The Standard Model

Curatorial Propositions

The
Standard
Model

Curatorial Propositions

The Standard Model

Curatorial Propositions

Edited by Nella Aarne, Lucy Lopez and Adam Smythe

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

By the mid-1960's one of the most fundamental arguments in cosmology had been more or less settled. The observation of cosmic microwave background radiation, a heat signal remaining from the origin of the universe, proved the existence of the Big Bang. Old ideas of an eternally steady universe were thrown out and a consensus formed that our universe was formed in a violent, explosive singularity. By the 1990's the Hubble Space Telescope was accurately measuring the rate of expansion of the universe, with the logical conclusion that if the universe is expanding, it must have once been smaller, hotter and denser; it must have had a Big Bang origin. The acceptance of the Big Bang led cosmologists to form an accurate and comprehensive mathematical model of the universe, The Standard Model. The mathematics behind The Standard Model were eloquent, balanced and beautiful. It was a model that could unravel the mechanics of our brutal origin and predict events in the future.

But problems soon emerged. The laws of physics, as we understand them, completely break down when we attempt to calculate the first fraction of a second of the universe. The Big Bang, along with everything in our universe, appeared to spring unaccountably into existence from absolutely nothing. As telescope resolution improved and data collection increased, scientists found contradictions between their observations and the predictions made by The Standard Model. Galaxies seemed to defy gravity, the masses of objects appeared to be wrong, the temperature of the universe didn't make any sense and everything was moving in an unexpected direction.

Radical research centres have been established to solve the inherent contradictions and errors of The Standard Model. Theories of dark matter, inflation, super-symmetry, multiverses, a bouncing universe and dark energy all compete as plausible solutions to the problems of the model. Some of these theories aspire to replace The Standard Model, others have been incorporated as amendments, but few are supported by empirical evidence. Concepts of alternative realities, black hole origins and surreptitious forces that cannot be perceived sound like unhinged works of fantasy or science-fiction. But far from being unbound, these wild theoretical creations are rooted in mathematical solutions to observable problems. As The Standard Model absorbs more of these speculative revisions, it becomes much less eloquent, more contradictory, full of arbitrary constants (numbers used to balance equations) and algebraic slights of hand.

This publication of texts by curators, academics and writers mirrors The Standard Model of cosmology. The authors of this book take venerable theories of writers such as Derrida, Benjamin and Adorno, and hold them to account. The following essays interrogate the theories of contemporary art, seek out aporia and offer speculative alternatives and amendments. Just as the cosmologists of The Standard Model, the writers included in this book address the disparity between theory and material reality, whether in art, sociology or politics. And, just as with nascent discourses in the sciences, there are overlaps and contradictions between the works in this publication. But, it is at this point that the analogy breaks down. Whilst the scientists' ultimate goal is to find concrete, universal and objective

solutions, we curators have the task of reconciling multiple voices and subjectivities — not necessarily to flatten our differences into a cohesive whole, nor to create an ambivalent relativism, but to attempt to find a productive discourse capable of dealing with oppositional propositions, cultural differences, and political disputes.

Our own Standard Model has been split into three sections, each representing a different aspect of exhibition making: **What**? **Where**? and **With.** The first section, **What?**, tackles the specificity of the object of curating. Hanna Laura Kaljo's *Intamacy* poetically articulates, with the use of a metaphorical journey across an ocean, the precarious task of approaching an artwork from the position of a curator. Metaphor is a key tool in articulating the elusive object of curating, and is a device used by both Akane Miki and Adriënne Groen. Miki's *Untitled (Diary)* uses the metaphor of the author's diary to address the significance of curatorial methodologies in an age of algorithmic technology. In *Unboxing,* Groen takes the story of clearing out a house as her analogy to define the act of curating. Adam Smythe and Daniela Wüstenberg both articulate the **What?** of curating by uncoupling art from theory. Smythe's essay *Against Accountancy* argues for a reconsideration of the role of aesthetics and affect, whilst Wüstenberg's vitriolic essay *To The Daring, Belongs The Future* demands that curating is to be used as a tool of action rather than navel gazing.

Where? looks at the sites of art and curating. Antonio Garcia-Acosta's interview with Patrick Coyle, *On Guided Tours*, gives a wonderful insight into Coyle's practice as an artist who often leaves the gallery behind in favour of walking tours around cities such as Hull and London. Lanny Walker also looks outside of the white cube in her essay *Slow Down, Listen Up*. Walker examines the ways in which sound art is exhibited and points to the digital realm as a possible reprieve from the shortcomings of the gallery. Rudi Christian Ferreira's *61 De Villiers* takes his grandparents' garden in South Africa as a site that informs his practice as a curator. For Ferreira, the garden is a manifestation of the colonial, environmental and political concerns that he feels compelled to address in his work as a curator. The signifi-

cance of particular places is also reflected in Siyun Tang's *Mirage*, an interview with artist Roel van Putten that is intersected with images by Simone Monsi. *Mirage* shares the experiences of van Putten, a European artist, during his time living and working in China. *Curating the Soviets* by Marina Maximova questions the location of the history of curating. Maximova's historical account of the development of experimental curatorial practices in the U.S.S.R. offers an alternative view of the development of the discipline of curating.

With concerns the people involved in the curatorial process and how we might work together. Nella Aarne's *You Made My Heart Malleable When You Poured Yours Out Before Me* is an intimate account of the fracturing of one's self that occurs in the encounter between two people. Aarne brings the theoretical work of Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous into a personal space of the author's reflection on working together. In *A Semi;colon Reflection on Migratory Aesthetics,* Emma Siemen-Adolphe toys with the fragmentary voice of the curator, in which aspects of the private relationships between curators and artists are always occluded from the public exhibition. The relationship between artist and curator is explored in Carolina Ongaro's *Desire Lines,* which factors in the shifts in her perception of artist Felix Melia's work as an ongoing dialogue between the two unfolds. Cory Scozzari and Franziska Wildförster take a more oblique approach to the question of who is involved; their work, *Identity Crisis,* consists of an imagined conversation between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Klaus Biesenbach, using images taken from their instagram accounts. The complexities of identity are also explored in Dimitra Gkitsa's *Against the Solitude of the White Cube,* in which Gkitsa poetically deconstructs identity. Finally, in her essay *On Addressing a Public,* Lucy Lopez considers questions concerning the role of the exhibition as a form of address, taking up critical ideas from political theorists Laclau, Warner, and Power.

What?

Intimacy, a Methodological Proposition

Hanna Laura Kaljo

One of us came to a sudden halt and began gazing across the great ocean with distinct scrutiny. In that moment I realised that another moon-like sphere had appeared above us, more vivid than the other six. The enormous plates of land underneath were once again shifting away from each other – I could hear a deep cracking as they departed in agony. Ever since the newly formed Pangaea pushed our bones out from her core, we had journeyed along the infinite coast of the only island we had ever known. The evening mist was heavy on the lungs. He finally turned to us, leaving the sea behind, and revealed that he had seen a distant light flickering on the verge of his sight and that we should travel to meet her.

It often seems that to approach an artwork is to begin with an inevitable stare into the far horizon. The object inhabits multiple discursive domains; we are not able to access it directly, but only begin to comprehend it as we follow its gradual unfolding within the process of artistic research. The curator is the one setting sail across the great ocean towards the auspicious fragment of light, leaving behind all that she has known as her familiar ground.

After months at sea, the horizon remains open and the source of light continuously flickering. In frustration from infinite travel, the curator might stop and build a frame, encouraging the viewer to look through it towards the destination. From such immense distance the fitful light can take various anthropomorphic configurations and the curator's convincing words will surely shape them even further. Yet if we continue, eventually arriving on the shore of an unknown land, perspectives are thrown out of proportion: we seem to be standing among an infinite community of islands. Raise a torch and let light fall on the intricate organisms slowly wrapping themselves around our knees. We spend a remarkable duration learning to listen and eventually imitate the cryptic languages of our host.

Following the trail leading to *intimate* modes of enquiry can be a laborious endeavour. The curator must resist falling back to comfortable gestures; she must withstand relying on preconceived theories and instrumentalized knowledges. It may be that upon arrival she encounters familiar customs, foreseeing a fruitful exchange. Yet she must only eat what the land provides. *Intimacy* entails true convergence and allows the format of display to adhere to the inherent individuality of the work. Occasionally the art object cannot be extracted from the flow of process it is intertwined with; *intimacy* leads the curator to recognise this hybridity and choose her tools accordingly.

Intimacy as a curatorial method involves expanding rather than sealing the contradictions inherent to a research-led artistic practice. There is no perceivable foreground or background; distinctions between the finished and the in-progress become redundant categories within an exhibition that takes its form from the logic of the artistic practice itself. As if we had never left Pangaea, or perhaps we are simply standing on the side of her reaching arm. We witness in proximity: a thousand layers.

Untitled (Diary)

Akane Miki

Since I was a teenager, I have been keeping something like a diary, but as I did not date my entries, things can get confusing. Sometimes there were intervals of more than half a year between texts and sometimes I wrote a few texts about different topics in the same day. There are, for example, short reviews of exhibitions, quotes from books, notes from conversations with friends, letters to myself, etc. The diary's overall content is based on my daily experiences, but I have the weird habit that I tend to skip some pages while I write, and to then fill those blank pages later. Therefore, my diary is no longer a 'proper' diary in terms of chronologically recording the events of my everyday life. Instead, as my diary lacks linearity, it is rather a collection of successive elliptical moments of reflection.

***

It is said that the circuitry of collecting information and producing narratives in the human brain starts to form at the age of three. Although this narrative production begins on a very temporal and less self-conscious level, a variety of narrative patterns are infused through the growth process and eventually a specific form becomes an individual's basic way of thinking.[1] Being surrounded by vast amounts of information, we learn how to relate ourselves to everyday experience in our own unique way. This is a biological process of forming systematical flow in the human brain.

In today's world, the extreme development of digital technologies and communication tools has encouraged people to select and arrange the knowledge and information that surrounds them by using smart devices and simple online media such as social networking and bookmarking services. By adapting oneself to handle these editing sources, it would be fairly easy to become an expert of sorts at collecting particular elements from a sea of information, making a timeline, putting things together and sharing this information with other people. In opposition to the algorithmic ordering of search-engines, the role of so-called 'content curators' has become more important than before. Additionally, living in the age of information overload, we have become obsessed with the idea of newness and originality.

Meanwhile, the formats of these social services are administering people to follow the sequences provided by media organisations. Timelines on social networking sites, for example, add the date automatically to each post, and when you delete it, the next post replaces the old one. Information and documents are always put in an order and archived in a way in which you can later easily find using categories buttons or tags. This ability to find archived information is one of the many daily habits that people nowadays have acquired unknowingly.

***

Similarly, curating art is also about forming narratives and producing new values from existent material. Until recently, curators were un-

[1] Gary D. Fireman, Ted E. McVay, Owen J. Flanagan eds. (2003) *Narrative and Consciousness : Literature, Psychology and the Brain.* Oxford:Oxford University Press;1 ed. pp27-32

derstood to have special knowledge and skills to access information. This is still the main role of curators, but if the most expected role of curators is to 'arrange' things and to share the specific sequences with other people, it is no longer a privileged position. Internet databases are now open to a large public, and, in particular with contemporary art, there is often more information online than in print. In fact, the current emergence of the independent curator suggests that the act of curating has become more engaged with handling time, spaces and events outside of institutions.

Although current exhibitions often tend to criticise the conventional narrative production in the art world, this criticism also ends up within a 'narrative of criticising narratives.' The problem is always subjectivity: it has become more important to consider from what position and to which audience the narrative is diffused, because one of the major premises of contemporary curating is that there is no absolute 'truth' or a universal reality. The most crucial role of the curator today is to address subjectivity.

***

Returning to the story of my diary, I have found that the way in which my irregular thoughts were avoiding linearity opened up space for me to consider subjectivity. Instead of seeking a comfortable flow, it gave me a chance to ask myself if there were alternative ways to read the fragments. The more we get used to the comfortable stream of narrative production, which is actually articulated with algorithms by massive enterprises or desperately renewed with online social services, the less we come to use our innate, human ability to make sense of the world. If contemporary curatorial practices no longer aim to seek the singular truth, then the crucial role of the curator is to produce meaning from the fragments of daily life.

Unboxing: A Journey Within Four Walls

Adriënne E. Groen

■

The boxes were discovered scattered throughout four of the eight rooms in the house that hadn't been entered for more than fifteen years — which is more than half of the author's age — except by the man who had lived there. From the outset, the house didn't appear any different from the rest of the neighbourhood, filled with newly weds and young families. There were the same well-kept bushes and small trees as in all other front gardens and the same brightly white painted bricks, although when magnified, this particular house camouflaged its worn-out state behind its facade. Next to the front door was a bay window with a set of yellowed floral patterned curtains hanging behind the glass, preventing a curious passerby from peering in. When standing on the front door's threshold there is a balancing point between two worlds that couldn't be more opposite from each other. The interior was dark, and the lack of light led the senses to both the musty scents of ageing and an incredibly dampened silence.

The floral patterns on the curtains matched the sagging brown-green wallpaper, giving clues to suggest the house was last furnished in the 1960s. The only additions being some modern appliances and tools that sat inactivated, unused, some still sitting in their fading boxes. It was like physically entering into a confused time capsule, one that began to accurately describe the nuances and behaviour of the individual.

■

Like a pyramid turned onto its point, the most interesting boxes came to rest at the top of the house, in the attic that was difficult to access with broken chairs, table tops, and walls – perhaps decades – of collected newspapers obstructing the natural passage way. As one would expect from objects hidden in an attic, the boxes were covered with numerous years worth of dust. It was not the dust that made them more interesting or curious; besides, the other rooms were equally dusty. Rather, it was the objects hidden inside that raised curiosity. Stacked and sorted according to shape and size were hundreds – perhaps even thousands – of twigs.

