice with regard to its (changing) politics. And, this is my key point, feminist thought is much needed when it comes to gaining deeper insights into how curating is addressing and making public the social changes wrought by feminism, feminist thought, and feminist art.

### **On the Chronopolitics of Feminist Historiography**

As noted, feminist thought is not monolithic, and feminist historiography seeks to mobilize strategic critical resistance against the logic of linear progress. Paradox and contradiction, as I will show in more detail later, are part of feminist thought's legacy and of its current transformations. Yet, there is a troubling tendency to be made out within the historiography of feminism as an object of study. Both a large number of feminist movements and the body of most diverse feminist thought have been written into what is now a rather canonical history hinging on chronopolitically charged terms of before versus after, pioneering versus obsolete, older versus younger. Crucial to my chronopolitical critique of feminist thought's historiography are art historian Griselda Pollock's work on paradox and Sarah Bracke's and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's re-reading of contradiction via feminist standpoint theory.

What follows now is an outline mapping the conventional narratives of feminist thought. I will move through a number of different yet closely related narratives. As I move through these narratives, I will point out a number of chronopolitical implications and contradictions. The history of feminism has been written as a history of waves: First Wave, Second Wave, Third Wave, and, most recently, Fourth Wave. The history of feminism has also been written in terms of pre and post: prefeminist, feminist, postfeminist. Both the waves model and the pre/post model suggest a "progressive chronology."<sup>19</sup> Susan Archer Mann points to the linearity implied in the wave model. "No doubt, many histories of U.S. feminism have employed a linear, wave approach."<sup>20</sup> Linear constructions of historical time are inherently Eurocentric. They share common legacies with modernism, modernity, progress, and universal history. Amongst many other things, feminist historiography sought to actively intervene into such concepts of historical time, to deconstruct and challenge its enduring hegemonic underpinnings, and to transgress such concepts and the resulting models of constructing history via linear narrations. First-wave feminism commonly refers to movements around suffrage and to activities taking place through the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Second wave and third wave on the contrary are separated by a mere decade. "The second wave denotes the resurgence of women's organizing in the 1960s and ends (...) with the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1982. The third wave refers to the resurgence of feminist activism in the 1990s, especially by younger feminists who came of age after the second wave." The wave approach suggests a causal linearity that is very much following a chronopolitical logic owed to modernist ideas of progress. It is exactly such a progress-centric model of historiographic narration that feminist thought rejects and deconstructs. Yet, with feminism as the object of historical study, this progress-based narrative has become canonical and hegemonic. Therefore, Mann argues for a more nuanced model of feminism's historiography. She offers a number of reasons why the waves model is problematic.

First, wave approaches too often downplay the importance of individual and small-scale collective actions as well as indirect and covert acts. Second, they ignore feminist writings and activities before and between different waves.

Third, wave approaches generally draw attention to the common themes that unify each wave and focus on the largest and most hegemonic feminist organizations. Hence, they tend to obscure the diversity of competing feminisms within each wave as well as the contributions of more politically radical feminists and of women activists and theorists marginalized within each wave.<sup>21</sup>

I share Mann's thoughts on such necessary problematisation. I conceive feminist thought as historically and geographically situated. Therefore, more nuanced concepts and more detailed research with regard to individual and small-scale actions, uncommon or marginal themes, and competing positions are not only welcome, but a necessity.

This text is dedicated to the study of *The International Dinner Party in Feminist Curatorial Thought*. *The International Dinner Party* project was originally conceived by Suzanne Lacy as a tribute to her mentor Judy Chicago. *The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago opened on March 14, 1979. During the exhibition opening at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the *International Dinner Party* was performed by Lacy. *The Dinner Party* is considered a powerful and controversial icon of feminist art and by extension a symbol of second-wave feminism. *The International Dinner Party* both shares, and as I seek to show, transgresses the legacy constructed by the historiographic operations at work in the wave model. Therefore, it is of importance to understand how the wave model operates. This offers the basis for working out how *The International Dinner Party* is conventionally situated in historical terms. *The International Dinner Party* is constituted via complex relations within a network of many different individual feminist activists and artists, but also feminist groups and organizations. Therefore, both actions representing different scales, ranging from the individual to organizations, are of interest to this study. In addition, the individuals and organizations contributing to *The International Dinner Party* are situated in regional and geographical contexts differing widely from each other. This confirms that all the critical points raised in Susan Archer Mann's problematisation need to be taken up in research and theorisation. Yet, I want to argue that a "cultural feminist analysis"<sup>22</sup> of *The International Dinner Party* and its situating in trans-historic feminist curatorial thought also needs to critically challenge the foundational assumptions of the waves narrative. The waves model suggests development and progress. It is this progress-centric model of historiographic narration that feminist thought sought to reject and deconstruct. Therefore, it is important to understand the waves narrative in historical terms, yet to not reproduce its chronopolitical hegemony. Prefeminist or protofeminist, feminist, and postfeminist suggest a similar progress-centric and linear conception of historic development. Feminism has come to be understood through this specific, chronopolitically charged terminology and ordering. Not only does such an ordering construct a linearity, it also suggests that one model replaces the other, or put differently, makes it obsolete. The differences between pre- and post- or between different waves are therefore not only temporal, but ideological. They are commonly understood as ideologically split, especially between second wave and third wave feminism or feminism and postfeminism. Meskimmon's critical cartography is helpful to recognize that chronology and ideology are complexly connected with geographies and geopolitics. Such a linear ordering implies the "displacement of one set of approaches by others."<sup>23</sup> This means first of all that the waves model was applied outside of the U.S. context from where it originated. It means secondly that this displacement has to be critically analysed with regard to what is referred to as centres and margins. Revisiting March 14, 1979, the evening of *The International Dinner Party*, a moment in time commonly fully associated with second-wave femi-

nist thinking, will necessarily entail confronting inherent hegemonic assumptions and working out nuanced differences of historic feminist thought and movement. I aim to critically address the chronopolitical implications and to actively address the paradox that feminist historiography has critically deconstructed meta-narratives, progress, and linearity, yet the historical study of feminism has, to some degree, reproduced such concepts. I will take up Mann's points of paying attention to individual and small-scale collective actions as well as to uncommon actions in order to better understand the diversity of feminisms articulated via the messages of *The International Dinner Party*. I engage with "situated knowledges and politics of location"<sup>24</sup> throughout my analysis. Therefore I will link the points raised by Mann with Meskimmon's concept of critical cartography in order to counteract both a progress-centric wave-based model and a centre (U.S.)-to-margin-based chronological model.

### Questions and Paradoxes

Let me now turn once more to asking a question. I have already pointed out that asking what feminism is, or what feminist art is, or what feminist thought is, can actually be considered a paradigmatic feminist method. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of the question as method. First, to keep the question open as a method implies to theoretically bear the consequences that it can in fact not be answered. Or put differently, that it is part of the question's method to resist closure and to uphold this ongoing process of producing new answers. Second, it is not only necessary to reopen the question again and again from a critical and deconstructivist theoretical perspective, as noted before, but also because of the transformations of the concrete historical conditions that need to be addressed. Looked at through the lens of the question as method, feminism is based upon this paradox of never fully answering and, at the same time, never ceasing to ask over and over again. In particular, I will now focus the histories of art histories and their pivoting on the question as method and the paradox as constitutive. In so doing, I aim to transfer insights gained from art histories' critical historiographic project to my analysis of *The International Dinner Party* with regard to curating's historiography. In her essay, *The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories*, Griselda Pollock activates the tradition of the question as feminist method.

The term 'feminist theory' has a wide currency now. But what is it? Does it mean that there is a coherent perspective on all areas unified under the rubric feminism? [...] Raising the question catapults us from the neatly ordered universe/university of intellectual knowledge with this clear disciplinary division into a field of practice. The feminist question—the key question of feminism—brings down the load bearing walls which compartmentalize academic knowledge to reveal the structure of sexual difference by which society and culture is riven, showing that all disciplines are impregnated with the ideological premises of a sex/gender system.<sup>25</sup>

Following Pollock and many other feminist scholars and theorists, an important aim for feminist thought is therefore to transform compartmentalized intellectual knowledge production into a field of practice. Feminist knowledge practices pivot around the social and ideological implications of sexual difference. Turning knowledge production into a field of practice is important for my understanding of curating's underpinnings. A feminist turn in curating also addresses the social and ideological implications of sexual difference. For this reason, curatorial knowledge production can be understood as a practice, and, as I want to suggest, curatorial knowledge production as a feminist practice. I will return to this in more detail later

in this essay. For now, I want to emphasize that, from a feminist standpoint, practicing knowledge includes the activities of dis/ordering, un/learning, inter/vening, and moving inter/disciplinarily. This is in line with opening the question of what feminism is and what feminism does. Feminist knowledge production also needs to extend such a practice of dis/ordering and inter/vening to the body of knowledge produced by feminist thought. Yet, in doing so, feminist thought ought to be careful not to repeat the ideological splitting and displacing of one set of approaches by others based upon a progress-centric chronopolitical argument of before/after, obsolete/new, earlier/future-oriented. "Feminism demands that certain issues remain in view, and it functions as a resistance to any tendency to stabilize knowledge or theory around fictions of the generically human or the monolithically universal or any other androcentric, racist, sexist or ageist myth of imperial Western culture and its (often not so) radical discourses."<sup>26</sup> Such a movement of destabilizing needs to be practised not only with regard to the monolithic regimes to which Pollock critically points, but also with regard to by now hegemonic and canonical chronopolitical regimes within feminism itself.

Then, I would assert that feminism signifies a set of positions, not an essence; a critical practice not a doxa; a dynamic and self-critical response and intervention, not a platform. It is the precarious product of a paradox. Seeming to speak in the name of women, feminist analysis perpetually deconstructs the very term around which it is politically organised. (...) Yet there has been no linear progress from early thoughts to mature theories. Rather we have a synchronic configuration of debates within feminism, all of which have something valuable to contribute to the enlarging feminist enterprise. Yet they are all, none the less, caught up in the very systems of sexual difference they critique. The issue becomes one of how to make that paradox the condition of radical practice.<sup>27</sup>

Both, synchronic configuration and the paradox as a condition of radical practice are of methodological importance for my study of *Suzanne Lacy's International Dinner Party in Feminist Curatorial Thought*. Even though I am committed, as I pointed out earlier, to critical cartography and politics of location, I am equally interested in mobilizing synchronic configurations, both over times and in time. In bringing together cultural feminist analysis, archival studies, feminist art history, critical feminist theories, philosophy, curatorial research and curatorial practices, I seek to counteract the academic compartmentalization in order to destabilize intellectual knowledge as field of practice. This process brings together feminist cultural analysis and curating in order to create new insights into feminist artmaking and into emerging feminist histories of curating's histories by being attentive to *The International Dinner Party's* contributors' situated knowledge and by associating affinities and links within a historiography of feminist curating.

Following Pollock, I refuse a linear succession from earlier feminist practice and theory to a mature feminist practice and theory. This follows a line of feminist thought that is aimed against monolithic and universal(izing) structures of hegemonic Western thought and culture. I join Pollock's critical analysis of the histories of art history, which offers a model for critically analysing histories of curating's history, with Sarah Bracke's and María Puig de la Bellacasa's re-working of feminist standpoint theory. In historical terms, standpoint theory came into being during the same decade *The International Dinner Party* took place. An important example for standpoint theory from this period is Dorothy E. Smith's 1974 *Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology*. Both the feminist activist art practice of *The International Dinner Party* and standpoint theory share the active questioning of

power relations and seek to take the production of knowledge into women's own hands in order to turn it into a political practice. Activist feminist art practice and feminist research practice converge in the strategy (if not the practice) of consciousness-raising to "produce oppositional and shared consciousnesses in oppressed groups—to create oppressed peoples as collective 'subjects' of research rather than only as objects of others' observation (...)."28 Both *The International Dinner Party* and standpoint theory share the historical horizon of second-wave feminism. Again, it is of importance to critically point to the chronopolitical regime at work. "The main critique on standpoint we are confronted with is, roughly stated: standpoint feminism is modern and essentialist and left little space to other parameters of analysis, such as "race," ethnicity, class, and sexuality, facilitated by postmodernisms."<sup>29</sup> For my pursuit of an anti-monolithic project within feminist thought and a politics that actively seeks to re/disorient canonical orderings of feminist thought as a passage from earlier essentialist and collectivity-oriented to anti-essentialist and individualist-based approaches, joining Pollock's arguments with Bracke's and de la Bellacasa's work is crucial. Speaking of the paradox, Pollock argues that it shaped the period of feminist thought from the late 1970s to the late 1990s.

This paradox has shaped the history of the last twenty years of feminist practice, which can perhaps be characterized by the passage from essence (a strong sense of identity of woman and the collectivity of women) to difference (a more anguished recognition not only of that which divides and undoes the collectivity of women, but also the structural condition of the term 'Woman' as an affect of psycho-symbolic systems which produce and differentiate subjectivities across the formations of class, race, and sexuality).<sup>30</sup>

In my attempt to follow not only the logic, but also the history of the paradox, I reach an impasse. The paradox's history shares the chronopolitical regime of the ideological split governing the progress-centric narration of the wave model. This is marked by a constellation of earlier/later and, as described by Pollock here, by essence/difference. Critical cartography cannot solve this problem of using the paradox as a condition for critical practice, yet avoiding a linear chronology. Therefore, I turn to Sarah Bracke's and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's "generational" discussion of standpoint theory. They express their hope that standpoint theory's "constant reformulation (...) through feminist practices of theory (...) perpetually challenges theoretical dichotomies, in particular modern/postmodern oppositions."<sup>31</sup> Their work presents a possibility to proactively work with the oppositions that are inherent to the chronopolitical regimes of progress and displacement within feminist thought. "As academics we have been raised as 'modernists' because we are supposed to *show that we know better* than those who came before us. As *feminist* academics, we feel we ought to resist this modernist attitude because we are aware that we do not know 'better than' but 'better with/because of' those who came before us."<sup>32</sup>

With Pollock I showed that feminist thought turns intellectual knowledge production into a field of practice that allows for synchronic configurations. Following Meskimmon, I showed how critical cartography makes chronopolitical regimes of progress understood within feminist thought. Therefore, special attention [now] needs to be paid to the politics of location emphasized by Lykke. Following Bracke and Puig de la Bellacasa, I seek to show how orientations via dichotomies, which play out both with regard to chronopolitics and to the politics of location, can be politically addressed within a field of practice. Bracke and Puig de la Bellacasa intro-

duce a line of thought that suggests “better with/because of” rather than “better than.”<sup>33</sup> This opens up the potential of a very different chronopolitical orientation towards the past. It does by no means obviate the need for a critical revisiting of the past nor the necessary deconstruction of monolithically universal and Western-centric historiographic knowledge production, but it avoids the ideological split of before/after or obsolete/current that functions as an impasse in much of feminist thought’s history. ‘Better with/because of’ opens up an envisioning of different cross-temporal and transgressive affinities, or to put it differently, synchronic alignments. It also creates the possibility of envisioning how opening the traditional question of what feminism is and what feminist practice does allows it to no longer be governed by the chronopolitical imperative of “better than,” but by a continuous dialogue and debate based upon “better with.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Binaries/Dichotomies**

I have demonstrated that feminist thought actively engages with binaries and dichotomies. These are not only part of feminist thought’s legacy but also part of ongoing debates and discussions. Binaries and dichotomies are part of the paradox that constitutes feminist thought as a form of knowledge production considered a field of practice and a field of practicing theory politically. Binaries and dichotomies are equally part of the chronopolitical ordering of feminist thought’s canonical historiography. Before/after is conventionally equated with an ideological split and a move toward progress. Before/after is constitutive for the displacement narrative. Even though the displacement narrative supposedly overcomes binary structures central to Western thought, it is, paradoxically, itself governed by yet another binary: the before/after binary. This closely resembles a progress-based model of advancement. Binaries express power relations and hierarchies.

Examples include the division of sexes into male/female or of sexualities into heterosexual/homosexual. While these categories are used to define and distinguish one from the other, they are not just different; they are unequal; they entail hidden hierarchies where one side is privileged and the other is viewed as abject or lesser. There is also a sinister tendency to link up the lesser side of the binary with other demeaning or demonizing terms. For example, male/female is often linked to rational/irrational, culture/nature, order/chaos, and so forth.<sup>35</sup>

Binaries, and dichotomies, are part of the politics of location. ‘Here’, equated with U.S. or Western feminist thought, is understood as a location of origin, a chronopolitically charged “before”. “There”, equated with non-Western feminist thought, then becomes “after”. Here/there is equated with centre/margin or centre/periphery. Here/there has commonly been understood as unequal. Bound up with the chronopolitical regime, this here/there model has been conventionally turned into a U.S.-centric or Western-centric hegemony of feminist thought which then spread to other parts of the world. This model can therefore be expressed in a binary that is spatially and temporally constructed as follows: here-before/there-after. This reveals that U.S. or Western feminist thought has not operated outside the hegemonic chronopolitical regimes governing modernity’s relations between Western and non-Western societies with regard to temporal value judgements such as advanced or developing.<sup>36</sup> Even though feminist thought actively challenged modernism and modernity, it is therefore paradoxically bound up with the power politics of its binary thought structure on many levels. It is not only important to challenge the binary between Western and non-Western, but equally the construction of a monolithic West and a monolithic non-West. Displacement narratives therefore not only concern the temporalities structuring feminist thought’s histori-

ographies, but spatialities expressed through specific locations as well. To complicate matters further, the wave model has to be joined with the before/after model in order to critically examine the chronopolitically charged hierarchical logics and power relations. At times, “before” is equated with first-wave feminism, which is rediscovered and praised for its engagement with civil and political rights. At times, “before” is equated with second-wave feminism, which is dismissed on grounds of essentialism and lack of attention paid to race-based, class-based, ethnic, religious, or immigrant diversity. At times, “before” is equated with first-wave feminism and dismissed on grounds of privileging the right to vote over economic or social rights. At times, “before” is equated with second-wave feminism and rediscovered in its dimensions of social reproduction, standpoint, and eco-feminism. Some feminists argue for a twenty-first century fourth-wave feminism.<sup>37</sup> At times, “before” is equated with third-wave feminism, which is criticised for its failure to establish a coherent feminist movement. At times, “before” is equated with third-wave feminism, which is rediscovered for its deconstruction of binaries. “The post-structuralist generation should be given credit for loosening up the binary scheme of dialectical thought and confronting the issue of negativity and power in a more multi-directional, embodied and embedded manner.”<sup>38</sup> Fourth-wave feminism is, yet again, the dis/continuation of the wave model. The previous waves are overcome, yet the waves model itself is continued. Postcolonial debate, critical positions by women of colour feminists both living in the global South and the global North, transgenderism, as well as the changes wrought by social media in activism, politics, and networking, are some of the features considered central to the emergence of current fourth-wave feminism.

