

# **I Am Doing Curating Now (and Then)**

**Kit HAMMONDS**

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Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture  
Kingston University

Student number: 1544148



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## **Abstract**

Pursuing threads of my own activity that are discussed or enacted in texts and their related curatorial and publication projects, I put forward a practice that performs curating in the act of doing it. The thesis lays out a context for this approach to curating against a backdrop of how curatorial theory has been moving the practice towards disciplinarity.

Through proposing the adoption of the persona of a curator, facilitating a means to play with the conventions of art, I explore how exhibitions and the institutions in which they are staged may be convened as a different form of public space. This stands as a countermove against the formation of curating as a discipline. In this, curating is displayed as a fundamental aspect of the contemporary aesthetic where narratives, both real and fictive, suffused with the a sense of self in a broader cultural landscape. I touch on a shift where veracity in saying and acting out roles has supplanted concrete truths. As a fundamental player in a globalised culture, the curator, and doing curating, is claimed as potentially emancipatory, albeit fraught with tensions. My own work proves illustrative of how these tensions might be generative by adopting rules or conventions as game-like structures. This offers a unique consideration of what lies between critical and practice-based acts – exhibition-making, critical writing and an element of strategically deployed tom-foolery - in an attempt to avoid simple definition and lay out alternative, speculative positions. I illustrate and narrate these moves in the outcomes of a selected number of projects over the past decade, and lay out how my approach may be transferred into a formal museum setting.



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## **Foreword**

### **But Not Forward**

Things have changed dramatically in the last year as I wrote this. The world has tipped on its axis, and with it some basic precepts that were expected to be progressive and libertarian have turned turtle.

There is an obvious figurehead to this – Donald Trump. Although in Asia, Europe and the Americas that have all been home to me in the past twelve months a pattern has emerged. Watching Brexit from a distance leaves me in a suspended state of disbelief thinking ‘surely this *cannot* be real.’ I don’t want to dwell too much on the dire ethical conditions other than to say it appears to have thrown so many peoples lives into chaos; that it has brought to light many of the issues that I have been trying to come to terms with in my work, even if casting a shadow over them at the same time. It has exposed the thinness of civility. The clearest victim is the value of truth. Progressive thought has been questioning truth’s complicity in normative, colonial and other forms of tacit power by using critical and aesthetic means, cultivating new languages even, to seek greater emancipation. Suddenly this language has changed hands and being used as a tool of control. While it is clearly not possible for a single person to sign a piece of paper and make something so in reality, that others have been so swift to put into action edicts that reverse any sense of progress is worrisome. What has been exposed is exactly how fragile the foundations of a liberal democracy are. Hope of ‘freedom to’ is being reduced to hope to retain even a sliver of ‘freedom from’.

Why should this matter to my dissertation about curating over the past decade or so? I certainly don’t want to claim that I have been in any way prophetic about such seismic changes, or even particularly active in resisting them. But in many ways the contradictions of public life the early 21<sup>st</sup> century – the high-contemporary if you will – have been at the heart of what my work, sometimes seeking out the best-case scenarios

within systems that have become so complex, so abstract, that they have inevitably produced a sense of dislocation and despair. At other times I have simply been pointing out the contradictions in those systems we have decided to put our trust in, and trying to find ways to manage them.

I have worked in an international setting throughout my career, not only as I have had the chance to work on different scales in different places, but also in addressing the make up of our lives as a public outside of nationhood. Despite its relatively bad rap, Globalisation holds as much potential as it does dangers. I am fortunate to have been in times and places that have allowed me free passage between the different regions of the world. And, it must be said, I've also been stubborn, picaresque, or simply curious enough to insist on being placed between one location and another, rather than rooted to the spot.

Where this foreword finds its relevance is in commenting on how fiction has been employed in recent work as a method to address truths embedded in artistic, curatorial and institutional practices that might otherwise be obscured by reality. It is not an original perspective to see art as containing an element of fantasy in order to exhibit criticality. Playing with such tensions is at the heart of creativity. However, the recent shifts sketched out above have seen playful fictionalisation acquire the sour taste of 'alternative facts' and, therefore, become explicit political tools for oppressive forms. The danger is my, and other's, methods might now be associated with institutional dominance rather than the carnivalesque sense of resistance and protest against them that was intended. The tragic way in which counter-cultural perspectives have been *detoured*, leads me to feel the need to assert how abject I find this condition. Somehow, looking back at moments of contrarian and foolish play begins to feel complicit with rather than opposition to institutions. But I would still assert, strongly, that fiction and play are fundamentally embedded in attempts to build new forms of public space, while simultaneously un-building existing hierarchies of power. The

dystopian realms of fiction which once seemed like ephemeral playgrounds now loom close on the horizon as concrete structures.

If this all sounds like 'I doth protest too much', so be it. But with the encroachment of fiction into real power structures, a clear statement of intent seems warranted. As the stage of the world turns, what once might have seemed provocative may quickly become conservative under one's feet. Rather than an insistence on what follows being hard and fast knowledge, then, it remains a scenario to be questioned, critiqued and countered in return. Everything should be at play, and the rules should be flexible to allow its dissent without recrimination.



# **I Am Doing Curating Now (and Then)**

## **An Introduction**

How does one perform 'doing curating'? More significantly can one engage in curating both institutionally and performatively at once? This is the subject of this dissertation that seeks to place my practice as a curator whose works digress beyond the usual borders, the common-law sense of a discipline-which-is-not-yet-a-discipline.

It is not the first time I have asked myself this question. In a statement in catalogue in 2012 I wrote:

What should a curator do? What should I do? How should I talk about myself in clear terms when everything seems so accidental and mixed up with the chaos of life? What leads what? The curating, or the washing up, or love and romance, or simple survival – they all, in the end play their part.  
(portfolio 1.1)

To some extent, the questions remain the same. It is just that the attempts to answer them that have become somewhat more refined.

To examine how curating is both a play and is at play, I present a body of evidence through selected published writing that discuss both my own work and how it relates to current curatorial discourse. Through this, I demonstrate my active engagement with how both exhibition-making, pedagogic and critical practices have been employed in various constellations to both perform and discuss curating's limitations and potentials as a significant agent in the contemporary. But the crux of this analysis requires other elements of my practice to be taken into account, ones that do not directly fit within the division of theory and practice. For this they require narration. Therefore the method of this study includes other curatorial acts that include live presentations, exhibitions and even anecdotes as texts *per se*. The majority might be said to be published in the most literal interpretation of the word – that is it has been made

public, or put on stage. The manifestations of my research include lectures, teaching and other moments when writing, workshops and presentations have addressed very specific audiences rather than general readership, in forms of distribution that falls under the normal precepts of publication as such. This is not merely a statement on method, but an integral part of my approach to writing, thinking and doing that requires frequent shifts of tenor depending on who is reading or listening.

These narratives also include some of the surplus work I have done during this 10-year period – essays written and never published either through failure on my part to complete them, or the editors considering them not right for their own journals or catalogues. And, of course, there are exhibitions themselves, with surplus gestures that did not show their hand other than tacitly. More than simply exposing my own failings, I seek to set out the intellectual terrain from which other trains of thought (or research) have proceeded. The inclusion of sections or references to these bodies of un-published knowledge contributes to the overall thesis I seek to address, that the explicit and implicit knowledge are just as equally part of my practice that performs curating as those that *are* curating, just as Stanislavski's 'method' in acting goes beyond the script or what is put on stage by blurring the distinction between being oneself and being another.

This dissertation is presented in three sections - which roughly divide into theory, practice and a conclusion that considers how one might synthesise the two. But as stated above, this is not to create a process by which one leads from the other. It is merely an expedient method by which to paint a critical *mise en scene* in which different voices are used for different affects. This seemed preferable to dividing into isolated 'themes'. There have been frequent parallel activities, things that persisted over years, and others that appeared out of happenstance. Some actions lie latent and forgotten and only later were returned to either methodologically, formally, or critically. I hope my narrations will

bring an alternative order to my thinking that is ultimately more sensible than linear.

Section One looks at the current and developing state of curatorial discourse. In the first chapter I survey current thinking from a variety of positions from my own perspectives. The second chapter (drawn on one such 'failed' text that did not reach publication) blocks out how curatorial discourse has developed as, primarily, a discourse of the curator and how this might tally with current understandings of value, for better or worse. As a note, I am clearly proposing myself as an actor in both this thesis, and in my curating despite seeming to rally against this definition. But this second chapter aims to differentiate between the usual dichotomy of Curating and Curator and lay the groundwork for a different path where the two aspects are not in antagonism to one another but, as Chantal Mouffe (2007) might describe it, in a state of agonism. This is not a conundrum I seek to resolve or answer, but instead simply to stake out key positions that I have taken that have set a path to what is to follow. The third chapter looks at positions that I have elaborated in subsequent publishing projects and in lectures that provide further points of orientation. Among them is the role of curatorial education that is part and parcel of curating's disciplining, and yet also exhibits a contested ground between practice and persona. The section concludes with how curating reflects some of the fundamental rules of the game in what is emerging as an aesthetics of the contemporary.

Section Two addresses strands of my curatorial practice that have relationships to Publication, have taken place in Institutional Settings and emerged through Cartographic Acts, all forms that have appeared as central to my work as both subject and method. As I intend to evidence, these terms are not to be taken in the material sense, but as fields of play where the conventions and implications of each has been tested or pushed against, sometimes to the point of absurdity. It is here that they become performance or performative. These examples take the notion of public space as a *theatrum mundi* in which the political and the social is

performed by actors, agents and other public figures distinct from the reality of everyday life. A second interpretation of play will therefore recur, that of the game. I will draw on various aspects of play theory from the foundational text *Homo Ludens* by Johan Huizinga (1938), to applications in studies of pedagogy (Freire 1970), language (Crystal 1998), literature (Lescure 1973) and social activism in its broadest political sense (Kane 2004; Sennett 1974). While the focus remains on curating as a game in which conventions are reacted to and against, rather than the curator as an actor or player, there is some interplay between these areas of attention. What emerges is intended to show my practice as breaking the rules of curating as it is usually, tacitly defined through the employment of certain 'gambits' that redefine the field of play. Through this I aim to convene particular 'play communities' (Huizinga 1938), be they made up of artists, curators, collaborators or publics as conventionally understood, as inherent parts of exhibition-making.

In my conclusion I aim to discuss how these acts might influence each other taking my recent project *The Editorial* as an example. In that project I synthesised more clearly and more consciously the ideas of writing, discourse, events, scenography and curatorial theorising than in previous project. I will consider how selecting, displaying and narrating might be undone and rewoven. This is not a singular address, but appears, I hope, as a red-thread through my work. Underlying all of these areas of activity are more foundational questions of what it means to be in public in the contemporary moment. Therefore considerations of how a public art institution might become more of a public space while still supporting and presenting the subjectivities of artists; how artists and curators might act as public intellectuals; why they might be well placed to do so; and how does one's actions convene, constitute or establish social spaces in order to do this in between authoritative and anti-authoritarian positions all fall within its ambit.



I will not make any claims for deep originality, favouring, instead a defence of idiosyncrasy. This is not without its ends, as the themes of play, fiction, and other experiments contribute to a sense of learning through doing that is akin to, while also ultimately sceptical of, Ranciere's (1991) notions of emancipation within teaching and learning. Questions of freedom versus conformity equally lie at the heart of this dissertation and my practice as a whole. The explicit question of how to perform 'doing curating' thereby reflects on a distinctly contemporary sense of self that the curator, somewhat ironically, has come to represent. As a public intellectual of a particular kind, and within a particular set of cultural relationships, being a curator is a mask one dons that comes with particular expectations and freedoms of its own.

In a postscript I reflect on where I have found myself unexpectedly as an institutional curator in a museum, a position that seemed an extremely unlikely turn of events even less than twelve months ago when embarking on this appraisal of my work. The title of this dissertation reflects the surprising analogies between my prior work and this new position. It is borrowed from the literally performative work of John Baldessari, whose major solo exhibition is my first assignment in my new curatorial position. Its awkward grammar is 'after' Baldessari's seminal video performance *I Am Making Art* (1971) where he states deadpan 'I am making art' while striking various poses that are deliberately 'wrong' in a constant state of improvisation. An added significance is in its insistence of 'now', of being in the present. That is being contemporary. Performative in the twin senses of being performed, and as a declarative statement, unexpectedly touches on the dual approach in my own work: I both do and declare that I do. This final chapter present a section of the catalogue essay which considers how Baldessari's work is definitive of aspects of a contemporary aesthetic that my own work has instinctively, or perhaps simply sub-consciously, mirrored.



## **Section One**

### **Curatorial Discourse**



# Chapter 1

## A Curatorial Narrative

Before I begin to consider my own work, it is necessary to lie out some points of orientation on the Curator, Curating and the Curatorial. This will form the stage of current discourse on which my own work has played out. There are a limited number of renowned curators who explicitly perform the role. Foremost among them is the curatorial collective What, How and for Whom? (WHW, Croatia 1999-present) who use artistic and performative methodologies; yet do not fall into a parallel roles of artist/curator. WHW's introductory statement for Istanbul Biennial (2009) was delivered in a theatrical setting, the curators emerging from behind velvet curtains and standing on chairs. In chorus they asked: 'Is it not possible to think of art the way Brecht understood theater — a mode of "collective historical elucidation," an apparatus for constructing truth rather than what amounts to a viewing feast for the bourgeoisie?' (WHW 2009, p10) That they enacted this in their curatorial approach as well as finding it in the art on display is significant, moving curating into a fictive, if no less 'truthful' position.

Another key figure is Raimundas Malasuaskas (b. Lithuania, 1972) has frequently employed stagecraft in exhibitions. In *Hypnotic Show* (2014) an audience where guided round an exhibition, experiencing works that only existed through the powers of suggestion. As the founder of CAC TV (Lithuania, 1995-2006) he also acted as host of a weekly slot on the state television channel, not as a commentator but as a player alongside artists and writers. It should also be noted he has played a significant role in curatorial education as a professor at the curatorial programme of the California College of Art.

A third prominent exponent of acting out as an aspect of curating is Pablo Leon de la Barra (Mexico 1972) who has transgressed and continues to move between roles of actor in artists works, commissioner, exhibition-

designer, and institutional curator with surprising fluidity for one working as the UBS Curator of Latin American Art at the Guggenheim.

All three go beyond the forms of curating that few have managed before, perhaps with the obvious exception of Harold Szeemann who was theatre trained, and was even carried into his Press Conference for *Documenta V* (1972) on a throne and dressed as an am-dram king in seeming self-parody of his position of power. (See Cornelis, 1972; Derieux, 2008 et al)

In a series of public lecture given at the Museum of the National Taipei University of Education in 2015/2016 I explored some of these methods alongside other interpretations of curating. The series included: 'A Brief History of the History of Curating'; 'Who is the Curator? And What is Curating Anyway?'; and 'Exhibition Making Narratives.' (appendices iv-vi) Together they laid out the foundational history and theory of curating contemporary art, a discourse that is vibrant in the West, but has not impacted significantly on East Asian practices as yet. The three titles covered areas that impact on this dissertation.

The first was a lecture in response to the publication of a traditional Chinese translation of Hans Ulrich Obrist's (2011) *A Brief History of Curating* by the Taiwanese publisher ArtCo. My lecture took an overview of the formation of a canon of curatorial history and theory in the past 20 years – a history primarily based in European and American exhibitions in the post-War period and their move towards globalization. Among the lecture's key points was how Hans Ulrich Obrist has become a self-appointed archetype of what is considered the Curator today, a position he has established for himself by inscribing himself at the apex of a particular teleological perspective on history. I noted how the strength of his work, and its limits, are that his books on the subject are constructed not as critical reflections, but collections of interviews, mainly with artists, on the subject. His own practice has been, therefore, primarily about conversation and anecdote, creating a Socratic primacy of the

spoken word over the written one, with himself at the centre of a discourse.

This inscribes Obrist own voice and his persona into the history in a very literal manner. Alongside this I surveyed alternative perspectives where the curator is secondary to the act of curating that works between different agents, a perspective that Maria Lind (2008) coined as 'The Curatorial'. Between these two poles I also outlined other iterations including Research-Curating (Diedrichsen 2014, Enwezor 2002 et al) and Curating as a Social or Pedagogic practice (Kreps 2003, O'Neill & Wilson 2010) that go beyond curating as exhibition-making or its most reduced definition of 'selection and display'.

The second lecture mapped out a genealogy of curators and their curatorial styles and approaches. It also considered why the curator has become so present as a public figure that reflects cultural values. The third lecture looked at forms of exhibition as narrative devices, and how this evolution also reflects value-formation in contemporary culture.

It is the current focus on the curator as a quasi-celebrity on the one hand, and a general state of play for self-nomination on the other, that has led me to be inherently suspicious of people who call themselves curators. I immediately want to know what they have curated. The reason for this is the explosion of the curator into a broad cultural domain that David Balzar (2014) has discussed in *Curationism: How Curating Took over the Art World and Everything Else* as a much maligned, but in fact highly informed overview of the current cultural malaise. As illustration of the problem, an anecdote:

When curating the Central Academy of Fine Art Museum (CAFAM) biennial under the auspices of the Royal College of Art, I was asked by the museum to have a 'mentor' from among academic staff as it was part of the exhibition's 'structure'. Originally, I was the mentor, but had fallen into the position of curating the section almost by chance due to my

nominee being rejected by the museum for undeclared reasons (probably political ones as the nominee was employed at a prominent Hong Kong museum). As I found myself in the role of 'doing curating', the CAFAM Director and Curator suggested that a particular senior figure from the college took the mentor role. While an established artist and having published a book on the ontology of digital print, this individual showed no engagement with the discourse of curating. I felt this inappropriate and asked him to allow me to nominate my own mentor instead:

KH: Given this is an international exhibition, I feel my 'mentor' should be someone with an academic profile in curating in order to represent the college at the forefront of curatorial discourse and education. Don't you agree?

NB: Well, I have done some curating...

KH: The mentor is expected to write an academic essay on curating for the catalogue.

NB: Yes, perhaps, someone else would be better.

I paraphrase, of course, but the awkward grammar of having "done some curating" is authentic. I could only assume it meant he had, like most artists, organised some exhibitions somewhere. A snippy internal voice wanted the conversation to have gone more like this:

NB: Well, I have done some curating...

KH: Well, I have 'done some digital print.' In fact my retired Mother has 'done some digital print' on an almost daily basis by printing out family photos on her home office inkjet. But I would not ask her to write an essay on its ontology in the catalogue of a major international exhibition within an academic context. It would likely represent me, you, the institution and quite probably her, badly.

In the end, my newly employed Head of Programme, Victoria Walsh, was named as my mentor at my request, and left me to write the essay on my own. (portfolio 1.2) In some ways the situation had a surprisingly deep



effect. It underlined that curating is generally perceived to be something that everyone does today, and that provoked the question of why it should be so in this 'high-contemporary' moment. My determination to write both curatorial and academic essay was not pure hubris. The interlocking nature of questions of how and when the curatorial act is performed, and by whom, was among the lines of argument in both exhibition and curatorial discourse I aimed to develop.

More often than not, the curator is seen as a secondary activity, subordinate to another discipline. 'Artist and curator', 'designer and curator', 'musician and curator', are common. Curator and Artist rarely heard. Oddly, it is usually Curator and Writer - not the other way round. Perhaps that is simply due to the ring of it, its enunciation. But, I would suggest, the conjunction of professional identities more often than not demonstrates that the identity of 'curator' has been adopted as a second or even third string to one's bow because one *needs* to be seen to be engaged within its discourse.

The origins for this current need lies in shifting attitudes towards art. What was endemic to the art gallery and museum system has become epidemic in culture at large. The spread of 'curator' as an asserted public identity is reminiscent of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century desire to be publicly seen as an artist, even when one is something quite different, as characterised in the true story of entrepreneur Walter Keane as portrayed in Tim Burton's 2014 film *Big Eyes*. So desperate to be *seen* as an artist, he doesn't even engage in painting but simply rebrands the work of others with his own signature, including his wife's. What is made clear in this otherwise flawed film is the emergence of the artist as a cultural figure in the public eye, personifying an accrued set of values, the then emergent notion of a 'lifestyle' – namely bohemian freedom that borders on the libertine – that lends narrative to one's life in lieu of values. That Keane is able to pull on the costume of a striped Breton jumper (*a la* Picasso) and stand around in the park playing the role without putting brush to canvas is a critical point about to how the artist

entered an American, and thereby global, aspirational imaginary as a free player in an increasingly flat cultural landscape.

Artist is, perhaps, with 'musician' and 'actor', uniquely self-declared, an almost existential state rather than a professional moniker. These activities have been de-specialised, requiring no recognition or specific training to *be* an artist even if it enacted in one's leisure time. In fact, amateur or outsider artists may even carry some additional merit or heroism in the eyes of the public. But increasingly being an artist is professionalised, and one might speculate that 'curator' has joined, or even replaced 'artist' in some senses, which I will go on to discuss later. But for now it is worth noting that in a climate where curatorial programmes are increasingly common and increasingly foundational, many European directors and curators have been vocal that they are untrained in curating and curatorial programmes are unnecessary or even detrimental (although most have received master's degrees in Art History, the pre-existing requirement for those entering the profession).

Among them are Alex Farquaharson, now Director of Tate Britain, who was himself on the staff of the RCA curating programme, and Polly Staple, Director of Chisenhale (see Lange 2011). Anthony Huberman has also proclaimed the redundancy of curatorial programmes from his position as Director at CCA Wattis in San Francisco, despite the same institution offering one of the most respected Masters in curating in the USA. (see Markopoulos 2015). There appears to be some self-aggrandising going on, a slightly heroic positioning that lies on the axis of romantic sensibilities and the spirit of an independent curator, as if education were there to control and discipline rather than open up possibilities. In the symposium staged at CCA Wattis, Huberman and I stood on opposite sides of a debate where I defended the right to education as a space of rehearsal and acquisition of knowledge, while he attacked curatorial training as inequitable with the experience of practice. We were, in fact, arguing across the face of each other, and both agreed that education is not a substitute for experience, nor is it fundamentally necessary to have

some form of institutional accreditation to be a professional curator. Nevertheless pedagogy and the questioning that arises from it has benefits aside from being indoctrinated into a 'right way' to do things, as the curatorial programmes had been accused of since their infancy in the mid-90s (to which I can attest as a subject of just such a programme, as well as being one of its professors).

So I am not fighting against this 'self-directed' point of view and am in no way calling for professionalization of curating. In fact I will go on to defend its very deliberately non-disciplinary and non-specialised potential in the next chapter. There should be no barriers to curating an exhibition, just as there should be no barriers to making art, or to education. Despite my own involvement in curatorial education over more than a decade, I would not, personally, insist that a professional accreditation is a requirement to having the permission to curate. In fact I have vehemently fought against this at the conference that accompanied the same exhibition mentioned above where Gao Shiming, the director of the China Art Academy, called for an official accreditation for curators akin to that of a quantity surveyor or other authority:

Currently there are people running around curating exhibitions with no formal training. We should instigate a professional body to ensure that no untrained or uncertified people are allowed to curate exhibitions responsibly.

This is the type of top-down policy that, in my view, stifles any form of art or creativity that is (and should be) emergent. And Hangzhou is probably the most liberal-minded of art schools in China with curatorial programmes. Reading between the lines, the Chinese academies were competing on stage for the right to be that government-recognised authorising body for curators, therefore capturing the market for education in a country where a new museum has opened every thirty minutes in the past three years. Moreover, it would cement the head of that body as the leading voice and power in the same system.

Gao Shiming was trained as an artist and has curated various exhibitions without training, so it appears quite contradictory to be putting himself in the position of authority here. But he has 'earned' the right to be seen as a curator. Regardless of how his projects manifest themselves, he has a clear track record of acting curatorially in making exhibitions *and* engaging in what it means to make an exhibition - not merely in the 'selecting and displaying' works of art which has come to be seen as the core operations of a curator. (see Balzar 2014)

But, as per Huberman et al, making exhibitions (itself a broad category not limited to presenting work in a gallery) is a necessary activity. The experience earned through a practice of exhibition-making, as with any practice, leads to not merely the doing but the questioning of the whys and wherefores of how it is done. Someone who reaches this position is what I would call a curator, regardless of his or her professional status, and is acting performatively, thereby creating a narrative for the exhibition as a public space. Between the two poles sketched out here we run up against questions of self-appointed taste and connoisseurship at one extreme, and professionalization or institutionalisation on the other. What I am seeking is something that escapes both yet remains grounded in the act of doing curating.

In order to look into this further we need now to turn to the formation of curatorial discourse and consider where it questions itself, and where it is merely reconfirming a convention that may, as I suggest in 'When was Curating?' (portfolio 1.2 & 1.3) be reaching a point of redundancy or obsolescence through its ubiquity. Following a traditional sociological trajectory of the formation knowledge from Biography, to Learning to Institution and its ultimate cyclical unbuilding (Karl Mannheim 1936, albeit strongly refuted in Adorno 1967) we can start at the individual; that is the constitution of the character/actor of the curator.

This is a significant question for me, not only for my own practice and research but also in a pragmatic sense through teaching aspects of

curating contemporary art in various locations. Pedagogy is fundamentally related to assisting others form their own identities (professional and/or personal). Therefore, I have developed my own critique of the conditions of the curator as a cultural figure, and the development of a discourse around it. What follows is the edited draft of an ultimately unpublished essay that was commissioned for a reader on self-organisation. The paper was rejected after a number of re-writes and long conversations with the editors. I was told this was in part due to the 'choppy' style of the essay, although I did argue at the time that this was reflective of the argument I was putting forward about the fragmentary nature of the curator as an actor. Apparently this proved unconvincing.

While this now forms a chapter here, it also sits in relationship to a series of public lectures that were given in Taipei mentioned above. I term them scripts as when lecturing I tend to stake out some key-points in slides, but do not read from a paper. Therefore they are pathways to follow and frequently involve ad-libbing in response to trains of thought and to comments from the audience. I make this aside to illustrate that here, and in other writing, I aim to perform a kind of curatorial aesthetic within my writing and lecturing. This formed the basis for *Towards an Editorial Aesthetic* that is discussed in the final section. In some respects my proposition is both an extension of my approach in light of my practice and critical writing around publication, but also as a synthesis of exhibition-making, writing and form of spatial or non-linear narration. In attempting to reframe curatorial discourse I began to feel it might be more constructive and less constrictive to look beyond definitions of curating in museums to how we understand art, or rather aesthetics, in the current landscape where image, language, information and culture circulate more freely, and more untethered, than ever before.



## Chapter 2

### The Undisciplined Curator

At certain moments characters emerge which personify the times in which we live. Today it is the curator who, at his/her peak, best fits the contemporary world, its lifestyles, and aspirations. As a distinctly 21<sup>st</sup> century persona, the curator stands as both heroic and monstrous having broken free from the specialist museum departments and run amok in popular culture at large. I'd like to consider why and how contemporary curators have become representative of a broad range of cultural attitudes, and how they prove to be both threatening to the status quo and potentially liberating in their undisciplined nature.

To point out the rise of the curator is nothing new. In the 1990s independent curators such as Hans Ulrich Obrist were ushered in, shifting the spotlight from the artist and their works to the exhibition and its makers. There were precedents, of course. Harold Szeemann was quickly named as the godfather of the curatorial act, although he too had precedents. And, as with any change to the system, scepticism about curators and their agencies appeared almost as soon as they gained public visibility. Among the fears that emerged were: the professionalization of art; the validity of the curator to 'use' artists' work to their own ends; and the institutionalisation of institutional critique all contributed towards defining curatorial discourse. What exactly constitutes this curatorial act, different from simply displaying work continues to be a bone of contention.

