Curatorial theory as practice: a critical analysis of curatorial anthologies, symposia and case-study writing.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to interrogate the effects that the main formats of curatorial theory have had on curating as a field. The context where my research sits is curating's shift towards non-exhibitionary, collective forms of practice and the abandonment of authorial curating in favour of a more self-effacing, less hierarchical type of practitioner. The thesis explains how curating's main formats of reflection (the anthology, the self-reported case study and the symposium) behave; and how they do so, through their enactment and circulation, in ways that might be at odds with certain strands of curating that have avowed a desire for horizontality. Because it has been those strands of curatorial practice that have also championed the production of theory as an expanded form of curating, my research's aim has been to demystify the assumption that these formats, curating's rhetorical production, are innocent or less hierarchical for being non-exhibitionary—or, more broadly, for being "discursive", to use curating's prevalent understanding of discursive practices as those where speech acts occupy a central role. While I show that these formats are not unproblematic, it has also been my intention to explain how they might have other repercussions that are not necessarily negative. These formats, as I elaborate in the conclusions, hold the field together, transform curatorial thinking into a body of knowable objects and generate a shared consciousness among practitioners.

My critique draws on Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Louis Althousser in order to operate with key concepts such as discourse, performativity and ideology, respectively, as well as on various scholars that have contributed to literary theory (Terry Eagleton, Stanley Fish, Mary Louise Pratt) and performance studies (Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander) to further nuance my understanding of the different formats I have analysed. Key practitioners whose contributions to curatorial theory I have unpacked are Paul O'Neill, Beatrice von Bismarck, Irit Rogoff and Mick Wilson, among others.

The introduction sets the scene and outlines the structure of the thesis as a programme of analysis. It also includes a breakdown of the methodology, positionality, scope and limitations of the thesis. The first chapter focuses on

anthologies of curatorial theory and their relationship to ideas of programming and readership. The second chapter unpacks self-reported case studies as a primary writing strategy in curatorial thinking. The third chapter traces the various places where discursivity and rhetorical production appear vis-a-vis non-representation and community instantiation in the evolution of curatorial thinking. The fourth and last chapter interrogates the role of the live audience in the production of curatorial thinking.

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

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Acknowledgments

Definition of terms

It might be worth dwelling on a few important, recurrent terms whose presence is ubiquitous in this thesis. I clarify these terms since, more often than not, in analysing what curators have said about curating, their implicit understanding of those words has spilled into my own writing.

- *Discourse*: The conventional understanding of discourse and/or discursivity in curatorial thinking oscillates between 'language' (where curatorial discourse would stand in for 'written and spoken commentary on curating') to 'field', with adjacent meanings akin to 'theory' and/or 'self-reflectivity'—just like, quite regularly, the term "the curatorial" is utilised as a shorthand for curatorial theory, which, as I hope to show in pages 46-47, is but a misconception. It is possible to contend that these conceptualisations of discourse can be summarised as 'what is said about curating'. However, because my understanding of discourse is Foucauldian (and, in this sense, I understand discourse not just as what is being said about a practice, but rather, as the set of practices, objects, ideas, relationships that regulate what can be said), discourse (curatorial discourse) is not solely what it is said about curating but, also, how it is said and where. With this, my understanding of discourse analysis is, as Foucault himself forcefully expressed in *The Will To Knowledge*, "to discover who does the speaking, the positions and viewpoints from which they speak, the institutions which prompt people to speak about it and which store and distribute the things that are said".[1]

- *Politics*: While leftist politics constitute curating's prevalent ideological position, the utilisation of the term in curatorial thinking ranges from a tautological/informational paradigm (a political project is a project that talks about politics) to the production of images or moments that depict possible and future ways of organising life, from the search for

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[1] Michel Foucault. *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1. London: Penguin, 1998 [1976].

an aesthetic experience of togetherness among project participants to experiments in collective organisation of cultural production. All of these conceptualisations share, in my view, an implicit understanding of politics as a collective effort—although, what that effort is for is sometimes unstated. The emphasis in collectivity is not mistaken and, in this sense, my (somewhat slippery) understanding of politics has to do with how different groups or individuals organise and negotiate (sometimes democratically, sometimes coercively) power.

- *The curatorial*: After analysing different elaborations on this term in chapter 1, my definition of the curatorial is historical: it is, or perhaps, was, a moment in the evolution of curating and of curatorial thinking, in which the practice of exhibition making as the primary activity of curating was challenged and where a more expansive notion that frequently preferenced formats of collective discussion and assembly was foregrounded.

- *Performativity*: I explain at length in chapter 4 how there seems to be two souls, two competing understandings of performativity in curating and, more broadly, in the Humanities. These two souls are, on the one hand, performativity as 'showing' or 'showing-doing' (pp. 207-209) and, on the other, performativity as the effects of language and gestures. I often use the term as a combination of the two, as how things, words and gestures show or are made to show their effects.

Introduction

If this text was *just* theory, that is, pure discourse, sheer 'logos', could one ever read it? Does it do something because it is written, typed, edited, because it glimmers on a laptop screen or it comes before one as ink, printed on what once was a blank page? Does it do anything at all because it is, after all, *matter*? Or, to put it a bit differently, does its materiality, how it is used and how it circulates, matter? With these playful questions I want to explain where all of this, my thesis, came from; how it started. It started as a suspicion of what to me was a puzzling contradiction that I kept encountering during my days as a student on the Curating Contemporary Art course at RCA: That some of the things that were being said about curatorial practice seemed not to apply to how and where those things were being said. Let us have a look, for instance, at the first book I bought about contemporary curating, *Curating Research*.[2] In the introduction, the editors remind the reader that their intention in "commissioning and assembling those texts for the reader ha[s] not been to construct a fixed taxonomy of curatorial research but rather to suggest ways to open up new pathways".[3] Thus, the book is presented as the result of an intellectual interest that yields a set of suggestions. One might take them up or simply discard them. It's an open invitation. The reader can decide what to do with that.

Elsewhere, in the same introduction, the editors give a definition of authorial curating as "commissioning or working with artworks for a public manifestation within an exhibitionary frame or organising principle defined by a curator". Is this not what the editors were doing with this anthology? Was there not something eminently authorial, through editing, in this book? How could this be?

It is this somewhat contradictory logic that my original suspicion has tried to investigate: that the desire for a less authorial, more distributed,

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2 Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson. *Curating Research*. Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2015.
3 Ibid, p. 10.

post-exhibitionary kind of curating was and still is absent in the production and circulation of curatorial thinking. While explicit theorization of curating was then shifting this field of practice towards the curatorial and towards other ways of curating that wanted to abandon the idea of the curator as author and narrator, how such theorization has been presented, published or staged often does not seem to take into account these changes, as if curatorial theory or curatorial thinking were not part of curating, as if theory were not a practice.

What can one learn from this contradiction? If non-exhibitionary, non-representational forms of curation have resulted in a less authorial, less heroic, more collective and horizontal kind of curatorial practice, what effects do the formats of curating's theoretical production have had on this field?. This one has been the primary research question of my thesis.

Lack of interrogation about these formats, formats that I have come to call rhetorical platforms, not only pointed at a less researched area in curatorial thinking but also furthered the primary research question of my thesis into the following ones: what do these platforms tell us about the ideas of horizontality, access and circulation they contain? How do they relate to curating's political desire to distribute agency, critique and change? In light of what, at first glance, seemed a rather authorial way of producing discourse, the role played by the publics of these platforms emerged as a research question as well. That is, what does the audience, the reader, the viewer do in all of this?

Over several years, this thesis had, as a provisional title, something along the lines of "the politics of curatorial discourse". What I then meant by politics was regulatory effects, imbalances in agency, authority and expertise and not necessarily a set of ethical stances that curating has embraced as its own and/or curating's desire for a certain kind of political (des)organisation. This understanding is indeed Foucauldian but it is not just an acknowledgment that "power is everywhere" but, rather, that discourse production plays a regulatory function and that statements regulate and govern (each other and others); and that interrogating this is an examination, as Foucault himself

would have had it, of a regime and of a politics.[4] And because this understanding of politics is inseparable from discourse, discourse analysis is what I have conveyed. I have indeed traced how ideas circulate and relate to each other throughout texts and other snippets of documentation accounting for curating's explicit theorisation. But my research has not only been an analysis of language and concepts and of the relationship established between them in language. It is also a Foucauldian type of discourse analysis in that it also looks at the devices where that specific type of language happens.

The first chapter of my thesis, "Doing things with anthologies and symposia" indeed looks at curatorial collective volumes in what proved to be a difficult exercise. These books were both my literature review, in that they contain a patchwork of at times explicit, at times implicit ideas on the anthology as a format, while being my first research materials. In characterising how curators have understood the anthology as a public platform, it soon became clear to me that there were properties attributed to the anthology that I had to examine. My research has therefore paid attention to what is being said but, more importantly, to how and where discourse is being said, that is: the forms, sensibly apprehensible, of discourse (the book cover, the page, the genre, the video recording, the lecture theatre). In this sense, the first chapter aims to situate, on the hand, the importance of anthologies in the production of curatorial discourse and how publishing has been conceptualized by some curators over the last three decades. But it also foregrounds what they can achieve (together with their live correlate, the symposium) to reposition a practice, an institution, an idea, a departmental shift, through their very materiality. This, in turn, can help us understand that the transformation of curating into a field of inquiry is not just the result of a self-less intellectual effort. At the same time, tracing how these anthologies work also renders an image, a representation, of a set of practices that have often aspired to escape a representational logic.

My description of the encounter with the research materials has indeed a Latourian ring to it in that I have tried to describe or inscribe my examples within the wider context of the curatorial field without giving primacy to live

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[4] Michel Foucault."The Order of Discourse" in Robert Young (ed.) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 48-78, 53.

speech over printed matter or vice versa. Also, it resonates with Latour in that, as Latour himself would have had it, I "take seriously" what the actors say or do in the materials I analyse.[5] But I have never been able to fully accept that one tells it all, that actors are self-transparent, or that the obvious (what we apprehend through our senses) is the only story that is being told. In this sense, my analysis is of a critical type and that appears through my resorting to thinkers that have unpacked the intricacies of ideology: Althusser, Eagleton, Butler. Butler, together with other important scholars that have greatly contributed to performance studies, like Phelan or Auslander, has largely informed my understanding of performativity, which becomes both a concept and part of the method. That a performative lens was necessary to supplement discourse analysis was determined by asking after the how and the where (and implicitly the before whom) of curatorial discourse, that is, of what is said about curating.

The first chapter ends with a detailed example of the oxymoronic relationship between, on the one hand, a collective moment where professional value, forms of capital and audience presence are purported to be blurred and, on the other hand, the omniscient, apodictic narration of the curator, where the narrator, in the example at hand, is Beatrice Von Bismarck, whose voice is the only one that is heard. Such an oxymoron, which at some point I make it apparent under the question ¨where is everyone else?" is indeed one of the primary contradictions at the core of a textual strategy that I go on to call the self-reported case study (chapter 2): That is, that a project hailed in the name of plurality, horizontality and collectivity appears as one voice and, more importantly, whether any collective, non-hierarchical kind of work took place for that project to circulate as a text, one is never told.

The examples that I analyse in chapter 2, while indeed responding to central tropes of curatorial discourse, were not representing an explicit conversation that tries to expressly theorise curatorial practice. Rather; I chose two different examples of purportedly non-representational practice in order to see what happens to those examples when reinscribed into an economy of

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[5] Latour, Bruno, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

representation: On the one hand, an exhibition with an important performative component and an interest in exploring how to accommodate sound and voice within a curatorial project. On the other hand, a project where the non-representational element was organisational and deliberative, happening before the public output. I have done this because the self-reported case-study, as a writing technique, is so pervasive that I wanted to see what effects its utilisation is having on the curatorial field as a whole, not just on the textual representation of the curatorial discursive event, that is, the symposium, materially represented through the anthology.

The third chapter aims to explain and situate where this appetite for public speaking has come from and in what developments in the expansion of curatorial discourse we can locate this desire for dialogical, discursive and live events as examples of practice that seem to promise a more egalitarian, less authorial, politicised kind of encounter. I start by analysing the example of practice that has traditionally been saluted as the seminal moment of public speaking in curating (as well as curating's 'repolitization'), documenta X, to later talk about different moments of curatorial discourse that have characterised curating as a practice that 'speaks' (which I call curating's 'rhetoricality' in pages 138-140). I later move on to situate discursive practices within the educational and non-representational turn in contemporary curating. The analysis comes to an end by confronting, anew, my account of curating's desire for rhetoric with an example of a curatorial symposium, The Future Curatorial. While I still refer to the resulting anthology, this time I focused on its circulating as video recordings of a live event. In looking at those video recordings, what seems to emerge is the privileging of discourse as uttered speech or language. The non-linguistic elements of discourse enunciation (their ritual context, pp. 203-204) seemed to be left behind. But not all of them disappear. The game of gazes that I describe in pages 160-162, the subject who sees without seeing their face, opens up two communities of interest or two moments of publicness that are co-originary to the live event (a professional audience, which makes the cut of posterity) and the attendant/viewer, which is present through its absence in the circulation of discourse.

This is what I try to unpack in chapter 4: the role of the audience in the live enunciation of discourse, which I first distinguish from private viewership and readership (pp. 179-180) in order to retrieve its specificity to later choose an example of curatorial practice, *Former West*, where discourse and practice, live event and printed matter are complicated in a way that becomes all the more unique through its Public Editorial Meetings (pp. 192-194).

I think it is in this chapter where the most important contributions of my thesis are: on the one hand, that the live encounter might be the only one moment when the producers of discourse are susceptible to disruption, when their ideas can be confronted *in situ* and where dissent cannot be controlled by the unifying form of the text (and/or of video documentation). On the other hand, the presence of a live audience in a lecture theatre might facilitate some kind of collective consciousness of being in a field of inquiry. And maybe, more crucially, that the still ongoing divide between display and liveness, exhibition and programme, representation and non-representation can be overcome by looking at the curatorial field through the lens of performativity. Through this lens, one can also see the textual, printed and other forms of discourse representation as performing which makes me wonder, as a final conclusion and maybe the beginning of my future research, whether the live encounter where the curator as textual representation can be held accountable is the place that the anthologies I discussed in the introduction seem to have neglected: the classroom.

I will summarise now the contributions, I believe, my thesis offers to the curatorial field:

1) That curatorial literature reinscribes curating into an economy of representation while allowing us to see that there is a split economy of value in curatorial discourse, where the non-representational is posited as more desirable than the representational but where thought is what the anthologies represent. At the same time, It acts as a representation of a reality, discourse, field, that we cannot grasp as a totality, and makes the field of knowable and transmittable.

2) The pervasiveness of the self-reported case study has reintroduced into the curatorial field a number of tropes. a) a modernist understanding of the curatorial project, that appears often without historical or

institutional context, b) a suspension of the performativity of interpretation and dissent; c) a reassertion of the divide professional/non-professional, d) the knowability of curatorial experience, available through narration to other practitioners.

3) That the conversation as the paradigm of non-representational curating might stems from various shifts and debates in curatorial practice but that also can be supplemented by acknowledging that there have been conceptualisations and images of curating and of exhibitionary curating as a practice that speaks and persuades.

4) That the presence of a live audience finds discourse at its most vulnerable, opening up the possibility of holding the speakers accountable. At the same time, the performative layout of the lecture theatre and the podium might render available a collective consciousness of belonging to a field for the speakers.

5) That performativity, that things perform as showing-dowing, might be what can bridge curating's split economy of value.

Positionality

Like many people before me (and perhaps less so when, in 2017, I joined RCA) I came into curating through art history, with an interlude where I read 19th-Century Studies as my first postgraduate course. I owe a lot to that programme. It trained me to analyse texts but more importantly, how different ideas, especially those ideas that seek to lay claim to knowledge, have historically seemed to necessitate specific formats and textual strategies in order to succeed. The original suspicion that originated this thesis was indeed informed by this background. However, my scepticism was, and still is, furthered by having been the reader, the audience member, the trainee curator, in sum, the recipient and addressee of curating's theoretical production. In this sense, while often being a member of the abstract public curatorial theory is addressed to, I am not an occasional visitor that writes from a different field, altogether alien to curating. I am part of this field of

practice, a field that, more often than not, sees theory as an abstract effort or as an addendum to 'actual' practice. At the same time, this thesis is a theoretical contribution (yes, practical indeed in that writing is a practice) on curatorial theory and it seeks to be, perhaps with certain hubris, and intervention in the field. This is also why how this thesis is written, as I shall explain below, has been important: it has helped me navigate this contradiction.

Methodology

The "materials" that this introduction has outlined—anthologies, case-studies, live encounters and the textual inscription of understandings of curating—point at a preliminary outline of what methods of analysis I will utilise in my research. In this sense, I am indebted to the fields of literary and performance studies as well as to discourse analysis. Nevertheless, it would be somewhat absurd not to acknowledge that curatorial thinking and curatorial studies have also found its own object of study: that cultural production has a public dimension and that such publicness is not univocal or self-evident. In this sense, there is something that, in my view, appears as eminently curatorial: that I analyse these materials at the moment of its public access and of its circulation. This is why my research has dispensed with interviews. Actually, interviewing as a research method that allows for retrieving something like a historical or critical truth would, if anything, perpetuate the centrality of the curator in the production of discourse (as if only through the curator's confirmation or rebuttal what can be said about their work had validity).

A number of theoretical stances underpin my analysis throughout this thesis, not without promiscuity and at times just implicitly. In this sense, even though my understanding of discourse is Foucauldian,[6] my grasp of its material dimension has been refined thanks to work of the feminist thinkers

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[6] Michel Foucault. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge: New York, 2002 [1969]).

such as Donna Haraway, Karen Barad and Judith Butler, which have foregrounded that discursive practices, even though operating on the level of language, are also instantiated through matter and bodies.[7] Butler has also been particularly informative for my understanding of performativity.[8]This concept has proven to be a useful tool to unpack the centrality that curatorial thinking has attributed to live events and to the enunciation of discourse in public. In addition to this, that specific literary genres and techniques also bring about characteristics that allow practices to lay claim to knowledge is a realisation that I also owe to Hayden White.[9]

Bruno Latour has also been illuminating in his obliteration of hierarchies between human and between actors and relations.[10] However, because Latour's thinking is positioned as a nemesis to Pierre Bourdieu's, there is a repudiation of ideology as a central tenet of analysis that I cannot do without. While I do not deal with ideology explicitly in my thesis, I do have an understanding of this concept that distances from its common or garden use today and that has been clearly informed by post-1968 Marxist thinkers, Louis Althusser and Terry Eagleton.[11] This is an understanding of ideology as operating on the level of symbolic language (even if it is not linguistically) but also as a fundamentally unconscious realm that portrays hegemonic power as natural and obvious. It is, in my view, when positions, formats and behaviours are posited as evident and self-transparent that the workings of critique are needed.

It is important to acknowledge that my thesis analyses a set of formats of theory belonging to a field that keeps on changing. In this sense, my research is contemporaneous with the evolution of curating. I have tried to

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[7] Donna Haraway. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1988, pp. 575–99; Karen Barad. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2003, pp. 801–31. Judith Butler. *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
[8] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (Routledge: New York, 1990).
[9] Hayden White. *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).
[10] Bruno Latour, *Re-assembling the social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[11] Louis Althusser. *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008); Terry Eagleton. *Criticism and Ideology*. A *Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 2008 [1976]).

acknowledge some important changes in curatorial thinking that were somewhat incipient when I started writing my thesis in 2019. Back then, the curatorial still exercised a great deal of ascendancy and co-curation, for instance, was germinating as a concept and strategy. The structure of my thesis also reflects how my understanding of those formats, and how they relate to each other, shifted through my research. Anthologies were indeed my point of departure (or of entry) since, to me, they forcefully exemplified what in my view was an undeniable conflict between a posthierarchical desire and authoritative thinking. Self-reported case studies emerged as a writing strategy demanding analysis through looking at those anthologies. Indeed, I could have chosen collections of interviews and analyse what the interview does as a format (and it may well be what my future research will focus on) but it was the prevalence of self-reported exemplification in writing (which also happens in and through interviews) that made focus on the latter. In any case, I have tried to acknowledge how the self-reported case study is a strategy that can be found in a variety of types of text, not just academic papers. This is why I chose a conversation transcript as one of my examples in chapter 2.

An important finding brought about by analysing curatorial anthologies was their entanglement with symposia or, as they often referred to as, discursive events. In order to disentangle this and to better understand why discursive platforms are often seen as unproblematic, I wrote chapter 3.

And it is also because of the contemporaneity of my research and because of how preliminary suspicions are nuanced and times abandoned that I have wished to reflect through my writing how my theoretical understanding of discourse, politics and performativity has changed. This is why there are times in my thesis when, seemingly all of the sudden, a new thinker appears. My reading of what other curators or scholars of curating have written and thought introduced me to other thinkers that I was less familiar with at the beginning of my research. When, suddenly, the reader finds that I am talking about Karen Barad or Donna Haraway, that is because that was the moment when they came into my thinking. The view that the researcher puts together a toolbox of theoretical devices before using them as a ready-to-hand scalpel able to dissect an object of analysis is, in my view, a mystification. There is a

messiness, a promiscuity between subject matter and theoretical tool that is always labile.

The main research question—what are the effects of the formats that curatorial theory has privileged—demanded a primary research approach of close analysis of the formats and contents of the curatorial objects that form my examples. The attempt to understand these objects as doing something in relation to the political aspirations of contemporary curatorial practice demanded drawing on different theorists as I moved towards one of my primary conclusions. That is, it is through an understanding of the duality of performance and performativity that these 'theoretical' objects can be brought into a broader understanding of curatorial practice in which they participate both as theory and practice. This thesis mirrors this research trajectory: it performs the unfolding of my thinking through the process of research.

The writing, which acts as "thick description",[12] both presents the effects of the formats while also acting as a demystifying gesture. By embedding different examples of publishing and performative practice in curating (rhetorical platforms) within their wider material and discursive contexts, I have intended to foreground the mystifications they conceal and how they are not self-contained artefacts. They are part of wider networks of ideas, institutional devices and individual agendas. As I have just adumbrated, the writing also shows the promiscuity and at times stochastic nature of research. It is not just that, often, the thinking happens through writing (as opposed to the belief that one thinks and, then, one writes what has been thought). The fantasy of slickness, which much of curating's rhetorical production perpetuates, is something I wanted to stay away from while preserving the standards of academic research. My thesis is not a critique of exemplary or paradigmatic thinking in curating, but rather how the representational and exemplary effects of such formats are being utilised and how the "showing-doing" of curating's explicit theorisation, to use a term that will recurrently appear in the fourth chapter, work.

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[12] For the notion of "thick description" see: Clifford Geerz. The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz. New York: Basic Books Inc, 1973.

My analysing the effects (and not the intentions) has also determined that I have not used interviews as a primary research strategy. Interviewing the main names did seem to be pertinent. To me, the oxymoron is evident: not only does it resituate meaning and significance as transcendental to the object being analysed. It presupposes that authorial intention is what ultimately validates information. It would be tantamount to admitting that knowing what "actually" happened, the instigator's original intent (which, I contend, one cannot apprehend through reading, viewing, studying or researching), alters the very material effects of the objects of analysis. Indeed, it can supplement the researcher's understanding of the object at issue but it cannot suspend the object's effects in its circulation. Assuming otherwise becomes all the more paradoxical when the field at hand is curating. A field of inquiry that, arguably, busies itself with the being public of cultural production, would be sanctioning the validity of new knowledge and research through an encounter that is in essence private.

Scope and limitations

If discourse is what makes possible that something is said about a subject (curating), not everything that is being said (not every commentary, to use another term by Foucault) holds equal power (and because there is such an imbalance, there is also contestation, there is conflict and there is *politics*). This is why I have tried to analyse contributions to curatorial thinking by its major players: Irit Rogoff, Beatrice Von Bismarck, Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, among others, which, as I show in pages 27-29, are often in a position where they are both producers of theory as well as historians thereof.

While the Internet is not specifically addressed as a medium, it would be spurious of me to maintain a distinction between the lectern and the screen. That is, to sustain that I have *solely* analysed books and texts as hard copies that have landed on my desk (versus, for instance, video recordings that one only has access to online) is just not tenable. In this sense, my research has

taken place at a time when search engines, online files and archival platforms are ready to hand and these have been, more often than not, the very medium where my objects of analysis have appeared before me. But this is why what I say in this thesis about the regulatory effects of the anthology or of case-study writing in curatorial literature has been elaborated, reflected on and distilled both at the library and on the computer. One cannot be distinguished from the other. At the same time, it is indeed thanks to having online platforms available that I have been able to access video recordings of events that would have been lost otherwise.

It is also true that I speak in this thesis about examples of curatorial practice (or, rather, about examples of reflection on curatorial practice) where such an overlapping was not historically the case. Slovenian artist Vuk Ćosić's *documenta Done*, his downloading of documenta X's website and online exhibition after it went offline and CD-ROM copies of the platform started being sold, exemplifies a moment when the digital was not understood by curatorial practitioners as is nowadays. Ćosić's smuggling of documenta X's online site onto his own server was a response to documenta's (failed) understanding of the online as an ancillary medium or as a space that could be regulated, thus standing in opposition to the net.art movement's championing of the Internet as a space beyond the grip of institutional control.[13]

Nevertheless, this example is useful to further situate the scope and limitations of my research. Ćosić's artistic piracy is not part of the materials I analyse precisely because what my thesis tries to unpack are some formats of explicit theorisation on curating (however significant Ćosić's rebellious gesture was when it comes to problematising the artworld's back-then uneasy relationship with online platforms). These formats, as I have stated above, are the anthology, the self-reported case study (which indeed is often published in online journals) and the symposium, and with them, I have focused on ideas of readership and live audience. I would be remiss however if I did not mention that Catherine David did characterise the Internet as a space of participation in a way that strongly resonates with how readership and

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[13] Caitlin Jones, p. 84.

publishing as participation has been characterised in curatorial thinking, as I aim to show in chapter 1 (pp. 31-32).[14]

It is also important to acknowledge that I have analysed examples of anthologies that sought to circulate conceptualisations of curating as a post-hierarchical practice. To me, it was those anthologies which presented the contradiction I have described at its clearest. This is not, however, the only type of anthology that curating has produced. In chapter 1, I refer to some of those types: collections of interviews with curators, which enjoyed some momentum in the early 2000s and whose perhaps best-known example came along a little bit later: Obrist's *A Brief History of Curating*.

This type of anthology has perhaps been resurrected. *Why I Do Why I Do: Global Curators Speak* is a new addition to a genre that, in my view, had a period of waning but has never fully died.[15] While this would be a different type of anthology, that is, the collection of interviews or of snippets of practical wisdom, it actually shows that the scope of my thesis is not, by now, purely historical. Curators continue self-reporting their work, positioning it as exemplary instances of curatorial practice—*Why I Do Why I Do*, in particular, presents a series of in-focus descriptions of a single project.

As a toolkit that is used as a collection of 'vademecums' by artists, curators and other practitioners that are looking for a point of entry into a topic, the *Documents* series published by Whitechapel Gallery should be mentioned. *Documents* is a collection of small, accessible volumes that gather key writings on pivotal ideas, practices, and debates in contemporary art and theory. Each book assembles texts from artists, critics, historians, and theorists, often spanning different periods and disciplines, to trace the genealogy of a concept or movement. Nevertheless, while pedagogical and somewhat more playful in scope and tone, one cannot but wonder why, for instance, the volume *Work*,

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[14] Caitlin Jones, 'The Copy and The Paste' in rhizome.org, March 2nd 2017, https://rhizome.org/editorial/2017/mar/02/the-copy-and-the-paste/ (accessed July 28th 2025). This article makes reference to David's characterisation of documenta X's website as a space of participation. While Jones's link is no longer accessible, David's text is now stored in https://documenta10.de/english/debatea.htm.

[15] Steven Henry Madoff (ed.) *Why I Do What I Do*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2024.

for instance, did not explicitly address all of the labour that made the publication possible.[16]

I single out this specific example to also recognise that things might be changing. The anthology *Not Going It Alone* furthers what the collective volume *Curating After The Global* had tried to explicitly acknowledge: that anthologies are actually the product of an ecology of practices, that many practitioners are involved in their elaboration and that the very materiality of those books has often concealed numerous moments of collective work.[17]

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[16] Friederike Sigler (ed.). 'Work' in *Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017.

[17] Paul O'Neill, Gerrie van Noord, Elizabeth Larison (eds.). *Not Going It Alone: Collective Curatorial Curating*. New York: Apex Art Curatorial Program, 2024. Paul O'Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds, Mick Wilson, (eds). *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.

Chapter 1:
Doing things with anthologies and symposia

A special type of practice: rhetorical platforms

Over the past 25 years, there have been a number of shifts in curating that have led to an increasing number of dialogical, conversational, and discursive programmes. This heterogeneous panorama of speech-based practices have come to occupy a central place in the curatorial field. These types of curatorial projects have often been considered to facilitate some sort of political horizontality, knowledge redistribution, or, as Maria Lind would have it, a disturbance of the institutional status quo[18]—a desire to effect a structural intervention which some have labelled as "the political potential of curatorial practice".[19] These changes must be situated within institutional developments in contemporary art, such as the binnealization of the art world[20] or the expansion of learning and education departments in art organisations;[21] and need to be positioned alongside several shifts in artistic practice, namely, the second wave of institutional critique,[22] new genre public art,[23] participatory

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[18] Maria Lind has repeatedly referred in these terms to what she seeks to achieve by her practice. See, for instance, Maria Lind. *Performing the Curatorial* (Berlin; Sternberg Press, 2021) or "Learning from Art and Artists," in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. Brian Kuan Wood (Berlin; Sternberg Press, 2010). I find her phrase particularly fortunate since, if taken in its Althusserian sense, it can also account for institutional devices other than the physical space of the institution, thus including ideology.

[19] I am borrowing this phrase from the title of the fourth issue of *On Curating*, 2010. See, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-4.html

[20] Ray Anne Lockard. "Outside the Boundaries: Contemporary Art and Global Biennials." *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2013, pp. 102–11.

[21] Sandra Neugärten, "art thinking doing art: Artistic Practices in Educational Contexts from 1900 to Today" in *e-flux Education*, Nov 17 2023, https://www.e-flux.com/education/features/575591/art-thinking-doing-art-artistic-practices-in-educational-contexts-from-1900-to-today (Accessed Feb 22nd 2024); Tom Holert. Art in The Knowledge-based Polis in *e-flux Journal*, vol. 3, Feb 2009, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68537/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/ (Accessed May 17th 2020).

[22] John C. Welchman (ed.) *Institutional Critique and After* (Zürich: JRP/Ringier, 2006).

[23] Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art,* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

art,[24] the so-called educational turn[25] and relational aesthetics.[26] More broadly, it is safe to affirm that, in a way that resonates with socially-engaged artistic practice, this discursive turn has responded in our times to "the emergence of the contemporary "post-political" consensus and the near-total marketisation of art and education".[27] While Claire Bishop's claim is made in relation to participatory art, it seems reasonable to ask whether dialogical and discursive practices in curating might hold some stake in "the populist agenda of neoliberal governments",[28] just like participation, as a discursive and practical arena, often has, as her historical analysis shows. More specifically, I contend that these projects, events and platforms must be subject to critical scrutiny in order to ask at whose expense and for whose benefit such political horizontality is being enacted.

In curatorial literature, these discursive practices are also regarded as pivotal in the development of curating as a self-conscious practice (a practice that thinks itself or even a practice that presents itself) as well as in the emergence of curatorial discourse as a field of inquiry (a field whose practitioners interrogate something).[29] Indeed, the explicit reflection necessary for such developments—reflection on curating and on the questions which curatorial discourse might be asking—has taken place by means of a number of different types of platforms: symposia, conferences, congresses and other discursive events which have been the privileged formats conveying the expansion of curating as a discursive formation. However, while this is more or less acknowledged with varying degrees of explicitness—often in passing, though—what these platforms might be doing to the discourse they enact and to the "political potential" they contain is routinely under-examined.

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[24] Ricardo Basbaum. "Post-Participatory Participation" in *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, no. 28, 2011, pp. 90–101.

[25] Dennis Atkinson, "Contemporary art and art in education: The new, emancipation and truth." in *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 31 (1), 2012, pp. 5-18; Nadine M. Kalin "Art's Pedagogical Paradox" in *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2014, pp. 190–202.

[26] Nicolas Bourriaud. *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002)

[27] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 227.

[28] *Ibid*, p. 227.

[29] Paul O'Neill. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012). Also, Paul O'Neill "The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse" in Judith Rugg, and Michèle Sedgwick (eds.) *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), pp. 13-28.

This absence of critical interrogation becomes all the more striking when one realises that it is thanks to these types of practices that curatorial thinking emerged and, more importantly, that these shifts took place due to the critical re-examination of modernist exhibition-making. An important effect of that reassessment has been a suspicion towards authorial curating and towards the figure of the curator as the main actor of curatorial practice.[30] And yet, public talks, interviews, collective volumes of curatorial texts (which are almost systematically accompanied with printed addenda of institutional biographies), they all populate a cultural economy where authorship blatantly occupies a central position and where curators show themselves both as intellectual producers through texts and publications, and as bodies uttering critique and expertise through the staging of a public talk. What an interrogation of these discursive formats would reveal remains therefore an unanswered question.

With the shift toward discursive practices, some effects were attributed to these. What emerges here is an arena where, by means of public speaking, a community whose instantiation is purported to take place beyond the hegemonic ideological order is somehow gathered—be this community fictional, actual, or experimental—and where a discourse formation is posited to be emerging amidst or thanks to such community. To put it plainly, the "political potential" of curating seems to converge with the emergence of curatorial discourse in the arena of speech-based practices, a convergence that was brought to the fore by the re-examination of the exhibition in the 1990s and 2000s and by collaborative public programmes in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis—for instance, the collaborative project *How To Work Together*, a partnership formed by The Chisenhale Gallery, Studio Voltaire and The Showroom in London in 2014.[31]

This coincidence has also been fostered by a discursive turn in artistic and curatorial practice, an important shift which has brought public programming

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[30] Olga Fernandez Lopez, "Just what is it that makes 'Curating' so different, so appealing?" in *Institution as Medium, Curating as Institutional Critique*, Part 1, *OnCurating* Issue 8, 2011, p. 40.
[31] Andrea Phillips. "Arts Organisations, Educational Institutions and the Collaborative Imperative' in Carolina Rito and Bill Balaskas (eds.), *Institutions as Praxis: New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2020).

to the fore of contemporary curating or, as Paul O'Neill would have it, "a turn towards discursivity and discussion and the kind of spaces of display that involve talking heads rather than objects on the wall".[32] This turn, O'Neill notes, has often produced spectacularized formats in which public speaking or discursive activity is performed in front of an audience (as an example, O'Neill refers to Obrist's "interview marathons" at the Serpentine Gallery), much like the educational turn also brought about what Irit Rogoff calls "pedagogic aesthetics",[33] that is, a staging of the educational environment in art spaces that doesn't necessarily seek to interrogate pedagogy or education. And yet, those projects that have embraced situated, durational approaches —projects that are posited to "respond to immediate conditions and local constituencies"—[34] are portrayed as facilitating "particular discussions, debates or interaction[s] that [are] not happening elsewhere",[35] elsewhere being conventional discursive settings, like a town hall or a classroom, with these projects therefore relying on conversational practices as a key political technique for the curator. As opposed to spectacularized formats, these projects are claimed to be "performing discourse within the context of a group that ha[s] an interest in participating in the same discourse, dialogue or debate",[36] maintaining the divide between the spectacular, purported to be hegemonically co-opted, and the arena of deictic participation, which is seen as more direct and egalitarian.

Within this context, it seems crucial to acknowledge, as Michel Foucault would have maintained, that in "every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures"[37]. More importantly, as he would later try to answer in *The Will to Knowledge*, what is said about something generates "effects of power" (and sometimes it doesn't). Given Foucault's diagnosis of the power of discourse,

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[32] Paul O'Neill (Interview). "The Politics of the Small Act" in *On Curating*, 4 (2010): *The Political Potential of Curatorial Practice*, pp. 8-10 (8).
[33] Irit Rogoff, "Turning" in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.), *Curating and the Educational Turn* (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2010), p. 42.
[34] Paul O'Neill. "The Politics of the Small Act", p. 9.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Michel Foucault,"The Order of Discourse'" in Robert Young (ed.) *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 48-78, 53.

"the central issue, then, is (...) to account for the fact that [something] is spoken about, to discover who does the speaking".[38] For Foucault, this is why power and knowledge are so intimately intertwined, not only because discourse is regulated but also, because discourse *regulates*. When curating is being talked about, even when it happens in convivially shared spaces, it cannot happen without generating, either by reinforcement or by subversion, power effects and power dynamics. Whether what this speaking is doing is to reinforce or to subvert the institutional status quo arises here as a fundamental question. This very text, my PhD thesis, can serve as an example: my writing seeks to situate my scholarly voice in a position where what I say about curating can operate at the level of the formation of discourse, while there are already other institutional and material devices at play that are already sanctioning what I say as admissible, promising, rigorous or accurate (or, on the contrary, as whacky, fringe, unorthodox or patchy). What I say about curating is embedded in an intricate web of discursive formations, material technologies and institutional devices that make acceptable what I say about curating, that allows me to get to speak about curating while, at the same time, revert to the same web as a locus for discourse formation—a locus that I invoke and help constitute. In this sense, it is telling that the gesture that brings completion to this project is called "submission".

In sum, what does what curators say about curating do? But, also, what is the relationship between how (and also where) curating is spoken about, the things that get said about curating and the possibilities of the curatorial field? And, perhaps most importantly, for whom is all this speaking? What does the addressee of discourse do with/to the discourse they witness?

These questions can also be reformulated in a slightly different way when applied to the discursive production I am referring to, that is, the curatorial field: how does speaking (what is said, where it is said, how it is said and in what format that saying takes place) about curating regulate curating itself? What would this interplay between discourse and power look like when taken to the arena of curatorial symposia and public talks? On the one hand, not all examples of discursive practice have operated as loci of discourse enactment.

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[38] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) (London: Penguin, 1998, [1976]), p. 11.

For instance, Catherine David's public talks during her edition of *documenta* (arguably, as I shall explain later in chapter 3, the first example of a discursive programme in a major exhibition) did not aim to produce curatorial discourse, understood here as an explicit theorisation of curating, however influential they have been for curatorial practice later and even though they instantiated a curatorial position or strategy. At the same time, it is possible to locate many cases of practice that have enriched and contributed to curating's professional lore and critical self-reflexivity without seeking recourse to public speaking—many exhibitions that have been in the evolution of contemporary curating come to mind here, from Bart de Baere's *This is the Show and The Show is Many Things* (1994), to Maria Lind's *Telling Histories* (2003) or Bruno Latour's *Making Things Public* (2005), *Pet Hüttner's I am a Curator* (2003) to cite a few. My suggestion is, in turn, that it is possible to identify examples of curatorial practice where curatorial discourse (what is said about curating) and the instantiation of a community (who is speaking about curating and who is being spoken to) are posited to intersect and that they do so by means of making language public. In other words: events and formats where talking about curating is happening, and where it is doing something to and for someone. As stated in the introduction, what talking about curating is doing *because* it is taking place in specific formats and specific institutional loci remains the primary question of my research project. Drawing on Paul O'Neill's notion of "rhetorical production" in curating, I shall refer to these practices or speech moments as *rhetorical platforms*, to acknowledge that they are indeed discourse insofar as language but, equally, that such language cannot be severed from the material formats, genres, strategies and performative iterations where such language is elaborated.[39] Thus, interrogating these rhetorical platforms will allow me to unpack how discourse formation and community instantiation (or a desire therefor) intertwine and affect each other in the curatorial field—all the more important given that contemporary curating lays unreserved claims to a type of political horizontality that seeks to distantiate from liberal conceptions of public or publicness in order to "create a public platform that allows people to take part

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[39] Paul O'Neill. *Curating Research* (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2015), p. 7.

in"[40]—what Irit Rogoff refers to as "the event of knowledge".[41] In this sense, Michael Warner's characterization of publics has held important sway in how curators have imagined this type of gathering: a public is self-organized, and autotelic; it is a space of discourse organised by discourse alone and is constituted by virtue of being addressed.[42]

What this political horizontality might mean or look like is difficult to pin down, but can be traced throughout curatorial literature, often appearing in relation to discursive practices (and, more recently, in relation to co-production and deliberation). In conversation with Beatrice von Bismarck (a dialogue to which I shall return in more depth in this chapter, pp. 47-48), Rogoff locates the origin of this "uneasy relation between curating, artistic practices of knowledge production and political imperatives"[43] in Catherine David's *documenta X*. In her influential essay *Turning*, the importance of David's edition of *documenta* is highlighted as having ushered in, together with Okwui Enwezor's *documenta 11*, the conversational as a type of practice and mode of relationality in contemporary art, which transformed the art world into "a site of extensive talking",[44] where conversations and similar formats were not any longer "subject to the twin authorities of governing institutions or authoritative academic knowledge (...) and enabled the invention of subjects as they emerged and were recognised."[45] Speaking, somehow, brought about a deictic, situated arena for knowledge construction and self-governmentality, an opportunity that, as Rogoff herself regrets, soon became mere "stylistic branding"[46]—a critique that, in turn, resonates with O'Neill's as explained above (p. 30). This position is updated in the reprinted version of *Turning* published in 2012 as part of *Curating and the Educational Turn*, where, as an alternative to the closure provoked by the branding of conversational practices in curating, Rogoff suggests Gerald Raunig's notion

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[40] Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, "Curating/Curatorial (A Conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck*)"* in *Cultures of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), pp. 21-37, 23.
[41] Ibid, p. 23.
[42] Michael Warner, "Publics and Counter-Publics" in *Public Culture*, Volume 14, Number 1, Winter 2002, pp. 49-90, p. 50.
[43] Ibid, p. 26.
[44] Irit Rogoff, "Turning" in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, p. 43.
[45] Ibid, p. 43.
[46] Ibid, p. 34.

of "instituent practice". Raunig's term, which is proposed as "a further development of Negri's (...) "constituent practice",[47] refers to those cultural practices that distance themselves from institutional critique and that postulate themselves as "proposals for a good life, suggestions for possible new worlds (...) and the involvement in its actualization"[48]—world-making is also, to Warner, another characteristic of publicness.[49]

This is not, however, a utopian project. Raunig's understanding of the shift that instituent practices generate is described as "a turn from a policy of audience integration and activation toward a micro-political machine."[50] That is, from the enfranchisement of minorities and the participation of a hitherto passive public to practices that transform public institutions into institutions of the common or, as Isabell Lorey would have it, into examples of "presentist democratic practices"[51] (as opposed to representative models of democracy and of hierarchical organization in the arts). Together with many other thinkers and practitioners, these contributions have been helpful to develop artistic and curatorial projects that have sought to overcome representation as a politico-aesthetic regime, an agenda that has gained momentum in light of the global political panorama of the last fifteen years, with the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement being important political experiences that have reinvigorated curating's understanding of said instituent practices. Amidst this agenda, conversational and dialogical practices are still at the core of what curator Maria Hlavajova has eloquently labelled the art "of being together otherwise"[52]—in my view, a phrase that refers to Butler's reading of Foucault's notion of critique and to practices of self-governmentality.[53] I am referring to practices in curating underpinned by understandings of critique as "how-not-be-governed" (Butler) and of community as a collective gathering that is not founded upon identity or defining essence (Agamben, for instance,

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[47] Ibid, p. 44. Also, see: Gerald Raunig, "Flatness Rules: Instituent Practices and Institutions of the Common in a Flat World" in Pascal Gielen (ed.) *Institutional Attitudes*, pp. 167-181, 176.
[48] Gerald Raunig, "Flatness Rules", p. 176.
[49] Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 56.
[50] Gerald Raunig, "Flatness Rules", p. 175.
[51] Isabell Lorey, "On Democracy and Occupation: Horizontality and the Need for New Forms of Verticality" in Pascal Gielen (ed.) *Institutional Attitudes*, p. 77-100, 86.
[52] "About" in *Bakonline.org*,, https://www.bakonline.org/over-ons/, (accessed Jan 10th 2021)
[53] Judith Butler, "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue'", in Sarah Salih (ed.) *The Judith Butler Reader*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) pp. 302—22.

as well as other philosophers his book *The Coming Community* was a response to, like Nancy and Blanchot).[54] To Butler, critique, or the moment that makes it possible, is a realisation or assent that happens *in* the subject and which translates as an imperative to devise other forms of collective organisation that contest hegemonic power. Similarly, the type of community that Giorgio Agamben desires is antithetical to the State, where the State necessitates identity as the foundation of politics in order to exercise control, he contends. As Agamben goes on to say: "What the State cannot tolerate in any way, however, is that the singularities form a community without affirming an identity, that humans co-belong without any representable condition of belonging (…) The possibility of (…) being taken up without an identity is a threat the State cannot come to terms with".[55]

Because Butler's characterisation of critique is negative ("how not to")[56] and Agamben's eschatological community (a community that is to come) has not taken place yet, these ideas, when embraced by curatorial practice and re-elaborated as curating's political imagination, have generated projects that act as propositional and fabulatory platforms—what Bassam El Baroni has identified as "a newfound embrace of fictioning as central to the construction of transformative programmes".[57] That is, they are posited as generating an opportunity to envisage and imagine a different world.

For instance, one of Hlavajova's last projects, as part of her tenure as director of BAK, was the research itinerary *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living*, a public programme that started in 2017 which largely relied on the assembly as a primary mode of organisation and, also, delved into the assembly as an object of enquiry—the second iteration of the *Propositions* programme, *Assemblism*, responded to the question 'how to assemble now?', which BAK has taken as an on-going line of research still active today.[58]

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[54] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2007 [1990]); Jean-Luc Nancy. *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1991 [1986]); Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*
[55] Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, p. 86.
[56] Judith Butler . "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault';s Virtue", in Sarah Salih (ed.) The Judith Butler Reader. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) pp. 302—22.
[57] Bassam El Baroni, "Whither the Exhibition in the Age of Finance? Notes Towards a Curatorial Practice of Leveraging" In *On Curating*, Issue 58, March 2024, pp. 38-45, p. 39.
[58] "Propositions #2 Assemblism" in *Bakonline.org*, https://www.bakonline.org/program-item/assemblism/, (accessed Jan 10th 2021).

This brief summary of how the liberal, representational notion of public has shifted over the past fifteen years in curatorial discourse aims to underline that curating's claims to and hope for political horizontality and constituent rupture are still current, especially through projects that see themselves as exercises in world-making (proposition) and in story-telling (fabulation). Often, such political configuration, the political machine that is purported to be enacted by some examples of curatorial practice, takes the form of a gathering of speaking bodies. This is not to say that, for instance, an artist-led project taking the form of a workshop and a symposium where curators talk about curating operate in the same way. But, as opposed to activist movements, which don't seem to need the presence of a curator, one cannot but wonder how such political horizontality or counter-hegemonic contestation is possibly reconciled with the "charismatic agency"[59] of the curator, even when curators have tried to embrace a less heroic and less authorial persona and have adopted more self-effacing positions—what Nanne Buurman has called "curatorial modesty".[60]

A stable relationship: The anthology and the symposium

When looking at the rhetorical platforms of curating, there is one specific relationship between performative moment and documentation that stands out due to its persistence and ubiquity across the field: the curatorial symposium and its often following anthology. The term *anthology* has traditionally designated collections of previously printed texts, frequently used in classrooms as an introduction to a specific field of studies or to highlight texts seen by practitioners as essential or seminal. As Karen L. Kilcup points

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[59] This term is used by Paul O'Neill in his introduction to "Locating the Producers to describe 'the visionary means [curators] use to engage participants and visitors" (Paul O'Neill. Introduction in Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty (eds.) *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011), p. 7.
[60] Nanne Buurman, "From Prison Guard to Healer: Curatorial Subjectivities in the Context of Gendered Economies" in *On Curating*, Issue 52 pp. 21-35, p. 23.

out, anthologies operate within a logic of "excellence, representativeness (and/or comprehensiveness), and interest, often working in some combination".[61] This is why critical interrogation of the anthological format has occurred, within the field of literary studies, in relation to canon formation and to the teaching of literature.[62]

In the curatorial field, however, the anthology and the edited volume (that is, a collection of texts written anew on a specific subject, as opposed to the anthology, which presents existing writing) seem to be mutually interchangeable terms. At the same time, there is a certain level of genre promiscuity and textual multifariousness, with many of these collective volumes often being a combination of already-printed texts and newly commissioned articles. This interchangeability seems to have been at play since the birth of curatorial literature. *Thinking About Exhibitions*, a seminal book for thinking about curating, was presented by its editors as an anthology, even though it compiled newly produced scholarship—and, interestingly enough, was regarded by the editorial team as working like a group exhibition. Similarly, most of the collective volumes edited by Paul O'Neill in collaboration with Mick Wilson are positioned as anthologies, despite publishing new writing. For this reason, I will continue referring to these volumes as anthologies throughout my analysis. With this lexical choice, I aim to highlight that I am analysing curating's rhetorical production at the moment of its circulation.