Paradoxically, before/after is the central binary that remains, despite feminist thought’s deconstructing of and loosening up of binary thought. Amelia Jones has pointed out ways of critical engagement with the binary legacy of much of Western thought, and by extension, much of Western art.<sup>39</sup> Jones proposes a “queer feminist durationality.”<sup>40</sup> She elaborates: “I suggest that feminism must take on queer theoretical insights (particularly the dissolution of binary thinking and the putting in motion of meaning) as well as the insights of Marxian, anti-racist and postcolonial theory in order to accommodate the new global world order.” And, as I want to add, with regard to my study of *The International Dinner Party*, a further extension to such an approach with regard to the chronopolitical regimes revealed by Meskimmon’s critical cartography beyond the historic moment of the new global world order, toward a critical engagement with both the past and the future. Far from disregarding the impact of binary thought, Jones acknowledges the reverberations of its power relations. Therefore, she proposes a (self-)critical feminist engagement that thinks “beyond or away from the binary,”<sup>41</sup> and she does so by opening up a question which is, as I have shown before, very much part of feminist thought’s tradition.

How can we think beyond or away from the binary, or more explicitly put, how can we understand images and performances in more nuanced ways as articulating potential identificatory structures that are not simplistically binary? How can we explore these flows of inter-relationality through visual practice in ways that still convey a feminist politics—an attention to inequities among subjects relating to gender broadly construed as experienced and understood through class, national, ethnic, religious, and other modes of identification?<sup>42</sup>

Amelia Jones carefully opens up possible associations and alignments between the more recent emergence of a queer feminist durationality and the

longstanding tradition of feminist politics. She cautions that there is the risk of binary simplicity, and therefore emphasizes the need for critical deconstruction. Yet, she equally cautions to dismiss identification entirely, and in extension identity politics. For that reason, Jones suggests to work critically with both the dangers and potentials of identificatory structures. Looked at through the lens of chronopolitical regimes, Jones carefully navigates different waves of feminist temporalities and proposes new alignments via the temporal category of durationality. She suggests ways of critical engagement activated by 'away and beyond' as well as new alignments activated by 'inter, trans, and between.' This is of methodological importance for my research and my cultural feminist analysis of the issues raised by *The International Dinner Party*.

The binary before/after is very much part of movements of displacement and advancement/development and their respective value judgments. Before/after governs much of feminist thought's historiography and is actively challenged by concepts such as queer feminist durationality and better with/because of. In her book *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Thought*, Clare Hemmings offers a precise analysis of how narratives about Western feminist theory are constructed. Hemmings addresses the politics at work with regard to recurrent tropes that can be found in the historiographic narratives of academic Anglo-European feminist theory. She differentiates between three different modes of storytelling in the narratives that are to be discerned in essays published in feminist journals such as *Signs*, *Feminist Review*, and *Feminist Theory*. These three modes are progress (p. 31-58), loss (p. 59-94) and return (p. 95-130). Progress aims to leave behind essentialism. Loss laments the absence of a current feminist movement. Return suggests that, "We can combine the lessons of postmodern feminism with the materiality of embodiment and structural inequalities to move on from the current and theoretical impasse."<sup>43</sup> Taken together, progress, loss, and return offer a model to understand how the before/after dichotomy is activated and re-negotiated. Hemmings' analysis is of importance in working out chronopolitical pitfalls and in understanding better just how chronopolitically charged any historiography of feminist thought is. In historical terms, *The International Dinner Party* is part of the concrete conditions of the year 1979 and can thus be considered part of second-wave feminism. Such a historiographic ordering bears the danger of the project being dismissed on grounds of essentialism. (= progress) This could also lead to its romanticization or glorification because of the project's representation of a celebratory moment of a worldwide feminist movement. (= loss) It could also lead to using the lessons gained from the project in contemporary feminist artistic and curatorial practice. (= return). In order to counteract these chronopolitical dangers and to actively address its paradoxes, I will use a research-based approach to the contributors to *The International Dinner Party*. This approach relies, as I explained earlier, on the politics of location and situated knowledge in order to counteract a hegemonic chrono-cartography of here-before (U.S. or Western feminism) and there-after (non-U.S. or non-Western feminism). Special attention will be paid to demonstrating how *The International Dinner Party* foregrounds concerns that resist categorization via the wave model, and therefore allow for a more nuanced understanding of feminist thought by way of avoiding simplifying dichotomic constellations between before/after and here/there. My research-based approach toward the feminist subjects who contributed to the making of *The International Dinner Party* seeks to counter-act the here-before/there-after binary. Central to my feminist cultural analysis of the issues raised by *The International Dinner Party* is a theoretical alignment between queer feminist durationality and 'better with/because of.'

### Associations and Transgressions



So far, I have firmly placed my approach to method in a tradition of feminist thought, and have tried to use it to approach curating in a theoretical and historical framework. Equally, I have opened a critical perspective on feminist thought's historiographic project with regard to the chronopolitical regime by which it is governed. I am activating the anti-monolithic intent expressed in feminist thought. Yet, I am actively counteracting the structural binary of advancement and obsolescence that is part of feminist thought's conventional historiographic narratives. Counteracting this chronopolitical binary of advancement/obsolescence is a task to be more fully theoretically acknowledged and addressed within the feminist historiographic enterprise. I bring this counteracting to the project of curating's historiography. And I invoke again the method of the question. Feminism is the question, I suggested. By association, I want to suggest, curating is the question. In her 2001 essay *Survey for Art and Feminism*, Peggy Phelan returns to the question of feminism within the context of a book that is curatorially organized across several generations of artists.

The troublesome question emerges: what is feminism? When faced with such an amorphous and ambivalent term, the shrewd often answer that it must be plural—not feminism but feminisms. [...] The ideological stakes in the question 'what is feminism?' have often led to increasingly sophisticated but, it must be admitted also, increasingly evasive responses. I prefer a bold, if broad definition: feminism is the conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category for the organization of culture. Moreover, the pattern of that organization usually favours men over women.<sup>44</sup>

Opening the question again is not only a feminist tradition and a theoretical operation. It is equally a historiographic operation that pays close attention to the transformationality of theories and practices bound up with the concrete historic conditions of any given time in any given location. Therefore critical cartography, situated knowledge, and politics of location are of theoretical importance to my feminist cultural analysis. Through Griselda Pollock, I introduced the paradox of being bound up with the very system of sexual difference one critiques and how to make this paradox the very condition of radical practice. I would now like to proceed by way of joining questions and paradoxes and binaries/dichotomies with associations and transgressions. In the already quoted essay, *Survey*, Peggy Phelan also writes: "Alluringly open, deceptively simple, art and feminism is a seductive subject. Among the most provocative words for critical writing, the conjunction and compels an associative logic."<sup>45</sup> I fully agree with the potentials of an associative logic and want to foreground that this very logic is open to questions, paradoxes, and renegotiations of binaries and dichotomies. And/and multiplies this associative logic and directs its interest to the space that is opened up by the mark of the forward slash that, theoretically speaking, can make itself part of the questions and paradoxes. Therefore, the forward slash, or whack,<sup>46</sup> is of methodological importance to my approach in order to understand how feminist thought works and moves. I aim to work conceptually as well as methodologically with the forward slash or whack, "/" . This becomes a tool of thinking in order to activate this line, this border, or ultimately this space that both separates and connects. Taken together, the conjunction and as well as the forward slash motivate transnational as well as transhistorical associations. Based upon association and transgression, I turn to the theoretical and practical concept of transnational feminism as developed by Charda Talpade Mohanty. Suzanne Lacy's *The International Dinner Party* project motivated the contributions of more than 2000 women organizing 200 dinners. Taken together, the 200 different dinners can be understood as an ad-hoc community originating through the support system of the 1979 women's movements. Local

women's organizations, individual artists, or feminist communities organized dinners. Therefore, the framework of transnational feminism is of importance to understand both the possible associations between women around the globe and the complexities and contradictions with regard to the politics of location and situated knowledge as discussed earlier. Mohanty uses these terms "imagined communities" and "communities of resistance" not because they are not "real" but because it suggests commitment and potential alliances and collaborations across divisive boundaries.<sup>47</sup> Understood as such, community is not an essentializing given or a ready-made localizable entity. I associate *The International Dinner Party* with the concepts of both an imagined community and a community of resistance. In historical hindsight, this community can be joined by accessing their messages, by tracing the cultural and political legacy of change produced by this community of women, and the ad-hoc March 14, 1979 feminist archive they created. I use Mohanty's concept of imagined communities and communities of resistance to counteract notions of essentializing women's communities, which is very much part of how second-wave feminism has been historicized and criticized. This is conceptually part of my reading conventional feminist thought's historiography against its grain.

The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of Third World feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. It is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class, and gender—the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves with and participate in these imagined communities. However, clearly our relations to and centrality in particular struggles depend on our different, often conflictual, locations and histories.<sup>48</sup>

My research-based approach to a selected number of the different communities or individuals who hosted the 200 different dinners is owed to understanding their different locations and histories. Yet, I also seek to pay close attention to possible affinities based upon the politics of association. Therefore, association is understood both as a theoretical method and a political practice. The first follows Phelan's suggestion of an associative logic creating new, unexpected, and, at times, surprising constellations (something closely resembling curatorial constellations). The second understands associations politically and follows Mohanty: "Communities of resistance like imagined communities is a political definition, not an essentialist one."<sup>49</sup> Associating is thus understood as the political practice of producing and reproducing communities. "Community, then, is the product of work, of struggle."<sup>50</sup>

Peggy Phelan's suggestion of an associative logic led me to place *The International Dinner Party* in feminist curatorial thought. Amelia Jones' 1996 exhibition *Sexual Politics. Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* inspired the choice of my title *Suzanne Lacy's International Dinner Party in Feminist Curatorial Thought*. In her exhibition catalogue essay, "Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories," Amelia Jones emphasizes that she aims to "work within a historical and theoretical (rather than aesthetic or monographic) framework."<sup>51</sup> Both Jones' curatorial work and her essay writing use a historical and theoretical framework. This strongly inspired my approach toward *The International Dinner Party*. By way of using a historical and theoretical framework, I placed *The International Dinner Party* in its multi-locational historical context and in feminist curatorial thought, both historically and currently. Central to my interest are the project's social politics, or put differently, the politics of communities of resistance or imagined com-

munities. Equally central to my interest is the project's complex constellation between activism, art-making, feminism, political struggles, curating, and the institution of the museum. I came to understand the different tasks performed by artist Suzanne Lacy as curatorial in nature. Lacy acted as artist, inviter, feminist community organizer, and bridge between the art world and women's/feminist communities, between women's and feminists' intellectual, convivial, social, and political work and the institution of the museum. Therefore, not only the critical transgression of the waves model is of importance to my analysis, but also curatorial and theoretical transgressions of hegemonic narratives of the history of curating. This history, for the better part, has been written from the perspective of curators-as-authors. This, in fact, revives the monographic model of historical narration. Interestingly enough, the art historical convention of the monographic model very much suits the neoliberal model of star curators.

(...) [T]he shift from the mechanically chronological display to the thematic or monographic exhibition all dramatise the role of the curator in the mediation of art. The visibility of figures like Harald Szeemann or, more recently, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Nicolas Bourriaud as the authors of signature exhibition practices is another effect of the evolution of the neoliberal museum and its search for constant innovation and dynamism, and is a development that has produced a voluminous literature on the curator.<sup>52</sup>

Again, it is the chronopolitical regime of progress and advancement, this time in the guise of originality, innovation, dynamism, or "novelty,"<sup>53</sup> that governs much of curating's historiography. Dimitrakaki and Perry propose to "move beyond the normative distinction between a mothers' and a daughters' generation (...)."<sup>54</sup> Based upon this suggestion, it is my aim to make a critical contribution to counteracting the chronopolitical regime of advancement/obsolescence within feminist historiography's waves model and the art historical monographic/neoliberal star-curator model dominating much of curating's historiography. "There is in fact a long and continuous history of feminist curating that has tended to be submerged by the weight of the search for novelty."<sup>55</sup> I want to turn once more to Sarah Bracke's and Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's 'better with/because of' to support my resistance against novelty. Novelty also tends to obscure that we build on the work of others in order to both associate (with) and transgress (beyond). I draw on Dorothee Richter's critical analysis of the curator's structural position with regard to modernism's artistic genius and neoliberalism's curatorial networker in order to understand curating from a feminist standpoint.

The figure of the curator (as a structural model) is in many ways a draft of a new post-Fordist accented authorship. This figure takes on in many ways, as I have expressed elsewhere, the paradigmatic attributes of the masculine mythos of "artistic genius", connects this with mobility and networking – and there you have the new role model for the Western post-industrial lifestyle.<sup>56</sup>

The structural model is, per Richter, embedded in a historiographic construction of genealogical filiation. The neoliberal dynamism and novelty is joined with the monographic narrative model that is multiplied via a father-son genealogy. Therefore, critical feminist historiography is key in terms of counteracting the discursive power relations of such constructions.

Just think of current publications, such as Hans Ulrich Obrist's (H.U.O.) *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating*. It may be symptomatic

that there is only one contribution by a woman in it, with the exception of a one-page foreword by April Lamm, in which the figure of the curator is identified in the same father-son line of Harald Szeemann – Pontus Hultén – Alexander Dorner – H.U.O. [...] Not only is the absence of women symptomatic, but above all, this discourse about curatorial activity returns to the subject of the “genius curator.”<sup>57</sup>

I draw on Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Framing Feminism. Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985* to understand that much of feminist art making also led to exhibition organizing, exhibition making, and was in fact marked by collective curatorial energy and endeavour. I draw on exemplary curatorial models such as *Sexual Politics. Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* by Amelia Jones to understand how feminist art history and theory impacts on curating and via curating. Another feminist way of approaching curatorial practice is offered by curator and critic Renée Baert's “who thinks through curating as a dialogical practice: exhibitions talking to other exhibitions.”<sup>58</sup> ‘Because of’ all of this feminist thought on which to build, I can move toward a different understanding of curating's practice and curatorial historiography. I seek to build upon feminist associations and transgressions with regard to curatorial thought. My critical refusal of the displacement narratives and the novelty imperative leads me to using an associative logic and a transgressive feminist imagination of linking *The International Dinner Party* with a possible extension toward curating's history, embodied in the salon model, and toward curating's future via feminist and queer feminist living archive practices and imagined communities of resistance.

In concluding, I want to return to my opening question: What if there is a feminist turn in curating? And I want to suggest that there is in fact a feminist turn in curating. I understand my feminist cultural analysis of *The International Dinner Party* that pairs a research-based approach with a theory-based approach to be part of this feminist turn in curating. Methodologically I build on feminist thought to historicise, theorise, and practise curating. I want to emphasize that it is my aim to counteract the chronopolitics that would proclaim such a turn as novelty-centric, and therefore ultimately bound up with the advancement/obsolescence binary. On the contrary, throughout my study I follow the earlier mentioned feminist method of ‘better with/because of’ those who came before us.<sup>59</sup> It is my firm conviction that a feminist turn in curating builds upon questions raised, answers suggested, and transgressions risked by many, many others. Because of these possible associations with the work of many others, such a feminist turn in curating will, throughout my study, be extended both toward the past and toward (possible) futures.

**Elke Krasny** is professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She was Guest Professor at the University of Bremen in 2006, at the Academy of Fine Arts Nuremberg in 2013, and at the Vienna University of Technology in 2014. She received the Austrian Outstanding Artist Award for Women's Culture in 2011. In 2012 she was Visiting Scholar at the CCA, Canadian Centre for Architecture, in Montréal. Her work as a curator, critic, cultural theorist and urban researcher clearly shows her interest in urban transformation processes, the critical history of architecture, the politics of history, and the historiography of feminist curatorial practices. She edited a book on the history of self-organization *Hands-On Urbanism 1850-2012. The Right to Green* appeared in 2012 and her exhibition by the same name was shown at the Architecture Centre Vienna, the Museum for Contemporary Art Leipzig and included in the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2012. She curated the discursive event *Women's Movements: Feminist Agency. Intersections of Activism, Archiving, Art, Art History, Critical Research and Curating at Rotor*, association for contemporary art Graz. She

co-edited the 2013 volume *Women's: Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art*. Krasny did take part in the "Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies, Practice-Based Doctoral Programme".

## Notes

**1** A number of exhibitions, conferences, research networks, symposia, and publications do suggest that we can in fact speak of a feminist turn in curating. Examples include the 2006 *Curatorial Strategies* issue of *n.paradoxa*: international feminist art journal, the 2006 essay *Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices since the 1970s*, 2007 exhibitions *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* and *Global Feminisms*. 2008 witnessed *La Mirada Iracunda/ The Furious Gaze* and 2009 witnessed *Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*. Publications include the 2006 essay *Issues in Feminist Curation: Strategies and Practices*, the 2010 volume of *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, the 2013 *Politics in a Glass Case. Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* and *Women's: Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art*, and *nparadoxa's A Chronological List of International Exhibitions on Women Artists and Feminist art Practices* (<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/feministartexhibitions.pdf>, last updated October 2014). Symposia and conferences include the 1999 *Dialogues and Debates Symposium on Feminist Positions in Contemporary Visual Arts* hosted by Künstlerinnenstiftung Höge, Bremen; the 2008 *The Furious Gaze* conference at Centro Cultural Montehermoso Kulturunea; the 2010 *Frauen: Museum: Zwischen Sammlungsstrategie und Sozialer Plattform (Women's: Museum: Between Collection Strategies and Social Platforms)* at the Vienna Library, the 2012 *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* conference at Tate Modern London, the 2012 *The First Supper Symposium* at Handverkeren Kurs- og Konferansesenter, the 2014 *Curating Feminism Conference* hosted by Sydney College of the Arts, School of Letters, Arts and Media, and The Power Institute, University of Sydney, and *Feminist Turn in Curating* panel at the 2015 *Curating Everything (curating as symptom)* symposium at Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst Zurich.

**2** Susan Archer Mann, "Introduction," in *Doing Feminist Theory: From Modernity to Postmodernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), xvii.

**3** Marsha Meskimmon, "Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally," in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler and Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art and Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2007), 335.

**4** Meskimmon (2007), 335.

**5** Doreen Massey, "Imagining Globalization: Power-

Geometries of Time-Space," in *Global Futures: Migration, Environment and Globalization*, eds. Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hicman, and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 31. quoted in Meskimmon (2007), 324.

**6** Meskimmon (2007), 324.

**7** To give but a very few examples: *What is Feminism?* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1916; *What is Socialist Feminism?* by Barbara Ehrenreich, 1976; *What is Feminism?* edited by Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, 1986; *What is Feminist Art? Interview with Mary Kelly* by Rozsika Parker, 1977; *What is Feminist Art?* by Judy Chicago (no date); Chris Beasley, *What Is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, 1999; *What is Feminist in Feminist Theory?* by Cathrine Egeland, 2004; *What is Black Feminism?*, The Black International, 2014.