This all remained relatively contained within the museum, until, in the past few years the desire to curate has spilt onto the streets. With this move fears have emerged within the art 'world' that art's self-assumed special and specialised status as high-culture being lost. In a peculiar volte-face the term 'curated' appeared first and most prominently outside the gallery in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century within the music industry. In

the early 2000s, artists' bands lost their vogue, while curated music festivals such as *All Tomorrow's Parties* or *Meltdown* saw certain respected musicians (frequently also celebrities) invited to select the line-ups. Only a few years earlier, curators had been enacting and reflecting on being DJs. Nicolas Bourriaud (2002 p35) claimed them as 'remixers' of culture: 'Throughout the Eighties, the democratization of computers and the appearance of sampling allowed for the emergence of a new cultural configuration, whose emblematic figures are the programmer and DJ' while also spinning records at art parties. Others, such as Matthew Higgs sound-tracked the exhibition opening parties as part of their broader interests which straddled art and music, while the art they showed frequently paying homage to punk and DIY cultures from the 1970s. Far from being isolated in specialised art media, the discourse spread into journalism. Details magazine wrote in 2011 that 'curating is the new power move' likening it to Djing. (Clark 2011) The affinity of the selection and presentation of others' creations is clear. Somehow, it has become cool to curate, to become a museum worker. Even Kanye West is doing it.

What the trend for curating suggests is not merely about the power to select and display, but also about inhabiting, or at least playing the role of curator. To this end one can dress up. Puma released a (man's) 'Curator' shoe more than a decade ago, J-Crew the (women's) 'Curator Pant' in 2014. COS has a curator suit, and their stores are frequently 'curated' rather than designed. So one can go out and buy the curator look, although it would be an odd transgender ensemble. And one can play at curating everyday with phone apps Y-Plan to 'curate your weekend'. Other cultural listings now offer 'curated' selections, implying that they are more exclusive, selective. As Miya Tokumitsu points out, "Curation" has come to validate what would otherwise be simple preferences as not merely unique, but profoundly so.' We might say it is a self-deception, that one's personal choices have some value and we in turn has some semblance of individuality in the face of the limited range of responses available. The 'prestige appropriation' (Tokumitsu 2015) curating brings



with it is as much about proving freedom of choice to one's self as it is to demonstrate one's agency to others. And so it might seem inevitable that curating has even become bound up in the language of politics. In what might be representational of 'peak curator', former environmentalist turned general political commentator George Monbiot (2015) even promoted the candidature of Jeremy Corbyn as the next leader of the Labour party by claiming him to be 'the curator of the future'. There is something menacing in the idea that the future will be curated, casting it in the mould of dystopic speculative realism that moves curating and its apparent popularity outside the field of culture entirely into a significant part of the contemporary mind-set, and into a field of power.

From inside the art world is easy to mock this apparent popularisation with its implications of dumbing down. But in a climate where inter-disciplinarity is prized we might start to look at the curator as a costume that one pulls on under certain conditions to enact the undisciplined. This makes it reflective of current attitudes to knowledge, value and moreover freedom, that is the new ideologies of contingency of language and desire. As David Balzar recently considered 'curationism' is not only to examine the power embedded in the activity of 'selecting and displaying. It is also to discover important, perhaps unsettling things about how we currently understand value, and ourselves.' (Balzar p2015) It is here that the crisis and fears for artists offer the greatest insight.

In 'Art Without Artists' Anton Vidokle (2010) sums up the pervasive mood. Locked outside the museum trying to gain access, Vidokle casts the artist as a cultural labourer evoking the language of unionisation. By implication the curator is an industrialists' overseer. 'For owners of the culture factory—whether state or privately owned—it would be rather convenient if artists, who are a historically disobedient group, could be replaced with a disciplined contingent trained to obey authority.' Such sentiment fits the polemic of immaterial labour and precarious working conditions that has become the standard in discussions around the

curator's rise to dominance. But to cast artists as labourers is a peculiar thing running counter to the expectations of creativity arising from 'free' individuals. What Vidokle appears to call for is the advantages of employment without surrendering to a collective labour force, *no quid pro quo*. There is a basic syntax problem in expecting subjective individuals to assemble for a shared cause (Diedrichsen 2014). So it comes across as a rather reactionary position to suggest that in a scenario when the curator is visible 'the economic gain would be enormous, entailing the replacement of a group that holds the rights to their own production with one comprised of salaried employees.' (Vidokle 2010) This Marxist inflection paints institutions as tantamount to big business and Vidokle's concerns also fall within an economic discourse with the curator as competition of the market share of funds and attention. Much of the negative discourse around the curator focuses on such labour relations, and if we adopt the curatorial persona then we are inevitably professionalising our choices. But this is not representative of the real working conditions and responsibilities it brings, more our imaginary ideals of a free individual. Miya Tokumitsu (2015) notes, more accurately that 'Professional curating is a collaborative endeavour, one in which compromise and working within constraints are as critical as personal vision. But curation in common parlance strongly emphasizes the latter.'

So the question we should start with is related not to the economics of art and its labour relations, but to broader shifts in cultural values. There are other routes to track the shift of attention from artist to curator that acknowledge the artists subjectivity as an extreme specialism and how a picaresque lack of specialism that the curator embodies has come to be more appealing.

Sitting right on the cusp of the contemporary period Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989) considers his nascent future, our present. He charts how romantic poet and artist represented a counterpoint to industrialisation, and how they laid the foundations for a

new character to emerge more suited to the immaterial, information society. Integral to Rorty's argument is how a desire for freedom replacing the Hegelian search for truth or Nietzschean will to power as an underlying driving force of human nature or 'To show how things look if we drop the demand for a theory which unifies the public and private, and are content to treat the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable' Rorty explains. 'His ironist is the 'sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires'. Such a person is a 'historicist' *and* a 'nominalist', in some ways a schizoid persona able to manage an internal contradiction. It seems there is no-one better suited to occupy this space than the curator, negotiating between the public institution and the private artist. (Rorty 1989 p xv). Whether the curator is responsible for these conditions or is merely their symptom, their face, is a moot point. The figure of the curator has come to occupy this nexus of languages – visual, economic, aesthetic, historical - and is able to employ them as need arises without internal contradiction. In this sense the curator is the contingent ironist par excellence, a jack-of-all-trades, free to shift attention from one area to another under the contingency of their needs and, it seems, their desires.

If curators are archetypal contingent ironists, they match up to a broader relativism in culture where writing history has been replaced by writing fiction. It is through the novel that we are able to 'connect the present with the past, on the one hand, with utopian futures, on the other.' (Rorty p xvi) And it is in these constant re-imaginings of the future, utopian or Gothic, as an 'endless process – an endless, proliferating realization of freedom, rather than a convergence towards and already existing truth.' (Rorty 1989 p xvi) Such are the defining characteristics the Contemporary.

The Romantics' literature paved the way for something quite other, something terrifying yet to come, as Osborne has it, their project returns in a profane sublime at the heart of the Contemporary aesthetics, nature

replaced by the artifice of endless fragments of series in post-conceptual practices. (Osborne 2013) Far from the overwhelming sublime of her contemporaries that connected the inner world to a distant nature, Mary Shelley's now foundation work of proto-science fiction literature, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* provides a possible template for the curator. For what could be more contingent and horrific than a monster stitched together of parts, one who surpasses its master. The horrific personification of what and industrialised, capitalist society might produce is some kind of hybrid, adaptable, reconfigurable and not bound by traditional labour relations or any singular identity. Whereas the romantic becomes lost in an oceanic whole, the monster it creates is a series of fragments plucked from here and there. For today 'nobody revels in being overwhelmed... so we start looking for people who say, "This thing you're interested in? I will curate it for you."' (Rosenbaum 2011 quoted in Clark 2011) The curator is created by contemporary culture to fill the need to assemble ones fragments into a whole.

There have been various references to the curator as such a monster. Cuauhtemoc Medina (2010, p11) defined the curator as 'some kind of Frankenstein who exists in a confusion of identities and disciplinary constructs'. We might infer he means the monster rather than the doctor, albeit his point might ring equally true for both. The doctor is neither scientist nor artist, but an alchemist, just as his progeny is only a series of parts questioning his own existence, searching for a non-existent soul. If we follow Deleuze & Guattari (1989) to see that our becoming selves are guided by pre-individual desires, we might also say that they are equally guided by pre-individual fears, and insecurity over our identities *becoming* yet never *being* must surely be among them. In this respect the urgency of a need to insist on one's status and recognition in the social sphere in order to possess this or any identity sees curators as a symptom of organ rejection in the Frankenstein-like assemblage Medina likens them to.

Identity is a common issue in curatorial discourse. Paul O'Neill (2007) notes that 'curating is no longer about being somebody else; it is about being a curator, not as it is understood in practice, but in discourse.' O'Neill claims that in practice the need not only to make an exhibition, but for the 'hand' of the curator to be made present, to be visible as a framing device, for it to be in dialogue with an emergent language of exhibition-making.

As this suggests, there is a tendency today towards the disciplining of curatorial discourse as a bolstering of curatorial identity. However, this academic turn is distinct from the collaborative nature of the practice itself. Practice remains in the wild. It is evidenced in the emergence of and subsequent expansion in the field of curatorial education, a field frequently accused of 'creating' or 'producing' curators. The academy relies on disciplines, although to turn to this question would be to ignore a more significant one. For academies, colleges and universities don't create people. Students choose fields in which to study, and the demand for curatorial education has grown faster than its supply - another symptom of curating's popularisation. So we must ask what is driving these desires among those wishing to take on the identity of a curator, if as O'Neill might suggest, it being one is *passé* in the face of discourse's rise.

I'd suggest that being a curator of exhibitions has been replaced by playing the role, taking up the persona. A persona is a 'mask' (literally, in its etymology, and metaphorically in the roles we play in public), lending a theatrical performance to the construction of identity in the public sphere. Our personae are our networked selves - the legal, economic etc. We now recognise these as facets of the self, a coming to terms with the incommensurability of our public and private selves. If curators have superseded artists it is as the appropriate cultural persona to represent freedom to move between these personas through their acts in the arena of contemporary culture. More significantly than merely 'free to choose things', curators appear to be free to choose their own identity without

the need to be authentic. Today's iteration of curating is to select, display and thereby construct *identity* in ad hoc assemblages from fragments of others.

And here we reach the ironic crux of the issue. While people seek out a definition within the professional persona as 'curator', it is to evade definition of the self. My contention is that the very nature of curating runs counter to, or at least in extreme tension with disciplinarity. It may be that disciplinarity itself is fundamentally based in a redundant sense of self, one rooted in a 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century perception of the world. It is interesting to compare this to consideration of disciplinarity is cultural studies for some cues on how this might prove an effective response to contemporaneity. Curating is partially contained within cultural studies as both a field and a method of enquiry. The reverse is equally true. Therefore, multivalent relationships exist between cultural studies and curating. Both cross borders between academic study, cultural criticism and its broader affects in politics and historicity. And both activities emerge in response to shifts into plural cultures.

Mindfully we might envisage the curator alongside Stuart Hall's 'public intellectual'. As with Hall himself, the curator as public intellectual is highly visible in the media asked to speak on a range of subjects, or simply to be pictured as a social nexus. Such figures have a potential to modify, think through and articulate complex situations by binding together different voices, including the subjective artist's and the consensual institution's. This is their apparent independence, one not bound to any particular church. Modern, disciplinarian thinking would see a voice speaking outside of his or her specialism as irresponsible, moving from expertise into amateurism. In today's conception we might see this as somewhat clever, heroic even. To map one area of thought onto another, however well thought through or irresponsible it may be, is a distinctly curatorial characteristic at odds from their specialist art historian namesakes of the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Wantonly undisciplined and somewhat unregulated, it is the curator's task to bring one area of

meaning into another, not only for theoretical gain, but also to the advantage of the other core tasks of professional curating - fundraising from private, public and 'third sector' sources, as well as the publicity of institution, artist and, of course, themselves.

Arjan Appadurai exposes two main senses of disciplinarity with obvious resonance to the curator. The first is 'care, cultivation, habit' which is much the same as the definition of curating. The second is 'field, method, subject matter'. (1996 p30) Appadurai notes that in seeking to open up these areas to enquiry, it is in the liberal arts college (using the American expression) the need for critical thinking rather than fixed methods are best explored. And it is in the liberal arts college that 'plan a' is best enacted - 'liberal' specifically implying a freedom from conventions. He also notes that 'On first glance, discipline in the sense of care, cultivation, and habit' may appear to be best exemplified and institutionalised in the British ideal of the gentleman-scholar or amateur' (1996 p31) Balzar also observes that the origin of the curator falls within the untrained. 'The curator has always been a bit of an amateur. In ancient Rome, where *curatores* and procurates were charged with the care (*cura*) of public works or minors or the mentally disabled... The ground-breaking curators of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were dealers, artists, and museum directors.' (Balzar 2015) So the curator may administer discipline on one hand, but also care for and cultivate the undisciplined in another, again, interfacing between public and private individuals. Its monstrosity appears as amateurism, a 'jack of all trades' approach. But when Shakespeare first used that term, it held none of the negative connotations it holds now with the addition of 'master of none' - that is a modern interpretation, and so too should it not in the contemporary.

It is my view that curating needs to maintain something of the amateur about it, its ability to shift between languages and activities with a contingent and ironic nature. Just as the persona of the artist is bound up with a desire for savage freedom in the modern sensibility, the curator is bound up with an undisciplined freedom in the contemporary one where

our selves and our professional personas are intricately stitched together. The limits of freedom might be rather proscribed but it is curators who have found themselves best placed to negotiate between the public and private realm. The artist remains confined in the private space, the museum in the public one.

Here languages are performed as demonstrative events where 'selecting and displaying' are bound up in what Zygmunt Bauman describes as a 'liquid modernity' where old systems of values and structures that 'used to frame narratives' are 'like zombies... simultaneously dead and alive.' (2000 p8) For Bauman the exhibition of consumption is an act in public with more valences in the construction of self than the actual acquisition of material things. We see a similar thread of reason in Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's semio-capitalism, where 'attitudes, attributes and ideas are directly productive without materializing them.' The resulting precarious workforce produce 'semio-artifacts', employed and paid on a contingent basis only at the 'precise time they are required'. (Genosko & Thoburn 2011 p5) Under these conditions, the curator is uniquely able to respond creatively, effectively and affectively, whereas the artist, as we have already seen with Vidokle's polemic, is put at risk.

In one final consideration of the move to language and contingency within curatorial practice we might turn to Diedrich Diederichsen's lecture on the syntax errors of group exhibitions (Diederichsen 2014). Here he notes that there is an inherent problem in the very nature of curatorial practice, for group exhibitions are intended at once to support the uniqueness, subjectivity and individuality of artists (and moreover their works), and yet to bring them into some sense of similitude under a theme, historical or geographic period. Diederichsen is more precise than most in his concerns about the figure of the curator, identifying specifically the 'charismatic curator' as a quasi-shamanic persona. His more optimistic alternative sees the curator as one of a series of practicing personas – artist, but also scientist, researcher, and historian – an agent building a contingent living community, not a consensus.



In order to do this, the curator is able to span disciplines without necessarily performing, conforming to, or even consuming them. To discipline curatorial activity, therefore, would be to compartmentalise it and remove its essential agency in constructing the heterotopic narratives that allows artists, and others to act both in solidarity and difference. This facility to publicly perform selection ad hoc is naturally appealing for anyone to demonstrate that they possess agency and independence of action in a world in short supply of freedom. That everyone feels required to demonstrate this to themselves and others seems essential if terrifying.



## Chapter 3

### Curare Currere

My work has been informed by disciplinary definitions, and seeks to evade them. Language frequently offers ambiguities that open up interstices of meaning that become playgrounds for my work, both through etymology (fact) and puns, coincidences of the *sound* of a word, and deliberate misunderstanding. Play itself is rather ambiguous as a word, and I follow through the logic of many play theorists in skipping between language and games. Barthes wrote that language, 'this social product is autonomous, like a game with its own rules, for it can be handled only after a period of learning.' (Barthes 1964 p14) and a 'game is itself a language, depending upon the same symbolic structure that is to be found language and narrative. A game is a sentence.' (Barthes 1975 p81) We can also reverse this and say that language is a game, and that games offer routes to learning.

Playing defines both games and acting, so language and learning begins to fall within the same ambit. It becomes a narrative of the self in relationship to the social world – that is in the public sphere.

Importantly, as I have explored in lectures on curating (see appendices iv-vi) and intimated in the former chapter, the 'selection and display' of culture is inadequate to describe the full impact of the curatorial and its significance for a contemporary aesthetic. It requires what is selected and displayed to be set into a narrative. Traditionally this is grand narrative of an accepted history, but with the shift away from absolute values (truths) to more subjective ones, how one portrays a narrative in the gallery has been redefined. Constructing one's identity in a relativistic manner through one's acts in public lies at the heart of contemporary notions of how one values one's self. That this is most commonly done through consumerism in the modern world, and more recently through the display of one's consumption on social media, is only one possibility, albeit an almost inescapable, ubiquitous means.

Other options do exist. Making a public for a narrative, therefore, is inherently curatorial, whether one is a curator or not. Learning to play with the languages of culture (be their the spatial, political, cultural or words themselves) is part of such a methodology.

So false corollaries, while dubious as ‘argument’, can provide some interesting trains of thought. One such accident of language is the false corollary of *currere* and *curare* that, while it in actuality bears no etymological shared root, creates an interplay in my own work, and has more than a passing relationship to culture at large. Public museums and galleries are, after all, seen as socially educative (see appendix i). Even with this context, however, it only really makes sense in my own narrative where pedagogy and curating have run hand in hand. But it does bring some useful perspectives to this discourse.

*Currere*, as William Pinar (2004) defines, presents an alternative perspective on a curriculum, that is a ‘running, course or career’ all of which also contain significant overlaps between teaching, learning and lived experience. What Pinar claims is that *currere* offers a self-reflective form of teaching in which the teacher’s own experiences are integrated in the act of constructing a learning path or ‘complicated conversation with oneself (as a ‘private’ intellectual), an ongoing project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action—as a private-and-public intellectual – with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere.’

In his original 1975 text Pinar also notes that this is to act as (if not be) an artist by the simple formula: ‘I experience, and I attempt to express in publicly communicable language what it is I experience.’ (Pinar 1975, p6) For me this is very much akin to the curatorial act. Metaphorically it lies as a narrative that in turn charts out a space of play through experiential encounters. It is distinct from *curare* that has its origins (as is repeatedly reminded in all definitions of curating) as ‘to take care of’. There is little doubt that the current conception of curating has moved

away from this museological nature of caring for objects to something that through research or through enactment might now be much closer to that of *currere*. Or as Balzar puts it: 'Curators no longer tended ground, but secured, organized and landscaped it.' (Balzar 2014 p40) The process of mapping a conceptual landscape in which the narrative, truthful or otherwise, can unfold certainly falls within Pinar's pedagogic model.

As Ranciere states in the *Ignorant Schoolmaster*: 'Thought is not told *in truth*; it is expressed *in veracity*. It is divided, it is told, it is translated for someone else, who will make of it another tale, another translation, on one condition: the will to communicate, the will to figure out what the other is thinking, and this under no guarantee beyond his narration.' (Ranciere 1991 p62) Veracity is defined by the quality of being true, honest and accurate. Moreover, when expressed in *speech or statement*, veracity militates against the concrete form of truth. What I will go on to tell, sometimes through narrative, anecdotes, or conversations, frequently taught me more, that is 'revealed the truths', than the written word. For play is built on the means in which a story might tell us more about ourselves and the world around us than any relaying of evidence, or as Schiller put it: 'Deeper meaning lies in the fairy tale of my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.' (Schiller 1799, Act III, p4) For play, of which a fairy-tale is a linguistic form, allows the narrative to unfold between clearly defined paths. 'Play lies outside the antithesis of wisdom and folly, and equally outside those of truth and falsehood, good and evil.' (Huizinga p6)

This contributes to illustrate how my practice plays with the conventions and codes that divide the disciplines (particular the becoming discipline of Curating), and, through its deliberate self-reflexivity, dissolves set language through conceited misunderstandings. As John Baldessari puts it: 'Well, I don't know if you talk about progress nowadays, but changes in art history come about from misinformation.' (Baldessari 1992)

Such misinformation (as distinct from 'post-truth') that one might have to play with are, in my claims for this dissertation, the very grist of finding veracity in one's work. It is how things circulate between public and private as well as the distinctions between them that give us sense and make things sensible and allow knowledge its own form of emancipation through the construction of a narrative - authentic or fictive. The curator here plays a particular role. 'In line with concurrent developments in media technologies such as social networking and 24-hour rolling news, the personal perspective or 'eye-witness' story has been accorded new status, whilst the traditionally anonymous and respected author - the curator - has been increasingly challenged.'

(Macleod, Hourston Hanks & Hale 2012 pxxii)

It is my contention, however, that this is at the very heart of why the curator has, far from being challenged, been moved from anonymity into the spotlight. In order to grasp the narrative there is, increasingly, a need for just such personas to consolidate the story of an exhibition when selection and display, or even the display of selection (Bauman 2000) alone are an everyday consumer act. While authority, alongside progress, might be seen as redundant (say for the artist), a character actor who can change roles according to the narrative (the curator) finds particular relevance. The character that the curator appears to fit is not one of the academic but Richard Rorty's (1989 p xvi) contingent 'ironist', who accepts the incommensurability of private and public life and that fiction 'lets us redescribe ourselves. That is why the novel, the movie and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise.' We might now count the exhibition among those media, and the curator as an actor within it. The question it leaves me with is, how can it be by an abject character, a fool rather than a hero?

As Bakhtin says, the fool 'represented a certain form of life, which was real and ideal at the same time. They stood on the borderline between life and art' (1968 p8). Performing curating in this manner is therefore to act as 'a rogue who dons the mask of a fool in order to motivate

distortions and sufferings of languages and labels, thus unmasking them by not understanding them' (ibid, pp404-405) This is the role my works seeks to place me in. It follows logic, rules and conventions somewhat blindly, ultimately to the point that they collapse. This is foolish, but not without agency. More importantly it runs against the grain of received notions of success in the contemporary, and reintroduces a lost aspect of progressive art (and ideologies), that is risk, an inherent aspect of play.

Mexican Curator Cuauhtemoc Medina (b. 1965) made this clear during the *Manifesta Rendezvous* (2012), an event I convened at the Royal College of Art. 'If you don't risk being ashamed by what you do, then you are not really curating' he told my students, to some uncomfortable shuffling around the room. Not concerned about a bad review. Not worried if no one comes. Not even embarrassed, but *ashamed*. It's a difficult dictum to live up to in a professionalised, career-orientated, that is risk averse curatorial (and contemporary) field. If 'prestige appropriation' (Tokumitsu 2015) fall within the consensual, as the word appropriation suggest, then curatorial acts must, in fact, reach out elsewhere to find a more precarious value than the mere confirmation culture of selecting and displaying. One needs to be on stage, yet always running the risk of falling off it and into the orchestra pit.





## **Section Two**

### **Curatorial Acts**



## Chapter 4

### Publishing and Making Public

The invitation from Emily Pethick to collaborate on her final project as Curator-in-Residence at Cubitt Gallery (London 2004) grew out of a mutual interest in publishing at the fringes of the art world. The result was *Publish and de Damned*, a project that I continued to lead for 10 years with the involvement of various others at different times. The original manifestations of *Publish and be Damned* included a 'Public Library' of independent artist-led publications. Alongside we staged a book fair that was closer to a swap meet, lasting only six hours rather than the industry standard 3-days. It proved surprisingly popular, and self-sustaining, creating its own community. In essence it continued through the interest of the artists themselves, Emily, myself and others putting time in to organise it in only the most skeletal way. In this sense it was counter-curating. We set out the stalls (literally and metaphorically) for any publication that clearly was not being made, or even had the potential to be, a profitable business. Few would even cover their own production costs at the best of times.

At that time publishing fairs were few and far between, and usually required coughing up fees for the stalls, a fact that priced out these counter-economic presses. Our approach was to make it free to participate and free to enter. The much shorter time commitment also meant people were more willing to invest their time in attending to hawk their books and buy those from others. The Public Library of more than 500 titles interested artist-run spaces that were, geographically, on the periphery. And so it circulated relatively freely for the cost of the postage of a number of boxes, accruing more material as it went. Between venues the 'archive' lived under my bed.

Rather than artists' books in the parallel traditions of Ed Ruscha and Dieter Roth, the publications we were attracted to were artist-led

fanzines, magazines, journals and other periodicals. Alongside this, we had both been engaged with works that activated histories and formations of alternative societies and counter-cultures; be they hippy, collectivist, anarchist or others aligned with radical social change in how we live together - a theme that developed in parallel in our subsequent practices, although with quite different articulations.

My personal interest in conceiving the project was based in some of the difficulties I encountered with seeking to establish an imprint of my own under the name 'millimetre'. Millimetre was specifically aimed at small publications such as pamphlets, chapbooks and comic books. While I was able to provide design skills through desktop publishing, and to fund the printing basically from my own pocket – a spin-off from my institutional position at the South London Gallery and a desire to put some of that back into artistic production in the simplest manner – the time commitment and financial black hole of distributing the material led to much of the print run propping up my bed after the initial launch. Such is the fate of so many publications produced independently.

I will not take time here to narrate an official history and outline of *Publish and be Damned* – this can be read in my essays included in the portfolio, some written during its life, and some after its death. *Publish and be Damned* became a shambolic authority on artist publications at a point when publishing was at a nadir, a seemingly redundant form of media which has since found itself reachin a new zenith. Over the course of its life, however, *Publish and be Damned* allowed me to explore an alternative practice that included performative and critical practices in parallel. Whereas *Nordic Models* (portfolio 2.4) used an event in Stockholm to write a text about the social democratic potential of independent presses more akin to academic discourse, what I would like to now go on to relate is a narrative of smaller, almost undocumented acts that occurred as *Publish and be Damned*, a persona I could draw on when the opportunity arose, that, in turn, led to other projects where the

borders of curating and artistic practice began to break down, indeed become amateur and foolish.

### **In Character, The Drunken Orator**

My turn as a drunken orator appeared within some of my projects around publishing where I have blurred lectures into more performative actions. These emerged in two parallel areas. Along with other curators and artists, I was invited to design a cocktail for Mexican artist Mario Garcia Torres's social event cum artwork *The Night Before the Morning After* (2010-ongoing). The International Klein Blue cocktail inspired Garcia Torre's project; a drink designed to match the Yves Klein's trademarked pigment and served at his exhibition openings in the early 1960s prior to his untimely death. Each iteration of Garcia Torre's work asked artists and curators to come up with their own, generally unpalatable concoctions. My contribution as *Publish and be Damned* was a 'Publish and be Slammed' - a tequila shot (the cheapest in the bar) with a cube of vodka lime jelly. Within the jelly were slithers of adverts from Frieze magazine's anniversary issue.

The choices of these elements were a little baroque in the telling, but are useful to explain. Firstly, tequila shots had become a regular feature of *Publish and be Damned* via Pablo Leon de la Barra, the first commissioned designer of the Publish and be Damned Public Library, and frequent participant in the fair. It was his invitation that involved me in Garcia Torres's work, and the cocktail was in part in homage to his contribution, both social and artistic. At that time, molecular cookery was very much in vogue at the higher end of culture, so the cod allusions in the solidified vodka jelly which was equally popular at the lower ends of culture in various Friday night slammers was deliberately tongue-in-cheek. The final ingredient can be contextualised by the project happening concurrently with the anniversary of the Frieze Art Fair, to which I had previously been invited as a VIP in its earlier years, and increasingly rolled down and eventually off the guest list along with many other

curators and artists. In short it was cocking a snoot in some physical manner to the situation, particularly its odd marriage of high-class exclusivity and popularisation of contemporary art through a marketplace rather than a museum. This is, of course, a little petty, but if the drunken orator is anything he is not afraid to offend with some veracity, even at his, that is my own expense. The physical critique lies in how to drink the cocktail. As one crushes the vodka jelly in ones mouth, inevitably bits of the magazine will stick between one's teeth, and, ultimately, they will be shit out the next day, or, if you have too many, vomited out even sooner. And so, drunken and disorderly, this abject orator makes a fool of himself criticising the powers that be with a certain amount of self satisfaction and oneiric amusement, but with little power. Here in such a carnival or fairground seeking more obliteration than revolution.