The concomitance of symposium and anthology in the expansion of curatorial discourse has been so regular and so frequent that it has become today a commonplace or even "classic" format. From the most early examples of theoretical enquiry into curating—*Naming a Practice* (1996),[63] *Curating Degree Zero* (1998)[64]—the concurrence of an academic or seemingly academic

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[61] Karen L. Kilcup. "Anthologizing matters: The Poetry and Prose of Recovery Work" in *symploke* 8:1-2 (2000) pp. 36-56.

[62] See, for instance: Glen M. Johnson, "The Teaching Anthology" in Nemoianu, V., and Royal, R., *Hospitable Canons. Essays on Literary Play, Scholarly Choice and Popular Pressures* (Philadelphia: John Benjis, 1990).

[63] Peter White, *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future* (Banff, Alta: Banff Centre Press, 1996).

[64] Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter (eds.). *Curating Degree Zero. An International Curating Symposium* (Nuremberg, Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 1999).

gathering with a subsequent anthological publication has transformed the former into something like a prerequisite for the very publication of the curatorial book. *The Curatorial Conundrum*[65] (2016) was also an example of this, a case that, in turn, was followed by *How Institutions Think*[66] and Curating *After the Global,*[67] all published after symposia. Even the most recent contributions to the curatorial field, such as *Institution as Praxis* continue to follow this model.[68] Due to the frequency with which these two devices come hand in hand and also to its intricate interrelationships, I will hereafter refer to their concurrence as the *anthology/symposium binomial* or, more simply put, the *anthology/symposium.* The slash is important here: it helps to visually understand two elements that are inextricably united in their division, that is, a performative moment (a moment where something was said through public speech) and a text that could be taken as documentation from that moment. The relationship between performance and documentation has been complicated by the academic debate that Peggy Phelan and Philip Auslander initiated in the 1990s and of which I will provide a brief outline here (I will expand on this debate in chapter 3, pp. 165-167 and on the implications of Auslander's stance in chapter 4, pp. 179-183). On the one hand, Phelan posits performance as a practice that resists representation and, with it, allows for escaping a representational economy of political visibility which, to her, sides with the logic of capitalism. Auslander, on the contrary, points at a number of examples of performance where documentation is generated as part of the performance itself, a decisive move that attempts to demystify the essentialism underpinning Phelan's position—in any case, Auslander cannot deny that there are indeed performative moments that leave no trace.

Phelan and Auslander are useful to understand that the relationship between a curatorial symposium and its resulting anthology is not linear or causal (that is, an anthology was published because there was a symposium and therefore, it acts as documentation for a performative event). Instead, the underpinning

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[65] Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson (eds.), *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice*? (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016).
[66] Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson. *How Institutions Think. Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse.* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2017).
[67] Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds, Simon Sheikh and Mick Wilson. *Curating after the Global: Roadmaps to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019).
[68] Carolina Rito and Bill Balaskas (eds.) *Institution as Praxis. New Curatorial Directions for Collaborative Research.* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020).

logics are more intricate: perhaps there was a symposium because an anthology was to be published. One contains the other while, at the same time, they maintain a relationship of semi-autonomy: they are inextricably linked but neither of them can fully determine the other one.

This is not, however, a theoretical imposition. Over the last decade, some important contributions to curatorial thinking have already rendered visible and problematised this originary coincidence between public discussion and publication, the colossal project *Former West* (2008-2016) being an instance of this: its *Public Editorial Meetings*, which led to the project's final publication, included as part of its publicly held conferences and seminars the discussions that concerned the publishing of the final volume.[69] Epitomic of this simultaneity was *documenta 13*, whose publications (*The Logbook* and *The Guidebook*) displayed the curatorial work conducive to the final event and to the publishing of the three-part catalogue itself.[70]

Conversely, some practitioners who have made major contributions to the expansion of curatorial thinking have often included materials derived from the conferences conducive to their anthologies. In addition to the transcriptions or written re-elaborations of the papers delivered in the symposia *Taking the Matter into Common Hands,*[71] which Maria Lind co-convened with Johanna Billing and Lars Nilson, the subsequent anthology included stills from Michael Beutler's film documentation, photographs of the different workshops and a copy of the symposium leaflet detailing the programme, a practice that Maria Lind repeated in *Performing the Curatorial.*[72] In a similar fashion, Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty also include transcripts from conversations and materials from the projects that nurtured *Locating the Producers*, an anthology of reflective texts that draws from durational and dialogical practices (many of them posited as symposia) instigated by O'Neill.[73]

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[69] Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh. *Former West. Art and The Contemporary After 1989* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016).
[70] Documenta (13), *2, Das Kochbuch = the logbook* (Ostfilderm, Hatje Cantz, 2012) and Documenta (13), *3, Das Begleitbuch = The Guidebook* (Ostfilderm, Hatje Cantz, 2012).
[71] Johanna Billing, Maria Lind, Lars Nilsson (eds.), *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007).
[72] Maria Lind, *Performing the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).
[73] Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty (eds.), *Locating the Producers*.

This description of the relationship between symposium and anthology aims to show that this is neither univocal nor simple. It represents a moment of speech and, at the same time, it doesn't. It is documentation from a discursive event and it isn't: it is also its own moment of enunciation. This is a difficult position that I will try to maintain throughout this chapter in order to establish the central dynamic at issue in this thesis, that is, between the different types of rhetorical production in curating, their performative effects resulting from the specificity of the formats utilised and the authority of the curator.

If I have deemed the above reflection to be necessary, it is in order to explain with seriousness why these anthologies are inextricably part of these rhetorical platforms without entrapping my analysis in the bafflement that comes when one admits that all writing is an act of speech (or that selecting and editing are synonymous with curating, or that two things that happen one after the other one form a narrative). Indeed, they come from a moment of speech: a specific one, with its own particular institutional, historical and material context. At the same time, the conditions that make possible that curating is being spoken about are also altered by those moments of speech. What type of alteration, what type of re-regulation all of that speaking carries out needs critical examination, especially when confronted against curators' disavowal of authority and authorship.

While an analysis of the anthology is, to an extent, an analysis of the symposium, these books have their own life and they do their own things. On the one hand, even if a book might appear to be a ready-made object, whose relationship to its conditions of production are mystified (one cannot but notice, for instance, how the curatorial anthologies published by Open Editions are staged on the publisher's website as desirable, ornamental objects, as beautiful volumes whose bookishness is foregrounded as their main characteristic), it is equally clear that the publication of a collective volume includes a number of conversations other than those it claims to transcribe—*Curating After the Global*, maybe for the first in this type of literature, generously acknowledged the work undertaken by the editor in the

process of transcribing and re-writing the contributors' text.[74] In this sense, while curatorial practice has increasingly shifted the focus towards rendering visible the diverse conditions under which contemporary culture emerges, there is a conversational history of secrets and closed-door chats that constitute the anthology but are effaced from its publication. The anthology conceals the conversation that produces it, mirroring the seemingly obvious presence of authoritative voices that are invited to the curatorial conference. Who gets invited to the anthology/symposium therefore becomes a question—a question that, I suggest, reinforces the unifying power of the slash and that further revitalises the Foucauldian question "who gets to speak about curating?", introduced in pp. 28-30.

To bring this reflection to an end, it might be useful here to turn to Terry Eagleton's often-cited excerpt from *Criticism and Ideology*:

> In studying the relations between text and performance, then, we are studying a mode of determination (...) which cannot be accounted for in terms of "reflection" or "reproduction". We are examining in short the conditions of a production.[75]

A few lines later, in regard to the relationship between dramatic text and the dramatic staging of a text, he goes on to say:

> What is at issue here then is the production of a production (...) The dramatic production, in other words, can never simply be the production of the text as autotelic artefact, as an exhibition of jewellery might display a necklace; it is, inevitably, a production of the text as a product (...). The production does not merely "double" the text's self-understanding but constructs an interpretation of that self-understanding, an ideology of that ideology.[76]

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[74] Paul O'Neill et al (eds.), *Curating After the Global,* p. 3.
[75] Terry Eagleton. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 2006, [1976]), p. 67.
[76] Ibid, p. 68.

While one cannot possibly agree with the notion of display as being an autotelic characteristic of an artefact (as if display did nothing and were an end it itself), Eagleton's sophisticated stance on the productive relationship between text and performance allows me to rethink the complicated link that the slash signifies between anthology and symposium. If, according to Eagleton, "the text is the determinate product of a particular history"[77] and the dramatic production, in turn, "produces the text's internal relations to its object",[78] the symposium and the anthology are mutually producing each other's internal relations to curatorial discourse (their object) while maintaining the specific historical conditions that are unique to the contexts in which they were produced. In my view, this strongly echoes the relationship between the enactment of discourse and what discourse enacts as understood by Foucault.[79] Moreover, Eagleton's understanding of the relationship between dramatic text and dramatic production mirrors the relationship of the anthology and the symposium in a way that helps me reformulate my understanding of the two; the anthology contains an understanding of its "dramatic production" (the symposium) and, viceversa, the staging of the symposium brings about a certain interpretation of the anthological format.

This entangled bidirectionality—discourse regulates what can be said and what can be said regulates discourse, just like anthology and symposium contain understandings of each other—also resonates with Auslander's nuanced revision of his own work when he shows how performance documentation also performs (does something), which he refines by drawing on Searle's notion of "illocutionary statement".[80] This type of statement, of which the declaration is paradigmatic, both refers to a preexisting world and also constitutes a new one. It is bidirectional and entangled, just like the

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[77] Ibid, p. 67.
[78] Ibid, p. 67.
[79] Kai Alanen. *Practices and Thought in Michel Foucault's Philosophy* (Helsinki: Books on Demand, 2018) pp. 60-65.
[80] Philip Auslander. "Surrogate Performances: Performance Documentation and the New York Avant-garde, ca. 1964–74." In *On Performativity*, edited by Elizabeth Carpenter. Vol. 1 of *Living Collections Catalogue*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014. http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/surrogate-performances. (Accessed Jan 21st 2021)

anthology and the symposium are intertwined. But more importantly it does something to the very world that makes it possible; just like my writing this PhD thesis requires a pre-existing field of discourse that my writing, if it all goes well, will somehow alter. It is regulated as much as it regulates. Who is regulated and who regulates remains therefore a fundamental question.

A moment in discourse: Anthologies of the curatorial

To further unpack the somewhat oxymoronic relationship between modes of curating posited as horizontal, dehierarchical moments and the authoritativeness of discourse production, I will focus on three specific anthologies that championed this redistributed, event-based paradigm and that were published as the result of live professional discussions: *Cultures of the Curatorial* (2012), edited by Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski;[81] *The Curatorial* (2013), edited by Jean-Paul Martinon;[82] and *Performing the Curatorial* (2012), edited by Maria Lind.[83]

These anthologies were published after a busy decade that witnessed the first blooming of curatorial literature—*Curating in the 21st Century* (2000), *Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation* (2001-2002), *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial practices* (2003), *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (2007), *A Brief History of Curating* (2008), *Curating and the Educational Turn* (2010), *Locating the Producers* (2011), to name but a few—and even a certain affectation of curating's writing strategies, that *Curating Subjects* (2007), which would initiate Paul O'Neill's first series of curatorial anthologies, advocated to change.[84] With the addition of *documenta 13* and the accompanying publication of *The Book of Books*, 2012 was a particularly significant year in the expansion and maturity of curatorial literature—Paul O'Neill's *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* and Terry Smith's *Thinking about Curating* were also published

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[81] Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012)

[82] Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)

[83] Maria Lind, *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art.*

[84] Paul O'Neill. "Introduction" in *Curating Subjects* (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2007).

that year—[85]and in the consolidation of curating both as a practice that publishes and as a practice that speaks.

In addition to the changes outlined above (pp. 25-26), which give a partial account of how these rhetorical platforms came to occupy a central place in curatorial practice, it is important to add a series of major shifts undergone by contemporary art and curating which entailed a new type of intricate relationship between the museum, academic institutions and art education. To give a specific example, in the UK this process was initiated in the late 90s "when public and government scrutiny of national research funding in the Arts and Humanities came into focus".[86] An early example of this type of scrutiny can be found in 1992 the *Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)* of the Higher Education Founding Council for England (HEFCE), that started to implement research output criteria "particularly in the field of performance, design and media".[87] Across Europe, the implementation of the Bologna Process accelerated the restructuring of cultural practices, of their teaching and their realisation as measurable and marketable. The marketization of higher education, an institutional arena where the distinction between museum and academy could not be maintained any longer, received as a response what has been posited as the educational turn in curatorial and artistic practice. It also paralleled the proliferation of museum education and learning departments in Europe and America, with important pioneering examples located in the global South such as Tania Bruguera's *Cátedra Arte de Conducta.[88]* Either by reproduction or by perversion of institutional formats, the mimicking of academic institutions through the setting-up of projects that incorporated educational goals and methods led to the proliferation of symposia, conferences, talks and workshops that attempted to offer an alternative to conventional education. With the emergence of 'New Institutionalism', arguably an iteration of institutional critique that trickled down through Europe in the 2000s, institutionalised formats that mirrored

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[85] Paul O'Neill. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012); Terry Smith, *Thinking about Curating* (New York, ICI: 2012).
[86] Victoria Walsh, "Redistributing Knowledge and Practice in the Art Museum" in *Stedelijk Studies (Between the Discursive and Immersive)*, 4 (4), 2016. pp. 1-16, 2.
[87] Tom Holert, "Art in the Knowledge-based Polis" in *e-flux*, 3, Feb 2009, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68537/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/, (accessed Jan 14th 2021).
[88] Claire Bishop, "Artificial Hells", p. 241-250.

those typical of the university and of academic disciplines came also to the fore of curatorial projects—James Voorhies notes, for instance, how the term "discussion platform" was popularised through projects that ascribed to this type of institutional practice.[89]

I think it is in this context where the three anthologies that I have selected for scrutiny here must be situated. It is, to an extent, a context of exhaustion, where the educational turn had already proven to be commodifiable and to lend itself to becoming, as Claire Bishop would have it, mere "edu-tainment".[90] It is also a moment where the critical impetus of New Institutionalism to generate new, alternative institutional models seemed to have depleted its critical potential. It is at this crossroads where the notion of the curatorial appears as a strategy and, in hindsight, as an important development in the political and critical shift of curating from the enfranchisement of publics and audience participation towards project-specific constituencies and instituent practices.

I shall refer below (pp. 46-47) to the specific institutional contexts that surrounded these publications, but suffice it for now to say that they stem from three conversations or moments that took place under the aegis of specific, in this case academic, institutions: *Cultures of the Curatorial* is based on a conference held at the Academy of Visual Arts of Leipzig (HBG) in January 2010, which would in turn lead into a postgraduate programme of the same name.[91] *The Curatorial*, on its part, gathers "some of the voices that were heard during the first five years" of the *Curatorial/Knowledge* PhD programme at Goldsmiths, London, within its department of Visual Cultures.[92] Last, *Performing the Curatorial* results from the symposium, *History, immateriality and mediation: How can we practice "the curatorial" today?*, hosted by the University of Gothenburg as part of its Cultural Heritage seminars.[93] Put together, these three anthologies yield a map of institutional

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[89] James Voorhies (ed.). *Whatever happened to New Institutionalism*.(Berlin: Sternberg Press), 2016. [Cambridge, MA: Carpenter Center for the VIsual Arts], p. 9.
[90] Claire Bishop, "Artificial Hells", p.p 241-274.
[91] Beatrice von Bismark et. al (eds.). "Introduction" in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, p. 8.
[92] Jean Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, "Preface" in *The Curatorial*, p. x.
[93] "Performing the Curatorial: A Research Project on "The Curatorial" Within and Beyond Art" [Announcement, Feb 21, 2011] in *Art and Education*,

spaces where certain questions were being asked at a particular moment, spaces which, in turn, form a web, since the editors of these volumes contributed to each other's while maintaining different positions on what the concept they were trying to posit might have actually meant. I have chosen these three anthologies not on the basis of a presumed historical maturity, as if they held a zenithal position in relation to previous publications, but on the basis of the place they occupy in the development of curatorial discourse as a field of enquiry that seeks to devise and enact alternative political configurations—an evolution that at times has translated as a new ontological vocabulary and as the ontological enfranchisement of non-human elements as part of the political community.

Below I try to locate the importance of this concept, the curatorial, as part of this evolution but also in relation to the discursive changes that the anthology/symposium has brought about. My position is that it is possible to trace a series of developments in curatorial thinking where anthologies and printed matter played a role in curating's critical prowess to reimagine alternative configurations of citizenship and to position itself amidst a knowledge and service economy on which it has relied but also from which it has distanced itself.

As anthologies, one could argue, a major audience these publications summon is their readership. This readership is both assumed as existing but also enacted, just like there is an idea of public which is originary to the planning of an exhibitionary project and a moment of publicness that takes place once the project is realised. That anthologies and collective publications somehow resemble exhibitions is not a rare trope across curatorial literature. *Thinking about Exhibitions*, arguably the first monographic volume that ushered in curatorial discourse, as I indicated above (p. 35), acknowledged the inherently postmodernist nature of the anthological format, fragmented, and "virtually synonymous" with the exhibition.[94] The volume, say the editors, "can be

https://www.artandeducation.net/announcements/110266/performing-the-curatorial-a-research-project-on-the-curatorial-within-and-beyond-art.(accessed Jan 15th 2021).

[94] Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (eds.). *Thinking about exhibitions* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 1-2.

compared to an international group exhibition of North American and European contributors".[95]

documenta X, to which I referred above as a key moment in the introduction of conversational practices in curating (p. 31), is a good example of the intimate relationship between printed matter and the expansion of what curating came to understand as publicness or publicity. Instead of a catalogue, and somehow mirroring her 100 Days - 100 Guests, David published *Poetics/Politics documenta X - the book*, an anthology that gathers a multifarious diversity of critical texts aiming to convey "a plurality of perspectives, disciplines and media",[96] thus materializing David's intention to politically reposition documenta in relation to a world which previous editions had distantiated from—insightfully, Georgina Jackson notes how "documenta X's explicit engagement with the state of the world"[97] resonates with Von Bismarck's positioning of the curatorial as having "specific socio-political relevance within contemporary society".[98]

Okwui Enwezor's vision for Documenta11 furthered the relationship between public engagement and printed matter. Articulated "as a constellation of public spheres",[99] Enwezor's project sought to shatter Habermas's unitarian concept of bourgeois public sphere by creating a series of platforms which, in turn, were purported to act as 'an open encyclopedia for the analysis of late modernity(...), a compendium of voices, cultural, artistic, and knowledge circuits'.[100] The different platforms or moments of inquiry, which were held over two years across the globe, were posited twice as a book of books, that is, the *encyclopedia* and the *compendium.* In *Documenta11*, public sphere and printed matter conflated to become one and the same discursive paradigm—a conflation of book and exhibition that Enwezor reiterated when he curated *La Triennale* in 2011, whose anthology was purported to be a "second

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[95] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[96] Lutz Jahre, "Curators and Catalogues" in Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (eds.), *50 Years documenta 1955-2005: Archive in Motion: Documenta Manual* (Kassel: Kunsthalle Fridericianum, 2005), p. 58.
[97] Georgia Jackson, "And the Question Is…" in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.), *Curating Research*, pp. 60-78, 69.
[98] *Ibid*, p. 69.
[99] Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box" in Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya (eds.), *Documenta 11_Platform5: The Exhibition. Catalogue* (Kassel: Hatje Cantz, 2002), p. 54.
[100] *Ibid*, p. 49.

cartography" to the actual event.[101] Earlier, in 2007, in conversation with Paul O'Neill, Enwezor had seen a clear similitude between group exhibitions and anthologies as working "contra the canonical model of the monographic presentation",[102] the latter being associated with historical accounts as opposed to the "a-historical" nature of the group show.[103] While it is not clear what Enwezor might have meant by this a-historicity of the group exhibition—what else but a historical account was his exhibition *The Short Century* (2001)?—it seems plausible that he considered the group show and the anthological format as departing from the unity that narrative brings about, due to their fragmentary character. The fact that he used the term "constellation", a typically Benjaminian term to which I shall return below (pp. 48-49), points in that direction. Benjamin coined this term in order to free historical materialism from the bourgeois notion of progress and to rethink images as containing a more intricate, relational understanding between past and present. Constellations, historically and philosophically, are autonomous sets of links and connections that cannot be accounted for by one system.[104]

I think it is in this context, where the unitarian notion of public and the understanding of the exhibition as a narrative device has been shattered and fragmented, where the emergence of the curatorial must also be placed. As opposed to the self-referentiality and self-reflexivity that had marked curatorial literature in the 2000s (two characteristics that have remained central as reflective strategies, as the persistence of interviews, of accounts of realised projects and of practice-based research attests), the notion of *the curatorial* that these three anthologies championed, aimed to take curatorial thinking beyond the accumulation of professional lore and practical wisdom. On the one hand, this critical position (and self-perception) that these three anthologies purported to hold delimited curating as a more or less sophisticated set of practices subjected to the realization of a final cultural

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[101] Okwui Enwezor. "Introduction" in *Intense Proximity*, p. 11-14
[102] Paul O'Neill and Okwui Enwezor. "Curating Beyond the Canon" in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, pp. 118-12, p. 119
[103] *Ibid*, p. 119.
[104] For this, see: Carlo Salzani. "Constellations of Reading: Walter Benjamin" *in Figures of Actuality* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 13-36.

product; for Martinon and Bismarck, these practices are also distinctive of a professional field whose most idiosyncratic product is the exhibition. On the other hand, Lind's stance refers to a more comprehensive purview, since what the curatorial is distancing from also includes 'curating in the expanded field',[105] that is, what extends "beyond the walls of the institution as well as beyond what are traditionally called programming and education".[106] This is a decisive move, since it includes as part of 'curatorial praxis', and not as part of "the curatorial", significant questions such as "how things are organized, how an exhibition is put together, how a symposium is orchestrated".[107] That is, to Lind, rhetorical platforms *are* curatorial practice in their own right—even if not necessarily part of the curatorial.

What the three editors seem to set out to do is a deconstructive task by which all the already existing categories that informed and hitherto constituted curatorial practice and curatorial thinking are subject to critical scrutiny in order to do without them. Particularly eloquent is Rogoff's desideratum to get rid of the inherited vocabulary: "words like "art", "audience", "curator", "institution", and so on" which she regards as "evacuated of all meaning".[108] A singular, univocal meaning for these terms appears to be impossible to maintain given the multiplicity and uniqueness of each curatorial project, she contends. It is a somewhat Derridian reassessment of curating—that the notion of the curatorial is theoretically in debt to Derrida is both acknowledged by Rogoff and Martinon, especially in relation to the concept of "send-off", placing the focus on the processual and the labile.[109]

On her part, Beatrice von Bismarck explicitly refers to Bruno Latour as having been informative of her thinking.[110] In *Reassembling the Social*, Latour's methodological reflection on Actor-Network-theory, he outlines a deconstructive programme that strongly resonates with Rogoff and Von Bismarck's insofar as Latour is devoted to yield what some scholars have

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[105] Maria Lind, "Performing the Curatorial", p. 11.
[106] Ibid, p. 11.
[107] Ibid, p. 11.
[108] Irit Rogoff (and Beatrice von Bismarck), "Curating/Curatorial" in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, p. 35.
[109] Ibid, p. 23. Also, Jean Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, "Introduction" in Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial*, pp. i-xii.
[110] Beatrice von Bismarck, "The Exhibition as Collective" in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, p. 289-302.

labelled as a "minimum-wage metaphysics", an "experimental" or "empirical" metaphysics that "serves the purpose of opening the world anew, in conjunction with empirical research".[111] In his own words, the "task is no longer to impose some order, to limit the range of acceptable entities".[112] "All the ingredients already accepted in the collective realm"—be these notion of 'class', 'nation', 'totalitarianism', 'peer pressure', 'family', 'gender', etc—cannot account for the "shape, size, heterogeneity, and combination of associations", the sociologist's object of study.[113] The sociologist's task is to trace such associations, whose specificity exceeds ready-made categories. An important aspect of this tracing of social links is that these links cannot be replaced, that is, they are unique.[114] This is where the notion of "constellation" or "the constellational", which I briefly referenced above (p.46), comes into the scene. Even though Bismarck doesn't refer to Benjamin as having ushered in the term as a key notion of critical theory—Adorno later developed it further—[115] maybe she doesn't need to: the term had already been used by Okwui Enwezor as previously noted (pp. 45-46) but, also, by Nicholas Bourriaud in 2009 as part of the rationale behind *Altermodern.*[116] Obrist's retrieval of Edouard Glissant's notion of "archipelago" reveals a similar structure.[117] In any case, how she characterises the constellation that the curatorial enacts does resonate with Benjamin's description of the term, which some scholars have described as "a relation to individual objects to each other and to the viewer [which] can be grasped only instantaneously and only through a specific viewer's standpoint"[118]—that of the philosopher's, the historian's or the cultural critic's. While the question "whose standpoint?" already emerges here, what it is important to highlight is that the notion of constellation brings together things (knowledges, objects, individuals) that are not previously

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[111] Nora Hämäläinen and Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen, "Latour's empirical metaphysics" in *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory,* 17:1 (2016), pp. 20-37
[112] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social,* p. 12
[113] *Ibid,* p. 11
[114] *Ibid,* p. 36
[115] Theodor Adorno, *The Actuality of Philosophy* in *Telos* 31 (Spring 1977), 120-133.
[116] Claire Staebler, "Toward an Idea of Destination: In Conversation with Nicolas Bourriaud" in Okwui Enwezor (ed.) *Intense Proximity. An Anthology of the Near and the Far* (Paris: Artlys, 2012).
[117] Hans Ulrich Obrist, "Digging into the Past to Unearth the Future", in Paul O'Neill et al (eds.) *The Curatorial Conundrum.*
[118] Nassima Sahraoui and Caroline Sauter (eds.),*Thinking in Constellations: Walter Benjamin in the Humanitie*s, p. 8.

connected through pre-existing logics, but rather by a specific, unique set of relationships that would generate an entirely different figure or constellation if the elements were changed or if the links connecting them were redrawn.[119] Such elements are not only material or visual things; they can also be epistemological or historical structures that are brought together in a form that is unique every time.[120] It is a relational type of gaze, as Benjamin eloquently puts it in his *Epistemo-Critical Prologue* to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: "Ideas are related to things like constellations are to stars".[121]

In *Curating/Curatorial*, the conversation between Von Bismarck and Rogoff that is today almost a *locus classicus* of curatorial thinking, Rogoff welcomes Von Bismarck's understanding of the curatorial as a constellational mode of practice and puts in dialogue with Leibniz's notion of "singularity", a philosophico-mathematical term in Leibniz's thought that could be described, maybe all too readily, as a point of inflexion or value of a mathematical function where the rules, so to speak, do not apply—curiously enough, Leibniz also influenced the sociological theory of Gabriel Tarde, whose thinking Bruno Latour tried to retrieve and reassess.[122]

While this is interesting because it starts to resonate with the drifting that instituent practices are purported to bring about (that is, a moment or space where preexistent norms are not in place any longer) Rogoff uses the notion of singularity to further elaborate on her understanding of the "event of knowledge", which she describes as a site for "the relational mode of the subject".[123] Again, in addition to the question of whose standpoint creates the constellation, one cannot but wonder what or who this relational subject is. What I think is to note here, however, is how the curatorial refers to this "minimum-wage" vocabulary of curatorial practice that emerges as relations and elements whose juxtaposition is unique every time—it is *rare*, like the

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[119] Alexander Stern. *The Fall of Language. Benjamin and Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), pp. 90-140.
[120] *Ibid*, p. 109.
[121] Walter Benjamin. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1998 [1928]), p. 34.
[122] Anthony King. "Gabriel Tarde and Contemporary Social Theory." *Sociological Theory*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2016, pp. 45–61.
[123] Irit Rogoff (and Beatrice von Bismarck), "Curating/Curatorial" in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, p. 29.

statement is to Foucault. What the curatorial attempts to offer to curatorial discourse is a non-fundamentality of a field of inquiry that is devoted to studying and negotiating the conditions under which art and culture become public and with it, the possibility to form collectivities whose political status is not quidditative but specific and autonomous—and yet, the curator's word, as the main voice enacting this discursive turn, appears as its foundation.

These developments in curatorial thinking also echoed important shifts that curatorial practice, as well as the formats where curatorial thinking was materialising, was bringing about. A very early instance of the professional desideratum to expand the institutional and territorial confines of contemporary artistic practices and of critical thinking can be found in *META*, a series of publications that were released during Ute Meta Bauer's directorship of Künsterlhaus Stuttgart between 1992 and 1994—the second issue, META 2 contains the proceedings derived from the symposium "A New Spirit in Curating?". *META* was presented "as a continuation of the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart programme by other means".[124] But what this continuation was able to do seemed to be somehow under question. The reader is thus forewarned: "*META* is just as authentic as what is shown in the building and elsewhere, and as authentic as the events it reports".[125] While the similarity is acknowledged in the statement (this object is something that resembles something else), the fact that META needs to be posited twice as equally authentic as the exhibitionary space and the event programme is echoing two perceptions that were commonplace at the time: on the one hand, that printed documentation is but *mere* documentation which cannot account for the event happened. On the other hand, the site of the authentic is located in the exhibitionary building, and therefore the true abode of curatorial and artistic practice. As a phrase, "as authentic as" seems to be positioned against an entire readership which would somehow dismiss the value of the periodical for being documentation and for not being exhibitionary. By positing the magazine as "as authentic", Ute Meta Bauer seems to be opening up a specific space for authenticity that is related neither to the performative nor the

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[124] Ute Meta Bauer, (ed.), *Meta 2: The New Spirit in Curating*, (Stuttgart: Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 1992), p. 4.
[125] *Ibid*, p. 4.

exhibitionary. It is specific and valuable, and we need to be reminded that such is the case.

While being director of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, Bauer was invited by Helmut Drexler and Andrea Fraser to participate in a working group that took place at the Kunstraum at the University of Lüneburg: *Services: The Conditions and Relations of Service Provision in Contemporary Project Oriented Artistic Practice*. In turn, Drexler and Fraser had been invited by the co-directors of this art space: Diethelm Stoller, Ulf Wuggenig, and Beatrice von Bismarck. What Drexler and Fraser were trying to interrogate and expand on was the idea of 'service provision', a typical trait of post-Fordist economies which, in their view, operated as a common feature that could define a large spectrum of artistic practices in the early 1990s, practices which were perceived as more difficult to transfer into the art market, such as performances, conversations and reading groups.[126] By resorting to this notion, they were seeking to yield some strategies to alleviate the precariousness of that type of artistic labour that seemed to resist being collectable, thus attempting to generate a new discursive space for value, potentially the same space that META opened up for the periodical publication. This early example serves to illustrate a particular instance in which art has incorporated a reclaimed aesthetics and vocabulary from a service economy and from cognitive capitalism to open up a new space of value for those practices that were not considered as labour, or for those practices (publishing, editing and conferring) which, when proliferating in the field of curating, would encounter a similar backlash, echoed in the professional debate for and against the paracuratorial.[127]

But the shattering of the notions of public and audience is not the only evolution that we can trace here. With the publication of Maurizio Lazzarato's *Immaterial Labour* in 1996, the critical correlate of service provision was

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[126] Andrea Fraser, "Services: A Working Group Exhibition" in Beatrice von Bismarck, Diethelm Stoller, Ulf Wuggenig (eds.), *Games, Fights, Collaboration. Das Spiel von Grenze und Überschreitung*, Stuttgart: Cantz 1996), https://kunstraum.leuphana.de/texte/efraser.html (accessed Jan 19th 2021).
[127] For this, see: Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox". *The Exhibitionist* No. 6. 2012. pp. 55 - 60: Jens Hoffman and Maria Lind, 'To Show or Not To Show'. *Mousse* No. 31. 2011 in http://www.moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=759 [accessed Jan 20th 2021].

sanctioned.[128] Lazzarato's concept became a key tenet of cultural practices and its pervasiveness across contemporary art thinking reached the three anthologies at hand. While none of them acknowledged a particular type of readership, nor problematised their being anthologies, they assumed that there was someone out there, willing to engage with "the kind of deconstructive speculation that has been the most productive and enjoyable part of our studies".[129] The three of them, however, did maintain a relationship with the post-Fordist paradigm of service provision which, though maybe needed in the 1990s, the editors sought to overcome in order to open up a discursive locus for the curatorial, the object of these anthologies. As I said above (pp. 43-44), Maria Lind's *Performing the Curatorial* results, among other discursive moments, from a symposium entitled *History, immateriality and mediation: How can we practice "the curatorial" today?.[130]* The event attempted to expand the currency of the curatorial, departing from the premise that "interest in post-Fordist service and information-oriented working methods is evident within contemporary art".[131] As opposed to curating, which, in Rogoff's view, is marked by "the dominance of neoliberal models of work that valorize hyper-production" and whose "expansion is perceived as a form of post-Fordist entrepreneurship",[132] Von Bismarck posits the curatorial as a field in its Bourdieusian sense[133]—curating siding with Lazzarato's notion of immaterial labour. Rogoff, on her part, claims to do without notions of "practice, audience, curator, space, exhibition, exhibition, performance, intervention, [and] education"[134] to position the curatorial as something that extends beyond pre-established conceptions of knowledge and collectivity. In sum, the three volumes somehow attempt to distance the concept which they try to circulate by visualizing it as distinct from the new

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[128] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" in Virno, Paolo; Hardt, Michael (eds.). *Radical Thought in Italy : A Potential Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 142–157

[129] Jean Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, "Introduction" in *The Curatorial*, p. xi

[130] "Performing the Curatorial: A Research Project on "The Curatorial" Within and Beyond Art" [Announcement, Feb 21, 2011] in *Art and Education*, https://www.artandeducation.net/announcements/110266/performing-the-curatorial-a-research-project-on-the-curatorial-within-and-beyond-art (accessed Jan 15th 2021).

[131] Irit Rogoff, "The Expanded Field" in Jean Paul Martinon (ed.) *The Curatorial*, p. 41.

[132] Loc. cit.

[133] Beatrice von Bismarck [in conversation with Irit Rogoff], "Curating/Curatorial" in *Cultures of the Curatorial,* p. 37.

[134] Irit Rogoff, "The Expanded Field", p. 43.

economy of value that assigned specific significance to printed matter and conversations, a positioning that is reiterated by Rogoff in *Turning* or in *Curating/Curatorial*. A conundrum, or perhaps a mystification, seems to emerge when one realises that the concept of the curatorial is nevertheless being thought, articulated and disseminated by using the same platforms and practices that the curatorial is purported to overcome. This is all the more striking when readership or publicness or reception are categories which the authors implicitly acknowledge in relation to these anthologies themselves. Or at least, they recognize the existence of *someone else* who will read them. When the reader is being taken through what the curatorial does, Martinon and Rogoff say, quoting Mieke Bal, "look, that is how this is":[135] Look; You; Imperative mood of the verb uttered by an I. What else can summon the presence of the other, of the beholder but that "look"? Doesn't this remind one of Austin's performative statement in which there is always someone else's gaze? Is the gaze of the reader what makes the curatorial perform? The unswervingly political distinction between we ("We wish to talk about curating"[136]) and you, that other who has been told to look, opens up, in my view, the terrain for an analysis of the politics of readership and attendance these platforms contain. More importantly, it is generating a we/you divide where a group of practitioners perceive themselves as distinct from other practitioners. There seems to be therefore an already constituted community that stands, as a primary opposition, against other practitioners. There seems to be an already constituted subject, an already existing consciousness that is both part of discourse but also antecedes it: I would wager, this consciousness is the curator's, the subject that occupies the constellational standpoint. To my mind comes Judith Butler's virtuoso reading of Althusser's theory of subjectivation in *The Psychic Life of Power*.[137] In this text, Butler undertakes a very close reading of Althusser's notion of interpellation, the moment when the State hails the subject by hailing. Butler says, if the subject is formed when it is interpellated, if the subject "turns around" when hailed, there needs to be something like a pre-existing conscience that the State is hailing.[138] Who is

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[135] Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, "Preface" in *The Curatorial*, p. ix.
[136] Ibid, p. viii
[137] Judith Butler. *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
[138] Ibid, pp. 106-131.

this someone that is formed into a subject? Who is, I wonder now in relation to the curatorial field, this subject that is invited to carry out a curatorial project? When Rogoff and Von Bismarck say that there is an ambition that cannot be fulfilled by curatorial practice, whose ambition is this? If constellations are dependent on a standpoint, whose standpoint is it?

Together with the "further shift from representation to investigation"[139] that the curatorial aimed to bring to the fore, other developments in curating that have worked in the direction of non-representational practice have also informed how curators understand the anthology. In the same year when *Thinking about exhibitions* was published, Nicholas Boruriaud coined for the first time the term *relational aesthetics* in the catalogue for the exhibition *Traffic* (1996). As Claire Bishop contends, Bourriaud's aesthetic concept is intimately connected to ideas of the exhibition as a laboratory during the early 2000s, a paradigm championed by Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Nicholas Bourriaud himself, among other curators. While Bishop suggests that their curatorial understanding of the exhibition as a site for experimentation was somehow dependent on the open-endedness of the artworks they were working with then,[140] the proliferation of exhibitions that sought to open up a space "of questioning and enquiry of the socio-political present and future"[141] reinforced the perception of the exhibition as a site for experimentation and the testing of new ideas. This went on to also shift how curators came to perceive anthologies (once again, presented as printed equivalent to the exhibitionary): "[i]n the end", says Paul O'Neill in *Curating Subjects*, "anthologies are similar to exhibitions. They are testing sites that evolve through variable degrees of dialogue, semi-autonomous participation and self-determined modes of resistance",[142] an idea that he reiterated, this time with Mick Wilson as co-editor, in *Curating and the Educational Turn.*[143] I think it is possible to see already how certain questions start to emerge: is visiting an exhibition the same action as reading a book? How and what, or maybe whom, do I resist with my self-determination when I read an

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[139] Irit Rogoff, "The Expanded Field" in *The Curatorial*, p. 47.
[140] Claire Bishop. *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*. October 110, Fall 2004, 31-79.
[141] Georgina Jackson, "And the Question Is…", p. 62.
[142] Paul O'Neill. *Curating Subjects* (Amsterdam, Open Editions: 2007), p. 18.
[143] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, "Introduction" in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, p. 21.

anthology? Is self-determination something that I have or possess when I sit at my desk? In what exactly am I participating when I read an anthology? Am I being given some sort of participatory status in relation, for example, to the rhetorical platform that might have originated it?

Is there a class in this text?

While these anthologies might obey a professional desideratum to populate the world with snippets of critique, often in the name of the expansion of the public sphere, the specificity of their contents situates the scope of their potential readership. The question therefore remains 'who is actually reading these anthologies?, whose faces did the editors have in mind when they published these books?'. Since I wish to move beyond mere conjecturing and beyond the level of symbolic readership, I am going to depart from the only existential certainty that I harbor regarding the reception of these anthologies: I am reading them.

As many of my colleagues, I came into curating through a more or less serendipitous series of educational and professional vicissitudes, an intellectual investment in contemporary art and some novice experiments that translated as the setting-up of a couple of exhibitions. Keen as I was to delve into this practice (though maybe not as a curator) I enrolled in a postgraduate master's degree where, for the first time, I came into contact with "curatorial literature", that is, the things that previous curators had said about curating before me—some of my classmates, more diligent than I was, had already done some of these readings. One could contend that I came into contact with these anthologies when I became part of a 'community of inquiry', to use the term coined by John Dewey, where texts are critically handled and where a set of interests, tools and reading codes are being shared.

It was in the particular site of the classroom where these anthologies, if in a fragmentary fashion, were being read. Although the proliferation of curatorial programmes and the need for materials for such programmes may have in part occasioned their being published, the content of these publications is frequently dismissive of the growth in curatorial education.

In fact, , most curatorial anthologies seemed to be rather alarmed by the proliferation of these courses and sought to respond to this concern. The three anthologies at hand also echo the same worry. As one learns when reading Martinon and Rogoff, "the proliferation of curatorial activities, *courses*, residencies and prizes (...) is not founded on a solid intellectual basis"[144] and thus these practitioners are doomed to succumb "to a market ravenous for spectacle and entertainment"[145]—of which these courses surely are but a vile commodification. Maria Lind was equally concerned about how these courses were going when she was director of the Centre for Curatorial Studies at Bard College. In a conversation with curator Eungie Joo, part of *Performing the Curatorial*, Lind confesses that she was worried that her students at Bard would become "apparatchiks",[146] entrapped, as Eungie Joo says, in "the production of professionals who are really excited to make exhibitions and just travel those exhibitions",[147] a remark that she makes about Lind's students. Professionalism, which is what was happening at CCS Bard, is referred to as a limiting factor in curating—arguably, one assumes, a limiting factor against the "viral presence"[148] of the curatorial. On her part, Beatrice von Bismarck is a bit more indulgent in her introduction and her anthology is not positioned against these programmes. As one learns when reading Lind,[149] Bismarck had already founded an MA course in the autumn of 2009, a few months before the conference that, in principle, generated *Cultures of the Curatorial.* Indeed, given the low regard in which these postgraduate courses are taken, it makes a big difference to say that a publication results from the gathering of a group of epistemic equals instead of publicly admitting that its institutional origin is part of the neoliberal machinery of higher education.

While positions on the empowering potential of academic institutions are various among curators, with debates often focusing on the role of art education within the wider context of educational systems, true curatorial criticality seems to emerge beyond the classroom—the Curatorial/Knowledge PhD programme that originated Martinon's anthology being the exception, "a

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[144] Jean Paul Martinon (ed.) *The Curatorial*, p. Viii. My italics.
[145] Ibid, p. ix
[146] Maria Lind , *Performing the Curatorial*, p. 85
[147] Ibid, p. 85
[148] Ibid, p. 19
[149] Ibid, p. 18

space of gathering (...) to which many young curators and artists have come to share in the discussion"[150] about curating. Even Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, in their particularly sober introduction to *Curating and the Educational Turn* (2010), do not mention curatorial study programmes, not even as an attack. The "micropolitical mobilization", as the authors would refer to what these projects enact, aspired to by the examples of practice they describe or include in this anthology is explained solely through the very evolution of curatorial projects or by acknowledging the influence of a non-artistic tradition (one is left to assume that O'Neill and Wilson were referring to political activism).[151] Thus, the relationship between curating and education, however complex and multifarious, does not include the proliferation of curatorial programmes or what these often postgraduate courses might be doing, which seems to me especially relevant when these anthologies end up being read, perhaps primarily, by students of such programmes. Not only does the instantiation of critical pedagogies happen elsewhere; reflection itself on what might happen in the curatorial classroom appears to be redundant and useless. New instances of critique cannot emerge if "we pivot our observations around formalised encounters like art education and we enlist what we know", says Sarah Pierce, who also contributes to *The Curatorial*.[152] What is that which we know? And who is this *we* that already knows? I would wager that this is the already-curator, the practitioner that has become such by virtue of their own practice and that is the desired reader of these anthologies. My class, in the meantime, is not in these texts.

A community of practitioners as potential or desired readership emerges here. Clearly, it would be rather foolish on my part to deny the fact that, just like there were already classrooms that would receive these anthologies, curating as a field of practice was also operating as a co-originary condition for these anthologies to exist. To continue my analysis, I will admit now as a premise that a community of curators other than those contributing to these anthologies or those participating in these symposia is the effective readership

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[150] Jean Paul Martinon. *The Curatorial*, p. viii
[151] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson. "Introduction" in *Curating and the Educational Turn*, pp. 11-22.
[152] Sarah Pierce, "We Spoke About Hippies" in *Nought to Sixty: 60 Projects 6 Months* (London: ICA, 2009), pp.246–247.

of these publications, a readership that shares a number of interpretive tools and codes with the editors and symposium convenors.

Indeed, how I read the sentence "the conditions (...) under which art and culture become public"[153]—arguably, what the three anthologies at hand seek to interrogate—is different from how I would have read it when I was eighteen and I was reading Art History. Back then, I would have understood something similar to "how art and culture becomes state-owned" or, maybe, "how art and culture can happen in parks and streets". Today, ten years have gone by since I was an undergraduate and now, even though I cannot really phrase what the notion of public might mean as a ready-to-hand definition, I read the same sentence as "how art and culture emerges from its somewhat concealed or unseen places of production and enters the realm of something that resembles a phenomenologically shared consciousness" (for instance!) and I read it in a way that resonates with how other practitioners or certain types of scholars might similarly read it or use it when talking about contemporary art and culture.

The two possible readings of this phrase resonate with Stanley Fish's anecdote that gives name to his collection of essays on literary theory *Is There a Text in This Class?.*[154] The anecdote, I believe, is particularly relevant when it comes to talk about readership and anthologies. It goes as follows: when a literary scholar at John Hopkins University is asked by a student "Is there a text in this class?", his answer is "Yes; it's the Norton Anthology of Literature". The student corrects him and reiterates the question, making it explicit that what she actually means is whether "texts" as positive entities are something which is believed in in that class or, rather, they constitute a historically specific notion with no real correlative. Fish uses this example to introduce his notion of *interpretive community,* a term that is not totally dissimilar to Dewey's concept of community of inquiry, which I briefly introduced above. Fish's idea allows for understanding that meaning is not generated in the vacuum or in the monacal privacy of the desk. On the contrary, ordinary meaning is always

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[153] Beatrice von Bismarck et al. (eds.), "Introduction" in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, p. 9.

[154] Stanley Fish. *Is There a Text in This Class*. The Authority of Interpretive Communities (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

dependent on specific interpretive codes that act as semantic norms for practitioners within the same field.[155]

Fish's term is a development of reader-response literary theory that acted as a reply to a specific scholarly debate that was shaking American Academia in the 70s. Reader-response criticism had arisen as a reaction, among other things, to New Criticism and to the centrality of authorial intention as the main analytical locus of literary theory since the 1940s. The recentering of the reader as a site of meaning production, coincided with Kuhn's devastating argument that sciences are historically constructed and with the arrival of Derrida's deconstruction of the humanities. Thus, many joined the bandwagon of relativism. In order to counter the perils that relativism could have possibly brought about, including the end of literary criticism (which seemed to be particularly frightening a number of scholars such as Abrams and Hirsch), Fish steps in and proposes his notion of a collectively determined norm of interpretation for meaning and for literary criticism itself.[156]

There are several reasons why, if helpful, Fish's theory is insufficient. As Mary Louise Pratt points out in her response to Fish and other scholars,[157] the former's depiction doesn't account for change (how could the curatorial possibly emerge as opposed to curating?), doesn't account for conflict (different positions coexist within one and the same community, just like they do in the anthology), doesn't explain how hierarchical power might impose certain positions within the same community (everything would happen within spontaneously formed consensus) and doesn't explain how authority emerges—in Fish's view, the authority of the teacher in the classroom is "accidental", which would make me assume that the authority of the symposium convenor or the anthology editor is also circumstantial, a lesser evil in an already evil world, much like I adumbrated in the introduction (pp. 59-60). The final blow from Fish comes, however, when the notion of interpretative community is taken in relation to the interpretive norm: "rather than acting on their own, interpreters act as extensions of an institutional

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[155] Ibid, pp. 303-321.
[156] Loc. cit.
[157] Mary Louise Pratt, "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader Response Criticism" in *boundary 2*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics (Autumn, 1982 - Winter, 1983), pp. 201-231.

community".[158] There is a lot to unpack here. On the one hand, it strongly resonates with the semi-autonomous participation that curatorial anthologies facilitate: I read and I get a place in the gang. On the other hand, it is fantastic news for everyone: suddenly, my research does not have a problem to tackle, my interpretive reading of these anthologies is giving me a little chunk of institutional collegiality, and we can go home. It all strikes me as particularly close to Bismarck's vision of the relationship between the curatorial and "the actors (individuals and institutions alike)" which, in turn, "participate in the field of the curatorial through the various activities they take on temporarily".[159] Inexplicably but true, curatorial citizenship is somehow granted to those who participate in the socio-political adventure of the curatorial moment, reproduced and circulated in the anthology.

Provocations aside, what Mary Louise Pratt points at is how Fish's notion of interpretative community cannot give account of how said interpretive communities are "bound on other grounds as well, bound to have common interest besides the production of interpretations, bound to correspond to other social differentiations".[160] That is, these interpretive communities are formed *also* due to ideological positions, power struggles and institutional structures which do not meet each other in conditions of equality to produce an interpretative community that, in this case, the anthology somehow harbours and generously makes extensive to the reader. Or so the reader is told.