**8** Chris Beasley, *What Is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999) 21. Quoted in Susan Archer Mann (2010), 4.

**9** see Susan Archer Mann (2010), xvi.

**10** Rosemarie Tong, "Introduction. The Diversity of Feminist Thinking," in *Feminist Thought. A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2014), 1.

**11** Tong (2014), 1.

**12** Tong (2014), 1.

**13** There are a number of publications that in fact suggest a turn toward curating's history and a number of different journals establishing a discourse on curating. Examples include: Nathalie Heinrich and Michael Pollak, "From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a Singular Position," in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 23–250; Peter White, ed., *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future* (Banff: Banff Centre for the Arts, 1996); Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter, eds., *Curating Degree Zero: An International Curating Symposium* (Nuremberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 1999); Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin, eds., *The Producers*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Fine Art, 2000); Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (London: One Off Press, 2000); Catherine Thomas, *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice* (Banff: Banff Centre Press, 2000); Gavin Wade, ed., *Curating in the 21st Century* (Walsall: New Art Gallery Walsall; Wolverhampton: University of Wolverhampton, 2000); Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews*, ed. Thomas Boutoux, vol. 1 (Milan: Charta, 2003); Christoph Tannert, Ute Tischler, and Künstlerhaus

Bethanien, eds., *MIB—Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice* (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2004) Revolver, 2004; Hans-Joachim Müller, *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker* (Munich: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2006); Paul O’Neill, *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions/de Appel, 2007); Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2008); Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Curating\* But Were Afraid to Ask* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2011); Dorothee Richter, “Artists and Curators as Authors, Competitors, Collaborators, or Teamworkers?” in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, eds. Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schaffaff, and Thomas Weski (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2012); Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012); Paul O’Neill, Paul, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures*, (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 2012); Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Ways of Curating* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014) Jens Hoffman, *(Curating) From A to Z* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2015)

Another route into writing curating’s history is provided by Afterall’s Exhibition Histories Series. “This series is the result of a research project developed by Afterall at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London, in collaboration with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. The first publication was launched in 2010. In 2012, a new partnership was formed with the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College.” (Cornelia Butler and other authors, *From Coneptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard’s Number Shows 1969–74*, London: Afterall, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London, 2012) flyleaf.

Journals on curating’s theory and practice, on curatorial discourse, and to some extent, curating’s histories include: *Curator The Museum Journal* (this peer-reviewed academic journal was founded in 1958); *Exhibitionist* (published by the National Association for Museum Exhibition since 1981); *Manifesta Journal. Around Curatorial Practice*, <http://www.manifestajournal.org/about> (founded in 2003); *OnCurating*, <http://www.on-curating.org> (this international journal focuses on curatorial practice and theory, it was founded in 2008); *The Exhibitionist*, <http://the-exhibitionist.com> (this journal by curators and for curators was founded in 2009); *Red Hook Journal*, <http://www.bard.edu/ccs/redhook/about-the-red-hook-journal/> (the Center for Curatorial Studies Bard started this journal in 2011); *Journal of Curatorial Studies* (this peer-reviewed print journal was started in 2012); *Artist as Curator*, <http://www.theartistascurator.org> (this publication project was started in 2013)

14 Dorothee Richter, “About On-Curating.Org, ONCURATING.org, issue 01 (2008): 1. Accessed May, 24, 2015. <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-1>.

[html#.VWq\\_EUuWHwl](http://html#.VWq_EUuWHwl).

15 Tong (2014), 1. Recitation is owed to Clare Hemmings who introduced this method in her 2011 book *Why Stories Matter. The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*.

16 Beasley (1999), 21.

17 Mann (2012), xvi.

18 Mann (2012), xviii.

19 Meskimmon (2007), 335.

20 Mann (2010), xvii.

21 Mann (2010), xvii–xviii.

22 Griselda Pollock, “A Lonely Preface,” in *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), xxiv.

23 Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 32.

24 Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies. A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), xiii.

25 Griselda Pollock, “The Politics of Theory: Generations and Geographies in Feminist Theory and the Histories of Art Histories,” in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

26 Pollock (1996), 4–5.

27 Pollock (1996), 4–5.

28 Sandra Harding, “Introduction: Standpoint Theory as a Site of Political, Philosophical and Scientific Debate,” in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader. Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

29 Sarah Bracke and María Puig de la Bellacasa, “Building Standpoints,” in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader. Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 309.

30 Pollock (1996), 5.

31 Sarah Bracke and María Puig de la Bellacasa, “Building Standpoints,” in *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader. Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

32 Bracke and Puig de la Bellacasa (2004), 309.

33

34 To provide an example here. In *Depression. a Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich describes the work of artists Sheila Pepe and Allyson Mitchell to emphasize that “their work does not celebrate the ‘third wave’ at the expense of the second wave.” (p.188) Cvetkovich states that artist Sheila “Pepe proactively names as her influences both Judy Chicago and Eva Hesse, slyly referring to them as the parents who didn’t speak to one another and expressing a conviction that work that can be simultaneously sexy and abstract.” (p. 182) see: Ann Cvetkovich, “The Utopia of Ordinary Habit. Crafting, Creativity, and Spiritual Practice,”

in *Depression: a Public Feeling*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 154–202.

**35** Susan Archer Mann (2010), 216.

**36** See: Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, Don Hubert and Kenneth Thompson (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), 185–225.

**37** Examples are: Eliasaid Munro, “Feminism: a Fourth Wave?” *Political Insight* 4, 2 (2013) 22–25 or Jennifer Baumgardner, “Is there a Fourth Wave? If so, does it matter,” In *F’EM! Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls*. (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2011), 243–252.

**38** Rosi Braidotti, “Powers of Affirmation,” in *The Unexpected Guest: Art, Writing and Thinking on Hospitality*, ed. Sally Tallant and Paul Domela (London: Art Books Publishing, 2012), 281.

**39** Amelia Jones, “Art as a binary proposition; identity as a binary proposition,” in *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 17–62.

**40** Amelia Jones, “Queer Feminist Durationality: Time and Materiality as a Means of Resisting Spatial Objectification,” in *Seeing Differently A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 170–217.

**41** Amelia Jones (2012), 178.

**42** Amelia Jones (2012), 178

**43** Hemmings (2011), 32.

**44** Peggy Phelan, “Survey,” in *Art and Feminism*, ed. Helen Reckitt (London and New York: Phaidon, 2001), 18.

**45** Phelan (2001), 16.

**46** In writing about an associative logic, I was delighted to see that the forward slash whack is homophone to “WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution”, the title of the 2007 large-scale feminist exhibition that was curated by Cornelia Butler and first shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Widely acclaimed for its scope, the show was also heatedly debated by feminist art theorists, curators, and historians with regard to the paradoxes between institutions’ desires and the willingness to put on one feminist blockbuster show and institutions’ resistance to structural, economic, political, and organizational feminist transformation.

**47** Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 47.

**48** Mohanty (2003), p. 46.

**49** Mohanty (2003), p. 47.

**50** Mohanty (2003), p. 104.

**51** Amelia Jones, “Sexual Politics: Feminist Strategies, Feminist Conflicts, Feminist Histories,” in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones (UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center in association with Berkeley, Los

Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 24.

**52** Dimitrakaki and Perry (2012): 10–11.

**53** Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, “How to be Seen: An Introduction to Feminist Politics, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions,” in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 12.

**54** Dimitrakaki and Perry (2012): 5.

**55** Dimitrakaki and Perry (2012): 12.

**56** Dorothee Richter, “In Conversation with False Hearted Fanny: Feminist Demands on Curating,” in *Women’s Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art*, ed. by Elke Krasny and Frauenmuseum Meran (Wien: Löcker, 2013), 92.

**57** Richter (2013): 93.

**58** Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessic Sjöholm Skrubbe, “Preface”, in *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, ed. Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), xviii.

**59** Bracke and Puig de la Bellacasa (2004): 309.

# Performing Justice – From Dada’s Trial to Yael Bartana’s JRMiP Congress

## by Avi Feldman

### Introduction

The “Trial of Maurice Barrès,” created by Dada in Paris in 1921, represents a significant moment in avant-garde art. Shifting between the legal and the arts, the Barrès trial serves as an early example of pioneering experimentation with aesthetics and politics. In the following essay, I seek to not only further explore the trial from a legal perspective, but to also relate it to our time. In order to do so, I have chosen to focus on the first Congress of “The Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland” (JRMiP) created by Yael Bartana in 2012. Juxtaposing the Barrès trial and Bartana’s JRMiP Congress reflects the spirit of thinking of the French Dadaist André Breton who, in his report following the Barrès trial and the “Grande Saison Dada,” claimed “that work perceived by its makers to be an experimental failure in its own time (like the Dada Season of 1921) may nevertheless have resonance in the future, under new conditions.”<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the amount of research on the Dada trial as a legal document and event is relatively scarce,<sup>2</sup> which complicates and makes difficult any quest to give an embedded account of the resonance predicated by Breton. Therefore, in the following essay I aspire to demonstrate how vital it is to unfold the Dada trial in relation to other notable and influential trials of the era, such as the Alfred Dreyfus and Émile Zola trials, in order to better comprehend the Dada motivation in staging a trial and in calling for justice through legal instruments and space. On a similar note, by paying close attention to the political and social consequences the Dreyfus trial has had and still holds, I endeavour to analyse Bartana’s Congress and its call for justice in Europe, Poland, and Israel, to be imagined, if not to be immediately achieved, by formulating and providing explicit legal demands.

### The Barrès Trial – Background

Taking place in May 1921 in Paris, the Trial of Maurice Barrès was held at the Salle des Sociétés in Paris, revolving around the accountability of Barrès’ metamorphosis from being an influential revolutionary thinker to becoming a politician advocating in favour of nationalism. Announced in several newspapers as a prosecution of the writer-turned-politician Maurice Barrès, it assembled members of the Dada group (directed by poet and writer André Breton) around a court-like performance. Made to resemble a French court tribunal, the performance was constructed around the participation of Dada members and the public acting as defence attorneys, prosecution counsel, a judge, two assistant judges, and a president of the tribunal.

The trial is perceived by Clair Bishop as part of the second phase of Dada, which Breton in a Radio interview in 1952 identified as a development of the “lively agitation” of the first phase, yet now ‘more groping...through radically renewed



meanst phase.”<sup>3</sup> According to Bishop, “The Barrès Trial was advertised as a hearing of the author Maurice Barrès (1862– 1923), whose book *Un Homme Libre* (1889), had been a great influence on Breton and Aragon in their youth.”<sup>4</sup> The aim of the trial was, in Breton’s words, “to determine the extent to which a man could be held accountable if his will to power led him to champion conformist values that diametrically opposed the ideas of his youth.”<sup>5</sup> The charges brought against Barrès during the trial were summed up in a Dada manner as consisting of “committing an attack on the security of the mind.”<sup>6</sup>

Both Bishop and James M. Harding<sup>7</sup> begin their exploration of the trial by positioning this act as part of a European modernist period through which legal institutional formats were reinvented and re-examined anew. While it may be hard to pinpoint and agree on when this period began, it is agreed that it “is marked by a self-conscious exploration of the forms of artistic expression,”<sup>8</sup> as evident in Breton’s re-instrumentalization of the courtroom as an artistic intervention. According to Harding, there is a strong duality to be found in this process as it wanders between achieving remarkable innovation and yet struggling with “forms that seem no longer capable of sustaining them.”<sup>9</sup> The modernist ambition to find new cultural meanings and a new language to express them has led to re-examination of existing formats, such as the courtroom and the legal system. “The staging of Western modernism was frequently tied to a fundamental search for untapped and fresh venues [...] intertwined with a basic rethinking of the very language that constituted the stage.” An earlier known example of this quest, prior to the utilization of the court and the legal sphere, can be observed in the Dadaists’ reuse of the format of the cabaret and the creation of Cabaret Voltaire during the years 1915–1917 in Zurich, which was a “mixed bills of performance, music and poetry.”<sup>10</sup> Later on, in what will come to be known as the “1921 Dada Season,” opening in April of that year, the Dada group will search for spaces considered by them as having “no reason to exist [...] only areas considered not picturesque, nonhistorical [...] and unsentimental would qualify [...]”<sup>11</sup> The season is also a moment in which Dada began a process of reflection on how it might be reinvented before deteriorating into a routine.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, the trial being one of the season’s essential components was part of Breton’s attempt to conquer new physical and mental terrains for Dada’s actions. Harding points out that the artistic experimentations characterized by the Dadaist early revitalizations of theatrical formats through the use of popular cultural venues, led to a gradual greater interest in the social sphere, such as the courtroom as further discussed in this chapter. For Harding, this is the result of a constant pendulum movement shared by the Dadaists. The innovation that appeared through “the ideological guise of a forward-looking, self-reflective, and radical exploration of new modes of performance [...] was almost always haunted by a conservative shadow.”<sup>13</sup> The ambiguity of Dada lies exactly here—between the new and the old, between the quests for a new set of values while being engaged with already existing formats.

### **Dada and the Dreyfus Affair**

In order to better comprehend the Dada interest in the format of the trial, one must begin by referring to one of the most influential and controversial trials that began in Paris in 1894, only to be resolved in 1906. What has become to be known as the Dreyfus Affair has had an immense political, legal, and social impact in France during those years and beyond. The atrocity and the fragility of the French Republic and its legal system had been brutally exposed following the Dreyfus trial, up to his exoneration. The debate surrounding the false allegations against

the French Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus severely divided public opinion, evoking issues such as anti-Semitism, nationality, and cultural identity.

The first trial of Dreyfus opened on 19 December 1894, at the end of which he was found guilty of treason. On 5 January 1895, "At a ceremony in the courtyard of the *École Militaire*, Dreyfus was publicly stripped of his rank and was sentenced to life imprisonment in solitary confinement in an ex-lepers' colony on Devil's Island off the coast of French Guyana."<sup>14</sup> Dreyfus was facing public humiliation as he was degraded before an enthusiastic crowd yelling at him "Jew" and "Judas!", while he continuously declared his innocence. The public scene of the once celebrated Army Captain losing his military rank was to become a symbol of a time of decay. Reminiscent of the long forgotten public tortures of medieval Europe, "It took place in the immediate shadow of the monument of modernity, the Eiffel Tower, then six years old [...] The very improbability of such an act's happening at such a time—to an assimilated Jew who had mastered a meritocratic system and a city that was the pride and pilothouse of civic rationalism—made it a portent [...] The Dreyfus Affair was the first indication that a new epoch of progress and cosmopolitan optimism would be met by a countervailing wave of hatred that deformed the next half century of European history."<sup>15</sup>

The Dreyfus trial, and his imprisonment on what was later to be proved to be unfounded evidence, has led to several other related court trials and public turbulence, including a trial against Major Esterhazy as the actual perpetrator of the act of treason, and another against the writer Émile Zola who published an open letter in defence of Dreyfus in *L'Aurore* newspaper under the headline "J'accuse...!". Zola needed to consequently flee to England as he was found guilty of libel. However, his famous open letter to the President of France has prompted what is known to be the "birth of the intellectuals." The day after the publication of "J'accuse" the same newspaper went on to publish a statement in protest of the 'judicial irregularities' of the 1894 trial and 'the mysteries surrounding the Esterhazy affair'. This measure became to be known as the "Manifesto of the Intellectuals" as it "was signed by over a hundred leading figures in the fields of letters, science and education and marked the entry en masse of 'the intellectuals' into politics, in the sense that they were stepping outside their spheres of expertise and were publicly and collectively taking a position on a political (and also moral) issue."<sup>16</sup>

The Dreyfus trial and his public dishonour attracted great attention from the general public, however, it was Zola's trial that led to a concrete and immediate impact on French society. It seemed that everyone wanted to get involved with the trial against the famous author as described by Joseph Reinach, the author of *Histoire de l'Affaire Dreyfus*: "Never had such a numerous, more passionately agitated, crowd invaded the Assises chamber. Lawyers were piled on top of each other, some clinging to the high ramparts surrounding the reserved enclosure or to the window sills; and mingling with them, crushed to suffocation point, in the emotion of the spectacle absorbing the whole world's attention, elegant ladies, journalists, officers, men of leisure, actors, 'Everybody who was anybody—all, the cream, of Paris!'"<sup>17</sup> The unprecedented engagement of intellectuals and the general public in the trials that followed the Dreyfus trial certainly played a pivotal role in changing and reforming artistic involvement as well. The Dreyfus trial is also known to be the force leading Léon Blum into active participation in French politics. Blum, who later became the first socialist and Jewish premier, is quoted by Jacqueline Rose as saying that the Dreyfus Affair "was as violent a crisis as the French Revolution and the Great War."<sup>18</sup>

Maurice Barrès, the French novelist and journalist-turned-politician who will be the target of the later-to-come Dada trial, is also considered as one of France's leading intellectuals upon whom the Dreyfus trial had an immense influence. In Jacqueline Rose's exploration of great writers and scholars such as Marcel Proust, Samuel Beckett, and Sigmund Freud, she focuses mostly on the Dreyfusards, those who stood in support of Dreyfus. Rose does not, however, discuss much at length the position of anti-Dreyfusards, such as Barrès, for whom the Dreyfus trial had marked a dramatic ideological change in the direction of nationalism.

Yet, I wish to emphasize that it was Dada, more than twenty years following the Dreyfus Affair, that decided to bring to justice the case of Barrès by accusing him of moral betrayal for "committing an attack on the security of the mind."<sup>19</sup> The research on the Dada trial for the most part does not pay attention to the reasons behind the decision to put Barrès on trial and not any other living or dead or fictional figure. However, I am of the opinion that dwelling on why Barrès became Dada's target shall yield fruitful and relevant new perceptions in the context of this essay. As I will show, this decision by Dada attests to the remarkable influence Barrès continued to have in France, especially for the younger generation of French intellectuals, writers, and politicians such as André Gide, Louis Aragon, and Blum himself. As the historian Zeev Sternhell states in his article on the rise of the right wing in France following the 1870 war and France's defeat by Germany: "Barrès was for the men of his generation the model of the engaged intellectual and the *philosophe*, in the eighteen-century French meaning of the term."<sup>20</sup> Sternhell further argues that for most of today scholars, Barrès plays a negligible role, but that in the context of his own time and means of influence, Barrès must be considered as a modern intellectual: "His conception of the nature of political struggle in a liberal democratic system reveals an acute understanding of the imperative of politics in modern society [...] reflected the changes in occurring then in the European intellectual climate which amounted to a veritable intellectual revolution."<sup>21</sup>

In what Sternhell perceives to be outstanding political intuition, he demonstrates how Barrès was able to present nationalism as a fulfilment of socialism, as it ensures first and foremost the state's commitment to its citizens as "nationalism, Barrès claimed, 'is deeply concerned with establishing just relationships among all Frenchmen'."<sup>22</sup> This manner in which Barrès impressively juggles to intertwine right and left politics gained further ideological implications during the trial of Dreyfus. Allowing a fertile ground for anti-Semitism during the trial, "Barrès went on to elaborate this nationalism of the 'little man', of all those who had nothing but their rootedness, their Frenchness [...]. For Barrès, it was a political conception, not mere hatred of the Jew; it had its task to fulfill on the flanks of socialism. It was a progressive notion – Barrès was addressing himself to republicans and democrats meant to serve as the groundwork for a mass movement."<sup>23</sup>

### **The Barrès Trial – A Political Participatory Space**

The attempt to capture the masses and to engage in a new participatory dynamic of politics and debate can, to some degree, be perceived as shared by both politicians and artists of that time period. In order to further shed light on the notion of the participatory as a crucial part of the Dada trial, I must again refer to Bishop and her book, *Artificial Hells*. According to Bishop, Breton's interest in the public sphere led him to consider the format of the trial as a space for Dada experimentation. She states that, "By spring 1921[...] the group decided to take performance out of a cabaret context and into extra-institutional public space."<sup>24</sup> Directing her gaze towards the participatory aspects of Dada, Bishop includes the trial event as part of the Dada manifestations of April and May 1921, which "sought to

include the Parisian public through 'Visits – Dada Salon [...] Summons – Accusations Orders and Judgments.'<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the open call to the public to participate in the trial as part of the jury proves to be, according to Bishop, a step towards further inclusion of the public in Dada's performances.