Without doubt there was a deliberate madness to this act or masquerade, but there were less (slightly less) abject allusions that came into play. Derived from the almost mythical work *Art and Culture: Chew and Still* (1966-69) by John Latham, I developed a series of texts and performances where the acts of speaking, writing, reading, and digesting or regurgitating were conflated. (appendix ii & portfolio 2.6).

Kurt Schwitters is widely alleged to have claimed that 'anything the artist spits is art'<sup>1</sup> (see Lake 2014 p21), an aphorism that gives a visceral word-image to the Dadaist perspective that is also present in Duchamp's equally scatological *Fountain* (1917). But today it resurfaces as a question; is anything that the curator spits curatorial? Or does such an act go against the grain of curating in such a way as to shift it into the parallel universe of art?

The oral was repeated in the imagery to advertise *Publish and be Damned's* project at the Plymouth Art Centre. My open mouth held the

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<sup>1</sup> Widely quoted as a aphorism and dated between 1927 and 1933, frequently with the addition of 'allegedly

title *PABD MOUTH* on its tongue like an acid tab about to be swallowed. Plymouth is my hometown, and one I have little real affection for. It is a strange hybrid of picturesque idyllic countryside and coast where people chose to retire, and on the other a drug infused, lost youth culture living around the dying embers of its naval history and closed dockyards. My memories of it are suffused with meaningless violence, and surround by people fearing difference. But my family still live there in apparent tranquillity, and my mother is a painter of traditional landscapes, the kind of art that is anathema to those within the contemporary art world. My parents additionally produce honey as a cottage industry and I chose to ironically name them as sponsors as they were generously hosting a number of guests due to budget cuts from the organisers. There are similar economies at play in the independent art publishing and cottage industries, in short no one gets paid for their time. They are labours induced by a hobbyist mentality, one I have always sought to heroise and promote. The amateurism of culture is a kind of democratisation and deprofessionalisation as an implication of Joseph Beuys' (1972) claim that 'everyone is an artist.'

Alongside these latent twists, I have been chewing and spitting out books in a number of scenarios – in lectures and seminars, as performances and later in exhibitions. (see Portfolio 2.6) These acts began from an exhibition proposal about the relationship between the spoken and the written word. Originally presented as a paper at a college research seminar, it still sits unrealised among in a folder titled 'Show Ideas' on my computer as the working document 'Spit It Out: Artists' Books as a Social Event'. The show would have brought together a number of works where publishing and oral acts in the public coalesced. Among the artists was John Latham.

Latham was, without doubt, rather proficient at turning the conceptual into a spectacle. His *Skoob Tower* (1966) were performances of the most aggressive kind using flamethrowers to incinerate the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, a particularly uncomfortable act against 'total knowledge' as it

echoed the Nazi's book burnings. But it was the more low-key, intimate *Chew and Still: Art and Culture* (1968) that caught my attention for its potential to turn mastication into a critical act. In a seminar at Central St Martins, he and his students chewed up a copy of Clement Greenberg's book and spat it into a container where it fermented. As the book came from the college library, Latham was (or so the mythology goes) sacked for destroying art school property.

Re-visiting the work as a curatorial act seemed more appropriate and contingent than exhibiting the object, which is now, rather sterilely held in the Museum of Modern Art collection in New York. So subsequently, I have re-performed the act of chewing books and spitting them out in a number of contexts as part of a building performative curatorial practice. The first public attempt was at a discussion on artist books at the Taipei Contemporary Art Center in summer 2014, where I began to eat the publication during my presentation, and offer pages to the reluctant audience. As related in the *Prova* article, the resulting book mash was placed in a jar to ferment. After being presented as a proposal for a subsequent project at an open studio event, the jar of mash was then buried, making it more of a book Kimchi than a beer.

Also in 2014, the act repeated, and evolved as part of the first Index Art Book Fair in Guadalajara. Its change was partly inspired by an accident and become a method of translation rather than appropriation. I had commissioned the Taiwanese/New Zealand publication *White Fungus* to produce an issue of their bilingual *Subconscious Restaurant*. However, it didn't arrive in time due to customs problems, so their US Editor and I had to come up with a suitable launch event for a magazine that no one could actually read or buy. Poetry was read from the magazine in the original Mandarin, an English translation, and a second level translation in Spanish, while a Mariachi band played ad hoc, and the editor and I ate the magazine and spat it out on stage alongside them. There was less rhyme or reason than Dadaist spectacle, but it proved effective in



changing the tone of an otherwise rather academic series of events during what should have been more of a fairground than a point of sale.

A third iteration of the act took place in March 2015 for an exhibition where I had been asked to exhibit as an artist, the first time I had been invited to take this role for some 20 years. My work, a 'Frankenstein Museum', consisted of two elements, that each applied a curatorial logic under more urgent conditions than the preservation of objects in the collection, that being the preservation of life post environmental collapse. I presented a speculative fiction in the form of a display, one where the curator had remained at work with the collection of the Hong Gah museum and took items from its catalogue and library as a means to generate power.

*Chew and Still* was 'industrialised'. Copies of more than 100 books from the museum's library were taken, chewed up and spat out into fermenting jars to make a rough beer. From there a liquor was distilled, the installation containing the fermenting book brew and an ad hoc still equipment made from items lying around in storage cupboards and the kitchen. This sat alongside roughly made copies of three bronze figurines of adolescent nude women taken from the collection. These were submerged in salt water up to their neck and turned into a simple galvanic battery. By changing the purpose of display, the collection was used to produce heat from the fermentation and spirit as a fuel, and light from the electricity.

There is an alchemic nature to this project, harking back to the cusp of the enlightenment in a number of ways. The primitive method for making alcohol - or salivacohol as it is sometimes known - was mainly produced within a ritual setting, and is such basic natural chemistry it is practiced by tribal cultures at rituals alongside the ingestion of hallucinogens. The Galvanic energy was equally mysterious when used to animate the dead frogs legs by the eponymous 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian scientist's experiments at the early stages of understanding bioelectrical

activity. Of course, this folds back into the history of science fiction through Mary Shelley's proto-science fiction, proto-gothic novel *Frankenstein, Or A Modern Prometheus*, having been in part inspired by a report on Galvani's work and speculating on its ethical repercussions.

The work was elaborated in a short text that was due for publication in the catalogue, a catalogue that never reached print (I believe due to budget problems on behalf of the curator, as well as some slackardery). (see appendix ii) The text, however, also fell foul of a basic misunderstanding on the word count that in Chinese means 'characters', so 700 words as requested was far in excess of the expected length. The explanatory passages of text were included in the exhibition as part of the work itself, written on the glass framing a found educational poster of a frog's nervous system with the narrative parts of the text overlaying the nervous system itself. In this way the didactic elements and the display, and the 'artwork' became part of the same diagrammatic narrative.

The work was developed concurrently with 'The Undisciplined Curator' (see Chapter 2) and the overlaps should be apparent, both in the motifs of Frankenstein and in harking back to the advent of rational science and Science Fiction as a point of time where the birth of the curator could be seen as bifurcating off from a romantic sensibility of the artist. This moment at the heart of critics around contemporaneity that I will expand on in the conclusion. However, one aspect of contemporaneity, that of the disjunctive time where past and future are synchronous with the present, does bear some examination now, partly as it is a sentiment, or on-going allegorical sub-text within my work in various exhibition formats.

The curated group exhibition in which this project was presented, set a stage based on popular fiction and cinema where climate change has rendered the globe survivable only under extreme conditions. The sub-genre of Science Fiction dubbed 'Cli-Fi' incorporates mainly Western dystopian novels and films ranging from the apocalyptic Hollywood disaster movies such as *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) and more subtle

reflections in Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014). Man's mastery of nature present in the earliest science fiction is turned over in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century stories to show its opposite: nature overwhelming civilisation without remorse.

Book publicist Dan Bloom coined the term 'Cli-Fi' in 2007, although retrospectively we can apply it across the science fiction genre as one of the classic tropes. While in capitalist countries science fiction tended to respond to the perils of industrialisation and technological mastery over nature, the Soviet science fiction such as Lem frequently employed the failures of technology and the transformation of nature as a sentient super-organism within its narratives. Therefore to speak of 'A Climate Fictionalism' as if it were a timeframe or movement – an 'ism' – places it among more modern myth than contemporary ones, exhibiting a split between ideological poles rather than an irony.

Mark Fisher's explores this very cultural malaise in his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative*. (2009) He begins with analysis of the opening sections of the film *Children of Men* (2006), a cinema released Hollywood movie based on PD James' novel of the same name that is very much within the genre. It is significant, I would claim, that he focuses not on the novel – which we can presume to be more subtly complex than the movie – but on its cinematic translation. As noted previously, the contingent irony of contemporary culture (Rorty 1989) has the novel, that is the narrative form, firmly embedded in its relativistic value system. Peter Osborne (2015) also finds a return to the Romantic embedded in the seriality of post-conceptual art in his appraisal of the aesthetics of contemporary art. Bruno Latour's precursors to Actor Network Theory also refute the modern, returning to the bifurcation of knowledge and re-inscribing affect and nature into the scientific model of analysis (1991). I will return to these points in more detail, but they provide wings to the scenography of other, more traditional exhibition projects in the next chapter.



## Chapter 5

### Institutional Settings

Art institutions might have been founded as forms of social improvement, but there is a dystopian air to galleries and museums that mirrors the shift in attitudes towards any kind of disciplinary structures. Within my curatorial practice, first explored at the South London Gallery, I considered the possibility for a cultural institution to act publicly rather than as a civic body through a series of projects, thereby imagining how the institution might have been different. These projects drew on the history of the institution itself – not just its exhibitions but also its social agency, and specific historical instances that brought its validity into question. They became cruxes around which to imagine the institution in an alternate or speculative reality, more a present than a future, but still imbued with the status of ‘what-if’ or ‘as-if’ scenarios.

Like many people today, I am suspicious of institutions. It is not that they are inherently flawed, but their current constitution within a neo-liberal economy is subject to the same pressures as other businesses. And yet, in general, they remain rather embedded within a conservative idea of what this might mean. The civic administration is out of step with the currents of managerial or business thinking, and yet the art institution purports to be, and has the ultimate self-belief that it is, at the forefront of culture. Within this there is a persistent delusion of art as avant-garde, while its institutions are very much at the rear guard of how they imagine themselves.

The trajectory of exhibitions was not planned in advance but emerged through a series of exhibitions and projects. In turn, this led on to papers on the origins of European institutions within philanthropic acts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century whose ideologies remain implicit within their approaches today (see appendix i), and how speculative narratives might redefine them into the future. The precursor to these was a project realised as an

intern, and was more a managerial opportunity. As a young curator, eager to establish a name for myself, I acted quite opportunistically to bring Nils Norman's *Geocruiser* to the public square outside Peckham Library. The project had been commissioned by the now defunct Institute of Visual Culture in Cambridge, and was staged in partnership with the publisher Book Works. The *Geocruiser* consisted of a converted coach housing a countercultural library that ran from 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian thinking and social reform through arts to contemporary anarchist literature. It also contained an organic greenhouse, and a solar powered study centre. The engine of the *Geocruiser* ran on biodiesel, a seemingly esoteric substance at the time, although only a year later many of the public buses in London began to use it as part of the movement of ecological, or 'green' thinking into the mainstream.

What I can claim I added to the project was its context. The location was apt. If not a unique site, the Peckham Library was built as part of gentrification process, but stood then as a beacon a sign of the incomplete project of social improvements in the area begun more than a century previously. Indeed the South London Gallery was one of its main institutions in this first wave, and its second was the Peckham Experiment (1929-1950). Nevertheless, the North Peckham Estate that borders the square had been a no-go zone for the police in the late 1980s as it had in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and still bore some remnants of the squat culture part of the occupation of that area. Close by was (and still is) the anarchist library Infoshop.

As a educational project, my curatorial part was also played out by organising a demonstration of how to make biodiesel by recycling used Chip-shop frying oil instructed by one of largest (although still backyard) producers. The process of making biodiesel is somewhat alchemic turning the straw coloured chip-fat into a form of 'black gold'. And the equipment was not particularly smart – just some frying oil, an old plastic bottle, some glycerine from the local pharmacy, and the rule of thumb. The history of the diesel engine actually begins in this way,

having been developed to run on oils derived from plants rather than the by-products of the petroleum industry. Diesel was meant to be a substitute, a renewable one at that, for the extraction of oil from the ground. However, the power of the petroleum industry lobbied to make it economically unviable.

This is an aside, but a significant one as it points towards how alternative modes of thought lie latent in our culture having been misappropriated and detached from the ideologies that were their founding and inspiration. They just need a narrative to become manifest. It is significant in this discourse for if institutions are expected to represent the ideologies in which they are built, then we should also accept that the hegemony is not the only ideology out there, it is just the one that has an ability, a strongly exercised ability, to absorb or exclude products, or 'things' from its systems of value unless institutions can be formed to create new contexts. While it would be more proper to proceed through this section in date order, I am not intending to illustrate an evolution or development of ideas through the projects I am bringing together. Instead it would be better to illustrate this latent and obscured ideology within the institutions and organisations around us. For there are correlations between the civic square outside Peckham Library, and the other public places thereabouts, and the history of the playground in particular emerged in later projects as an anarchist - or at least self-organised endeavor. (Norman 2003)

As Norman illustrates in his work, and in his publications, the adventure play park was, initially, a response to the utter lack of provision of public services for children outside of the formalities of schooling following the second World War. As Keith Cranwell describes: 'The first adventure playgrounds in Britain were established in the late 1940s and early 1950s and were known as "junk playgrounds". Most of the were set up by unpaid volunteers and parents driven by a strong belief in creating stimulating places for children to play.' (2003 p8) Cranwell also notes that 'This free play is the opposite of its municipal cousin, fixed play.

Fixed play is the term used to describe the inflexible ironmongery of unattended modular metal climbing frames and swings. They are usually designed not by the users, but by an architect, an artist or (worst of all) an urban planner: to put it simply, by a grown-up.' (Cranwell 2003 p7)

There are understandable reasons for this need for play provision outside of institutions. Under serious economic pressures that the war effort required and the urgent need to rebuild housing and other basic living requirements after extensive blitzing of cities across Europe, leisure time remained on hold as a priority for government spending and for society at large. The bombed-out wastelands of London, like those of Berlin, created free space in which an experiment could be initiated by groups informed by then new and alternative perspectives on play as an essential aspect of building a just society. (Huizinga 1949) In *Homo Ludens*, the foundational text of what became known as the play movement, Huizinga puts play at the very heart of human life, its fundamental education. Pat Kane (2012) furthers this by noting that play is not only a human activity but can be observed in animals 'role-playing' in their adolescence within a safe, but uncontrolled space.

Therefore the advent of the adventure playground is almost anarchy in reverse, anarchists doing the job that institutions are meant to do. Rather than the inept attempts of Conrad's *Secret Agent* (1907) or its real world inspiration Martial Bourdin who, in 1894, fatally blew himself up while targeting the Royal Observatory in Greenwich, the post-war anarchists set to rebuilding public life from the bomb damage. Once a nation state had managed to abdicate law and order in favour of war, and bomb and be bombed more savagely than any anarchist cell could manage, then it left anarchic groups within a deeply troubled sense of resistance that found its outlet in dynamic play rather than in dynamite.

My interest in this was two-fold. The first was to imagine what might happen to the conditions of viewing art if the play aspect was shifted to the viewer rather than being exhibited in the artist's practice. The notion



of art as an outcome of free play is common. The viewer, however, is subjectified by the institution and expected to 'move through a programmed experience that casts the visitor in the role of an ideal citizen' and learn how to behave in the present from the 'civilised past' (Duncan & Wallach 1980 p451) However, in play theory it is actually in playing out the game, rather than instructional learning as self-improvement during ones leisure time (the civilised classical ideal cribbed from Ancient Greece), that offers the most potential for civility. As Sutton-Smith's research suggests it was, in fact, in play that the Greek polis created its sense of public as 'games borrowed much of their meanings – whether those meanings involved notions of complexity, religion, or competitiveness – from their cultural context.' Play, in mirroring and rehearsing the codes of public life, cultivated those same responsibilities in citizens. The thesis found historical support in Huizinga who, 'suggested that the cultural complexity of game rules anticipated the legal and civic complexity of the civilizations where they developed.' (both Sutton-Smith 2008 p102).

This consideration surfaced most clearly in the exhibition *Games & Theory* that reconceived the gallery as a play park with Norman as its architect. Works by artists that participated in transgressions of boundaries, that is play, in the public space were coupled with installations that demanded the viewer move differently to experience them. Among them another slight at *Frieze*, with Dan Shippides' climbing wall made of copies of the magazine screwed to the wall. Other works were placed on a climbing structure so visitors had to scale the walls to see them.

My second interest that led to the exhibitions conception was to see if one could reconcile two actually divergent but interlocked notions that ad appeared in culture in the post-war schism. While *Homo Ludens* is addressed to play and learning as a tactical method (as per de Certeau 1984), a gamer seeks to effect strategy in a competitive war like scenario. A gamer invokes power relationships, attempting to dominate and

subjugate. This bifurcation of playing and games is an artificial one, although it is compounded by both 'sides' – play is 'free and creative', games 'applied and competitive'. Yet, both sides of this discourse also seem to adopt each other's methods. What makes the issue of play in contemporary society so current is illustrated by the game-like nature of capitalism markets themselves with their 'betting' systems, coupled with the capitalisation of creative play such as Serious Play (trademark Lego) and the systems such as the Accelerated Learning Environment (trademark and proprietorial system currently owned by CapGemini), and, of course, the flexible campus and play spaces of Google et al. This is not as new as it might at first appear, even Huizinga alluded to this in *Homo Ludens* when he stated 'Business becomes play. This process goes so far that some of the great business concerns deliberately instill the play-spirit into their workers to step up production.' (1949, p200)

To suggest that somehow art is a distinct 'free' space for play within this cultural context is problematic, and denies the role that art can play in the social milieu. Creative and countercultural discourses claim play as non-competitive and in opposition to the capitalised worlds - acts of resistance. But then play is frequently invoked around skateboarding and parkour which are highly marketable as representations of 'cool', 'urban' etc. My intention was, therefore, to try to reconcile, in some ways the two as a means to ask how free one is to act publicly? Why must an institution continue to support the civilising effects of observing an artist at play in their work, yet not encourage the potentially uncivilising effects of providing a space of play in itself for the public? What if we *have* to move our bodies as a way to observe, decommissioning the hierarchy of senses that is put in place by the *visual* arts? Why should that be a risk inside the gallery?

Positive reviews of *Games & Theory* were few, people taking at stand against this possibility of presenting games and play within some kind of discursive and social relation with one another, partly as it also implied that the political and the aesthetic might also be related. Play became a

quasi-object in Latourian terms that piqued those invested in particular applications of language and who expected a defined set of ideas and, presumably, ideologies, to emerge. It was seen as an abject position, one deliberately intimated in the title itself. Not noticed by many, 'Games & Theory' was not a claim for the content of the show, but a reference to the highest echelon of the militaristic state in *Starship Troopers* (1997) where game playing was valued above all – a *dystopian* play society. That has subsequently been explored in many other science fiction movies, particularly, for obvious reasons, in those aimed at the teenage market - *Enders Game* (2013); *The Hunger Games* (2012) – all 'low brow' yet 'revolutionary' storylines where the individual player is co-opted and oppressed, or liberated through their ability to play games.

Physically it proved problematic for the institution to cope with the risk involved in having a play-park in the gallery itself – one which was of the same ilk as those found in every outdoor public space unsupervised without concerns for culpability. Yet here, within the gallery a disclaimer was (without my knowledge) employed following the opening whereby visitors were required to sign in to the installation for fear of legal action. Somewhat ironically for a contemporary art space, to mitigate risk.

There was a hidden, specific history in this theatre between history and imagination, a 'what-if' scenario based on the gallery's own war damaged history. Originally there was a second exhibition hall and lecture room at the South London Gallery. They were hit by a doodlebug during the Second World War and destroyed, and later became a garden to the neighbouring house. For the sake of *Games & Theory* they hung as a ghost institution that offered an alter-history, reconstitute by the project as if the play park had risen from its ruins instead.

That all of this remained somewhat buried is to some extent a failure of me to act fully as a curator and to bring discourse to the surface. I was somewhat content to play within the fantasy without sharing it other than in speech, although it was explored in a more rhetorical narrative in

a later publication. (Portfolio 3.2) In contradiction to Lefebvre's (1992) invocation of ideology being a discourse of real space, it remained part of the internal discourse of the institution to question its everyday function, and its potential. This was, at least, recognised in a *Time Out* review that generously acknowledged the exhibition as having more depths than immediately appeared. And in keeping with the previous issue raised of the curator operating within an anecdotal and rhetorical, possibly sophistic manner, this was most likely swayed from a telephone conversation with the critic that wrote it than from visiting the gallery.

The exhibition was not the first time that the abandoned garden had been used as a backdrop for a project. A commission by Mark Dion as part of his solo exhibition *Microcosmographia* opened up the garden for the first time after the neighbouring house was officially being handed over the gallery for expansion. Previously the property was derelict and dangerous to enter. The bounding wall to the garden was formally one of the walls to the second gallery and still held a listed terracotta frieze. But when it fell off in a gale and the parts collected and saved, it became to break through the wall and create a very rough-and-ready 'secret garden'. Dion conceived of a project whereby a 'field unit' would be built within the garden, and a herbarium artist and an entomological photographer would catalogue the flora and fauna of this natural urban island. As with the vernacular forms of architecture of the play park at the centre of *Games & Theory*, Dion's project set the stage for an existing parallel world of artists employing their skills but in quite different fields of knowledge.

In the gallery, the installation was presented as a natural history museum through a selection of works by Dion, each based on various forms of museological display and taxonomies. Dion's work has always been more interested in the mind of the scientist than the science itself, displaying natural history as a social construct reflecting the present, that is as a narrative. And while superficially the works appear dedicated to nature, they are more accurately homages to the extinct knowledge of the

curious gentleman scientist. *The Ichthyosaur* (2002) is a case in point. The life-size diorama saw the creature on a beach surrounded by the anachronistic trappings of a cultural fossil - the fossil hunter. The work revolves around the disagreement of such 19<sup>th</sup> century gentlemen as to the animal's rightful place in the evolutionary tree. Ichthyosaurs appeared to have features of both fish and reptile (they are sea reptiles) and confused taxonomists. It also featured prominently in the popular imagination at the height of Victorian museum culture with many speculating that Ichthyosaurs were evidence of sea monsters of myth. Dion's installation was chosen as the centrepiece of the exhibition as it drew, in part, on the dioramas presented in the Crystal Palace, not far from the South London Gallery, that erroneously showed Ichthyosaurs basking on the sands.

In both *Games & Theory* and *Microcosmographia* the institution of the South London Gallery was reimagined through problematic speculations on the public spaces that it could have been, and the different ideologies and ontologies they represent. More importantly, however, was to reflect back on the nature of the gallery as it is by using its own history as a stage to consider relations between culture and leisure. Both alternatives held within them leisure as a productive space of education akin to the expectations of the art gallery as a pedagogic institution, and engaged with a mode of thought that directly relates to play in this sense - that of curiosity, be it that of a child or that of the 'gentleman scientist', both equally undisciplined.

Thomas Zipp's solo exhibition *Planet Caravan, is there life after death? A futurist world fair*, as its title suggests, also touched on the redundant forms of exhibition-making, among other more esoteric references. (portfolio 6.2) The exhibition itself was crammed with works to the point of almost excluding the visitor. Its references were to totalising forms of knowledge and the individual maverick figures whose morality, beliefs and science roamed freely in a romantic landscape normally reserved for the artist, but played out here between science and religion.

At the heart of the exhibition was a chapel built in the style of a wooden chalet, its roof undulating and interior walls lined with almost black canvases that were marked out with stellar constellations. At its centre, a stone font held hallucinogenic mushrooms growing, which, in theory at least, the visitor could pick and consume. In the rest of the gallery, 15 freestanding painted assemblages were placed like a labyrinth, each holding portraits and/or models related to thinkers from German history such as Kepler and Heisenberg, whose work bound together political thinking and the explosion of worldviews, be they spiritual or atomic. And between them roamed a herd of modernist cow-like concrete sculptures - copies of a sculpture seen in documentation of the Nazi 'curated' *Degenerate Art Exhibition* (1937) that was since destroyed.

Its anarchic representation of a world fair was, therefore, related to the political motivation of such expos as ideological theatres. There is a ludic quality to Zipp's work. Not merely its playfulness, but in its spontaneity and, to a lesser degree, its semblance to models of amoral knowledge versus judgements applied to the characters of history. I can offer anecdotal evidence for its spontaneity, the paintings in the chapel being produced in the gallery late one night, the artist not entirely within his full faculties and in a state of distraction with brush in one hand and girlfriend in the other. But the deception has a more allusive notion in his work that I explored within my essay, for the semblance comes through a free-floating passage between meanings and associations. Play and semblance are sometimes seen as polarities, but in fact, the term ludic draws them together in their 'non-seriousness' (seen positively by Huizinga, 1949).

The essay I wrote based on Zipp's work took off from his subject matter and re-performed the transformations in knowledge between science and spirituality. The exhibition, on the other hand, highlights how if the institutions of art, like all institutions, are representations of the ideology

in which they are produced and how their exhibitions take part in political positioning.

And, as with all speculative fictions, Zipp's work resonates with the subdued or displaced violence and uncivility that institutions impose on contemporary life. In this sense it interfaces with the emergent field of knowledge 'exhibition histories', if, like most of Zipp's work, it arrives from a deliberately abject cultural perspective, that of a ruined culture and, as with my own curatorial approach, turn histories into narratives.

The other projects that fell within this arch included *Summer Daze* and *The Mothership Collective*, both of these were play-orientated, one taking the form of a quasi-art school and one an afro-futurist commune. For the art school a traditional life-drawing class by artist Olivia Plender was staged theatrically with painted ruins as a backdrop to the model, and the artist playing the role of a bohemian art instructor reading romantic and modernist poetry as inspiration instead of offering advice and skills to the participants. This event, more than the others, directly reference the SLG's history, the technical college that was part of its complex, continuing to run as the neighbouring Camberwell College of Art. Plender's meta-level performance was a precursor to the multi-use ideas in the *Games & Theory*. Most of the participants were simply there to take advantage of a free life-drawing class, while some were active audience members to the performance. Frequently they were both.

*The Mothership Collective* followed a similar format, inviting the artist Harold Offeh to mastermind the concept. As the title suggests his project had overtones to race politics linked to the Afro-Futurist movement personified in Parliament's *Mothership Connection* and Sun Ra's Arkestra. The Afro-Futurists were both utopian and dystopian at the same time. Their imagination of leaving earth behind and forming their own colony was a last resort of a racially divided society as well as a cosmic connection to a lost African spirituality through a new ageism of Science Fiction as a lens through which the ancient Egyptian's founding

civilisation could be brought into the present - or as Kodwo Eshun puts it (after William Gibson) it how 'afro-futurism could use science fiction to preprogram the present.' (1998 p107)

These two acted as a precursor to the later exhibition *The Weasel: Contemporary Art and Pop Music*. The scenario here was to pitch the South London Gallery as a music venue. In this scenario we can imagine gallery as an abandoned ruin taken over for raves and concerts, a hedonistic anarchism of sorts that is nevertheless at the foundation for much of our current cultural aspirations (and nostalgia), particularly in the UK. As a space in which identities were able to shift and be formed outside of the norms of society (and frequently with the aid of chemicals), the hedonistic 80s rave culture was something that many artists have harked back to in recent years for its carnivalesque abandonment that is now recognised as a transformative cultural moment. There are concrete links between contemporary art and new media and pop music, which in the eighties was enabled through broadcast media rather than the nascent potentiality of the Internet. The future was being imagined on MTV by artists such as Keith Haring, Barbara Kruger et al in rapid bite-sized chunks well before the sound bites of spin-doctors. For *The Weasel* I put together a screening programme of artist/musicians' videos and films that followed the format of the pop video, and this was shown in an effusive, over the top installation by Brazilian artist group Assume Vivid Astro Focus replete with homoerotic and trans-characters that challenged taste and decency. The videos ranged from introverted vampiric Goths, to amateur synth-pop performed in dance routines by ungainly artists in a public park.