What the anthology/symposium can do

I think a good example of how these communities and their codes are formed can be found in what *Performing the Curatorial* materially enacted with its publication. As I explained above (p. 43), *Performing the Curatorial* is the name given to a series of seminars that were held under the aegis of the University of Gothenburg in the autumn of 2010 and the winter of 2011. As

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[158] Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?*, p. 321.
[159] Beatrice von Bismarck et al. (eds.), "Introduction" in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, p. 12.
[160] Mary Louise Pratt, "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations", p. 228.

one learns when reading the preface to the book, an interdisciplinary group of researchers was "invited by the vice chancellor (...) to coordinate and define a new research area—heritage studies".[161] The well-meant invitation, which possesses the subtle scent of mystifications, is not telling the reader that this was part of a major institutional and administrative renovation that the University of Gothenburg had initiated that year, an overhaul of the educational centre which sought to make the university more competitive and more able to attract funding. As the VISION 2020 memorandum says, five priority research areas were identified to receive more funding and institutional attention, cultural heritage being one of them.[162] At the same time, this still germinal academic department, which, as the preface shows, was trying to find its specificity within contemporary scholarship, seeks the help of fellow Swedishwoman Maria Lind, who had recently stepped down as director of the Centre for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, a position which she had held since 2008. Lind returned to Sweden, where she took up the directorship of the Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm, an art centre owned by a private foundation since 2000 and located in an economically less thriving area of the city. As Maria Lind acknowledges, "the average income is lower than in the rest of the country, and average unemployment is higher. Over the last fifteen years a lot of societal services have been removed".[163]

After the seminars of *Performing the Curatorial* were held, Tensta Konsthall would later publish, in collaboration with Berlin-based publishing house Sternberg Press, the namesake anthology. While this is not to say that that the questions which this particular anthology/symposium was asking were merely the result of a mutually needed alliance between two incipient projects (the department of Heritage Studies at the University of Gothenburg and the new tenure of Maria Lind as director of Tensta Konsthall), I do think these connections need to be included in order to understand what this symposium and its subsequent anthology were possibly doing in a specific institutional and intellectual context and how their mutual aid was potentially an exercise of institutional self-positioning (a "we" that emerges as opposed to a "you").

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[161] Johan Öberg, "Performing Heritage at the University : Some Remarks on Maria Lind's Program" in *Performing the Curatorial*, p. 5.
[162] https://www.sv.uio.no/arena/english/research/projects/flagship/institutional-reports/gothenburg.pdf (Accessed Dec 11th 2020)
[163] Interview Maria Lind. "On Curating New Institutionalism".

More importantly, *Performing the curatorial* is not solely the result of this nascent reputational economy, it is also a material instance that helps enact an authoritative voice and that enhances the impact, outreach, and influence of an idea that will be later distributed, thus altering and transforming an existing field of practice.

I turn now to a different case. *Cultures of the Curatorial* begins, as most anthologies, with an introduction. There, the editors of the volume—Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, and Thomas Weski—introduce the contributors and their texts while setting up the arena where the book sits. As opposed to other similar texts reflecting on curating, which often depart from the particularities of curating as a practice embedded in specific material and institutional cultures, *Cultures of the Curatorial* situates its subject matter—the curatorial—in the realm of knowledge and scholarly study from the get-go. By comparing it with other formations, such as "the cinematic" or "the literary", the curatorial is posited not so much as a type of discourse formation similar to a discipline but as something that resembles a field.[164] That is, instead of asking after a particular type of cultural object, it is devoted to a property that, admittedly, all cultural objects possess: their *appearance*, their becoming public—and therefore, their becoming *before* someone. In this sense, it resonates, for instance, with Richard Schechner's description of performance studies, which, in his view, are devoted to studying the behaviour of things and gestures,[165] or with James Elkin's definition of visual studies as "the study of visual practices across all boundaries".[166]

In his introduction, Elkins refers to visual studies pioneer Nicholas Mirzoeff and to his insisting on the institutional stability that warrants the publication of textbooks and anthologies. For the anthology to exist, something stable enough—a field—needs to be already operating. Crucially, Mirzoeff's stance on the relationship between the more or less fluid formation of a field of study and the anthologies that come with it is that anthologies—including his very own one, *The Visual Culture Reader*—help define and give stability to a field

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[164] Beatrice von Bismarck et al., "Introduction" in Beatrice von Bismarck et al. (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*, p. 8.

[165] Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-4.

[166] James Elkins. Visual Studies. *A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 7.

whose boundaries are not clear.[167] While this is not to say that the anthology *fixates* per definition, its power as an institutional device cannot go unnoticed. More importantly, the self-recurring circle formed by a field that is stable enough to produce its own representation (the anthology) and the fixating power of the anthology over the field it represents resembles largely the same conflation between representation and the real that Phelan herself pointed in *Unmarked*: Drawing on Judith Butler's *Force of Fantasy*. As briefly outlined above (p.62), Phelan reminds us that "representation relies on reproducing a specific logic of the real" while "this logical real promotes its own representation".[168]

The Visual Cultural Reader was published in 1998, almost fifteen years before *Cultures of the Curatorial* was released. Mirzoeff's volume included three introductions (also posited as "provocations"), which tried to re-examine this field of inquiry while opening new questions for practitioners. One of these three introductory texts is signed by Irit Rogoff, who, as it has been said above (pp. 52-53), became one of the main instigators of the notion of the curatorial. While one could argue that Rogoff's shift from visual studies towards the curatorial might have obeyed the urge to break with this self-recurring logic of the real and its representation, that is, of the field of inquiry and its anthology, it is interesting to see that one of the main thinkers of the curatorial came from a scholarly arena where anthologies were at the core of the field's very conditions of possibility. It is therefore all the more surprising that the discursive formation that the curatorial is, whose main format of expansion has been the anthology, has not given any thought to what anthologies might be doing to the discourse they represent.

By comparing *Cultures of the Curatorial* with other anthologies that responded to emergent scholarly fields, I aim to render visible the intricate relationship between the anthology and the field it attempts to represent, a relationship that must be added to the already complex conflation between the anthology and the symposium. More crucially, this comparison might help me make better sense of why anthologies have been both privileged and uninterrogated in the curatorial field, or why they seem to be taken for

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[167] Nicholas Mirzoef (ed.) *The Visual Culture Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 3-23.
[168] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 2.

innocent artefacts that can effectively accommodate a plurality of voices: if we situate curatorial discourse as stemming from curating alone, anthologies appear to come from nowhere, hence their being taken for a mirroring image of the group exhibition in written format, as was pointed out in pp. 45-47. Quite the opposite, if the epistemic status of the curatorial is accepted, it might hold water that the curatorial has incorporated elements from other concurrent fields of knowledge, as much as it has informed and contributed to many other discursive formations. I would argue this is how the *appearance* of its main discursive technologies—the anthology, the symposium, the interview, the talk—might start coming together. It also allows one to realise that there is an institutional and administrative history of thought that happens in and through university departments and that has an impact on how the main actors of a particular field of discourse have undergone their own personal vicissitudes and intellectual growth towards new lines of research. In the same way that it is puzzling, for instance, that a government sees the digital, culture, media and sports as sharing a common feature that makes them one and the same administrative matter, one cannot but wonder what institutional understanding and what specific conditions have created a departmental divide in Goldsmiths' where the MFA in Curating programme is taught in the Department of Art whereas the Curatorial/Knowledge PhD is under the aegis of the Department of Visual Studies.[169] What the anthologies above point at is that the curatorial doesn't only emerge from a theoretical enterprise that departs from a more or less promiscuous set of practices (curating). While this is true in a sense, it cannot account for the entire story. The type of critique that leads to the "minimum-wage" vocabulary above could only be possible after the emergence of new academic disciplines (performance studies, visual studies, cultural studies, to mention a few) that do not perceive themselves as being devoted to studying a predetermined set of objects (theatre, art, culture) but, rather, to studying a characteristic that spans across a multiplicity of diverse objects.

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[169] "MFA in Curating" in *gold.ac.uk*, https://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mfa-curating/, (accessed April 22nd 2021).

These three examples of anthologies that I have chosen here show two things: on the one hand, the most likely audience and readership (post-graduate students) to attend these symposia and to discuss these anthologies remains unacknowledged when not expressly decried. On the other hand, the specifics of their institutional and material history are somewhat absent and barely explained, thus creating the effect that guest speakers and contributors (both in the anthology and in the symposium) are somehow the most evident cast choice. In other words, they appear as 'native' to the discursive arena they are enacting. This silence on the conditions of production of curatorial discourse also generates the idea that the very emergence of curatorial discourse and the shifts that contemporary curating has undergone since the 1990s have happened either by spontaneous generation or by a series of authored practices, intellectual desires and curatorial *ambitions* that underpin the centrality of the curator both as the main locus and as the producer of curatorial discourse—I will try to show below that there is another process by which this can also happen (pp. 70-72).

There is another form of mystification that was anticipated above when I pointed to the perils of claiming, without critical examination, that participation in curatorial projects is made extensive, in the same shape and form, to those who read the documentation generated by these projects: while it is evident this cannot be the case, what these symposia and anthologies are doing insofar as they are held and circulated among pre-existing conditions of reception remains uninterrogated. More crucially, analysing who these platforms and publications are for, that is, who is benefiting from speaking about curating and from speaking as curating, becomes all the more important when claims are held that curatorial practice ultimately shifts "the traditional qualities, functions, and status of (…) the various people involved"[170] in a given project, that is, when it is affirmed that the role of "visitors, curators and critics (…) whatever their personal or professional background"[171] is somehow blurred. These are words pronounced by Beatrice von Bismarck in relation to those exhibitionary practices that see themselves as instantiating the curatorial. Whereas I focused on Maria Lind's *Performing the Curatorial* to

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[170] Beatrice von Bismark. "The Exhibition as Collective" in *Cultures of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), p. 290.
[171] *Ibid*, p. 291.

exemplify how institutional agendas intertwine and materialise in curatorial anthologies and symposia, and on Jean Paul Martinon's *The Curatorial* to bring to the fore how curatorial discourse is also embedded in wider realignments in academic disciplines, I will hone in on Von Bismarck's *Cultures of the Curatorial* to show how speaking about curating does different things depending on who does the speaking. There are a number of reasons justifying this choice but suffice it for now to highlight two. First, the blurring between anthology and symposium is here more marked, since some transcripts of conversations (one must presume that these were held during the actual conference) are published in the book as well as more conventional essays. Secondly, the editors speak a lot in the volume and they do so in a number of different ways and forms. While one can also find the editors intervening directly in the other anthologies, in this one, one can find them maintaining conversations (i.e., Bismarck with Rogoff), interviewing guests (i.e., Bismarck and Schaffaf with Eyal Weizman) and contributing to the professional lore of the anthology with their own reflection on the curatorial (each of the three co-editors writes an essay in this volume). The different roles adopted by the three main instigators of this publication makes their thinking more present throughout the book and renders visible how their interests actively articulate the anthology, in addition to a textbook-like, four-part division that structures the different texts: *I. Conditions, II. Disciplines and Cultures, III. Roles and Positions, IV. Institutions.*

In *The Exhibition as Collective*, an essay that seeks to re-centre exhibitionary practices as the primary site of experimentation for the curatorial, Beatrice Von Bismarck draws her account from Dorit Margreiter's show *Raumvermittlung* (Mediating Space, 2006), which, as one learns, was conceptually indebted to the long-standing series of projects that Von Bismarck had initiated in 1994 with Diethelm Stoller and Ulf Wuggenig at the Kunstraum of the University of Lüneburg[172]—where, instigated by these three scholars, the aforementioned working group *Services* took place (p. 51). What could be seen perhaps as an unsurprising coincidence gains interest if one remembers that *Services* was formed in order to incorporate lexicon and

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[172] *Ibid*, p. 300.

concepts from the realm of service provision economies with the aim to open up a space of value for those artistic practices that were receiving scarce professional acknowledgement at that time. As I explained above, *Services* initiated, like the publication *META*, a series of shifts in curating by which less object-based practices sought to achieve cultural significance and professional value, namely, performances, workshops, conferences and publications. However, by the time *Cultures of the Curatorial* was published, speaking about curating no longer took place against the background of an arts world where these types of platform lacked value. Quite the opposite, curating's rhetorical production was by then embedded in an lively "reputational economy", to quote Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson,[173] where speaking and publishing, just like in academia, are exercises of professional validation and instrumental in the accumulation of symbolic capital by institutions and curators alike.[174] It is important in this sense to understand that this is not (only) a matter of elucidating who gets to speak about curating and why, but also what that speaking is doing for the person who gets to speak. In the case of this particular anthology, the editors have improved the outlook of their scholarly résumé while presenting themselves as instigators of discourse before the interpretive communities of artistic and curatorial practices. What one can see, I believe, is an accumulation of symbolic capital in the public persona of the curator and the curator as the primary figure that makes an understanding of curating public.

As an example of curatorial practice, *Raumvermittlung* took the form of a series of different iterations, different subprojects and uses of the gallery space whose only permanent element throughout the duration of the project was a white wooden wall created by the artist. The location, the layout and the position of the wall could be changed at the participants' will, thus acting "as a guideline, obstacle, framework, support, enabler and instigator".[175] What strikes the reader in Von Bismarck's account is the thoroughly detailed description of how the wall was an iteration of the artist's practice, as well as

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[173] Mick Wilson and Paul O'Neill, *Curatorial counter-rhetorics and the educational turn*, Journal of Visual Art Practice, 9:2 (2010), pp. 177-193.

[174] Mick Wilson, "Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns" in Paul O'Neill (ed). *Curating Subjects*.

[175] Beatrice von Bismarck, *The Exhibition as Collective*, p. 293.

where and how previous walls created by the artist had been exhibited and with what references from the history of contemporary art these walls had established a dialogue. In turn, "the various circles of participants that were addressed by and integrated into the working process of Raumvertilung"[176] are included in the text with a different writing technique. As opposed to what the wall was doing in the exhibition space—whose location, function and use one gets to know about as the author goes through descriptions of some of the different projects that were part of *Raumvermittlung*—how "guests became hosts and students became teachers (...) and participants were at once subjects and objects"[177] remains unexplained. One learns that "a sensible disposition of the limited resources of space, time and money had to be negotiated continuously".[178] How did this happen? Was a committee formed? And, if so, how was this committee appointed? Were there any documents that were generated by these, one must assume, discursive moments of negotiation? We learn, for instance, that the circle of participants "continually grew over the course of the work".[179] If this is the case, who gets to decide who is part of the circle and who is not? In this curatorial pastoral, one cannot really see how these experiments of political and epistemic horizontality actually happened, whether there was a constituent process or, rather, it all began with the curator's *ambition*, however well-meant and righteous. In this account, we are promised that everything went well, that conflict was negotiated, that roles were swapped, that networks emerged and dissolved "the distinction between nature and society".[180] And yet one cannot but wonder why it is Beatrice von Bismarck's voice that says all this. Where is everybody else? This is a question that can also be put to the anthology. For instance, how was that four-part division that structures the volume configured? Did, for instance, the students who were taking the already existing postgraduate programme at the Academy of Visual Arts of Leipzig participate in the making of the symposium? Did they get to say anything on the day?

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[176] *Ibid*, p. 291.
[177] *Ibid*, p. 295.
[178] *Ibid*, p. 295.
[179] *Ibid*, p. 295.
[180] *Ibid*, p. 297.

By analysing this text, I do not aim to position a critique against one particular account of curatorial practice given by one particular curator. Rather, this type of writing technique, the description of a project by the curator who carried out that very same project, pervades curatorial literature, where the rehearsal of alternative modes of political organization are systematically narrated by the same professionals who, despite all the well-intended rhetoric, have instigated the projects being discussed while granting themselves a surplus of professional authority that public/published speaking about curating generates. I shall return to this in the next chapter. Curatorial anthologies, which often operate as collections of this type of writing, are also shrouded by this seemingly prudent and vigilant rhetoric: *this anthology does not do what anthologies do—it doesn't exclude, it doesn't fixate, it doesn't instruct.*

In this particular case, *The Exhibition as Collective* includes a conceptual trope that, I contend, can allow us to interrogate what *Cultures of the Curatorial* might or might not be doing. Von Bismarck further elaborates the description of *Raumvermittlung* as instantiation of the curatorial by adding that, as well as responding to Margreiter's wall in each particular iteration of the project, the participants were also questioning and reacting to the artist's "status as an internationally recognized artist", a status that operated as the very "subject of the various presentation formats and contents". Each project was indistinguishably a response both to the wall and to Margreiter's artistic persona. This rhetorical merge between artist and artwork is drawn from Von Bismarck's take on Bruno Latour's notion of "*delegation*", the principle by which nonhuman entities are able to activate subjects.[181] Margreiter's wall is not only an example of the artist's technical labour but also of her accumulated social, cultural, and above all symbolic capital" of the artist. "With Latour", she contends, "it could even be argued that types of capital themselves appear as actants".[182] While Von Bismarck's reflection referred to exhibitionary formats, her resorting to a philosophy of technology that virtually includes all possible objects able to activate humans makes me wonder whether this is also applicable to the anthology at issue. Is *Cultures of*

[181] Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 187
[182] Beatrice von Bismarck, *The Exhibition as Collective*, p. 293.

the Curatorial an artefact where the accumulated social, cultural, and symbolic capital of the three co-editors has been somehow congealed?. Am I activated when I read this anthology? Where can I give agency to the private exercise of reading at my desk? Where can I find arenas for the negotiation between the editor's speaking about curating and what I have to say about it? If postgraduate courses and gallery education are not spaces where this can happen, where then?.

While, indeed, accumulated capital is a good description of what curatorial anthologies might contain, it is imperative to distinguish here between what happens in the exhibition (be it "participation", "horizontality", "assembly" or "public") and the sites of discursive enunciation that anthologies and symposia are. Whatever it is that these platforms assemble or bring together, it cannot be the same as exhibitions because the conditions of reception of what they say, of what they enunciate, are very different. Bismarck's interest in the exhibitionary as an arena for negotiation places the focus on collective assembly while, crucially, emphasising its "performative layout".[183] I think that these two qualities, which are posited in the essay as fundamental to exhibitions, can prove very useful when interrogating anthologies and symposia. The mandate one receives upon visiting an exhibition, that is, what the subject is interpellated with—be this "look" (or "look, this is how it is"), be this "show yourself"—is simply not clear. We fail to perform "visitor", "participant" or "citizen" in a space of enunciation that, after much critical scrutiny, does not narrate as much as it stutters.

On the other hand, it allows one to get a glimpse of the assembly that might or might not happen. Seeing others and being seen by others might be a precondition for collective action—Judith Butler, for instance, points at appearing together as a fundamental force in the performative power of assemblies.[184] When I am in the gallery space I get a glimpse of what "a public" might be, even if it's just a little transient instantiation of the "public sphere". I also see that I am not alone in performing my visit or my participation in the

[183] Ibid, p. 295.
[184] Ibid, p. 295.

show. I see that I am not the only one who fails to perform the exhibitionary mandate.

Attending a conference or reading a book is entirely different. Sitting in a lecture theatre has less margin for error. I face forward. I say little. I just need to listen to the speaker. I don't get to see who is around, unless I decide to turn my head. However, those who are invited as guests do get to see their peers—maybe this is how a community of interest appears. I shall return to the specificity of the live event and its reception in chapter 4.

What I have attempted to show by analysing these anthologies, these three instances of documentation that were generated from and in three conversations about curatorial practice, is how these formats are not innocent. They exercise some agency over the discourse they produce, a discourse that extends beyond them as well as making these publications possible. Indeed, the three examples at times become just a nod in a wider network formed, in turn, by other anthologies and other platforms at various levels—materially, institutionally and discursively. In sum, they assemble and they are assembled; they produce and are produced. It is precisely this somewhat undecidable nature where the possibility of critique emerges and where one cannot but wonder who and for whom these platforms are assembled but, equally, at whose expense. Reputational economies can be altered and reinforced by these rhetorical platforms, platforms that obey interests that are at times explicit and, at other times, concealed.

These rhetorical platforms, the co-originary entanglement that is formed by both speaking and writing (a speaking that speaks curating and a writing that writes curating), are helpful to trace the most important shifts that have transformed curating from practice to discourse and, within it, the evolution of the idea of public from passive/active spectatorship towards knowledge redistribution and political horizontality. The relationship between these platforms and the discourse they produce is however more complex and intricate. It is not that they somehow bear witness to those changes, as if historical changes in discourse simply happened for their own sake and were materially expressed in certain devices (here anthologies and public speaking

events) awaiting to be unpacked by philological examination. While it is true that they lend themselves to produce something like an account of the history of curatorial discourse, what they also render visible is that they have actively informed and brought about such changes, that they have underpinned curating's ability to imagine itself as a practice that is able to produce the conditions for a different type of political configuration within and beyond institutional spaces and material objecthood. They have reshaped, to use Pascal Gielen's term, the "institutional imagination" of curating,[185] an imagination that these rhetorical platforms facilitate. They have also brought about a renewed understanding of some artistic and curatorial practices that have traded on the ubiquity of immaterial labour to extend their reach and capillary infiltration within the interstices of institutional spaces as well as beyond them.

But these formats are old and well known to other fields of inquiry—which in itself is not a problem, but it should possibly make one wonder whether they deserve some interrogation. Anthologies, as indicated above, have been subject to scholarly debate, especially in the arena of education and curriculum studies, and their role as primary meta-genre in the teaching of academic disciplines hasn't gone unnoticed.[186] They have been largely discussed as a device that enacts canon formation, that fosters the underrepresentation of minority literatures, that perpetuates chronological and geographical approaches to the humanities and that can never account for the diversity of practices and cultural production in a particular field.[187]

Throughout the documentation derived from these rhetorical platforms, one gets to see how curating gets spoken about, thus following the trail of that slippery thing that is discourse formation. While, however, it is not possible to see the totality of discourse, we can possibly become aware of its emergence

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[185] Pascal Gielen. Institutional Imagination. "Instituting Contemporary Art Minus the "Contemporary'" in Pascal Gielen (ed.) *Institutional Attitudes*, pp. 11-34.

[186] David Damrosch, "The Mirror and The Window: Reflections on Anthology Construction" in *Pedagogy*, Volume 1, Issue 1, winter 2001, pp. 207-214; Johnson, Glen M., "The Teaching Anthology" in Nemoianu, V., and Royal, R., *Hospitable Canons. Essays on Literary Play, Scholarly Choice and Popular Pressures* (Philadelphia: John Benjis, 1990), p. 125.

[187] Barbara Benedict, "Choice Reading: Anthologies, reading practices and the canon 1680-1800" in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 45 (The History of the Book), 2005.

synecdochally, that is, by *representation*. That curatorial publications *represent* is crucial here, since many of the projects and examples of curatorial practice these anthologies compile are purported to be non-representational, and since the "event of knowledge" is posited as immanent to the project itself. The same can be said about the symposium or similar iterations of public speaking in the curatorial field, where the plurality of voices these events try to foreground is but a representation of the professional field, like a parliament represents the abstract notion of the Nation.

While I think there is enough evidence indicating that curators overtly think that anthologies and symposia are part of their curatorial practices—at times embracing the specificity of their formats, at times recognising similarities with platforms of display—one might adduce that these rhetorical platforms, that is, the production of curatorial discourse might be happening as the result of projects that are not, as such, curatorial. Indeed, it might not be enough to object that these platforms are organised by curators, that these anthologies are edited and instigated by curators that are talking about curating (often, indeed, inviting artists, writers and educators to contribute to these discussions). Asserting otherwise would entail to admit, however, that the site of theory is other than the site of practice, that curatorial discourse has emerged elsewhere, beyond the very practice of curating. In this sense, two entirely different fields of practice (and potentially two separate discourse formations) are too high a price to pay.

With the regulation of curatorial discourse and the representation of non-representational modes of curatorial practice, another trope that both regulates and gets regulated appears to be the curator. At the same time, the question of who gets to speak and, also, whose speaking is silenced by those who get to speak about curating, remains somewhat unanswered. It is my impression that it is the case because these formats mystify their conditions of production. And yet, as Gayatri Spivak insightfully notes, "it is the unguarded practice of conversation" where one can catch "glimpse the track of

ideology".[188] It seems that that one of the conditions that makes possible that curating is spoken about is the existence of a primary locus which is referred to under various terms and names: "charismatic agency" in Paul O'Neill,[189] Hans Ulrich Obrist's "invitation" to initiate a project,[190] Okwui Enwezor's "appointment",[191] or the "ambition" that underlies a curatorial project, as Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck unreservedly put it.[192] It all seems to start with a curatorial "mind at work", to quote Chus Martínez, which "instituent practices" in curating cannot do without the curator's. The emergence of the curator as a discursive trope is, in my view, a crucial formation that needs analysing, since it appears to be, at once, the maker of discourse and part of the discourse formation. What I think starts to be seen throughout the documentation that these platforms generate is a series of textual, visual and material representations of the curator that co-exist with representations of the audience, understandings of publicness and political desires that might be at odds with how non-representational projects in curatorial practice are characterised.

[188] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Macmillan Education: Basingstoke, 1988, pp. 271-313 (272).
[189] Paul O'Neill, *Locating the Producers*, p. 7.
[190] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *do it: the compendium* (New York: ICI, 2013).
[191] Okwui Enwezor. "Introduction" in *Intense Proximity*, p. 21
[192] Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, *Curating/Curatorial*, pp. 28-29

Chapter 2
Case-study writing and the persistence of curatorial authority

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to render visible how curatorial anthologies are not just documents or texts that stem from discursive moments as a *mere* result of these. Indeed, even though they respond to specific instances of curatorial discourse, the intertwinings between anthology and symposium are not simple and their analysis allows for a deeper understanding of how speech and writing can overlap in ways that might shed new light on our usual grasp of the relationship between spoken word and written text as loci where discourse is enacted. Moreover, if one takes such instances of speech as performative moments, that is, as staged examples of public speaking that happen before *someone*, the symposium/anthology device is further complicated—to the performativity of curatorial discourse I shall return later, in chapter 4.

More particularly, I resorted to three curatorial publications, three volumes that ushered in a particular formation of curatorial discourse (the curatorial), in order to show how one of its most utilised formats, the anthology, was a useful device to trace institutional agendas, professional interests and wider readjustments in higher education and cultural policy—shifts that have given shape to curatorial discourse itself and which I have referred to as its conditions of production. As I hope to have shown, this is helpful in order to understand that discursive shifts in a given field of inquiry, in this case, curatorial practice, are not mere gratuitous, personal endeavours embedded in a wider scheme of intellectual developments that one can trace in a vacuum. This type of scrutiny becomes all the more urgent in the case of curatorial discourse, when such shifts are purported to take place in the name of political horizontality. More specifically, when looking at projects that are described as instantiations of the curatorial, and which are posited as having originated in collaboration with live participants, the textual account of such examples of practice through the sole voice of the curator seems at least oxymoronic.

The description of the curatorial project by the curator pervades curatorial literature. If the first collections of interviews and conversations transcripts

compiled blurbs of professional wisdom or discussions on different topics,[193] curatorial writing soon crystallised as self-reported accounts of a curator's own practice. By 2006, Paul O'Neill had commissioned, as I mentioned above (pp. 41 and 54), the volume *Curating Subjects*, in part as an opportunity to abandon a type of writing practice that had become commonplace. Like Beatrice Von Bismarck's account of *Raumvermittlung,* self-reported case-studies present and explain projects in an almost omniscient fashion. Whether the account they give is true or not, it is impossible to investigate, especially since whatever takes places in the curatorial project is posited as somewhat immanent to the project itself, like in Rogoff's "event of knowledge". Moreover, whether their self-reported accounts of those non-representational projects might be at odds with what those projects are purported to have achieved, insofar as such descriptions are inscribed in a representational economy, is a question that remains unanswered.

In order to analyse how the curatorial case-study works, that is, what the case study is doing in and to the production of curatorial discourse, I will resort to other fields of inquiry that have used case studies to advance their research. At the same time, it is also important to maintain the 'field specificity' of curatorial discourse (for lack of a better name), that is, to pay attention to how case studies behave differently when this type of writing strategy is talking about curating and is not, for instance, part of political science research. That is, the case-study as used in curatorial literature does things that would otherwise not be possible in a different field.[194] It is precisely those differences, at once unique and specific while being in tension with what the *curatorial* case-study might share with other fields of inquiry, where the focus of this chapter is. What are then those characteristics, formal or context-specific, historical or intrinsic, that suggest this centrality of the case-study? What can one know about this research stratageme that makes it look like a good

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[193] Carolee Thea (ed.). *Foci: Interviews with Ten International Curators*. (New York: Apex Art, 2001); Carin Kuoni (ed.) *Words of Wisdom. A Curator's Vademecum on Contemporary Art* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2001).
[194] While in Medicine, for instance, the case-study allowed practitioners to bring together the patient's account and the doctor's report, in social-science research this type of research strategy might help researchers to validate a theory or point out where a general law does not apply.

candidate to further understand the complicated relationship between a discursive formation, the forms that contain it and, in Bourdiean terms, its 'incumbents'?[195]

As I shall expand on below (pp. 78-80), at the core of this type of research writing, there is some sort of relationship between example and rule, singularity and generalisation. In principle, such tension, in the form of a schism, was what the curatorial set out to explore, as explained in the previous chapter: to retrieve the specificity of every curatorial project, to uncover a "degree-zero" vocabulary underlying curatorial practice that could not be subsumed under general categories.[196] While one could argue that the two main components at both ends of this link are the same when applied to the case study (the singular *versus*(?) the general), it remains to be seen whether the relationship between singular event and general category works the same when brought together in the case study genre. Furthermore, this quasi-metaphysical understanding of the case study, this "degree-zero" definition, however provisional, might not be sufficient when such primary categories are filled with specific contents and with the materiality of writing itself.

It might be useful to acknowledge that this writing genre, even though sometimes it takes the form of a typically academic text, appears in a variety of shapes and forms and, at times, it is not self-reported. For instance, it is possible to find publications that operate as one gigantic case-study, such as the anthology *Tentsa Museum: Reports from New Sweden*, published in 2021, where several authors address one extended curatorial project: Maria Lind's directorship at the eponymous art centre.[197]

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[195] Hanna-Mari Husu, Rethinking incumbency: Utilising Bourdieu's field, capital, and habitus to explain energy transitions in "Energy Research & Social Science", Volume 93, 2022.

[196] By "incumbent" Pierre Bourdieu referred to those practitioners within a particular field whose position of power prevents the field from undergoing changes (which could challenge the incumbent's power positions). For an updated elaboration of Bourdieu's concept see, Niel Fligstein and Doug McAdam, *A Theory of Fields* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[197] Maria Lind (ed.) *Tentsa Museum: Reports from New Sweden* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2021).

In any case, the ubiquitous presence of the self-reported case that Paul O'Neill was seeking to break with back in 2006 is still found in the three-part issue the journal PARSE published in 2021, right at the height of the pandemic, under the aegis of the University of Gothenburg.[198] I want to focus on this publication because it re-elaborates exhibitionary practices through a redistributed approach where the role of the audience or of the participant in the production of knowledge is central. Largely instigated by Mick Wilson, this three-volume special issue was devoted to reassessing the role that exhibitions might still play as primary sites for curatorial and artistic experimentation after twenty years of dialogical, durational, and discursive practices in contemporary art and curation. *On the Question of Exhibition* was published, in fact, as the written correlate of *handsful thrown into air and scattered over earth* (no capital letters), a curatorial workshop held online in June of 2020 as part of the 9th Bucharest Biennale—an event that I was able to attend myself due to its online nature. That the event was called a "workshop" seems a deliberate move and a somewhat important feature since its twin programme, *Contemporary Art Biennials—our hegemonic machines in states of emergency*, was labelled as a curatorial "conference".[199] In turn, as one learns when reading the programme's online blurb, these two platforms were presented as *discursive*—curiously and significantly enough, the journal is not.[200] Combined, they formed the discursive components of *Farewell to Research*, a curatorial project conceptualised by Henk Slager which aimed to reassess the research paradigm that has underpinned curatorial and artistic practices over the last decade—arguably, the same decade that 'the curatorial' ushered in.

As a collection of different writing formats, from more conventional essays to conversation transcripts, *On the Question of Exhibition* features an important number of texts that use the case study in different ways and forms. Just to

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[198] Nick Aikens, Kjell Caminha, Jyoti Mistry, Mick Wilson (eds.) "*On the Question of the Exhibition*" in *PARSE*, Issue 13, parts 1-3 (Spring-Autum, 2021).
[199] Ronald Kolb, Shwetal A. Patel, Dorothee Richter (eds.) "Contemporary Art Biennials–Our Hegemonic Machines in Times of Emergency" in *On Curating*. Issue 46 (June, 2020), accessed March 2022.
[200] "9th Bucharest Biennale: Farewell to Research" in *Biennialfoundation.org*, accessed March 2022, https://biennialfoundation.org/2020/04/9th-bucharest-biennale-farewell-to-research.

point out a few, Sabina Dahl Nielsen's article focuses on the institutional practices of SAVVY Contemporary, a project that describes itself as "an art space, discursive platform, eating and drinking spot, njangi house, space for conviviality"[201] and on how this Berlin-based initiative has attempted to respond to what social scientist Naika Foroutan refers to as "post-migrant societies of negotiation".[202]

In what one could call an almost classical exercise in curatorial writing style, curator Kris Dittel and musicologist Jelena Novak, give their readers an account of their curatorial project *Post-Opera*, an exhibition and public programme held at TENT Rotterdam between April and June of 2019, which in turn resulted from a collaboration between this Dutch art platform and the Operadagen Rotterdam festival.[203] Both in *Post-Opera* and through their essay, Dittel and Novak aim to tackle the apparently insurmountable contradiction that exhibiting the human voice brings in itself. After all, they wonder, how could one *show* something inherently invisible within the eminently visual apparatus of an exhibition?

Similarly, in a four-way conversation, Mick Wilson, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Maria Hlavajova and Damon Reaves focus on two examples of exhibitionary practice, *Philadelphia Assembled*, a project that spanned between 2014 and 2017 at Philadelphia Museum of Art, and *Trainings for the Not-Yet*, which BAK hosted between 2019-20, this time to reflect on how exhibitions can open up spaces that respond to political and material precarity.[204] The fact that the article appears as the transcript of a conversation held by four practitioners should not confound the reader: it is also a two-part case study, however softened by the seemingly spontaneous tone that a dialogue can facilitate.

I could keep going and enlisting the array of texts that feature some type of usage of the case-study as a reflective technique or research strategy. However I think that it is already possible to see how what the case study is doing in

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[201] Sabina Dahl Nielsen, "Njangi House: SAVVY CONTEMPORARY and the Postmigrant Condition" in *On the Question of the Exhibition*, Issue 13, part 3 (Autumn 2021), accessed March 2022.
[202] *Ibid*, accessed March 2022.
[203] Kris Dittel and Jelena Novak, "Exhibiting the Voice" in *On the Question of Exhibition*, Issue 13, part 2 (Summer 2021), accessed March 2022.
[204] Jeanne van Heeswijk, Maria Hlavajova, Damon Reaves and Mick Wilson; "Wiggling the Frame: Philadelphia Assembled" and "Trainings for the Not-Yet" in *On the Question of the Exhibition*, Issue 13, part 3 (Autumn 2021), accessed March 2022.

each of these three texts, the explicitness and clarity of its presence in the text as a format, and the relationship between writer and text, is not homogenous. A variety of different *cases* of case-study seems to emerge here, which of course, begs the question of whether all of them are case studies altogether and whether the use of examples is indeed exemplary across these three texts. At this point, what I have posited as some sort of preliminary understanding of what the case study is is now confronted with a reasonable doubt: is any example of practice a case study of that same practice at issue? Would the projects presented in these texts stand the rigours of, as a sociologist would probably have it, qualitative research? Am I somehow rigging my method in a way that makes anything become a case study? What exactly am I looking at?

An epistemic genre

Nowhere, perhaps, are cases as forcefully explained as in Giorgio Agamben's *On The Signature of Things*, his methodological account of what he calls paradigmatic thinking. Agamben situates the case amidst a constellation formed by the exception (the suspension of the rule) and the example (the explanation of a rule through an individual instantiation). To explain how cases operate, Agamben resorts to how the word "rose" in Latin (rosa) is used to illustrate the first declension (rosa, rosae, rosam, etc.). As he goes on to say: "Through its paradigmatic *exhibition* [my emphasis] (...), the normal use as well as the denotative character of the term *rose* is suspended".[205] The case needs to suspend something for it to become such.

When taken beyond the realm of philological analysis (Agamben's usual point of departure), case studies (a somewhat lengthier, textual form of a case) and how they operate has also been subject to debate. The "definitional morass", to quote case-study expert John Gerring, of this format hasn't gone unnoticed in those fields of inquiry where this research strategy has traditionally occupied a central place.[206] Gerring, whose methodological thinking is a useful

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[205] Giorgio Agamben, *On the Signature of Things*. (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 11.
[206] John Gerring. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 17.

compass to navigate the case-study mire, acknowledges that what researchers in comparative politics might have in mind when defining what a case study is is not univocal. On the contrary, their understanding varies and might focus on very different aspects of the format.[207] On the one hand, it is possible to find depictions of the case study such as social scientist Robert Yin's, who yields a 'performative' definition of the case: "what the case does represent is a research strategy, to be likened to an experiment, a history or a simulation".[208] Yin's is, in my view, an interesting description of the case-study: it acknowledges its heuristic value, that is, insofar as a strategy, it allows the researcher to achieve a goal and solve a problem. But still more interesting is the fact that he needs to explain what the case-study is by using other examples —the experiment, the history, the simulation— which, in turn, he seems to draw from other disciplines—he refers to, for instance, experiments in neuroanatomy and to historiography in order to nuance the specificity of the case.[209] It seems as if the very definition of an example was in itself exemplary, as if it needed to use an example to exhibit itself. At the same time, Yin does not phrase his definition of the case by using a copulative phrase —that is, of the type A is B. Instead, he tells us what the case study might be by telling us what it does, hence its performative character.

Yin's description of the case is actually a *case* for the case study at a time when this research method was under scrutiny, when not under blatant attack.[210] In his article, he goes on to further elaborate on this research strategy that he is advocating for. Yin presents the case study as an "attempt to examine a) a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear". Disquisitions aside as to what constitutes a phenomenon and what real-life, it is to note here how Yin admits the blurriness of the case study and locates its usefulness

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[207] Loc. cit., p. 17. See also Gerring's seminal article "What is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?" In *The American Political Science Review*, May, 2004, Vol. 98, No. 2 (May, 2004), pp. 341-354.
[208] Robert Yin. "The Case Study Crisis: Some Answers" in *Administrative Science Quarterly* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Mar., 1981), pp. 58-65, p. 59.
[209] Loc. cit.
[210] See for instance Matthew Mies "Qualitative Data as an attractive nuisance" in *Administrative Science Quarterly* , Vol. 24, No. 4, "Qualitative Methodology" (Dec., 1979), pp. 590-601, which Yin's article is a response to.

precisely there: to use a more current term, it is in its situatedness where the value of the case study lies.

While Yin yields a situated account of the case study, educational psychologist Robert Stake has contributed to understanding this primary type of research strategy thanks to his reflective work, which is often included in university handbooks for qualitative research. Stake holds the view that what makes something a case is defined by the researcher's "interest (…), not by the methods of inquiry used".[211] That Stake places the emphasis on the notion of interest, severing it from methodological demands, is an important move: if interest mediates between researcher and case (after all, as Stake himself acknowledges, the primary gesture that makes something into a case is selection), then something like a phenomenological space appears, an 'intention' which might be triggered by a personal interest, a whimsical appetite, an institutional agenda, or a wider research project. In Stake's view, what construes a singularity as a case is therefore value-laden and value-dependant. It is neither innocent nor aseptic. There is an affective relationship between case and researcher, but also instrumental interests and/or, at the same time, the external imposition to delve into a specific case in order to learn about a particular phenomenon. In distinguishing between intrinsic and instrumental case studies, Stake is making room for the specific contexts where a given case takes place. A given thing becomes a case where it is endowed with relevance in relation to a particular purpose. At the same time, such purpose can be contained by the case itself or extend beyond it or be adjacent to the thing being examined.

For me, what is crucial in Stake's discussion is his acknowledging that, however intricate and multiple the definition of the case study be, it comes into being and circulates among researchers as a written text: the report. It is indeed difficult to separate whatever immanent or transcendent relationship there might be between chosen case and studied phenomenon from the account of such relationship. Stake further nuances the function of this type of writing, whose "purpose of the case report is not to represent the world, but to

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[211] Robert E. Stake. *Qualitative Case Studies*. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications: 2008), p. 443.

represent the case".[212] Here, writing seems to be what gives the case study its materiality. What allows its circulation as constructed knowledge is that it is accounted for as a narration or "thick description", to use the term coined by the ethnographer Clifford Geertz.[213] I contend that this is a crucial trait: not only the case study is a research strategy (I *study* something and I am doing it by paying special attention to it in order to understand that something or, maybe, something else); it is also a type of literary genre, akin to the narrative account. More importantly, insofar as it is an account that is told to someone else or read by someone else, it is susceptible to being staged, being delivered, that is, to being performed.[214] That is, the case study lends to itself to narratological and performative analysis.

As opposed to Yin, who sees a fuzzy area where phenomenon and context overlap, Stakes insists on the bounded nature of the case. Because it is constructed, in its shifting from being *something* into being a *case* the latter is severed from its original surroundings. Case-making or, rather, case-choosing is a gesture that generates a new context where personal, institutional and professional motivations might also be at play.[215] This, I believe, resonates with my unpacking of the anthology and the symposium in the previous chapter (pp. 60-71) but the object at issue here might not function exactly the same. I shall resort shortly to the three texts I selected above from *On the Question of Exhibitions* to see if 'that's the case'. If, as Stake maintains, case-study writing is in essence a representational exercise, how would it fit into a discursive formation and field of practice that has tirelessly sought to become post-representational? It is in this preliminary observation, I contend,

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[212] Robert E. Stake. "Case studies". In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 134 - 164). (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003) Ch. 5, p. 156

[213] An important number of reflective accounts tackling the methodological problem posed by case-study research seem to acknowledge the importance of Geerz in developing case-oriented research. For the notion of "thick description" see: Clifford Geerz. The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz. New York: Basic Books Inc, 1973.

[214]* I realise that this might not be sufficiently explained. If one reads my thesis from the start, I develop this intimate relationship between performativity and someone's gaze or presence in am referring here to my methodological reflection on Austin, Phelan and Auslander. See the text on methodology submitted for the confirmation exam. Headline: "Research Methods".

[215] Robert E. Stake. "Case Studies" In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 134 - 164). (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003)., pp. 134-164. For Stake's at-length work on the case-study, see Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1995).

where the suitability of case study writing reveals again its importance as a primary research object.

In having a look at these two researchers, arguably from different fields of enquiry but definitely preoccupied with the functioning of the case study, I think it is possible to see how their attempts at a working definition of the case study cannot be taken any further than that. But that is not necessarily a bad thing. Maybe the case is something that remains such when we don't give it too much thought. When we try to grasp it, it escapes. I am personally comfortable with this slipperiness. I find Yin's and Stake's insights incredibly illuminating—in other words, there's philosophical hope for the social sciences too. But while many political and social scientists have enriched the still ongoing academic debate on case-study-based research —no doubt, a methodological imperative in a field of inquiry that aspires to objectivity— their attempt to solve the case-study conundrum might seem Byzantine when taken into curatorial discourse. After all, does it really matter to curators whether a case study is *idiographic* or *nomothetic*, to use Gerring's proposed classification?[216] Wouldn't this mean, besides, to impose foreign categories to a field of inquiry (curatorial discourse) which is, however semi-autonomously, particular and specific? Moreover, is the function of the curatorial case to test or to validate or, rather, does it have a more polemical, controversial nature?

What I have tried to draw attention to is how social scientists and other researchers that use qualitative methods as well, realise that the case study is not an obvious or unproblematic writing technique or research strategy. Working definitions seem to oscillate between saluted indeterminacy (Yin, pp. 81-82) and differential boundedness (Stake, pp. 82-83).

Other fields have also interrogated the case study in a way that might prove useful to better understand its significance in curating. Because they deal with the knowable and with how we can come to know things, cases have been around for a long time. Literary scholar André Jolles, for instance, considered the case to be one of the nine basic genres that originated literature.[217] To him,

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[216] John Gerring. "Single-Outcome Studies: A Methodological Primer" in *International Sociology*, Vol. 21, No 5, 2006, pp. 707-734.
[217] André Jolles. *Simple Forms: Legend, Saga, Myth, Riddle, Saying, Case, Memorabile, Fairytale, Joke.* Trans. Peter J. Schwartz (New York: Verso, 2017), pp. 171-99.

a case would be a literary device that problematises the application of a moral rule or complicates its use. Utilised as a tool to sharpen practical wisdom, cases exposed how the universality of moral postulates could eventually be suspended in certain scenarios where the rules of morality were confronted or unapplicable.

Because cases can be used as a teaching and learning device, they have been present in the historical formation of a variety of disciplines, practices and fields of inquiry. Medicine, for instance, has paid close attention to them as a story-telling practice of knowledge dissemination, especially after many doctors reclaimed the narrative value of case-telling in medical practice during the last decades of the 20th Century. This is why historian of medicine Gianna Pomata coined the term "epistemic genre" to include the case in the group of texts "that develop in tandem with scientific practices". The inventory formed by this wealth of formats is vast and, to her, ranges from "the treatise, the commentary, the textbook [and] the encyclopaedia" to "the aphorism, the dialogue, the essay [and] the medical recipe".[218] The atlas, the experimental article and the letter, as she goes on to add, are also part of this list. While most of these types of writing can hold literary value in their own right and might lend themselves to be objects for philological criticism, they all seem to be "linked, in the eyes of their authors, to the practice of knowledge-making (however culturally defined)".[219]

I now will go back to some of the texts I started to talk about above (p. 79), to see whether I can generate a portrayal of the workings of the case-study report in curatorial literature.

While it would be easy for me to apply the same type of criticism that I attempted to carry out in the previous chapter, I would like to take my analysis now a bit further. Indeed, I could keep expanding on what I said when I was unpacking the anthology and the symposium as an institutional and historical node often bringing together agendas that are far from disinterested. The essays contained in *On the Question of the Exhibition* are

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[218] Gianna Pomata. "The Medical CAse Narrative: Distant Reading of an Epistemic Genre" in *Literature and Medicine*, 32, no. 1 (Spring 2014), pp. 1-23, pp. 2-3.
[219] Ibid, p 2.

no different. In this sense, I can still remember how the director of the Bucharest Biennale, who was attending *handsful thrown*, tried to sabotage the event by yelling and later by typing on the ZOOM chat that Mick Wilson was utilising an event that was funded with Romanian public money as a networking platform for his students at the University of Gothenburg. And, indeed, one could deduce that, for instance, *Exhibiting the Voice* is an essay that gives Jelena Novak an opportunity to keep *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body*, her book published in 2015, current and relevant or, similarly, that this is a chance for Kris Dittel to get another paper published and demonstrate his dexterity in critical theory. A less cynical perspective, however, would entail taking the issue they set out to explore seriously. In fact, their starting point comes from a discursive aporia that could potentially render visible, at least on paper, the limits of contemporary curating: if, indeed, exhibitions (still) are primary sites for curatorial practice and experimentation whose main operation is to show or to visually present within a specific type of attention regime, how can practitioners accommodate something that seems to escape this logic? How is it possible to show a voice without seeking resort to representational devices?.[220] It certainly is a legitimate question for a discursive formation and field of practice that has actively sought to distance itself from representation—here understood both as a symbolic and a political regime. Discursive and dialogical practices in curating as well as the symposia, workshops and conferences where curatorial discourse is produced obey a similar desideratum, as I have intimated above (pp. 71-72).

The elusiveness of the voice hasn't gone unnoticed in some philosophical traditions. Poststructuralism and psychoanalysis have paid particular attention to its slippery character. To Lacan (who Dittel and Novak, in a sense, tacitly refer to through a quote by Žižek) the voice, together with the gaze, are paradigmatic examples of the 'objet petit a' [object (a)], the subject's unattainable object of desire.[221] The spectral nature of the voice, as Žižek observes, makes it as if it was not fully owned by the uttering body.[222] While

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[220] Kris Dittel and Jelena Novak, "Exhibiting the Voice", accessed April 2022.
[221] Jacques Lacan. *Seminar XIV: The Logic of Fantasy*, 16 January 1966 (unpublished).
[222] Slavoj Žižek, "I hear You with My Eyes"; or, "The Invisible Master", in Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek (eds.) *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects*. (Durham, NC, and London: Duke

the human voice has its origin in a bodily organ, it is also perceived as happening both in and out of the larynx. This inherent "ventriloquism" of the human voice, to use Novak's characterisation, lends itself to estrangement and undecidability. In sum, it gives us trouble and, when taken into the realm of curatorial discourse, it can trouble what it is understood that curating is able to do.