■

A box is a space like a house: it has a floor (the base), four walls, and a ceiling (the lid). In similar ways, a box protects and keeps something safe, hiding what is inside from light, from heat, from cold – from sight. Like a house, or a room, a box can be opened or closed: revealing or concealing its contents. Whether this space is empty or full, it can tell a story. The story could be about the nature of the space or the content, or it can reveal meanings – old or new. Whether the content is or isn't there, it won't affect its container: a box is still a box with or without it. Packing boxes is not as uncontrolled an action as it may seem. Moving an object from outside to the inside of a container constructed from cardboard is controlled by the decisions of the person, the packer, but, in fact, the box has a similar power. Its dimensions determine the maximum size of an object, how the

object is placed inside the box, and how many of a kind. Packing, then, involves both human and box, a mutual relation between the two that is often unacknowledged. The act of opening boxes to see what is hidden or stored inside could be seen as opening up windows or a door of a house. This way, a box as a window opens up to different segments of time or of one's life (that of an object or of a person). A similar train of thought runs through Paul Auster's *Moon Palace* that tells the story of a young man searching through his past. His journey begins when he receives 1493 books from his uncle that arrive unannounced and neatly stacked in boxes. He uses these boxes as 'imaginary furniture' for his bare New York apartment: sixteen support his mattress, twelve become a table, seven function as chairs, and so on. When his uncle dies two years later, he decides to open up the boxes one by one and starts reading every single book – perhaps as part of his mourning process. The books never followed a thematic or alphabetical order, but were structured according to purchase date and they entered the boxes following this same logic. It shows his uncle was attached to this system – a system that could have only been developed by himself and it was imperative that this was continued when the books left his home. It was also a system that could be lost if the boxes were packed in the most efficient way, losing an order that was not based on visible markings. Every box represented a particular moment in time: each box individually opening up, as a window, to various segments of his uncle's life:

> If nothing else, the chronology was intact, the sequence had been preserved by default. I considered this to be an ideal arrangement. Each time I opened a box, I was able to enter another segment of my uncle's life, a fixed period of days or weeks or months…[1]

■

Whilst unpacking his collection of books, Walter Benjamin described a similar journey in *Unpacking My Library – A Talk about Book Collecting*

[1] Auster, P. (1989) *Moon Palace* London: Faber and Faber p21

(1931). Every time one of the crates (packed without any structure or order) was opened, he reminisced about his successes and failures at auction houses or the cities where he found these hidden gems, simultaneously outlining various ways of acquiring books. Benjamin's journey was guided by the familiarity of the contents of each crate, contrary to Auster's character who was unaware where this journey would take him, especially because the outside of the boxes did not reveal the period of the books inside. Therefore presenting a discontinuity between exterior and interior similar to the house in question, a miscommunication between the boxes and the thousands of twigs inside.

■

The twigs were stored in twelve boxes that did not systematically correspond to their containers, there were no labels on the outside to suggest a logical connection with the contents. Barely visible text, print and stickers revealed signs of the inhabitants prior to the twigs: commodities like margarine, macaroni and match boxes. Both the boxes and twigs have been reutilised and have been given a new purpose by an individual whose reasoning and decisions are no longer present. Cut up into smaller pieces, the twigs are no longer the extensions of a tree, but have become their own object, placed together as a new whole, during a specific moment in time that does not match the clues given on the boxes.

The interior of the house, so different to that of its outside manifestation, appeared as a time capsule; in turn, could the encounter with the boxes containing peculiar contents also be perceived as a time capsule? Perhaps an encounter with parallels to the future discovery of the *Voyager Golden Record*: a time capsule that was launched into space in the late 1970s carrying welcome-messages recorded in more than fifty languages with sound and image clips that could potentially give another life form a description of our society and world. Though of course it is questionable whether this (yet to be determined) life form would even be able to comprehend these messages or the object itself. What would such an object really communicate?

■

Details of the twigs could be analysed; their shape, colour, form and measurements could be described. An expert could reveal what kind of tree they originated from and whether the twigs used to have leaves or flowers, maybe acorns. Perhaps they were gathered as specimens, similar to the workings of a collection housed by an anthropological or natural history museum, but with its cataloguing system left unfinished. Perhaps they are just twigs, accumulated because they are twigs, referring to nothing but themselves. Or, perhaps, their meaning is only examined because the twigs were found inside the boxes — a space for safekeeping, protection, or hiding. Imagine how different it would have been were they discovered in plastic bags that almost immediately indicate a certain wish to discard. More simply, the small hand sized fragments suggest they could have been collected for the purpose of firewood, even though there was no fireplace in the house, nor would they be able to keep a fire burning for long. So how should they be understood? In *The System of Collecting*, Jean Baudrillard describes two functions of objects that could be applied:

> [Any] given object can have two functions: it can be utilized, or it can be possessed. The first function has to do with the subject's project of asserting practical control within the real world, the second with an enterprise of abstract mastery whereby the subject seeks to assert himself as an autonomous totality outside the world.[2]

He proposes that once an object has been claimed as a possession, it loses its use-value and is given a new destiny — to be collected — the meaning of which is decided upon by the 'subject' – a collector. '[A] single object can never be enough', writes Baudrillard.[3] Drive, passion and desire will lead the collector to acquire or accumulate

more objects until they produce a new product, the collection. Following this train of thought set out by Baudrillard, perhaps the twigs were never intended to function as twigs. Perhaps they were always objects of possession, identified as such by being contained in the boxes, admired by the individual, the man that now can be identified as the collector. Even though this collector is no longer here, his traces have been left in these boxes, within these twigs. As Walter Benjamin wrote, 'ownership is the most intimate relationship that one could have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.'[4]

■

The boxes were discovered by the author scattered throughout the vacated house with the most interesting articles at the top, in the dark and silent attic. The boxes have become imbued with traces of a personality, and as such, they open up to different segments of one's life, to the history of their anonymous collector. A thick layer of dust betrays their untouched state and they appear as grounded anchors in the space.

Imagine removing these anchors from their fixed state, imagine them being moved outside of the space that has been containing them – like a box in itself. The journey would start the moment that the attic's threshold is crossed. The boxes would be taken down the staircase, leading to the hallway of a lower level where a red runner with floral patterns on the edges covers the wooden floorboards, muting the creaking footsteps. Different doors lead to different rooms, a bathroom, a bedroom and a spacious study. There, a dusty chair stands motionless and forgotten behind a desk that is almost lost amidst piles of magazines and newspapers, an amount of pages that would tire even the most active reader. Back in the hallway, the red runner is draped onto another set of steps that continues down the stairs. At this very moment, the ground floor was seeing more people

[2] Baudrillard, J. (1994) *The System of Collecting* p8 In: Elsner, J and Cardinal, R. eds. *The Cultures of Collecting* pp 7-24
[3] Ibid.

[4] Benjamin, W. (1968) *Unpacking my Library* p67 In: Arendt, H. ed. *Illuminations* pp 57-69 Originally published in Die Literische Welt, 1931

than it had in the last fifteen years. Every pair of hands was carrying one or two boxes, some of them empty, some of them full – containing slides, postcards, travel books, and wine corks. Similarly to the twigs, all the objects were meticulously placed in the boxes, ordered and structured as if they had a discernible system. The various boxes are carried outside through the front door, placed onto the pavement and covered by a large plastic sheet to protect them from the drizzling rain. Though the sky is grey and moody, the house appears brighter than ever. The floral patterned curtains have been shifted to the sides and weak strips of light penetrate the windows, faintly illuminating the shapes of two old, dusty armchairs in the gradually emptying space. It is now clear more than ever — the house is a box that holds the traces of the collector. Opening and closing the door is like opening and closing the lid of a box; almost physically parallel to Georges Perec's diagrammatic writing in *Life: A User's Manual* (1978)[5], in which he strips the façade of a Parisian block of flats throughout the system of his chapters. Will the meaning of these sheet-covered boxes and the objects inside remain after leaving the perimeters of this larger brick box? Some objects, such as the slides and postcards, hold their visual markings more clearly. They can be easily traced back to a particular moment in time, through the faces or locations recorded and noted. It is obvious that some of the significance of the objects has already been lost through the disappearance of the collector and we can be sure that further information will be lost in the forthcoming months and years. Regardless, they will be redistributed, scattered and reinterpreted in new settings and contexts – most will be repossessed, perhaps finding new boxes to reside in.

[5] Perec, G (1987) *Life: A User's Manual* trans. Bellos, D. London: Collins Harvil. Originally published in France under the title *La vie mode d'emploi by Hachette*, Paris, 1978

Against Accountancy

Adam Smythe

For all its anecdotal wit and narrative flair, art history is essentially a job of accountancy; a role of adding up successive causes and mathematically deducing their effects. Art historians lure us in with some forceful literary hooks, but ultimately they always return to the role of accountant. Occasionally there is an audit, in which non-male, non-white, or non-European artists are treated as decimal remainders and retrospectively accounted for in an act of balancing the books. More recently the currency has been converted from a history of art to a history of exhibitions. The historian, still, remains fastidiously focused on sums. However, historical accountancy has its use. A good historical account can fill in gaps in works that offer only partial access. In some cases, such as the protest art of the Guerrilla Girls, the dialectic of accountancy is part of the methodology, reception and value of the work. However, in the case of more aesthetic or phenomenological works a question emerges regarding the spirit of these works in relation to that of art history. Why is it, for example, that we are unable to address the work of Donald Judd without mentioning Clement Greenberg? Judd's proficiency as a theoretician is no justification for expressing his work purely within the terms of a theoretical bickering.

In his essay *Why Is Art Met With Such Disbelief? It's Too Much Like Magic,* critic Jan Verwoert revisits questions frequently asked by those outside of the art world's operations. '[T}wo questions follow [art] around no matter how hard we try to ward them off, 'What is it good for?' some inquire, while others demand to know, 'What does it represent?'…In surprising unison, the working and upper-classes are eager to oblige: 'Yes, the status of art must be identified, asap, and at all costs."[1] The problem that we face in answering these questions is that the spirit with which they are asked is definitively economic, whereas the spirit with which we make, experience and discuss art is environmental:

> [G]etting a sense for the quality of this color and shape, for its reason to be and remain in the mix…has fairly little to do with a logic of purposeful action. It's rather a long-term process of attuning oneself to the decisive relations and tensions between the qualities and states within an environment, as much as within the work. This is not just some consideration of the laws of more or less tasteful composition. Rather it is a sense for what does, or precisely doesn't, rhyme or resonate.[2]

Whilst the terms of Verwoert's dichotomy are intended to describe encounters with the vehemently anti-art, the spirit of economy could readily be applied to the art-historian. And, given that the realm of art history is no longer a discrete specialism, but rather a discipline that is becoming increasingly dispatched to the desk of the critic, theoretician, artist and curator, its spirit falls dangerously close to practice. Our first literary apprehension of visual art may well be an art-historical text: a chunky artist monograph, a survey of art since… or art after…, or a book charting an ism of some kind. This primacy of the art-historical lingers on into formal art education. Fine Art curriculums seem much more likely to demand that students to write in terms of history rather than criticism. Even after all the hours spent in the studio and gallery, enmeshed in an environmental mode

1 Verwoert, J. (2013) *Why is Art Met With Disbelief? It's Too Much Like Magic* p91 in Verwoert, J., Rehberg, V.S. & Slater, M. (eds.), COOKIE! Sternberg Press: Berlin. pp 91-106.
2 Ibid. p96

of thought, some of the economic spirit of art-history remains.

Our engagement with the spirit of economy has undesirable effects. Verwoert points to a tendency to redefine our own practices into terms that are economically consummate. '[We] go as far as to (re) organize our practices according to whatever new paradigm appears to be imbued with the magical power to bestow instant legitimacy on what we do. (From todays book of incantations we recommend 'research based art' or 'art as a form of knowledge') It's a game we can only lose. Because the rules are written by others.'[3] The economic spirit also infects our expectations of art and culture. At the 'Owning the immaterial: art, technology and culture' symposium at Firstsite, writer Mark Fisher outlined a dichotomy between 20th and 21st century music: 'The shifts in music that we passed into in the 20th century, from at least the beginning of the 1960's to 2000, were rapid successions of new sounds, new sensations. That really has stopped in the 21st century… There is nothing, literally nothing, that has come out of the 21st century that couldn't have come out of the 20th.'[4] Fisher's disappointment, and diagnostic of the loss of a dialectic of boredom, is grounded in an expectation generated by a historical, and economic, spirit. In this spirit the punk movement becomes an antidote to overblown rock and glam acts—which it was—and inherently valuable because of this fact—which it isn't. The qualities of a particular album or artwork become secondary to their position within a historic sequence.

The effect of accountancy on curating (by which I do not distinguish between the artist-as-curator or self-curated project and the institutional, professionalized curator) is pertinent. Curating not only establishes discourse around its object — the work of art — but is also the means by which art goes public. We can obviously point to the historic exhibition, and within this category also point out the number of exhibitions that claim to have rediscovered and repositioned artists within an art historic lineage. This is a good thing, in principle

3 Ibid. p94
4 Fisher, M. (2014) Presented at *Owning The Immaterial: Art, Technology and Culture* at Firstsite, Colchester

at least. The past shifts and goes through the same intensities of acceleration and unexpected manoeuvre as the present and future; we should of course continue to make amendments to our histories, we should of course write in those who have been unfairly left out. But the problem is that it is difficult to shift between the economic spirit of history and the environmental spirit of art practice. The danger is that we place emphasis on, augment the viewer with, or even reduce the value of the work to the economic. Just as with Fisher the value is placed on the status within a historic sequence and not on the states of, and that are produced by, the work. This follows into exhibitions of recent or current art. The demand placed on the curator is to tell the audience why this work is important. A common way to articulate significance is to extend a historical framework; to try and predict, or even prescribe, the historicity of the contemporary work. This is why we get a lot of buzz-words, usually with familiar prefix and suffixes. But, if value is to be taken with an environmental spirit then its newness or its venerability as historically influential, should at the most form only a minor component of this judgement.