Over the course of the exhibition there were a series of performances at night by 'art bands' that turned the gallery into the venue it imagined itself to be, and using the installation by Assume Vivid Astro Focus as a stage. Among the works was a sculpture by Matt Stokes, *Real Utopia* (2005), a carefully replica of a sound system from the earliest illegal raves that took place in a cave in the lake district. Fully working, the



sound system was used for the performances and gigs. As with *Games & Theory*, or other projects outlined above, the background of the exhibition was not well articulated, or at least not exposed in public literature.

As I have teased out in the above, through a highly specific trajectory of exhibitions that lay somewhat outside the South London Gallery's main programme I explored recurrent motifs that aim to question the validity of the institution, and its conditions for participation, spectatorship and agency that employ various fictional or speculative scenarios. Ruins are a leitmotif, more a dystopic razed ground than a utopian tabula rasa. They overlaid gallery's history with a speculative position, moments that could be imagined after the fictional end of the gallery's real world narrative.

Those ruins are not just physical, but also ideological, and as such they play into the speculative fictional realm of a dystopia in which alternatives and freedoms have ebbed away, with the gallery acting as a last refuge. The projects experimented with the 'double consciousness' of the gallery-goer and how knowledge or political agency may be constructed differently not just through the visual but also through play and leisure. (with apologies to Fukuyama 1992 and De Bois 1903)

This all leads to the question: Why is it necessary to imagine alternative lives for the institution, to create fictions as well as histories? One reason is to be able to maintain the institutions power to transform or as Pascal Gielen writes:

Because we can distinguish between the real world and the imagined, or fictional 'reality', change and innovation are within the realm of human possibility. Regardless of whether such change means progression or regression, our ability to oscillate between non-fiction and fiction is crucial in imagining other worlds, in being creative, in presenting different models of society or in addressing ecological issues. (2013 p12)

What we are talking about, then, is how institutions constitute a dialectic relationship with freedom, which is magnified in contemporary aesthetics – the underlying subject of these exhibitions.

I would argue this *can* be (but rarely is) played out in various manners simultaneously at different levels of organisation. It is not done hermetically within the institution or only in the present, but in discourse with the past, that is the exhibition and institutional history, and with the imagination of the future, regardless of whether that imagination is in ‘regressive or progressive’ moments. This act is carried out by curator, artist and public simultaneously in a dynamic system of writing of rules (again by all the agents at hand) and then the breaking of them and building new ones from the ruins. As a curatorial game it echoes Sennett (1974) where he (in stated contra-position to Huizinga) sees a vibrant public life as constructed through play by acting roles rather than authentic free expression. For Sennett fictional narratives and reality are overlaid, they influence each other to build sociability. It is in antithesis to ‘freedom from’ and finds ‘freedom to’ in the social rules that one learns.

We can study these rolling transformations in a narrative that is specific to this consideration of curating, the history of institutional critique. The crux of institutional critique as art lies within the transformation of culture and in particular the materials of art in the 1960s and early 1970s as artists’ works began to undermine the institutions that purport to house them – museums. As Albarro writes such practices ‘revisited that radical promise of the European Enlightenment, and they did so precisely by confronting the institution of art with the claim that it was not sufficiently committed to, let alone realizing or fulfilling, the pursuit of publicness that had brought it into being in the first place.’ (2009 p3) Institutional critique attacked the problems on many sides – through the inequality of representation of race, gender, and other cultures; through business interests; and the depoliticised isolation of art from the world outside the museum’s walls. The deconstruction of the institution as a

network of interests, from nation forming to political and ideological normalization, was equally present in theoretical writing, most clearly within the writing of Foucault who analysed the 'web of social relations ("power") that effectively shape ("normalize") the modern individual' (Caputo & Yount 1993 p v).

As noted earlier, the art institution in particular sits in a contradictory position as a social organisation that seeks to create coherent cultural narratives while supporting the irreducible singularity and subjectivity of artists and their work. (Diedrichsen 2014) In institutional critique, therefore, there is a double bind of the *modern* institution that requires itself to open up to that which aims to ruin it. For the contemporary institution (and along with it the contemporary as an aesthetic), however, this contradiction has been fully absorbed, it is inherently ironic, able to articulate the triumvirate of fields that Latour (1991) defines – the art work and its subject as 'reality', the institution as 'social space' and the narrative discourse of contemporary art and cultural theory – as intertwined. It also leaves a vacant spot for a character to step in to a leading role. Institutional critique achieved some of its goals in this first wave, and artists such as Mark Dion opened it out beyond the art museum to other institutions, extending its life in a second. But the gesture left itself somewhat redundant artistically beyond a specific time. For once established as a mark of 'criticality' and freedom for museums to respond to these artists' works, it is canonised to some extent. That is its radicality is normalized, and internalised. As Simon Sheikh (2006) has proposed, its principles can even be taken in house, enacted without artists by curators undertaking 'institutionalised critique'.

Transgressing one set of rules, therefore, puts into motion another. At least this is the case within any institution that is not simply razed to the ground. It is the fate of all knowledge to be ultimately concretised within a set of principles – indeed institutions are not the buildings but the set of relationships, the languages, and the instinctive calls and responses that become so deeply part of a culture they are Pavlovian. That is unless

they can be put into a constant state of challenge and iteration, or as Chantal Mouffe (2007) argues, a dissensus that reflects a truly public space. Despite its rules, art institutions operate on the principle of providing the artist (at least) with freedom to. Institutional critique exercised that 'freedom to' to address issues of its dialectic partner 'freedom from'. (as per Berlin 1969). Institutionalised critique, however, runs the danger of inverting that unless enacted with some levity of the theatre.

As can be seen, my string of exhibitions involved a certain amount of stagecraft in order to push them into the speculative realm. This was done visually, alluding to alternative forms of display, and in the case of *Games & Theory* also required the visitor to move and encounter the works differently. But in *No Puppet is Dumber than its Puppeteer* (2014) the idea of creating a sceneography was more subtle, closer to 'the seamless synthesis of space, text, research, art, actors, directors and spectators that contributes to an original creation.' (Howard 2002 p4)

Set within a biennale with a self-reflexive curatorial theme, *No Puppet is Dumber than its Puppeteer* sought to question the agency of artist, curator and audience in viewing the work by setting up a series of different specific settings within the exhibition to ask who is 'pulling the strings'. I did not aim to fall on one side or the other, but the exhibition did react to current concerns of the curator being an impresario or otherwise Machiavellian character orchestrating a spectacle from behind the scenes. How one meets art within the social network of other visitors and institutional players guided the selection of the works, the form of display, and the narrative of the exhibition. Staging, therefore, was a key aspect to the critical nature of the exhibition, which was only touched on in part in the writing, the essay providing more a parallel line of thought, a technique of making a writing simultaneously that I explored as method in other exhibitions.

I do not intend here to detail all the ways in which the exhibition was

staged, but can point to a few examples in ways this was enacted. A wall in the museum was tiled in an almost seamless way by artist Wang Wei. The installation *Natural History #2* (2012) was a recreation of the distinctly anti-naturalistic monkey enclosure in a South China Zoo. Coupled with a photograph of a crowd of visitors looking at the monkeys, shown elsewhere in the galleries, it created a backdrop framing the museum public, unwittingly, as objects of exhibition themselves for those visitors who had seen the photograph and were now cognisant of its relational context as a framing device. A model theatre by Mark Dion entitled *Course of Empire* (2011) where one looked through a series of stage sets representing a regressive history from the modern museum to nature overrunning it (a direct reference to the theatrical, romantic imagination of a pure nature), was placed in such a way as to frame this encounter further. Other works, such as Wendelien Van Oldenborgh's *L'Javanese* (2013) put into play two gallery visitors on film, both of African origin, as they encounter a colonial museum in the Netherlands, intercut with an unseen narrator (a curator, also of African descent) encountering the museums archives. While watching these journeys through a museum, the netting curtains that defined the viewing space of Van Oldenborgh's work also provided a view onto the live exhibition visitors as they encountered the works, overlaying directed and undirected experiences. These works most concisely illustrate the concept of the show as a theatrical space. But it was in the 'curatorial experiment' that I acted between the roles of curator, artist and educator. A cabinet display in a large hermetic vitrine was produced based on a 'workshop' with sculpture students from the Central Academy of Fine Arts. They were asked to construct a simple glove puppet using primary school art materials to represent their imagination of who looked at their art. Afterwards, they were asked select a group of images (simple photocopies of seminal exhibitions, without contextualization) and arrange a display inside the cabinet for their imaginary viewer. The workshop then discussed how things were arranged and how art was communicated. For many, this was a challenge. They struggled to downgrade the realization of ideas through

simple art materials to 'juvenile' ones, we might say to allow themselves to play, and also struggled to think about who saw their work, and how it was encountered outside of the secure space of their studios. The discussion opened up hostility towards curating and myself as the curator in this instance, which was probably a fair position to take given how I was 'using' them for setting a stage. The informality of the display was a deliberate retort to the usual formality and 'hermetically-sealed' works that normally find their way into the cabinets. But more over, it was the photographs of artists at work inside the cabinets – literally turned into part of the display – and its documentation in the catalogue that was the 'curatorial act' I intended all along.

## Chapter 6

### Cartographic Acts

#### Ground Level

*Ground Level* (2011) began from the point of trying to connect the social with the geographical, extending it beyond the institutional position in the urban fabric to nature, society and politics. Combining different notions of cartography as an act in which a narrative is overlaid falls close to scenography. The writing around the exhibition, and the theme, followed a method akin to conceptual mapping.

Among the devices that I used, which the title hints towards, is the very ambiguity of meaning, and contingent and meaninglessness of drawing up the borders or boundaries between one thing and another on the ground. The nature of cartography is a form of projection from the individual point of view to that of an overseer. It is an abstraction of landmarks of orientation and abstraction that connects real and imaginary viewpoints.

It was a missed opportunity not to be able to return to Jameson (1991) in the essay and in the critical and aesthetic context for the show. Whether we now agree or refute his claims for postmodernism in general in favour of the contemporary complex, his work staked out some of the boundaries of a cultural landscape in which aesthetics are, in my view, currently active. Writing now, many of my projects have attempted to articulate what Jameson so succinctly describes as 'cognitive mapping.' In this he lays out how 'a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organising concern' and defines 'the aesthetic of this new (and hypothetical) cultural form as an aesthetic of cognitive *mapping*.' (Jameson 1989 p50) Although he names this postmodern, I will later go

on to claim this is merely a nascent contemporary aesthetic with repercussions for the centrality of the curatorial.

So it seems timely here to lay out some of his argument that has do emerge in later projects, even if they were not brought to bear in *Ground Level*. At least, I might claim, that in coming to this point there has been a certain amount of 'wandering around' or *derive* as expressed in the essay to *Ground Level* 'Beating the Bounds' (portfolio 4.4) that is not without value. The focus is on the cartographic act, not the map, that is to say, getting to know the lay of the land, rather than overseeing it. It comes closer to Jameson's reading of Kevin Lynch's subjects that 'traditionally are described as itineraries rather than as maps: diagrams organised around the still subject-centred or existential journey of the traveller, along which various significant key features are marked oases, mountain ranges, rivers, monuments, and the like.' (Jameson 1989 p51-52)

This subject-centred way of being and narrating political space was the subject of *Games & Theory*, and its underpinnings in the *derive*, psycho-geography and other Situationist inspired practices where the deliberate acts of getting lost, and creating one's own sense of space, and one's own interpretations (physical, poetic or psychological) of landmarks and borders alike. Inspired in part by the Situationists' methods of recording and narrating the experience of spaces – psychogeography as it is more commonly known – the catalogue for *Ground Level* made the first tentative steps away from the 'right' form of curatorial essay writing towards more creative ones. The marginalia that accompanied 'Beating the Bounds' took the form of small visual notes that were not illustrations as such, more visual side comments. And these were selected in part to create some visual rhythms of worldviews that inevitably ended up with the majority being circles. This had repercussions in further curatorial and writing around a specific geopolitical theatre.



## EUROPE to the power of N

In 2011 I was invited to join the research and exhibition group *Europe to the Power of N (EuropeN)*, a project beginning at the Galerie fuer Zietgenoissche Kunste (GfZK) in Leipzig, one of the city's museums and committed to contemporary art in dialogue with other visual culture practices such as architecture and design. *EuropeN* then become a network of activity in European countries as part of the Goethe Institut's 'Excellence Framework' projects. Barbara Steiner, then director of the GfZK, headed the entire series and those involved included curators, artists and designers working in a flat structure.

There were a number of planning and discussion meetings in Leipzig leading up to the project, and these included three exhibitions in the GfZK pavilion, a gallery space commissioned by Steiner as a new model for exhibition spaces. The architectural practice led by Christian Teckert had produced the building to contain no white cubes, and mobile walls built into the structure. Within that space, all ten curators were asked to curate small exhibitions as curatorial proposals for their individual projects that would take place in their own countries as part of *EuropeN*. These were titled *Scenarios about Europe (2010-2011)*.

This project was an education for me. Steiner, in particular, provided me with an intellectual framework that I had only an instinctive and haphazard grasp of up until that point - one gathered through stumbling through practice and experiment. Notably, towards the end of the Leipzig editions Steiner offered me two bits of advice, both of them broke the borders for me between curatorial conventions and practice in useful ways and I offer them here as an anecdote:

Scenario one

Steiner: Kit, just stop worrying about it

Me: Worry about what?

Steiner: Whether you are a curator or not. Your ideas are good, just do them.

Me: Oh

#### Scenario two

Steiner: You're projects are a bit coquettish

Me: Oh

From this advice, and the freedom offered by the structure of *Scenarios about Europe* (and from the quite incredible opportunity to meet the other curators, artists and designers from across Europe I would not normally have encountered), the projects marked both a transformation and a consolidation of my practice in equal measure. This is not in isolation; there were a few other projects that I was working on at the same time which were informing each other. But I have to give credit here to Steiner for unlocking the latent restraints that I held onto, for making them conscious critical positions from which I could embark.

I'll go on here to talk about the concept of the scenarios about Europe and the other activities around *Europe to the power of N* before considering how it challenged my own curating and opened up some of the avenues for my practice. I will then elaborate on how they provided a narrative that allowed for a cognitive map and its relationship to contemporary constructs of knowledge (real or imaginary), namely conspiracy theory.

As described above, the *Scenarios about Europe* were a series of three exhibitions with each of the ten curators involved in programming a room. Provided with an equal budget and randomly allocate space, we were free to present exhibitions that raised questions, reflections and/or possible solutions, about Europe. There was no obligation to work as a curator, by which I mean there was no obligation to invite artists at all. In all three I chose to work with or alongside an artist. While not quite

ready to relinquish all sense of responsibility in acting properly in the role of a curator, I intervened in their work in some way – mainly through alternative forms of didacticism in the work . I thereby inserted the curatorial act into the works rather than merely displaying and building discourses around them. This was negotiated with the artist, so took different forms, while each addressed a different space of culture.

Nils Norman's project was a political landscape – a social space and the real and imaginary hybrid political groups within a map with the groups conceived of by myself according to Norman's directions. Lincoln Tobier's context was the media – the public sphere, the space of discourse. His radio play *The Orchestra Pit Theory* (2010) was based on Roger Ailes' expressed manipulation of political news coverage by orchestrating banal celebrity events. For this I inserted a sculptural interpretation panel containing newspaper cuttings about the then current *News of the World* phone hacking scandal. The third involved Hannes Zebedin's *Monument* (2011) physical movement of earth from outside to inside – we might call this space the 'real' – and for this I wrote a creative text on the window of the museum (see portfolio 4.5). These three spaces were conceptually mapped out according to Latour's (1991) triumvirate, and all contained an element of conspiracy theory taken from mass media. But I was also drawing on different metaphor that links back to the fictional spaces of institutions discussed above – those of three cases of dystopian science fiction – JG Ballard's *Super Cannes* (2000); George Orwell's *1984* (1949); and Brian Aldiss's *Earthworks* (1965). This is already well laid out in the essay 'Three Scenarios About Europe: Proofs and Predictions' (portfolio 4.5) so I won't go into it in great detail here other than to say that in addition the encounter with *Slavs & Tatars*' exploration of 'third way' politics (also documented in Portfolio 4.8), the arbitrary similitude of signifiers of three part systems laid the groundwork for continuing to analyse something as complex as a socio-political and economic formation of the European Union as a fiction.

The exhibition I developed in London *The Europa Triangle* (2013) sprang from this and it explored both curating and this 'cognitive mapping' on various levels. The curating was enacted by lowest common denominator of curatorial principles – selecting artists whose works exhibited triangles or other three point representations. In this sense, it was 'doing curating' performatively rather than curating proper. It therefore marked turn in my curatorial practice. If previous experiments had been playing around the edges of the institution, this engaged head on.

It was in the essay that I tried to put this into practice, and follow Steiner's advice and carry out the project without consideration for what was right and proper as a curator. The first sketch of 'Pyramid Rhetoric: Or On the Point of Collapse' (portfolio 4.7) was presented as a lecture in the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin. For some it could have been described as a lecture performance, for others a heavy slice of sophistry, or perhaps delusional logic. It followed the reasoning of conspiracy, the everyday fabrication of a narrative that binds things of apparent similitude into a worldview framework. Here, I felt at the time, was where curating was entering the general contemporary sensibility. By selecting and building a narrative (sometimes through display) subjectively, and by drawing on images and texts that were to hand, I put fiction and fact alongside each other with the same weight of (supposed) truth. That is, it was the enactment of the absurdity of the curatorial, in all its inherent self-referentiality and ironism. Here we need to go into more detail as it is presented without meta-narrative in the publication, leaving a great deal of room for explanation.

When attempting to look at the world around us in all its complexity, then, we will necessarily find contradictions and exceptions that make similarity seem so exceptional that it lends some sense of importance. Yet, at the same time art is expected to somehow represent singularities and subjectivities. This creates seeming paradoxes, whether it is the 'glocal' as it was called within exhibition-making discourse in the early 2000s; or the 'syntax error' that Diedrich Diedrichsen identifies in the

very nature of curating group exhibitions. In his lecture given Serralves and later at the Royal College of Art notes there is an inherent contradiction in the curator being expected to bring together artists as expressing singularities in their unique work under a unifying umbrella of collective theme. His example is Kasper Koenig's exhibition *WestKunst* (1981, Cologne), and points towards how this is created out of a need of the market for figures to validate artists' value in a system beset by the crisis on popular (visual) culture. Similarity in difference is the validating factor. We might also see this in the context of the European Union's formation that, at its outset, adopted the motto - 'unity in difference'. Finding some sense of unity in difference as a dialectic model is inherent in the curatorial act, and extends to the discourse around curating by dint of trying to find relevance for curating itself within a broader culture.

The Curatorial as defined by Maria Lind is distinct from curating as such. 'Is there something we could call the curatorial? A way of linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space? An endeavor that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against it?' (Lind 2009 p63)

The curatorial is not the activity or discourse around it in isolation, but a web of relationships between the business of art institutions, in mounting exhibitions, in cultural politics, and in working with artists. For Lind it is through curatorial work that one can expose institutional norms, question them, and to some extent seek alternative (presumably more ethical, but at least more contemporary) models. As one of the key figures in 'New Institutionalism' through the 1990s and early 2000s, Lind has played a significant role in putting such practices at the heart of curating exhibitions and running arts organisations. It should not escape our notice that the emergence of the independent curator as a public figure is concurrent with this and, whereas the history of the contemporary curating, or exhibition-making, that might be traced to the 1960s with Szeemann et al. We can also say that Szeemann's time is

merely curating's infancy. It is only on reaching the next generation of curators (Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hou Hanru as well as Lind are among its key players) that the curatorial is borne out of curating's own 'mirror stage' towards its self-reflexivity. Such nascent thinking emerged in my own practice more clearly through *The Europa Triangle*, even if thinking doesn't follow clearly defined smooth paths but evolves and grows like knotty roots.

The Europa Triangle aimed to adopt, and to some, albeit highly limited, extent, deal with such a knotty model, and take it to a quasi-logical extreme – that is move it into speculation. If the model of similarity and connective is so mundane to be meaningless, it might become a useful parody to examine how we come to terms with much more complex forms – a curatorial McGuffin. The triangle is one such example of an empty form where meaning is applied from many perspectives, as if its simplicity is in itself demonstrable or explanatory. It is the simplest complete form (least number of sides for a geometric shape, least defined in terms of relationships, other polygons require more complex definition). It is essentially empty of meaning. Yet, culturally the triangle appears frequently in political, religious, personal and other 'models' of relationships. The 'triad' appears throughout theory of all kinds, in models and maps and even in belief. It is this, that *and* the other. It is the method (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), their lineage (say the Nature/Social/Discourse trinity that, admittedly, Latour tries to unbuild as a division of thought) and their content. Once one starts to look for similarities they appear everywhere. Terry Smith (2009) isolates three currents in contemporary curating and contemporary art that encompass every variation. Three appears, after all, to be the magic number.

The aim of the project was not to propose a highly meaningless form of similarity between the artists' works within the exhibition, but a simple contingency of relationships between them. The writing, however, followed the logic of socially constructed knowledge (with all its inaccuracies) or what might better be called contemporary belief made

out of a chain of association between visually similar 'things' taken out of their own context. The triangle, and its solid form the pyramid (frequently conflated in 'pyramid models' lending further validity rather than contradiction in the dimensional shift between them) acts effectively to represent this in sensible form. Therefore the triangle appears as a proof, perhaps through its very simplicity, regardless of how ambiguous it is. I discuss this in the exhibition's essay, following a path from the 'sacred geometry' of pyramids and the foundations of geometry itself that connect the earth to mystical spaces, to the delusional 'pyramid schemes' whose neat promissory logic of profit is illusionary and seductive. But it is not only the text that plays a role in constructing this misleading explanation. It is also the sequence of images that make this rhetoric persuasive even if it is rooted in sophistry.

There are some precedents to this method, in particular the 'Pathos-Formal' of Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* in which images are literally torn from their physical context (the books in which they are found) and from their historical lineage to be recombined in 'flights of images' (Michaud 1998) that define some universal tropes in art history, and, arguably, an early form of 'visual cultures'. Of course Warburg's forms are not as simple as a triangle. But they do rely on similitude and repetition that creates a pattern across the ages. This institutes a language, the institution of responses to certain forms with empathy, or pathos, or other affects. Belief might fall within those responses, and so might fiction or myth. It is worth noting that Warburg has increasingly been seen as an essential form of cognitive mapping that might act as an alternative ground from which contemporary curating emerges (see Didi-Huberman 2016 & 2010) where the curator is a quasi-artist in their selection of images (of art or of visual culture) and almost alchemical means of putting them into a narrative play. For my own work, the employment of a triangle, or other device, might be considered in similar terms. A leitmotif in exhibition-making, it sought to provide a conduit between the different levels or plateaus of culture and other forms of knowledge that lie outside its main fields of knowledge, while also

reflecting its structures. A similar pattern was intended in *No Puppet is Dumber than its Puppeteer* that more explicitly used the curatorial act of exhibition-making as a form of scenography, choreographing the encounters between institution, curator, art and visitor while the writing cognitive map of ideas on curating itself. Crucial to this was the experience of an exhibition as a constructed territory where visitor, art and institution are put into play with one another. (Portfolio 3.6)

These exhibitions and texts are set between the developing scenarios of exhibition histories an emergent field of study and its relationship to the formation of the curatorial as a discipline in the academic terms, or as Felix Vogel (2013) describe it the 'curatorial discourse of exhibition history'.

Vogel's argument that 'two exhibition histories' (we might even suggest there are more) define a split between those practiced by the art institution as a research organisation and those practiced within the academic environment, that is within curatorial studies, is significant. The bifurcation is synonymous with practice versus theory debates. But it is an artificial one where textual narratives and practice-based ones are not, in fact, divided. Curating as an activity is unusual in this sense. An exhibition is frequently developed alongside a textual argument as part of the same research project. Whereas one side expects a linear exposition, the other has the character of a more open and subjective experiential narrative made up of fragments encountered in space. As noted above, the critique of institutional practices of which curating is a part can be traced back to the bifurcation into discrete fields of knowledge in the Enlightenment. That institutional curating should be set on one side of this bifurcation is inevitable. Indeed it is inherent in its foundations.

My most recent exploration of this that reflects and reflects on curatorial writing attempts to travel backwards in its philosophical aims to consider what can be curatorial or critical writing around an exhibition



by artist Yu-Chen Wang (Taiwan, 1977). For the exhibition it took the form of a serialised fiction that drew on various sources that reflect and reflect on the themes in the artist's work. As a meta-text, published for the *Journal of Artistic Research*, it became a reflection on curatorial writing in both form and in content. The text is difficult to describe in detail as it is avowedly non-linear and puts words together spatially. (see portfolio 4.10) However, key elements included a fictionalized account of visiting the exhibition – itself serialised in four parts, each occupying different 'genre-spaces'. It's secondary text is a series of marginalia running alongside the narrative unpicking some of the references to existing texts and the genres used to construct the narrative. The main body of the exposition contextualises the approach critically, with reflections on how curatorial writing might develop – both in catalogue essays for authored shows, or as an approach to an exhibition that has been curated by others (of which the text is an example). While each text can be read from top to bottom, it is intended to function as a map of ideas, where the different genres and spaces combine.

As noted in the introduction 'genres are a combination of style and content' (see OED 2017). I would argue that this goes back to the O'Neill's idea that to curate requires a critical reference, not merely a case of selecting and displaying. The generic character of curating thus lends a character of iteration rather than radical break. But I would also diverge from his point of view by asserting that the critical grounding of a curatorial project, its place in a series, need not be within the discourse of curating itself, but can be drawn from other fields of knowledge or practice. There is an oxymoron that emerges here, however, as this might itself be considered within the discourse of curating. The science-fictional element, in particular, has its legacy within my own practice as well as others. Ballard, in particular, might be seen as particularly inspirational for curators, not least for his own depictions of dystopian spaces.



## **Section Three**

## **Conclusions**



## The Editorial Aesthetic: A Conclusion

*The Editorial* (Taipei Biennial 2016 & Asia Art Archive 2017) began to stitch together some of the activities I have presented in the previous chapters. In subject matter it sought to build and expand on critical practice around art publication by extending into a mapping of publishing projects in Asian territories. As a staged project it combined live forums and an exhibition element as event, with a heavy emphasis on scenography, with the scenography proposed as a concept of publication moving off the page. As a consideration of what new practices might be, the *Editorial Aesthetic* was proposed in the convergent practices of certain disciplinary notions of artist, designer, curator and editor. Therefore the aim was to blur the boundaries between research, presentation, discussion and performance. Overall the concept was to do this through the creation of an agora-like space in which exchange of various kinds could take place, both in and out of roles. Given its Western origins, 'agora' is perhaps a difficult word to simply transfer, but there is no equivalent common name for the South East Asian marketplace, which inspired the visual elements and, in many ways are more agora-like than any remaining public space in the West. I will go on to describe this further.