If we take to the extreme Dittel and Novak's proposition, these two practitioners are, in principle, identifying *something* that does not satisfy a rule: it is, in essence, an exception. This is not however what their case is. *Post-Opera* is reported as an attempt to overcome an aporetic problem. Another way to put it is that their project attempts to reinscribe this exception to a rule, which I am going to call *R*, as an example of the same rule, which needs to be amended, *R'*, if it is to accommodate *Post-Opera* as a case of what otherwise would remain exception: with a different understanding of what an exhibition is or can do, those things that resist representation can have a place. In investigating the singing voice through artistic practices, the exemption amends the rule to become a case thereof. It tries to propose a solution to overcome a problem, and in doing so, what is presented as a case actually shifts the entire paradigm.

Or such would be the goal which, in principle, their report is intended to achieve. In reading their essay, however, it is possible to see that their description of the project has given the researchers further insights into different phenomena, which their account of *Post-Opera* also includes. The collaboration between these two practitioners, a curator and a musicologist, yields a two-part (or rather, two-act) tale where they share with the reader what they have learned from their project—in relation to this, it is important to note Stake's recommendation that, when cases are of great complexity, collaboration between researchers is advised. While some of the key tropes that underpin their argument are, in my view, weak points (for instance, opera is presented as the ultimate vocal genre; one cannot but wonder why it is any more vocal than reciting poetry, a parliamentary intervention or the

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University Press, 1996. pp. 90-126, quoted in Kris Dittel and Jelena Novak, *Op. cit.*, accessed April 2022.

celebration of mass), Dittel and Novak, as they themselves tell their readers, have learnt more than one thing.

One the one hand, using an exhibitionary format and working with critical artistic practices helped both researchers to re-examine their understanding of the human, singing voice. This is where Novak has the floor and intervenes directly in the text. She presents what the project has taught her in relation to her research interests and expertise. Thanks to collaborating with the artists participating in the exhibition, she has refined and further complicated her understanding of the singing voice in a post-human context, her main intellectual preoccupation. For Novak, to use Stake's term, Post-Opera is an *intrinsic case*. It holds a personal interest in and for itself, which is very different from presenting a case to understand a contradiction at the centre of a general category or to exemplify a wider phenomenon. To put it differently, in an intrinsic case, what the researcher learns is immanent to the case. It is not located somewhere beyond.

On his part, Dittel (one must assume it is Dittel who is writing after Novak's explicitation of herself) reflects on how *Post-Opera* has yielded an opportunity for curatorial experimentation and allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how an exhibitionary format can accommodate non-linear conceptions of time. Expressed in this manner, Post-Opera is a case that has helped the researcher understand a specific problem of curatorial practice, a slight drift from the essay's original plan. This discursive shift allows Dittel and Novak to render an account of what they have learnt through a specific instance of curatorial practice. Through practising curation, they have acquired new, specific knowledge about concrete aspects of their respective practices (musicology and curating) while, in principle, sharpening their understanding of the curatorial field. This type of knowledge narration, which resonates with what the Ancient Greek would have called *phronesis,*[223] is reminiscent of

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[223] In classical thought, *phronesis*, often translated into modern languages as "practical wisdom", is the type of knowledge one would acquire through and by practising a techné (a practice that is regulated by a set of transmittable rules). The carpenter, for instance, after having learnt the rules of carpentry, would gain new insights into her trade through the very practice of those rules, which can never fully mirror their own material application. For a brief, yet thorough account of phronetic knowledge and its reintroduction in modern thought, see: Henry Pickford, "Poiêsis, Praxis, Aisthesis: Remarks on Aristotle and Marx" in Amir Gandesha and Johan F. Hartle (eds.) *Aesthetic Marx*, 23-48.

"early" examples of curatorial literature from the late 90s and 2000s,[224] when theoretical reflection on curating still was a more or less amorphous set of professional thoughts and observations derived from a field of practice that was beginning to show epistemic self-consciousness.

Let us take a closer look at their text, in particular at the paragraphs regarding the question of exhibitionary, non-linear time. The fundamental question for Dittle is whether an exhibition can "present a non-linear experience within which artworks retain their singularity, while at the same time presenting a chorus of human and non-human voices".[225] In part, this is an operational, practical, and absolutely pertinent question: how can a curator maintain the unique character of the artworks she is working with when these are sound pieces or when their medium is the singing voice? Answering this question should have yielded a precious contribution to curatorial lore, a how-to guide, however brief, to curating sound and live voice through the lens of post-human critique. Instead, Dittle chooses to elaborate on the non-linear nature of his project, where he locates the uniqueness of Post-Opera's temporality. That exhibitions have a by-default linear temporality is maintained throughout the essay and is not subject to any type of debate: temporality in exhibitions in general (except for Post-Opera) is linear. In order to foreground the uniqueness of the project, its contribution to the field, previous examples of curatorial practice need to be posited as obsolete or insufficient. This type of strategy can be found in other tropes of the essay. To Novak, the West is a uniform, unvarying entity that has produced one and only one ideologically laden notion of what "having a voice" means or is.

"This non-linearity" of Post-Opera, says Dittel, "also promoted a rhizomatic mode of thought and perception, allowing for multiple ways of making connections, creating potentialities, and generating a collectivity of voices".[226] If Dittel's wording sounds familiar, it is because this is what many exhibitions

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[224] Examples of this type of literature can be found in Carin Kuoni (ed.). *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vademecum on Contemporary Art* (Independent Curators International, 2001) or Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (eds). "The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation" (Newcastle: BALTIC, 2001).

[225] As writer and curator Tirdad Zolghadr bitterly points out, this is a metaphor for curating in general that both serves to define any exhibition, curatorial discourse or what the curatorial is. On this, see his book *Traction* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

[226] Dittel and Novak, *loc. cit.*

have been posited to facilitate over the last decade, from *documenta 13*'s frenetic choreographic thinking[227] to any example of practice that sees itself as enacting the curatorial.[228] In itself, there is nothing wrong with making that statement. It is, one could argue, a gesture that inscribes the project in the wider scheme of curatorial discourse and resonates with its historical evolution. But I am more inclined to think that this type of rhetoric is not helping the authors make their point.

That Dittel goes on to characterise the rhizomatic nature of his project as a mode "allowing audience members to tune in and out at will"[229] further underpins my view that is less substantiated analysis mimicking the politico-epistemic ecumenism that characterises curatorial prose: I wonder whether, when visiting an institution whose exhibitions arguably display a sense of temporality that is more linear because such exhibitions are, for instance, revisiting a period, a movement, or an artist's career, visitors cannot tune in and out at will. Is it not an intellectual perplexity to reduce a project's potential contribution to curatorial practice to the freedom of attention of its audiences? Is it not such freedom that distinguishes the exhibition from other spaces of discourse distribution, such as the lecture theatre or the cinema, where behavioural rules are easier to read and hold a tighter grip on the audience?

As the reader can infer from the ironic tone of my questions, I find this type of rhetoric problematic. Not only do I find it so because both contributors acknowledge their receiving public funds from Portuguese and Dutch institutions so they could produce their writing—a help which, when acknowledged, adds further institutional sheen to the reputational economy they are being admitted into by getting their text published in PARSE.

It is their rhetorical strategies which kindles my reasoning.

Below, I intend to analyse two of those strategies: a writing technique and a seemingly deliberate silence. Both are possible to find in landmark essays in/on curating by prominent curators—Rogoff, Lind, Obrist, Von Bismarck, Kristov-Bagarkiev, to name a few—and still pervade curatorial literature

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[227] Nanne Buurman "CCB With... Displaying Curatorial Relationality in Documenta (13)'s " The Logbook" in *On Curating*, Issue 33, pp. 61-75.
[228] See, for instance, how Maria Lind describes her own work in *Performing the Curatorial* or the contributions to Martinon's *The Curatorial*.
[229] Dittel and Novak, loc. cit.

(either as a written text and/or as an oral presentation). These two examples of rhetorical strategy are: *a)* ekphrastic description of artistic and curatorial practice and *b)* omission of similar precedents and akin projects in exhibitionary history.

The three texts that I have mentioned above showcase these two features, yet in various degrees and with slightly different usage. Not every single text ever produced using the case-study report within curatorial discourse necessarily resorts to these two elements but they often do. Choosing these two rhetorical devices is not innocent. Examining what they entail might shed further light on the relationship between curatorial discourse, its desire for political horizontality and the role of the curator amidst it.

I will keep the focus on the essay I have been discussing, to later include other texts featuring the same strategies, so the analysis is not limited to one particular example.

Ekphrasis and omission

By ekphrasis, poets and writers have normally meant the description of an artwork.[230] Ekphrasis used to be a particularly popular genre in Greek and Roman literature, when it would often take the function of a rhetorical exercise to develop writing skills.[231] The aim of ekphrastic writing was, however, to render a vivid account of a visual artwork so the reader can somehow experience it vicariously. Because of this vicarious nature of the ekphrasis, the writer tries to overcome the potentially infinite gap between the represented object and the representing text by rendering a portrayal where vividness and liveliness are the main compositional principles. The proposed remedy to the tragedy of not being before the artwork, the tragedy of not having seen it, is to evoke a lively experience in the reader through dramatic description or animated storytelling. As one can certainly imagine, whether

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[230] See, Liliane Louvel's characterisation of the ekphrasis as "[une] description étendue d'un objet en termes vifs et animés, a vu son sens progressivement se restreindre à la description détaillée d'un objet d'art" Liliane Louvel. *L'oeil du text* (Toulouse, Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1998), p. 72.
[231] Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, (Farnham, 2009).

ekphrastic descriptions are mere representations of an artwork or, rather, are art in their own right has been a matter of debate.

The first time I heard this term, however, was when I was reading Art History as an undergraduate student. This is no wonder. To an extent, there was something quite ekphrastic to studying all of those artworks, that myriad artefacts that we had never seen in real life and which were presented to us through pictures in books, slides on walls, and written sources—in that sense, I can still remember the description of Hagia Sophia by Paulus Silentarius, my namesake, who witnessed the reconstruction of the temple's dome back in the 6th century.[232]

Modern art history made extensive use of ekphrastic writing during the early stages of its formation as an academic discipline and so did art criticism, Diderot's art reviews being a good example of this. Art historians such as John Ruskin or Alois Rigel extensively used ekphrasis as a writing device, often with the intention to popularise a field that seemed to remain dangerously esoteric from the outset.[233] In the 20th-century, more recent art historians such as Ernst Gombrich or mediaeval art scholar Michel Camille also resorted to ekphrastic writing as a useful tool to start informing a historiographic argument.[234] It is thought that the etymological origin of this peculiar term stems from the prefix '*ek*' ("*out-*") and the verbal lexeme '*phrazein*', (to speak out, to indicate, to explain) and, thus, it is closely related to another important writing device, a strategy of persuasion particularly cherished among classical rhetoricians: the '*explicatio*'.

While it seems to have come into English in the 18th-century already as a "description of an artwork", the term would have originally referred to the description of an object, in particular, of an *inanimate* object, which the ekphrastic gesture makes it "speak out". In this sense, German scholar Nicola Creighton gives a particularly specific definition of the term: "to call or to

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[232] Emiliem van Opstall.. "THE WORKS OF THE EMPEROR AND THE WORKS OF THE POET: PAUL THE SILENTIARY'S EKPHRASIS OF HAGIA SOPHIA." *Byzantion*, vol. 87, 2017, pp. 387–405. For a translation of the text in English, see: Peter Neville Bell (ed.). *Three political voices from the age of Justinian : Agapetus, 'Advice to the Emperor' : Dialogue on political science : Paul the Silentiary, "Description of Hagia Sophia."* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press: 2009).

[233] Jás Elsner, "Art History as Ekphrasis" in *Art History*, nº 33, vol 1. (February 2010), pp. 10-27.

[234] *Ibid.*

proclaim an inanimate object by its name".[235] That the original meaning of the term implied an action by which the inanimate is made to speak seems to be a technical convention in literary scholarship and often appears unreferenced. One is left to suppose that such a reading is taken from sources that are taken as typical examples of ekphrastic writing in Ancient literature, Homer's description of Achilles's shield in the *Iliad* being often posited as the *locus classicus* of the genre.

I contend that this specific power that the ekphrastic description is said to possess, that is, to make things speak, strongly resonates with how historian of art history Donald Preziosi positions art history's own disciplinary assumption that things and artistic objects can "speak themselves",[236] which he regards as a central tenet of its discursive structure. Similarly, in his recalling Émil Benveniste, Hayden White makes a parallel remark: the belief that inanimate objects have the ability to speak –and can therefore be made to speak– is central to narrativizing discourses (those which give events a narrative form, history proper among them).[237]

Another relationship between ekphrasis and art history seems to emerge here. What I am trying to show is that there seems to be an intimate link between ekphrasis and the (art)-historical account on the level of discourse; not just when these are taught and disseminated. In this regard, narrative starts emerging as an important mode of speaking that bridges the two.

That ekphrasis is a central element, when not the fundamental form of art-historical writing, is the thesis maintained by scholar Jás Elsner, who salutes the creative potential of this narrative genre. In his view, "to say that art history is ekphrasis is to say that it is no less literary and rhetorical as a discipline than it is philosophical or historical. It is to claim the study of art as playful and fictional as well as serious and substantial".[238]

I find Elsner's description of art history as an ekphrastic type of writing particularly illuminating. Not only does it not compromise its rigour as an

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[235] Creighton, Nicola. "Peace Talks Between Image and Word: Carl Einstein's Struggle for a Non-Totalizing Ekphrasis". *Narrative(s) in Conflict*, edited by Wolfgang Müller-Funk and Clemens Ruthner, Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017, pp. 63-86.
[236] Donald Preziosi, *Rethinking Art History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 83.
[237] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" in T*he Content of the Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 1-25.
[238] Jás Elsner, "Art History as Ekphrasis", p. 26.

academic discipline, says Elsner; the intermedial, narrative nature inherent to describing an artwork holds value in itself. It allows for an understanding of art history as literary practice where ekphrastic description occupies a prominent place—whether ekphrasis truly is the paradigmatic genre of art-historical writing is a statement that is not free of controversy but Elsner's focus on narrative description is here of interest for a number of reasons. It will be important further down in my analysis, when I address the relationship between curatorial writing and art criticism (pp. 97-101).

Moreover, just like Stake accommodates the researcher's personal interest (pp. 88-89), which becomes a constituent element of the operative shift that a specific thing undergoes from being *a something* into becoming a case, narrative description of an artwork similarly allows the researcher to explicitly include their desire for the artwork that is being described. In other words, it re-inscribes art history as a writing practice that exists within a libidinal economy, a move which, in my view, demystifies the purportedly aseptic relationship between the researcher and her object of study, a drive that similarly kindles my writing as expressed in pages 47-48.

I am revisiting how ekphrastic, narrative descriptions have come into art-historical writing to show that, indeed, it is a useful tool both to rethink the discipline and to utilise when one is putting together an art-historical account. In other words, I am ok with ekphrasis. I think it holds value in and of itself. While I do not think that narrative description is "the only way" as it certainly is for post-critique (or anti-critique?) thinkers such as Bruno Latour,[239] I do acknowledge that narration, here specifically in its ekphrastic form, comes from an existential tragedy and has an epistemic purpose: I am here writing my thesis at my desk and, unfortunately, you are not, and the only way for me to share this with you, to generate something like an experiential exchange, is by telling you. This is the fundamental role that narrative and storytelling plays, for instance, in Walter Benjamin's view: to make the exchange of otherwise inalienably private experiences possible, an

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[239] Bruno Latour, *Re-assembling the social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), in particular, a vindication of (ideologically innocent) description can be found in *On the Difficulty of Being an ANT*, an interview included in the book just cited.

ability which, at the time he was writing *The Storyteller*, the philosopher feared we were somehow losing.[240] Benjamin's is, in my view, a beautiful, full-of-hope understanding of what telling something to someone does. The very writing of my thesis does not escape the reader's alterity and their absence either.

Things get even more tragic when ekphrastic accounts are referring to examples of performative practice. To an extent, all the argumentation above works well with (and is implicitly having in mind) a notion of visual arts that is eminently modernist: painting, sculpture and, if anything, architecture. This is, in part, understandable, since the objects that are being described often still exist and one could claim that a good ekphrasis instils in the reader the desire to aesthetically experience the object at issue, just like a good review.

For example, George Eliot's review of Antigone starts describing a specific performance that she had attended at a theatre on Drury Lane. While it would be an idle pursuit to want to witness that very same show, Sophocles's text is still available today—altered, translated, disfigured but available at Waterstones. And even though, certainly, my experiencing Antigone is necessarily, infinitely different from George Eliot's, an ekphrastic account or a critical review would be, on the contrary, all I would have when the artwork is, for instance, a performance by Tino Sehgal, which, as it is known, is carefully designed as to not leave or produce any sort of material that could act as documentation.[241]

Nevertheless, if what makes a description ekphrastic is its portraying an artwork, there is, in principle, nothing that prevents a performance piece from lending itself to being accounted for through this genre, since performance is today considered an artistic form in its own right, even though modernist, objectual conceptions of art may still be prevalent. Take, for instance, RoseLee Goldberg's landmark book *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*[242]

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[240] Walter Benjamin. *The Storyteller* (New York: New York Review Book, 2019), pp. 48-49.
[241] Véronique Hudon. "The Curator's Work: Stories and Experiences from Tino Sehgal's Events" in Véronique Hudon et al (eds.) *Curating Live Arts: Critical Perspectives, Essays, and Conversations on Theory and Practice* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), pp. 263–72.
[242] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2011).

or her more recent volume *Performance Now*,[243] where descriptive narrations of what a particular performance might have consisted of occupy a great part of her writing.

It is no wonder that accounts of curatorial projects that are in essence conversational or speech-based and therefore performative —or, as curatorial wisdom would have it, *discursive*– need to resort to a type of narration that is essentially the ekphrastic account of said curatorial projects. While these rhetorical platforms might not be artworks in themselves, they do follow, as a specific instance of curatorial practice, "the logic of contemporary art", as Maria Lind would have it and, with it, the (i)logic of performance. In this sense, I do not believe that a performance programme is any more performative than a curatorial symposium, a thought that stems from my understanding of performativity as elaborated in pages 111-114.

In what follows, I analyse two excerpts from *Exhibiting the Voice*. Both refer to *BirdBecomeBird,* a performative/sound piece by Irish artist and writer Suzanne Walsh.

The first passage could be considered an ekphrasis. The second one, however, might seem to be an example of ekphrastic writing but it isn't.

> "The performance started with a sequence of improvised sung phrases on a loop, and as the piece progressed it developed into a cacophony of non-human voices, eventually filling the space with cries and cackles. At no point during the performance did one notice Walsh emitting animalistic sounds into the microphone. However, it was a series of twitters and other bird sounds that recurred in the chorus of looped sound fragments. Evenetually [sic], these sounds led back to a musical sequence".[244]

What is this first excerpt doing? What type of writing is this? It seems to me that it is a description. It is giving an account of how the artist generates a cacophony of animal-sounds from the accretion of recorded snippets of her

[243] RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Now* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2018).
[244] Dittel and Novak, *loc. cit.*, accessed May 2022.

voice, till these become indistinguishable from each other. While I do not think that this is a specimen of belle-lettres writing, it shouldn't be a problem to concede that it is finely redacted. Whereas it is difficult to discern its vividness —how could one possibly gauge that?– images of what the performance might have looked like are coming to (my) mind. In sum, it is, one could argue, vivid enough. It ticks the necessary boxes to qualify as an ekphrasis.

Novak's is a nicely written description of Walsh's work which, if one keeps reading, extends beyond a mere depiction of its elements but, rather, of its functioning. After all, describing a performance seems to beg an account of what it *does*:

> "Suzanne Walsh's performance never truly became birdsong, in the sense of a virtuosic mimicry. Neither did it allude to the "animal within", which is a frequent trope of classical philosophy and psychoanalysis, and one in which animality becomes a locus for projections representing human weaknesses. Instead, Walsh's piece occupied a confusing thin line along which human and bird vocalisations merged into one another"[245]

If the turn from representational to non-representational practices in contemporary art and curation has entailed, on the level of theory, a discursive shift from the question "what does it mean?" towards the question "how does it work?", it seems a fortunate choice to describe how an artwork operates when, as in this case, the piece at issue is a performance.

Unavoidably, the non-representational turn has dramatically influenced art writing practices—after all, performative and discursive art seemed to demand a type of narrative account other than the objectual description— and it has been at the core of the shift from art criticism towards curatorial texts. In order to further understand how this type of "operative" description functions, it might be worth looking with a bit of detail at the evolution of art criticism since the 1980s and at how it has reflected those changes, leading into a type of writing practice that resonates with curatorial literature.

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[245] *Ibid.*

When looking closely at what was being said about art criticism at the time curatorial discourse was first emerging,[246] there are tropes or concerns pervading those conversations which resonate with important tensions that have been at the core of curatorial thinking: for instance, in the colloquium *Are They Writing Like Mandarins?* (1989) and, more especially, the symposium *Writing about Art* (1991)—both bringing together some of the most important figures of Anglo-American criticism—what status art criticism held as a type of language occupied a central place in the conversation. What seemed to be in question in those colloquia was the legitimacy of art criticism as a meaning-making practice. By extension, the case for the authorial voice of the art critic was also under scrutiny. Whether art criticism was a type of specialism distinct from, for instance, art history or art theory was therefore at stake, even though, in its shift from being a registry of aesthetic experience towards a producer of context, art criticism was increasingly reliant on the two. In other words, what was being interrogated at the time is whether art criticism had something to say in and for itself that could not be said by means of other types of specialist writing—to translate the terms of this debate into a language that resonates more with curatorial discourse, the question remained whether art criticism, that is, a type of rhetorical production on art, held any specific value any longer, which is not dissimilar to the all too familiar quarrel between curating as an eminently exhibitionary practice versus the production of curatorial discourse, which will be shown in pages 195-196. In fact, the art criticism of the 1980s and 1990s was being seen as "merely rhetorical" after having embraced a writing style characterised by its obscurity and sententiousness, a trait that would still pervade it well into the 2000s.[247] In turn, the embracing of this obscurity had been initiated in the late 1970s as a gesture that mirrored the intricate language that literary criticism was using at the time and indexically saluted the irruption of post-structural philosophy in American academia. But this somewhat manierist state which art criticism was in in the last decades of 20th century had originally started as a fruitful dialogue with post-structural critique that addressed the

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[246] That is, curatorial discourse understood here as explicit self-reflection on curatorial practice.

[247] Matthew Arnatt and Matthew Collings. *Criticism* (London: Rachmaninoffs, 2004).

epistemic foundations of the humanities and the social sciences—the examination of the case-study being part of this—: that is, art criticism started to think itself and "to interrogate [its] own assumptions regarding judgement".[248] This was not however the only logic art criticism would echo. As Michael Shreyach notes, the shift from contemplative aesthetics towards direct participation of the public in the 1970s—at least posited as such by artists— would be accelerated in the 1980s with art's (or at least part of it) expressed commitment to intervention in politics: "the boundaries traditionally maintained between aesthetics and actual participation eroded the artificial divisions between art criticism and criticism of society (...) the result was a reunification of political and art criticism".[249]

So far, it is possible to see how, indeed, this discursive arena of the late 20th century was, if not prefiguring, at least undergoing changes that strongly resonate with the shifts that have transformed curating into a practice that seeks both to redistribute knowledge and to alter the status quo, shifts that have followed the changes in artistic practice that Shreyach also mentions. Actually, a different terminology might render Shreyach's account somewhat more recognisable: the shift from representational to post-representational artistic practices is what blurs the distinction between art criticism and political critique. But there is one specific debate within the wider context of the developments described above, I contend, which pertains particularly to its relationship to the case-study as a primary writing strategy: the question of whether art criticism should be formally taught and whether it should be part of artistic training. The several symposia that would later lead to the publication of Elkins's *The State of Art Criticism* indeed reveal that, in the early 2000s, there was a professional concern for the transmission of this practice, that is, how and if art criticism was a type of writing that can be taught and learnt—and who gets to qualify as an art critic. I think it is easy to recognise how this debate resonates with the discussion on professional courses in curation versus qualification by practice, as outlined in pages 55-57. What I think is of interest here is how this concern seems to come hand in hand with the disappearance of a readership for art criticism—a complaint

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[248] Mark Bauerlein. "A Commentary on the First Roundtable" in James Elkins (ed.) *The State of Art Criticism*, pp. 308-312, 309.
[249] Michael Shreyach, "The Recovery of Criticism" in *The State of Art Criticism*, p. 9.

which, as of 2019, Raphael Rubenstein would still maintain.[250] Elkins mourns what appears to be a period of decadence for art critical writing, when art criticism, depicted as dying from its success, is being written and published in numbers never seen before and is present everywhere in the art world. Art criticism was ubiquitous and yet nobody seemed to care.[251]

This is exactly the same critique that spurs John Gerring's by-now classic article *What Is a Study Case and What is It Good For?*, where he explicitly acknowledges the disciplinary paradox sitting at the core of political science (his field of practice): "Although much of what we know about the empirical world is drawn from case studies and case studies continue to constitute a large proportion of the work generated by the discipline, the case study *method* is held in low regard or is simply ignored".[252] Gerring's pointing out that lack of interrogation regarding the case-study as a research method which, oddly enough, remains central to political science, closely resonates with Elkin's depiction of the state of art criticism. Curiously enough, both texts were published one year apart.

This is not, however, the only intertwining between reflective accounts of art criticism and debates on case-study research. Just like there is something ekphrastic to the accounts that art history produces, art criticism has inevitably resorted to sensuous description as a primary component of art review writing. But, at the same time, the texts produced by art criticism necessarily entail a notional, if implicit understanding of what art is or should be or what art should do, hence the bound-to-happen tension between art criticism and art theory. (Traditional) art criticism, be it a review on a painting or be it on a performance, was and is underpinned by at least some kind of "ready-to-hand" concept of painting or performance art—lack of theoretical explicitation does not mean that no underpinning theory exists. On the contrary, we might be in the presence of an older one. It is also easy to see that the same is also true of art history: the fact that cake recipes are not part of the repertoire of objects art history devotes itself to indicates that there is some

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[250] Raphael Rubenstein. "Where is the Audience for Art Criticism Now?" in *Art in America*, October 1, 2019.
[251] James Elkins. What Happened to Art Criticism?
[252] John Gerring. *What is a Case Study and What is It Good For?*, p. 342.

sort of discernment, some sort of preliminary understanding, however incongruent, however problematic, of what art is.[253]

While not an example of practice that uses the case-study for research purposes, art criticism, because of such preliminary knowledge, operates in a case-study-like logic when reviewing a specific given artwork. Art reviews resort to ekphrastic description while drawing attention on a specific artwork, an artist, or an exhibition that is then presented as exemplary (or "unexemplary") of such preliminary theory.

When taken to the realm of post/non-representational practices in art and curating, a different type of account able to include the newly generated relationships between audiences, artworks, and institutions might seem somehow to be required. Even though self-reported, Rogoff and Von Bismarck's narration of their projects in the previous chapter purported to explain (and validate) the type of constituency generated by their projects—let us refer to this type of description as "operational" ekphrasis, since I already used this term provisionally before (pp. 96-97)—. What I think is crucial here is how both curators used instances of their practice to *exemplify* the notion they were discussing.

This exemplary logic has persisted. In the evolution from art criticism towards reflective accounts of curatorial practice, thinking through examples still is a central rhetorical strategy if not an epistemic foundation—it might well be what they both have in common. The relationship, as I hope to show later on (pp. 106-108), is in fact more complicated: just like the case-study might serve several purposes, there's an oscillation between the anecdotal and the extraordinary that the example bridges. It is precisely the extraordinary example (the exception) that connects contemporary curatorial literature with art historical writing, I contend.

Through my analysis of the conversation held between Rogoff and Von Bismarck (pp. 49-50), I had started to point out why it was problematic, or at least not innocent, that a curator reports on behalf of the audience and that

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[253] Donal Preziosi, Op. cit., especially Chapter 2: *The Obscure Object of Desire. The Art of Art History*.

there was a risk of making claims that are rather unsubstantiated. While something similar is at play in *Exhibiting the Voice*, what this second passage from Dittel and Novak's text is doing is slightly different.

To Novak, there seems to be two theoretical demands that are non-negotiable, two conditions that Post-Opera needs to satisfy. These two conditions, which *BirdBecomesBird* meets, are, on the one hand, that the project challenges Western politico-aesthetic conceptions of what is often understood by the phrase "to have a voice" and, on the other hand, that this critique needs to be posited through a posthuman prism.[254] This is instantiated by Walsh's sound performance in that, as one learns, her work is shifting away from mimetic representation of Nature (Western category challenged; tick) and it is generating an interspecies sonority where the human and the animal non-human blur and reveal what they have in common (post-human take on the notion of voice; tick)—"Without aiming to represent or mimic animality, Walsh's performance evoked a mutual interdependence of species, as well as invoking our intermingled past and future",[255] indicates Novak.

This is, indeed, pretty nuanced stuff and, surely, Suzanne Walsh's work is a sophisticated piece of sound and performance that successfully achieved its poetic and discursive goals. There is no irony in my words: I am convinced that, to some, it did—after all, who am I to say otherwise? I wasn't even there! Besides, I must admit that I do understand what Novak is talking about. After a first reading of her text, I find myself buying the argument of the article. Where is the problem then?

The problem is that I do not think that this second passage is an example of ekphrastic description. My reluctance to accept it as such is because, despite the apparently descriptive tone, what this passage is doing is telling me how Walsh's sound performance must be read. That is, while the first excerpt indeed rendered a sensuous, evocative description of the project, this second paragraph is describing the discursive loci where, according to the curator, this particular artwork is situated. The artwork description that the reader is given is actually fixating the discursive tropes that Walsh's performance is speaking or relating to. This is, in my view, epistemically and politically

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[254] *Ibid.*
[255] *Ibid.*

problematic since the fragment at hand is not only acting as a regulatory device of the discourse the text is affiliated to but is *also* regulatory of the reader's own tropes of reception. In other words, I am being told the way I need to be understanding the artwork in relation to and as embodiment of the critique it is trying to posit. It doesn't really need to expressly deny that other interpretations are possible but in presenting itself as 'performative ekphrasis', for lack of a better name (that is, something that looks like an ekphrastic account), the (im)possibility of dissident, conflicting interpretations easily goes unnoticed. It looks like "mere", "innocent" description. In sum, Novak's 'pseudo-ekphrastic' account is resituating the discursive frame where the activity of reading and the meanings such activity produces *can* happen. What kind of text is this which is able to cherry-pick the discursive formations that pertain to it and which can seamlessly regulate its own interpretation? What would have happened if at the end of his *Ulysses*, conscious that he might have taken things a bit to far, Joyce would added a little explanatory note reading: "Dear reader", he would go, "I had a lot of fun putting together this impossible-to-decipher, beaut-of-modernist-prose book, but you can find attached the master code so you can know what I actually meant. This is a great compass that you can use to navigate my writing with certainty; it will allow you to know what I meant across interpretive communities, discourse formations, ideological shifts and centuries of literary history. It doesn't really matter who you are or where you are coming from. This is what it all means and your interpretation is, alas, irrelevant." Probably, nothing really would have happened, one could say, since I would still be privy to the promiscuous exercise that reading is.

I am using an absurd mock example to illustrate that there is a difference between a work of fiction, even if it included a "how-to-read-me" brochure attached to it, posited as able to resist all possible interpretive contexts, and a text that is positioning itself as a piece of research writing in its own right, that, however, seems to necessitate that all other possible interpretations at the live event coincide with the text's. The fundamental difference lies in that it doesn't really matter how many interpretations Joyce's readership can generate, its multiplicity will not compromise its functioning as a literary

work: actually it is because interpretations are potentially infinite that literary and artistic works *work*. In the case of the text at hand, however, only if I accept the fixating of discursive *loci* and I admit an interpretive code that slips by as ekphrastic description, Novak text works. In other words, only by taking Novak's interpretation as the only possible one, her argument holds water. And while this might indeed be an okay interpretation shared by everyone who could attend and see *BirdBecomeBird* (literary and artistic common sense tells me that this is pretty unlikely), the text is certainly silent as to whether other art objects, exhibitionary devices or the audience's behaviour might have actually enhanced, hampered or completely obscured that reading. Only the curator, whose witnessing is posited as both the practitioner's and the audience's, seems to know the true reading and meaning of this particular sound performance piece, omniscient of all the subtleties and fine complexities that underlie the artwork, presented to us as a unity with no internal contradictions and, I would wager, no room for criticism other than the curator's. Nevertheless, curatorial ekphrastic writing can aspire farther. As we learn when Dittel describes another piece included in the exhibition, Martin Riches's *The Audition*, "the uncanny experience of a baritone voice arising from a strange yet striking and charming contraption, singing an operatic aria, *provoked emphatic audience reactions*".[256] The curators' ekphrastic and interpretive skills are here extended to include what the public has felt, whose aesthetic experience of the artwork becomes somehow transparent before the curatorial mind. This case blurs together production, intention, materialisation and reception into a singular moment which only the curator seems to capture as omniscient narrator. As much as it is an acceptable objection to adduce that my writing is doing the same, and that such is the persuasive work of rhetoric in general, I think the crucial difference is that, for this case study to be exemplary, the interpretive multifariousness of the audience needs to be presented as univocal.

Indeed, the last is an extreme instance of curatorial rhetoric where epistemic hubris seems to have been given free rein. However, while I am not trying to say that the public's aesthetic experience is always included through the curator's reporting—often it is not included at all—*Exhibiting the Voice* is a

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[256] Ibid, my italics.

good example of the great disparity between the purported interpretive, aesthetic openness of the exhibitionary project and the tight mechanisms of hermeneutic control that can be operating in the texts such projects generate.

Certainly, one could adduce as an objection to my argument that I can still interpret both Walsh's piece and Novak's text as I deem fit, that I am generously included in the community of interest that shared readership somehow facilitates. But it is my view, as I have tried to point out in the first chapter, that this type of literary/artistic theory that implicitly underlies curatorial thinking is flawed and, furthermore, becomes all the more problematic when it is confronted with the epistemic and political horizontality curators purport to herald and instantiate. While it is not for me to call into question *what* might have happened at a given exhibition, what it is said about it cannot reproduce the exact same 'event of knowledge' because those words, uttered or written, are distributed in ways and places, be these discursive or physical, where pre-existing power dynamics exist. In sum, the great hermeneutic "conversation that we ourselves are",[257] as Gadamer would have it, that global readership curating seeks to reach to, cannot explain or account for the unequal conditions of reception where such (in this case curatorial) conversation circulates. To quote Terry Eagleton, this type of argument "cannot (...) come to terms with the problem of ideology — with the fact that the unending "dialogue" of human history is as often as not a monologue by the powerful to the powerless, or that if it is indeed a "dialogue" then the partners (...) hardly occupy equal positions".[258] This is all the more problematic, I contend, when the places where the conversation on curating are allowed to happen have also been delimited and sanctioned by curatorial discourse itself, as seen in the previous chapter (pp. 73-74).

In limiting the interpretation of *BirdBecomeBird* by fixating the discursive tropes it speaks to, one further consequence emerges here that should not go unnoticed: the things that are said about Walsh's sound performance, a description which should help us imagine and understand what a post-human,

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[257] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheer and Ward, 1975), p. 340.
[258] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory. An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 73.

non-Western poetics of the singing voice would look like, could actually be said about *any* iteration or instantiation of *BirdBecomeBird*. Whether the physicality of the space, the particularities of a specific institutional setting, the general mood of the audience, or even the "tech specs" altered in any shape or form the delivering of Walsh's piece remains unanswered. Did anything go wrong? And if so, isn't this hypothetical failure where the uniqueness of this particular iteration of a performance might hold its specificity?

In my view, it wouldn't be unreasonable to label this type of narration as "anti-performative". By giving only one account of how this sound performance worked and by positing it as successfully instantiating the discursive rationale of the exhibition, the unavoidable variability that performative iteration brings in itself is somehow diluted, if not obliterated. Moreover, in what surfaces now as an oxymoron, it is telling the reader nothing specific about the exhibition. *BirdBecomeBird*, while accounted for as part of a specific instance of curatorial practice, is however positioned amidst the intangible, slippery vacuum of discourse. But I think it is also possible to maintain the view that there is something "anti-curatorial" in the way Walsh's work is somehow uprooted or pulled up from its exhibitionary context. While curatorial projects overtly profess their (critical) situatedness and embeddedness in the historical and institutional contexts where they take place and while it is possible to maintain that curating, as a whole, posits itself as a situated field of practice, this "dis-situating" gesture becomes all the more problematic.

Art criticism and curatorial ventriloquism

In this chapter, I have been analysing the case-study as a primary writing strategy in curatorial discourse, often taking the form of a self-reported retelling about a curator's own projects. I was trying to show how this specific type of research account resonates with writing strategies that had traditionally been used and problematised in the social sciences while potentially constituting a form of art criticism at a time when shifts in contemporary artistic practice demand something else other than aesthetic gratification. Such changes can be succinctly summarised under the turn from the representational to the non-representational in artistic and curatorial practice, a complex, multifaceted turn that has operated at various levels, both material, discursive and institutional, which I shall explain in more detail in pages 118-119. An understanding of art which doesn't see itself as representation, that is, as encapsulating some ulterior meaning (be it the artist's intention or psyche, a specific social context, or some poetical machinery the critic is able to sift through) but, rather, conceives it as a practice that does something, that *works,* and that holds ideological sway in publics and audiences, seems to beg a different type of writing, a different kind of criticism. Instead of a demise of art criticism due to "a decline of critical authority", as Brian Dillon points out it in his review of Boris Groys's *Art Powe*r, it might prove more advantageous to think through art criticism's apparent waning as a transfer of such critical authority from the critic to the curator, the latter being a practitioner that not only puts up shows but also writes, thinks, convenes and publishes.[259]

This is no new idea. In an essay published in 2010, Tom Morton suggested how such transfer would explain what had somehow become a jaded trope in contemporary art discussions: that art criticism was or is in crisis.[260] Echoing an older text by Alex Farquhason,[261] Morton points at the professional promiscuity of curators, who more often than not, produce writing that one

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[259] Brian Dillon. "Art Power" in *frieze,* 09 Sept 2008, https://www.frieze.com/article/art-power (accessed Nov 22nd 2022).

[260] Tom Morton. *"*Three or Four Types of Intimacy*" in* Jeff Khonsary, Melanie O'Brian (eds.) Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism (Vancouver: Artspeak, 2010).

[261] Alex Farquharson, "Is the Pen Still Mightier?" in *frieze* no. 92 (June–August 2005), 118–19.

cannot but consider art criticism.[262] Together with a shift in the agents producing criticism, such changes also entail a shift in the theoretical framework that underpins art thinking. To put it in the same terminology I have been previously using, the discourse that made art criticism possible (which would in turn be regulated by the very writing of art criticism) has changed as well.[263] If one compares the essay I analysed above, where the effects of different performative moments on the audience are central to the case made by authors, with, say, an art review about an early example of "political" art, one might easily feel perplexed. Look, for instance, at Roberta Smith's review on the Whitney Biennial held in 1993. Smith brings her review to an end by adding a little nugget of art theory, a short paragraph where, in a manifesto-like fashion, she sums up what art (and what good art) should look like: "art is a form of visual communication that must exist for its own sake before it can further a cause".[264] The fact that this Katian rhetoric that champions art's autonomy sounds today somewhat dated (if not bewildering) suggests a major shift in the way we understand art.

While all of this is applicable to artistic and curatorial practices that aim to present or posit a more or less deconstructive critique on a given topic or a specific problem, it might be worth spending some time looking at what writing and speaking about curating might do when the practice at issue is seeking to stage, enact or instantiate something like a political experiment/experience. Through my writing, while I have acknowledged that the search for political and knowledge redistribution is at the heart of contemporary curating, I haven't undertaken an analysis of the thinking that underlies such claims. While the vocabulary being used in curating's rhetorical production is often implicit and at times slippery, it is possible to find examples where the type of community-like instantiation that a curatorial project might facilitate is characterised in detail.

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[262] Tom Morton. Op. cit.
[263] I am here using the term discourse in its Foucaldian sense, as a set of relations between ideas, institutions, objects, and practices that make a statement possible.
[264] Roberta Smith. "At the Withney, A Biennial With a Social Conscience" in The New York Times, March 5th 1993, https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/05/arts/at-the-whitney-a-biennial-with-a-social-conscience.html (Accessed Nov 13th 2022).

Wiggling the Frame: "Philadelphia Assembled" and "Trainings for the Non-Yet", a four-way conversation between Jeanne van Heeswijk, Mick Wilson, Maria Hlavajova and Damon Reaves, contains a number of rich, thorough elaborations about how exhibitionary practices and curatorial work can devise "protocols" or "pathways of engagement", to use Heeswijk's own terminology, that allow already-existing agents and initiatives to participate in the planning and execution of an exhibition. Published as part of the three-part series that form *On the Question of Exhibitions*, this conversation transcript analyses the curatorial premise and working methodology underlying two projects by Van Heeswijk at Philadelphia Museum of Art (2014-2017) and at Utrecht-based artistic platform BAK (2019-2020).

Underpinning the text, there is a recentering gesture that positions exhibitionary practices as platforms where political horizontality and knowledge redistribution can *also* happen, after two decades when discursive, dialogical and durational projects in contemporary art *beyond* the exhibition were purported as ideal formats for such inclusiveness. This is not to say that *Philadelphia Assembled* and *Trainings for the Non-Yet* are neither discursive, dialogical nor durational. On the contrary, the span, methodology and processual nature of these two projects say otherwise, as I will explain below (pp. 117-118). What *Wiggling the Frame* seeks to reimagine, through these specific examples of artistic and exhibitionary practice, is how exhibitions can also be the result of collective, community-driven negotiation while inhabiting the nooks and crannies of an institution. To an extent, it resonates with another conversation that was analysed above: Curating/Curatorial, held by Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck; *Wiggling the Frame* being somewhat closer to Von Bismarck's view that exhibitions, as the conventional home of curating, can also bring about a disruption of hegemonic narratives.

While such collectively held exchanges and discussions are fundamental to Van Hesswijk's artistic practice as well as to Hlavajova's curatorial vision, how exactly they operate and how they might keep functioning once the staging of the project is over is what *Wiggling the Frame* attempts to problematize. I will try now to unpack what claims are held on collectivity and its agency

throughout the text at hand as well as what value they are deemed to have once they leave the institutional space.

The text's title already allows one to get a glimpse of the speakers' institutional thinking, that is, their view on how (art) institutions operate insofar as sites of ideological production, hegemonic discourse or, simply put, managerial power in an art project. *Wiggling the Frame* suggests that institutional spaces are, above all, structures, a type of scaffolding which, in being wiggled, is taken as necessary (otherwise, the title might have been "Burning the Frame", "Dumping the Frame" or "Down with the Frame"). If one keeps thinking through this metaphor, it would be possible to argue that, since this structure is a frame and not, for instance, a diesel motor, the speakers might be thinking of an edifice-like thing that has gaps and vents. It would also seem plausible that the frame they are thinking of might support something else, or might delimit something, or it might be one's gaze which it is framing. What else could one possibly say about this frame? As I have already indicated, It wiggles, which means that it cannot be fully rigid, otherwise it would break. It possesses certain flexibility, enough to be wiggled, to accommodate a certain amount of change.

Despite the playful tone, this is no rhetorical game. I am trying to show what the title might connote in order to render visible the speaker's positioning in relation to how institutional power works. Institutions are here entertained not as monoliths, but as having margin for change since the frames that form them have some flexibility. In a nutshell: there is still (wiggle) *room* for hope. Within the discursive arena of curating, this understanding of institutions as spaces where negotiation can take place somehow opposes the view that traditional institutional settings have no space for dissent or ideological nonconformity and, if they do, such dissent is immediately commodified by the grip of display (I shall come back to this later, in pages 114-116). The institutional thinking that pervades *Wiggling the Frame* thinks through art institutions beyond zero-sum game logics and sees them as complex structures where rabbit holes with the potential to disrupt, if provisionally, their power machinery exist and can be found.

It actually has an Althusserian ring to it. In his seminal text *Ideology and Ideology States Apparatuses*, Marxian theorist Althusser was set to

re-elaborate Marx's theory of the state at a time when it was felt imperative to de-stalinize Marxist thought.[265] One of Althusser's contributions in this text was his distinction between repressive state apparatuses (i.e., the police, or any other institution that uses coercion or violence) and ideological state apparatuses (i.e., a school), that is, institutions that operate on a symbolic level—to put in more current terms, ISAs intervene at the level of discourse. More importantly, because they are, as it were, less repressive than RSAs, less tight their grip, ISAs can also be 'places' where class struggle, contestation and even their very takeover by the oppressed might occur.

I resort to Althusser because his notion of ISA might lend itself to further understanding institutional thinking within curatorial discourse: as apparatuses, they *function*, they *work*, they are devices that play a role and have a purpose. I would contend that this "functional" reading can bridge the gap between traditional political thinking and curatorial notions of performativity within the institution: if one of the possible meanings of performative is that "it does something", institutions indeed perform because they do things and, similarly, institutions can be performed insofar as they can be made do things differently. I argue that it is in this light how *Wiggling the Frame* must be interpreted.

While this reading resonates with contributions that stem from institutional critique, whose first developments were posited through examples of performative action by artists during the 1960s[266] and the 1990s,[267] there is another link to performativity that underpins the text. *Wiggling the Frame* seems to resort, if tacitly, to Judith Butler's conceptualization of the term to describe and complicate how *Philadelphia Assembled* operates as a working methodology. When further explaining how her "protocols of engagement" work in relation to collaborative practices, Van Heeswijk refers to the words of storyteller and performer Denise Valentine, who convened one of the four

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[265] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideology States Apparatuses", in *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008), pp.

[266] Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions", *October 55*, 1990, pp. 105–143.

[267] Andrea Phraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique" in *Artforum*, Sept 2005.

platforms (or "atmospheres", to use the term used in the project, a term that Van Heewsijk acknowledges elsewhere to have borrowed from Bruno Latour's *Making Things Public),*[268] platforms that, in turn, structured *Philadelphia Assembled.* Valentine notes, says Van Heeswijk, that "these [rehearsals]", that is, the collective practising of these protocols or toolsets, "are non-linear, and that there is a need for a constant repetition for these things to become embodied practices".[269] I contend that, even though unacknowledged, this methodological observation is actually rephrasing Judith Butler's theoretical caution that performativity "is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration".[270]

It is worth lingering over this similarity briefly. If one takes Valentine's remark as a rewording of Butler's explanation on performativity, two aspects stand out as the main tenets of this description: that it is iterative, that is, it happens repeatedly over time, and that such repetition is needed for whatever it is being performed to become embodied or naturalised, the latter being the result of the former. When brought together, embodiment and naturalisation appear to work as akin terms. While "embodiment" is indicative of the tacit, inward, and non-discursive nature of this process, naturalisation seems to suggest a turn towards implicitness, away from reflectivity. The naturalised, performed gesture —a protocol, to keep using one of the key terms Van Heeswijk employs in her practice— has shifted from being conscious and explicit to becoming unconscious and implicit; automated. This is a decisive point, since it is situating performativity as operating on the level of ideology—to Althusser, ideology appears before one as "conscious" only on condition that it is "unconscious".[271] Althusser's notion of ideology is however laid out as absolutely forceful, that is, when the subject is hailed by ideological enunciation, the subject cannot but respond to whatever mandate they are receiving. This theoretical resemblance to fate is what Butler unpacks and

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[268] Interview: Jeanne van Heeswijk and Amanda Sroka, Philadelphia Assembled in title magazine, Dec 8th 2017. http://www.title-magazine.com/2017/12/interview-jeanne-van-heeswijk-and-amanda-sroka-philadelphia-assembled/ (Accessed Oct 28th 2022)
[269] Jeanne Van Heeswijk, "Wiggling the Frame"
[270] Judith Butler, Preface (1999) in *Gender Trouble*, p. xv
[271] Louis Althusser. *For Marx* (London: Verso, 2007 [1969]), p. 233.

complements in her article C*onscience Doth Make Us Subjects of Us All*, which would be later included as part of *The Psychic Life of Power*. In this text, Butler reexamines Althusser's depiction of the subject as always-responding or always-abiding by maintaining that the subject's performative enactments of ideology are deeply intertwined with the subject's own libidinal attachment to the *status quo*. One has a desire to respond to ideological interpellation in a way such that one keeps reproducing existing ideological structures because one's subjectivity or one's account of who one is in part explained by those very same structures. Butler's reexamination allows her to contend that it is through the subject's own inspection of its own desires —why does one respond to gender, for instance, through heteronormativity?; what is at skate for me when I respond to gender in a hegemonically sanctioned way?— that the subject can decide not to abide. In sum, whereas in Althusser ideology is irresistible, Butler's complementary critique of Althusser's characterisation of ideology makes room for the subject's resistance against ideological power.[272]

That Van Heeswijk as well as Hvalavoja have resorted to Butler's thinking to inform their artistic and curatorial practice is nothing new. Van Heeswijk has elsewhere acknowledged being familiar with Butler's thinking and Hlavajova's ongoing curatorial project at BAK, *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living*, overtly echoes Butler's *thinking otherwise* in *What is Critique?*. Perhaps an important difference in *Wiggling the Frame* is that, as opposed to the individual stylization of institutional mandates (of which gender is, in Butler's *Gender Trouble*, a specific case and structure), this conversation is placing the emphasis on collectivity—a turn or shift towards collective action that Butler herself had also started exploring in *Bodies that Matter*.[273] In this sense, in her *Preface* to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler adumbrated a connection between her notion of performativity and Bourdieu's notion of habitus, "a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures,

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[272] Matthew Lampert. "Resisting Ideology: On Butler's Critique of Althusser" in *Diacritics*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2015, pp. 124–47.