Even when we manage to avoid this art-historical pitfall, we are often required or perhaps just compelled to write something about the exhibition that we have just curated (or, as is more often the case, write something whilst halfway through install). These can, of course, be wonderfully insightful texts that open up the work or place the viewer within a particular framework of ideas that proves fruitful to the act of viewing. They may provide missing context for the work, relevant technical information, or a tangential narrative that does not infringe upon the works autonomy. But in many cases the text accompanying an exhibition seems designed purely to speed up our experience of art with a process of glancing, deducing meaning from the given text, making an assessment of the collusion of the two and the implications of that particular meaning. Fifteen minutes should do the trick, and onto the next show.

But, Verowert's diametric terms can only takes us so far, because although his distinctions might be useful, they are slightly blunt and

abstract. Marking the difference between economic and environmental spirits opens up a set of problems that may have previously been hidden. Yet, most artworks are not fully environmental. They are not purely made of rhythms, rhymes and resonances – unless we take Verwoert to its extreme in which case we may end up with a cannon of the most vacuous and meaningless works, and declare Anish Kapoor as our truly revolutionary leader. Of course this would be ridiculous. And with what spirit do we read Verwoert's line of enquiry? As with most of Verwoert's writing it is propositional and witty, holding po-faced academia at a distance. But it would be a great leap to suggest that his essay is in any way environmental. An economic spirit has been deployed, with a critical structure and logic in order to help us locate the environmental. And we find the economic in the work of art too, in its discursive capacity. The problem that then arises is one of the entanglement between environments and economics. It is a problem that I have so far expressed as catastrophe, but perhaps one that holds potential.

Sophie Lee's two-part exhibition, *Sugars, Protein and Salt (Perfect Fried I and II),* which ran currently at IMT gallery and Gowlett Peaks in September 2014, unlocks this antagonistic potential. At IMT Lee presented a digital film accompanied by a wall display of colourful mitochondrial shapes cut from metal. The exhibition at Gowlett Peaks mimicked this arrangement; telecommunication boxes cut from the same metal accompanied a second digital film. In both cases the urban texture and images of Lee's film works spilled onto the gallery furniture and walls. There are dichotomies at play in Lee's work: spoken word set against text, objects and flat images, biological subjects and inanimate objects. None of these dichotomies are forced into hierarchies, nor do they form economic relationships. There are no polemics; no sequencing towards a singular argument or proposition. Individual elements of Lee's work do not logically follow on from one another. Rather, *Sugars Protein and Salt* formed rhythms and resonances. In *Perfect Fried I* the camera simulates the view of a commuter bus. The cast of buildings, objects and people is not purposefully composed, but builds affects nonetheless. Likewise, still images show

bins and urban detritus that form unordered aggregates. Textures and imagery conspire into complex alliances. And a digital rendering of a thighbone appears weightless, sitting somewhere between the screen, the camera lens and the windowpane of the bus.

Sophie Lee, *Sugars, Protein and Salt (Perfect Fried II)*. Gowlett Peaks, 2014.

The voiceover of Lee's film follows suit. Lee rejects diegetic certitude for a flow of offbeat rhythms, scattered narratives, and poetic fragments. Metaphors are deployed without a target. The narrator switches from female to male and back again, from a native English to a foreign tongue. These voices are emptied of subject positions; instead they carry a heightened sense of phonic synergy between the voice and the script. Lee's script skips between the scales of microscopic mitochondria and hollow mountains, and between the temporality of pre-historic animal life and modern digital technologies. Language performs a similar trick in *(Perfect Fried II),* although in this instance it is grammatical rather than linguistic. The film overlays a series of flash words that read something like a Gertrude Stein poem, scattered and spliced in the fashion of a William S Burrows cut-up; 'fillet-o-fish', 'more bounce for your ounce', 'nipple'. With this mixture of text and spoken word, still and moving image, sculpture and music, Lee establishes a relationship of parity between the individual components of her work; they form assemblages.

Lee's assemblages are sites where agency is not located hierarchically; where all components of the assemblage affect one another; where the assemblage produces affect and cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts; whereby the sum of its parts do not engage dialectically (as in Eisensteins theory of montage); and where the assemblage seeks to form new connections to other assemblages. All of the components are fragmentary, you cannot read the work as a + b leads to c. Text lingers free of context and audio literally shakes the viewer. There is a magic involved in the work, you will not connect it on a cognitive plane, not from the modern territory. You have feel it. It is also not guaranteed. Resonances and rhymes can be witnessed within the work, and also with the urban environment that it connects with. This is the environmental spirit of *Sugars, Protein and Salt*. But it is not the only spirit at work.

One of Lee's narrators garners some analysis from the fetid urban wasteland: 'We start to fetishize the leftovers. A whole civilization built on a collective admiration of Tesco bags, tobacco leaves, damp windows and after-school smells.' There are propositions, too: 'Lets take a look toward the history of legibility. First, the bear scratching his claws against the rock. The lines start to melt together into figures and forms; representation occurs.' We are also instructed by Lee's narrator: 'let's eat her food, let's eat metals, let's eat our hard-drives.' These analyses and theoretical propositions never accumulate into the structure of an essay or thesis; they are disrupted by the rhythms at play. But nonetheless, they are discursive. Let's eat our hard-drives; let's think using a gastronomic framework; let's theorize the origin of the image; let's consider deep time; let's examine the urban environment. From this perspective Lee's rhythmic aesthetic avoids the vacancy that plagues Verwoert's concept of the environmental, whilst avoiding the opposite pitfall of instrumentalising the aesthetic to illustrate a clever theory.

Although the economic and environmental are active, we do not witness a synthesis of these elements. Lee's assemblages perform a productive antagonism; rather than finding a resolution, Lee activates

the conflictual spirits of art. Neither economic nor environmental subsumes the other. Instead, they mutually betray one another in a way that means form and content do not necessarily always agree. Propositions are cut short by shifts in tempo and the visceral, bodily experience of Lee's pounding bass line is broken by an unexpected appeal to the cognitive. This mutual betrayal preserves the boundaries of spirits in conflict, but also establishes a communication between the two. They might undercut each other, but their betrayal means that they are always stepping into each other's territory, unlocking potential. For a brief moment discourse becomes rhythmic, resonance turns discursive. The value of Lee's work is not located in any political implications of a study on the urban environment or the fracture of hypermodernity on our psyche, nor is it located in the affecting formal qualities that vibrate and move the viewer. The value of this work lies in the modes of thinking and producing that occur through the friction of divergent spirits.

A substantial demand now meets the writer and curator. We need to locate context in cases where it is absent, open works up to discourse, make connections between other works of art and other disciplines, we need to articulate the urgency and significance of the art that we are addressing. But to ask ourselves constantly, in what spirit do I write? And with what spirit(s) does the work of art function? We may need to hold ourselves back from our own fervent desire to contextualize, or else succumb to the capture of accountancy. And once captured, our expectations fall victim to a well-versed history, the unpredictable value of the aesthetic is left out and what results is nothing short of iconoclasm. In the words of philosopher Jane Bennett, we need to use writing 'to tune the human body and render it more susceptible to the frequencies of material agency inside and around us'[5]. We should use text to augment the viewer to the radical potential of conflict between aesthetics and discourse. In doing so we may find a vocabulary to more fully articulate the urgency, significance and agency of this tension and escape accountancy.

5 Bennett, J. (2011) Presented at *Powers of the Hoard* at Vera List Center for Art and Politics, New York.

To the Daring, Belongs the Future

Daniela Wüstenberg

All this talk about theory… of course theory is an important tool in curating, and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to read theory. But curating is not theory, it's action.

I think of curating as an art in itself, and as such, it should be done passionately - based on acquired knowledge and thoughtful expertise, of course, but not just relying on that. Like going into battle for something you firmly believe in. Finding allies, gathering all the forces you can, brace yourself, and just do it. Just like art should be done. Just like martial arts are done. With precision, tactics and skill; but also with improvisation and guts, defying that innate fear of failure. Without thinking about potential buyers, art market value and personal gain. You might not win the battle, but you have shown something that took guts to show. Something that is excluded from the commercial art worlds, something that is not serving anybody's agenda, something inspiring and warm, opposing that omnipresent cold-hearted cynicism, something empowering, to someone, somewhere, and if it's only to honor the artist. Of course, I am aware that there are many different views on what curating is, but this is mine, and I trust myself on this one.

A prestigious speaker at an art talk I went to recently said: 'As we all know, the concept of democracy is dead.' This statement filled me with a rush of excitement. My heart started racing, blood rushed to my cheeks, and suppressed laughter tickled my throat - it was such a bold statement that it felt exhilarating and 'hip' to hear. But when I thought about it for a moment, it slowly filled me with anger. Because instead of dwelling in this seemingly 'cool, provocative' posture, the person could have invited people to actively and vigorously participate in democracy (arguably, a much 'less exciting' statement – as we've heard it so many times before).

I mention this incident, because in that moment I realized how strongly I believe in democracy. Not because I believe in nation states, borders, nationalism, passports and turning away immigrants or refugees. Not because I believe in politicians, the upper class, the police and the military, private property in a scale surpassing the GPD of entire countries, corporations and manipulative corporate media; in the church, laws, judges, prisons, schools and other institutions - but because there is no other alternative. There is no better concept than democracy, so far. It is flawed, but it is far better than anything else I can imagine. Accuse me of a lack of imagination, if you want.

By democracy, of course, I don't mean the order we have right now. I mean that, which could happen, if we all fully engaged in creating that democracy we truly want, instead of giving away our responsibility to others, blaming others, or blaming ourselves, as good citizens do in a neo-liberal world. I mean to stop everything for a minute and to figure out what we really want and how to get it. To think about what we really don't want, how we can get rid of that, and to start with ourselves. Declaring something 'dead', before we ever tried to get it right seems like surrender.

Yes, we were never given a fair fight and we never had the time to engage, to listen, to think - most of us were too busy trying to make a living. Yes, a lot of things are wrong in the democratic states that

only some of us have the privilege to live in – while many others are excluded. But this is mainly because we are all too comfortable to change things: To interrupt. To be inconvenient. To ask aching questions. To not settle for rhetoric answers any longer.

I see myself as an extension of artists, a string in a network, hoping to grow into a rope. I am here to make things happen, to connect others, to help create something that has become a luxury for most of us: the space and the mind-frame for discussion, contemplation, wonder, amazement, acknowledgement and sharing without a price tag attached.

I want people to engage with art, and while doing so, to talk to each other. Speaking sensibly, even in fiery disagreement, is an act that will get lost in the future, with all of us interacting through screens and consuming directly what others have experienced via smart phone video uploads on social media platforms – we can like it, dislike it or ignore it, but seldom is there a serious, in-depth discussion: a transforming, illuminating exchange of words. Gestures. Poetry. Humaneness. I'm not nostalgic; I just think a few things about humanity are worth preserving.

In the future, we will need to preserve this skill of actual, face-to-face human interaction, the skill of formulating and expressing our thoughts and ideas, so we can add our part to the grand design. I hope we will create spaces that are locations for mutual learning, alternative education and politicisation. We will start exchange hubs for free knowledge, grounded in empathy and propelled by the will to understand and respect each other, the longing to find opportunities to co-operate with each other. It is not a fad. It will be a necessity. With states dismantling the rights that generations before us fought for, a constant flux of privatization, global corporations funding politics as much as art and a noticeable shift back towards reactionary, authoritarian ideas all over Europe, the course of our existence and how we want to create our lives in the future is at stake.

I think that curators have to embrace their responsibility to facilitate all of the above, and to construct the *space/time* where artists and audiences can work on creating a democratic, fair and humane society. We need to act and shake off that numbing feeling of being too comfortable with what we still have, too scared to loose it, but not scared enough to fight for it – yet.

While I write this, I can see the smirk some people have on their faces by now, and that's okay. I am happy my 'cute' and totally 'unhip' idealism managed to amuse you. Hopefully, someday (to paraphrase John Lennon) you will join us.

Where?

On Guided Tours: A Conversation with Patrick Coyle

Antonio Garcia Acosta

For artists, walking has usually been a solitary activity. Whether drifting in the city, roaming through the landscape or pacing back and forth in the studio, artists' walks have often consisted of individual efforts to bring art closer to everyday life. These adventures are frequently conveyed through documentation and other tangible materials that are later displayed in a gallery space. Symptomatically, survey exhibitions on walking have largely stayed within the boundaries of the museum, featuring few instances of actual walking.

Artist-led walks present the possibility of socialising what is otherwise a solitary artistic pursuit. By using the format of the guided tour, artists can involve their audiences in the activity of walking, produce a dynamic relation to place and allude to a variety of histories. With these thoughts in mind, I approached Patrick Coyle (b. Hull, 1983), an artist whose work centres on writing, performance and sculpture. For his residency at The Hub in the Wellcome Collection, Coyle has been recording himself delivering speeches whilst jogging, in an exploration of how creativity is influenced by physical exertion.

In other projects, Coyle has conducted spoken guided tours in the streets of cities such as London, Norwich and Hull. I am particularly interested in the use of the format of the guided tour, which is on the one hand associated with the tourism industry, but which has also been repurposed by artists such as Jane Rendell, Marysia Lewandoska and Ruth Ewan.

Antonio Garcia-Acosta: In *Hullture, City of Cultrue* [sic] (2014) you conducted a 'guided tourk' [sic] of your hometown, drawing on diverse sources, including your writing about Philip Larkin, libraries, museums and personal anecdotes relating to Hull. How would you describe the aims and motivations behind this tour?