The shift in Dada towards a greater engagement with the public sphere, institutions, and audiences could also explain why Barrès was chosen as the target of the trial. In the volatile political atmosphere of the French Third Republic, as France was healing its wounds from its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Barrès adopted a new way to conduct politics. During this "profound crisis in French democracy,"<sup>26</sup> Barrès had also exercised a move into direct contact with the general public in a call against the establishment, a move to be interrogated by Dada in the years thereafter: "Against the institution which was the embodiment of parliamentary democracy, Barrès appealed directly to the people; as against the parliamentary circus he called for direct action, and with the ample evocation of revolutionary imagery, sought to mobilize against the triumphant bourgeoisie the most deprived social levels."<sup>27</sup>

Barrès, who at first belonged to the liberal left political ranks, is perceived by historians such as Sternhell to be an intriguing case study for the ideological changes that began to form in France after 1870, in which the vocabulary of the left continues to be used by right-wing figures such as Barrès while distorting any significance of its prior meaning. "Against parliamentarism, Barrès set the cult of the leader [...] and in place of capitalism, he called for reforms whose essence was protectionism."<sup>28</sup> Sternhell concludes with the realization that "...in a given situation, the masses could easily give their support to a party which had borrowed its social values from the left and its political ones from the right."<sup>29</sup> In other words, or better so in the words of Dada: the political and legal establishment has proven to be "committing an attack on the security of the mind." This manipulative transformation from left-wing values to right-wing politics, as in the case of Barrès, was the essence of the Dada trial.

The Dada trial was set to confront the loss of values and the corruption of state institutions by deconstructing the courtroom. Breton's motivation was to challenge, prosecute, and seek justice from a person once considered by him and the rest of Dada as a beloved hero and respected ally. In order to be able to judge and bring about justice, a fully fledged court was what Breton needed. Hence, unlike earlier events by the Dada group, the trial was straightforwardly conceived to replicate a real tribunal.<sup>30</sup> From its own very title to the red, white, and black clothes worn by Dada participants in accordance with the official French Court of Justice, it abandoned much of the Dadaists' absurdist performances as they headed into the public sphere. It is agreed upon by most researchers that the trial redirected the Dada movement into new directions and mainly towards Surrealism. Moreover, the turn of Dada toward a construction of a courtroom signals "the most significant shift [...] Dada now presumed to judge rather than simply to negate; in other words, it attempted to find a position rather than offering an a priori rejection of all positions."<sup>31</sup>

The transference of Dada from rejection to a judgement claiming to bring justice where state institutions and courts have failed can be understood as part of a radical intent to "dissolve the division between the life of art and the art of life."<sup>32</sup> If, at the beginning of the Dada group, it was important to appropriate existing spaces and transform them into spaces immersed with Dada content and values, it was now the time to move further into other directions and make use of the public

space, and engage in a new relation with the general public. Using the “real life” format of the trial into which Dadaist content is inserted demonstrates the ability of Dada to swing between art and life, and thus produce their own politics. As T.J. Demos puts it, following Ranciere’s idea of the political, Dada “realizes its ‘moral directions’ by both transgressing and perpetuating the division between aesthetic autonomy and social practice.”<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, what is important to remember when analyzing the Dada trial is the constant ambivalent tension between being a parody of the law, while at the same time handling it wholeheartedly in earnest. The trial offers us a break from the common distinction between life and art. Dada appropriates the format of the trial for the creation of an intervention in the public space that breaks down the barriers “...between artistic performance and social process, resulting in a new kind of assertion of art’s autonomy—not as a self-contained ideal realm of aesthetic experience, but rather as an autonomous form of social experience.”<sup>34</sup> The trial serves as an excellent example of Dada’s ability to interact with the tension between life and art. By trying a living politician, the Dada trial managed to blur all distinctions between the real and the imaginary.

### **The Barrès Trial – Legal Form and Content**

On this backdrop, the Barrès trial can be perceived as a pivotal moment in which the contradictive mechanism of Dada comes out: “Appropriating as it did the legal structures of the courtroom is a gesture aimed at securing political and cultural values from a perceived corruption and demise [...] it served as the point of departure for the fleeting infatuation with legal constructs that swept the Parisian avant-gardes in the early 1920s.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, staging a performance within the framework of a trial offered a fake legitimacy “whose chief governing assumptions included the notions of unbiased authority and objective truth.”<sup>36</sup> Along with the Dada fascination with legal matters, the trial stands out as even more vital when considering the failure of Breton in assembling the “The Congress of Paris” later on, or in light of several lawsuits that were part of the growing rivalry between Breton and Tristan Tzara. “The Trial and Sentencing of Maurice Barrès by Dada marked the beginning of a circuitous chain of events,<sup>37</sup> all of which exposed the contradicting rhetoric of Dada, as well as their interest in breaking into new formats of artistic interventions in public space.

Without going any further into the stormy commotion of relations between Breton and Tzara,<sup>38</sup> two main figures of the Dada group, it is generally agreed that the trial was “a breaking point between Paris Dada and an emerging Surrealist movement.”<sup>39</sup> However, what is central to my argument is a reflection on the trial as a format that captures within it diverting artistic and legal rhetoric and strategies. These strategies are best summed up by Harding as a motion consisting of “looking backward and forward simultaneously [...] openly committed to a backward-glancing project of recovery and preservation, i.e. to a project of rescuing youthful, revolutionary ideas from the ageing, increasingly reactionary, and nationalistic hands.”<sup>40</sup> Hence, the trial of Maurice Barrès can be perceived as a culmination of a Dadaist use of an earlier existing state apparatus<sup>41</sup> format to which they were able to inject new rhetoric and anti-traditional concepts. It may have been that the trial was a result of inner struggles for power and authority within the ranks of Dada, but nevertheless, it succeeded in staging the old in close proximity to the new and appropriating a state-organized format for the creation of a new performance that crucifies both the past and the vanguards. It is in a sense an internal critic that questions the Dada mechanism itself. The trial dichotomy is embedded

within it. On the one hand, it aims to outrage its audience and public, while at the very same time it is concerned with confronting its own authenticity.

The façade of the accused Barrès, once an ally and a close visionary, was taken down to reveal his true face as a right-wing conservative politician. In the same manner, the trial suggests that Dada needs to see this as an alarming signal indicating the danger that also awaits the group itself of becoming reactionary, nationalist, and bourgeois. As Harding states, although “the question of whether Dada actually has exhausted itself was taken for granted and never addressed [...] it constructed an analogy between Barrès and Dada.”<sup>42</sup> It is the analogy between Dada and Barrès that symbolizes the innate, inner, and outer struggles between the reactionary and the progressive, which may explain Breton’s wish for the death penalty for Barrès. Yet at this point, other and somewhat more practical questions come to the surface: Could there be a trial in absence of the accused who left Paris on that day<sup>43</sup> and was represented in the trial in the form of a mannequin? Could justice be achieved without the presence of the defendant, or does it fundamentally undermine the whole process?

It is especially significant to consider that, in contrast to the missing Barrès, the tribunal was at full occupancy, as it was composed by “a judge, two assistant judges, the prosecution, and two counsels for the defense [...] all of whom treated the proceedings with the utmost seriousness [...] and accompanied by a phalanx of witnesses who testified to the public danger of the accused.”<sup>44</sup> And not only did all seem true and real in the conduct of the trial, for Breton, according to his biographer, “This was no parody, but the real thing—or as close as his lack of judicial authority would allow.”<sup>45</sup> In the absence of the defendant, the only opposition to the trial was expressed by Tristan Tzara. This outstanding move can be understood as part of the mistrust that formed in the volatile relation between Breton and Tzara. However, the statement made by Tzara during the trial proves to extend beyond mere personal disenchantment. Before leaving the stage and heading into the streets, Tzara claimed to have “absolutely no confidence in justice even if that justice is enacted by Dada.”<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the trial went on and ended with Barrès being found guilty based on testimonies given against him. Barrès was not sentenced to death, as requested by Breton, but to twenty years of hard labour. This verdict left both Barrès and Dada somewhat alive, as perhaps the fact that Tzara left the event ignited a sense that after all, “Beneath the façade of avant-gardism, The Trial was thus embedded in a discourse that cultivated conformity and that did so under the aura of establishing, indeed in securing, objective truth and order.”<sup>47</sup> The departure of Tzara can be perceived as his own interpretation of what it meant to engage with the masses. It can be proclaimed that while Tzara called for a direct engagement with the public by heading into the streets, Breton proposed or called upon the creation of an alternative legal system to service the public. To him it was clear that since the Dreyfus Affair and beyond, the judicial system had proven to be corrupted and malfunctioning, also proven by the fact that a figure such as Barrès escaped any kind of official state legal judgment.

### **The First Congress of The Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP) – Between Congress and a Trial**

Taking a leap to Yael Bartana’s first Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP), it should be firstly stated that in Bartana’s project one cannot speak of a direct visual investment into exploring the courtroom as a space for investigation as has been the case in the Barrès trial. Nevertheless, although Bartana does not specify that the congress function as a trial or a tribunal, I shall seek to demonstrate how she has exercised the power to judge Israel/Poland/the EU through rhetoric, parody, and public participation exercised prior to

and during the event, and also through exposing an alternative view of Jewish as justice.

At an immediate glance, the first Congress of the “Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP)” organized by Bartana in 2012 in Berlin has little to do with the mock trial organized by Breton in Paris. Dealing for the most part with the history of the Zionist movement, Bartana had clearly titled the three-day event, which was part of the Berlin Biennale and held at the Hebbel am Ufer Theatre, as a “Congress” in direct reference to the first Zionist Congress, held in Basel Switzerland in 1897.<sup>48</sup> Bartana’s project, which began in 2007 with a video titled *Mary Koszmary*<sup>49</sup> (nightmares), culminated by the time of the JRMiP congress in Berlin to a fully fledged movement consisting of international registered members holding membership cards, a flag, an identifiable symbol, a declared manifesto, etc. Maintaining all along the way a blurred distinction between “real” and “fictional”,<sup>50</sup> Bartana was able to position the movement on the border between being a political engagement and being a fictional artistic project.

Organized around a roundtable bearing the symbol of the movement at its centre, it is sufficient to acknowledge that the Congress had been directed to engage with three main issues which were formalized as questions: “How should the EU change in order to welcome the Other?”, “How should Poland change within a re-imagined EU?”, and “How should Israel change to become part of the Middle East?”<sup>51</sup> Making an open call to the general public to join as delegates during the gathering of the Congress, it was declared on the Congress’ website prior to its opening that it seeks to “collectively imagine a new future and to formulate the concrete platform and demands of the movement.”<sup>52</sup>

The Congress embarked on a public reading of a letter written by the late leader of the Movement, Sławomir Sierakowski.<sup>53</sup> The letter, it was announced, was found after Sierakowski’s assassination depicted in the third video of Bartana’s *Polish Trilogy* titled *Zamach* (Assassination). In this fictitious letter, Sierakowski calls for radical social change to be achieved by following the five proposals he designates at the end of his letter. Here I wish to stress how all of Sierakowski’s proposals are clearly concerned with legal matters, as they advocate for the urgent need for a legal amendment of Polish, Israeli, and European laws and constitutions: “1. Polish citizenship to all immigrants! 2. Reintegration tax to cover the costs of moving 3.3 million Jews to Poland! 3. Hebrew as the second official language in Poland! 4. Dismissal notice of the Polish state concerning the concordat with the Vatican state—each religious institution should act on the same level! 5. Minorities House instead of Senate in Polish Parliament!”<sup>54</sup>

The lack of any legal authority in the format of the Congress did not, however, deter the delegates summoned by Bartana to actively participate in a highly emotional debate. During the three-day event they proposed, outlined, and voted on the future JRMiP agenda also through raising legal demands. The practicality of the execution of those legal proposals did not seem to concern Bartana or the delegates summoned to the Congress, just as the invitation set by Breton for a trial of Maurice Barrès was made regardless of whether a legal actuality existed or not. In both cases, participants were engaged in and with legal formats and themes, while simultaneously ignoring the very premises on which they were conducted. Merging an unclear dichotomy between life and art, reality and fiction, both the Congress and the Barrès trial could be perceived as “a dissolution that also led to the interpenetration of aesthetics and politics,”<sup>55</sup> as argued by Demos in relation to the Dada trial. Held ninety-one years apart on the very same day (the Barrès trial

on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, while the Congress closed on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May), the two events have more in common than meets the eye, not only in what they leave open, blurred, or unravelled, but also in their goals and aspirations. Taking into account the obvious obligatory differences, and of the clear, estranged gap existing between two events taking place in different centuries, surroundings, and contexts, I aspire to shed light on their intriguing commonalities (without overlooking their differences), and by doing so, offer a new examination on the past and current artistic fascination and engagement with legal spaces.

A first step in the route to establishing similarities shared by the two projects can be tracked in their original motivation. For Breton, the writer Maurice Barrès was “one of the heroes of his adolescence”<sup>56</sup> who betrayed their shared beliefs and goals. Barrès’ political activism shifted from an early support in “anarchism, freedom and total individualism,” to an active involvement in right-wing politics, especially following the Dreyfus Affair, as he “changed his colours and turned right-wing, nationalist and bourgeois.”<sup>57</sup> Bartana, on the other hand, has been described as acting as if she was a betrayed lover of Zionism.<sup>58</sup> Pointing a blaming critical finger towards Israel’s current state of affairs, Bartana’s post-Zionist approach in her films cannot be ignored. Appropriating Zionist ideals and propaganda in “a kind of reverse Zionism,”<sup>59</sup> Bartana described herself as coming from a “very Zionist”<sup>60</sup> family. She realizes her films, such as the *Polish Trilogy*, can be perceived as anti-Zionist; however, she states that one should “...be very careful about using the term anti-Zionist; maybe anti-Israel is a better way to say it.”<sup>61</sup> Hence, both the Dada trial and the Congress are motivated by their creators’ wish to tackle the impact of this consequent reactionary development, and demand justice from those they once perceived as open, liberal, and progressive. Determined to examine, with the participation of the general public, the change that occurred and the responsibility this entails, both events can be described through the manner in which Breton explained the trial in his own words as a way “to determine the extent to which a man could be held accountable if his will to power led him to champion conformist values that diametrically opposed the ideas of his youth.”<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, the demands made by the delegates emerge from the past, but only in order to make clear proposals for the future. While some have demanded during the JRMiP Congress for the “EU to expand until it includes China”, many of the demands (quoted in Bartana’s catalogue for the exhibition at the Secession which was curated with the Congress as its centrepiece) included within it were legal propositions such as “Polish citizenship to all immigrants; reintegration tax to cover the cost of moving 3.3 million Jews to Poland; the state of Poland should devote 15% of its annual budget to culture and arts [...]”<sup>63</sup> The direction of the Congress, from the reading of the “last words” written by the movement’s late leader, to the demands made during the three-day event, can be defined by the same words used by art historian and critic T.J. Demos with regard to the Barrès trial: “It transferred the forms of aesthetic creativity into legal affairs, so that an intellectual’s political developments and ensuing contradictions could be publicly debated and the offender held accountable within an unconventional courtroom that was *sui generis*.”<sup>64</sup>

Realizing the Congress as a strategy beyond its immediate initial construction in relation to the Zionist Congress offers a needed acknowledgment in the wide scope provided by Bartana. The broad reading of the Congress through a legal prism is derived from the overreaching dimensions of the Congress itself. These overarching attributes have been strongly established in the movement’s manifesto that calls for the inclusion of “all those for whom there is no place in their home-



lands – the expelled and the prosecuted. There will be no discrimination in our movement. We shall not ask about your life stories, check your residence cards or question your refugee status [...].”<sup>65</sup> And although these embracing arms may seem a mock of the nation state or a parody on the current state of anti-refugee acts and laws in Europe just as in Israel, I suggest applying a more complex view of Bartana’s project in the spirit and image of Dada. The political stances made by Bartana are fruitful exactly because she maintains an ambivalent position between the serious and mockery, between real life and art. Similarly to Dada, Bartana’s utilization of the Congress offers a rearrangement of existing legal and political formats, which opens possibilities for “reconfiguring art as a political issue, or asserting itself as true politics.”<sup>66</sup> From the first video in the *Polish Trilogy* to the Congress, Bartana asserts her aim towards a reconfiguration of the space between art and life, the real and the imaginary. Releasing the JRMiP movement and its first Congress from the immediate concerns of whether it is real or fictive opens a possibility of being neither true nor fictional. The perplexing thoughts and emotions evoked by Bartana’s videos and Congress confirm the disruption of preconceived borders between a legal discourse and artistic practice.

Long after the Dada trial claimed ownership of the format of the court “joining aesthetic to ethical judgment and reinforcing it with (pretend) legal authority,”<sup>67</sup> the JRMiP Congress continues to experiment with the artistic ability to transfer aesthetics into political and legal spheres of action. Positioning the Congress as space to discuss the great questions relating to the future of Europe or the Middle East has enabled it to become a space for public debate, where legal and political alternatives are intertwined and imagined even when presumably being far-fetched and unconventional. Demos’ argument regarding the Dada trial is valid also for Bartana’s conduct, in which “the aesthetic regime introduces continuity between art and politics, such that aesthetics exceeds the realm of art by endowing the political world with visible forms.”<sup>68</sup> Creating a platform in which there is “a productive tension where neither term eclipses the other one,”<sup>69</sup> the Congress’ impact is gained through its fluctuated movement between aesthetics and politics without clarifying any borders.