Before addressing these aspects of *The Editorial*, it is worth reviewing the interrupted narrative that led up to its realisation. I was invited to submit a proposal for the Taipei Biennial based on a conversation I had with the Director of the 2016 edition, Corinne Diserens. Her approach to curating the biennial had an open submission element for Taiwanese artists, although I fell outside of the scope as a temporary resident, but not a citizen. This left the project in between being part of the biennial proper and a hosted event. Practically speaking, this meant that funding was very limited – from my experience this was not unusual for a 'book fair,' the status of the project as it began. In addition to the biennial I forged a partnership between my quasi-organisation, Vernacular Institute (an organisation of one used as a *nom de guerre* to legitimise and lend

authority to my individual practice, as well as providing something of a public persona behind which to hid), the Biennial and the Asia Art Archive (AAA). The AAA's curator of Public Programmes, Ingrid Chu, had been working on a series called 'Free-Parking' which included the presentation of book collections and informal libraries from South, East and South East Asia in the AAA's own library in Hong Kong. Without going into all the negotiations and the substantial difficulties in making this project happen, one crucial point is worth noting. Despite accepting the idea of a book fair, and advertising the project as part of the biennial, the Taipei Fine Art Museum only later informed us that it was against government regulations to allow anything to be sold on the premises. This left the idea of a fair, and its economy in crisis, and needing substantial rethinking. This greatly affected the project's direction as the original proposal depending on publishers traveling on their own funds with the expectation of making back costs through sales.

As a result, the programme shifted more towards a conference or symposium, or as I would prefer to term it, a convention. While all three have significant overlaps, the term convention is most accurate as it included not only the critical discourse around a subject, but a series of other related events, and was, primarily, aimed at enthusiasts of independent publishing. As related in texts I have written on *Publish and be Damned*, it is in the Science Fiction convention caucuses and other fan-cultures that publishing acted as a precursor to social media. (see Portfolio 2.3). The fanzine was an unmonitored and informal mode of communication peer-to-peer, and, while such activity is now obsolete in the liberal West, in certain Asian countries the relative invisibility and uncensored nature of independent publishing that can cross borders disguised inside an envelope, still offer some solutions to urgent political conditions. As such, the term convention, as with the informal (or black) marketplaces, offer a kind of Temporary Autonomous Zone. Even Bey who coined this term finds it a little out-dated feeling his original text is 'very much a book of the 80s, a strangely romantic and more erotic era than the 90s or the nameless decade we now inhabit'. Something with an

edge of nostalgia and outdatedness, like the artist book, is nicely relevant here when it defines a liberated area of 'land, time or imagination' outside of institutional or state control. (Bey, 2003 p x) As a field of action it has a particular cadence stretching beyond institutionalised and intellectual freedoms. Bey also notes, 'you could even talk about relative degrees of TAZness; a bit of autonomy's better than none, after all. I find hobby groups and old-fashioned fraternal organizations interesting in this regard.' (Bey, 2003 p xii) *The Editorial* was a low level of TAZness for this very reason, a common space.

But for some the artist book fair is of a higher agency. During a closed door caucus, one participant from Vietnam described how staging her own art book fair and exhibitions in Penom Penh left her awake at night in case the police might come and confiscate the books and arrest her for subversive activity. A second instance saw a participant from Sri Lanka anxiously refuse permission for the recordings of the event to be made public in case her government censors might see it and close down her independent library that currently flies under the radar. The situation in mainland China, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia is similar. Books and art are both considered potentially subversive and subject to ad hoc censorship.

Both Cambodian and Sri Lankan participants were educated in the US or the UK, and worked internationally, and are far from political radicals. It is easy to forget from the perspective of social or liberal/neo-liberal democracies of which Taiwan is one such state (see appendix iii for a consideration of the reciprocal problems this poses). It remains, for me, difficult to imagine how even the most simple acts of providing space for art and publications might tread close to genuine precarity in art, publishing or curatorial practice. It is equally difficult to imagine the continuing agency of publishing even 'post-internet' a genre (in my words) of work that is 'created with a consciousness of the networks within which it exists, from conception and production to dissemination and reception.' (Archey & Peckham 2014 p1)

And so, any consideration of contemporary aesthetics requires the constant reminder that, in fact, this remains an uneven field. Even when the contemporary might include disjunctive experiences of time, those of them critically addressing them (myself included) remain outside of the *actual* precarity this produces. That said, alongside the two-day event, included a lecture I gave in advance 'Towards an Editorial Aesthetic' (appendix vii) which laid out a critical position in relation to curating, artistic practice and publishing. Also included in the programme was a critical workshop with Brian Kuan Wood (editor of E-Flux Journal), a related publication by the Asia Art Archive (AAA) (portfolio 5.2) and a subsequent display at the AAA in Hong Kong that featured the publications gathered for *The Editorial* in Taipei.

There are two elements of the project that require further description that lead into the critical discussion proper. The first is a large-scale print that was laid on the floor around which presentations and performances took place (portfolio 5.1). Measuring 4m x 4m the print was made on a piece of PVC fabric, the kind that has replaced the traditional wheat-paste sheets used in billboard advertising. The design was a preliminary (and very deliberately unfinished draft) proof sheet of a fictive 16-page publication – an essay about *The Editorial Aesthetics* that put various quotes gathered during our research from publishers, artists and curators both present and absent, into a tentative narrative. It sat between design, draft essay under revision, and demarcation of a public space within the gallery.

Furthermore it was intended to sit between the curatorial act of research and building of narrative from the selection and display of different subjectivities and the parallel activities of exhibition design or scenography. Throughout the project it was open for revision by participants and visitors alike. The most radical intervention of this kind came from the artist Betty Apple (Taiwan, 1982), whose performance



used amplified cheap Chinese-import vibrators, other publications and broken glass to intervene in the text physically and sonically.

The device of laying down a sheet of PVC, essentially second hand advertising, is one of the elements that as taken directly from observation of the informal street markets in South East Asia. Seen as disposable by the advertising companies it is, in fact, extremely cheap and durable material. While this makes it especially suitable for advertising in tropical climates, the PVC circulates well after it is removed from billboards and is reused throughout the region in various ways. It is not unusual to see fragments of past political election campaign posters or advertising for real estate, for instance, reemployed in street markets, restaurants and homes, as awnings, dividers or flooring to contingently claim part of the street as part of a territory. In the larger markets, complete advertising is laid out daily to as clean places to sit, eat and to watch street performers. While they 'belong' to certain stalls, they are not policed as such.

The overlays of corporate or political propaganda reappropriated as raw material for self-organised, independent, if temporary social space echoed the nature of the publications themselves. Both printed materials 'make public' spaces in different ways. It deliberately ran counter to Bernays' use of such 'propaganda' to lend a contemporary usurpation or even realisation of how 'the multiple press, and the public school, that riot of the industrial revolution, have taken the power from the kings and given it to the people.' (1928 p19)

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre asks: 'what is an ideology without a space to which it refers, a space which it describes, whose vocabulary and likes it makes use of, and whose code it embodies... Ideology per se might well be said to consist primarily in a discourse upon social space.' (1992 p44) If that is the case, then institutions would be a manifestation of the discourse of ideology in real space, that is a social milieu rather than an internally imagined one. There are some

loops of reason here, but not unproductive ones, for a representation of social space must be made in the social space itself. The institution becomes a fold in reality. And when reality is folded in this way (as per Deleuze, 1993) it also folds the past and future into the present tense. In producing such vernacular spaces we can read them as convergent acts where the remains of the past find a pragmatic, accidental and contingent meaning in the present.

As can be seen in my incomplete text, the editorial act and the curatorial act are in a state of convergence. Both rely on selecting, but not necessarily on displaying as traditionally conceived. Display has been replaced by the building of narratives from existing fragments. This is at the heart of what I proposed as *The Editorial Aesthetic*, a selective view that seeks to build narratives that consolidate or challenge institutional positions when used effectively. The countering from *within* is significant in facilitating sub-cultural publics to become counter-publics, thereby affecting the formation of institutions from a kind of infiltration of open spaces between regulations. (see Warner 2002)

This significant perspective on the formation of the public space from within is, for Warner (2002) something of a personified act. He particularly focuses on trans and queer groups who are able to use public institutions as spaces to act out identities that fall outside normative societies. Hence they are counter-publics. In turn, this acting out affects the formation of the public space itself. It reemphasises some of the aspects of play and acting in the *Theatrum Mundi* that I discussed in previous chapters (Sennett 1976) whereby playing a role (or in this case a persona) is integral to the formation of a healthy public life, and has been marginalized from the modern sensibility through a focus on (in Sennett's opinion a false sense of) authenticity of the self.

However, the process Warner sketches out can also be seen to relate to other marginal groups differently convened, not merely those that are rooted in identity. While the urgency of being an artist is not quite as

fraught in society as non-normative identities – it has, by and large, been accepted into society post Modernism. It is inherent in our conception of the contemporary period. Nevertheless, many artists, particularly within the current art-publishing activities of art book fairs and publishing that, as stated above, has its legacy in fan and sub-cultures convened around popular culture, yet providing space for marginal caucuses to convene.

And so this brings us back to the question at the beginning of this thesis, how am I acting curating in the doing? And particularly how am I acting curating against the backdrop of the *contemporary*?

As I have demonstrated, my work has moved beyond simple definitions of curating as an activity to curating as an act, one which is self-reflective and at play on different levels, frequently adopting existing frameworks of thought, or existing narratives in which to reapply as method. This is done in a contingent and frequently ironic manner. Lind's 'The Curatorial' isolates that approach within the 'politics' of curating, a series of moves and counter-moves between different actors that impact on the context in which exhibitions are made. Other interpretations see curating as self-reflexive only in building a discourse around exhibition-making as a form (O'Neill) or in isolating its history (Vogel). These, in my view remain constrained within existing discourses when we can see directly in commentaries such as Balzar's that curating has *already* stepped off its mark and fallen into the Orchestra Pit. *The Editorial Aesthetic* further emphasises this point. But rather than try to shore up the defences of curating and art *as* an institution, by performing the curatorial act, I hope, that this can prove emancipatory and see artistic activity as contributing more fully to the construction of a genuine public space.

All these interpretations, in my view, leave out an important aspect of curating to reach out into a public space beyond its own set of relationships and into dialogue with different forms of selection, display and building narratives. My interpretation of self-reflexivity, therefore, is rather than defining a set of rules, to adopt existing ones as means to act

out an emancipated notion of public space, even if only speculatively. This sounds like a rather grand claim for what is evidently quite a picaresque practice. But as we have seen, the picaresque nature is one in which play can encompass seriousness (Huizinga) and pull on a mask and act the fool to reveal the nature of absurdity of the material or immaterial institutions that bind us (Bakhtin). It follows the certain logic of the writing group Oulipo for whom obstructions and constraints make them 'Rats who build labyrinths in order to escape.' (Lescure 1973) The conventions, be they languages or rules, can be constructed from game-like situations in which new meaning can be forged by reactions against the constraints imposed.

What I have shown is this is not merely the questioning of the curator as a personification of contemporary character in which selection and display are part of a necessary, day-to-day building of a personal sense of self, a personal narrative. But through the *use* of applying personae relative to their subject, the curatorial project might find other ways in which the means of selection, display and narrative construction become publicly open to change, that exhibitions themselves can act. This does not mean overriding the artists' voice, however. It means adopting their own rules and logics and attempting to reapply them in different ways alongside them as part of a discursive, playful method. It provides an experiential staging of works of art that goes beyond merely narrating them in words but also in structure, and in space.

Therefore 'doing' curating is not merely the representation of networks of influence but the creation of new encounters, a kind of storytelling that opens up the play circle of the art world to the world at large and accepts, with some irony, its contradictions, rather than present truths – either in the art work, or through art works. Inevitably this places it within an imaginary and allegorical framework, rather than a directly political one.

Rutger Wolfson puts forward a case in which art might transgress its boundaries through reconfiguring its institutions. As he notes: 'In art,

autonomy is coupled not to rules but directly to the artist: only someone working in complete artistic freedom can produce art. As long as the artist engages with his or her own artistic tradition, any topic, any point of reference, any form is permissible.' (Wolfson 2008, p128)

For de Duve (2012) this sits at the very heart of the contemporary aesthetic where questioning a work's truth and beauty has been replaced by a simpler choice of whether something falls within an acceptance of being art. Via the deictic statement 'this is art' (de Duve 2014) Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) provides us with the choice to accept or denounce something as 'cannot be art.' Once that realm is open, all things *are* art, unless we choose to reject them. Perhaps unfortunately, this like Beuys's statement 'everyone is an artist' leaves art undifferentiated unless denied. Contemporary aesthetics are displaced away from a question of what a thing is, to what its context is, or the narrative it is given. The artist might present works as art, but these are necessarily mediated through the choices of the curator to assert that it is acceptably art. Without that authority, one can only state that something is not art, at risk of looking foolish. Osborne's definition of the core of contemporary aesthetics, while seemingly opposition to de Duve's, leaves us in a similar position. For Osborne all contemporary art is 'post-conceptual' but finds that aspects of the Romantic tradition can be found hidden behind conceptual art's legacy of apparently non-naturalistic focus on mathematical progression, language and logic, and information. In its focus on series in art as a reinscription of the sublime, the artist is able to claim authority through the choice of its rules and the imposition of an end 'For the rationality of any series is compromised by the arbitrariness of its beginning (its rule) and (if it is in principle infinite) the point at which its pursuit is terminated.' (Osborne 2013 p61)

When all series are *possibly* art, but at the same time arbitrary, it leads, in my view, towards a self-reflexive relationship with art's own history. Without this signposting it appears like it 'cannot be art'. The mediator that facilitates this, in institutional terms, is the curator when allow

works of art and artists into the narrative of the museum. Osborne does assert that contemporary art 'relies for its productive ambiguity upon a general ambiguity in the relationship between historical and fictional narratives.' (2013 p33) But in order to transform relationships, make it public, the narrative must be performed by 'doing' curating as a methodological act that speculates on what art is. This opens up the conventional relationships of art, audience and institution to create a public space, one that is an agonistic question rather than a deictic statement. As Wolfson puts it 'In order to force art out of its autism, to let it truly come out of itself, museums have to examine what art *can* be. Professionals working in other disciplines should be actively involved.' (2008 p130)

Through aiming to move beyond saying what is selected and what is displayed, a narrative or editorial act is able to explore why and what is possible. Doing curating speculates rather than asserts by pointing to the relativity of the rules by which art (the artist, the work, the institutions and their narratives) manifests in the world, and offering new ways for it to interact socially. 'Doing' curating is acting and playing, adopting a character and laying out the stage. It is staking out the rules of a game in order to generate a new narrative. Through this the somewhat arbitrary markers of freedom in contemporary art is exposed, and then redeployed, as a means to break the fourth wall, if only now and then.

## Learning to Read With John Baldessari A Postscript

Just as the last completed project *The Editorial*, has come to bring together some of the previous strands of my work into play with one another, I feel it is worthwhile to spend some time postscript to look at how they will continue to play a role.

Running through my work, and therefore this thesis, is my own awkward relationship between institutional and independent. It is marked out in the critical readings of what constitutes the curator, and also in the division of work into particular narratives that bring together my work within and outside institutional support structures. The accepted wisdom is that the independent curator has more freedom to than the institutional one who is bound by rules and conventions. If taken as is, then my current role, moving back into the institution would be regressive (at least curatorially speaking), while, it has to be said, significantly progressive when it comes to basic need of income and exhibition support.

On the surface the more complicated definition of the curator 'selection and display in the form of a narrative' that I have laid out are significantly different from a project such as *The Editorial*. In monetary terms, my first exhibition at the Museo Jumex has a production budget of more than 20,000 times the size of the one I had at my disposal compared to my last. It seemingly returns to the conventions of a solo show by a major international artist (meaning recognised internationally) that might also be considered a diminishing return. Not only that, I did not *even* select the artist – failing on the first of the three definitions of curating. It was given to me a requirement of taking the job, albeit a rather fortuitous one.

But lessons learnt in previous projects are finding surprising outlets, and working with the oeuvre of John Baldessari provides equally surprising food for thought on my own curatorial practice.

The approach for *Learning to Read with John Baldessari* (11 November 2017 – 8 April 2018, Museo Jumex, Mexico City) is to follow the logic of Baldessari's own work, a decision which itself follows the logic of his own work to some extent. In this sense it is tautological and performative, as is Baldessari's own practice. This is most clearly illustrated in the main curatorial gambit of the show – to survey his practice through an A-Z drawn out from works made between 1966 and 2016 instead of following a chronological structure. This alternative order of works does not solely follow the artist's authority, but draws on my own reading of the image, the title, the overall shape of the work, and at times tangential word plays of my own. A is (of course) for Apple, but Z is for Sleep.

In effect, I am taking my authority serious by acting in the manner of Baldessari (or at least my interpretation of it), not by being a surrogate for his own interpretation. By reordering the work outside of themes and chronologies, the A-Z runs counter to the accepted norms of curating, yet, equally adopts an alternative, in some ways more basic level of order. By doing so it aims to uncover transversal motifs that run through Baldessari's practice. That is to read his practice in his own language. As with the alphabet itself, a pedagogic or instructional mnemonic convention above anything else, the exhibition as a whole investigates different forms of teaching and learning, and the linguistic and aesthetic structures that articulate learning (frequently subverted by Baldessari in his work). This is done by looking beyond the work into a broader practice in which the artist equally acts as teacher, collaborator, and student at different times and for different strategic affects. The sections include Classes (both art school teaching environment in which Baldessari is perhaps as famous for rethinking as his art, as well as classification systems such as the A-Z), Instructions (as rules and games inspiring creativity) and Judgments (those at the infra-thin layer between



aesthetics and morals). The last of these focuses on myths and narrative as a form of pedagogy, an approach that opens up to concepts of good and bad, right and wrong. These myths include art itself and cinema as much as religion or fairy tales communicated through these mediums.

Meanwhile the catalogue essay reads Baldessari through different pedagogical models – with play as a key concept. The ideas that I aim to draw out of Baldessari's oeuvre are that educational models and aesthetic ones have parallels and interact with one another. Play as an ur-learning activity is fundamental to this argument, linking what de Duve astutely dissected as being at the basis of the current understanding of judgment of art not in revealing actual truth, but in the consideration of a more prosaic version of truth 'this is or this cannot be art'. And in following his logic I can say ask 'this is or this cannot be curating' speaking with absolute veracity, while avoiding all notions of truth or its denial.



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## **Appendices**

### **Unpublished Texts and Lecture Notes**

Appendix i: *Philanthropy in the UK*

Lecture delivered at the *B-Open Symposium*. Bergen Kunsthall and Bergen Festival, 27 October 2010

Appendix ii: *A Frankenstein Museum or A Contemporary Prometheus: The Hong-Gah Collection Repurposed*

Exhibition text for project as part of *A Climate Fictionalism* (23 March - 12 May 2015) - unpublished

Appendix iii: *On the Tensions between autonomy and solidarity in Taiwanese contemporary art and its independent institutions*

Research paper submitted to the Taiwan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Center for Chinese Studies at the completion of the Taiwan Fellowship June-December 2015

Appendix iv: *A Brief History of the History of Curating*

Public Lecture at the Museum of the National Taipei University of Education on 26 December 2015

Appendix v: *Who is the Curator? And What is Curating Anyway?*

Public Lecture at the Museum of the National Taipei University of Education on 19 March 2016

Appendix vi: *Exhibition Narratives*

Public Lecture at the Museum of the National Taipei University of Education on 23 April 2016

Appendix vii: *Towards the Editorial Aesthetic*

Public Lecture at the National Taipei University of Education on 28 October 2016 as part of *The Editorial* programme of events (October 2016 - February 2017)



## appendix i

### Philanthropy in the UK

#### [1] Title

#### [2] Preamble

[3] **“Let’s start indoors.** Let’s start by imaging a fine [4]**Persian carpet** and a hunting knife. The carpet is twelve feet by eighteen... Is the knife razor sharp? If not we hone it. We set about cutting the carpet into thirty-six equal pieces each one a rectangle , two feet by three. Never mind the hardwood floor. The severing fibres release small tweaky noises, like the muted yelps of outraged Persian weavers. Never mind the weavers. When we’re finished cutting, we measure the individual pieces, total them up – and find that, lo, we there’s still nearly 216 square feet of recognisably carpet-like stuff.” (Quammen p1)

When David Quammen describes the world as a Persian rug at the opening of his book, *The Song of the Dodo*, it is a familiar image. We are used to seeing the world through this metaphor, the threads of individual histories, politics, wars, migrations and passions creating an overall pattern in its tapestry.

Quammen, of course, is not talking about history, but of ecology, and a fragile one at that. Quammen’s rhetoric leads to the questions:

[5]’But what does that amount to? Have we now got 36 nice Persian throw rugs? No. All we’re left with is three dozen ragged fragments, each one worthless and commencing to come apart.’ (Quammen 1996 p3)

While Quammen is talking about Island Biogeography rather than culture the metaphor remains good for any complex system where many minor strands are embedded within this structure. And while *The Song of the Dodo* is primarily about extinction, the same ecological impact of [6] **Island Biogeography** not only underpins our understanding of evolution in flora and fauna via Darwin’s study of the Galapagos Islands, it also explains the gigantification and miniturisation of species found in Island ecologies.

The most illustrative example, if still highly debated is **[7] Homo Florientis** – the one metre tall species of human indicated by remains found on the Indonesian island of Flores – where certain rats have developed to be the size of Dogs, and elephants barely larger than sheep as a result of their geographic isolation. Indeed one might argue that culture and nature are in this way similar, at least in the way they come to life. But that is for another time and another story.

So today I want to stretch Quammen's metaphor a little further, turn it upside down, and at risk of overloading it to the point of breaking, I intend to look at a particular (cultural) island and the strands running through it. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to look at the environment and attitudes that have affected the role of the artist in society in the past century or so.

**[8]** I do this in the knowledge of it being very particular, not just locally, but also as a national tendency within a global archipelago of contemporary art practice. Therefore this is a British take on the issue of how artists survive and remain useful within the ecology of culture, in other words how artists continue to be part of the overall pattern despite the many cuts that are currently being made into its social fabric. Underlying this discussion is the relationship between the individual and the wellbeing of society at large, and while Britain may be an island increasingly peripheral to mainland Europe, the distortions in scale might bring into focus a number of issues that are faced elsewhere.

### **[9] And so to Peckham**

In this lecture I am going to examine the role of philanthropy has played in relationship to the change in status of the artist and image production at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These two intersecting interests will be presented using the philanthropic work of [11]Passmore Edwards in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although little known, even in the UK, Passmore Edwards had a significant impact on culture, education and public health, particularly in poorer areas of the country.

His bequest was responsible for more than [12] 80 buildings being constructed including a number of free libraries and art galleries in the East and South East of London, then the slum areas of the city, as well as almshouses, hospitals, washhouses and other social welfare minded institutions in Cornwall, one of the most underdeveloped regions of England. These areas are, perhaps surprisingly still classified today as being in need of financial investment and qualify for special support under the European Union's regional development schemes.

This led to Edwards to become known as the Cornish Carnegie, although his efforts are somewhat eclipsed by larger and more central developments by philanthropists of the same era. However, few have had such a wide ranging impact on the arts and social welfare in disadvantaged areas of the UK.

[13] [14] The South London Gallery, located in the heart of Peckham is one examples of Edwards' philanthropic gestures and is typical of the many projects that he supported. The gallery had grown out of the work of another philanthropist, William Rossiter. Again, a self-made and self educated man, Rossiter's energy drove the development of the gallery which began as a free library and turned into place for art only through the efficacy of Rossiter's lobbying which had seen the local council establish a free public library of its own once demand for it had been proven.

The spirit of the enterprise was embedded in the floor itself with the inscription [15] 'The source of Art is in the Life of a People' - a unique inlaid wooden floor designed by the graphic artist Walter Crane. Rossiter's choice of Peckham was distinctly related to the lives of the people living in its slums: [16] 'the daily lives of the people most need such refreshment, where the great artisan class, whose work beautifies the wealthier part of the metropolis, live with so little beauty.'  
(Waterfield & Smith 1994 p55)

William Morris was also a supporter of the gallery, which aimed to be 'the National Gallery for the working class people of South London' and attracted patrons of the real National Gallery to its board, including Frederic Lord Leighton as its chairman.

While the gallery's founding was done in a spirit of development, once opened it was not without conflict. Rossiter found the locals a difficult audience, but an improving one:

'After 20 years' working,' he once said, 'I can trace at least 100 people who have passed through the gradations of beginning by swearing at us and throwing cabbage stumps . . . then becoming regular attendants at our lectures, and developing into really thoughtful people.' (ibid)

Rossiter was enraged by the way in which the middle classes used his institution as a place for their own entertainment by smoking cigars and playing cello in the gallery among other transgressions. In particular, in a lambasting public speech at the opening of the gallery's extension funded by Edwards, he criticised his wealthy patrons for refusing to pay the one penny charge for a catalogue, when the working class were willing to spend the same amount almost without exception.

While not explicit in the documentation, Rossiter was clearly considered to have bitten the hand that feeds him and was rapidly squeezed out once Lord Leighton took the chair. The gallery transitioned into a public organisation, being taken over by the local ward, and then inherited by the borough council post war. However, this itself can be seen as a triumph of philanthropy to force public money to be invested in art for its educative value and sowed the seeds for today's attitudes towards the value of the arts. But more on this later.

### **[17] The Peckham Experiment**

Rossiter was not the only philanthropist or social worker to contribute to the cultural life of the area, Peckham becoming a laboratory of social



good, namely for it being at the bottom of the social register, in the capital at least.

30 years on and one of the most influential programmes for community health was established by Drs George Scott Williamson and Dr Innes H. Pearse, a husband and wife team investigating the social aspects of a people's wellbeing.

In an essay published by the foundation that has continued the doctor's work *Health of The Individual, of the Family, of Society* the good of the project is outlined thus:

[18] Health is everyone's birthright; the pity is that so many lose it. In spite of our vast sickness services... the burden of ill-health in the community remains heavy... all this study of disease does not reveal to us the laws of health. It is health itself which must be studied. We must devise laboratories where we can put health, too, under a lens, look at it, discover how it behaves, and find out in what conditions it can grow and spread (Williamson & Pearse 1926)

The Peckham experiment began in 1926 as a way to measure the benefit of health rather than the negative effects of disease. In fact they chose to study health as if it were transmitted in the same way: 'that health is more powerful and more infectious than disease'. (ibid)

[19] In some respects the need for more than simply barriers to disease, but an holistic perspective on the health of a people was a precursor to the National Health Service, their purpose built Pioneer Health Centre being a model for the health centres built by the British Government post-World War II as part of the countries modernisation. However, the fundamental principles – that promoting health through active involvement in community and environment, were shelved in favour of focusing the limited resources of government to treating the sick or as the medical doctor and Social Welfare historian Arati Karnak puts it:

[20] 'Once again, health was being defined by lack of disease rather than the promotion of health. The Peckham Experiment did not fit with the policies and goals of the Ministry of Health'

While somewhat tautological in his argument, Karnak picks up on a major faultline – that the British Government at that time had to tackle various issues of health within the community during the rebuilding of London after the Blitz. While Peckham itself was not particularly heavily effected, an emphasis on measurable outcomes, demonstrable change from ill to well was more valuable than the aim of improving living standards for those not in dire need.

### **[21] Exposure**

In parallel to some of the developments made in privately financed and ultimately state sponsored social welfare a revolution in the realm of aesthetics was underway.

At the same time that Rossiter was negotiating with Passmore Edwards to build the South London Art Gallery, two developments were due to change the face of artistic production from its foundations. Only two years after the gallery's opening the first cinema film was presented, which also led to George Eastman was setting another revolution in motion with the launch of photographic film, a new lightweight photographic medium which turned the studio portraiture and specialist field into a mass market product and by 1900 [22] Eastman Kodak launched the Brownie camera to the public. A 20<sup>th</sup> century product par excellence, as we now know, the technology was to become all but obsolete and defunct by the end of the millennium.