Patrick Coyle: The tour began in the Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, as part of an event organized by Compass Live Arts that aimed 'to prompt discussions about experimental art projects in the area with an eye towards developing activity for Hull's standing as Capital of Culture in 2017'. My script for the tour explored some extreme possible outcomes of the award, such as Hull becoming the Cultural Capital of the world. It was spoken in a fictional future dialect loosely based on the distinctive accent and dialect of Hull and the surrounding area of North East Yorkshire.
Many of my ideas for the script resulted from conversations with people over the years about whether 'cultural funding' should be prioritized over deeper socio-economic issues, and the inevitable argument that the money should be going to hospitals and schools instead. I was also thinking about the utopian-sounding hopes and claims for the cultural and economic improvement of Hull and other cities that won similar awards in the past, such as Derry and Liverpool.

AGA: Often a tour will follow an obligatory itinerary, a series of displacements and stops, as the guide indicates the different points of interest or what one could perhaps call 'exhibits'; stopping, pointing and examining, often by delivering a relatively short text. The obligatory character of the itinerary corresponds to a narrative thread,

where the exhibits offer the opportunity to examine specific aspects of the landscape. The text has the double purpose of commenting on these exhibits and advancing the narrative, integrating each chapter to a meaningful whole. For the French philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard, the obligatory itinerary mirrors the narrative structure of the nineteenth-century novel, in which a usually young male hero faces a series of challenges that are character-forming. In the exhibition *Les Immaterieux* (1985, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris) curated by Lyotard and Thierry Chaput, there was no obligatory itinerary. Instead, visitors were invited to follow their own unconstrained journeys while listening to an audioguide consisting of music and quotes taken from writers and philosophers. It was a multidisciplinary project with a complex thesis that Lyotard conveyed in an equally challenging way. For some, the exhibition proved too perplexing, forcing visitors to 'give up on understanding'[1]. And yet, the confusion generated was seen by others as a success in a project that intended to reflect the postmodern collapse of grand narratives. Itineraries are elements that invite consideration, because in their structure they already say something about how one regards an audience. How was the itinerary of your project conceived?

PC: The tour itself was semi-improvised, by which I mean that the script allowed for a certain amount of deviation based on which sites were to be visited and referred to. My route had several 'forks' (multiple possibilities) in it that I could decide between at the time of delivery based on how many people attended the tour, how engaged they were and how willing they might be to follow me to certain more populated sites of the city on a Saturday evening, such as one of the city's iconic cream-coloured phone booths or the bronze statue of Philip Larkin in the middle of the train station.

AGA: You have used the format of the guided tour both inside the gallery space and as a walk outdoors. What is it that you find interesting about guided tours?

1 Scheidermann, D. (1985) *Candide at Les Immaterieux* in *Le Monde*, 2 April 1985.

PC: I was in a museum last week and the tour guide very quickly read the exhibition label while he waited for the group to assemble, and then regurgitated the information fairly accurately in an animated and entertaining way. Having also just read the label, I noted that the only thing he added was a comment about how shiny the object was. I'm not saying this is the case with all tour guides, and I'm not even saying it's wrong to pay someone to dictate a label (especially for a large group) but the role of the tour guide can represent something pertinent about the way we receive information in a culture that places so much importance on reducing everything into short videos and Tweetable phrases. Summarizing the history of an object, movement, site or person's life within an extremely limited amount of time can be a very useful exercise as long as we remain aware of its impossibility.

AGA: Walking around and looking at objects is something that one does on the street but is also the main way in which exhibitions operate.

PC: Yes, and the guided tour potentially gives more attention to those objects in the street which might otherwise be overlooked.

AGA: What does walking bring to the work? In a walk, one follows a path, in a text one follows a thought.

PC: As I mentioned, the function of the guided walk is that even if I choose to stick to my script I have the option to improvise the route. I'm interested in what happens when a speaker projects an alternative narrative onto a given site, and the dynamism and unpredictability of the walk means that the backdrop is always in transition. Also, there is obviously a long history of equating walking with literary thought, and there have been some fantastic projects recently like *Walking Ulysses* (using a Google Map of Dublin) and the Mrs. Dalloway Walk in London.

AGA: Your texts seem to follow a thread for a while, followed by

digressing and interrupting, and moving forward by associations in meaning or homophony. Can you say something about how the text comes together? Another aspect of your work is that your text often overlaps with other sources, ranging from what you've heard while travelling on the tube to J. L. Borges' *'The Aleph'* (1945), a short story about a point in space that contains the entire universe in such a way that whoever looks at it understand everything[2]. In one of your works, *The Infinite Gravy* (2013), the aleph becomes an Oxo stock cube, making it completely banal. Often, a performance moves from moments of seriousness, with scholarly comments and elaborate metaphors, to the everyday and the literal. Your performances are also punctuated by moments of what I take to be deliberate gestures of self-doubt and apologies. There are also frequent repetitions and interruptions that seem to play an important role. Can you comment on the tone of your texts and their mode of delivery?

PC: In some cases the text comes together as a result of those connections that happen when you first visit a new place or revisit a familiar place with new intentions.
Interruptions and repetitions don't have a role as such, but it would be impossible to write without interruption, and to pretend that I do not digress or make wide associative leaps when I write would require a level or artifice (or perhaps discipline) that I am not comfortable with or capable of.
For example, I'm writing this in an academic art reference library, and there are several people whispering very loudly. The only conversation I can hear is about how to access JStor. I am trying to concentrate on answering your questions, but my primary thoughts are about hearing the library attendant teaching someone how to use an online digital library, and in the process disturbing everyone else in the room, all of whom are using paper books. Except for me because I only came here to use my laptop.
It would feel disingenuous not to share this preoccupation with you, especially given its relevance to your questions, even if you don't

want to include it in the interview. 'Disingenuous' isn't really the right word, because, like interruption, it would seem impossible not to be disingenuous in writing, because there is always going to be more information withheld than offered. It is exactly this kind of conundrum I'm interested in though, and attempting to pick apart these definitions through writing while conflicted with indecision and uncertainty about what this will mean when someone else hears or reads it.

2 Borges, J. L., *The Aleph* (1949) in *Collected Fictions* (1998), Andrew Hurley (trans.) New York: Penguin, pp. 274-86.

Slow Down, Listen Up

Lanny Walker

Entering the car park stairwell, the sight of cracked green paint greets me and the feint smell of urine pervades my nostrils. The sign on the lift doors reads 'Out of order' and as I begin my ascent to the top floor of this central London car park, the everyday noises and hustle and bustle of Soho street life begin to dissipate. The rumble of a bassline starts to enter my auditory senses and begins to pulsate through my chest. Walking through the doorway into a darkened room I am suddenly encompassed by the sonic and visual delights of Japanese sound artist, Ryoji Ikeda.

Ikeda, a leading electronic composer and visual artist, focuses on the point where art and science converge, tending to make exhibitions that are both extremely loud and visually inspiring. His installation *supersymmetry[1],* the result of his residency at *CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research,* is his response to quantum mechanics, particle physics and space-time symmetry. This exhibition exemplifies

1 supersymmetry is a sound and visual installation by artist Ryoji Ikeda presented in conjunction with The Vinyl Factory, London, April to May 2015

a well-executed sound show; it is sensorial, immersive and features a range of aural titillation from slow-tempo, high-pitched beeps reminiscent of life support machines to flat expanses of 'non-sound', an almost white noise, hinting at space or technology.

The contemporary sound art landscape is an interconnected web of composers and sound practitioners (Janek Schaefer, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Julian Day, Haroon Mirza, John Wynne, Chris Watson), curators (Sam Belafonte, Call & Response, Electra), sound producers and writers (Iain Pate to David Toop and Trevor Cox) whose worlds collide through that of the sonic, whether it be through fluxus experimental music or the sound gradients of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Why is sound such an appealing medium? One of the reasons that practices with a strong sonic component are so engaging is the powerful effect they can have on the body. Brian Massumi describes this as the *autonomic* effect, the feeling when the hairs of your arm stand on end before you can even consciously think about what is happening. Catching up with our internal bodily reactions in a post-reflection encounter is one of the most profound artistic experiences; one is moved by the presence of sound without knowing why.

Sound can be physical and personal at the same time, it is something that shapes and forms us in different ways. Do you recall the hums, echoes or other sounds of your childhood? For Brandon LaBelle, sound is 'a significant model for also thinking and experiencing the contemporary condition […] sound is promiscuous. It exists as a network that teaches us how to belong, to find place'[2].

In his recent book, *Sonic Wonderland,* Trevor Cox explores sound acoustics within different architectural environments including analyses into the measurement of reverberations and noise decay. Reverberation, which is the amount of time it takes for a noise to bounce around a space, is often measured by sound technicians who pop

2 LaBelle, B. (2010) *Acoustic Territories: Sound Culture and Everyday Life* New York: Continuum p xvii

balloons or clap to measure the time it takes for a noise to dissipate. The architecture of the space, from churches with domed ceilings to old metal shipping containers, is equally as important as the sounds created.

Often set within an acoustically poor gallery setting amidst concrete walls and floor-to-ceiling glass, the sound exhibition today often struggles to be properly heard. The underlying problem of sound spillage becomes apparent through the curation of many group exhibitions today: frequently there will be a central artwork playing over the loudspeakers of a main space, with more subtle works dotted around and made audible via the use of headphones – with the central artwork still discernible through the headset. Moreover, there is the reverberation to consider, which can enhance or undermine an exhibition, depending on the environment and amount of reverberation required by the artist. Perhaps simple things such as enhanced soundproofing, exhibition design and equipment should be taken more into account so that the audible components work together more effectively.

Undoubtedly, presenting sound art as a live event has an incredibly powerful and alluring physical presence. However, the proliferation of websites such as the sound blog *Everyday Listening*[3] or *Opening Times*[4], an organisation that makes digital art commissions, offers an alternative to the limitations of the gallery. Of course, achieving the *autonomic* effect depends here on the equipment and environment of a dispersed audience. With the frantic pace of knowledge and information circulated on the internet, I wonder how online platforms can showcase sound in a way that continues to be both inventive and corporeally alluring.

Jonathan Crary in his book *24/7 Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* considers the 24:7 aspect of modern life, suggesting that we have

shifted towards a gradual blurring between night and day, and that we are now living in 'a time without time'[5]. Technological devices such as smartphones and tablets, which are rarely turned off but merely put into sleep mode, reduce us to a constant state of consumption. In conjunction with this, the bombardment of the image via Instagram or other social media websites never seems to cease. This acceleration tends towards a compression of information. Hito Steyrl writes of what she terms the 'poor image': 'Its quality is bad, its resolution substandard...It is a ghost of an image, a preview, a thumbnail, an errant idea, an itinerant image distributed for free, squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed' in a kind of 'audiovisual capitalism.'[6]

But unlike the poor image, which circulates at a dizzying pace, or the endless PDFs stored on hard-drives after being quickly skimmed, sound cannot be sped up. The compression of an audio file reduces its quality, but does not make space for more sound to be heard simultaneously. Whereas the proliferation of the digital image has engendered the viewing of more images at a quicker pace, sound can only be absorbed in real time. In this way online platforms, such as *Everyday Listening* and *Opening Times,* offer resistance to online acceleration and an alternative to poor gallery acoustics.

3 Everyday Listening is a sound art blog run by Hugo Verweij and Mark IJzerman. http://www.every-daylistening.com/
4 Opening Times is a not-for-profit digital art commissioning body. http://otdac.org/

5 Crary, J. (2013) *24/7 Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* London: Verso Books p29
6 Steyerl (2009) *In Defence of the Poor Image* e-flux journal. Available at http://www.e-flux.com/journal/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/

61 de Villiers:
A Possible Pedagogical Site Haunted by a Shared Colonial Past

Rudi Christian Ferreira

I grew up in Cape Town, a place noted for its natural beauty; Table Mountain, Devil's Peak, the Wine Route, the Garden Route and of course, a climate to enjoy nature almost year-round. I took the enjoyment of nature for granted until I immigrated to Britain and realised that nature is indeed specific to place and that the natural landscape of London not only jarred with my perceptions of what nature is but also how to engage with it. My relocation triggered an ongoing interest in nature and, in particular, its various cultural and historical associations.

As the first decade of the new millennium rolled on, I became aware of the growing concern for the environment and how after centuries of abuse the warning signs became unavoidable and our impact on earth needed to be addressed. Scientists named the effect we are having on the planet the Anthropocene Age, which quickly became an ever-expanding constellation within art and culture. Today there are numerous discourses at play within the subject of the Anthropocene with artists, curators and cultural institutions all contributing to these

discourses as a response to the urgency concerning the current state of the environment. My own contribution to this discourse through my curatorial practice have been varied over the years with exhibitions around themes such as mankind's attempts at controlling nature by considering Lynne Wray's drawings of the gardens at Versailles, or Emer O'Brien's video work that documents the taming of wild horses. I have also curated work by Julia Rosa Clark, whose practice has influenced my approach to the complexities of the built environment, nature and traumatic cultural histories. Clark's intricate installations lament not only a lost past, but also a lost future. Her work forms generous sites that we can learn from, investigating uneasy subject matter such as the early signs of global warming, our continued fetishisation of commodities and colonial histories. Similar to the pedagogical sites created by Clark's installations, I wish to propose another site, one that touches on similar subjectivities and is accessible to all – however, the example I am referencing is only accessible through my childhood memories and will transplant us to a specific time and place in South African history.

***

61 de Villiers was a site of violence, displacement and forced relocations. It was often a place for experimentation, sometimes a place of failure and was frequently documented. 61 de Villiers was the site of a typical suburban garden that belonged to my maternal grandparents, Burney and Rina Dicker. My grandfather was third generation British and my grandmother was of Dutch descent, but when I was growing up we spoke in Afrikaans – a hybridised language unique to South Africa and notorious for being the language of oppression during the Apartheid era. I remember their garden vividly. It was filled with fragrant rose bushes, towering delphiniums, fleeting day lilies, bold hydrangeas, colourful petunias, a young peach tree and an old prune tree, a productive vegetable plot and a small rockery. Their garden provided them and our family with great joy – in particular my grandmother who would participate in the annual town fete and would often win awards for her collection of rare Cymbidiums or

for her Cape gooseberry or fig preserves she made using fruit from the garden of which she would be extremely proud. But gardens are fleeting and in a constant state of flux, which is why it was so important for my grandparents to document their garden by photographing it, which in turn allowed them to improve on the layout year after year by referencing those documents. The house at 61 de Villiers remains, but my grandparents have long since lived there and all that has been left behind from the once august garden are the photographs, Grandmothers awards, the memories I keep of it and the cuttings and seedlings my grandmother passed on to her daughters and now continue to grow in their gardens.