[273] See, for instance, her work on "collective institutions for grieving" in Judith Butler. "Critically Queer" in *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class".[274]

What I think is of particular significance is how *Wiggling the Frame* conceals a refined understanding of institutional settings as porous spaces where conflict and contention can take place and be negotiated, while thinking of participants as the main actors of such negotiations through their resistance to reproducing institutional practices of display. A productive space seems to emerge here, delimited between an Althusserian reading of institutional workings and Butler's notion of performativity. This is a complex theoretical account that indeed makes room for institutional change while also, in principle, giving some margin for collective agency. Not only institutions can be wiggled, whatever institutional enunciation or mandate one receives can also be questioned and redone, since it is not fully irresistible. Rendering the theoretical underpinnings of this text is also helpful to understand what institutional mandate such collective exercises, these community learnings or trainings for the non-yet (to use another key term in Van Heeswijk practice, which would in turn lend its name to her project at BAK) are doing in the specific contexts *Wiggling the Frame* refers to.

The conversation begins with a preliminary remark by Mick Wislon, where he describes the invitation received by Van Heeswijk from the Philadelphia Museum of Art "as something like a mid-career retrospective". Van Heeswijk's reading of such an invitation, how she interprets this mandate, is somewhat undoing institutional understandings of exhibitionary practice. As she goes on to say:

> "rather than presenting objects that in some way *belong* to my work or that came about through its processes, I thought it was more interesting to look through the ways in which I have been working (…). I used some of the ways in which I normally start works, creating what I call "protocols of engagement" or "pathways of engagement".[275]

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[274] Diane Reay. "'It's All Becoming a Habitus': Beyond the Habitual Use of Habitus in Educational Research." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2004, pp. 431–44.
[275] Jeanne Van Heeswijk, "Wiggling the Frame".

Something like a displaced or delegated notion of authorship is somewhat emerging in this paragraph, as well as of what counts as artwork, of the relationship between artwork and objecthood. Van Heeswijk's undoing of the invitation she receives for her exhibition translates as a number of conversations held across Philadelphia over a year. The questions being asked (and, implicitly, the mandate to answer them) were, as Van Heeswijk says, "Where are alternatives created? Where are the acts of resistance and resilience? Where are people creating new imaginaries for the future of Philadelphia?".[276] The responses these questions prompted would later configure, through the process Van Heeswijk refers to as "deep listening", the five main platforms that would structure *Philadelphia Assembled*, namely *Reconstructions*, *Sovereignty*, *Futures*, *Sanctuary* and *Movement*. It is these five platforms which received the name of atmospheres, which the artist also calls "fields of interaction", a term that somehow suggests that these platforms were sites for exchange and discussion—it is not clear from the text whether the process of deciding what these atmospheres would enact or address was collegial or, rather, was Van Heewijk's sole decision, even if they were informed by the conversations held with Philadelphia's collectives and grassroots initiatives.

As one learns from Van Heeswijk's account of her project, these platforms hosted a deliberative process where participants had to negotiate and agree on the objects and artefacts that would later be displayed as part of the actual exhibition. In this exercise of value commoning, there is a transfer of the primary mandate of the exhibition, which Mick Wilson at some point describes as "look, this is what is, what matters", from the institution to the different actors participating in the project. This, of course, wasn't free of conflict, as Van Heeswijk reports. As she recalls:

> "There was, for instance, a textile display upstairs in the building
> where the exhibition took place. For conservation reasons it was
> important that moths would not enter the building. To ensure this,
> all objects needed to go into "the freezer." But how do you then

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[276] *Ibid.*

bring in a spiritual object and put it in a freezer to sterilize it? (...) There were many interesting conflicts like this from an exhibition-making standpoint: How should the objects be delivered? How should they be received?"

Indeed, this example illustrates well the type of conflict that this sort of deliberative practice, where different value sets are confronted, might trigger. Dissent happened and the text acknowledges it. And yet, the text is silent as to whether spiritual objects ended up in the freezer. What was overridden here? Was it health and safety? Was it the physical integrity of the textile piece? Or was it, rather, the sacrosanct nature of whatever spiritual objects the exhibition featured?. It almost seems as if, by acknowledging this episode of dissent, of conflicting artefacts sharing the exhibitionary space, this friction was somewhat resolved. More crucially, two questions that come to mind are not asked: How was conflict mediated here? Who mediates conflict in this particular case? Even though these questions are not explicitly made, it might be possible to find an answer in Van Heeswijk's account of another instance of the project:

> I think that was clear within the Sanctuary atmosphere working group. (...) [I]n the second meeting of that group of twenty five people, it turned out that there were not many value sets that were held in common among them. The interesting response that the group produced was to say: "OK, let's pause for a moment, let's put judgement aside and let's go and practice some of each other's toolsets, in order to understand the works done and take it from there." The idea of working collectively with different people's skillsets or toolsets or value sets was born there, to deal with different understandings of Sanctuary.[277]

While indeed there is a concrete example of mediation here, one cannot but wonder whose toolsets or value sets were being practised through this exchange. Was it everyone's individually? Was it all of them? Was it only those

[277] Ibid.

value sets that were conflicting or not shared in common? More importantly, the fact that this practising of someone else's toolsets (a term the text seems to equate to value sets) leads into an 'understanding', that is, a point where the participants can take things from, implies that, again, something like a common ground and the resolution of conflicting views has been achieved. Internecine tensions within the group have been left behind and a univocal project everyone understands has been defined. I contend this is not very dissimilar from how semantic meaning was fixated in *Exhibiting the Voice*. The performativity of these toolsets, the embodied repetition of their use, always produces the same outcome: the absence of conflict. Putting into practice someone else's value sets necessarily generates an understanding of such values. Whereas I would agree that indeed some sort of insight can be gained from this type of exercise, are these understandings always the same? Does the practising of such toolsets necessarily entail a non-conflicting understanding thereof? Is this understanding of how understanding works somewhat anti-performative? To go back to Butler, if the mandate of gender cannot anticipate the multiple ways in which it is going to be understood and performed (one cannot fully succeed in performing gender), how can different answers be resolved in one univocal reading? How is it possible that all of the responses to the questions being asked can be successfully resolved as one common understanding? Or is this univocal character an illusion generated by the text?

'Understanding' seems therefore to be another key term in Van Heeswijk's practice—as well as in Hlavajova's curatorial thinking, as I will show below (pp. 118-119). In *Philadelphia Assembled*, understanding (of different protocols, different value sets; of the different concepts the atmospheres enact) is what is exchanged and practised, its result being the series of objects that the exhibition displays. To put it differently, through using those toolsets, through the performativity of those exercises, one seems to gain some sort of knowledge—yet another instance in curatorial literature of practical wisdom, that is, knowledge acquired through the practising of a practice. That is, in practising the toolsets, one 'understands'.

What does one understand, though? While understanding is what somehow makes *Philadelphia Assembled* possible as an exhibition, understanding

seems to be the outcome of *Trainings for Non-Yet*, Van Heeswijk's next project. Informed and devised during *Philadelphia Assembled*, *Trainings for the Non-Yet* was hosted by BAK in between 2019 and 2020. Whereas protocols of engagements were what facilitated the Philadelphia exhibition, in the project at BAK these exercises were conceived as happening "already within the exhibitionary process".[278] These were practice- or skill-focused, often taking the form of a workshop convened either by Van Heeswijk herself or other practitioners, where the training delivered or practised ranged "from "dreamscaping" to radical listening, from creating sanctuary to enacting radical care, from fighting housing struggles to building solidarity economies, and from composing intersectional alliances to becoming collective".[279] In *Wiggling the Frame*, this vast array of different tools are summed up by Hvalavoja as "enacting a collectively negotiated *understanding* of what would make for a good society".[280] Again, the singular outcome (one understanding) is the result of some negotiation, some agreement that results from a dissension that lends itself to resolution. What makes for a good society is univocally understood by everyone. Receiving or participating in these trainings, even though such training might be practised in manifold, conflicting ways, results in consensus.

That something like a harmonious resolution, a univocal understanding, has been achieved through Van Heeswijk's practice becomes all the more clear when attention is drawn to another piece of documentation generated by this project: her website. Hers is a strikingly forceful example of textbook representation of the non-representational. Van Heeswijk's site presents her practice as an interactive atlas that the user can navigate in order to find out about her work. Since she conceives of her different projects as mutually related, what the website displays is an entangled map of lines or radii that stem from a series of points, non-linearly scattered over a seemingly endless blank surface, each point referring to a specific instance of her work—*Philadelphia Assembled*, *Trainings for the Non-Yet*, her still on-going series *Public Faculty*, etc—. Upon clicking on one of these points, a new set of

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278 Ibid.
279 https://www.bakonline.org/program-item/trainings-for-the-not-yet/
280 Jeanne Van Heeswijk, "Wiggling the Frame".

radii spreads, forming a circle of dots whose centre is the point being clicked—this is a feature not every point displays. These new dots that crown the radii signify the participants involved in the project. Since they are arranged in a circle, all of them are placed at the same distance from the centre (the project itself). In other words, their relationship to the project is presented as the same. Whatever and whoever *Philadelphia Assembled*, for instance, when put together, can lend themselves to the most perfect of forms, a circle, a harmonious community that has gathered around a project where conflict and dissent have been obliterated—interestingly enough, *Trainings for the Non-Yet* doesn't generate a circle of dots.

It is important to remember at this point that what *Wiggling the Frame* is doing, in discussing Van Heeswijk's practice, is to posit *Philadelphia Assembled* and *Trainings for the Non-Yet* as 'exemplary'. It is a four-way conversation where two instances of artistic/curatorial practice are presented as examples of collective action in exhibitionary practices—in the former, an exhibition is the result of such an action; in the latter, collective action is what happens in the exhibition. While this is not to say that Van Heeswijk's work is discussed as paradigmatic, it is indeed a case study of good, virtuous practice—so virtuous that it allows, to recall Hvalajova's words, us to understand how a good society could take place.

  In the first chapter, I analysed Beatrice von Bismarck's *Exhibition as Collective*, her account of Dorit Margreiter's show *Raumvermittlung*, hosted by the project space */D/O/K/C* in 2007 (pp. 66-70). My main criticism then was that Von Bismarck's written account of Margreiter's work (certainly an example of case-study writing in curatorial literature) acted as a unifying device whose apodictic prose was but a declarative description of an otherwise rather nebulous political horizontality which Margreiter's project was purported to have achieved. The reader is left with little else than Von Bismarck's assurance that something truly egalitarian took place, that pre-existing hierarchies and professionally sanctioned expertises were somehow subverted, and that agency was evenly redistributed among participants. While the success of the project is not what I was assessing there, the text alas remained silent as to what those participants, especially those

who are not identified as having an artistic practice, felt or thought during the project. What I then tried to draw attention to was the somewhat oxymoronic relationship between claims of collectivity within non-representational (yet still exhibitionary) practices and the fact that the writing on such projects is often conveyed by a singular voice, the curator's, which is in turn inscribed in an already existing reputational economy of which the curator is the main beneficiary.

To further complicate the intricacies of case-study accounts as a writing strategy that still pervades curatorial literature, I have focused in this chapter on *Exhibiting the Voice*, a retelling of the show *Post-Opera*. The aim has been to render visible how, in order for this case study to be posited as a successful example, the writers fixated the possible interpretations of the artworks featured in the exhibition—a gesture that takes the form of ekphrastic description—while also presenting their project as an exception or extraordinary instance of exhibitionary practice that foregrounds never-seen modes of display strategies, even though such claims can indeed be disputed or at least nuanced if the project is situated within the wider context of its field of practice (pp. 87-90).

It is interesting to see how, almost a decade after the publication of *Cultures of the Curatorial*, the same search for a non-hierarchical organisation of cultural production is still at stake in *Wiggling the Frame*. Naturally, ten years of curatorial thinking and practice have greatly contributed to more elaborate explanations as to how this process might actually take place and how it can be facilitated. Unpacking the theoretical scaffolding that underpins this conversation should shed light on how rich and complex curatorial and artistic thinking has become in its attempt to answer the question of whether the collective redistribution of cultural production is possible.

It would be easy to adduce, as a preliminary objection, that this account of *Philadelphia Assembled* and *Trainings for The Non-Yet* is still reproducing the same contradictions that Von Bismarck's text poses. One wonders, for instance, despite having troubled conventional interpretive practices by allowing visitors to be project collaborators and to explain during the show what their involvement had consisted of (as one learns in reading the text) none of those participants have been invited to join the conversation.

Speaking about the project seems to be a task reserved for the professional. Practice can be distributed; discourse production, however, remains patrimony of the practitioner.

But this would be too easy a criticism. What I contend is crucial here is that collective participation needs to be posited, in the text or the website, as harmonious and univocal in order for the project to be presented as successful. The unswervingly conflicting nature of performativity, the fact that one can always fail to perform an institutional mandate, however delegated through artistic or curatorial practice it might be, is somewhat suspended by a speech act or by a representational gesture that equalises every performative stylization as being always the same and ultimately non-conflicting. In other words, what the text needs to imply for the case-study to work is that the performativity of these actions is always performed *well*.

At the same time, the circulation of case study writing, just like the legal case circulates among jurists and the medical case among doctors, renders a textual form that allows for *some* knowledge for curators. It would permit access to a type of knowledge that tries to encapsulate, like narration does for Benjamin, a witnessed moment that is inevitably lost, just like the legal case gives an account of a trial or the medical case, of how the encounter with a patient. This might have been needed in order to talk about experiences of knowledge that are posited, in curatorial discourse, as immanent to the curatorial project.

Chapter 3
Difficult conversations: Speaking as curating's "political imagination"[281]

What I tried to show in the previous chapter is that case study writing, in itself a representational device, might be fulfilling a modernist desire among curators that may have never fully abated. It "de-situates" whatever curatorial project is being discussed, talked about or foregrounded. Even though it highlights, it does so by separating. Through a gesture that severs, it reinscribes the curatorial project within a regime of autonomy. This one is not the only paradox that emerges here: the case study becomes such at the expense of a number of conversations, exchanges, dialogues and unreported speech acts that are ironically claimed to be what makes a given project paradigmatic or exemplary, if not fully extraordinary. But it also acts as a unifying force where the audience's interpretive multifariousness and/or decisional dissent are somewhat subsumed under one univocal reading or one univocal result. And, despite this, the same assumption keeps being reiterated by curatorial thinking: that live encounters are but a prerequisite for a redistributed model of cultural production, where redistribution means a purer experience of democratic mobilisation. In this chapter, I am going to unpack how curatorial thinking has understood conversations and live, public exchanges as central to curating's ability to bring about change.

What, in my view, emerges from the previous chapter is the assumption that non-exhibitionary programming (often taking the form of a conversation, a deliberative moment or the witnessing of a live event as its main public output) yields an opportunity where audiences or non-professional participants have some sway in the carrying out of a curatorial project. It purportedly opens up a space where other voices can be heard and where the uttering of such voices translates as something more participatory than

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[281] I am borrowing Gerald Raunig's term to mean curating's set of images and metaphors that practitioners often mobilise to describe the curatorial field. On political imagination and exhibitions, with an emphasis on story-telling, see Cătălin Gheorghe and Mick Wilson, "Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination. Introduction" in Cătălin Gheorghe and Mick Wilson (eds.) *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination* (Vector/Parse, 2021).

"mere" exhibition-viewing. In this sense, while the production of curatorial thinking is somewhat seen as happening amidst the ecumenism of readership (or, for that matter, of video watching, if what one is accessing is a video recording of a lecture), how curators talk about their project, an exercise that inevitable *represents* an irretrievable moment, seems to generate a harmonious picture, a political theodicy where conflict and difference, even though at times acknowledged, is subsumed under the general frame of a curatorial project that has successfully brought about, if not political, at least organisational horizontality.

It was maybe a matter of time that the ideas elaborated by curatorial thinking about event-based programming were seen as *also* taking place in exhibitionary formats, as well as in the managerial organisation of art institutions. In her second volume to the *Cultures of the Curatorial* series, Beatrice von Bismarck would further what she had started adumbrating in her conversation with Irit Rogoff, as outlined in pages 49-50. In *Timing: On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*, she goes on to say exhibitions can potentially question "the social and political dimensions that, time and again, draw associations with temporalization, raising hopes of an event-and-dialogue format that pushes toward democracy, participation, and de-hierarchization; that offer the chance for an immaterial, temporary community-building independent of artworks; and that nourish the idea of a laboratory situation that includes all actors involved".[282]

This is an essential move of Von Bismarck's, who sees deliberation and live discussion (event-and-dialogue) as a political opportunity that emerges within exhibitionary formats while reinforcing the idea that it is through talking that something like a horizontal exchange takes place. More crucially, in characterising as democratic what such encounters are purported to facilitate, she is inscribing curating's "political potential"—to refer back to the term I had

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[282] Beatrice von Bismarck. "Introduction" in *Cultures of the Curatorial: Timing. On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting*. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014), p. 9. This excerpt is, in my view, a typical depiction of a curatorial understanding as politics: a horizontal organisation, ecumenically inclusive, where all constituents are purported to hold equal sway. Even though she goes on to say "independent of artworks", the emphasis on a "format" implies, in my opinion, that such political horizontality is only achieved within the curatorial project, which, implicitly, stands in opposition to less democratic, less participatory and more hierarchical forms of political life.

used in the first chapter (pp. 25-26)—within the political tradition of democracy, here implicitly positioned on the horizon of utopia (hope). Community, one that is democratically configured, is what the exhibition produces through live conversation. Conversation, in turn, is the medium through which curating's democratic desiderata are instantiated, be these through exhibitionary or programmatic practice.

The idea that it is through dialogue that curating can achieve a temporary instantiation of democracy has been successful. Today, the semantic family formed by co-production, co-creation, co-curation and akin terms (terms I shall address with more detail in the next chapter) has been embraced by art organisations as an institutional imperative and is often seen as a strategy to re-enfranchise un/disinterested audiences and to negotiate interpretative strategies, objects and displays with constituents and audiences.[283] The resulting view is that, because there was some preliminary conversation that included members of the local community, the public outputs of an institution have been democratically devised.

That I am now drawing attention to conversations that antecede the public moments of a curatorial project, be this an exhibition, a public programme or a discursive event, is in order to complicate the role conversations have played in curatorial practice.[284] The position different conversational encounters might occupy within a curatorial project oscillates from close-door preparatory meetings to public outputs.

[283] Wayne Shand. "Co-Production and Institutional Change." in *Exploring Institutional Change: The Contribution of Co-Production to Shaping Institutions*, International Institute for Environment and Development, 2015, pp. 9–11. Also, Christopher Whitehead, Tom Schofield, Gönül Bozoğlu. *Plural Heritages and Community Co-production* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[284] For a systematic account on the centrality of the conversational within curatorial practice see Alexandra Ross. "Continuous Curatorial Conversations: An Exploration of the Role of Conversation within the Writing of a Supplementary History of the Curatorial" (PhD Thesis) in *discovery.dundee.ac.uk* (Accessed Nov 2023)

Let's talk: A desire for politics

As in every edition, *documenta X* spanned over one hundred days. But unlike previous times, every evening, over one hundred evenings, artistic director Catherine David would punctually show up at the *documenta* Hall at 7:00 pm to hold a conversation. These talks, also presented as exchange and encounter, would be held between David herself and numerous different invitees, followed by a more open discussion with the audience and the *documenta* team. Though marginally reviewed at the time,[285] *100 Days – 100 Guests* is today saluted as a decisive point in the shift undergone by contemporary art, as well as by contemporary curating, towards conversational practices,[286] together with other types of public platform posited as collective modalities of communication where the act of speaking and verbal, articulated uttering play a fundamental role. While, back in 1997, David's series of talks obeyed the urge to introduce, by means of talking, voices originated beyond Western artistic production,[287] twenty years later public speaking would keep occupying a central position in *documenta*'s public programming. The 14th edition of the show would feature *The Parliament of Bodies*, curated by philosopher and activist Paul B. Preciado; a complex, durational project in which moments or acts of speech, understood in an expanded way, are at the core of the programme. Crucially, Preciado's blurring of the distinction between talk and performance seems to be a decisive move to facilitate an "exercise of freedom", as the very title of the programme says, foregrounding *documenta*'s role as a space where something like a political moment or an experiment of self-determination (or perception thereof) was able to take place.[288] More radical was *ruangrupa*'s edition of *documenta* where

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[285] For instance, after making a case for documenta X's retrieval of a political agenda in artistic practice, art critic Mónica Amor barely devotes a paragraph –the very last one– to address the significance of these talks. See, Mónica Amor (1997) 'Documenta X' in *Third Text*, 11:40, 95-100.

[286] See, for instance, Irit Rogoff, "Turning" in Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson (eds.) *Curating and the Educational Turn* (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2010), 32-46 (43).

[287] Interestingly enough, the very press release described the talks as a response to the question "how do others speak and what about?" See: http://universes-in-universe.de/doc/e_press2.htm (Accessed Nov 29th 2020).

[288] Maria Nicolacopoulou. Exercises of Freedom? A review of documenta 14's Public Programs launch in Athens in *Ocula Magazine* (Nov 2016), https://ocula.com/magazine/features/exercises-of-freedom-a-review-of-documenta-14%E2%80%99s-pu/ (Accessed Jun 25th 2024).

deliberation and conversational decision-making happened as part of the exhibition and where the entire programme was devised through conversations open to different publics. This was an important innovation: as opposed to *documenta X,* where there was a somewhat conventional programme of public talks that worked as an addendum to the main exhibition programme; or to *documenta 14,* where the *Parliament of Bodies* emphasised the performative elements of conversational exchanges, presented "neither as an exhibition nor a conference" but, rather, as a "political theatre",[289] *documenta fifteen* situated collective deliberation both as the exhibition's organisational principle and as its public output.

This brief comparison between the curatorial project that has been hailed as the ushering-in of public speaking in curating with two other editions of the same show is not an attempt to fixate a three-tiered typology but, rather, to draw attention at how discursive moments might occupy different places and play different roles in the planning and carrying out of a curatorial project. By looking at how different understandings of public speaking, address and exchange have operated in the curatorial field, it is possible to come to understand in greater depth curating's appetite for redistribution, political horizontality and community emancipation. In this sense, given the plurality and diversity of such understandings, even if one just pays attention to the place they occupy within a curatorial project, it might be useful to refer to the spectrum formed by these speech-acts as 'the rhetorical' of curating.

By this lexical choice, I also wish to acknowledge previous scholarship in and on curating that has labelled this set of formats, platforms and strategies as 'rhetorical production', a term which I already resorted to in the first chapter.[290] Often, these rhetorical platforms, or rhetorical moments, can also be found under the epithet 'discursive',[291] which already shows that, in curatorial thinking, understandings of 'rhetoric' and 'discourse' have, to some extent, merged. This does not mean that they have fully conflated or that any overlapping between the two is mistaken. In fact, as I hope to show, this

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[289] Iliana Fokianaki. Missing Bodies. A report from the opening of Paul B. Preciado's Public Programs for documenta 14, Athens in Frieze Magazine (Oct 2016), https://www.frieze.com/article/missing-bodies. (Accessed Jun 25th 2024).
[290] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, "Introduction" in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.) *Curating Research* (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2015).
[291] See for instance, Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, *Biennials, Triennials and documenta* (Chichester: Wiley, 2016).

merge has also triggered a wealth of thinking on what these terms might actually mean for curators and practitioners. Instead, to underline this functional synonymy allows for the identification of the places where such rhetorical production has taken place and/or been discussed, since 'discursive' is often an adjective attributed to examples of curatorial practice where talking is what fundamentally happens, be this an artist-led reading group or an academic conference.

While talks, seminars, public conferences, symposia and anthologies have been more or less expressly acknowledged to have shifted curatorial practice since the early 1990s, these formats remain today under-analysed, at least in relation to the specificity of speech as a medium.[292] Indeed, sober analyses on, for instance, the curatorial turn (curating's transformation into a field of inquiry) can but recognise the influence of these platforms.[293] And yet, they seem to neglect a critical, specific assessment of such influence.[294] If 1997 officially confirmed the importance of the conversation as public output within the art world, the next decade witnessed the flourishing and proliferating of much curatorial talk—the public conversation, the collection of interviews and the symposium being the main format for reflection on curating. That curating was being talked about, and that talking about curating (and talking as curating) was actually mobilising a new vocabulary allowing for deeper questioning, found an early critique in Alex Farquhson's *I curate, you curate, we curate*, in which the coining of a new verb, 'to curate', is excoriated for its reinforcing of curatorial authorship.[295] Farquhson's criticism took place at a time when non-exhibitinary forms of curating were not considered curating proper by many. An implicit yet crucial divide emerged here: the exhibition, which gets curated, was the main professional arena of the curator-as-auteur; non-exhibitionary forms of public output, however, were purported to lend itself to less authoritative forms of practice,

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[292] Paul O'Neill. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

[293] By such transformation I mean curating's shift towards becoming a practice that can lay claim to knowledge.

[294] Paul O'Neill "The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse" in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, eds Judith Rugg, and Michèle Sedgwick. (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2007), 13-28.

[295] Alex Farquharson. "I curate, you curate, we curate" in *Art Monthly*, 270 (October 2003).

even though such forms were still reckoning with its status within the curatorial field. What started emerging here was a scenario where exhibition-making was seen as charismatic, authorial curating, and where 'rhetorical production', that is, non-exhibitionary, discursive forms of curatorial practice were associated with curatorial modesty.

Further curatorial talking and non-exhibitionary forms of curating where speech played a central role finally triggered the "*paracuratorial* debate" that Jens Hoffman[296] and Paul O'Neill[297] starred in; a tension that has been maintained in the operative distinction between curating and the curatorial, as shown in pages 71-72, despite the increasing ascendancy of the former over the latter at that time. At the core of this debate, speech-based practices, including publishing and public programming were posited (by Hoffman) as different from curation.

Undoubtedly, the invention of a neologism that designates a specific type of action for which the then-available vocabulary was not enough, was symptomatic of extensive reflection on what curating was and what curators do. Apart from a new lexicon, curatorial interrogation and curatorial talk also generated its own array of rhetorical formats, genres and typologies that are now commonplace. After emerging in the early 1990s as privileged formats enabling reflection, the interview, the dialogue, the first-person narrative and reflective self-referentiality (an introspective mood that J. J. Charlesworth called curating's "institutionalisation of self-reflexivity")[298] became what one could label as 'rhetorical techniques', fundamental units of curatorial discourse that, in turn, gave birth to subsequent typologies of written production, some which I have unpacked already: the self-reported case study, the collection of interviews, symposium proceedings and the collective volume—in fact, the prevalence of this repertoire of textual strategies was at the core of Paul O'Neill's first anthology, whose aim was not to reproduce what by then already seemed jaded writing techniques (namely "the

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[296] Jens Hoffmann, Maria Lind, "To Show or Not To Show". *Mousse* No. 31. 2011. *moussemagazine.it* Mousse Magazine, Web. 4. Sep. 2012.
[297] Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox". *The Exhibitionist* No. 6. 2012. pp. 55 - 60.
[298] J. J. Charlesworth. "Curating Doubt" in Judith Rugg, Michele Sedgwick (eds.) *Issues in Contemporary Curating and Performance* (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), p. 93.

first-person narrative and curator self-positioning [,] articulated through primary interviews, statements and exhibition re-presentations").[299] To this set of discursive formats, I contend, it is possible to add today the letter, the email exchange, the recorded voice or the radio podcast. With the non-exhibitionary seen as a less authorial form of curating, this wider range of rhetorical platforms and techniques have often been purported to facilitate some type of community gathering—I am thinking, for instance, on the radio stations of *documenta 14* (*Every Time A Ear Di Soun*, curated by Bonaventura Soh Bejeng Ndikung) or the *Mittlungsradio* at the 10th Berlin Biennale. And yet, there seems to be a correlation between emphasis on discursivity and the centrality of the curator, even in projects which tried to bring out a more self-effacing model of exhibitionary curating. Notable in this sense was, for instance, the publication of Caroline Christov Bagarkiev's emails in the lead-up to *documenta 13*,[300] a show where "curatorial authorship oscillated ambivalently between a compliance with the model of the invisible female hostess and the (re)centring on the curator as an object of attention".[301] For Bagarkiev's edition of *documenta*, three collective volumes were published: *The Book of Books* and *The Logbook*, and the catalogue, which operated, as one learns, as representations of the curatorial "mind-at-work".[302] The discursive or rhetorical production accompanying the exhibition was utilised to inscribe the curator as an object on display.

A similar tension between curatorial (self)-reflexivity and, in this case, exhibitionary formats has been also identified in projects that tried to advance a re-distributed, more democratic model of curatorial practice. In *The Culture of Curating*, Paul O'Neill draws attention to shows such as "I Am a Curator" (2003), where artist Per Hüttner invited members of the public to put forward one-day exhibition proposals, or Jens Hoffman "Artists Favourites", where 39 artists were invited to choose a favourite artwork.[303] In these examples of

[299] Paul O'Neill, "Introduction: Paul O'Neill interviewed by Annie Fletcher" in *Curating Subjects* (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2006), p. 13.

[300] Nanne Buurman, "CCB with… Displaying Curatorial Relationality in DOCUMENTA (13)'s The Logbook" in *Journal of Curatorial Studies,* 5:1, 2016, Special Issue "Affect and Relationality," ed. by Jennifer Fisher and Helena Reckitt, pp. 76-99.

[301] Nanne Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at DOCUMENTA (13)" in *On Curating*, Issue 29, May 2016, pp.

[302] Chus Martinez. "Chus Martinez". In *The Book of Books* (Kassel: Documenta, 2013).

[303] Paul O'Neill. *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, pp. 112-116.

curatorial practice where curatorial authority is purported to be obscured or effaced, participants, be these artists or audience members, are invited to partake in an already existing curatorial logic that remains unaltered and where the distinction curator/not-curator acts as the main regulatory principle.[304] In this sense, one cannot but wonder why the same perspicuous interrogation remains unapplied to curating's rhetorical production, that is, to its books, texts, symposia and public talks.

documenta X: The great conversation

As a notion, *politics* is no less slippery a term than discourse or rhetoric. Neither is it what it means to be instantiated as a community, to quote Von Bismarck's excerpt cited on page 123.[305] Pinning it down becomes all the more difficult after what has been called non-foundational political thinking came into curating over the past two decades, through thinkers such as Ranciere or Nancy, whose main philosophical contribution is that no predetermined essence should constitute the foundation of a political community (and, by extension, of political praxis). Rather, as Oliver Marchant would have it, the absence of foundation is (or should be), to post/non-foundational thinkers, the very foundation of politics—a philosophical solution in contemporary political thinking whose aim has been to avoid replicating the political essentialism that underpinned totalitarian regimes and that has implicitly pervaded concepts of Nation, People and citizenship in liberal democracies.[306] In any case, one does not need to seek recourse to this philosophical tradition to see how curators understand the instantiation of a situated community. Michael Warner's characterisation of publics underpins what, in my view, is curating's prevalent understanding of "community-building": a public is both a self-organised collective and a discursive moment organised solely by

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[304] Ibid.

[305] Jens Hoffman. *Artists' Favourites* (London: ICA, 2004).

[306] Oliver Marchart. *Post-Foundational Political Thought. Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Ediburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 2007), pp. 11-13. Also, see: Thomas Bedorf, "Being Other, Being Different: A Normative Gap in Thinking the "Impossible Community'?" in Elke Bippus, Jörg Huber, Dorothee Richter (eds.) *BEING-WITH, Community – Ontological and Political Perspectives, OnCurating*, Issue 7, 2011. https://www.on-curating.org/issue-7-reader/being-other-being-different-a-normative-gap-in -thinking-the-impossible-community.html.

discourse itself (where discourse must be understood as an already-existing conversation that is consubstantial to public formation).[307]

To get a sense of the 'political potential' attributed to discursive practices in curating, I shall focus on the example of practice that has been identified, as I explained before (pages 45-46), as the *locus classicus* of the discursive turn in curatorial practice: *documenta X*, with its public programme *100 Days - 100 Guests* and its accompanying set of publications. In an interview with Robert Storr, Catherine David herself admitted that the discursive, non-exhibitionary elements of *documenta X* were central to the project, which she posited as having three parts: the exhibition proper, the public lecture programme above mentioned, and *das Buch*, also known as *Poetics - Politics*, the exhibition's main publication.[308] While, as I have shown in the introduction, understandings of programming and publishing as part of curatorial practice were already brewing in the early 1990s, often used with the aim to expand audiences and to reclaim the value of non-objectual artistic practices, I would like to examine now the role the public conversation, as a format, played in *documenta X*.

The logo designed for the 1997's edition of *documenta* (it's tenth iteration) provoked outrage: a red, upper case 'X' (the Roman numeral for 10) crossing out a black, lower case 'd'; one letter superimposed upon the other one, functioning, as it were, like a pun. The former somewhat cancelled or suspended the latter, a palimpsestic gesture that revokes as much as it retrieves. The team behind "Little d big X documenta", as Daniel Birnbaum put it with obvious jocularity, had devised an emblem that was found impressively poetic by some (Boris Groys) and "close to being fascistic" by others (Donald Kuspit)[309]—nobody could have possibly foreseen, with the

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[307] Michael Warner. "Publics and Counterpublics", pp. 50-55 and pp. 62-68.

[308] Robert Storr. *Documenta X* (Interview with Catherine David) in *ArtForum*, May 1997 at https://www.artforum.com/print/199705/documenta-x-32824 [Accessed Jan 23th 2023]

[309] Daniel Birnbaum. "Little d, Big X. Documenta X: The Artforum Questionnaire" in *Artforum 36* (September 1997), accessed Jan 18th 2023. https://www.artforum.com/features/little-d-big-x-documenta-x-the-artforum-questionnaire-201766/

expansion of mobile technology, that the same letter combination would indicate laughter when typed in a message a few years later.

Indeed, the powerful, hammer-and-sickle-like image (to use the same simile evoked by a Kuspit in dismay)[310] lent itself to a variety of interpretations where the institutional and exhibitionary tradition initiated by documenta in 1955 was perceived to be at stake. That the only image featured in the official poster was precisely a large-scale version of the logo elevated the two letters to the category of statement. With this monogram acting as the very visual identity of the project, Catherine David, *documenta X*'s artistic director, was implicitly positioning her curatorial vision as somewhat in conflict with previous iterations of the show—in particular, against Jan Hoet's *documenta*, the previous one, when the Roman numeral IX (9) had been reintroduced in the catalogue's title; a project that had in turn been criticised as complicit with culture's turn towards spectacle—. What David was set to achieve, as Monica Amor would have it, was to reclaim "the political project of the avangard".[311]

The 1997's edition of *documenta* is considered to be a decisive moment in the history of contemporary art: it was the show that repoliticized the artworld or that validated an ongoing desire for repolitisation—in this sense, the 1990s wave of institutional critique, to which I shall refer below (pp. 138-140), was part of this desire. The perception that contemporary art was then empty of any kind of political hubris might have been exacerbated by the previous edition of *documenta*, whose director, Jan Hoet, openly recanted politics. In fact, the rhetoric he used was symptomatic of a decade of triumphant neoliberalism. To Hoet, art was an "instrument that can make us conscious of our individuality",[312] collectivity being but the sum or addition of individuals in a public space.

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[310] Donald Kuspit, "negative documenta" in *Artnet*, July 28th 1997, accessed Jan 18th 2023 [http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/features/kuspit/kuspit7-25-97.asp].

[311] Mónica Amor, "Documenta X. Reclaiming the Political Project of the Avantgarde" in *Third Text* 11: 40, 1997, pp. 95-100, also published as "Documenta X: The double triumph of the political referent over the poetic imaginary" in *ArtNexus, nº* 26 (Arte en Colombia 72), Nov - Jan 1998, accessed Jan 19th 2023, [https://www.artnexus.com/en/magazines/article-magazine-artnexus/622a0a4350d85fdb65d7956d/26/documenta-x].

[312] Angela Bartholomew. "Installations Everywhere: Disorientation and Displacement in Jan Hoet's documenta IX' in *On Curating*, Issue 33, June 2017 (the documenta issue), pp. 144-150.

The politicisation of art that *documenta X* attempted to bring about was founded, however, on a specific understanding of politics and of the relationship between politics and art. Just like the show's logo functioned as a refounding gesture for David's edition of *documenta*, it is possible to get a sense of what this repoliticisation consisted of by looking at *Poetics -Politics*, *documenta X*'s main publication. Its first pages show a series of images that bring together Kassel's past and *documenta*'s inception as a post-war event (images of Kassel after its bombardment in 1943, Paul Celan's poem *Death Fugue*, a fragment from Brecht's *Arbeitsjournal* on the atomic bomb, among other excerpts) as well as a series of 'collages' or juxtapositions of images that reveal that documenta X's repoliticisation aimed to operate on a geopolitical level: In fickling through these initial pages, one can see, for instance, a map that reads "Die Weltmächte im Kalten Krieg 1946 - 1962" [The World Powers in The Cold War 1946 - 1962], showing the countries part of the Warsaw Pact and an Iran still aligned with the Western Bloc. A banner issued by the OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America), commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Struggling People of South Africa, can also be seen in these initial pages. These two groups of images signal *documenta X*'s positioning both as a retrieval of its foundational moment and as a platform which, in 1997, was contesting the globalism of "the end of history". With the OSPAAAL banner, I believe, David was trying to reclaim the leftist political tradition of the Global South. In the introduction to *Poetics - Politics*, the editors acknowledged: "The book singles out complex cultural responses to the unifying processes of global modernity".[313] I think it is in this context, where *documenta X*'s sees its mission as a platform where cultural practices from non-Western milieus could have visibility, that *documenta*'s public programme must be situated.

The choice of words, "complex cultural responses" is telling. In this sense, David establishes a series of distinctions that she discusses with Robert Storr which I will try to provide an outline of here. David seems determined to

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[313] Catherine David and Jean-Francois Chevrier (eds.), *Politics, Poetics: documenta X, the Book*, (Kassel: Cantz, 1997).

maintain a terminology that allowed her to distance her *documenta* from the then-prevalent understanding of politics and of political art. Firstly, that political art is a historically specific brand whose significance was then depleted.[314] "Political art" was also informational or nominative, that is, it "talks about" politics—one is left to assume that she meant conventional, partisan and representational politics—and therefore has no efficacy any longer since it is complicit with hegemonic power.[315] Secondly, that David's characterisation of politics departs from a position of critique, that is, a position of contestation against hegemonic power, whose historical instantiation in 1997 was post-1989 globalisation. Thus, politics and critique are tied together in curatorial practice through a decisive move that still resounds nowadays. More importantly, for critique (for critical art) to take place, certain conditions of production are necessary, asserts David.[316] It cannot happen anywhere. This is why, despite the strong Franco-German presence in *documenta X*, David tried to re-enfranchise, through the discursive components of the show, critical practices from the Global South. If David's notion of politics necessarily implied a critical position and therefore a counter-hegemonic position, criticality was, to David, a rare event.

Taken at face value, this attempt to re-enfranchise non-Western artistic practices was seen at the time as a failure. In a review of *documenta*'s public programme, critic Sabine Vogel decried that only a fifth of the guests were of non-Western origin while another fifth alone were French.[317] Overall, a marked Euro-centrism dominated both the exhibition, the publications, and the lecture programme. More recent accounts examining *dX*'s contribution to curatorial practice (as well as its shortcomings) have nevertheless acknowledged the significance of these discursive events where David invited post-colonial thinkers and theorists of globalisation to deliver talks during this public talks programme. As art historian and *documenta* specialist Nanne

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[314] Robert Storr. *Documenta X* (Interview with Catherine David) in *ArtForum*, May 1997 at https://www.artforum.com/print/199705/documenta-x-32824 [Accessed Jan 23th 2023]

[315] Ibid.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Sabine Vogel. "The Torture of Enlightment. On *100 Days - 100 Guests* and *documenta X*" [Translated by Holly Austin] in *Universes in Universe dX Special*, 1997/2020, accessed Jan 19th 2023, [https://universes.art/en/documenta/1997/100-days-100-guests/sabine-vogel]

Buurman has pointed out, the curatorial rationale underpinning David's project was an early effort "to challenge the Eurocentric assumptions of *documenta*—albeit primarily on a discursive/verbal level".[318]

I would like to linger briefly over this '*albeit*' which somehow suggests a certain insufficiency of discourse, as if the discursive intervention David was trying to prompt was not enough. Buurman's review of the political claims held by the different directorships of *documenta* aims to warn about the perils of the conflation between diversity and democracy in exhibitionary practice, as well as warning about the failure that different attempts to subvert hierarchical structures through representational gestures often entails. Buurman's analysis more than 20 years after documenta X is indicative of a bicephalous tradition in contemporary art thinking: 1) that discursive practices in curating are somewhat more political than exhibitions and 2) that the same practices are but a simulacrum of politics.[319]

Instead of diving into what otherwise would be a definitional mire (David's characterisation of political art is often implicit or differential, as I have just adumbrated in pages 133-135), it might prove more useful to state the difficulties one encounters when trying to pin down her understanding of politics or, rather, of what counts as political, which, as I have just shown, is deeply intertwined with criticality. In this sense, there seems to be a primary gap between how David portrays politics when talking '*from within documenta*' (in the exhibition catalogue, titled *Politics - Poetics* and, within it, the two-part conversation *The Political Potential of Art*, held between Benjamin Buchloch, Jean-François Chevrier and Catherine David herself) versus how politics are described by David when talking '*about documenta*' (for instance, in her interview with Robert Storr published the same year in *ArtForum*). While politics or political significance seems to be the realm of *documenta* proper, in her conversation with Storr, on the contrary, political

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[318] Nanne Buurman, "d is for…? documenta and the politics of (re)presentation" in Field, Issue 18-19, Spring 2021, https://field-journal.com/issue-18-19/d-is-for-documenta-and-the-politics-of-representation/ (Accessed Oct 17th 2022). Buurman's is, in my view, a typical characterisation of discourse or discursivity in curating as verbal, as that which happens through talking.

[319] Robert Storr. *Documenta X* (Interview with Catherine David) in *ArtForum*, May 1997 at https://www.artforum.com/print/199705/documenta-x-32824 [Accessed Jan 23th 2023]

art is excoriated as an "instrumentalized category", that is, a brand or label that was being used for commercial purposes in the 90s—as David herself would have it, "a development of late 70's art".[320] She herself provides a definition of what she makes of this criticality: "[Critical art] has to do with what I would call the radical critique of culture's anthropological foundations—meaning paying attention to articulations, to sites of relevance, and to shifts from one area of competence to another".[321] While there is a somewhat tautological element to this description—critical art is what posits a critique—David's opposition to what she believes to be "pseudocritical art or pseudopolitical artists" establishes an important divide between artistic practices that are taken by David as being authentically 'critico-political' (my own term, for lack of a better word) versus that kind of art which is not so despite claiming otherwise. I think this opposition, if strategic, is decisive since it prefigures a similar dialectics that became central to later developments in curatorial discourse: that is, that there is something politically truer, more authentic, more immediate or more genuine in whatever takes place in the curatorial project, as opposed to what happens in representative experiments of democracy or hierarchical examples of cultural redistribution, much like Von Bismarck's characterisation of curatorial politics I showed in pages 123-124.

Another important element of this characterisation of critico-political art is the subject that exercises such critique. The critical subject (here the curator) *pays attention*, that is, it establishes a specific conscious/phenomenological relationship to a particular type of object or of practice. There seems to be a primary subject that *attends*, a subject whose critique or critico-political attention is exercised; a subject who is able to identify those articulations, sites of relevance and shifts between areas of competence which David refers to. I place an emphasis on David's idea of paying attention because it strongly resonates, I believe, with Warner's characterisation of the minimum kind of participation that maintains a public organised as such: "Belonging to a public seems to require at least minimal participation, even if it is patient or notional, rather than a permanent state of being. Merely *paying attention* can

[320] Ibid.
[321] Ibid.

be enough to make you a member".[322] What I think it emerges here is a characterisation of politics through David's definition of critical art that necessitates a public, that is, that sees critico-political art as a special type of address.

While it is not clear whether such subjectivity is the artist's, the curator's or the audience's, political criticality seems to be a fundamentally intellectual enterprise that takes place through attention, through belonging to a public. This politics/critique complex takes place through the presence of an addressee.

documenta X rendered visible two types of modes of address with two different understandings of politics: one the one hand, there is the visibility politics of the discursive programme, a "solution to the dilemma that bedevils Western exhibition makers anxious to acknowledge the globalization of post-colonial culture, but also aware that it is counter-productive to include artworks from non-Western countries in their exhibitions as exotic bonbons."[323]The public conversation helped David present examples of contemporary practice that extended beyond the Western remit. Actually, these public talks in front of a live audience did not necessarily focus on artistic practice per se. As David says elsewhere, the "radicality of contemporary non-Western expressions often finds its privileged avenues in music, oral and written language (literature, theater), and cinema forms which have traditionally contributed to strategies of emancipation."[324]

On the other hand, there is David's understanding of politics as the realm of critical art, an art that pays special attention to the foundations of cultural production and which, through attention, summons a public. This public, I assume, grasps the interrogation of such foundations through '*attending*' the exhibition.

Overall, however, what I think it is possible to see in David's edition of documenta is the inception of a thinking that mirrors very closely what I

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[322] Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 71. My emphasis.

[323] Camiel Van Winkel. "Against the grain. Documenta in search of a new tone" in *Archis*, August 07, 1997. https://archis.org/volume/a-rebours-documenta-zoekt-naar-een-nieuwe-toon-against-the-grain-documents-in-search-of-a-new-tone/ (Accessed Jan 13th 2023).

[324] Catherine David. *Documenta X: Short Guide* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), p. 11-12.

showed and unpack in the first chapter (pages 41 and 68-71) and in the previous section (pages 126-127): that something more horizontal and egalitarian can be achieved through discursive practices (in this case, visibility through *documenta*'s public programme) and that the curator's counterhegemonic understanding of politics will also be the audience's.

Curatorial "rhetoricality"

Still much more interesting is that, operating at the level of discourse formation, what one could call a 'rhetorical imagination'—that is, an envisioning of curating as rhetoric—seems to have nurtured the expansion of curating as a field of inquiry. *Thinking About Exhibitions*, arguably the first volume that addresses the exhibitionary as a specific, autonomous medium, included an article by Bruce Ferguson in which an intricate panoply of voices, acts of speech, languages and rhetoric become the images in which the exhibitionary complex is conceptualised and interrogated. These speaking devices can well be summarized in Ferguson's claim that "exhibitions are the material speech of what is essentially a political institution, one with legal and ethical responsibilities, constituencies and agents (...). And like other political institutions with socially authorised voices, what they do and in whose name are important to any sense of a democracy, especially a democracy of representations".[325] What interests me here is the way Ferguson binds together rhetoric and politics. Crucially, within the context of institutional critique, which I would argue the volume could be considered to be part of, this rhetorical imagination allows for asking whether, if exhibitions are something like institutional speech acts, they operate at the level of ideological structures and might be acting, as Ferguson implicitly acknowledges, as governing devices. One compelling question emerges here: if curatorial anthologies, for instance, operate just like exhibitions (as indicated in pages

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[325] Bruce W. Ferguson. "Exhibition Rhetorics: Material speech and utter sense" in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne, (eds.): *Thinking about Exhibitions*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

70-71)[326] and these are institutional acts of speech, what institution is behind the publication of a newly edited volume? Does this rhetorical imagination allow for identifying curators as "synecdoches in [the sense] that they represent concentrated versions of the moral economy that defines contemporary art at large?"[327]

The prevalence of a rhetorical imagination or rhetorical paradigm underlying curating has since then pervaded later developments in curatorial thinking. Simon Sheikh's and Irit Rogoff's elaborations on curating as a "mode of address" already implicitly invoke a certain politics (there is a subject being addressed by the curatorial speech act and a community emerging from the curatorial moment of knowledge, in a way resonates with Warner's formation of the public) that is fundamentally linked to rhetoric. More expressly, however, they link curating's address to constituent acts[328] and moments of self-institution.[329] What type of address facilitates this political self-institution and community formation? Is it always that of the curator's? In what way is this type of rhetoric different from other political acts of speech?