While photographic images had been seen for over 80 years, the phenomena was as much a part of the travelling carnival shows as a day to day encounter, and with limitations that placed them more centrally in the spiritualist movement as evidence of the occult as in everyday life with various photographers claiming to have captured ghosts, ectoplasm

and fairies in the face of the old adage: 'The camera never lies' – now as obsolete in our psyche as the bromide plates on which they were shot.

### **The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction**

[23]And so to Paris in the 1930s and the publication of Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). This well known critique of the aura of the work of art delineates a moment when mechanical means, particularly photography, were beginning to be employed in the making of art. The idea that a work of art might include, or even consist solely of remade industrial objects had been proposed in various artistic lineages – Duchamp's *Fountain*; the futurists; Dadaists – to name but a few. And naturally some works of art, bronze sculpture and print editions, had been mechanically produced in multiples since the invention of the press. Benjamin, however, sought to examine the ontological effect of this movement on the work of art itself, and as his other essays show, aims to look at the changes in visual culture as a whole that the new forms of image making that the 20<sup>th</sup> century allowed for began to reach fruition in the commercials and arcades.

While this text is familiar to most involved in contemporary art today, it is often overlooked that it is not a nostalgic call against progress, but a look towards the realms of new art, new media if you like, that can effect the most change.

Benjamin explains his position thus:

The nineteenth-century dispute as to the artistic value of painting versus photography today seems devious and confused. This does not diminish its importance, however; if anything, it underlines it. The dispute was in fact as symptom of a historical transformation the universal impact of which was not realised by either of the rivals. When the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever. The resulting change in the function of art transcended the perspective of the century; for a long time it even escaped that of the twentieth century, which experienced the development of film. Earlier much futile thought had been devoted to the question

of whether photography is an art. The primary question – whether the very invention of photography transformed the entire nature of art – was not raised. (1936 p226)

It is in cinema that Benjamin finds the necessary binding together of narrative and image for revolutionary potential – but only under the right conditions such as in Russia where:

‘Some of the players whom we meet in Russian films are not actors in our sense but people who portray themselves and primarily in their own work process. In Western Europe the capitalistic exploitation of the film denies consideration to modern man’s legitimate claim to being reproduced. Under these conditions the film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations. (ibid p226)

The point I would like to make here is not that mechanical reproduction levers open mass media as a site for artistic production per se. Instead to read between the lines and note that Benjamin expects the arts to do social good – in his case films Marxist revolutionary potential. He even likens the new art forms to the surgeon.

‘How does the cameraman compare with the painter? To answer this we take recourse to an analogy with a surgical operation. The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient’s body...’ [25] ‘Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law.’ (ibid p226-227)

We should not forget of course that Benjamin is, to some extent, fighting over the arts against the propaganda ridden visual culture of Europe on

the brink of war. Early cinema was rife with communist or fascist propaganda – from Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) to Reizenstahl's *Triumph of Will* (1935). For good or for bad the work of art was being put to use by governing bodies. But Benjamin's wellbeing, the good of art, is still palpable as he goes on to apply psychoanalytical theory to films affects.

'The characteristics of the film lie not only in the manner in which man presents himself to mechanical equipment but also in the manner in which, but means of this apparatus, man can represent his environment. A glance at occupational psychology illustrates the testing capacity of the equipment. Psychoanalysis illustrates it in a different perspective. The film has enriched our field of perception with methods which can be illustrated by those of Freudian Theory. .... Since the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* things have changed.' (ibid p228)

Benjamin goes on to discuss Architecture, perhaps unsurprising given the etymological roots of 'Camera' in latin languages – although, in Germanic the 'camera' is always an 'apparatus' rather than a space.

### **[26] Put to Work**

We can see, that by the '30s artists were routinely being put to use. No longer artisans who created unique hand crafted objects, no longer someone whose indexical mark is left on the work of art itself, but a director of fractured views.

This is of course nothing new. But in tying the threads I have presented together we gain a perspective it points towards a paradigmatic shift for the role of the artist in society. I'd like to argue that it is a repercussion of late Victorian attitudes towards the arts as educative that inform such views. Prior to 1900 the artists' role was fairly secure – their base function to produce images. As we have seen, the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marks the point at which this is debased as photography moves from a scientific and specialist apparatus to a mass media recording device

leaving the artists' privileged position as imager of society terminally undermined. A new use value for the artist had to be found if they were to continue as a part of society.

[27] While some experimental forms for the artist to find a place in a wider social context, we need only look up the road from the South London Gallery, past a restaurant named 'The Peckham Experiment' to John Latham's old home, 'Flat Time House' now an archive of his life art and ideas, including the Artist Placement Group, a project he established with Barbara Steveni and other artists of their generation.

The Artist Placement Group proposed that the artist should be brought into business and public governance as a freethinking individual – a troubleshooter of sorts, but rather than looking to cure problems, aiming to improve the health of the organisation and its products.

As Howard Gardner suggests in his essay *The Arts and Human Development* the artist adopts much the same perspective of that of a child by 'body-thinking', an alternative to the scientific method puts forward 'another way of cutting up the universe'. (Gardner 1973)

These ideas may have taken 30 years to percolate into the governance of cultural giving, but it is now an expected outcome of any public presentation of art that good comes out of it by education, and normally education in a social sense, to build harmony and understanding of others, particularly other cultures.

### **[28] And so today**

How have these issues been resolved? This is difficult to say with complete clarity as the question has been repeatedly challenged. The reality is that works of art continue to have an auric value when placed in the commodity system, now more so, in fact, than ever before. Just as Lord Leighton might have presented himself as much a patron as an artist, so now Damian Hirst pitches himself as much as a philanthropist

as artist – with varying levels of authenticity. But the battleground is equally littered with the corpses of other models of art as a social experiment. *Relational Aesthetics* (Bourriaud 1998) is but one of the socially engaged art practices theorised in museums, galleries and offsite projects.

But within the public sector, and most keenly felt within the public funding systems, artists are now required to demonstrate a measurable outcome, to consider their audience first, before the work is made, and how they will do them good. The obstacles that the Peckham Experiment found in healthcare – the NHS treating visible problems rather than looking for solutions through improving living conditions is symptomatic of a publicly funded approach in the UK. For the UK government, the targets match their own. The deletion of the aura of the work of art from all other spheres than the monetary means that artists' work, the good they do, must be quantified in other ways.

So in these strands a pattern begins to emerge. Perhaps only a 26<sup>th</sup> of the problem, or perhaps even less, but a pattern nevertheless. The pattern is an important one as increasingly the arts get squeezed into a position on which they rely, after a hundred years of support within the public sector, on the generosity and whims of individual philanthropists. But it is not only the artist who has been made partially redundant in this case.

[29] Philanthropic models are now also looked at as 'profitable' sectors. Emergent in the field of giving are Academy Schools in the UK, where businesses, religious groups or even individuals can gain a significant amount of control over what is actually taught in the syllabus for cash contributions. Indeed the Peckham Academy is actually branded with the logo of Harris carpets, the carpet manufacturing company of Lord Harris of Peckham whose title itself a newly created title that puts what was once an area where progressive modernisation was seen as bringing about social change. In today's cultural economics this is but the thin end of the wedge. As recently as Tuesday this week, the British Conservative

led coalition government announced they are cutting funding towards the arts to a staggering degree. [30] The Arts Council, the UK governments grant giving arm, had its operating costs slashed from 44 to 22 million pounds, and its grant giving cut by 33%. Likewise public funding of higher education has been near obliterated with an 80% reduction in grants to universities. We may have to wait another century to see what effects such change will have on aesthetics, but it will certainly herald a new notion of support for the arts in the short term.



## appendix ii

### **A Frankenstein Museum, or a Contemporary Prometheus The Hong Gah Collection repurposed**

*A Frankenstein Collection, or a Contemporary Prometheus* is a fictional scenario for a future when art, the museum, and the curator are rendered redundant in the face of more urgent needs following an environmental collapse. It draws on the Hong Gah museum's collection, along with processes drawn from the history of modern art, science and literature. Presented as a series of systemic models and diagrams it proposes how the collection, and art more generally, may be repurposed for more urgent needs.

At the centre of the installation, three bronze sculptures sit submerged up to their necks in seawater. Wired together they create a simple battery providing a small electrical charge. In 1790 Enlightened Italian scientist Galvani discovered that two different metals in an electrolytic solution – say salt water – would create an electrical current. And when connected to a disembodied frog's legs it made them twitch.

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or a Modern Prometheus* was published in 1818, and we can presume it was influenced by Galvani's experiments, although there is no direct evidence. As much as the story is the one of the origins of both science fiction and gothic literature, like both genres it is at heart a morality tale for the modern, industrial age. The 'Modern Prometheus', Victor Frankenstein, was cursed by his curiosity into bioelectricity and creating life just as the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus warned against attempting to perform acts reserved for the gods. It questioned the nature of the enlightenment, and its emphasis on individualism free from spirituality, as well as rationalism.

The enlightenment sits at the vanguard of the modern age, both its industry and science, and the emergence of the romantic figure of the artist. Prior to the enlightenment art was purposeful, either in presenting history and myth as a sermon for the present, or in its representation. The modern era allowed the artist and the work of art to be freed from this function, instead creating a vision of the future – the utopias of Golden and Silver age science fiction among them. This project presents a reversal, a Bronze Age science fiction perhaps.

The contemporary period, in which we now live, is defined by its lack of vision for the future. Climate Fiction, along with other sub-genres of Science and Speculative Fiction, almost universally present dystopia where science and industry have run amuck and upset the natural order to the point of poisoning the atmosphere and natural resources and bringing about ecological catastrophes or technology that starts to fight back.

A second element in the installation proposes a system for taking books from the bibliography of *A Climate Fictionalism* and turns them into alcohol by a process of fermentation and distillation. As well as repurposing the knowledge contained within the books, it also draws on a work of art by British artist John Latham which performed a physical and abject critique of Modernism. *Art & Culture: Chew and Still, 1967*, was a performance of sorts, in which Latham took Clement Greenberg's high modernist tract, masticated it, and spat it out into a jar. Using the methods of tribal cultures in brewing rough alcohols such as Chicha, the spit causes starches to be turned to sugars, and natural yeasts to ferment the mash. Throughout Latham's work is the questioning of total knowledge in religion and science, and here both the attitude and the process has been scaled up, and then distilled, to create a rough baiju to be drunk, or used as fuel.

These core elements are combined with diagrams and drawings including those that are made on pages of the Hong-Gah Museum's catalogue of embroidery. Wired together they reflect the museum whose systems have been reconfigured for survival of people rather than preservation of cultural artefacts.

Of course all this is speculative, fictional, and as such a myth reflecting aspects of the current cultural status quo. As such it is a morality tale of its own. *The Contemporary Prometheus* is a curator whose work is based in systemic thinking and replacing the artist as lone creator of autonomous objects after the end of civilisation as we know it – with all the benefits and problems that ensue in this alternate history and future.



## **appendix iii**

### **On the tensions between autonomy and solidarity in Taiwanese contemporary art and its independent institutions**

In 2015 I was awarded a Taiwan Fellowship to conduct independent research in Taipei. It has been an interesting time for this country that is not recognised by the United Nations and, as a result, has little formal diplomatic connections with other states. This is despite being de facto the most fully-fledged democracy in East Asia, and one of the most economically successful states in the past 30 years. Taiwan's cultural scenes are equally developed, with a substantial museum and independent art scene, the host to one of the first international biennials in Asia, and an influential player in contemporary sound art, cinema and design, all the more significant considering the size of the country, a total of 20,000,000 inhabitants on an island little bigger than Wales.

Nevertheless, Taiwan lives with a fraught colonial history from the West, China and Japan alike, and a national identity constantly in status quo of 'One China, Two Systems' - a legacy of the Chinese Civil War that ran from 1927 to 1950 when Chiang Kai Shek was routed from the mainland to Taiwan to set up government on the island under dictatorial conditions. With both sides claiming the right to rule China, this political stand-off persists to this day. With this socio-political history, independence carries particular weight in Taiwan, and within such conditions the interpretation of art as free, independent or autonomous, and the role it plays in building a cultural identity are unique.

Having originally set out to look at the organisational structures within a number of Taiwanese independent art spaces as a way to look at what freedom might mean within Taiwan's specific cultural setting, my research took a turn through watching a film made by students from the Taipei University of the Arts who had convened themselves under the name the 'Post-Movements Squad'. Shown at the Taipei Contemporary

Art Center in advance of their international symposium 'Made in Public - Property Protest Commons'<sup>2</sup>, the film documented a prior internal discussion reflecting on their experiences as participants of the Sunflower Revolution a year earlier. A concern ran throughout those involved with the legacy of the occupation that illuminate the paradoxical position that has become everyday for many Taiwanese citizens. That legacy was not a political, but a personal one, a sentiment shared across the young artists that had created a sense of resentment about how effective it might be to create art at all. Had the concerns stopped there it might to be expected. But the concerns were not with the importance of art in the face of 'real life' but in how the art students felt they had not been able to capitalise as individuals on the experience. This was put in terms derived from French post-structuralist thinking: 'How was my subjectivity heard and expressed within this movement? And how did my art benefit from this experience?'<sup>3</sup>

These questions are at first unsettling as they suggest that participation in a collective grassroots movement - and a single issue protest at that - might be enacted not to show support, but to take advantage of a moment of clear importance in the cultural and political formation of Taiwan today. It also points towards certain expectations that relate not so much to freedom as they might in more revolutionary moments of localised modernism<sup>4</sup> but to autonomy in art and culture. The expectations of young artists, informed by previous generations, and how they organise themselves outside of formal institutions reflects attitudes

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<sup>2</sup> 2-20 September, 2015 at the Taipei Contemporary Art Center

<sup>3</sup> Film documenting the 'Post-Movement Forum', 2014 shown at the Taipei Contemporary Art Center, 9 September 2015 with an introduction and discussion by Huang I-Cheng representing the Post-Movements Squad

<sup>4</sup> Here I refer to the temporal definition of Modernism that springs from Cultural Studies Center and Stuart Hall's 1969 paper 'When was Modernism?' and its history having later been taken up as both title and method by Geeta Kapur in her 1998 book of the same name. Significant to both is a post-colonial understanding that Modernism takes place in specific locations under certain conditions. Modernity, therefore, is not developed outside the West merely as a mimicking or adopting of those ideas but with its own constellations of ideas, ideologies and socio-political contexts. In a previous paper 'When was Curating?' I have begun to sketch out a different constellation applied to contemporaneity (published in Art Criticism Taiwan issue 69, Tainan University of the Arts, Fall 2015).

that make up the contemporaneity of art, artists and their position within society.

The role of art students within the Sunflower Movement has two particular and significant relationships that make this an important point of study. Firstly, while much has been made of the political connotations of the Sunflower as the emblem of the protests (its historical echoes of the Wild Lily Movement and its symbolic heliotropic nature)<sup>5</sup> According to the narrative of the students from the Taipei University of the Arts, the Sunflowers were first made more out of boredom and a wish to create rather than out of a predetermined 'branding' of the protest.<sup>6</sup> The sunflower sculptures attached to the outside of the building captured the attention of the assembled people and the international media at the protest site, proving to be a natural emergent symbol. In fact this 'use' of art was for some of the artists involved in the protest one of the on-going unsettling issues with their involvement, being seen as image makers, and, as a result having their actual political voices omitted from the discourse.

The second significant relationship between art and the protest was a single painting which was the first to adorn the lectern within the Legislative Yuan itself. This romanticised painting of students occupying the building and listening to Lin Fei-Fan, helped to establish his leadership in the public eye and invoked a groundswell of students within the building painting and adorning the stage with their art alongside the more traditional political slogans. Again, reports from those involved in the protest suggest that these paintings originated as a

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<sup>5</sup> Widely reported in news media around the time, (see "Rally backs Taiwan students occupying parliament". BBC News. 21 March 2014. Retrieved 29 March 2014) it is not possible to locate the origins of this interpretation having become common discourse around the protest sites. Notably, however, its cultural reading and the relationship between symbolism and word/image/object association are consistent with art criticism whereby the physical movement of the flower becomes related to the political movement of the people. This is translatable between cultures as the Chinese 運動 carries the same double meaning as 'movement' in English.

<sup>6</sup> Exposed in the 'Post-Movements Squad' film and by their representative Huang I-Chieng at the 'Made in Public' symposium, Taipei Contemporary Art Center, 9 September 2011

result of boredom during the extended sit in, but swiftly became a visual symbol for the protests that helped to maintain its media presence and sympathy within the public eye, with all the same problematics of removing voice of their artists from the actual political debate.

In fact, this image became so emblematic of the protests that they have been incorporated into numerous works of art shown internationally by not only Taiwanese but also Chinese artists. The work of Han Ishu depicts the final day of the protests in pixelated form as part of his *Life-Scans* series (2014-15), the pixels being made up of 10 NTD coins. And more significantly by Yuan Goang-Ming a professor of the students who participated in the protests, whose work *Landscape of Energy*, 2014 incorporates a scene with the camera tracking back from the stage to the balcony of the Legislative Yuan filmed on the final day of the protest. The video has been shown widely in international museums and biennales in the last year.<sup>7</sup> But neither of these artists were directly involved in the protests themselves.

So the individual, primarily student artists taking part in the protests remained largely faceless, and while part of the solidarity found in any grass-roots political movement were and remain in some ways disenfranchised from both their political peers' basic understanding of art as a craft or part of a media-orientated system, and by their artistic peers who, perhaps as a result of more distance, have been able to capture the emblematic images within their own subjective practices. But outside the Legislative Yuan among the supporting rally other artist activities were able to provide more complex responses to the situation.

As an independent art space organised as a members association since 2010, Taipei Contemporary Art Center (TCAC) is particularly apt for

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<sup>7</sup> Reports of this are varied. Despite its success as a work (among his nominated videos for the Taishin Art Award 2015) it has been accused by students as being exploitative and dictatorial in its approach. Yuan Goang-Ming received official clearance to make the film and, in order to achieve its depopulated interior in keeping with the rest of the video, the protesters were instructed to move out of the frame during the filming, a fact that many considered uncomfortable.



study as it was also a participant within the demonstrations. Whereas the student artists were involved in the occupation of the Legislative Yuan, and took a role in the organisation of the campaign, TCAC's role was one of solidarity with the protesters in the streets surrounding the building. Under the Chairmanship of Meiya Cheng, TCAC established a base among the street protesters for more from 24 March to the end of the occupation on 10 April. Here they presented artists works outside the gallery in a unique manner, integrating contemporary art into a protest context. Among the works by contemporary artists displayed was an existing project by Luxury Logico. The production of bottled water by this leading Taipei-based artists' group is an on-going project that creates an alternative funding structure for young artists. The sale of bottles of their own designer water usually goes towards a grant for the production of new work by younger artists. Within the context of the Sunflower Movement, the water was distributed for free by TCAC, just one of many groups attending the protests providing basic provisions for others, the art project circulating anew outside its usual economic framework. Video works by artists such as Jun Yang (the founder of TCAC) and Kao Junn-Honn, among others were aimed at bringing the content of works of art, protest and Taiwanese political history respectively, to the debates through locating them in this context.

But more significantly, TCAC moved its administration to the protest site as well as its programming. This more subtle display of solidarity with the student-led protest is in some ways a more radical one. The constitution of a protest is more usually made up of individuals or political groups that represent subjective and personal positions. Freedom within society is most commonly located within the individual, their personal enactments of power within a liberal democracy are enabled through individual political opinions that sit alongside their consumer rights. Those organisations that do hold public political voices are organisations built around a political position giving their leaderships a mandate to speak on specific subjects on behalf of their constituents. Only rarely do members organisations whose memberships

are convened around issues outside of the political realm. For an organisation of artists to put its support behind a campaign or movement that does not relate to its own constitutional aims is at first surprising, if not highly unorthodox.

In fact, this was in keeping with the history of the organisation and its activities and related to the integrated subjects and management its on-going programmes of exhibitions, talks and public events. The participation in protests was not unusual for the organisation, which regularly decamped to demonstrations outside the presidential palace during Manray Hsu's time leading TCAC at the organisation's foundation. 'I tried to create a programme where art was put into dialogue with other practices - and the protesters were an important part of that'. Although it was driven by the individual's working within the Center it was reflective of an attempt to reorganise an art centre around its core concerns structurally. Terms such as Flexitime seem out of place within an associate structure primarily run by volunteers, but Hsu's innovation was to move away from a time and space structure to a task based one. Not that this was a formal working structure. In the event of moving offices for a protest it was enacted with an economy of means usually reserved for the family home: 'we would put a note on the door saying we were closed with our phone number and could be found at the protest site for any work matters.'<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that TCAC was originally established as a temporary organisation, springing from a commissioned work by Jun Yang from the Taipei Biennale in 2007. Granted operational funding from the JUT foundation as well as a home in a building owned by the foundation for only two years, the continued existence of TCAC beyond its initial lifespan was a tenuous position. As Hsu readily admits, the freedom allowed from having these basic resources allowed him to think outside the conventions of institutions and to question the funding system itself,

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Manray Hsu, 15 October 2015.

enabling him to refuse funding if it did not fit with the organisations ideologies, which he invoked Isaac Berlin to describe as the ability 'to choose between the good and evil freedoms allowed by the funding'<sup>9</sup>. Meiya Cheng's vision for TCAC, as she puts it was to 'keep it alive'<sup>10</sup> once these basic lifelines provided by the JUT foundation were removed. And while this required more reliance on funding from public funding such as the Taiwanese Foundation for Arts and Culture and the Taiwan Cultural Ministry, it was important to her to maintain the methods and interests of its founding Chair despite having access to different networks of support as Hsu. The formal, rather than contingent relocation of TCAC to the protest was one of a move towards an institutional response if an acceptance that the radical, revolutionary belief that had surrounded the formation of the artist association had waned. And with it the black and white nature of Hsu's imperative responses under TCAC's initial ironic contingency<sup>11</sup>, shifted more to a consolidated approach to both programme and organisation.

The current phase of TCAC has grown out of a situation in which it is possible for the organisation to reformulate it, using the template of the demonstrations as the opening of the possibility of freedom from its own institutionalisation. In 2015 Esther Lu adopted the role of director, in some ways a shift further toward the institutionalisation of TCAC being the first paid head of the programme.<sup>12</sup> However, she also instigated a

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<sup>9</sup> The more common translation of Isaac Berlin's concepts of freedom are 'positive' and 'negative' freedom. Positive freedom is related to 'self-mastery'. See Isaac Berlin's 1958 essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty.' The choice to discuss this as 'good and evil' reflects aspects of Hsu's more radicalized and revolutionary interpretation of what art can and should do in the political domain and shifts the discourse more towards Hannah Arendt's discourses around freedom including 'On Revolution' and 'Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on The Banality of Evil', both 1963.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Meiya Cheng, 11 November 2015

<sup>11</sup> Ironic Contingency is a term taken from *Irony, Contingency and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty, 1989. In this he describes the Ironic Contingent as an 'actor in Late Capitalism' who 'replaces the Romantic Artist under the new conditions of freedom.' I have applied this to the position of the curator in other essays (The Undisciplined Curator, Specialism, Open Editions 2016) to represent a shift in the cultural imaginary of the autonomous and free individuals in contemporary globalized culture.

<sup>12</sup> Both Hsu and Cheng worked on a voluntary basis as Chair of the members board, although practically worked in the role of director of the organisation and its programme

flat structure working with the former Programme Manager - now a curator - and a former member of the management board - also termed curator: Jo Ying Peng and Fang Yen-Hsiang respectively. This reformulation at the very core of how TCAC is organised has allowed the programming team to undertake deeper research, and with stable support from the Ministry of Culture for its operational costs, it has freed them from the requirements to present finished work and to concentrate instead on the generation of knowledge and reflection.

And so the programme has begun to provide a forum to look at the on-going historicisation of the Sunflower Movement, among others. The presentation of students' perspectives within a public forum rather than a college seminar situation has allowed them to create greater linkages between generations and to have voice alongside their peers and their senior artists. This freedom of voice is far from the radicalised proclamations of a protest in progress. Just as there has been a shift in the general mood of Taiwanese people after the protests from one in which Chinese interests were inevitably going to take over Taiwanese ones to a position that the current status quo is maintainable, there is an observable shift in artistic organisations and individual artists to writing, and more importantly constantly rewriting one's own histories. This freedom is closer to Richard Sennett's positive reading of the authority of the autonomous individual<sup>13</sup>, which, I would argue is applicable to organisations as much as subjective individuals.

As Sennett explains 'in a world where material differences are becoming less glaring, in which services and skills are the coins of exchange, autonomy is more stable. One person is needed by others more than he or she needs them... the skills being those which he or she has learned to *be* rather than something that person owns.'<sup>14</sup>

This shift is present in Taiwanese contemporary art and curatorial practices emerging after the Sunflower Movement as both the

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<sup>13</sup> p85, Richard Sennett, *Authority*, 1988 - emphasis my own.

discomfort of being autonomous and yet showing solidarity, and in the reformulation of the organisations observable today.



## **appendix iv**

### **A Brief History of the History of Curating**

Thank you for coming. It is an honour to have been invited by ArtCo and Lu Pei Yi to give my perspectives on curating and its histories. In some respects I am an outsider to this discourse, being more concerned with the practice and the future of curating than it's past. But then all history is concerned with the here and now, and what will come to be. And it would be somewhat absurd to claim that I have not been involved in curatorial history having taught some 200 plus students of curating at the Royal College of Art in London, as well as guest lectures, seminars and conferences related to curating in Europe, the Americas and Asia.

The time of curating is something that has appeared in my writing, most recently in the journal *Art Criticism Taiwan*, in which I ask the question: *When Was Curating?* leading to the more unsettling question of whether that time has already past into history.

Why should this matter? Why should we be concerned with what history is being written? And by whom?

Curatorial history has become a hot subject in the past 20 years as curatorial programmes have grown up in institutions and curatorial discourse has rippled out from being a relatively specialist subject to being one of common currency.

I'd like to survey the current consensus on curatorial history, which is still very much in formation. Through this I'd like to begin to explore what is at stake, who is defining it, and finally, to open up a discussion with Lu Peiyi on whether there might be distinct local histories, just as we already acknowledge there to be distinct local contexts in which art is more, or less, relevant.

At its origin 'Curatorial History', and its rivalrous sibling 'Exhibition Histories' has grown up with the advent of curatorial education. And with it certain canons have emerged, turning point exhibitions which raise the questions about curating, not, necessarily providing the answers.

Without doubt, *When Attitudes Become Form* has become the original curated exhibition from which all others have been measured, even if, despite its ubiquity in the history it has been rather renamed from. Its original title: *Live in your Head: When Attitudes become Form (Work-Processes-Concepts-Situtations-Information)* (1969, Bern) has been partially lost from sight.

History has the tendency to revise itself to suit the present. As we all know, history is written by the victors, and rewritten again and again by their progeny.

I would suggest that in trying to write a history of curating we encounter an ontological problem because curating is a contemporary practice.

### **Evolution of the Museum - From Exhibition to Display**

But we can't ignore the museum as having a role in curating.

A history of museums and collecting is more clearly defined and is a history of acquisition of material things to narrate a history, and a history of the power of public display.

We pass from the private collection of the hidden hoard, to the curiosity cabinet in which artefacts are displayed, to the ordered history of the museum. From ownership to display. From the nature and culture as part of one whole to the departmentalisation of human and natural history.

Here, defined as early as Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, given in 1820s published in 1830 the museum is a logical ordering of the natural and



cultural world. Its exhibitions are reflections of the history that they institution seeks to present as concrete and immutable. Shinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin, opened in 1830

As Merleau-Ponty states: 'Hegel is the Museum. He is if you wish all philosophies, but deprived on their finiteness and power of impact, embalm, transformed he believes into themselves, but really transformed into Hegel.' (1952 p119) The Museum seeks to contain everything, but also cuts it off from its own world.