Exploring the taxonomy of gardens, we could consider 61 de Villiers to be an example of the English Cottage Garden style – that is, a garden that is a riot of colour and fragrance from early spring to late summer, but also a garden that is productive, with fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers growing amongst each other. The very act of naming it an English Cottage Garden is to romanticise the garden as something that belongs in the English countryside – an imagining of what a garden would look like in a rural setting as viewed through the lens of the suburban. Neither of my grandparents has ever crossed the borders of South Africa. The reference eludes to the English settlers who brought this style of gardening with them when they colonised South Africa. However, when we consider the genealogy of gardens in South Africa we have to credit the Dutch with creating the first garden in Cape Town, which is still flourishing today. The Company's Garden, in reference to the Dutch East India Company was created in 1652, the same year that the country was 'founded' and was intended to be a productive garden that could provide the nautical explorers and trading ships with supplies as they passed the southern most tip of Africa.

When British settlers arrived in 1795, they did what most colonisers did – they recreated the colony in the image of the homeland. They set about landscaping and turning the natural habitat into something that was managed and controlled, catalogued and indexed, but most importantly, something that was recognisably British. As more settlers arrived, and more native Africans were dispossessed of their land, entire suburbs were being created, complete with English gardens. In African culture, the notion of gardening is a foreign one; in African culture nature is all around us, there to be enjoyed by everyone and for everyone's benefit – not something that is limited to a back yard for private use. It was of course not only the act of creating space for the settlers and their gardens that was violent but also the act of acquiring plants. During this period of colonial conquest, plant hunters would look for unique and interesting plants to forcefully remove from their natural habitat and take back to Britain. For some it would be for the prestige of having the rarest plants, but for most it would be for economic gain. Of course, this was not unique to the European colonial period, as the international plant trade happened as early as the Enlightenment, if not earlier.

The reason that my grandparents, and other families living in white suburban areas, had a garden whilst most native African families did not, was not only because they occupied an economically privileged position due to the Apartheid regime, but also because they came from a different cultural heritage. Considering the failures of my grandparents' garden, I realise that certain plants perished because they were never intended to grow there – the plants were not suited to the climate because they were brought over from far away places. My own garden in London is symptomatic of this condition – colonised by plants that grew in my grandmother's garden. Whilst the British plants she struggled to grow at 61 de Villiers thrive in mine, some South African varieties I am growing are struggling to survive the harsh winters and damp summers of London.

Throughout history, gardens have fulfilled a variety of roles, from subsistence to displays of power to leisure activities. Yet, throughout history, they have been inextricably linked to a violent past, whether through the Enclosure Acts to create private land, plant hunters who would sail the world removing plants from their natural habitat, or colonisers displacing people to create gardens. My proposition is not

that we must stop gardening, but in fact that we should be peda-
gogues to its tainted history, and educate others through using the
garden as a site for pedagogy. The garden can be a productive site
that allows us an entry point into discourses surrounding notions not
only of the colonial project but also our colonising of the environ-
ment.

Mirage

Siyun Tang

Introduction:

"Journeys to relive your past?" was the Khan's question at this point, a question which could also have been formulated: "Journeys to recover your future?"
And Marco's answer was: "Elsewhere is a negative mirror. The traveller recognizes the little that is his, discovering the much he has not had and will never have."
— Italo Calvino, Invisible Cities

Mirage is about cities, translations and the imaginary. Globalisation makes everywhere look the same but feel different. In the seventeenth century the West was translating the East into Chinoiserie, leaving an odd Chinese Pagoda in the Kew Gardens; in the twenty-first century, China was copying European cities for its rich citizens. Not only do people travel, but buildings and landscapes, too. These are more than just Architectural Doppelgängers, they are re-imaginations. They are not something left behind, but something carried forward with us.

Mirage is a slice of space that I share with Roel van Putten and Simone Monsi in The Standard Model. These pages are occupied by interviews and images about memory, cities and imagination. Through the dialogue between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo, Italo Calvino created a city with so many layers that it can be revisited countless times — a space that allows the reader to be in turn lost and found. In the following pages, different cultures are mediated through a composition of conversations and images. They carry memories of the past and projections of the imagination.

'Beijing has a sweet, sticky smell. Sweet, meaty smells.'
'Hunan smells exciting, like gunpowder.'
'London smells like Sunday roast, a mouldy carpet in a pub and beer.'
'My hometown smells like forest and wet grass.'
— Roel van Putten

Roel van Putten (b.1988, Netherlands) is an artist based in London. He has traveled and lived in different cities in China. During these visits, he worked as an artist, a fireworks designer and a student.

Simone Monsi (b. 1988, Italy) is an artist currently based in London. He works across social media and is interested in online exoticism, the failure of misappropriation and the translation of dreams.
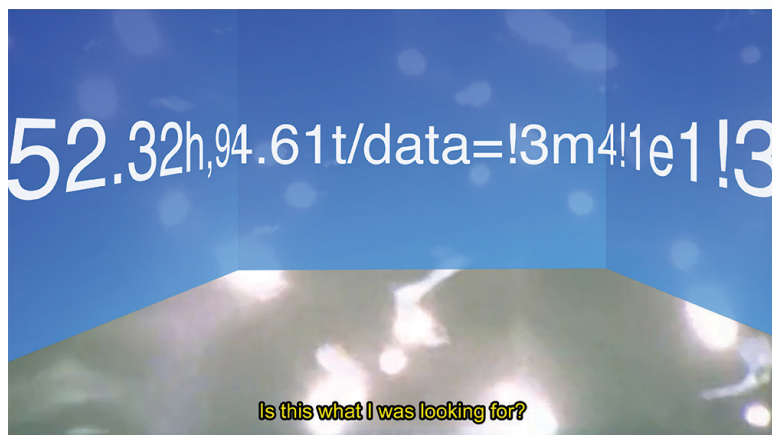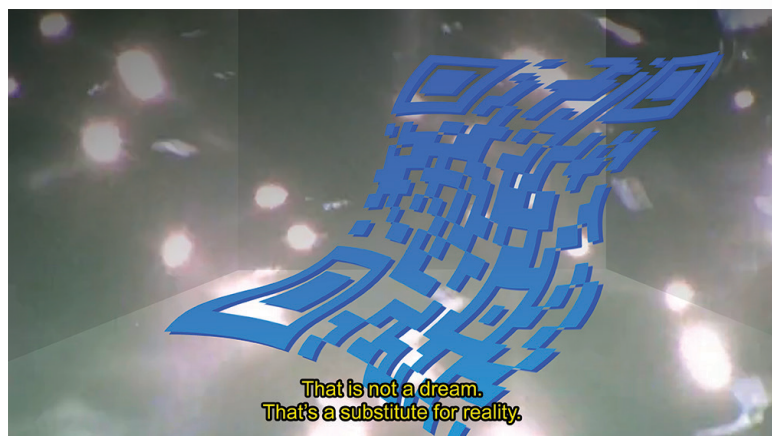
Simone Monsi, Still from: *Can I Dream Alone*, 2015. HD video. Courtesy the Artist

Part 1: Cities & Revisits
A Difficult Revisit

Siyun Tang: You spent more than a year in China, and lived in Liuyang for a few months making fireworks. Had you been to China before?

Roel van Putten: At first, I was not working. I had no responsibilities, so it was more about exploring the place. It was in December and everything seems nice at that time of the year. The first time I went to Liuyang from Beijing, but the second time I travelled straight from the Netherlands. During my second visit I was working, so there was more responsibility. It was strange. When I travelled from Beijing, everything felt very exotic, because everything was very rural compared to Beijing. But when I came from the Netherlands, and knew that I needed to stay there for four months, my perception of the rural exotic site had changed. When I arrived it was very grey and gloomy, and felt quite depressing. It was not how I had remembered the first visit.

ST: Life can be difficult for a foreigner. How was your life in Liuyang? You mentioned that it felt rural and was close to the countryside.

RP: I worked for a Belgian fireworks company, which has offices in Mainland China, Hong Kong and Belgium. The company was run by both a Belgian owner and a Chinese owner. I knew that it was going to be hard but I didn't know that the Chinese boss would have a completely different understanding of what I was doing there. My Belgian boss called me a firework designer but my Chinese boss called me a graphic designer. There was a struggle between the Belgian and the Chinese branches. I ended up working with both, but the Chinese branch didn't take my firework design seriously. I worked with a group of people who did not understand English very well and did not understand marketing or the value of good communication. They only talked about making money, which made it very diffi-

cult for me to communicate with them. The people of Liuyang have an agricultural background and, in the past, it was difficult to make money. Now, a new market has opened in the fireworks industry, but the interest of the industry in profit exceeds any concern for the quality of the products.

20 years ago, Liuyang was a city of 50,000 people. When the government decided that this would be the place to produce fireworks, all the firework manufacturers moved there. Now the population of the city has reached 1,000,000 people.

Part 2: Cities & Flavour
All Cities Are Defined By Their Own Food Culture In China

ST: How was the food in China?

RP: The food in Liuyang is spicy but very fresh. Once I went to a restaurant where we needed to pick our own vegetables from the land. Then I gave the ingredients to the cook. Parts of the land were far away, so they also went out on a motorbike to pick vegetables for us. It was the best food I ever tried.

ST: Did you cook a lot when you were staying in the city?

RP: It was difficult to cook, as I didn't know how to use the kitchen. It was quite old, greasy and dusty and, since I lived in the office, the whole office would smell if I cooked. Hence I ate out everyday.

ST: In China you aren't so aware of globalisation because you don't consume goods from all over the world. Everything is made in China. You don't see supermarkets fetishising world cuisine, for example. In the United Kingdom, you get a stronger sense of globalisation. If you go to a supermarket, all the food is from different places. You can feel the strong presence of global trading.

RP: I agree. China has such an interesting culinary culture. When you do see globalisation in Chinese cooking, it always comes out as something completely new; pizza becomes Chinese pizza with Beijing duck on it, and its made of the same dough as croissants. And I saw a woman eating pizza with chopsticks. It was amazing. I had never seen pizza being eaten with chopsticks. I think what happens is that when foreign food is imported, it is reinterpreted by using the core ingredients and techniques of the local cuisine.

ST: Did you find a lot of differences between all the cities that you visited?

RP: Aesthetically there is not much difference between the cities, but the climate and the food are very different. All cities are defined by their own food culture in China. The way that the locals communicate with each other is different, too.

ST: What about smells, how do different cities smell in your memory?

RP: Beijing has a sweet, sticky smell. Sweet, meaty smells. Henan smells exciting, like gunpowder. I think that London smells like Sunday roast because, when I first visited London, it was Sunday. London also smells like a mouldy carpet in a pub with beer spilt on it.

ST: So what does your hometown smell like?

RP: My hometown smells of forests and wet grass. People in the Netherlands mostly eat at home, so the city doesn't smell of food, while in China there is a culture of eating out. I think that is why China smells of food.

Part 3: Cities & Fireworks
Everywhere Has Their Own Culture And Fireworks Tradition

ST: In Liuyang, how present were fireworks? Could you see fireworks all the time, everyday?

RP: In Liuyang, fireworks were everywhere. But you were only allowed to set off a firework inside the testing ground. Outside of Liuyang, most people find fireworks very exciting, but people there don't enjoy them because they have to work with them every day. You can hear fireworks from 10am till 11pm, and the testing grounds are set up from around 7am. It makes you feel like you are in a war zone. Fireworks are typically associated with pleasure, but in Liuyang they sound like war. Sometimes there are really heavy explosions. I think that's what people like about fireworks; they are sort of dangerous.

ST: As you mentioned, the government has designated Liuyang as the center of firework manufacturing. How many fireworks are produced there?

RP: Ninety percent of fireworks sold globally are produced in Liuyang; almost all of them. Now, I will always think of the city of Liuyang when I see fireworks. I know the whole route that fireworks travel across the world. They are stored in warehouses in Henan, then packed in containers, driven in a truck to Guangzhou and finally shipped to international customers.

ST: Do the fireworks smell as well? What kind of smell is that?

RP: There is a constant smell of gunpowder in the city. The smell of the fireworks is exciting because the explosion of a firework is a transportation of energy. It relates to how quickly the energy is released, how loud the bang is and how much smoke they produce. But this excitement is probably only felt by visitors from outside the city. At Chinese New Year, Liuyang is the only place that doesn't have a fireworks display. The locals are sick of them.

ST: Apart from the smell, have you got any other distinct memories of fireworks?

RP: There is a special kind of red clay in the fireworks from Liuyang. They are built like cannons: there is a tube, under the tube there's a layer of clay, and on top of that there is a small bomb that explodes inside the tube so that it shoots itself into the sky. After that, the clay falls out. If you go to the Netherlands after New Year's Eve, the streets are covered with the red clay from Liuyang. It's very funny to see Chinese soil spread on Dutch land every year on the first of January.

ST: So fireworks are also very popular in the Netherlands?

RP: Yes, though people prefer different kinds of fireworks in different markets and cultures. For the Dutch market, more bangers are produced than for any other market. Bangers are less popular in Denmark and Germany, and in the UK they are forbidden. In Belgium, skyrockets are most popular. Every place has its own culture and firework tradition.

Part 4: Cities & Fakes
Ersha Island and Chinatown

ST: Could you tell me about the other cities you've visited in South China?

RP: I was in Guangzhou for two days and went to a French concession, an island built by French colonisers. I didn't know that there was a French colonial legacy in China. Later, when I was working in Liuyang, someone told me that there was a sign on the island saying: 'no dogs, no Chinese'.