### **The Dreyfus Affair and Bartana’s JRMiP Congress**

At this stage it is of importance to return to the Dreyfus Affair and relate it to Bartana’s Congress just as I explored it previously in relation to Dada. Mentioning Proust and Barrès earlier on as two prominent figures for which the Dreyfus trial played a pivotal turning point, I wish to include in this list a young journalist by the name of Theodor Herzl, for whom the Dreyfus trial equally left an indelible mark. Reporting from Paris on the Dreyfus Trial for the Austrian newspaper the *Neue Freie Presse*, Herzl is better known as the founding father of Zionism. What began as an observational report on the trial of Dreyfus gradually led Herzl in the following years to organize the first Zionist Congress in Basel, which, as mentioned above, provides the basis for Bartana’s Congress. Moreover, I shall argue, from a contemporary standpoint, the Dreyfus Affair’s influence cannot be overlooked also when dealing with Bartana’s Congress. As demonstrated by Jacqueline Rose, the Dreyfus Affair has had a long and profound ongoing legacy and relevance in contemporary Israel. Rose eloquently describes the involvement of Proust in the Dreyfus Affair and the impact his writing has had on French and European culture. However, she does not halt there as her journey from Dreyfus, Proust, and Freud leads her to Israel and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “...from the heart of Europe at the turn of the twentieth century to the Middle East, where the legacy of Dreyfus is still being played out to this day.”<sup>70</sup> Later in her book, Rose further states that,

"There is a line, we are often told, that runs from the Dreyfus Affair to the creation of Israel as a nation."<sup>71</sup>

The Congress created by Bartana does not give into the notion that with the establishment of the Zionist movement by Herzl following the Dreyfus Trial the idea of Jewish emancipation came to an end. There is a sense of a truth to drawing a line from the Dreyfus Trial to the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel; however, as Rose also states, this is not the only valid story. Instead, she claims we should "take from Dreyfus a warning—against an over-fervent nationalism, against infallible armies raised to the level of theocratic principle, against an ethnic exclusivity that blinds a people to the other peoples of the world, and against governments that try to cover up their own crimes."<sup>72</sup> Following this short introduction to Herzl, it is worthwhile now to bring the figure of Bernard Lazare into the discussion. Lazare's unique personality and philosophy sheds a new light on the variety of impacts the Dreyfus Affair has had among Jewish and Zionist scholars and activists. It is a historical truth that the first Zionist Congress was initiated and presided by Herzl, but it is the voice of Lazare that Bartana has been channeling as she deconstructs the Zionist Congress into a Congress for her initiated Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland.

These two voices have already been examined by Hannah Arendt in a number of publications. In the comparison that Arendt draws between the two who "had witnessed the Dreyfus trial, and both were profoundly transformed by the experience,"<sup>73</sup> she writes that they "were turned into Jews by anti-Semitism [...] For them their Jewish origin had a political and national significance,"<sup>74</sup> yet it came to be that "Herzl's views dominated twentieth-century Zionism whereas Lazare had become a pariah among his own people, dying in poverty and obscurity."<sup>75</sup>

### On Being Jewish and On Justice

As baffling as the JRMiP Congress might seem to be in its intersection of truth and fiction, of legal matters and imagination, Bartana's artistic manoeuvre is based on creating and facilitating a frame in which differing or even negating powers and ideologies can form an encounter.<sup>76</sup> In the most immediate way, one can say that Bartana appropriates Herzl's first Zionist Congress in order to implement into it diverting views.<sup>77</sup> One example for this is the turning of the Congress to an all-inclusive event dealing with universal and global issues to which not only Jews were invited. Titled the *Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland*, by the time the Congress took place, it has been clearly stated that the movement is open to all nationalities and religions, just as to all refugees and to stateless people. This ambivalence, from the one side the movement keeping the "Jewish" in its title, while from the other side defining and providing a framework open to all, is crucial to the understanding of the aim for justice called upon by the Congress. I will argue that the perception of the Congress by Bartana as a space demanding legal justice offers us a path to understanding part of the ambiguity of the Congress, which lies precisely in the tension between Jewish and non-Jewish; between being inclusive to being exclusive. In order to achieve this, I need to return at this stage, as promised earlier above, to the Dreyfus Affair, and more precisely to Bernard Lazare.

In her writings, Hannah Arendt considers Lazare the epiphany of a "conscious pariah"<sup>78</sup> alongside other notable figures such as Heinrich Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, and Franz Kafka. According to Arendt, it was Lazare who translated the position of the pariah into a political discourse: "Living in the France of the Dreyfus affair, Lazare could appreciate at first hand the pariah quality of Jewish existence."<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, Arendt argued that Lazare was aware that a solution to Jewish prosecution was not in exclusion, as Herzl advocated, but through building alliances with

other minorities and prosecuted people: "The emancipated Jew must awake to an awareness of his position and, conscious of it, become a rebel against it—the champion of an oppressed people." In doing so, and by entering the space of politics, "Lazare's idea was, therefore, that the Jew should come out openly as the representative of the pariah [...] He wanted him to stop seeking release in an attitude of superior indifference or in lofty and rarefied cogitation about the nature of man per se."<sup>80</sup> Another important text by Arendt to be mentioned in the context of Bartana's Congress is titled "Herzl and Lazare". In describing the different positions each of the two prominent figures took following the Dreyfus trial, Arendt stresses that when hearing the mob crying "Death to the Jews!", Lazare "realized at once that from now on he was an outcast and accepted the challenge."<sup>81</sup> In contrast to Herzl, for whom the event prompted him to write his book *The Jewish State*, where he argues for the need of a particular state dedicated only to the Jewish nation, Lazare directed his efforts in a more universal direction "as a conscious Jew, fighting for justice in general but for the Jewish people in particular."<sup>82</sup> Herzl planned an "escape or deliverance in a homeland," while for Lazare "the territorial question was secondary."<sup>83</sup> Unlike Herzl, whose translation of the Dreyfus trial has been in seeing anti-Semitism as a deeply-rooted, not-to-be-solved problem, Lazare sought to find in France and in the rest of Europe "real comrades-in-arms, whom he hoped to find among all the oppressed groups of contemporary Europe."<sup>84</sup>

Almost completely ignored by France's Jewry and failing to reach out to others in Europe, Lazare was unable to embark on his mission to find allies among the weak and the persecuted. Yet, Lazare's aspirations eagerly inhabit Bartana's project and its accompanying manifesto as it declares, "We shall be strong in our weakness."<sup>85</sup> "We Shall be Strong in Our Weakness. Notes from the First Congress of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland" was also the name of a performance directed by Bartana in 2010 at the Hebbel am Ufer, the same theatre that would host her Congress two years later. The similarities in the vocabulary and actions offered by Bartana can be easily traced in the thinking of Lazare.

Not only did Lazare fail to succeed in forming an alliance among Jews and Christians in Europe during his time, he has also been cast to an ultimate oblivion. At the final footnote of Arendt article on Herzl and Lazare, she mentions the contribution of the French writer, poet, and Dreyfusard Charles Péguy, who wrote a memoir *Le portrait de Bernard Lazare*, which saved Lazare's memory from fading with no return. Interestingly enough, Lazare's writings and ideas are gaining new recognition and new followers, such as Jacqueline Rose who in the introduction of her book quoted in the chapter "Proust among the Nations," she describes Lazare as "a key player and for me a hero of this drama."<sup>86</sup> Rose's reading of the Dreyfus Affair alongside his contemporaries, such as Freud and Proust, offers an insight into the way the Dreyfus Affair has been crucial to the intellectual development of European writers and scholars at that time and all the way to our days. Although not focusing her investigation on Lazare, Rose identifies him as "the first public defender of Dreyfus."<sup>87</sup> More importantly, Lazare is acknowledged by Rose as remarkably prophetic political thinker who had had the capacity to envision a different lesson from the anti-Semitism erupting in France during and following the Dreyfus Affair to the one offered by Herzl. Born to a Jewish family in the Southern part of France, Lazare's upbringing and education did not have much to do with forming a Jewish identity.<sup>88</sup> As mentioned earlier, in the same manner as Herzl, Lazare was forced to be confronted with being Jewish during the Dreyfus trial. The hatred showed by the masses to Jews sent him down this path; however, for him it meant that "I am a Jew and I know nothing about the Jews."<sup>89</sup> According to Rose, "For Lazare, therefore, being a Jew did not mean an exclusive ethnic identity. It was

more like a project, an identity to be discovered and forged against hatred, as well as a form of continuous self-education."<sup>90</sup>

As Lazare understood himself to be a Jew without religious conviction, the question that remained open to probing has been—how and what can be the content of his non-religious faith? His answer as quoted by Rose was, "I belong to the race of those [...] who were first to introduce the idea of justice into the world. [...] All of them, each and every one, my ancestors, my brothers, wanted, fanatically, that right should be done to one and all, and that injustice should never tip unfairly the scales of the law."<sup>91</sup> In the words of Léon Blum introduced by Rose at the opening of her book, "Just as science is the religion of the positivists, justice is the religion of the Jew."<sup>92</sup> From this point of understanding Jewish as justice, I wish to draw the parallel to Bartana's project. Defending her position as not anti-Zionist, Bartana quite similarly to Lazare, who was a Zionist and worked at the beginning along with Herzl, sets to bring into a Zionist platform—the Congress—voices long forgotten such as that of Lazare. Through a contemporary investigation, Bartana invites us to imagine the Zionist movement anew. And she does this very much in accordance with Lazare, as it is safe to say, that each of them embarked on a quest to uncover and bestow new content and relevant meaning to what it is to be Jewish just as much as to what it is to seek and perform justice.

**Avi Feldman** (Born in Montreal, Canada) is based in Tel-Aviv and Berlin where he works as a curator and writer. Since 2013, Feldman is a PhD candidate at The Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies, Practice-Based Doctoral Programme - collaboration between University of Reading (UK) and the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, Zurich University for the Arts (CH). As part of this programme his thesis focuses on examining contemporary reciprocal relations between the fields of art and law.

Among other projects, Feldman has been the director and co-curator of *Vdance International Video and Dance Festival* at the Tel-Aviv Cinematheque, and associate curator for avant-garde film at *The Jerusalem International Film Festival*. Recently, he has co-curated the exhibition 'Set in Motion' at the Petach Tikva Museum of Art, and 'Imagine the Law' (2013) at FKSE Budapest. Among his latest publication is 'Extremum – Reflections on the work of Yasmeen Godder', which he also edited; and contributed texts to Jonas Staal's *Ideological Guide to the Venice Biennale 2013*, and for Yael Bartana's performance 'Two Minutes of Standstill', *Impulse Biennale 2013*. Feldmann is taking part in the "Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies, Practice-Based Doctoral Programme".



JRMiP Congress

## Notes

1 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, 2012, page 7.

2 In her introduction to the collection of essays "The Dada Seminars" published in 2005, Leah Dickerman points out to the lack of research on the Dada movement, unlike extensive research done on Russian Constructivism and Surrealism. "There have been relatively few sustained efforts to examine the premises of Dada practice in broad view, to understand either its structural workings or the significance of its activities within a historical field."

3 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, 2012, page 66

4 Ibid, page 72

5 T.J. Demos, "Dada's Event," *Communities of Sense*, ed. Jaleh Mansoor et al., Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010, page 141-2.

6 Ibid., page 142.

7 James M. Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde (s)*, The University of Michigan Press, 2013.

8 Ibid., page 28.

9 Ibid., page 28.

10 See Bishop, page 66.

11 T.J. Demos, page 135.

12 Harding "Dadaist performances were "patterned after cabaret shows;" yet the lack of creative innovation eventually left its practitioners "discontented, hardly proud of the pitiful carnival ruses", page 138.

13 See Harding, page 29.

14 David Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, page 13.

15 Adam Gopnik, "Trial of the Century," *The New Yorker*, September 28, 2009.

16 David Drake, *French Intellectuals and Politics from the Dreyfus Affair to the Occupation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, page 21.

17 Jacqueline Rose, *Proust among the Nations*, The University of Chicago Press, 2011, page 26.

18 Ibid., page 5.

19 See footnote 6.

20 Zeev Sternhell, "National Socialism and Antisemitism: The Case of Maurice Barres," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Sage Publications, 1973, page 47.

21 Ibid., page 48.

22 Ibid., page 56.

23 Ibid., page 57-8.

24 See Bishop, page 66.

25 See Bishop, page 66.

26 Zeev Sternhell, page 48.

27 Ibid. page 51.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

30 Demos states that Breton went to observe hearings at the Palais de Justice prior to the mock trial "to study the procedural aspects of litigation," page 142.

31 See Bishop, page 73.

32 See Demos, page 140.

33 See Demos discussion of an earlier Dada event and visit to St.-Julian, page 141.

34 See Demos, page 141.

35 See Harding, page 29.

36 Ibid, page 35.

37 Ibid., page 30.

38 "The Dada Season...denotes a period of fracture within the group; specifically, it testifies to increased tension between Breton, Tzara and Francis Picabia." See Bishop, page 67.

39 See Harding, page 30.

40 See Harding, page 30.

41 For a more in-depth exploration on state apparatuses in relation to Althusser, please see chapter two my upcoming PhD thesis.

42 See Harding, page 35.

43 See Demos "The defendant Barres was invited but unable to attend, as he was already committed to a prior engagement in Aix-en-Provence, where he was to discuss 'The French Soul during the War'." page 142.

44 See Harding, page 37.

45 See Demos, page 142.

46 See Harding, page 38.

47 See Harding, page 39.

48 "The Congress, in which 197 delegates participate, accepts the Basle Program: Zionism strives to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law [...] Herzl writes in his diary: "At Basle I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it." From *The Zionist Archives* - <http://www.zionistarchives.org/il/en/datelist/Pages/Congress1.aspx>

49 *Mary Koszmary* was the first part in what is known to be *The Polish Trilogy* dealing "with the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland, demanding the return of 3,300,000 Jews to Poland. The films *Mary Koszmary* (Nightmare, 2007), *Mur I Wieza* (Wall and Tower, 2009), and *Zamach* (Assassination, 2011) were chosen to represent Poland at the 54th Venice Biennale. From the Tel-Aviv Museum of Art web-site: <http://www.tamuseum.org.il/about-the-exhibition/>

rael-bartana

**50** The consistent debate of whether *The Polish Trilogy* and congress are real or unreal is evident in numerous articles all pointing to this space of contradiction emphasized by Bartana. See, just for example, the *Art News* article by Robin Cembalest posted on 18 April 2013, or *The Guardian* article by Laura Cumming published on 13 May 2012.

**51** <http://www.jrmip.org/>

**52** See <http://www.jrmip.org/>

**53** Sierakowski who plays the protagonist in Bartana's Polish Trilogy of videos, is himself a Polish scholar and political activist and founder of the Krytyka Polityczna movement in Poland. In the first video he delivers a speech calling 3.3 million of Jews to return to Poland. In the second video 'Mur I Wieza' Sierakowski is already presented as a leader with followers erecting a wall and tower or Kibutz in Warsaw, while the third video opens with Sierakowski's funeral as a mass movement of people gathering from all over the world to attend his almost state official funeral.

**54** See <http://www.jrmip.org/>

**55** See Demos, page 138.

**56** Wayne Andrews, *The Surrealist Parade*, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1990, page 38.

**57** See Bishop, page 72.

**58** In an article published in Hebrew in the *Ha'aretz* newspaper on 18 April 2008, under the title "Leni Riefenstahl, just the other way around", Bartana is described as holding a position towards Israel of a disappointed lover, and she is quoted saying she is not "an Israeli hater [...] and I do things out of love for this country [...] in spite of all the criticism I have here is my home.

**59** <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/arts/design/yael-bartana-and-europe-will-be-stunned.html>

**60** <http://tabletmag.com/scroll/110143/israeli-artist-yael-bartana-in-denmark>

**61** <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/previews/return-an-interview-with-yael-bartana/>

**62** See Bishop, page 72.

**63** Yael Bartana, *Wenn Ihr wollt, ist es kein Traum*, Secession 2013, Revolver Verlag.

**64** T.J. Demos, "Dada's Event," *Communities of Sense*, ed. Jaleh Mansoor et al., Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010, page 143.

**65** For a visual representation of the manifesto and reading its text - <http://1vze7o2h8a2b2tyah-l3i0t68.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Manifesto.jpg>

**66** See Demos, page 141.

**67** *Ibid.*, page 143.

**68** *Ibid.*, page 143.

**69** *Ibid.*, page 145.

**70** Jacqueline Rose, *Proust among the Nations*, The University of Chicago Press, 2011, page 10.

**71** *Ibid.*, page 60.

**72** *Ibid.*, page 61.

**73** Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt And The Jewish Question*, The MIT Press, 1996, page 46.

**74** Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, Schocken Books, 2007, page 338.

**75** Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt And The Jewish Question*, The MIT Press, 1996, page 46-7.

**76** For a thorough discussion on the concept of the encounter, see chapter 2 of my upcoming PhD dissertation.

**77** Here again, one notices a similar artistic act shared both by Bartana and Dada. Bartana begins from the Zionist Congress in order to exhaust it and to pour into it newly imagined content, just as Dada did with the format of the court, or the French tribunal.

**78** Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings*, Schocken Books, 2007, page 274.

**79** *Ibid.*, page 283.

**80** *Ibid.*, page 284.

**81** *Ibid.*, page 338.

**82** *Ibid.*, page 338.

**83** *Ibid.*, page 339.

**84** *Ibid.*, page 339-340.

**85** See footnote 66.

**86** Jacqueline Rose, *Proust Among the Nations*, The University of Chicago Press, 2011, page 10.

**87** *Ibid.*, page 57.

**88** *Ibid.*, page 58.

**89** *Ibid.*, page 58.

**90** *Ibid.*, page 58.

**91** *Ibid.*, page 59.

**92** *Ibid.*, page 21.

# “Something that has to do with life itself”

## World of Matter and the Radical Imaginary

by Brian Holmes

In the antechamber of the exhibition there is a parable.<sup>1</sup> For centuries the fisherfolk of Urk lived on an island in the middle of the Zuidersee. Then in 1932 the Dutch government decided to build dikes against the ocean. The island is now anchored on dry land. It must have been as if the world had turned upside down. Yet the film *Episode of the Sea*, by Lonnie van Brummelen and Siebren de Haan, does not really explain why the fisherfolk of Urk remained attached to their ancient trade. Instead it is all about the present. Images of nets tell a story of deep entanglement in the regulations of the European Union. You are encountering an age-old way of life that has always had to deal with human transformations of the environment.