Clearly such museums had a curator (Hegelian or otherwise), caring for the artefacts and defining the displays. But their work was quite distinct from curating as we would discuss it today. These exhibitions were by-products of the collection, and their keepers historians. The art, even if autonomous, reflected its culture as a permanent true history and knowledge.

In *The Power of Display* Mary Staniszewski (1998) marks out the Museum of Modern Art and the work of its founding director Alfred Barr as a turning point towards a new form of display. Barr used analytical methods, architectural research into how people looked and moved through space, to reconceive exhibitions into multilayered, rather than linear histories.

But even then the exhibitions themselves could be simply defined into two basic exhibition types based on:

The Solo 'Master' artist

Temporal/Geographic exhibitions

Our curating as a contemporary practice is necessarily rooted in the present. In an interview for a documentary film about Harald Szeemann's documenta 5 Lawrence Weiner comments that: 'Contemporary art may not be relevant in 5 years time. I hope not.' (Cornelis 1979) If curating is

a contemporary practice it also has moved away from permanence in the collection and exhibition to the temporality of selection and display that, as David Balzar puts it in his 2015 book 'Curationism' reflects broader cultural attitudes towards value. To Examine Curationism is: 'not only to examine the power embedded in the activity of 'selecting and displaying. It is also to discover important, perhaps unsettling things about how we currently understand value, and ourselves.' (Balzar 2015)

And the curator does not simply select the works of art, or the artists, but also the methods of display, of contextualisation and theme.

### **FROM SALON TO BIENNALE**

The history of curating exhibitions is in parallel to that of the museum. It arguably starts in the Salon, not in the Museum. The Salon was a disorderly contemporary space. In the Salon it was possible to see the new art, clustered together, overlapping, layered in the present. And, of course, it was also possible to buy the work. Salons were not curated spaces at all, but showroom, organised by artists and art associations to show and to sell. These spaces were so contemporary that the paintings were frequently finished in situ, this illustration from 1830. Selection was by committee, here in Paris in the 1920s, and, as we are all aware, the art that was omitted created *Salon de Refuse* which were frequently more significant than the institutional space.

We take it for granted today that the biennale is a more refined space than the salon, closer to the museum and the tourist industry than to the art market. But in fact the first biennale, the Venice Biennale was a large-scale art fair. The works were for sale as well as to view. It was only post-war, and in light of the foundation of Documenta that the large scale international exhibitions that we call biennales began to take on themes, relating contemporary art to the contemporary world. Now it is all but expected.

Paul O'Neill describes the shift towards a self-awareness, or self-reflexive nature of curating as:

**Curating is no longer about being somebody else; it is about being a curator, not as it is understood in practice, but in discourse. [That] curating is the participation in the selection, co-production, display and/or dissemination of art is made apparent by a perceptible framing device. (O'Neill 2006)**

Simon Sheik refers to the lessons learnt by curators and institutions by artists to become self-reflexive and self-questioning as 'institutionalised critique'. (Sheik 2006)

These have resulted in curating requiring a history, or mode of display, and is where the history of curating itself becomes closest to that of contemporary art rather than as a form of museology.

Whereas in the treasure trove to the museum we moved from ownership to public display, we can now see in the contemporary the exercising of the power of selecting and displaying. It is not surprising in the glut of images and the relativism that we live within today that this might be the case. Owning is no longer interesting, nor is the display of these artefacts. the power to display ones choices is. And curating fits within this theory. And so the history of curating may also be seen as a facet of contemporary cultural attitudes at large.



## **appendix v**

### **Who is the Curator? And what is Curating Anyway?**

In the past ten years the curator has gone from a specialist working in museums to a public figure recognisable to almost anyone with an eye to culture. But while the personality is increasingly a celebrity, what a curator actually does remains rather indistinct.

This lecture will look at some of the people who have become definitive of the contemporary art curator, and look at what lies at the core of curating as an activity.

I will focus on contemporary art for two reasons. Firstly, it is the field which is best known to me, and where there is the greatest amount of discourse around the curator and their work.

Secondly, I would argue, is that other uses of the term 'The Curator' spring from those active within contemporary art.

Nevertheless, as The Curator has begun to appear within other cultural fields - in particular the entertainment industry - the role is increasingly used in an ad hoc manner. This is something we will return to towards the end to question whether the curator is fundamentally a contemporary persona. So to begin, I would like to give a short genealogy of curators from the mid twentieth century to today. That time frame is specific, as modernism turned into the contemporary.

#### **Who is The Curator? A Genealogy of Curating:**

Until the mid-twentieth century, the curator worked in the basement of the museum, conserving and protecting works of art, cataloguing them, and only occasionally, displaying them. Their role was academic and

practical, works of art displayed in correct historical chronology. So it had been since the foundation of the museum itself.

These curators still exist as their work is a requirement of any collection. Preservation of the valuable works of art is a specialist job requiring responsible research skills alongside the practical ones of restoration. But as art increasingly moved off the canvas and pedestal, and engaged directly with the materials and ideas of contemporary life, those skills could no longer be limited to canvas, paint, bronze and marble, but required more dexterous thinking. And so these backroom 'caretakers' were overtaken by more visible characters, frequently directing museums, defining the ways in which art and its history are configured in new ways.

Alfred Barr is among the pioneers now understood as a curator. The founding director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1929 his exhibitions re-envisioned art as part of a broader cultural production. Art and other artefacts of contemporary life in America and other cultures (both modern and 'primitive' were displayed together, albeit in anaesthetic conditions - isolated from the world by even 'neutral' lighting 'neutral' white cubes. He is the archetypal 'museum' man, one step away from the traditional curator, but with a public position and avant garde ideas. His exhibitions defined the Blockbuster, particularly with his exhibition of Van Gogh in 1938 and Picasso in 1939 which located the to that point less well known artist as the most important figures in modernism.

In Europe, Pontus Hulten worked within a similar position at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm which opened in 1958. The collection and exhibitions moved beyond art to include design. Partly under the influence of a more permissive society and partly from the irreverence introduced to art by the surrealists and Dadaists, Hulten was a more flamboyant character, as were his exhibitions.

Both these curators defined the popular exhibition, making art a living part of culture, a talking point within society and the media.

Along with a few others who radically transformed the work of museums), their influence on curating was to pave the way for what we now might understand as the curator, or more importantly what we might call the 'Independent Curator'

Harald Szeemann is widely seen as the archetype of the independent curator, although he was not independent per se, working in art spaces to begin with, only later gaining independence from them through his acclaim for exhibitions such as *When Attitudes Become Form* in 1969. I discussed this in a previous talk here. But it is worth pointing out the value of *When Attitudes Become Form* in bringing conceptual art to Europe, and as a definition of the 'new art' exhibition where the artists and the curator were part of the same social group. While not collaborators, they were friends, and this friendship has proved influential in establishing one of the social functions expected of the curator. It will appear in other areas as we progress. Szeemann, in opposition to his predecessors' work called himself an exhibition maker. Another idea which has strong currency today.

Lucy Lippard, I would argue, was equally in this vein. She has not called herself a curator either, preferring artist or art historian, although her influence has also been significant, if less well documented. Her approach to curating conceptual art was to introduce a structure - that of the index card. In some ways this is more radical an intervention in curating as it removes the autonomy of the artist to define their own media. Seth Seiglaub, with his *Xerox Book* did a similar thing, giving a standard format to artists to react to.

The curator who has the most visibility today was strongly influenced by these and other curators. Hans Ulrich Obrist has become today's archetype of the curator for many, and has gone to some lengths to

secure that position himself. His exhibitions are less well known than his current celebrity, I would argue. But that is not to say he has not been influential in some ways. Primarily, he has been responsible with others in defining a new generation of artists at the tipping point when contemporary art has entered the mainstream entertainment industry, and those artists have frequently commented on and participated in the entertainment industry.

Other figures include: Hou Hanru, a contemporary of Obrist's in Paris in the 1990s; Maria Lind - collaborator with Hans Ulrich Obrist on Salon 3 and now director of the Teksta Kunsthall, Charles Esche, now director of the Van Abe Museum and founding editor of Afterall.

Charles Esche bridges to another type - the curator as a researcher, and the exhibition as an intellectual activity alongside academic ones.

Among the archetypes are Okwui Enweso, director of Documenta 11 which included a series of platforms. Enweso has said that for him the exhibition is just one part of a larger project to generate knowledge and discourse around particular issues.

Gao Shiming from China, involved in the academic field as much as in exhibition making, is another, or Corinne Diserens, the next curator of the Taipei Biennale might also fall within this field. As we can see from this, the curator has become a global character, not just flying internationally to export curating, but making efforts to produce local histories and knowledges through their projects.

Gao Shiming offered a particular view of how this might be conceived in a conference associated with the Central Academy of Fine Art's 2014 biennial in Beijing stating that:



**Chinese culture invented the curator with court's appointing officials to arrange the environments and organise the activities in pavilions where the arts were presented.**

Leaving aside the question of precedence, what it does signal is the difference in histories that the arts have not only in media and themes but also in the way in which they have been presented. Of course in contemporary global art this space has become somewhat homogenised and difference is more subtle.

The current generation of curators have, likewise, emerged from and challenged these positions, and in some ways enjoyed the open field it has created. In short curators such Jens Hoffmann, Tirdad Zolghadr, Pablo Leon de la Barra, or Raimundas Malasauskas are international exhibition makers where the exhibition is frequently the form, and the artists are players within it. Known as mavericks at the start, most of these are now in senior positions within institutions.

A final position that is important to note is that of the youngest curators who are entering institutional positions through what is now clearly defined as a career. Wang Xiaoyu and Omar Kholief, now in post at the Guggenheim and Chicago Art Museum respectively are both products of curatorial programmes, and both keen to distance themselves from that fact.

This was by no means an exhaustive list of current curators. That this list is already long, and could be much longer, indicates how the curator has become a figure which people both revere and are suspicious of in equal measure.

In efforts to demystify the curator museums such as Tate have curators write blogs to communicate their work to the public. This is a requirement of the job, it is seen as being part of public accountability. But the idea that the traditional curator might have done this, even if the technology were available, is clearly perverse. And so the curator has

become a public figure, but what actually makes someone a curator is something we can now go on to discuss. Entertaining as I hope the previous section was, this next section will be more technical...

### **What is Curating?**

It has been my position that Curating sits between theory and practice. This has been common when working as a curator and teaching curating. It has also appeared in areas that do not fit neatly into either of these categories.

To think about what curating is we must begin with both of these areas, and see where they overlap. And to look at the practical side is the best place to start as it is concrete.

### **What is Curating? Practice**

In his essay 'Curationism, how curating took over the world' David Balzar (2014) describes the basic understanding of curating to be: 'Selection and Display' before noting that beneath this there are some troubling issues of about what curating's current popularity demonstrates about how we value things and ourselves.

This touches on the practical side of the activity first, and we can go on to the more difficult issue of value afterwards.

### **Curating handbooks**

During the emergence of curatorial theory in the late 1990s and exploding the last decade, somewhat of a countermovement is the emergence of the 'handbook' for curators, which gives a practical guide of how to go about curating an exhibition. They usually cover specific topics.

As others, we can start by making a list of what the curator is commonly expected to do.

I say commonly as there are many exceptions, depending on the personality of the person being designated 'the curator'.

The most simple is:

**Organise an exhibition including:**

- 1. Select the content**
- 2. Introduce the exhibition to the public**

**Also they are commonly expected to:**

- 1. organise the funding for the exhibition**
- 2. negotiate between the institution and other interested parties**
- 3. design the exhibition**

All these words are open to interpretation. An exhibition may be many things, how one selects the things to be displayed may involve many processes, and organising the funding for an exhibition can range from zero to millions of dollars.

And so we might add one more criteria to the details above:

**AND the curator is expected to decide HOW these things are done.**

That is not to say that they have complete freedom to do so. A curator cannot decide to spend millions of dollars, or to hold an exhibition within a major museum without being given the authority to do so, of course. BUT, they can designate an exhibition as a biennial even if realised in a shoebox without any art work. They can say that the artists whose works

are on display are the very best examples of artists working today without permission. They may be held accountable for it in criticism later, but are free to use whatever is at their disposal, and language in particular is freely available.

This might be done by:

**Select the content by:**

- a. selecting the works of art or other objects from collections**
- b. inviting artists or designers and discussing with them what they will contribute**
- c. an open call**
- d. commissioning new work for the exhibition**

Commissioning is particularly tricky yet one of the most highly respected aspects of curating.

As Louise Buck and Daniel McClean explain in their *Commissioning Contemporary Art: A Handbook for Curators, Collectors and Artists*

**There is no single way to undertake commission contemporary art: it is in the very nature of the undertaking that every circumstance and opportunity is different, and the approaches to commissioning can - and should - be as unique and specific as the works they generate. At the same time... one can identify a number of common principles and protocols regarding the fundamental questions of when, what and how to commission... (Buck & McClean 2012 p1)**

As well as requiring sensitivity to these issues, the curator involved in commissioning is required to have unequalled access to the artist. As Chrissie Iles states.

**The key [for a successful commission] is trust between the artist and curator. And that trust is the curator's highest reward.**

(quoted in Buck & McClean p50)

Good practice as a curator dictates these principles as applicable across the board.

And to conclude this section, we might, go on to ask what is curating good for?

We have already seen that one simple idea is entertainment - a part of the leisure industry, so lets include this at the start - I do actually believe that art should be entertaining in some respects.

- **Entertainment**

- **Education**

- **Knowledge production**

This was the traditional form as well as the new extensions through platforms and discourse as part of the exhibition

- **Creation of value**

This is tricky, as value can be commercial, or social, or political, or personal. But, I would argue, that it is only when the exhibition is made that art can acquire or convey any of these ideas.

## **Theory**

Lets look at the issue of Theory in curating. Theory impacts on curating in various ways, but as have seen, it is in the field of How, that it has its largest application.

Theory may inform the content or framework of the exhibition. This may include the theme of the show - and in that case theory and/or history might be drawn from as wide a range as the inspiration of art practice itself. It may also include the display, drawn from the history of exhibition making.

Its interesting to note, however, that exhibitions are mainly within a relatively narrow field. There is much debate about whether one can legitimately curate a group exhibition, for instance. It seems to fail to satisfy some instinctive criteria about selecting. The international group exhibition is where curating seems at its most archetypal.

- The Collection display - primarily historical as a core aspect of the museum
- The Temporary Thematic Group exhibition (biennale being the archetypal form, but also includes a loans show for a museum, for instance)
- Temporal, Geographical, or temporo/geographical survey
- social engagement and/or public project
- media specific (which now frequently includes performance)

All of which, may, include commissioning as an approach.

Surprisingly it is difficult to imagine an exhibition which does not fit within these genres. Despite the apparent experimentation in curating over the past 15-20 years in particular, most of these forms of exhibition or curatorial project were already toyed with prior to 1970.

Surveying all of this we are left with curating encompassing everything, and at the same time losing its specificity. We all 'select and display' on a daily basis, from our clothes, and via social media or lives. Some of us decide not to display our selections, others all of them, enacting another of the curatorial traits, the power to choose how to display.

What this does is not to define us as curators. It defines that the curatorial, Balzar's Curationism, is an essential element in contemporary life. For some this is professionalised. As we are talking about curating in contemporary art we should also consider Art itself within this similar state. As much as we can self-designate ourselves as curators without an issue (in contrast we cannot simply say we are a doctor or a pilot, for instance), we can also self-designate ourselves as artists, regardless of the activity we undertake.

In the case of art we live in a situation which is post-Beuys's statement that 'Everybody is an artist'. notably stated in his lecture performance *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler - Auf dem Weg zur Freiheitsgestalt des sozialen Organismus* (1972)

What, I would say, is that Beuys is not saying we are all artists, but we all act in different ways artistically. We can surmise this with the second half of the lecture title which is usually ignored: '**Towards a design for the freedom of the social organism**'. Becoming an artist is in this respect simply a means to an end for individual freedom in society. It is not saying that we all need to become artists professionally, but to acknowledge we are all able to be free through acting as an artist. Moreover, it doesn't say we all are artists of equal status, talent, ability or criticality, we do not all have an art practice.

My argument would be similar for curating. We are all enacting curating on some level, but there are still those that do so professionally and critically as a practice.

## **OULIPO**

### **'Rats who build their own labyrinth in order to escape'**

The questions we ask about art and curating are often flawed in this way. We look to try to say what it is, submit a definition. Art (not just artists but the entire system of art, its writing, curating, institutions) frequently

seek out alternatives, it is in the nature of the modern and contemporary art discourse and practice to value transgression from definitions through explorations of freedom, and radical transformation. Therefore any definition becomes simply another constraint, a fresh wall in the labyrinth that is rallied against.

Any concrete ideas of what good art or curating may be, also falls into another paradigm, that of the academy. For art, it is almost impossible today to say what is professional, unless one refers to money alone. But being paid more is not always the sign of world leading, or most beneficial. And so we are always, within the professional world, thrown back onto a consensual agreement of what is worthwhile at the time. And the apparent position of the curator in making these decisions, seemingly autonomously, is a matter for much concern in elevating the curator to the position of desire it currently resides in.

Artists have voiced concerns about being usurped in this respect.

**The curator, like an editor, used to be firmly associated with one museum, and then this notion of the independent curator came into play with people such as Szeemann. (Obrist 2010 p8)**

It should be noted that Hans Ulrich Obrist's books on curating all revolve around conversations with other practitioners, not in writing theory or guidance. In this respect Obrist's curating is discursive, not fixed. His curatorial knowledge is vehemently social.

This provides somewhat of a key to what makes curating such a contemporary activity as knowledge has moved from the concrete forms of the museum to being socially constructed. This condition of knowledge today was conceived by Bruno Latour in Actor Network Theory.

Actor Network Theory has two relevant aspects here. Firstly it refutes explanation. As Latour states:



**explanation does not follow from description; it is description taken that much further.; It is not, in other words, a theory 'of anything, but rather a method, or a 'how-to book. (Latour 1991b p129)**

Like curating, it is more concerned with method than explanation, or as the museum might put it 'historicisation'.

Secondly, Actor Network Theory places the object into the social conditions with agency as powerful as a person. Objects, both physical things and information, play a role in constructing knowledge, not merely as products of human conditions to be studied but having an influence on how knowledge itself is formed and understood.

Here art and other cultural artefacts have a special position, we are familiar with art 'speaking to us', and those that can 'select and display' the objects that are given a public platform through which to speak are in a position of privilege. Those are the people that act out curating in the professional sphere. As Miya Tokumitsu states:

**Professional curating is a collaborative endeavour, one in which compromise and working within constraints are as critical as personal vision. But curation in common parlance strongly emphasizes the latter.**  
(Tokumitsu 2015)

This subjectivity of the curator is where many of the problems arise. If we think back to the earliest curators they were expected to be objective. Today, curating is more closely associated with the individual, the curator. By implication their individual tastes and interests are taken to be indicative of what we as a public should find interesting too. This gives them power, or at least the perception of power.

And this power comes from the assumed 'independence' of the curator, his or her autonomy. Richard Sennett links Autonomy to Authority stating:

**There were also attempts to enshrine individualism itself, so that the expert - the engineer, doctor, or scientist with modern technological skills - working alone according only to the dictates of his expertise, yet controlling others, became a figure of authority. Tocqueville calls 'the independent ones' the only people of his time securely able to command respect from others and make them afraid.**

(Sennett 1980 p45)

## **THE PROBLEMS WITH CURATING**

But who does the curator make afraid? On one side there are the artists, who are afraid of being usurped.

Anton Vidokle is outspoken about this, casting the artist as the worker and the curator as their overseer. He talks of being cut out of the power structure of the institution and replaced with the manager, the curator. This is not entirely without context as a number of the mavericks in our fist section might be considered to have done this, ever overshadowing the artist or removing them from the equation altogether as exhibition makers.

**In such a scenario the economic gain would be enormous, entailing the replacement of a group that holds the rights to their own production with one comprised of salaried employees.**

(Vidokle 2010)

However, to claim the artist EVER had this kind of agency within the museum is misguided.

Instead, perhaps we can see this as a concern for a different symptom, art becoming part of the entertainment industry with the curator as auteur or impresario. Like artists some curators express concern over these conditions, although rarely solutions.

The other area where the popularity and celebrity of curators is now being expressed is by curators themselves. Having increasingly lost their 'specialism' as a result of the term being used so widely, the feeling that their scholarship should be reduced to a form of entertainment is disconcerting, and I admit it is for me as well when I see things like this:

### **KAYNE WEST**

When a pop musician feels entitled to 'curate' a magazine article (with advice) it is unsettling. But it also raises other questions less easily mocked. For the museum has been the preserve of an educated (normally privileged) few. Isn't it a good thing if a street artist, and a black American at that, might start to appear within its still very white walls.

And so we reach full circle of a kind to ask again who is the curator. And who has the right?



## **appendix vi**

### **Exhibition Narratives**

In this lecture I will look at one specific aspect of exhibition making or curating as it is more commonly known. The exhibition narrative is one of the core principles of curating a worthwhile show of art. It has its precedents in museums but in recent years the narrative has taken on new meaning.

In the context of art museums, exhibition narratives are formed by curators in order to convey certain stories or themes derived from certain art historical content represented by museum collections. Making Museums

By reading exhibitions in this way I will aim to unpack some of the transformations in the way we come to understand the world around us. Exhibitions, in this sense, are part of a visual culture and a visual literacy and we will read them as such.

To begin with we should be precise about the meaning of the term narrative. As an English speaker, I turn to the Oxford English Dictionary where a narrative is defined as:

**A spoken or written account of connected events**

**It is further defined in three ways as:**

**The narrated part of a literary work,  
as distinct from dialogue**

**The practice or art of telling stories**

**A representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values**

As we will see, all these meanings will come into play at particular periods of time and in certain practices. In fact, it is the confusion of language that allows for games to be played between one meaning and another as only the last of these is directly related to exhibition making as the others occur only in language itself.

**Nowadays the term 'narrative' appears ubiquitous, having been appropriated into diverse spheres from politics to the media, and often tarnished by its associations with the 'spin' of grandiose conceptions and post-rationalised excuses; tall stories and cover stories. In museums, narrative has come to be associated, negatively, with 'top-down', macro histories, linear interpretive frameworks which present a dominant version of history, side-lining the experiences and values of others in the process. However, in the context of contemporary museum making, we propose to reclaim the term narrative as it appears to offer a way forward. Museum space and its production are traditionally compartmentalized, disciplinary boundaries between curators, graphic designers, script writers, architects and developers, for example, are entrenched, and perpetuated by professional and institutional amnesia. (MacLeod et al, 2012) Pxxi**

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## **GRAND NARRATIVES**

The traditional narrative of exhibitions, like that of the traditional notion of a curator is rooted in the museum. Museums are, for many, narrative structures in themselves. They tell history. As I have mentioned in previous talks, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century art museum is built to reflect the story it tells. Its exterior is monumental, built to stand for all time - frequently in a classical style as a 'museon' or temple of the muses in reference to the ancient Greek buildings in which the arts were housed.

Inside, it contains a series of galleries that present art in a linear narrative starting at the earliest works of art to the most recent. The history is one of continual progress of civilisation and culture is a reflection of that progress.

In this way they are:

**A representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values (OED)**

As Laurent Fleury describes it:

**Culture, as its anthropological definition would suggest, is informed by an ensemble of institutions, each of which is situated in a historical narrative and characterised by certain particularities. (Fleury 2014 p4)**

The traditional art museum's peculiarities are those of art and art history as a reflection of culture itself. The histories it tells are known as Grand Narratives, ones that are fixed and authoritative, even authoritarian spanning from the classical period - the origins of civilisation in the Western world to the recent past. That too is reflected in how works are displayed. Fixed within periods and movements, the works are unable to move. Many museums, particularly national museums, remain within this paradigm today, even when they may have incorporated temporary exhibition spaces into their structures.

**Indeed, viewing artifacts in the earliest public museums depended on prescribed viewing sequences, based on how visitors "move through a programmed experience that casts the visitor in the role of an ideal citizen." In this sense, the museum space was where visitors were expected to act in a certain way during their visit in order to appreciate the knowledge of the "civilized past" represented (Duncan & Wallach, 1980, p. 451).**

This phenomenon is discussed by Bennett (1995) in the context of museums' cultivating role in society: he considered nineteenth century

museums as places 'where civilized forms of behaviour might be learnt and thus diffused more widely through the social body'

We can trace the evolution of the museum through the evolution of the architecture of the Tate Gallery in London. This is not to say it is exemplary, but it has undergone particular changes since its founding in 1897 which make it useful to study.

The museum itself was actually a private endeavour to begin with, built by the industrialist Henry Tate, who made much of his fortune through sugar (and the associated shipping industry of cotton and slavery, something we will return to). He was an early 'globalised' trader, and built the original Tate gallery to house his private collection, which he later gifted to the nation. The original galleries were laid out in the manner of the historical museum. Turn left at the entrance, and enter the earliest period and continue through the museum, period by period until the present day art. The gallery was expanded almost as soon as it was opened. And then again to house a collection of Turner paintings - at the time (and still for many today) the most famous British painter and the 'logical conclusion' of painting's development verging on abstraction and in many respects is now understood to have heralded in the modern era. Subsequent developments added large exhibition halls for sculpture and further galleries.

The museum underwent a more significant change in the 1970s when, influenced by contemporary international art a temporary exhibition hall was built towards the rear. These were radically different in style from the traditional exhibition spaces - white cube with walls that could be reconfigured according to the exhibition's themes and influenced by the already well established forms of modern art museums in the USA and Europe such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York which was already approaching its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



But the museum of art remained relatively enclosed within its own narrative. Institutions of all kinds are reflections of the ideology from which they made, and the museum is a visible representation of the ideology of its founders, whether they are a nation or an individual. The Art Museum is enclosed even further, as it reflects the history of art itself as a conquest of culture, its own culture. Painting and sculptures from the classical period to the early modern presented scenes from history, in a broad sense as they may also represent mythical or religious scenes. While fantastical, their classical references sit in the story of human progress by relating morality.

The next stage of development saw the building of Tate Modern, a converted power station which is now a model for many other museums being built today, particularly in Asia - the Powerstation in Shanghai is modelled, conceptually on Tate Modern. Opening in 2000, Tate Modern has no specific architectural structure for its collection, and the collection is regularly reordered according to themes rather than historical narratives. Of course it only shows art which is considered 'Modern' but many would actually consider contemporary, works from 1950 onwards.

As the director Nicolas Serota puts it the choice to move away from periods to 'styles' was significant in Tate Modern's approach:

**This is because a 'focus on artists' styles downplays the importance of the historical story line and thus allows visitors to appreciate the unique qualities of the art of the individual artist.**

Serota further remarks that displaying the works of art on the basis of experiential qualities has essentially become a norm in art museums today and thus, the didactic purpose of these museums has departed from its high minded and encyclopedic definition.

We can see, here, that incorporating the viewpoint of the visitor to the display, rather than insisting on the institutions' authority over the art is

key. Another innovation was to 'author' the display texts with the curator's name attached, implying that this is their point of view, rather than a definitive fact. And so Tate Modern moved away from the 'high minded' or 'scholarly' approach towards one aimed at inspiring imagination in the public to wonder and question what they are being presented with.