ST: That was the Ersha Island. How was it?

RP: The island in Guangzhou looks a bit European, but is now taken over by Chinese businesses. Everything I saw in China that looked European seemed as if it was built in homage. There were buildings built in a French style where the Chinese government was building a new town. It was like a replica of an existing European city, built of Chinese materials.

ST: Was that how you imagined a Chinese town influenced by French design would look? Were you able to explore the city much in two days?

RP: I really liked the city. I thought that Guangzhou was very new, but it has over 2000 years of history. The most noticeable element that stood out as new was the recently built 600-meters tall white tower of the city. I also went to the Guangdong Museum of Modern Art next to the Pearl River. During my time there, I saw many unique buildings; they looked French, but had a colour that diverted from the French architectural tradition, like purple or blue.

ST: What about the Chinatown in London? Does it give you a sense of China?

RP: It's not really Chinese, it's a bit fake. It feels like China, smells like China. But it is more like a place built for the British. Maybe it's part of the colonial legacy of Britain; many places there sell Dim Sum from Hong Kong. For me China is more about the north. South China is very different in terms of the culture, customs and language. In the south there are similarities to London, for example people queue up in Hong Kong. While in Beijing, north of China I never saw people queue up.

ST: What about the Chinatown in your home country?

RP: In the Netherlands, it's very different because of the Dutch colonial history. Dutch Chinatowns are based on Western ideas of both Indonesia and China. These places reveal the lasting presence of colonial history.

ST: Did you see any other replicas of foreign architecture while you were in China?

RP: In certain areas you see foreign influence. I saw a replica of the White House and an Austrian village. But they interpret foreign architecture in a Chinese way, so it is a completely new style, which hasn't existed before. These aren't replicas derived from original contexts, but rather like replicas of buildings in movies. Some designs are based on photographs and materialise as something entirely unique. This is amazing to me.

Curating
the Soviets

Marina Maximova

When returning home to Moscow, I often struggle to explain my curatorial practice. I by no means want to claim that curatorial discourses are absolute terra incognita in Russia. In conversation with art professionals it raises no more questions or concerns than, for example, here, in the UK. However, for a wider audience, the role and functions of the curator remain vague and unclear. The most obvious reason for this, of course, is the fact that curating as a profession in the sense that we understand it today, appeared in Russia much later than in the West. One of the renowned Russian art theorists, following the notorious phrase that 'there was no sex in the USSR', argued that there was no curating in the USSR either. But surely, with both sex and curating, this could not be true. The aim of this short essay is to contradict his argument and to acknowledge the first Soviet curators by pointing to their most notable and significant projects.

In the West, the development of curating is usually traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was this period of postwar stabilization and economic growth that led to considerable changes in the art infrastructure and rapid expansion of different art institutions, such

as museums of modern and contemporary art as well as art festivals, biennials, triennials, etc. At the same time, new trends in art emerged, which prompted curators to expand the boundaries of traditional exhibition spaces and take art outside of the conventional museum environment. Both of these changes put the profession of curator in high demand.

The artistic environment in Soviet Russia was dramatically different during this period. Art was split into two seemingly antithetical, but at the same time intersecting, worlds. On the one hand, there was official state art. Both the art produced and the means of display were very conventional and left no space for curatorial experiments. On the other hand, there was underground art. This movement united all those artists who were not willing to follow state policy in the arts, and tried to revive the artistic language of modernism. They had no access to exhibition venues and were pushed outside of the public sphere into the space of private apartments. There was no selection process for these exhibitions; artists displayed everything that they had recently made, hanging the works in any available space. Apartment exhibitions were a rare opportunity for artists to discuss their work with a likeminded audience. However, they soon became unsatisfied with such limited exhibition opportunities and started to experiment with forms of display, turning their exhibitions into actions or statements. It was this borderline existence, the self-containment of the underground art world and the peculiar relations between the underground and the state that determined the development of curating in the USSR.

In the late 1960s underground artists got support from scientific institutions and research centres, where they began to organize their shows. Foreign expats were also key in supporting underground artists. One of the most significant exhibitions at that time took place in the yard of the American journalist Edmund Stivenson's house and was curated by Leonid Talochkin. The hang of the work was conventional from a curatorial perspective, but the site of the exhibition and the desire to take artworks to an unusual environment were radical.

It was not until 1973 that the first truly revolutionary apartment exhibition, *Paradise,* by Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, was curated. The whole space of a private apartment was darkened; visitors had to use torches to see the works on display and the performances taking place in the kitchen. Rather than clearing away objects of everyday life in order to find space for artworks, they transformed them into elements of an exhibition. Komar and Melamid turned the Soviet apartment into a completely aestheticized environment, challenging the conventions of earlier apartment exhibitions.
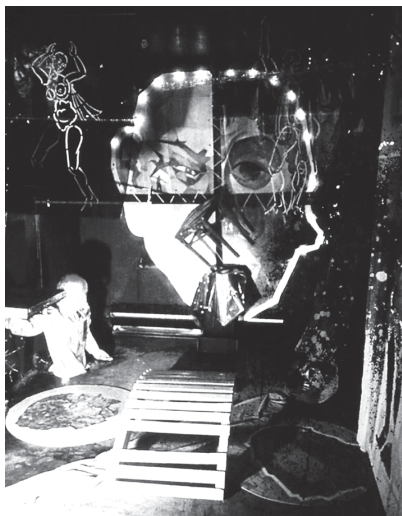
V. Komar, A. Melamid. Paradise. Moscow, 1973

1st APT-ART Exhibition. Installation view. Moscow, 1982

Curatorial experiments were taken further with the appearance of APT-ART gallery in 1982.
Often referred to as the first private gallery in the USSR, it was located in the private apartment of artist
Nikita Alekseev. He underplayed the domesticity of the space by hiding all of the objects of everyday living or turning them into elements of the exhibition. All of the furniture, white goods and surfaces were used as places of display. Following the example of Western galleries and artist-run spaces, Alekseev was developing a curatorial programme with carefully planned exhibitions, openings and receptions. The emergence of such a space was also shaped by the practices of a younger generation of underground artists. Compared to their predecessors, whose practice only reached the limited audience of underground art, they aspired to broaden their exposure. Although, by the beginning of the 1980s, they could theoretically gain access to some semi-public, officially approved exhibition venues, they were not interested in conventional spaces and wanted to experiment with new modes of display. From the first exhibition, APT-ART triggered a wide response in both official and unofficial art circles. Nevertheless, the gallery was soon closed after a KGB search and accusations of anti-Soviet activities. It continued its existence in more inventive forms. *APT-ART Al Fresco* in May 1983 and *APT-ART Behind The Fence* in September of the same year were organized in the countryside, reflecting the lack of exhibition venues. Another reincarnation of the gallery was in the form of a portable exhibition, *SZ Solo Show,* curated by artist duo Victor Skersis and Vadim Zakharov. The artists created a miniature version of their last show in Alekseev's apartment, which had resulted in the KGB search. They could take it anywhere and arrange it on any available surface.

APT-ART Behind The Fence. Installation view. Tarasovka, 1983

With the introduction of Gorbachev's reforms, which started in 1985 and led to much more latitude in the state cultural policy, everything that could not even be imagined before suddenly became possible.

Underground artists gained access to almost all of the public venues, but were no longer interested in them. The energy of the underground movement was so powerful that it could not be confined within the walls of a museum or gallery. Artworks were taken away from the white cube in favour of environments that could bring them to life, but at the same time the selection of the works exhibited also changed these environments, questioning their functions and social roles. Artists were keen to be in direct contact with society, which had rejected them for so long, in order to test their practices against an audience accustomed to officially approved state art. Another important feature of that time was the appearance of an art market for underground art that simultaneously attracted and disgusted the artists, becoming the focus of many of their shows.

N. Alekseev at Art Against Commerce exhibition. Moscow, 1986

In 1986 artists of APT-ART Gallery organized *Art Against Commerce,* an exhibition held in Bitsevsky (Bitza) park. This park was famous for its market of amateur artworks made in the traditional Russian style popular among foreigners. The exhibition of underground art was held alongside stalls exhibiting kitsch and traditional works. It was not only the physical change of environment that artists were looking for, but also the proximity to a commercial, and more orthodox, artistic context.

A year later artists were still reflecting on the influence of collectors taste in their practices. One of the most interesting cases was *An Exhibition in Hell* held in Orekhovo-Borisovo Park in 1987. The curator asked artists to produce new paintings, the most salable art medium, specifically for this event. They were later buried in the park, facing downwards, so the inhabitants of hell could enjoy the show. After a year the paintings were excavated. Interestingly, two of the works disappeared. The organisers joked that the inhabitants of hell had taken the paintings, and that this proved the widespread popularity of underground art. The rest of the rescued paintings, after spending a year buried in soil, became absolutely unattractive to the art market.

Exhibition in Hell. Opening (1987) and closing (1988) of the show. Moscow

This period of *perestroika* (political reform) brought lots of hopes and expectations for the future of underground artists and the development of curating. The first post-Soviet years saw the emergence of several distinctive art venues, Regina Gallery and Trekhprudny Squat being the two most significant from a curatorial perspective. The former was closely associated with the practice of Oleg Kulik, a provocative performance artist, who became curator of the gallery during the first years of its existence. In his work he constantly challenged viewers' understanding of what an exhibition means, what can be displayed, how long it can last and how it can be organized. The latter functioned as an artist-run space with a distinctive exhibition strategy and opened a new show every Thursday over the course of two years.

Sadly, not many post-perestroika hopes materialised. The lack of art infrastructure in Russia is still one of the most crucial factors affecting the development of young artists and curators. However, some positive changes have become evident during the last few years, such as a recent boom in research of underground art. As the above examples illustrate, there is a rich history of curating that differs from the Western model due to the particularities of its development. It goes far beyond apartment exhibitions and I believe that it could serve as an endless source of inspiration for younger art professionals and serve as an impulse for revival of curating in Russia.

With?

You Made My Heart Malleable When You Poured Yours Out Before Me

Nella Aarne

> I-met-her-some-thirty-five-years-ago-maybe.
> And although I have probably never understood anything about it,
> although I have not understood her yet, we have probably never
> been apart. It is *as if* we had *almost* never been apart.
> Yes, I believe, I-met-her-some-thirty-five-years-ago-maybe.[1]
> – Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That is to Say…*

You took cautious steps towards me, ensconced yourself beside me and changed all of my 1087 selves. Perhaps there were always hundreds of me, and constantly more in the making. But I did not hear all of what was me until you shook me awake with your song and sparked the first discordant tones in the array of hundreds of voices within me, which had until then been perfectly synchronised into one. The discord began as minor whispers, gently out of beat, but soon grew louder demanding to be heard. These new voices circulat-

ed with yours, singing with it, in turn complementing and interrupting it, at times even disturbing one another.[2] In the presence of your warmth, a wave of unfamiliar tones and intensities traversed me and changed the course of my thought and movement. I discovered that I was, in fact, many, and thrown to the mercy of inevitable metamorphoses. It was the first moment in which I felt love.

As your voice stirred the depths of everything that I could be, I tried to cover my ears and resist the heat. You see, at times closeness can appear threatening. Profound intimacy is not only an occasion of tenderness, shelter and discovery, but also bears the inescapability of succumbing to the radiance of the other, slowly becoming malleable in the other's warmth. Reaching for me fearlessly and with unforeseen openness and generosity, you obscured the boundary between you and I, and melted my outline, which had until then been defined and impervious to the movements of the other. Every word that you enunciated, every instance in which our eyes locked, and each fraction of a second during which I felt the thrill of your presence, left a permanent imprint on all of my 1087 selves – the constantly multiplying abundance of me, whom I had only just discovered because you had incited me to speak in *1,000 tongues*[3] at once. On your part, it was a meticulous process of loving persuasion. When you poured your heart out before me, mine, too, became fluid like molten tin.

In your scarlet glow, I transformed into formless silvery-white metal. I became uncontainable and luxuriant, fluctuating yet intermittently congruous with your movements. Overcome with my unanticipated love for a living other and enthralled by your difference, I attuned to you, awash in your indecipherable, compelling and intoxicating unfamiliarity. I took a precipitous leap of faith and dared for all of what you were – you, too, were incalculably many. It was because of your eloquent presence, soft in its persistence, that my molten heart now resounded with the entirety of your inexhaustibly multiplying

1 Derrida, J. (2006) *H.C. for Live, That is to Say…* trans. Melisi, S. and Herbrechter, S. California: Stanford University Press p5 Originally published in 2000

2 Derrida, J (2006) *From the Word to Life: A Dialogue between Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous* p1 In: *New Literary History*, vol. 37, no. 1, *Hélène Cixous: When the World Is a Stage,* Winter 2006, pp. 1-13
3 Cixous, H. (1976) *The Laugh of the Medusa* p889 In: *Signs*, vol. 1, no 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875-893

choir, which I knew was bound to be as dissonant with mine as it was within itself. All of my 1087 selves aspired to absorb each and every dizzying[6] note of your tune – no, hundreds of tunes – whilst recognising that I could never master them or claim them as my own. This love did not seek to subdue you, but to embrace everything that you already were and were about to become.[4]

Of course, the astonishing intensity with which our utterances circled one another, the relentless polyphony, which allowed no chance for silence, hauled both you and I to the brink of exhaustion. Again and again, I heard hundreds of our voices being engulfed by yet another interminable dispute. Crescendoing as a tangle of disagreeing pitches and timbres, and with an infinite range of unprecedented languages, this incongruous composition of broken chords strained my eardrums. At times, my perpetual motion in your blazing heat was as draining as it was exhilarating. In an uncontrollable frenzy, all of my 1087 selves strove at once to adoringly concur, and contentiously conflict, with *the amplitude of songs*[5] emanating from you. You were in your absolute difference so enigmatically capricious, that your closeness felt overwhelming, dangerous, unbearable. Still I revered you. You were like oxygen with which I wanted to fill my lungs; a nourishing life force holding the capacity to ensure my survival.