Even today, institutional critique, which keeps occupying a good part of curatorial reflection, seems to take the form of a critique of institutional (and anti-institutional) "rhetoric".[330] Indeed, one could say that the instantiation (and written account) of particular curatorial practices are concrete examples of those rhetorics –which, in turn, rely on the rhetorical figures listed above. However, the understanding of what these "*rhetorics*" are or mean, what they entail both politically and epistemically, seem to work as a given.

Something similar could be said about those texts that have tried to tackle the potential and the dangers of biennials and the so-called biennialization of the art world.[331] Even though a "discursive turn" is identified in the biennial format, ushered in by the foregrounding of "symposia, platforms for

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[326] Paul O'Neill. *Curating Subjects*, p. 12.
[327] Tirdad Zolghadr. *Traction* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), pp. 47-48.
[328] Simon Sheikh. "Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of The Curator", in Paul O'Neill (ed.). *Curating Subjects*. Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007.
[329] Irit Rogoff, "Smuggling – An Embodied Criticality". *eipcp.net*. European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, 2006. Web. 2. Nov. 2012.
[330] Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds, Mick Wilson (eds.) " Introduction" in *How Institutions Think* (Luma Foundation and CCS Bard, 2017).
[331] Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, Solveig Øvstebø, The Biennial Reader. (Bergen and Ostfildern: Berge Kunsthall/Hatje Cantz, 2010).

discussion, research, and knowledge production"[332] which aim to foster "the engagement of the audience in listening, reading, studying, or participating rather than merely looking",[333] it is not stated how these platforms operate to achieve those goals. Instead, discursivity is somehow distilled from the ordinary everydayness that talking brings in itself. Talks simply *talk* and, thus, while the notion of discursivity is being problematized, the sites where such discursivity emerges move to the background. The specificity of what public-speaking and talking-together is able to do at the level of knowledge and politics seems to be closer to a professional desideratum than to an actual examination of these formats.

As opposed to this 'institutionally-specific' or 'platform-oriented' understanding of discursivity as that which happens in speech-based, dialogic practice, Mick Wilson's *Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns* is perhaps the most significant piece of curatorial literature in which speech is problematised as such, that is, as a speaking act.[334] While being practically a historical account of how conversational artistic practices have informed curating and its expansion into the curatorial, Wilson identifies how these practices can overhaul and strengthen reputational economies and yet how, at the same time, they are crucial to convey the curatorial desire for public instantiation. Wilson continued his interest in reputational economies and took it, in collaboration with Paul O'Neill, into an understanding of 'rhetoric' that seems to distantiate from former notions of discourse or discursivity.[335] In *Curatorial Counter-rhetorics And The Educational Turn*, rhetoric or the rhetorical seems to acquire a new dimension in which the materiality of discourse is also attended. 'Discourse-in-its-enactment' could work as a functional definition of what they seem to mean by rhetoric (and by counter-rhetoric). This reading is one that I am drawing out here, but it remains implicit in the text, since it is not the notion of counter-rhetoric which is expressly problematised. However, the reconceptualization of

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[332] Bruce W. Ferguson, Milena M. Hoegsberg. "Talking and Thinking about biennials" (2010) in Elena Filipovic et al. (eds.) *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 360-377.

[333] *Ibid.*

[334] Mick Wilson. "Curatorial Moments and Discursive Moments" in Paul O'Neill (ed.) *Curating Subjects*.

[335] Mick Wilson, Paul O'Neill. "Curatorial counter-rhetorics and the educational turn", in *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 9:2 (2010), 177-193.

discursivity as rhetoric seems to follow a reassessment of curating's available means to facilitate collective agency and appears to reinforce the authors' predilection for the durational. In 2011, O'Neill further elaborated on the durational, taking as a departure point his contribution to the paracuratorial debate, another thread that links rhetoric and the evolution of contemporary curating. *Locating the Producers*, coauthored with Claire Doherty, is O'Neill's major elaboration on durational processes as a means to place the focus on public-engaging and community formation,[336] perhaps best epitomized in his lastest venture *PUBLICS*.

The work of O'Neill and Wilson, both separately and collaboratively written, is of particular relevance here since it locates the shifts that have led curating towards these durational approaches as well as those material practices and conceptual tropes that strongly resonate with the rhetorical of curating. While other theoretical contributions from the fields of philosophy, critical and literary theory and other disciplines in the humanities have also informed this current tendency towards a focus on durational processes, this two-tiered understanding of rhetoric—discursive practices and/versus curatorial rhetorics—[337]allows for the tracing of the internal developments that have shifted the curatorial field. And, of course, that O'Neill and Wilson came to re-elaborate their understanding of discourse-as-rhetoric by reflecting on the educational turn cannot remain unnoticed.

Pervading curatorial literature, a main site for "rhetorical production"—the 'rhetoricality' of which is at times acknowledged, presupposed and even nullified– is the proliferation of professional courses in curating, which, despite having materially generated further rhetorical platforms and despite having expanded curatorial discourse, are generally ascribed to a neoliberal overhauling in higher education, as shown in pages 55-57. While it is interesting to see how the upper echelons of international curating gather to

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[336] Paul O'Neill and Claire Doherty. *Locating the Producers. Durational Approaches to Public Art*. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2011.

[337] By this I intend to highlight two understandings of discursivity in curatorial thinking. On the one hand, discursivity designates practices that foreground talking or speaking in a public setting. On the other hand, discursivity also appears as a theoretical formation that happens through specific material formats that interrogate curating and that O'Neill and Wilson would label as 'rhetoric'.

discuss and to publish anthologies on the complexities of curatorial studies, what those courses do is still *terra incognita.*[338]

On the contrary, the educational turn in curating —that is, the turn towards critical pedagogies, the discussion of formal and informal education and the reshaping of curatorial projects as educational initiatives within the institutional spaces of contemporary art, rather than within the university — has been, both as a theme and as a phenomenon, widely debated. In this context of discussions on education and on curators' ability to educate, I think it is possible to find another arena in which speaking, public address, and other similar aspects that could be labelled as rhetorical, have been implicitly questioned.[339]

In *Performance or Enactment*, Andrea Fraser expresses her discomfort and disappointment at what she perceives to be a regressive evolution of the notion of 'performativity'.[340] In the article, Fraser makes her case for a new term, 'enactment', that would theoretically reframe her practice while helping her distance herself from the hackneyed connotations of the term 'performative', in a move that resonates with David'd disawoval of 'political art' as explained in pages 133-134. Her abandonment of "performativity" commences with a succinct yet very precise outline that describes how the term travelled from linguistics and from Austin's work into contemporary art practice. This shift, as she goes on to say, took place gradually during the 70s and 80s, with 1990 being a turning point after Judith Butler's publication of *Gender Trouble*. Fraser's famous performance *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* sat in this context. As the artist herself tells us, 'performativity' and 'speech acts' were pivotal notions informing her work at the time and *Museum Highlights* in particular.

Andrea Fraser's embracing of the promise that performativity had claimed to bring about—that is, the overcoming of the distinction between doing and

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[338] Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds & Mick Wilson. *The Curatorial Conundrum. What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?* Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016.

[339] I label those aspects as rhetorical to distinguish discourse as speaking, which is the somewhat prevalent understanding of discourse and discursivity in curating, from discourse as knowledge formation.

[340] Andrea Fraser. "Performance or Enactment?" in Dertnig, Carola/Thun, Felicitas eds., *Performing the Sentence: Views on Research and Teaching in Performance Art*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014. pp. 123-127

saying[341]—was related, however, to another theoretical arena, that of institutional critique, a strand of practice she contributed to usher in. Thus, Fraser's performances operated at the intersection between performative thinking and, arguably, the main discursive formation that would foster and nurture what today is known as the curatorial turn, that is, the transformation of curating into an expanded field of discourses and practices that are not limited to exhibition-making or to theoretical enquiry into the exhibitionary solely.

I must draw attention to how Fraser's notion of performance, while explicitly acknowledged to be standing at that crossroads, has served to problematize more recent developments in contemporary curating, particularly the tangible yet contested relationship between curating and education. In a *Letter to Jane*, Simon Sheikh turns to *Museum Highlights* to unpack the entangled implications between "the practice of exhibition-making" –which, for him, "is always already a pedagogical endeavour"–[342] and the salutation of the educational as a turn, as a theme, or even as a departmental overhauling in the museum. The tension between exhibiting-as-education and curating-as-education is formulated as a pull between "two sets of rhetorics", separated by an institutional hierarchy that braces a voice which speaks "*above* the artworks, the artists and their times and contexts", thus functioning as "means of control over the language *on* art, if not the language *of* art" itself. Sheikh's analysis of the educational turn in curating placed rhetoric as a functioning device at the centre of curatorial practice –and thus, as a primary object of desire. Crucially, Sheikh's understanding of the exhibitionary complex, which includes "curatorial techniques" as pedagogical by definition, relies on Tony Bennet's conceptualization of the museum's power as being exercised through persuasion instead of through coercion. This is a decisive move, since it implicitly situates "the museum and, by extension, curatorial processes" in the realm of what has traditionally been par excellence the art of persuasion: rhetoric. The pedagogical character of the exhibitionary operates through techniques that are therefore rhetorical in nature.

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[341] Ibid, p. 124

[342] Simon Sheikh, *A Letter to Jane* (Investigation of a Function) in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (eds.) *Curating and the Educational Turn* (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2010), pp. 65-71.

Sheikh's essay was published in 2010, specifically commissioned for *Curating and the Educational* Turn, the second in the series of anthologies edited by Paul O'Neill, this time in collaboration with Mick Wilson. Heteroclite in essence and critical, if not polemical, in scope, this volume aimed to both respond to and account for the vast array of educational practices, processes and initiatives that had populated the curatorial field over the previous decade. Contributions to this anthology are as multifarious in tone, approach, content and position as the very panorama they survey when put together. And yet, despite the supposed theme at hand, that is, analysis and reflection on the alleged educational turn in curating, rhetoric pervades a good part of the anthology either as a central problem or as a critical prompt. Indeed, rhetoric or the rhetorical seems to be, as it were, the unconscious to the conundrum that this anthology posits. A fear of rhetoric –or rather, of "mere rhetoric" as Peio Aguirre would have it–[343] emerges when the editors come to reckon with the historicizing power that the word "turn" possesses, a power that seems to side with the risk of commodifying the matter at issue, as one of the contributors, Hassan Khan, also underlines[344] or as Irit Rogoff similarly regrets when she refers to fashionable 'pedagogical aesthetics'. Throughout the anthology, what the rhetorical seems to mean oscillates from just mere frills to powerful, highly sophisticated techniques. Between these two poles, there seems to be various understandings of rhetoric and several degrees of centrality within the texts, from Sheikh's explicit discussion of a two-tiered rhetoric enacted by institutions, to implicit readings of the rhetorical as 'discursive' (Janna Graham), to analyses that grapple with the historical specificity of 'turns' as artistic and curatorial lexicon (Zolghadr). Many of these understandings resonate with those presented above. More broadly, it could be said that linguistic prioritization or denial of the phrase '(the educational) turn' is a common concern shared by most contributors. Rhetoric, however, is not only presented here as an element of discourse, as if it only operated at the level of ideology or in a vacuum. Some of the contributors make very compelling cases for platforms and formats whose

[343] Peio Aguirre, "Education with innovations: Beyond Art-pedagogical projects" in *Curating and The Educational Turn*, pp. 174-185.
[344] Hassan Khan, "A simple turn: Notes on argument", in *Curating and the Educational Turn.*, 118-123.

material specificity resonates deeply with the idea of rhetoric I have been trying to adumbrate above (pages 138-142), inasmuch as they refer again to the sphere of the spoken word; platforms and formats that, in turn, seem to host, as Irit Rogoff would have it, "the moment when we attend to the production and articulation (...) of subjectivities that are neither gathered nor reflected by other utterances".[345] This focus on "spaces where the curious gather"[346] was placing the emphasis on the formation of collectivities, a plurality that gathers itself and on whose behalf nobody *speaks*.

For Rogoff, the conversation or the conversational mode has been "the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade", acknowledged, as indicated above, as one of the most important contributions resulting from Documenta X (1997) and also Documenta 11 (2002). Aguirre, who considers that art is amidst "the enthronement of speech",[347] holds a view that is perhaps even more conclusive: within the context of education, "the invisible architecture that supports communication, transference, the corporality of the voice, or even just silence"[348] cannot be represented, thus situating the conversational in the place of the irreproducible. This is, in my opinion, a decisive move, because it both retrieves the specificity of both coming and speaking together –of *'conferring'*– while rendering those moments of exchange virtually inaccessible for those who have not been lucky enough to have been there. How can researchers evaluate those rhetorical platforms? If the materials that led to *Curating and the Educational Turn* were developed through a "series of seminars and public discussions"[349] and, thus, they form a written reflection of those talks, does this mean that this anthology cannot give us access to those seminars? How can one give a critical or historical account of those moments if they are irreproducible and (historically) irrepresentable? Can this pervasiveness of speech and rhetoric in contemporary curating allow for rethinking a curatorial type of historical writing that is not a representation? Is the fact that the speech of curating might be ungraspable what allows for a genuine moment of political

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[345] Irit Rogoff, "Turning" in *Curating and The Educational Turn*, p. 46.
[346] *Ibid.*
[347] Peio Aguirre, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
[348] *Ibid*, p. 179.
[349] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson. "Introduction" in *Curating and the Educational Turn.*, p. 12.

community and if so, is that specific to curators or, rather, can it be made extensive to everyone?

Speaking as non-representation

Aguirre's reflection on the irretrievable presentness of the curatorial moment takes us to a possible reframing of the three arenas described above—the expansion of curatorial discourse, the biennialization of contemporary art and the educational turn—that has been central to the evolution of contemporary art as a whole and of contemporary curating as a concrete set of practices: the crisis of representation as a dominant conceptual framework in artistic practices, art criticism and art historical writing. While it is difficult to determine whether the egg came before the chicken, that is, whether those three specific historical developments are resulting from a broader shift or, rather, they themselves fostered that crisis, I argue that it is possible to relate them to each of the fundamental transitions that led to a post-representational scenario, as posited by Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja: the dematerialization of the artistic object (and, with it, the dematerialization of its container), the relation to the viewer, and the relation to the institution.[350] These various understandings that the shift towards the non-representational entails could also be conceptualized and reassessed as departures from rhetorical paradigms, as I will go on to explain now.

The dematerialization of the artistic object from the 1960s, for instance, was conducive to artistic practices that could not be any longer understood as static signifiers of a semantic content—that is, as objects that speak *on behalf of*. As opposed to a painting, which could more easily accommodate a hermeneutic conception of the artwork as representing a time, an epoch, a school or an authorial psyche (in sum, as a speaking, communicative artefact whose meaning and significance could be delivered before a public by certain experts) performative practices have sought to enact and problematise

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[350] Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja "What comes after the show? On postrepresentational curating", in *On-curating.org*, №14, 2012

presence or presentation as the material and conceptual plane on which performance operates.

Among these performative practices, conversational art is of particular interest here since it offers a good example of how a new relation to the viewer was pivotal in the shift towards the non-representational, while allowing for expressing this shift in rhetorical terms. As Grant Kester maintains in *Conversation Pieces*, conversational artistic practice has largely sought to bring together different communities and groups, often disenfranchised or in conflict, in an attempt to "give them voice".[351] This dialogical model in which participants would speak for themselves would stand in opposition to the rhetorical distribution of the representational, in which art is produced and displayed as historically representing a community's system of values, thus speaking 'on behalf' of and therefore 'representing' that particular community. The third element stated above, the (critical) relation to the institution, which arguably knows two different moments in curatorial history (artist-led institutional critique in the 1960s and 70s and curator-led New Institutionalism in the 1990s and early 2000s, though the term was first coined in 2003)[352] has attempted to understand the workings and dynamics of cultural institutions while trying to implement new strategies to revert these. The proliferation of symposia, talks and conversations must also be included within this agenda that actively aims to subvert the voice of the institution from within or/and seeking new formats that can instantiate this critical dissent, usually by purportedly forming critical communities. That is, in the shift towards the post-representational, the new relation between curatorial practice and the institution has allowed for a deeper understanding of the museum, the gallery and the exhibition as sites where discourse is produced and enacted by specific rhetorics, while attempting to destabilise these from within in order to generate new moments of collectivity—in a fashion that resonates with understandings of institutional flexibility as outlined in the previous chapter (pp. 110-111).

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[351] Grant H. Kester. *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art.* Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004.
[352] Tone Hansen. "New Nordic Critique" in James Voorhies (ed.). "What ever happened to New Institutionalism". Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016.

Matching those specific historical developments of curating (moments in which rhetoric has played an important role) with a broader critique that has underpinned the evolution of contemporary art and contemporary curation allows for a deeper problematization of the issue at hand. It might be through critical theories of political and aesthetic representation —for Gayatri Spivak, for instance, both types of representation are rhetorical—[353] that a method can be created in order to evaluate whether the political and epistemic agenda that curators purport to instantiate is being successfully accomplished through public speaking and similar formats that are increasingly privileging uttering and voicing as their medium.

In light of what has been called a post-representational crisis, the questions asked throughout this thesis can be also repositioned: have these developments been complete or, rather, are their objects of critique being reintroduced by other means? While post-representational curating could be accounted for as the result of several displacements that entailed a refusal of "speaking-on-behalf" and sought to facilitate unheard voices, those same displacements seem to cohabit with understandings of the curatorial field as a set speaking practices with speaking subjectivities that, by being presented instead of represented, might be actually reinforcing the authorial figure of the curator, as Maria Lind and Alex Faqurhason already regretted in a conversation held at Tate Modern in 2007.[354] Similarly, they might be sanctioning the art world as a fundamental entertainment industry and a key asset in our experiential economy, Obrist's Serpentine Marathons being a good example of this.

What I have tried to do above is to show the pervasiveness and the slipperiness of what I have come to call 'the rhetorical'—sometimes I feel inclined to say 'rhetoricism'—in curatorial thinking. At the same time, the previous survey has tried to explore how different conceptions of rhetoric and

[353] Gayatri Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (eds.), M*arxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (Macmillan Education: Basingstoke), 1988, pp. 271-313; p. 275.

[354] Maria Lind and Alex Farquharson. "Integrative Institutionalism: a Reconsideration," in The New Administration of Aesthetics, Tone Hansen and Trude Iversen eds., (Torpedo Press, Oslo, 2007.)

different types of rhetorical platform have played a significant role in the formation of curatorial discourse and the critical shift of this discourse, at least on paper, towards political horizontality, community-led knowledge construction and epistemic redistribution. I suggest, however, that the translation of this survey into a set of primary research questions can be further understood and better pinned down by examining how one particular case, one specific rhetorical platform, might generate a number of distances and proximities between its own taking place, the discourse it seeks to enact and other speaking objects with their own material specificity. In doing so, I do not aim to act as a fault-finding corrective that points at what could have been done differently. Rather, I want to question how horizontal a non-representational moment can be, what makes possible a conversation, however immanent and self-contained it is purported to be—just like the anthology, as I showed in the first chapter , is the result of pre-existing conditions. Equally, the particular formats and specific media in which that discourse is disseminated are not necessarily coincidental with how, where and for whom that very same discourse is produced. More often than not, the circulation of discourse does not yield a mirroring image of the original conversation.

Between presence and posterity: The Future Curatorial

On November 6th 2014, the Hessel Museum at the Centre for Curatorial Studies of the Bard College hosted a three-day symposium on curatorial practice. Those who managed to get to the small locality of Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, were welcomed by a fanciful vinyl lettering that read, in different fonts and sizes, the conference's title on the entrance's see-through walls. With a tongue-in-cheek overtone, *The Future Curatorial What Not And Study What, Conundrum* was the somewhat cumbersome headline chosen to title the conference. Though convoluted enough as to need a comma to preserve meaning, the semantic content of the phrase was actually reasonably straightforward; for the convenors of the symposium, and

presumably for those invested in curating as well, there was a future to interrogate, a puzzling issue to address and, perhaps, a certain degree of curricular perplexity that demanded attention. As for me, I was not able to make it. Both as a postgraduate-student studying curating and, nowadays, as a researcher, my ability to access this particular past event is limited to the different 'rhetorical platforms' that this symposium generated, as well as to a few images that are scattered across the Internet.

One of those images was that of the entrance showing the conference's title. The idea of the somewhat colourful, playful lettering was devised by the designer Alfons Hooikaas, who wanted to express the diversity of the participants presenting at the conference "through a multitude of typographic voices, teetering between cacophony and harmony".[355] This light-hearted musicality contrasted with the long list of credited institutions that supported the symposium. *The Future Curatorial* had been possible thanks to the collaboration of "four of the world's most prominent curatorial programmes",[356] namely The Valand Art Academy at the University of Gothenburg, the MRes in Exhibition Studies jointly convened by Afterall Books and Central Saint Martins, de Appel Curatorial Programme, and the CCS Bard itself. These four courses had joined forces under the aegis of the LUMA Foundation, which acted as patron of the symposium, in order to tackle the "potentially inescapable conundrum"[357] in which twenty-five years of discursive and material developments had positioned curating as a field. Such a solid heft of institutional sheen and scholarly authority might have obeyed the urge to present the conference as a truly ecumenic council, a gathering of practitioners who, somehow, could represent the whole of curatorial practice. Indeed, such was the scope and intellectual ambition of the event, as one learns in reading the e-flux blurb that had announced the celebration of the conference the previous October. *The Curatorial Future* was

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[355]As stated in Alfons Hooikaas's website: http://www.hooikaas.net/project/the_future_curatorial_what_not [Visited between 14th of March and 24th of April 2020]

[356] e-flux announcement on Oct 6, 2014 at https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/30550/symposium-at-bard-college-to-address-the-future-of-curatorial-research-presented-with-luma-foundation/

[357]Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, Lucy Steeds. *The Curatorial Conundrum. What to study? What to research? What to practice?*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), p. 7.

to be held in order "to generate new forms for instituting the future of curatorial research and practice".

The three convenors of the conference—Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson, lead faculty at CCS Bard, Afterall/CSM and the Valand Academy respectively—acknowledged this comprehensive purview when looking back at that event in *The Curatorial Conundrum*, the anthology that compiled the lectures and papers delivered at the symposium. Despite the Anglo-American medley of the institutions organizing the conference, curating was there to be discussed within "the global contemporary",[358] pointing towards "the increasingly global circuit" of curatorial education and bearing in mind the "globally dispersed readership" that, a couple of years after the event at Bard, would find the book in bookshops and on library shelves.[359] The equally global cast of presenters and respondents featured familiar names—Hans Ulrich Obrist, Liam Gillick or Luis Camnitzer come to mind—alongside other lesser known practitioners whose presence in the conference somehow expanded a geographical arena that could seem otherwise institutionally Western.

Although new curatorial programmes keep proliferating still today and many did not exist at the time *The Future Curatorial* was held, it is to note the omission of other critical ventures and equally prominent academic centres that pioneered curatorial discourse and curatorial training. In fact, the absence of Goldsmiths' *Curatorial/Knowledge* research programme, one of the main hubs where *the curatorial* was expanded into a field of enquiry, makes one consider, for instance, whether the slightly jocular "what not" of the title goes actually contra this body of discourse, even though the presence in the event of Simon Sheikh must be credited.[360] Similarly, one cannot but wonder why some already then on-going courses, structurally more fragile due to the material contingencies of their specific locations, are not there—for example, the intensive course *Àsikò* initiated in 2010 by CCA Lagos director

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[358] Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson, Lucy Steeds. T*he Curatorial Conundrum. What to study? What to research? What to practice?*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), p. 7.
[359] Ibid, p. 7.
[360] Jean Paul Martinon's anthology of text, *The Curatorial* (2012) overtly admits its debt with the course.

Bibi Silva, a programme that has since then roamed across Nigeria, Senegal, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ghana.[361]

In the same way, as a native speaker of Spanish myself, I cannot but notice that the contributions from the only two Spanish-speaking curators in the conference, Miguel A. López and Elvira Dyanganu Ose, while trying to present vernacular approaches to art-historical writing and institutional critique, are somehow embedded in a wider debate whose rules are set up in English and whose internal genealogy is eminently Anglo-American.[362] More importantly, this tension between the present and the absent entails a preliminary understanding of *where* things are happening while making it evident that some receive the invite to talk when others do not. Whereas one could argue that it pertains to the conference format to be selective, which I agree with, the benefits of being there might be greater than those of being absent, as I intend to show later.

Though perhaps flawed in its attempt to articulate a sense of globality, the double centrality of the cultural West as both institutional organizer and discursive referee of *The Curatorial Future* helps to locate the conference within the institutional history of curating and the evolution of curatorial discourse. As a symposium, this particular conference is a typical example of those dialogical and conversational practices that I mentioned above and that have fostered curating's shift from practice to discourse and from the exhibitionary towards the durational and the educational. More specifically, it could be considered as a kind of literary and event genre within curating: the symposium-like, academic-looking, plurally choral gathering of curators, which will later be followed, as was explained in the first chapter, by the publication of an anthology, a type of publication that has echoed somehow the merger between the museum and the academy.

But *The Curatorial Future* is a typical example of curatorial inquiry in various ways. On the one hand, it admitted subaltern experiences of practice to the main arena of discussion, resonating with the agenda of inclusivity that

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[361] The programme Ásikó recently published its own anthology in 2017: Bisi Silva (ed.) *Àsikò: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa* (Lagos: CCA Lagos, 2017).
[362] This is somehow acknowledged and problematized in Galit Eilat's conference, who represented the curatorial collective What, How & for Whom at the symposium.

underpinned Catherine David's talks back in 1997, which I have addressed above (pages 136-138). On the other hand, the sense of urgency and the wish to reimagine future alternatives is almost a common topic in the rhetorical production of curating since it began to expand in the late 1990s, a type of inquiry that, again, has often been facilitated by conference-like platforms and their subsequent anthologies. From *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future*, a symposium held in 1994 at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada, to *Great Expectations: Prospects for the Future of Curatorial Education*, also held at the same venue more than twenty years later; from *The Biennial Reader* to the gatherings that led to the the publication of *Curating and the Educational Turn*, the search for alternative methodologies, negotiations and tactics to bring about a different present has been a primary concern for curators for the past twenty-five years. These inquiries into curatorial futurities have been greatly informed by educational projects while often attempting to contest the proliferation of university graduate programmes in curating—from which the four organising courses seem to distantiate. In this sense, one must acknowledge that *The Curatorial Future* echoed a type of reflection that critical pedagogies had been elaborating over the previous decade, resulting in, as curator Tirdad Zolghadr would have it, "deictic knowledges",[363] as opposed to utopian, perpetually postponed communities—'the public', for instance, being one of them, as in the view of some theorists like Suhail Malik[364] or Andrea Philips.[365]

But this exploration of "new forms for instituting" curatorial practice that hope to break with a more or less established disciplinary panorama is also typical of who, arguably, was its main instigator, Paul O'Neill. As I pointed out on page 41, O'Neill published the commissioned volume *Curating Subjects*, his first anthology. The rationale for the book was to separate from what then was a ubiquitous type of writing method and rhetorical technique among

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[363] The term was the title of one the modules part of Zolghadr's seminar delivered at *unitednationsplaza* in 2006. This technical term of his can also be found in *Traction*. (New York: Sternberg Press, 2016).

[364] See, for instance, Suhail Malik, "Ape Says No" in *Red Hook Journal*, https://ccs.bard.edu/redhook/ape-says-no/index.html (Accessed Jun 24th 2020).

[365] See for instance her interview Andrea Philips, "Public Enemy" in *Kunskritik*. https://kunstkritikk.com/public-enemy/

curators: self-reflexivity and self-recursivity as the main source of critical inquiry into the practice of curating.[366] The commissioned texts, which adopted a plurality of formats and delved into various topics, thus aimed to imagine and offer a number of alternative approaches to curatorial practice. A few years later, the very same texts that O'Neill commissioned helped him nurture his doctoral thesis, presented that year, and transform it into his new book *The Culture of Curating and The Curating of Culture(s)*, which also traded on certain essays included in his second anthology *Curating and The Educational Turn*. Thus, The *Curating of Cultures* results from Paul O'Neill's instigating the production of new discourse, which he will later turn into his own historical account of curatorial practices.

This exceptional relationship between discourse producer and historian of discourse resonates with Claire Bishop's critique of 'relational aesthetics',[367] a theoretical device that Nicolas Bourriaud largely drew from his persistent collaboration with a particular roster of artists. Crucially, the coinage of that term would later enthrone him as an art theorist and star curator. In her assessment of Bourriaud's thinking, Bishop argues that both as a theoretical reflection, with its specific rhetoric of open-endedness, and as a privileged set of practices, relational aesthetics seemed to obscure who is actually benefiting from that type of artistic production while enacting notions of community instantiation that prove chimerical in its presumption of a unified social body. Between the publication of *Esthétique Relationnelle* and *The Curatorial Future* almost two decades had elapsed, during which curating and its expanded discursive production had, in theory, overcome theoretical stances that envisioned political harmony as the somehow spontaneous production of certain artistic practices—*documenta 13* possibly being the most significant example celebrating "the un-harmonious" as a politico-epistemic model of conviviality.[368] It was precisely during these two decades that rhetorical platforms had come to occupy a central position in curating's shift toward the durational, the expansion of pedagogical and educational initiatives, and the rise of curatorial discourse, changes that resulted in less ingenuous

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[366] Paul O'Neill. *Curating Subjects*. (Amsterdam: Open Editions, 2007).

[367] Claire Bishop. *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*. OCTOBER 110, Fall 2004, pp. 51–79.

[368] Chus Martinez. "Chus Martinez" in *The Book of Books* (Kassel: Documenta, 2013).

conceptions of what type of political moment curatorial practice can bring about. I would argue, however, that the lack of analysis of those platforms and of how they actually work might be mirroring a similar conflict between discourse formation and discourse distribution as the one Bishop pointed out in 2004 regarding relational aesthetics. That is, whether the envisioning of knowledge communities that include conflict and dissension as generative forces might actually be obscuring that a separate community of practitioners is actually emerging, separate from the audience, the student or the researcher.

As a researcher , I do not have direct access to the particular site of discursive enunciation that *The Future Curatorial* was. While I think that this epistemic obviousness might partially explain why conferences, symposia and anthologies have remained uninterrogated in curatorial literature (after all, these platforms are posited as post-representational or non-representational practices, ergo any form of posterior critique would somehow entail the dreaded return of representation), they do not pose a more challenging obstacle than any other past deed of which a historical account is to be given and which the historian has not directly witnessed. At the same time, it is clear that my account has to be necessarily different from that of those who were present and actively participated in the event. Two different communities of knowledge are therefore created: the specific, present audience and the global viewership that is not less of a construct than the notion of public.[369] I suggest that, to an extent, it is in this light that one must understand the different materials that a conference's documentation might consist of, that is, that these are an attempt to overcome the distance between those who arrived in time and those, the vast majority, who were too late to be there. But, equally, these materials might allow for an examination of the actual value and significance that public speaking might hold for the curatorial field; whether the relevant and the important resides in the documentation that a conference generates or in the event itself. In turn, the different materials that represent the moment of discourse correspond to dominant forms of documentation

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[369] On this see, for instance: Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*. (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002).

that might be shaping how these rhetorical platforms are specifically taking place. In the case of *The Future Curatorial*, those materials are mainly three: the video recordings of the symposium, its live coverage on the online platform *e-flux conversations* and the anthology *The Curatorial Conundrum*. Here, I will focus on the first.

The lectures, panels and responses of *The Future Curatorial* were separately recorded in video and uploaded to an online streaming platform—interestingly enough, the CCS Bard website does not provide access to this content at present. Those recordings take the viewer to the start of the first lecture, thus beginning *in media res*. Whether one is being welcomed, whether the online, by-default-late attendant is being thanked for their time and interest, remains unknown. It can only be assumed that some warm introductory speech took place, possibly by the director of the host institution, O'Neill, but this is mere speculation. Instead, the viewer is directed to the first presentation of the conference, which, detached from its immediate context, somehow happens in a narrative vacuum. This first video, a representation of a particular talk with its own particular temporality and spatiality, portrays the speaker in the middle of things. His voice marks the beginning of the story, in a similar fashion to how literary characters manifest in Erich Auerbach's analysis of biblical literature, who simply *are* amidst an undefined, narratively implicit background—Abraham's "Here I am!", which, as Auerbach himself interestingly points out, originally meant "behold me", resonates with the speaker's first uttering "I'm going to speak". And just like the biblical narrator does not seem to be interested in telling the reader where Abraham is ("Where he is actually, whether in Beersheba or elsewhere, whether indoors or in the open air, is not stated")[370] the viewer, in and by observing what the video has recorded, cannot know as much either.

Although it is possible to see that the talk is taking place amidst a diaphanous structure that resembles a geometrical arcade, formed of inverse pyramids and columns, and that the attendants are sitting at a labyrinthic arrangement of tables, one can only see what seemingly is just another arts venue. Whether

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[370] Eric Auerbach. *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 2013).

that structure has been purposely commissioned or was already there, whether the setting is part of an on-going project, is said nowhere. Right above the screening window, one can only read the title of the symposium and the heavy, lengthy litany of institutional names. Below the latter, it reads "November 6-8, 2014. Bard College, Annandale on Hudson. NY 12504". The closest thing to a historical type of notation is little more than a succinct line resembling a postal address, a paratactical phrasing that, as in Hayden White's analysis of medieval chronologies, "has no high points or low points",[371] floating in the virtually endless plane of cyberspace. Severed from the actual running of the conference and materially facilitated by the Internet, the lecture is presented as a moment of enunciation that a particular institutional framework—even the very postcode is a state technology—is able to dispatch or issue.

Still more crucial is the fact that this compartmentation of the conferences into a serial sequence of lectures reveals an implicit understanding of what is valuable, what is key and what is secondary in the celebration of a conference. Even though untransferable and irreproducible in essence, it seems that orality is the gist of the matter, the material that conveys discourse, and that in public speaking is where the enactment and dissemination of ideas resides. Similarly, this severed and decontextualized presentation of the lectures forecloses any possibility of knowing why certain ideas make it to the arena of posterity and why, by virtue of what type of mechanism, the roster of presenters is formed by certain practitioners and not by others (even though, surely, that was never disclosed during the conference itself); whether they represent the multifarious field of contemporary curating and, if so, who has appointed them as *delegates*–I am purposely here referring to Pierre Bourdieu's essay *Delegation and Political Fetishism*,[372] a text that has also been used by Grant Kester to problematize the aporetic place that the artist has often occupied in conversational practices.[373]

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[371] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality" in *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 1-25
[372] Pierre Bourdieu. *Delegation and Political Fetishism* in Thesis Eleven, 1984. 10-11, 56-70
[373] Grant Kester. *Conversational Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

To consider Bourdieu's thesis that those who speak *"on behalf of"* are fetishized and come to conceal "the truth of the relation of representation"[374]–just like Chantal Mouffe defines the hegemonic as that which conceals the contingency of its origin–[375] allows me to further interrogate how the video might operate. If the presenters at the conferences act like delegates or representatives of curating-as-a-field, the recordings finish severing the representational link, presenting the lecturers as independent sources of practical wisdom, since the contingency of their appointment as presenters is concealed. More importantly, just like there is no way to know on what basis some practitioners are there and some are simply absent, dangerously naturalising the presenters by means of a logic of the relevant and the pertinent; the videos help further deepen such naturalisation. The fact that video recordings behave like snippets of the past that allow for intellectual plurality and universal access, the fact that their functioning is taken for granted and goes unnoticed, should precisely indicate, as Judith Butler would have it, that a hegemonic structure is being dealt with and that a critical distance is therefore required to denaturalize its workings.[376]

I am reminded of Peio Aguirre's essay I referred to above (page 144), in which he expresses his belief that "[w]hen a photographic camera is inserted into an educational setting, or when someone takes a step back to portray a learning scene, then all the invisible architecture that supports communication (...) is suddenly eradicated".[377] If that is true, then the video recording preserves discourse while eliminating that which makes it a communicative act; uncommunicated discourse that, in turn, will later be mutely received by a "globally dispersed" readership. To support his point, Aguirre also resorts to Barthe's shifting understanding of the seminar format from a community of speakers towards a community of listeners.[378] If those who only have online access to the conference cannot but listen solely, since replying is simply

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[374] Ibid, p. 56.
[375] Chantal Mouffe. *On the Political.* (2005), p. 17.
[376] Judith Butler, "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue", in *The Political*, ed. David Ingram (Oxford/Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002)
[377] Peio Aguirre, op. cit., p. 179.
[378] Aguirre refers to Roland Barthe's "To the Seminar" in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989.

impossible, it seems reasonable to contend that the conference is forming a somewhat global seminar. While this needs to be proven and relies heavily on the assumption that the sum of private moments of viewership generates something like an epistemic community, it poses a more compelling question: what kind of community is formed by those who got to speak?—I will try to answer this question in the next chapter.

Of course, the videos give one further type of information than what is contained in just the mere delivery of the lectures. It is possible to recognise certain 'tropes' that the aforementioned developments in curating have spawned. As curator Natasha Ginwala observes, attendants "are enclosed–in what seems like yet another attempt to be horizontal, non-linear and "what not".[379] Though perhaps an example of fashionable educational aesthetics that Irit Rogoff deplored in *Turning,*[380] the first speaker, Eddie Chambers, is indeed amidst a spatial layout that looks closer to a parliamentary meeting than an academic lecture hall—paintings of the Council of Trent come to my mind.

It is the type of staging that resonates with Kristina Podesva's description of pedagogical projects in contemporary art: "A post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants",[381] performatively epitomized by O'Neill's refusal to moderate—instead, he would rather "wait". Indeed, both Paul O'Neil and Mick Wilson are familiar with the specific characteristics of critical learning in contemporary art and curating. Within the internal history of Bard College, non-hierarchical teaching settings had already been introduced during Maria Lind's tenure as director of CCS Bard, *The Greenroom Discussions* being a good example of this type of platform. Her work is acknowledged by O'Neill and Wilson in *Curating and the Educational Turn* as decisive in the developments that shaped the educational agenda of curating, together with other "short-lived, institutional moments", such as, for instance, Nicolas Bourriaud's at the Palais de Tokyo or

[379]Natasha Ginwala at *e-flux conversations:* conversations.e-flux.com/t/bard-conference-on-curatorial-practice-day-1-live-coverage-by-karen-archey/524 [Accessed between March 10th and April 20th 2020]
[380] Irit Rogoff, "Turning" in *Curating and the Educational Turn.*
[381] Kristina Podesva. "A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art" in *Fillip* 6, 2007, at https://fillip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn

Charles Esche's at Rooseum in Malmö, two of the main figures of the so-called New Institutionalism.[382] It seems reasonable to ask whether *The Curatorial Future* should be seen as a part of a tradition that has sought to practice strategies of complicity within the institution in order to subvert the institution itself. But the videos might prove otherwise.

Indeed, one cannot but realise that the anonymous faces that pop up among the convoluted arrangement of chairs and tables are CCS Bard students, or perhaps former graduates from the courses that convened the symposium—Ginwala, for instance, graduated from de Appel curatorial programme a couple of years before the conference. As one goes on watching the recordings, some of those faces reveal their identity: they are the presenters' themselves. Nowhere perhaps is this more forcefully expressed than during the presentation delivered by Eddie Chambers, who is sitting by the next speaker, Jelena Vesić. Possibly nervous because she is about to give a lecture on the canon, she seems distracted, looking up and down and often turning her gaze to a little piece of paper that she holds in her hands. At some point, she realises something, grabs a blue little leaflet and reads it with concentration till she raises her head, almost imperceptibly. Is she looking at me? What is she looking at? Quiet and discreetly, she is just checking if she can find another presenter among the audience, and it seems that she does.

This partition of the conference's time into individual talks generates a divide between the very holding of the conference itself and its posterior viewing by online users, who are too late to taste the white wine (which, apparently, was really good, Mick Wilson relates that someone had said), to enjoy the convivial atmosphere that seemed to have reigned during the breaks, or to partake in the roasting of two little pigs—an unusual meal of which we learn when listening to Wilson's closing presentation and which happened to be an iteration of the *Sesiones Puerquito* (Piglet Sessions), a performative project by Mexican design studio Pedro y Juana.

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[382] Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson. *Curating and The Educational Turn*. pp. 13-14.

Thus, online viewers find themselves unable to experience the non-discursive elements of the event,[383] having access only to the verbal epithelium of the lectures and their subsequent exchanges with the public. What in different circumstances would be to state the obvious becomes here problematic: Just like in the 1990s Rirkrit Tiravanija's relational curry acted to some as a vehicle for congenial reconciliation between artists, critics, curators and uncredited strangers,[384] while, to others, raised many questions about who that curry was intended for,[385] the two little pigs that were roasted and presumably eaten, as well as the sharing of other nibbles, wine, projects, and ideas, only belong in the memory of the attendants—as Mick Wilson repeatedly asks: "do you remember the pig?". I certainly can't.

One would contend that nothing is to be gained from having online access to those interstitial moments, to those snippets of friendship and intellectual camaraderie that do not lend themselves to second-hand purchase. But then, what is the actual role of those elements that, as we keep being told, make possible the curatorial "event of knowledge"? Are they irrelevant? Are they there to make things a little bit more low-key? Or am I misreading *The Future Curatorial* when I define it as an *'event of knowledge',* as that which curatorial work is able to produce? It might be useful to recall here Rogoff's characterisation of the event of knowledge: a set of relations between objects, ideas and audiences that hold epistemic status (something is known or learnt through it), which happens thanks to the presence of a public and whose unexpected relationality has been facilitated by the curator.[386] Given the epistemic immanence of the curatorial project, here an academic symposium, the video recordings can only render a partial image and understanding of such an event. Documentation, be it a video or a text, cannot let us know what actually happened.

My analysis of one particular example of rhetorical platform within the context of curatorial discourse has aimed to relocate with precision a set of research questions that, due to the slipperiness of the field itself, were

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[383] Again, by discursive, I am here utilising curating's 'average understanding' of discursivity as live language.

[384] Jerry Saltz, "A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija", *Art in America* (February 1996).

[385] Claire Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.*, pp. 68-70.

[386] Irit Rogoff. "The Expanded Field" in Jean Paul Martinon (ed.) *The Curatorial: a Philosophy of Curating,* p. 42

somehow difficult to distill. I think, however, that these could be now posited as follows:

If the materiality of institutions, exhibitions and artistic formats does not only mean and signify, but also *operates* at various levels (political, epistemic, ideological), how do the specific formats that have been privileged by the discursive platforms of curating work? What do they do in relation to the political agenda they purport to bring about? What is the relationship between public speaking and the "event of knowledge" (Rogoff) that curating facilitates? In other words, what does the addressee do in all of this? In this sense, I wonder how non-representational practices (a conference) relate to their representational devices (an anthology for instance) if the performative moment where they originated is only partially knowable, if knowable at all? If one is not part of the event of knowledge, since one needs to be there for it to happen, I wonder whether the circulation of curating's rhetorical production can achieve the political horizontality that non-representational curating seeks to instantiate.

In light of the changes that global politics are currently undergoing, do these rhetorical platforms reproduce conventional political schemes or, rather, do they offer a significantly different political project? Following Chantal Mouffe, are these platforms agonistic structures or do they work, rather, like a series of monologues? It seems that the agonistic subject is the reader or the video viewer, as opposed to the live audience.

I see you speak

One little piggy was roasted. Pedro and Juana did it. The roasting of a pig, as I already mentioned, was part of a performance of which I first learned of when watching the video recording of Mick Wilson's final remarks—the only speaker who, together with Vivien Ziherl, problematized in his speech their addressing

a specific audience in a specific context, making it explicit that public speaking, a moment of speech that happens before someone, *does* something. Wilson acknowledged the power that his position as a final speaker exerts over the conference as a whole, and attempted to deliver a talk that can drift from the three epistemic stances that, as he says, final remarks always impose on whatever has been previously said, that is, on whatever they are remarking. These "three epistemic impositions" that emerge "when one speaker comes to speak in the place where others have already spoken" are, in Wilson's view, the summary (displacement), the commentary (distantiation), and the exclusion (disavowal). On her part, Ziherl, who starts by stating that she comes "from a performance institution" and that she is "very aware of the dramaturgies of speech", stands up and delivers a lecture/address in which research, process and audience are explicitly foregrounded and rendered visible as constitutive elements of Ziherl's talk.

By the peculiar delivery of their presentations, Wilson and Ziherl remind us that public speaking is never innocent or straightforward and that there is something eminently performative to speaking *before* someone. What else, if not performative, could it be to speak in a conference? One cannot but note that the by-now *locus classicus* where the term 'performative' was coined referred to utterances and moments of speech that take place before someone. In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin carefully introduces this type of utterance by isolating a particular set of statements whose characteristics he tries to pin down by exemplifying them. Four preliminary examples are given by Austin, three of which take place during public ceremonies or during events that require an accredited witness (i.e.: "I do" in the course of a wedding, the naming a ship during its launching, and to bequeath something during the reading of a will ["I bequeath my watch my brother]).[387] The fourth one, in turn, implicitly acknowledges the presence of an interlocutor ("I bet you that…"). While later scholars, like Eve Sedgwick, have further elaborated on Austin's final conclusion that speaking always *does* something,[388] I want to pay attention here to what it seems to be, at least by now, an interesting coincidence in Austin's list of examples: that performative utterances seem to

[387] John L. Austin. *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 5.
[388] Eve Sedgwick and Andrew Parker (eds.) *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

require a particular kind of gaze, the presence of a certain someone in order for that utterance to perform—this is why, in reviewing Austin's performative, Benveniste distinguishes yet another set of statements which he calls "acts of authority", which oppose "failed" performative statements such as, for instance, my decreeing a general mobilisation herein or the hashtag *#Iherebyorder* that went viral in 2019 after Donald Trump tried to use his executive powers on Twitter regarding a matter he had no authority over. In order to achieve the performativity which performatives seek to enact, these statements need, as it were, an economy of belief other than one's own.[389]

Austin's notion of performativity has now become almost commonplace while having nurtured the thinking of many scholars in performance studies, drama and other artistic practices. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan attempts to retrieve the "psycho-political" specificity of performance as an alternative to the logic of representation and reproductivity that the visual enacts. In her own words, her project is an attempt "to revalue a belief in subjectivity and identity which is not visibly representable".[390] Her final conclusions are gathered in her last chapter, *The Ontology of Performance*, in which she gives a basic definition for this type of artistic practice: Performance is representation without reproduction and thus, it must disappear upon its own realisation. To put it more radically, performance remains such inasmuch as it disappears.

While I do know that *The Curatorial* Future was not a performative event or a series of performances in its artistic sense, there was something *utterly* performative about a group of people conferring and saying things aloud–not to mention that there has been an entire genre of lecture-performance dating back to the 1960s.[391] Wilson's and Ziherl's talk, the purposely designed architecture of the room and the little piggy that got roasted, I think, point in that direction.

During the conference, however, many things disappeared or, at least, remain unattainable today; the little piggy among others, but also the presumably congenial conversations that the white wine facilitated. Other things, other

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[389] Emile Benveniste. "Analytical philosophy and language" in *Problems in general linguistics*. (Coral Gables, FL: Univ. of Miami Press, 1971), pp. 231–238.
[390] Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance* (New York: Rouledge, 1993), p. 11.
[391] Patricia Milder. "TEACHING AS ART: The Contemporary Lecture-Performance." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2011, pp. 13–27.

utterances, in turn, survived. They were documented, represented and distributed, consequently establishing two types of speech: a speech that perishes (informal, unrecorded, private; truly performative perhaps?) and a speech that prevails (formal, prepared, public; bringer of discourse). These two types of speech resonate with Phelan's theoretical enterprise inasmuch as they implicitly bring forward a particular "logic of representation that relies on a specific logic of the real"[392]—in this case, of "the real discursive" [my own term] or the type of utterance where discourse formation *really* resides. At the same time, this logic of the real "promotes its own representation",[393] that is, real discourse needs to be represented to be sanctioned as "the real discursive", hence its dissemination by means of video recordings or anthologies.

Phelan's account, however, would force one to dispense with all the utterances that were reinscribed in this reproductive economy of representation of which the video recordings are just a fragment. Does this mean that the performativity of these lectures is forever gone for having been documented? Is there any possible relationship between the video recordings and their originary speeches that do not reproduce the partition between performance and documentation?