How to face the natural crisis of global society? How to engage with the overwhelming material conditions of the Anthropocene? In the year 2014, awareness of human-induced global warming seemed to reach a kind of planetary tipping-point. Yet, earlier experiences like the Fukushima meltdown, the BP oil spill, or the flooding of New Orleans show that profound shocks to consciousness can be erased by dull, everyday reinforcements of the industrial norm. The point is to go beyond just reacting to the next inevitable flood or blowout. If we want to break the cycle of disaster, public outcry and induced denial, then changes in our mental maps, or indeed, in our shared cosmologies, must be followed by transformations of our social institutions. Maybe it's not such a bad idea to begin exactly where *World of Matter* does, with the institutions of representation.<sup>2</sup> At stake is the relation between the capacity to make images of worldly things and the capacity to remake an inhabitable world.

I'd like to kick off this review with a philosophical proposal. The link between image and world is at the heart of what the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis calls the “imaginary institution of society.” For him, the radical imaginary is “the capacity to posit that which is not, to see in something that which is not there.”<sup>3</sup> But the question is not *whether* this is done, for all societies are so instituted. The question is *what* do we invent, *how* do we see the world? How do we institute a new territory, a new reality? If we could learn to perceive other things than the objects of our desires, other beings than ourselves alone, then the radical imagination could provide the missing key to a currently unthinkable planetary democracy. For Castoriadis, emancipation is the process whereby the collective self (*autos*) creates its own laws (*nomos*). This is done, not only through negotiation over meaningful words, but also through the circulation of affective images. As he writes: “I call autonomous a society that not only knows explicitly that it has created its own laws but has insti-



tuted itself so as to free its radical imaginery and enable itself to alter its institutions through collective, self-reflective, and deliberate activity."<sup>4</sup>

Today the societies of the so-called developed world have no such autonomy. We cannot even imagine the collectivity, let alone the laws or the norms that could resolve the natural crisis of global society. The very possibility of change remains invisible, like a spirit in a rock that you can't see. Yet that missing spirit may have everything to do with your own material survival. A foundational role awaits for artistic images at grips with the planetary real.

The exhibition and web platform *World of Matter* follows crisscrossed paths through a number of major processes whereby humans are transforming the land, the water, and the atmosphere. For this ongoing visual research, a core group of some ten authors carries out documentary probes, cartographic renderings, scientific explorations, and juridical analyses of worldly matters that include oil and mineral extraction, industrialized and organic agriculture, dams, water-works and fisheries. The results so far have been shown in Dortmund, Germany, at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York, and the Concordia University in Montreal, with further showings coming up in Stockholm and Minneapolis.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the videos, photographs, maps and texts can be consulted at [www.worldofmatter.net](http://www.worldofmatter.net). They focus on human and non-human actors, at scales from macro to micro.

Let's start from the beginning: Ursula Biemann's *Egyptian Chemistry*, which opens the tightly packed exhibition in New York. We're greeted by a display of laboratory flasks and beakers, echoing a video image projected high against the back of the gallery, showing a white-coated scientist manipulating the same equipment. A tracery of the meandering Nile runs laterally along deep blue walls, guiding the eye toward a lower projection that shows casually dressed locals gathering water samples from the river bank. To the right, three small monitors hang in a row, head high, each with dangling headphones. The invitation is clear: it's time to take the plunge into complex narratives. At stake in each fragmentary sequence is the overwhelming agency of the river, whose bounteous and destructive floods have given rise to the water-management projects of successive "hydraulic civilizations." How does the Nile flow today?

With delicately chosen documentary clips informed by off-screen or full-face interviews, the videos tell of dam-building campaigns, irrigation technologies, peasant struggles in the countryside and scientific testing and modelling of the river's currents. The atmospheric physicist Carl Hodges describes utopian schemes to plant carbon-absorbing mangroves in seawater canals for the production of food, animal feed, and biofuels. Standing ankle deep in the tide with his sport coat and jaunty leather hat, Hodges rejoins the long line of Faustian inventors and developers portrayed in Marshall Berman's scathingly critical book, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*. A scandalous sense of hubris gathers around those who want to change the very face of the earth, or in this case, to lay their own hand on the waters. Yet in the face of famines and penuries to come, one can also feel inspired by this visionary scientist.

Other modernization campaigns—like making the desert bloom with irrigation and antibiotics—do not look anywhere near so good. We see the tubes and wheels of an automated sprinkler rolling across parched soil like the skeleton of some silvery dinosaur. Eschewing pyramids or mummies and looking from the present to the future, Biemann evokes the processes of coevolution that have fashioned the Egyptian landscape. Inside a warehouse-like structure we see scale mod-

els of the flowing river and its associated control devices (dams, locks, hydroelectric power generators, etc). Fragmentary captions flash up on the screen: "Millennia of engineers / who measure and calculate / draw plans and build models." We are being asked to conceive how the mind articulates vast material transformations.

This show has its own very powerful philosophical debate, provided by thinkers like Michel Serres, Donna Haraway, Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, Jane Bennett, and Bruno Latour. At the close of Ursula Biemann's series, Harman himself appears against the chemical background of tear gas floating into the compound of Cairo's American University where he teaches. The key concepts of his object-oriented ontology are evoked in a few phrases. "All knowledge is oblique, all knowledge is an allusion," he says. "You can never get back to the absolute knowledge because you cannot translate a thing into any form of relation." In this philosophy—which is also called "speculative realism"—objects inevitably withdraw from direct access. Things exist autonomously, on their own terms, without correlation to the human world; they are irreducible to the vagaries of our perception. Yet by the same token, "any real relation automatically becomes a new object"—that is to say, a mental phenomenon, a thing *for humans*, or what Castoriadis might call a figment of the radical imaginary. "That's the political level," Harman explains, wiping his eyes against the tear gas. "But I would also say that I do not feel the need to ground everything in politics. This idea that the cash value of any philosophy is its political virtues is in a way the last phase of correlationist philosophy."

Cash values aside, it's very hard to see how any valid philosophy could elude contemporary politics. But Biemann translates Harman's thinking into her own exploratory practice, attentive to the complex actor-networks that shape the Nile ecology. The point is to pay attention to the things themselves, to look outside the closure of specific cultural frames. Then we become aware of new agencies. As we read on the gallery wall: "Metachemistry is a planetary narration that alludes to the earth as a mighty chemical body where the crackling noise of the forming and breaking of molecular bonds can be heard at all times." So where does metachemistry touch political flesh?

Turn the corner for one answer. A giant Dymaxion map spreads out above a vitrine filled with texts and objects. On Buckminster Fuller's defamiliarizing cartography, Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer have located container ship bottlenecks, rare earth deposits, oil and immigration choke points—geographical sites where the limits to global growth become starkly evident. Each dot on the map warns of future crises. "It is here that we find the call for a new ecological understanding coalescing with the call for a new political economy," reads the wall text. Technoscience makes the molecular global. Case studies of disaster-prone environments are presented in the vitrines below, initiating us to a vertiginous telescoping of scales.

Take a few steps further: images of huge, highly rationalized fields spring into view. You're flying in the air, you're trapped inside an endless factory, you're gazing upon night-dark furrows stippled with bright flocks like snow. Below these large projections, a line-up of four small monitors guides you through a planet planted in cotton. From Brazil to India to Texas to Burkina Faso, Uwe Martin conducts reportage-style interviews with peasants, so-called "conventional" farmers, agro-ecological researchers, organic pioneers, and the food activist Vandana Shiva. Gradually you realize that this distant subject is really very close to your own skin. The global scale shrinks down to the shirt you are wearing. The planter Gilson Pinesso recounts how he transferred GMO methods from Brazil to the rich black soil of the

Sudan, where he was invited by a government minister. For ten uncomfortable minutes, a cotton-grower from the Global South looks us straight in the eye and talks pure corporate strategy. “The Sudanese farmers will take some time to internalize all this know-how, all this technology,” he explains, predicting a ten-year lapse before they complete their rendezvous with capitalist destiny.

Those trained in the subtleties of contemporary art tend to shudder when they encounter this kind of blunt reportage. Rightly so: because it reveals, or even embodies, the banal and continuous violence that links us all into the contemporary division of labour.

In the past, vanguard political artists engaged their struggles by means of shocking divides, in symbolic portrayals of military conflicts, sexual rifts, labour hierarchies, commodity fetishes, and excluded or self-assertive others. For them, ideology was understood in structuralist terms, as a violently deterministic relation between individual lives and fundamental symbolic categories. The role of the artist or theorist was to lift the veil of particulars and show these structures at work in your own life. At best, an existential breakthrough might open the floodgates of emancipation. The artists in *World of Matter* take a very different approach. They develop an ecological vision that includes human involvement at every turn. By focusing on concrete geographical relations such as the circulation of goods, technologies, and scientific concepts, they trace out a metonymic skein that ultimately forces us to recognize ourselves as functioning parts of the global whole. The shock, if that’s still the word, comes not from a split but a suture. We are all Gilson Pinesso, but each with our particular specialties. The coherence of the global system is the radical imaginary of contemporary capitalism itself: a pervasive just-in-time economy whose ubiquitous flow-objects are not only at your fingertips, but also inside you, as world-pictures that you continually recreate and propagate through your professional activity. Ideology is neither a veil nor a pair of heavy chains, but an actively maintained connection between endless sequences of images. At the root (at the radical level) the capitalist world economy is a socially instituted fiction.

Yet reality, as Harman reminds us, remains distinct from all merely human correlations. The strength of *World of Matter* is to present itself, not as fully integrated single narrative, but as distinct and recombinable files, fragmentary testimonies from a hearing that is still in progress. Its strength to let the world *break down* into real complexity, so that “the crackling noise of the forming and breaking of molecular bonds can be heard at all times.” So how does chemistry dissolve into materialist politics?

Sit down to Paulo Tavares’ work: *Non-Human Rights*. Now you’re in for a long and fascinating journey through the indigenous struggles of the 1990s in Ecuador, leading up to the country’s new 2008 Constitution, which recognized the rights of nature, or better, of La Pachamama. Scenes of rural protesters and landscapes devastated by oil and mineral extraction alternate with quotations from the Michel Serres’ 1900 book, *The Natural Contract*. Look at the settling ponds in the jungle, where Texaco pumped billions of gallons of toxic effluents from its wells. As indigenous activist Luis Macas recounts: “We’re fighting for something that has to do with life itself.” But that living reality is inseparable from a cultural idea. At the end of the video, Tavares addresses himself directly to the environmentalist Esperanza Martínez: “It is said that Modernity is that system in which there is one nature and various cultures, right? But what you are saying is different. There exist various different natures.” “Yes,” she replies. “Precisely as many as there are cultures.”

A subtle tension runs throughout this project, between the anthropological claim that human groups create their own distinct worlds and the central philosophical claim of object-oriented ontology, which is that reality withdraws from any merely human correlation. This contradiction between the two approaches becomes explicit in Tavares' video, where the scenes of extractivist devastation are preceded by inter-titles evoking "object-oriented violence." Again this is a reference to Michel Serres, who forcefully shows how human beings make war on the rest of the living world. But it is also an attack on object-oriented thinking. The implication is that philosophy must never neglect its ecological context, lest it participate in unbearable atrocities.

Nonetheless, Graham Harman's philosophy is vindicated in this same work, although in terms he would probably not himself accept. For the "natural contract" of which it is question here springs into being through the recognition of hitherto ignored and discounted material things—rocks, trees, soil, air—which the indigenous people conceive as inseparable from "spirits of the forest." There is foundational potential in that which withdraws from Western instrumental rationality.

I began this review with the notion of the radical imaginary: a raw psychic representation of the world which is normed and stabilized by social institutions, but which can also break away, reconfigure itself, and take new roots among the community of living beings—on the condition that social institutions are themselves transformed to match the new vision. For Castoriadis, that transformation begins when individuals and groups start to recognize that the only guarantee of their own autonomy, of their own emancipation and pathway to a good life, is to be found in common norms and laws that guarantee good living for others. What *World of Matter* tries to do—with some help from both Michel Serres and the speculative realists—is to extend this democratic process to non-humans.

Let's close with a short proposal by Mabe Bethônico, an artist-researcher from Belo Horizonte, Brazil. It's the "Museum of Public Concerns," improvised on the ground in the face of the privatization of cultural institutions by mining companies in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais. The recipe for institutional autonomy is disarmingly simple: involve sociologists, media theorists, anthropologists and artists in the creation of a mobile museum that could present precisely those things that corporate culture skips over—notably the histories of oil and mineral extraction. Plans unfold on the video screen for a DIY display structure that looks eminently practical. Only such an activist approach can deal with "matters of public concern." Yet what else is *World of Matter* doing, on a website and in a university rather than out on the streets?

There may be an invitation here. Download the videos, put them in your bicycle- or solar-powered vehicle, and show them to everyone you meet. Treat them just like material things that have to do with life itself. It's high time to make a break with our own normalized ways of creating and propagating world-pictures. Don't imagine the apocalypse, that's old hat. Just bring your radical imagination to focus on the end of global capitalism.

This text was published online, see <http://midwestcompass.org/something-that-has-to-do-with-life-itself/>

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<http://www.geobodies.org>

<http://www.worldofmatter.net>

**Brian Holmes** is an art and cultural critic with a taste for on-the-ground intervention. Living in Paris from 1990 to 2009, he collaborated with political art groups such as Ne Pas Plier, Bureau d'Etudes, Public Netbase, Hackitectura, Makrolab, and published in *Multitudes*, *Springerin*, and *Brumaria*. With Claire Pentecost and the 16 Beaver Group he co-organized the Continental Drift seminars. His essays revolve around art, free cooperation, the network society, political economy, and grassroots resistance. His books include *Escape the Overcode: Activist Art in the Control Society* and *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms: Essays in Reverse Imagineering*. In Chicago, where he now lives, he is a member of the Compass group and teaches at the University of Illinois. Recent collaborative projects can be seen at <http://southwestcorridor-northwestpassage.org> and <http://midwestcompass.org/water-sheds/map.html>. Text archive of older work at <http://brianholmes.wordpress.com>.

### Notes

1 A review of the show at CUNY Graduate Center, New York, September-November 2014. *World of Matter* was presented by Ursula Biemann at the "Curating Everything" symposium.

2 *World of Matter* is an international art and media project initiated by an interdisciplinary group of artists and scholars investigating primary materials and the complex ecologies of which they are a part. Participants include Mabe Bethônico, Ursula Biemann, Uwe Martin & Frauke Huber, Elaine Gan, Helge Mooshammer and Peter Moertenboeck, Emily Scott, Paulo Tavares and Lonnie van Brummelen & Siebren de Haan,

3 C. Castoriadis, "The State of the Subject Today," in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, tr. D. A. Curtis, (Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 151.

4 C. Castoriadis, "Psychoanalysis and Politics," *ibid.*, p. 132.

5 Exhibitions took place in the following venues: *WORLD OF MATTER - On the Global Ecologies of Raw Material*, at HMKV Dortmund, March-June 2014, and at James Gallery, CUNY Graduate Center, New York, September-November 2014; *WORLD OF MATTER - Exposing Resource Ecologies*, at Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery, Concordia University Montreal, February-April 2015. *World of Matter* conferences run parallel to the exhibition opening. The *World of Matter* book is published by Sternberg Press Berlin/New York, 2015. <http://events.worldofmatter.net>



- Captions**
- 1 *World of Matter*, van Brummelen de Haan, *Episode of the Sea*
  - 2 *World of Matter*, Biemann, Egyptian, Chemistry, © Hannes Woidich
  - 3 *World of Matter*, map, Peter Helge Dortmund
  - 4 *World of Matter*, © Yoko Dupuis
  - 5 *World of Matter*, Uwe Martin, *Landrush*
  - 6 *World of Matter*, Tavares, *Non Human Rights*, © Hannes Woidich
  - 7 *World of Matter*, website

# The Curator and Her Double. The Cruelty of the Avatar by Ellen Blumenstein

*Echte Kultur wirkt durch den Überschwang und durch ihre Kraft, das europäische Kunstideal hingegen zielt darauf ab, den Geist auf eine von der Kraft geschiedene Haltung zu verweisen, die deren Überschwang zuschaut.*

Antonin Artaud, *Das Theater und sein Double*<sup>1</sup>

“True culture operates by exaltation and force, while the European ideal of art attempts to cast the mind into an attitude distinct from force but addicted to exaltation.”

*Wir werden uns fragen, was diesem Schicksal der Grausamkeit entsprechend “ausstellen” (exposer) bedeutet, und es wird darum gehen, etwas eher Schlägen als Blicken “aus-zu-setzen” (ex-poser).*

Jacques Derrida: Artaud<sup>2</sup>

Why do people visit museums? What specific impact are exhibitions able to achieve? General as these questions may seem, they nevertheless underlie all curatorial activity—or at least they ought to. For, occupied with their impassioned and self-centred rivalry over “authorship”—that is, over visibility and recognition—those engaged in the art world are neglecting a far more significant present-day problem, namely the fact that the museum, reduced to having to justify itself in economic terms, is increasingly degenerating into a temple of amusement for bored consumers and thereby losing sight of its social function and the responsibility that comes with it. In the spirit of Antonin Artaud and his concept of cruelty, which demands that one should relentlessly call into question one’s own ideas about reality and [man’s] poetic place in reality and force the spectator to do likewise, the “avatar” represents an attempt to become aware of those ideas oneself and to make them visible and palpable to visitors. This project, a collaboration between an artist (Ulf Aminde) and a curator (Ellen Blumenstein), sets out to champion the role of institutions by providing art with options for action and room to maneuver.

What does a visitor, a critic, an artist, or a colleague expect when a curator introduces [his or] her program? Very few tend to reflect on their own—probably differing—expectations, but most of them nevertheless react according to them, since these necessarily precede any reception of both the broader outlines and the single projects within an institutional program. Anticipating these expectations, the curator will base her decisions on the institution’s profile—an implicit, but consensual image formed by the members of the field (which, by agreeing upon a limited set of rules, qualify as a group through the very same process). She will aim to mark (and prove) her rank, and develop a program on the basis of those inner-circle expectations.

On the one hand, these kinds of conventions are necessary for any existing structure, because not a single proposition can be made without the distinguishing

borders between one field and the next. On the other hand, though, if invariably applied, the same rules would obstruct any development or change within that given field. All players in a defined context are therefore constantly negotiating their roles between protecting the status quo and testing its boundaries.

In today's art world, however, this balance has been upset, as the burden for keeping the system in flux has been delegated exclusively to the artist, while the position of the other members is strictly regulated: the curator facilitates the artist's interests, the institution provides space for artworks to unfold their "presence", the critic communicates the latest trends, and the visitor is elevated by the sublime experience.<sup>3</sup> At first sight, at least, this situation seems to be comfortable for the artist. But if s/he is the sole appointed agent of experimentation and the only one permitted to claim authorship, then any attempt to truly renegotiate the terms of activity and provide differing perspectives is rendered impossible, since there is no one left to counter this challenge. As a result, not even the artists themselves benefit from their seemingly privileged position—and the art system remains paralyzed like a see-saw with only one side occupied.