It was a ceaseless erratic dance, swinging me back and forth between a desire for ardent attachment and a panic-stricken urge for distance. But the vehemence of the fleeting, harmonious sequences in our tremendous dissonant choir sustained my movement. These silver-toned waves of sound sporadically rushing through us were sublime, and their enduring effects altered the course of our imminent metamorphoses. As my amorphous metallic essence continued to obtain new forms under the influence of your evolving aura, I understood that you would remain forever different and inscrutable to me, just as the

potential embedded in the hundreds of voices within me was to remain unfamiliar to myself and to you. My heart never solidified after our first encounter. In love, you gave me *this gift of alterability,*[6] the capacity of always being several, of always being in the making, of always taking impetuous leaps for the other. Now, my 1386 selves echo in confounding discord the multiplicity of our tunes, still circulating around an intangible trace of your voice.

4 Cixous, H. (1986) *Sorties: Out and Out/Attacks/Ways Out/Forays* In: *The Newly Born Woman* Manchester: Manchester University Press p 78 Originally published in 1975
5 Derrida, J. (2006) *H.C. for Live, That is to Say…* trans. Melisi, S. and Herbrechter, S. California: Stanford University Press p13 Originally published in 2000

6 Cixous, H. (1976) *The Laugh of the Medusa* p889 In: *Signs*, vol. 1, no 4, Summer 1976, pp. 875-893

A Semi;Colon Reflection on Migratory Aesthetics

Emma Siemens-Adolphe

derlying the inalienable value of these two artistic practices, which is mostly governed
which it is produced, displayed and circulated, the exchange that occurred between Alex
Fusaro and JupiterWoods questioned the efficacy of cultural translation when crossing
s. Translation being a strategy that I employed, not in a linguistic sense, but as a way c
s tied to living in a globalized world predicated by network relations[8]. Encouraging a m
g on an art-work, by prompting audience engagement and blurred authorship, I hope t
sed potential paradoxes that are tied to contemporary art. This exhibition provided a co
en actants that attempted to rupture a carefully controlled system, be it through the infil

---

ones, Amelia. *Body Art/Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.
Malpas, Jeff, "Hans-Georg Gadamer", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition),
Zalta (ed.)
hese ideas of translation are informed by: Étienne Balibar's text "Strangers as Enemies: Further Reflecti
Aporias of Transnational Citizenship"MCRI Globalization and Autonomy, 2006. The notion of migrat
sthetics is discussed in Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord's introduction to "Essays in Migratory Aesth

Desire Lines
Reflections on an ongoing dialogue with artist Felix Melia

Carolina Ongaro

Standing in front of Felix Melia's work installed in the exhibition *this place is really nowhere*, Jupiter Woods, I like to think of how it appears, to me, as a step within an ongoing dialogue, still open to further evolvements and new manifestations. I know this sequence, I am familiar with it. The images that emerge here, so affective to me, have followed a path that brought the artist here, and myself to him. I contemplate the great space for thinking that this dialogue has activated in my personal path, emerging here within a powerful succession of frames.

The backpack has become container for a vibrating superimposition of images. In the background of the screen, flashing bodies perform disparate gestures, their presence in space scrutinised through rectangular images that are layered upon layers, flattened upon other screens. These bodies appear on top of, and then dissolve into, film footage evoking the mythologies of road trips, of landscapes lived through a window, of construction sites sitting within the temporary clear spaces of the Metropolis. The visual experience of this edited composition is partly hidden in this black backpack, reminding me of the architecture of a body in motion.

With Melia, I have been thinking about the performances played by the objects which accompany us on our journeys. They become part of our narratives, virtuality enacted in space. In viewing this work, a sense of movement is present in the perception of the spectator, experiencing a zooming in and out of images retaining motion. The bodies depicted participate in a movement through disposition: without acting, they nevertheless perform agency. Their occupancy within the composition is continuously challenged; these bodies seem displaced. They do not share their personal narratives with those of the spaces traversed; yet, they infiltrate the collage and inhabit it solidly, to then eventually dissolve again.

1 Bruno, G. (2002) *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* London: Verso Books p16

The artist writes:

> I like to think about the physical world, or reality, as a continuous sequence of thresholds and transformations. These are nonlinear, spherical. Their dynamics and narratives in representational space are consistently impacting upon and changing the body.[1]

Mythological narratives-in-motion show an absence of humanity that is still claiming for a scattered presence of the bodies and their expressions in space. Hands perform their own languages; their gesticulation naturally bridges these bodies and the contexts in which they operate. The sanctioned power of visuality connected to imaging is therefore superseded by the potentiality of other senses, reclaiming their own position within a bodily apprehension of space.

The idea of the gaze in Melia's work is explored in its layered, experiential dimensions employed in both representation and spectatorship. A sense of cinematic displacement is often induced, to engender in the audience awareness of their physical position in space while experiencing moving images. The exploration of movement as a continuous state of becoming is confronted with those rigid and prescriptive structures embedded in architecture, the urban fabric and the space of cinema itself. Regulatory frameworks that define the navigation of the bodies in space intertwine the characters' personal narratives, desires and journeys.

The spectator is called into action; reclaiming her position and presence in space, she becomes a 'voyageur, a passenger who traverses haptic, emotive terrain'.[2]

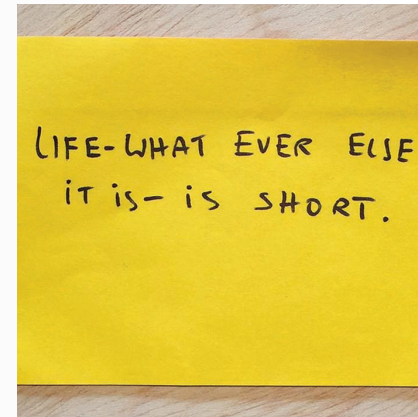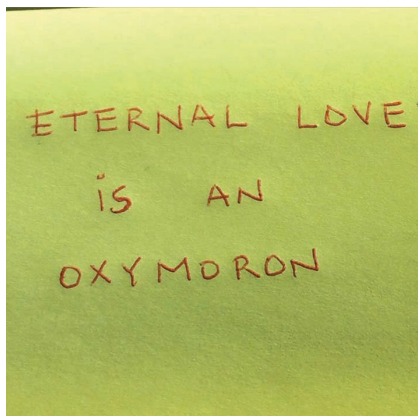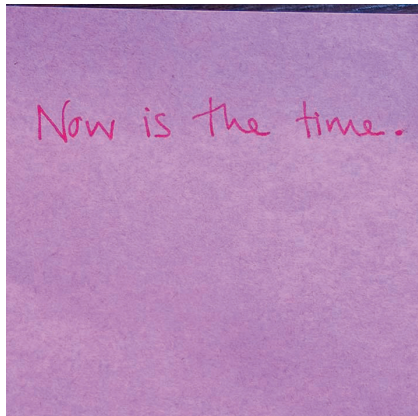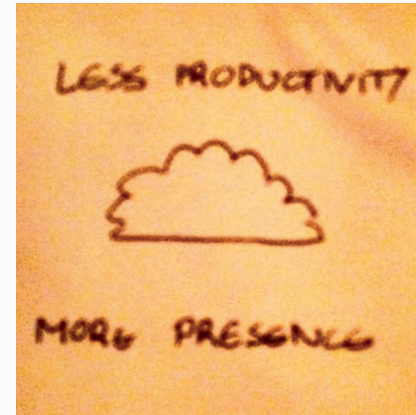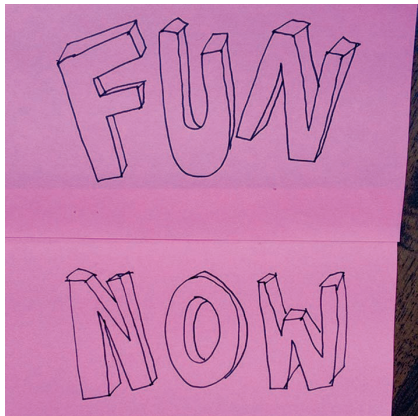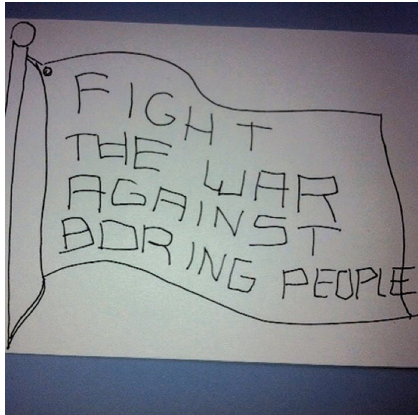This is only the start for us, there is still so much to talk about.

X

2 Rimbaud, A. (1962) *Letter, 13 May 1871* In: Bernard, O. ed. *Collected Poems* London: Penguin Books
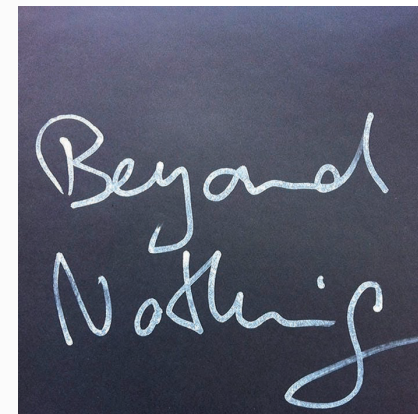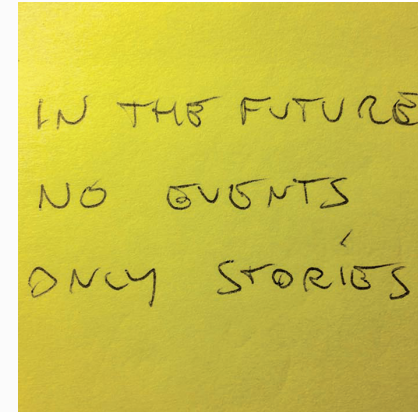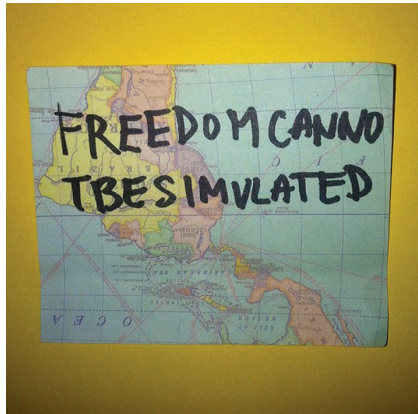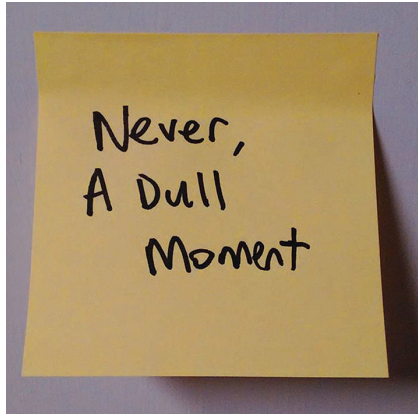
Identity Crisis

Cory Scozzari and Franziska Wildförster

Identity Crisis is an imagined conversation comprised of images of texts and images of views borrowed from the Instagram accounts of @hansulrichobrist and @klausbiesenbach curated by Cory Scozzari and Franziska Wildförster.

Never,
A Dull
Moment

FREEDOMCANNO
TBESIMULATED

IN THE FUTURE
NO EVENTS
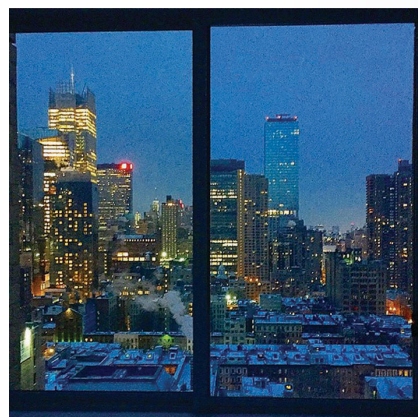ONLY STORIES

Beyond
Nothing

IMAGINE WHAT
IT'S LIKE TO BE ME.

Sleep is for the weak.

POODLES OF POWER?
HAS POLITICAL ART
EVER CHANGED
THE WORLD?

UTOPIA
IS SO
CLOSE
YOU CAN
SMELL IT!

Against the Solitude of the White Cube

Dimitra Gkitsa

to my comrades

...ἔκαστος οὖν ἡμῶν ἐστιν ἀνθρώπου ξύμβολον[1]
Plato, *Symposium*, 189.d.5–193.a

Act I. Depose

'Each one of us is but the *symbolon* of a human being —sliced in half like a flatfish, two instead of one — and each pursues a never-ending search for the *symbolon* of himself'[2]. No, this is not about finding meaning in differences. This is about abandoning all meanings. It is something more than signs of (I)dentification. What is it then? It is about pieces smashed, broken and dismantled that receive substance only during the action of coming together (συμβάλλω[3]). This process presupposes an imaginative act of deposition, of withdrawal from every power; the power that protects the 'I' from

its extinction; the parasitic power imposed over the 'You'; the power that deforms and expels every chance of a 'We'. So, what am I again? I am nothing but a symbol under the symbol of *your* existence and desire. I succumb to you. I dissolve into you. I surrender without being defeated because I know that I can only *be* in the presence of (an)other and I come into being when I choose to abandon myself and perfectly detach from myself. Your scent, the tone of your voice, your touch that becomes an everlasting scar in my mind, your gaze falling upon me inside this quiet room nullifies me, and at the same time it brings my pieces together in all the combinations of orders and disorders, possibilities and impossibilities.

No, this is not a judgment and neither a condition of being, but an unconditional process of ex/changing the self with something — anything — unknown and strange that comes from *you* to *me*. It is an infinite and imminent relation of the self to the unpredictable movement of the other. I need this mutual estrangement, this unexpected gesture because only through and with the realization and acceptance of our common strangeness we can transform our separation into some kind of dynamic relation. I need this intermediary moment of uncertainty and joyful insecurity because only through this I can metamorphose the vast, unbearable solitude of the white cube into thousands of universes. I need this reciprocal wise ignorance of not knowing. Because, despite everything, only this way I can at least synchronize my ceaseless breathing ebulliently with all the traces that you leave around and on me, and I can trustfully cherish every action that you take — as you also do with mine.