Philip Auslander responds to questions that resonate with the above ones in his seminal essay *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*—an essay that, otherwise, does not make one single mention to Phelan's work, even though his aim is to tilt at notions of performance as immediate presence and direct witnessing.[394]

In this essay, Auslander resorts to some cases of performative practice in which photography does not operate as documentation but, rather, as 'originary' elements *in* the performance and not *of(f)* the performance (i.e.: Marcel Duchamp, Cindy Sherman, Matthew Barney), to later make the argument extensive to *all* types of performance, which often need some sort of representational material to confirm their occurrence, and whose phenomenal existence is not altered by being reproduced. While Auslander's rationale is

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[392] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 6.
[393] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 9.
[394] Philip Auslander. "The Performativity of Performance Documentation." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2006, pp. 1–10.

not free of controversy and seems to fall in the same theoretical trap he himself posits—he argues that a recording of the Beatles does not alter the fact they performed *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* when, in fact, recording instruments, microphones, and all sorts of sophisticated devices whose function I can only imagine, are equally originary to the recording of the album, as well as the very idea of the album itself.

Auslander's contention, however, allows for rethinking the video recordings, the *e-flux* live coverage and the anthology that followed *The Curatorial Future* as 'originary' to and of the conference. I consider this a decisive factor for my analysis, since it makes possible an understanding of the materials derived from the symposium as constituent of the event of knowledge and not as mere documents that simply bear witness–even though that in itself is not unproblematic. At the same time, the specific particularities of these formats, though able to have their semantic function "in their own right", must be necessarily at play at this originary level.

At this originary level, what the public distribution of curatorial discourse through its different materials reveals is that there is always someone looking, or, rather, there is always the assumption that someone's eyes will be there, even after the gaze that made the live performance of discourse possible is gone. Sometimes that gaze might be another practitioner's, like in that moment when Jelena Vesić tries to recognise a colleague. At times, however, that gaze can be anyone's. Because the "eye" of documentation looks at the producer of discourse, the face of the audience is both acknowledged and concealed. Following Lacan, Phelan goes on to say "the gaze guarantees the failure of self-seeing".[395] That is, I see, and because I see I cannot see myself. It is the presence of the eye that cannot see itself that brings about the performativity of the performance.

That the public circulation of curatorial discourse is articulated through the gaze of a public makes the audience both a constituent element of such publicness and of its performativity while maintaining it as that which cannot be seen. What one sees is the curator being seen. If the audience cannot see themselves (or, for that matter, the reader or the video viewer) then its

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[395] Phelan. *Unmarked*, p. 15.

presence is what makes curatorial discourse performative. In this light, unpacking the role of the audience in the production of curatorial discourse through the lens of performativity will be the focus of my next chapter.

Coda: documenta fifteen

In the introduction, I acknowledged the contemporaneity of this thesis. My research and writing has taken place as new examples of curatorial practice seeking to bring about some form of non-hierarchical horizontality continue happening. An important development in this shift towards curatorial modes that enact redistributed forms of collaboration was documenta fifteen (d15), which I briefly addressed in pages 125-126. In this sense, I would be remiss if I did not expand on this project. As a caveat, I will not elaborate on the project's by-now infamous antisemitic controversy, even though, ironically enough, it evidenced how hardline ecumenism and radical participation in curating may, if accidentally, include political stances that curating firmly disavows (and that I do too).[396]

The fifteenth edition of documenta, held in Kassel in 2022, was entrusted to Indonesian art collective ruangrupa, whose vision for the project aimed to blur the divide between close-door decision-making and public output or, in other words, to redistribute and decentralise curatorial agency. Instead of devising the show as the final result of preliminary work and planning, it foregrounded processes—economic, social, pedagogical, and infrastructural—as the very material output of the exhibition.

Whereas prior documenta editions often staged global contemporary art (or, at least, a desire for such global scope) through the lens of an overarching theme (or absence thereof, like *documenta 13*), ruangrupa introduced the concept of 'lumbung' (the Indonesian term for a communal rice barn) as the

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[396] On this matter, see: Gregory Sholette. 'A short and incomplete history of "bad" curating as collective resistance' in e-flux Criticism, https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/491800/a-short-and-incomplete-history-of-bad-curating-as-collective-resistance (accessed July 24th 2025).

guiding principle of *d15*. The lumbung metaphor functioned not only as a thematic reference but as an infrastructural model for the exhibition itself. The collective envisioned *d15* as a redistribution system: resources, time, and space were pooled and shared among participants, who then decided collectively how to allocate them. In this sense, the exhibition did not merely represent collective processes through process outputs—it was itself constituted by them.

This infrastructural reorientation meant that the exhibitionary output was not limited to finished works on display but included the assemblies (also known as 'majelis'), budgetary negotiations, and collective decision-making processes that shaped the event. Back-of-house and final output were conflated. d15 rendered visible the politics of cultural production normally hidden behind the scenes, foregrounding the messy and fragile infrastructures that sustain artistic practice.

A key mechanism through which processes emerged as the main exhibitionary output was ruangrupa's method of selection. Rather than inviting individual artists, they invited 14 collectives (the so-called "lumbung members"), who in turn nominated further participants. This rhizomatic chain of invitation emphasized trust and existing relationships over curatorial authority. This approach, it has been claimed, positioned d15 as a form of resistance to the star system of the art world and to the hierarchies of expertise that often govern biennials and mega-exhibitions.[397]

Participants collectively debated programming, finances, and responsibilities. The process of participation itself became *performative*, in that it happened before a public (or, to refer back to my interim characterisation of performance in pages 166-167, before someone else's eyes). For instance, many collectives established working groups, kitchens, publishing hubs, or activist networks within the city. An example of this was the Spanish collective INLAND, which set up agricultural and food-related projects, including workshops around farming and ecological knowledge. Gudskul, an educational platform that is, in turn, one of ruangrupa's members, organized

[397] Di Liu. '*Unorchestrated Symphony: documenta fifteen as a Site of Resistance*' in Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 2024, pp. 106-132.

Gudkitchen, a shared space in Kassel's Fridericianum where artists and visitors cooked and ate together as a form of community-making. Dutch project The Black Archives duplicated part of its archive, accepting contributions from participants and visitors.

Publishing practices held a particularly important place within d15's understanding of process. For ruangrupa and many of the invited collectives, publishing was not limited to the production of books or catalogues (even though there were some official publications I shall address below) but, rather, was understood as a social act of distribution, translation, and archiving. lumbung Press thus became one of d15's "initiative projects", a communally used offset machine that artists could utilise at will.[398] The importance of this project was not just to performatively showcase printing and textual production as part of the exhibition. Its intention was forcefully explained as "transmission without intermediaries, translation or proofreading outside the logic of each project".As Erick Beltrán, documenta fifteen's artistic director for the show's editorial project, says elsewhere, "[t]he projects should speak for themselves, in their own terms, with no room for an omniscient voice seeking to classify or define them. Instead of selecting, controlling, cutting or excluding".[399] Disguised as a gesture that seeks to reclaim some form of critical sovereignty, I think this notion of a project that "speaks for itself", without mediation, strongly resonates with the reemergence of a modernist paradigm that case-study writing has reintroduced in curatorial thinking and that I have explained in the second chapter—let alone his own writing as omniscient narrator of the activities lumbung Press undertook, which I have just quoted.

But even the official publications that d15 generated seemed to be reckoning with their own purported horizontality. Important, in this sense, is the fact there was a group of *official* texts, of institutional enunciations, versus the vast

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[398] Initiative project is the term used by ruangrupa's members in 'A Moderated Public Conversation with ruangrupa' in *Political Choreographies, Decolonial Theories, Trans Bodies* (eds. Marina Griznik and Jovita Pristovsek), Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023, p. 260.

[399] Erick Beltrán. 'Some Guiding Terms for Lumbung Press: Defining "publishing"' in *L'Internationale*, April 22nd 2023, https://archive-2014-2024.internationaleonline.org/opinions/1099_some_guiding_terms_for_lumbung_press_defining_publishing/ (Accessed July 21st 2025).

array of materials that were printed as part of documenta fifteen. In collaboration with Hatzje Cantz, documenta's anointed publishing house, the 2022 edition of the show published a handbook, a family book, and an anthology of literary texts which poetically explored and presented terms akin to *lumbung* in other languages and from various parts of the world. For the anthology, eight publishing houses joined forces to make eight different editions of the book to provide a global perspective. Each of the editions was written and translated into a different language (namely, Basque, Spanish, Portuguese, Indonesian, German and English), expanding documenta's linguistic remit by enfranchising minority languages or languages from the Global South. ruangrupa's characterisation of *lumbung stories* (the anthology's title) is telling: "a true product of communal action".[400] The emphasis on its character, true, genuine, resonates with Ute Meta Bauer's characterisation of her publishing practice as "as authentic" as her exhibitionary programme, which I discussed in the first chapter in pages 50-51. The necessity to qualify lumbung stories as 'truly communal' expresses, in my view, ruangrupa's anxiety that perhaps d15's official publications were somewhat less redistributed, less decentralised, than the rest of the programme—or, at least, that they would be perceived as such by their readership.

And that is, to me, what speaks directly to the main knub of my thesis. Yes, curating might now have an example of a successfully decentralised megaproject, a nuanced image of what a curatorially redistributed platform would look like (and of the sheer amount of energy such redistribution might require). Some have said that even d15's publicness generated a tier of participants (or rather, non-participants), who felt as if they were arriving late at the party, those who arrived when participation had already taken place, rendering a division where those performing stand before those not performing, that is, those doing and those showing their doing versus those who see the doing.[401] Such a divide, I ask myself, might be a necessary

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[400] 'lumbrung Press' in *documenta-fifteen.de,* https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung-press (accessed July 21st 2025).

[401] On this, see: Veronika Molnár. "Fragmented memories from documenta fifteen" in mezosfera.org, Aug 2023,

prerequisite for such images of redistribution to have an effect. In this sense, while it is not the object of my thesis to analyse whether propositional or fabulatory images of curatorial horizontality fail or function, what it is of importance here is that commentary of such images (in other words, talking about curating) is not horizontal or communally produced and documenta fifteen has not escaped that logic.

It is to note, for instance, the two symposia held to reflect on the show, whose material layout and format did not distance from a conventional conference (like the The Future Curatorial, for instance, which I have addressed in detail in this chapter). *(un)Common Grounds: Reflecting on documenta fifteen* (Sept 2022) was hosted by Dutch organisation Framer Framed and co-organized by Akademie van Kunsten (Society of Arts), and the Van Abbemuseum. Together with a roster of internationally established curators and practitioners ("thinker-speakers"), it featured some contributions from ruangrupa members. Its aim was "to act both as a conceptual space to think through debates raised during the exhibition period, and a platform carrying on the lumbung spirit."[402] In this regard, 'spirit' is an apt term to describe the symposium's re-elaboration of lumbung as a concept. Instead of being an organisational principle, it operated as an ethos, as an atmosphere of conviviality (epitomised by a geodesic dome on display alongside the speakers as well as by the visual identity's fun colors). The symposium concealed whatever preliminary conversations took place for it to be possible; its documentation in the form of video recordings, again, prioritised expert speech—which must have been inevitable, since the programme was but a series of moments of expertise and reflection enacted before an audience. Ironically enough, when audience members shared their thoughts with the panel on the one occasion they had to chip in (the 'open conversation' that closed the programme), the camera does not film them.

http://mezosfera.org/fragmented-memories-from-documenta-fifteen/, (accessed July 21st 2025)

[402] 'Symposium: (un)Common Grounds - Reflecting on documenta fifteen' in framerframed.nl, https://framerframed.nl/en/projecten/uncommon-grounds-reflecting-on-documenta-fifteen, (accessed July 22nd 2025).

Indeed, this public event was not under the aegis of documenta, despite Framer Framed's effort to loosely brand it as being part of it. It was a moment where a curatorial experiment was explicitly theorised and such theorisation was happening through a format that has little resemblance to a collective effort in cultural production. Substantially more serious in both tone and scenography was *documenta fifteen as a Watershed Moment?: Art, Politics and the Public Sphere*, held in November 2023 and organised by the documenta Institute and Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, featuring no members of ruangrupa. A succession of specialists against a black backdrop, solely accompanied by a few pieces of austere furniture, was everything the programme had on the stage. Taking place entirely in German, as opposed to the polyglot desire underlying d15's publications, the symposium was clearly an attempt to control optics and save face after the various controversies the show protagonised the previous year.

That idea that, because there was a truly horizontal moment where organizational performance and the printing of its documents are jumbled together (much like those performances described by Auslander that produce their own documentation while they are happening), their conditions of reception and circulation are also horizontal is but a presupposition and it would seem that even radical experiments in curatorial decentralisation still have an appetite for authoritative modes of explicit theorisation—like ruangrupa's participation in *un(Common Grounds)*. In any case, this thesis is less preoccupied with denouncing that collective, decentralised, post-hierarchical experiences in curatorial practice are not what they are purported to be—I suspect, yes, that more often than not they aren't. Rather, I am trying to show how explicit reflection on curating—talking about curating, in sum—is often happening through formats that are rather vertical.

Chapter 4
The performance of curatorial thinking

In the second chapter, my analysis focused on a specific writing strategy, the self-reported case study, in order to show how the relationship between discourse and practice in certain instances of contemporary curating is complex if not paradoxical. In particular, I tried to unpack how the unswervingly promiscuous experience that participating in a curatorial project often is—that is, the multiplicity of readings, itineraries, gestures and makeshift choreographies that the audience's always-partial literacy of the exhibitionary space inevitably generates—is somewhat transformed, when discussed and talked about by its instigators, into a univocal account of such experience. I contended that there were different types of discursive control in retelling a project (as explained in the different examples that I foregrounded) and that such transformation into an unproblematic, conflict-free account might be a necessary gesture for those speech-acts to be significant, or at least to be posited as such, within curatorial discourse. The chapter deepened one of the critiques I had tried to position in the first chapter of this thesis, where I attempted to show how certain ideas of readership in curatorial thinking were, if anything, more similar to a political fantasy than to deictic participation (pp. 58-60). My aim then was to demystify the prevalent notion that what is said about curating somewhat mirrors the redistributive politics (or a desire for such politics) that many curatorial projects, as well as many examples of artistic practice that have contributed to the curatorial field, purport to bring about.

Another way to put what I tried to achieve through my analysis is how the anthology as a primary format of curatorial literature can be a helpful tool to trace the shift from exhibitionary and representational curating towards non-exhibitionary practices, as part of a widespread discursive turn in the curatorial field. While, in my view, that much is true, I also attempted to show how readership, as a form of engagement, cannot possibly replicate the type of participation or audience involvement that takes place in an exhibition or in a

discursive event. If anything, the claim that readership elicits some kind of intellectual transfiguration that is necessarily tantamount to some critical awakening (and therefore equals participation) resonates more closely with ideas of politics-as-critique that had currency in the 1990s, such as Catherine David's documenta X, than with more recent notions of politics-as-coming-together or politics-as-gathering-in-person. This assumption, or perhaps professional neglect, that readership and participation are somewhat similar stem from a blurred understanding of how anthologies work, as I pointed out before (pp. 45-46), a functioning that is often seen as mirroring the "polyphonic" or "constellational" characterisation of group exhibitions—even though exhibitions have often been considered to be less participatory or more passive than other types of curatorial project.

More specifically, I focused on the disparity between how the curatorial (a specific discourse formation within curating) has reflected on projects that the curatorial itself sees as part of its own logic and how written accounts of such projects somehow obliterate whatever redistribution of agency and spectatorship they claim to facilitate. This reemergence of curatorial authority through self-reported writing is what the second chapter sought to unpack in greater detail.

The analysis becomes all the more relevant when one situates it within (and contra) the professional belief among curators that discursive practices within curating,[403] its turn towards non-representation, are able to broker more inclusivity, a higher degree of involvement from the audience, a more egalitarian example of democratic organisation and, in sum, a more authentic form of political community—a prevalent conviction that resonates with the field of performance studies, where a similar conventional wisdom claims that something like a community takes place or is formed, between performer and audience, at the live event, as Philip Auslander has pointed out and has sought to problematise.[404] The emphasis on the live presence of the audience (as necessary as the curator's work for the event of knowledge to take place) and how it is somehow at odds with the event's documentation is where the

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[403] Again, I am using here the term 'discursive' as has been used in curatorial thinking: non-exhibitionary, event-based outputs that privilege oral exchange and public speaking.
[404] Philip Auslander. *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge 1999), p. 2.

previous chapter arrived at, a point of arrival that I have furthered nuanced by expanding on documenta fifteen.

A new vocabulary

In addition to d15's decentralised experiment in curatorial practice, I would contend that curating's professional desideratum for politico-semiotic horizontality—and for authority diffraction—has accelerated over the last few years, with the emergence of a new term, co-production (or co-curating) which might refer either to a redistributed paradigm for the production of meaning or to the very assembling of a political community itself: that is, the community *produces* together with the sanctioned cultural practitioner or, rather, in a surprisingly authoritative turn, community is what is co-produced by curatorial practice. This is a term that seems to be replacing "participation" within curatorial discourse and which, in the UK, has been championed by different research councils[405] and generated a number of projects purported to be community-led such as *Co-Curate North East*—whose fundamental output is not dissimilar from the online repository that Philadelpia Assembled created—or, for instance, *Science Museum: Community-in-Residence*.[406]

The oscillation between these two poles (community as co-producer and community as the co-produced) is fluid and, at times, both are conflated. For instance, as cultural historian and curator Tehmina Goskar indicates, "community, engagement and co-curating are interchangeable ideas".[407] Not only is *community* one of the agents (and discursive loci) which this form of co-productive paradigm seeks to equate with the traditional sites and brokers of cultural production, that is, professional practitioners and institutions. With its mutual interchangeability, Goskar posits community as a synonym for co-curating. By virtue of this equivalence, the practitioners adhering to this working paradigm (co-curating/co-production) see themselves as both instigators and members of the community they co-curate. As Museum

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[405] https://co-curate.ncl.ac.uk/uploads/Notes_on_Co-production_Hudson_etal.pdf

[406] https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/157728719.pdf

[407] Tehmina Goskar. "Citizen Curators. Cultural Democracy in Action?" in *Museum Worlds: Advances in Research*, 10 (2022), pp. 78–92.

Studies scholar Helen Graham maintains, this a discursive gesture and a model of practice that blurs the institution/public division as much as it is retained.[408] This hybrid and yet aporetic self-understanding of the cultural practitioner stems from Science and Technology studies—Graham points at Donna Haraway as a seminal contributor to this model where the practitioner (the biologist, in Haraway's case) is both producing discourse and produced by discourse—while the text bridging the gap between this field of enquiry and cultural institutions (in particular, museums) is Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*. This embeddedness of the practitioner within its field of practice, with its double-edged, intertwined productivity, closely resonates with the political operativity of discourse that I have pointed out in the first chapter (pp. 26-31): it regulates as much as it gets regulated; it is produced as much as it produces.

To situate this thinking back into the specific context of my research—the formats that have enacted curatorial discourse—these latest developments in the political discourse of curating (and its underpinning epistemology) help me advance a new working explanation: not only is the curator the producer of a discourse formation where practitioners themselves are inscribed as a discursive trope—I am thinking of the by-now jaded question "what is a curator?" or, similarly, of the wealth of reflective accounts on curatorial practice that have been published under the metonymic umbrella "the curator as"—. Something more decisive seems to emerge here: the curator is also materially produced by curatorial discourse,[409] a production which does not happen in a vacuum, but rather, in specific formats that possess their own materiality. Just like (the body of) the biologist is both "organism and biology-as-discourse",[410] it seems reasonable to ask oneself whether the curator is both that who does curating, in the most prosaic sense of the verb "doing", as well as the material and discursive result of explicit curatorial thinking itself and of its performance.

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[408] Helen Graham "The 'co' in co-production: Museums, community participation and Science and Technology Studies" in *Science Museums and Research*, Spring 2016, https://journal.sciencemuseum.ac.uk/article/the-co-in-co-production/#main-body (Accessed July 22nd 2023).
[409] And here, yes, I am using curatorial discourse as a short hand for what I stated in the introduction: explicit theorization on curatorial practice.
[410] *Ibid.*

While this might now seem to be a more refined understanding of the entangled relationship between discourse and practice, matter and meaning, this cannot fully answer what audiences, publics, readers, bystanders and beholders are doing in all of this. In this sense, while the question of whether one effectively participates in the formation of discourse through the activity of reading might have a somewhat more evident answer (the private exercise of reading cannot possibly be the same as the publication of a book), a similar interrogation is applicable when one thinks of how audiences are involved or participate when attending a public talk or when watching, for instance, a video recording of a conference paper.

Clearly, readership, insofar as a phantasmagorical figure the author might bear in mind while producing a text, cannot operate in a similar fashion. Neither can the bystander audience. Even though it has been a crucial tenet of my analysis to show how anthologies and symposia are intimately intertwined in a way that resists a fully discrete separation, it would be a major mistake to conflate lecture attendance with reading a book. Indeed, while it is possible to protest a guest speaker or to interrupt the delivery of a conference paper, little can one expect to happen if a book is yelled at.

In this chapter, what I am going to attempt to undertake is a three-tiered analysis: 1) to retrieve the specificity of viewing—or rather, to use the term used by television studies scholar John Fiske, *audiencing*—[411] in order to avoid its conflation with readership-as-participation within the production of curatorial discourse; 2) to readdress the public talk as a performative moment or as showing-doing, for which I will need to triangulate different notions of performativity and 3) to unpack a specific and somewhat unique example of discursive practice, one of *Former West*'s Public Editorial Meetings, where the public performance of discourse and its relationship to its main material output (in this particular case, the quasi-encyclopedic volume Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989) are complicated in a way that might shed new light on the role audiences play in the production of curatorial discourse and its political desire for redistribution.

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[411] John Fiske. "Audiencing: A cultural studies approach to watching television" in Poetics, Volume 21, Issue 4, Aug 1992, pp. 345-359.

Live reading, live viewing

It is useful to resort to Philip Auslander's long-standing work on the concept of liveliness in order to differentiate between these two different modes of discursive attention, that is, text reading versus talk viewing—after all, I share with him a similar concern, as I have just pointed out above. In his article *Digital Liveness, A Historico-Philosophical Perspective,* Auslander further develops what he was set to achieve in the second edition of his celebrated book *Liveness* and attempts to recenter the role of audiences and spectatorship in the construction of live experiences—the emphasis is placed, as the title suggests, on screen-user interactions. This is, in my view, a nuanced, if heuristic text where what constitutes liveness is problematized in light of the developments brought about by the proliferation of digital spaces, a milieu that seems all the more appropriate for the purposes of my analysis since both the researcher and the curious normally access curatorial talks and lectures through the video recordings that populate the Internet, if available.

That interacting with websites might be perceived as a live experience is a view that the performance studies scholar had already adumbrated in his second edition to *Liveness*, a position that he maintains in his later article by stating that the perception of digital liveness resides in the ability of "websites and other virtual entities [to] respond to us in real time".[412] A preliminary observation comes to mind: however vibrant the private reading of a text might be, the text does not respond to the reader like a website does to the user. At the same time, if real-time response, or perception thereof, is what constitutes a live experience, one could adduce that the lecture theatre's behaviour, the body language of the attendants, the faces they make and even their occasional yawning, is what makes any given instance of public speaking a live event, insofar as those changes can elicit a response in the lecturer—and this might be the reason why, interrupting his own lecture, Fred Moten once ardently described the act of reading a paper as "wrong, evil, vicious":[413] in

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[412] Philip Auslander. "Digital Liveness, A Historico-Philosophical Perspective" in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 102 (2012), pp. 3-11, p. 4.
[413] Fred Moten. *A Poetics of the Undercommons* (New York: Sputnik and Fizzle, 2016), p. 16.

reading a paper aloud to an audience, one is not looking at the attendants and the liveness of the event could be compromised. This is, I contend, a fundamental difference between readership and spectatorship that requires a specific analysis. Ignoring it would render this project incomplete.

To brace his thinking, Auslander draws on the work of George Gadamer in *Truth and Method* not so much to posit digital interactions as aesthetic experiences in themselves but, rather, to emphasise the role of the spectator in transforming a given experience into a live one, in a gesture that mirrors Gadamer's thesis that aesthetic experiences are co-produced by the receptor. To express it in Gadamerian terms: the artwork or, to Auslander, the digitally mediatised object, contains a "claim" or a demand "that is fulfilled only when the audience accepts it".[414] Gadamer sees the receptor, be it a reader, a viewer or a spectator, as a subject that carries out an imperative contained in the artwork (the task to produce artistic meaning and significance). This is a mandate that awaits aesthetic elaboration and predates literary or visual reception of the object. This demand is better explained in relation to his notion of "contemporaneity", which Auslender needs to unpack in his article as well in order to develop his argument. The centrality of this concept in Gadamer's thinking allowed the philosopher to reposition aesthetic experience (literary, musical or artistic) as an active task that renders cultural production meaningful and relevant beyond its immediate historical and material context.[415] Such a task is by definition conscious and its enactment is referred to as an *achievement*.[416] As Cinthya R. Nielsen explains on Gadamer's concept of contemporaneity, "[h]istorical distance is not a barrier to the work's meaningful address". Rather, it "comes to presence through spectatorial, auditorial, and performative *cooperative* activity".[417] The being-contemporary of an artwork is both contained in it and enacted through the conscious

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[414] Philip Auslander. "Digital Liveness, A Historico-Philosophical Perspective" in *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 102 (2012), pp. 3-11, p. 7.
[415] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 123.
[416] Hans-Goerg Gadamer, "The Artwork in Word and Image: 'So True, So Full of Being!'" in Richard E. Palmer (trans. and ed.) *The Gadamer Reader. A Bouquet of the Later Writings*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 199.
[417] Cynthia R. Nielsen. "Gadamer on the Event of Art, the Other, and a Gesture Toward a Gadamarian Approach to Free Jazz" in *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics* 2016, article 6. pp. 1-17. My italics.

exercise of reading, viewing or listening. To an extent, one could say that this conscious engagement with the artistic or literary object forms the basis of criticism. What emerges here is a reclaiming, as a participatory activity, of what, to some, would be traditional types of aesthetic or artistic encounter, as opposed to notions of participation as physical activity—a reparative gesture that, in principle, I agree with. In other words, to Gadamer, to read (if done well) is to participate. The spectator participates through their consciously being there and one's participation in the history of art and culture takes place through this conscious engagement with its products.

I suspect things behave differently when taken to the realm of discourse production (in this particular case, curatorial discourse), a type of cultural production that is also read, viewed and listened to. I shall show below that this notion of participation vis-à-vis reading/viewing has limitations, and that it resonates with those notions of participation that I hinted as untenable in the previous chapter. It also contains, however, a useful trope that will help me resituate my analysis within what, in my view, is a more effective type of theoretical device.

Auslander's drawing on Gadamer's characterisation of aesthetic experience is an attempt to establish an analogous correlation between aesthetic achievement (the conscious task of rendering an object contemporary) and digital liveness (in fact, a correlation with liveness as a general concept). This is a strategy Auslander uses to overcome the technological determinism that other scholars in the field of performance studies have foregrounded in order to define *when* liveness happens—that is, that only certain technologies and certain discourses on technology are able to produce a live experience. However, the emphasis on the spectator-user's ability to resynthesize an experience into a live one appears somewhat tautological since, as Auslander himself sums up at the end of this article, "[t]he experience of liveness results from our conscious act of grasping virtual entities as live in response to the claims they make on us".[418] Liveness, therefore, emerges when one consciously sees something as live because the demand to become live was already immanent to whichever mediatized object one is interacting with. Or to put it

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[418] Philip Auslander, *Digital Liveness*, p. 11

more plainly, liveness seems to be what one experiences as such. While this apparently emancipatory bid might have some truth to it, one cannot but wonder whether this private resynthesis of a given experience as a live one always holds equal sway. Whatever I perceive as live experience, can it, for instance, alter hegemonic ideas on liveness? Can it elicit changes in whatever prevalent discourse on liveness prevails at a given historical moment? I ask these questions to show how this position on liveness and, by extension, on artistic and literary criticism (since it is posited as analogue to Gadamer's aesthetic experience) takes us rather closely to the ideas of readership and participation in discourse that I unpacked in the first chapter (pp. 28-31) i. Auslander's position cannot really account (it might not even need to) for how prevalent ideas of what liveness is are formed and circulated. As a researcher who in essence is devoted to studying the intricacies of discourse formation, it is a perplexity to maintain that everything that is said about a field of enquiry regulates that field. The performativity of a statement, the ability of a speech-act to be effective, greatly depends on where something is said. In this sense, it might be useful to recall Terry Eagleton's trenchant critique of Gadamer's hermeneutic criticism, where the English scholar shows how the great conversation of literary tradition that Gadamer champions cannot account for how this tête-a-tête with the history of art and literature takes, more often than not, the form of a monologue.[419] It cannot explain why certain voices get to be heard while others remain ignored. This, in my view, mirrors the impasse I had arrived at when I was analysing notions of readership as discourse participation as well as Pratt's criticism of reader-response theory (pp. 59-60).[420]

While Auslander's Gadamerian game somehow resonates with the political ecumenism that ideas of readership in curating contain, the notion of 'claim' or 'demand' is an important device, since it deeply resonates with Butler's

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[419] Terry Eagleton. "Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Reception Theory" in *An Introduction to Literary Theory* (2nd edition) (The University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 47-78.
[420] Mary Louise Pratt. "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader
Response Criticism" in boundary 2, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics
(Autumn, 1982 - Winter, 1983), pp. 201-231.

thinking of performativity as including the variety of responses one produces when fulfilling an ideological mandate.[421] My unpacking of Auslander's position is helpful to understand that, even though his characterisation might be limited, the presence of a live audience, of other bodies, might be a fundamental element one needs to pay attention to when analysing what happens during a public talk. It has also helped me point out that conflating between audience presence and readership can replicate the same mistakes that conflating anthology and exhibition can bring about. This is why, I contend, a performative analysis of discourse production, of curating's explicit theorisation of itself, might prove more helpful.

Performance review

It is in the context of this framework where one of the examples I unpacked in chapter two, *Wiggling the Frame* and its relationship to the projects it describes (*Philadelphia Assembled* and *Trainings for the Non-Yet*) gains special significance. The last pages of that chapter tried to render visible how, in the transcript of that four-way conversation, there was something like a performative theory of the art institution as well as a performative understanding of participation as politics (or of participation as a rehearsal for politics). In analysing how those projects were discussed and characterised, something like an anti-performative account of performativity emerged, since the failure and resistance that performing an instruction, a mandate or a task entails was there presented as 'successfully' performed—even though there is a moment of explicit acknowledgment of conflict and radical disagreement as part of Van Heeswijk's practice, a moment of recognition that such conflicts are, as Mick Wilson describes them, "intrinsic social values".[422]

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[421] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (Routledge: New York, 1990).

[422] Despite his words, even Mick Wilson's remark cannot admit full disagreement as the foundation of Van Heewijk's working methodology. When the Sanctuary Atmosphere reached a point where there was no possible agreement on a shared set of key values, practising each other's tools replaced persuasion with understanding. That is, I practise your learning tool, and by practising it I understand your position. While Wilson sees here a preservation of

To bring this back to Butler's notion of performativity: if the mandate of gender can be interpreted in manifold ways, if one's understanding of gender is never univocal and this is why one fails to fully accommodate such mandate (that is, one fails to completely fulfil the ideological expectation of how gender should be presented), if what makes it *performative* is that one interprets and carries out an instruction every time in a new way, how is it possible that whatever instructions are given to an audience can always generate one and the same understanding of "good politics"?—in this case, this understanding of what "good politics" or even a "politics proper" might look like is always predetermined as the artist's or the curator's. A recent case that similarly exemplifies the assumption that a (progressive) political proposition will be ecumenically understood by the audience is the exhibitionary programme and curatorial vision that the new team at Barcelona's MACBA has championed since the appointment of its new director. The 2023 programme was presented in Spanish media as a plan for "the breakdown of modern and historical ideology",[423] which would be achieved through a series of propositional exhibitions. One cannot but assume that the originary breakdown, the primary critical distance that makes such an ideological breakdown possible, has somewhat taken place already in the curatorial mind. Not only is the curatorial team positioned as a subjectivity *dans le vrai*.[424] It doesn't need to deal with the ideological conditions that underpin the reception of an exhibition, since the expectation that whatever discursive intervention is sought through that programme is absolute and infallible.[425]

In my view, this thinking somehow contradicts the notions of performativity that have enriched academic discourse and artistic practice since the 1990s. To translate this to the context of this last example: I instruct you to have an ideological breakdown and the ideological breakdown will happen. Has

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radical conflict at the core of Philadelphia Assembled, I see its obliteration, since "not understanding" the other's positions never seems to be an option.

[423] Noelia Ramírez. "Decolonial y colectiva: así será la mirada del Macba" en 2023 en *El Pais*, Dec 12 2022, at https://elpais.com/espana/catalunya/2022-12-13/decolonial-y-revisionista-de-la-memoria-colectiva-asi-sera-la-mirada-del-macba-en-2023.html, [My translation] (accessed, May 22nd 2023).

[424] I am referring to Hal Foster's realisation that, in contemporary art discourse, the subaltern subject is seen as ideologically self-transparent. See, Hal Foster. *The Return of The Real. The Avant-Garde at The End of The Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 177.

[425] Here I am using the term 'discourse' in its Foucauldian sense.

curating's embracing of a performative understanding of the institution rendered performativity ineffective? Or is it how curatorial discourse is produced which suspends the multifariousness of performativity?

Van Heeswijk's response to Wilson's explicit acknowledgement of something like a conflictual practice, of a moment where disagreement is negotiated through practising what other participants were bringing to the project, is a recollection of a specific instance of *Philadelphia Assembled*, when the Alumni Ex-Offenders Association decided to "inhabit" one of the pieces of the exhibition (Framework for an Affordable House) and hold their meetings "publicly within the museum"—in a way that is reminiscent of documenta fifteen. I quote the excerpt at length below:

> So I said "OK, let's stop here together and let's just talk through what it means to have you perform your meetings, or have your meetings here in this reconstruction of an affordable house in the Museum. Are you performing yourself? What does this do? Are you on display?" This was a very intense question: "Are you aware it might look like you put yourself on display, or that I put you on display, or that we put you on display?" (...) They saw it as an opportunity to practise in public, and that also by performing themselves in public they were using it as a learning opportunity. In the end, none of the meetings were perceived as a display.[426]

Two different meanings of what it would mean to practise in public, to show oneself or one's practice in public, seem to emerge here: to perform oneself versus to be put on display. Performance and display seem to be an opposing pair where one appears to be somewhat more admissible than the other. The distinction between to perform and to perform oneself is not clear and it might prove difficult to infer it from the excerpt alone, though there appears to be a difference between the group *performing* their meetings at the exhibition and the same group just *having* their meetings there, as if that would amount to two separate phenomenological or aesthetical tiers.

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[426] Jeanne Van Heswijk, *Wiggling the Frame*, p. 26.

There is one plausible reading of what to perform oneself would mean. In talking about examples of delegated performance, Claire Bishop uses the expression "to perform themselves" to refer to hired actors or participants that are not playing a character other than who they are.[427] While it seems to me that to perform oneself inevitably entails an act of self-alienation, I understand that what this phrase might designate is that the individual performing oneself is not playing an assigned role other than whatever presentation of the self they perform on a daily basis—which is in turn redoing and responding to various institutional or ideological mandates.

However, in Van Hewijk's case, to perform (oneself) does seem to be, if maybe not desirable, at least an acceptable thing to do. It is "to be on display" that reads as a thornier matter. In fact, there is even a certain sense of relief when, as one goes on to learn, display is not what those meetings were perceived as. Whether somebody else, for instance a casual visitor, did perceive them as being on display, one is not told.

On the one hand, the apodictic statement that describes how the meetings operated resonates with part of the criticism I posited in the previous chapters: the producer of discourse knows that their speech has a series of policing effects—"I say that this does not do what it does", as was the case in the anthology—while the interpretive possibilities of the object at hand are curtailed—the group said that they did not perceived themselves as being on display, so they were not on display. What I think is of particular importance here is this distinction between an action that is positive or generative and the same action being posited as somewhat spurious or inauthentic. Indeed, one can understand the artist's (and the panel's) ethical and political implications that *exhibiting* a vulnerable collective or a subaltern subjectivity entails—if that was the case, the project would be haunted by the ghost of extractivism and colonial subjugation.

The difference however remains. The same action—holding a meeting—can be either performance or display. What does this difference, which the text insists on, mean? What can one make of it? What notion of performativity is this one, which seems to be fundamentally different from display? Could the display of

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[427] Claire Bishop. *Artificial Hells*, p. 226.

the group's meetings make something else perform? I cannot but recall here the opening chapter to Peggy Phelan's celebrated *Unmarked*, where the author, drawing from Lacanian psychoanalysis, expands the purview of the symbolic gaze that makes the performative moment possible by making it extensive to other types of look (or of being looked at): Phelan refers to Louise Bourgeois's marble sculpture, *Nature Study, Velvet Eyes* (1984) whose pair of human-looking eyeballs, embedded in a piece of rock, look at the viewer in return.[428] It is this interplay between the gaze of the object on display and the gaze of the viewer that generates a "performative exchange with its beholder", as performance studies scholar Daniel Sack further elaborates in relation to Phelan's example.[429] Who is performing when one looks at the Alumni Ex-Offenders Association holding their meetings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art? Is it the artist? The institution? The audience maybe? Am I being performed or am I performing when I read Van Heeswijk's account of her project in conversation with the rest of the panel? Similarly, to mind also comes Erving Goffman's by-now classic *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where the sociologist undertakes an analysis of human interactions through the lens of theatre and dramaturgy. In his book, Goffman yields a definition of performance that might be helpful to recall here. Performance is defined as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants".[430] Someone else's presence appears to be a prerequisite for the performative action to occur. One performs provided that there is another person, namely, as Goffman himself points out: "the audience, observers, or co-participants".[431] Again, not only is to perform posited here as an action that has something like a return or like an effect on someone else (be it the performer or the beholder). In acknowledging that "the other participant" can be (part of) an audience or an observer, somebody else's gaze is summoned to this drama as a constituent element which the performance needs for it to take place.

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[428] Peggy Phelan, "Broken simmetries: memory, sight, love" in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York, Routledge, 1993 [2001]), pp. 21

[429] Daniel Sack, "Beholding potentiality" in *After Live: Possibility, Potentiality and the Future of Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), pp. 119.

[430] Erving Goffman. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1959). p. 15.

[431] Ibid, p. 15

This distinction between performance and display, which resonates with the same divide Jacques Ranciere tries to overcome in *The Emancipated Spectator* between action and contemplation (I shall dwell on this further below), might look like an intellectual perplexity to some scholars in performance studies.[432] While I shall expand below on examples of analysis that unpack the intricacies of what it means to perform as an artistic practice to later see how this compares to performative moments of curatorial discourse, suffice it for now to resort here to Richard Schechner's introductory remark as to what counts as a performance (his primary object of study). Schechner cannot but admit that hardline definitions of the term are not particularly helpful when it comes to tracing the limits of his field of inquiry. As he goes on to say, "the underlying notion is that any action that is framed, presented, high-lighted, or *displayed* is a performance".[433] "To perform", he continues elsewhere, could also be conceptualised as "doing" and "showing doing"—again, a doing that is seen[434]. While a new distinction seems to emerge here—a distinction to which he adds "explaining "showing doing", a task he sees as often being the critic's—one that entails something like a phenomenological tilt, showing is not an action that is radically separate from performance. It is, if anything, a specific kind of performative action.[435]

Schechner's definition is without a doubt provisional and an attempt of his to get to something like a degree-zero vocabulary for performance studies, a starting point from which to navigate the field. There are other elements that characterise the performative action, such as repetition, rehearsal and routine, which he also addresses (and which have a lot in common with Butler's and Goffman's understanding of performativity that I addressed in pages 183 and 187).

What has made me focus on this somewhat oversimplified definition is its success. In a paper delivered in 2004, which would later become her article *The Nonperformativity of Racism*, Sarah Ahmed decries the banalisation of the term, which back then, she felt, was already "over-used within academic

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[432] Jacques Ranciere. *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 1-41.
[433] Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies. An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 2. My italics.
[434] Ibid, p. 2.
[435] Ibid, p. 3.

writing".[436] As she contends, "it seems as if almost everything is performative, where performative is used as a way of indicating that something is "brought into existence" through speech, representation, writing, law, practice or discourse".[437] Her paper, as she herself acknowledges, is posited as an attempt to retrieve the specificity of performative speech-acts and to distinguish them from those which are not.

The pervasiveness and misuse of the term, often in its adjectival form, is also identified by art historian Dorothea von Hantelmann as prevalent in contemporary art discourse, which she sees as often being used to suggest a "performance-like" characteristic a given artwork is said to possess. Von Hantelmann's proposal to put an end to what she sees as a terminological confusion in the field is to recognise that all artworks indeed have a performative aspect, that is, that they do things beyond what they originally mean.[438]

These two take-downs on a banal usage of the term "performative", of what it means to say that something "performs", are underpinned by an understanding of performativity that drifts away from elaborations of performativity that stem from performance studies and from understandings of performance as "showing doing". Indeed, in this "linguistic paradigm" of the performative, for lack of a better word, the gaze that makes performance possible is somewhat neglected as a fundamental element of performance. I myself can acknowledge that the fundamental reading of performativity that underpins my analysis in chapter 2 follows this understanding of the performative as meaning-making as opposed to "showing doing".

But even Austin's notion of what a performative speech-act is—which Hantelmann identifies as the *locus classicus* of the concept—seems to entail someone else's gaze, or at least someone else's presence, for the performative statement to have an effect. All of the examples that Austin uses to explain the

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[436] Sara Ahmed. "The Nonperformativity of Antiracism." *Meridians*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2006, pp. 104–26.

[437] Ibid.

[438] Dorothea Von Hantelmman. "The Experiential Turn." In *On Performativity*, edited by Elizabeth Carpenter. Vol. 1 of *Living Collections Catalogue*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2014. http://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn. [Accessed on June May 30th 2023]
I feel that her solution to the problem somehow reinscribes it in the very banalisation that she is determined to fix. At the same time, I agree with this somewhat undecidable and yet undeniable distinction between meaning and working.

workings of performative enunciation always take place in front of *someone else*, as explained in pages 164-165.[439]

Through this account of different theoretical attempts to define "performative", one can see that two traditions or two souls inhabit contemporary understandings of what to perform might be. Is this what the difference between "to perform" (proper) and "to display" is trying to evoke? In her introduction to *Participation*, part of Whitechapel Gallery's *Documents of Contemporary Art Collection*, Claire Bishop makes an important observation that might be helpful to better understand how these two traditions might translate within the context of contemporary art and other critical practices. She observes that the disruptions of theatrical convention that Bertolt Brecht sought to enact in order to instigate critical distance in the audience might be seen today as a "relatively passive mode of spectatorship".[440] Critical thinking, that is, "raising consciousness" opposes the paradigm of "physical involvement", which might seem somewhat more genuinely participatory by today's standards.[441]. It might be this which is at stake in such distinction, that raising consciousness remains or is seen as a somewhat lesser form of critical engagement as opposed to action.

At the same time, gaze, or maybe presence, emerges here as a central element that performance needs—even, in my view, in those accounts of performativity where gaze is obscured. The gaze of those who were lucky enough to watch the Ex-Offenders Alumni Association hold their meetings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, what did it do? Were they seeing a performance that was not displayed or was what they were seeing closer to "showing doing"? Is this a knowable question? Can one distinguish between a gaze that makes a performance occur and a gaze that transforms an event into display?

To bring it back to the main object of my research, are there any traces of this/these gaze(s) in the sites where curatorial discourse is produced? And what is that gaze doing to the discourse that is looking at?

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[439] J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 5.
[440] Claire Bishop. "Introduction" in Claire Bishop (ed.) *Participation* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2006), p. 11.
[441] Ibid, p. 11.

Former West: Curating as conceptualising

As I indicated in chapter 2, Van Heeswijk's account of her projects in *Wiggling the Frame* took place in dialogue with three other participants, among which is to note the presence of Maria Hlavajova, the director of Utrecht-based art space *BAK, basis voor actuele kunst*. Since its inception in 2000, BAK has hosted intense critical activity, often combining artistic research and practice, discursive events and activism. Under the overarching imperative to rethink "how to be together otherwise", a motto that pervades Hvalajova's writing and which sums up her curatorial vision, these "*situated research events* include a multiplicity of practices (research exhibitions, conferences, lectures, learning curricula, workshops and seminars, publications) as forms of public assembly".[442] In the first chapter, I already mentioned BAK as an example of artistic and curatorial platform where discursive events are complicated through redistributive organisational models or where at least such desire for horizontality was posited at the core of its activities. In particular, I mentioned its eight-year project *Former West*, a vast programme of research activities entertained as "a collective and nomadic project of inquiry" under the aegis of BAK as primary host and instigator, though in solidarity and collaboration with many other institutions and practitioners worldwide.[443]

Several public events that were part of this project took place in a number of cities across Europe, such as London, Budapest, Madrid, Berlin, Warsaw or Istanbul, to name a few. The list of institutions and initiatives that co-hosted these is equally long and included spaces, collectives and ventures such as Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Berlin), tranzit.hu (Budapest), Academy of Fine Arts (Vienna), Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (Madrid), Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven) or Afterall (London), to give a summary of the wealth of collaborations Former West enacted and drew on. The diversity of events that structured the project is also complex and they were divided in a number of categories according to their different formats, namely research congresses, research seminars, research exhibitions and, more importantly,

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[442] "BAK, basis voor actuele kunst" in *e-flux Institutions*, https://www.e-flux.com/institutions/633/bak-basis-voor-actuele-kunst/ [Accessed June 1st 2023]

[443] "Former West: Art and The Contemporary After 1989" in *formerwest.org*, https://formerwest.org/Publication [Accessed June 1st 2023]/

public editorial meetings (as well as a number of smaller publications generated by those events). These public editorial meetings had then drawn my attention, if in passing, since they seemed to complicate the relationship between publications and their preliminary planning. While surely there were closed-door conversations that remain unbeknownst to audiences and readership alike, the public performance (or display) of these meetings that would later be fundamental in the planning of a comprehensive anthology—an all-encompassing volume that covered and reassessed the significance of the project—brings together publication and discursive gathering, documentation and performance, in a new light. That is, these public editorial meetings were held before someone else's gaze or in the presence of an audience whose participation and what it consisted of I wish to examine.

Within the vast span of the project, the public programme *Former West: Documents, Constellations, Prospects* is of particular importance, held in collaboration with Berlin-based institution Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in March 2013 (hereafter: *Former West: Documents*). The project's final publication, *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989* acknowledges the importance of the Berlin iteration of the project within its own overall trajectory and discursive orientation, hence my focus on it.[444] *Former West: Documents* left *some* kinds of documentation behind that are currently available to the researcher. These fundamentally consist of written accounts—often about the event but not derived from the event—contained in the programme brochure as well as on the Former West website and in the anthology itself. Other materials that one could count as documentation are the images taken during the event and some video recordings of the public talks, though not of the public editorial meetings. For this reason, I will need to combine my analysis with the next iteration of such meetings—interestingly enough, not even BAK itself has kept video recordings of these first editorial meetings, as I found out upon requesting them to its team. At a moment in the history of curatorial practice where the status of programming as curatorial practice in its own right was still under question, if not considered as entirely

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[444] Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (eds.) *Former West: Art and The Contemporary After 1989* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016).

non-curatorial, the value attributed to this special, somewhat unique type of public meeting was probably seen as little, hence the loss of these video recordings. I shall return to this below.

Former West: Documents was structured in a series of thematic blocs or "currents", namely Learning Place, Art Production, Infrastructures, Insurgent Cosmopolitanism and Dissident Knowledges, each of them conceptualised by a guest practitioner.[445] The programme becomes all the more significant since it initiated the public editorial meetings that would later be a primary format of the wider research project, devised in their first edition by Simon Sheikh. Sheikh would also chair the next iterations of these public editorial meetings, whose recordings are still available to contemporary viewership, In addition to these editorial meetings and the public talks held during that week, *Dissident Knowledges*, conceptualised by Kathrin Romberg and Maria Hlavojova herself, differed from the other four currents, which had a more discursive emphasis, and featured a series of performances, installations and film screenings. It was therefore a complex programme that included a wealth of different types of curatorial practice—it is interesting to note that the different discursive events as well as the five currents appear as "conceptualised by" and not "curated by" the guest practitioners. I would wager, in fact, that this choice of words is not innocent and I think that lingering over, if briefly, the distinction between curation and conceptualization that *Former West: Documents* implicitly brought about might shed light on how public programmes and discourse production were seen back then by curators and where they thought curatorial discourse sat within their field of practice.

