

# Curating: politics of display, politics of site and politics of transfer and translation

## Editorial by Dorothee Richter and Nkule Mabaso

This issue of OnCurating consists of a variety of texts and interviews, which were developed out of interviews from participants connected to the Postgraduate programme in Curating ([www.curating.org](http://www.curating.org)). Many of the authors and interviewees gave lectures and participated in the programme over the last four years, adding to the dialogue in the postgraduate programme, as well as other curators in the field.

In the spirit of slowing down, in sometimes rather a hastily discourse, we would like to present them to a broad public, which engages with our main topics: politics of display, politics of site and politics of transfer and translation, topics which refer clearly to the research institution where the Postgraduate Programme in Curating is situated: the Institute Cultural Studies in the Arts at the Zurich University of the Arts. We see the curatorial discourse not primarily as a philosophical discourse with some practical outcomes. We are always interested in the power relations and politics, which structure the field. As curators and as researchers we have chosen the attitude that practice and theory are intertwined profoundly, and both materialisations have the ability “to do things” with art and with words, to intervene, to highlight.

**Elena Filipovic's** *Global White Cube*, first published in 2005, traces the genealogy of exhibition formats through the development and success of the white cube, its putative neutrality, and its ubiquitous architectural use in commercial galleries and art fairs. Filipovic discusses the global hegemonic shifts brought on by the white cube's impact on contemporary art, curating, and art institutions.

**Paul O'Neill** writes about the ‘group exhibition’ and how it has opened up a range of curatorial approaches to demystify the role of mediation, and as such has also enabled divergent artistic practices to be exhibited together under a single rubric. He does this by examining curatorial statement across a period of time show how each group show, was the result of divergent, complex, and dialectical relations between the curator and the artist as co-producers, during a process of co-production, which has the possibility to lead to the construction of co-operative and co-authored group exhibition-formations.

**Dorothee Richter** describes the relationship of terms commonly used within the activity of “exhibiting”, and the promise they hold of disclosing otherwise concealed knowledge. Richter considers various historic exhibitions that came

into existence, from a close reading of Mary Anne Staniszewski's study, *The Power of Display* (1998) in order to thereafter discuss contemporary exhibitions. Staniszewski concludes that there are three normative kinds of exhibition developed over time, the propagandist, the ennobling, and the pedagogic exhibition. Richter makes the addition of a fourth category, which she refers to as the "self-critical" exhibition.

**Marco Scotini** in his text *The World belongs to us*, runs through seminal moments of the last 10 years that reveal the self exploitation and lack of control that art workers have in the art system which is poised against them in favour of big institutions and money. Scotini includes several examples that show there is no longer an outside; all institutions have been subsumed into the fold of the hypervisible art organisations, which he points to as being more hypothetical than real.

**Monan Slome and Joshua Simon**, write about the *Aesthetics of Terror* workshop, which took at the Postgraduate Programme in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) in 2008, and generated a set of questions, leading to the development of the exhibition originally planned to be shown at the Chelsea Art Museum, New York. The show encountered many difficulties and received asylum in another institution. The exhibition and text take the events of 9/11 as a starting point and the precipitating events that followed are contemplated from a specific formal perspective and analysis is of the pictorial strategies of terrorism through certain visual characteristics of the spectacle of terror and its echoes in contemporary art.

This issue also includes a number of interviews from contemporary curators in the field:

**René Block** discusses his career spanning decades from 1964, at the age of twenty-two, when he founded his first gallery in Berlin, and touches on the risk and challenges that have followed. The interview is divided along the range of Blocks activities including curating, art promotion and financing and collecting. Block gives insight on the development of art in the early 1970s and the advent of the Independent curator made prominent by Harald Szeemann.

**Rainer Ganahl**, talks about the nature of his production and his objective replication of the 'often obscene and hideous' language of economics and politics in his *Credit Crunch Meals* series, which deals with the obscene economic injustice revealed by the credit crisis that hit the international markets in 2008. He further expands on the notion of defining a practice, the role of the curator, the dynamic power-relation in the exhibition making process, and speaks on the relation to autonomy and commodification of objects and other aspects as explicated in his 2007 text, *When attitudes becomes curating* (2007).

**Saša Nabergoj** expands on her presentation at the Kunstverein Zürich (Wäscherei) in September 2011. In this interview she explicates what is missing if there is no time for laziness, what she is trying to get out of a discourse about laziness and gives insight on the artistic scene in Ljubljana, the economic situation artists of artists in Slovenia and the curator roles in 'collaborating' with artists.

**Paul O'Neill** touches on artists run centres that have eventually become institutions and the instrumentalisation for art for social engineering purposes and draws out the paradigmatic problems posed by setting *New Institutionalism* as a short lived shift happening in the last fifteen years, with its major proponents initially all in relatively small institutions, which they have all left for larger institutions.

He explains further the position of the individual curators who coined the term, is a by-product of the internalization of the modus operandi of the institution.

**Mirjam Varadinis** discusses the site-specific exhibition, *Shifting Identities* (2008), which had as one of its venues the Zurich Airport; and reflected on themes such as globalization, borders, and migration. Mirjam speaks about the complexities of working in the third space, like an airport with this exhibition, in which 67 artists participated and confronted changes in the concept of identity on multiple levels.

In this almost candid interview with Nkule Mabaso, **Anton Vidokle** writes about his early influences and the development of his creative interests while growing up in Moscow. Vidokle finds the subjective nature of curating especially problematic and discusses the objective, systematic, almost scientific, practice which most of the time it is not.