**Exhibition design in the 20<sup>th</sup> century diverged radically from that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by using neutral wall colours and individual rooms with few works in each. 'First is the belief that modern works of art can be understood independently of historical context. Second is the notion that the formal and artistic explorations in the modern works of art can be studied within their various arrangements and combinations in a gallery space. Indeed, this exhibition approach was implicit in the MoMA's original mission, stating that modern works of art can be best understood, studied and appreciated through their combinations in a "laboratory like" environment that promotes understanding contemporary art through experimenting with various arrangements of works of art. (Stanizewski 1996 p3)**

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#### FANTASY AND REALITY

**in line with concurrent developments in media technologies such as social networking and 24-hour rolling news, the personal perspective or 'eye-witness' story has been accorded new status, whilst the traditionally anonymous and respected author - the curator - has been increasingly challenged. Paradoxically, perhaps, the curator has never had more freedom or better methods and resources to mediate the authentic artefact, which in itself is arguably less prized than in previous eras. Mediation may not have quite become the message - as Marshall McLuhan suggested - but the balance of power has undoubtedly shifted, with curatorial decisions operating on a sliding scale between liberation and misrepresentation. (Macleod et al 2012 Pxxii)**

In contemporary life the narrative has taken on new importance in our perception of the world around us, and the people and things that share or shape our experiences. The mythical fantasies of painting and sculpture

of history books have been replaced by the equally fantastical narratives of science fiction of literature and cinema.

Among those playing with the notion of a narrative are curators such as Jens Hoffman. Hoffman has a strong thread in his own career's narrative that relates contemporary art to literature rather than history. From 2008-2010 he curated three exhibitions based on iconic American Novels including *The Wizard of Oz*, *Moby-Dick* and *Huckleberry Finn*. Through this relationship of literature, art and exhibition-making he explored how

**literature can provide a frame through which to understand today's political realities by looking at the past.**  
(Hoffman 2012)

But these were not his first attempts to do so, and I can take a role in the story myself, rather than simply narrate it. Among the exhibitions based on literature that Hoffman instigated was *Around the World in Eighty Days* that I co-curated while working at the South London Gallery. Hoffman was then Director of Exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London, and provided the framework of the exhibition through a reference to Jules Verne's novel for a collaborative project. Among the reasons for his interest in this novel was the location of the ICA itself. Verne's novel begins at the Reform Club, a real world gentlemen's club, and one of the most conservative institutions on the same street as the ICA's current home. For Hoffman, visiting London from Germany for his job interview, the fact the Reform Club actually existed, was surprising. To be honest, I also assumed it to be a fictional place. Of further interest was Verne's lampooning of the British high society explorer in the novel. In fact the novel was based on a real newspaper report that revealed it would be possible to circumnavigate the globe in 80 days due to the new steamships of the time, and the increasingly precise nature of travel schedules on trains and boats. Moreover, this could be seen as a reflection of what made London what it is today - a centre of international commerce and the most multi-cultural

society worldwide. Not that this was not without its problems - those of imperial power, domination, exploitation and inequity - both in the novel and in the city today. But the novel did provide a lens through which to ask these questions - the narrative was not a definitive line but the opening up of a disjuncture between reality and fiction that left the established progress of history rather unsteady.

But the exhibition itself did not reflect directly on this story, but invited artists identified as 'London artists' but who were born in other countries to respond to the book with new or existing works. Here it conformed to a contemporary exhibition-making format where the artists were invited as representations of their own mixed cultures, but given freedom to produce or show works of their own choosing in negotiation with the curators. The exhibition narrative was, in short, a background context rather than told through the works themselves. In order to provide a narrative to the exhibition itself, quotes from Vernes' novel were placed - in chronological order - through the galleries.

Works such as Lebanese-born Mona Hatoum's map of the world made from marbles on the floor was a reflection of the instability of globalisation and imperialism. Alexandra de Cunha's flags made from beach towels introduced aspects of nationhood and international tourism, particularly related to his Brazilian nationality. Travel, tourism and displacement also appeared in the works of Japanese artist Hiraki Sawa's videos. These artists could be called visibly internationally.

The exhibition also introduced artists as international who were not normally seen as such. Janice Kerbel, a Canadian born artists, produced maps of the stars on the day that Phileas Fogg left and returned on his journey. Portuguese artist Joao Penalva's installation was based on the myth of a ghost ship from the period in which the novel was set.

This is not isolated to the work of the curator, but is, in some respects illustrative of the rise in the role of the curator as we move away from

the individual objects and individual artist, to seeing values in networks of meaning where fiction has become as reliable and significant in our understanding as the official histories that museums represented.

Marketing and product development has shifted in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to place value not on the material or use value of things but on their narrative. This is a murky world that I cannot go into in great depth about here, but it is still worthwhile to touch on some of these notions as they have implications for our perception of art alongside other objects that surround us day to day.

As branding company Paradux put it, a Brand Narrative is:

**both the history of and the future focus for your business. All tied up in one tight strategy... and it is important: because people naturally want to be part of something bigger, they want to matter, and they want their lives to have meaning. Most of all, they want to become part of a gripping narrative.**

The most illustrative way in which brands construct their public image to project a lifestyle around their products. What we are buying is not the product itself but an entire set of implications for consuming it. Brands such as coca-cola, for instance, sell us an entire heritage alongside the flavoured sugar water inside the bottle. Abstract values, such as freedom, are frequently invoked.

Art has its role to play in constructing certain brands' images. BMW and Absolute were among the first to commission major artists to decorate their products, drawing art into their narrative. Even *When Attitudes Become Form* was sponsored by Phillip Morris cigarettes who subsequently adopted the slogan '**it takes art to make a company great**'.

**They rely on the joint forces of advertising and the 'creative industries' for producing fantasy worlds through which the**

**identity of the consumer is constructed. To buy something today is to enter into a specific world, to indemnify with a certain culture and become part of the imagined community.**  
(Mouffe 2007)

This has become exponentially more significant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At the heart of new brands is the creation of a lifestyle that accompanies it. With the purchase (that is the consumption) of a product one acquires this lifestyle. That this is a mirage is obvious to us all, but we participate in the creation of that illusion. While museums are seen as complicit in this industrialisation of culture, they are also seen as a potential site in which it can be challenged through speculation and imagination.

### **SPECULATION**

And while institutions are relatively discredited today, they still hold this potential. In discussing the possibilities of institutions for countering the passive nature of neo-liberalism and industrial entertainment, Pascal Geilen stays:

**From the very moment that art started calling itself 'contemporary' (everything that is made now is contemporary and therefore has no historical depth, but neither does it have a future), it not only lost its verticality. By applying such sterile self-labelling (which by the way is remarkably in tune with the movement in the 1970s through the mid 1980s towards post-fordism and neo-liberalism), art lost its own voice.**

**Regardless of whether such change means progression or regression, our ability to oscillate between non-fiction and fiction is crucial in imagining other worlds, in being creative, in presenting different models of society or in addressing ecological issues.** (both Geilen 2007)

I'd like now to introduce a strand of my own exhibition and some of the contexts in which they were placed that expand on these ideas. Whereas *Around the World in Eighty Days* responded to fiction, but followed a relatively conventional pathway in exhibition making, other projects of

mine attempted to cast the institution itself as a fictional scenario. The South London Gallery was founded concurrently with the Tate Gallery in the 1890s as an exhibition hall for the then contemporary art, but with a specific goal of catering to the working classes of London's outskirts. Small, in comparison, it had a clear education goal to contribute towards the social development of London's slums. The Whitechapel gallery in London had the same mission and was funded by the same philanthropist. The gallery was part of a network of institutions to further public education and health, including bath-houses, public libraries and a technical college. In this respect it was more of a public space than a museum.

Its own development is the reverse of the Tate's, shrinking rather than growing over time as the college and bath houses were either closed down or shifted in purpose. The gallery itself was hit by a bomb during world war two demolishing its lecture theatre and second gallery, and the park in which it was situated was redeveloped post war into social housing.

A number of my projects created a parallel history for the gallery, a speculative fiction that were intended to reactivate the gallery as a public space in different forms. This could be considered a series of 'what if' scenarios explored through exhibitions.

**It has also, then, been a period of fundamental reinvention in the design and shaping of museums. Fascinating examples of 'the new museum making' include high-profile and highly communicative buildings, evocative landscapes, sophisticated and emotive exhibitions and, sometimes, small and quirkily interpretive interventions within existing museums and gallery spaces. What unites many of these approaches is the attempt to create what might be called 'narrative environments'; experiences which integrate objects and spaces - and stories of people and places - as part of the process of storytelling that speaks of the experience of the everyday and ours sense of self, as well as the special and the unique. (Macleod et al 2012 pxx)**

The first of these was *Summer Daze*, which turned the exhibition hall into an art school for one month - as if the gallery had been demolished but the college had remained, and continued to operate within a utopian model. It was not the professional art school, but orientated towards the public and each day a contemporary artist would run a class. Those taking part in the school had their work displayed in the gallery within series of frames on the wall, and an exhibition was produced that ran after the project.

The second, the following year followed a similar structure, but this time with a strong theme that built a more specific fiction around the workshops. Working with artist Harold Offeh, we produced *'The Mothership Collective'* a fiction based on Afrofuturism. For that period the gallery became a futuristic commune with art, music, poetry and design, and parties. Set within this narrative, the social space that radically transformed both in its activities, and its racial make up. As hinted at in *Around the World in Eighty Days*, London's galleries and museums are not the most culturally diverse, reflecting the ideology of Britain's Imperial past and global domination. To turn the space into this alternative, was a radical political gesture, even if somewhat masked behind the sociable aspects.

In 2008 the gallery was transformed again into a nightclub. While not a public space, per se, the rave and alternative music culture has been politically charged since the 1960s, no more so in London, and was a place of transgression, particularly in consolidating queer movements. The exhibition commissioned the Brazilian artists Assume Vivid Astro Focus to build a stage, and Italian and Hong Kong artists Ludovica Gioscia and Karen Tang to build a bar. The programme included film screens of art band's video, and live performances by a variety of musicians from social choirs to bands such as Maxi Giel! From New York. A special sound system by Matt Stokes was a precise reconstruction of rave sound system from the 1980s and a DJ was revived to use the sound system for an all night rave.



One final project cast the museum as a play park, and took a specific history as its inspiration. Post war, Anarchist groups started building adventure playgrounds within wastelands from the wood taken from bombed buildings to provide some spaces of play for children during a time when there was no public provision. Children would be encouraged to be imaginative and participate in the design and build of these playgrounds. This radicalised activity was subsumed within civic administration in the 1970s and many of these spaces became dystopian versions of their former selves, plagued by violence and unsupervised. Increasingly the play structures become 'safe'.

This history was parallel to the south London gallery's own incorporation into civic management, and with the bomb damaged site of its second gallery still located next door, the context was to think what would have happened if the gallery had become a space of play instead of display. The works involved artists including Nils Norman, who constructed a play space within the gallery, and Dan Shipsides, controversially, produced a climbing wall made from Frieze magazines on which people could move around the gallery without touching the walls. Originally this space was open for anyone to use, not just to view art, but also to play. However, inevitably, it fell victim to the health and safety concerns and the show required a disclaimer to enter in the end. An unfortunate collision of reality and fiction.

Play is inherently political today, it is seen as a form of resistance and imagination within public space and been adopted, artistically by movements such as reclaim the streets. The latter two exhibitions tried to bring forms of carnival and play into the art institution through fiction, but in the end often pointed out the dystopian reality rather than the utopian potential.

Frederic Jameson was among the first to provide a critical framework that linked the institutions of capitalism to those of fiction. In

*Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, he reflects on how a particular form of science fiction has become the leading imagination of our time. Whereas the science fiction of the modern era believed in progress, and imagined utopian worlds that would spring from it, the new science fiction was dystopian predicated on the catastrophic fall of civilisation. (Jameson 1989)

**but what of the catastrophe itself? It is evident that the theme of sterility must be read metaphorically, as a displacement of another kind of anxiety... How long can a culture persist without the new? (Fisher 2009)**

## appendix vii

### Towards an Editorial Aesthetic

At the height of focus on the curator as an emergent central figure in contemporary art its lead exponent, Hans Ulrich Obrist, professed that 'the curator is akin to an editor'. It fits perfectly with his dictum: 'whatever you do, do something else'.

I've never been a big fan of Obrist, despite his clear contributions to the field of exhibition-making and, moreover, to the high visibility that curating has today both in contemporary art, then more recently, in plethora other cultural fields. His discourse, in particular, has predominantly focused on the person rather than the process, and is rife with empty aphorisms to support it. However, at the time this statement was useful in giving some sense to a public of what a curator actually does, a tangible move away from museology to fit in a system or hierarchy of cultural production already institutionalised.

Curating as a particular activity centred on the gallery has suffered since, partly, it has to be said, due to figures such as Obrist who look to not do something else, but do everything. As a result, curating has become diluted in a 20-year *volte face* despite 'to curate' still not appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary where LOL, Omni-shambles and other colloquialism drawn from popular media have. Despite curator being updated, then, curating has not. Guest editors of magazines are increasingly referred to as curators. And alongside it, artists have found offence and expressed concern about being displaced as the centre of exhibitions. Artist-Curators emerge, then curator-artists emerge in response.

Only Maria Lind has genuinely provided a respite in her proposition of 'the curatorial', a far more wide-reaching and open-ended series of

relations that still, ultimately, maintain working with artists to produce an exhibition at its core.

I could go on, but increasingly the abundance of discourse that seeks to define or discipline curating and the curator leaves one in a state of exasperation. Instead, I'd like to put forward an alternative form of practice that is not inherently tied to any discipline. Undoubtedly it reflects my own interests, which are admittedly broad.

### **THE EDITORIAL AESTHETIC**

The Editorial is a proper noun, a thing, a column in a newspaper or journal, written by the editor giving commentary on what lies within. In this sense it is analogous to the curator's introduction, with one key distinction - it comments on what lies within its pages, not on the anterior context in which the art in an exhibition site.

The Editorial is also an adjective to describe an activity - the editing of a publication as in 'The Editorial Team'. It describes what people do.

As with many English expressions that find favour in critical discourse, I'm going to use ambiguity to my advantage by sticking a 'The' on the front of an existing adjectival noun: Editorial thus opening it up to intellectual inquiry. Why the 'The' should act this way is mysterious, but it turns a proper noun into something of a field. Its probably bad form, and resonates academic pretension, to which I am not entirely immune. But sometimes the 'The' is a useful emphasis, other times a redundancy. Ask any editor. Finishing with Aesthetics at the end only doubles this effect. Although it is worth stating here that Aesthetics has a SPECIFIC meaning, often forgotten: A set of Principles or Philosophical enquiry concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty.

So The Editorial Aesthetics, can this offer something of a open and beautiful space? Or is it another enclosed refuge. I'll go on to make my

case, and leave it to discourse to take over. After all, its possible this will be the only time it is truly used, unless someone else choses to pick it up, for good or for bad.

I'll address this throughout. But for now enough of this long preamble and lets get down to business.

## **EDITORIAL ACTS**

What is the editorial act? In its essence editing is the bring together content - be it images or text - into a single publication or programme. It is enacted in the editing room, cutting film or, today digital sequences, or in the newspaper office bringing together reports, reportage, opinion and even horoscopes. In screen it is condenses in montages, on paper, collages. Other editors, act on the text itself, correcting grammar, removing redundancies, honing a text into a publishable form. And this is, in the main, only the surface of their task which includes putting together a series of publications, building a programme. Whichever form it takes, editing is quite literally incisive, the editor's tools are scalpels rather than pencils. Through this act they create their own narratives across platforms, sections or sequences, narratives that make sense, or rather they make those narratives sensible.

What the editor produces is a condensation of other peoples narratives.

We may ask why should it be necessary to establish this aesthetics? My argument is based in a transformation in the way in which the public approaches culture in a media rich environment. This richness has caused further significant changes to the nature of art as a 'whole' object, its singularity and its monadic quality. In fact, we could say it has become a dispersed network of meanings rather than anything concrete, and the publication has become a central point in bringing together the narrative of a work that has lost all physicality and moved into information - a legacy of conceptual art practices now intrinsic to all forms of

contemporary art that one might encounter in the galleries, museums, biennials, art fairs and other areas of presentation.

This is the material/immateriality of the work, but as an event it has also moved to a new position between an equally newly constituted artist and audience synthesis that emerges from changing relationships with media as a whole.

It is no longer a radical position to suggest that the viewer, at least in part, constructs the work and interacts with it. There are numerous positions that reflect this - be it debates around the efficacy and intent of participatory art, or the commentary based media of citizen and mainstream journalism that not only allow for but actively encourage 'feedback' while also sourcing content from that same data-field. Running waves running beneath the surface and occasionally breaking on the shores of discourse are issues such as crowdsourcing programmes that threaten the authority of an institutions individual curators, and equally threaten to wash away specialisms in a tide of populism.

My own reading of these tendencies is the shift in the media (including exhibition) away from constructing a readership to constituting readers. In the bourgeois public sphere proposed by Habermas (1989), newspapers and other media create a political identity for its readers, and directs them. The public constitutes itself around these editorial voices. They hold sway over and, to some extent, homogenise and mould their readerships. In the current media this is less apparent. Journalism, in this respect, was careful to be accurate, but not afraid to draw conclusions and be partial. This rigour of journalism has mutated into a more speculative position where, instead, contemporary editorial activity is not to cast strong opinions outwards, but to reflect the field of debate. It has some level of protectionism by reporting what people are saying rather than what people should know. It is concealing rather than revealing in its desire to represent the gamut of opinion and, at its most

dangerous gives voice to ultra-minority extremist views in the desire for parity of voice indiscriminately.

In some cases this could be characterised as a shift the depth to shallowness. But I don't want to fall into this judgemental similar but would rather report it as a change in axis between the authority of the editor, and that of the individuated reader. And with that comes as many potentials as problems.

The death of the author and the birth of the reader was, of course, heralded by Barthes who shifted writing as taking place as an event in the recipient rather than disseminator. 'he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted'. (Barthes 1977 p 148) He was prescient to note this shift, however he was referring to a very pure capitalist state that is the prehistory of today's conditions. The reader is suspended while reading a text without history. Today that is far from the case, the reader's history is the conditioning of the text itself, and so writers, or artists, are required to identify with a history in order for the reader to locate their multiple threads.

In this situation, the narrative between voices or histories is the constituent factor. It is, therefore, in the construction of narrative between story lines that the editorial thrives. It is not authorship as such, but the construction of arcs (to borrow from the episodic forms of television series and comic books, themselves now a dominant form of cultural entertainment that have also transformed the movie industry with the 'universes' of Marvel, and more recently DC superheroes' interweaving story lines between individual films and film series themselves).

**I've always believed that the curator is a medium. The curator exists to get the artist's voice out there... I have a very artist-centered view because everything I've ever done comes out of the dialogue with artists.** (Obrist 2012 p44)

"An editor is a mediator. She stands between the writer and the reader and helps them to understand each other" says the Writers Helper blog. (Owens 2003)

One way of differentiating between a curator and editor can be found on Fastcompany, who say that the curator IS an author, albeit through 'quotation' and that is an essential to their filtering and contextualising the slew of information available today to answer: 'So, if editors refine a topic, and curators define a topic—why does it matter now?' (Rosenbaum 2011b)

So there seems to be, in my mind some confluence, or perhaps convergence between the two. And not only that. If we say that curators contextualise existing material into a new narrative as an act of authorship, then surely the artist themselves, and anyone engaged in the assembly of information is acting editorially. The focus on research based or journalistic art practices in recent years evident throughout contemporary art

How did such a thing come to pass? Simply put it is a response to the changes in readership we have experienced and the dissolution of boundaries between print and broadcast media, and physical space that has altered ALL positions within it - maker, presenter, audience no longer apply. The identity one acts out in any given situation can now be better focused on how one is acting rather than the persona one is adopting. This is an epistemological shift that has very deep connotations as it challenges any notion of truth or veracity.

One affirmation is that, in the media where algorithmic content selection is creating strange attractor-like preferences that appear dispassionate, but are in fact rife with the same problems as society that are embedded in language almost unseen.



To mention algorithms invokes some thoughts of mathematics and the arcane connections of data. There is one major problem with any algorithm, its basis on popularity. Statistical or probability matrixes will always be applied towards a given goal, and to some extent this is a self-fulfilling prophecy. We experience it every day. When reading the guardian the most read newstories at the bottom of the website are, almost without exception, the ones at the top of the page - unless there is something cute. But this is a feedback loop. I read the headlines, that makes it popular, so it is at the top of the popular list. And when a cute story reaches the 'most read' section it is pushed up to the headlines, generating more hits ad infinitum. It creates ever decreasing circles of accessibility. Online ads are even more enclosed. There is only one online store I use - a fashion store called Oki-ni. Whatever media outlet I go to, I only see ads for Oki-ni... until recently when I, almost accidentally, looked at an online auction house to get a rough valuation for something I had picked up in a flea market. Now the only advert I see is for 'The Auctioneer'. In essence I am enclosed in my own preferences, even if accidentally created, unchallenged.

This is nothing unfamiliar, we have all experienced it, possibly even before coming here. A few of you may even be experiencing it now having a sneaky look at the latest sneakers or Iphone while listening to me.

What is required are the skills to introduce the unexpected, the non-individuated concensus. Personally I want to see things I DON'T know about, not confirm those things I already know.

**Human curator-editors can do things algorithms can't, like drive attention to high-quality but little-known writers and champion a diversity of voices and topics. (McLaughlin 2016)**

This is not simply a practical issue, but an aesthetic one. While data appears boundless, it is in fact a series of interlocking localities. Very

small universes that orbit around interest groups that are self-confirming.

The editorial aesthetic is, then, counter to this. It reflects not the singularities but a cognitive mapping of subjective spaces. These spaces are built from confluences of different fields of knowledge. The editorial is an aggregated one, open-ended, a pile rather than an column.

**Selected Publications**  
**2007 - 2017**



## Portfolio of Selected Publications: 2007-2017

(note: translations in other languages are not included except when including images contribute to document or illustrate projects under discussion)

### 1. Curatorial History, Theory & Practice

- 1.1 'Statement on Curating' in SUVAKOVIC, Misko (2012). *Asymmetric Europe* (cat). Novi Sad: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Vojvodina
- 1.2 'When Was Curating?' in WANG, Chunchen (ed) (2014). *The Invisible Hand: Curating as Gesture. The Second CAFAM Biennale*. Beijing: Central Academy of Fine Art Museum
- 1.3 'When Was Curating?' in LU, Peiyi (ed) (2015). *Art Criticism Taiwan* no 64. Tainan: Tainan National University of Arts
- 1.4 Contributions to MARKOPOULOUS, Leigh (ed) (2015). *Great Expectations: Prospects for the Future of Curatorial Education*. San Francisco & Cologne: California College of Arts & Walter Koenig Books

### 2. Publishing

- 2.1 'Publish and be Damned' in *Celeste* May 2010. Mexico: Celeste
- 2.2 'Publish and be Damned' in MAIER, Tobi, LOTZ, Antonia et al (eds) (2011), *Ludlow 38: The First Three Years*, Spector Books, Leipzig & Goethe-Institute, New York
- 2.3 'Interview with Della Von Hisa (Alexis Fagin Black)' in HAMMONDS, Kit (ed) (2012). *Three Letter Words Issue 1: OMG*. London: Publish and be Damned
- 2.4 'Nordic Models' in HAMMONDS, Kit (2012). *Nordic Models*. London & Stockholm. Publish and be Damned Inprint (sic) & Index Stockholm
- 2.5 *Blue Lines, Red Threads: Social Tendencies in Artist Publications* (cat), Serralves Museum, Porto (2014)
- 2.6 'Somewhere Between Curatorial and Artistic Practice' in FAUST, Chantal (ed) (2014). *Prova 2: Humanities Research Forum Journal*. London: Royal College of Art

- 2.7 'The Strange Life and Uncanny Death of Publish and be Damned' in CELLA, Bernard (ed) (2015), *No-ISBN*, Vienna & Cologne: Salon fuer Kunstbuch & Walter Koenig Books
- 2.8 'Staples and Ink: Some Reflections on the Small Press Boom in Contemporary Art Publishing - interview with Bernhard Cella & Kit Hammonds'. MUNOZ, Maite (2016). *Radio Web Macba*. Barcelona: Museum of Contemporary Art, Barcelona. Available at: <<http://macba.cat/en/audio-rwm-kit-hammonds-bernhard-cella>> [last accessed 20 May 2017]. Included on USB drive. Filename: staples\_and\_ink.mp3

### 3. Institutional Settings

- 3.1 'A Discussion on the Facets of a Crystal Land' (2007). Published by the British Council following the European Young Curators Forum at Musac, Leon. (published copy untraced).
- 3.2 'Games People Play' in WILLIAMS, Frances (ed) (2009). *The Cat Came As A Tomato*. London: South London Gallery
- 3.3 'Things and Stuff: Experimental Models of the Spaces of Production' in HAMMONDS, Kit (ed) (2012). *Ways of Working: A Mock Up*. Cambridgeshire: Wying Arts Centre
- 3.4 'Fabulously Rich' in HAMMONDS, Kit (ed). *Ways of Working: A Rate of Exchange*. Cambridgeshire: Wying Arts Centre
- 3.5 'Scenarios futurs: Un jeu - Edition de Charlesroi' in ZEBEDIN, Hannes et al (ed) (2014). *Hotel Charlesroi: Force du Changement* [exhibition guide]. Charlesroi: Hotel Charleroi
- 3.6 'No Puppet is Dumber than its Puppeteer' in WANG, Chunchen (ed) (2014). *The Invisible Hand: Curating as Gesture. The Second CAFAM Biennale* (cat). Beijing: Central Academy of Fine Art Museum
- 3.7 'Curatorial Experiment: Cabinet of Contemporary Curiosity' in WANG, Chunchen (ed) (2014). *The Invisible Hand: Curating as Gesture. The Second CAFAM Biennale* (cat). Beijing: Central Academy of Fine Art Museum
- 3.8 'Art in the Age of Risk Management' in WOODESON, Ben (2015). *Obstacle* (cat). London: Berloni

#### 4. Cartographic Acts

- 4.1 Various catalogue entries for FITZSIMMONS, Claire, HAMMONDS, Kit et al (eds) (2006). *Around the World in Eighty Days* (cat). Frankfurt am Main: Revolver
- 4.2 "'Around the World in Eighty Days" and other fictions' in SMOLAK, Anna (ed) (2008). *Transkultura: Art and Fluid Reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Conference Materials - a Selection of Papers*. Krakow: Bunkier Sztuki
- 4.3 'Transkultura - Two Sides of a Mirror' in *Obieg* magazine Summer 2008. Warsaw: Obieg. (published copy untraced)
- 4.4 'Beating the Bounds' in HAMMONDS, Kit (2011). *Ground Level* (cat). London: Hayward Publishing
- 4.5 'Experimental Fictions: Predictions and Proofs' in STEINER, Barbara (2012). *The Scenario Book*. Berlin: Jovus
- 4.6 'The Europa Triangle: An Introduction' in HAMMONDS, Kit (2013). *The Europa Triangle* (cat). London: Publish and be Damned Inprint (sic)
- 4.7 'Pyramid Rhetoric: On the Point of Collapse' in HAMMONDS, Kit (2013). *The Europa Triangle* (cat). London: Publish and be Damned Inprint (sic)
- 4.8 'The Europa Triangle' and other contributions to STEINER, Barbara (ed) (2013). *The Europe (to the power of) n Book*. Berlin: Jovus
- 4.9 'Essay on Balance Sheets' in HAMMONDS, Kit (2015). *Balance Sheets* (cat). Hong Kong: Edouard Malingue Gallery
- 4.10 'This Exhibition is an Island' (2017). *Journal of Artistic Research* Issue 13 [Internet]. <<http://www.jar-online.net/this-exhibition-is-an-island/>>.

#### 5. The Editorial Aesthetic

- 5.1 *What is the Editorial?* [exhibition guide and floor text], Taipei Biennial, 2016
- 5.2 'What does Independent Art Publishing in Asia Mean to You?' in CHU, Ingrid (2016). *15 Invitations*. Aug–Oct 15. Hong Kong: Asia Art Archive

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