Consequentially, I do not think that the seeming loss of art's relevance can be blamed upon the increasing dominance of the art market alone, but that this dominance is instead another effect of the art world's fixation on the artist as *the* exceptional subject of society. Reducing recognition to a dog-eat-dog-competition for visibility, we either over-achieve the capitalist mandate ourselves—in rivalry with the artist—or delegate the burden of *jouissance* to him/her and thereby postpone the essential question of meaning, or the sense of what we are doing, into an ever-more-distant future (which is, of course, also in line with capitalism).

This difficulty is by no means a new one, seeing as the demand to call into question one's own "ideas about reality and [man's] poetic place in reality" was already formulated, amongst many others, by the French author Antonin Artaud in the early 1930s. As one of the most vehement critics of the modern cultural institution, he drafted several manifesto-style texts on a "theater of cruelty"<sup>4</sup> to confront the spectators with the performing arts' deadening conventions and to force them to assume a self-aware position towards culture and themselves. "Cruel" in Artaud's sense is a physical attack on the viewer, which deprives him/her of his/her expertise and exposes him/her to his/her own lack of inquisitiveness. Art's task, as Jacques Derrida analyses on the occasion of a presentation of Artaud's paintings and drawings at the Museum of Modern Art in New York,<sup>5</sup> is to perpetrate a blow on the spectator. In his lecture, Derrida transfers Artaud's ideas on theater to the museum and questions its function today, taking into account the role of the artist and the artwork, as well as of exhibition organizers and the audience, and subsequently developing ideas for a new understanding of the museum's place in society, according to Artaud.

Following Artaud, I consciously disappointed the expectations on my programming at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin – only to wholly fulfil them in a successive step: in 2013, I opened with a *Relaunch* of the institution—which was both the project's title and its programme—before the first "proper" exhibition, which was a solo show by the Berlin-based, French-Algerian artist Kader Attia that opened a month later.

*Relaunch* consisted of a number of interventions, which all called into question unconscious automatisms in the art world: The first act was to empty out the entire building and to present KW as a framework, which has been determined by a



particular history and general expectations, channelled through the political, social, and cultural contexts within which it positions itself—but which is also theoretically free to be imagined anew at any given moment. This idea was implemented through the specifically commissioned project *Markierung* by the Bulgarian artist Nedko Solakov, who inscribed stories about the past of the building and the institution, about real projects to happen soon and my fantasies and plans for the future, as well as his own observations, onto the institution's empty walls. *Markierung* was conceived as a collaboration between an artist and a curator: while walking through the building, I told him everything that came to my mind or that I thought was important for people to know, and Nedko transformed it into the same form of scribbling he usually makes for his own works. Additionally, he took the freedom to comment on our conversations and made them partially public, so that we became visible as individuals negotiating our interests—and as a by-product, showed that there is nothing natural about how any exhibition appears, since any display / exhibition architecture responds to an implicit set of conventions and rules that differ widely across periods and contexts.

Another part of *Relaunch* introduced so-called *Teasers*, which referenced future projects without being artworks in themselves. The twenty *Teasers* presented different ideas or exhibitions, some of which have already happened by now, others which were abandoned at some point along the way. The idea here was to use them—like Nedko's markings—as moments of irritation, confronting the usual art-goer's unconscious anticipation to see the newest contemporary art and at the same time gain reconfirmation as a connoisseur who recognizes a great deal of those works. Likewise, the teasers functioned as ice-breakers that resonated with non-professional visitors who might not immediately understand the codes of contemporary art, and through them they had the opportunity to learn something about this partially secret language...

One of the teasers, for example, was a model of a fruit fly, two meters wide, which is part of the collection of the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden. The future plan at the time was to collaborate with the museum and present objects from their industrial and educational collection, set in contrast to contemporary artworks, in order to unsettle each type of the objects' status in relation to each other. Unfortunately, and for different reasons, this project could not be realized and was abandoned, at least for the time being.

Another teaser announced the show *Real Emotions. Thinking in Film* (co-curated with Franz Rodenkirchen and Daniel Tyradellis, 2014), which dealt with cinema's potential to create emotions and originate new images of the world: we asked twenty different people to describe one scene from the iconic film *Vampyr* by Carl Theodor Dreyer (1932) in just a few lines. The written descriptions were presented on stands in front of a loop of that very scene, and showed in a very simple way that film not only intentionally constructs our emotions, but also uses them to open our minds to new experiences.

The most far-reaching project within *Relaunch*, however, was the Avatar. The avatar, aka Sabine Reinfeld and Ulf Aminde, accompanied the entire process of re-positioning and introducing my plans for KW and the institutional interests I wanted to pursue. The idea of this project goes back to an informal conversation between Ulf and myself, in which we discussed strategies for creating a self-reflexive, but not self-contained, moment in each of our practices to understand the restraints we were working with on a daily basis, without even being aware of them, and how to make these accessible to the audience. An avatar seemed to be a playful

and timely tool in which to blend artistic and curatorial strategies and to place authorship somewhere in between the two, in order to uncover our respective desires for recognition (amongst other things), on the one hand, and the often implicit and unconscious expectations of our colleagues and the audiences on the other.

Our objective was to move beyond the self-referentiality of the system in which we are working and to strive for a kind of art that we – the artists, the curators, and the institutions as responsible stakeholders – consider relevant today. Within the long-term collaboration *Insistere*, Aminde recruited Reinfeld and together they created the project *Don't Fuck with my Name. Hacking the Curator*, introducing my alter ego Ellen Bluumenstein (spelled with a double “u”) as a real person and as an online presence parallel to my own emergence as a “public figure”. The intervention started at the press conference of *Relaunch*. While I presented my program and future plans to the attending press, the *Avatar* held court downstairs in the yard and in the exhibition spaces and greeted regular audiences and passers-by. We had agreed on not being at the same place at once, so during the opening later we were both present but tried to stay on different floors. In her public appearances, which were sometimes coordinated with the artistic office or with me, but sometimes not—Ellen Bluumenstein first focused on representing or interpreting the public figure of a curator by visualizing and commenting on both her/my professional self-image and the public’s projections onto her, and also opened her own website and Facebook account. A few months later, she also translated a curatorial speech into a spoken word performance. A participant of this performance commented on Facebook: “Even more intriguing for me is the fact that it is unclear, if the letter from Ellen Bluumenstein addresses the real Ellen Blumenstein, or if it is written to herself as the Avatar, just as it is unknown whether or not the real Ellen Blumenstein has read this post and is indeed reflecting on her position as chief curator.” Of course, it is not clear either whether any of the content of this speech was ever said by me or if the artists completely made it up—or whether it is a mixture of both. The avatar therefore marks the intersection point of curatorial and artistic imagination, expectations, and concerns. Apparently, I can only reflect on my own perspective—if the artists would reflect on this project instead, their contribution would likely not adopt a textual format.

This essay intends to make the ambivalent character of the project fruitful by addressing both positions: I will track my current fantasies of what I would have done had I been the artist conceiving of the Avatar Ellen Bluumenstein, and I will imagine what could have been the maximum consistent outcome of the project from a curatorial perspective.

My first immediate fantasy when revisiting the video documentation of my double’s performance in preparation for this text was: I wish we curators would all perform our public appearances in a more artistic sense and turn our speech acts into reasons to develop coherent formats more than we currently do. Needless to say that the occasions on which we are obliged to speak are so numerous, that it appears absolutely unrealistic to put in the same effort as into a proper performance piece. (Again, this argument resonates both ways: maybe curators should not only notice the fact that our input often lacks depth, but also take appropriate action? And, we may assume that it is not only us who are overworked, so that a bad performance may either just be the result of too little time, or a good one shows that the artist prioritizes differently...).

In any case, I found the idea that the *Avatar* could literally double the presence of the chief curator very tempting, and that she could therefore not only reduce my work load and split the public attention between us, but also make visible the curatorial persona as an institutional agent, which is not identical with the individual taking that position. The curator inevitably acts as a symptom of an institution, representing what the organization wants from the inside, but is also addressed from the outside as the one who is able to fulfil any kind of wish or demand. Thus she is like a doorkeeper who makes sure the house is open and accessible, but also controls who comes in and which role is assigned to each person. I very much liked the image that *Insistere* gave to this function, namely the woman in a black frock literally greeting visitors at the entrance. She was standing at the entrance door in a black coat, shook hands with people very seriously, pretending that she could close the door at any time and keep somebody out or lock someone else inside. At the opening reception, the *Avatar* over-affirmed my representative duties and glamorously bathed in the masses – joyfully shaking her hair over and over again in front of the people watching her.

As embarrassing as both the guests and myself found this appearance, it was just as telling to consider my own ambivalence about being proud of my program on the one hand, and anxious of being rejected and overwhelmed with the attention both of us were getting on the other. Why not admit to enjoying these moments of recognition? The larger part of curatorial work is less gratifying, in fact.

Other interventions remained partially invisible to the external viewer, but video and photo documentation was presented online. The *Avatar* gave guided tours of the exhibition and showed people around the building, staged an argument with one of the guards and posed at my desk in the artistic office in a Zombie-like outfit.

It very quickly became apparent in the process that any space that I did not have control over personally was not accessible to the *Avatar*. I had fantasized, for example, that she would host events, write my press releases, give public interviews or take over strategic or fundraising appointments for me. Not only had I wished to share the burden of this time-consuming labour, but I was also curious to see how the audience, press, politicians, administrators, or funders would have reacted when confronted with a doppelgänger of myself, having to decide if they should actually address this individual in front of them as a curator or as an artist, as me or as Sabine Reinfeld, or maybe even as Ulf Aminde. Expectedly, none of those institutions were open to the experiment, and at this early stage of my employment I could not handle the confrontation either—and did not dare to. Even leading an internal team meeting proved to be impossible, as my colleagues outside of the artistic office rejected the *Avatar*'s interference into our daily routine. One of the funniest incidents thus occurred at the Venice Biennial of that year, when Ellen Bluumenstein posted on Facebook that she had missed her flight. I was not informed about her activities and rarely use social media for private purposes, so I was more than surprised when my colleagues were startled to see me in town—the story became the running gag of the opening weekend.

The final presentation of *Don't Fuck with my Name. Hacking the Curator* was staged as a participatory performance lecture in which each visitor co-acted as KW's curator, so there were many *Avatars*. The event turned out to be disastrous, from Ulf's perspective, because the audience immediately started questioning what he was doing—something that is very rare in artistic performance today, because the general art audience has become accustomed to artists' provocations over the last four decades of performance art. Hardly any professional attendee would be offended today, because s/he knows s/he is part of an artwork and would feel

narrow-minded if s/he didn't comply with the ideas of the artist who is considered the beholder of truth, knowledge and/or innovation. I thus claim that Ulf made himself consciously vulnerable—a strategy he frequently applies in his work—by blurring the boundaries between an artistic and a curatorial position, and that the audience unconsciously reacted to that fact.

Apart from it being stressful and uncomfortable for Ulf, as well as for me, who was partially being addressed through the critique of him or of the project, the evening was a success from my point of view in the sense that the positions of artist, curator, and audience were visibly shifting during that night. If there was any problem in the arrangement of the evening, it was that we had failed to anticipate the aggression produced by this loss of a clear role.

While the subjects of today's art prefer to challenge established structures or hegemonic discourses, the experience with the *Avatar* shows how difficult it is to confront one's own convictions, routine, or habits or even to let go of them. It is very easy to comply with the curatorial role—even if it is sometimes exhausting or nerve-wracking: We make the discourse, we define who partakes in it and who does not, and we also form careers; many times, our own careers are connected to how well we accommodate the expectations of the system in which we act. Thematic curating is increasingly reduced to the context of biennials, where our *left, ecological, feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial, political*, and so on positions are asserted in vague concepts including a safe-guarding reference to a philosopher, some name-dropping of well respected artists, and a somehow intuitive arrangement of single works each visibly matching the topic. We, as art world practitioners, share the same conduct, which we consider truer than that of any other approach. But this attitude tends not only to bore the audience (and ourselves, if we dare to admit it), but also to stop at merely reassuring our own position—other than that, it frustrates everyone.

As diverse as curatorial activity is today, the core expertise is still in exhibition making, since exhibitions are public interfaces theoretically open to anyone and thus extended beyond the reach of internal or professional debate. Exhibitions are ways to bring an argument into space, which means that someone claims authorship—along with the possibility of being criticized for it.

Therefore, the insertion of an *Avatar* into a curatorial routine certainly has to take on the challenge of actually organizing a show as a curator, not as an artist. This distinction in positioning is crucial, since what the artist gains from a curatorial perspective is the potential of being evaluated for his or her proposition. What s/he reversely makes visible is the assumption that valuable content can actually be produced not only by a single artwork, but also by a constellation of objects of any kind in space.

For more information on the *Avatar*, check:

<http://ellenblumenstein.de>

<https://www.facebook.com/ellen.blumenstein?fref=ts>

<https://vimeo.com/86791983>

**Ellen Blumenstein** has been chief curator of KW Institute for contemporary art, Berlin since January 2013. In her first year, she realized the exhibitions "Relaunch", "Kader Attia: Repair. 5 Acts" and "Real Emotions: Thinking in Film", as well as launching comprehensive public programs and professional partnerships. In her second year she premiered the first solo exhibitions in Germany of artists Ryan Trecartin, Kate Cooper, Channa Horwitz and Elin Hansdottir. Before KW, she was an independent curator, member of the curatorial collective THE OFFICE and founder of the project space Salon Populaire. Between 1998-2005 she worked as a curator for KW Institute for Contemporary Art, where she realized the exhibition project "Regarding Terror: The RAF-Exhibition" (with Klaus Biesenbach, Felix Ensslin, 2005). Since, she curated the exhibition "Between Two Deaths" at ZKM in Karlsruhe (with Felix Ensslin, 2007), and in 2011 she curated the Icelandic Pavilion at the Venice Biennial (Libia Castro and Ólafur Ólafsson).

### Notes

1 Antonin Artaud, *Das Theater und sein Double* Fischer Verlag, S. 13. / English Version, p. 10, 1958 Grove Press edition, trans. Mary Caroline Richards

2 Jacques Derrida: *Artaud Moma* Passagen Verlag S. 63.

3 Compare, for example, Reinhard Hoeps, „Gott ist nicht die Lösung, Gott ist das Problem“, IN: *Religion, Magazin der Kulturstiftung des Bundes* #24, Frühling/Sommer 2015, S. 17-18.

4 dt. Antonin Artaud: *Das Theater und sein Double*, Frankfurt am Main, 1969.

5 Jacques Derrida: *Artaud Moma*, Passagen Verlag, Vienna, 1996.



1,2,3 Relaunch 28.4.–25.8.2013, *Insistere #7, Don'* Series of Performances © Sabine Reinfeld/Ulf Aminde

4 Relaunch 28.4.–25.8.2013, *Insistere #7, Don' fuck with my name (Hacking the Curator)*, Series of Performances, Foto: Petrov Ahner © Sabine Reinfeld/Ulf Aminde

# Thinking About Curatorial Education

## by Dorothee Richter

Undoubtedly CURATING is a new discursive formation, as defined by Michel Foucault, which has rapidly developed since the 1970s. We are aware that we are also part of this instituting process, with the developing of an Archive, with the Postgraduate Programme in Curating at ZHdK, and with the PhD platform, a cooperation between the University of Reading and our publications. This formation is instituted in hierarchical formations and power relations. Therefore we strive to open up processes, to question what instituting and de-instituting means, and to make our thoughts, struggles, and research accessible. As in all forms of cultural production, content and form are interrelated (but not the same), and it matters, as an ideological production, what one does, what one brings into existence. To mirror our approach of teaching as practice with its impact of curatorial projects and possibilities, this article discusses a specific “pedagogical” attitude which is fundamental for the programme. I try to show how this works as a practice that is intensely informed by theory which influences and reflects actual projects and attitudes. So curatorial knowledge production, which means in my understanding a complex offering of visual, spatial, theoretical, context-related and historically situated meaning production, is therefore based on concepts of theory as a practice—a deeply politically motivated construct. In this article I try to formulate this based on the example of Gasthaus zum Bären / Museum Bäregasse in Zurich—one of our curatorial experiments.

When I was asked to deliver a concept for Museum Baerengasse / Gasthaus zum Baeren, I saw the opportunity to work in a very experimental way with students of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating in conjunction with the web-journal [www.on-curating.org](http://www.on-curating.org). As we later found out, we also manoeuvred ourselves into a trap in the sense that the university did not see any means of funding this undertaking, and on the other hand we were practically banned from all other funding bodies precisely because we are a part of the university, a dilemma that stayed with us. For extremely experimental endeavours of the kind we developed into, there simply are no funding bodies.

On the other hand we were very grateful for the wonderful space, despite this drawback, we were quite sure that the endeavour could create something new, something important for the Zurich scene, challenging for students, and also important for an international outreach. The drive, the urgency I felt was related to what Jacques Derrida once formulated for a “university without conditions”, a model he positioned against contemporary universities that work hand in hand with industries, be it in connection with technical innovations or, I take the liberty to add, anything that might be called creative industries. Derrida demands: “Consequence of this thesis: such an unconditional resistance could oppose the university to a great number of powers, for example to state powers (and thus to the power of the nation-state and to its phantasm of indivisible sovereignty, which indicates how the university might be in advance not just cosmopolitan, but universal,

extending beyond worldwide citizenship and the nation-state in general), to economic powers (to cooperations and to national and international capital), to the powers of the media, ideological, religious, and cultural powers, and so forth – in short, to all the powers that limit democracy to come.”<sup>1</sup>

A “democracy to come” is a promising horizon for any programme. To explain the concept, I would like to lay out different trajectories: on the one hand a short description of the formats I had in mind, and on the other hand a reflection on pedagogical elements as understood from the perspective of the theory on ideological state apparatuses developed by Louis Althusser, which in my understanding could be re-interpreted in a differentiated way with Lacanian concepts of the screen/tableau. Both of these trajectories are intrinsically intertwined with a specific attitude in actual encounters. This attitude can be seen in the light of Derrida’s demand for a “university without conditions”, which also demands a very specific attitude on the part of the professor. For Derrida the word ‘profess’, with its Latin origin, means to declare openly, to declare publicly: “The declaration of the one who professes is a performative declaration in some way. It pledges like an act of sworn faith, an oath, a testimony, a manifestation, an attestation, or a promise, a commitment. To profess is to make a pledge while committing to one’s responsibility. To make profession is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one’s word and believe this declaration.”<sup>2</sup> In this sense I wanted to make my own deep interest in arts and democracy become part of the undertakings at Museum Baerengasse / Gasthaus zum Baeren, but also my deep interest in the potentials of all students as a group, and of each student as an individual entity with his or her knowledge, history, and abilities.