Act II. Oppose

But if I am only through and within our nexus of exchanges, if I can be only via my relation to you, does this make us a 'we'? Then again, what are we and what could we be? Do these rapid traverses of interconnections between me, you and them subsume us under cruel categories, groups, classes, genders, races, networks? And what if 'they' might also be 'we'? No, do not paralyze yourself in

1 *Each one of us is but the symbol of a human being*
2 Plato, *Symposium*, 189.d.5-193.a
3 συμβάλλω [symbalo] = contribute (In ancient Greek it contained the meaning of uniting and bringing together the separate pieces that constituted a *symbolon*)

moments of exclusions. Remember, this acrobatic archi/tectonics of arbitrary assemblies and canons carries on and preserves an *archi* (ἀρχή[4]) of always protecting the secrets of its deeper and inner space. You are part of the group, but still you do not wholly possess its language — because if you did, the net would fall apart. The state of things in that complex mess is interlaced in conceptual frameworks that define the being and its relations. You are part of that system without choosing it, sometimes without even realizing it. You move throughout these complex structures — in any case, you were never their *techton* (τέκτων)[5] — without being able to decode the secret messages and without accessing the background mechanisms, foundation of authorities and mystical state of things. You see yourself again trapped in that dark cave without detecting the source that gives life to all the shadows that incarnate your nightmares.

So, rage against every kind of enclosure. Oppose the paraphernalia of hierarchical structures. Resign from everything you believe you have under control. Read the changes of time, learn again from the absolute beginning how to move back and forth in all the possible directions, circles, spirals, spins, pulsations, streams, and sing along that old refrain. Take support from your friends, be a silent parasite and open up a passage, a non passage that can allow the arrival of your unpredictable other self, of your other *symbolon*. Embrace this new visitor that enters quietly from the side door; it brings a new inappropriate, indecorous, irreparable, and at the same time, vital future. You need that future as you need a trembling light in the night. It is the chaotic unknown that makes you turn towards the mirror and realize you are someone else and your 'I' is nothing but the other: *Je est un autre!*[6]

Act III. Compose

How then can I learn to live with you? How can complicated puzzles in their unique singularity tangle and knot around each other in such a way that would always complement, support one another and simultaneously be open for new and unpredictable entries? How can we compose a common song out of these separate cacophonies and asynchronous individual improvisations? Decisive here is the idea that we co-create an active collective involving absolutely no essence (being) at all. We come bare-skinned willing to expose all the relations and nuances of the self and manage to remain always in the mode and process of becoming. Sharing an *inessential* and always nomadic commonality that can be transformed into a form of solidarity means a reciprocal implication of belonging without obtaining any (I)dentity. It is a way of establishing an intimate territory without really owning it or feeling it to be your home; a familiarity that grows proportionally with the estrangement of the self from the self. It is about knowing that everything is prone to change and able to adjust in any time and space. But how many of us would really dare to remain in a constant flux of abandoning every essence, every meaning, and identity? How many of us would dare to disturb the comfort zone, get out of the comfort zone and ultimately destroy all the zones?

---

4 ἀρχή = 1.Start, beginning, origin (referring both to aspects of time and space), 2.Fundamental princi-ples that constitute a science, an ideology, religion or belief, 3.Administrative and governmental power, domination.
5 τέκτων = constructor, builder.
6 *I is another*, Arthur Rimbaud, Letter, 13 May 1871. *Collected Poems*, ed. Oliver Bernard (1962)

On Addressing a Public

Lucy Lopez

Michael Warner writes of 'the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation—like the public of this essay.'[1] These texts could be reimagined as exhibitions, performances, political addresses; with Warner, we can understand the exhibition or arts organisation as *creating* an audience through its address, rather than speaking to a pre-existing audience. This presents a number of possibilities.

Considering the reach of any particular exhibition (via physical attendance, printed matter, reviews, online content, or documentation) we might consider how the public formed by an address could be a distributed public, i.e. one existing over different cultural, linguistic and political contexts. In this instance, the address itself could become not only the formation of a public, but something that enables a form of translation or discourse between *counter*-publics. A counter-public, as conceived by Warner, is marked by both its subordinate

1 Warner, M. (2002) *Publics and Counterpublics* p50 In: *Public Culture,* Vol. 14 No. 1 pp 49-90

status and its awareness of that status. Warner writes: 'the way *the* public functions in the public sphere—as *the people*—is only possible because it is really *a* public of discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized, and herein lies its power as well as its elusive strangeness.'[2] This opens up a number of questions for curatorial practice: which *addresses* or modes of exhibition making might be able to form the exhibition as political space? How might the address of a curatorial practice be approached in order to speak to a particular public? What agency could the exhibition have in creating collectivities?

Writing in his 2005 book *On Populist Reason*, Ernesto Laclau describes a (potentially left-wing) populism as being made up of a number of differential conflicts which form an equivalential chain. In the context of a number of conflicts being left unresolved, 'there is an accumulation of unfulfilled demands and an increasing inability of the institutional system to absorb them in a *differential* way (each in isolation from the others), and an *equivalential* relation is established between them.'[3] For Laclau, this mode of political organisation is, similarly to Warner, predicated on a performative act of *naming* – it is the uniting under a common address that allows the creation of a populism. In the process of naming, 'a popular identity functions as a tendentially empty signifier.'[4] In other words, a certain identity is made to embody the whole, and only through this totalising function does the populism come to exist. As one demand expands to represent an ever-larger chain of demands, it loses its particularity; it becomes empty. Laclau gives the examples here of terms such as *Justice* or *Freedom*. We could also think of, for example, movements opposed to gentrification in Western Europe and anti-austerity movements in Spain and Greece; each made up of numerous particular struggles and demands which are united by a popular identity.

Warner's discursive publics and counter-publics – organised against the state, united in attention, being both personal and impersonal,

2 Ibid. p51
3 Laclau, E. (2005). *On Populist Reason* London: Verso p.73
4 Ibid. p96

and in the latter case, representing a *subaltern* in Spivak's sense – relate to Laclau's populism in a way that might help us to consider its uses and limitations. As Laclau's definition of populist discourse is inclusive of difference, we could view this as being made up of a number of counter-publics, which unite as *a public* under a naming which is not specific to any of their particular concerns, but which lends a certain unity to their joint activity and so adds momentum. As Warner's counter-publics are *mobile* publics, they are well placed to function as part of Laclau's populist discourse, gaining agency that they would not have otherwise, but through the totalising function of an empty signifier. It seems pertinent to consider: is it possible for counter-publics *within* a populist discourse to retain their particularity whilst being jointly mobile? In other words: can a counter public gain force without being attached to an empty signifier? Might the address, in Warner's sense, and its ability to create a distributed, and changing public, allow us to think of a unifying function without the production of emptiness?

On a smaller scale, we can consider how organisation could retain particularity through a politics of friendship and care. Celine Condorelli discusses support structures as being essential to cultural production: 'Friendship, like support, is considered here as an essentially political relationship of allegiance and responsibility… working together can start from as well as create forms of solidarity and friendship, which are then to be pursued as both condition and intent, motivating actions taken and allowing work undertaken.'[5] There is radicality in support, in refusing to be pitted as competitors, in finding common ground. However, though we might understand how a politics of friendship could be applied to direct working relationships, could this be extended to a model for collective organisation? Condorelli writes that 'one of the best definitions of cultural production is perhaps that of 'making things public': the process of connecting things, establishing relationships, which in many ways

means befriending issues, people, contexts.'[6] Can the address be an address of friendship? How does support sit alongside demand?

Laclau's focus is on uniting through unfulfilled demands, against an unresponsive state. We could consider refusal as prior to demand - refusal to reproduce the conditions of the dominant order. This refusal is what necessitates demand. Nina Power writes of a collective refusal: 'only a collective, non-nihilistic non-reproduction of certain aspects of the status quo can ensure that we are thinking and acting according to the right scale: the trick is to work out what we can and cannot say no to, together.'[7] Key to Power's thought is the decision regarding what is, and is not, useful to refuse. How can we hold on to elements of care, such as maternal care or friendship, whilst also refusing certain modes of reproduction? She asks: 'What would it mean to refuse to perpetuate the ongoing processes that constitute and maintain capitalism while refusing to give up on care and other human relations that sustain us? Is it possible to separate the two adequately or at all?' [8] This refusal is not *passive*, but productive: a consideration of what might be useful to say no to, rather than a complete exit.

It is important to apply these theoretical questions to concrete and specific situations, and to the problems thrown up by current political struggles. These include the potentialities of curatorial practice, if we consider both the artwork and the exhibition as sites of political agency. If the exhibition functions as an *address*, then the curator is in a position of some responsibility; what is the tone of this address? Who might choose to listen, or, indeed, to answer? How could an exhibition articulate refusal and demand - what types of artistic practices and modes of curating would this entail? Hopefully this short text might serve as a starting point for thinking about these questions, that I consider crucial to contemporary curating.

5 Condorelli, C. (2013) *Too Close to See: Notes on Friendship, a Conversation with Johan Frederik Hartle* p63 In: *Self-Organised*, eds. Hebert, Stine & Karlsen, Anne Szefer London: Occasional Table pp 62-73
6 Ibid.

7 Power, N. (2014). *Brief Notes towards a Non-Nihilistic Theory of Non-Reproduction* p3 In: *Studies in the Maternal*, Vol. 6 Issue 1, London: Birkbeck
8 Ibid. p2
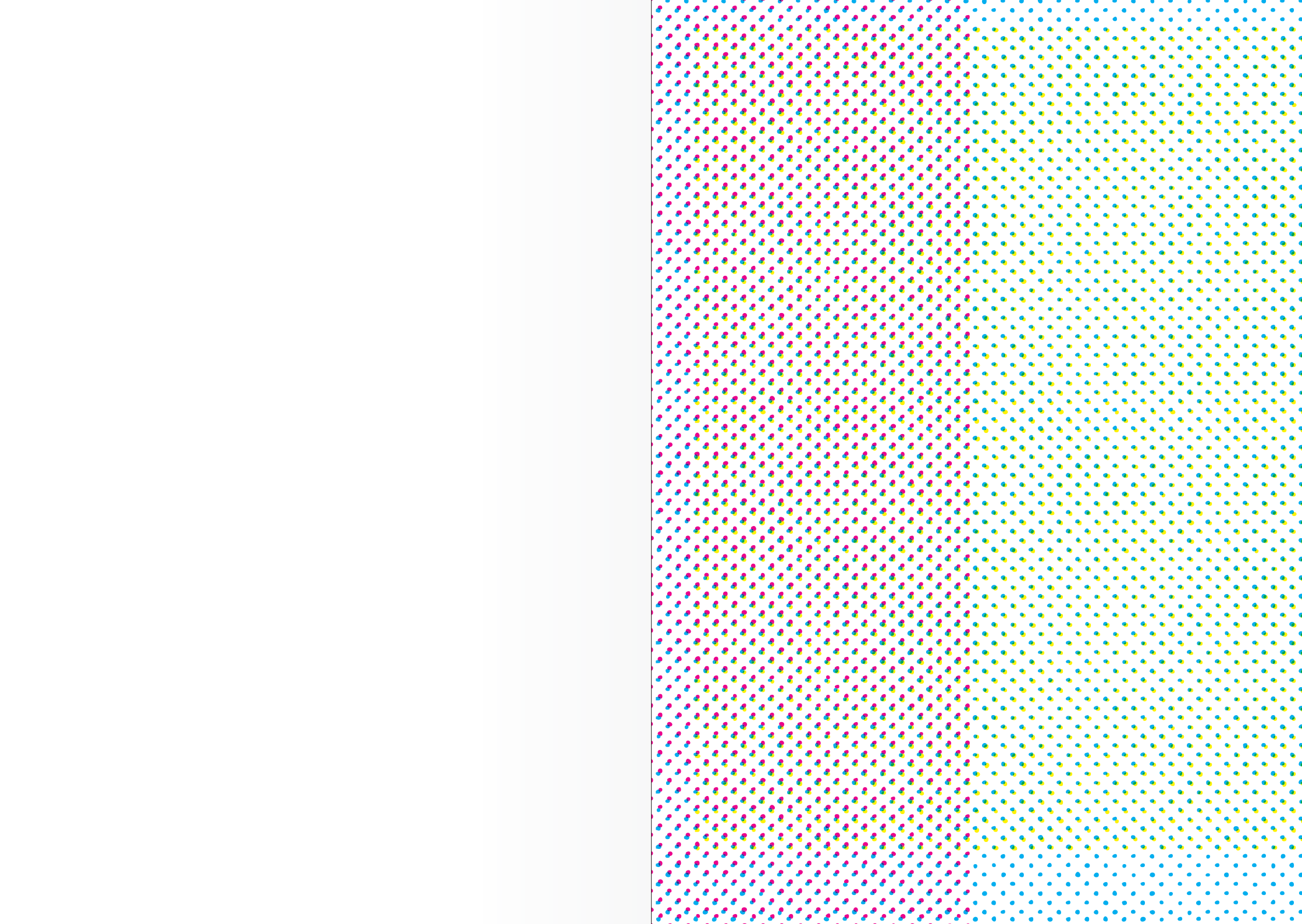
Contributors

Nella Aarne
Rudi Christian Ferreira
Antonio Garcia-Acosta
Dimitra Gkitsa
Adriënne Groen
Hanna Laura Kaljo
Lucy Lopez
Marina Maximova
Akane Miki
Carolina Ongaro
Cory Scozzari and Franziska Wildförster
Emma Siemens-Adolphe
Adam Smythe
Siyun Tang
Lanny Walker
Daniela Wüstenberg