Indeed, 2013 seemed to have reached a turning point in curating's shift towards self-reflectivity where the agency, role and authorial capacity of the curator was under scrutiny—perhaps a reaction against the understated but all-pervasive curatorial apotheosis of documenta 13, where Christov-Bagarkiev's "hyperbolic exhibitionism"[446] positioned her curatorial

[445] Janine Armin (ed). *Former West: Documents, Constellations, Prospects* (HKW and bak, 2013), https://issuu.com/hkwberlin/docs/former_west_booklet_english?mode=window&pageNumber=1 (Accessed Jun 1st 2023).
[446] Nanne Buurman. CCB with... Displaying Curatorial Relationality in dOCUMENTA (13)'s The Logbook in *On Curating*, Issue 33, June 2016, pp. 61-75

persona both as origin and object of the exhibitionary process, despite a rhetoric of professional modesty and hospitality that prevailed during the show.[447]

For instance, the specialised journal *On Curating*, a still young publication at the time, devoted an issue to these matters that same year, focusing on the overlappings between artistic and curatorial practice and the legitimacy of curatorial authorship. Even the limits and possibility of curating as a specific practice seemed to be then under attack, as Paul O'Neill decried amidst what seemed to be a profound crisis in the field. "This tendency", as he would go on to say, was "particularly apparent in recent attempts to distinguish the concepts of the curatorial and the *paracuratorial*, with the *para* conceived of as operating away from, alongside, or supplementary to the main curatorial work of exhibition making".[448] The divide between those activities that were seen as pertaining to curating and those who were considered as ancillary to it strongly resonated with the ushering in of the curatorial as a discursive formation, a shift that displaces the focus away from exhibitionary practices, which in turn recentered of other types of cultural production whose result was not necessarily an exhibition. In any case, despite being a debate that one can locate in the 2010s, with some early contributions to the discussion dating back to the 2000s, such as Alex Farquharson's,*[449]* it is to remember that non-exhibitionary practices such as publishing were seen by some practitioners as a fundamental aspect of a curator's institutional activity, which I described in the first chapter.

Not only would this set of auxiliary tasks include activities like publishing. Paracuratorial were also examples of what today would be curatorial practice proper, such as public programming, conferences or reading groups: in sum, activities that would be considered as discursive. I contend it is in this context where Former West's distinction between "to conceptualise" and "to curate" must be situated, even though, in this particular case, it might have also been a strategy to diffract curatorial authority. And, as I started explaining above, this

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[447] Nanne Buurman. Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA (13) in *On Curating*, Issue 29, 2016, pp. 146-160.
[448] Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox" in *The Exhibitionist* vol. 6 (2012), pp. 55-60, p. 55.
[449] Alex Farquharson. "I Curate You Curate We Curate" in *ArtMonthly*, Sept 2003, pp. 7-10.

might also explain why the first public editorial meetings left no recordings behind.

This is a stage in the expansion of curatorial thinking where the loci of discourse were seen as different from the places of conventional curatorial practice. Particularly illuminating in this sense is the text "Curators who Don't Curate", by writer and art critic Karen Wilson-Goldie, published at the time in the now extinct Red Hook Journal, CCS Bard's online journal and Tirdad Zolghadr's editorial project. In this reflective piece that pays special attention to the curatorial pursuits of young practitioners in Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria and Istanbul, Wilson-Goldie makes an important differentiation that one cannot but notice. What these young curators were doing—"[o]organising public events, running workshops, designing educational programs, building audiences, and activating unused spaces"—[450]seemed to stand in opposition to a list of institutionally-backed activities one could read as curation *proper*, namely "making exhibitions, caring for collections, or even generating (…) curatorial discourse".[451] The distinction not only emphasises what at the time was conventional wisdom, that is, that curating was essentially an exhibition-making practice. It posits public programming as non-curating. While this position can render one perplexed (it is nevertheless interesting to note how, to Wilson-Goldie, exhibitionary practices side with the production of curatorial discourse, a working definition of discourse that sees discourse formation as happening beyond verbal speech), I suggest it is in this context, where practice and discourse were at odds, where one must situate Former West as an eminently discursive project. Emphasising this is important to understand the professional neglect towards the formats where curatorial discourse has taken place. Not only was it (and still is) assumed that collective publications somehow mirror the dynamics of a group exhibition. When it came to discursive platforms, these were not seen as examples of curatorial practice.

[450] Karen Wilson-Goldie, "Curators Who Don't Curate" in *Red Hook Journal*, May 5th 2012, at https://ccs.bard.edu/redhook/curators-who-don%E2%80%99t-curate/index.html [Accessed July 3rd 2023]
[451] Ibid, [Accessed July 3rd 2023]

Before focusing on *Former West: Documents* in order to unpack the relationship between discursive moment and audience, it might also be useful to briefly situate the general project and what it was set to achieve within another arena of curatorial discourse: its self-imaging as a critical practice that can make claims to politics and challenge the statu quo. Unlike other examples of curatorial practice and discourse that might bring to the fore a sense of politics as participation or politics as gathering, or as opposed to projects that see themselves as situated activism (the "political micromobilization" Paul O'Neill would describe his durational projects as),[452] *Former West* positioned its contribution as a response to "those remaining hegemonies—such as the west's persisting primacy in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields"—[453] made global by the world order that emerged after the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. Former West's aim as a discursive intervention was to question the primacy of the west (I retain the lower case that Hlavajova and Sheikh chose to use as a demystifying gesture) both on a geopolitical level but also in the production and distribution of contemporary art—a somewhat complex relationship since the same events that, to some, made the world post-historic and post-ideological are acknowledged in the book as making art truly contemporary and truly global.[454]

As the editors explain, the foundational moment in contemporary art's response to the post-1989 geopolitical reordering was 1992, when the commissioners of the national pavilions that would be part in the 45th Venice Biennale gathered in a meeting convened by Achille Bonito Oliva, a decisive year for "what we know today as global contemporary art".[455] This attempt to retrieve the specificity of what makes contemporary art contemporary, while subverting the power dynamics that govern society and artistic practices on a global scale, is what "formering" the west was set to achieve as primary critical gesture.

In this sense, Former West sits within a wider set of practices that have distanced themselves from representational politics and from attempts to re-enfranchise artistic practices from the Global South—attempts which do not

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[452] Paul O'Neill, *Locating the Producers*, p. 14.
[453] Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (eds.) *Former West: Art and The Contemporary After 1989*, p. 24.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Ibid.

necessarily question the ideological and institutional matrix where they take place. A good example to compare *Former West* with is *documenta X*, whose programme of public talks—to David, one of the three pillars structuring her edition of the show, together with the publication and the exhibition itself[456]—sought precisely to include critical practices that often stemmed from other fields such as cinema or architecture and from beyond the Euro-American context. While *documenta X*'s remit also spoke to contemporary geopolitics—Catherine David entertained the post-1989 world as a new tripartition, namely the United States, the European Union and Asia[457]—the location for the production of contemporary art remained western in essence. In fact, in what would nowadays seem a case in point of curatorial hubris, the territories that would have formerly been known as Third World were considered as lacking the necessary institutional and material infrastructure to produce contemporary art, even though they were invited to participate in the show through other examples of cultural practice or through the guest speakers that were part of the public programme.

One important aspect of my analysis in the introduction was the conflation between publication and discursive moment or, more particularly, between anthology and symposium in the production of curatorial discourse. While both are intimately related, their relationship to each other cannot possibly be of full dependence but, rather, of semi-autonomy. This might be a more or less obvious statement when what one takes as "documentation" is a text that gives an account of something that happened, as is the case in chapter 1. More typical materials that might be generated during a performance—photographs or videos, for instance—also illustrate this difference well, even when what is explicitly at stake during a performative moment is how discourse is produced through a specific distribution of power. Arnout Mik's (delegated) performance *Untitled* (2013), which took place during the week-long discursive event *Former West: Documents, Constellations, Prospect*s is a good example of this.

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[456] Robert Storr. *Documenta X* (Interview with Catherine David) in *ArtForum*, May 1997 at https://www.artforum.com/print/199705/documenta-x-32824 [Accessed Jan 23th 2023]
[457] Catherine David and Jean-Francois Chevrier (eds.), *Politics, Poetics: documenta X, the Book*, (Kassel: Cantz, 1997), p. 6.

Insulting the guest

Those attending the public programme that the Berlin-based institution HKW held that March had been warned. The extensive booklet, which already acknowledged that the course of things could potentially differ slightly from the original schedule, indicated that, at some point on Friday 23rd, at an unspecified location within the venue, *Untitled* would take place. In the end, it was after Piotr Piotrokoski's lecture *Global Agoraphilia* that a group of amateur actors—familiar faces that had been attending the week-long programme—started to speak in tongues in a "collective uprising (...), voicing their disenchantment, and stating the unstated".[458] All of the things that one is tempted to do while attending a lecture that are normally not allowed were invoked through this disruption. *Glossolalia*, the uttering of syllables and of unintelligible, language-like speech, probably helped the surprised audience understand that it was not picketers who they were seeing or that this was a bunch of demonstrators that had to be dislodged. In the context of *Former West: Documents*, Mik's performance aimed to complicate questions on participation and audience the programme was set to examine, testing "the limits of disobedience and noncompliance".[459]

Alas, as Okwui Enwezor would have had it, it is not possible to infer historical context from display.[460] The "insurgent citizen" that Maria Hlavoja identifies as the new subject at the centre of what she refers to as the "public fabric", a dissatisfied citizenship which Mik's performance somewhat invokes, inevitable points at the civil movements that bloomed across Europe and the Arab World in the immediately previous years (The Arab Spring, The 15-M demonstrations in Spain or the Occupy movement). Such context becomes difficult to pin

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[458] "Untitled, Aernout Mik, 22 March 2013" in *formerwest.org* at
https://formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Contributions/Untitled2013
[Accessed June 23 th 2023]
[459] Ibid, [Accessed June 23th 2023]
[460] Okwui Enwezor and Paul O'Neill "Curating beyond the Canon: Okwui Enwezor interviewed by Paul O'Neill," in Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects* (London: Open Editions, 2007), pp. 109–22

down when one goes through the opening pages to the anthology *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*. Pages 1 to 6 showcase images taken during *Untitled*, where some of these uprising participants appear gesturing and casting what seems to be some type of locution—elsewhere, however, I read that *Untitled* is composed of "footage of a performance".[461] The book itself refers to Mik's work as if those pages were the work itself. This confusion, however, I find productive and I do not wish to eliminate.

The images, I contend, produce a rather different effect. What it is shown is a number of individuals in what appears to be a manic frenzy—trance or delirium are also featured in previous work by Mik, such as in *Training Ground* (2007)[462]—speaking to or addressing nobody in particular, amidst some (other) members of the audience whose faces oscillate between perplexity, surprise and absence—Hieronymus Bosch's *Ship of Fools* comes to mind—. The sense of collectivity that the performance sought to invoke is portrayed here, as a result of its being a photograph, as a sum of individualities. A smartly dressed woman mouths towards where the lecture podium probably is, hands clasped and pointing at her chest as if she was yelling "What about me?".

Choosing Mik's performance/documentation to frame my analysis of the public editorial meetings as a discursive event is a strategy that I am using not so much to establish a hierarchy of media or documentation materials where the moment of speech is posited as more authentic—that virtue often attributed to performance proper—or where visual images derived from a performative moment are considered a feeble testimony of what actually happened. Rather, it helps me foreground the necessity for different types of analysis depending on different types of engagement, audience and viewership, a set of specific types of public moment that are indeed similar yet distinct, as Michael Warner greatly advanced in *Publics and Counterpublics*.[463] The performative moment and the complex typology of materials its

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[461] Véronique Hudon and Boris Charmatz. "Bodies in Museums: Institutional Practices and Politics" in HUDON, Véronique et al (eds.) *Curating Live Arts: Critical Perspectives, Essays, and Conversations on Theory and Practice* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019) pp. 355–62.

[462]Maria Hlavajova. "From Emergency to Emergence. Notes on *Citizens and Subjects* by Aernout Mik" in *Open*, 14, 2008 (Art as Public Issue), p. 118-137, p. 122.

[463] Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*. (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002).

documentation consists of offers a complex collection of different media where the foundational essence of the performative moment is somewhat decentered, as curator and performance scholar Judit Bodor has brought to the fore.[464] In this sense, what Mik's performance and its materials render visible is the different meaning-making processes that various types of specific engagement can yield—the audience probably witnessed a controlled riot, a drill for a rebellion; the researcher or the curious reader might be seeing something like a bout of frenzy.

The usefulness of Mik's performance is not depleted here. Either madness or revolt, *Untitled* points at the regulatory structure of the public talk: what it allows to happen and what it does not. More crucially, it renders visible the agency held by what is not allowed to happen. While, as I started intimating above, yelling at a book in private will surely hold little sway in the production of discourse, standing up and interrupting a public conversation will have a different effect. By this, I am not referring to an interruption of discourse as a field in the making, that is, a breakdown of the field of inquiry. Instead, it would be the *course* of discourse, the moment of its uttering, that would be interrupted. A broadside might be the obvious example that comes to mind or the type of disorderly intervention that would receive at the House of Commons, for instance, a thunderous "order!". While this is not necessarily the type of interruption I have in mind, Judith Butler's theoretical work on the politico-moral nature of the insult can be helpful here. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler unpacks the intricacies of injurious statements, which she characterises as belonging to those "parts of language that are uttered, utterable and explicit".[465] Language can hurt us because we are already constituted in language and because there is a foundational injury at the core of this being-in-language that being a subject is. In this sense it is not dissimilar from

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[464] Judit Bodor. "The 'Extended Life' of Performance: Curating 1960s Multimedia Art in the Contemporary Museum" in HÖLLING, H. B., BEWER,, F. G. & AMMANN, K. (eds.). *The Explicit Material: Inquiries on the Intersection of Curatorial and Conservation Cultures.* (Boston: Brill, 2019) pp. 117-141.

[465] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 2.

the loss of jouissance in Lacan (unregulated pleasure), a loss that takes place the moment one enters the Symbolic, which includes language.[466]

If, to Butler, the formative power of language, which always precedes us and within which we are always caught up, is something like an originary insult, one could say that an interruption of a public talk is, at its core, a speech-act (or some kind of performative gesture) that also finds an injured origin in the preceding regulation of knowledge and power of which the public talk is but a synecdochal example. In other words, there would be a by-default insult in the predetermined division between speaker and audience, between podium and seat—a divide that some examples of curatorial conference have actually tried to diffract by resorting to unconventional seating arrangements, *The Curatorial Conundrum* being an example of this.

More importantly, to Butler, the insulted subject feels wounded or injured when they do not know where they are, when *where* refers to the necessary context for the speech act to be effective. In other words: when the regulatory context the injured subject believes themselves to be embedded within is subverted or blown up.[467] As Butler puts it, the effect of the insulting speech act is that the person being addressed by the insult feels that they are not in control. To translate this into the case of a public speaker insulted by an audience member, in the context of a public talk, control is kept both by authoritative presence and a number of material devices and the lecturer knows what place they occupy: the place of discursive enunciation. No doubt, Mik's *Untitled* was an interruption that acted as a simulacrum of an insult where the speaker whose lecture was abruptly terminated must have known himself as a lecturer again after realising that all of that gibbering was actually planned.

Seeing ourselves: Former West's Public Editorial Meetings

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[466] Bruce Fink. *The Lacanian Subject. Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
[467] Judith Butler. *Excitable Speech*, pp. 4-5.

As a discursive device, the regulatory context of a lecture theatre is particularly successful. We know what we do and who we are depending on where we sit. The ritual, which is Butler's redoing of Austin's ceremonial context—that which allows the performative statement to have an effect—[468]is familiar to the audience as well as to the speaker. It is legible and readable, like going to the cinema or using a zebra crossing. In this sense, I cannot resist but to provocatively ask whether exhibitions are spaces where one feels less insulted in Butlerian terms or where this foundational insult is less likely to occur because the exhibition's regulatory power, its legibility and behavioural regulation, that is, the spectators ability to know where and who they are, is somewhat exercised through less tight a grip.

As a controlled moment of injurious speech, *Untitled* is useful to render visible, through uttered speech, the structures that would be subverted through disruption. This is not, however, how things normally happen. While one can admit that risk of insult or interruption is somewhat always present at every public engagement, discursive events in the art world tend to occur with normalcy, even though examples of audience rebellion or conversation going awry might loom large in the collective memory when they take place. The ritualised place for dissent and for eventual anger normally has its allocated place when the conversation is open to the audience.

With this law-abiding respect for the ritual space of the lecture theatre, things panned out during *Other Survivalims*, the second iteration of Former West's public editorial meetings. The event was curated—not conceptualised this time—by Simon Sheikh, Maria Hlavajova and Boris Buden and held at Het Utrecht Archief (Utrecht) in May 2014. The project was devised and announced as being in preparation for the forthcoming release of Former West, which would still take two years to be published, a series of "small-scale gatherings" which took "the editorial meeting as their model for informal (re)negotiations of the living knowledge brought together through the course of the project", the project being Former West, the eight-year-long research platform BAK had initiated in 2008. As I mentioned above, the public editorial meeting had already been rehearsed, as a format, the previous year in Berlin.

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[468] Ibid, p 3.

The urgent matters *Other Survivalisms* sought to address (namely *The Commons as The Survival of "The Public"*, *Survival Through an Economic and Environmental Lens* and *Critique and the Ideology of Post-isms*, matters that where somehow already implicit in the five "currents" *Former West: Documents* was divided in) advocated for a commoning of governmental modes in contemporary art organisations which these public editorial meetings must have sought to exemplify. At first glance, this would be a decisive move where the desire for political horizontality is applied to a discursive platform. A type of gathering that would normally take place behind closed doors was now being held in front of an audience and therefore made public, as Simon Sheikh points out in his introductory remarks to the event. This, it would seem, would be the crux of the event.

That the audience members will act as active parties in the (re)negotiation that these editorial meetings were purported to be (a deliberative process this type of meeting is in essence) was signalled by some clip folders that were distributed among the attendants and also among the speakers—an item which, as Andrea Philips remarks shortly after the start of her intervention, is somewhat evocative of organisational aesthetics from the 1990s.[469]

The uniqueness of the term the event is described as—(re)negotiation—should also draw attention. Some conversation already took place; something was already negotiated. What this wording suggests, in my view, is that, even though there would be new negotiations that would emerge and were not foreseen by the convenors, *something* was anyhow about to be re-done, re-synthesized, re-worked. That is, a set of thoughts and speech-acts had already been privately uttered—maybe, I wonder, part of the ritual context necessary for this specific instance of curatorial discourse to happen and to have effect. This originary, private moment becomes all the more evident when the members of the first panel (Andrea Philips, Massimiliano Mollona, Mark Fisher and Simon Sheikh) realise the "incestuous" nature of the roundtable, to use Sheikh's own adjectivization: all of the guest speakers were faculty at

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[469] Andrea Phillips. "The Commons as the Survival of the "Public" - panel discussion - 16/05/2014" in *Youtube*, uploaded by *BAK basis voor actuele kunst*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VvZ5P5vkJs&list=PLKRIMgiirxA7aSWoPmFyjk9PbfIb 7CeGF&index=4

Goldsmiths' at the time.[470] Sheikh's jocular remark is met with collegial laughter by the rest of panel members, perhaps an attempt to dissipate accusations of institutional endogamy from the public. As a strategy, this tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement resembles, to me, how curatorial anthologies attempt to suspend their regulatory power by positing themselves as non-regulatory or how academic institutions, as Sarah Ahmed has shown, use statements of support to diversity and inclusion as self-images of diversity and inclusion itself. In any case, whether this coincidence is the result of institutional clientelism or genuine intellectual affinity I will leave as open.

I would like to take the analysis a little further from the already rehearsed view that some kind of preexisting power is somewhat inherent or inevitable (even though such recognition does not deplete the problem of how pre-existing power-knowledge is organised and who gets to organise it).

Upon watching the video recordings from *Other Survivalisms,* the viewer comes to realise that the similarity with other types of discursive event is noticeable. One cannot but wonder whether they differ, to any extent, from any conventional public programme addressing curatorial practice—by conventional, I mean a conference like any one mentioned in the previous chapters, for instance, that is, a series of interventions delivered before a public that resonate with delivering an academic paper. In this sense, it would be difficult to ascertain that this was not an event whose contents did not sit within curatorial discourse. The pressing matters addressed during these three-day gathering included topics that were and are central to the curatorial field then and today, from alternative modes of institutional organisation in the artworld to the commodification and reification of critical terminology. Similarly, most of the guest speakers were there in their capacity as curators, critics, writers, scholars whose specialism is the institutional devices of contemporary art and hyphenated combinations thereof. It seems that the editorial nature of the event in general is purely nominal, even though the first roundtable   (or rather, first round of papers,) does acknowledge the

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[470] Simon Sheikh. "The Commons as the Survival of the "Public" - panel discussion - 16/05/2014" in *Youtube,* uploaded by *BAK basis voor actuele kunst,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VvZ5P5vkJs&list=PLKRIMgiirxA7aSWoPmFyjk9PbfIb7CeGF&index=4

preparatory nature of the texts that would be read and discussed. The questions asked after the presentations to the different speakers also showcase the taxonomy of responses one could expect after a public talk, from examples of intellectual bravado and critical self-positioning to remarks that insightfully interrogate or expand the matter at hand. As much as the event, however, might have resembled conventional formats of academic and curatorial discourse and even though one could dismiss the Q&As that followed as a farce, one cannot possibly ascertain whether the contributions from the audience became, at some point, part of the book these meetings were a prelude to, unless one admits Auslander's notion of liveness as tantamount to discursive agency—exhaustive philological analysis could shed light on whether this was certainly the case, but this is not what I am trying to answer at the moment. The question is not so much whether what the audience said made it, in some shape or form, into the book F*ormer West*, but rather, what the presence of the audience was doing in this specific instance of discourse.

Throughout the several hours of watching that *Other Survivalisms* required from its future viewers, the answer, or something hinting at one, came fairly early. In her introducing the event, Maria Hlavajova refers, as a lighthearted anecdote that brings her preliminary intervention to an end, the words of a colleague of hers, an editor, who the previous night had sent her an email after an editorial meeting he had attended. The email, Hlavavoja reports, read: "Maria, I am relieved our meetings are not public".[471] This is a feeling Hlavavoja herself shares or empathises with: "[which] I understand", she adds in front of the audience.[472] What is this relief and what can it tell us about the being-public of a meeting that is normally private? Where does the anxiety come from? I contend that the presence of a public (someone else's presence; what transforms an act into a performance) generates some kind of self-awareness in this practitioner, an editor, whose pursuits normally happen in private. And this might happen because there is risk of injury and possibility for contestation. There is, in sum, accountability. To put it in the Lacanian

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[471] Maria Hlavajova. "The Commons as the Survival of the "Public - welcome and introduction Maria Hlavajova - 16/05/2014" in *Youtube*, uploaded by BAK basis voor actuele kunst, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azT5BNwj164&list=PLKRIMgiirxA7aSW0PmFyjk9PbfIb7CeGF
[472] Ibid.

terminology Peggy Phelan used in *Unmarked*: one is presented in front of the gaze of the Other.[473] To Lacan, the Other/other's gaze is the origin of a special kind of self-awaresness, shame.[474] To Sartre, the same could be caused by an imagined gaze "in the field of the Other",[475] that is, presence—Louise Bourgeoise's pair of eyes and its ability to make one perform that I had recalled at the beginning of this chapter.

This is where it might be helpful to recall Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator,* his demystification of the purported passiveness of the audience, to understand one of the possible types of agency the public, and in this particular case, the public before these editorial meetings were held, might exercise: it can hold the producer of discourse accountable. To Rancière, audiences are doing work. The spectator "observes, selects, compares and interprets" and "composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her".[476] Spectators are constantly producing their criticism while attending a staged performance. And that criticism, happening in front of the performer, in front of the speaker, is ready to hand and available for delivery. This is not to say that this is the distinctive feature a public always possesses but it might be a constituent function it plays when discourse is being uttered in public. Dissent, contestation and even insult might take place right in the vicinity of discourse production, if not during its very uttering. One is made responsible for what one says or, at least, the possibility of immediate scrutiny exists—to mind comes what could be its opposite temporality, plagiarism that only gets detected after years of scholarship and publishing.

But this is not the only aspect of Rancière's critique of passive spectatorship that is relevant for the purposes of this analysis. Rancière, who is occupied in retrieving spaces for non-representational equality, sees in theatre or, for that matter, in the staged event, a place for a live collective. He goes on to say, "theatre remains the only place for facing the audience with itself as a

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[473] Peggy Phelan. *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

[474] Amanda Holmes. "That Which Cannot Be Shared: On the Politics of Shame" in *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2015, pp. 415–23.

[475] Paul Gyllenhammer, "Sartre on Shame: From Ontology to Social Critique" in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 41(1), 2010, pp. 48–63.

[476] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 11.

collective".[477] In actuality, Rancière is elaborating on a fragment from a "presentational text" that announced the event where *The Emancipated Spectator* originated. In characterising this statement, which he acknowledges not to be his, though he sees it as epitomising his position, the philosopher further emphasised its meaning: "It involves an idea of community as self-presence".[478] It is in theatre, or at the staged event, where the spectator becomes aware of its collectivity.

Unlike in theatre, however, where actors cannot see the audience that is beholding them due to the light and shadow contrast between the stage and the pit, speakers and lecturers can see the audience when they are delivering a paper, like Phillips, Mollona and Fisher were during *Other Survivalisms*. They can see the faces of those who might hold them accountable. This is, I contend, a second moment of spectatorship, a derivative audience, as it were, that is watching an audience. Can one not attribute the same moment of collective realisation to this second audience formed by speakers? To take my question even further, is the speakers' becoming spectatorship which gives them a glimpse of something like being part of a discourse formation? I cannot but see something like a sense of discursive collectivity emerging here.

This is where my "performance review", a somewhat jocular title for the section where I tried to theoretically obliterate the difference between display and performativity (certainly, they are different kinds of performativity but my aim was to show that maintaining such a distinction is not necessarily helpful or might hold little water) gains its relevance. The showing-doing of discourse that a book is (I am showing-doing that I handle with agility academic jargon, florid prose and discursive complexity) cannot possibly be the same as the showing-doing of stage presence, public persona and oratory. It cannot possibly endow the writer with the same moment of collective realisation that happens during the staged speech-act, even if the liquid face of those I write this for, a face that normally takes the features of my supervisors, also makes my writing something like a performance—in its Sartrian sense, their gaze is always upon my typing this text. And it cannot possibly be the same either

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[477] Ibid, p. 5.
[478] Ibid, p. 6.

because its fundamental difference resides in the proximity between the moment of enunciation and the moment of reception, the immediacy between discursive proposition and the risk of contestation, which might (or might not) happen on the spot. The distance between the inception of discourse and its *publication* (somewhat simultaneous in the public talk) is a tension that finds, in the public event, discourse at its most fragile.

It might be useful to resort here to Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*. In characterising the agency of a public towards the moment of address that has gathered it together, he goes on to say:

> "The more punctual and abbreviated the circulation, and the more discourse indexes the punctuality of its own circulation, the closer a public stands to politics. At longer rhythms or more continuous flows, action becomes harder to imagine. This is the fate of academic publics, a fact very little understood when academics claim by intention or proclamation to be doing politics."[479]

What Warner's reference to academic publics is pointing at is that academic writing is a "longer-rhythm" kind of circulation. Indeed, the distance between the "production" of the address (research and writing) and the formation of its public can be a long stretch. The author is concealed behind the materiality and editorial production which the text imposes. When it comes to the live performance of discourse, however, the public's right to reply is within reach. In this sense, *Former West's Public Editorial Meetings* might offer an example of how the production of curatorial discourse can be, if not fully redistributed or co-produced, at least demystified. The convenors attempted to make public certain moments of practice that would normally remain private and, with it, offered to the audience an opportunity to hold the speakers accountable. They were there, showing the intricacies of their intellectual work.

This, however, is only true for those who attended. For those who have accessed the meeting through its "documentation" (the meeting's counterpublic), the performance of discourse appears as display thereof, with

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[479] Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics,* p. 68.

their right to reply and the possibility to insult suspended. In any case, what my re-elaboration of the two "traditions" that, as I have shown, underpin notions of performativity in curating renders visible something else: that display can also be a type of performance, that an understanding of performativity as showing or showing-doing, (not solely as live, staged encounter) is also at work in moments of discourse that are a distance away from their moment of utterance—unless one accepts that display and documentation do nothing, that is, that they do not perform. And if that is the case, what is their value?

Conclusions

Analysing the performative effects of how curatorial theory circulates has been what, in essence, this thesis has aimed to investigate.

Worried, back in the 1990s, that practitioners in her field were overlooking the wave of anthologies that have boomed in architectural theory, Sylvia Lavin, herself an architectural historian, was determined to draw attention to the publishing fever some of her colleagues seemed to be undergoing. The anthological boom she was feeling weariness for was happening in an academic field which, in turn, had experienced the same deconstructive gesture that shook much of academia in the 1980s and that gave birth to a number of new fields of inquiry. This process had transformed historical and philological disciplines into a panorama of 'studies'—the field of Visual Studies, which I referred to in the first chapter, resulted from this shift.

In the case of architecture—"sometimes considered a profession, sometimes a part of the humanities, frequently relegated to vocationally oriented campuses"[480]—this field of practice could now lay claim to theoretical interrogation. In *Theory into History, Or, The Will to Anthology*, Lavin warned her colleagues of what, in her view, were the perils of the anthological format, that is, that "anthologies, compendia, and other such collections establish completion and lend stability to an otherwise promiscuous body of material".[481] Hers was a reasonable concern, since the fluidity and semantic deconstruction of buildings-as-texts had been possible thanks to such promiscuity. If the preferred publishing format of architectural theorists had more to do with the modernist museum—as Lavin herself points out—the fluidity that had transformed architecture into a field of inquiry could be then compromised. Anthologies, museum-like devices, as she goes on to say, bring closure and order.[482]

I am resorting to Lavin's text to foreground the distance between my point of departure and the position I see myself in now. Indeed, curatorial anthologies

[480] Sylvia Lavin. "Theory into History, Or, The Will to Anthology" in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* Vol. 58, No. 3, Architectural History 1999/2000 (Sep., 1999), pp. 494-499, p. 496.
[481] Ibid, p. 494.
[482] Ibid, p. 494.

might not be the ecumenic, selfless intellectual effort curators purport them to be. But they might bring about important effects that keep a field together, that bring closure.

While it seems that the anthologies Lavin was preoccupied by were fixating discourse-as-history because of their intention—that is, to render a handbook of essential texts—instead of because of the particularities of their format, it is telling that she saw a structural similarity between the anthology and the modernist museum and, implicitly, with a regime of representation. The curatorial anthologies that I have drawn attention throughout this thesis, even though they rarely take the form of a propaedeutic handbook like the ones Lavin was referring to, also have the same property—and have at times been seen as a printed correlate of exhibitions. Of course, this simile sheds light as much as it obscures, in that one does not get to see the multiplicity of texts at once, as opposed to what happens in the museological exhibition, where different objects and artworks can be seen simultaneously. Rather, the rules of readership, and of academic readership in particular, demand a different gaze, text by text, provided that the reader is engaging with the entire volume. More importantly, one (the reader) is not seen (that is, not being seen read), and one's right to respond is, if not curtailed, at least postponed or delayed. In this sense, chapter 3 pointed at a similar scenario when the materials available for the researcher or the curious are video recordings. Because the reader's gaze or, for that matter, the viewer's, is the gaze that cannot see itself, the eyes of the public, be it readership or online viewership, become the element that confirms the staging of theoretical production. The presence of an audience that is actual or fictitious (which is not the same as to say 'irreal') is what gives curatorial theory its status as performance, if what one understands as a performance is a staged encounter with a public. In this sense, the "showing-doing" that is staged is the curator's explicit (self)theorisation.

Readership or private viewership, however, is not the only type of engagement that the materials and formats of curatorial theory demand from the addressee. One of the main findings of my research is that, if one admits Rancière's stance that it is in theatre where one finds the best example of egalitarian community (to him, actually, theatre is the paradigmatic form

democracy takes),[483] then it is during the live performance of curatorial thinking that attendants can get a sense of belonging to a collective effort or to a community of inquiry. I arrived at this conclusion in chapter 4 through a re-elaboration of understandings of performativity as "showing" and "showing-doing". But it has been even more crucial to realise that the specific materiality of the lecture theatre also allows the speakers to see themselves as a community of performers, in this case, a community of discourse producers, since their showing-doing is discourse production. It is in the space where bodies have a live encounter where, to Butler, the political, performative quality of the assembly or the vigil resides as well.[484] The circulation of curatorial anthologies as representational devices of the curatorial mind-at-work might present a field before the reader but it can also act as documentation of a performative when a group of practitioners realised they belong to one and the same field of practice (which is not to say that such a field is univocal, uniform or symmetric). In other words, together with the curatorial case study, a writing strategy which I will return to below, the public performance of discourse might have been an empowering move for curators and other practitioners with an interest in curatorial practice to see themselves as devoted to a field of inquiry. As platforms allowing for the examination of a practice, the textual and performative formats of curatorial discourse have opened up a space for curators to self-reflect on their work, be this through writing or through staged discourse production. Such realisation might have been crucial, I believe, for contemporary curating to become a discourse formation.

Rancière, however, knew that this idea of a collectivity of bodies aggregated around the live encounter where the spark of emancipation happens is often just a presupposition (a concern Auslander also shares). To him, the horizontality of the audience's encounter with a performative event has less to do with mere presence but, rather, with the public's ability to re-interpret what they are witnessing—presence is therefore consubstantial to the public's semantic re-doing of the theatre play but it is not in itself where the

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[483] Jacques Rancière. *The Emancipated Spectato*r, p. 4.
[484] Judith Butler. *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015)Ik

horizontality of the community resides. "Spectators see, feel and understand something in as much as they compose their own poem, as in their way, do actors or playwrights, director dancers or performers".[485] Every attendant is re-elaborating the staged production in multifarious ways, an interpretive promiscuity that everyone exercises and that the playwright cannot control.

What, to Rancière, all of the members of the audience share, in a way that makes the audience an egalitarian collectivity, is that *everyone* co-produces meaning and it does so with their individual itinerary through the "forest of things and signs".[486] Crucially, while it might be at the theatre where attendants get a sense of the shared equality of critical force, Rancière makes the egalitarianism of critical re-elaboration extensive to any other type of performance, to any type of live encounter with cultural production. With this move, he wants to extend the egalitarianism of a public's semantic re-elaborations to other forms of cultural exchange. In this sense, Rancière anticipates what my re-working of notions of performativity in chapter 4 rendered visible: that performative moments indeed perform but that other forms of publicness, such as display, are also performative, in that visitors of an exhibition (all of them) are always re-elaborating its meaning. However, it is crucial that I strongly highlight that, as much as this might be true of whatever happens in the reader's mind (or the visitor's or/and the by-stander attendant's, for that matter) does not circulate amidst conditions that are equal for everyone. The interpretive effort, which here has been the anthology and the case study, is carried out by the curator, who resorts to formats of theoretical distribution that stage some interpretations, some actions, some ideas.

To put this differently, even though theatre might be taken as the paradigm that explains the egalitarianism of the public's interpretive work, it is not the sole locus where such critical commonality takes place. To take this back to the formats of curatorial discourse, the egalitarian nature of semantic re-elaboration can also happen when reading a book or watching a video recording of a curatorial talk.

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[485] Jacques Rancière. *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 4.
[486] Jacques Rancière. *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 4.

Indeed, for the person speaking curating at the lecture theatre as well as for the public, the disruption of "the distribution of the sensible" by the audience might be somewhat tangible.[487] This is why it was important to highlight the possibility of the insult during the live staging of curatorial discourse: the speaker knows that they can be interrupted. However, this cannot account for what happens when the live event is talked about *after*, for how discourse circulates beyond its live inception. Because Rancière restored the individual's interpretive sovereignty, that is, the right to criticism we all share, it has been assumed that the circulation of curatorial discourse also happens through egalitarian channels. This is exactly where Mary Louise Pratt's critique of reader-response criticism sat.[488] These ideas of egalitarian community, be these interpretive in Fish's case, or facilitated by a curatorial project, cannot account for conflict, for how certain positions end up being hegemonic and for how authority emerges. My position is actually that, even if such ideas could account for those issues, the formats that contain them are actually producing something like an authoritative verticality.

As I have found through my research, this is why the idea of readership and spectatorship as participation in discourse cannot hold water, unless one concedes that an informational paradigm of knowledge (I read, therefore I am part of discourse) and passive viewership are admitted as being as participatory as understandings of participation-as-physical-movement or as co-production. In this sense, I think it is possible to see, at least when it comes to understandings of interpretation and performativity, that what the curatorial text reveals is that the audience's semantic re-elaboration of an artwork, be it interpretive or performative (a distinction that, after the analysis undertaken in chapter 4, now seems difficult to maintain), is reported as unequivocal. Not only is it that the curatorial case study posits itself as an example of curatorial practice that works 'well', but that, for it to work well, whatever interpretations of an artwork or whatever stylizations of a

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[487] Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

[488] Mary Louise Pratt. "Interpretive Strategies/Strategic Interpretations: On Anglo-American Reader Response Criticism" in *boundary 2*, Vol. 11, No. 1/2, Engagements: Postmodernism, Marxism, Politics (Autumn, 1982 - Winter, 1983), pp. 201-231.

performative exercise might have taken place during a live encounter are reproduced in the text as being free of conflict and as matching the curators' understanding of what ought to have happened. What emerges in analysing these formats of curatorial theory is that, despite the different understandings of political horizontality, inclusivity and epistemic immanence that curating has attributed to live encounters and conversations, such characteristics have also been attributed to the very circulation of curatorial theory. Because the public is seen as co-producing discourse through presence and through the interpretation of the performative event, the public's interpretation is believed to be the same. The egalitarianism of everyone's ability to re-elaborate a text has been confounded with interpretive sameness.

It might be useful to recall here Sara Ahmed's notion of the non-performative.[489] To her, a non-performative statement is a performative speech act whose effects are, however, suspended. The paradigmatic example of this type of speech is, in Ahmed's work, commitment to diversity in higher education institutions. The statement "we commit to diversity" is indeed performative, like an oath (it does its doing through its being said), but it does not bring about, in itself, the diversity heralded by it unless further action is taken. Indeed, the speaking of the statement in fact operates to take the place of doing the work itself, as such it is uttered with a non-performative intentionality. When looking at the anthology as a speech act that claims to instantiate an ecumenic readership, or looking at the case study as the textual correlate of a live project, a paradox that resonates with Ahmed's non-performative seems to emerge. On the one hand, the community of interest the anthology invokes works, rather, as a collection of solitary readers, while the main forum (the classroom) where these publications could potentially be discussed is decried as co-opted by the education market. There can only be a community of inquiry as long as the community remains fragmented and opaque to itself or as long as a unitary, Habermasian idea of readership is embraced. One could take this even further: the idea of a universal readership and viewership that is posited as egalitarian and

[489] Sara Ahmed, "How Not to Do Things with Words" in *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies*, 2016, vol. 16, pp. 1-10, p. 1.

horizontal might be what allows the contributors to see themselves as a community of interest: that of those who produce discourse. What I mean by this is that, it is not just that a self-conscious community of practitioners emerges because of the formats where they think together (that much, I believe, is true as well). This communal self-awareness emerges because those formats are believed to be positioned against the uniform background of abstract, face-less readership and viewership.

The purported egalitarianism of the circulation of curatorial discourse is, I believe, a mystification that has allowed curating to assume that theoretical production does not reinstate the authority that has supposedly been given up in the move from curating to the curatorial. This is why the notion of non-performative, a performative act which is uttered with the intention not to work, is useful. The multiplicity of interpretations can only be admitted as long as it is one interpretation: the curator's. The public's co-production of discourse can only perform as long as its performativity (the doing of their interpretation) is tantamount to the curator's understanding of the artwork or of an idea that is being positioned. Exemplary of this type of thinking is the idea of "ideological breakdown" championed by MACBA that I mentioned in chapter 4: One attends the exhibition and, then, the desired dislodging of an ideological trope takes place. To put it in Ahmed's terminology, the performativity of interpretive co-production, the re-elaboration of a text, uttered or printed, works, when the curator talks about it, by not letting the public do its work. In this sense, the understanding of performativity that seems to prevail in curatorial discourse is actually an idea of non-performativity.

The critical egalitarianism of Rancière, conflated in curatorial discourse with what seems to be a perceived egalitarianism of its own circulation, co-exists when a modernist understanding of the artwork and of the curatorial project as having unequivocal meaning. The fixation of meaning and of performative interpretation through curating's rhetorical production is brought about by the producer of theory, which polices, through their very speaking, the epistemic multifariousness of the audience. As opposed to the modernist understanding of aesthetics, which focuses on cultural objects that one can

return to rather than on performative moments that are inevitably lost, the distance generated here between curatorial speech and curatorial project makes criticism an even more difficult task, since the primary access one has to past examples practice is the account given by the curator. In this sense, describing the survival of art criticism in curatorial literature, as I did in chapter 2, appears now as a decisive shift. Contrary to the accountability the critic exercises on the artist, the curator strives to hold themselves accountable through their own theoretical reflection, staged before an audience that often cannot reply.

While Rancière's project was to restore the performativity of the public in the production of meaning (a production that cannot be anticipated by the performer-as-author), this idea cannot explain how different modes of address, that is, different modes of performance, also dictate how they are presented before a public and how a public is structured according to the particularities of each of these modes. This is also why I have tried to maintain a distinction between readership, viewership and live presence, to point at the fact that, even though they all have performativity in common, each performativity is distinct. To illustrate this point, I quote here at length the following excerpt from Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics*.

> "There is no speech or performance addressed to a public that does
> not try to specify in advance, in countless highly condensed ways,
> the lifeworld of its circulation: not just through its discursive
> claims…but through the pragmatics of its speech genres, idioms,
> stylistic markers, address, temporality, mise-en-scene, citational
> field, interlocutory protocols, lexicon, and so on….Public discourse
> says not only 'Let a public exist' but 'Let it have this character, speak
> this way, see the world in this way".[490]

This quote from Warner highlights why I have paid particular attention to curatorial rhetorical production. As I have shown through the close analysis of particular exemplary instances of how contemporary curatorial discourse has

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[490] Michael Warner. *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 114.

come to publicness, these modes of address, formats and relations between live events and written accounts assert not to just arguments about how new forms of curatorial practice render ideas of publicness, but they themselves assert ideas of how curatorial publics are and should be constituted. That these are often at odds with the supposed modes of publicness of the curatorial projects that they frequently describe has been a central claim of this thesis. When the public of a discursive moment is readership or postponed viewership, participation works by not working. This is also why analysing the specificities of the live performance of curatorial thinking has been important. The position of discourse producer vis-à-vis public speaker before a live audience is a moment where authority is at its most fragile. It can be contested and the enunciation of discourse disrupted. Nevertheless, it is in the immediacy and situatedness of the live encounter where its limitations reside. Not everyone can be there, at the live inception of reflective enunciation. Thus, the circulation of curatorial discourse through the documentation of live events remains the primary form of access to discourse production.

I wonder, amidst this context, whether a different type of theoretical, written practice within the curatorial field might be necessary for such professional accountability to work in a more complete form. In this sense, I see my thesis as a rehearsal of what this type of practice, a type of writing that acts as a form of 'curatorial criticism', for lack of a better word.

Actually, this scenario where different practices respond to each other is prefigured, to an extent, within the very production of curatorial thinking. In looking at the platforms of curating's rhetorical production one can see that there is a plurality of practitioners. Not all of them are curators, even though the curator occupies a position of preeminence. This resituates curatorial discourse as a formation that has been nurtured by other fields of practice and of inquiry (if such distinction is tenable) and therefore it situates the curatorial field within the great family of fields of knowledge (as well as within their institutional apparatuses). The choice of the collective volume, in that it resonates with the critical theory anthologies that boomed with the rise of post-structuralism in Anglo-American academia, also foregrounds curatorial

thought's will to critique. These aesthetics of criticality through publishing show curating as a field able to produce a body of texts and volumes whose shape resembles the great anthologies and critical readers of the 1980s and 1990s, such as some of the volumes I mentioned in t the first chapter. As a publishing strategy that attempts to mirror a certain type of discursive production, embracing the anthological format might have also helped some curators, siding with many artists, to historically signal the rebuttal of curatorial authorship or of the curator as auteur, a modality of curating that was seen as complicit with hegemonic power and a less democratic form of cultural production.

During a lecture that was later conducive to his essay on his philosophical method,[491] Giorgio Agamben reminds the audience that Foucault had "freed history from the tyranny of metonymic context (for example, '*France in the Seventeenth Century*') to give back to metaphorical contexts their primacy".[492] While notions such as "the curatorial", "the educational turn" or "curatorial research" might be indeed enacted by the very publications that discuss them, it might also be the case that they work as metaphoric devices that represent the very characteristics that discourse has: fragmentary, disperse, conflicted (in theory) but also organised, regulated and represented through language. They might be assembling curatorial thinking as a discourse formation but, also and more importantly, curators' understanding of how discourse is formed. Insofar as they respond to issues that were deemed urgent by curators or to specific debates and new paradigms that were emerging in the field, anthologies do have a historicizing power in that they act as a material index of such urgencies. Because they explain changes in curatorial discourse over time, they act as a historicizing device, a type of historicization that is not that of historiography but that tries to give an account of new discursive developments and, therefore, of changes in the field. At the same time, they explicate as much as they complicate curatorial discourse, sometimes through subversion of dominant paradigms, sometimes by re-enacting them. These

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[491] Giorgio Agamben, *On the Signature of Things*. (New York: Zone Books, 2009).
[492] Giorgio Agamben. "What is a Paradigm?". European Graduate School Video Lectures [video file]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9Wxn1L9Er0 [Accessed: Jan 20th 2021]

effects become all the more tangible in certain cases, where new discursive moments or debates are simultaneously instigated and historicised by certain anthologies, like Paul O'Neill's *Occasional Table* series (*Curating Subjects, Curating and The Educational Turn, Curating Research*). Often, however, these publications see the light in the name of a crisis in curating and proclaim the death of a previously prevalent paradigmatic understanding of curatorial practice (their accompanying live platforms often embracing the same type of urgency) that acts as an 'other to the anthology'. This is exacerbated by the mystifications the curatorial anthology instantiates through the rhetoric it resorts to: these publications are often presented as an intellectual effort whose institutional and material context is silenced, pervaded by ideas of critical and political endeavour that sound as heroic as the type of charismatic curating that the field has in theory abandoned.

When confronted with their performative counterpart (the symposium or the public talk), these collective volumes act as representation of a debate, instead of being a debate in themselves. They are not a rhetorical device that mirrors the effects of a live exchange because they simply cannot. Just like one's response to a book, in the privacy of one's room, will not elicit a reply, the contributions do not respond to each other. Rather, what the anthology presents is closer to a procession of stances, where the debates the anthology aims to anthologise are presented as collections of soliloquies or monologues, where practitioners take turns to make their point. In this sense, I am reminded here of mediaeval glossas and other note-taking, citational practices that once populated books and I wonder what curatorial volumes would look like if texts referred to each other, if the contributors had room to comment on their colleagues' texts. Mutual commentary, beyond the close-door process of editorial discussion, could maybe facilitate a platform that would resemble more faithfully an actual debate.

At the same time, the inevitable representation that emerges when a field of inquiry gets talked about is also what renders it available as knowledge. The representation of discourse that curating's rhetorical production is, permits, in

my view, some kind of dissemination of a knowledge which, because of its purported immanence to the curatorial project, would otherwise remain unknowable. For instance, the curatorial, as a theoretical framework and modality of curatorial practice, became known and circulated amidst a community of practitioners because of its representation through language, that is, because it was talked about. Another way to put it is that the enunciation of curatorial discourse, even when it originates as a live performance before an audience, circulates as documentation, documentation which, I must recall here, is often co-originary to the live event, like those performances pointed at by Auslander and which generated documentation as part of them. Such documentation, in turn, also performs, that is, it does, it shows, it shows that it does.

I am reminded here of Umberto Eco's words: "Books", he would say, "belong to those kinds of instruments that, once invented, have not been further improved because they are already alright, such as the hammer, the knife, spoon or scissors".[493] The formats that instantiate curatorial discourse and its circulation belong, like books to Eco, to a set of discursive devices that have a long tradition. I am not suggesting that the anthology, the case-study, the academic paper or the public meeting admit no improvement but I do think it is important to acknowledge that they have been utilised for a long time and by many fields. They are, one could say, well tested. What I mean is, rather, if Eco's assumption is correct, that vertical power, authority and representation (part of how books perform) will be inevitable results from using formats that curating, for being a field of inquiry, might find it difficult to do without. The question, in my view, is not whether such formats need to be abandoned altogether but rather, whether other forms of circulation where horizontality and accountability might occur are possible. To avoid the reinscription of curatorial discourse within a representational logic of authority, this field of inquiry might have to open its own theoretical production and its performance out to those publics it claims to owe itself to.

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[493] Umberto Eco (Lecture) "Vegetal and Mineral Memory: The Future of Books" [delivered at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina on 1 November 2003] in *bibalex.org* https://www.bibalex.org/attachments/english/Vegetal_and_Mineral_Memory.pdf (Accessed July 17th 2024).

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