In my own curatorial projects I have long been interested in experimenting with new formats, formats that exhibit a strange tendency to shift from being an office to being a studio, an exhibition space, a project space, a gathering space or a bar. The modern basement of Museum Baerengasse / Gasthaus zum Baeren, with its relatively large spaces, could be used as a walk-in cinema where short films would be shown in a loop, so visitors could just drop in for a while and leave again. It would also work as a dance floor, as we later discovered. But to explain this, I must introduce the situation at Museum Baerengasse / Gasthaus zum Baeren. When we moved in, it was a strange postmodern building which actually consisted of two buildings that had been moved there from across the street, a distance of about seventy metres. The two medieval buildings were moved because the UBS had undertaken to erect a huge administrative ensemble. They were placed side by side and connected with a modern staircase and a lift—a strange conglomerate of modern and old spaces, or, in short: absolutely postmodern. So the rooms were actually relatively small and also had an intense language of their own, with wood, and with mouldings on the ceiling. There were also huge old ovens still installed in it, left over from a time when the building served as a museum of medieval living conditions, a branch of the Landesmuseum. Not at all a white cube—and, it must be confessed, extremely difficult to work with from a curatorial perspective.

The rooms were narrow and also often too small for our growing public, when we had discussions, talks, or screenings. Before we used the space, the Museum Baerengasse had presented contemporary art exhibitions, and for about two years it has also hosted the Kunsthalle Zurich.

So some of the features of the space did bring with them typical exclusion scenarios of a museum, which invites mainly the white middle class, but without the typical interpellation of a subject that is in a central perspective overview situation



and also always on display, which, as Tony Bennett has argued in detail, creates a subject that installs the perspective of being seen inside and develops all the habitual self-control of a bourgeois citizen.<sup>3</sup> Actually, the Museum Baerengasse's spaces had a tendency to hide people; one always had difficulties meeting in the labyrinthine spaces. But the exclusion was a precondition, to which were added, in our case, the preconditions of a university setting (which is unquestionably another scenario of exclusion).

To explain the specific pedagogical understanding that informs our programme, I have always thought that notions of radical democratic pedagogy are interesting and in many ways valuable. Here I refer to Mary Drinkwater's discerning research on pedagogical approaches to which I can relate because I have my background in an academy that offers a wide range of courses in humanistic psychology and political science. Drinkwater based her research on radical educational policy argumentation on John Dewey and Paolo Freire, and she is moreover interested in the agency that could be achieved in a political sense.<sup>4</sup> She explains what radical educational policy could be and what methods should be used: "Traditional, rational or managerial policy development approaches are generally linear, staged and state controlled or state centred. A radical policy approach, in contrast, recognizes both the complexity and the value of having a broad and diverse group of stakeholders or policy actors acting at many different levels. The use of the metaphor of a policy web (Goldberg, 2006; Joshee, 2008) helps to understand how the policy process is shaped by circulating discourses. Using this metaphor, policy is designed as an ensemble of multiple discourses that interact in a complex web of relationships that enables or constrains social relations. It is a fluid arrangement of discourses existing at a given moment in time, emerging out of the struggle between multiple discourses from multiple voices in a given context."<sup>5</sup> For the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, the idea of a complex and diverse group corresponded first of all to the actual students' group, because the students are already working in different fields of art and culture. The programme resides in the department of further education, which means that we have gallerists, a film festival director, a performance festival director, a literature festival director, people who work in art institutions as producers or in art education, and sometimes students with a background in film and often in art history, art and design. We have also students with extremely different cultural backgrounds: about one third are Swiss, but the rest come from Italy, France, Austria, Cuba, Brazil, Canada, the US, the UK, Romania, Serbia, South Africa, Lebanon and Israel. On a second level, the students should be able to apply the idea of diverse groups of stakeholders to the actual working situation of the curator. A curator is always involved in negotiations with artists, production groups and stakeholders in the arts, cultural policy, and the broader society. So the actual formulation of a position in the programme should later be transferrable to other challenges. For the programme and our situation in the Museum Baerengasse / Gasthaus zum Baeren, it is important to keep in mind the "metaphor of a policy web" and, as Drinkwater claims, "Using this metaphor, policy is designed as an ensemble of multiple discourses that interact in a complex web of relationships that enables or constrains social relations."<sup>6</sup>

The concept of a fluid arrangement of discourses existing at a given moment in time appeals to me as a way of sketching our situation as a programme in the Museum Baerengasse. It takes into consideration that ideas and inputs of students as well as of myself and other lecturers in the programme formulated the events we developed. On the other hand, the actual power structures are not ignored. For this reason, for the multiplicity of inputs in the form of screenings, talks and exhibitions, some of the projects were developed on the basis of concepts presented by

myself and other lecturers, sometimes developed for participating students, and others were developed by students (see the names in each project description in our publication in the on-curating book section) and the programme assistant, Mirjam Bayerdörfer. Different stages of professionalization and specific knowledge were thus clearly reflected in the programme. Given the diverse backgrounds and working experiences of the participants, this does not imply a hierarchy of professionalization with lecturers at the top, assistants in the middle, and students at the bottom, but that a multiplicity of abilities and professional qualifications were at stake: there were a lot of people with very different skills and experience involved, whether in exhibition production, short film, working with young students, collecting, programming music events, programming performance, philosophy, etc. In any case, the different sets of knowledge were something I accepted wholeheartedly because I believe that a university setting must allow experiments, failures, fissures, even confusion, and should provide a setting for long-term engagement and project work, and that the latter should emerge out of the struggle between multiple discourses from multiple voices in a given context. So my goal was not to have a perfect programme, but to have an imperfect platform for experiments, but with a specific direction. Taking into consideration that a space such as a university is structured hierarchically, quite in keeping with Johan Galtung's concept of "structural violence", a multiplicity of concepts of subjectivity and creativity were at stake and acknowledged.<sup>7</sup>

To return to the concept of ideological state apparatuses: Louis Althusser argues that every cultural production situates and, in a sense, produces a subject through interpellations.<sup>8</sup> As some may recall, we made this claim also for the subject of an exhibition, which is also the addressee of interpellations—the subject is, in a sense, produced by the exhibition, as Wolfgang Kemp diagnosed for some paintings in the space of the political.<sup>9</sup> Some contemporary theoreticians consider the notion of interpellation too reductionist. Especially cultural studies have taken into consideration the possibilities of accepting a proposed ideological layout, refusing it or challenging it. However, I think this may work on a much deeper level of address and intersubjectivity. Jacques Lacan developed the metaphor of a screen or tableau on which a subject projects multiple "answers" or reactions to the interpellations reaching it from the outside. In the Lacanian conception, a subject is on the one hand already spoken, which means it is placed in a signifying or symbolic chain. A subject is inscribed into this line of descent before its birth and after its death, and this unconsciously influences its development and positioning.<sup>10</sup> In this sense a subject is not at all autonomous.

The ideal of an autonomous subjectivity is based on an illusion, which is developed during the mirror stage. In the mirror stage an imaginary whole subject is constructed, but this subjectivity must be acknowledged from the outside. The small child sees itself as a whole image and reacts jubilantly. For Lacan this is the fundamental structure of subjectivity, which is obviously based on a misconception, because the moment of validation is eluded as well as the actual extreme dependency on other human beings. This is the basis of the imaginary register. To see oneself as the central point of central perspective is illusionary in the sense that that the other—or, more specifically, an imagined perspective of the other—is sketched by Lacan as another triangle, reversing and overlapping the imaginary triangle of the central perspective. In this construction the subject starts to project itself onto the imagined position in favour of the person who sees the subject. It multiplies different projections of its image (illusionary subjectivity) onto this screen/tableau. To connect this scheme to the more rigid model of Althusser, a subject permanently projects its own subjectivity in relation to an imagined other

onto a tableau, where it is seen by the other. In this model, subjectivity is produced in an ongoing process of interpellations and projections, and is in no way fixed and in no way autonomous. This is also why a teacher–student relationship is extremely important, taking into consideration the power relationship Althusser implied in his example of someone being addressed by a policeman.

From my perspective, the fact that the actual hierarchy of the teacher–student relationship permits a moment of equality and acknowledgement in the event of interaction is highly contradictory.<sup>11</sup> Jacques Rancière defines equality as being in fundamental opposition to the police order, the limiting power structure of a society. The police order is unable to “respond to the moment of equality of speaking bodies.”<sup>12</sup> For Rancière, equality is produced in a process, in an open set of practices. He thus draws two conclusions: “First, equality is not a state, not a goal that an action may seek to achieve. It is a premise that an action sets out to verify. Second, this set of practices has no particular name. Equality has no visibility of its own. Its premise must be understood in the practices that articulate it, and extricated from its implicitness.”<sup>13</sup>

Rancière’s important deliberations on the ignorant schoolmaster argue in favour of equal intelligence as a precondition for education.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, already the term “schoolmaster” alone implies a hierarchy. In these processes the contradiction is preconditioned. So from my perspective a teacher has to be aware of his or her responsibility; she or he should sense the need to become acquainted with the specific subjective entity, the cultural backgrounds, the skills and abilities, the trajectories and goals of each student. As described by Derrida, a teacher has to do this on the basis of his or her own positioning and own sense of its urgent necessity. What is more, a teacher has to risk an uncontrollable moment of encounter, an encounter in which equality in the sense of being equally valuable is the precondition. This moment could be described as re-cognition, which I strongly believe holds the potential for change. At the same time, curating (and other forms of cultural production) offers the potential to transform an urgency or, in the Lacanian sense, the wish for the “object petit a”, which is best described as a lack, a wanting, a longing. To transfer this longing into some sort of a signifying chain would be what could happen through the “talking cure” as well as by producing culture and art. Naturally, different sign systems as language or art offer different possibilities and trajectories. I hope this short excursus is not understood in a reductive way.

I would like to continue by discussing the promising and inspiring talk entitled “The Subject of Curating”, given by Felix Ensslin at the symposium *Curating: Glittering Myth, Revolutionary Force, Social Symptom?*, in which he set forth in detail pre-figurative structures of curatorial practice and, more specifically, of curating in the university context.<sup>15</sup> The notion “subject” is associated in English on the one hand with subjectivity, and on the other hand with the notion of a specific topic. Thus the word “subject” in Ensslin’s title is left to shift ambiguously back and forth. We are left to consider the influence a subject has on a subject in both directions, without falling into the trap of an actor-network theory, which projects the capacity to act onto things.

In Ensslin’s concept, all empirical tools of curating as specific activities—installing exhibitions, art-historical knowledge, institutional management, organization of networks, connoisseurship, tools of mediation, judging, fundraising and so on—i.e., all the activities with which curating is usually associated, are considered something that comes along with the job. A show is produced because you feel the

urgency to make something materialize, to put something on view, to implement a discourse (as a subject, not as a “thing”).

The art academy of the present is based on different models which are all to an extent also present in the contemporary situation. To quote Thierry de Duve, these models could be categorized as the academy model, the Bauhaus model and the contemporary model.<sup>16</sup> All of them have different preconceptions of the subject and of creativity. Very briefly, the academy upholds the idea of the artist as a genius who is supposed to be an inspiration for his students; they are supposed to follow his example and learn his techniques through imitation. The students are organized as a group of followers, but they can also compete, initially for his recognition and later for public recognition; on the other hand, the alumni of this specific group would also later on promote each other. (The gender aspect is very clear and does not require further discussion here). The concept of the Bauhaus, which was the leading model only very briefly between the two world wars but still has a lot of influence today, changed the ideology of the genius at work. The new ideology was that of creativity and of intensive work based on industrial production and an interest in new materials. The idea was of a twofold education combining aspects of art and aspects of engineering. In many respects this concept bore resemblance to industrial production and to an intense ideology of work.

The concept referred to by Bailey<sup>17</sup> as contemporary is based on the idea of developing an attitude, which makes it necessary to engage in reading and discussing viewpoints. This practice is based on working together and not on developing singular authorship, and in this context to deconstruct means to question many existing paradigms and formats. What is also important here is the necessity of developing an idea about one’s own situation, one’s own position, as part of a specific situation at the university, in the arts, and in society as a whole. Students should come out of their training self-empowered; thus the teachers can do no more than serve as examples; they cannot prescribe courses of action or give orders. Our exhibition projects could be assigned to this category. *Is it (Y)ours?*, curated by Damian Jurt and myself, asks who owns the public space and extends this question to a multitude of different contexts, pointing out similarities and differences. “Who owns the public space? How can we formulate in it claims and contradictions? How do alternative utopias develop? And how to transform communities, strategic alliances and movements? How do artists formulate claims to participation? And how do artists intervene in Cape Town, Hong Kong, Bern, Zurich, Berlin, Cairo?”

For the exhibition we collaborated with Christian Falsnaes to produce a video on site at the Museum Baerengasse. In the first part we acted with him as a choir to a strange musical, and in the second part we interacted in a performance in which we cut all of his clothes off his body while talking about art, re-enactment, gender, and vulnerability. The second shared exhibition *Unsettling the Setting. Playing, Plying, Squatting // Operating, Owning, Occupying --- or rather?* was curated by Mirjam Bayerdörfer and myself. We asked artists, theorists, and curators to provide a concept for our somehow uncanny situation at Gasthaus zum Baeren / Museum Baerengasse. “Around the Paradeplatz in Zurich, money does not grow on trees but instead is buried in the ground. What for? What does it do there? The Museum Bäerengasse is located 200 m from Paradeplatz. For whom? What does it do there?” to quote parts of the concept. Our aim was to explore the situation of our project at that location, and we understood this as a starting point for discussions with the students and the public. The last shared project, *Involvement Requires Perception*, invited eleven artist-run spaces to present one work (which could also be a social

sculpture) and one manifesto each. Here, two students worked with each art space. This project handed over the actual curatorial tasks and negotiations to the students, and as a result was extremely productive. It showed very divergent approaches to art and social space, and provided a scope for negotiations and discussions. These three programmatic exhibitions can be understood as the backbone of the project, a form of self-reflection and a means of asking questions about the social, architectural, and political situation and how to deal with it. Within this context we provided space and opportunities (although very little money) to realize projects with or without advice. The loose framework for the projects was “Curate Your Context”, the request to think about your context and to initiate a programme that would reflect aspects of specific contexts. As you can see from the intense and diverse programme, students of all backgrounds took advantage of the opportunity and realized shows, performances, discussions, music, book launches, etc. The programme was moreover accompanied by a series of talks reflecting on curating and cultural practices.

I am convinced that today one has also to take into consideration all aspects of digitalization, which works as an acceleration tool and as a public space. This is why we have the webjournal [www.on-curating.org](http://www.on-curating.org) as a partner for the programme on some issues. Derrida describes this aspect as follows: “One of the mutations that affect the place and nature of university *travail* is today a certain delocalizing virtualization of space of communication, discussion, publication, archivization. It is not the virtualization that is absolutely novel in its structure, for as soon as there is a trace, there is also some virtualization; it is the ‘abc’ of deconstruction. What is new, quantitatively, is the acceleration of the rhythm, the extent and powers of capitalization of such virtuality. Hence the necessity to rethink the concepts of the possible and the impossible. This new technical ‘stage’ of virtualization (computerization, digitalization, virtually immediate worldwide-ization of readability, telework, and so forth) destabilizes, as we well know, the university habitat. It upsets the university’s topology, disturbs everything that organizes the places defining it, namely, the territory of its fields and its disciplinary frontiers as well as its places of discussion, its field of battle, its *Kampfplatz*, its theoretical battlefield – and the communitary structure of its ‘campus’.”<sup>18</sup> We are interested in this new topology of the university, in knowledge production as a will to know changes. At this stage we would like to make our endeavours and shared efforts available to a larger public, a public space which is, as stated by Derrida, a field of competition, a struggle for visibility, but on the other hand also a democratic tool, which opens up to people from far away. As stated by Peter Weibel,<sup>19</sup> the digital media change any notion of distance. They also change our senses, our human condition as such. For us, the students and lecturers of the programme, the webjournal [www.on-curating.org](http://www.on-curating.org) holds the promise to be not just a second-rate consumer of thoughts, but of producing knowledge about curating alongside temporary projects in space. Again, this is another opportunity of self-empowerment for students and alumni to materialize their urgencies.

See all projects of Gasthaus zum Bären /Museum Bäregasse, publication in the book section of [OnCurating.org](http://OnCurating.org).

**Dorothee Richter**, curator, since 2005 head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (MAS/CAS) [www.curating.org](http://www.curating.org) at the University of the Arts Zurich ZHdK (Co-founder and concept), she also co-founded with Susanne Clausen the “Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies, Practice-Based Doctoral Programme” a cooperation of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating and the Department of Fine Arts,

University of Reading. From 1999 to the end of 2003, Richter was artistic director of the Künstlerhaus Bremen where she curated a discursive programme based on feminist issues, urban situations, power relation issues, institutional critique. She worked as a curator ever since. She co-curated numerous symposia. She co-conceived and coordinated the research and archiving project *Curating Degree Zero* (2003-2008) which explored critical and experimental approaches to exhibition making at the beginning of the millennium. PHD "Fluxus. Kunst gleich Leben? Mythen um Autorschaft, Produktion, Geschlecht und Gemeinschaft", publisher of [www.on-curating.org](http://www.on-curating.org) which presents current approaches to critical curatorial practice; In 2013 she finalised a film together with Ronald Kolb: „Flux Us Now! Fluxus explored with a camera.“ 2014 -2015 artistic director of Gasthaus zum Baeren/ Museum Baerengasse, Zurich . At the moment she is working with Ronald Kolb on a digital archive/ film on Curatorial practice, a cooperation project of ZKM Karlsruhe and ZHdK.

## Notes

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11 I am not deeply familiar with Maude

Manoni's pedagogical concepts, which she derived from Lacanian theory.

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15 See as video the talk by Felix Ensslin, "The Subject of Curating" at the symposium *Curating: Glittering Myth, Revolutionary Force, Social Symptom?*, Zurich University of the Arts, 2014, <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/talks/glittering-myths-felix-ensslin> (accessed March 2015).

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**Captions**

1 Video Production with Christian Falsnaes and students of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, for the exhibition *Is it (Y)ours?*

2 Exhibition view, *Is it (Y)ours?*, 13 March 2014

3,4 Exhibition view, *Involvement Requires Perception. 11 project spaces – 11 artworks – 11 ways*, 6 March 2015

5,6,7 Exhibition view, *Unsettling the Setting*, 24 October 2014

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**Contributors**

Felix Ensslin, Ellen Blumenstein, Brian Holmes,  
Sabeth Buchmann, Sergio Edelzstein, Avi Feldman,  
Elke Krasny, Dorothee Richter

**Proofreading**

Stephanie Carwin

**Web Design and Graphic Design Concept**

Ronald Kolb, Biotop 3000

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Toni-Areal,  
Pfungstweidstrasse 96,  
8031 Zürich  
info@oncurating.org  
www.on-curating.org

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